

Fjord of Killary

By [Kevin Barry](#)

January 24, 2010

The New Yorker

So I bought an old hotel on the fjord of Killary. It was set hard by the harbor wall, with Mweelrea Mountain across the water, and disgracefully gray skies above. It rained two hundred and eighty-seven days of the year, and the locals were given to magnificent mood swings. On the night in question, the rain was particularly violent—it came down like handfuls of nails flung hard and fast by a seriously riled sky god. I was at this point eight months in the place and about convinced that it would be the death of me.

“It’s end-of-the-fucking-world stuff out there,” I said.

The chorus of locals in the hotel’s lounge bar, as always, ignored me. I was a fretful blow-in, by their mark, and simply not cut out for tough, gnarly, West of Ireland living. They were listening, instead, to John Murphy, our alcoholic funeral director.

“I’ll bury anythin’ that fuckin’ moves,” he said.

“Bastards, suicides, tinkers,” he said.

“I couldn’t give a fuckin’ monkey’s,” he said.

Mweelrea is the most depressing mountain you’ve ever seen, by the way, and its gaunt, looming shape filled almost every view from the Water’s Edge Hotel, the lounge bar’s included. The locals drank mostly Bushmills whiskey and Guinness stout, and they drank them to great excess. I wiped their slops from the counter with a bar cloth I had come to hate with a passion verging on the insane. I said, “But, seriously, that’s one motherfucker of a high tide, no?”

Barely the toss of a glance I received. The talk had shifted to roads, mileage, general directions. They made a geography of the country by the naming of pubs:

“Do you know Madigan’s in Maynooth?”

“I do, of course.”

“You’d take a left there.”

“I have you now.”

The hotel had twenty-three bedrooms and listed westward. Set a can of peas on the floor of just about any bedroom and it would roll slowly in the direction of the gibbering Atlantic. The estate agent had gussied up the history of the place in the brochure—a traditional coaching inn, original

beams, visited by Thackeray, heritage bleeding out the wazoo, etc.—and I had leaped at it. I was the last of the hopeless romantics.

The talk had moved on, briefly, from roads and directions.

“If he’s still around when her bandages come off,” Bill Knott, the surveyor, said, “he’s a braver man than me.”

“Nice woman,” John Murphy agreed. “As long as you don’t put your hand in the cage.”

Behind the bar: the Guinness tap, the Smithwicks tap, the lager taps, the line of optics, the neatly stacked rows of glasses, and a high stool that sat by a wee slit of window that had a view across the water toward Mweelrea. The iodine tang of kelp hung in the air always, and put me in mind of embalming fluid. Bill Knott looked vaguely from his Bushmills toward the water.

“Highish, all right,” he said. “But now what’d we be talkin’ about for Belmullet, would you say? Off a slow road?”

The primary interest of these people’s lives, it often seemed, was how far one place was from another, and how long it might take to complete the journey, given the state of the roads. Bill had been in haulage as a young man and considered himself expert.

“I don’t know, Bill,” I said.

“Would we say an hour twenty if you weren’t tailbacked out of Newport?”

“I said I really don’t fucking well know, Bill.”

“There are those’ll say you’d do it in an hour.” He sipped, delicately. “But you’d want to be grease fuckin’ lightnin’ coming up from Westport direction, wouldn’t you?”

“We could be swimming it yet, Bill.”

I had made—despite it all—a mild success of myself in life. But on turning forty, the previous year, I had sensed exhaustion rising up in me, like rot. Before forty, you think that exhaustion is something like a long-lasting hangover. But at forty you learn all about it. Even your passions exhaust you. I found that to be alone with the work all day was increasingly difficult. And the city had become a jag on my nerves—there was too much young flesh around. The brochure about the hotel appeared in my life like a revelation. I clutched it in my hands for days on end. I grew feverish with the notion of a westward flight. I lay in bed with the brochure, as the throb of the city sounded a kind of raspy, taunting note, and I moaned as I read:

Original beams.

Traditional coaching inn.

Thackeray.

Estd. 1648.

The hotel had the promise of an ideal solution. I could distract myself (from myself) with its day-to-day running, its endless small errands, and perhaps, late at night, or very early in the morning, I could continue, at some less intense level, with the poetry.

All of my friends, every last one of them, said, “The Shining.”

