I met him in a Dublin bar,

Louis Belfast

by Philip F. Clark

his bright white hair shining like some last call light.

I pushed among the crowd and stood behind him, my eyes trying to catch the bartender's tattooed glance.

As luck would have it, I got a seat next to him, as its previous owner stumbled to the door. With a sidelong glance, we nodded. I tried to order a drink. He asked, "American?"

"New Yorker, yes."

"Louis, Belfast," and I thought at first it was his full name.

He turned ice blue eyes to the bar.

"A Guinness, Declan, when you have a chance."

When it came he placed it in front of me.

"They're slow here, this time of night. Cheers."

He was maybe in his 70's; a strong broad chest, well-dressed, smoothed-faced.

A blackened thumb tapped a beat to Crowded House, drumming in the room.

He leaned into me; in a clipped and beautiful brogue, he said,
"They say we have the gift of gab so be prepared, I probably won't shut up."
He'd traveled, taught, had a former wife in a former life. His lover died.

"I'm monkish now, all I love to do is read." For the rest of the night, Guinness after Guinness (I learned the art of buying a round) we spoke of Joyce, and James, Dickinson, Manley Hopkins, Bowen.

I don't remember getting outside the bar.

"Will you come back to us, here in Dublin?

You must take my number down."

He hailed a cab. His strong arm settled me in; he leaned into the window for a kiss. "Get home safe, lad. You know, there really is a death of the heart." Louis Belfast strode away.