

***A Green Journey.* Jon Hassler. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985.**

Night before Christmas – snowy – Janet visits Agatha – Janet’s father got nervous around Agatha McGee – “after all these years of falling short of Miss McGee’s expectations...” [1]

Janet = 17 and pregnant. [2]

Agatha’s smile = “two parts festive and one part grim.” [2]

Dr. Maitland re: Janet – “promise unfulfilled.” [3]

Agatha: “This is a time for strength” – “... refrain from self-pity.” [3]

Carrying suitcase upstairs, “Janet shared the weight with Agatha.” [4]

Janet: “She loved sex. She loved Eddie. For two weeks, Eddie loved her.” [5]

Pregnancy caused Janet “an occasional day of vague sadness.” [5]

Agatha re: baptismal dress – “Tomorrow we’ll press out the wrinkles.” [5]

Agatha agrees to be godmother. [5]

Church packed for Midnight Mass. [6]

Re: Fr. Finn – “... when left to his own he was too stable, according to Agatha and half her fellow parishioners, to depart from tradition. Or too dull-witted, according to the other half.” [6]

Bishop Swayles: “a dear old reactionary.” [6]

Agatha prays for Janet, the baby and the Raft family. [7]

TV Mass: “the pope in charge.” [7]

Janet hears a Virgin Mary hymn, and wonders about virginity and Agatha. [7]

Agatha: “when she was young and had the opportunities she hadn’t felt the need, and later, feeling the need, she had no opportunities.” [7]

She rejected Preston Waner in 1938: “I can’t marry a farmer.” [7]

“I was born to teach, not to churn... She loved classrooms. Barns made her sneeze.” [7]

Lillian visits Agatha – had been with Imogene in Berrington –had heard the gossip of a pregnant Raft staying with Agatha. [7-11]

Agatha serves Lillian “plum wine she had made last summer, using wild plums she had picked on the banks of the Badbattle River.” [11]

Imogene = “strikingly unattractive in a graceless, gangly way.” [12]

“Agatha knew a lifelong spinster when she say one, and Imogene, at forty, had all the marks. Self-sufficiency was one, self-absorption was another; not to mention imperiousness.” [12]

Lillian’s gossip: “a heart attack, two funerals and a broken hip... a chimney fire, a litter of kittens, a pilfered newspaper dispenser in front of the Hub Café.” [12]

Agatha and Lillian shared no interests – they were friends “because for nearly seven decades their back doors had been facing one another across an alley.” [13]

Lillian “was honest, simplehearted and enviably placed.” [13]

Three

Agatha walks Janet to the hospital – New Year’s Eve. [15]

Daniel Buckingham, Jr., businessman and expectant father, says re: Janet – “It’s a shame the way people like that reproduce themselves.” [16]

Agatha, angry: “In the sight of God, this baby of Janet Raft’s is as sacred and noble as any Buckingham that ever walked the face of the earth.” [16]

Janet’s baby is denied 1st baby of the year honors because of illegitimacy. [17-18]

Agatha: “... the worst kind of discrimination, namely prejudice against the poor and helpless.” [18]

Agatha takes basinet from Buckingham furniture store, and threatens Buckingham with reprisal if he doesn’t make sure Janet receives the gifts due the 1st baby of the year. [20]

Agatha to Janet: “Keep your baby warm and clean, Janet, and hold him in your arms as much as possible.” [20]

Agatha says a silent prayer for Janet. [21]

Agatha’s schoolwork = “paltry compared to helping a new life into the world” – “she felt hollow.” [21]

“... deeper and broader than loneliness.” [21]

Four

Agatha’s shortlived retirement – “... her discovery that retirement provided a very weak position from which to attack the forces of secularization.” [24-25]

A letter from James O’Hannon – with a photo. [25]

Agatha had previously sent him a photo of herself in front of a lilac bush. [26]

James’s family owns a pub, where he grew up: “The men on their stools sipping their pints were an interesting bit of humanity.” [26]

His father had died when he was young, and he blamed the Brits. [26]

James's picture: "On his lips she was the hint of a smile, a trace of good humor." [27]

Agatha's letter, re: her parents - "... I think they never quite got over their delight in my existence." [28]

"A stupid new wrinkle at Mass last Sunday. Impious handshaking." [28]

It seems to Agatha that "the entire Church of Rome teetered on the brink of chaos." [28]

"All her life she had been more inflexible than the Church - or steadfast." [28]

"Agatha loved the Church of her girlhood above everything else in the world. The Church had been her primary conveyance through life." [28]

"Defending the faith was easy in those days because the Church, having picked up nineteen centuries of momentum was traveling steadily along a straight track with all the signals clear." [29]

