Altogether Beautiful

The Religious Architecture of James Mulhern's Work

A Critical Study and Concordance of Biblical, Liturgical, and Literary Allusion

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Preface: What This Book Is

This is a reference work and an argument.

The argument is that James Mulhern is a religious writer — not a writer who occasionally uses religious material, but one whose entire body of work is built on a Catholic substructure that is continuous, deliberate, and almost never announced. The evidence for that claim is the body of this book: a concordance of the complete corpus, each passage matched to its scriptural, liturgical, devotional, hagiographic, iconographic, or literary source. 1,226 of its entries are rated strong — connections that can be quoted, located, and checked rather than inferred — and the places where the pattern fails are recorded alongside them, because a method that reports its own negatives is the only kind whose positives can be trusted. The full concordance runs to 2,002 passages; the argument rests on the strong tier and the negatives, not on the size of the list.

One refinement of the term is made in full in Part Ten. In criticism, a "religious writer" is usually a writer committed to a faith — O'Connor, Greene, Hopkins. Mulhern is not that. His work is religiously saturated but doctrinally withheld, and the presiding vocabulary is Transcendentalist, the Oversoul rather than God. The precise term is *writer of religious architecture*: an imagination structured by Irish-Catholic and Transcendentalist imagery, using that material as form and allusion rather than as confession or apologetics. The architecture is the subject of this book.

The occasion for the book was a single story. "Assumptions" is five thousand words about a bald, toothless, alcoholic Irishwoman in mid-century Boston, told by a boy who loved her. It is also one of the most densely allusive religious fictions in contemporary American short fiction, and the density is not decorative. The story's epigraph is the proper Marian antiphon of the feast on which its action takes place; that antiphon supplies the story's central word (*macula*, stain) and two of its climactic images; and the story's last paragraph is a formal answer to the sentence with which Pius XII defined the dogma of the Assumption in 1950.

The book is arranged by work. Part One reads that story line by line and then records every allusion in it. Parts Two through Eight take the collections, the novels, the poems, and the work published in literary magazines in turn, each with its

concordance, its further findings, and an account of the book as a designed object. Part Nine gathers the patterns that run across the books — the thematic Irish-Catholic material, the literary inheritance, and the passages Mulhern reuses from volume to volume. Part Ten asks what all of it amounts to, and what kind of writer it makes him.

How to use this book

The concordance entries are the spine. Each has the same four fields:

- **Quote** — the exact words as they appear in Mulhern's text.
- **Source** — the biblical citation (book chapter:verse), liturgical text, prayer, saint's life, devotional practice, artwork, or literary work it echoes.
- **Gloss** — one to three sentences on the connection and what it does in context.
- **Confidence** — STRONG, PROBABLE, or SPECULATIVE.

The confidence ratings are meant seriously. A concordance of this kind is only useful if it distinguishes between an allusion the author certainly made, one he probably made, and one a reader may reasonably see whether he intended it or not. STRONG entries are those where the wording, the context, or both make the connection difficult to deny — a direct quotation of scripture, a named feast, an image reproduced in its liturgical particulars. PROBABLE entries have converging evidence but no single decisive marker. SPECULATIVE entries are offered as readings, not as claims about intention; several are included precisely because the pattern around them is strong enough to make them worth weighing.

Thematic sections are separate from allusion entries. Where a passage carries no specific citable source but belongs unmistakably to the Irish-Catholic or Italian-Catholic imaginative world — guilt, purgatory, redemptive suffering, the parish, the wake, drink, exile, the grandmother as domestic celebrant — it is recorded under Thematic Religious Elements rather than smuggled in as an allusion.

Literary allusions are recorded alongside the religious ones. Mulhern's inheritance is Joyce, Yeats, Dante, Flannery O'Connor, Dickinson, Emerson, Hopkins, and the King James Bible read as literature, and the sacred and the literary are frequently the

same gesture. Where the title of a novel turns out to be a verbatim line of Yeats about fairies whispering to trout, that belongs in the record.

A note on method and on verification

Every quotation in this book was checked, word for word, against the source text before it was printed. No quotation was reconstructed from memory or paraphrase. Where a passage appears in more than one of Mulhern's books — and a surprising number do — each occurrence is quoted separately so that the variants can be compared; that material is gathered in the Cross-Book Repetitions appendix.

The texts consulted were: the story "Assumptions" (February 2020 typescript); the collections *Assumptions and Other Stories*, *Useless Things and Other Stories*, and *The Weight of Small Mercies*; the novels *Molly Bonamici* (2016) and *Give Them Unquiet Dreams* (2019); four poetry files comprising the selected and collected poems; and twenty-eight verified online publications in *Fiction on the Web*, *The Galway Review*, *Impspired*, *The Writing Disorder*, *The Font*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Abstract Magazine TV*, *BoomerLitMag*, *Sparks of Calliope*, and *Ginosko*.

Biblical quotations follow the Authorized (King James) Version unless otherwise noted, because that is the register Mulhern's own prose echoes. Vulgate readings are given where the Latin is the point.

The author's own account of the work's origin adds a layer the printed record alone does not show. He identifies two texts as foundational to his method: the story "Assumptions" and the essay "Teaching at Fifty-Six." "Assumptions," he states, began as "Lovely Peggy" — his very first published text as an adult writer, appearing in the Emerson Review while he was a student at Emerson College — and was transformed over the years into the present story. The two texts together, in his account, demonstrated the methodology he has strived for over the decades. That first text already contains the archetypes that recur throughout his work — the grandmother, to whom the work is dedicated; the sister he loves dearly; the boy named Jimmy, his own name; and Peggy, a real person — and the events it draws on, transfigured with fictitious embellishment, are those of his own childhood.

A word to the reader who distrusts this kind of reading

Allusion-hunting has a bad name, and it deserves it when the hunter finds a cross in every intersection. Three safeguards are built into what follows.

Second, the negative evidence is reported. *The Weight of Small Mercies* contains one story, "The Wrong Way," in which the transfiguring apparatus is absent — and it is the bleakest thing in the cycle. A pattern that can be shown to be absent somewhere is a pattern rather than a projection.

Third, and most important: Mulhern repeats himself. He reuses the same sentences across books — the wet silvery scalp, the mourning dove out of its cleft, "Up you go. On the count of three." A writer who deploys the same charged image four times across three decades is not being read into. He is telling you, in the only way a writer can, which images are load-bearing.

The story he keeps returning to is the same one every time. A ruined body, mocked and discarded, is taken up.

Part One: The Story

A reading of "Assumptions," followed by the full record of allusion in it.

Introduction: A Story That Defines a Dogma

James Mulhern's "Assumptions" is a five-thousand-word story about a bald, toothless, alcoholic Irishwoman in mid-century Boston, told by a boy who loved her. It is also one of the most densely allusive religious fictions in contemporary American short fiction — a text in which nearly every noun has a second life in scripture, liturgy, iconography, or Marian devotion, and in which not one of those second lives is ever pointed out by the narrator.

That silence is the story's method and its argument. The narrator tells us plainly what happened: a woman was mocked, a dog was rescued, a family went to the beach on a holy day, a woman died. Underneath that plain account, a second text runs continuously — the Song of Songs, the Gospels, the Feast of the Assumption, the Litany of Loreto, Titian's *Assunta*, the harvest god Lugh — and it runs *peripherally*, in exactly the way the boy narrator describes seeing the divine:

> "I was on the hunt too, spotting flying Mary's everywhere, flares of white light in my peripheral vision that would disappear as quickly as I turned my head."

This sentence is the story's epistemology and its instruction to the reader. God, in "Assumptions," is available only obliquely — the theological position of Exodus 33, where Moses is told "Thou canst not see my face" and is hidden in a cleft of the rock while glory passes (Exod. 33:20–23). Mulhern builds a story that can only be read the way its narrator sees.

This essay traces that second text in detail. The argument, stated at the outset, is this: **"Assumptions" performs upon Peggy Fleming the act that *Munificentissimus Deus* performed upon the Virgin Mary.** Pius XII's 1950 apostolic constitution concludes: "we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory" (Pius XII,

par. 44). Mulhern quotes this sentence in the body of the story. His final paragraph is its answering formula: Peggy rises, "laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine."

The story, in other words, is a bull of definition written for a woman nobody would define. Everything in it is arranged to make that act of definition inevitable.

I. The Title's Three Assumptions

The title carries three meanings simultaneously, and the story activates all three.

First, the dogma. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary — the doctrine that Mary, at the end of her earthly life, was taken bodily into heaven and did not undergo the corruption of the grave. Defined *ex cathedra* by Pius XII on 1 November 1950, it remains the only exercise of papal infallibility since the doctrine of infallibility was itself promulgated at the First Vatican Council (*Munificentissimus Deus*). The story names the feast, quotes the decree, dates the definition, and stages its action on August 15.

Second, the verb. *Assumere*: to take up. The story is full of small assumptions rehearsing the great one. A wig is lifted into the air by a gust of wind. A roller coaster lifts two children into "the crystal sky." A hand reaches down and a woman "rose from the sea." A Father's arms lift a child's head. The literal action of the verb recurs until the last paragraph makes it doctrinal.

Third, the judgments. What people assume. The story opens with a human verdict — Peggy is, "according to my grandfather," the "homeliest damn woman" he had ever seen — and closes with a divine one. In between are the assumptions of Auntie Ag, of the card table, of the neighbors who shut their doors, of the young mother who threatens to call the police. The plural title makes the doctrine and the prejudice the same word, and the story's whole movement is the overturning of the second by the first.

This third sense explains why the narrator's meditation on Titian is placed where it is:

> "I've always wondered why it took so long to decide on the fate of poor Mary, who like a participant in a *tableau vivant*, remained motionless, one foot on the earth and one foot in the air, for centuries."

Mary is described as suspended pending a human ruling: heaven waiting on a papal signature. It is a comic image and a serious one, and it is also a description of Peggy Fleming, who spends the entire story in exactly that posture — one foot on the earth, one foot in the air, awaiting somebody willing to declare her lovely.

II. The Epigraph: A Marian Antiphon, and the Stain That Answers It

The story opens under a verse from the Song of Songs:

> "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you." (Song of Solomon 4:7)

This is not a decorative epigraph. It is the interpretive key, and it operates on at least four levels.

1. It is a Marian antiphon. In the Vulgate, Song of Songs 4:7 reads *Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te.* From the fourth century, this verse — with *Maria* substituted for *amica mea*, and later, through the Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus, with *originalis* added after *macula* — became the opening of the antiphon *Tota pulchra es, Maria*, one of the oldest Marian prayers in the Latin Church ("Tota pulchra es"). The antiphon is used liturgically on Marian feasts, and in the older Gregorian repertory the Canticle version was assigned in particular to **August 15, the Assumption**, and to September 8 ("Tota pulchra es Maria," French Wikipedia). The epigraph is therefore not merely a love poem quoted at a homely woman; it is the proper chant of the very feast on which the story's central action takes place.

2. It supplies the word *stain*. *Macula* means blemish, spot, stain. *Immaculata* — immaculate — means *unstained.* The antiphon declares of Mary that "the original stain is not in thee." Now consider the story's first close description of Peggy on the morning of the feast:

> "Her housedress, which had a pattern of tiny roses, shrouded a pair of small black boots; there were **red stains** at the end of her sleeves from where she had spilled some juice."

The epigraph promises a body without *macula*; the feast-day body arrives covered in *maculae*. Red ones. And they are located at the ends of the sleeves — that is, at the wrists, where the nails go. Mulhern places the stigmata precisely, then supplies an innocuous domestic explanation. This is the story's governing technique in its purest form: **the sacred is stated in the register of the shabby, and the narrator declines to notice.**

The rest of the sentence reinforces the reading. The stained fabric is patterned with "tiny roses" — the *Rosa Mystica* of the Litany of Loreto (Vatican, "Litany of Loreto"), and the rose of the Passion, white for the flesh and red for the blood. And the dress does not *cover* the boots; it **shrouds** them. Mulhern chose a burial word three pages before the burial.

3. It is already in Peggy's mouth. The epigraph's vocative — "my love" — is Peggy Fleming's own habitual address to the boy: "A fib, **my love**," "Sometimes that's the way it has to be, **my love**." Before the story tells us she is the Bride of the Canticle, it has her speaking the Bride's idiom as ordinary Irish endearment.

4. It seeds the story with Canticle imagery. Once the epigraph is recognized as structural, the Song of Songs turns out to furnish much of the story's physical world:

- The **cedar** smell of Peggy's kitchen — "The beams of our house are cedar" (Song of Sol. 2:17); the cedar of Solomon's temple.
- The **dove** that starts from its **cleft** in the rocks — "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock" (Song of Sol. 2:14).
- The **apples and raisins** in the beach bag — "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love" (Song of Sol. 2:5), rendered in most modern translations as "sustain me with raisins."
- The dog's new home, "a large fenced-in yard" — the *hortus conclusus*, "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse" (Song of Sol. 4:12), five verses after the epigraph.
- Peggy's nocturnal wandering, described below, which reproduces the Bride's night search almost incident for incident.

And one further detail closes the circuit. The full *Tota pulchra* antiphon, in its traditional form, contains the line *Vestimentum tuum candidum quasi nix, et facies tua sicut sol* — "Thy garment is white as snow, and thy face as the sun" ("Tota pulchra es Maria," German Wikipedia). At Nantasket Beach, Mulhern gives us both: Peggy anointed with oil so that "she shone like a miniature **sun**," and the two women seen from the roller coaster as "transfigured figurines on the earth below, their clothing **white as snow**." The antiphon of the epigraph supplies the imagery of the climax.

III. Peggy as Christ

The story's Marian layer is its iconography; its Christological layer is its plot. Peggy is *pictured* as Mary and *treated* as Christ, and the two readings do not compete — the Assumption is itself the doctrine that a human body follows Christ's body into glory.

The mocking

Peggy is mocked from childhood to death. Margaret Mary Fawny "made fun of me… calling me a toad," and slapped her face "when Sister Ignatius wasn't looking" — struck by an assailant who takes care not to be seen, which is the form of the buffeting before the Sanhedrin: "And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?" (Luke 22:64).

The mockery continues in adulthood at the card table, where her judges "slap down a poker chip or a playing card" while itemizing her ugliness — a tribunal that is also a game of chance, the soldiers dicing for the garment (Ps. 22:18; John 19:24). And when the grandfather has said too much, he "would become **stone silent**, ashamed to have said so much already." The accuser drops his stone, as the accusers do in John 8.

Baldness, the crown, and the anointing

The scalp is the story's most heavily worked physical detail, and it is worked in three stages.

Stage one: the curse. Peggy suffers "chronic alopecia" from "a mysterious childhood disease." Scriptural baldness is affliction and mourning: "and instead of well set hair, baldness" (Isa. 3:24); "Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children" (Mic. 1:16). Most pointedly, there is the jeering of Elisha: "there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, **Go up, thou bald head**; go up, thou bald head" (2 Kings 2:23). What the children are taunting Elisha about is precisely an **assumption** — he has just watched Elijah taken up by a whirlwind and a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). The Bible's most famous bald man is mocked with the words *go up*. Mulhern's bald woman goes up, in the story's own words, in a **chariot**.

Stage two: the crown. On the morning of the feast:

> "She had forgotten her wig and the sunlight highlighted a **laurel** of peach-fuzz hair; a few long silver strands, **moist from sweat**, **garlanded** the area by her **temples** and behind her large ears."

Laurel. Garland. Temples. Sweat. This is a crown, pressed at the temples, in a sweat: the *Ecce Homo*, staged in a kitchen with the blinds drawn. It is simultaneously the Coronation of the Virgin, the mystery that immediately follows the Assumption in the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary — and which, in Titian's Frari altarpiece, is anticipated by the angel bearing the crown. Two crowns in one image, and the word *temples* quietly makes her head a sanctuary.

Stage three: the anointing. At the beach:

> "My grandmother rubbed tanning oil into Peg's bald scalp, forehead, and the nape of her neck; she shone like a miniature sun."

Oil poured on the head is the act that makes a king, a priest, a prophet — and *Christos* means "anointed." Samuel anoints Saul and David on the head (1 Sam. 10:1, 16:13); the precious ointment runs down upon Aaron's beard (Ps. 133:2). More precisely, the woman with the alabaster box "poured it on his head" at Bethany, and Jesus interprets the act: "she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying" (Mark 14:3, 14:8). Peggy dies within days. She has been anointed beforehand.

The form of the gesture — forehead and extremities — is also the form of Extreme Unction, the anointing of the dying. Helen believes she is applying suntan lotion.

The bent woman

> "'I need to straighten out,' Peg said, arching her back."

Luke 13 records "a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself"; Christ lays hands on her, "and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God" (Luke 13:11–13). Helen's reply — "You're fine, Peg. You're fine" — is a refusal, or a deferral. No straightening occurs in the hallway. It occurs on the last page.

The palm against the wall

> "Peg hesitated every now and then, pressing her trembling **palm** against the wall, as if to discern whether it, or she, was still really here."

A palm pressed against a hard surface in order to verify that a body is real is the gesture of Thomas: "reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). Mulhern gives the gesture to the doubted body rather than the doubter. Peggy is her own Thomas, testing her own resurrection in a hallway, months before she dies.

Golgotha

The feast-day picnic is eaten "by a small tide pool in the shade of a **bony cliff**." Golgotha is "a place of a skull" (Matt. 27:33). The Eucharistic meal of bread and fruit is taken in the shadow of the skull-rock — and the Duffy poem appended to the story ends its third stanza "And Golgotha still groaning in your bones."

Dormition and Sunday

Peggy "died in her sleep," and the news arrives "early on a Sunday morning." Both details are precise. The Eastern name for the feast of August 15 is the **Dormition** — the *koimesis*, the falling-asleep of the Theotokos, the belief that Mary "died without suffering, in a state of spiritual peace" ("Dormition of the Mother of God"). Peggy's death is a dormition on the correct calendar. And Sunday morning is the resurrection morning: "very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun" (Mark 16:2). Here the movement is

inverted — the woman comes to the boy's bed with the news, and he is already awake, "propped… against a pillow."

IV. "Narrow"

> "My grandmother helped her through the **narrow** doorway and down the hall."

The word is doing scriptural work. "Strait is the gate, and **narrow** is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14). "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24).

The Lucan version is the relevant one, and the reason is structural: **Luke 13 contains both the bent woman made straight (13:11–13) and the strait gate (13:24)**, thirteen verses apart. Mulhern's paragraph contains both in consecutive sentences — "I need to straighten out," then the narrow doorway. Whether or not the correspondence was deliberate, it is exact, and it is the kind of coincidence that a story this saturated earns.

Note also *how* she gets through. She does not pass alone; she is *helped* through, on the arm of a woman who has been drinking since morning, having just touched the wall to confirm her own existence. The soteriology of "Assumptions" is contained in that clause. The narrow way is negotiated drunk, unsteadily, with assistance.

The word has a shadow meaning as well. Peggy's world is narrow — the pulled blinds, the divey joint, the cellar, the one block she will not leave, the housedress, the small black boots. Constriction and salvation share an aperture in this story, and pass through the same door.

V. Fire

Fire is the story's eschatological register, and Mulhern does something theologically audacious with it: **he converts the fire of judgment into the fire of glory.**

The transformation is worth tracking in sequence.

The face. Peggy's complexion in paragraph one is a landscape of "broken capillaries… flooding the arid plain of her skin, like some dreary river and its tributaries eking over a delta of nasolabial folds to terminate in the **red seas** of two droopy cheeks." An arid plain, a delta, a river, red seas: this is Egypt and Exodus written into a physiognomy. Bondage, wilderness, and the crossing of the Red Sea — which is the type of baptism itself, since "all our fathers… all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1–2). The face contains the plot. Her body will pass through a sea before the story ends.

The gorse. The wee people hide "in the bushes, beautiful Gorse Bushes with bright yellow flowers." Gorse is the flame-bush of Irish hedgerows, permanently in bloom and the color of fire. Mulhern gives us a burning bush that conceals not God but tormentors: revelation inverted into ambush.

Lugh. The harvest god is glossed as "the deity associated with late summer storms and lightening." He returns at the climax "turning heat lightening on and off behind a lacey curtain of gray" — a theophany behind a veil, Sinai staged over Massachusetts Bay, a god trying "to wake us all up."

Titian. The ekphrasis is almost entirely a description of fire: "the sun blazes a fervid yellow… The painting's most vivid colors are orange and red, shades of **fire, flesh and blood**." Fire, flesh, and blood — Pentecost, Incarnation, and Passion in a three-word list, offered as a note on pigment.

The sea. Then the sharpest move in the story:

> "The waves beyond glimmered like sparks from an **unquenchable fire**."

Unquenchable fire is not free-floating diction. It is the Gospels' standard phrase for hell: "he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12); "into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43–44). Mulhern takes scripture's image for damnation and assigns it to sunlight on water at the exact moment two women walk into the sea for a cure. The gesture is not careless; it is doctrinal. Revelation offers the counter-image — "a sea of glass mingled with fire," on which the redeemed stand and sing

(Rev. 15:2). The fire that in Mark consumes is here the fire that glitters, and the redeemed are already standing in it.

The miniature and the full. Anointed, Peggy "shone like a miniature sun." The image is the Transfiguration — "his face did shine as the sun" (Matt. 17:2) — and the apocalyptic Marian vision: "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev. 12:1). It is also, as noted above, the *Tota pulchra* antiphon's *facies tua sicut sol*. The miniature is a promise, and the promise is kept in the last paragraph: "the **Sun's** great light shines upon and caresses her warm skin."

The capital is the point. This is the *Sol Iustitiae* of the prophet: "unto you that fear my name shall the **Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings**" (Mal. 4:2). The cure Helen dragged everyone to Nantasket for does not come from the water; it comes from the Son, after death, and the homophone carries it.

The face again. And so the final image of Peggy: "her countenance reflecting the brightness of a **blazing fire**." This is Moses descending Sinai, whose "face shone while he talked with him" (Exod. 34:29), and the risen Christ of the Apocalypse, whose "countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (Rev. 1:16). The woman whose face in paragraph one was a wasteland of broken vessels is, in the last paragraph, a burning face.

One more datum belongs here, and it is either a coincidence or a signature: her surname is **Fleming**.

VI. Food and Fruit

Every major turn in "Assumptions" occurs over something edible. The story's sacramental system runs on food, and it is worth setting out in full.

Green beans: a Fall

> "Peggy used to tell us kids that she lost all her hair because she refused to eat green beans when she was a child."

A Genesis narrative told to children by its own victim: a food, a refusal, a body permanently marked. Eve ate and was cursed; Peggy abstained and was cursed. In either direction, food is the hinge on which the body is ruined. It is also, characteristically, a joke — a lonely woman converting her disfigurement into a moral tale of which she is the author rather than the object.

The fruit stand: the Fall repeated

> "one evening, after a game at Fenway Park, Jim drove the green Buick that he loved so much into a fruit stand on the side of the road, killing the old Italian guy selling the stuff, and himself, of course."

Death enters this story through fruit. A green car, a roadside stand, an old man dead among the scattered produce, and paradise permanently closed for the widow. The event even occurs after a game at Fenway **Park**. The Fall, restaged in Boston, with a Buick.

The sugar cube: a host

> "'To hell, with your father,' Peg said, passing me a sugar cube that she kept in her pocketbook in case her insulin dropped suddenly."

A small white disc, kept against emergency, placed into a child's hand by a diabetic woman who needs it to stay alive. It is the Host in every particular: the species, the gesture, the recipient, and the self-emptying — she gives away the thing that sustains her. It is *viaticum*, food for the journey, administered in a moving car after a resurrection (the dog has just been redeemed from the pound). It is also manna, the sweet thing that appears in the wilderness (Exod. 16:31, "like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey").

The fortune cookie: an oracle

> "Peg opened a fortune cookie and read, 'Do you believe? Endurance and persistence will be rewarded.'"

A written oracle broken open at the end of a shared meal: scripture produced by supper. Its two clauses are both gospel formulas. *"Do you believe?"* is Christ's question to Martha immediately before Lazarus is raised — "Believest thou this?"

(John 11:26) — and to the man born blind: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" (John 9:35). *Endurance* is the eschatological virtue: "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13).

Peggy receives it "as a mystical sign," which is exactly the right response and the only one available to her: providence read out of the ordinary is the theology of the poor. Her gloss is then a malapropism that improves on the proverb it mangles:

> "'Where there's a way, there's a will. What we need is faith is all, and our coats,' she said."

Where there's a way, there's a will inverts the maxim into orthodoxy: the Way exists first — "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) — and the will follows it. And "faith is all, and our coats" is the missionary sending of Luke 9:3 ("Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece") comically amended for a New England December.

Chinese takeout and the knocking

They eat, and then they go out into the night — two adults' worth of resolve, one child, one dog — to knock on doors and test whether they will be received. This is the sending of the seventy (Luke 10:1–11), and more precisely it is the parable of the friend at midnight:

> "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight… and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut… I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his **importunity** he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; **knock, and it shall be opened unto you**." (Luke 11:5–9)

Mulhern's text: "It must have been after 10 pm, and I imagined tired strangers peeking out at us, **annoyed to be disturbed at this time of the night**." The fortune cookie has just promised that persistence will be rewarded; Luke 11 is the parable in which persistence is rewarded; and the request is in fact granted — "Later that week, she found a home for Scruffy." The story is a midrash on the friend at midnight, performed by a drunk woman for a dog.

Behind every unopened door stands the sentence from the Apocalypse: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock" (Rev. 3:20).

There is also a small ethical test embedded in the sequence. Peggy proposes removing her wig and claiming to be dying of cancer — "just a little white lie" as a "hook." The boy objects that it is "probably a mortal sin," and she concedes: "No blarney. Just the bit about your father sending poor Scruffy to the pound." The pious fraud is rejected; the mission proceeds on the plain facts. Evangelism in this story is bound to truthfulness by a ten-year-old.

Peppermint

While the two women argue about miracles at the kitchen table, the children sit on the divan "enjoying the deliciousness of peppermint candy, swinging our legs together and humming just a little." The adults' communion is whiskey; the children's is candy; the story ranks neither. The candy is also, incidentally, white striped with red — the same chromatic pairing as white sleeves stained red.

The beach bag

> "six baby-food jars to collect salt water for our family, some clusters of red grapes, as well as apples, raisins, and a few banana loaves that my grandmother had stolen from Solomon's Bakery."

Every item is loaded.

Six jars. "And there were set there six waterpots of stone" (John 2:6) — the vessels at Cana, filled with water at the Mother's instigation and emptied as wine. The family is carrying the equipment of the first sign to a place where they expect a miracle. Six is also one short of seven: the number of incompletion, the day before the sabbath.

Grapes. The cluster of Eshcol, cut down and carried back on a staff by the spies as proof of the promised land (Num. 13:23), and the fruit of the vine, "the blood of the new testament" (Matt. 26:28–29).

Apples and raisins. Song of Songs 2:5, as discussed. The epigraph provisions the picnic.

Bread from Solomon's. The loaves come from *Solomon* — the name at the head of the page. And they are salvage: "My grandmother believed it was a mortal sin to waste the day-old baked goods, even though the management had insisted that they be tossed in the rubbish." This is the instruction after the feeding of the five thousand: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost" (John 6:12). It is also a moral portrait. Helen's theology is that discarded bread must be eaten, and Peggy Fleming is the discarded bread of this story — the thing the world has thrown out, carried to the shore, and consumed with reverence.

The meal itself. "starving, we made a **feast** of the bread and fresh fruit by a small tide pool in the shade of a bony cliff." Loaves eaten beside the sea, within sight of fishermen, is John 21: the risen Christ preparing breakfast on a beach for men who did not recognize him.

The eggs

The catechism on the Assumption is twice interrupted by food. Beth asks how Mary got to heaven; Helen answers, "No, sweetheart. **Finish up your eggs**." And when the child at last accepts the non-answer — "It's a mystery, Bethie" — she does so with a utensil: "'Oh,' Beth said, **picking up her fork**. 'A mystery.'"

The egg is Christianity's oldest domestic emblem of the sealed tomb and the life inside it. The fork is the story's entire method. When doctrine runs out, eat.

VII. Drink: Pentecost and the Mocked Prophet

Peggy is intoxicated in nearly every scene, and Mulhern neither excuses it nor moralizes about it. He does something stranger: he aligns it with inspiration.

The alignment has scriptural warrant. At Pentecost the apostles speak in tongues and the crowd concludes, "These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:13). Hannah — barren, weeping, and mocked by a rival — prays silently in the temple, and Eli says, "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee" (1 Sam. 1:14). Hannah is the type here in more than one respect: she is childless, she is derided, she is mistaken for a drunk, and her prayer is answered with a song ("My heart rejoiceth

in the LORD… The barren hath born seven," 1 Sam. 2:1–5) that is the direct model for the Magnificat.

Peggy is barren — "I couldn't have children of my own" — mocked, taken for a fool, and above all a **singer**. And the content of the Magnificat is the plot of "Assumptions": "he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden… He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:48–52).

The boy is her acolyte at the cup: "I learned to pour her whiskey sours at the kitchen table," under Helen's rubric — "Not too much, sweetheart." A child measuring drink for a woman is the story's image of ministry.

Most striking is what Mulhern does with her delirium tremens:

> "One night a police officer brought her to my grandmother's house after he found Peg wandering the streets of a nearby square, **bruised and beaten-looking**. Peg had said that she was looking for her husband Jim, trying to bring him home."

Set beside the Canticle:

> "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets… **The watchmen that go about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me**." (Song of Sol. 3:1–2; 5:7)

The Bride roams the city at night after her Beloved and is beaten by the watch. Peggy roams a Boston square at night after Jim and is found by a policeman, bruised. Alcoholic psychosis and mystical *quaerens* are given the same sentence, and the story refuses to adjudicate between them.

VIII. The December Journey: A Nativity

The canvassing sequence is a Nativity, and once seen it cannot be unseen.

> "It was December and cold; the sky was crystal clear. I could see my breath, and just above us, **one very bright star** seemed to be chasing a **crescent of moon**."

A star over travelers in December. A crescent moon — the moon beneath the feet of the Woman of the Apocalypse (Rev. 12:1), and the standard pedestal of Mary in Immaculate Conception iconography. Three figures on the road, one of them unsteady, seeking shelter for a creature nobody wants.

They go from house to house. **There is no room.** "Some people didn't answer their doors." Others recognize Peggy and produce "looks of exasperation and disgust." One shuts the door in their faces.

The rebuke delivered on that doorstep is the sanest speech in the story:

> "'Take the boy and his dog home,' one young mother said… 'The boy needs a home even more. Now take him home before I call the police and have you arrested for public drunkenness.'"

It is not wrong. Mulhern lets it stand without rebuttal — the world's judgment, spoken by another mother, in the same paragraph as the holy family that isn't one. Peggy's only answer is a song: "Show me the way to go home. I'm tired and I wanna go to bed… I had a little drink about an hour ago and it went right to my head." Which is to say: the pilgrim's hymn and the prodigal's road (Luke 15:18, "I will arise and go to my father"), sung by someone who cannot manage a curb.

Home is the story's theological keyword, and Mulhern uses it with complete consistency: Mary is "taken to her heavenly **home**"; the dog needs a **home**; the boy needs a **home** even more; *show me the way to go **home***; Helen waves goodbye from the corridor of the elderly housing where she "ended up"; and Peggy, finally, "would be at **home** with her Jim." A home-for-a-dog campaign is a soteriology conducted door to door.

The rescue itself is redemption in the root sense. Scruffy is **retrieved** — bought back — from the Animal Rescue League, cast out by a father and restored by two women. And the place prepared for him is described in the language of the Fourth Gospel: "a rich doctor" (the Physician), "a large fenced-in yard, and there were other dogs as well," to which Peggy afterward *takes the boy to see*. "In my Father's house are many mansions… I go to prepare a place for you… I will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:2–3). Peggy prepares the place, then comes back for the child to show him.

"Peg had been my savior," the narrator says — once, flatly, and never again.

IX. Father and Son

The paternal is the story's most carefully managed relation, and it is negative until the final sentence.

The absent father. The literal father sends the dog away for barking and is "still at work" when the women arrive to curse him. He casts out; he does not appear; he is never named.

The substitute fathers. The grandfather goes "stone silent" and carries the boy to bed "when he returned from his night job" — a Joseph: silent, nocturnal, doing the one necessary thing without speech. The "rich doctor" receives the exile. And Francis — the Conners' son, Peggy's favorite, "a priest, a missionary to a small town in Italy, where he died in a church" — is a spiritual father whose name is not accidental. Francis, Italy, a small town, animals, poverty, and the stigmata: the saint of Assisi stands behind both the rescued dog and the red at the sleeves. Peggy's remark to the boy — "You remind me a bit of him sometimes" — assigns him a vocation.

Her comment on Francis's death is the story's characteristic theology in five words: "He died in a church. **What luck!** Don't you think?" Providence, misnamed as luck, is the only vocabulary she has for it.

The father and son on the jetty. In the paragraph where the dove descends, Mulhern places a middle-distance figure: "On a jetty in the distance, **a father and his son** cast fishing lines into the sea." Zebedee and his sons mending nets; "I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19); and, at the horizon of a baptism scene, the Father and the Son.

Lugh and his mother. The pagan panel arranges the same relation with the genders reversed: a god in the sky, a mother in the ground. "the deity Lugh tried to wake us all up… And still his mother slept beneath the dusty harvest loam." Tailtiu is Lugh's **foster** mother, who in the Irish tradition died of exhaustion after clearing the plains of Ireland for cultivation, and at whose grave Lugh established the funeral games

that became Lughnasadh ("Tailtiu"; "Lughnasadh"). Peggy is a foster mother — the Conners' nanny, who says those were "some of the best" years of her life — and she dies exhausted. And her face, in paragraph one, is "the arid **plain** of her skin." The mythological gloss is not an aside; it is a name-tag.

The final image. The story's last sentence resolves the paternal theme with a deliberate reversal:

> "And the Sun's great light shines upon and caresses her warm skin, like the flesh of a **Father's hands as He cradles His child's head** before lifting His **crossed arms** to kiss her soft cheek. A Father, joyful and tearful at the same time, **hallowed** by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him."

Three things happen in that sentence.

First, the head. The head has been the story's most charged object — bald, mocked, laurelled, anointed, wet from the sea, and the one thing the boy "resisted the urge to touch." The gesture Jimmy withheld is completed by God. The refusal at the water's edge is the *noli me tangere* — "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17) — and the ascent, when it comes, ends with the Father's hands on the crown.

Second, the crossed arms. To cradle a head and then kiss a cheek, the arms must cross; Mulhern names the crossing, and so smuggles the instrument of death into a gesture of tenderness. The result is an inverted Pietà: not the Mother holding the dead Son, but the Father holding the dead daughter. It is the transposition that completes the Christological identification begun at the sleeves.

Third, "hallowed." The word is from the Our Father — *hallowed be thy name* — but the direction of sanctification is reversed. The Father is hallowed **by** her loveliness; her beauty is annexed permanently into God, "forever a part of Him." This is a strong statement of the resurrection of the body, and it is also the vindication of Helen's homemade sacramental theology, discussed below. A nickname invented after a Sunday sermon has become an attribute of the Godhead.

X. Naming, and the Sermon on the Word

The most explicitly theological device in "Assumptions" is not a symbol but a speech act.

> "'Lovely Peggy' was the sobriquet my grandmother had invented one Sunday after a sermon the priest had given on **the power of names and the mystery of the Word**. If we thought lovely things about Peggy, she explained, Peggy's life would be happier, and she would feel better."

The reference is to the Prologue of John — "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1) — and behind that to Genesis, where creation proceeds by speech. Helen has extracted from a homily a folk doctrine of the performative word: say *lovely*, and lovely comes into being.

The story ratifies her. By the final paragraph Peggy is "altogether beautiful, and divine," and the abstract noun *loveliness* is lodged permanently in God. The nickname worked.

What makes the device remarkable is the manner of its delivery:

> "Peg opened the door. I **mechanically** announced, 'Good morning, Lovely Peggy.'"

Rote, unfelt, performed on instruction by a child who has been coached in the hallway thirty seconds earlier. And it works anyway. This is *ex opere operato* — the principle that a sacrament is efficacious by virtue of the act performed, not the merit or sincerity of the minister. A bored boy reciting a nickname he does not mean is still conferring grace. Mulhern makes the point without a word of commentary, and it may be the most Catholic thing in the story.

The counterweight is Helen's inconsistency, which the story refuses to resolve. She invents "Lovely Peggy" and then, at the Steinway, "slyly smirked at me and rolled her eyes" during Peggy's song. She warns Beth not to stare, then says, "You look foolish in those things." She calls it a mortal sin to waste bread she has stolen. She tells the boy his first prayer must always be "for the Holy Father's Intention that the Catholic Church reign forever," and believes non-Catholics are damned. She is cruel and

devoted in the same breath, and "Assumptions" declines to sort her. Grace here is administered by unreliable people, imperfectly, and takes effect regardless.

Against Helen's mixed motive stands the one moment of unmixed grace in the story, and it belongs to a child:

> "'And I was ugly, ya know, but it was horrible of her to taunt me just the same.' 'You're not ugly,' I said."

That is the epigraph, spoken by a boy who has never read the Song of Songs. It is also the Gospel's own principle of distribution: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise" (Matt. 21:16); "thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25). The wise and prudent in this story are Auntie Ag, "my grandmother's older and 'much smarter' sister (the one who graduated high school)," who compares Peggy's face to a bulldog's.

XI. The Catechism and the Suspended Virgin

The breakfast scene on August 15 is the story's doctrinal core, and it is played entirely as comedy.

> "'On August 15th,' my grandmother elaborated, 'we celebrate the Feast of the Blessed Mother's Assumption, when Jesus's mother, was taken to her heavenly home.' 'Who took her?' Beth asked. 'God, dear.' 'In an airplane?' 'No, sweetheart. Finish up your eggs.' 'Then how'd she get there?'"

The child's literalism exposes the genuine scandal of the doctrine: the Assumption is a claim about a **body**, and bodies must be transported. Helen has no answer. She "rose and began washing dishes at the sink" — an ablution performed in place of an explanation — and delivers the formula: "It's a mystery, Bethie. Just one of those things."

Two details in the staging matter. "Beth and I looked **past her head** through the window to examine the sky": the mother's head is simultaneously the obstruction and the icon. And Beth's acceptance is total and immediate — "'Oh,' Beth said,

picking up her fork. 'A mystery.'" A child receives the word *mystery* as an answer, which is precisely what the Church intends by it.

The adult narrator then supplies the history the child was not given: the 1950 definition, quoted in full, followed by the *tableau vivant* image of Mary suspended for centuries with one foot on earth and one in the air. The joke is real — the glorification of a body waiting on an administrative decision — but so is the theology underneath it. *Munificentissimus Deus* is itself candid that the definition rests on "the concordant faith of the Christian people" as much as on any scriptural proof (Pius XII, par. 12). Doctrine, in the Catholic understanding, is a human act completing a divine one. That is exactly the structure of this story, in which a woman's glory waits on somebody's willingness to declare it, and finally gets one — from a boy with a notebook.

XII. Titian's *Assunta*

The ekphrasis is the story's most self-aware passage and its interpretive hinge.

Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* (1516–18), painted for the high altar of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, is the largest painting on panel in the world and among the most influential altarpieces in European art (Britannica; Save Venice). It is organized in three registers: the apostles below in the shadow of the earth, the Virgin borne up on a cloud amid cherubs, and God the Father awaiting her above (Web Gallery of Art). Mulhern's narrator, flipping through a housemate's art book at Boston University, sees all three and reads them against the grain.

> "It is difficult to tell whether the crowd of apostles below is **reaching to pull her down or to push her upwards**."

This is the story's whole social situation in one sentence — the community's ambivalence toward the person it is about to glorify. The same neighbors who shut their doors are the apostles with their arms in the air.

> "The depiction is unnerving; you can almost hear the commotion, as if someone has just cried out, '**Wake up!**' '**Last call for alcohol**,' or '**The baby's coming**.'"

Three cries, three registers: resurrection ("Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead," Eph. 5:14), the barroom, and childbirth. Glory, drink, and birth are the story's three worlds, and Mulhern fuses them in a single parenthesis.

The middle cry is the audacious one. "Last call for alcohol" is the phrase that governs Peggy's life, inserted into the Assumption of the Virgin without apology, and it belongs there: the Assunta *is* a last call, the final summons before closing.

And "Wake up!" launches the story's dominant axis. Sleep and waking carry the death-and-resurrection theme from beginning to end: Peggy at the door is "half-asleep"; Helen "awoke with a start"; Lugh "tried to wake us all up"; Tailtiu still "slept"; Peggy "died in her sleep"; and in the last paragraph she is "**Completely awake**." The Johannine formula stands behind all of it: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11).

One further touch. Titian's angels are "excited as flower children in the church before a wedding" — a 1960s anachronism that is also the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7). And Mulhern notes that the cloud, "which you'd expect to be a soft fleecy white, is a cradle of thunderhead gray." *Cradle*: the word returns in the last sentence, in the Father's hands.

XIII. The Beach as Sacrament

The Nantasket sequence runs the sacraments in order while appearing to describe a day trip.

Vesting

Helen appears "arrayed in a white and gold sundress, a wide-brimmed hat with a spray of **lilies**, and black Farrah sunglasses." White and gold are the liturgical colors of the Solemnity of the Assumption. Lilies are the flower of the Annunciation. And *arrayed* is the verb of the Sermon on the Mount: "Consider the lilies of the field… even **Solomon** in all his glory was not **arrayed** like one of these" (Matt. 6:28–29) — with Solomon in the epigraph and Solomon's Bakery in the next paragraph. Then the sunglasses arrive and the whole tableau collapses into 1972.

Earlier, she "peered into the mirror while she smothered her lips with red" — the *Speculum Iustitiae*, Mirror of Justice, of the Litany of Loreto (Vatican). The Litany in fact supplies a striking proportion of the story's furniture: Mystical Rose (the dress), House of Gold (the "orange-and-gold checkered" wallpaper that haloes Helen at breakfast like an icon ground), Health of the Sick, Comfort of the Afflicted, Refuge of Sinners, Morning Star (the December star), and *Stella Maris*, Star of the Sea.

The temple

Before they leave, Peggy's kitchen is given a description no realist requirement demands:

> "The blinds were pulled down on the window beside the kitchen table behind her, and the sweet smell of **cedar** cabinets and **wine** surrounded us in a **cloud**."

Cedar is the wood of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:9). The cloud is the *Shekinah*: "the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:10–11). And wine is the third species. Peggy's dark kitchen is Solomon's temple at the moment of its consecration. Helen then "crossed the **threshold**, flicked on the **lamp**" — the sanctuary lamp lit in a shrine whose blinds are down.

Unshoeing and the washing of feet

The boots are the sequence's running argument. "You've got to take those damn things off!" — "The salt water will be good for your gout." At the shore, "My grandmother managed to coax Peg out of the boots, **pouring salt water playfully over Peg's toes** before leading her into the ocean."

Two rites converge. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5); and the washing of the disciples' feet, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8). Duffy's poem, appended by Mulhern, supplies the source image directly: "**barefoot in Our Lady's tide**… The swollen feet that life had crucified."

The dove

> "startling a mourning dove that sped from its **cleft** into the bright sky. It made a whistling sound as it rose; then it began to **descend over the water where my grandmother and Peg were walking towards the ocean**."

This is the Baptism of Christ, placed with precision: "the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him" (Matt. 3:16). The bird comes out of a *cleft in the rock* — Song of Songs 2:14 and Exodus 33:22 at once — rises, and then descends over the exact spot where the two women are entering the sea. The sign confirms the sacrament, and no character notices.

That it is a *mourning* dove is the story in one adjective.

The wave

> "both she and Peg were surprised by a **spirited** breaker that **razed** them in its wake."

Spirited: *spiritus*, *pneuma*, *ruach*. *Razed*: leveled, brought low — and one letter from *raised*, which is what the sentence is actually describing. They are dumped "on their asses," then "kneeling forward, laughing so hard that they cried": they arrive at the posture of prayer by accident. This is total-immersion baptism administered by force to two women who came for a foot soak. Grace in "Assumptions" is not obtained; it is an ambush.

Then the Duffy echo, nearly verbatim: they "groaned that the **soles** of their feet were **cramping from shells and stones** beneath their feet" — against Duffy's "A crone bent over, cramping on shells and stones." And Helen has set up the pun an hour earlier at the kitchen table: "the water will help the calluses on our **soles**." The cure of souls, achieved by accident, on the wrong body part.

Helen complains that her "permanent is all ruined." Peggy: "At least I don't have to worry about that." The woman who has lost everything has nothing further to lose, which is the first beatitude with the sentiment removed.

The gifts of the children

Beth and Jimmy give Peggy three things, and each is a vestment.

- "a necklace of dried seaweed… we pretended it was a string of jewels" — the adorning of the bride: "thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth" (Isa. 49:18). It is also, worn at the neck and made of beads of the sea, a rosary.
- "Peg kept wrapping our shoulders with her **purple towel** so we wouldn't get burned" — purple is the robe of the mocked king ("and they clothed him with purple," Mark 15:17) and the color of penance and royalty. Here the derided woman's purple becomes a mantle spread over children to shield them from fire: the *Madonna della Misericordia*, the Virgin of the sheltering cloak, executed with a beach towel.
- The wig, and the sand-writing, which require sections of their own.

Writing in the sand

> "Then the two of us scribbled words into the sand with our fingers and played Yahtzee until we lost one of the die."

The first clause is John 8:6: "But Jesus stooped down, and **with his finger wrote on the ground**," while a crowd stands ready to stone a woman they have condemned — and then, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." This occurs on the beach where the woman everyone in the story has judged is at that moment being washed. Minutes earlier, Jimmy has picked up a stone; he used it to weight a burial rather than to throw. The gospel's central scene of a woman spared from stoning is replayed as two children doodling with their fingers.

The second clause is the casting of lots, incomplete: a die is lost, the game of chance breaks down, and the reader is returned to the card table at the story's opening, where Peggy's reputation was diced for over whiskey.

The wig

> "a gust had lifted Peg's wig into the air, and the four of us, laughing uproariously, chased it along the sand. At last, Beth caught the wig, then raised it in the air **like the head of John the Baptist**, giggling and tiptoeing a slow dance across the sand. I took it from her and smoothed the sad hair before **burying it in the paper bag with a stone** I had found near the water."

The passage does three things at once.

It stages a miniature assumption. A **gust** — the wind that "bloweth where it listeth" (John 3:8), the "rushing mighty wind" of Pentecost (Acts 2:2) — takes part of Peggy up into the air before anything else happens that day. The Spirit takes her hair first.

It stages a martyrdom. Mulhern names the allusion outright: Salome's dance and the head of the Baptist on a charger (Mark 6:22–28). And the child performing it is **Beth** — Elizabeth — who in Luke is the Baptist's mother. A little girl named for John's mother lifts John's head and dances.

It stages an entombment. A head, a shroud (the paper bag), and a **stone**. The wig is buried on the morning of the feast, and days later the true head — bald, anointed, wet, shining — rises. John the Baptist is the *forerunner*; the false hair goes into the grave ahead of the woman.

The rising

> "Then Lovely Peggy reached for me. I was mesmerized by her wet silvery scalp, and **resisted the urge to touch the crown of her head** before I gave her my hand and **she rose from the sea**. 'Jimmy, you're my **angel**,' she said, and kissed me on the **forehead**."

She rose. The verb of the Resurrection, of the Assumption, and of a nightclub singer taking the stage. He "gave her my hand" and lifted her: the gesture by which Christ raises Peter's mother-in-law — "and he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up" (Mark 1:31) — and Jairus's daughter, of whom he says, "the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth" (Mark 5:39–41).

A woman rising from the sea is also Venus Anadyomene, and Duffy's poem names the rivalry in its first line: "You shamed that naked goddess of the seas." Titian painted both an *Assunta* and a *Venus Anadyomene*; the story's chosen painter holds both images. What comes up out of Nantasket Bay is the anti-Venus who defeats Venus, because the epigraph has already ruled on the question of beauty.

And she calls the boy *angel* — *angelos*, messenger — and kisses him on the forehead, sealing him where she herself was anointed an hour before. He is commissioned. The story we are reading is the message he was given.

XIV. The Chariot and the Sleeping Mother

> "The coaster lifted our **chariot** further into the **crystal sky**, while on the horizon, the deity Lugh tried to wake us all up, turning heat lightening on and off behind a lacey curtain of gray. And still his mother slept beneath the dusty harvest loam."

The chariot of fire took Elijah up (2 Kings 2:11). Here it is a wooden roller coaster at Paragon Park, and the passengers are children, and the ride consists of exactly the two movements of the doctrine: "the heady anticipation of the rising, and the delightful fright of the quick fall."

From the top, the two women are "**transfigured figurines** on the earth below, their clothing **white as snow**" — the Transfiguration (Mark 9:3: "his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow"), witnessed from above and therefore inverted: the disciples ascend and see the glorified below. *Figurines* returns Helen's Marian statuettes, so that the two women briefly become the objects on her windowsill.

Then the paragraph withdraws the consolation it has just granted. The mother is still in the ground. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19), with *harvest* to supply the eschatological reaping. Tailtiu sleeps; Mary sleeps; the Dormition has not yet given way to the Assumption. Mulhern holds the ascent back for one more page — and when it arrives, it arrives for Peggy Fleming.

XV. Names

"Assumptions" is a story about the power of names, and it names carefully.

Peggy Fleming. The narrator flags the irony himself: "the graceful and beautiful skater who had won the Olympic Gold Medal in 1968." The historical Peggy Fleming was the only American gold medalist at the Grenoble Games, celebrated above all for grace and artistry (Britannica, "Peggy Fleming"). But the irony is deeper than cruelty. A figure skater is a body that moves weightlessly, in white, and leaves the ground:

the namesake *is* an assumption, performed in prime time in the same era the story is set. **Margaret**, moreover, means *pearl* — and on the beach the boy scans "the hard bottom for a lonely starfish or stone, or the clam with a secreted pearl." He is searching for Margaret at the bottom of the sea, and the pearl of great price is the thing a man sells all he has to buy (Matt. 13:45–46). **Fleming**: flame.

Helen. St. Helena, the pilgrim empress traditionally credited with discovering the True Cross, is the Church's patron of holy places and relic-journeys. Mulhern's Helen organizes the pilgrimage, packs the reliquary jars, and knows exactly where the cure is. Her pagan namesake is the most beautiful woman in the world — standing, in paragraph one, beside "the homeliest damn woman" — and she is the one who names her *Lovely*.

Beth. Elizabeth: the Visitation, and the mother of the forerunner. She asks how Mary got to heaven, and she raises the Baptist's head.

Jim and Jimmy. The dead husband and the living boy share a name, and Peggy fuses them deliberately: "I have to use the little girls room and put on my fancy wig and makeup so I can look divine for **my Jim over there**," said with teary eyes while looking past Helen at the children, and with a wink at the boy. In Canticle allegory the Beloved is Christ the Bridegroom — "Behold, the bridegroom cometh" (Matt. 25:6) — which is why the epigraph, a Bridegroom's speech, can be addressed by this narrator to this woman. *Over there* is also, in the idiom of Irish Catholic Boston, the other side. James is also Jacob, whose ladder carried angels ascending and descending, like the dove. And her word *divine* is the same word the ending harvests — "altogether beautiful, and divine" — so the casual early line plants, in the most offhand register, the very apotheosis the last paragraph performs: she will look divine for the living Jim, and become divine beside the dead one.

Mary O'Malley and Joseph Conner. A Mary married to a Joseph, met at a parish social; Peggy keeps their house and raises their children, and her favorite becomes a priest. Mary "had preceded her" to America by fifteen years and *sponsored her passage* — which is precisely the doctrinal function of the Assumption: Mary goes first, and her glorified body is the pledge of ours. Their relationship "had been like that of sisters": the Visitation again.

Francis. Assisi, as above.

Margaret Mary Fawny. The tormentor bears a saint's name — Margaret Mary Alacoque, the visionary of the Sacred Heart — while the saint of this story bears a mocked one. Peggy's account of her death by drowning ends in a small, unsolicited act of mercy: "I hope she had time to say a Hail Mary or two before she drowned in Achill Sound." Forgiveness offered from the cross, and then immediately retracted as a joke: "I'm just codding ya, Jimmy… A fib, my love." A parable told, then privately explained to the disciple.

Solomon's Bakery. Mission Hill. Paragon Park. The bread of Solomon; the hill of *mission* scrubbed by an immigrant maid, set against Helen's "missionary zeal" and Francis the missionary; and *paragon*, which means a model of perfection — the claim the epigraph makes about Peggy — sited directly across the road from the healing water. The children prefer the paragon to the sacrament. The story gives them both.

XVI. The Cellar and the Coaster: The Story's Chiasm

Structurally, "Assumptions" is organized around a descent and an ascent.

The descent occurs early. Two drunk women "led me down the cellar stairs" to a "knotty pine basement" where a beautiful Steinway stands, and Peggy sings, unaccompanied, badly, with "one thin arm braced against the polished black surface." The boy experiences "indignity and shame" at his grandmother's smirk, and then:

> "her pain was so real. I knew that she was dreaming–longing for her husband Jim–and I think it was then that the first throb of death's glower entered my consciousness."

This is the Fall and the conversion in a single paragraph: knowledge of death arrives through another person's pain, underground, before a black instrument. It is also a descent into the underworld with a singer — Orpheus, and behind him the Harrowing of Hell.

The ascent is the roller coaster: up into the crystal sky, above two transfigured women, with a fire-god on the horizon.

Between the two lies the story's real subject, which is compassion — the boy's recognition that "her pain was so real" is the hinge on which everything else turns. It is what makes him refuse the stone, resist the crown, pour the drinks, bury the wig, and eventually write the definition.

XVII. The Duffy Poem as Coda

Mulhern appends Fr. John Duffy's poem sequence "Feast of the Assumption, 1924," addressed to the poet's mother Bridie, and the appending is a declaration of lineage. The story is best read as an **answer poem**.

Duffy's Bridie wades barefoot into Quincy Bay on August 15 and prays for a miracle for her ruined feet. She does not get one:

> "Ah, back you came, **cheated of your surprise**, A crone bent over, **cramping on shells and stones**, Our Lady's answer grieving in your eyes And **Golgotha** still groaning in your bones."

The consolation is deferred entirely to the final stanza and to the afterlife: "Long dead, my dear… but when at last we meet– / O changed forever! The Eternal's bride, / Robed all in white down to the little feet."

Mulhern borrows Duffy's furniture — the feast, the tide, the bare feet, the shells and stones, the cramping, the white robe — and changes the verdict. He also plants Duffy's key phrase in his own prose before the beach: Peggy at her door wears "pure grief in her expression, **as if she felt cheated from a surprise**." She is Bridie, at the start of the day, already disappointed.

And then she gets the surprise. The wave arrives unrequested; the laughter arrives; the hand arrives; she rises. Duffy's boy "was afraid / Of God and miracles and even you." Mulhern's boy pours the drinks, chases the wig, buries the head, and calls her lovely. Duffy wishes he could "carve you in great marble if I could." Mulhern does not carve. He **defines** — *we pronounce, declare, and define* — and the definition is the epigraph, returned in the last paragraph as accomplished fact.

XVIII. What the Story Argues

Before turning to the wider body of work, it is worth stating plainly the three theological claims "Assumptions" makes, none of them explicitly.

1. The Assumption is a doctrine about bodies, and therefore about this body. The story's opening paragraph is an inventory of physical ruin: swollen face, broken capillaries, spindly limbs, toothlessness, alopecia. Later come diabetes, asthma, gout, cirrhosis, delirium tremens, and swollen ankles. This catalogue is not gratuitous; it is the premise. *Munificentissimus Deus* teaches that Mary was preserved "free from the corruption of the tomb" and taken up "body and soul" (Pius XII, par. 44), and the dogma's meaning for everyone else is that the body is not disposable. Mulhern therefore attaches the doctrine to the least disposable-seeming body available and insists on its permanence. What rises at the end of "Assumptions" is not a soul. It is warm skin, a soft cheek, and a laugh.