But I was thinking, The West of Ireland . . . the murmurous ocean . . . the rocky hills hard-founded in a greenish light (the light of a sad dream) . . . the cleansing air . . . the stoats peeping shyly from gaps in the drystone walls . . .

Yes. It would all do to make a new man of me. Of course, I hadn’t counted on having to listen to my summer staff, a pack of healthily energetic young Belarusians, fucking one another at all angles of the clock.

And the ocean turned out to gibber rather than murmur.

Gibber gibber—*whoosh*. Gibber gibber—*whoosh*.

Down the far end of the bar, Mick Harty, distributor of bull semen for the vicinity, was molesting his enormously fat wife, Vivien.

“We’re after a meal at the place run by the Dutch faggots,” he said. “Oysters for a starter . . . They have me gone fuckin’ bananas!”

Vivien slapped and roared at him as he stroked her massive haunches. She reddened and chortled as he twisted her around and pulled her vast rear side into his crotch area. Nobody apart from me paid a blind bit of attention to the spectacle. And, even as she suffered a pretend butt-rape from her cackling husband, she turned to me and informed me, precisely, what they had paid for the meal at the Dutch couple’s restaurant.

“Two starters, two mains, we shared a dessert, two bottles of wine, two cappuccinos,” she said, as Mick grinded slowly behind her, hoarsely yodelling an Alicia Keys ballad. “Hundred thirty-six euros, even—not cheap, Caoimhin.”

“Cappuccino is a breakfast drink,” I said. “You’re not supposed to have it after a meal.”

I was not well liked out in Killary. I was considered “superior.” Of course, I was fucking superior. I ate at least five portions of fruit and veg daily. I had omega 3 from oily fish coming out my ears. I limited myself to twenty-one units of alcohol a week. I hadn’t written two consecutive lines of a poem in eight months. I was becoming versed, instead, in the strange, illicit practices of the hill country.

“Fuckers are washin’ diesel up there again,” John Murphy said. “The Hourigans? Of course, they’d a father a diesel-washer before ’em, didn’t they? Cunts to a man.”

“Cunts,” Bill Knott confirmed.

Outside, the rain continued to hammer away at our dismal little world, and the sky had shucked the last of its evening gray to take on an intense purplish tone that was ominous, close-in, Biblical.

“Sky is weirdin’ up like I don’t know fucking what,” I said.

John Murphy grabbed my elbow as I passed along the bar—he was aggressive, always, once the third pint was downed—and he said, “I s’pose you know that possessed fuckin’ she-devil above in the house will put me in the ground?”

“John,” I said, “I really don’t want to hear about it.”

“I mean literally, Caoimhin! She’ll fuckin’ do for me!”

“John, your marriage is your own private business.”

“She’s fuckin’ poisoning me! I swear to bleedin’ fuckin’ Jesus! I can taste it off the fuckin’ tea, Caoimh!”

“Would you go again, John?” I indicated his emptied stout glass.

“Oh, please,” he said.

They were all nut jobs. This is what it came down to. This is the thing you learn about habitual country drinkers. They suffer all manner of delusions, paranoia, warped fantasies. It is a most intense world indeed that a hard drinker builds around himself, and it is difficult for him not to assume that everyone else in the place is involved with it.

“Mick’s a man of sixty,” Vivien Harty said, awed at the persistence of her husband’s desires, “and he’d still get up on a cracked fuckin’ plate.”

Just then a cacophony erupted:

From the hillsides, everywhere, came the aggravated howls of dogs. These were amped to an unnatural degree. The talk in the lounge bar stalled for a moment in response but, just as abruptly, it resumed.

“The tiramisu?” Mick Harty said. “You wouldn’t know whether to eat it or smear it all over yourself.”

Nadia, one of my Belarusians, came through from the supper room and sullenly collected some glasses.

“The arse on that,” John Murphy said.

“Please, John,” I said.

“Two apples in a hankie,” he said.

I believed all nine of my summer staff to be in varying degrees of sexual contact with one another. I housed them in the dreary, viewless rooms at the back of the hotel, where I myself lived during what I will laughably describe as high season (the innocence), and my sleepless nights were filled with the sound of their rotating passions.

“Thank you, Nadia,” I said.

She scowled at me as she placed the glasses in the dishwasher. I was never allowed to forget that I was paying minimum wage.

The dogs had stopped; the rain continued.