Agatha subscribes to *The Fortress*, where she read a letter by James. [29]

The Fortress was subscribed to by people who believe that "Only by preserving the old rituals could the Church continue to hold out beauty and vision as possibilities in a world of blind, violent disorder." [29]

James's letter re: Ireland's bishops: "They trust instead the tried and true" (which seemed poetic to Agatha). [30]

Agatha is initially upset; "She'd make a mighty poor bystander;" but calmed by his sincerity. [31]

By "their first anniversary" in April, their letters changed tone - "their preoccupation with religion was gradually dropping away" - "... they began to review random incidents from their near and distant past" (including "prose portraits ... of their fellow townsmen." [31]

'Dear Miss McGee / Dear Mr. O'Hannon' became 'Dear Agatha / Dear James.' [31]

Agatha to James: "My, how nearly perfect is my ignorance of babies and the way they grow. And how complete is the delight I take in this one." [32]

Agatha's involvement "has nothing to do with Christian charity" - "there is a liveliness in their house lacking in my own" - "I do not find it unpleasant to hold Stephen in my lap." [32]

"Hardscrabble girls" = "Agatha's term for the daughters of improvident or missing parents..." [32]

Agatha's "four-year degree at a Franciscan college." [33]

Hardscrabble grandmothers (Agatha's contemporaries) had 8-10 children - their daughters had half as many. [33]

"They looked out at their limited world with the same pale, weathered eyes of the grandmothers, eyes sadly reconciled to want." [33]

Janet "had been spared those eyes." [33]

Farmers "without vision enough to move away." [33]

Janet's father "had been one of the unluckiest men Agatha had ever known." [34]

Agatha, picking chokecherries: "She loved summer above all seasons." [35]

Janet's father, Francis, tells Agatha chokecherry is a tree, not a bush. "If I'm ever in doubt about how much credit to give a thing, I always give it more..." [36]

Agatha: "always soft in your judgments" (unspoken). [36]

Francis to Agatha: "... you always give it less..." [36]

"Any borderline case gets less from you, rather than more." [36]

"... what's the fun in life for the person who's so strict all the time?" [36]

Agatha says such standards are her "nature." - "But she wasn't nearly so confident as she sounded." - "Had she truly followed her destiny?" [37]

Agatha to Francis: "How do you bear this life... ?" [37-38]

"I'm just one of your natural-born jackpine savages, I guess..." [38]

"I'm happy as a tick on a fat sheep." [38]

Agatha: "Oh, to be so reconciled." [38]

Five

Stephen growing up - walks and falls, but no bruises: "All was well." [40]

Begins talking, mimicking his aunts. [40]

Janet falls in love with Randy Meers. [40]

Randy's father's "return on two and a half years of tuition, room and board was a son with eleven college credits. [41-42]

Randy joins his father's real estate firm. [42]

To Janet: "the Brass Fox [a log-cabin, lake shore night club] was society." [42]

Janet met Randy there: one night they went into the woods, "and they made love on a blanket to the thrumming of a million frogs." [43]

A week later, Randy proposes to Janet: "... holding his face tightly to her breasts and feeling that her heart would surely break with joy. 'Oh, yes, yes, Randy.'" [43]

Janet and Randy marry and move in with his parents. [43]

Janet's father says she married into "uppitiness." [44]

"Janet got a job and Randy got the blues." [44]

Janet worked as secretary to the principal at St. Isidore's - and had "a natural way with tools" and so fixed school equipment. [44]

“But while Janet soared, Randy sank.” [45]

“... his gloomy periods seemed to come and go without any relation to events outside his head.” [45]

“How unlucky, thought Janet, that an apprentice realtor should lose his belief in property.” [45]

Randy: “Why is the whole surface of the earth divided up among owners?” ... did God say ‘Go forth and make real estate out of all the dry land?’ [46]

Janet tired of “his finding absurdity in every commonplace thing.” [46]

Randy’s father fires him; a string of jobs followed, and Randy always wondered what difference it made “in the larger context of life.” [47]

Janet, re: Randy – “... good sex at the right time cured so many ills.” [48]

But Janet couldn’t talk to Agatha McGee about that! – “... she didn’t know the first thing about sex.” [48]

Janet cried on her wedding day because of Agatha’s reservations about Randy, but: “She washed her face and got married and never looked back.” [49]

Six

Agatha McGee’s 46th and final year of teaching: “Looking back through her gradebooks, Agatha found that she had improved the minds of over twelve hundred twelve-year-olds.” [50]

“Her past seemed a span of innocuous days. And her nights? Her most dramatic recurring dream in recent nights was one in which she had difficulty opening a jar of peanut butter.” [50]