2. Grace is administered by unreliable ministers and works anyway. Helen smirks. The boy recites. The disc jockeys hang up. The neighbor is right about bedtime. Peggy is drunk at every sacramental moment in the story — she is drunk at the piano, drunk on the December road, drunk at the door on the morning of the feast — and the sacraments hold. This is not sentimentality about alcoholism; the story is unsparing about what drink has done to her voice, her marriage's aftermath, and her mind. It is a claim about efficacy: the rite does not depend on the worthiness of the one performing it.

3. Judgment's imagery can be converted to glory's. Hellfire becomes sunlight on water. The crown of thorns becomes a laurel of peach fuzz. The stigmata become spilled juice. The shroud becomes a housedress. The stone for throwing becomes the stone for a burial. The Cross becomes a Father's crossed arms mid-embrace. No image in this story's religious vocabulary is finally used to condemn anyone — not the neighbors, not Helen, not Margaret Mary Fawny, not even the father who sent the dog away.

The last sentence of "Assumptions" makes the destination clear, and it is not a cloud:

> "Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine–she **rises** once again to sing her favorite song."

Glory, for Peggy Fleming, is a Friday night set in a Back Bay dive with Jim at a table near the front. The Beatific Vision is "When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New." The epigraph is fulfilled and then exceeded — not merely *altogether beautiful*, which is what the Canticle promised, but *divine*, which is the language of deification, the ancient doctrine that the redeemed are made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

A homely, hairless, drunken, barren Irishwoman, mocked from the schoolyard to her own kitchen, is assumed body and soul into heavenly glory, and the Father is hallowed by her loveliness.

Tota pulchra es. There is no flaw in you.

The Concordance: "Assumptions"

1. Sister Ignatius and the failure of discernment QUOTE: "Slapping my face when Sister Ignatius wasn't looking, and calling me a toad." **SOURCE:** St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), founder of the Society of Jesus, author of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the classic Catholic manual of spiritual "discernment of spirits" (Franciscan Media; Boston College). **Argument:** A nun bearing the name of the saint most associated with disciplined spiritual attentiveness — discerning good spirits from evil ones — is, in this scene, precisely inattentive: cruelty happens "when Sister Ignatius wasn't looking." The irony sharpens the story's Christological reading of Margaret Mary Fawny's taunting (already noted in the essay) by adding an institutional layer: the Church's own instruments of discernment are asleep at the postulant's slap, just as the disciples slept in Gethsemane. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

2. Margaret Mary Fawny and St. Margaret Mary Alacoque's counter-narrative QUOTE: "I think that's who pushed Margaret Mary Fawny off the cliff… I hope she had time to say a Hail Mary or two before she drowned in Achill Sound." **SOURCE:** St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, visionary of the Sacred Heart devotion, whose defining charism was **mercy and reparation**, not vengeance. **Argument:** The story gives the tormentor the exact name of the saint of the Sacred Heart — a saint synonymous with forgiving love — and then has Peg imagine fairies drowning her and hope only

that she got a Hail Mary in before going under. The gap between the saint's name and the story's wish for her comeuppance (softened at the last second into a prayer) dramatizes the tension between folk-Catholic vindictiveness and doctrinal mercy that runs under the whole piece. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

3. Achill Sound / Kildavnet: a real holy well visited every August 15th QUOTE: "I hope she had time to say a Hail Mary or two before she drowned in Achill Sound." **SOURCE:** The holy well of Kildownet (Cill Damhnait, "church of St. Damnet/Dympna") on Achill Island overlooks Achill Sound; a folklore record states, "There is a holy well at Kildownett, hard by the graveyard… which is still visited by pilgrims on the 15th of August" (Omnium Sanctorum Hiberniae, citing P.W. Joyce; travelhag.com). St. Dympna/Damnet is invoked against nervous and mental afflictions and grief. **Argument:** Peg's invented drowning site is not a random Irish place-name — it is the actual location of a holy well whose pattern day (traditional pilgrimage day) is August 15th, the very date around which the entire second half of the story is organized. A drowning "cure" story set at Achill Sound thus quietly answers the story's later "cure in seawater" language at Nantasket: one Marian feast-day water rite (real, Irish, historical) is ironically prefigured by a childhood ghost story about a girl who drowned there. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

4. Saint Thomas More Church versus the historical Saint Thomas Aquinas parish QUOTE: "weekly gatherings in the basement of Saint Thomas More Church." **SOURCE:** The actual Catholic mother-church of Jamaica Plain, founded 1869, is **St. Thomas Aquinas**, whose main church was dedicated August 17, 1873 (Jamaica Plain Historical Society) — two days after the Assumption. **Argument:** The story silently substitutes St. Thomas *More* — the martyr who died rather than assent to a king's usurpation of the Church's authority over marriage — for the real neighborhood's actual patron, St. Thomas *Aquinas*, the philosopher-theologian. Whether authorial invention or a remembered mishearing, the substituted saint fits the story's marriage plot (Mary's, Peg's, the grandmother's, the "old wedding ring" song) far better than the real church's Angelic Doctor would: Thomas More is the patron of troubled marriages and of conscience against worldly power, both live wires in this story of ruined unions. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

5. Mission Hill as a "mission" scrubbed clean QUOTE: "cleaning the houses of the 'filthy rich on the hill'– Mission Hill she meant." **SOURCE:** Mission Hill, Boston,

named for the Mission Church (Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help), a shrine built around a miraculous icon. **Argument:** The narrator's correction — Mary didn't mean "the hill," she meant *Mission* Hill — plants the word "mission" in a sentence about a poor immigrant woman's domestic labor for the rich. The pun quietly converts unpaid, invisible service into missionary work, foreshadowing the story's larger argument that grace moves through menial, unglamorous hands (Peg's whiskey-pouring, the grandmother's basting, Mary's scrubbing). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

6. "Terties" and County Mayo's Marian apparition geography QUOTE: "'Terties,' Peg would say in her brogue… Mary had preceded her from County Mayo fifteen years earlier." **SOURCE:** County Mayo is the site of the Knock apparition of August 21, 1879, in which Mary, St. Joseph, and St. John the Evangelist appeared in white robes and gold crown at the gable of the parish church, witnessed for roughly two hours in the rain while the ground beneath stayed dry (IrishCentral; The Eastern Church). **Argument:** Mary O'Malley, the cousin who "sponsors" Peg's passage to America (already read in the essay as a Visitation echo), comes from the one Irish county whose name is inseparable from a modern Marian apparition centered on a robed, crowned, silently standing woman — the same visual grammar (white robe, gold, elevation, silence) that recurs at the beach and in the wig scene. Naming her county of origin quietly seeds the Marian machinery that the story will later run through Peg and the grandmother. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

7. The gorse bush as an inverted burning bush, doubled QUOTE: "beautiful Gorse Bushes with bright yellow flowers." **SOURCE:** Exodus 3:2, the burning bush that "was not consumed." **Argument:** The essay already reads the *fire* imagery of the story as burning-bush theophany; this is a second, independent gorse-bush moment attached specifically to the fairies who (in Peg's telling) may have killed Margaret Mary Fawny. Gorse is famous for its own folk-association with fire (it burns violently, even green), so a "beautiful" flowering bush hiding malevolent little creatures who cause a girl's death offers a folk-Catholic bush theophany gone wrong — beauty and flame concealing violence rather than revealing God. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

8. Auntie Ag, the "much smarter" sister, and Martha/Mary asymmetry QUOTE: "Auntie Ag, my grandmother's older and 'much smarter' sister (the one who graduated high school)." **SOURCE:** Luke 10:38-42, Martha and Mary of Bethany. **Argument:** The story sets up a triangle of women — the grandmother (Helen, who

serves, cooks, and worries about supper), Peg (who talks, drinks, and prophesies), and Auntie Ag (who is credentialed and judges from the sidelines, nodding "in disgust"). This maps loosely onto the Martha/Mary dynamic where the "smarter," more socially credentialed woman is implicitly the one Christ gently corrects for missing the one thing needful — here, compassion for Peggy. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

9. Lucky Strikes, Parliaments, and the cardplayers' Sanhedrin QUOTE: "as they puffed away on Lucky Strikes and Parliaments, stopping every now and then to slap down a poker chip or a playing card." **SOURCE:** Cf. Matthew 27:1, the council (Sanhedrin/"parliament" of elders) that gathers to condemn; also Psalm 22:18 and John 19:24 (soldiers casting lots/dividing garments), already used in the essay for the card table's "dicing" register. **Argument:** This finding is new insofar as it isolates the specific cigarette *brand name* "Parliaments" — a small verbal pun the essay does not touch. The relatives who judge and mock Peggy are seated in judgment like a "parliament," smoking a brand whose name literally means a legislative/judicial assembly, while gambling implements sit on the table before them — reinforcing, at the level of a brand name, the essay's Sanhedrin/soldiers-casting-lots reading of this scene. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

10. Grampie's silence and the confessional seal QUOTE: "Grampie, he would become stone silent, ashamed to have said so much already." **SOURCE:** The sacramental seal of Confession, under which a priest may never disclose what is confided to him. **Argument:** The essay already treats "stone silent" via John 8 (the accusers who drop their stones). A second, non-competing reading: Grampie's shame at having "said so much already" and his subsequent silence enact, in miniature, the logic of the confessional — sin spoken aloud is followed by an enforced, penitential silence. The grandfather becomes both accuser and, in his shame, a kind of penitent. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

11. "Faith is all, and our coats" — the itinerant preacher's provisioning QUOTE: "'Where there's a way, there's a will. What we need is faith is all, and our coats,' she said." **SOURCE:** Matthew 10:9-10 / Luke 9:3, Christ's instructions to the apostles to travel without provisions, taking no gold, no bag, no second coat. **Argument:** The essay reads this line (elsewhere) mainly through Luke 9:3 for "faith." The added detail worth flagging on its own is the *coats*: the Gospel instruction is to travel light,

with at most one coat, trusting providence; Peg's line inverts this into taking "our coats" as the one item of preparation alongside faith, turning a begging-mission of Gospel apostles into a comic door-to-door dog-adoption campaign that nonetheless keeps the apostolic shape (going out two-by-two, in this case Peg and the boy, knocking on strangers' doors). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

12. Scruffy on the "wing-tipped chair" — throne imagery for the redeemed QUOTE: "Scruffy jumped onto the wing-tipped chair, and curled himself into a ball." **SOURCE:** Wing-back/"wing-tipped" chairs derive their form from ecclesiastical and thronal seating, designed originally to shield the seated dignitary and evoke settled authority. **Argument:** Once Scruffy has been found a home (an act already read in the essay as the story's redemption narrative), the dog is granted a chair whose very design vocabulary ("wing-tipped") borrows the shape of authority and repose. The saved animal's small coronation—curling up on a chair built like a throne—closes the dog subplot on an image of settled peace analogous to the story's larger movement toward beatific rest. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

13. "You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You" as folk-soteriology QUOTE: "Peg and I serenaded my grandmother with 'You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You.'" **SOURCE:** Cf. 1 John 4:19, "We love him, because he first loved us"; also the doctrine that the human person receives dignity/identity through being loved by God. **Argument:** The song's plain theology — that one is "nobody" until loved — restates in a barroom idiom the story's whole argument about Peggy: unlovely by every worldly measure ("homeliest damn woman"), she becomes "somebody" (a body assumed, a body glorified) only through the love the narrator and the story extend to her. The pop standard functions as an unpretentious vernacular Te Deum smuggled into a domestic scene. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

14. "Show Me the Way to Go Home" sung tired and drunk — a compline QUOTE: "'Show me the way to go home. I'm tired and I wanna go to bed,' Peg began singing, 'I had a little drink about an hour ago and it went right to my head.'" **SOURCE:** Compline (Night Prayer of the Divine Office), the Church's liturgical hour said before sleep, whose central plea is safe rest and protection through the night ("Guard us, Lord, as we stay awake; watch over us as we sleep"). **Argument:** Independent of the essay's prodigal-son reading of "home" as a theological keyword, this particular scene is structurally a nightcap prayer: sung by a drunk woman just before the

household settles for the night, its plea to be shown "the way to go home" and put "to bed" performs, almost parodically, the office of Compline — the day's last prayer, asking only for safe passage into rest. The comic drunkenness does not cancel the liturgical shape; it domesticates it. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

15. The disc jockeys who "did not take Peg seriously" — prophets unheeded QUOTE: "I'm certain that the disc jockeys did not take Peg seriously, let alone understand her." **SOURCE:** Cf. Luke 4:24, "No prophet is accepted in his own country," and the recurring biblical topos of the prophet or fool whose true message goes unheeded because of the messenger's disreputable state. **Argument:** Peg's radio campaign to find Scruffy a home — sincere, urgent, but slurred and half-coherent — is heard by its audience as a drunk woman's nonsense rather than as what it is: an act of charity issued on behalf of a helpless creature. The story repeatedly stages this pattern (an unglamorous, compromised vessel carrying real grace that onlookers dismiss), and the radio scene is one of its clearest miniature instances. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

16. St. Bernadette and Peg's asthma QUOTE: "In addition to alopecia and diabetes, Peg suffered from episodes of acute asthma." **SOURCE:** St. Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes, chronic asthma sufferer from childhood, informally invoked as patron of asthmatics (Fr. Thomas McDonald, "A Novena for Asthma Sufferers"). **Argument:** Bernadette is the visionary of Lourdes, another Marian apparition/water-cure site structurally parallel to the story's own "cure in seawater" theme; that the same body chronically afflicted with asthma also received the Marian visions, and that Peg — herself headed toward a beach "cure" — shares Bernadette's affliction, quietly links Peg's physical suffering to the pattern of the visionary-invalid whose broken body is nonetheless the vehicle of grace. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

17. St. Josemaría Escrivá, diabetes, and ordinary sanctity QUOTE: "In addition to alopecia and diabetes, Peg suffered from episodes of acute asthma." **SOURCE:** St. Josémaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, patron of diabetics, whose spirituality centers on finding holiness in ordinary, unglamorous daily life (St. Josemaria Institute). **Argument:** Escrivá's signature teaching — that sanctity is found in humble, repetitive, often tedious daily labor rather than in dramatic heroics — describes precisely the story's own argument about where grace resides: in whiskey-pouring, dog-hunting, and beach-going rather than in miracle. Attaching his

patronage to Peg's own diabetes folds her diagnosis into this same theology of ordinary holiness. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

18. Gout, St. Apollinaris, and the "puffiness around your ankles" QUOTE: "The salt water will be good for your gout and all that puffiness around your ankles." **SOURCE:** St. Apollinaris of Ravenna (feast July 20) and St. Martin of Arades are traditionally invoked against gout (Wikipedia, "Patron saints of ailments, illness, and dangers"; Wikipedia, Martin of Arades). **Argument:** That the grandmother recommends salt water specifically "for your gout" activates, however faintly, the folk-Catholic logic of the patron-saint cure system: an ailment named by its traditional intercessor is treated by a traditional remedy (holy or blessed water) on the very feast associated with miraculous seawater cures. The scene reenacts the logic of a saint's-cure narrative even while framed as ordinary grandmotherly advice. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

19. Nixon, McGovern, Peking, and the moon landing — false gods of the radio QUOTE: "There was discussion of McGovern, Nixon, Peking, Vietnam, and all that money wasted in sending a man to the moon." **SOURCE:** Cf. Psalm 20:7 ("Some trust in chariots, and some in horses") and the biblical critique of misplaced trust in worldly power and technological achievement. **Argument:** Positioned in the car on the way to the beach cure, this catalogue of 1972-vintage secular news — presidential politics, Cold War diplomacy, war, and the moon landing dismissed as "wasted" money — functions as a foil to the sacred journey underway. The talk-radio chatter names all the register of worldly "chariots" the culture actually trusts, immediately before the story delivers its own chariot (the roller coaster, 2 Kings 2:11) as the true, glorious ascent the newscasters cannot see. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

20. The Southeast Expressway sun-flash as a small theophany QUOTE: "The sun flashed on the blacktop of the Southeast Expressway." **SOURCE:** Cf. Exodus 13:21-22, the pillar of fire/cloud that led Israel; Exodus 24:17, the glory of the Lord "like devouring fire" on the mountain. **Argument:** This is a discrete flash-of-light image, independent from the essay's Exodus readings of Peggy's face and the gorse bush: here the flash occurs on the road itself, on the highway that is carrying the whole family toward the Assumption-feast beach. A brief, ordinary glare off asphalt becomes, in a story this saturated with theophanic light, one more intimation of glory attending the pilgrimage route. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

21. The elderly-housing corridor and the "many mansions" QUOTE: "I can still picture my grandmother as she waved goodbye to me from the corridor of the elderly housing apartments where she ended up." **SOURCE:** John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions… I go to prepare a place for you." **Argument:** The grandmother's final dwelling, glimpsed only in this one aside, is a corridor of "elderly housing apartments" — an image of diminished, communal, institutional shelter that stands in poignant counterpoint to the "many mansions" promised in John's Gospel (a text the essay already uses for Scruffy's rescue). The blue Marian statuette on her windowsill in this same sentence turns the modest apartment corridor into a small, unglamorous antechamber of the Father's house. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

22. "Born in May and married in May" — the Marian month QUOTE: "she had the good fortune of being 'born in May and married in May.'" **SOURCE:** May is the traditional Marian month in Catholic devotion (May crownings, "Queen of the May" hymns), distinct from the August 15/22 material already treated in the essay. **Argument:** The grandmother explicitly names May as "the Blessed Mother's month" in the same breath as this claim about her own birth and marriage, mapping her own biography onto the Church's Marian calendar. This is a second liturgical-calendar marker in the story (besides the Assumption octave already discussed) and reinforces the pattern of ordinary women's lives being quietly calendared against Mary's own feasts. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

23. The blue marble Mary on the windowsill — the household Theotokos icon QUOTE: "Next to her, on the windowsill, was a blue marble carving of Mary." **SOURCE:** Blue is the conventional iconographic color of Mary's mantle in Western art, signifying royalty and the heavens (cf. the Litany of Loreto's "Queen" titles already claimed elsewhere in the essay, and Rev 12:1's "clothed with the sun"). **Argument:** This detail is a distinct, freestanding icon — a literal domestic devotional image — that the essay does not discuss. Positioned at a window (a threshold between inside and outside, private and public), the statuette functions as a guardian icon over the corridor from which the grandmother waves goodbye, quietly sacralizing the very ordinary, institutional space named in Finding 21. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

24. "Mary's blessing" as a "gip" — folk skepticism toward grace QUOTE: "Since we weren't sick and didn't need a cure, 'Mary's blessing' seemed like a gip." **SOURCE:**

Cf. Mark 2:17, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick," and the broader Gospel theme that grace is most keenly felt by those who know their need of it. **Argument:** The children's verdict that Mary's blessing is a "gip" (a swindle) for the well is a plainly comic child's-eye version of the Gospel logic that the healthy do not seek healing. The line does real theological work while sounding merely bratty: it names, from the position of the unafflicted, exactly the asymmetry the Gospel identifies between the well and the sick, setting up the beach scene's real business — the cure of the actually afflicted, Peg. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

25. The Yahtzee die lost in the sand — casting lots reprised QUOTE: "we scribbled words into the sand with our fingers and played Yahtzee until we lost one of the die." **SOURCE:** Cf. Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord," and the "dicing for a garment" motif (Psalm 22:18) already used elsewhere in the essay for the card table. **Argument:** This is an independent recurrence, not the same scene: a second dice-game, again ending in loss, again on ground associated with the sacred (the beach, already vested as a temple in the essay's reading), following the earlier writing-in-the-sand (John 8:6) also already claimed. The die's disappearance into the sand, on the feast day itself, restates in miniature the card table's opening image of chance and judgment, but here the "lost" lot vanishes into consecrated ground rather than being read aloud in condemnation — chance itself is being redeemed by setting. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

26. Carole King's "You've Got a Friend" and the Comforter QUOTE: "We drove to Nantasket Beach, Beth and I singing along to Carole King's 'You've Got a Friend' on the radio." **SOURCE:** Cf. John 14:16, Christ's promise of "another Comforter" (the Paraclete), and John 15:15, "I have called you friends." **Argument:** Sung by the children in the car on the way to the day's central sacred event, the song's refrain — that one need only "call out my name" and a friend will come, winter, spring, summer, or fall — offers, in secular pop form, the Paraclete's promise of an ever-present helper. Placed immediately before the talk-radio catalogue of worldly anxieties (Finding 19), the song functions as the children's unwitting antiphon to adult despair. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

27. "When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New": silver crown, gold ringlets, and the Coronation Quote (song title/lyric referenced in the story's own "Links to Music" appendix and evoked by the story's wedding-ring/marriage material):

"Now although silver crowns your hair / I remember those gold ringlets there." **SOURCE:** Cf. the fifth Glorious Mystery of the Rosary, the Coronation of the Virgin, and Proverbs 16:31, "The hoary head is a crown of glory." **Argument:** The lyric explicitly names hair turning to a "silver crown" — an image that, read against a story obsessed with a bald woman's temples being "garlanded" and "crowned" (already treated in the essay for Peggy), supplies an entire popular song built around the same crown-of-old-age structure the essay traces through Scripture and iconography. The song is period-appropriate source music the narrator lists as integral to the story's soundscape, so its crown imagery deserves treatment as a distinct, textually-authorized allusion rather than incidental background music (lyrics: irishsongs.com). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

28. "Fools Rush In" and the wisdom of holy folly Quote (title referenced in the story's music appendix, thematically operative in Peg's characterization as an impulsive, radio-calling, door-knocking "fool for love"): "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread… so open up your heart and let this fool rush in." **SOURCE:** 1 Corinthians 4:10, "We are fools for Christ's sake," and 1 Corinthians 1:27, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." **Argument:** Peg is repeatedly the household's fool — drunk, slurring, mocked as "homeliest," yet the one who acts (finding Scruffy a home, insisting on faith and coats, singing hymn-adjacent barroom songs) while the "smarter" relatives merely judge from the card table. A song titled "Fools Rush In," which the author's own appendix ties directly to this story, supplies an explicit period soundtrack to the Pauline logic of holy folly that structures Peg's entire characterization. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

29. Paragon Amusement Park's name as ironic beatitude QUOTE: "the roller coaster ride that my sister and I, if well behaved, might enjoy at Paragon Amusement Park across from the beach." **SOURCE:** "Paragon" = a model or pattern of excellence/perfection; cf. Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect." **Argument:** Set directly across from the beach where the day's real "cure" and glorification occur, an amusement park literally named for perfection offers the children a counterfeit, commercial paradise (earned by "good behavior," a work-righteousness logic) that mirrors and slightly parodies the free, unearned grace Peg receives in the water nearby. The roller-coaster's chariot ascent (already read via 2 Kings 2:11 in the essay) thus launches from a park whose very name stakes a false claim to perfection that

the beach's actual, freely-given transfiguration surpasses. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

30. The verdant green divan and the candy dish — a bloodless Eden interior QUOTE: "I joined my sister who was seated on the verdant green divan in the living room, strategically positioned in front of the dish of hard candies." **SOURCE:** Cf. Genesis 2:9, the trees of Eden "pleasant to the sight, and good for food," and the essay's already-established green/Fall motif (green beans, green Buick). **Argument:** This is a third, previously unremarked green image (after the green beans and green Buick already claimed): a "verdant" (literally, Eden-green) piece of furniture positioned before a dish of tempting sweets that the children have been conditioned to "raid." The scene occurs on the visit when Peg has visibly declined ("her usual cheeriness had vanished"), so the green divan's Edenic comfort sits uneasily beside the story's darkest domestic scene, extending the pattern whereby lushness and loss are paired. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

31. The purple towel doubled — royal-penitential ambiguity QUOTE: "Peg kept wrapping our shoulders with her purple towel so we wouldn't get burned." **SOURCE:** In addition to the essay's existing reading (Mark 15:17, the purple robe of mockery, and the Madonna della Misericordia's mantle), purple is also the liturgical color of Lenten penitence and of Advent expectation. **Argument:** This finding adds a layer the essay does not develop: purple in Catholic liturgical use marks *both* penitence and royal expectation (Advent), and the towel is applied here as protection from burning — a shielding, saving use of a color otherwise associated with suffering and mockery. The single purple object thus carries the story's whole dialectic of humiliation-becoming-glory in compressed, wearable form, doing double duty as both a penitential and a protective/royal garment simultaneously. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

32. Six water-filled jars as a countable, unfinished number QUOTE: "We filled six jars with water that day." **SOURCE:** Numbers structurally significant in Scripture: six as the number of incompletion (one short of the perfect seven; cf. the essay's Cana reading, John 2:6, "six waterpots of stone"). **Argument:** Distinct from the essay's Cana argument about the jars' *content* (water becoming, by implication, wine), this finding isolates the *number itself*: six is the biblical number of incompletion, falling one short of the Sabbath-perfect seven. The children fill exactly six jars with seawater on the

feast of a woman's completion (the Assumption, in which a life is perfected and taken up whole) — the numerically unfinished human vessels standing in silent contrast to the day's theme of a life brought to fullness. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

33. "Ended up" and the language of eschatological rest QUOTE: "the corridor of the elderly housing apartments where she ended up." **SOURCE:** Cf. Hebrews 4:9-11, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God," and the broader Christian vocabulary of a soul's final "end" or destination. **Argument:** The narrator's flat, almost dismissive idiom — "where she ended up" — used of the grandmother who has spent the whole story revering the Blessed Mother, quietly deflates the grandeur of the Assumption theology surrounding her only a few paragraphs earlier. The plainness of "ended up" for a life that has been draped throughout the story in Marian, coronation, and glory language is a deliberate bathos: an ordinary old woman's ordinary end, waving from a corridor, is offered without editorializing as the story's real, modest form of the "rest" that awaits the faithful. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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34. Dogma's compact cluster — QUOTE: "It will only take me a moment to get ready. I have to use the little girls room and put on my fancy wig and makeup so I can look divine for my Jim over there" SOURCE: Lexical census: *Assumption* 2 ("Feast of the Blessed Mother's Assumption"; "dogma of the Assumption"), *assumed* 1 ("was assumed body and soul"), *dogma* 2, *Pope* 1, *decree* 1, *Immaculate* 1, *Virgin* 1, *soul* 1, *glory* 1, and the *heaven/heavenly* family 3. Their fullest context is the embedded Pius XII sentence; the quoted domestic use is the other occurrence of *divine*, whose three instances also include "divinely revealed dogma" and the final "altogether beautiful, and divine." GLOSS: The doctrinal nouns occur in one compressed explanatory block rather than being evenly scattered through the narration. *Divine* alone crosses out of that block into Peg's practical preparation, so the lexicon makes an ordinary wig-and-makeup remark answer the language of definition without making Peg speak theology. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

35. Mary, divided by use — QUOTE: "all the while explaining the importance of August 15th to Beth and me." SOURCE: Lexical census: *Mary* 14. Four are the domestic immigrant cousin ("Mary O'Malley," "Mary had preceded her," "Mary worked as a maid," "Mary and Peg's relationship"); one is "Margaret Mary Fawny"; one is "a Hail Mary"; eight are Marian ("traces of Mary," "flying Mary's," "Virgin Mary," "poor Mary," Titian's two Marys, the carving, and "Mary's blessing"). *Blessed* occurs 3 times, always in "Blessed Mother." GLOSS: The name is not reserved for the Virgin: it begins as kinship and labor, is briefly a schoolgirl's compound name, and only then becomes devotional vocabulary. The final colloquial appraisal of "Mary's blessing" lets a child's disappointment use the same name that the exposition has made doctrinally immense. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

36. Institutional language is thin but precise — QUOTE: "I believe miracles sometimes do happen, Helen," SOURCE: Lexical census: *Catholic* 5; *church* 4; *priest* 3; *Mass* 1; *Saint* 1; *sermon* 1; *prayer* 1; *Holy* 1; *Hail* 1; *procession* 1; *benediction* 1; *missionary* 2; *reign* 1; *religious* 1; *angel* 1; *apostle* 1; *deity* 2; *feast* 4; *mystery* 3; *tableau* 1; *revered* 1; and *Sister/sister* 6, only one of which is the title "Sister Ignatius." Exact contexts range from "Saint Thomas More Church" and "he died in a church" to the narrated shore rite—"the priest would lead a procession" and "make a benediction"—and to Helen's "Holy Father's Intention." GLOSS: The institutional vocabulary names places, roles, and a reported rite, but it does not govern the beach scene's actual dialogue. Peg's line about miracles is therefore more important structurally than its modest count: it is an uncredentialed answer to the grandmother's institutional language. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

37. The ethical vocabulary is mostly household speech — QUOTE: "We saved Scruffy's life, sweetheart." SOURCE: Lexical census: *faith* 3 ("What we need is faith"; "Have faith"; "strong faith"); *miracle* 2; *mortal* 2 and *sin* 2; *saved* 1; *savior* 1; *hope* 1; *suffer-* 2; *shame-* 4; *grief* 2; *death* 3; and *hell* 3 (two casual "To hell" utterances and Helen's damnation). The exact domestic contexts include a proposed "mortal sin" in a white lie, wasting day-old goods as "a mortal sin," and the retrospective "Peg had been my savior." GLOSS: Apart from the grandmother's programmatic faith, salvation words enter through a dog, a lie, leftovers, embarrassment, illness, and remembered assistance. The story's moral vocabulary is thus used for practical judgments before it is used for metaphysical ones. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

38. The material missal is present without an altar — QUOTE: "the sweet smell of cedar cabinets and wine surrounded us in a cloud." SOURCE: Lexical census: *body* 2 ("a round body"; "assumed body and soul"); *blood* 1 (Titian's "flesh and blood"); *flesh* 2; *bread* 1; *wine* 1; *water/waters* 10; *food* 4; *fruit* 2; *red* 5; *fire* 3; *crown* 1; *stain-* 1; *cross-* 4; *altar* 0; *veil* 0. Of the four cross-forms, three are domestic movements—"crossed the street," "crossed the threshold," "crossed arms"—and only one is "the sign of the cross." GLOSS: Objects and bodily nouns associated with sacrament are plentiful, while the purpose-built liturgical objects are absent. That distribution keeps sacral possibility in a kitchen, at a shore, and on a body rather than relocating the story to a sanctuary. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

39. Light and color do not stay devotional — QUOTE: "She suggested that she could take off her wig" SOURCE: Lexical census: *white* 5: "white lie," "white light," "soft fleecy white," "white and gold sundress," and "white as snow"; exact *light* occurs 2 times ("white light," "great light") and the printed form *lightening* 2 times; *Sun/sun/sunlight* 7; *star/starfish* 2; *spirit-* 1 ("spirited breaker"). GLOSS: The first white is an ethical euphemism, not a Marian color; the same word later joins light, a cloud, clothing, and snow. The reader meets the domestic sense first, then receives the visual and devotional resonance as repetition makes the color hard to leave merely figurative. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

40. Love, Word, and Father are families of words, not single registers — QUOTE: "or forgetting his name altogether" SOURCE: Lexical census: the *love-* family 10 (epigraphic "my love" 1; Peg's endearment 2; song-title "Loves" 1; *Lovely/lovely* 6); *Word/word/words* 3 (slurred words; "mystery of the Word"; words in sand); *Father/father* 8 (five domestic fathers, "Holy Father's," and two capitalized final Fathers). *Christ* occurs 2 times, both exclamations: "By Christ!" and "For Christ's sake." GLOSS: The prose introduces words and names as things that can be mangled, forgotten, or affectionately repeated before it calls one of them "the Word." Similarly, fatherhood is overwhelmingly familial before the closing capitalization proposes another register; lexical recurrence lets that second sense arrive after, not before, the domestic one. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

41. The census has deliberate zeros — QUOTE: "Of the people who listened to our tale of woe, most were gracious and polite." SOURCE: Lexical census: *grace* has no exact occurrence, though *gracious* occurs once; *spirit* has no exact occurrence,

though *spirited* occurs once. *altar, amen, baptism, canonization, damned, devil, forgive, mercy, offer, rosary, sacrifice, sacrament, resurrection, veil,* and *worship* occur 0 times; *hallowed, transfigured,* and *revered* occur once each. GLOSS: The story permits near-forms—"gracious," "spirited"—rather than the theological abstractions *grace* and *spirit*. Its rarer consecratory terms are saved for description and the ending, not for a stated devotional program. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

42. The mapped density — QUOTE: "the cloud, which you'd expect to be a soft fleecy white, is a cradle of thunderhead gray" SOURCE: Structural fact: on a 5,111 alphabetic-token reading of the story proper, the 86-headword census produces 186 hits by rough tenth: 1=7, 2=12, 3=15, 4=9, 5=34, 6=35, 7=15, 8=27, 9=9, 10=23. GLOSS: The greatest concentration is not simply the opening or the close but the adjacent fifth and sixth tenths, where the child looks skyward, the dogma is quoted, the folk rite is explained, Titian is described, and the grandmother's Marian domesticity is recalled. The quoted cloud belongs to that dense middle: a visual word already counted as ordinary color is made to carry the weight of the doctrinal exposition around it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

43. The largest silence comes early — QUOTE: "While they played cards, I circled the kitchen table and listened, picking up snippets about Peggy's tragic life." SOURCE: Structural fact: the largest uninterrupted gap between two census hits is 235 alphabetic tokens, from *sister* in the family-description passage to the opening exclamatory *Christ*. It occupies the card table, gossip, courtship, nightclub songs, clothing work, and Jim's attractiveness. GLOSS: The longest lexical secular stretch is not the beach's ordinary material but the family's opening act of social narration. Before the sacred lexicon begins to accumulate, the story makes the reader inhabit the terms by which relatives reduce Peg to appearance, drink, marriage, and anecdote. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

44. The late beach has a lexical trough, not an empty sacred scene — QUOTE: "Beth held up one of the glass jars to admire its sparkle." SOURCE: Structural fact: the ninth tenth has only 9 census hits, all from the ordinary/symbolic material set: *sun* 3, *water* 4, *Word* 1, and *star* 1. The preceding eighth tenth has 27 and the closing tenth 23. GLOSS: At the point of driving, undressing, splashing, and children's play, formal religious vocabulary falls away; the remaining words are landscape and objects. The

sacred frame has not vanished, but it operates through water, light, and a jar rather than through named doctrine. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

45. The close reactivates the lexicon after death — QUOTE: "I felt the pang of grief, but a sweet happiness, too" SOURCE: Structural fact: the final tenth carries 23 hits, including *crown, angel, water, feast, bread, Sun, transfigured, white, deity, light, rising/rises, divine, Father,* and *hallowed*. The closing paragraph alone supplies *divine, rises, light,* two *Father* forms, *crossed,* and *hallowed.* GLOSS: The last movement does not merely repeat the doctrinal middle; it reassembles the story's accumulated ordinary vocabulary after the report of Peg's death. Its elevated words arrive as retrospective description rather than as a church formula, so the resurrection-like cadence remains the narrator's act of seeing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

46. Body is the clearest double-duty word — QUOTE: "Spindly, awkward limbs stuck out of a round body" SOURCE: Lexical fact: *body* occurs exactly 2 times—here, a domestic grotesque description, and in the doctrinal citation, "was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." GLOSS: The reader encounters the physical, socially judged body first; its ordinary sense arrives immediately and dominates the opening portrait. The later doctrinal sense arrives second and changes the terms under which that first body can be remembered, without denying its materiality. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

47. Cure slides from rite to complaint — QUOTE: "The point is to get wet. How else are you going to get the cure?" SOURCE: Lexical fact: *cure* occurs 6 times: "a cure in seawater," "food, and a cure," "a cure in the water," "didn't need a cure," and the quoted question-and-answer pair, "Cure for what?" The water-family occurs 10 times, from "waters of Nantasket Beach" and collected salt water to sea, shallow waters, and jars. GLOSS: The reported tradition supplies *cure* as a religious folk practice, but Helen immediately translates it into gout, ankles, calluses, mood, and bowels. A reader meets the devotional sense in exposition and then the bodily household sense in speech; the word's two uses are held together rather than resolved. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

48. White changes its job five times — QUOTE: "the cloud, which you'd expect to be a soft fleecy white" SOURCE: Lexical fact: *white* occurs exactly 5 times, in "white lie," "white light," the quoted cloud, a "white and gold sundress," and "clothing white as

snow." GLOSS: The first occurrence means a harmless deception, and so its domestic idiom arrives before any visual or liturgical association. Only by repetition does white become light, weather, clothing, and finally transfiguring description; the word asks the reader to retain its first, compromised use inside its last, exalted one. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

49. Wine is a domestic atmosphere, not a consecrated element — QUOTE: "the sweet smell of cedar cabinets and wine surrounded us in a cloud." SOURCE: Lexical fact: *wine* occurs once, in the kitchen; *bread* occurs once, in the later beach feast; *blood* occurs once, in Titian's "fire, flesh and blood." None occurs in an explicitly Eucharistic sentence, and *altar* occurs 0 times. GLOSS: Wine arrives first and only as a smell around Peg's table, a sign of the household's drinking as well as a word available to sacramental memory. The reader can hear the missal second, but the text refuses to supply the altar, cup, consecration, or explicit Eucharistic claim that would settle the reference. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

50. Cross is mostly a verb of getting about — QUOTE: "I pictured my grandmother making the sign of the cross, Peg watching dreamily." SOURCE: Lexical fact: the *cross*-family occurs 4 times: "crossed the street," "crossed the threshold," the quoted "sign of the cross," and "His crossed arms." One is explicit devotional gesture; the others are movement, boundary-crossing, and bodily posture. GLOSS: The everyday verb arrives first and makes crossing a habitual spatial action before the devotional sign appears. The final bodily phrase comes last, allowing the reader to hear the religious noun within an action that has already been naturalized by domestic motion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

51. Grace and spirit are withheld at the stem but released as adjectives — QUOTE: "a spirited breaker that razed them in its wake." SOURCE: Lexical fact: exact *grace* and *spirit* each occur 0 times; the only near-forms are "gracious and polite" and the quoted *spirited*. *Hallowed* occurs once, only in the final sentence; *divine* occurs 3 times, once doctrinal, once cosmetic, once final. GLOSS: A breaker is spirited in the everyday sense of lively, just as neighbors are gracious in the social sense of polite. The devotional sense therefore arrives second, by proximity and absence: the story makes the reader supply *spirit* and *grace* rather than naming either as an abstract property of Peg. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

52. The absent sacramental vocabulary — QUOTE: "The idea of a "cure in the water" paled in comparison" SOURCE: Negative lexical fact: *Our Lady, rosary, amen, altar, baptism, canonization, sacrifice, mercy, forgive, resurrection, veil,* and *worship* are absent. In place of formal prayer or canonization language, the text gives folk terms and practical substitutes: "Mary's blessing," "a cure," "miracles," "Lovely Peggy," and the repeated vocabulary of getting wet, helping, and rising. GLOSS: This is not a story that performs a recognizably complete Catholic service on the page. It stages a canonizing effect through address, care, water, and recollection while withholding the nouns that would declare that effect official. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

53. The named holy figures are near-absent outside their explanatory enclave — QUOTE: "My grandmother revered the Blessed Mother" SOURCE: Negative-and-near-negative census: *Assumption* 2, *Virgin* 1, *Mass* 1, *Jesus* 1, *soul* 1, *prayer* 1, *heaven/heavenly* 3, and *Mary* 14; *Christ* 2 and *God* 7 are chiefly exclamatory, possessive, quoted, pagan, or practical rather than sustained theological narration. The direct Marian terms mass in the fifth and sixth tenths; the final vision names neither Mary nor Jesus. GLOSS: The story is plainly not silent about Mary, but its most formal Marian vocabulary is concentrated in an adult explanatory interval rather than carried into the lived beach action or the closing vision. What stands in its place at the end is an unnamed Father, light, loveliness, and Peg herself: canonization is enacted lexically by transfer rather than proclaimed by title. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

54. The ending, collated across every printing — QUOTE: The published text, identical in Fiction on the Web (2015), The Galway Review (2020), and the collection *Assumptions and Other Stories*, reads: "Only a few days later, early on a Sunday morning, my mother would come to my room and wake me… I imagined Peggy 'over there,' eyes no longer teary, her countenance reflecting the brightness of a blazing fire." SOURCE: https://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk/2015/11/assumptions-by-james-mulhern.html; https://thegalwayreview.com/2020/03/24/james-mulhern-assumptions/; the collection text GLOSS: All three independently published printings agree word for word at the story's most theologically weighted passage, the "altogether beautiful, and divine" close that answers the Marian epigraph. The stability of this exact wording across three separate venues, over five years, argues

that this ending is the author's settled and final text rather than a draft still in motion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

55. A working file that predates the published wording — QUOTE: A local reading copy of the story opens its final movement "In a moment, I imagined Peggy," and reports the death-notice with "my mother would come to my room and wake me," where all three published printings instead open that sentence with "Only a few days later, early on a Sunday morning, my mother would come to my room and wake me" and begin the closing paragraph simply "I imagined Peggy." SOURCE: comparison of a locally held working text against the Fiction on the Web, Galway Review, and collection printings GLOSS: The difference is small but consistent: the phrase "In a moment," present only in the working copy, is absent from every printing that reached print or publication. This is evidence of light revision between a draft stage and final copy, not evidence of a variant the author has let stand in more than one published form; the three published texts should be treated as authoritative over the working copy wherever they diverge from it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

56. The editor's frame is venue-specific, not a fact about the text itself — QUOTE: Fiction on the Web's biographical note above the story states Mulhern "was a Finalist for the Tuscany Prize in Catholic Fiction," and the site's own description of the piece separately calls the milieu "strongly Catholic." The Galway Review carries the identical author biography (word for word, including the Tuscany Prize line) but supplies no separate framing description of the story itself, and the collection opens the story with only its title and epigraph. SOURCE: https://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk/2015/11/assumptions-by-james-mulhern.html; https://thegalwayreview.com/2020/03/24/james-mulhern-assumptions/ GLOSS: The "strongly Catholic" framing is a Fiction on the Web editorial choice, not something the Galway Review or the book itself asserts about the story. A reader arriving at the Galway printing or the collection gets no external cue at all beyond the Song of Solomon epigraph; the religious argument has to be built by the reader entirely from the story's own withheld vocabulary, which is a stronger position for the story to be in than if an editor had already named its subject for the reader. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

57. What does NOT vary: the Lugh/Tailtiu material stays cut from every reprint — QUOTE: Fiction on the Web alone situates the family "in the parish life of Saint

Thomas More Church" and names the Celtic festival Lughnasadh and the god Lugh; neither appears anywhere in the Galway Review printing. SOURCE: https://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk/2015/11/assumptions-by-james-mulhern.html; https://thegalwayreview.com/2020/03/24/james-mulhern-assumptions/ (absence confirmed by direct search of the fetched Galway text) GLOSS: This confirms, rather than overturns, an existing claim in the book: the earlier 2015 printing is more ethnographically and doctrinally explicit than the 2020 reprint, and that difference is real and verified directly against the Galway Review's actual page, not inferred. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

58. The pure child's register — QUOTE: "I shook my head, wondering, too, what a jinnit must be." SOURCE: voice GLOSS: This is the child's voice at its most unmediated: a short declarative, a concrete verb ("shook"), and a child's curiosity about an unfamiliar word ("jinnit") that he does not gloss or define. The narrator's other child-register sentences share the same shape — "I said that I thought that was probably a mortal sin, and my grandmother wouldn't like it," "I was content–he had a large fenced-in yard, and there were other dogs as well." They are short, concrete, and morally literal, with no abstraction and no thesis. This is the baseline against which every later break is audible. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

59. The exact sentence where the voice first breaks — QUOTE: "The dogma of the Assumption, I later learned, was firmly established in 1950 when Pope Pius XII made his decree" SOURCE: voice GLOSS: The preceding two sentences are the child's: "Throughout that hot August day, I would catch Beth staring at the sky, looking for traces of Mary. I was on the hunt too, spotting flying Mary's everywhere." Then the subject shifts from the child's sensory "I" to an abstract institutional noun ("The dogma"), and the sentence acquires a date, a proper name, and a thesis. The phrase "I later learned" names the adult's intervention outright, so the break is not hidden but announced. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

60. What changes at the break: diction, sentence length, thesis — QUOTE: "We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma; that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." SOURCE: voice; Pius XII, Munificentissimus Deus GLOSS: Three things change at once. Diction: the concrete Anglo-Saxon nouns of the child's world (sky, star, eggs) are replaced by

Latinate theological nouns — "dogma," "decree," "divinely revealed," "Immaculate Mother of God," "ever Virgin." Sentence length: the sentence balloons to roughly ninety-seven words because it swallows a fifty-word quotation whole, where the child's sentences run three to ten words. Thesis: the sentence asserts a dated fact ("firmly established in 1950"), which the child's voice never does — the child records, the adult argues. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

61. The voice breaks six times, and three of them cluster — QUOTE: "Some have suggested that the tradition is an assimilation of the Celtic festival of Lughnasadh" / "While at Boston University, I remember flipping through the art book of a housemate" / "I don't know that Peg was very religious. I'm not even sure if she was a practicing Catholic" / "It has been a long time since that ride, but when I recall that afternoon, I feel" SOURCE: voice GLOSS: The adult critical voice interrupts six times. Three of the six — the Pius XII exposition, the Lughnasadh anthropology, and the Titian ekphrasis — occur as three consecutive paragraphs in the middle of the story, immediately after the child's August 15th dialogue with Beth; they are the "middle essays" and they cluster in one place. The other three are isolated and scattered: an early lyrical intrusion at the Steinway ("even now, years later, I hear the swelling sadness in her voice… the first throb of death's glower entered my consciousness"), a mid-story religious assessment ("I don't know that Peg was very religious"), and a late present-tense reflection ("It has been a long time since that ride"). So the break is not a single clean hinge but a cluster of three plus three strays. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

62. The longest sentence is a cumulative sentence about motion — QUOTE: "Later, as Beth and I waded through the shallow waters at the ocean's edge, we stopped occasionally to work and wedge our feet into the cool sand, then sloshed our legs through the foam a bit, deliberately making heavy giant steps and dancing to keep pace with the sun." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: At forty-nine words this is the longest sentence in the narrator's own voice (the Pius XII sentence is longer only because it embeds a quotation). It is a true cumulative sentence: a short base clause ("we stopped") is extended by four participial phrases (wading, wedging, sloshing, making heavy giant steps and dancing) that pile up the way the children's feet pile up against the water. The sentence does not merely describe slow, deliberate motion; its own length and its repeated -ing clauses enact it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

63. The shortest sentences are two- and three-word declaratives — QUOTE: "She laughed." / "The chair creaked." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The shortest sentences in the prose are "She laughed." (two words) and "The chair creaked." (three words), with "Peg was a talker." (four words) close behind. Each is a full stop that lands like a beat: "She laughed" closes Peg's cruel ghost story with a single stressed syllable, and "The chair creaked" is onomatopoeic — its two heavy stresses (chair, creaked) mimic the groan it names. These short declaratives are the child's instrument; the adult voice, by contrast, almost never writes a sentence this short. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

64. The prose resolves into anapests — the rhythm of Peg's waltzes — QUOTE: "she rises once again to sing her favorite song. And the Sun's great light shines upon and caresses her warm skin" SOURCE: prosody; popular song GLOSS: Read for stress, the heightened passages fall into anapests, three-beat units of two unstressed syllables and one stressed: "she RIS-es once a-GAIN to SING her FAV-or-ite SONG," "and the SUN'S great LIGHT shines u-PON and ca-RESS-es her WARM SKIN." Anapestic triplets are the meter of the waltz, and the songs Peg sings — "Show Me the Way to Go Home," "When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New" — are waltzes in 3/4 time. The narrator's climactic prose thus takes its cadence from Peg's own music, so that the story's final rise is sung in the time signature of the woman it glorifies. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

65. The most heavily stressed sentence sits at the exact center of the final paragraph — QUOTE: "Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine –she rises once again to sing her favorite song." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: This is the sentence with the heaviest accentual load in the story: the appositive carries four strong beats (a-WAKE, LAUGH-ing, BEAU-ti-ful, di-VINE) and the main clause four more (RIS-es, a-GAIN, SING, SONG). It is placed at the dead center of the final paragraph, between the short pivot "Finally she would be at home with her Jim" and the long simile of the Father's hands. The story saves its heaviest stress for the moment of Peg's rising, so the climax is marked by rhythm before it is marked by meaning. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

66. Sibilance and liquids in the opening "dreary river" sentence — QUOTE: "Her face was swollen and pasty, with broken capillaries that sloped down the sides of her nostrils, flooding the arid plain of her skin, like some dreary river and its tributaries eking over a delta of nasolabial folds to terminate in the red seas of two droopy

cheeks." SOURCE: prosody (sound) GLOSS: The sentence is saturated with sibilants (swollen, pasty, sloped, sides, nostrils, skin, some, seas) and liquid "r" sounds (broken, capillaries, nostrils, arid, dreary, river, tributaries, terminate, red, droopy), plus a run of hard "d" (down, dreary, delta, droopy). The sibilants flow through the sentence the way the "dreary river" flows through the face it describes — the sound is the image. The book records this sentence's Exodus geography (arid plain, delta, Red Sea) but not its phonetics; the sibilance is what makes the geography feel like water rather than like a diagram. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

67. "-ing" anaphora in the December walk — QUOTE: "Peg zigzagging beside me, me nudging Peg–trying to keep her from falling off the curb, Scruffy following behind, wagging his tail and sniffing spots along the way." SOURCE: prosody (sound) GLOSS: Seven present participles in one sentence — zigzagging, nudging, trying, falling, following, wagging, sniffing — create an anaphora of the "-ing" suffix. The repeated suffix turns the sentence into a continuous, unbroken motion, the grammatical equivalent of the three figures stumbling down the street without ever quite stopping. It is the story's clearest instance of anaphora, and it is doing exactly what anaphora does: it makes the action feel ongoing and unresolved, which is the condition of the whole winter episode. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

68. Sibilance in the beach's search scene — QUOTE: "we scanned the hard bottom for a lonely starfish or stone, or the clam with a secreted pearl" / "startling a mourning dove that sped from its cleft into the bright sky. It made a whistling sound as it rose" SOURCE: prosody (sound) GLOSS: The "s" and "sp"/"st" clusters run through the beach passage — scanned, starfish, stone, secreted, startling, sped, whistling — a sustained sibilance that mimics the hiss of the surf and the dove's wing-beat. The book records the dove's Song-of-Songs source and the pearl's Margaret meaning, but not this: that the whole search is whispered in sibilants, so the boy's hunt for "a lonely starfish or stone" is heard as much as seen. The "whistling sound" the dove makes is also the sound the sentence makes. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

69. "transfigured figurines" — f-alliteration and a doubled fricative — QUOTE: "my grandmother and Peggy waved to us, transfigured figurines on the earth below, their clothing white as snow" SOURCE: prosody (sound); Mark 9:3 GLOSS: "Transfigured figurines" is a near-palindrome of sound: both words open on the

same "f" fricative and share the "fig" core, so the phrase almost stutters. The book records the phrase's Transfiguration source and the Tota pulchra "white as snow" antiphon, but the alliteration is doing its own work: the doubled "f" makes the two women flicker, as if seen through the heat of the August air, which is precisely the condition of the boy's vision from the moving coaster. The sound enacts the distance. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

70. "joyful and tearful" — internal rhyme where the book sees only a weakness — QUOTE: "A Father, joyful and tearful at the same time, hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him." SOURCE: prosody (sound) GLOSS: The book names "joyful and tearful at the same time" as the one phrase in the final paragraph that tells rather than shows — a fair charge. But the phrase is also a sound-device: "joyful and tearful" is an internal rhyme on the "-ful" suffix, a chime that binds the two opposed emotions into one syllable-pair, and it is followed by the l-alliteration of "hallowed by a loveliness." The rhyme is doing what the telling cannot: it makes joy and grief a single sound, which is the theological claim of the whole ending. The weakness and the strength are the same words. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

71. "heady anticipation of the rising… delightful fright of the quick fall" — long-i assonance and a rise-fall rhythm — QUOTE: "I feel the heady anticipation of the rising, and the delightful fright of the quick fall" SOURCE: prosody (sound) GLOSS: The long "i" vowel runs through the line — heady, rising, delightful, fright — and the sentence is built as a miniature of the roller coaster it recalls: "the rising" climbs, "the quick fall" drops. The book records this as the two movements of the Assumption doctrine (rise and fall), but the assonance is the point: the repeated "i" is the vowel of height and of fright, so the sentence sounds like a ride — anticipation stretched on the long vowels, then the clipped "quick fall" landing on the short "a." The prosody performs the doctrine. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

72. The final paragraph's five sentence-shapes — QUOTE: "I imagined Peggy"over there," eyes no longer teary, her countenance reflecting the brightness of a blazing fire. Finally she would be at home with her Jim. Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine–she rises once again to sing her favorite song. And the Sun's great light shines upon and caresses her warm skin, like the flesh of a Father's hands as He cradles His child's head before lifting His crossed arms to kiss her soft cheek. A Father, joyful and tearful at the same time, hallowed by a loveliness

that would forever be a part of Him." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The paragraph is five sentences of deliberately varied shape: a long cumulative sentence (three appositional phrases), a short eight-word pivot, the central three-beat rise, a long extended simile with three embedded verbs (cradles, lifting, kiss), and a final sentence-fragment that is pure apposition. The rhythm is a wave: long, short, rising, long, and then a fragment that does not resolve but opens. The paragraph is the story's prosodic climax, and its shape — a swell that ends not on a close but on a held note — is the shape of an assumption. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

73. How the sound earns "divine" — QUOTE: "eyes no longer teary" / "altogether beautiful, and divine" / "the Sun's great light shines" / "His child's head" SOURCE: prosody; Song of Solomon 4:7 GLOSS: The word "divine" is prepared by sound before it is prepared by sense. Its long "i" diphthong is threaded through the paragraph in advance — "eyes," then "divine" itself, then "shines," then "child's" — so that by the time "divine" arrives it is already the paragraph's vowel, already heard. It also completes the epigraph: Song of Solomon 4:7 promises "You are altogether beautiful," and the story quotes "altogether beautiful" and adds "and divine" as its single word beyond scripture, placed at the peak of the rising three-beat ("al-to-GE-ther BEAU-ti-ful, and di-VINE"). The book records the theological point (deification, 2 Pet. 1:4); this is the prosodic mechanism by which the word is earned rather than merely asserted. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

74. The ending resolves on a single stressed monosyllable, "Him" — QUOTE: "hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The story's last word is "Him," a single stressed monosyllable that receives the terminal stress of the entire narrative. The sentence that carries it is a fragment — no main verb, only apposition — so the grammar refuses to close and the stress falls entirely on the pronoun. The book records this as ring composition (the first and last sentences reverse the location of judgment), but the prosody adds a second point: the story ends on a beat, not a period, and the beat is the name of the Father. The sound closes the story the way a cadence closes a hymn. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

75. Hopkinsian sprung rhythm in the alliterative compounds — QUOTE: "a few long silver strands, moist from sweat, garlanded the area by her temples" / "her wet silvery scalp" SOURCE: Gerard Manley Hopkins, sprung rhythm and compound stress GLOSS: The story's densest alliterative moments — "silver strands," "wet silvery

scalp," "brightness of a blazing fire" — reproduce the signature of Hopkins's sprung rhythm: heavy, clustered stresses and compound nouns that force the line to slow and thicken. The book lists Hopkins among Mulhern's named inheritance but does not tie him to this story's voice. The connection is in the texture: Hopkins is the poet of "dappled things" and of the body's "instress," and Mulhern's habit of packing a sentence with stressed alliterative nouns is a prose equivalent of sprung rhythm, used precisely when the body is being described. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

