

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.