Janet stopped at Agatha’s with Stephen each Friday, which “allowed her to act motherly and godmotherly” – Janet felt “pride at being welcomed into Agatha’s stately house.” [50]

Agatha “had perfected the meaningful frown to the point of using it when she didn’t mean to” – so Stephen didn’t smile at her as much as she wished. [50]

Janet to Randy’s boss: “Just talk. Tell him his troubles aren’t all that big and life does have meaning...” [54]

Agatha sees Janet and Randy kiss: “Their silhouettes lingered in her mind. So did the sound of their kisses.” -- Looking over the playground: “If you traced all these children back to their beginnings, you come to kisses.” – “... the kisses sounded in her head, four short and one long, like Morse Code.” [54-55]

James’s last letter: “... so jolting was his cry of loneliness.” [55]

Agatha was more reserved in her correspondence with James, “giving or withholding at will. Wasn’t that the great advantage of living one’s life alone, the control?” [56]

But she suggests coming to Ireland for a visit, and he makes no mention of the suggestion in his next letter. [57]

Seven

Imogene suggests a trip to Ireland for Lillian and Agatha; there was an upcoming trip led by Bishop Baker, whom Agatha “abhorred.” [58-60]

Bishop Baker “urged his flock to call him Dick.” [60]

“... folksy homilies” – “aw-shucks manner.” [60]

Agatha feared Bishop Baker’s strong will, “a will been on loosing barbarism on the diocese.” [61]

“For the past two weeks cascading water had been showing up repeatedly in her [Agatha’s] dreams and she had awakened each morning with a deep yearning for something she couldn’t identify, a longing so lush that it must have been rooted for years under the surface of her daily life.” [62]

But Agatha couldn’t “name” the longing. [62]

Agatha McGee “would meet the man in her life.” [67]

Eight

Bishop Baker’s letter changing the system of Confirmation. [68]

Agatha McGee and Bishop Baker both follow their conscience. “But his is in error.” [70]

Agatha’s pastor asks: “Then why do you suppose your viewpoints are so far apart.” Agatha: “... his prayers aren’t being answered.” [70]

Bishop Baker hears confessions on Saturday, so wouldn’t be available to see Agatha, so she goes to Berrington to speak with him in the confessional. [71]

One line for anonymous, one for face-to-face: “She chose the anonymous side, that line being shorter and the face-to-face method being progressive.” [71]

The remodeled cathedral = “plain as a Quaker meetinghouse.” [71]

Agatha confesses that Bishop Baker is the occasion of her sins of anger and despair – he senses “the emotion in her voice, its forthrightness, its power.” [72]

Agatha takes her confirmation students (except for those whose parents had “progressive sympathies” and kept their children at home) to Bishop Baker’s house (where he is playing bridge). [73-74]

“... a caravan of thirteen cars and a pickup truck.” [74]

“... a blustery evening” – hailstones. [74]

Agatha McGee “had decided to say not a word during this entire mission for fear of inadvertently violating some new rule of the bishop’s.” [74-75]

In Bishop Baker’s house, “... the walls hung with gilt-framed portraits of long-dead prelates.” [75]

Bishop Baker offers to take the whole group to the church for “some proper ritual. He said this with neither magnanimity nor malice. He said it with wonder.” [78]

Gathering in the house after Bishop Baker “confirmed the twelve” – “Bishop Baker worked his way through the crowd.” [78]

Bishop Baker expresses hope for “friendship” with Agatha; she expects “a lengthy war.” [79]

Bishop Baker offers Agatha a ride in Ireland, since he’ll have a car. [79]

She feels a “moral duty to accept a peace offering.” [79-80]

Bishop Baker’s smile: “Up close it was warm, unfeigned.” [80]

Agatha: “All right, Your Excellency.” Bishop Baker: “Call me Dick.” [80]

Bishop Baker’s plan to close St. Isidore’s school. [80]

Bishop Baker’s hope for Agatha McGee to be his contact in Staggerford – “What a hell of a bishop she’d make.” [81]

Nine

Movie on the place in Close Encounters (though not named in the book – rather, “something about visitors from outer space”). [82]

Lillian talks of scandals in Staggerford’s past; Agatha laughs, “surprised by her own levity.” [84]

Title of the tour is: “The Essence of the Emerald Isle... with Special Attention to Its Catholic Heritage” Fr, Garvey, the tour leader, “is worried that she and Janet will miss a lot if they go off on their own.” [85]

Agatha to herself: “It was a wonder the way bishops learned to talk in capital letters like that.” [85]

“The bishop liked Janet’s smile.” [86]

