

Frank McGuinness

**MAY TWENTY-
SECOND**



Gallery Books

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Contents

Notes 10

PART ONE

Clonmany page 13
The Willow Tree in Winter 14
Ephebe 15
Jocasta 17
The Milky Way 19
The Women With No Shadows 20
Adam 21
Top Hat 23
Utah 24
Chesterbread 25
Lampedusa 27
The Travel Pass 28
Cerberus 29
The Sand House, Rosstownlough 30

PART TWO

Visions of Lyra
1 AKIRA KUROSAWA 32
2 ROBERT ALTMAN 32
3 RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER 33
4 DAVID LEAN 33
5 AGNÈS VARDA 34
6 FEDERICO FELLINI 34
7 PETER WEIR 35
Ganymede 36
Scavengers at Waterloo 38
Ulrich Zwingli's Lament for Geneva, 1519 39
Coco Chanel 41
Toque 43
The Ward in the Night 44
Mark Smeaton 46
Robert Johnson Meets the Devil 47

The Mallow Plant 48
Mount Sandel 49
The Dionne Quintuplets 51
Little Richard 52
Cordelia 54

PART THREE

Dancing with Goya 57

PART FOUR

Montaigne's Cat 70
The Avenue in Lockdown 73
Dresden
1 MOTHER 74
2 SOUP 74
3 HORSE AND CART 75
4 THE LUTHERAN CHURCH ON ADELAIDE ROAD 76
Half Moon Street 78
The Russian Convoys 80
The Redshank 85
Rembrandt and Money 86
Heretic 87
Spanish Flu, 1918 88
Vicky de Lambray 90
Pangur, My Cat 93
The Fountain House in Petersburg 94
Glencolmcille: Fr James McDyer 95
Gola 96

PART FIVE

Meryton

1 MRS BENNETT 98
2 CAROLINE BINGLEY 99
3 SIR WILLIAM LUCAS 100
4 AUNT PHILLIPS 101
5 COLONEL AND HARRIET FORSTER 102
6 SISTERS 103

Underneath the Stairs 105
The October Devotions, 1962 106
Learn to Read 108
Psalter 109
The Merchant of Prato 110
Feeding Birds in My Garden 111
Caroline Blackwood 112
The Swilly Hotel 115
The U-Boats Surrender, Lisahally, Derry 116
Persepolis, 1971 117
Chaos, 1945 119
The Year I Went With No Watch 120
Belfield: A Mosaic 121

The Ward in the Night

Last thing in the very dead of night time
it's me walking the wards, a grave robber,
not much to witness, hoping that the locks
swing open to rooms occupied by giants,
hoping to go home to our beds, waiting
for sleep to shed its skin through mind and limb
poisoning my body's red meat and veins,
wondering who lies touching the pale night,
listening to footsteps haunt corridors,
troussing mobiles, iPads and wallets.

Each time I pass their station kind staff say
things must be on the mend, your legs, well done.
My legs look less like suckling pigs tonight?
Am I one step nearer the abattoir?
I keep that panic close within my breast,
do my damndest not to squeal blue murder,
crash into doors ajar, windows, dreams,
hoping to kip sound tonight, marbled
by guns blazing at the marauding hoards
painting graves rainbow colours in my head.

If I sleep may I wake in some kingdom
of being well, managing without — what?
The able-bodied speak alien tongues.
Mixing medicines from sealed cabinets,
inviting folk to sing in harmony.
Grab a pew to rest now near Timbuktu,
learning from desert tribes a dance, a song,
juggling the bones we grave robbers salvaged
from the deluge soaking the sheets at night.

How do we feed and water chanting hoards
gathered where sun and moon collide in skies
as is their wont inside hospital wards?

Cannibals scramble an egg, fry rashers,
ooze sausage, white pudding, black toast and tea
yellow as canaries deep down coal mines,
doves blessing my swollen legs, chrism oiled,
believing tall stories spun in kitchens,
breaking bread with almond milk, curds, whey,
shutting eyes in hope they'll close this evening.

Last thing in the very dead of night time
I do my best and try to walk the wards
under doctors' orders, hands out, begging,
let me just get home and fill my own bed,
a bed big enough to lie together,
to draw from a well awash in spilt milk
a sleep enslaved in dreams just one more time
robbing the graves of respected elders,
juggling the bones belonging to our dead,
wondering who walks empty wards in night time?

Half Moon Street

for Daniel Finn

1

The hidden wonders of the world
reveal themselves in all their mystery,
frightening the secret police
stationed at the edge of Half Moon Street,
the splendiferous cavalry
glimpsed through the Judas-window,
their coats of many colours stitched
with the czarina's lost amber.

Winter wisely did a runner from
the tundra of Half Moon Street.
Wolves licked the windows.
Doors, ajar, slammed themselves shut.
We could smell blood of our loins
simmering gently in tureens,
feeding the circus of strong men
with barley bread in October.

2

Too many hearty cooks spoiled
the seasoned, salty October,
singing peace, peace on earth,
protecting the realm of dead souls.
They strung up the famished wolves.
They executed the swinging doors.
No chance of snatching forty winks.
Revolutions never cease on Half Moon Street.

Forever making sweet moan,
broths of boys threw their legs over
roundabout horses safely grazing
near streets lined with linden trees.
The cavalry climbed over the wall,
spilling like money through fields of maize,
white asparagus and tulip bulbs.
Spring had come to Half Moon Street.