It was by now a hysterical downpour, with great sheets of water steaming down from Mweelrea, and the harbor roared in the fattening light. Visibility was reduced to fourteen feet. This all signalled that the West of Ireland holiday season had begun.

“He was thrun down,” John Murphy said, speaking of a man he had lately buried. “He went into himself. He didn’t talk for a year and a half and then he choked on a sausage. You’d visit and he’d say nothin’ to you, but he’d know you were there. The little eyes would follow you around the room.”

“Age was he when he went, John?”

“Forty-two.”

“Youngish?”

“Arra. He was better off out of it.”

My first weeks out at the Water’s Edge, I had kept a surreptitious notebook under the bar. The likes of “thrun down” would get a delighted entry. I would guess at the likely etymology—from “thrown down,” as in “laid low”? But I had quickly had my fill of these maudlin bastards.

This, by the way, was the Monday of the May bank-holiday weekend. Killary was *en fête*. Local opinion, cheerfully, was that it had been among the wettest bank holidays ever witnessed. The few deluded hill walkers and cyclists who had shown up had departed early, in wordless outrage, and in the library room of the Water’s Edge there was just a pair of elderly couples still enjoying

the open fire. I left the bar and took a pass through the library to smile at them, to throw on a few sods of turf, and to make sure they hadn't died on the premises.

They stared into the flames.

"That's some evening?" I tried, but there was no response.

Both couples held hands and appeared to be significantly tranquillized. Coming through the lobby again, I looked out through the doors and saw a pair of minks creep over the harbor wall. They crossed the road, in perfect tandem, and headed for the rising fields beyond the hotel. I went back into the bar. I found that I had an odd nausea developing.

"They can cut out that particular gland," Bill Knott said, "but if the wound goes septic after?"

He shook his head hopelessly.

"That," he said, "is when the fun and games start."

Mine was one of four licensed premises in a scattered district of three-hundred-odd souls. This is a brutal scarcity, by Irish ratios, so there was enough trade to keep us all tunnelling toward oblivion. The bar was another of the elements that had sold the place to me. It was pleasant, certainly, with an old-fashioned mahogany finish, zinc-topped low tables, and some prints of photo finishes from fabled race meetings at Ballybrit. I always tended bar in the evenings. I'd had a deranged notion that this would establish me as a kind of charming-innkeeper figure. This was despite the fact that not one but two ex-girlfriends (both of them, admittedly, sharp-tongued academics) had described my manner as "funereal."

The bar-side babble continued unchecked:

Bill Knott was now reckoning the distance to Derry if you were to go via Enniskillen. Vivien Harty was telling John Murphy that that wasn't tuppence worth of a coat his wife had on the Tuesday gone, that he was looking after her all the same, and that no woman deserved it more, given what she'd been through with the botched hysterectomy. Mick Harty talked of the cross-border trade in stallions and looked faintly murderous. "Our horses the fuckers are after now," he said.

Nadia, meantime, was singing weird Belarusian pop beneath her breath as she got up on the footstool to polish the optics. A seep of vomit rose in my gullet. I was soul sick. I was failing spectacularly at this whole mine-host lark. I quietly leaned on the bar by the till. I looked out the small window. Watery, it was.

"Seriously, lads, we haven't seen a tide that high, surely?" I said. "Have we?"

It was lapping by now at the top of the harbor wall. The estate agent had assured me that the place never flooded. I'd looked the slithery old fuck in the eye and believed him. I had suspected, I had hoped, that the life I found out here would eventually do something for my work.

Something would gestate in me. I'd be able to move away from all that obtuse, arrhythmic stuff about the sex heat of cities that had made me mildly famous in provincial English departments. My poetry was known of but was not a difficulty for the Killary locals—there had never been a shortage of poets out there. Every last crooked rock of the place had at some point seated the bony arse of some hypochondriacal epiphany-seeker. Some fucker who'd forever be giving out about his lungs.

“You'd do jail time for that,” John Murphy said.

He was eying once more the rear quarters of Nadia as she headed for the kitchen.

“John, I've warned you about this,” I said.

“I'm only sayin',” he said.

“You'll love him. He's an eighty-per-cent match to your iPod.”