“... Miss McGee’s reputation as a surrogate mother to certain unfortunate girls.” [86]

Bishop Baker had heard gossip about Janet and Randy, how he had married “beneath him,” but was impressed by Janet, as he had not been by Randy when he met him at a KC function. [87-88]

“He was tired of busybodies telling him how real-life stories would end. Real-life stories wrote themselves and often included some very surprising chapters.” [88]

Agatha says she’s in Ireland to trace her family tree – “This being the first lie of her life.” [89]

“The truth – the secret truth – was James.” [89]

Staggerford townspeople had watched Agatha McGee’s every action and admired her “straight and narrow predictability without realizing the extent to which their scrutiny was its cause.” [89]

Agatha to Lillian: “I’ve always wanted more out of life than is given to groups.” [90]

Ten

“Agatha’s first footsteps in a foreign land...” [93]

Irish currency: “arcane lettering and engravings of poets and fish.” [93]

The Bishop “moved enthusiastically.” [94]

“So this is Ireland,’ she murmured. It was all very much like a rainy day at home.” [94-95]

Post-retirement “deep soul-searching” led Agatha to “vow before God that she would not spend her old age minding other people’s business.” [95]

Priests called Agatha McGee “Her Excellency: -- “for her efforts at holding back Church reform. [95]

But “she had lost faith in herself as standard-bearer” – “Looking back at her record of wins and losses, she wasn’t impressed.” [96]

“The Irish light was so strange, so fragile.” [96]

Bishop Baker visiting seminaries to entice some (future) priests to Berrington. [97]

“... twenty centuries had taught the Church patience.” [97]

Bishop Baker attached to Agatha for “friendship” – a mother figure. [97]

Bishop Baker wanted Agatha to be principal of St. Isidore’s for two years, before closing it. [99]

Also wanted Agatha in the front seat as a map reader: “Somebody to point the way.” [99]

Janet looking out the car window at natural beauty of Ireland – she also saw the goodness in Randy that others couldn’t see. [100]

Eleven

Randy’s father recalls a Doctor’s comment: “... the brain was full of chemicals, and it would take a team of biochemists to understand the repeated establishment and overthrow of the states of Randy’s mind.” [102]

Randy lonely for Janet – mentally resolving to change and become a better husband – all as he drank five beers. [103]

“Beer lowered his spirits. He had come dangerously close to being happy this evening... Elation was not to be trusted. It never lasted. Happiness was risky. Beer was comfortably depressing.” [104]

Man in bar to Randy, who’s “so-so” – “I know all about so-so.”

Randy wasn’t a fighter, but he wonders “what was worth fighting for in the larger context of life. Love.” [106]

Randy buys a vacuum cleaner for Janet from the guy in the bar – “So strong was Randy’s desire to please Janet.” [109]

Twelve

The sea “was like nothing Agatha had ever seen, and it took her breath away.” -- :Rock and water. Water and rock. The marriage of land and sea...” [112]

Stay at St. Margaret's Bed & Breakfast. [112]

Old man "whose sexuality had outlived his means of satisfying it." [120]

Bishop Baker wasn't repelled, but "moved to pity." [120]

Bishop Baker looking over sea: "I find a pier like this and I look west and I think of all the water between me and my everyday life and I feel so free I want to sing." [121]

Agatha "dreamed little shreds of dreams." [122]

News of a family killed by Brits in Belfast. [123]

Janet talks to Agatha about her hard life with the Meers. [125]

Agatha tells Janet about James - Agatha "fell silent. She felt confused. Never in her adult life had she been at a loss for words." [126]

Thirteen

Dropping Janet off at Randy's relatives. [130ff]

Agatha "was watching something strange and ominous happen to the light over the Wicklow Hills" ... "A cloud of foreboding moved across her mind as she came to realize how much she was expecting from a man she had never met." [132]

Alexander Fermoye tells the story of the family killed in Ulster. [134-137]

A tremor in Agatha's hands. [137]

Fourteen

James O'Hannon comes to Agatha's hotel to meet her. "It was simply the most pleasing voice she had ever heard." [139]

James recalls a wedding he served as a boy, an ugly marriage that had turned him away from marriage. The bride's own parents weren't at the wedding, saying "there were some things in life so ugly that only the priest had the power to look upon them." [143-144]

Agatha: our cathedral "looks like a warehouse. Without the wars." [147]

Re: Bishop Baker - "He's one of those people you could almost like if it weren't for his beliefs." [147]

As James embraced her, Agatha "felt that for a mere seven hundred dollars she had been carried not only from the New World to the Old, but also beyond it, to the realm of her happiest dreams." [148]

Fifteen

James and Agatha go to National Gallery - James points out his favorite, a Brueghel painting of a peasant wedding. [149]

"Life!" is what James sees in the Brueghel.