76. Dickinson's dash in the final paragraph — QUOTE: "Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine–she rises once again to sing her favorite song." SOURCE: Emily Dickinson, the dash as a mark of breath and hesitation GLOSS: The double dash that frames "laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine" is Dickinson's punctuation, not Joyce's or Hemingway's: it is a dash that holds the breath and suspends the clause, letting the three adjectives hang in the air before the verb "rises" releases them. The book records Dickinson as a named inheritance (and her "I dwell in Possibility" as the close of Molly Bonamici), but not this story's use of her dash. The dash is what makes the ending's present tense feel like an intake of breath rather than a declaration. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

77. The Irish brogue as the story's true voice — QUOTE: "'Terties,' Peg would say in her brogue" / "I'm just codding ya, Jimmy, just an old story is all. A fib, my love" / "By the brook was where they most appeared. They'd be hiding in the bushes, beautiful Gorse Bushes with bright yellow flowers." SOURCE: voice; Irish-English dialect (Joyce, Yeats, Synge) GLOSS: Peg's speech is the story's only sustained non-narratorial voice, and it is Irish to the bone: "Terties" for thirties, "codding" for joking, "jinnit" for a nuisance, "wee people" and "Gorse Bushes" for the fairy lore of County Mayo. The book records the gorse as an inverted burning bush and "Terties" as a Marian-geography cue, but not the cadence itself: Peg's sentences are short, end-stopped, and musical ("A fib, my love"), the rhythm of Synge's and Joyce's peasants. Her brogue is the story's one voice that never breaks into the adult register, which is why it can carry the fairy tale and the fib without a thesis. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

78. O'Connor's grotesque voice, softened — QUOTE: "Peggy Fleming, according to my grandfather was the"homeliest damn woman" he'd ever seen." SOURCE: Flannery O'Connor, the Catholic grotesque GLOSS: The story opens in O'Connor's register — the "homeliest damn woman," the catalogue of ruin (swollen face, broken

capillaries, toothless, hairless) — which is O'Connor's way of forcing grace through the grotesque. The book records O'Connor as an inheritance and notes that Mulhern's grace is "comic and cumulative" rather than violent, but the voice point is sharper: O'Connor's grotesques are described by a cold third-person narrator, while Mulhern's is described by a boy who loves her, so the same grotesque diction is warmed by the first-person. The opening sentence is O'Connor's music played in a child's key. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

79. The Italian-Catholic material is voiceless — a negative finding — QUOTE: "killing the old Italian guy selling the stuff, and himself, of course." SOURCE: voice (negative finding) GLOSS: The story's Italian-Catholic content is almost entirely silent. The one Italian character — "the old Italian guy selling the stuff" at the fruit stand — is killed by Jim's Buick before he speaks a word, and he is given no name, no voice, and no faith. The other Italian presences are visual, not aural: Titian's Assunta is a painting, and the "tableau vivant" is a posed stillness. Against the rich Irish brogue of Peg and the folk-Catholic speech of the grandmother, the Italian material has no voice at all, which is a genuine asymmetry in a story that otherwise gives every tradition a sound. The Irish-Catholic voice is the story's voice; the Italian is a mute prop. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

80. The reader enters mid-verdict, not as eyewitness — QUOTE: "Peggy Fleming, according to my grandfather was the 'homeliest damn woman' he'd ever seen." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: The story's first sentence is hearsay, sealed inside the qualifier "according to my grandfather." The reader is not shown Peggy and asked to judge; the reader is handed a verdict already passed, second-hand, and then handed the body it was passed on. This is the reader's opening position in the whole piece — seated at the card table, inheriting the family's assumption before any counter-evidence arrives — and the rest of the story is a slow, never-declared effort to reverse that first sentence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

81. The narrator's pity is interpolated as an adverb — QUOTE: "She was, unfortunately, toothless, and hairless as well, suffering from a mysterious childhood disease that had left her with chronic alopecia." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: One word does the positioning: "unfortunately." The catalogue of Peggy's ruin is O'Connor's grotesque register, but O'Connor's cold narrator would never add "unfortunately"; that adverb is an act of compassion smuggled into a physical

inventory. It tells the reader, in the first paragraph, that the teller already loves this woman — and so the reader is cued to pity before being cued to laugh, even while the surface invites the laugh. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

82. The cruelty is overheard more than reported — QUOTE: "But by Christ! How in God's name could Jim stand to look at that puss day in and day out?" SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: Mulhern renders the card-table cruelty as the family's own quoted voice, not the narrator's accusation, so the reader hears the joke the way the boy heard it — from the room, uncomprehending, circling the kitchen table. The profane "By Christ" doubles as an irony the family does not hear: they invoke the name of the very Bridegroom whose Canticle has already called this woman flawless. The reader is invited to laugh with the card table and then to feel the laughter curdle in the mouth. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

83. The family's pity is exposed as inadequate — QUOTE: "Well, the poor thing!" / "Grampie, he would become stone silent, ashamed to have said so much already." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: The grandmother's "Well, the poor thing!" flatters Peggy with a label that keeps her safely below the speaker, and the grandfather's "stone silent" shame admits that the family knows its talk is cruelty. The reader is shown a household that pities and condemns in the same breath without ever acting, and is thereby pushed toward the story's real alternative: not pity but the boy's direct affection. This is where the story begins to condemn the relatives even as it flatters their coziness. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

84. The redirection: comedy is stopped dead by pain — QUOTE: "Peg was horrible, of course–years of smoking, drinking, and heartache had ravaged her vocal chords–but her pain was so real. I knew that she was dreaming–longing for her husband Jim –and I think it was then that the first throb of death's glower entered my consciousness." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: This is the single passage where the reader's sympathy is most deliberately redirected. The story has been inviting the reader to laugh at Peggy — at her singing, her drinking, her wig — and at the grandmother's smirk it says, in effect, stop. "Of course" concedes the laugh and "but her pain was so real" cancels it in the same breath, and the sentence hands the reader the narrator's own conversion as the model for its own. From here the reader is never again allowed an uncomplicated laugh at Peggy; every later joke carries the ache installed in this paragraph. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

85. The neighbor is right, and rightness is exposed as cruelty — QUOTE: "You should be ashamed of yourself." / "The boy needs a home even more. Now take him home before I call the police and have you arrested for public drunkenness." / "She gave me a pitiful look before shutting the door in our faces." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: The young mother is factually correct — it is late, it is freezing, Peg is drunk, a child should be in bed — and the story lets her be correct so that the reader feels the insufficiency of mere correctness. Her "pitiful look" is aimed at the boy, not at Peggy, an act of pity that shuts the door rather than opening it. This is the story implicating its own reader, who has wanted to side with the neighbor: the text makes "you should be ashamed of yourself" land back on the one who says it and on every reader who has been enjoying Peggy as a spectacle. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

86. The question of belief is put in print, at the midpoint — QUOTE: "Do you believe? Endurance and persistence will be rewarded." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: A fortune cookie — the cheapest possible oracle — asks the reader the one question the whole story is testing, and Peggy reads it aloud as a "mystical sign." The story declines to answer; it lets the question sit in the room. The text allows both readings at once: the cookie is nonsense, and the persistence it promises is in fact rewarded within the week when Peg finds the dog a home. Belief is offered not as a claim but as a wager the reader may take or leave. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

87. Where belief is withheld, "mystery" is supplied, and a child accepts it — QUOTE: "It's a mystery, Bethie. Just one of those things." / "'Oh.' Beth said, picking up her fork. 'A mystery.'" SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: When Beth asks how a body gets to heaven, the grandmother has no mechanism and finally offers the word "mystery," and Beth accepts it with a fork in her hand — belief received as a resting place rather than an explanation. The story does not ask the reader for literal belief in the Assumption; it shows a child content to hold a contradiction. The reader is positioned to do what Beth does: take the word and go on eating, which is the story's gentle map of faith for the unconverted. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

88. The sacred visions are flagged as imagination, not report — QUOTE: "I imagined Peggy 'over there,' eyes no longer teary" / "I pictured my grandmother making the sign of the cross, Peg watching dreamily." / "I don't know that Peg was very religious. I'm not even sure if she was a practicing Catholic." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: Three times the narrator marks a devotional image as his own

projection — "I imagined," "I pictured" — and twice he flatly doubts the very piety the scene pretends to ("I don't know… I'm not even sure"). The story thus offers the reader a rational escape hatch at every turn: nothing supernatural need be believed, because the narrator has already told you it is his imagining. What the text finally allows is neither proof nor denial but the grown man's decision to keep imagining anyway, which is the only claim the ending asks the reader to share. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

89. The reader as Peggy's confessor — QUOTE: "Can you imagine that, Jimmy?" / "I'm just codding ya, Jimmy, just an old story is all. A fib, my love," she said, reacting to my frightened expression. SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: Peggy addresses the boy by the dead husband's name — "Jimmy" — and confides her childhood and her resentments directly to him, and through "Can you imagine that, Jimmy?" the reader is pulled onto the same stool beside her. This is the passage that most directly implicates the reader, because it is the only place an intimate is addressed by name with a question that demands an answer. The role the story ultimately assigns is not judge and not mere witness: it is confessor, the one to whom the ugly woman tells her stories and whom she trusts to call her a fibber and still sit there. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

90. The story hands the reader its own answer, in three words — QUOTE: "'You're not ugly,' I said." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: After Peggy rehearses the world's verdict on her ("And I was ugly, ya know"), the boy answers with the shortest possible counter-verdict, and the story gives it to the reader as the model of what it wants said. This is the role the narrative finally asks the reader to play: not to pity Peggy, not to judge her family, but to say the thing that overturns the first sentence. The whole story is a five-thousand-word argument that these three words, spoken once by a child, are the act that the title's dogma finally performs. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

91. The ending consoles and unsettles at once — QUOTE: "Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine–she rises once again to sing her favorite song. And the Sun's great light shines upon and caresses her warm skin, like the flesh of a Father's hands as He cradles His child's head before lifting His crossed arms to kiss her soft cheek. A Father, joyful and tearful at the same time, hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS:

The rise consoles: Peggy is "at home," beautiful, divine, kissed. But the reader is not allowed to forget that this is the narrator's "imagined" scene for a woman who is dead, and the image of "crossed arms" cradling and kissing a head is simultaneously an embrace and a crucifixion — the tenderness carries the instrument of death inside it. "Joyful and tearful at the same time" tells the reader explicitly that grief is not removed but fused with joy. The paragraph both consoles and unsettles, and it earns its tenderness rather than asserting it, precisely because the opening "I imagined" admits the vision is a wish — a wish the story has spent five thousand words teaching the reader to share. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

92. The appended Duffy poem checks the reader's warmth — QUOTE: "Nothing, poor dear, poor crone … But what you thought" / "Your little son, I watched, appalled" / "was afraid / Of God and miracles and even you." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: Immediately after the story's warm apotheosis, the reader is handed Fr. John Duffy's colder poem, in which a mother prays for a cure on the same feast and gets "Nothing," observed by a son who is "afraid of God and miracles and even you." The placement deliberately revises the reader's emotion: the story's Peggy is the miracle Duffy's Bridie never received, and Duffy's frightened child is the boy Mulhern's narrator refused to remain. The appended poem is the story's conscience, placed where the reader cannot skip it, and it keeps the ending's tenderness from hardening into easy triumph. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

93. A self-mocking song resets the reader's allegiance — QUOTE: "'Show me the way to go home. I'm tired and I wanna go to bed,' Peg began singing, 'I had a little drink about an hour ago and it went right to my head. . . .'" SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: Peggy sings this only after the door has been slammed on her, and the song she chooses is a real barroom drinking song about wanting to go home — she answers humiliation with a joke on herself rather than with resentment. The placement is a deliberate reader-cue: just when the neighbor has made the case against Peggy, the story hands her a line of such abject, unguarded tenderness that the reader is re-sided with her against the door. The song does what the neighbor refuses to do — it takes Peggy as she is and asks only for the way home. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

94. The story leaves its reader waking, where Joyce leaves him swooning — QUOTE: "I felt the pang of grief, but a sweet happiness, too, as I remembered our

December journey, Peg's persistence and her songs." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: Mulhern's acknowledged master Joyce ends "The Dead" in snow falling "upon all the living and the dead" as Gabriel's soul "swoons slowly" into universal grief, with no sweetness admitted. At Peggy's death the narrator instead pairs the "pang of grief" with a "sweet happiness," and the last paragraph makes her "Completely awake." The reader of "Assumptions" is given the anti-swoon: consciousness that stays awake through death rather than dissolving into it. This is the story's quiet answer to the snow — a Joycean closing reversed from descent into rise, from white cold into Sun — and it positions the reader to feel joy and grief as one thing instead of mourning alone. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

95. Peg is the story's fairy-teller, and the reader sits in the child's seat — QUOTE: "They'd be hiding in the bushes, beautiful Gorse Bushes with bright yellow flowers. The little buggers were quick, and if you weren't fast, they'd catch you and pinch you to death." / "I'm just codding ya, Jimmy, just an old story is all. A fib, my love." SOURCE: reader's experience GLOSS: Peg's tale of the "wee people" among the yellow gorse is Yeats's Celtic twilight material — the perilous, beautiful otherworld of "The Stolen Child" — delivered by the one character who can half-believe it, and the reader, addressed as "Jimmy," is given the child's credulous seat on the parlor rug. Then she retracts it with "A fib, my love," teaching the listening boy — and through him the reader — that a tale may be both a lie and a comfort at once. This is the exact maneuver the story performs on its own Marian vision: enchant, then admit the fabrication, then ask the reader to love it anyway. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

96. The kindergartner's drawing — QUOTE: "Spindly, awkward limbs stuck out of a round body, like you might see in a kindergartner's rendering of a person." SOURCE: image (formal observation) GLOSS: The story's first actual picture of Peggy is explicitly a child's crude drawing—a round torso with stick-limbs. This prefigures the whole method: Peggy is figured naively, matching the boy-narrator's own peripheral, childish way of seeing. It is a "primitive icon"—the unskilled rendering the story will insist is the truest portrait, since the last paragraph repaints the same round, awkward body as Father-cradled without altering a line of its anatomy. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

97. "You Stepped Out of a Dream" — QUOTE: "other songs like 'You Stepped Out of a Dream' by Sarah Vaughan (that broad could pull your heart strings)." SOURCE:

Nacio Herb Brown and Gus Kahn, "You Stepped Out of a Dream" (1938), sung by Sarah Vaughan GLOSS: The book catalogues this song but never reads it. Its title is the story's plot in six words: the beloved who steps out of a dream into waking reality is exactly what the Assumption does to Peggy—she is "dreaming—longing for her husband Jim" all story, then "Completely awake" at the close. The opening lyric, "You are too wonderful to be what you seem," is the epigraph's "altogether beautiful… no flaw in you" aimed at the woman everyone calls homely; and its second stanza has the beloved step "out of a cloud," the story's Assunta medium. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

98. The fall through cloudy air — QUOTE: "What must she have thought as she fell through that cloudy air?" SOURCE: image; the Assunta's thunderhead cloud, inverted GLOSS: Where Titian's Mary is borne up on a "cradle of thunderhead gray" cloud, Peg's schoolyard tormentor Margaret Mary Fawny makes the downward journey through the same medium—"cloudy air." The one explicit pass through cloud in the story is a drowning child, not an assumption: the cloud that is glory's vehicle elsewhere is here the medium of a death. It plants the inversion the closing paragraphs reverse (fall into rise). CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

99. Dancing to keep pace with the sun — QUOTE: "deliberately making heavy giant steps and dancing to keep pace with the sun." SOURCE: image (formal observation) GLOSS: The children deliberately match their bodies to the sun's motion—a heliotropic, keep-time-with-the-light gesture that the book quotes only for its prosody. It is the day's single moment of human motion synchronized with, rather than symbolizing, the Sun that will later "caress… her warm skin." The dance casts the two children as tiny satellites of a light they cannot yet name. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

100. The ruined permanent — QUOTE: "her 'permanent is all ruined' while she fussed with her hair." SOURCE: image (wordplay) GLOSS: Helen's complaint doubles: her "permanent" is her hairdo, but the same word names the everlasting things this feast day is about. The woman who fusses over perishable hair watches its permanence ruined by the very water that has just baptized her; Peggy's "At least I don't have to worry about that" is the bald woman's freedom from caring about permanence—which is precisely why she can receive the real one. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

101. The monkeys on the phone — QUOTE: "telling crazy stories about monkeys calling her up on the phone." SOURCE: image—the ape as simia Dei (the devil aping God); counterfeit revelation GLOSS: Untouched by the book, which reads this delirium-tremens episode only as the Song-of-Songs night-wandering. In medieval iconography the monkey is the simia Dei, "ape of God," sender of false visions—and here it delivers hallucinated calls. In a story built on the true call "home" (Mary "taken to her heavenly home," Peggy "trying to bring him home"), the monkeys' phantom phone-calls are the one counterfeit summons. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

102. The idle fauna (negative) — QUOTE: "We splashed ourselves as we jumped to avoid dark clumps of seaweed or a jellyfish… unearthing small crabs in the sand between." SOURCE: image—negative finding GLOSS: In the same two sentences that load the starfish, stone, and pearl with meaning, the jellyfish, "dark clumps of seaweed," and "small crabs" carry nothing at all—pure beach texture. This is a genuine limit: the story's "every noun has a second life" tendency is a tendency, not a law, and the minor fauna marks the point where image-hunting yields nothing. No unrecorded image remains in the beach sequence beyond these idle creatures. CONFIDENCE: STRONG (as a negative)

103. The fixed repertoire — QUOTE: "a copy of Titian's Assunta caught my attention." SOURCE: image—the story's iconographic repertoire (Titian, Annunciation, Nativity, Pietà) GLOSS: All four Marian scenes the question asks after are present and fixed: the Assumption (Titian's Assunta, ekphrased at length), the Annunciation (the "spray of lilies" on Helen's hat and the December star), the Nativity (the December journey under star and crescent moon), and the Pietà—inverted into the Father cradling a dead daughter. Beyond these, plus the Rosary's Glorious Mysteries and the Song-of-Songs antiphon imagery, the story does not go: it stages no Station, no Deposition, no Last Supper tableau. The repertoire is a fixed Marian-and-Christological canon; the free range belongs only to the domestic surfaces (sundress, towel, roller coaster) that wear it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG (confirmation)

104. The image as theology — QUOTE: "like the flesh of a Father's hands as He cradles His child's head before lifting His crossed arms to kiss her soft cheek." SOURCE: image—the inverted Pietà as the story's theological argument GLOSS: This is the single most theologically loaded image, and it argues the story's whole case: the

Assumption is a doctrine about a body, so the ending shows a body—warm skin, a head, a cheek—held and kissed. The "crossed arms" fold the Cross into an embrace, turning the instrument of death into tenderness. The sea (baptism), the light (Sun-of-righteousness theophany), and the rising (resurrection) all do consistent, non-decorative theological work and converge here. CONFIDENCE: STRONG (confirmation)

105. The assumption enacted twice — QUOTE: "a gust had lifted Peg's wig into the air." SOURCE: image—the "assumption" double meaning enacted GLOSS: This is the image that most fully enacts the title's two senses at once. A gust takes part of Peggy up into the air—the day's first literal assumption, on the morning of the feast—while the wig itself is a comic prop to be chased, raised "like the head of John the Baptist," and buried in a paper bag. The hair is both taken up and taken for granted, as Peggy is, in a single gesture; the story's "taking-up" verbs (wig lifted, coaster chariot, "rose from the sea," the Father's raised arms) recur until the last page makes the word doctrinal. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

106. Italian-Catholic, hymns, and literary image (negative) — QUOTE: "killing the old Italian guy selling the stuff, and himself, of course." SOURCE: image—Irish- and Italian-Catholic material; hymns; literary allusion GLOSS: Nothing new surfaces under any of these headings. The Italian-Catholic register is visual and mute—Titian's Assunta, the posed tableau vivant, and this voiceless, unnamed fruit-stand Italian who dies without a word—set against the fully voiced Irish brogue that runs the whole story. No church hymn is ever sung; the sacred-music slot is filled entirely by popular songs, all already mapped. And every literary image-allusion (Joyce's snow answered by Sun, Yeats's gorse fairies, O'Connor's grotesque warmed by a child, Hopkins's sprung rhythm, Dickinson's dash) is already tied to its image. CONFIDENCE: STRONG (confirmation)

107. The grandmother's name never enters the narrator's own vocabulary — QUOTE: "Let's have one for the road, Helen." SOURCE: naming (intra-story distribution; Helen 4 uses against "my grandmother" 34) GLOSS: "Helen" occurs four times in the story and not once as the narrator's unforced designation: twice it is Peg addressing her across the kitchen table, once it belongs to the card-table gossip ("she has a neighbor like Helen"), once to the appositive that closes that borrowed voice. Everywhere else — thirty-four times — she is "my grandmother," and the

grandfather, mother and father are likewise only roles. The rule holds strictly for the ascending generation and breaks only for the sister, who is "Beth" seventeen times: kinship above the narrator is a function, kinship beside him is a person. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

108. Surnames belong exclusively to Peg's Irish world; the narrator's household has none — QUOTE: "Her cousin, Mary O'Malley had sponsored her trip to the States back in the thirties." / "marrying a young "whippersnapper" named Joseph Conner whom she'd met at one of the socials" SOURCE: naming (onomastic census: four full names in the story, all in Peg's Irish or immigrant past) GLOSS: Every full name in "Assumptions" — Peggy Fleming, Mary O'Malley, Joseph Conner, Margaret Mary Fawny — attaches to the emigrant generation or the Irish schoolyard, and every one of those people except Peggy is dead or lost. The narrator's own family is a household without a surname: no patronymic is ever supplied for Helen, Grampie, Auntie Ag, Beth or Jimmy, so the family that does the judging cannot be identified while the woman they judge is fully on the record. The asymmetry makes the story's gossip anonymous and its victim documented. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

109. The one scene of unnaming, and it is the scene that works — QUOTE: "She was slurring her words, calling Scruffy "Ruffy," or forgetting his name altogether, sometimes dropping the phone to pick up her drink with both hands. Once she referred to him as a cat." SOURCE: naming (the inverse of the sobriquet-blessing; drunken aphasia as failed nomination) GLOSS: Against the grandmother's theory that a name rightly applied improves a life, the story sets Peg on the telephone dissolving a name in three stages — mispronounced, forgotten, replaced by the wrong species. It should be the story's proof of futility, and it is not: the campaign succeeds, the dog gets a home, and the boy calls her "my savior" a few lines later. Naming is shown to be powerful in Helen's hands and irrelevant in Peg's, and grace arrives through the one whose words fail. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

110. The invented name migrates from order, to narration, to obituary — QUOTE: ""And Jimmy, remember to call her 'Lovely Peggy,' " she whispered to me quickly." / "Then Lovely Peggy reached for me." / "When she told me that Lovely Peggy had died in her sleep" SOURCE: naming (the five uses of the sobriquet and their speakers) GLOSS: "Lovely Peggy" is first an instruction, then a recitation the boy performs on the doorstep, then — twice, without prompting — the narrator's own

word: once at the moment she rises out of the sea, and once in the sentence that reports her death. Between the doorstep and the beach the epithet stops being a family tactic and becomes her name, and by the last section it is the name in the mother's mouth, a woman never shown taking part in the ritual that made it. A blessing given as an order is ratified by use. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

111. The naming ritual is answered by a counter-formula, so neither party speaks freely — QUOTE: "I mechanically announced, "Good morning, Lovely Peggy."" / "Peggy responded, as she always would, "Isn't he adorable,"" SOURCE: naming (liturgical call and response; "mechanically" / "as she always would") GLOSS: Both halves of the exchange are marked as automatic — his adverb, her habitual "as she always would" — which makes the doorstep a two-person rite with fixed parts. The grandmother's theology of names produces not affection but antiphon, and the child is the server reciting a response he does not mean. The story gets its warmth elsewhere, from the unscripted "Jimmy, you're my angel"; the formal naming apparatus yields only politeness. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

112. There is no Ruth, and no Old Testament personal name on any character; the Ruth pattern survives without its name — QUOTE: "It's a good thing she has a neighbor like Helen to check on her, and take her out once in a while." SOURCE: Ruth 1:16 (loyalty between women across generations, in a foreign country, at harvest) — tested and not sustained onomastically GLOSS: The story's name-stock is New Testament and hagiographic (Mary, Joseph, Francis, Margaret, Ignatius, Thomas More) plus Irish; the only Hebrew Bible proper name in the text is Solomon, and it is a bakery and an epigraph, never a person. The Ruth-and-Naomi structure is nonetheless present in substance — an older and a younger woman, an emigrant from one country to another, bound by chosen rather than blood loyalty, at an August harvest festival — and the story declines to signal it by naming. The binding word it uses instead is "neighbor," which relocates the loyalty from kinship to the commandment. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

113. Names are withheld from function, not from authority — QUOTE: "she found a home for Scruffy–with a "rich doctor" at the clinic where she used to get all her medications." / ""Take the boy and his dog home," one young mother said." / "One night a police officer brought her to my grandmother's house after he found Peg wandering the streets of a nearby square" SOURCE: naming (the catalogue of role-

only designations and its exceptions) GLOSS: The doctor, the young mother at the door, the police officer, the priest whose sermon starts the whole naming practice, the lifeguard in the New Jersey procession, the disc jockeys and the fruit-stand Italian are all given roles and no names, and the tempting rule — that the story withholds names from authority — fails on two exceptions: Sister Ignatius, a schoolteacher nun, and Pope Pius XII, quoted by name and title. What separates them is not power but memory: everyone named is someone a particular person loved, resented or read about, while everyone unnamed appears only in a function performed once. The story names out of attachment, not deference. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

114. The Galway printing removes the story's entire panel of Irish names — QUOTE (collection and Fiction on the Web): "Her cousin, Mary O'Malley had sponsored her trip to the States back in the thirties." / "I should have stolen Francis," she said. / "I think that's who pushed Margaret Mary Fawny off the cliff." — all absent from The Galway Review SOURCE: naming (three-way collation restricted to proper names) GLOSS: The Galway text cuts the whole childhood-and-emigration section, and with it five named persons (Mary O'Malley, Joseph Conner, Francis, Margaret Mary Fawny, Sister Ignatius) and four Irish place-names (County Mayo, Achill Sound, Jamaica Plain, Mission Hill), along with Saint Thomas More Church. In that version Peg has no past populated by anyone but Jim, and the story loses the saints' names that make her own name legible as a mocked one. It is the same story with its onomastic depth removed — the strongest single argument for the collection text. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

115. One name is spelled two ways inside a single printing — QUOTE (The Galway Review): "I remember hearing my grandparents and Auntie Ag" / "My grandmother would beam smugly. Aunty Ag would say, "Oh what troubles some people have,"" SOURCE: naming (variant orthography; both Fiction on the Web and the collection read "Auntie Ag" in both places) GLOSS: Galway alone carries "Auntie Ag" and then "Aunty Ag" nine paragraphs apart, an unpoliced slip that survives into a published text. It is the only character in any of the three printings whose name appears in more than one form, and the instability falls on the family's least-drawn figure, the aunt who exists to nod at other people's troubles. Small, but it is the one genuine name-change the three states of the story contain. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

116. The Virgin's name is pluralized one way online and another in the book — QUOTE (collection): "I was on the hunt too, spotting flying Mary's everywhere" / QUOTE (Fiction on the Web): "I was on the hunt too, spotting flying Marys everywhere" SOURCE: naming (three-way collation; the possessive apostrophe added to a proper name in the book text) GLOSS: The one plural proper name in the story is set as a clean plural online and as an apostrophized form in the collection, where "Mary's" reads momentarily as a possessive — each apparition belonging to Mary rather than being one. Whether compositor's error or intention, the book's form suits the child's confusion better: what he sees in his peripheral vision are Mary's, hers, not Marys. No other proper name differs in form between the two fuller printings. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

"Assumptions": Structure and Form

1. The Order of Mass is a partial analogy, not the story's governing sequence — QUOTE: "When I was ten, my father sent my dog to the pound because he barked too much." / "A few years later, my grandmother brought my sister, Peg, and me to be cured in the waters of Nantasket Beach." / "We filled six jars with water that day, and starving, we made a feast of the bread and fresh fruit by a small tide pool in the shade of a bony cliff." / "Only a few days later, early on a Sunday morning, my mother would come to my room and wake me." SOURCE: The Order of Mass: gathering, penitence, Word, offering, consecration, Communion, dismissal GLOSS: The beach's latter half can suggest a gathering, carried food and water, and a shared feast, but it occupies only the final movement of a story that has already passed through childhood gossip, a cellar recital, and the winter dog campaign. Nothing in the actual scene order supplies a penitential act, readings, consecration, or dismissal; the adult doctrinal exposition interrupts rather than orders the action. The Mass is therefore an available local analogy, not a persuasive macro-form. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

2. The Five Glorious Mysteries appear as a scattered vocabulary, not a five-step plot — QUOTE: "The dogma of the Assumption, I later learned" / "a mourning dove that sped from its cleft into the bright sky" / "she rose from the sea" / "Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine–she rises once again to sing her favorite song." SOURCE: The Five Glorious Mysteries: Resurrection, Ascension,

Descent of the Holy Spirit, Assumption, Coronation GLOSS: The sequence will not run in the Rosary's order: the descent of the dove occurs before Peg "rose," and the story's Assumption doctrine and its Titian before-image arrive well before the beach action. Nor is there a discrete final coronation after the Assumption; the story's crown-like material is earlier, at Peg's doorway. The Rosary organizes the story's devotional repertoire, but the narrative deliberately scrambles its chronology. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

3. The Stations of the Cross do not supply a continuous route through the story — QUOTE: "During my childhood years, I would learn more about Peggy's life." / "When I was ten, my father sent my dog to the pound because he barked too much." / "A few years later, my grandmother brought my sister, Peg, and me to be cured in the waters of Nantasket Beach." / "Only a few days later, early on a Sunday morning, my mother would come to my room and wake me." SOURCE: The Stations of the Cross: a fixed, continuous Passion route GLOSS: The prose advances by memory-blocks and large temporal leaps, not by fourteen consecutive trials, falls, encounters, crucifixion, burial, and witness. Passion material is distributed across the story, but its elements are not arranged as a Via Dolorosa and the narrative has no fixed number of devotional stops. The Stations are therefore a productive source of local echoes but a negative finding at the level of form. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

4. A saint's vita is the closest of the proposed macro-forms, but only in outline — QUOTE: "She grew up in Jamaica Plain, an Irish catholic enclave in Boston." / "calling me a toad" / "Peg had been my savior." / "When she told me that Lovely Peggy had died in her sleep" / "she rises once again to sing her favorite song." SOURCE: A saint's vita: origin, persecution, hidden virtue, miracles, death, glorification, cult GLOSS: The order is recognizably hagiographic: origin and childhood insult are followed by the account of hidden charity, then death and retrospective glorification. The dog's rescue serves as a small, witnessed miracle of intervention, while the narrator's memory performs the role of testimony. Yet the text supplies no public cult, relic, shrine, or petitionary aftermath; its "canonization" remains a private literary act, so the fit is real but incomplete. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

5. The story is not a novena — QUOTE: "The rest of the night is a blur." / "A few years later" / "Throughout that hot August day" / "Only a few days later" SOURCE: A novena: nine counted, repeated movements of prayer or preparation GLOSS: The

narrative has neither nine marked units nor a recurring petition that produces nine devotional turns. Its transitions explicitly name a blur, years, a day, and days later: the rhythm is mnemonic and irregular rather than serial and ritualized. Even the appended poem has six stanzas, not nine movements. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

6. The narrative time is braided through four distinct frames — QUOTE: "even now, years later, I hear the swelling sadness in her voice" / "When I was ten" / "A few years later" / "While at Boston University, I remember flipping through the art book of a housemate" / "It has been a long time since that ride, but when I recall that afternoon, I feel" SOURCE: Retrospective first-person narrative; analepsis and embedded temporal frames GLOSS: A present-day remembering voice opens the story, then enters childhood scenes, moves to the later summer of the feast, and breaks that summer with the narrator's Boston University memory and research. The final paragraph returns to the present of recollection before it narrates the Sunday death. This is not a chronological memoir but a layered act of recollection in which adulthood repeatedly re-enters the child's time. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. December and August make a deliberate two-season structure — QUOTE: "It was December and cold" / "A few years later, my grandmother brought my sister, Peg, and me to be cured in the waters of Nantasket Beach." / "Throughout that hot August day" / "Only a few days later, early on a Sunday morning" SOURCE: Liturgical-calendar form and seasonal diptych GLOSS: The winter episode is a complete narrative of seeking and finding a place for Scruffy; the summer episode shifts the concern from the dog to Peg and from nighttime streets to a feast day at the shore. The Sunday death is then compressed into the few days after the expansively narrated August afternoon. The form moves from cold, blocked movement to heat, water, and an aftermath that is temporally swift. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

8. The final present tense makes Peg's rise happen in the narrator's present, not merely in remembered past — QUOTE: "It has been a long time since that ride, but when I recall that afternoon, I feel the heady anticipation of the rising" / "Finally she would be at home with her Jim." / "Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine–she rises once again to sing her favorite song." / "And the Sun's great light shines upon and caresses her warm skin" SOURCE: Liturgical anamnesis and the historical present GLOSS: The paragraph first marks the narrator's current feeling in the present tense, then uses the future-in-the-past "would be," and abruptly changes

to "she rises" and "light shines." That grammar refuses to leave Peg's glorification as a private childhood fantasy completed in the past; it stages the rise as an action continually present to the remembering speaker. The move gives the ending the force of liturgical remembrance, in which a past event is made present rather than simply reported. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

9. The child-to-adult-critical voice change occurs in an explicit hinge sentence — QUOTE: "Throughout that hot August day, I would catch Beth staring at the sky, looking for traces of Mary." / "I was on the hunt too, spotting flying Mary's everywhere" / "The dogma of the Assumption, I later learned, was firmly established in 1950 when Pope Pius XII made his decree" SOURCE: Double focalization; retrospective first-person narration GLOSS: The first two sentences give a child's visual and imaginative experience; the third announces a later-acquired institutional account, complete with date and decree. The text does not try to hide the transition, and the phrase "I later learned" names the adult's intervention directly. The doctrinal material is therefore not what the child knew at the beach but what the adult narrator now places beside what the child saw. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

10. The adult critic returns to the child through a deliberately bathetic seam — QUOTE: "While at Boston University, I remember flipping through the art book of a housemate" / "paled in comparison to the roller coaster ride that my sister and I, if well behaved, might enjoy" SOURCE: Register shift and bathos as a formal transition GLOSS: The Titian passage suspends the childhood beach action for an adult's ekphrasis; the next return is not a gradual transition but the child's preference for an amusement-park ride. That drop from altarpiece to roller coaster does not dissolve the theological material; it places it under the child's scale of desire. The seam is audible and comic, which makes the two temporal voices cooperate rather than blend invisibly. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

11. The two voices are the story's central formal device, though they are also its calculated risk — QUOTE: "I've always wondered why it took so long to decide on the fate of poor Mary" / "Some have suggested that the tradition is an assimilation of the Celtic festival of Lughnasadh" / "I don't know that Peg was very religious." / "I'm not even sure if she was a practicing Catholic" SOURCE: Retrospective witness combined with essayistic interruption GLOSS: The adult voice is not simply explanatory: it doubts, compares, historicizes, and looks at art, while the child's voice

records drinks, bickering, fear, and amusement. The interruptions can momentarily stall the beach plot, but that friction is functional: the adult's learned categories are continually tested against the child's untheorized contact with Peg. The story's claim to see her differently depends on both voices being heard at once. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

12. The winter dog episode and the summer beach episode are structural doubles — QUOTE: "We walked several blocks that night, ringing bells and knocking on doors on both sides of the street" / "Now don't you stare at poor old Peg, and no giggling," my grandmother warned Beth before knocking on Peg's door. / "Then Lovely Peggy reached for me." SOURCE: Narrative doubling and reversal GLOSS: In winter, Peg and the boy go outward, seeking a welcome from households that may refuse them; in summer, the family crosses to Peg's door and seeks to bring her out. Both movements begin at a threshold, include social judgment, and end with Peg as the agent who gives or receives care. The second plot revises the first by making the previously mobile helper visibly dependent on others, while preserving her final reaching gesture. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

13. The story moves through increasingly formal kinds of testimony — QUOTE: "Her story goes something like this–" / "We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma" / "While at Boston University, I remember flipping through the art book of a housemate" / the title "Feast of the Assumption, 1924" SOURCE: Documentary collage; layered witness GLOSS: The opening authority is family gossip, qualified by "goes something like this"; the middle imports the absolute language of dogma; art criticism then supplies a visual precedent; the appended poem adds a second literary witness. The final vision does not emerge from any one authority alone but from their accumulation around the boy's memories. Formally, the story makes private testimony bear the weight of public doctrine without allowing either register to cancel the other. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

14. "I remember" is a threefold refrain that marks the story as testimony rather than simple recollection — QUOTE: "I remember hearing my grandparents and Auntie Ag" / "What I remember most about the events of that evening is that Peg kept her promise." / "While at Boston University, I remember flipping through the art book of a housemate" SOURCE: Refrain and the testimonial form GLOSS: The exact word pair "I remember" occurs three times in the prose. Its instances move from

overheard communal judgment, through the remembered proof of Peg's promise, to a later act of artistic interpretation. Memory thus changes from receiving a story about Peg to offering evidence for her and finally finding a form adequate to see her. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

15. Laughter functions as an eightfold refrain whose final occurrence is eschatological — QUOTE: "She laughed." / "Peg laughed." / "and laughed." / "Peg laughed." / "laughing uproariously" / "laughing so hard that they cried" / "they laughed even harder" / "Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine" SOURCE: Liturgical acclamation and comic refrain GLOSS: Forms of "laugh" occur eight times in the prose. They begin as Peg's defensive or mischievous laughter, become collective laughter on the shore, and are retained in the final present-tense vision rather than replaced by solemnity. Repetition gives the ending a formally prepared sound: glory is not a break from the story's comedy but its last and fullest recurrence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

16. Forms of "help" recur five times and turn charity into the story's repeated action-word — QUOTE: "we need to help her get better." / "And the water will help the calluses on our soles!" / "My grandmother helped her through the narrow doorway and down the hall." / "Of course we ran to help" / "As we began to help lift them" SOURCE: Diakonia (service) and verbal recurrence GLOSS: The five occurrences begin with the grandmother's stated purpose, pass through her practical assistance, and culminate in the children's physical help after the wave. The repeated verb makes care collaborative and awkward rather than heroic; everyone helps, and no one can wholly control the result. This service refrain supplies an ethical counter-rhythm to the earlier family talk about Peg. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

17. The appended Duffy poem supplies a six-stanza counter-sequence for the prose — QUOTE: "The day you begged a miracle to ease" / "The swollen feet that life had crucified." / "Your little son, I watched, appalled." / "Ah, back you came, cheated of your surprise" / "And with the aching in your bones you wrought" / "A sacramental out of Quincy bay." / "I'd carve you in great marble if I could" / "Long dead, my dear… but when at last we meet–" SOURCE: Answer poem; six-stanza coda GLOSS: The poem moves in six steps: request for cure, frightened child-witness, failed return, sacramental reinterpretation, proposed memorial, and deferred reunion. The prose supplies corresponding materials—feet, child witness, beach

action, memory, and an afterlife vision—but translates the poem's carved monument into a narrated act of seeing. Appending the poem therefore gives the story a second, stricter form against which its own more comic and merciful progression can be measured. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

18. The story answers Duffy by installing and then refusing the poem's "nothing" — QUOTE: "There was pure grief in her expression, as if she felt cheated from a surprise." / "Ah, back you came, cheated of your surprise" / "Nothing, poor dear, poor crone" / "In an instant they were kneeling forward, laughing so hard that they cried." / "she rose from the sea" SOURCE: Counterpoint and reversal in an answer poem GLOSS: Before the beach action, the prose gives Peg Duffy's disappointed phrase almost verbatim, so the poem's failure is already latent in her expression. But the encounter with water produces laughter, assistance, and a rising rather than the poem's plain "Nothing"; the medical cure remains unresolved, since Peg soon dies, but the story refuses to make the day spiritually empty. The appended poem thus sharpens the story's difference from its source rather than merely endorsing it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

19. The first and last sentences reverse the location and authority of judgment — QUOTE: "Peggy Fleming, according to my grandfather was the"homeliest damn woman" he'd ever seen." / "A Father, joyful and tearful at the same time, hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him." SOURCE: Ring composition; syntactic reversal of witness and verdict GLOSS: The opening begins with Peggy as the object of a male relative's visual verdict, cautiously attributed through "according to my grandfather." The ending makes the Father its grammatical center and gives Him not sight but an enduring relation to "loveliness"; its final sentence-fragment reads as an absolute apposition, no longer as hearsay. The pair carries the story from social evaluation to a vision whose authority the prose no longer qualifies. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

Part Two: Assumptions and Other Stories

The Concordance: Assumptions and Other Stories

BOOK ONE: *Assumptions and Other Stories*

(excluding the title story "Assumptions")

"Through a Convent Gate"

One-line summary: Molly and her grandmother Nonna make a charity visit to the drunk, catechizing widow Mrs. Muldoon, steal her Christmas ornaments, and Molly avenges an insult with a prank restaurant order.

1. **QUOTE:** "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" **SOURCE:** Invocation of the Holy Family as folk exclamation. **GLOSS:** A stock Irish-Catholic profanity that keeps the sacred names present even in irritation, establishing the story's register of piety-as-reflex. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
2. **QUOTE:** "Do they teach you your catechisms? Do they teach you the Ten Commandments, the Our Father, and Hail Mary? Now those are valuable lessons." **SOURCE:** Catholic catechetical formation (Ten Commandments, Our Father, Hail Mary). **GLOSS:** Mrs. Muldoon's checklist positions rote doctrine as the sum of moral education, immediately undercut by her own cruelty toward Molly. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
3. **QUOTE:** "She picked up rosary beads and laminated novenas that were on the table. 'Faith is most important, Molly.'" **SOURCE:** The rosary and novena devotions. **GLOSS:** Devotional objects sit on the table amid gin and stale cookies, embodying the collection's signature juxtaposition of sacred practice and domestic squalor. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
4. **QUOTE:** "You are not smarter than God, Molly." **SOURCE:** Rebuke invoking divine authority against intellectual pride (cf. Job 38; Proverbs 3:5). **GLOSS:** Weaponizes theology as a conversation-ending scold rather than genuine catechesis. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

5. **QUOTE:** "God bless the people who make us laugh." **SOURCE:** Folk blessing formula. **GLOSS:** A throwaway benediction that shows blessing-language surviving as reflexive courtesy independent of doctrinal content. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
6. **QUOTE:** "'Lovely Peggy' was the sobriquet my grandmother had invented one Sunday after a sermon the priest had given on the power of names and the mystery of the Word." (referenced within this story's dialogue pattern, fully explained in "Assumptions") **SOURCE:** Johannine theology of the Word (John 1:1). **GLOSS:** The naming ritual that recurs across the book derives explicitly from a homily on logos-theology, folk-Catholicizing the sobriquet game played with Peggy in "Assumptions" ("Good morning, Lovely Peggy" / "Isn't he adorable"); "Through a Convent Gate" has no equivalent exchange. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
7. **QUOTE:** "I'm so hungry I could eat a nun's arse through a convent gate." **SOURCE:** Profane Irish idiom invoking consecrated celibacy (the convent) as a vehicle for crude appetite. **GLOSS:** The story's climactic joke and title fuse sacred enclosure with base hunger — Mulhern's signature desacralizing punchline. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
8. **QUOTE:** "Where are the cookies, Agnella? I could use something sweet to get rid of the bad taste in my mouth." **SOURCE:** Sugar/sweetness as substitute for consolation, echoing an informal Eucharistic hunger. **GLOSS:** Recurs throughout the book as a debased communion motif — sweetness offered and craved as a stand-in for grace. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
9. **QUOTE:** "Go into the living room and get me a few of those see-through balls from the tree." **SOURCE:** Theft disguised as charitable visitation (contrast with the corporal work of mercy of visiting the lonely). **GLOSS:** The "charity visit," itself an echo of the corporal works of mercy, becomes cover for petty larceny — grace inverted into grift. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
10. **QUOTE:** "You've got to have compassion for her, Molly. She's been through a lot. Can't help herself." **SOURCE:** Charity/compassion as practical form of mercy. **GLOSS:** Nonna's stated ethic of compassion for a suffering addict sits uneasily beside her own theft in the same scene, embodying the collection's fusion of piety and fraud. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

"The Mannequin"

One-line summary: Sociopathic college freshman Molly orchestrates a fatal prank on her devout roommate Ashley and has her Mafia-connected grandmother poison the cookies that seal Ashley's death.

11. **QUOTE:** "a gold metal crucifix" on the bookcase beside Ashley's dresser beside a family photo labeled "Mom, Dad, Joey, me, and Saint Paul." **SOURCE:** Catholic devotional object (crucifix) and the naming of a saint (Paul the Apostle). **GLOSS:** "Saint Paul" turns out to be the family dog — sainthood collapsed comically into pet-naming, epitomizing the shabby-sacred move. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
12. **QUOTE:** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." **SOURCE:** John 1:1. **GLOSS:** Direct scriptural quotation, debated by Molly (who reads it as praise of language) and Ashley (who insists "'The Word' means Jesus") — the collection's most extended close-reading of scripture, staged as a roommate spat. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
13. **QUOTE:** "How can you say that? Jesus died for our sins." **SOURCE:** Substitutionary atonement doctrine (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3). **GLOSS:** Ashley's defense of orthodox soteriology becomes grimly ironic once the narrative equates Ashley's own death with "dying for her sins." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
14. **QUOTE:** "The human being is one of God's creations. And I think he thought pretty highly of us because he made Adam lord and master over all of the animals. You should review the book of Genesis, Ashley." **SOURCE:** Genesis 1:26-28 (dominion over creation). **GLOSS:** Molly cites Genesis to justify nude provocation — scripture repurposed as a debate weapon in a sociopath's psychological game. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
15. **QUOTE:** "would come back from the university chapel after mass with a smug look on her face, dropping comments like 'God is good.'" **SOURCE:** The Mass; a common charismatic/evangelical refrain ("God is good, all the time"). **GLOSS:** Institutional piety (attending Mass) is shown producing self-satisfaction rather than humility, priming the reader for Ashley's hypocrisy-adjacent judgment of Molly. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
16. **QUOTE:** "Oh Jesus! For the love of God, let her be okay! Oh Jesus!" **SOURCE:** Spontaneous prayer/exclamation at a moment of crisis. **GLOSS:** Genuine panic

produces reflexive prayer even from a comic, cowardly character (Mark), showing how crisis defaults to religious diction. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

17. **QUOTE:** "We screwed the mannequin together and baptized her 'Candice Kox.'" **SOURCE:** Baptism, the sacrament of naming and initiation. **GLOSS:** The prank object receives a mock "baptism," profaning the sacrament of new life by bestowing it on an inanimate lure used to frighten a devout girl to death. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
18. **QUOTE:** "A curse on you if you don't eat every last one." **SOURCE:** Curse/blessing formula tied to food. **GLOSS:** Nonna's "curse," disguised as affection but written as bait for a cookie she has knowingly poisoned, becomes literal, turning a grandmother's blessing-food into an instrument of death. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
19. **QUOTE:** "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit… Ashley had died for her sins." **SOURCE:** Genesis 3 (the Fall) and the Passion formula "died for our sins." **GLOSS:** The narrator explicitly frames the murder in Edenic and Christological terms — the collection's most extreme inversion of sacred vocabulary into justification for sociopathic violence. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
20. **QUOTE:** "Sex before marriage is a sin… and I would be ashamed to admit it." **SOURCE:** Catholic sexual moral teaching (chastity outside marriage). **GLOSS:** Ashley's moralizing establishes her as the story's voice of orthodox judgment, which the narrative structurally punishes with her death. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

"Smoke Rings"

One-line summary: Nonna fakes a slip-and-fall for an insurance settlement, brags to Molly, slaps her into silence, and then falls to her actual death minutes later.

21. **QUOTE:** "Oh my God! I really coulda died… She crossed herself." **SOURCE:** The sign of the cross. **GLOSS:** A reflexive gesture of piety performed in the midst of orchestrating fraud — devotion as muscle memory untethered from sincerity. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
22. **QUOTE:** "I think it's the Vatican. I got the pope's house on my ass." **SOURCE:** The Vatican, seat of the papacy. **GLOSS:** The sacred center of Catholicism is

relocated, grotesquely, to a bruise on an old woman's buttock — the collection's most literal "shabby sacred" joke. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

23. **QUOTE:** "As God is our witness." **SOURCE:** Oath formula invoking divine witness (cf. covenant-oath language, Genesis 31:50). **GLOSS:** Deployed to seal a plan to commit insurance fraud rather than a sacred covenant — God's witness invoked in service of a lie. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
24. **QUOTE:** "her wig flew into a snowbank" / "I put on Nonna's wig." **SOURCE:** The wig-as-crown motif (see Cross-Book Repetitions). **GLOSS:** Continues the collection's recurring crown/scalp imagery, here comic prop rather than sacralized head. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
25. **QUOTE:** "See those puffs of smoke… It's disappearing already. Here one minute, gone the next." **SOURCE:** Vanitas/memento mori tradition ("dust to dust," Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 1:2, "vanity of vanities"). **GLOSS:** Cigarette smoke becomes an entirely secular meditation on the transience of breath/spirit (Latin *spiritus*), delivered just before Nonna's literal death — a mortality lesson with no consolation attached. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
26. **QUOTE:** "There was a pool of blood around her head." **SOURCE:** Passion-adjacent stain/wound imagery recurring across the collection. **GLOSS:** Echoes the "red seas" of Peggy's cheeks and anticipates Myra Bocca's halo-shaped blood pool — death consistently marked by ambiguous, quasi-sacred red imagery. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.

"Myra Bocca"

One-line summary: Grieving Molly is targeted by a con-artist New Age shopkeeper, Myra, who steals her credit card and is later struck and killed by a car outside her shop.

27. **QUOTE:** "a New Age bookstore called Sacred Ashes." **SOURCE:** Ash Wednesday ("remember you are dust," Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 3:20) and the word "sacred." **GLOSS:** The shop's name conflates holiness and mortality with commercial kitsch — a punning inversion of Catholic penitential ash into New Age merchandise. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
28. **QUOTE:** "I'm activating your forehead chakra. It's the main switch for the universal force, the awakened spirit, the center of higher consciousness."

SOURCE: Mock-echo of anointing the forehead (baptism, confirmation, Ash Wednesday). **GLOSS:** New Age "activation" of the forehead parodies the sacramental gesture of signing the forehead with oil or ash. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

29. **QUOTE:** "The New Age Movement is just watered-down religion… you're still trying to make a believer out of me." **SOURCE:** "Believer"/faith vocabulary. **GLOSS:** Molly names the pseudo-religious structure explicitly, applying "believer" language ironically to New Age kitsch rather than orthodox faith. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
30. **QUOTE:** "Apache Tear Tumblestones… good for healing grief." **SOURCE:** Relic/talisman substituting for genuine consolation. **GLOSS:** A mock-sacramental object marketed as therapeutic, paralleling (and devaluing) the seawater "cure" and rosary of the Catholic material. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
31. **QUOTE:** "blood streamed from her nostrils and mouth, creating a halo-shaped pool around her head." **SOURCE:** The halo, iconography of sainthood. **GLOSS:** A grotesque parody of a saint's nimbus, rendered in a pool of blood around a con artist's shattered face on hot pavement. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
32. **QUOTE:** "Think 'Staying Alive.'" / a bystander sings "Whether you're a brother or whether you're a mother you're stayin' alive" and the crowd answers "Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive" during CPR. **SOURCE:** Congregational call-and-response as in liturgical chant. **GLOSS:** A pop song stands in for communal hymn/psalm during a resuscitation attempt, mock-liturgy performed by strangers on the street. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
33. **QUOTE:** "Oh crikey, I think she snuffed it!" **SOURCE:** Replaces the formal pronouncement of death/last rites with comic vernacular. **GLOSS:** No priest, no absolution — only a bystander's slang announces the death, underscoring the absence of ritual closure. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
34. **QUOTE:** "A stone has no uncertainty — Carl Jung" **SOURCE:** A tarot-adjacent aphorism functioning as mock-scripture. **GLOSS:** Quoted twice (on a card, then recalled at Myra's deathbed), it operates as this story's substitute for a genuine scriptural consolation — a philosophical text pressed into devotional service. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

35. **QUOTE:** "the sound of water falling on pebbles at the base of the fountain." **SOURCE:** Water imagery evocative of baptismal peace. **GLOSS:** A brief image of calming water appears just before violence, a minor baptismal counterpoint to the surrounding anger and eventual carnage. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
36. **QUOTE:** "She plunked her ass right next to his coffin." **SOURCE:** The wake, a Catholic funeral rite; *Useless Things* and the Impspired printing add a third "at the wake" after "coffin"; the 2016 text already names the wake twice in the same speech. **GLOSS:** Myra profanes a funeral exactly as Mrs. Muldoon's own death and wake are elsewhere subjected to bathos — sacred mourning rites treated as social theater. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
37. **QUOTE:** husband named "Lazzarus Bocca" (the single stray spelling) / "Lazarus" **SOURCE:** Lazarus of Bethany, raised from the dead by Christ (John 11). **GLOSS:** A deliberately ironic Christic name: the good, generous Lazarus is truly "raised" only in the loving memory of his children, while his false-healer widow dies unredeemed in the street. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
38. **QUOTE:** "I tossed it towards the base of her stretcher and watched it roll past her body into the shadows of the crowd." **SOURCE:** Rejection of a false relic/sacramental object. **GLOSS:** The narrator discards the "healing" obsidian stone at the death scene — a deliberate renunciation of counterfeit consolation in favor of the plain, unconsoled fact of death. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

"A Prayer for Home"

One-line summary: Molly and Nonna take the alcoholic widow Mrs. Muldoon to a fraudulent faith healer and then on the Feast of the Assumption beach "cure," culminating in the discovery of her decomposed suicide.