Cartoon by William Haefeli

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He sullenly turned back to his stout. The people of this part of North Galway are oversexed. That is my belief. I had found a level of ribaldry that bordered on the paganistic. It goes back, of course. They lick it up off the crooked rocks. Thackeray, indeed, remarked on the corsetless dress of rural Irish women, and the fact that they kissed perfect strangers in greeting, their vast bosoms swinging.

“It's not,” John Murphy said, “like I'm goin' to take a lep at the little bitch. My leppin' days are long fuckin' over.”

If I sold the place for even three-quarters of what I paid for it, I could buy half of Cambodia and do a Colonel fucking Kurtz on it. Lovely, coldhearted Nadia came running from the kitchen. She was as white as the fallen dead.

“Is otter!” she cried.

“What?”

“Is otter in kitchen!” she cried.

He was eating soup when I got there. Carrot and coriander from a ten-gallon pot. Normally, they are terribly skittish, otters, but this fellow was languorous as a surfer. Nervously, I shooed him toward the back door. He took his own sweet time about heading there. Once outside, he aimed not for the tide-line rocks, where the otters all lived, but for the higher ground, south.

I looked out toward the harbor. The harbor wall was disappearing beneath spilling sheets of water. I came back into the lounge.

“A fucking otter is right,” I said.

They looked at me, the locals, in quiet disgust, as if I could expect no less than otters in the kitchen, the way I was after letting things go.

I pointed to the harbor.

“Will it flood?” I asked, and there was a quake in my tone.

“You’d make good time coming out of Sligo, normally,” Bill Knott said. “Unless you had a Thursday on your hands. But of course them fuckers have any amount of a road under them since McSharry was minister.”

“I said will it flood, Bill? Will it flood? Are you even listening to me?”

A gray silence swelled briefly.

“Hasn’t in sixteen years,” he said. “Won’t now.”

I spent all my waking hours keeping the Water’s Edge on the go. I was short-breathed, tense, out of whack. I was at roughly the midpoint of what, for poets, would be termed “a long silence”—five years had passed since my last collection. Anytime I sat down to page or screen, I felt as if I might weep, and I didn’t always resist the temptation. Mountain bleakness, the lapidary rhythms of the water, the vast schizophrenic skies: these weren’t inspiring poetry in me; they were inspiring hopeless lust and negative thought patterns. Again and again, the truth was confronting me: I was a born townie, and I had made a dreadful mistake in coming here. I set down a fresh Bushmills for Bill Knott.

“This place your crowd are from,” he said. “Belarus?”

“Yes, Bill?”

“What way’d they be for road out there?”

“When you think,” Vivien Harty said, “of what this country went through for the sake of Europe, when we went on our hands and fuckin’ knees before Brussels, to be given the lick of a fuckin’ butter voucher, and as soon as we have ourselves even halfways right these bastards from the back end of nowhere decide they can move in wherever they like and take our fuckin’ jobs?”

On the Killary hillsides the dogs howled again in fright-night sequence, one curdling scream giving way to another; they were even louder now than before.

“Mother of Jesus,” John Murphy said.

The dogs were so loud now as to be unignorable. We all went to the windows. The roadway between hotel and harbor wall had in recent moments disappeared. The last of the evening light was an unreal throb of Kermit green. The dogs howled. The rain continued.

“The roads,” Bill Knott said, at last impressed, “will be unpassable.”

Mick Harty’s hands slipped down over the backs of Vivien’s thighs. The rain came in great, unstoppable drifts on a high westerly from the Atlantic.

“That ain’t quittin’ anytime soon,” I said, stating the blindingly obvious.

“Water’s up to the second step,” Vivien Harty noted.

Four old stone steps led up to the inn’s front porch.

“And rising,” Mick Harty said.

“I haven’t seen rain the likes of that,” John Murphy said, “since Castlebar, the March of ’73.”

“What’d we be talkin’ about for Castlebar?” Bill Knott said. “Forty-five minutes on light road?”

We moved back from the windows. Our movement had become curiously choreographed. Quiet calls were made on mobiles. We spoke now in whispers.

All along the fjord, word quickly had it, the waters had risen and had breached the harbor walls. The emergency services had been alerted. There was talk—a little late for it—of sandbagging. We were joined in the lounge bar by six of the nine Belarusians—the other three had gone to the cineplex in Westport, fate having put on a Dan Brown adaptation—and by the two elderly couples, who had managed not to die off in the library.

I said, “A round of drinks on the house, folks. We may be out here for some time.”