At a painting of the Last Supper, Agatha felt wonderful that anywhere she went “she could witness this ceremony of bread and wine and be united with the Apostles and all believers ever since.” [150]

“She felt a sudden desire to attend Mass with James.” [150]

Agatha thinks of almost having married Preston Warner in 1938. [152]

At the beach, “There were babies all over the place.” [153]

James is “edgy.” [154]

Agatha notices that many Irish people “resembled her ancestors.” [154-155]

“Basking in warmth, James and Agatha went on speaking of death.” [155]

James, re: his visits home – “... there’s no joy to be had from it, the female presence gone.” [156]

Agatha talks of Miles Pruitt’s death: “What saved me was Beverly.” [156]

With James consoling her, holding her – “Agatha wouldn’t mind if she never moved from this beach. She felt whole and complete and exhausted, as though bringing this story of Miles Pruitt to Ireland and handing it over to James were the major work of her life.” [157]

At Trinity College library, seeing the Book of Kells (open to John’s gospel): “How could thirteen-hundred-year-old ink be so vivid?” [157]

“With so far to fall... her spirits took a dizzying plunge” when James says he won’t be able to see her for a few days. [158]

Sixteen

“Agatha had lived her life believing that nothing was hopeless in the morning.” [159]

“It was clear what to do. She must offer to help him through his crisis.” [159]

She decided to go to Mass – unthinkable that she could be in Ireland without sitting/standing/kneeling next to James. She “loved” him. [159]

“Yes, the pain in her breast had to be love. Either that or a coronary.” [160]

She wept “like a jilted girl.” [160]

St. Brigid’s church = “sharply gothic” – “embellished outside with layers of curliques and pigeon droppings and angels in half relief.” [162]

Feast of Corpus Christi. The priest “was a tall, white-haired man. He was pale, with ruddy spots high on his cheekbones. He was James.” [163]

Agatha “hadn’t been conscious of the bitter laugh she had uttered as she fled the church.” [163]

“She was thinking back to the time when she was nine years old and introduced to chaos for the first time” – she had seen “the idiot girl” in a neighborhood house – “Her face seemed not to correspond to God’s plan for human faces.” [163]

The girl's father took the flowers Agatha's mother had sent: "The solicitude in his eyes was that of a man who had been carrying his child from crib to couch and back again for forty years." [163]

"... the girl's presence caused in Agatha a bowel-churning shock and a confusing chain of thoughts that would last her a lifetime. Why had God given the Quimbys this cross?" [166]

Waiting for the train, Agatha felt "She must see the sea. To keep her balance, she must fix her eyes on the perfect horizontal of the sea." [166]

"Throughout her life whenever she was bowled over, Agatha invariably got to her feet again by finding the precise words and the proper listener to hear them. Today's listener was God, no doubt, this being Sunday and God being her only friend within earshot." [166]

"Who said there are no snakes in Ireland?" [167]

Seventeen

Bishop Baker at seminary: "... vocations in decline now, even in Ireland." [168]

Bishop Baker discovers Agatha has checked out of hotel. [167]

Bishop Baker to Janet re: Agatha - "... if she needs help - that's what we've got to find out." [172]

Agatha, at a guesthouse, could think further ahead in her life "not that Janet wasn't looming in the way." [173]

Was Agatha tired from "love lag." [174]

Janet calls Randy - both say they're lonely for each other. [180-182]

Eighteen

Janet at IRA rally: "It seemed "the wrong time" and "the wrong place" for a political rally. [186]

Agatha calls the IRA "terrorists." [188]

Agatha and Janet on bus, "carried through all the gradations of Dublin's poverty and wealth" - "Have you noticed, Janet, there are fewer bus stops among the rich, and no joggers among the poor?" [188]

Janet finds Agatha's expression "unreadable." [189]

Agatha: "I can't get enough of the sea... there's so much more to the world than we realize." [189]

Janet prefers Minnesota lakes to the sea: "they're smaller." [189]

Agatha shows Janet her sketches: [189]

"I'm an artist by default..." - "Imitation has never been my strong point... My strong point was always composition." [190]

Janet remembered 6th grade: when "Miss McGee pointed out that each element - this tree, this barn, this road - was placed where it was for a reason... She

went on and on about balance... It was the artist's job to rearrange nature, she said; life as you meet it needed a great deal of straightening and fixing. Everything in nature had once had its place, but some things since the Fall of Man had been *misplaced*, and the artist had to set everything right." [190]