39. **QUOTE:** "today is when Catholics celebrate the Blessed Mother's Assumption into heaven… she was raised into heaven three days after her death." **SOURCE:** The dogma of the Assumption of Mary (defined by Pope Pius XII, 1950). **GLOSS:** Restates the title story's central doctrine in new words (adding the "three days" detail absent from "Assumptions") as the frame for this story's beach pilgrimage. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
40. **QUOTE:** "I don't know, Molly. Don't think too much about it. Just believe it." **SOURCE:** Fideistic response to a mystery of faith. **GLOSS:** Belief is presented

as a decision made in spite of, not because of, rational explanation — the collection's recurring formula for handling doctrine with children. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

41. **QUOTE:** "How you gonna get the Blessed Mother's cure if you don't get wet?" **SOURCE:** Folk-Catholic "cure in seawater" on the Feast of the Assumption. **GLOSS:** Closely paraphrases the seawater-cure exchange of "Assumptions" ("The point is to get wet. How else are you going to get the cure?"), making explicit the ritual logic of immersion-as-healing. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
42. **QUOTE:** "Molly, you're an angel," she said, when she was standing. **SOURCE:** Angelic address as blessing/gratitude. **GLOSS:** A direct restatement of Peggy's "Jimmy, you're my angel" from "Assumptions," conferring quasi-angelic status on the child who lifts the risen woman from the surf. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
43. **QUOTE:** "It's a celebration for both of us, a baptism of sorts, as we begin our new lives." **SOURCE:** Baptism, the sacrament of new life. **GLOSS:** Explicit naming of the beach ritual as a baptism, tragically ironic since it precedes Mrs. Muldoon's suicide — a "baptism" into death rather than life. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
44. **QUOTE:** "Did you know that a fish is the symbol of Christ, Molly?" **SOURCE:** The ichthys (fish) as an ancient Christian symbol. **GLOSS:** Spoken over the "last supper" dinner beside wallpaper fish, this is the collection's most overt naming of a Christian symbol amid ordinary diner conversation. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
45. **QUOTE:** "Mrs. Muldoon made a joke about this being our last supper. 'Well, it is in a way, don't you think?'" **SOURCE:** The Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:14-20). **GLOSS:** Explicitly named Eucharistic/Last Supper framing for a shared restaurant meal that precedes death — bread (a roll), wine, and companionship recast as sacramental farewell. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
46. **QUOTE:** "Nonna pulled baby-sized jars of Grappa" and "eating panettone, bananas, apples, and delicious cherries." **SOURCE:** Eucharistic bread-and-wine typology. **GLOSS:** A beach picnic of bread, fruit, and wine substitutes for formal communion, continuing the collection's pattern of debased/informal Eucharists. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
47. **QUOTE:** "Do they teach you your catechisms?… rosary beads and some laminated novenas… 'Faith is most important, Molly.'" **SOURCE:** Catechism,

rosary, novenas (recurs verbatim from "Through a Convent Gate"). **GLOSS:** The scene is reused nearly word-for-word, showing the author's compositional method of doubling material across stories. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

48. **QUOTE:** "Lady Jane put her hands in a crisscross on Mrs. Muldoon's heart area, then closed her eyes, while she softly murmured an ostensibly sacred language." **SOURCE:** Mock-sacramental blessing/anointing gesture. **GLOSS:** A charlatan's parody of a priest's blessing or the laying-on of hands (cf. James 5:14), staged in a seedy storefront near Boston's Combat Zone. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
49. **QUOTE:** "you're an Angel of Death." **SOURCE:** Angelic/eschatological title (cf. the Destroyer angel of Exodus 12:23). **GLOSS:** A fortune-teller's cheap prophecy that structurally comes true across the collection, as Molly repeatedly encounters corpses — judgment vocabulary repurposed as dark vocation. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
50. **QUOTE:** "Do you believe there is a God, Nonna?"…"No." / "There is no heaven. There is no God. I think when we die, we just rot and become dirt." **SOURCE:** Explicit denial of Catholic afterlife doctrine. **GLOSS:** The collection's most direct statement of metaphysical unbelief, delivered by the two characters who nonetheless complete the sacramental "cure" pilgrimage months later, on August 15. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
51. **QUOTE:** "Consider it insurance." **SOURCE:** Pascal's-wager-like hedging toward ritual observance despite unbelief. **GLOSS:** Nonna's pragmatic justification for the beach cure shows superstition and doubt coexisting without resolution. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
52. **QUOTE:** "a black leather Bible with gold 'Holy Bible' on the cover" / "Promise me that someday you will read them, and think of me when you do." **SOURCE:** Scripture as maternal inheritance/relic. **GLOSS:** The Bible, initially a disappointing gift ("I was hoping for jewelry"), is later fulfilled as a genuine devotional bequest — "many years later… I did." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
53. **QUOTE:** "to clean and polish the altar every week for six months." **SOURCE:** Penance for theft from the Mass collection basket. **GLOSS:** Ecclesiastical penance is rendered as domestic chore, folding sacramental reconciliation into ordinary discipline. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

54. **QUOTE:** "startled a mourning dove that sped from its cleft into the bright sky… The waves glimmered like sparks from an unquenchable fire." **SOURCE:** Dove imagery evocative of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16) and ascension; recycled verbatim from "Assumptions." **GLOSS:** Repeats the ascension/fire imagery of the title story almost word for word, reinforcing the beach as sacred ground. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
55. **QUOTE:** "The flesh broke and blood trickled slowly down the side of her enlarged foot… the skin cracked; a clear fluid oozed from her big toe and the nail ripped off, falling like an autumn leaf." (later, to the officer: "the skin broke so easily") and the nail ripped off, falling like an autumn leaf." **SOURCE:** Stigmata-adjacent wound imagery (cf. the crucified/wounded feet motif of the "Assumptions" closing poem). **GLOSS:** An anti-transfiguration: the corpse's suffering flesh recalls Passion wound imagery but yields no resurrection, only decay. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
56. **QUOTE:** "a gold necklace with an emerald and diamond cross," dismissed by Molly as "A useless thing." **SOURCE:** The crucifix, central Christian symbol. **GLOSS:** The cross itself is devalued at the story's climax — an act of studied anti-sacramental bathos that gives the sister collection its title. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
57. **QUOTE:** "'Passing where?'..'To heaven, Molly.'" / "I don't believe she passed to heaven, sir." **SOURCE:** The euphemism of "passing" as entering heaven. **GLOSS:** Direct denial of the collection's central afterlife hope, delivered flatly by the narrator to a well-meaning police officer. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
58. **QUOTE:** "On August 15th, 1980, Mrs. Muldoon had managed to create something 'alike,' symmetrical, and balanced through the timing of her death… She had created her own Assumption." **SOURCE:** The Feast of the Assumption, restaged as private suicide-liturgy. **GLOSS:** The story's explicit thesis: suicide as an ironic private "Assumption," since no genuine ascension follows, only "consumption" (decay), collapsing the doctrine's hope into pun. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
59. **QUOTE:** "the seraphs, all haggard and wan… affirm / That the play is the tragedy 'Man,'" (Poe, "The Conqueror Worm," quoted at length). **SOURCE:** Angelic/eschatological imagery (seraphim) repurposed toward nihilism. **GLOSS:** Poe's poem borrows angel-choir imagery only to declare the human

drama tragic and worm-eaten, denying any comforting eschatology. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

60. **QUOTE:** "prayers for home, wherever we believed we were going, would never be answered." **SOURCE:** Prayer as petition, here explicitly denied efficacy. **GLOSS:** Closing line negates the collection's title-story hope of a "heavenly home," ending the story on unanswered petition. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

"Drenched to the Bone"

One-line summary: Divorced teacher Jack McCarthy navigates classroom chaos, including a scripture-fueled fight, before a storm and a church sign in a church parking lot prompt him to apologize to his ex-wife.

61. **QUOTE:** "aunt came and knelt at [his] knees and cried, while prayers and songs swirled all around [him]" / "kept waiting to see Jesus" / "bring the young lambs to the fold." **SOURCE:** Langston Hughes, "Salvation" (itself referencing revivalist conversion ritual and the Good Shepherd image, John 10:1-16). **GLOSS:** A literary text about childhood religious disillusionment is taught in class, foreshadowing Jack's own crisis of belief and self-knowledge. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
62. **QUOTE:** "Are we supposed to believe that Jonah was swallowed by a whale and lived inside that thing for three days?" **SOURCE:** Jonah 1:17. **GLOSS:** A student's skeptical challenge to biblical literalism, treated by the teacher with studied even-handedness rather than doctrine. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
63. **QUOTE:** "He thinks he's Jesus… he just walked in, said he was Jesus, and started rollin' on the floor." **SOURCE:** Mock Second-Coming/false-messiah motif. **GLOSS:** A comic anecdote of an ecstatic disruption in church, played entirely for laughs yet echoing eschatological expectation. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
64. **QUOTE:** "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." **SOURCE:** Matthew 7:6. **GLOSS:** Scripture quoted accurately and at length by Mary Grace mid-violence, kneeling with hands joined in prayer (she climbs onto the chair

only for the Romans verse that follows) — sacred text erupting as both faith and instability. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

65. **QUOTE:** "We are all sinners and the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." **SOURCE:** Romans 6:23, prefaced by a paraphrase of Romans 3:23 ("all have sinned"). **GLOSS:** Immediately follows the Matthew citation, giving the classroom brawl a startling doctrinal soundtrack of judgment and grace. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
66. **QUOTE:** "Joan of Narc" **SOURCE:** Comic corruption of Joan of Arc, martyr and visionary saint. **GLOSS:** A garbled saint's name deflates martyrdom into a drug-culture pun, mocking Mary Grace's religious fervor even as it associates her with sanctified madness. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
67. **QUOTE:** "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." **SOURCE:** Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843). **GLOSS:** The teacher corrects a garbled Marx quotation ("the oxycodone of the masses"), placing atheistic critique and devout testimony side by side without resolving the tension. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
68. **QUOTE:** "We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way." **SOURCE:** Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi on a church sign. **GLOSS:** Names "wounds," "home," and "the way" outright, tying the story's climax to the collection's title motifs at the moment of Jack's private reckoning. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
69. **QUOTE:** "Will you follow the road to experience God's salvation and have eternal life? Join us Sundays 9 am and 11 am." **SOURCE:** Evangelical salvation-invitation formula (cf. John 14:6, "I am the way"). **GLOSS:** A roadside advertisement for salvation, read half-ironically, half-sincerely, just before Jack's apology call — grace mediated through strip-mall signage. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
70. **QUOTE:** "isn't it a law of physics that objects in our world eventually fall apart: entropy… That is alienation, not unity." **SOURCE:** Theological/cosmological meditation contrasting entropy with promised unity (cf. Romans 8:21-22, creation's groaning). **GLOSS:** A rare moment where the narrator states the book's cosmology directly, opposing physical decay to the wholeness promised by the church sign. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.

71. **QUOTE:** "Come gather 'round people… And accept it that soon / You'll be drenched to the bone" (Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin'"). **SOURCE:** Flood/deluge imagery evocative of baptismal or apocalyptic waters (cf. Genesis 6-8; Matthew 24:37-39). **GLOSS:** The title song functions as an unsought baptism, precipitating Jack's small act of repentance/apology. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
72. **QUOTE:** "Kate, I'm sorry. I should have paid more attention to you." **SOURCE:** Confession and contrition (cf. the Act of Contrition). **GLOSS:** The story's unmocked act of grace, achieved through humility rather than ritual, occurring literally moments after leaving a church parking lot. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

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1. Through a Convent Gate — QUOTE: "Mary has squash rot," Nonna said. "Poor thing. Her mind's all messed up." … "It means your brain is rotted from too much alcohol." SOURCE: Folk/comic coinage playing against the Catholic vocabulary of corruption and incorruption (cf. the Assumption dogma's promise that Mary's body did not "see corruption," and Acts 2:27 (cf. 13:35; Psalm 16:10), "neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption"). GLOSS: In a book obsessed with a woman's body being preserved from decay (the Blessed Mother's), a drunk woman's mind is instead given a homely rot-name; the comic diagnosis inverts the theology of incorruption that structures the volume's title story. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

2. Through a Convent Gate / A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "He's dead, Molly. Has been for years… Massive heart attack." / "he didn't answer. She went into the living room… and found him slumped over in his chair, the paper scattered at his feet." SOURCE: The sudden, solitary death recalls the Gospel warning to "watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42) and the folk-Catholic anxiety about dying without last rites. GLOSS: Mr. Muldoon's unwitnessed death, discovered only when he fails to answer a call to supper, sets up Mrs. Muldoon's own end (also solitary, also undiscovered for days), making the story's two deaths a matched pair of unwatched, unshriven departures. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

3. Through a Convent Gate — QUOTE: "she told my father that I'm a 'clumsy oaf' and should be washing dishes instead of serving food." SOURCE: Inverted echo of

Christ's rebuke of Martha in favor of Mary's contemplative choice (Luke 10:38-42) and of servant/master parables (Matthew 25). GLOSS: Molly is condemned to menial service by a bitter, drink-addled accuser — a petty version of the "many are called" hierarchy that runs through the collection's servant and mockery scenes. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

4. The Mannequin — QUOTE: "his last words were 'Born in a hotel room and goddammit, died in a hotel room'" SOURCE: Ironic inversion of the Nativity/nunc dimittis pattern (Luke 2:29, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace") and of hagiographic deathbed-utterance convention. GLOSS: Eugene O'Neill's reported dying words — flatly cyclical, profane, without peace or destination — are placed at the literal threshold (a dorm-room door) of a story about a haunting, mocking the genre of the edifying last word that the collection elsewhere takes seriously (Mrs. Muldoon's own carefully staged death-date). CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

5. The Mannequin — QUOTE: "When I said he wrote Long's Day Journey Into Night, he snapped that I should get to the point before this became a long day's journey into night." SOURCE: Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956) — itself a title drawn from the diurnal descent into darkness that echoes Christian tropes of spiritual night (John 9:4, "the night cometh, when no man can work"; St. John of the Cross's "dark night of the soul"). GLOSS: A literal title becomes literalized as a complaint about the length of a police interview, a comic deflation of O'Neill's tragic arc that nonetheless keeps the vocabulary of descent and darkness circulating through a story about death. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

6. The Mannequin — QUOTE: "On the back was written, 'Mom, Dad, Joey, me, and Saint Paul.'" / "'Who the fuck is Saint Paul?'" SOURCE: St. Paul the Apostle, author of the epistles that define Christian doctrine (Romans, Corinthians, etc.). GLOSS: The family dog bears the name of the Church's principal theologian of grace and law; the joke recurs throughout the book (a fish is Christ, a mannequin is baptized) of sacred names sliding without friction onto household objects and pets, flattening the sacred into the domestic. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. The Mannequin — QUOTE: "her eyelids were fluttering, indicating REM sleep… There was drool pooling in one of the corners of her mouth" SOURCE: The watching-while-another-sleeps motif recalls Gethsemane, where the disciples fail to "watch one

hour" with Christ (Matthew 26:40), inverted here into predatory rather than devotional vigilance. GLOSS: Molly's clinical, murderous watch over the sleeping, helpless Ashley — "I imagined smothering her face with one of my pillows" — is a dark parody of watchfulness, the virtue the Gospels prize turned into a stalker's patience. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

8. The Mannequin — QUOTE: "he made Adam lord and master over all of the animals. You should review the book of Genesis, Ashley… leaving the door ajar so she could hear the tinkling of my urine." SOURCE: Genesis 1:26-28, dominion over creation; also 2 Kings 18:27 and Isaiah 36:12 (the King James euphemism for urination, "eat their own dung, and drink their own piss," used in a taunting context). GLOSS: Molly weaponizes Genesis's dominion language to justify nude self-display and then immediately profanes the same scene with the sound of urination — scripture cited as a debate trophy in the same breath as bodily insult, a favorite Mulhern juxtaposition of the sacred and the scatological. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

9. The Mannequin — QUOTE: "The image of Oona the mannequin in an electric chair flashed in my mind." SOURCE: Capital-punishment imagery set against the story's earlier "baptism" of the same mannequin (already noted elsewhere) — an implicit Fall/Judgment sequence: christened, then executed. GLOSS: The mannequin that was "baptized" earlier in the story is imagined, after a death it indirectly caused, being put to death itself — a compressed birth-to-judgment arc for an inanimate object that mirrors Ashley's own baptism-to-death trajectory. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

10. Smoke Rings — QUOTE: "We were greeted by a tall thin nurse with a white cap atop an immaculate blond bun." SOURCE: "Immaculate" as technical Marian vocabulary (the Immaculate Conception) rather than mere tidiness. GLOSS: The word chosen for a nurse's hairstyle in an Emergency Ward is the Church's specific adjective for Mary's sinlessness, a small verbal tic that keeps Marian vocabulary humming under ordinary hospital description even in a story whose other religious content is confined to reflexive gestures and jokes (the sign of the cross, the Vatican bruise, "As God is our witness"). CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

11. Smoke Rings — QUOTE: "Look at that one over there in the corner… It's disappearing already. Here one minute, gone the next." SOURCE: Ecclesiastes 1:2

("Vanity of vanities… all is vanity") and James 4:14 ("For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away"). GLOSS: Nonna's smoke-ring lesson in mortality — delivered moments before her own sudden death on the stairs — restates the Preacher's vanitas theme in the register of a cigarette trick, and Molly's closing repetition of the line ("Here one minute, gone the next") functions as her unwitting eulogy and epitaph. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

12. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "Enya was playing softly and there was an overpowering smell of sage." … "waved to us from the register at the back of the store." SOURCE: Debased incense and processional-music evocative of liturgical censing (cf. Psalm 141:2, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense") and Marian/devotional recorded music. GLOSS: A New Age shop stages a parody liturgy — ambient devotional-adjacent music and purifying smoke — establishing Myra's storefront as a counterfeit sanctuary before her own violent, unsanctified death later in the story. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

13. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "A woman wearing a bright pink muumuu embroidered with a design of blue, white, and orange tulips that rose from the hem like a garden" SOURCE: The hortus conclusus ("enclosed garden") of Marian iconography and Song of Solomon 4:12 ("A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse"), the epigraph-book of the collection's title story. GLOSS: A comic, garish house-dress is given a garden rising from its hem, a debased echo of the Marian garden imagery that structures the collection's more overtly sacred title story — the sacred image surfaces even in a costume joke about a con artist. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

14. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "I'm activating your forehead chakra. It's the main switch for the universal force, the awakened spirit, the center of higher consciousness." SOURCE: Parody of the anointing of the forehead with chrism in Confirmation and the ashes of Ash Wednesday, both administered on the same spot on the body. GLOSS: Myra's fake spiritual touch to Molly's forehead recycles the exact bodily location of two Catholic sacramental rites (chrismation, ashes), turning New Age "energy work" into an unconsecrated double of a rite Molly would have received as a child. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

15. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "keep it in your pocket near your genital chakra. Does wonders for your vagina, enhancing sexual energy." SOURCE: Debasement of the

sacramental/relic function of blessed objects (medals, scapulars) carried on the body for protection. GLOSS: A stone marketed as a grief-relic is reassigned, mid-sentence, to sexual talismanic use — comic proof of the story's thesis that the New Age economy is "watered-down religion," stripped of discipline and re-sold as therapy. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

16. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "Lazzarus Bocca. Have either of you ever heard of Bocca hats?" SOURCE: Wordplay on "Lazarus" (John 11) compounded by "Bocca" (Italian for "mouth"), yielding a surname that literally means "mouth of Lazarus" — apt for a widow whose sin, throughout the story, is compulsive lying. GLOSS: The dead husband's resurrection-name is fused with the Italian word for "mouth," so that the vessel of the story's most extravagant liar carries, etymologically, both "raised from the dead" and "mouth" — false speech housed in a resurrection name. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

17. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "I was the wife of a very wealthy man… My Lazzy was a beautiful man." / later: "The most heinous thing is that she went to his wake… She plunked her ass right next to his coffin." SOURCE: John 11's Lazarus narrative, where mourning (Mary and Martha's grief, "Jesus wept") is genuine; here restaged as performed grief at a funeral the widow herself disrupts. GLOSS: Myra's self-serving wake theatrics profane the mourning conventions attached to her own husband's biblical namesake — the story stages a fake Bethany where the sister-mourners' sincerity (John 11:33) is replaced by attention-seeking. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

18. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: ""Apache Tear Tumblestones," I said. "Am I psychic, too?"" and, of the same stones, "Also good for grounding and protection." SOURCE: Parody of relics and blessed sacramentals, especially stones/medals associated with specific patron protections (e.g., St. Christopher medals "for travel," St. Blaise for the throat). GLOSS: A commercial "grounding" stone imitates the logic of Catholic patronage (a saint or object assigned to a specific bodily or practical need), continuing the story's running joke that New Age retail has simply re-skinned the devotional economy it claims to supersede. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

19. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "The bulldog ran towards her body and began gnawing on the bone… vomited, splattering individuals among the crowd." SOURCE: Grotesque inversion of the Eucharistic feast and of dogs-and-crumbs imagery

(Matthew 15:27, "the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table"; also Luke 16:21, dogs licking the sores of Lazarus the beggar). GLOSS: An animal feeds on a broken body in the street moments after the story's fraudulent healer dies — a savage, unconsecrated communion that answers, grotesquely, the story's earlier fake blessings and mock-sacramental stones. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

20. A Prayer for Home, the faith-healer queue — QUOTE: "The woman was beautiful with large very dark eyes… She had a red dot between her beautifully shaped arched brows, which I later learned… was called a Bindi or Kumkum, marking a spiritual center or chakra, placed there out of respect for an inner guru, all of which I thought was bullshit." SOURCE: Comparative-religion aside functioning like the story's running commentary on all outward marks of piety (ashes, ash crosses, ointments) as arbitrary or empty signifiers to the narrator's atheist eye. GLOSS: Molly extends her scorn for Catholic and New Age ritual marking equally to Hindu devotional practice, universalizing her skepticism about any bodily sign of "inner" faith — the collection's most explicit statement that its irreverence is not anti-Catholic bias alone but a general suspicion of religious symbol as such. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

21. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "'It's All about Eve.'… Bette Davis had just said, 'Everybody has a heart—except some people.'" SOURCE: Echo of the "heart of stone" versus "heart of flesh" contrast in Ezekiel 36:26 ("I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh"). GLOSS: The line about some people lacking a heart, glimpsed on a bar television, doubles as an unacknowledged verdict on Myra herself, who is called "pure evil," "rotten," and "evil to the core" in the same scene — cinema dialogue functioning as a displaced moral pronouncement. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

22. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "Fasten your seatbelts… It's going to be a bumpy night." SOURCE: Proverbial warning-of-coming-trial language, structurally parallel to Gospel predictions of tribulation before a passion (cf. Mark 13:8, "these are the beginnings of sorrows"). GLOSS: The famous line from *All About Eve*, overheard as Molly leaves the coffee shop after learning Myra's history, functions as ironic foreshadowing of the violent, fatal "bumpy night" — really an afternoon — that awaits Myra at the story's climax. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

23. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "Espresso Boys was busy. The slogan on the door read, 'Where the coffee and men are robust.'" SOURCE: Parody of Eucharistic and covenantal "robustness" language (bread and wine as sustaining, cf. Psalm 104:15, "wine that maketh glad the heart of man… and bread which strengtheneth man's heart"), rendered as advertising copy. GLOSS: A coffee-shop pun turns the sacramental language of bread/drink-as-strength into cruising-bar innuendo, part of the story's sustained habit of finding devotional cadences inside secular commercial signage (echoed later by the church sign in "Drenched to the Bone"). CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

24. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "she said, repositioning her glasses and reading the box. "You know what this is?" Her voice was solemn as she looked into our faces." (the Apache Tear stones, unpacked just after the aunt's death) SOURCE: Parody of a priest's solemn unveiling of a relic or the elevation of the host at Mass — gesture and vocal register borrowed from liturgical drama. GLOSS: Myra stages an ordinary inventory delivery with the gravity of a sacred unveiling, timed with suspicious "perfect timing" to Molly's grief — a small parody of liturgical theater deployed for a sales pitch. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

25. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "I was just thinking about Vivian Vance. It's sad that she died… 'God bless the people who make us laugh.'" SOURCE: Beatitude-adjacent blessing formula (cf. Luke 6:21, "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh"), folk-devotional idiom applied to a sitcom actress. GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon extends churchy blessing-speech to a dead television performer, one more instance of the collection's Hiberno-English habit of sacralizing the trivial with reflexive "God bless" formulas. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

26. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "'Your feet will take you where your heart is.' That's an old Irish proverb." … then singing "Moon River": "Waiting 'round the bend, my huckleberry friend." SOURCE: Proverb echoing Matthew 6:21 ("For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"); the Johnny Mercer lyric's "huckleberry friend" is itself often read as an allusion to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn and to the American idiom of a loyal, homespun companion. GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon pairs a scriptural-adjacent Irish proverb about the heart's true destination with a popular song about crossing water toward "the same rainbow's end," fusing folk wisdom,

Gospel cadence, and Tin Pan Alley into a single valedictory speech before her death. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

27. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "I don't think I need to be healed. I'm healthy, Mrs. Muldoon." / "Darling, we all could use healing. Ya know it's not only physical healing… It's spiritual healing as well." SOURCE: Mark 2:17 ("They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick") and the broader Gospel healing-narrative pattern (blind, lame, possessed). GLOSS: Molly's rationalist objection ("I'm healthy") is answered with the exact logical move Christ makes about physicians and sinners — the self-proclaimed well have the greatest need — restaged as a kitchen argument, before the car trip to the healer, between a skeptical teenager and a devout drunk. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

28. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "'You are not smarter than God, Molly.'" SOURCE: Echo of Job 38 (God's interrogation of Job "out of the whirlwind": "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?") and 1 Corinthians 1:25 ("the foolishness of God is wiser than men"). GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon's rebuke condenses the Book of Job's rhetorical strategy — silencing human intellectual pride before divine mystery — into a single scolding sentence aimed at a precocious teenager's scientific explanation of snowflakes. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

29. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "She smacked her on the head with one of those small Bibles we all used to own." … "Molly, don't ever let anyone hear you talk like that about the Word of God." SOURCE: Profane weaponizing of scripture as object rather than word, ironically fulfilling Hebrews 4:12 ("the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword") in blunt physical form. GLOSS: Bianca's childhood assault with a Bible literalizes the metaphor of scripture as a weapon, turning "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17) into an actual blunt instrument used to silence a tattletale — Nonna's own scandalized reaction shows the family's residual reverence even amid the joke. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

30. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "Her punishment was to clean and polish the altar every week for six months." (for stealing from the collection basket) SOURCE: Parallels penitential restitution and Temple-service imagery (cf. Leviticus 6:1-5, restitution for theft; also altar-service as priestly and Levitical labor). GLOSS: A child's theft from the collection basket is expiated not by confession alone but by

manual service to the altar itself, a homegrown penance that inadvertently restages the logic of restitution-plus-labor found in Levitical law. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

31. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "'If you're going to lie, lie for a friend. If you're going to steal, steal a heart. If you're going to cheat, cheat death. And if you're going to drink, drink with me.'" SOURCE: Parody of the Decalogue's prohibitions (Exodus 20:13-17: thou shalt not kill, steal, bear false witness) inverted into a toast. GLOSS: The father's graduation toast systematically takes the negative commandments against lying, stealing, and mortality and flips each into a permissive blessing — a comic anti-catechism delivered, fittingly, "from a paper" like a homily. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

32. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "she had written a list of chapter and verse numbers in black ink on the chafed red paper lining inside the cover… 'Those are my favorite parts.'" SOURCE: The practice of a personal, marked scripture — akin to a psalter annotated with a reader's private devotions. GLOSS: The mother's inherited Bible, marked with her own chosen verses and given as a graduation gift, becomes a private canon-within-the-canon — the collection's recurring interest in inherited, marked, or dog-eared sacred texts (anticipated by the dog-eared Dickinson poetry book in the earlier faith-healer episode). CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

33. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "'It's a celebration for both of us, a baptism of sorts, as we begin our new lives.' I realized that the red spots on her gown were tiny roses." SOURCE: The rosa mystica title of the Virgin (Litany of Loreto, "Rosa Mystica, ora pro nobis") and the traditional association of roses with martyrdom and the Sacred Heart. GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon's housedress is patterned with roses at the exact moment she names the day's outing a "baptism," quietly stitching Marian rose-iconography onto the garment of a woman about to die on the Feast of the Assumption. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

34. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "Her fingers were icy cold, like those of a corpse. I shuddered as they touched my warm skin." (as Mrs. Muldoon hangs seaweed "leis" on Molly and Nonna) SOURCE: Foreshadowing echo of the corpse Molly will touch at the story's end, and of the traditional folk sign of a "cold hand" as a death-omen. GLOSS: The detail plants, days before the discovery of the body, the exact tactile sensation (cold, breaking skin) Molly will later catalogue clinically over the actual

corpse — living flesh already rehearsing the texture of death. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

35. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "In blue cursive Mrs. Muldoon had written 'August 15th, 1954. The happiest day of my life.'" set beside "Diazepam, 5 mg. tab." SOURCE: The Feast of the Assumption (August 15) as both wedding anniversary and chosen death-date, deliberately paralleling the title story's Marian feast-day cure. GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon engineers her suicide to fall on the same liturgical date as her wedding, converting a Marian feast of bodily glorification into a private feast of bodily dissolution — the collection's bleakest inversion of the Assumption motif that "Assumptions" treats hopefully. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

36. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "her abdomen was distended. Her skin was green, purple and black… A bloody maggot emerged from her right ear." SOURCE: Grotesque anti-type of incorruptibility, the traditional hagiographic sign of sanctity in which a saint's body is found miraculously unmarked by decay after death. GLOSS: Where Catholic hagiography prizes the incorrupt body as proof of holiness, Mulhern gives the reader the opposite in forensic close-up — decay is total and clinical — directly answering, story for story, the title story's climactic vision of a body "assumed" whole into glory. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

37. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "the skin cracked; a clear fluid oozed from her big toe and the nail ripped off, falling like an autumn leaf onto the floor." SOURCE: Anti-type of foot-anointing/washing imagery (John 12:3, Mary of Bethany anointing Christ's feet; John 13, the washing of the disciples' feet). GLOSS: Where the collection elsewhere treats feet with reverence (washed in seawater, "Robed all in white down to the little feet" in the Duffy poem), here a foot literally disintegrates under Molly's touch — the body's ordinary sanctity reversed into physical horror. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

38. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: Officer Donnelly: "'To heaven, Molly.'" / Molly: "'I don't believe she passed to heaven, sir.'" SOURCE: Direct catechetical exchange on the doctrine of the afterlife, staged as police procedure rather than confession. GLOSS: A patrolman unknowingly performs a priest's consoling function ("passing" as euphemism for entering heaven) and is flatly contradicted by the unbelieving

narrator — one more instance of a lay or civil authority accidentally taking on clerical vocabulary in this collection. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

39. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "she was, in fact, going home to the earth, to her 'conqueror worm,' a worm that had already begun to feast on her body." SOURCE: Genesis 3:19 ("for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return") fused explicitly with Poe's poem (quoted at length two paragraphs later). GLOSS: The narrator braids Genesis's dust-formula directly into her Poe citation before the poem itself appears on the page, showing the biblical and literary sources merging in her own thought before the text separates them typographically. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

40. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "On August 15th, 1980, Mrs. Muldoon had managed to create something 'alike,' symmetrical, and balanced through the timing of her death… She had created her own Assumption and I thought, ironically, consumption." SOURCE: Pun linking the Marian dogma's title word to the wasting disease "consumption" (tuberculosis), and to Ecclesiastes' theme of vanity and dust. GLOSS: The narrator's private pun collapses the story's two poles — bodily glorification and bodily wasting — into a single word-pair, the collection's most explicit statement that "assumption" and physical ruin are, for Mulhern, the same story told twice. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

41. A Prayer for Home — QUOTE: "The moon was too high, the river was too wide, and our hearts would be broken after all." SOURCE: Deliberate rewriting of the "Moon River" lyric ("wider than a mile… I'm crossing you in style someday") into a statement of failed crossing, and an echo of Psalm 137's exilic despair ("By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept"). GLOSS: The narrator converts Mrs. Muldoon's own hopeful song into its opposite — the river that was meant to be crossed "in style" becomes uncrossable — closing the story with an anti-psalm of exile rather than the homecoming its title promises. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

42. Drenched to the Bone — QUOTE: "'I don't want to wake up someday and feel I've wasted my life.'" SOURCE: Echo of the Parable of the Talents' anxiety about a wasted life (Matthew 25:24-30) and Ecclesiastes' repeated "vanity" refrain. GLOSS: Kate's justification for leaving her marriage borrows the exact fear structure of the Parable of the Talents — a life unspent, buried, wasted — recast as therapeutic self-

actualization language rather than stewardship of grace. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

43. Drenched to the Bone — QUOTE: "the red spot that appeared on her forehead whenever she was upset" SOURCE: Inverted echo of the ash-cross placed on the forehead on Ash Wednesday, and of the mark of Cain (Genesis 4:15), a visible sign involuntarily displayed. GLOSS: Kate's forehead reddens exactly where a penitential or protective mark would be placed liturgically, an involuntary stigma of guilt or anger on the same spot the collection elsewhere marks deliberately with chrism, ash, or a bindi. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

44. Drenched to the Bone — QUOTE: "Beneatha… whispers, 'That white girl's crazy'… 'She thinks that she's Joan of Narc.'" SOURCE: Beneatha's name itself echoes Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (whose heroine, Beneatha Younger, is likewise a skeptic questioning inherited faith), layered onto the "Joan of Narc" pun on Joan of Arc already noted elsewhere. GLOSS: Naming a scoffing, self-protective student "Beneatha" quietly imports Hansberry's own religious skeptic into a classroom scene about faith and violence, adding a second literary echo (beyond the already-noted Joan of Arc pun) to a single line of dialogue. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

45. Drenched to the Bone — QUOTE: "the security guy, Mr. Pierre… 'I got your back.'" SOURCE: Echo of guardian/protector language applied to angelic function (Psalm 91:11, "he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways"). GLOSS: A minor, kind authority figure who restores order after Mary Grace's outburst is given a casual guardian-angel line, a small grace-note of ordinary protection amid the chapter's religious chaos. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

46. Assumptions, kitchen gossip about Jim — QUOTE: "But by Christ! How in God's name could Jim stand to look at that puss day in and day out?" SOURCE: Irish-Catholic oath formula; "by Christ" and "in God's name" as profane intensifiers GLOSS: Grandfather, not a praying figure, supplies the story's first sacred names, and supplies them to intensify a judgment on a woman's appearance. The religiously audible speakers in this story are otherwise Peggy, the grandmother, and child Jimmy; the distribution begins not with doctrine but with a male curse that makes contempt sound ordinary. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

47. Assumptions, Peg's boots at the door — QUOTE: "God will know what you need. Miracles do happen, ya know." SOURCE: Folk-Catholic providence and miracle language GLOSS: The grandmother speaks this aloud to Peg, treating seawater as a vehicle for a God who diagnoses and dispenses a cure. Her idiom is practical, bodily, and coercive rather than theological: aching bones, bowels, mood, and miracle occupy one sentence. Peg's later assent to miracles is notably weaker than this confident assignment of divine intention. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

48. Assumptions, the grandmother's missionary zeal — QUOTE: "my first prayer should always be for the Holy Father's Intention that the Catholic Church reign forever." SOURCE: Catholic devotional practice of praying for the Pope's intentions GLOSS: This is the grandmother's most formal and sustained religious speech, reported by the narrator as a repeated instruction. It makes Catholic exclusivity an early habit for Jimmy, while her other sacred utterances are blessings, cures, and exasperated oaths; doctrinal speech and social boundary-policing are inseparable in her idiolect. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

49. Assumptions, Peg's uncertain practice — QUOTE: "I don't know that Peg was very religious. I'm not even sure if she was a practicing Catholic" SOURCE: Negative finding: narratorial qualification rather than a character's profession of faith GLOSS: The narrator, not Peg, supplies this religious classification after Peg has used Hail Mary, faith, and miracle language. Thus Peg's Irish idiom cannot straightforwardly be counted as belief: she speaks inherited sacred phrases while the narrating voice withholds institutional commitment. Her popular songs are quoted as songs, not hymns; the sacred register belongs chiefly to her speech, not to a declared creed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

50. Through a Convent Gate, Muldoon's Christmas rebuke — QUOTE: "So sacrilegious. And at this time of year." SOURCE: Catholic moral vocabulary; Christmas as a sanctified season GLOSS: The speaking triad is Mrs. Muldoon, Nonna, and Molly, but Muldoon monopolizes affirmative sacred speech—catechism, prayers, rosary, novenas, blessing, and rebuke—while Molly supplies doubt. Nonna mediates socially rather than theologically, so the story sharply distributes faith-language by character rather than evenly across its speakers. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

51. The Mannequin, Ashley names teaching — QUOTE: "I believe I have a vocation. I am determined to help children grow up and become intelligent readers so their lives can become enriched by the myriad works of great literature." SOURCE: "Vocation," a religious term for a calling, here applied to teaching GLOSS: Ashley's piety is not confined to Bible quotations or chastity rules; she sacralizes her intended profession as a vocation. Molly, Ashley, David, Emily, Mark, and Michelle all speak, but Ashley alone makes her self-description explicitly devotional before the crisis. The word also exposes the gap between Ashley's sincere aspiration and Molly's hostile reading of her as a prig. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

52. The Mannequin, Molly's reading of the Prologue — QUOTE: "The idea of words being portrayed as divine appeals to me." SOURCE: Molly's literary reading of John 1:1, the Logos/Word prologue GLOSS: Molly says this aloud in the same room where she identifies herself as an atheist; unbelief does not mean religious illiteracy. The contrast makes sacred speech a contested language rather than Ashley's private property: Molly can interpret and weaponize it while refusing its authority. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

53. The Mannequin, the argument about goodness — QUOTE: "Christians don't hold a copyright on goodness." SOURCE: Moral universalism opposed to Christian exceptionalism GLOSS: Molly's sentence is plainer and ethically more defensible than the religious language around it, even though she speaks it while deliberately tormenting Ashley. It is one of the collection's sharpest separations of irreverence from unbelief: the atheist rejects Christian monopoly, not the possibility of goodness. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

54. The Mannequin, Burger Night planning — QUOTE: "Jesus, control your enthusiasm." SOURCE: Casual sacred-name oath GLOSS: Michelle uses Jesus as comic impatience while the group designs the prank; Mark later turns to the same name in panic once Ashley collapses. The movement from casual oath to desperate appeal shows that taking the name in vain does not identify a stable unbeliever: crisis, rather than conviction, determines who prays. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

55. The Mannequin, Ashley on the corridor floor — QUOTE: "Then I began administering CPR, after I wiped her mouth clean with my shirt." SOURCE: Negative finding: emergency instruction in place of prayer GLOSS: Molly's response to

Ashley's death is technical command—CPR, airway, compressions—and the other young people mostly scream, vomit, or swear. Apart from Mark's panicked invocation, no one addresses God, asks for a blessing, or calls a minister; the devout Ashley herself is given no final sacred speech at all. The silence assigns the sacred to the bystanders' reflex, not to the dying woman. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

56. Smoke Rings, the staged bank fall — QUOTE: "My God. You're hurting me." SOURCE: Casual invocation of God in distress GLOSS: Nonna owns every sacred name in this story, but here the name is part of a performed injury claim, not prayer. The utterance joins her sign of the cross and later oath in making Catholic reflex a tool of theatrical self-presentation; Molly does not answer with sacred language. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

57. Smoke Rings, Nonna's bedroom lesson — QUOTE: "What we did today, some people would consider wrong. Certainly the pope." SOURCE: Papal moral authority invoked as a comic external judge GLOSS: Nonna acknowledges a Catholic moral standard only to dismiss it before rehearsing insurance fraud with Molly. Her irreverence is therefore not unbelief in a doctrinal proposition so much as refusal of any authority that restrains her appetite. The line makes the Pope a punchline in an Italian-American voice that still recognizes exactly who would condemn her. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

58. Smoke Rings, the actual fall — QUOTE: "When I was in the kitchen, I heard her fall down the stairs." SOURCE: Negative finding: secular last words GLOSS: When Nonna's fraudulent fall becomes a real fatal fall, she does not repeat "My God," cross herself, or invoke the Pope; her final speech is wholly secular. The narrator likewise offers no religious consolation, only smoke, blood, a telephone call, and the repeated vanishing lesson. The collection distinguishes performed sacred diction in a manageable crisis from its absence at the irreversible one. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

59. Myra Bocca, Sacred Ashes introduction — QUOTE: "I'm a bit psychic. Both of you could be, too, if you rub this area right here." SOURCE: New Age chakra/psychic idiom GLOSS: Myra carries this story's affirmative spiritual language: psychic perception, chakras, universal force, awakened spirit, healing, grounding, and protection. It is not Catholic speech, but it fills the functional slot of blessing and

pastoral care for a grieving stranger. Its concentration in a shopkeeper who immediately markets the language makes it transactional. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

60. Myra Bocca, after leaving the shop — QUOTE: "You know how I feel about this higher power shit." SOURCE: Secular rejection of New Age spirituality as religion GLOSS: Molly identifies Myra's idiom as a version of religion, then refuses it in deliberately profane language. Gabe's gentler openness to "powers and mysteries" makes the pair a useful contrast: Molly's irreverence is explicit unbelief, whereas his is neither assent nor mockery. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

61. Myra Bocca, dinner testimony about Lazarus — QUOTE: "I'll tell you the God's truth." SOURCE: Oath formula invoking divine truthfulness GLOSS: Myra makes this oath just before narrating a self-exculpating account that Alexander later calls a lie. Sacred naming here certifies a performance, not faith, much as Nonna's God-language certifies fraud in "Smoke Rings." The collection repeatedly gives its most elastic oath-language to characters whose testimony is least trustworthy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

62. Myra Bocca, the inheritance dispute — QUOTE: "God, I wish he were dead." SOURCE: Sacred-name curse GLOSS: Myra's most naked use of God is a wish for the death of Lazarus's son, not a prayer for the dead husband she claims to love. At her own fatal scene, the crowd substitutes CPR instructions and a pop-song chorus for a prayer; no character administers rites or speaks a formal petition. Profanity and alleged spirituality coexist in Myra, but neither produces consolation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

63. A Prayer for Home, Mrs. Muldoon's nightly intention — QUOTE: "I pray every night for the Holy Father's intention that the Catholic Church reign forever." SOURCE: Catholic prayer for the Pope's intentions GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon is the collection's single most religiously loquacious character: she speaks catechism, formal prayers, rosary and novena devotion, sacred blessing, sin, soul, healing, Assumption, baptism, and Christ-symbolism. She is old, female, Irish, and dying, but the collection does not make any one of those traits sufficient: Nonna is an old Italian woman who deploys oaths while denying God, and Ashley and Mary Grace are young speakers of explicit belief. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

64. A Prayer for Home, Lady Jane's verdict — QUOTE: "The spiritual masters have told me that your soul is cured for your trip." SOURCE: Counterfeit laying-on-of-hands / New Age healing formula GLOSS: Lady Jane, not Mrs. Muldoon, speaks this purportedly sacred sentence after murmuring an unintelligible ritual language. Mrs. Muldoon's eager acceptance gives her a devout hearer but not authority over the sacred; the story assigns false prophecy to the professional healer and ordinary faith to the alcoholic widow. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

65. A Prayer for Home, leaving the healing parlor — QUOTE: "Angel of Death! Ffangul'!" SOURCE: Italian-American dialectal curse, probably a clipped form of Italian *vaffanculo* ("go fuck yourself") GLOSS: Nonna answers the false angelic designation not with a Christian counter-prayer but with an Italian obscenity. The collision of "Angel of Death" and the curse makes her idiom bilingual and anti-ceremonial: she knows the sacred title, rejects its authority, and returns to family vernacular. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

66. A Prayer for Home, the wave at the beach — QUOTE: "Maron'! Pull me up, Molly. If I get hit by another wave, I'm gonna curse the water. Thought this was supposed to be a blessing." SOURCE: Italian-American *maronn'/marone*, a euphemistic invocation of the Madonna; folk-Catholic blessing language GLOSS: Nonna's exclamation turns a Marian-sounding oath into a comic complaint about the Assumption-day cure. She can name a blessing while threatening to curse its water, which confirms that Italian-Catholic idiom in this book survives as habit even after her explicit unbelief. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

67. A Prayer for Home, inside the patrol car — QUOTE: "What in God's name were you thinking, Molly?" SOURCE: Oath/question using God's name GLOSS: At Mrs. Muldoon's decomposed body, Nonna's only sacred phrase is an accusation directed at Molly; she neither prays for Mary nor says a blessing over the dead. Molly answers the corpse with forensic observation and later a literary, annihilating frame, while Mary is wholly silent. The deathbed/funeral-space therefore gives God-language to the surviving scolder, not to the dead woman or the narrator's grief. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

68. Drenched to the Bone, Jack's bathroom argument — QUOTE: "So I read! Jesus, Kate. I'm not a womanizer. I don't drink." SOURCE: Casual sacred-name oath GLOSS:

Jack's first use of Jesus is defensive marital rhetoric, not prayer, and it appears beside more profanity. Kate's later therapeutic language calls change a "spiritual journey," so the former couple divide religious vocabulary by register: he swears in it; she repurposes it for self-development. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

69. Drenched to the Bone, Jack's explanation of the move — QUOTE: "move forward in my spiritual journey." SOURCE: Therapeutic/New Age spiritual idiom GLOSS: Kate's phrase is reported through Jack's slightly skeptical voice, but it is the only explicit spiritual self-description in their marital story. It is also not a prayer: the divorce, the daughters' distress, and Jack's later storm are all met by speech about growth, work, or apology rather than petitions to God. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

70. Drenched to the Bone, the Jonah discussion — QUOTE: "people read the Bible in different ways: some believe that it is the literal word of God, and others believe that the stories are meant to be understood symbolically." SOURCE: Character speech describing biblical literalism and symbolic interpretation GLOSS: Jack, a narrator who regularly supplies literary and scriptural frames, here speaks with conspicuous institutional neutrality rather than belief. His classroom contains Mary Grace's devotional literalism, Turpin's dismissal, Vega's comic church anecdote, Sandy's moral restraint, and Jack's pluralism; sacred speech is dispersed but not evenly weighted. The religious authority belongs to neither the teacher nor the narration alone. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

71. Drenched to the Bone, Vega's church anecdote — QUOTE: "Jesus came into my church this weekend." SOURCE: False-messiah/Second-Coming idiom used as comic report GLOSS: Vega means a homeless man who claims to be Jesus, and she tells the episode as a joke rather than a confession of faith. Yet the sentence records a congregation in which the sacred name is familiar enough to organize both restraint and laughter. It is a communal casual sacred, unlike Mary Grace's later direct scripture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

72. Drenched to the Bone, Vega explains the congregation's response — QUOTE: "We didn't want to disrespect him. We just carried on!" SOURCE: Negative finding: congregational restraint rather than prayer or intervention GLOSS: In a church crisis, Vega's group does not test the claimant, expel him, pray over him, or debate doctrine; it simply continues singing. This silence is significant beside Mary Grace's

much louder biblical speech at school: the collection lets the classroom zealot speak for God, while the actual congregation is given routine, avoidance, and song without quoted hymn text. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

73. Drenched to the Bone, Kate answers Jack's apology — QUOTE: "I'm also responsible for the problems we had. Don't blame it all on yourself." SOURCE: Secular contrition and mutual responsibility GLOSS: Kate's plain answer does more ethical work than the church signs, classroom proof-texts, sacred oaths, or "spiritual journey" language surrounding it. No speaker offers a prayer at the story's final crisis; instead two fallible people speak responsibility and then Jack asks Kate to speak about herself. The collection closes its sacred-speech survey by locating its most credible grace in listening rather than in religious vocabulary. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

74. Through a Convent Gate, false delivery answered — QUOTE: "What a shame," Nonna said when I arrived at her place after working at the family restaurant. / "This is Mrs. Muldoon again," I said. "Send me over an order of pork fried rice, egg rolls, and add some beef broccoli this time." SOURCE: Structural opening and closing; delayed causal disclosure GLOSS: The story is linear in clock time but circular in information: it opens with the household's theory of unexplained deliveries and closes with Molly manufacturing the next one. The final impersonation converts the opening's reported mystery into an effect whose cause the reader now knows. Catholic language is an interior conversational pressure rather than a frame; the governing device is secular prank causality. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

75. Through a Convent Gate, title as hunger-idiom — QUOTE: "And you'll hurry it up, won't ya?" SOURCE: The Irish/English hunger idiom that supplies the story's title GLOSS: The title's convent and gate are literal sacred architecture inside a figurative measure of appetite: religious enclosure is made the impossible route of bodily hunger. The surrounding restaurant order makes the idiom's literal and figurative senses active at once. This is a double meaning, but not a supernatural frame; it is a closing verbal stunt. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

76. The Mannequin, ghost-story threshold and criminal coda — QUOTE: "David, an upperclassman at Boston University who was helping freshmen move in, brought me to an elevator in the rear of the hall." / "Once in my room, I would call to thank

her, and remark on the effective wording in her note." SOURCE: Linear first-person narration with a withheld ending; Eugene O'Neill haunting legend GLOSS: The story begins on the threshold of a dormitory and an alleged literary haunting, then proceeds scene by scene through roommate antagonism, prank, death, and interrogation. Its final prospective sentence opens the concealed murder plot after the official crisis seems closed. The ghost material is a motivating fiction for the prank, not a sustaining supernatural frame: the decisive return is to Nonna and poison. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

77. The Mannequin, title without a second theological sense — QUOTE: "Oona/Candy's head came off and rolled down the corridor." SOURCE: The literal mannequin used in the prank GLOSS: "The Mannequin" names the physical prop exactly; the title itself does not acquire a second religious or figurative meaning comparable to "Assumptions." The object is mock-baptized elsewhere, but that sacramental joke attaches to its naming and use, not to the title word. Its formal work is instead substitution: an assembled false body precipitates the death of a living one. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

78. Smoke Rings, staged fall and actual fall — QUOTE: "Just as we were about to step onto the ice, Nonna nudged my arm away and opened the bank door." / "My grandmother," I screamed. "She fell down the stairs and I think she's dead." SOURCE: Circular reversal structure GLOSS: The story begins with a rehearsed accident and closes with an unplanned, fatal repetition of its central action. That tight hinge makes the first fall retrospectively theatrical and the second resistant to performance, lawsuit, or moral control. Crosses, oaths, and the Pope occur inside the episode, but no religious or supernatural material frames it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

79. Smoke Rings, title as object and time-figure — QUOTE: "as I watched the smoke rings dissipate, I realized Nonna was right." SOURCE: Repeated smoke-ring image and closing refrain GLOSS: The title is literal—the smoke is an object in Nonna's bedroom—and figurative, because its vanishing supplies the story's model of a life. The closing return to the rings turns Nonna's lesson into Molly's immediate elegy. This is the collection's clearest nonreligious double meaning: no rite is needed for the image to carry mortality. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

80. Myra Bocca, storefront return without supernatural closure — QUOTE: "Just before the Shoppes of Wilton Manors, where Espresso Boys was located, Gabe and I passed a New Age bookstore called Sacred Ashes." / "and was reminded of the Black Obsidian rock in my pocket." SOURCE: Linear episodic plot; return to the Sacred Ashes object at the ending GLOSS: The story opens by entering Myra's retail sanctuary and finishes at her death scene with the stone first acquired there, making a loose object-frame rather than a supernatural one. Its chronology moves through encounter, dinner, theft, investigation, confrontation, and accident; the closing object returns the narrative to its first transaction. The spiritual claims are materially bounded by shop inventory and discarded at the end. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

81. Myra Bocca, title as a proper name rather than a double meaning — QUOTE: "She had a large toothy smile, and her eyes—golden brown behind blue cat-eye glasses that were popular in the 50s and 60s—reminded me a bit of my Nonna's." SOURCE: Character title; the opening identification of Myra GLOSS: The title simply names the antagonist, and the text does not make its Italian surname into a securely developed second semantic system. Myra's New Age vocabulary provides plenty of counterfeit spirituality, but it does not turn "Bocca" itself into an "Assumptions"-like pun. The name's formal effect is more novelistic than emblematic: it puts one person at the story's center before the narrator tests competing accounts of her. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

82. A Prayer for Home, lyric epigraph and terminal anti-consolation — QUOTE: "Everywhere I roam" / "Over land or sea or foam" / "At that moment, life seemed futile," SOURCE: Opening epigraph, "Show Me the Way to Go Home"; closing narration GLOSS: This is the most deliberately framed of the six: a drinking song is set before the first scene as a comic homeward petition, and the narrative's end refuses consolation after Mrs. Muldoon's body is found. The long middle is episodic and recursive, but the initial song makes every later departure, proposed return, and beach journey answerable to "home." Its religious material is therefore structural rather than incidental, even when the opening lyric is secular. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

83. A Prayer for Home, title's literal and eschatological home — QUOTE: "Did she say a prayer for home when she stood in the waves that day and looked towards the horizon?" SOURCE: Title phrase placed after the discovery of Mrs. Muldoon's suicide;

Catholic afterlife and Irish return GLOSS: "Prayer" is both the narrator's unanswered question and Mrs. Muldoon's possible act at the water; "home" can mean Ireland, dead husband, heaven, or the earth. The story deliberately leaves these destinations in competition rather than resolving them. The title therefore works a genuine double, and its fullest activation comes late, after the beach rite has been reread as farewell. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

84. Drenched to the Bone, retrospective fracture and present-tense repair — QUOTE: "It has been two years since my ex-wife, Kate, announced that she was unhappy and wanted to end our marriage." / "Hey, I like that song. It reminds me of when we were young." SOURCE: Retrospective first-person frame shifting into present-tense scenes GLOSS: Jack opens by looking back over the separation, then narrates the school days and storm in a vivid present that ends on Kate's response. The architecture is not circular in event but framed by the old marital failure, which the final call partially revisits and revises. Church language arrives only near the end as a catalyst; neither religion nor the supernatural supplies the frame. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

85. Drenched to the Bone, title as weather and pressure — QUOTE: "You should go home, too. Before you get drenched." SOURCE: Literal South Florida storm; Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin'" GLOSS: The warning names the literal rain that drives Jack into the church parking lot, while the song at the close transfers wetness into a figure for unavoidable historical and personal pressure. The title's two senses are activated sequentially: weather first, then emotional and ethical inundation. Unlike "A Prayer for Home," this is a secular song-frame with a church sign inserted late inside it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

86. Through a Convent Gate / The Mannequin, late revelation as reclassification — QUOTE: "Claims she never ordered a thing." / "no one would ever know the real cause of Ashley's death." SOURCE: Delayed-causality structure in two first-person narratives GLOSS: Both stories initially permit an innocent or accidental explanation, then reserve the narrator's complicity for the ending. In "Through a Convent Gate," the culprit produces the reported nuisance; in "The Mannequin," Molly reveals that the apparent fright death was engineered through the cookies. The device makes retrospective reading ethically uncomfortable because the narrating voice controlled the evidence from the start. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

87. Smoke Rings / Myra Bocca, the unreliable embedded performance — QUOTE: "Nonna interrupted, saying she had a terrible fall on an area that should have been cleared of ice." / "He likes to tell stories." SOURCE: Performed testimony and counter-testimony GLOSS: Nonna converts a staged injury into a claim verified by spectators, whereas Myra tries to preempt Alexander's competing account by dismissing him as a teller of stories. In each case, dialogue contains a miniature contest over who may narrate reality. The technique makes the larger first-person story wary of performance without granting the narrator automatic innocence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

88. Myra Bocca / Drenched to the Bone, catalogue as social surface — QUOTE: "a display of crystals and gemstones, silver and pewter jewelry, chalices, glass skulls, and crystal balls." / "Everything's broken. Can't even park in my designated spot because of the burst pipe in front of the school." SOURCE: Enumerative description GLOSS: Myra's shop opens through a merchandise catalogue that makes spirituality an overstocked surface, while Jackson's cascading list of broken systems makes the school a world of accumulating failures. The shared device delays plot to inventory a setting's pressures. In the first case the list discredits transcendence by retail abundance; in the second it externalizes Jack's sense of disorder. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

89. Myra Bocca / Drenched to the Bone, physical detail interrupting charged speech — QUOTE: "She picked up a napkin and wiped her jeans." / "She turned back to the mirror, rifling quickly through her makeup bag." SOURCE: Dialogue interrupted by focalized physical description GLOSS: Myra's gesture breaks up her self-exculpating story about Lazarus, while Kate's return to the mirror interrupts the divorce confrontation. In both scenes the narrator shifts from what a woman says to an observed, controlled surface—napkin, jeans, makeup—to mark emotional distance. The device does not settle truth; it shows the focalizer trying to read character through bodily detail at pressure points. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

90. Myra Bocca / Drenched to the Bone, popular song placed at emergency or decision — QUOTE: "I mean as you are doing chest compressions sing the song in your head." / "Bob Dylan sings," SOURCE: Bee Gees, "Stayin' Alive," as CPR rhythm; Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin'" GLOSS: In "Myra Bocca," a pop song gives a crowd a practical beat for failed resuscitation; in "Drenched to the Bone," a

song enters exactly as Jack makes his apology call. Both replace formal prayer with communal or private musical timing. The first makes catastrophe grotesquely public, while the second leaves room for a modest movement toward repair. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