Applause greeted this. I felt suddenly that I was growing into the mine-host role. There was a conviviality in the bar, the type that is said to come always with threatened disaster.

Great howls of wind echoed down the Doo Lough Valley, and they were answered in volleyed sequence by the howls of the Killary dogs.

Four of the six Belarusians wore love bites on their necks as they sipped at their complimentary bottled Heinekens. They were apparently feasting delightedly on one another in my back rooms.

The elderlies introduced themselves.

We met Alan and Norah Fettle from Limerick, and Jimmy and Janey McAllister from Limavady. They were the least scared among us, the least awed.

“Yon wind’s changing,” Jimmy Mac said. “Yon wind’s shiftin’ easterly so ’tis.”

“I wouldn’t like the sounds of that,” John Murphy said. “Not much good will ever come out of a swappin’ wind. You’d hear that said.”

It was said also in Killary that an easterly wind unseated the mind.

I shot a glance outside, and on a low branch of the may tree hanging over the water a black-backed gull had apparently killed its mate and was starting to eat it. This didn’t seem like news that anybody wanted to hear, so I kept it to myself.

Alexei, the conspicuously walleyed Belarusian, had gone to survey the scene from an upstairs window and he returned to report that the car park beside the hotel was flooded completely.

“Insurance will cover any damage,” Bill Knott soothed.

“It’s going to be one of those fuckin’ news clips,” John Murphy said. “Some fuckin’ ape sailin’ down the street on a tea tray.”

“Jesus Christ, what’s that gull doing?” Norah Fettle said.

It was an inopportune moment to draw attention to the gull situation. The black-back had just at that instant managed to prise its partner’s head off, and was flailing it about. Janey McAllister passed out cold on the floor. There was no getting away from the fact that we were being sucked into the deeps of an emergency.

I was getting happy notions. I was thinking, The place gets wiped out, I claim the insurance, and it’s Cambodia here I come.

Norah Fettle and Vivien Harty tended to Janey McAllister. She was frothing a little, and moaning softly. They called for brandy. Bill Knott signalled for a fresh Bushmills, John Murphy for a pint of stout.

We all looked out the windows.

The water had passed the fourth step and was sweeping over the porch. We were on some vague level aware that house lights still burned on the far side of the harbor, along the mountainside of Mweelrea. Then, at once, the lights over there cut out.

“Good night, Irene,” Bill Knott said.

The worst of the news was that the emergency appeared to be localized. The fjord of Killary was flooding when no other place was flooding. The rest of the country was going about its humdrum Monday-night business—watching football matches, or Dan Brown adaptations, putting out the bins, or putting up with their marriages—while the people of our vicinity prepared for watery graves. I felt, finally, as if I had been accepted.

And I felt that the worst possible course would be to close the bar. There was a kind of hilarity to the proceedings still, and this would not be maintained if I stopped serving booze. The pace of the drinking, if anything, quickened now that the waters were rising. You'd never know when you were going to lift your last.

"Would we want to be making south?" Mick Harty wondered.

Vivien rubbed at his wrist so tenderly that I found myself welling up.

"Hush," she said. "Hush it, babes."

"If we went up past Lough Fee and swung around the far side of her," Bill Knott said, "we'd nearly make it to the N59."

The Belarusians carted boxloads of old curtains down from the attic to use as sops against the doorways, but the moment the last boxload reached the bottom of the stairs the doors popped and the waters entered.

I moved everybody upstairs. There was a function room up there that I used for the occasional wedding. It had a fully stocked bar and operational disco lights. We weren't a moment too soon. As I trailed up the stairs, keeping to the rear of all my locals and Belarusians, I cast an eye back over my shoulder. It had the look of death's dateless night out there.

"Hup, people!" I cried. "Hup for Jesus' sake!"

The function room was used less often than it should have been—the locals got married in Alghero if they had the price of it at all. More calls were made on mobiles. We were promised that the emergency services were being moved out. I turned off the harsh strip lighting overhead and switched to the mood lighting, which moved in lovely, dreamy, disco swirls. Even yet the rain hammered down on my old hotel at Killary. I opened the bar, and the locals weren't shy about stepping up to it.

We drank.

We whispered.

We laughed like cats.

Bill Knott reckoned the distance to Clare Island oversea, if it should come to it.