Agatha sketching the cliffs. Lacks depth. Janet impulsively adds a gliding full in the sky of the sketch. Agatha asks: "Why should that bird make such a difference?" [192]

Like the painting in the art gallery, where the elusive image of Judas drew the eye away from Christ while simultaneously heightening the drama that Christ was at the center. As Agatha had come to understand her own life better in the past four years by concentrating on James." [192]

"Things throw light on things." [192]

Agatha and Janet watching an elderly couple. Janet hopes she and Randy will be like this. Agatha feels she and James had been like that for those few hours – "so *used* to each other." [193]

Nineteen

"In history class Randy had never had difficulty understanding the balance of power between nations; all his life he had been eyewitness to the balance of power between parents." [197]

"Life was full of opportunities once you learned to see them" (Randy thinks). [198]

Randy showing house. Second couple, pregnant wife had asthma attack; Randy takes her to the hospital. [201f]

"There was a lot to be said for charity... Maybe it was his nature to be a saint." [204]

Randy goes to new pharmacist's house to try to sell her the vacuum cleaner; she flirts with him until finding out he's married." [204]

Twenty

Bishop Baker goes to Ballywegs to meet James O'Hannon, after having found out about him from Janet. [212-216]

"St. Brigid's put him in mind of a dark giant brooding inwardly, and ignoring, except for a few hours every Sunday, the villagers whose lives it controlled." [215-216]

"... the high iron fence surrounding the compound of gray Catholicism." [216]

"No signs of life anywhere, no movement..." [216]

James reminded Bishop Baker of priests in his own diocese: "... the mercy house and the haphazard diet stood in the bishop's mind for the absence of a companion in the life of every priest" ... "All priests are pathetically alone, he thought, myself included." [217-218]

James: "I'm talking about the urge of the spirit." [218]

James: "The only indiscretion of my life, and in less than two days here's a bishop come to reprimand me." [219]

Compared to the esteem in which priests are regarded in Ireland, Bishop Baker remarks of Minnesota: "... we're not so Catholic as all that." [220]

James: "I've lived a lifetime as prince and I'm not finding it a pleasant thing to look back on. It's kept me separate from my people, it has, my eminence has. Prevented me from being close to anyone." [220]

James, re: his classmates, teachers at the seminary - "They're lost in their books and theologies." [221]

"At Christmas I come right out and say it, 'You're a lovable gang of God's people.'" [223]

"... even though I have everything a priest would want, there's more to life than a priest would want." [223]

"I'd exchange all the esteem in the world for a single friend." [223]

Bishop Baker finds James "a lonely man without malice" - "James so obviously needed a listener." [223]

Twenty-One

Randy takes Stephen to Janet's family. [225]

He "marveled at the cheer pervading this ramshackle house." [226]

The house "always... made him happy" - but he always came down "realizing that he didn't fit into his place in life the way the Rafts fit into theirs." [226]

Twenty-Two

James: "Leave it to the Irish to confuse their priest with a king." [228]

James prepares dinner for Bishop Baker; tries to get him to eat mushrooms; feeds them to cat to prove they aren't poisonous. [229-230]

Bishop Baker finds the cat stiff! And tells James they need to go to a hospital. [231]

Bishop Baker prays: "Not death in Ballybegs at the hands of a whiskey priest." [231]

Bishop Baker: "There's time to save our lives." [232]

Bishop Baker remembers being close to death as a child - swimming. [233]

"If his life had been spared once, why not twice? And tonight, by helping to save the life of James O'Hannon, wasn't he somehow paying off his old debt to Howie?" [233]

Nurse in the hospital was a nun in white. [234]

The doctor "might have been posing for a portrait: *Doctor Meditating.*" [235]

Doctor is puzzled because he's never seen James drunk before. [235]

Bishop Baker drinks ipecac and vomits so loudly that "hall visitors abandoned their loved ones and hurried home." [236]

Watching James's stomach being pumped, Bishop Baker wretches again, "asking God to credit this to his account of temporal punishment due to sin." [237]

Bishop Baker asks James to call Agatha. [237]

James finds the cat alive: "There she was, against the wall, licking the afterbirth off a kitten while three other kittens nuzzled her belly, nursing." [238]

Twenty-three

Bishop Baker stops by to take Agatha to the Hills she had wanted to see with James. [237-240]

Agatha: "Give me the map and I'll point the way... Once I figure out which is the passenger side." [240]

Agatha says there's no vocations in America because "we've never had to be spiritually tough" - Church in America declining. [241]

Bishop Baker hopeful - pilgrim Church - changes: "Better rough water than the doldrums." [241]