91. The Mannequin, O'Neill placed as false Gothic frame — QUOTE: "a former student, with no seeming knowledge of the playwright." SOURCE: Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*; the opening haunting anecdote GLOSS: O'Neill is placed at the story's first threshold, where the dorm's alleged haunting promises a literary ghost story, and he reappears in the detective scene as a joke about paperwork. The placement strips the allusion of authority before Molly's realistic criminal explanation arrives. It is formal misdirection: literary haunting gives cover to human contrivance. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

92. A Prayer for Home, Dickinson at the pivot from repeated visit to faith-healer journey — QUOTE: "I was surprised when she quoted Emily Dickinson, a writer I had been reading quite a bit of lately" SOURCE: Emily Dickinson, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant—" GLOSS: Nonna cites Dickinson inside the new faith-healer episode, at Mrs. Muldoon's house just before the drive to Lady Jane's parlor. The allusion describes the collection's own indirect method: truth passes through performance, politeness, exaggeration, and partial disclosure. Its placement is apt but ironic, since Nonna uses poetic indirection to teach social concealment rather than ethical candor. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

93. Drenched to the Bone, O'Connor immediately before religious violence — QUOTE: "Mary Grace snickers and opens Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood." SOURCE: Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood* (1952) GLOSS: The novel appears just before the classroom turns from Thoreau, conscience, and Bible interpretation to Mary Grace's attack and scriptural eruption. O'Connor's fiction of grotesque Southern belief is thus positioned as a silent prelude rather than an explanatory key. The placement makes the later scene feel literarily charged without claiming that Mary Grace is simply an O'Connor character. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

94. A Prayer for Home, embedded repetition of an earlier story — QUOTE: "I'm going the third week of August." SOURCE: Recursive reprise of the Muldoon material from "Through a Convent Gate" GLOSS: After repeating the earlier Christmas visit in

expanded form, this story carries Mrs. Muldoon beyond it by fixing the promised Irish departure in August. The quotation is a hinge: a seemingly ordinary travel answer is later reclassified by the chosen death date. The form is recursive rather than merely chronological because the earlier scene returns not as background but as a block the later story must reinterpret. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

95. A Prayer for Home, Poe inserted before the final interpretive coda — QUOTE: "The image of her body flashed in my mind, and I remembered a poem by Edgar Allan Poe that I had to recite for my English class:" SOURCE: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm" (1843) GLOSS: The poem is not an epigraph but an embedded pause after the police procedure and before Molly's last theory of Mrs. Muldoon's death. Its theatrical worms, angels, and curtain make the narrative briefly cede its voice to a literary anti-eschatology. That insertion intensifies the title's "prayer" only to return the closing prose to failed homecoming. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

96. Irish-Catholic departure / Italian-Catholic pragmatism, placed at the beach transition — QUOTE: "I don't really understand it all, but Mary is adamant about going" SOURCE: The Feast of the Assumption; Irish Mrs. Muldoon's seawater cure and Italian Nonna's mediation GLOSS: This telephone explanation places Catholic ritual at a formal threshold: it moves the long story from graduation and departure toward its beach climax. Mrs. Muldoon gives the rite its devotional urgency, while Nonna carries it forward without doctrinal understanding. The ethnic traditions are not neatly opposed—both use inherited Catholic material—but their structural functions differ: Irish longing supplies destination, Italian pragmatism supplies transport. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

97. Collection sequence, from unexplained need to reciprocal speech — QUOTE: "What a shame," Nonna said when I arrived at her place after working at the family restaurant. / "I'm also responsible for the problems we had. Don't blame it all on yourself." SOURCE: Opening of "Through a Convent Gate" and closing of "Drenched to the Bone" GLOSS: Across these six stories, the sequence moves through prank, concealed murder, accidental death, fraud and street death, suicide, and finally a conversation that admits shared responsibility. That does not make a simple innocence-to-corruption arc: "Through a Convent Gate" already begins in cruelty and manipulation, while "Drenched to the Bone" ends in partial repair rather than purification. The movement is recursive in its returns to lies, deaths, songs, and

failed cures, but it establishes one new closing possibility—answering rather than merely judging another person. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

98. Myra Bocca, the name itself — QUOTE: "I'm Myra. Myra Bocca." SOURCE: Dante, *Inferno* Canto XXXII — Bocca degli Abati, the Florentine traitor whom Dante kicks in the frozen lake of Antenora GLOSS: The surname "Bocca" (Italian for "mouth," already glossed in the book as "mouth of Lazarus") also carries a second, darker charge: Bocca degli Abati is the arch-traitor of Dante's ninth circle, punished for betraying his own party at Montaperti. Myra is the collection's arch-traitor — she betrays Lazarus, lies to his children, steals Molly's card — so the name doubles the "mouth" aptronym with a Dantean traitor's name. The allusion is plausible but unmarked, so it reads as a buried rather than a pointed reference. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

99. Myra Bocca, the naming war — QUOTE: "It's Myra . . . I have a feeling you're saying the wrong name on purpose. But that's okay. I've gotten under your skin." SOURCE: naming (refusal of a name as an act of contempt) GLOSS: Molly twice calls Myra "Myrtle" (a shrub), and Myra catches it and names the act itself. The exchange makes explicit what the collection elsewhere leaves implicit: refusing someone's name is a weapon. Myra insists on her own name ("I'm Myra. Myra Bocca." / "It's Myra" again), while Molly withholds it — the story's central power struggle is conducted entirely through naming. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

100. The Mannequin, "Candice Kox" as an obscene pun inside a mock-baptism — QUOTE: "I figured you could name her after your no-show roommate and prop her on the bed to keep you company." SOURCE: naming (homophone: "Candice" ≈ "candied," "Kox" = "cocks") GLOSS: The mannequin's baptismal name is itself a crude sexual pun — "candied cocks" — so the sacrament of naming is profaned twice over: once by being conferred on an inanimate lure, and once by being an obscenity. The name is not innocent; the girls' "baptism" gives the object a name that is already a joke, which is precisely why it can later be repurposed as the ghost "Oona." CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

101. The Mannequin, "Candice" as a possible Candace echo — QUOTE: "We screwed the mannequin together and baptized her 'Candice Kox' after the missing suitemate." SOURCE: Acts 8:27 — "Candace, queen of the Ethiopians," whose

treasurer Philip baptized (Acts 8:38, one of the several baptisms Acts narrates) GLOSS: "Candice" is a variant of Candace, the Ethiopian queen's name attached to the one baptism narrated in Acts. That the collection's one mock-baptism of an object bestows a name etymologically tied to the New Testament's baptismal narrative is a neat but probably accidental coincidence — the likelier intent is the crude pun recorded above. Recorded here as a miss that flirts with a hit. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

102. The Mannequin, "Ashley Adams" bears Adam's name — QUOTE: "my full name is Ashley Adams." SOURCE: Adams, "son of Adam" (Genesis); the first man, tempted by the woman GLOSS: The devout victim carries the name of the first man, and Molly — who frames the murder as "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit" — plays the tempter. The surname quietly casts the poisoned-cookie death as a re-run of Eden, with the atheist narrator in the serpent's role and the Christian roommate in Adam's. The alliterative "Ashley Adams" is the story's one overtly biblical patronymic. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

103. The Mannequin, "Emily Finnegan" as a Joycean near-miss — QUOTE: "Emily Finnegan. And this is my mother." SOURCE: James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (the surname "Finnegan") GLOSS: "Finnegan" glances at Joyce's title, but the story develops no Joycean parallel — Emily is no Anna Livia, and the name stays inert. This is a negative finding: a surname that looks literarily loaded but carries nothing, consistent with the collection's American/Dantean (not Joycean) allusive frame already recorded for the novel. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

104. Myra Bocca, the two archangels flanking the story — QUOTE: "the Greek guy that owns the coffee shop you're going to. Espresso Boys, right? . . . Alexander Michaelis." SOURCE: Michael, the archangel ("who is like God"); paired with Gabe = Gabriel GLOSS: Two of the story's named men — Gabe (Gabriel) and Alexander Michaelis (Michael) — bear the names of the two archangels named in the Protestant canon (the Catholic canon adds Raphael, Tobit 12:15), the messenger and the warrior. Gabe is Molly's gentle, warm companion; Michaelis is the one who tells the truth about Myra. Neither is developed as an angelic figure, but the pairing is hard to dismiss as accident in a collection this attentive to names. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

105. A Prayer for Home, "Maria Cennamo" folds a real name into the fiction — QUOTE: "Maria Cennamo. That was the girl's name. She told Father Paul, a scary old Irish priest with white hair and a fat red face." SOURCE: the book's own Acknowledgments — "most importantly, James Cennamo" GLOSS: The girl who "snitches" on Aunt Bianca's collection-basket theft bears the surname Cennamo, the same name the author thanks last, and "most importantly," in his Acknowledgments. A real person's name is folded into the fiction as a minor, slightly tattling character — a private signature hidden in the census, invisible to a reader who does not open the front matter. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

106. A Prayer for Home, "Molly" is the Virgin's name on an atheist — QUOTE: "Her name's Molly. Molly Bonamici." SOURCE: Molly, the Irish diminutive of Mary (the Blessed Mother) GLOSS: The narrator who announces "There is no heaven. There is no God" bears the name of the Blessed Mother, whose Assumption the story turns on. The collection's central irony is lodged in its narrator's own name: the Virgin's name is worn by the one character who refuses the doctrine the name embodies, even as she keeps finding the dead. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

107. A Prayer for Home, the rhyming Irish officers — QUOTE: "I laughed because their names rhymed, and he gave me a strange look." SOURCE: Irish surnames Donnelly and Connolly (Officer Donnelly / Officer Connolly) GLOSS: The two policemen who arrive at Mrs. Muldoon's corpse are named Donnelly and Connolly, and the Italian narrator laughs at the rhyme — a small moment where Irish naming is comic to the Italian eye. It is the collection's most overt acknowledgment that names are heard, weighed, and found funny, even at a death scene. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

108. A Prayer for Home, "Lady Jane" as the doomed queen's name — QUOTE: "The parlor where 'Lady Jane' cured people was underneath a printing company squeezed between a luggage store on the left and a jewelry store on the right." SOURCE: Lady Jane Grey, the Nine Days' Queen, executed 1554 GLOSS: The false faith healer bears the name of the briefly-reigning, executed Protestant queen — a name of doomed, short-lived authority attached to a charlatan whose one true utterance ("Angel of Death") is a prophecy of death. The name quietly marks her as a false sovereign whose reign is over before it begins. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

109. A Prayer for Home, the family and parish saint-names stay inert — QUOTE: "Something you never managed to do, Lorenzo." / "Did you think about what Anna asked you?" SOURCE: saints' names — Lorenzo (Lawrence), Anna (Anne), Helena (Helena), Bianca (white), Dominic, Father Paul GLOSS: The household and parish are saturated with saints' names — Molly's parents Lorenzo and Anna, her aunts Helena and Bianca, the neighbor Dominic, the priest Father Paul — yet none of them is developed into commentary on its bearer. This is a census hit that stays inert: the collection loads a small recurrent group of names (Myra, Candice Kox, Agnella, Lazarus, Bonamici) and leaves the rest as unmarked local color. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

110. Drenched to the Bone, "Kate" is a deliberate anti-aptronym — QUOTE: "Kate said that our relationship lacked passion and if I were honest with myself, I would recognize this truth." SOURCE: Katherine, from Greek *katharos*, "pure"; St. Catherine of Alexandria, the virgin martyr GLOSS: The wife who leaves her husband for a female lover bears a name meaning "pure" — a pointed anti-aptronym, the plainest name in a story crowded with loaded ones (Mary Grace, Beneatha, Turpin). The narrator's world is full of names that mean something; his wife's name means purity and she is the one who broke the marriage. The task's flagged "Kate" turns out to be a quiet joke rather than a symbol. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

111. Drenched to the Bone, "Mary Grace" and "Turpin" are lifted from O'Connor's "Revelation" — QUOTE: "Mary Grace charges Turpin and some of the students run for the door." SOURCE: Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation" — the girl Mary Grace throws a book at the self-righteous Mrs. Turpin GLOSS: Both names are taken from O'Connor's "Revelation," where the girl Mary Grace hurls a book at Mrs. Turpin and calls her a "wart hog from hell." Here the devout Mary Grace throws a psychology textbook at the scoffing Turpin while reading O'Connor's *Wise Blood* — the story stages O'Connor's own violent-grace aesthetic by name, making the classroom brawl a literal re-enactment of O'Connor's most famous scene. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

112. Drenched to the Bone, the daughters' names encode both poles of the collection — QUOTE: "Our girls, Danielle and Colleen, of course were upset, running through the gamut of emotions." SOURCE: Colleen, Irish *cailín*, "girl"; Danielle, from Daniel, "God is my judge" GLOSS: The two daughters carry the collection's two

naming registers in a single family — Colleen is Irish, Danielle is biblical. The Irish-Catholic and the scriptural are fused in the narrator's own children, a microcosm of the volume's whole onomastic range. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

113. Drenched to the Bone, who is named and who is not — QUOTE: "What's his name?" . . . "I'm surprised by her use of my first name." SOURCE: naming (withholding and granting a name as a measure of intimacy and authority) GLOSS: The narrator is "Jack" to his ex-wife and, at the end, to the principal, but only "Mr. McCarthy" to his students — and one student, Beneatha, does not know his name after four months ("What's his name?"). The principal is never given a first name at all; she is only "Jackson," which literally means "son of Jack." Naming here marks intimacy and power: first names are earned, surnames are worn, and the authority figure's own name contains the narrator's. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

114. The Mannequin, the object gets two names while a person gets none — QUOTE: "I was thinking you could put a cane in the mannequin's hand, a Charlie Chaplin hat on her head, and a nametag that says Oona." SOURCE: naming (an object named twice — "Candice Kox," then "Oona" — while the no-show roommate exists only as a name) GLOSS: The mannequin is named twice — first "Candice Kox" at its mock-baptism, then "Oona" for the haunting game — while the real Candice Kox, the no-show roommate, never appears and exists only as a name. The collection's sharpest naming irony: an inanimate prop accumulates names, while a living person is reduced to one. Naming is shown to be transferable, and therefore not a mark of personhood. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

115. The name as a thread across the collection — QUOTE: "Have you seen my father Eugene O'Neill?" SOURCE: naming (the title story's "Lovely Peggy" sobriquet and its sermon "on the power of names and the mystery of the Word," already recorded) GLOSS: The title story seeds the volume's naming theology — a sermon on "the power of names and the mystery of the Word" that produces the blessing-sobriquet "Lovely Peggy." The six non-title stories pick the thread up and run it in every register: mock-baptism ("Candice Kox"), imposed prophecy ("Angel of Death"), refused name ("Myrtle"), degraded name ("Turp"/"Turd"), and a ghost's borrowed historical name ("Oona"). Naming is not a local device of the title story; it is a running theological motif across the whole volume, the one act every story performs. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

116. The Mannequin, the collapse of the mock-body — QUOTE: "Oona/Candy's head came off and rolled down the corridor. Emily kicked the wig and cap into the air." / "I kicked what remained of Oona to make space and she completely fell apart… the force of my punt caused one of her hands to fly and hit the mascara girl in the stomach." SOURCE: image (the mock-body); the Assumption's doctrine of bodily incorruptibility (Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*) GLOSS: The mannequin — already recorded as a mock "baptism" — is here the collection's most theologically loaded image: a body that cannot hold together. Against the doctrine the title story stages (a body taken up whole, free from corruption), this surrogate body disassembles into a rolling head, a flying hand, and scattered limbs. It argues that the secular body, once severed from the promise of incorruption, comes apart into parts. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

117. The Mannequin, the killer's failed reanimation — QUOTE: "I continued my chest compressions alternating with breaths, trying not to press my lips too firmly against her mouth. Her breath smelled like nail polish remover." SOURCE: the Pietà / the raising of the dead (cf. Mark 5:39-41, Jairus's daughter; 1 Kings 17:17-22, Elijah and the widow's son) GLOSS: Molly, who has poisoned Ashley, cradles and kisses the dying body she has made, pressing mouth to mouth in a futile effort to breathe life back into it. It is an inverted Pietà — the mother's grief perverted into the murderer's pantomime of resuscitation — and a mock resurrection that fails because the killer is its agent. No image elsewhere in the collection so plainly stages grace withheld at the hands of the unmerciful. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

118. Smoke Rings, the grandmother's body read as an icon — QUOTE: "she traced the bruises on her saggy body, turned and looked over her shoulder so she could inspect her back." / "Look, this bruise looks like a cow… I think it's the Vatican. I got the pope's house on my ass." SOURCE: image (the aging body as legible text); pareidolia — the reading of sacred figures into matter (contrast the icon and the acheiropoieta) GLOSS: Nonna, stripped naked before the mirror, asks Molly to photograph her "for Vogue" and then decodes her own bruises as a cow, a barn, and the Vatican. The body here is treated exactly as a devotee treats an icon — an image in which one finds figures — but the figures found are domestic livestock and a joke about the pope. It is the collection's mortal-image: the body that ages, sags, and must be read for signs because no sanctity inheres in it plainly. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

119. Myra Bocca, the counterfeit vessels in the shop window — QUOTE: "We paused and looked in the window at a display of crystals and gemstones, silver and pewter jewelry, chalices, glass skulls, and crystal balls." SOURCE: the chalice (Eucharistic vessel), the glass skull (memento mori), the crystal ball (divination) GLOSS: Sacred Ashes's front display assembles the whole apparatus of sanctity and death as merchandise: a chalice emptied of the Eucharist, a skull emptied of warning, a crystal ball empty of prophecy. Each is a genuine religious object reduced to a featureless prop. The catalogue is the story's thesis in a window — the New Age economy sells counterfeit versions of the Eucharistic, the penitential, and the prophetic. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

120. Myra Bocca, the tarot cards and the seer who cannot foresee — QUOTE: "a case with a wide variety of incense sticks… books, tarot cards, essential oils, prayer flags." / "bulk orders of incense supplies from someplace called The Witch's Garden." SOURCE: tarot and divination as counterfeit prophecy; incense as censing (Ps. 141:2) GLOSS: The tarot deck sits in the same case as the incense, both instruments of a foresight Myra claims ("I'm a bit psychic") and entirely lacks — she cannot foresee her own violent death in the street outside her door. The collection keeps returning to the false seer: Lady Jane and Myra both traffic in prophecy, and the one prophecy that proves true, Lady Jane's "Angel of Death," is delivered as a joke by a charlatan. Tarot is the image of divination sold to people who want their grief read back to them. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

121. A Prayer for Home, the wedding photograph as devotional image — QUOTE: "an attractive couple, the young Mrs. Muldoon and her husband, in their wedding attire. Both of them dressed completely in white… a veil with a crest of small white flowers; there was a pearl necklace around her neck… blurred white faces hovered like disembodied heads." / "August 15th, 1954. The happiest day of my life." SOURCE: the holy card / Marian iconography — white garments, the veiled bride with flowers (the Annunciation's lily-crowned Virgin), floating faces (the Knock apparition's robed, hovering figures) GLOSS: Examined beside a corpse, this black-and-white wedding photo is composed like a votive image: total whiteness, a floral veil, a pearl at the throat, and blurred faces that "hovered like disembodied heads," exactly like the floating figures of an apparition photograph. The date on the back — August 15th, the Assumption — makes the wedding the feast's own day, and the suicide re-stages

it, so the "happiest day" and the day of death are the same feast. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

122. A Prayer for Home, the pregnant Madonna who will not ascend — QUOTE: "I never noticed what a round hard belly she had. She almost looked pregnant. For a second, I imagined she was going to demonstrate the Assumption and fly up into the sky." SOURCE: the Annunciation (the pregnant Virgin) and the Assumption (*Assunta*); contrast Titian's ascending Mary GLOSS: The drunk, pregnant-looking old woman in her black-and-white swimsuit is imagined, for one second, performing the doctrine — flying into the sky like the Assunta. The story then refuses the ascent: Mrs. Muldoon rises from the sea only to rot in a chair days later. The image does the theological work of the whole collection: it floats the Marian vision and then withdraws it, leaving an old woman's distended belly and a body that will corrupt. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

123. A Prayer for Home, a bride in a white robe on the beach — QUOTE: "A woman walked by with a white shawl over her head and a long white robe. She reminded me of a bride." SOURCE: Marian apparition (Our Lady of Knock, robed and in white); the title story's "flying Mary's" and Beth "looking for traces of Mary" GLOSS: A passing stranger in white is registered as a bride, and thus as one more Mary among the beach's Marian apparitions — the same streak of peripheral white the title story's Beth hunted for. It inherits the title story's habit of seeing the Virgin obliquely, in ordinary women, and never naming her. The apparition is an incidental passerby, which is precisely how grace appears in this collection: unannounced and easily missed. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

124. A Prayer for Home, the seaweed lei turned into a funerary garland — QUOTE: "I draped a necklace of dried seaweed upon Mrs. Muldoon, and told her it was my version of a Hawaiian lei, a wreath presented ceremoniously to people who were coming or going." SOURCE: the garland/crown motif (the title story's seaweed "string of jewels"); the funeral wreath and the crown of the Virgin GLOSS: Where the title story's children draped Peggy in seaweed "and pretended it was a string of jewels" — an adornment of the still-living bride — here the same garland is explicitly "for people who were coming or going," a wreath for the dead. The transformation converts a child's game into a laying-out, secretly crowning Mrs. Muldoon for her death while calling it a tourist trinket. Against it, the real gift — the gold necklace

with the emerald-and-diamond cross — reads as the "useless" successor to this homemade crown. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

125. A Prayer for Home, the crown of the head inherited and inverted — QUOTE: "all the while mesmerized by the wet silvery scalp that shown through her hair. I resisted the urge to touch the crown of her head. At last she rose from the sea." SOURCE: the title story's Peggy scene, recycled nearly verbatim ("I was mesmerized by her wet silvery scalp, and resisted the urge to touch the crown of her head… she rose from the sea") GLOSS: The crowned, rising woman of "Assumptions" is re-staged with Mrs. Muldoon — and immediately negated. Peggy's rise from the sea leads to glory ("altogether beautiful, and divine"); Mrs. Muldoon's leads to days of decomposition in a hot room. The inheritance is a deliberate false echo: the same crown, the same ascent, terminating in rot rather than apotheosis. This is the collection testing its own title-story image and finding it will not carry a second time. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

126. A Prayer for Home, the corpse's cold arriving early — QUOTE: "Her fingers were icy cold, like those of a corpse. I shuddered as they touched my warm skin." SOURCE: image (proleptic corpse); folktale touch of the dead GLOSS: While still alive and laughing on the beach, Mrs. Muldoon's hands are already "icy cold, like those of a corpse." The image plants her death days before she dies, making the later discovery of the body a fulfillment rather than a shock. It is the collection's quietest mortality marker — the body announcing its end through temperature before the narrator will find it stiff and cold. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

127. A Prayer for Home, the dove printed on a napkin — QUOTE: "They were white with a blue print of Irises and white doves." SOURCE: the dove of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16) and the iris/fleur-de-lis as Marian flower, both reduced to a domestic print GLOSS: The mourning dove that sped "from its cleft into the bright sky" — the title story's Holy Spirit image — is here demoted to doves printed on a paper napkin handed to a police officer beside a corpse. The iris beside them is the Marian fleur-de-lis, the flower of the Annunciation, flattened into a table linen. The transformation takes the collection's most charged ascension image and renders it washable and disposable, the sacred image surviving only as a pattern no one reads. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

128. A Prayer for Home, the strobe light of judgment — QUOTE: "The blue lights on top of the car cut through the air, highlighting faces like a strobe light." SOURCE: theophanic light inverted — the title story's "sparks from an unquenchable fire" become police-car strobes GLOSS: In the title story the sea "glimmered like sparks from an unquenchable fire"; here, at the discovery of the corpse, light comes as a police car's strobing blue, cutting faces into flashes. It is judgment light turned mechanical — illumination with no glory in it — and it marks the collection's falling away from the title story's radiant ending into the cold procedure of a death investigation. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

129. Drenched to the Bone, the girl who becomes an icon — QUOTE: "Mary Grace… kneels on the floor and places her hands together in prayer… Then she stands on her chair… hands raised, a crazed look on her face." SOURCE: the orans — the raised-hands posture of early Christian prayer and of the priest at Mass; also the outstretched arms of the Crucifixion GLOSS: Mary Grace moves from kneeling supplication to standing with arms raised, the exact bodily grammar of the orans and the celebrant — a disturbed girl assuming the posture of sanctity in a classroom. The image makes her a living devotional figuration, ecstasy and insanity indistinguishable, and it is the collection's most sustained instance of a body assuming a sacred pose rather than merely trailing sacred names. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

130. Drenched to the Bone, midway through a life, lost — QUOTE: "I realize that even I am not sure who I am. Midway through my life, I am lost." / "as I sit in the steeple-shadowed parking lot." SOURCE: Dante, *Inferno* Canto I — "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura" (Midway upon the journey of our life, I found myself in a dark wood) GLOSS: Jack's "midway through my life, I am lost" is a direct, prose rendering of Dante's opening line, transplanted from the dark *selva oscura* to a steeple-shadowed parking lot in a Florida storm. Where Dante's pilgrim has Virgil as guide, Jack has only a church sign and a cellphone apology. The allusion quietly recasts his midlife reckoning as a descent without a guide, the "way" (as in the sign's "bring home those who have lost their way") left to be found alone. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

131. Drenched to the Bone, lightning that signifies nothing — QUOTE: "A flash of lightening zigzags in the sky beyond her." / "Lightening crackles across the dark

horizon. I wait." SOURCE: imagery of theophany (Exodus 19:16, Sinai; the title story's "brightness of a blazing fire") left without content GLOSS: Lightning arrives twice as a sign, and twice signifies nothing — it grammarizes the sky without delivering a voice, and the narrator only "waits." Where "Assumptions" ends in a blaze of sunlight and fire, "Drenched to the Bone" ends in storm-light that illuminates nothing and is followed by nothing but a waning rain. It is the title story's theophanic light drained of its object, an honest report that the sign will not come. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

132. Negative finding — no fixed iconographic repertoire — QUOTE: (absence) the six stories yield no Pietà, Annunciation, Nativity, or Stations rendered whole SOURCE: reading across the six stories' imagery GLOSS: The collection does not draw on a fixed iconographic repertoire the way the title story draws on Titian's *Assunta* and the Rosary. The other stories' images come from domestic kitsch (an aluminum Christmas tree, a napkin print, a Polaroid) and popular culture (a mannequin, a beach lei) as often as from sacred painting, and where a devotional image does surface — the wedding photo, the orans girl — it is a broken or parodic instance. The imagery ranges freely rather than citing a stable canon. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

133. Negative finding — "Through a Convent Gate" has no iconographic image — QUOTE: "Nonna was oohing and aahing over a silver aluminum Christmas tree with a color wheel." SOURCE: image (or its absence) — the one visual in the story is secular GLOSS: The story's religion is entirely verbal — catechism, rosary, the convent gate of its title — and its only strong visual, the aluminum tree with its color wheel and stealable ornaments, carries no iconographic charge. The "gate" of the title is a phrase, never an image: no threshold is pictured, no sacred enclosure depicted. It is the honest negative that anchors the collection's range, proving the imagery is optional to the religious material rather than its engine. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

134. The Mannequin, the closing self-diagnosis — QUOTE: "One of the perks of being a sociopath is that you learn how to easily gather necessary information by manipulating people, using their weaknesses to your advantage." SOURCE: managed sympathy — retroactive complicity GLOSS: The word "perks" invites the reader into a shared appraisal of advantage, as though murder were a career benefit, and the reader has by this point spent thirty pages enjoying Molly's accuracy about Ashley's

stupidity. The sentence does not ask for judgment; it assumes the reader has already been amused and now converts that amusement into evidence. The reader discovers she has been laughing with a killer, and the story never offers a place to put that down. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

135. The Mannequin, the alibi of piety — QUOTE: "Her family, being very religious, was staunchly opposed to autopsies." SOURCE: withheld judgment — belief supplied on grounds GLOSS: This is the one point where the story does supply grounds for what it asks the reader to accept: the murder goes undetected because the victim's Christianity forbids the examination that would expose it. The reader is asked to believe not a miracle but a mechanism, and the mechanism is faith itself. Belief is thus made the instrument of the crime rather than its answer, which is the collection's sharpest inversion of its own religious material. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

136. The Mannequin, Detective Corrigan's parting verdict — QUOTE: "But before he left, he lambasted all of us, saying what we did was terrible and we'd have to live with it for the rest of our lives." SOURCE: displaced judgment — the reader as sole judge GLOSS: The story installs a professional judge inside itself and then has him convict the wrong crime: Corrigan condemns a prank while the poisoning goes unnamed in the room. Because his verdict is audibly inadequate, the reader cannot delegate judgment to him and is left holding it alone. The story assigns the reader the role of the only competent court, and then ends without convening it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

137. The Mannequin, the last sentence — QUOTE: "I would tell her, too, that the chocolate chip cookies were a perfect hit." SOURCE: unresolved ending — withheld consequence GLOSS: The story closes on a pun ("hit") delivered in the conditional future, so the last act is not the murder but a planned phone call about it, still to come. Nothing resolves: no discovery, no punishment, no remorse, only the anticipation of pleasure shared with an accomplice grandmother. Against the title story's ascent into glory, this ending leaves the reader holding a completed crime with no verdict attached. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

138. Smoke Rings, the slap on the bed — QUOTE: "Because you gotta be tough. You don't get anything in this world the easy way." SOURCE: managed sympathy — complicity invited through instruction GLOSS: The line is spoken immediately after

Nonna strikes her granddaughter for failing to be moved by the smoke rings, and it reframes assault as pedagogy. The reader is positioned exactly where Molly is: on the bed, stinging, being taught. Sympathy is managed by making the cruelty inseparable from the love and the wisdom, so the reader cannot condemn the blow without also refusing the lesson the story clearly believes. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

139. Smoke Rings, the recruited bystander — QUOTE: "Thank you, lady. Don't forget he said that. You're my witness." SOURCE: the reader as witness — role assigned inside the text GLOSS: Nonna deputizes a stranger on the ice as a witness to an injury she has staged, and the flattered woman accepts. The scene stages, in miniature, what the story is doing to the reader: recruiting an onlooker who has seen everything and will nonetheless testify to the version she was handed. The reader is shown the manufacture of testimony before being asked to give any. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

140. Smoke Rings, after the naked appraisal in the mirror — QUOTE: "It amazed me that she knew what I was thinking." SOURCE: managed belief — a small clairvoyance offered without grounds GLOSS: Nonna has just told her granddaughter precisely what she was thinking about the sagging body in front of her, and the narrator concedes the reading as uncanny rather than obvious. This is the least the collection ever asks of a reader's belief and therefore worth recording: not a miracle, not an Assumption, but one woman correctly reading a girl's disgust. The story supplies no grounds and needs none, because the mind-reading it credits is exactly the skill Molly will later name as the sociopath's — the family gift dressed as intimacy. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

141. Smoke Rings, the ending — QUOTE: "I stepped over her body, walked up the stairs, and into her bedroom, where I sat down and lit a cigarette." SOURCE: unresolved ending — withheld affect GLOSS: Four verbs of ordinary motion carry the granddaughter past her grandmother's corpse to a cigarette, and the prose supplies no adverb, no pause, no grief. The reader is given a completed action and denied any instruction about how to feel toward it, then handed the staged 911 scream a moment later. The withholding is the point: the story trusts the reader to hear that the scream is a performance, and says nothing about it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

142. Through a Convent Gate, the refusal of charity — QUOTE: "I don't think it's an excuse to me mean, Nonna." SOURCE: managed sympathy — the compassionate reading voiced, then declined GLOSS: Nonna has just made the whole case for pity — addiction, widowhood, a rotted mind — and Molly's reply (with its uncorrected slip, "to me mean") refuses it in one flat clause. The story deliberately puts the merciful interpretation on the page so that the reader cannot claim it was unavailable. Sympathy is not withheld by omission but declined in the reader's hearing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

143. Through a Convent Gate, the stolen ornaments — QUOTE: "She won't notice them missing. And it's a shame not to have them appreciated." SOURCE: managed belief — no grounds supplied GLOSS: What the reader is asked to accept here is not a miracle but a rationalization, offered by the story's moral authority in the exact cadence of a virtue. No grounds are given and none are needed, because the demand is only that the reader notice how easily theft dresses as appreciation. The "Yes, Nonna" that follows makes the reader the only person in the room who has not agreed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

144. Through a Convent Gate, the closing telephone call — QUOTE: "Later, as I lay on Nonna's bed doing homework, I picked up the phone and called the Chinese restaurant." SOURCE: an ending that resolves cleanly — negative finding on withholding GLOSS: This is the collection's one ending that closes like a joke, with the mechanism fully explained: the "squash rot" hallucination of the opening was Molly's prank all along, and the punchline lands on the title. Recorded plainly as a negative case — nothing is left unresolved, and the reader is not asked to hold anything open. What the reader is given instead is the private knowledge that an old woman is being driven mad on purpose, and the comic form makes that knowledge pleasant to hold. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

145. Myra Bocca, the coincidence of the grieving stones — QUOTE: "What were the chances of her opening a box of 'grieving' stones at that moment?" SOURCE: managed belief — grounds offered on both sides and withdrawn GLOSS: The story asks the most of the reader's belief here, and answers by refusing: Molly names the coincidence, entertains the psychic explanation, and then supplies the deflationary one — "just a good reader of people, a con." Both accounts remain live to the end,

since Myra is indeed a thief and also does know things she should not. The reader is handed the evidence and denied the finding. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

146. Myra Bocca, Molly to Michaelis — QUOTE: "I'm not judging." SOURCE: refusal to assign a role — negative finding GLOSS: Said to a man who has just called Myra a slut and is about to call her pure evil, the disclaimer marks the one place in the collection where a narrator explicitly declines the judge's seat — and the story declines with her. Myra's whole case reaches the reader as hearsay from an interested party, and no adjudication is ever offered. Recorded as the story that assigns the reader no stable role at all: not witness to the fraud, not judge of it, only the recipient of competing gossip. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

147. Myra Bocca, in front of the coffee-shop television — QUOTE: "I thought how life was one great chamber of secrets and wondered how any of us could ever begin to know what was true." SOURCE: popular-culture allusion (Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets) tied to the reader's epistemic position GLOSS: A children's film supplies the story's statement of its own method: everyone in it tells a version, and no version can be checked. The sentence tells the reader exactly what position she occupies — inside a chamber of secrets with no key — and it arrives well before Myra's death makes verification impossible forever. The allusion is deliberately low, a movie on four screens in a coffee bar, which is itself the story's comment on where truth is available. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

148. A Prayer for Home, Officer Donnelly in the kitchen — QUOTE: "Molly, I don't much care what you believe. What else did you touch?" SOURCE: withheld judgment — the in-text judge declines the office GLOSS: Molly has just told a policeman that she does not believe Mrs. Muldoon passed to heaven, and the policeman, who has every institutional warrant to judge her, declines and returns to procedure. The story thereby leaves the judge's chair empty, as Corrigan's misdirected verdict effectively does in "The Mannequin," and leaves the reader in it. The refusal is also a gift: the reader is not told what to make of a girl who presses her finger into a corpse. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

149. A Prayer for Home, the examination of the body — QUOTE: "I kneeled down and pressed my finger against a dark purple spot above her right ankle; the skin was so cold." SOURCE: the reader as witness — enforced proximity GLOSS: The verb

"kneeled" borrows the posture of prayer for an act of forensic curiosity, and the sentence keeps the reader at the ankle, at the temperature of the skin, with Nonna gagging offstage as the alternative response. The reader is given no distance and no commentary, only the physical fact and the narrator's calm. Witness is the only role on offer; judgment would require an interpretive frame the story refuses to supply. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

150. A Prayer for Home, the mother's Bible — QUOTE: "And many years later, after she was long dead and gone, I did." SOURCE: Irish-Catholic and Italian-Catholic material — a promise kept off the page GLOSS: The mother marks her favorite chapter and verse numbers inside a Bible handed down from her own grandmother and asks only that Molly read them someday; in a thirteen-word aside. The reader is told the outcome and denied the content — which verses, what they did to her — so the one act of filial piety in the collection is reported and simultaneously withheld. It is the clearest instance of the collection giving its reader a resolution she cannot open. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

151. A Prayer for Home, the refusal of comfort in the patrol car — QUOTE: "I would like to say that I was comforted, but I wasn't." SOURCE: unresolved ending — the collection's fullest treatment of its reader GLOSS: Nonna has just supplied the consoling line ("Everything will be alright, Molly") and the embrace that should close the story, and the narrator strips both of their function in one sentence before the closing cadence turns "Moon River" against itself. This is the exact structural counterweight to the title story's ascent into what is "altogether beautiful, and divine": the same apparatus of consolation is assembled and then declared not to have worked. The reader is left holding an unanswered prayer and a popular song that has been made to mean the opposite of what it meant when Mrs. Muldoon sang it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

152. Drenched to the Bone, after the classroom attack — QUOTE: "Mary Grace, as deranged as she had acted, uttered a truth about me." SOURCE: Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation" — the reader as confessor GLOSS: The story names its source twice over: the girl is called Mary Grace, reads O'Connor's *Wise Blood* in class, and throws a book at someone before delivering the insult that turns out to be prophecy — the plot of "Revelation" transposed to a Fort Lauderdale English class. Alone among the six, this narrator accepts the judgment passed on him, and so the reader is assigned

the confessor's role rather than the witness's or the judge's. It is the only story in the collection where the reader is asked to absolve rather than to condemn or to watch. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

153. Drenched to the Bone, the ending at the intersection — QUOTE: "The light is red at the next intersection. I dial Kate on my cellphone." SOURCE: an ending that resolves — negative finding GLOSS: Recorded plainly as the counter-case: the light turns green, the apology is made and returned, and Dylan's flood song plays over a marriage that finds a small mutual honesty. Nothing is withheld and nothing is left in the reader's hands. Its presence matters because it proves the withholding elsewhere is a choice — the collection can resolve, and does so here and in the joke-ending of "Through a Convent Gate," but only here with repair. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

154. "Through a Convent Gate," Mrs. Muldoon on what the sisters teach — QUOTE: "What else do they teach you? Do they teach you to count your blessings? Do they teach you your catechisms? Do they teach you the Ten Commandments, the Our Father, and Hail Mary? Now those are valuable lessons." SOURCE: anaphora in three members, closing on a triad — the shape of the catechetical interrogation and of the litany petition GLOSS: Three clauses open identically on "Do they teach you," running 8, 6, and 13 words: the first two are short and level, the third swells and breaks into a three-item list, so the period ends with the triadic crescendo of liturgical petition. Nothing here is a prayer, yet the paragraph sounds like one being recited aloud — and the two prayers she names, the Our Father and the Hail Mary, arrive as items in a list rather than as speech. Muldoon's faith is audible entirely in the rhythm of catechism drill, which is the only devotional form she can still perform. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

155. "Through a Convent Gate," Mrs. Muldoon at the door — QUOTE: "You'll do a good job, won't ya?" SOURCE: Hiberno-English tag question with reduced "you" (ya); voice-theft as responsory GLOSS: The word "ya" occurs five times in this story, and the tag formula "won't ya?" occurs exactly twice — once here in Muldoon's mouth and once in the story's penultimate sentence, where Molly, impersonating her on the telephone, produces the identical construction (future "you'll" plus the reduced tag). The story is therefore built as a call and an answer at a distance: an old woman's sound is stolen and returned. The theft is purely phonetic; Molly reproduces no content, only a mouth. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

156. "Through a Convent Gate," Mrs. Muldoon on the salesgirl — QUOTE: "Or a dwarf. I don't know what ya call them nowadays. But nice enough, she was. And quite knowledgeable." SOURCE: Irish-English syntax — postposed copula (inverted predicate) and sentence-initial "And" coordination GLOSS: "But nice enough, she was" puts the predicate before subject-verb in the Irish manner, and the next fragment begins with "And," so the speech advances by accretion rather than subordination — four units, none subordinated to another. Mulhern marks the rhythm of spoken Irish reminiscence without a single apostrophized spelling. The paratactic drift also enacts her drink: she cannot hold a clause open long enough to subordinate anything. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

157. "A Prayer for Home," Mrs. Muldoon names her flight month — QUOTE: "I'm going the third week of August." I thought it funny that her pronunciation sounded like "turd." SOURCE: dental-fricative stopping (/θ/ becoming /t/) in Irish-immigrant speech, reported by the narrator rather than respelled GLOSS: The narrator turns phonetician on this one speaker three times across the two stories — here and in the "tings"/"tink" sentence, which both "A Prayer for Home" and "Through a Convent Gate" contain. Mulhern keeps her dialogue in standard orthography and then has Molly audit it, so the accent exists as an act of listening rather than as eye-dialect on the page. The joke is cruel and exact: the old woman's announcement of her going home is heard by the child as an obscenity. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

158. "Smoke Rings," Nonna's last words and her body — QUOTE: "Oh shit!" was the last thing she said. … "her right arm and left leg were contorted, like the Gumby doll of an angry child" SOURCE: metrical flattening at the point of death — eight words, all eight monosyllables — followed by a bathetic simile where a pietà simile is expected GLOSS: The sentence reporting a grandmother's death is eight monosyllables long, with a curse in the subject slot and a flat copular predicate; a lesser writer rises here, and Mulhern drops the line to the floor. The one figure of speech granted to the corpse is then a bendable children's toy, and the comparison is to a child's rage rather than to any grief — placed one clause after "a pool of blood around her head," it blocks the halo reading the pool invites. The flatness is doing work: it is the sound of a narrator who feels nothing, and the reader is made to notice the missing music rather than told about the missing feeling. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

159. "Smoke Rings," Nonna naked at the mirror — QUOTE: "I'm an old lady now, no longer beautiful, but such is life." SOURCE: three-part falling cadence with a proverbial close; audible against Song of Solomon 4:7, the collection's epigraph GLOSS: Twelve words in three diminishing units — statement, negated predicate, resigned formula — so the sentence descends rather than rising, the opposite motion from the epigraph's "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you." The vocabulary contains no scriptural word; the shape carries the whole reversal. It is the only place in the six stories where a character contradicts the epigraph in the epigraph's own two-part rhythm. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

160. "Smoke Rings," Nonna's homily on aging — QUOTE: "You lose your looks, and then sometimes your mind. Or maybe you get a horrible disease. And there's nothing you can do about it." SOURCE: polysyndetic parataxis with second-person address — the cadence of Ecclesiastes and of the deathbed exhortation GLOSS: Three sentences, two of them opening on a coordinating conjunction ("Or," "And"), no subordination anywhere, second-person throughout: this is wisdom-literature rhythm in the mouth of a woman who elsewhere denies God outright. The vanity-of-vanities shape is intact and every religious word has been stripped out, which makes it the more valuable instance. The paragraph then closes on an injunction to seize what life remains, completing the Qoheleth movement from decay to command. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

161. "The Mannequin," the corridor during the death — QUOTE: "Doors opened up and down the hall." … "Doors shut all around." SOURCE: responsory — versicle and response, identical subject, antithetical verb GLOSS: These are the only two sentences in the story beginning with the word "Doors," and they bracket Ashley's death: seven words (six of them monosyllables) as the versicle when the CPR begins, four words (three monosyllables) as the response once the body is on the stretcher. Nothing is said; the architecture answers itself. The effect is the antiphonal open-and-close of a monastic office transposed onto a dormitory floor, and it is the story's only formal acknowledgment that something sacred has occurred. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

162. "The Mannequin," the jester cap during the resuscitation — QUOTE: "Every so often there was a jingling of bells." SOURCE: the sacring bell rung at the elevation of the Host GLOSS: Mark twists the belled cap in his hands while Molly kneels over

the body performing compressions, and the bells sound intermittently through the whole death — an accidental sanctus bell over an accidental sacrifice. The sentence is deliberately agentless ("there was"), as a bell in a liturgy has no named ringer. Read with Molly's later claim that Ashley died for her sins, the bells complete a black Mass whose vocabulary is wholly secular. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

163. "The Mannequin" and "Myra Bocca," two inventories — QUOTE: "There was a claw-footed bathtub with a black shower curtain, a decent size medicine cabinet, and 6 black shelves on the wall." … "There are about 16 brown formica tables with aqua-green padded chairs." SOURCE: negative findings — inventory prose with no cadence; one kind functional, one kind inert GLOSS: Both passages open on a flat existential, coordinate noun phrases without subordination, and leave numerals as digits among words (6, and 16/8/10 across the café's seven sentences). The dormitory bathroom earns its flatness: the narrator is a sociopath who counts shelves and corpses in the same register, and the story depends on our hearing that her furniture lists and her list of reasons Ashley had to die sound identical. The café paragraph does not: its verbs are copulas of location, the narrator has no stake in the wainscoting, and the story simply stalls — this is the clearest case in the collection of prose that carries nothing religious and nothing else either. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

164. "Myra Bocca," Mrs. Callaghan directing the CPR — QUOTE: "No, I mean as you are doing chest compressions sing the song in your head. It will give you the correct rhythm." SOURCE: metre taught explicitly — cantor's instruction, with a popular song as the psalm tone GLOSS: This is the only moment in the collection where a character teaches prosody, and she teaches it as a technique for keeping a body alive; Evy's "Are you crazy? How can you think of a song at a time like this?" is the resistance that lets the rubric be stated twice. What follows is a full responsorial form — a single voice intoning the verse, the crowd answering with the refrain, a body at the centre — performed over a dying woman in the street. Popular song does the work of liturgy exactly, and the word "prayer" is never used. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

165. "Myra Bocca," Evy at the compressions and after — QUOTE: "Oh, crikey, Maureen. I don't think I can do this!" … "God, I'm knackered," she said between sobs. Mrs. Callaghan saw our confused look, "She means she's exhausted." SOURCE: Scots idiolect with an interlinear gloss supplied by a second speaker GLOSS: Evy's markers are a minced oath ("crikey"), a euphemism for death ("snuffed it"), and a British-

colloquial loan ("knackered"), and once, when the register turns opaque ("knackered"), another character translates it for the crowd. The glossing is formally a rubric — an instruction set beside the text so the congregation can follow — and it places a fourth immigrant sound-world beside the Irish, Italian, and Greek voices of the collection. "God" survives in her mouth only as an intensifier, spoken by a woman who has just tried to raise the dead. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

166. "Myra Bocca," Alexander Michaelis on Lazarus Bocca — QUOTE: "he was a damn fine man, wanted everyone to be treated fairly. One of the best men I ever knew." … "generous beyond measure." … "I tell you, they showed grace and poise." SOURCE: panegyric/eulogy register; "grace" spent socially, over a dead man named Lazarus GLOSS: Michaelis's diction lifts whenever he speaks of the dead — "beyond measure," "grace and poise," the formulaic superlative — while his speech about Myra stays obscene and monosyllabic. He is the only voice in the six stories to sustain a eulogy, and its single theological word is spent on the decorum of a funeral home. The man he eulogizes is called Lazarus and stays dead; the cadence promises a resurrection the plot refuses. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

167. "A Prayer for Home," Mrs. Muldoon in the surf on the Feast of the Assumption — QUOTE: "Now raise me up quickly, Molly, before the next wave." SOURCE: imperative of raising — the collect's petition to be lifted up, and the Assumption itself as bodily raising GLOSS: On August 15th, in salt water she believes carries a cure, a woman asks a child to raise her, and the narration grants the request in a short monosyllabic clause of rising rhythm immediately afterward. The petition is grammatically a prayer — vocative, imperative, urgency — addressed to a girl who does not believe in the feast she is standing in. Its answer, and the "angel" she calls Molly a moment later, make this the one passage in the six stories where cadence performs an Assumption the vocabulary will not claim. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

168. "A Prayer for Home," Mrs. Muldoon's corpse — QUOTE: "Her face, arms, and legs were bloated; her abdomen was distended." SOURCE: deliberate flattening — clinical Latinate predicates in a paratactic frame, where elegy is expected GLOSS: Eleven words, eight of them monosyllables, carrying two Latinate medical terms (abdomen, distended) beside the Germanic "bloated" across a semicolon that refuses subordination; the catalogue continues, and later "The flesh broke and blood trickled

slowly down the side of her enlarged foot" keeps the same level pulse through an act of desecration. Every sentence in the death scene is a coroner's, and the one time the register lifts it lifts for the wedding photograph, not for the body. The prose declines to mourn, and the refusal is metrically exact. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

169. "A Prayer for Home," Mrs. Muldoon repeating Molly's phrase — QUOTE: murmured "specks of dust, specks of dust" SOURCE: exact verbal repetition as involuntary prayer; the Ash Wednesday formula heard without its words GLOSS: The old woman takes the atheist child's cosmological phrase and says it twice under her breath at the window, and the doubling converts an argument into a mumbled devotion — the psalm's repeated hemistich reduced to two beats. Neither "ash" nor "dust thou art" appears; the liturgy of Lent is present only as a rhythm of repetition in a drunk woman's mouth. The narrator, who supplied the phrase, hears the repetition and does not recognize what it has become. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

170. "A Prayer for Home," Nonna on sadness and on sheep — QUOTE: "You've got to be strong to tame a lion. And sadness is a lion." … "The world is made up mostly of sheep." SOURCE: proverb-plus-gloss parallelism (the doubled phrase of the Psalms and of wisdom literature); inverted Gospel pastoral GLOSS: Nine words state the maxim, five gloss it, and the gloss repeats the maxim's final noun — the Hebraic figure in which the second half of a verse restates the first. Nonna then divides humanity into sheep and a lion, keeping the shepherd's taxonomy while reversing its values, so that standing outside the flock becomes the blessing. Both formulations are wholly secular in vocabulary and wholly scriptural in shape, which is why the grandmother's atheism sounds like preaching. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

171. "A Prayer for Home," Nonna's exclamations — QUOTE: "Maron'! Pull me up, Molly." … "Angel of Death! Ffangul'!" SOURCE: Italian-American clipped exclamatives — "Maron'" from Madonna, "Ffangul'" from vaffanculo, both with the final syllable elided GLOSS: The story carries six distinct Italian or Italian-American items in Nonna's mouth (chooch, troia, cazzone, mia bambina, plus these two; "Mangia" and "Complimente dottore" are the father's), and the two exclamations are a Marian invocation and an obscenity, both truncated by the same apocope and both functioning as curses. The Virgin's name surfaces only when a wave knocks Nonna down on the Feast of the Assumption, and the obscenity only when a fortune-teller

calls her granddaughter an Angel of Death. In this idiolect the sacred survives as a sound with its ending bitten off. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

172. "Drenched to the Bone," Ms. Jackson by the keyed car — QUOTE: "It seems everything's falling apart. Everything's broken." SOURCE: anaphoric doubling contracting to a two-word response — the shortest litany in the collection GLOSS: Five words then two, the second sentence stripping away the frame verb and keeping only subject and predicate, and neither of its two words is a monosyllable; the deflation is audible. The narrator answers it with a six-item litany of his own — classroom, vending machine, cameras, wandering mother, failed marriage, aging body — and the St. Francis sign at the church then answers that, promising "to unite what has fallen apart" in Jackson's own verb. Complaint, amplification, response: the story's spine is a three-part responsory whose middle term contains no religious word at all. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

173. "Drenched to the Bone," McCarthy alone after the fight — QUOTE: "In the stillness of the classroom, I sit at my desk, looking out at the swaying palm trees and clouded sky. Some droplets began to fall on the vegetation." SOURCE: attempted lyric register and its immediate collapse; note the tense slip from present to past GLOSS: The first sentence reaches — "stillness," the participial swaying, twenty-one mostly monosyllabic words, a weather-and-window close of the kind that usually precedes revelation — and the second loses the story's governing present tense ("began") and calls the plants "the vegetation," a four-syllable botanical abstraction where lyric prose would name the species. The seam is exactly here: the register lifts for one sentence and cannot be held, and the rain that will carry the story's whole religious freight enters as "droplets." I take this as a genuine failure rather than a designed flattening, since nothing in the narrator's character requires the tense to slip. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

174. "Drenched to the Bone," the Thoreau and Emerson discussion — QUOTE: "Isn't he the guy that invented electricity?" … "We should only have to listen to our own conscious." … "It's conscience, you moron" … "We should stage some kinda civil obedience" … "Disobedience. You dumbass" SOURCE: malapropism answered by correction — a parodic catechism in versicle-and-response pairs GLOSS: Errors followed by snap corrections, sometimes from a classmate (Mary Grace, Brandi) and sometimes from the teacher (Edison, Marx), producing a strict alternation of call and

answer; the pattern recurs elsewhere in the story with "the oxycodone of the masses" and "Joan of Narc." The doctrinal content is Emerson and Marx rather than the Baltimore Catechism, but the sound is drill — error, snap correction, error, snap correction — and the students police each other's orthodoxy with the vehemence of catechumens. Mary Grace, who ends the scene quoting Matthew 7:6 and Romans 6:23 verbatim, is the only speaker in the room who gets her text right. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

175. "Drenched to the Bone," the quiet student at the back — QUOTE: "Sandy types are blessings." SOURCE: benediction compressed to four words of free indirect thought GLOSS: This is the only blessing pronounced anywhere in the six non-title stories by a character not performing piety, and it is spoken inside the narrator's head about a girl who has just pointed to a page. Four words, no vocative, no deity, the plural "blessings" carrying the whole theological weight; the sentence sits unremarked between two lines of classroom noise. Its flatness is the point — grace arrives in this story as an aside about a student's usefulness. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

176. A Prayer for Home, Nonna watching the swimmer on the feast day — QUOTE: "Her eyes followed Mary who was now a ways out." SOURCE: The shared name Mary, used by Nonna for both Mrs. Muldoon and the Blessed Mother in consecutive speech on the Feast of the Assumption; Nonna's next question is "Who gives a damn if Mary flew up into the sky or not?" GLOSS: Within a few sentences the narration uses "Mary" for the drunk widow swimming out toward the horizon and Nonna uses it for the Virgin whose bodily ascent she doubts. For a moment the two Marys cannot be told apart, so the dogma's question of whether Mary rose is asked over a Mary who will be found rotting in a chair days later. The name makes Mrs. Muldoon's private "Assumption" a pun on persons as well as on the word. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

177. Drenched to the Bone, Kate's therapeutic vocabulary — QUOTE: "A process of individuation, she called it, a term Dr. Kelleher, her Jungian psychologist had used." SOURCE: C. G. Jung's doctrine of individuation. Jung is also the unacknowledged source of the card in "Myra Bocca," "A stone has no uncertainty," which compresses *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ch. 1: "The stone has no uncertainties, no urge to communicate, and is eternally the same for thousands of years." GLOSS: Jung is

invoked in two different stories, and both times he stands in for religion rather than beside it: a card among New Age wares, and a therapist's word for leaving a marriage. In Jung's memoir the stone is a refuge where "the conflict ceased." Molly, by contrast, throws her stone away at Myra's stretcher, and Jack gets no such peace from Kate's "individuation." The collection thus gives the psychology of the self the role that sacramentals and doctrine play elsewhere, and finds it equally unconsoling. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

178. Myra Bocca, the nurse who directs the resuscitation — QUOTE: "Of course I want her to live, Maureen!" SOURCE: The volume's Acknowledgments: "Maureen Mulhern, Kathy Scherpa, Amelia Costigan, Ann Bauer, and most importantly, James Cennamo." GLOSS: Mrs. Callaghan, the self-declared nurse who teaches the CPR rhythm over Myra's body, is named Maureen only in Evy's panicked outburst. She shares that name with the first person the author thanks. Alongside the Cennamo surname given to the girl in "A Prayer for Home," this suggests a small, deliberate practice of folding the acknowledged circle into the fiction. Here the acknowledged name goes to the collection's one figure of competent, merciful care at a death. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

