

# Louis Belfast

by Philip F. Clark

I met him in a Dublin bar,  
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.