Agatha disagrees: "Better the doldrums than gales and typhoons... capsizing and sinking." [242]

Bishop Baker and Agatha talk about closing Catholic schools. [242-243]

Bishop Baker: "... the ongoing quality of the Church." Doesn't know what, because the Holy Spirit is "not one to tip His hand" - a sense of the faith "returning to the way it was with the early Christians." [244]

"I'll let you temper my idealism if you let me temper yours." [244]

"Antagonism was gone" between Agatha and Bishop Baker - "The difficult road had taken their minds off their argument. Sensing the hidden beauty around them, they felt like two pilgrims entering the unknown." [246]

"Agatha felt herself softening. Bishop Baker's cordiality was not forced, as she had once assumed it to be... He was a warm, smart, honest man. Despite the heresies he was tangled in, she found it impossible to go on disliking him." [247]

(Agatha and Bishop Baker's storyline alternates with that of Janet on a train to Belfast with Jack Scully who is trying to seduce her.) [247-252]

Belfast was "counterseductive." [253]

Bishop Baker proposes the principal's position to Agatha. [256]

Twenty-Four

Randy working on real estate deal. [257ff]

Twenty-Five

Agatha hears of IRA demonstration. Her host: "The Irish are like dogs when it come to grudges." [265]

Agatha ponders the principalship. [266]

"... the light this morning was strong and made her squint. It was the same pervasive light that moved into Minnesota on certain snowy days in winter and made you uncomfortable, a discourteous light that fell in through your windows and invaded the darkest recesses of your house, your soul. It cast no light, however, on her dilemma." [266]

With James gone from her life, Agatha's future looked empty. [266-267]

Agatha's main reason for thinking of becoming principal: "She loved St. Isidore's Elementary. She loved the brick, the windows, the hardwood floors... it housed her children." [267]

"Each of these reasons had its reverse side." [267]

"Though she had the skills to be principal, she didn't have the hope." [267]

With the school due to close in two years: "... how devastating on that final day, after two years as a lame-duck principal, to be the last one left in the empty halls, to go from room to room and make sure the lights were switched off and the shades were drawn and then to step out the front doorway and turn the key in the lock for the last time ever." [267]

Agatha reads a letter-to-the-editor about Paddy Creely who'd been killed. "Exactly how hate might lead to peace he never said." [268]

Her host, to Agatha, as James came to see her: "You're a great hit with the clergy, I must say." [269]

"'Father O'Hannon,' she said coldly." [269]

"I've come to apologize." -- "For being Father O'Hannon." -- "For not telling you." [269]

"Holding her hand, he felt how stiff and icy she was, and he began to lose courage." [269]

James's life had been happier than many, "yet not so happy as I had hoped it would be." [269-270]

"I got to know my parish the way a father knows his family, and from there I went on to know my parish the way a prisoner knows his prison." [270]

James wept, telling Agatha how much her letters had meant to him. "She had never before seen a man weeping." [270]

"Can you forgive me?" [271]

Agatha felt like pressing James's head to her breast, and felt like never seeing him again. [271]

"Agatha wanted to call after him," but James came back with a letter for Bishop Baker. [271]

Agatha asks James to accompany her a ways on her walk -- "Agatha holding his arm." [272]

Agatha compares her life in Staggerford to James's in Ballybegs: "Happy enough. Happier than most, I suppose. But too much the same from beginning to end." [272]

James's letters broke the sameness: "No two letters the same. No day quite the same for me when one of your letters arrived." [272]

James asks if they could continue writing, and "waited for her answer." [273]

James asks if what he did was sinful. Agatha: "Only your conscience knows your sins." [273]

James had come to think of Agatha as his conscience. Agatha: "Lord help you." [273]

James: Can anyone forgive him but Agatha? Agatha: "God can. He does it all the time." [273]

Agatha: Forgiving is not one of my skills. [273]

A "derelict" sits on the bench with James and Agatha, and introduces humor. [274]

Agatha thanks James for coming, and offers forgiveness. [274]

Agatha "can't be sure" if she'll write. [274]

James points out directions to Agatha, and she kisses his hand. [275]

Twenty-Six

Bishop Butler picks Agatha up and they go out to Comomile Kitchen; he asks her if she chose right by passing up the tour. Agatha: "I've seen it all. More than all." [276]

Agatha had gone to noon Mass, "and there had asked God if the pleasure of knowing James would someday heal the injury of discovering the truth about him, "and she was amazed to find that it was already so." [276-277]

Her pain "was no longer a chaotic sort of pain." [277]

They were eating with the Fermoyles. Opening of their shop was being delayed by the carpenter having a cold, and their greeting card display being delayed by "something about a strike among artists and versifiers." [277]