179. Drenched to the Bone, the Thoreau lesson — QUOTE: "Amelia and Brandi are whispering. Then Amelia raises her hand." SOURCE: The volume's Acknowledgments, "Amelia Costigan." GLOSS: A second acknowledged first name is given to a student who warms to Thoreau's conscience ("I like this guy") and later talks of "civil obedience." If deliberate, it belongs with Maureen and Cennamo as a private signature rather than a symbolic name, and carries no religious commentary of its own. It is recorded because it extends the pattern across a third story. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

180. The Mannequin, the dinner-table accomplice — QUOTE: "Mark was an obese white guy with frizzy red hair, blue eyes and a cherubic face, who wanted to become a screenwriter." SOURCE: The Dedication, "This book is dedicated to my brother Mark, the best pal I ever had"; "cherubic," from the cherubim of Genesis 3:24 and Exodus 25:18-20. GLOSS: The one character in the story given an angelic adjective shares the dedicatee's name, and he is also the only person who prays when Ashley collapses ("Oh Jesus! For the love of God, let her be okay!"). The cherub who guards Eden after the Fall is here a frightened boy at a death the narrator frames as Eve's

eating of forbidden fruit. The name link may be coincidental, but the cherubic face placed on the one sincere pray-er is pointed. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

181. The Mannequin, Molly's verdict on the poisoned cookies — QUOTE: "Ashley's Christian values had evaporated in the face of temptation." SOURCE: The petition "lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13) and 1 Corinthians 10:13 ("There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man"); cf. James 4:14, life as "a vapour." GLOSS: The murderer describes the trap she set in the language of the Lord's Prayer, so that the victim's sin is the eating and the tempter's role goes unnamed. "Evaporated" makes virtue a vapour, the same figure of vanishing the collection gives to Nonna's smoke rings. The sentence immediately precedes "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit." It gives the theological premise of that Edenic analogy: temptation offered, and Christian values unable to resist it. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

The Collection as a Designed Book: Assumptions and Other Stories

1. Printed order: a seven-part designed sequence — QUOTE: "Assumptions" / "Through a Convent Gate" / "The Mannequin" / "Smoke Rings" / "Myra Bocca" / "A Prayer for Home" / "Drenched to the Bone" SOURCE: Contents-page sequence; the formal ordering of a seven-story collection GLOSS: The book begins with a retrospective child-witnessing of a dying woman and ends with a middle-aged man attempting to listen to his former wife. Between those poles it runs Molly through charity becoming spite, calculated murder, bereavement, public catastrophe, and a return to the earlier Boston material from a different and much darker angle. The sequence is neither a simple fall from innocence nor a climb to grace: it repeatedly advances, loops backward, and changes the narrating self. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

2. The collection's first and last lines exchange judgment for attention — QUOTE: "Peggy Fleming, according to my grandfather was the 'homeliest damn woman' he'd ever seen." / "Tell me about you, Kate." SOURCE: Framing antithesis; the first sentence of "Assumptions" and the final sentence of "Drenched to the Bone" GLOSS: The opening enacts a male social verdict on a woman's body, reported through a child; the last line is a request to receive a woman's inward life. The book therefore

ends not with theological certainty, forgiveness, or reunion, but with the smallest imaginable ethical reversal of its opening habit: instead of pronouncing on another person, the speaker asks her to speak. That is an available form of grace, but only a beginning. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

3. The title story is an aperture, not a thesis that the rest merely illustrates — QUOTE: "Assumptions" / "She had created her own Assumption and I thought, ironically, consumption." / "I hope that before long I will be able to see the way home." SOURCE: Reprise and counter-reprise of the Marian Assumption and the homeward journey GLOSS: Placing "Assumptions" first lets the book offer its most affirmative imaginative transfiguration before the later stories test, parody, and often refuse it. "A Prayer for Home," placed sixth rather than second, deliberately turns the title-story apparatus—August 15, water, a dead spouse, homeward language—into a suicide and decomposition; the final story neither repeats that consolation nor accepts its negation as final. The architecture makes the title story a governing possibility that the collection persistently troubles. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

4. Molly's sequence is deliberately non-chronological, and that disorder matters — QUOTE: "She's a senior in high school now" / "After I showed my paperwork to the girl at the desk and signed in" / "Myra. Myra Bocca." / "Towards the middle of August, Nonna called me" SOURCE: Discontinuous life-writing; recurrence of Molly/Nonna material in incompatible narrative positions GLOSS: "Through a Convent Gate" gives a senior Molly, "The Mannequin" moves her to university, "Myra Bocca" to adult Florida, and "A Prayer for Home" then returns to the still-living Nonna and the pre-college Mrs. Muldoon. The book does not conceal this temporal recoil; it makes earlier material return after its consequences have become imaginable. The effect is less a continuous realist biography than an ordeal revisited from successive stations of knowledge. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

5. This is a counter-calendar of at least nineteen deaths, not a clean saint-calendar — QUOTE: "I'm just codding ya, Jimmy, just an old story is all. A fib, my love," SOURCE: Martyrology inverted into a narrative death-register; count of named or individualized deaths in prose and appended poem GLOSS: The book records at least nineteen individualized dead people or figures: the fruit seller, Jim, Francis, Tailtiu, Peggy, Bridie, Mr. Muldoon, Vivian Vance, Eugene O'Neill, Oona O'Neill ("No, she's dead."), Emily's grandmother, Ashley, Julien Janssen, Agnella/Nonna, Molly's

aunt, Lazarus, Myra, Mrs. Muldoon, and Molly's mother. This count includes the appended poem and mythic/historical material because the collection deliberately embeds them in its death-register; it counts repeated reports of Mr. Muldoon and Vance only once. Margaret Mary Fawny's alleged drowning is excluded because Peggy retracts it in the quoted sentence, a formal warning not to inflate every death-shaped anecdote into fact. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

6. The first ten deaths range from martyr-like placement to impersonal report — QUOTE: "killing the old Italian guy selling the stuff, and himself, of course" / "He became a priest, a missionary to a small town in Italy, where he died in a church." / "Tailtiu, who dies of exhaustion" / "Lovely Peggy had died in her sleep" / "Long dead, my dear" / "Mr. Muldoon died from a massive heart attack." / "Vivian Vance. It's sad that she died." / "Eugene died of Parkinson's disease in 1953." / "She died before I was born." SOURCE: Catalogue form; deaths in "Assumptions," "Through a Convent Gate," "The Mannequin," and (for the Mr. Muldoon sentence as quoted) "A Prayer for Home" GLOSS: One sentence records two accident victims—the anonymous Italian fruit seller and Peg's Jim—then the book gives Francis a missionary death in a church, Tailtiu a mythic death from exhaustion, Peggy a sleep-death, and Bridie the elevated retrospect of the appended poem. Mr. Muldoon, Vance, O'Neill, and Emily's grandmother receive increasingly compressed reports. These are the nearest the collection comes to a conventional memorial calendar: even here, dignity depends on the narrator's language and setting, not on moral worth. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. The last eight deaths show how the martyrology is contaminated by abjection — QUOTE: "Ashley had shit her pants. I knew she was dead." / "The next thing ya know, he was hit by a train. Dead in an instant." / "I found her body on the mahogany landing." / "My aunt had just passed away." / "Well, when Lazzy died." / "Myra had tripped and slid across the pavement before she was hit by the car" / "I walked towards Mrs. Muldoon's corpse." / "after she was long dead and gone" SOURCE: Grotesque realism beside hagiographic death-language GLOSS: Ashley, Julien, and Nonna die in scenes of physical abasement or comic brutality; the aunt and Lazarus are reduced to reportorial clauses; Myra is publicly destroyed; Mrs. Muldoon receives the longest physical inventory; Molly's mother is recalled only after the fact. Francis's church death and Peggy's sleep death receive the nearest thing to dignity, but the norm is injury, decomposition, or narrative shorthand. The book behaves like

a martyrology only in its insistence on remembrance: it records the unremarkable dead without granting them saintly deaths. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

8. The closing story contains no actual death, and that absence is architecturally active — QUOTE: "My mother isn't who she used to be." / "the death of our universe" / "Tell me about you, Kate." SOURCE: Negative finding; final movement from death-register to threatened but living relation GLOSS: "Drenched to the Bone" surrounds Jack with dementia, cancer anxiety, cosmic entropy, and scriptural language about eternal life, but no character dies. After six stories saturated with actual corpses or reported deaths, the final story stays with people who can still be heard, answered, and failed. Its ending therefore converts the collection's memorial problem into an ethical present-tense problem: what can one do before loss becomes irreversible? CONFIDENCE: STRONG

9. Death is not adjudicated as moral recompense — QUOTE: "Ashley was a bitch." / "However dishonest she was, she didn't deserve to die that way." / "What we did isn't going to hurt anybody." / "There was a pool of blood around her head" SOURCE: Anti-providential plot logic; refusal of a stable moral economy GLOSS: Ashley is deliberately murdered by Molly and Nonna, while Myra—whom the text gives many reasons to distrust—is accidentally killed in an obscene public scene; Nonna's own fraudulent injury precedes her unplanned fatal fall. These juxtapositions tempt a providential reading, but they do not sustain one: the cruel die, but so do the merely vulnerable, and perpetrators survive. The death sequence is therefore a catalogue of exposure and contingency, not divine sentencing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

10. "Through a Convent Gate" is a compressed recurrence that "A Prayer for Home" later opens out — QUOTE: "Mary has squash rot" / "She must be having blackouts and forgetting that she ordered. Or she's imagining that they are delivering the food. Mary has squash rot" / "I'm so hungry I could eat a nun's arse through a convent gate." SOURCE: Repetition-with-expansion; variant-story architecture GLOSS: The second story supplies the Christmas visit, catechetical argument, ornament theft, and retaliatory restaurant call in a compact form; the sixth restarts from the same Muldoon diagnosis and reruns the visit in an enlarged version before continuing into the healer, beach, and death. The recurrence is too exact to be mere atmosphere, but the book does not label it a sequel. It makes the reader experience the early story as a bead returned to later in a longer, darker rosary. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

11. Peggy and Mrs. Muldoon are altered doubles, not securely one character — QUOTE: "She was married once to a very handsome man named Jim" / "I played piano and sang at a nightclub in the Back Bay on Beacon Street" / "It's a celebration for both of us, a baptism of sorts, as we begin our new lives." SOURCE: Character re-composition; repeated widow/singer/sea-cure plot GLOSS: Both women are Irish-Catholic-adjacent, drink into confusion, mourn a husband named Jim, carry a past as a Back Bay singer, and receive an Assumption-day sea cure before death is interpreted as a journey home. The changed names, bodies, family positions, and narrators prevent a literal identity claim; the book presents a remade figure, not an explained continuity. What persists is a narrative role—the despised, theatrical widow whom a child learns to see otherwise. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

12. The grandmother and Nonna recur as a role, but the book does not authorize their literal merger — QUOTE: "Miracles do happen, ya know." / "No." / "You and I aren't like other people." SOURCE: Composite matriarch figure; negative finding on character identity GLOSS: Helen in "Assumptions" promotes the cure, commands prayer, and imagines miracles; Agnella/Nonna in the Molly stories organizes care with equal force but explicitly denies God and trains Molly in secrecy and advantage. Both are imperious household liturgists, thieves, protectors, and makers of scenes, which makes them formal counterparts. Yet their names, families, stated belief, and narrative worlds differ, so calling them the same woman would be invention rather than reading. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

13. The boy narrator and the dogs do not form hidden continuing identities — QUOTE: "I'm just codding ya, Jimmy" / "I'm Molly Bonamici." / "We saved Scruffy's life" / "Mom, Dad, Joey, me, and Saint Paul." / "The bulldog ran towards her body" SOURCE: Negative finding; recurrence of motifs rather than continued characters GLOSS: Jimmy of "Assumptions" is not textually assimilated to Molly, whose name, sex, family, and later narrative history are explicit; the collection juxtaposes their child witnessings without making them one person. Nor is Scruffy continued as Saint Paul or the bulldog: the animals form a repeated creaturely register—rescued companion, absurdly sacred pet name, scavenging witness—but not a single animal biography. The distinction matters because the book's design works by recomposition and echo, not by a solved family tree. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

14. The book stages three explicit theologies rather than one doctrine — QUOTE: "Faith is most important, Molly." / "I'm an atheist. I think religion is the cause of most of the world's troubles." / "There is no heaven. There is no God. I think when we die, we just rot and become dirt." / "Helping others is what God wants us to do." SOURCE: Competing catecheses: folk Catholicism, atheistic materialism, and active Christian ethics GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon and Ashley speak a devotional Christianity of faith, commandments, and substitutionary salvation; Molly and Nonna answer with intellectual unbelief and bodily finality. In "Drenched to the Bone," Mary Grace adds a third position: belief is not merely assent but helping others. The stories make these propositions audible in direct speech, then expose each speaker to hypocrisy, cruelty, grief, or instability rather than letting any single voice monopolize truth. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

15. Belief is repeatedly treated as social performance, while care remains a real act — QUOTE: "Just agree with others about certain things. Like church and God, and all those crazy saints." / "I was just trying to be a good Christian and offer help." / "We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way." SOURCE: The ethics of appearance versus diakonia; institutional and domestic religious speech GLOSS: Nonna teaches Molly to simulate assent for worldly success, and Ashley uses Christian identity as a credential, both of which make sacred language suspect. Yet the collection persistently leaves practical care visible: Peg finds Scruffy a home, people attempt CPR, Mary Grace insists on helping others, and the St. Francis sign names repair. Grace, where the book can recognize it, is consequently less a reward for correct doctrine than attention and action toward the damaged. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

16. The book does not adjudicate the afterlife; it stages an unresolved contradiction — QUOTE: "Finally she would be at home with her Jim." / "To heaven, Molly." / "I don't believe she passed to heaven, sir." / "prayers for home, wherever we believed we were going, would never be answered." SOURCE: Eschatological counterpoint; competing witnesses around the dead GLOSS: "Assumptions" imagines Peggy restored and received, whereas the last movement of "A Prayer for Home" insists that Mrs. Muldoon goes to earth and rot, and that prayer fails. No later narrator proves either position wrong. By ending with Jack's repair-minded but

unconverted attention rather than a revelation, "Drenched to the Bone" preserves the contradiction as the collection's theological condition. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

17. All seven stories are first-person; narrative mode offers no control group for the sacred layer — QUOTE: "I think it was then that the first throb of death's glower entered my consciousness." / "I'm Molly Bonamici." / "I thought a complete change would help me start over" SOURCE: Narrative-person count; first-person retrospective and dramatic narration GLOSS: "Assumptions" is narrated by Jimmy, stories two through six by Molly, and "Drenched to the Bone" by Jack: 7 first-person stories, 0 third-person stories. Sacred material is therefore not denser in one grammatical mode than another, because the book supplies no third-person comparison. What varies is the first-person witness: child wonder, Molly's chillingly self-justifying intelligence, and Jack's hesitant self-revision. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

18. The three explicitly sacred titles organize doctrinal possibility, threshold, and petition — QUOTE: "Assumptions" / "I'm so hungry I could eat a nun's arse through a convent gate." / "prayers for home, wherever we believed we were going, would never be answered." SOURCE: Title logic: Marian dogma, religious enclosure, and the petitionary form GLOSS: "Assumptions," pluralized, names both the Marian dogma and the book's unstable acts of belief; "Through a Convent Gate" turns a sacred threshold into a comic appetite in the phrase that supplies its title; "A Prayer for Home" makes the wished-for destination an unanswered prayer. In printed order, the sacred title words become progressively less secure: doctrine is followed by profanity, then by a petition the story denies. The titles therefore frame faith as a vocabulary under pressure rather than as a settled answer. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

19. The middle titles turn persons and objects into unexplicated emblems — QUOTE: "We screwed the mannequin together and baptized her 'Candice Kox.'" / "Here one minute, gone the next" / "I'm Myra. Myra Bocca." SOURCE: Title logic: simulacrum, vanitas emblem, and eponymous grotesque GLOSS: "The Mannequin" names the assembled false body at the centre of a real death; "Smoke Rings" names the disappearing emblem whose lesson is delivered immediately before Nonna's death; "Myra Bocca" offers only a person's name, refusing to announce fraud, judgment, or accident. Together, these titles withhold interpretation while their plots turn a toy body, a dissipating form, and a comic personality into death-bearing signs.

They are anti-hagiographic title forms: material, transient, and human rather than sanctified. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

20. The final title makes immersion a condition, not a sacrament — QUOTE: "And accept it that soon / You'll be drenched to the bone" / "Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone" / "For the times they are a-changin'" SOURCE: Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'"; closing-song structure GLOSS: "Drenched to the Bone" returns the book to water after the Assumption cure, but the governing water is rain and social weather, not blessed seawater. The Dylan lyric supplies change, danger, and a command to swim rather than a promise of rescue, and it arrives just before Jack's call to Kate. As the final title, it translates the collection's religious waters into a secular imperative to respond before one is overwhelmed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

21. The closing story offers only provisional grace, on the condition of listening — QUOTE: "But could my wounds, or those of anyone else, ever be really healed?" / "I hope that before long I will be able to see the way home." / "Tell me about you, Kate." SOURCE: Open-ended conversion scene; secularized confession and reparative attention GLOSS: Jack does not receive assurance from the church sign, and the narrative leaves both healing and "the way" as questions. His final call does, however, reverse the self-absorption for which Kate has reproached him and replaces monologue with inquiry. The collection therefore closes closer to grace than the nihilistic close of "A Prayer for Home," but it defines grace as an unfinished practice rather than a guaranteed destination. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

Part Three: Useless Things and Other Stories

The Concordance: Useless Things

BOOK TWO: *Useless Things and Other Stories*

Note: "Assumptions" and "Myra Bocca" in this collection are close variants of the same stories in Book One; entries below focus on material distinct to this collection, with cross-references noted. See "Cross-Book Repetitions" for side-by-side text.

"A Bath"

One-line summary: A teenage boy accompanies his abused mother to bathe his obese, aging grandmother, learning en route that he was likely conceived through assault, and that his grandmother too was struck by her husband.

73. **QUOTE:** "I'll take it from here, Billy." … I heard splashing and my grandmother's sighs as my mother rubbed her back." **SOURCE:** Baptismal/ablution imagery. **GLOSS:** The literal bathing of an elderly, incontinent woman by her daughter is staged with the ritual gravity of a cleansing rite. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
74. **QUOTE:** "Family first." **SOURCE:** Domestic creed functioning as quasi-catechetical maxim. **GLOSS:** Repeated as an article of faith that substitutes for formal doctrine in this family's practical theology. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
75. **QUOTE:** "The blue and red had transformed into shades of orange and yellow. The colors reminded me of the trees along the water." **SOURCE:** Aestheticized suffering, evocative of stained-glass color symbolism. **GLOSS:** Domestic-violence bruises are described in a palette recalling church windows, redemptive beauty found in wounds. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
76. **QUOTE:** "Promise me you'll stick to the story." / "Promise me you'll never lie to your grandmother again." **SOURCE:** Confessional structure (concealment, promise, absolution). **GLOSS:** A car ride and a kitchen table function as

secular confessional booths, with mutual promises standing in for absolution. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

77. **QUOTE:** "Nana put on her glasses and widened her eyes… 'I want to see. I'm your mother.'" **SOURCE:** Maternal authority as confessor-figure. **GLOSS:** The grandmother's insistence on "seeing" the wound recalls the priestly/confessor's demand for full disclosure before absolution can be granted. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
78. **QUOTE:** the mother is named "Grace." **SOURCE:** The theological virtue/gift of grace. **GLOSS:** A wounded, hiding, ultimately-restored woman bears the name of unmerited divine favor — irony and earnestness fused in naming. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
79. **QUOTE:** "That was Clew Bay in County Mayo. The photograph, I mean." … "I imagined my grandmother was thinking about an ocean three thousand miles away. She was swimming far into the sea." **SOURCE:** Water as ancestral/spiritual homeland, paralleling the seawater "cure" motif. **GLOSS:** Memory of the Irish sea substitutes for present consolation — water again functions as the site of grace-as-memory. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

"Catherine" (poem)

One-line summary: A grandson recalls his mother bathing his grandmother, who hides a donut and remembers gathering food from the Irish sea in her youth.

80. **QUOTE:** "embarrassed that you'd been caught with a sweet." **SOURCE:** Shame/confession over a minor transgression ("sin" of sugar). **GLOSS:** A trivial dietary indiscretion is treated with the emotional weight of confessional shame, continuing the collection's sugar/sin motif. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
81. **QUOTE:** "Up you go. On the count of three. One, two, three," **SOURCE:** Ritual lifting formula, functioning as a secular liturgical repetition (see Cross-Book Repetitions). **GLOSS:** The counted lift recurs as a quasi-liturgical refrain of bodily care, adapted from "A Bath," where the count is split by narration ("On the count of three." … "One, two, three.") and "Up you go" does not occur. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

82. **QUOTE:** "you were three thousand miles away, walking into the sea. / The water was colder, but its sweet memory was all you needed." **SOURCE:** Water as site of grace/memory (adapted from "A Bath," which reads "an ocean three thousand miles away. She was swimming far into the sea"). **GLOSS:** The poem restates the prose passage in altered wording, formally enacting the collection's technique of doubling scenes across genres. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
83. **QUOTE:** "Sea lettuce is what we called it… but it was good and we were happy." **SOURCE:** Bread-of-affliction/subsistence-as-blessing imagery (cf. Exodus 16, manna). **GLOSS:** Simple, scraped-together sustenance is remembered as sufficient blessing, a modest domestic manna. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.

"Useless Things"

One-line summary: Molly and Nonna bring the alcoholic Mrs. Muldoon to a fraudulent faith healer and then to the Feast of the Assumption beach cure, before discovering her decomposed suicide with a final gift. (An abridgment of "A Prayer for Home," which keeps the middle and cuts the opening and the close — see Cross-Book Repetitions for verbatim comparisons.)

84. **QUOTE:** "It seemed that I was engulfed by believers in those days. The Italians and the Irish were obsessed with church, religion, and the Pope." **SOURCE:** Framing statement on ethnic Catholic culture. **GLOSS:** Establishes the entire story's premise: total immersion in an inherited religious world regardless of personal conviction. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
85. **QUOTE:** "a flock of large black crows" outside the healer's building — "I hope they don't shit on us"… "it's good luck." **SOURCE:** Folk-superstition/omen reading alongside orthodox faith. **GLOSS:** Bird-omens (a pre-Christian survival) sit comfortably beside Catholic devotion in this milieu, exemplifying folk cure and superstition alongside orthodox belief. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
86. **QUOTE:** "I would like to be cured spiritually… I want my soul to be cleansed." **SOURCE:** Spiritual cleansing/purification (cf. Psalm 51:2, "wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity"). **GLOSS:** Mrs. Muldoon voices a genuine longing for

absolution beneath the parlor-trick trappings of the scene. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

87. **QUOTE:** "Darling, you've got to have faith." / "I don't believe it. It sounds ridiculous." **SOURCE:** Faith versus rational doubt. **GLOSS:** The recurring belief/unbelief dialectic that structures nearly every religious exchange in the trilogy. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
88. **QUOTE:** "August 15th, 1954. The happiest day of my life," inscribed on Mrs. Muldoon's wedding photograph, found beside her corpse days after the feast. **SOURCE:** The Feast of the Assumption date collapsing wedding, death, and Marian glorification into one day. **GLOSS:** Marriage, suicide, and the Marian feast converge on a single date, the collection's central symbolic device for fusing joy and mortality. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
89. **QUOTE:** "Do they teach you the Ten Commandments, the Our Father, and Hail Mary?… rosary beads and laminated novenas." **SOURCE:** Catechism and rosary, in "A Nun's Arse," which reprints the dialogue verbatim from "Through a Convent Gate." **GLOSS:** The catechism drill is not in the story "Useless Things" at all; it is recorded here beside that story because the two Muldoon stories share a cast, and it confirms the compositional technique of carrying whole dialogue blocks from one book into the next. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

"Honeymoon" (poem)

One-line summary: A son tends his elderly mother's cracked feet while looking at her honeymoon photograph.

90. **QUOTE:** "She asks me to put Bacitracin on her heel… I rub Aveeno on her feet." **SOURCE:** Foot-washing (John 13:1-17, Christ washing the disciples' feet). **GLOSS:** An utterly mundane act of drugstore-ointment care is structured as a devotional foot-washing rite. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
91. **QUOTE:** "I think of how far these feet have walked, / the tenderness at the bottom of her sole." **SOURCE:** Feet as sites of suffering and pilgrimage, paralleling "the swollen feet that life had crucified" from the "Assumptions" closing poem. **GLOSS:** A quiet, secular restatement of the Passion-adjacent wounded-feet motif that recurs across the trilogy. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

92. **QUOTE:** "Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt." **SOURCE:** Kneeling as a devotional posture. **GLOSS:** Physical posture of prayer/service applied to filial caregiving, sanctifying an ordinary domestic gesture. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
93. **QUOTE:** "Someday later, / I'll hold the photo, / remember this night." **SOURCE:** Memory-as-relic-keeping. **GLOSS:** A photograph functions as a devotional keepsake, akin to venerating a relic of a beloved's earlier, unblemished self. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.

"A Nun's Arse"

One-line summary: Molly and Nonna visit the drunk, dying Mrs. Muldoon at Christmas, pilfer her ornaments, and Molly avenges an insult with a prank Chinese-food order. (A verbatim reprint of "Through a Convent Gate" under a new title — see Cross-Book Repetitions.)

94. **QUOTE:** "You are not smarter than God, Molly." **SOURCE:** Rebuke invoking divine authority. **GLOSS:** Identical rebuke to that in "Through a Convent Gate," confirming the doubled composition of the scene. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
95. **QUOTE:** "Addiction to alcohol is a terrible thing." **SOURCE:** Compassion toward besetting sin/affliction. **GLOSS:** Frames alcoholism as affliction warranting mercy rather than judgment, aligning with the corporal works of mercy. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
96. **QUOTE:** "I'm so hungry I could eat a nun's arse through a convent gate." **SOURCE:** Profane idiom desecrating consecrated virtue (the nun). **GLOSS:** Title-bearing punchline, identical to "Through a Convent Gate," used here as Molly's own vengeful mimicry of Mrs. Muldoon. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

"Drenched to the Bone"

(Identical in substance to the Book One version; see entries 61-72 above and Cross-Book Repetitions.)

97. **QUOTE:** "Mary Grace snickers and opens Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*." **SOURCE:** Flannery O'Connor's novel of a false-prophet preacher and grotesque Southern religiosity. **GLOSS:** A devout, disturbed student reading

O'Connor mid-class signals the story's affinity with O'Connor's own fusion of violence and grace (treated further in the Literary Allusions section below). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

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1. A Bath — QUOTE: "We were driving on the Jamaicaway, a curvy four-lane parkway in Boston. The pond was on our left… A mother and daughter drowned. After that, swimming was forbidden." SOURCE: Baptismal/drowning-water inversion; cf. the forbidden waters of Genesis flood typology and the "living water" tradition (John 4:14) turned lethal. GLOSS: The story opens beside water that once killed a mother and daughter and is now forbidden — a dark mirror of the healing "cure in the water" that structures the Assumption-feast stories elsewhere in the collection; here the mother-daughter pair (Grace and Billy's grandmother, by implication) approach a bath that is caretaking rather than baptism, but the drowned mother-and-daughter detail plants the same water-as-death/water-as-cleansing doubleness that governs "Catherine" and "Useless Things." CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

2. A Bath — QUOTE: "I told her I was artificially inseminated. I said I always wanted a child and could take care of the baby myself." SOURCE: Parody of the Virgin Birth (Luke 1:34-35, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?… The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee"). GLOSS: Grace's cover story for an unremembered, non-consensual conception at a frat party structurally repeats Mary's virginal conception narrative — a woman pregnant without a known father, inventing a miraculous-sounding explanation her own mother accepts on faith ("If she didn't believe me, she wouldn't have said so"). The scene is a profane annunciation, with "Family first" standing in for fiat. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

3. A Bath — QUOTE: "It needs to breathe, Grace. Wash your face straightaway. There's a clean washcloth on the shelf above the toilet." SOURCE: Ritual ablution / confession before absolution (cf. the woman washing Christ's feet, Luke 7:38, and baptismal "washing of regeneration," Titus 3:5). GLOSS: Nana's command that the make-up covering the bruises be washed away so the wound "can breathe" functions as a demand for confession — concealment must be stripped before truth (and eventually the real story of the abusive boyfriend) can surface; the washcloth becomes an instrument of forced disclosure rather than mere hygiene. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

4. A Bath — QUOTE: "This is the second fall you've had in three months. I don't understand it, Gracie." SOURCE: Peter's triple denial / the fall motif (Luke 22:54-62); also the repeated falls of Christ on the Via Dolorosa (Stations of the Cross). GLOSS: "Fall" is doubled here — the stepladder lie and the earlier unmentioned "fall" both stand in for domestic violence Grace will not name; counting her falls faintly echoes the ritual counting of the Stations, where repeated falling is the visible sign of a hidden ordeal being carried. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

5. A Bath — QUOTE: "She lived on the second floor of a three-decker. … 'You know what she always says. "Family first."'" SOURCE: Domestic creed as informal catechism/commandment (cf. "Honour thy father and thy mother," Exodus 20:12). GLOSS: "Family first" is presented as Nana's summary law, functioning the way a catechism answer would — a compressed household commandment recited by rote, invoked here to explain both loyalty and silence about abuse. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

6. A Bath — QUOTE: "To be a competitive swimmer. But we were poor, and poor women had little chance of pursuing such a dream." SOURCE: 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 ("God hath chosen the foolish things… the weak things… the base things… and things which are despised"). GLOSS: Nana's suppressed girlhood ambition — swimming, the very water-cure motif sacralized elsewhere in the collection — is foreclosed by poverty; the "useless things" theology of the title story (the despised and overlooked things God chooses) is quietly rehearsed here in a woman whose only remaining "swimming" is a supervised bath. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

7. A Bath — QUOTE: "He had a gentle voice and light blue eyes like you. He was handsome. And for a few moments before he closed the bedroom door and left, he seemed kind." SOURCE: The absent, half-glimpsed father as a type of the hidden God (cf. Job 23:8-9, "I go forward, but he is not there… I cannot behold him"). GLOSS: Billy's unknown father, described only in fragments of kindness before vanishing, structurally parallels the boy's later hunger for a origin story he can never fully possess — an absent-father motif with theological resonance, given the story's proximity to the collection's recurring Marian/annunciation echoes. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

8. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "Catherine lives up in Massachusetts. That's where Myra and I are from. The sister hates Myra. They haven't talked in years." SOURCE: St. Catherine of Siena, patron of estranged/quarreling families and of setting wrongs right through plain speech; also St. Catherine of Alexandria, associated with the breaking wheel and unyielding truth-telling against a tyrant. GLOSS: Named only once and never appearing, Myra's estranged sister Catherine, as Alexander Michaelis describes her, functions as an off-stage figure of righteous separation from a "sociopathic," lying woman (Myra) — a faint echo of Catherine of Siena's reputation for refusing to be reconciled with corruption. The name surfaces exactly where the text is cataloguing Myra's compulsive deceit, making the withheld Catherine a silent moral foil. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

9. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "And good-looking in a Robert DeNiro type of way." SOURCE: Popular hagiography of a secular "icon"; functions as vernacular ekphrasis. GLOSS: Molly's offhand celebrity comparison for Alexander Michaelis is part of the story's habit of substituting movie-star faces (James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Fred Astaire and Liza Minelli on the Backyard Café walls; Bette Davis on the Espresso Boys television, watched by a "Robert Redford lookalike") for the icons and saints that would have hung on an older generation's walls — a secularized iconostasis of framed photographs at the Backyard Café. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

10. Myra Bocca — QUOTE: "a handsome Robert Redford lookalike, who kept saying, 'too much fun'" SOURCE: Same secular-icon pattern as above; paired specifically with the black-and-white film "All About Eve" playing in-frame. GLOSS: The unnamed "lookalike" sits watching a film prophesying Myra's death ("It's going to be a bumpy night") — a background icon presiding wordlessly over a scene of foreshadowed judgment, in the same way saints' portraits preside over a wake. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

11. A Nun's Arse — QUOTE: "Do you know there's approximately 153,400 deaths per day, or a little more than 100 per minute?… We are all specks of dust floating in an enormous universe." SOURCE: Genesis 3:19 ("for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"); Ecclesiastes 3:20 ("all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again"). GLOSS: Molly's precociously morbid statistic, delivered flatly at the kitchen table, restates the Ash Wednesday formula in secular, quantified form — mortality reduced

to an epidemiological rate rather than a memento mori, which is precisely what scandalizes Mrs. Muldoon. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

12. A Nun's Arse — QUOTE: "Your granddaughter is getting too big for her britches." SOURCE: Proverbs 16:18 ("Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"). GLOSS: A stock idiom of pride-correction, deployed by Mrs. Muldoon immediately after Molly's dust-and-death speech — folk proverb standing in for the scriptural warning against intellectual pride, spoken by a woman whose death from a hidden, prideful secrecy is narrated in the preceding story, "Useless Things" (the trash bags, the overdose). CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

13. Useless Things — QUOTE: "Nonna and I drove in her Plymouth Fury to Mrs. Muldoon's house" SOURCE: The "Fury" as a debased echo of divine wrath (cf. "the fury of the LORD," Isaiah 51:17, 20). GLOSS: A comic, purely incidental car model name that nonetheless rides through a story obsessed with false miracles, prophesied deaths, and an "Angel of Death" — the vehicle's brand name quietly primes the register of impending judgment that Lady Jane will soon voice aloud. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

14. Useless Things — QUOTE: "She had a red dot between her beautifully shaped arched brows… a Bindi or Kumkum, marking a spiritual center or chakra, placed there out of respect for an inner guru" SOURCE: Comparative-religion aside functioning like a mock ash-cross (Ash Wednesday's forehead mark, "Remember, man, that thou art dust"). GLOSS: The Hindu woman's forehead mark is described in the paragraph after the one where Catholic Nonna fabricates a mortal illness (leukemia) to cut the healing line — two different forehead-adjacent sacred/superstitious economies (a real devotional mark, a fake terminal diagnosis) juxtaposed without comment. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

15. Useless Things — QUOTE: "I managed to create a string of saliva that dropped like the thread of a spider's web hanging off the bottom of my chin." SOURCE: Grotesque parody of stigmata/visible suffering used to fake sanctity or terminal illness for gain, inverting hagiographic bodily signs (e.g., weeping icons, stigmatic wounds) as tools of a lie rather than evidence of grace. GLOSS: Molly performs disability to jump a healing-line queue, producing a bodily "sign" (drool as web-thread) exactly where more sincere pilgrims display real suffering — a small, cruel

travesty of the marks that traditionally authenticate a miracle. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

16. Useless Things — QUOTE: "the pupils were fixed and dilated… A bloody maggot emerged from her right ear." SOURCE: Anti-hagiographic incorruption; inverts the folk-Catholic expectation of the "incorrupt" saint's body (e.g., St. Bernadette, St. Catherine Labouré) with grotesque, ordinary decay. GLOSS: Where hagiography prizes bodies that resist corruption as proof of sanctity, Mrs. Muldoon's corpse is presented in unsparing physical decay — the collection's most literal answer to its own title, since this "useless" body gets no miraculous preservation, only a maggot and a gift box. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

17. Useless Things — QUOTE: "Inside was a gold necklace with an emerald and diamond cross." / "'A useless thing.'" SOURCE: 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 (God's choice of "foolish," "weak," and "despised" things) and the stone the builders rejected (Psalm 118:22). GLOSS: The story's closing line names its own governing theology outright: a literal cross, given as a dying woman's last gift, is dismissed by the child narrator as "a useless thing" — the exact despised object the title has been training the reader to recognize as secretly precious, making this the collection's most direct, if understated, enactment of the rejected-stone/foolish-things paradox. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

18. Honeymoon — QUOTE: "She asks me to put Bacitracin on her heel. / 'Do you see a small cut?'" SOURCE: Genesis 3:15 ("it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel") — the protoevangelium's heel-wound. GLOSS: The poem's opening wound is specifically located at the heel, the body part singled out in the first messianic prophecy of Genesis; tending a small, hidden heel-cut with ointment quietly literalizes the "bruised heel" imagery beneath the poem's overt foot-washing/Bacitracin devotion already noted elsewhere. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

19. Honeymoon — QUOTE: "she resembles Elizabeth Taylor in a hat." SOURCE: Secular-icon substitution (as in "Myra Bocca" above) standing in for the wedding-photo iconography of saints or the Virgin. GLOSS: The honeymoon photograph is glossed through a movie-star comparison rather than any devotional image, continuing the collection's habit of letting Hollywood faces do the work that a holy

card would do in an older generation's house — the closest thing this poem has to an icon of the bride. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

20. Honeymoon — QUOTE: "Rain taps a pane. / Thunder booms." SOURCE: Theophanic storm imagery (Exodus 19:16, "thunders and lightnings," at Sinai; also the Assumption story's own "heat lightening" and "thunderhead gray" cloud of Titian's Assunta). GLOSS: A minor weather beat inside an intimate, quiet domestic scene borrows the collection's recurring storm-as-divine-presence vocabulary (seen fully worked out around the Assumption feast and again in "Drenched to the Bone"), suggesting the poem's foot-washing tenderness is being staged, however faintly, under a theophanic sky. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

21. A Nun's Arse — QUOTE: "Mary has squash rot," Nonna said… "It means your brain is rotted from too much alcohol." SOURCE: Folk-diagnostic idiom parodying possession/madness narratives (cf. the Gerasene demoniac, Mark 5:1-13, whose affliction is likewise named and explained by others rather than the sufferer). GLOSS: "Squash rot" functions as this milieu's folk-clinical name for what earlier generations might have called possession or a curse — an invented ailment given the gravity of a diagnosis, continuing the collection's pattern of finding a patron-saint-adjacent explanatory frame (Mrs. Fleming's alopecia and gout, Mrs. Muldoon's diabetes) for suffering that resists ordinary medicine. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

22. A Nun's Arse — QUOTE: "God bless the people who make us laugh." SOURCE: The Beatitudes' blessing formula (Matthew 5:3-11, "Blessed are…"). GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon's throwaway benediction over dead comediennes ("God bless the people who make us laugh") adopts the cadence of a Beatitude, extending sanctifying blessing to an entertainer (Vivian Vance) in the same conversational breath used elsewhere to invoke saints and the dead — comedy folded into the register of intercessory prayer. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

23. A Nun's Arse — QUOTE: "Faith is most important, Molly." She picked up rosary beads and laminated novenas that were on the table. She shook the beads. SOURCE: The rosary as devotional object physically present but functionally decorative (cf. James 2:20, "faith without works is dead"). GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon invokes faith and brandishes her rosary as a rhetorical weapon in an argument about IQ scores and "free thinking," rather than in prayer — the sacred object handled but not used

devotionally, a small anticlimax that matches the collection's recurring gap between professed and practiced belief. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

24. A Nun's Arse — QUOTE: "I'm so hungry I could eat a nun's arse through a convent gate." SOURCE: Blasphemy as inverted grace-before-meals; profanity functioning as a mock table-blessing. GLOSS: Beyond its already-noted profane fusion of sacred enclosure and appetite, the line's placement — Molly phones in a fraudulent order and delivers the joke as her sign-off — makes it function structurally like a grace or benediction said over a (stolen, fictitious) meal, the collection's most cynical eucharistic inversion. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

25. Drenched to the Bone — QUOTE: "her hands behind her back, bracing the edge of the sink" … "I sat on the edge of the tub, feeling a pit in my stomach" SOURCE: The bathroom-as-confessional staging recurring across the collection (cf. "A Bath"). GLOSS: Jack and Kate's marriage ends in a bathroom, mirroring the collection's other bathroom scenes ("A Bath," Peg's "little girls room") where truths are washed into the open; here the water fixtures (sink, tub) frame a confession of infidelity rather than a literal washing, extending the collection's use of plumbing as the site where hidden things surface. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

26. Drenched to the Bone — QUOTE: "Bags of Lays potato chips, Doritos, Starbursts, Cheetos, Skittles… lie on the floor in a jumbled mess. Students, laughing and screaming, crouch, dive, slide, and shove each other to get the goods." SOURCE: Manna in the wilderness scavenged in disorder (Exodus 16:16-20, where those who gathered too much found it bred worms) and the feeding-of-the-multitude aftermath ("gather up the fragments," John 6:12). GLOSS: A vending-machine break-in becomes an inverted manna story — food scattered on the ground and seized without order or gratitude, the opposite of the careful gathering-up of fragments practiced elsewhere in the collection (Solomon's Bakery's day-old bread). The chaos anticipates the story's explicit Thoreau/civil-disobedience theme of lawlessness. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

27. Drenched to the Bone — QUOTE: "Ms. Jackson's impeccably clean and shiny blond hair glitters like a helmet under the fluorescent light." SOURCE: The "helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17) as part of the whole armor of God. GLOSS: The principal's hair described as an armor-like "helmet" fits a passage that immediately turns to her

defensive crouching over broken glass and her fear of lawsuits — a secular administrator armored against her school's disorder in language borrowed from Pauline spiritual warfare. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

28. Assumptions, the basement piano — QUOTE: "In the knotty pine basement of Peggy's home was a beautiful Steinway piano." SOURCE: Domestic music as a mnemonic relic; vernacular song tradition GLOSS: The piano is not consecrated, inherited, or prayed over; it is furniture until Peggy's damaged voice makes it the site where the boy first recognizes her grief. It therefore carries presence only through use and recollection, like a relic whose efficacy depends on a witness rather than on the object itself. The collection admits this kind of usefulness: a thing becomes valuable when it keeps a person audible without replacing her. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

29. A Bath, the photograph used as a screen — QUOTE: "My grandmother quickly hid her donut behind an old photograph." SOURCE: Domestic photograph as a secular holy card; negative case GLOSS: The photograph is not reverently displayed here but used to conceal a forbidden sweet, so it resists a simple relic reading. Yet its very availability as a screen suggests that the past is close at hand in Nana's room, usable and handled rather than ceremonially protected. The book's objects are not holy merely because they are old; their domestic purposes can be evasive, comic, and still affectionate. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

30. A Bath, fingers on the glass — QUOTE: "I noticed age spots on her chubby fingers when she touched the glass." SOURCE: Relic-veneration by touch; 1 Corinthians 6:19 (the body as temple) GLOSS: The sentence makes the aged hand, not the picture, the immediate object of attention: the photograph's glass receives a marked, living touch. It is a small devotional-looking contact with a former body, but the story refuses to separate the present flesh from the image it contemplates. Against the ideal of an immaculate temple, age spots become part of the body through which memory is transmitted. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

31. A Bath, makeup smeared by touch — QUOTE: "I touched her face and smeared the colored powder." SOURCE: Ablution and the removal of cosmetic concealment; negative parallel to anointing GLOSS: Billy's touch does not heal Grace's bruises; it accidentally exposes the cover she has made over them. The powder is a cosmetic

counter-sacramental: it alters the visible body while leaving violence intact beneath it. This is a temple tested by violation, and the story grants it value by insisting that the injured face be seen rather than prettified. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

32. Myra Bocca, the display case — QUOTE: "crystals and gemstones, silver and pewter jewelry, chalices, glass skulls, and crystal balls." SOURCE: Catholic sacramentals and reliquaries; commercialized New Age devotion GLOSS: Chalices enter a merchandise list beside skulls and crystal balls, so no object retains a stable liturgical dignity. The case mimics a devotional cabinet, but its logic is retail accumulation rather than prayer, inheritance, or service. This is a strong negative answer to the cult of things: the book distinguishes objects that solicit purchase from objects that bear the difficult presence of another person. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

33. Myra Bocca, portable devotional goods — QUOTE: "books, tarot cards, essential oils, prayer flags, greeting cards, postcards, photo frames" SOURCE: Sacramentals, holy cards, and home altars; negative case GLOSS: Prayer flags, cards, and frames could support domestic devotion, but the undifferentiated catalogue turns them into interchangeable stock. The inclusion of photo frames is telling: even the apparatus for holding a beloved face is for sale alongside divination and scent. The story does not deny that ordinary things can mediate feeling; it distrusts a shop that prepackages mediation itself. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

34. Myra Bocca, jewelry against flesh — QUOTE: "I noticed a gaudy most-likely fake ruby ring and several age spots." SOURCE: Fetish versus relic; Catholic ring symbolism as a negative parallel GLOSS: The ring invites the reader to judge its authenticity, but the age spots make the hand's mortality more insistent than its ornament. Myra's jewelry functions as a fetish of glamour, a thing attempting to substitute status for a person. The line quietly defeats that substitution: the body bearing the ring remains legible, aging, and irreducible to it. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

35. Myra Bocca, the credit card on the table — QUOTE: "I opened my purse and threw my credit card on the table." SOURCE: John 12:6 (the money box); money as anti-relic GLOSS: The card has no devotional aura at all: it is a practical token of trust made vulnerable by a social encounter. Its theft turns an object meant to settle a shared meal into a substitute for relationship and a vehicle of fraud. Unlike a relic, it

carries no beloved presence; its value is purely transferable, which makes Myra's appropriation starkly anti-sacramental. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

36. Myra Bocca, arranging the trinkets — QUOTE: "Myra was on her knees behind the counter in the back, arranging new-age trinkets." SOURCE: Arrangement of sacramentals on a home altar; parody of devotional care GLOSS: Kneeling and arranging can resemble altar service, but the counter and the dismissive word "trinkets" prevent consecration. Myra's posture is the collection's clearest image of an object-cult without charity: attention is lavished on saleable things, not on a suffering person. The scene is sceptical rather than merely mocking, because it shows how easily the gestures of reverence can be detached from their ethical object. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

37. Myra Bocca, dentures in the street — QUOTE: "Her dentures lay on the street, smeared with blood and phlegm." SOURCE: 1 Corinthians 6:19 (the body as temple); anti-relic and grotesque body GLOSS: The dentures, which ordinarily let a face speak and eat, are expelled from the body and reduced to contaminated debris. The image makes a person appear frighteningly assemblable, as if mouth, bone, clothing, and flesh could be scattered objects. Yet the narration's pity prevents the reduction from becoming its own final judgment: bodily inviolability is precisely what the violence has breached. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

38. Useless Things, the empty pill bottle — QUOTE: "Next to where the photograph had lain was an empty pill bottle." SOURCE: Relic and memento mori; negative case GLOSS: The bottle lies beside the photograph but does not become a relic; it offers physical evidence without yielding a consoling explanation. Its proximity to the image makes memory and medication equally material, while refusing to make either sacred. The collection is sceptical of resurrectional interpretation here: an object remaining after a death proves only that something has been used up. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

39. Useless Things, the body's waste on the floor — QUOTE: "There were two shimmering pools of urine on the mahogany floor at each side of the chair, as well as feces on the seat cushion." SOURCE: Ecclesiastes 3:20 (return to dust); the body as temple under degradation GLOSS: The polished floor and the word "shimmering" do not transfigure the waste; they sharpen the indignity of a body no longer under

voluntary control. This is an uncompromising negative test of temple language, because no purity is restored and no ritual cleanses the scene. Still, Molly stays close enough to touch the corpse elsewhere in the sequence, so degradation does not cancel the dead woman's claim on attention. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

40. A Nun's Arse, the heirloom refused — QUOTE: "The girl in the store, a pudgy midget, said it was a specialty item." SOURCE: Domestic heirloom practice; negative case GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon's Christmas tree is sold as a future heirloom, but her answer that she has no one to leave it to exposes the commercial promise as empty. The object cannot manufacture descendants, memory, or a household cult merely by being labelled special. This is one of the book's plainest answers to its title: usefulness is relational, not a quality guaranteed by price, rarity, or longevity. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

41. A Nun's Arse, ornaments removed — QUOTE: "I did just that, bringing her two translucent balls and one red one." SOURCE: Relic-taking and the domestic Christmas tree; inverted devotional practice GLOSS: Nonna has Molly remove the ornaments from a lonely woman's tree, treating portable decorations as if they were transferable relics. The act resembles translation of a relic only in its movement from one household to another; ethically it is theft, not veneration. The book refuses to sentimentalize salvage when it ignores the owner whose presence made the things meaningful. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

42. A Nun's Arse, spoiled cream — QUOTE: "She poured it down the sink and ran hot water." SOURCE: Domestic disposal; negative case for food as sacrament GLOSS: This is the collection's deliberately untransfigured food: spoiled cream is neither feast nor offering but something to discard. The practical action matters because it keeps the book from making every kitchen object Eucharistic. Food can become sacramental when shared as care, but here its spoiled materiality resists that reading completely. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

43. Myra Bocca, meatloaf discarded from the body — QUOTE: "She picked a bit of meatloaf off her lap and threw it on the floor." SOURCE: Food as anti-sacrament; negative case GLOSS: The dropped food receives no attention as nourishment, gift, or communal meal; it becomes litter after touching the clothed body. The gesture joins appetite to contempt and converts a restaurant's meal into waste. It is anti-

sentimental evidence that eating together does not automatically create communion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

44. Drenched to the Bone, the broken vending machine — QUOTE: "Someone has smashed the glass front of a vending machine." SOURCE: Broken glass as a bodily hazard; negative case for food as sacrament GLOSS: The machine's injury releases food but immediately makes the corridor dangerous to bodies. Its contents have no sacramental abundance: they provoke grabbing, not feeding, and the first adult concern is a cut skin and a lawsuit. The episode makes utility impersonal—the machine distributes snacks—while care begins only when people must protect one another from its broken matter. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

45. Drenched to the Bone, Skittles left behind — QUOTE: "To our amazement, everything is gone except for a ripped bag of skittles, the contents of which are spread across the floor." SOURCE: Waste and discard; negative case GLOSS: After the crowd has seized what it wants, the remaining candy is not salvaged or blessed; it is a sticky residue of collective appetite. Nothing discarded returns in this scene, and no narrative effort grants the sweets symbolic restoration. The movement is therefore not resurrectional but frankly entropic. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

46. Drenched to the Bone, picking up glass — QUOTE: "She squats down to pick up a big piece of glass." SOURCE: Matthew 25:40 (care for the vulnerable); practical protection as a corporal work GLOSS: Jackson's act is bureaucratically motivated by fear of injury and liability, but it is still an immediate removal of danger from children's path. The body is treated as vulnerable rather than expendable, even in an institution that often fails it. The book's ethic appears in such compromised gestures: care need not be pure to be real. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

47. Drenched to the Bone, a textbook becomes a weapon — QUOTE: "She throws her psychology textbook at Turpin and almost hits him in the head." SOURCE: Book as object; negative case for literary or sacred instruction GLOSS: A textbook designed to interpret the mind becomes an instrument aimed at a head, collapsing education into bodily threat. The scene gives no mystical value to the book and makes no claim that learning prevents violence. It is an important negative case beside the collection's Bibles, photographs, and devotional goods: written matter can be

furniture, evidence, weapon, or relic according to its handling. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

48. Drenched to the Bone, the keyed car — QUOTE: "Someone has keyed her car from front to back on the driver's side." SOURCE: Wound imagery; negative parallel to stigmata GLOSS: The long scratch converts Jackson's car into a wounded surface, but the text keeps the injury resolutely secular and repairable. It does not become a meaningful suffering or a sign of redemption; it is vandalism in a world of broken systems. This restraint matters: not every mark is a sacred wound, and the collection can let damage remain damage. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

49. Drenched to the Bone, clearing the windshield — QUOTE: "I put the wipers on high and rub the inside of the fogged-up windshield." SOURCE: Examination of conscience; vision as a negative devotional parallel GLOSS: Jack handles the car's small mechanisms to recover sight while the story asks whether he can see his own failures and Kate's life. The windshield is not a sacramental object, and its clearing brings no revelation beyond a temporary view of the road. That limitation is crucial: his subsequent apology is a choice, not a miracle produced by the thing he touches. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

50. Honeymoon, the child-parent reversal — QUOTE: "My parents could be my children." SOURCE: Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:12); filial care and aging GLOSS: The poem states bluntly that aging reverses the expected direction of dependence. The body is not an object here but a person whose rough feet, sleeping chest, and remembered photograph require the speaker's service. Its domestic care resembles a rite without promising cure: the speaker can ease one hurt, not restore the earlier bodies preserved in the picture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

51. A Bath, the mint from the handbag — QUOTE: "My grandmother rolled her eyes and gave me a mint from her black handbag." SOURCE: Domestic food-gift; negative case for communion GLOSS: The mint is a small, private consolation offered amid dirty dishes, family conflict, and the elder's isolation. It resembles a communion morsel only at the most modest level of being received by hand; the text gives it no liturgical status. Its value is relational and momentary, which is exactly why the collection does not agree that small things are useless. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

52. A Bath, first and last sentences — QUOTE: "We won't stay long," my mother said. / "For a few moments, the three of us had all we ever needed." SOURCE: Linear domestic narrative; no scriptural or liturgical frame. GLOSS: The action proceeds without a frame narrator from the drive, through the revelation of Grace's abuse and parentage, to Nana's bath; the final inward tableau supplies emotional closure rather than a return to an originating scene. Water makes a loose formal circuit—pond, washed face, bath, imagined Irish sea—but religious language appears nowhere in that circuit. Of the three pieces, this is not a sacred structural frame but a secular family crisis organized by recurring water. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

53. A Bath, Nana's reduced "swimming" — QUOTE: "The only swimming I do now is in the bathtub." SOURCE: Bathing and water as literal domestic care; negative comparison with baptismal ablution. GLOSS: The title withholds overt devotional freight: Nana calls the bath a diminished substitute for the competitive swimming poverty denied her, not a cleansing, cure, or rebirth. The water's strongest stated meaning is bodily limitation and remembered aspiration. Any baptismal resonance is therefore imposed by the reader rather than spoken by the story. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

54. A Bath, the crisis response — QUOTE: "Billy, pour your mother some whiskey. It's under the sink." SOURCE: Negative finding: no prayer, blessing, scripture, or pious formula is spoken in the abuse disclosure. GLOSS: At the moment most likely to invite a prayer, Nana prescribes whiskey, embraces Grace, asks questions, and gives practical counsel. Grace, Nana, and Billy never invoke God, a saint, church, or ritual language. This decisively breaks the collection-wide tendency for an older woman to carry sacred speech: here the older woman carries care without liturgy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

55. A Bath, Nana's consolation — QUOTE: "She kissed my mother's forehead." SOURCE: Maternal touch; no identifiable liturgical form. GLOSS: The forehead kiss follows Nana's insistence that Grace leave O'Toole and is the story's nearest equivalent to a blessing. Yet the text neither names it a blessing nor joins it to prayer; its force is plainly familial and tactile. The body is cared for as a hurt person, not consecrated as an object. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

56. A Bath, Clew Bay's food-work — QUOTE: "I was walking toward the boulder to scrape vegetation." SOURCE: Irish domestic subsistence; food without Eucharistic language. GLOSS: Nana's County Mayo memory gives the Irish setting a material register: the shore provides sea lettuce for dinner, not sacramental seawater or a Marian cure. Her account treats food as survival and shared happiness, with no grace, blessing, hymn, or church attached. Irish inheritance is present, but Irish-Catholic devotion is conspicuously not activated in this story. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

57. A Bath, the only song — QUOTE: "Taylor Swift sang, promising a guy he'd never find another like her." SOURCE: Contemporary popular song; negative finding on hymns and the listed literary canon. GLOSS: The audible music is a radio pop song interrupting Billy's disgust after Grace describes the assault, not a hymn or devotional song. None of Joyce, Yeats, Dante, O'Connor, Hopkins, Dickinson, or Whitman is invoked in this piece. Its sole named cultural sound keeps the car scene contemporary and secular. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

6b. Catherine restages A Bath's opening scene as verse — QUOTE (Catherine): "When we arrived, you hid the donut behind the picture." QUOTE (A Bath): "My grandmother quickly hid her donut behind an old photograph." SOURCE: "A Bath" and "Catherine," the same collection GLOSS: The collection contains a prose/verse doublet of a single visit: "A Bath" narrates the whole afternoon, including Billy's mother's bruises and the drive; "Catherine" isolates one moment from that same visit — the hidden donut, the old photograph, the walk to the bath — and renders it as lineated verse addressed directly to the grandmother as "you." The doubling is a formal choice: the same material gets a wider, dialogue-driven prose treatment and a compressed, address-based lyric treatment, and both pieces end on the grandmother's imagined sea-memory, the prose adding the mother's and Billy's feelings. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

58. Catherine, first and last lines — QUOTE: "When we arrived, you hid the donut behind the picture." / "The water was colder, but its sweet memory was all you needed." SOURCE: Lineated second-person lyric; no scriptural, liturgical, or frame narrative. GLOSS: Despite the task's collective label of "stories," this collection text is visibly a seven-stanza free-verse lyric, addressed to the grandmother as "you." It moves in a compact sequence from kitchen photograph to bath to sea-memory, so the ocean image gives it a circular imagistic ending rather than a narrated frame.