"Of course, it would not be the first time," he said, "that the likes of us would be sent hoppin' for the small boats."

Vivien Harty whispered to Janey McAllister. Janey's color was returning with frequent nips of my brandy. Vivien swirled it in the glass and fed it to the old lady; her tiny gray head she cradled on a vast lap.

“There’s little fear of you now, my sweet,” she said.

Thackeray, on visiting the backwoods of Ireland, bemoaned the “choking peat smoke” and the “obstreperous cider” and the diet of “raw ducks, raw pease” and also a particular inn: “No pen can describe that establishment, as no English imagination could have conceived it.”

John Murphy told us, loudly, that he loved his wife.

“She still excites me,” he said. “It’s been twenty-eight years, and I still get a horn on me when I see that bitch climb a stairs.”

I went to the landing outside the function room. I looked down the road. It was a waterway; the hotel’s porch had disappeared, and dozens of cormorants were approaching in formation across the water. It was like the attack on Dresden. I rushed back into the function room just as the cormorants landed on the tarpaulin of the kitchen roof out back, and a weeping Mick Harty was confessing to Vivien an affair of fifteen years’ standing. With her sister.

“All the auld filth starts to come out,” Alan Fettle said.

Vivien approached her husband, and embraced him, and planted a light kiss on his neck as they held each other against the darkness. Then she bit him on the neck. Blood came in great, angry spurts. I vomited, briefly, and decided to put on some music.

I looked out the landing window as I dashed along the corridor to get some CDs from my room—this was a bad move:

Seven sheep in a rowing boat were being bobbed about on the vicious waters of Killary. The sheep appeared strangely calm.

I picked lots of old familiars, old favorites: Abba, the Pretenders, Bryan Adams.

I pelted back to the function room.

“We’re here!” I cried. “We might as well have a disco!”

Oh, and we danced the night away out on the fjord of Killary. We danced to “Chiquitita,” slowly and sensuously; we danced in great, wet-eyed nostalgia to “Brass in Pocket,” and we had all the old steps still, as if 1979 were only yesterday; we punched the air madly to “Summer of ’69.”

I went out to the landing to find the six Belarusians sitting on the top step of the stairs. The waters of Killary were halfway up the stairs. Footstools sailed by in the lobby below, toilet rolls, place mats, phone books. But what could I do?

I returned to the function room and served out pints hand over fist.

All mobile signals were down.

There appeared on the horizon no saviors in hi-viz clothing.

The waters were rising yet.

And the view was suddenly clear to me. The world opened out to its grim beyonds and I realized that, at forty, one must learn the rigors of acceptance. Capitalize it: Acceptance. I needed to accept what was put before me—be it a watery grave in Ireland’s only natural fjord, or a return to the city and its grayer intensities, or a wordless exile in some steaming Cambodian swamp hole, or poems or no poems, or children or not, lovers or not, illness or otherwise, success or its absence. I would accept all that was put in my way, from here on through until I breathed my last.

Electrified, I searched for a notebook.

Bill Knott danced. John Murphy danced. The McAllisters and the Fettes waltzed. The Belarusians dry-humped one another in the function room’s darker corners. The Hartys were in deep, emotional conversation in a banquet booth—Mick held to his bleeding neck a wad of napkins. I myself took to the floor, swivelling slowly on my feet, and I closed my eyes against the swirling disco lights. The pink backs of my lids became twin screens for flashing apparitions of my childhood pets.

“Are ye enjoyin’ yerelves, lads?” I cried.

“Oh, heel up the cart there, now!”

“What’d we be talking about for Loughrea, would you say?”

“Didn’t I come back from that place one lung half the size of the other?”

“Ah, sure, that’s England for you.”

I ran out to the landing for a spot-check on the flooding situation, and was met there by Alexei, the walleyed Belarusian. He indicated with a happy jerk of his thumb the water level on the stairs. It had dropped a couple of steps. I patted his back, and winked just the once, and returned to the disco.

1648 was a year shy of Cromwell’s landing in Ireland, and already the inn at Killary fjord was in business—it would see out this disaster, too. Now random phrases and images came at me—the sudden quick-fire assaults that signal a new idea—and I knew that they would come in sequence soon enough, their predestined rhythms would assert. I felt a new, quiet ecstasy take hold.

The gloom of youth had at last lifted. ♦

Published in the print edition of the [February 1, 2010](#), issue.

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