Conversation about the state of Ireland -- economy in bad shape... Bishop Butler saddened by his visit to James: "the lonely priest in his cluttered house"... Janet homesick after her visit to the north... [277-278]

They were going to a play, but it wouldn't cheer them up because "It's full of terrible things... Infanticide." [278]

Alexander Fermoyle says the Church should fix things at home, but then contradicted himself by stating his admiration for Mother Theresa. [278]

“... what possible good was the church doing in Ireland, worshiping wafers of bread in gloomy old churches and teaching nonsense in gloomy old schools? What possible good had prayers ever done anybody?” (Alexander Fermoye) [278-279]

Agatha responds: “There’s no telling how much good prayers do... The human race is a family, and the prayers of any one of us induce God to look more kindly on all of us.” [279]

Evelyn asks Bishop Baker if he believes in the Mystical Body. “Agatha held her breath. It was one of the fundamental questions separating agnostics from true believers these days.” [279]

Bishop Baker: “Sure, I buy it.” ... “Agatha wanted to cheer.” [279]

They see preparations for a riot on the way to the theater. [280]

Before the play, the actor Jack Scully says of the play: “... it’s a play about the shit we carry around with us from the past.” [280]

The play was “more absurdist and profane than Agatha cared for.” – about “one generation falling into the ruts of past generations, the stupidity of human nature, the futility of human aspiration.” Most satirical character was a priest. [280]

[*je: cf. John Dunne’s two kinds of suffering*]

Agatha and Bishop Baker discuss the play during intermission. [281]

Agatha worries that god may be giving up on man, and then fears she may have expressed heresy. Bishop Baker: “Don’t worry so much about heresy, Agatha. It’s not a sin to think” [281]

During the play a confrontation had developed outside between police and a group of young boys. [281-282]

Near the end of the play, they hear an ambulance. Agatha thinks the play reflects what they were seeing in the play. Ireland “was a nation trapped in the rutted ways of her past, the old handing down their griefs and grudges to the young. The siren did for the play what the gull had done for her sketch on Howth pier – gave it dimension – and the play, in turn, a sketch of ink, lent dimensions to her impressions of Ireland.” [282]

Previously Agatha had seen Ireland’s suffering as a romance. The situation no longer seemed complex to her: “What was simpler than slashing open the human spirit and letting gout the beast?” [283]

As they left the theater, a man was singing to the few demonstrators who remained. [283]

Agatha: “In her head she was hearing all the ballads of former wars blending into this brand-new ballad... and this one blending into the ballads of wars to come.” [283]

Through the cab’s rear window, the scene was “ethereal... everything gray... the people seemed frozen in place, a small mass of humanity packed in a tight, immovable knot... Through the rain...

the scene became an abstract colorless etching of a nation enduring – as well as prolonging – its timeless, crippling pain.” [283]

Twenty-Seven

“But these were city impressions.” [284]

Refreshment came from the land... the sun, and the ocean. [284]

Agatha “thinking that this might very well be heaven.” [284]

In the clarity of the ocean horizon, it was clear to Agatha that she would take the principalship. [284]

“Things throw light on things.” [284]

Recalling James seeing “life” in the Brueghel painting: “Once life has washed over you in tides of joy and anguish, how could you choose to be high and dry? Life was crushing as well as uplifting, but it made no sense to call it quits if the alternative was knitting your days away with Lillian.” [284]

Part of what made Ireland ‘heaven’ ... “was the prospect of leaving it.” [286]

Agatha looking forward to what she would immediately do as principal. [286]

Lillian shows Agatha her postcards: “She had swallowed it whole.” Lillian asks Agatha what she had seen, and Agatha thinks of James, Bishop Baker, Janet: “I saw the essence of the Emerald Isle.” [287]

Bishop Baker leaves first class to sit by Agatha on the place; she hands him the letter from James. [287]

Reading the letter, Bishop Butler laughs – James wrote to tell Bishop Baker that his cat had kittens. [288]

Randy and Stephen drive to Twin Cities to meet Janet – Randy teaches Stephen “Blue Bayou”, singing along with Linda Ronstadt. [288-289]

Randy trying to complete his real estate deal, offering the Noznicks his vacuum cleaner as part of the deal. [290-291]

“Randy wanted to weep. His deal was falling apart.” [291]

Randy offers the Noznicks his mother’s check (which had been intended for cosmetics) to make the deal. [291]

Randy thinks: “Eugene Westermann might be a genius in sales, but what did he know about love?” [291]

“From now on Randy would sell himself to Janet through her weakness. Not a bad kid, Stephen. His voice was sensational on the high notes.” [292]