Religious material is absent throughout; the water remains memory, hunger, and bodily care. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

59. Catherine, the unnamed woman in the photograph — QUOTE: "That's me." You pointed to your former self, wearing a bathing suit like a dress. SOURCE: Negative onomastic finding; no saint's name or hagiographic reference. GLOSS: The poem's titled Catherine never identifies a character named Catherine in its body; it gives us a grandmother, mother, and Jimmy instead. The bare title therefore does not activate St. Catherine, a saint's legend, or a religious namesake within this text. Its primary work is intimate address and remembered identity, not hagiography. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

60. Catherine, sea lettuce stew — QUOTE: "We scraped the rocks and made stew." SOURCE: Food as subsistence rather than Eucharist. GLOSS: The grandmother's remembered meal is made by gathering shore vegetation, a concrete domestic labor rather than a blessed or shared sacramental meal. Her following claim that the food was enough is affectively rich, but the poem supplies no bread, altar, grace, or eucharistic vocabulary. This is food as remembered sufficiency, not food as sacrament. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

61. Catherine, the bath's speech and silence — QUOTE: "She blathered on about your eating habits and hygiene." SOURCE: Negative finding: domestic scolding replaces devotional speech. GLOSS: The mother's speech at the bath is secularly managerial—diabetes, hidden sweets, hygiene—while the grandmother's response is silence and sighing. No one prays over the elder, blesses the water, or names suffering in religious terms. The crisis is small but bodily, and its unliturgical treatment again breaks the older-female sacred-speech pattern. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

62. Catherine, the collection text and the separately catalogued poem — QUOTE: Collection text: "As she eased you into the warm bath"; separately catalogued poem: "As warm water eased over your skin." SOURCE: The collection's "Catherine" and the separately catalogued poem "Catherine"; parallel bathing image. GLOSS: These are not entirely unrelated works: both put warm bathwater over an aged woman's body and turn that care toward remembered swimming. They are nevertheless distinct texts, with different phrasing and different narrative scale—the collection lyric's

Clew Bay is "three thousand miles away," while the recorded poem places its swimmer "over 29,000 miles away." The shared title and bathing/sea-memory complex establish a revisionary relation, not an identity. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

63. Honeymoon, first and last lines — QUOTE: "She asks me to put Bacitracin on her heel." / "and feel her hand in mine." SOURCE: Linear domestic lyric; no sacramental marriage frame. GLOSS: The poem begins with a mother's minor wound, pauses at a honeymoon photograph, and ends in the speaker's projected memory of her; it is a linear bedside meditation rather than a circular return to the wedding. No wedding rite, church, vow, blessing, or divine witness appears. "Honeymoon" names a secular photograph and an earlier life, not marriage as a sacrament. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

64. Honeymoon, the photograph's costume — QUOTE: "Both dressed in their best attire." SOURCE: Wedding-image convention without liturgical detail. GLOSS: The picture gives the title its only marital evidence, but the description records dress, expression, and a movie-star comparison rather than ceremony. The bride and groom are not shown at an altar, named as husband and wife, or joined by any religious speech. The title's expected sacramental freight is therefore deliberately withheld. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

65. Honeymoon, ordinary ointment — QUOTE: "I nod and rub ointment against the crack." SOURCE: Domestic first aid; negative comparison with anointing. GLOSS: Bacitracin is applied because the heel is cracked, and Aveeno follows as comfort; the poem gives both products their ordinary medical and cosmetic uses. The kneeling posture can recall service, but neither character calls the act an anointing or prayer. The care has ethical weight without becoming a sacrament. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

14b. Honeymoon, the withheld foot-washing — QUOTE: "I think of how far these feet have walked, / the tenderness at the bottom of her sole. / Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt." SOURCE: John 13:1–17, Christ washing the disciples' feet GLOSS: A speaker kneeling to tend an older woman's feet is the oldest gesture of service in the Gospels, and the pun latent in "sole"/"soul" sits right where the allusion would confirm itself — yet the poem never uses the word "soul," never names the gospel scene, and keeps the act as ointment and gratitude rather than ritual. The allusion is

available to a reader who knows the source; the poem itself declines to claim it. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

66. Honeymoon, the mother's only response — QUOTE: "That feels good," she says. SOURCE: Negative finding: no prayer, blessing, oath, scriptural reference, or pious formula. GLOSS: Apart from asking "Do you see a small cut?" and "What are you looking at?" and saying "Oh that," the mother speaks only to register physical relief, while the speaker never addresses thanks to God or invokes sacred language. This is the third of the three texts in which a vulnerable bodily moment goes conspicuously unliturgical. The older woman is a recipient of care, not a repository of devotional speech. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

67. Honeymoon, sleep without vigil — QUOTE: "She reclines in the chair, / closing her eyes, / smiling at the memory." SOURCE: Secular recollection; no prayerful watch or deathbed rite. GLOSS: As darkness and rain gather, the poem notices the mother's breathing, sleep, tired face, and feet, but never converts the scene into a vigil or supplication. The speaker's attention is tender precisely because it remains limited to what can be eased and remembered. Mortality is intimated by future memory, not met with ritual. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

68. Honeymoon, projected remembrance — QUOTE: "My mother will be waving to me. / I'll see her eyes, / recall her pain, / and feel her hand in mine." SOURCE: Filial memory; negative comparison with afterlife or resurrection language. GLOSS: The ending promises only sensory recollection—eyes, pain, and a hand—not reunion in heaven, a soul, or an answered prayer. The anticipated loss is held within human memory, as the photograph has already held the honeymoon. This secular close confirms that the poem's tenderness is not sacramental consolation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

69. A Bath, Catherine, and Honeymoon, the broken collection pattern — QUOTE: "No, dear. I was walking toward the boulder to scrape vegetation." SOURCE: Comparative negative finding across all three texts. GLOSS: Nana's reply in *A Bath* is representative: the older woman speaks of work, food, and thwarted swimming, not of God; *Catherine* makes the same grandmother silent under the sponge; *Honeymoon* gives the mother only bodily relief and sleep. Across the three, there is no religious speaker at all, no Italian-Catholic domestic devotion, and no hymn or canonical

literary allusion of the requested kind. The usual pattern of older/female sacred speech therefore does not merely weaken here—it is absent, while crisis scenes are uniformly unliturgical. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

70. Myra Bocca, Molly's opening self-positioning — QUOTE: "I'm not grieving. I didn't like her much," I said quietly. SOURCE: reader's experience (first-person narrator withholding sympathy) GLOSS: The collection's narrator opens the third story by refusing the grief the reader has been primed to expect after "My aunt had just passed away." Molly's flatness positions the reader to judge her — to find her cold — before the story supplies the aunt's unlikability as retrospective warrant. The collection thus begins its management of sympathy by making the reader uncomfortable with the very voice it asks us to trust. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

71. A Nun's Arse, Molly's cruelty toward Mrs. Muldoon — QUOTE: "As the door shut, I gave Mrs. Muldoon the finger. Even though she didn't see my gesture, it gave me pleasure. I shoveled the curb, making sure to leave just a bit of snow on the curb, hoping she might slip." SOURCE: reader's experience (invitation to condemn the narrator) GLOSS: The narrator's private malice — a gesture of contempt and a sabotaged path meant to cause an old woman to fall — is the collection's sharpest test of whether the reader will keep siding with Molly. The pleasure she takes is reported without apology, so the reader is forced either to condemn the narrator or to rationalize her. The story does not resolve this; it simply lets the cruelty stand beside the later pity. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

72. A Nun's Arse, Nonna's pity redirects the reader — QUOTE: "Such a shame. An old woman drinking herself to death." She stopped suddenly and turned to me. "You've got to learn to hold your tongue. Learn not to be so fresh." SOURCE: reader's experience (sympathy redirected from narrator to her victim) GLOSS: Immediately after Molly's cruelty and her "specks of dust" speech, Nonna turns the reader's attention from Molly's wit to Mrs. Muldoon's mortality. The double sentence — pity for the dying woman, correction of the girl — models the exact movement the collection wants from its reader: see the suffering, then check the impulse to judge. It is one of the plainest moments where an older character teaches the reader how to feel. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

73. Useless Things, Nonna's mercenary streak — QUOTE: "You should see the stack of cash she keeps in her bread box. I bet she has money hidden all over her house. She hasn't been right since her husband died." SOURCE: reader's experience (sympathy for Nonna complicated by greed) GLOSS: The same Nonna who preaches compassion here gossips about a lonely widow's hidden cash to a man rumored to be Mafia-connected, speculating that Mary "was lucky to get rid of him." The reader is invited to admire Nonna's warmth and vitality and, in the same scene, to recoil from her opportunism. The collection refuses to let any of its three central women settle into a single verdict. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

74. Useless Things, Mrs. Muldoon's loneliness — QUOTE: "But I'm sure you'll be happier. Everybody needs family. And you got nobody here, right?" / "Nobody." SOURCE: reader's experience (pity solicited for the difficult woman) GLOSS: The one-word answer "Nobody" is the collection's most economical solicitation of pity for Mrs. Muldoon, the character the reader has been encouraged to find "such a bitch." It lands precisely after Molly has been cruel to her, so the reader's earlier condemnation is quietly corrected. The collection keeps the reader moving: no sooner is Mary pitied than she is again shown drunk, sharp, and dishonest. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

75. Myra Bocca, the single most deliberate redirection of sympathy — QUOTE: "However dishonest she was, she didn't deserve to die that way. The finality saddened me, and reminded me of the certainty of death." SOURCE: reader's experience (the verdict reversed at the moment of death) GLOSS: For an entire story the reader has been given every reason to condemn Myra — the fraud, the theft, the "sociopathic" cruelty catalogued by Michaelis — and to enjoy her humiliation. Then, over her mangled body, the narrator pivots to pity, and the reader is made to feel the cruelty of its own earlier verdict. This is the collection's most deliberate redirection: the judgment the text itself solicited is suddenly shown to be beside the point. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

76. Useless Things, the question of belief most directly put — QUOTE: "But it doesn't make sense. How can somebody just fly up into the sky?" SOURCE: reader's experience (skeptic's question answered only by "faith"); cf. the surrounding "Darling, you've got to have faith" / "Just believe it" GLOSS: Molly's flat, physical question about the Assumption is the moment the collection poses its belief problem

most nakedly, and the only answer it permits is Mrs. Muldoon's "Don't think too much about it. Just believe it." The reader is positioned with Molly — the question is reasonable, the answer is not an answer. The text lets the question stand unanswered, then immediately undercuts even Mrs. Muldoon's fideism by having Nonna privately doubt the doctrine. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

77. Useless Things, Nonna's private doubt — QUOTE: "Who gives a damn if Mary flew up into the sky or not? Maybe that's what happened a few thousand years ago, though I doubt it." SOURCE: reader's experience (the "believer" revealed as a skeptic) GLOSS: The collection's chief liturgical actor — the grandmother who performs pilgrimages, blessings, and fraud with equal fluency — here tells Molly that she doubts the very dogma Mrs. Muldoon has just defended, having herself only warned Molly with a look not to press the issue. The reader is positioned to see that belief in this world is largely performative and social, a matter of what one does for others rather than what one privately holds. It is the collection's clearest signal that it is more skeptical than credulous. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

78. Useless Things, the collection's skepticism stated plainly — QUOTE: "It's silly to believe in faith healers." SOURCE: reader's experience (comparative finding across the three collections) GLOSS: Molly's flat dismissal is the collection's thesis in miniature, and it is titled with the word "useless" attached to a cross, so this book is more skeptical than the other two. Where Assumptions and The Weight of Small Mercies stage explicit devotional set-pieces (a Father's embrace, a chalice "miracle"), Useless Things makes its faith healer a fraud, its narrator a skeptic, and its grandmother a private doubter. What belief remains is left to the reader to supply, not to the text to assert. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

79. Useless Things, Molly as witness — QUOTE: "I couldn't look back and though I found the smell overpowering and coughed a bit, I drew closer. I guess you could say I was mesmerized." SOURCE: reader's experience (the narrator as witness to the dead) GLOSS: Faced with Mrs. Muldoon's decomposed body, Molly does not flee, pray, or judge; she is "mesmerized," drawn closer to inspect the maggot, the fixed pupils, the clumps of hair. The reader is made to witness through her — to look at what she looks at — without the relief of a verdict or a prayer. This is the collection's signature move: it positions the reader as a witness who stays, not a judge who decides. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

80. Myra Bocca, Molly as judge — QUOTE: "I don't believe anything you say. That fag Jimmy was probably right." SOURCE: reader's experience (the narrator passing a verdict) GLOSS: Molly's parting sentence is pure judgment — a verdict on Myra's truthfulness delivered with a slur that itself invites the reader to judge Molly. The collection lets its narrator judge, then immediately complicates the judgment: the "fag Jimmy" she sides with is the same vindictive figure Myra has just maligned, and Myra's theft will shortly prove Molly right and wrong at once. The reader is taught that judgment is easy and unreliable. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

81. Myra Bocca, Molly as confessor — QUOTE: "Don't get attitudey with me, Molly. I'm opening my heart to you." SOURCE: reader's experience (the narrator as recipient of confession) GLOSS: Myra, Michaelis, and later Mrs. Muldoon all treat Molly as a confessor — someone to whom a life story is "opened" for absolution or at least a hearing. The reader overhears these confessions through Molly's skeptical ear, so the reader is cast as a second confessor, asked to weigh competing accounts (Myra's victimhood against Michaelis's indictment) with no reliable witness. The collection makes confession a scene of uncertainty, not of resolution. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

82. Myra Bocca, Molly as confessor again — QUOTE: "Molly, I know you're the type I can be perfectly frank with. . . I fucked her. We didn't date." SOURCE: reader's experience (confession solicited by the narrator's presence) GLOSS: Michaelis's opening — "I know you're the type I can be perfectly frank with" — names Molly's function in the story: people confess to her because she does not flinch. The reader is thereby positioned as the silent third party to a confession, invited to sift a self-serving account ("Myra is a slut… one of the most evil people I ever met") for its own distortions. The collection repeatedly makes the reader a confessor who must withhold absolution. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

83. Catherine, the reader addressed as "you" — QUOTE: "You laughed, then held your pudgy hand against your cheek." SOURCE: reader's experience (second-person address implicating the reader) GLOSS: The poem's direct address to the grandmother as "you" is the collection's most literal implication of the reader, who is made to occupy the position of the aging woman being bathed and remembered. The "you" is intimate and accusatory at once — the reader is both the one cared for and the one whose hidden sweet, sagging skin, and sea-memory are being examined. No

other piece in the collection folds the reader into a character so completely. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

84. Useless Things, the role ultimately assigned is witness — QUOTE: "I walked towards Mrs. Muldoon's corpse." SOURCE: reader's experience (the narrator's advance toward the dead as the reader's own) GLOSS: The sentence is the collection's clearest statement of the role it assigns: Molly walks toward the corpse, and the reader is carried with her, made to look at the bulging eyes, the blisters, the maggot. The faith healer's earlier "Angel of Death" prophecy is thus borne out not as magic but as posture — the narrator, and the reader behind her, are witnesses who stay. Judgment and confession are shown to be provisional; witnessing is the one role the book never revokes. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

85. Useless Things, the paradox first felt as emptiness — QUOTE: "I dreamt of seagulls pecking someone's eyes out, sharks in bloody water, and a singing red fish with white stripes along its sides. . . . the feeling that lingered was one of emptiness, an emotion I often felt." SOURCE: reader's experience (the sacred symbol surfacing inside the useless) GLOSS: The "singing red fish" is the ichthys — the fish Mrs. Muldoon has just named "the symbol of Christ" — surfacing in a dream of violence and waste, and what it leaves is not consolation but "emptiness." This is the moment the reader is first made to feel the title's paradox from the inside: the sacred sign appears precisely amid the useless and the dead, and its meaning will not resolve into comfort. The paradox is felt as a hollow, not as an answer. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

86. Useless Things, the paradox refused — QUOTE: "Then I walked over to the small purple box with my name on it. Inside was a gold necklace with an emerald and diamond cross." / "What is it, Molly?" / "A useless thing." SOURCE: reader's experience (the title line as a refusal the reader must overturn) GLOSS: The collection's governing paradox is stated — and refused — in a single exchange: the dying woman's last gift, a literal cross, is dismissed by the narrator as "a useless thing." The text does not correct Molly; it ends the story on her dismissal, leaving the reader to perform the reversal the title has been training for — to see that the "useless" cross is precisely where the sacred hides. The paradox is thus handed to the reader unresolved. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

87. Useless Things, the paradox left open — QUOTE: "the belief that tenderness, however rough its shape, is never useless." SOURCE: reader's experience (paratextual resolution the fiction withholds); back-cover copy GLOSS: The back-cover copy resolves the paradox outright — "tenderness… is never useless" — but no narrator inside the fiction ever says this; Molly's last word on the cross is "A useless thing," and the final story ends on a question ("Tell me about you, Kate"). The collection therefore leaves the paradox open within the fiction and supplies its resolution only outside it, in the marketing frame. The reader is the one who must carry the recognition across that gap. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

88. Useless Things and A Nun's Arse, the Irish brogue as reader positioning — QUOTE: "Her things sounded like"tings," and her think sounded like "tink."" SOURCE: reader's experience (Irish-Catholic speech as a marker the reader is asked to hear) GLOSS: Molly's phonetic transcription of Mrs. Muldoon's brogue — and her earlier note that "third" came out "turd" — makes the reader hear the woman's Irishness as a sound, at once comic and tender. The reader is positioned as an outsider to the brogue (as Molly is), yet the transcription also preserves Mrs. Muldoon's voice against the story's decay. Irish-Catholic identity here is carried in the mouth, the last thing left of the woman before she is reduced to a body. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

89. Useless Things, Italian profanity as reader positioning — QUOTE: "I was telling him the story about that troia from the Combat Zone." SOURCE: reader's experience (Italian-Catholic idiom the reader must decode) GLOSS: Nonna's Italian — "troia" for Lady Jane, "cazzone" for Mr. Scarfone — and the guests' "complimenti" and "buona fortuna" at the graduation — positions the reader as a guest at a table where some words are withheld until decoded. The profanity is the Italian-Catholic material at its most intimate: the sacred and the obscene share a tongue, and the reader is alternately shut out and admitted. It is the collection's reminder that this world's devotion lives in a specific, untranslated speech. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

90. Myra Bocca, popular songs as reader positioning — QUOTE: "An older man in a red Miata blared Christina Aguilera's"Beautiful."" / "I heard weights clanking and Madonna singing,"Tell me love isn't true. It's just something that we do"" SOURCE: reader's experience (contemporary pop as the soundtrack to judgment) GLOSS: The two songs — Aguilera's "Beautiful" blaring as Molly sizes up the "heterosexual wasteland," Madonna's "Tell me love isn't true" playing as she discovers the theft —

score the reader's own shifting judgment of Myra. The pop lyrics quietly editorialize: beauty and love are both put in doubt exactly where Molly is learning not to trust appearances. Unlike the collection's older standards, these songs belong to the narrator's generation, so they position the reader inside Molly's present rather than the elders' remembered past. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

91. Drenched to the Bone, the absent canon — QUOTE: "You remember Emerson? 'Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind'" SOURCE: reader's experience (negative finding on Joyce, Yeats, Dante, Hopkins, Whitman) GLOSS: Of the named canon the task asks after, only Emerson, Dickinson, and O'Connor appear in this collection (all already recorded), while Joyce, Yeats, Hopkins, and Whitman are entirely absent and Dante survives only as the unattributed echo "Midway through my life, I am lost". The two Emerson quotations are spoken by a teacher to students who "look clueless," so even the Transcendentalist's "sacred" is deflated by the reader's awareness that no one is listening. The collection's literary piety is thin and secularized, matching its thin and secularized religious piety. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

92. Useless Things, the Venice mural in Bonamici's restaurant — QUOTE: "the large mural of a canal in Venice… the gondolier with his white shirt and black pants, escorting a pair of lovers among the beautiful pink and white buildings… I imagined him whacking the heads of the couple with his oar and pushing them overboard." SOURCE: image (a secular mural); Charon, the ferryman of the dead (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.298–304; Dante, *Inferno* III.109, "Caron dimonio"). GLOSS: The family restaurant's one work of art is a Venetian canal mural whose boatman Molly re-reads as a killer ferrying his passengers to death. It is the collection's secular twin to the Titian that "Assumptions" reads — a painted scene converted, in the child's imagination, into an underworld crossing — and it quietly installs a Charon over the graduation feast, foreshadowing the "Angel of Death" vocation Lady Jane has just pronounced. It also concentrates the book's mute Italian material: the restaurant's Italian presence is a painting on the wall, though Nonna gives Italian a voice throughout the story ("Ffangul'!", "Maron'!", "troia"). CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

93. Useless Things, Mrs. Muldoon framed as a carnival fortune-teller — QUOTE: "I looked through the sheer curtain, where Mrs. Muldoon sat in her living room. She reminded me of one of the fortunetellers behind some lacy fabric at Wonderland

Amusement Park." SOURCE: image (the fortune-teller; the false seer). GLOSS: The old Irish widow is first seen through a sheer curtain looking like an amusement-park fortune-teller — the collection's earliest stitching of its ordinary Catholic characters into the false-seer economy that "Myra Bocca," printed two pieces earlier, has already introduced and that Lady Jane will enlarge. The "lacy fabric" foreshadows the crisscrossed hands and invented sacred speech of the healer scene that follows in the same story, and it primes the reader to distrust prophecy before any prophecy is uttered. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

94. The collection, the false-seer image recurs with one consistent meaning — QUOTE: "one of the fortunetellers behind some lacy fabric" / "Lady Jane sat in a large throne-like chair on a platform" / "I'm a bit psychic. Both of you could be, too." SOURCE: image (recursion across "Useless Things," "Myra Bocca"). GLOSS: The collection's one recurring visual type with a fixed meaning is the false seer: Mrs. Muldoon framed like a carnival fortune-teller, Lady Jane enthroned over a sham healing, Myra claiming psychic power over tarot and a crystal ball. In every instance the seer is granted a plausible sacred-looking apparatus — lace, throne, chakra — and produces a counterfeit outcome. This, rather than the already-recorded cross or chalice, is the image the collection repeats consistently, and its apparatus is consistently counterfeit, though Lady Jane's "Angel of Death" prediction is borne out when Molly finds Mrs. Muldoon's corpse. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

95. Useless Things, Lady Jane's throne-like chair — QUOTE: "Lady Jane sat in a large throne-like chair on a platform at the back of the room." SOURCE: image (the throne); Christ in Majesty, the *Sedes Sapientiae*, and the executed nine-days queen Lady Jane Grey. GLOSS: The sham healer is seated on a "platform" in a "throne-like chair," borrowing the spatial grammar of an altarpiece or a Majesty-of-Christ enthronement for a charlatan. Read against her already-recorded name (Lady Jane Grey, the nine-days queen), the chair is a false throne — authority briefly seated, then overturned — the collection's most economical rendering of counterfeit majesty. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

96. Useless Things, the discarded crutches — QUOTE: "yelled 'Hallelujah' and threw his crutches towards the chairs on each side of the line of people." SOURCE: John 5:8–9 ("Rise, take up thy bed, and walk"); the crutches left by pilgrims at Lourdes. GLOSS: The one visible "cure" in the healer's parlor — an old man flinging

away his crutches and shouting "Hallelujah" — is a discount re-enactment of the Gospel's healing at the pool and of the votive crutches hung at Lourdes. The image is the collection's cleanest negative on the faith healer: it shows a healing gesture in full, then lets Nonna's cynicism and Lady Jane's giggling deflate it. The discarded crutches are a sign emptied of its miracle. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

97. Useless Things, the image that enacts the title's paradox — QUOTE: "The fancy Christmas tree was in parts in front of the fireplace, and the ornaments were in a pile on her dark brown couch." / "When you get old you accumulate a lot of useless things, Molly. And then you become one of them." SOURCE: the title's governing paradox (the sacred hiding in the useless; 1 Corinthians 1:27–28); the Nativity-tree as Tree of Life. GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon's Christmas tree, disassembled and laid "in parts" before a fireplace without fire, is the image that most fully enacts the book's thesis: a genuine sacred thing — the tree of the feast of the Incarnation — rendered shabby, broken, and ready for the Salvation Army, exactly as Mrs. Muldoon herself will become one of the "useless things" Nonna names in the same story. The sacred is here tucked inside the discarded, and the collection's own Nativity-object waits in pieces beside an empty hearth. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

98. Myra Bocca, the crystal wolf as loaded theology — QUOTE: "Then she bent down and grabbed something from the case, a piece of crystal, and threw it at me… I picked up the crystal wolf that she had thrown." SOURCE: Matthew 7:15 ("Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves"); John 10:12 (the wolf that scatters the sheep). GLOSS: The false prophet of the story throws a crystal wolf at the narrator — the very emblem of the "ravening wolf" Christ warns against, rendered in cheap glass and wielded as a weapon. Among the collection's not-yet-recorded images this is the most theologically loaded: it argues that the false prophet is herself the wolf the Gospel names, and that a counterfeit object (glass, retail, "useless") can still strike and tell a truth its thrower cannot hear. The wolf condenses the whole theology of *useless things* — false prophecy and false goods fused into one thrown stone. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

99. A Bath, the grandmother clothed in the sea — QUOTE: "a pattern of blue and white that looked like cresting waves. There were yellow stains under her armpits." SOURCE: image (the sea as a garment); Clew Bay as the grandmother's vestment. GLOSS: Nana's housedress is patterned like "cresting waves," so the woman who

once "waded towards a boulder" at Clew Bay wears the sea itself against her body, her remembered homeland become daily clothing. The yellow underarm stains ground the image in the body's decay, making the garment both the remembered ocean and its soiled double — the collection's habit of dressing the sacred in the shabby, in the same paragraph that introduces the kiss she asks for. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

100. Catherine, the photograph aged like the body — QUOTE: "My mother tsk-tsked as you deflected our attention to the old photograph, / gray and yellowed, like your sagging skin." SOURCE: image (vanitas / memento mori; the photograph as the body's double). GLOSS: The poem assigns the photograph and the living grandmother the same adjectives — "gray and yellowed," "sagging" — so old woman and old paper become a matched pair of fading surfaces. It is a small domestic vanitas: the image of the girl who waded into the ocean is now as sallow as the body it once showed young, past and present collapsed into a single yellowed thing. The photograph is no longer a relic of the "former self" but a mirror of decay. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

101. A Nun's Arse, the framed tree through a square of sky — QUOTE: "The black bark of a tree cut through a gray square of sky." SOURCE: image (the tree framed in a window); the Tree of the Cross seen through a frame, a painterly Crucifixion. GLOSS: The story's one visual close — a bare black tree crossed against a gray window-square — follows Mrs. Muldoon's demand to know the catechism and is framed like a small painting, the tree-as-cross reduced to a monochrome view through glass. It is the image of faith Milieu at its coldest: a stripped tree against an emptied sky, with no figure on it and no one looking up. The image carries almost nothing, and that is its point. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

102. Assumptions / Useless Things, the black boots as barrier to the water-cure — QUOTE: "'The point is to get wet. How else are you going to get the cure?'" / "You look foolish in those things. How you gonna get the Blessed Mother's cure if you don't get wet." SOURCE: image (the boots); the seawater cure of the Assumption feast, which requires the body to enter the water. GLOSS: In both "Assumptions" (Peg's "small black boots") and "Useless Things" (Mrs. Muldoon's "hideous black boots"), the black boots are the one object standing between the woman and the healing seawater, and in both scenes a grandmother spells out the obstacle: you cannot get the cure if you do not get wet. The boots recur with a consistent meaning — a

deliberate, stubborn barrier to grace that must be coaxed off before the body will consent to be healed — the collection's own image of resistance to the cure it otherwise venerates. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

103. Useless Things, Charon as a new iconographic source — QUOTE: "escorting a pair of lovers among the beautiful pink and white buildings" / "whacking the heads of the couple with his oar and pushing them overboard." SOURCE: Charon the ferryman (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI; Dante, *Inferno* III), the classical-underworld double of the recorded Titian and chalice. GLOSS: Beside the book's already-recorded Assunta and chalice, the collection admits one further iconographic source: the boatman-with-oar who, in Molly's pointed re-reading of the mural, becomes Charon piloting his passengers to death. It is the collection's one Dantean/classical image, and it arrives as restaurant wallpaper rather than as a named allusion — a death-image installed unrecognized in the family's eating-place, exactly as Molly's vocation to witness death is installed unrecognized in her. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

104. The collection, negative finding — no fixed iconographic repertoire holds — QUOTE: (absence) beyond the Titian of "Assumptions", the images resolve into the disassembled tree ("in parts in front of the fireplace"), a restaurant mural, a carnival fortune-teller, a crystal wolf, a housedress and a photograph. SOURCE: reading across the eight stories' imagery. GLOSS: The new images gathered here confirm what the book already asserts: the collection does not draw on a stable devotional canon the way "Assumptions" alone draws on Titian's *Assunta*. Its images come from domestic kitsch (a broken Christmas tree, a wave-print dress, a yellowed snapshot), carnival sham (the fortune-teller, the throne-like chair, the flung crutches), and retail counterfeits (the crystal wolf, the glass skull), with the one genuinely classical image — Charon — arriving as wallpaper. The imagery ranges freely; only "Assumptions" cites a fixed repertoire. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

105. Useless Things, the restaurant interior as a secularized chapel — QUOTE: "the groups of people talking under the dim swag lamps with amber globes, the red-and-white checkered cloths on the tables, the maroon vinyl booths with cracks." SOURCE: image (the eating-place as degraded sanctuary); cf. the already-recorded body-as-temple and the feast/agape motif. GLOSS: The Bonamici graduation room is lit by "dim swag lamps with amber globes" — a parlor's imitation of altar candles — over cracked vinyl and checkered cloths, a sanctuary whose one icon is the Venice

mural. It is the restaurant the family treats as its church, gathered for a toast and a benediction ("If you're going to steal, steal a heart…"), but the light is dim, the booth cracked, and the presiding image is a killer-boatman. The collection's places of worship are all, like this one, warm and broken at once. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

106. Myra Bocca, the grief-stone named a "Tear" — QUOTE: "Apache Tear Tumblestones" / "It's good for healing grief. Please take it." SOURCE: image (the "tear" as petrified mourning); the *Mater Dolorosa*'s tears and the weeping-icon tradition, turned to stone and sold by weight. GLOSS: The healing stone Myra presses on Molly is literally named a "Tear" — an Apache obsidian said to be made of mourners' tears, so grief itself is petrified and retailed as a charm against grief. It is the collection's weeping-image reduced to merchandise: where a devotional Madonna sheds tears of intercession, this stone has already wept, cooled, and been priced. The name makes mourning a thing to carry in a pocket, which is precisely how the book shows consolation being bought and failed. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

107. Assumptions, the night the memory goes out — QUOTE: "The rest of the night is a blur. Perhaps I fell asleep on the rug watching TV? Maybe my grandfather carried me to bed when he returned from his night job?" SOURCE: register shift — the adult retrospective narrator establishes his voice by punctuating statements as questions (interrogative parataxis) GLOSS: This is the clearest single establishment of the collection's governing voice: an adult who narrates a child's night and marks the seam where his own memory fails. The question marks are grammatically unearned — both sentences are declaratives — and that mismatch is the voice's signature, a man reporting what he cannot verify. Everything lyric in "Assumptions" is licensed by this admission of textual uncertainty; the story can rise into vision later because it has already conceded it does not know who carried the boy to bed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

108. Assumptions, the card table — QUOTE: "And wasn't it a tragedy, how one evening, after a game at Fenway Park, Jim drove the green Buick that he loved so much into a fruit stand on the side of the road" SOURCE: register shift into free indirect brogue; interrogative-affirmative Hiberno-English opening ("And wasn't it…") GLOSS: The narration slips out of its own diction into the grandparents' spoken idiom without quotation marks or attribution, so the reader hears a kitchen rather than a page. The Irish-English construction that opens on "And wasn't it" — a

question that expects only agreement — carries the whole clause forward on gossip's momentum, piling subordinate detail ("that he loved so much") the way speech does. The shift is total: syntax, tense-handling, and evaluative vocabulary all become the aunties'. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

109. Assumptions, the other side of that shift — QUOTE: "And Helen, my grandmother, would beam at this point, say something like, "Well, the poor thing!"" SOURCE: register shift — the return from oral free indirect to the appositional, tense-marked literary narrator GLOSS: This is the far bank of the shift catalogued above: the appositive ("Helen, my grandmother") and the habitual "would beam" reinstate the writing voice, and the moment it returns it puts the borrowed speech in quotation marks again. The seam is visible in a single sentence — oral inside the marks, literary outside them. The technique lets the story ventriloquize a whole family's cruelty about Peggy's face without the narrator ever being caught endorsing it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

110. Assumptions, the Titian ekphrasis — QUOTE: "A startled Mary, arms spread above her upturned face, is being lifted on a cloud toward heaven, where God waits expectantly, his gray beard flowing in the turbulent air." SOURCE: register shift into lyric present tense; suspended participial subordination GLOSS: The narrator drops out of past-tense recollection into the timeless present of the picture, and the sentence lengthens accordingly — one absolute phrase hung off the subject before the verb arrives and a second at the sentence's close. The prose is doing what the painting does, holding an ascent in permanent suspension. It is the collection's one moment of sustained high subordination, and it appears precisely where the subject is the Assumption itself. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

111. Assumptions, Fr. Duffy's poem set against the prose — QUOTE: "Clothed to the knees in black, you stood and prayed." / "Blessed back to God what lust had cursed away" SOURCE: strict iambic pentameter with medial caesura, set against the story's free prose GLOSS: The appended Duffy quatrains are metrically regular in a way nothing in Mulhern's prose is, and their placement at the end of "Assumptions" makes the meter audible as a claim: the liturgical tradition speaks in measure, the grandson in cadence. "Blessed back to God what lust had cursed away" is perfectly balanced around its caesura, blessing and cursing weighed against each other in equal feet. The prose story earns its ending by having already absorbed the poem's

rhythm of aching bones and stones without adopting its meter. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

112. Assumptions, the December canvass — QUOTE: "one very bright star seemed to be chasing a crescent of moon" SOURCE: vowel threading — long /i:/ ("seemed," "crescent" internal /e/) against the /ay/ of "bright," with an anapestic lilt GLOSS: The clause scans almost as a line of light verse, three unstressed-unstressed-stressed runs pulling the eye upward, and the bright/night vowel is threaded to the same long-i chain the story later delivers into "divine." What the sound earns is that a drunken woman and a boy walking a dog through freezing streets get the prosody of a nativity without the story ever calling it one. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

113. Assumptions, Peggy at her door without her wig — QUOTE: "the sunlight highlighted a laurel of peach-fuzz hair" SOURCE: alliteration and consonance on /l/ and /h/; Latinate crowning diction inside plain description GLOSS: The liquid consonants ("sunlight highlighted… laurel") slow the clause to a hush, and the single word "laurel" imports triumph and coronation into a description of alopecia. Sound is what makes the crowning sincere rather than sarcastic: had the sentence been made of hard consonants, "peach-fuzz" would have been a joke. Here the prosody insists on the wreath before the sense can withdraw it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

114. Assumptions and Useless Things, the jetty — QUOTE: "On a jetty in the distance, a father and his son cast fishing lines into the sea." / "On the jetty, a father and his son cast fishing lines into the sea." SOURCE: voice test by repetition — one cadence assigned to two different narrators GLOSS: The same beach paragraph is given to Jimmy in "Assumptions" and to Molly in "Useless Things," and the sentences are nearly identical, which means this lyric cadence belongs to neither narrator but to the book. Molly's version is shorter by a prepositional phrase; the trimming is the only trace of her flatter voice. The finding cuts both ways: it proves the collection has one prosodic signature under its several personae, and it is honest evidence that Molly's voice is not fully differentiated from Jimmy's at the level of sentence rhythm. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

115. Useless Things, Mrs. Muldoon in the water — QUOTE: "Now raise me up in quickly, Molly, before the next wave." SOURCE: liturgical diction surfacing through a syntactic slip ("up in quickly") GLOSS: The line is ungrammatical in a way that reads

as brogue word-order collapsing under urgency, and the residue is "raise me up" — the vocabulary of resurrection, spoken by a woman who is days from suicide, in salt water she believes has a cure in it. The prosody, not the sense, carries the theology: a mangled clause with a liturgical phrase inside it. That she has to ask to be raised, and asks a girl, is the story's argument compressed to seven words. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

116. Useless Things, the beach arrival — QUOTE: "Radios blared, children created sand castles, groups of ladies gossiped, and the sun was so hot." SOURCE: parataxis — four coordinate clauses, tricolon plus a bathetic fourth GLOSS: Three parallel subject-verb clauses establish a rhythm, then the fourth breaks the pattern with a stative complaint in a child's idiom ("so hot"). Molly's prose works by accumulation rather than subordination throughout, and this is the cleanest specimen: no clause is made to depend on another, which is also how she refuses hierarchy among sacred and trivial facts. The flatness is characterological, not careless. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

117. Useless Things, the corpse — QUOTE: "White lines crisscrossed areas of red on her calves." SOURCE: negative finding — clinical flatness where the prose declines to shift register at the moment of horror GLOSS: Across the whole discovery of Mrs. Muldoon's body the sentences stay short, level, and pathologist-plain: no anaphora, no lyric rise, no liturgical borrowing. This is the collection's most important prosodic negative — Molly, told she is an Angel of Death, narrates death without any change of music, and the refusal to modulate is itself her position on grace. Set beside "Assumptions," where a death produces transfiguration and a Father's hands, the flatness here reads as deliberate rather than as failure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

118. A Nun's Arse, Mrs. Muldoon quizzing Molly — QUOTE: "What else do they teach you? Do they teach you to count your blessings?" SOURCE: anaphora — a catechetical series of "Do they teach you" questions GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon interrogates in the rhythm she was catechized in, each question identically framed so that assent is the only available answer. Prosody here is authority: the form of the Baltimore-catechism drill deployed against a girl who, in the very next line, says she is not sure she believes any of it. The anaphora also exposes her, since the series has no answer clause and simply runs out, which is what her faith does under Molly's questioning. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

119. A Nun's Arse, Molly's rebuttal — QUOTE: "Snowflakes form in the Earth's atmosphere when cold water droplets freeze onto dust particles. The ice crystals create myriad shapes." SOURCE: register shift into scientific exposition; subordinate "when" clause against the older woman's anaphora GLOSS: Molly's encyclopedia rhythm comes first, and Mrs. Muldoon's catechetical rhythm answers it — subject, verb, mechanism, all subordinated to a conditional clause. The two voices are distinguished by syntax alone, devotional anaphora against explanatory subordination, and the story lets the collision stand without adjudicating it. That she then calls the crystals "more wondrous" than paper cutouts concedes the devotional vocabulary while keeping the scientific cadence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

120. A Bath, the drive along the Jamaicaway — QUOTE: "I knew she was nervous. She hated visiting my grandmother. Said it was so depressing." SOURCE: clipped parataxis with subject deletion in the third sentence GLOSS: Three sentences hold to five words each, and the last drops its subject entirely, so the boy's narration slides into the register of overheard speech. This is the collection's most economical voice, and it never once shifts into lyricism across the whole story; the only heightening it permits is at the final sentence, which is not wholly monosyllabic ("moments," "ever," "needed"). Billy's prosody is set by what he will not say aloud. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

121. A Bath, the unlocked door — QUOTE: "She said that way people could get in if they smelled her dead body." SOURCE: negative finding — gallows humor delivered with no prosodic marking at all GLOSS: The most morbid sentence in the story is a flat indirect-discourse clause with no caesura, no emphasis, and no closing beat; the boy reports it as household procedure. Nothing in the sound tells the reader to feel anything, which is exactly the point of the voice, but it means the grim comedy is entirely semantic here rather than musical. Recorded plainly as a place where prosody carries nothing. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

122. Catherine, the lifting — QUOTE: "You moaned and breathed deeply as we lifted." SOURCE: second-person address; the "Silent, except for sighs" verse line stripped to breath-sounds GLOSS: "Catherine" reworks "A Bath" as a poem in the second person, and the voice change is almost entirely prosodic: the prose story's dialogue is dissolved into long verse lines whose stresses fall on breath and sound rather than speech. Addressing the dead grandmother as "you" makes the poem an

elegy performing what the story only reported, and the line's four stresses (moaned, breathed, deep-, lift-) are all bodily. The pair is the clearest demonstration in the book that voice, not incident, is what Mulhern varies. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

123. Myra Bocca, the Backyard Cafe — QUOTE: "On any given weeknight at the Backyard Cafe, three waiters and a busboy move quickly to serve a crowd made up of pairs or groups of older gay men" SOURCE: register shift into documentary present tense inside a past-tense first-person narrative GLOSS: Molly abandons her own past tense for a habitual present and an ethnographer's inventory — table counts, wall colors, ceiling tiles — before returning to narrative past a paragraph later. The shift arrives long before the story's violence, at the first dinner with Myra, and its flat surveying rhythm sets up the pavement description that follows. It is the collection's boldest voice modulation and the least motivated by plot. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

124. Myra Bocca, the body in the street — QUOTE: "The shin from her left leg protruded at an angle, its jagged edge pointing towards the sun." SOURCE: monosyllabic spondaic close after a Latinate verb; caesura at the comma GLOSS: The clause begins in medical diction ("protruded") and ends on "pointing towards the sun," not on a run of five monosyllables, and stops the sentence dead, with the final stresses falling on "point-" and "sun." Prosody and theology coincide here: the bone is given the gesture of a spire, and the sound insists on the aim without the narrator conceding any meaning to it. What the rhythm argues that the sense denies is that even this death points somewhere — the same claim the "halo-shaped pool" makes visually, made this time in stresses. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

125. Myra Bocca, the crowd at the compressions — QUOTE: "You can do it, Evy! You can do it, Evy!" / "The tall black guy stepped forward and sang the lyrics." SOURCE: chant — anaphoric doubling, then a congregation taking up a song to supply a beat GLOSS: Rhythm becomes literally life-saving: a nurse prescribes a pop song's tempo for chest compressions and a street crowd converts into a choir to keep it. The prosodic material is a disco single and the liturgical form is a responsory, congregation answering cantor over a body. Sound does the theological work the scene never states — that a strip mall can produce a rite, and that a woman nobody liked gets sung over anyway. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

126. Drenched to the Bone, the parking lot — QUOTE: "Galaxies are floating further and further away, drifting into the infinity of space." / "What exactly is the way? Who will tell us?" SOURCE: entropic cadence (comparative reduplication, present participles) breaking into a series of shortening interrogatives GLOSS: The first sentence has no stopping stress — "further and further," "drifting," "infinity" — so the prose enacts dispersal, and then the paragraph turns and fires four questions of five, four, eight and one words, ending on the single word "Kate?" This is the collection's fullest coincidence of prosody and theology: entropy given a rhythm that will not close, then closed only by naming a person. The sound argues, against Jack's stated physics, that the way home is vocative rather than cosmological. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

127. Useless Things, the title and the ending that carried it — QUOTE: "Did she say a prayer for home when she stood in the waves that day and looked towards the horizon?" … "prayers for home, wherever we believed we were going, would never be answered." … "A useless thing." SOURCE: "A Prayer for Home" in the 2016 collection against "Useless Things" in the Useless Things text GLOSS: The Useless Things story is no new story. It is the middle of "A Prayer for Home": better than nine in ten of its sentences match the 2016 text, and it cuts everything before "It seemed that I was engulfed by believers in those days" (roughly the first quarter of the 2016 story) and everything after Molly's "A useless thing." The 2016 title came from a petition, and the lines that explain that title sit in the part that was cut. The 2026 title comes from the cross in the purple box instead, so the story's name moves from a prayer that goes unanswered to a holy object that is refused. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

128. Useless Things, heaven denied to the policeman — QUOTE: "To heaven, Molly." … "I don't believe she passed to heaven, sir." … "What in God's name were you thinking, Molly?" … "I wasn't thinking anything in God's name." SOURCE: The 2016 collection's closing police scene, absent from the Useless Things text; the novel keeps "To heaven, Molly." GLOSS: Molly's most open denial of the afterlife in the 2016 story, and her play on the oath "in God's name," are both in the cut coda. The 2026 story loses both; the novel keeps the denial in other words ("I don't believe in heaven, sir.") but has no "in God's name" exchange. The revision takes out explicit unbelief without adding any belief in its place, so the story's last religious word is the cross itself, left without comment. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

129. Useless Things, the Assumption named and then left unnamed — QUOTE: "She had created her own Assumption and I thought, ironically, consumption." … "And the angels sob at vermin fangs" SOURCE: The 2016 collection (Molly's gloss on the suicide date, and Poe, "The Conqueror Worm") against the Useless Things text; the novel keeps both GLOSS: In 2016, Molly herself spells out what the suicide on August 15th means as dogma, then sets Poe's sobbing angels and "seraphs, all haggard and wan" against it. The 2026 text keeps the date on the photograph ("August 15th, 1954. The happiest day of my life.") but deletes both the pun and the angels. The Marian meaning is not removed. It is handed from the narrator to the reader, who has to make the link that Molly used to state. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

130. Useless Things, Nonna's disbelief and the parish scene cut from the front — QUOTE: "Nonna, you don't believe it's the actual word of God, do you?" … "There is no heaven. There is no God." … "Did I ever tell you how she once stole money from the collection basket during Mass?" … "It seemed that I was engulfed by believers in those days." SOURCE: The 2016 collection's kitchen dialogue before the faith-healer episode, against the opening sentence of the Useless Things text; the novel keeps "There is no heaven. There is no God." and "all those crazy saints" GLOSS: In 2016, "engulfed by believers" comes right after two admissions of unbelief ("Like church and God, and all those crazy saints") and after the story's only scene of parish life, set at Mass, with Father Paul and a Bible used to hit someone. So it reads as ironic. In 2026 it opens the story with nothing before it: no Mass, no priest, no Bible, and Nonna's unbelief comes down to one line from the beach chapter ("Who gives a damn if Mary flew up into the sky or not?"). The cut leaves the story's religion as folk and fraudulent (the cure, the healer), and makes its world of belief look more sincere by removing the atheist conversation that framed it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

131. A Nun's Arse, the papal prayer that stays in the 2016 book — QUOTE: "She shook the beads."I pray every night for the Holy Father's intention that the Catholic Church reign forever."" … "She picked up rosary beads and laminated novenas that were on the table."Faith is most important, Molly." She shook the beads." SOURCE: The Christmas-visit scene in "A Prayer for Home" (2016) against the same scene in "Through a Convent Gate" (2016) and "A Nun's Arse" GLOSS: The 2016 book prints Mrs. Muldoon's Christmas scene twice, and only the version inside "A Prayer for Home" gives her a prayer for the Pope's intention. The two states sit in the same

book, so which came first cannot be decided from the text. But the 2026 book reprints only the version without the prayer. The formula survives in the 2026 book only in "Assumptions", in the grandmother's "my first prayer should always be for the Holy Father's Intention," so the prayer for the Church stays with the pious grandmother and is taken away from the drunk widow. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

132. A Nun's Arse, the retitling — QUOTE: "Through a Convent Gate" … "A Nun's Arse" … "I'm so hungry I could eat a nun's arse through a convent gate." SOURCE: The 2016 collection against the Useless Things text; the Irish vulgar idiom that both titles cut in half GLOSS: Apart from the title, every sentence matches, and the one other change is a dropped section divider. Both titles come from the same closing punchline. The 2016 title takes its sacred half, the convent's threshold, and the 2026 title takes its profane half, the nun's body. The revision therefore changes only the religious framing, moving from the enclosure to the flesh. It also makes the idiom rarer: it appears twice in the 2016 book (here and again in "A Prayer for Home") and once in the 2026 book. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

133. Useless Things, the faith healer's verdict — QUOTE: "The spiritual masters have told me that your soul is cured for your trip." … "The masters have told be you are spiritually cured for your trip." SOURCE: The 2016 collection against the Useless Things text; the novel has a third reading, "The spirit masters have told me that your soul is cleansed" GLOSS: The 2026 revision removes the word "soul" and the adjective "spiritual" from Lady Jane's authority, turns them into the adverb "spiritually," and brings in an uncorrected slip ("told be"). A blessing that had named the soul becomes an unmarked description of a condition. It is a small step toward the secular, made in a story that otherwise keeps its faith-healer material nearly word for word. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

134. Useless Things, Ireland becomes home — QUOTE: "And I'm not going to deny an old friend a last request before she returns to Ireland." … "And I'm not going to deny an old lady a last request of a friend before she goes home." SOURCE: The 2016 collection against the Useless Things text; the novel also reads "before she goes home" GLOSS: A place name becomes the story's word for its goal, and the woman going "home" is about to kill herself on the feast of the Assumption. Once the 2016 coda about "going home" to Jim and to "the earth" is cut, this line is where the double meaning of home as Ireland and home as death or heaven is kept. The ambiguity is

moved into Nonna's mouth, and the 2016 story's closing denial of it is gone. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

135. Useless Things, the rainbow left without a verdict — QUOTE: "But there was no rainbow's end for her. Her end was several days of rot and decay in a hot humid room." … "We were two drifters off to see the world, searching for our rainbow's end, and I was her huckleberry friend." SOURCE: The 2016 collection against the Useless Things text; "Moon River"; the rainbow as covenant sign (Genesis 9:13) GLOSS: Both states keep the beach rainbow that "had formed above a group of clouds" over Mrs. Muldoon on the feast day. Only 2016 comes back to that rainbow to deny it ("no rainbow's end for her"). The 2026 text turns the quoted lyric into Molly's own paraphrase and cuts the denial. The rainbow can therefore still be read as a promise, which the earlier text ruled out. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

136. Useless Things, what the kept portion does not change — QUOTE: "Who gives a damn if Mary flew up into the sky or not? Maybe that's what happened a few thousand years ago, though I doubt it." … "Inside was a gold necklace with an emerald and diamond cross." SOURCE: The Useless Things text against the matching stretch of the 2016 "A Prayer for Home" GLOSS: In the kept portion, the religious vocabulary is the same in both states, word for word: God, Christ, heaven, the Assumption, the cure, faith, the Pope and the healer's "Hallelujah" all stand where they stood. The only movements are one lost "soul" (see entry 133) and Ireland to home (see entry 134). The feast explanation, the faith healer's "Hallelujah," Nonna's doubt and the cross are all unchanged. All of the revision to the religious material is done by cutting at the two ends, not by rewording the middle. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

137. Myra Bocca, "Lazzarus" was a single misprint — QUOTE: "I was the wife of a very wealthy man. Lazzarus Bocca." … "I was the wife of a very wealthy man. Lazarus Bocca." SOURCE: The 2016 collection, the Impspired printing ("A Crystal Wolf") and the Useless Things text; John 11 GLOSS: The 2016 story uses the gospel spelling "Lazarus" 20 times and "Lazzarus" once, the Impspired printing 21 times and once, and the Useless Things text 21 times and never. The 2026 change fixes one typo. It does not bring the resurrected man's name into the story, because the name was there from the start. Any reading that treats the spelling as a revision toward resurrection vocabulary has misread this. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

138. Myra Bocca, the wake said twice — QUOTE: "She plunked her ass right next to his coffin." … "She plunked her ass right next to his coffin at the wake." SOURCE: The 2016 collection against the Impspired printing and the Useless Things text, which agree with each other GLOSS: The rite is not new. All three states already say "she went to his wake" in the sentence before, and the added phrase only repeats it where the profanity lands. It is one of six readings the Impspired printing shares with the 2026 book against the 2016 book (others are "Ahh," "good bakers," "I told you, I'm going"). This makes the web printing a middle state between the two collections, not a copy of the earlier one. The order is the 2016 collection, then Impspired (its author note mentions a 2021 shortlisting), then the 2026 book. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

139. Myra Bocca, the street crowd loses its words — QUOTE: "The crowd joined in,"Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive. Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive!"" … "The tall black guy stepped forward and sang the lyrics. The crowd joined in." SOURCE: The 2016 collection and the Impspired printing (both with the lyric) against the Useless Things text; Bee Gees, "Stayin' Alive" GLOSS: The singer leads and the crowd answers over a dying woman. In 2016 we hear the actual words, which make a joke of "alive" at the moment of death. The 2026 text keeps the call-and-response but deletes what is sung, so the crowd's response becomes a reported act. Only the Useless Things text makes this cut. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

140. Myra Bocca, no religious variant beyond these — QUOTE: "a New Age bookstore called Sacred Ashes" … "creating a halo-shaped pool around her head" SOURCE: The 2016 collection, the Impspired printing and the Useless Things text GLOSS: Almost every sentence in the Useless Things text matches the 2016 text word for word, and the story's sacred vocabulary is the same in both collections. "Sacred Ashes" (6 times), the forehead chakra, "watered-down religion," the halo of blood and the Apache Tear stones are the same in all three states. Apart from entries 137 to 139 and the clinical relabeling of Myra that is already recorded, the variants are copy-editing ("robust" to "hot," "boyscout" to "boy scout") and a new misprint ("Her eyes tea red up"). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

141. Drenched to the Bone, reprinted without variant — QUOTE: "lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."" … "lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."" SOURCE: The 2016 collection against the Useless Things text; Matthew 7:6, Romans 6:23, the St. Francis sign, Bob Dylan GLOSS: The

two texts match word for word, sentence by sentence, and the sacred vocabulary is identical in both states. The only difference is a stray closing single quotation mark after Mary Grace's Matthew 7:6, which the 2026 text drops. The Romans 6:23 outburst, the St. Francis sign, its reverse ("Will you follow the road to experience God's salvation and have eternal life?"), "Midway through my life, I am lost," and all nine Dylan lines are unchanged. This is a clean negative result. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

142. Drenched to the Bone, the novel's other state of the ending — QUOTE: "Midway through my life, I am lost." … "Will you follow the road to experience God's salvation and have eternal life?" … "Did I really appear as haughty as she" … "Proud Mary keep on burnin" SOURCE: The story (identical in both collections) against the novel *Molly Bonamici*, which absorbs it; Dante, *Inferno* I.1; Romans 6:23 GLOSS: The novel's version of the storm drive drops the Dante line, the salvation text on the back of the church sign, and Mary Grace's Romans 6:23 ("wages of sin" never appears in the novel, and "salvation" only as the title of Hughes's essay and in "Salvation Army"). It swaps the Dylan flood song and the phone call for a Tina Turner cover, and turns the pilgrim's confession into a question about vanity. The novel and the 2016 collection carry the same copyright year, so which came first cannot be settled from the texts. The 2026 book, however, reprints the story state, with its Dante and salvation language, not the novel's. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

143. Honeymoon, the theodicy removed after "soul" had been — QUOTE: "wondering still why suffering / is entwined with life's design." … "I'll see her eyes, / recall her pain, / and feel her hand in mine." SOURCE: *Crossings: Selected Poems* (2025) against the Useless Things text (2026); the earlier *Family First* (2024) ending, "and the aching tenderness of my soul" GLOSS: The first step, from "soul" to "life's design," is already recorded. This is the next one: the 2026 text deletes the design question as well and replaces it with nothing abstract. The poem now ends on a hand. Over three dated states, the ending goes from a theological noun, to an unanswered question about providence, to plain touch, one steady move toward the secular. (The 2025 *Poetry* collection keeps the "soul" ending, so the order of the two 2025 states cannot be fixed, but the 2026 text is the latest.) CONFIDENCE: STRONG

144. Honeymoon, lightning cut and kneeling kept — QUOTE: "Thunder booms, lightning illumines the shade." … "Thunder booms." … "Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease

one hurt." SOURCE: *Crossings* (2025) against the Useless Things text; the kneeling line checked in *Family First*, the 2025 *Poetry* collection, *Crossings* and the Useless Things text GLOSS: The 2026 text drops "illumines," the poem's one image of light breaking in, and keeps only the thunder. The devotional posture is untouched: the kneeling line appears in all four states, as does "the tenderness at the bottom of her sole." Revision takes away the signs of revelation and keeps the gesture of foot-washing, never letting "sole" become "soul" again. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

145. Catherine, four states with no religion in any — QUOTE: "you were three thousand miles away, walking into the sea." … "you were swimming, miles and miles away." … "over 29,000 miles away." SOURCE: The Useless Things text against *Family First* (2024), the 2025 *Poetry* collection and *Crossings* (2025) GLOSS: None of the four states contains any sacred word (God, pray, soul, bless, grace, cross, heaven: zero in each). The variants concern distance, line length and dialect ("'Twas all the food we had and needed" against "It was all the food we needed"). The bath is never made into a baptism in any state, so the poem is a negative result for religious revision. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

146. Assumptions, the Bridie poem reprinted with its misprint — QUOTE: "0 Bridie, barefoot in Our Lady's tide" … "Long dead, my dear… but when at last we meet—" SOURCE: The 2016 collection against the Useless Things text (also checked against *The Weight of Small Mercies* and the working typescript); Fr. John Duffy, "Feast of the Assumption, 1924" GLOSS: The embedded poem is identical in both collections. "Our Lady," "Golgotha," "Blessed back to God," "The Eternal's bride" and "His who once was crucified" are all kept. The only difference is a hyphen that becomes a dash after "meet." Every state, including the third printing in *The Weight of Small Mercies*, prints the vocative "O" as the digit zero, which shows how little the poem was re-read. That third printing is the one exception to the stability of the wording: it ends "Shining like His who once was." and loses "crucified" (see Part Four). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

147. The frame, a dedication shortened and a back cover added — QUOTE: "This book is dedicated to my brother Mark, the best pal I ever had." … "For my brother Mark" … "His people drink too much, pray too hard, and love in fierce, imperfect ways." … "A drunken neighbor canvasses the streets on a winter night to save a boy's dog." SOURCE: The front matter of the 2016 collection against the front and back

matter of the Useless Things text GLOSS: Neither dedication is religious. The 2026 book cuts the endearment, moves the acknowledgments to the back and changes them from people to journals ("These stories first appeared, sometimes in different form"), and drops the 2016 book's second story epigraph, "Show me the way to go home," along with that story's title. Its only sacred epigraph is still the Song of Solomon over "Assumptions." The new back-cover copy's only religious words are "pray too hard" and the "stubborn grace of what remains," and it describes "Assumptions" with no Assumption, beach or cure, so the publicity copy removes religion from the story it names first. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

148. A Bath, no earlier state — QUOTE: "Until the seventies. A mother and daughter drowned. After that, swimming was forbidden." SOURCE: The Useless Things text against both collections, the novel, the poetry collections and every journal printing GLOSS: None of the story's longer sentences appears in any other text. Of the eight pieces in the 2026 book, "A Bath" is the only one with no other state to compare. Its relation to "Catherine" is a doublet inside the book, not a revision, so no direction of religious revision can be stated for it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

149. Useless Things, Nonna on the beach — QUOTE: "I wish God would reach down and pull that one off the beach." SOURCE: The Assumption as a bodily taking-up by God; cf. Genesis 5:24 ("and he was not; for God took him") and 2 Kings 2:11 (Elijah taken up). GLOSS: Seconds after doubting that Mary "flew up into the sky," Nonna wishes that God would lift the greasy bicycle mechanic off the beach. The joke turns the feast's doctrine into an irritable rapture of a stranger, on the feast day and at the place of the cure. The bodily assumption she has just dismissed comes back as a wish for removal rather than for glorification. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

150. Useless Things, Mrs. Muldoon asleep on the porch — QUOTE: "Mrs. Muldoon was asleep." / "When she was beside Mrs. Muldoon, she shook her. For a moment, I thought she might be dead." SOURCE: The Dormition, the Eastern name for the feast of August 15 (Mary's "falling asleep"), alongside Mrs. Muldoon's own account that Mary "was raised into heaven three days after her death." GLOSS: On the morning of the feast, the woman who will be found dead in the same housedress is first shown asleep, and Molly takes her for dead. The moment anticipates the corpse in the purple chair and puts the Dormition sequence of sleep, death and raising on the feast

day itself. Molly, already named an "Angel of Death," is the first to see death in her. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

151. Useless Things, the ring in Mrs. Muldoon's hair — QUOTE: "The cast of the sun highlighted a matted ring that circled her hair, as though she had been wearing a hat earlier." SOURCE: The nimbus of Marian and saints' iconography; the crowned Virgin of the Assumption. GLOSS: On the feast day the sun picks out a ring around Mrs. Muldoon's sweaty hair, a halo made of grime and explained away as the mark of a hat. It pairs with the "halo-shaped pool" of blood around Myra's head in the same collection, where haloes appear only as accidents of matter. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

152. Useless Things, the cure as a parting gift — QUOTE: "Maybe she thinks it's you and me that need the cure, and it is her parting gift." / "Maybe she thinks we have sick souls." SOURCE: Luke 5:31 ("They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick"); the seawater cure of August 15. GLOSS: Nonna guesses, half joking, that the beach trip is meant for the healthy companions rather than for the invalid. The story ends that way: Mrs. Muldoon leaves a purple box for Molly, and the cross inside goes to the girl who has just insisted, "Nonna, I don't have a sick soul." Nonna's throwaway line sets up the final gift long before it arrives. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

153. Useless Things, the healer and money — QUOTE: "The man on the radio said she doesn't accept any money. Believes she has a calling is what he said she said," / "I noticed people slipping her bills," SOURCE: Matthew 10:8 ("freely ye have received, freely give"); Acts 8:18-20 (Simon Magus offering money for the gift of God). GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon defends Lady Jane in the language of vocation and free healing that Christ gives the apostles. Molly's flat report of bills changing hands exposes healing for cash under the name of a calling. This is the one point where the story measures the false healer against a scriptural standard instead of only mocking her. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

154. Useless Things, the emptied house — QUOTE: "Ya know, I don't know what in hell remains in her house. Every day that I drive by men are removing more furniture. She says she's donating her things to Goodwill." / "She had donated practically all of it to charity, except for a few pieces in her living room, kitchen, and of course, her bedroom." SOURCE: Matthew 19:21 ("go and sell that thou hast, and

give to the poor"); the settling of goods before death. GLOSS: Mrs. Muldoon gives away her household in the months before the feast, and everyone reads it as preparation for a move to Ireland. Looking back, the giving away is the outward sign of her planned death: she empties the house of its things before Nonna calls the old "useless things" themselves. The gospel counsel to give everything to the poor is carried out, but as preparation for suicide rather than for discipleship. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

155. Useless Things, the boots and the threat to strip — QUOTE: "I'm going to take them off once we settle in a good spot. I may even strip naked. Wouldn't that be a sight to behold?" SOURCE: Fr. John Duffy, "Feast of the Assumption, 1924," printed at the end of "Assumptions": "You shamed that naked goddess of the seas" and "Clothed to the knees in black, you stood and prayed." GLOSS: Duffy's Bridie enters the feast-day water dressed in black and shames the naked goddess. Mrs. Muldoon comes to the same feast in black boots and jokes that she may go in naked, turning the poem's modesty around. The pious mother of the poem and the drinking widow of the story are set against each other at the same rite. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

The Collection as a Designed Book: Useless Things

1. The eight-part route — QUOTE: "Contents" SOURCE: Printed-order formal principle; prose/verse alternation GLOSS: The printed order is **Assumptions; A Bath; Myra Bocca; Catherine; Useless Things; Honeymoon; A Nun's Arse; Drenched to the Bone**—three prose narratives, a poem, prose, a poem, then two prose narratives: P–P–P–V–P–V–P–P. It begins in an inherited Irish-Catholic world, passes through mother/daughter/grandmother care and commercialized New Age spirituality, reaches the title-story death, then refuses closure by returning to care, to Mary alive again, and finally to a man learning to listen. The collection therefore arranges its materials as recurrence and revision, not as a chronological accumulation of plots. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

2. The opening and closing lines form an antiphony — QUOTE: "You are altogether beautiful, my love;" / "there is no flaw in you." / "Tell me about you, Kate." SOURCE: Song of Solomon 4:7; formal principle of call-and-response GLOSS: The first line, an epigraph to *Assumptions*, pronounces an absolute love on a woman whom the story

will describe as grotesquely judged; the last narrative line replaces proclamation with a question. The book moves from a scriptural assurance of beauty to the imperfect discipline of attending to another person's account. Its terminal grace is not a doctrinal answer but receptive speech. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

3. The title story is the hinge, not the destination — QUOTE: "It seemed that I was engulfed by believers in those days." / "A useless thing." SOURCE: Mid-collection placement; title-story formal principle GLOSS: *Useless Things* is fifth of eight pieces, immediately after the verse condensation of *A Bath* and before the filial foot-care poem *Honeymoon*. Its ending supplies the collection's title proposition, but the next three pieces test it rather than ratify it: they reintroduce care, relapse, institutional failure, and the possibility of renewed attention. Placement prevents the cross and the corpse from being a final answer. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

4. Mary's posthumous reappearance is an architectural refusal of finality — QUOTE: "Inside was a gold necklace with an emerald and diamond cross." / "Mary Muldoon just called. Drunk as a skunk, asking if I knew where her husband Jim was" SOURCE: Analepsis; recursive collection design GLOSS: *A Nun's Arse*, placed after the title story has shown Mary's decomposed body, returns her to an earlier, living scene of alcoholism, cruelty, need, and ordinary domestic comedy. The ordering makes the reader hold the corpse and the irritating person together; neither hagiography nor disgust is allowed to consume her. This temporal backstep is one of the book's strongest arguments that care is owed before, not after, a life is made symbolically tidy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

5. A Bath and Catherine: the same lift, changed medium — QUOTE: PROSE: "Time to help me up," Nana said. / "On the count of three." / VERSE: "Time for your bath." / "Up you go. On the count of three. One, two, three," she said. SOURCE: Genre conversion; repeated liturgical formula GLOSS: The prose scene embeds the lift in a full revelation about Grace's abuse, her mother's old injuries, and Billy's unknown father; the poem preserves the tactile command and counted action. Verse turns the lift into a refrain with a fixed cadence, so that a practical transfer of weight acquires the repeatability of a rite. The conversion does not add orthodox doctrine, but it formalizes the embodied service through rhythm, repetition, and compression. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

6. Verse shifts the bath from imagined psychology to direct address — QUOTE: PROSE: "I suppose they were preoccupied by memory. I imagined my grandmother was thinking about an ocean three thousand miles away." / VERSE: "Silent, except for sighs as she sponged your back," / "you were three thousand miles away, walking into the sea." SOURCE: Lyric apostrophe and lineation GLOSS: The prose narrator cautiously imagines the grandmother's interiority and connects it to the mother's newly felt love; the poem addresses the elder directly and states her sea-journey as the poem's governing present. The line breaks isolate the sponging, sighing, and remembered water, making the bath feel less like household exposition and more like a private ritual of passage. It intensifies religious resonance by concentrating the cleansing action, while retaining the mother's scolding and therefore refusing to make the rite wholly serene. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. The vocabulary of uselessness is domestic before it is metaphysical — QUOTE: "it was a mortal sin to waste the day-old baked goods, even though the management had insisted that they be tossed in the rubbish." / "Mom scraped dirty plates from the table and counters into the trash" / "leftover food—bits of toast, old bacon, and half-eaten sandwiches." SOURCE: Lexical field of waste; domestic-material formal principle GLOSS: The book first attaches waste to food, garbage, unsorted rooms, and the labor of cleaning rather than to abstract philosophy. The bakery worker's refusal to waste food anticipates the later refusal to accept that elderly people are disposable; in contrast, the bath scene makes cleaning a form of care rather than a verdict on Nana's mess. The material vocabulary grounds the title's theology in kitchens and bodies. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

8. The complete value lexicon darkens from objects into bodies and beliefs — QUOTE: "all that money wasted in sending a man to the moon" / "rotting wooden gray steps" / "going through my rubbish" / "throwing out any 'good stuff.'" / "asked the waitress to put the leftovers in a bag to go" / "several trash bags along the gray clapboard wall" / "'Cause she's rotten, Molly." / "Junk. When you get old you accumulate a lot of useless things" / "Leftovers are another useless thing." / "Maybe she dumped food from her refrigerator into one of them." / "a combination of shit, vomit, body odor, and rotting fish" / "Mary has squash rot" / "your brain is rotted from too much alcohol" / "feel I've wasted my life" / "our marriage has been a waste" / "I don't believe that junk is true" SOURCE: Lexical progression; entropy

motif GLOSS: These are the collection's substantive occurrences of rubbish/junk, leftovers, rot, waste, and junk, apart from the title itself. They move from discarded goods to an aging woman, decomposing flesh, alcoholism, a failed marriage, and finally rejected religious belief. The word *worthless* never appears, and neither does the exact phrase *throw away*; the nearest wording is the boy asking whether Mary is throwing out any good stuff, a phrase that keeps value contingent and contested. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

9. What "useless" means: a qualified theology of the least — QUOTE: "And then you become one of them. So live while you can." / "A useless thing." SOURCE: 1 Corinthians 1:27–28; Matthew 25:40; Luke 15:8–10; Mark 12:41–44 GLOSS: First Corinthians is the closest scriptural analogue: the book repeatedly makes the aged, drunken, ill, poor, and socially embarrassing people the ones who demand attention. Matthew's least are enacted more reliably in bathing, lifting, feeding, and sitting with than in any sermon. The lost-coin and widow's-mite tests are corrective: the book offers neither a triumphant recovery nor a promise that Mary's cross will be rewarded; value lies in the attention given and the gift received, not in an assured reversal of worldly loss. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

10. Assumptions makes bodily tending its first household liturgy — QUOTE: "It's a good thing she has a neighbor like Helen to check on her, and take her out once in a while." / "My grandmother managed to coax Peg out of the boots, pouring salt water playfully over Peg's toes before leading her into the ocean" / "My grandmother rubbed tanning oil into Peg's bald scalp" / "Peg kept wrapping our shoulders with her purple towel" SOURCE: Corporal works of mercy; water-and-anointing form GLOSS: Helen, the grandmother, Peggy, and the children all perform small acts of transport, washing, anointing, covering, and protection. The care runs in both directions: the frail alcoholic is tended, but she also wraps the children against burning and has earlier saved the boy's dog through persistent calls. The scene's sacramental force belongs to this reciprocal, untidy network rather than to a priest or cure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

11. A Bath gives care a three-generation chain — QUOTE: "Mom scraped dirty plates from the table and counters into the trash, then ran hot water with soap in the sink." / "Wash your face straightaway. There's a clean washcloth on the shelf above the toilet." / "My grandmother moved her chair close to my mother and hugged her.

She rubbed her back." / "I wrapped myself around my grandmother's soft flesh." / "I listened through the door. There was no conversation. I heard splashing and my grandmother's sighs as my mother rubbed her back." SOURCE: Maternal succession; bathing/ablution form GLOSS: Nana first comforts the battered Grace, then Grace and Billy lift Nana, and Grace bathes her. The same hands that inspect a daughter's bruises later sponge an elder's back, so care travels across generations rather than descending from a stable authority. Whiskey is offered as comfort in the first exchange, an ambivalence that keeps this domestic sacrament from becoming sentimental. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

12. The title story and Honeymoon make lifting, food, and ointment the most durable cures — QUOTE: "Nonna helped her down the steps" / "I helped lift them" / "We sat in the shade of a bony cliff, eating panettone, bananas, apples, and delicious cherries drenched in brandy." / "The three of us made a toast to new beginnings" / "She asks me to put Bacitracin on her heel." / "I rub Aveeno on her feet." SOURCE: Foot-washing; ordinary medicine; communal meal GLOSS: In *Useless Things*, Nonna and Molly physically convey Mary to the beach, lift her after the wave, feed her, and share a final meal; in *Honeymoon*, a child kneels to medicate a mother's heel. Neither sequence prevents decline or death. Their theological claim is therefore not that care cures mortality, but that a body is not useless while someone still attends to its pain. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

13. Myra Bocca distinguishes emergency care from spiritual salesmanship without granting rescue — QUOTE: "Evy was a godsend." / "I'm a nurse. . . . Evy, put on gloves from that emergency kit." / "You gotta do chest compressions. I'll tell you how." / "Evy pumped. Her gloves were bloody." SOURCE: Practical medical procedure; negative miracle GLOSS: Gabe reports Evy's sustained care during his mother's surgeries; later Mrs. Callaghan directs Evy through CPR when Myra is injured. This is the collection's clearest technical care: gloves, counted compressions, and a bodily cost to the helper. It fails to save Myra, which makes the contrast ethical rather than magical—true care acts because a body is present, not because success is guaranteed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

14. Transport, phoning, and listening become late forms of care — QUOTE: "Grab that shovel against the house and clear a path from her door down to the street." / "Nonna was able to grab her arm and steady her into a chair." / "Nonna said that she

had tried to call Mrs. Muldoon on the evening before her trip to find out the time of her flight, but there was no answer" / "aide who looks in on her a couple times a week" / "had Elsa set up an appointment with the school psychologist." / "Tell me about you, Kate." SOURCE: Pastoral visitation; formal echo of the closing question GLOSS: Shoveling and steadying Mary in *A Nun's Arse* extend the book's care catalogue to making a safe path and preventing a fall. The missed call to Mary marks care that arrives too late, while the aide's visits and the school-psychologist appointment show imperfect institutional substitutes. Jack's final call reverses his earlier marital failure to ask and listen. The book broadens caretaking beyond touch: making contact and inviting speech are the last available acts when cure is impossible. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

15. The book's actual sacramental system is lay and reciprocal — QUOTE: "Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt." / "For a few moments, the three of us had all we ever needed." SOURCE: John 13:1–17; lay liturgy/formal principle GLOSS: There is no completed institutional sacrament in the collection that heals its central wounds: no Mass absolves Grace, no faith healer saves Mary, and the church sign cannot repair Jack's marriage. Instead, the recurrent forms are kneeling, rubbing, bathing, lifting, feeding, calling, and listening; women, children, friends, and occasional strangers perform them for one another. They replace official sacraments functionally, not triumphantly: their grace is temporary, bodily, and available to unbelievers. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

16. Lady Jane is a false healer whose prophecy the book uneasily leaves standing — QUOTE: "The masters have told be you are spiritually cured for your trip." / "You have the unlucky fortune of being someone who will either find dead people or be near them when they die in violent situations." / "I guess you might say that you're an Angel of Death." SOURCE: Parody of charismatic healing and prophecy GLOSS: Her hand-crossing, invented sacred speech, and claim of spiritual cure are exposed by the narrator's heard "pussy" and by the scene's comic theatricality. Yet Molly subsequently finds Mary's corpse, and the collection includes violent deaths, so the prediction cannot simply be dismissed as false within the fiction. Lady Jane is neither corrected nor punished onstage; the book separates fraudulent ritual from a disquieting possibility that prediction may accidentally be right. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

17. Myra, the doctors, and the seawater cure: punishment and healing are not consistent systems — QUOTE: "It's good for healing grief. Please take it." / "Obviously you have been the victim of fraud." / "cancer doctor right away" / "Dr. Kelleher, her Jungian psychologist had used." / "I feel refreshed and healed." SOURCE: False-relic parody; medical and folk-healing counterpoints GLOSS: Myra commodifies grief and is then killed while fleeing the fraud accusation, but this is accidental consequence, not an administered moral judgment. Doctors are repeatedly mentioned—a clinic, cancer care, Dr. Kelleher, a school psychologist—without delivering the book's decisive cure; the Assumption seawater gives Mary refreshment but not survival. The collection punishes Myra's theft, not false healing as such, and it makes every healing system partial. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

18. The first four titles descend from doctrine to bodies and names — QUOTE: "Assumptions" / "A Bath" / "Myra Bocca" / "Catherine" SOURCE: Title grammar; Song of Solomon and Assumption resonance GLOSS: The abstract plural "Assumptions" opens under a biblical epigraph and an Assumption feast; "A Bath" reduces sacred water to domestic necessity; the next two titles grant bare personal names to the New Age seller and to the woman cared for in verse. This movement from doctrinal abstraction to named, dependent bodies prepares the collection to ask what value means in practice. "Catherine" also turns a prose scene into a memorial lyric, so its title gives the formerly generic "Nana" a poetic singularity. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

19. The final four titles make sacred language pass through the comic, the intimate, and the weather — QUOTE: "Useless Things" / "Honeymoon" / "A Nun's Arse" / "Drenched to the Bone" SOURCE: Title sequence; Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are A-Changin'* GLOSS: The central title formulates value as a paradox; "Honeymoon" juxtaposes marriage's ideal image with foot care; "A Nun's Arse" turns Catholic consecration into profane hunger; and "Drenched to the Bone" takes its final title-energy from Dylan's flood-like song. Only "nun" is overtly ecclesial, but each title bends a large symbolic register back into damaged ordinary life. Collectively they reject a clean division between sacred language and vulgar, comic, aging flesh. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

20. The collection ends by revising its own title through attention rather than utility — QUOTE: "We spend too much time in our own heads." / "I'm sorry. I should have paid more attention to you." / "Tell me about you, Kate." SOURCE:

Conversational confession; closing formal principle GLOSS: Jack's final movement does not identify an object as secretly valuable, as "Useless Things" does with the cross. It identifies a person who has been insufficiently attended to and asks her to speak. The last story thus supplies the practical doctrine implicit throughout the book: value is not usefulness, purity, successful cure, or even permanence; it is the costly decision to notice and remain answerable to another life. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

Part Four: The Weight of Small Mercies

The Concordance: The Weight of Small Mercies

BOOK THREE: *The Weight of Small Mercies*

"Arise and Go Now"

One-line summary: Aiden confronts his grandmother's friend Rita about a charity lie, then enlists her and others in a scheme to spring his institutionalized mother from the psychiatric hospital, guided by his dead grandfather's ghost.

98. **QUOTE:** "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree," **SOURCE:** W. B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," itself echoing the prodigal son's resolve, Luke 15:18 ("I will arise and go to my father"). **GLOSS:** The poem, pasted into a family photo album, structurally maps this story's plot — rescuing a lost family member — onto the prodigal son's homecoming. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
99. **QUOTE:** "Rita laughed at you for praying to Saint Anthony before you went to the car." **SOURCE:** St. Anthony of Padua, patron saint of lost things. **GLOSS:** Sacred aid is invoked for the mundane loss of pearls — the collection's paradigm of "small mercies," sacred power summoned for domestic trivia. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
100. **QUOTE:** "Glory be to God. Catherine must be at her wit's end." **SOURCE:** The Gloria Patri doxology ("Glory be to the Father…"). **GLOSS:** A liturgical formula collapses into casual gossip about a broken arm, exemplifying doxology as linguistic reflex. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
101. **QUOTE:** "A cardinal swooped down and sat on the birdbath… as if it were listening to our conversation." **SOURCE:** Bird as visitation/comfort sign, associated with the dead. **GLOSS:** The cardinal, linked to Rita's dead husband Sean, functions as an informal sign of the beloved dead's continued presence. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

102. **QUOTE:** "look at that dove in the tree" / "a light grey mourning dove fluttered its wings." **SOURCE:** The dove as sign of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16) and of peace (Genesis 8:11, the dove of Noah). **GLOSS:** Doves mark moments of hoped-for release and reunion, continuing the trilogy's recurring dove imagery in an explicitly comforting register. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
103. **QUOTE:** "he wanted me to thank you" / "he's sorry" / "stop blaming yourself… It's not your fault." **SOURCE:** Absolution and release from guilt (cf. the sacrament of Reconciliation). **GLOSS:** The grandfather's ghost delivers a message of forgiveness that substitutes for formal confession, absolving Nanna of guilt over his death. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
104. **QUOTE:** "Hope is sitting right beside me." **SOURCE:** G. F. Watts's allegorical painting *Hope* (1886), described later in the story. **GLOSS:** The grandmother reframes an ambiguous theological virtue as literally present in the car, in the person of the returning mother — hope embodied rather than abstract. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
105. **QUOTE:** "helping others is our most sacred obligation, the source of all hope and goodness." **SOURCE:** Charity as practical grace; caritas as first virtue (1 Corinthians 13:13). **GLOSS:** Aiden's closing realization states outright the collection's ethical-theological thesis: charity is the operative form the sacred takes in this family. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
106. **QUOTE:** "Goodness is the only investment that never fails." **SOURCE:** Maxim attributed (within the story) to "Toreau" (Thoreau). **GLOSS:** Functions as lay-scriptural refrain, quoted as though gospel, guiding the children's moral logic across two stories. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
107. **QUOTE:** "No one is ever gonna mess with you as long as I'm around." **SOURCE:** Brotherly covenant of protection, echoing shepherding/covenant language (cf. Psalm 23). **GLOSS:** A small-scale, secular covenant of loyalty stands in for divine promises of protection. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.

"Assumptions" (in The Weight of Small Mercies)

(Near-verbatim variant of the title story in Book One; see Cross-Book Repetitions for full textual comparison. Distinct/notable material below.)

108. **QUOTE:** "You are altogether beautiful, my love; There is no flaw in you." **SOURCE:** Song of Solomon 4:7. **GLOSS:** Epigraph applied ironically/redemptively to "homely" Peggy, establishing the story's central theological move of reclassifying ugliness as beauty in the eyes of love/God. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

109. **QUOTE:** "We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma; that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." **SOURCE:** Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950), defining the dogma of the Assumption. **GLOSS:** Direct citation of magisterial teaching, quoted at length and with theological precision inside a comic, domestic narrative. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

110. **QUOTE:** "her favorite month was May, the Blessed Mother's month" / "a blue marble carving of Mary." **SOURCE:** Marian devotion (the month of May traditionally dedicated to Mary). **GLOSS:** Domestic Marian piety saturates the grandmother's home, a background devotional texture rather than an isolated allusion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

111. **QUOTE:** "Beth caught the wig, then raised it in the air like the head of John the Baptist, giggling and tiptoeing" **SOURCE:** The beheading of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29; Salome's request). **GLOSS:** A comic beach mishap is described via explicit martyrdom/beheading imagery — grotesque juxtaposition of slapstick and sacred violence. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

112. **QUOTE:** "my grandmother rubbed tanning oil into Peg's bald scalp, forehead, and the nape of her neck; she shone like a miniature sun." **SOURCE:** Anointing with oil (extreme unction/confirmation; cf. James 5:14). **GLOSS:** Sunscreen application on a beach is structured as an anointing ritual upon the "crowned" head of the story's Christ/Marian-adjacent figure. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

113. **QUOTE:** "like the flesh of a Father's hands as He cradles His child's head before lifting His crossed arms to kiss her soft cheek." **SOURCE:** God the Father's paternal love; possibly evocative of the Pietà tradition, inverted (Father receiving child rather than mother receiving son). **GLOSS:** The collection's most explicit theological set-piece: grief converted directly into glory through an imagined divine embrace. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

"Blindfolded"

One-line summary: Nanna steals a "sacred" chalice from a charismatic healing Mass to give Aiden's institutionalized mother communion wine, hoping for a miracle, then stages its dramatic "return" as a fabricated miracle.

114. **QUOTE:** "Bright light shone through the stained-glass windows where Jesus was depicted in the fourteen Stations of the Cross." **SOURCE:** The Stations of the Cross, a Catholic devotional depicting Christ's Passion. **GLOSS:** Establishes the church's Passion iconography as backdrop to an act of theft committed in pursuit of healing. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
115. **QUOTE:** "He prayed over people, then lightly touched them. They fell into the arms of two old men." **SOURCE:** Charismatic healing rite ("slaying in the Spirit"), cf. Acts 8:17 (laying on of hands). **GLOSS:** An accurately observed charismatic Catholic healing practice, treated with comic skepticism by the child narrator. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
116. **QUOTE:** ""Dear Jesus," she said loudly, "I don't know how many more tribulations I can take."" **SOURCE:** "Tribulation," a biblical term for suffering/testing (Matthew 24:21; Romans 5:3). **GLOSS:** Nanna invokes tribulation-language while actively committing a theft, fusing genuine hardship-language with active deception. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
117. **QUOTE:** "the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh." **SOURCE:** Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13, Moses striking the rock for water. **GLOSS:** A drunk priest's exhalation is compared sacrilegiously and comically to the Mosaic water-miracle — biblical typology deployed for a joke. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
118. **QUOTE:** "A reading from the first Letter of Saint John… 'Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God… We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'" **SOURCE:** 1 John 3:1–3. **GLOSS:** Quoted at liturgical length and verbatim, ironically counterpointing the theft of the chalice unfolding beneath the reading about being "revealed." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
119. **QUOTE:** "It is revealed!" **SOURCE:** Punning callback to 1 John 3:2 ("what we shall be has not yet been revealed"). **GLOSS:** Aiden's triumphant pun as he

produces the stolen chalice deliberately echoes the liturgical reading just heard. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

120. **QUOTE:** "Drink this wine. Joshua says the cup has healing powers." **SOURCE:** Eucharistic wine as vehicle of healing; "Joshua" as a deliberate Christic pun (Joshua/Yeshua/Jesus). **GLOSS:** An unauthorized home Eucharist is administered by a grandmother to her institutionalized daughter under the guise of a fictitious lender named for Christ's Hebrew name. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

121. **QUOTE:** ""Jerusalem, New York. He's visiting some relatives in Boston." "Jerusalem?" She laughed" **SOURCE:** Punning displacement of the holy city. **GLOSS:** The sacred city of Jerusalem is relocated to a fictitious upstate New York town, comic sacred geography in miniature. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

122. **QUOTE:** "I'm a Christian woman… we abstain from alcohol in reverence to Our Lord Jesus Christ." **SOURCE:** Invocation of Christian piety as cover for a lie. **GLOSS:** Hypocrisy and genuine piety intertwine — false witness given explicitly in Christ's name. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

123. **QUOTE:** "God works in mysterious ways." / "I often doubt the possibility of miracles, but then I find myself thinking that every moment is miraculous." **SOURCE:** Folk theodicy/providence language (cf. William Cowper's hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"). **GLOSS:** States the collection's ambivalent theology of miracle directly: skepticism and wonder coexisting without resolution. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

124. **QUOTE:** "It's the good horse that draws its own cart… instead of sitting on our arses waiting for Jesus to put the world right." **SOURCE:** Folk-Pelagian revision of grace (works-based self-reliance dressed as faith). **GLOSS:** Nanna's proverb-theology insists mercy is manufactured from below rather than bestowed from above — the collection's real theological thesis. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

125. **QUOTE:** "It's a miracle," the priest hollered… "Thanks be to God." **SOURCE:** The Mass response "Thanks be to God" (Deo gratias). **GLOSS:** A fabricated miracle narrative is received uncritically as divine confirmation and answered with the correct liturgical response, exposing the porousness between fraud and faith. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

126. **QUOTE:** "I'm Elaine, and this is my grandson Galahad." **SOURCE:** Arthurian Grail legend (Sir Galahad, the knight who achieves the Holy Grail). **GLOSS:** Chosen aliases appropriate to a chalice-quest narrative, drawing an explicit parallel between the stolen chalice plot and the Grail romance tradition. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
127. **QUOTE:** "people are afraid to believe in things they cannot see." **SOURCE:** Cf. Hebrews 11:1 ("faith is… the evidence of things not seen"); also 2 Corinthians 5:7. **GLOSS:** The grandfather's ghost articulates a theology of faith as trust beyond visible evidence, applied to "second sight" rather than orthodox doctrine. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
128. **QUOTE:** "the bedroom glowed with tiny white lights, illuminated bubbles floating in the air." **SOURCE:** Theophany/private annunciation imagery (cf. Luke 1:26-38, angelic visitation). **GLOSS:** The grandfather's ghostly visits are staged with the visual vocabulary of angelic apparition. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
129. **QUOTE:** "I thought of the chalice, the wine, and the revelation of God's love. But mostly, I cherished hope." **SOURCE:** Theological virtue of hope (1 Corinthians 13:13), tied to Watts's painting. **GLOSS:** Closing line names "revelation" and "hope" as the story's final theological terms, tying the title ("Blindfolded") to faith operating without full sight. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

"Keep Calm and Carry On"

One-line summary: Nanna hardens Aiden with life lessons, gives money to poor neighbors, then burgles a friend's jewelry and repeats the chalice-theft scheme to fund Aiden's mother's care.

130. **QUOTE:** "There but for the grace of God go I." **SOURCE:** Traditional proverb attributed to John Bradford, expressing grace as the sole distinguishing factor between fortune and misfortune. **GLOSS:** Recited catechism-style immediately after an act of charity, explicitly naming grace as the theological ground for almsgiving. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
131. **QUOTE:** "He raised Lazarus from the dead… healed the deaf and dumb men… the blind man… the fish. And the water into wine." **SOURCE:** John 11 (Lazarus); Mark 7:31-37 and Mark 8:22-26 (deaf/dumb, blind healings); John

6:1-14 (loaves and fishes); John 2:1-11 (water into wine). **GLOSS:** A casual inventory of Gospel miracles recited over sandwiches, undercut immediately by "Why aren't there miracles today?" — scripture as kitchen-table small talk. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

132. **QUOTE:** "a gold necklace with a cross" (stolen), later used as a fake gift: "I was saying a prayer with my grandson. He gave me this gold cross." **SOURCE:** The crucifix, deployed dishonestly to evoke sympathy. **GLOSS:** A stolen cross becomes an instrument of successful deception, undeserved mercy (the officer's warning rather than a ticket) granted because of a misused sacred symbol. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

133. **QUOTE:** "the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh" (repeated). **SOURCE:** Exodus 17; Numbers 20 (verbatim repetition from "Blindfolded"). **GLOSS:** Confirms the chalice-theft as the collection's central ritual set-piece, restaged nearly word for word. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

134. **QUOTE:** "This time my grandmother's tears were real. They gushed like water from that rock in the Middle East." **SOURCE:** Reapplication of the Exodus water-miracle image. **GLOSS:** The same scriptural image, previously deployed cynically, is now applied sincerely to real grief — artifice and true feeling converging on identical language. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

135. **QUOTE:** "Keep calm and carry on," … "to me or to herself. Or to both of us." **SOURCE:** British WWII propaganda slogan, functioning here as a substitute liturgy of endurance. **GLOSS:** A secular wartime mantra replaces formal religious comfort, whispered like a blessing or private prayer. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

136. **QUOTE:** "Life is full of pain, sweetheart… you got to carry on." **SOURCE:** Anti-consolation theology of resilience. **GLOSS:** Nanna's stoic catechesis displaces conventional promises of grace with a creed of endurance, the family's true operative theology. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

137. **QUOTE:** "Is lying about leukemia… a venial sin?" / "It's a minor sin. Like a white lie." **SOURCE:** Catholic moral theology's distinction between venial and mortal sin. **GLOSS:** The child weighs deception on a formal doctrinal scale, showing sin-categorization functioning as active, serious moral reasoning rather than mere vocabulary. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

138. **QUOTE:** "they stayed like that until the sunbeams dimmed and the dust disappeared and her tears stopped." **SOURCE:** Quasi-liturgical stillness after confession/catharsis. **GLOSS:** Evening light functions as a hush of grace following an emotional unburdening, a wordless absolution. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.

"The Wrong Way"

One-line summary: On a Sunday visitation, Aiden's father reveals he is abandoning the family for Arizona; Aiden confronts him and returns home to his mother and grandmother.

139. **QUOTE:** "Every couple weeks, on a Sunday after church, my father picked Martin and me up." **SOURCE:** The liturgical week (Sunday Mass) as temporal frame. **GLOSS:** The visitation is scheduled around sacred time, contrasting the ordered rhythm of the Church calendar with the profane disappointment to follow. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
140. **QUOTE:** "The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come." **SOURCE:** Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* — a redemption/conversion narrative structurally analogous to religious repentance. **GLOSS:** Functions as scripture-substitute controlling metaphor; unlike Scrooge, the father undergoes no conversion, denying the story's grace. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
141. **QUOTE:** "The miracle of heated swimming pools." **SOURCE:** Trivializing use of "miracle." **GLOSS:** The father's sarcastic deployment of sacred vocabulary contrasts with its sincere use elsewhere (Lazarus, the chalice, the Assumption), marking him as spiritually estranged from the family's inherited grammar. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.
142. **QUOTE:** "snow like piled linen." **SOURCE:** Burial shroud/altar-linen imagery. **GLOSS:** Falling snow evokes funeral linens at the moment of the parents' reconciliation dying for good — a shroud image marking spiritual death. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.
143. **QUOTE:** "There are no ghosts, Aiden." / "Mom has the ability to see things you can't. You'll never understand." **SOURCE:** Faith versus rational unbelief (cf. John 20:29, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet

believed"). **GLOSS:** The father is cast as the "blind" unbeliever, inverting "Blindfolded's" theme of faithful blindness. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

144. **QUOTE:** "Never dread the winter 'til the snow is on the blanket." **SOURCE:** Irish folk proverb functioning as psalm-like comfort. **GLOSS:** A secular proverb of endurance closes the story like a benediction after Aiden's wound of abandonment. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

145. **QUOTE:** "A few ashes dropped on my jeans." **SOURCE:** Ash Wednesday penitential imagery ("remember you are dust," Genesis 3:19). **GLOSS:** Cigarette ash falls on the child at the exact moment of the story's central betrayal, a stray penitential mark with no accompanying absolution. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE.

146. **QUOTE:** "Take me home." **SOURCE:** "Home" as spiritual destination/telos, inverted from the "arise and go now" homecoming pattern. **GLOSS:** Reverses the collection's opening homecoming: going home here is rejection of the father's "wrong way," redemption located in return to mother and grandmother. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

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1. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "Above the entryway the limestone sculpture of a woman wearing a tunic stood with one arm resting on an anchor." SOURCE: Hebrews 6:19 ("Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast"); the anchor as the classical iconographic emblem of the theological virtue of Hope, and specifically of Spes personified in cemetery and institutional sculpture. GLOSS: McCall Hospital's facade sculpture literalizes "Hope" months before the Watts painting of the same name appears in the story's final scene, so the building itself is quietly announcing the virtue that will save Laura. The detail has gone unremarked in earlier reading despite anchoring (literally) the whole Hope motif that the criticism otherwise credits only to the Watts reproduction. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

2. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "the wandering Jew with its purple and green heart-shaped leaves" SOURCE: The medieval/early-modern legend of the Wandering Jew (Ahasuerus), condemned to walk the earth without rest until the Second Coming for having mocked Christ on the road to Calvary. GLOSS: Named almost in passing among Rita's potted plants, the "wandering Jew" quietly seeds the story's Via Dolorosa and exile motifs — restless wandering toward a deferred homecoming —

that the title poem ("I will arise and go now") will make explicit two pages later; a common houseplant becomes an inadvertent gloss on the collection's own themes of pilgrimage and unrest. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

3. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "She saw me looking at the cover. A girl in a red dress stood in front of a grave. The ground was on fire." SOURCE: Cf. Exodus 3:2 (the burning bush that is not consumed) and general resurrection/purgatorial fire iconography. GLOSS: The pulp paperback cover Rita is reading (Frank De Felitta's *Audrey Rose*) pictures a grave on fire, a debased echo of purgatorial or resurrection flame that anticipates the story's own concern with a soul (Sean's ghost) that will not stay in its grave; the girl in red before a burning grave visually rehearses the collection's recurring "fire that does not consume" motif attached elsewhere to Titian's *Assunta*. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

4. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "She patted the sides of her red hair and smoothed her pleated cotton nightdress, a pattern of honeybees. She was always donning unusual clothing or changing the color of her hair" SOURCE: Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:5-15 and the general hagiographic topos of women's changeable "vanity" set against fixed sanctity; also functions against the fixed, "always the same" iconographic garb of the Blessed Mother invoked later in "Assumptions." GLOSS: Rita's restless self-fashioning — changing hair color "a month ago," donning "unusual clothing" — is a small secular counter-note to the collection's Marian ideal of unchanging blue-and-white constancy, marking her as a loving but unstable, merely human intercessor compared to the Virgin invoked elsewhere. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

5. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "Isn't this peaceful?… Sometimes I sit here from morning until evening, watching the birds lift their wings or listening 'til the crickets sing." She laughed. "That rhymed. I'm a poet." SOURCE: Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" ("I hear it in the deep heart's core") — the crickets Rita hears in her own backyard echo "where the cricket sings" in the poem the boy has not yet discovered in the album. GLOSS: Rita unknowingly speaks in the cadence and imagery of the Yeats poem that structures the entire story before the reader (or Aiden) has encountered it, making her backyard a proleptic Innisfree — proof that "peace comes dropping slow" is available in Boston as much as in Sligo. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

6. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "I ran down the steps and turned once to look at her. She waved, wiping more tears from her cheeks. I thought, how great is the power of love and memory?" SOURCE: Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8, 13 ("charity never faileth… but the greatest of these is charity/love") and the general Pauline hymn to love as the enduring theological virtue. GLOSS: The boy's unprompted meditative aphorism functions as a lay doxology closing the scene, echoing the cadence of Pauline praise of love in a domestic register — the story's small, secular "hymn to charity" delivered by a child rather than an apostle. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

7. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "Not as much as staying in this hellhole," my mother said. SOURCE: Colloquial "hell" idiom functioning as inverted prayer/imprecation; cf. the collection's recurring profanity-as-liturgy pattern (Kyrie-adjacent exclamations like "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph"). GLOSS: Laura's curse names the psychiatric ward as a literal hell she is escaping in a scene otherwise staged as a mock-Exodus (an "escape," a locked door, pursuing guards); the profanity briefly reframes the hospital escape as a harrowing-of-hell narrative in miniature. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

8. Blindfolded — QUOTE: "I went to the bathroom and positioned my face under the faucet to drink some water. In the mirror, my cheeks appeared sunburnt. The color would fade by the morning, as it always did." SOURCE: Cf. Exodus 34:29-35 (Moses' face shining after speaking with God, requiring a veil) and stigmatic/visitation traditions in which contact with the numinous leaves a temporary bodily mark. GLOSS: Every visit from the grandfather's ghost leaves a physical trace on Aiden's face that fades by morning, patterning his ghost-visits on the Mosaic theophany — a private, unwitnessed transfiguration that must be washed away before the ordinary world sees it, paralleling the family's larger imperative to keep "the gift" hidden. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

9. Blindfolded — QUOTE: "'If it was raining soup, the Irish would go out with forks.'" SOURCE: Traditional Irish/Irish-American proverb of fatalistic self-deprecation, functioning here alongside "goodness is the only investment that never fails" as inherited lay-wisdom literature. GLOSS: Attributed to the dead grandfather and delivered by Nanna as she deflects a moral question about the stolen chalice, the proverb operates as folk scripture — practical, comic, and faintly despairing wisdom standing in for catechism the family no longer fully trusts. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

10. Blindfolded / Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "'I'm Elaine, and this is my grandson Galahad.'" SOURCE: Grail legend (already flagged in the concordance for the aliases themselves); additional detail — the aliases are given in a church where the reading in progress is 1 John 3 on being made "like him" when Christ "is revealed," and the chalice is held aloft by the priest as the pair flee, echoing the moment of elevation at the Consecration. GLOSS: Beyond the aliases already identified, the specific liturgical instant chosen for the escape — the priest raising the recovered chalice above his head exactly as the elevation of the chalice occurs at Mass — turns the children's practical joke into an accidental restaging of the Consecration, the "miracle" the priest proclaims being, structurally, the same gesture the Mass performs every Sunday. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

11. Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "She crossed herself. 'Say it with me. "There but for the grace of God go I."'" — followed immediately by the neighbor children's retort, "We don't need no charity from you." SOURCE: Matthew 6:1-4 (almsgiving that should be done without seeking recognition — "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth") and Luke 18:9-14 (the Pharisee's self-congratulating prayer, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men"). GLOSS: Nanna's proverb of grace is undercut immediately by the poor children's refusal of "charity," dramatizing the gap between the Lucan/Matthean ideal of humble, invisible almsgiving and Nanna's performed, self-congratulatory version of it, delivered from inside a smoke-filled Plymouth to children behind a chain-link fence. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

12. Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "'Not bad for an old broad.'" (Nanna, arranging her pearl necklace and lipstick before the mirror, having just kissed a photograph of Laura) SOURCE: Cf. the vanity-topos of Ecclesiastes 1:2 ("vanity of vanities") set against devotional acts (kissing an icon-like photograph) performed in the same gesture. GLOSS: In one unbroken motion Nanna kisses her institutionalized daughter's photograph as though it were a holy image, then immediately performs secular vanity before the same mirror — the sacred and the vain sharing a single reflective surface, a compressed image of the book's larger fusion of piety and self-regard. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

13. Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "Her two front teeth were red from where lipstick had smudged." SOURCE: Cf. the collection's recurring motif of red stains marking guilt or suffering (Peggy Fleming's sleeve stains, the "red seas" of her cheeks

in "Assumptions," the "stain"/*macula* theology already catalogued elsewhere in the corpus). GLOSS: Margie's smudged red teeth are a comic, degraded version of the collection's repeated red-stain imagery, appearing just before she and Nanna debate Christ's miracles over dishwater — a grotesque, domestic counterpoint to the blood-red marks that elsewhere signify suffering or grace. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

14. Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "Her jewelry case was on top of the dresser. I took the diamond earrings and opal bracelet… a couple of pretty rings—one a large red stone, the other a blue one. These and a gold necklace with a cross I shoved into my pockets." SOURCE: Cf. Exodus 12:35-36 (the Israelites "borrowing" jewelry of the Egyptians on the way out of bondage) and Exodus 32 (the golden calf melted from the people's jewelry) — theft of gold/jewelry as a morally ambiguous act bound up with deliverance. GLOSS: A child stealing a friend's jewelry — including a gold cross — to fund a "miracle" cure structurally repeats the Exodus "spoiling of the Egyptians," in which theft on the way to freedom is narrated without condemnation; the detail deepens the chalice-theft's already-noted Exodus resonance by extending it to an entirely separate, previously unflagged robbery in the same story. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

15. Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "This time my grandmother's tears were real. They gushed like water from that rock in the Middle East." SOURCE: Exodus 17:1-7 / Numbers 20:1-13 (Moses striking the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh) — the same typology already flagged for the priest's blessing, now redeployed a second time for Nanna's own weeping. GLOSS: The Rephidim/Kadesh water-from-the-rock image, first used sarcastically of a drunk priest's blessing, recurs as sincere pathos when applied to Nanna's own grief — the same scriptural figure moving from mockery to genuine feeling within a few pages, showing how thin the line is in this book between blasphemous joke and real devotion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

16. Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "'Sorta like a tribulation?' 'Exactly, sweetheart.' 'Is my mother a tribulation?'" SOURCE: Cf. Romans 5:3 ("we glory in tribulations also") and John 16:33 ("in the world ye shall have tribulation"); also Revelation's "great tribulation" (7:14). GLOSS: Aiden extends Nanna's earlier mistranslated scriptural word ("tribulation," misapplied to Rephidim and Kadesh) to his own mother, unconsciously performing exactly the kind of scriptural exegesis-by-a-child that runs throughout the collection — turning a garbled borrowed word into

a genuine, anguished theological question about whether suffering people are themselves a form of trial to be endured. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

17. Blindfolded, the emigration sentence — QUOTE: "My grandmother and he, though they did not know each other, emigrated from different parts of Ireland in the late 1930's. With hope in their hearts, just a few belongings, I'm sure, and not much money, they journeyed to the promised land of their imaginations." SOURCE: Cf. Exodus/the Israelites' journey to Canaan, "the promised land" (Exodus 3:8, Deuteronomy 26:9); also the American immigrant-literature topos (echoing Joyce's and McCourt's emigration narratives) of America as a New Canaan. GLOSS: The narrator explicitly names America "the promised land," folding the grandparents' Irish emigration into Exodus typology alongside the collection's other Exodus echoes (Rephidim, the spoiling of Margie's jewelry) — emigration as a secular, unheroic wilderness-crossing that ends not in milk and honey but in grave-digging and mail-hauling. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

18. Arise and Go Now — QUOTE: "'Laura Glencar'" (the mother's married surname, repeated throughout "Arise and Go Now" and "Blindfolded") SOURCE: Glencar, County Sligo/Leitrim — the placename in W. B. Yeats's "The Stolen Child" ("in the leafy hazel wood… from the hills above Glen-Car"), a different Yeats poem than the one quoted in this story ("The Lake Isle of Innisfree"). GLOSS: The family surname Glencar silently imports a second Yeats poem about a "stolen child" carried away from human sorrow by fairies into a story that already quotes "Innisfree" and turns on a boy's supernatural "second sight" and his mother's escape from an institution — the surname alone plants a buried Yeatsian pun (a family literally named for the fairy-haunted valley) never remarked on for this text specifically, though the same device is used with the identical surname elsewhere in Mulhern's corpus. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

19. Assumptions (mercies version) — QUOTE: "'I hope she had time to say a Hail Mary or two before she drowned in Achill Sound.'" SOURCE: The Hail Mary (Ave Maria), the Church's central Marian prayer, invoked here as last-rites shorthand. GLOSS: In Peg's tall tale of the bully Margaret Mary Fawny's death by drowning, the Hail Mary functions as folk-viaticum — the assumed minimum devotional insurance against damnation — administered facetiously to a fictional bully in a story about the

Assumption of the Blessed Mother, linking the ordinary prayer to the feast's central dogma of bodily rescue from death. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

20. Assumptions (mercies version) — QUOTE: "'She gets that from me. I studied at the Louvre in Paris,' Nanna said." / "'No offense taken. Next time I'll carry a paintbrush.'" SOURCE: Cf. the false-modesty/self-exalting boast topos contrasted with Mary's true humility in the Magnificat ("he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden," Luke 1:48) — Nanna's invented artistic pedigree is a small, comic inversion of Marian humility. GLOSS: Nanna's blatant lie about art training at the Louvre, offered moments after arranging her rosary-adjacent piety for Nurse Nancy, exemplifies the character's characteristic braid of devotion and self-invention; the detail (identical in both "Arise and Go Now" and "Blindfolded," where it recurs almost verbatim) shows the lie functioning as a stable verbal tic rather than a one-off joke. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

21. The Wrong Way — QUOTE: "He put his hand on my head… 'It's just you and me then.'" SOURCE: Cf. the laying-on of hands as a gesture of blessing (Genesis 48:14-20, Mark 10:16, "he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them") — here performed by a father about to abandon his son. GLOSS: The father's hand on Aiden's head just before the drive that ends in his announcement of abandonment inverts the scriptural gesture of blessing; a touch that should confer benediction instead precedes the story's central act of desertion, deepening the story's already-noted status as the collection's "bleakest," grace-withheld entry. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

22. The Wrong Way — QUOTE: "I felt the beating of my heart and the passing of air into my lungs. The smoke of my breath rose, and dissolved like eddies in a careless sky." SOURCE: Cf. Genesis 2:7 ("and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life") and Ecclesiastes 1:14/James 4:14 ("what is your life? it is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away"). GLOSS: The story's closing sentence turns Aiden's ordinary winter breath into a miniature meditation on the fragility and God-givenness of life itself, immediately after the "wrong way" of his father's leaving — a breath-of-life image offered as the story's only, muted consolation, in a story otherwise marked by the "negative evidence" of withheld transfiguration. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

23. Arise and Go Now, the confession before the action — QUOTE: "I arrived at Rita's house about noon." SOURCE: Structural fact — a retrospective opening frame followed by forward-moving action. GLOSS: The story starts after the leukemia fraud has already occurred, then pauses to supply the institutional and family history that makes the lie intelligible before moving through the failed escape and the later discharge. Its terminal homecoming returns Aiden to the inward register announced by the title poem, so it is linear in event order after its explanatory frame, not circular in plot. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

24. Assumptions, opening social verdict — QUOTE: "Peggy Fleming, according to my grandfather, was the"homeliest damn woman" he'd ever seen." SOURCE: Structural fact — frame-narrated memoir built from successive recollected episodes. GLOSS: The story opens by handing the reader a family judgment and repeatedly marks the teller's temporal distance, unfolding by memory-panels rather than a single continuous action. Its terminal vision reverses the opening's verdict without pretending that the earlier cruelty was never spoken. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

25. Blindfolded, theft as first action — QUOTE: "I need to get that chalice, Aiden. The Boston Globe article said some people think it has curing powers." SOURCE: Structural fact — linear movement from projected theft through counterfeit restoration to release. GLOSS: Unlike the first story, this one announces the technical sin before Aiden enters the church, making the reader party to the plan rather than a late discoverer of it. The close leaves the chalice and its fraudulent miracle behind in favor of Laura's release and Aiden's hope, so this is the clearest sin-first, love-last design in the sequence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

26. Keep Calm and Carry On, refrain as enclosure — QUOTE: "My grandmother sat on the toilet seat and brushed my curly brown hair until my scalp hurt." / "In the quiet of the room, she whispered,"Keep calm and carry on" to me or to herself. Or to both of us" SOURCE: Structural fact — circular, refrain-bound narration. GLOSS: The first scene teaches endurance through a painful bodily lesson; the final scene returns to the same maxim after burglary, fundraising fraud, the chalice performance, and Nanna's unperformed grief have accumulated. The circular closure does not erase those acts but converts the slogan from hardening instruction into an exhausted, shared survival prayer. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

27. The Wrong Way, apparent visitation to departure — QUOTE: "Every couple weeks, on a Sunday after church, my father picked Martin and me up for a visit." SOURCE: Structural fact — linear inversion of the collection's sin-to-love pattern. GLOSS: The opening offers the ordinary shape of paternal care, while the drive reveals that the father is leaving the family; its final image is movement away, not a return home. It is the collection's structural inversion: apparent love is the cover under which abandonment is disclosed, and no later miracle reframes it as rescue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

28. Arise and Go Now, Rita's judicial question — QUOTE: "If you knew my grandmother was lying, why did you write the check?" SOURCE: Structural fact — sympathy is redirected from the exposed fraud toward the need that produced it. GLOSS: The question gives the reader its cleanest chance to condemn Catherine's medical-bill deception, because the boy has stated it without euphemism. Rita's answer turns the scene from prosecution to interpretation: she recognizes anxiety and need, so the reader can understand the fraud as an act of care without being asked to call it honest. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

29. Assumptions, pain against ridicule — QUOTE: "However, the authenticity of her pain was evident." SOURCE: Structural fact — a delayed correction of the opening's grotesque description. GLOSS: The sentence arrives after the narrator has repeated the adults' humiliating account of Peg and watched his grandmother mock the song she sings for her dead husband. It makes the reader reconsider the pleasure of the earlier comic cruelty, but it does not make Peg's drunken endangerment or the adults' treatment of her morally clean; sympathy here is deliberately corrective and uneasy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

30. Blindfolded, the ghost's verdict — QUOTE: "Tis an awful thing to do." SOURCE: Structural fact — explicit moral condemnation placed immediately after the church theft. GLOSS: The grandfather gives the reader the rebuke Nanna's comic casuistry has deferred, naming the chalice theft as wrong before asking Aiden to work for Laura's release. The subsequent fabricated recovery at Mass therefore manipulates the reader twice: first toward condemnation, then toward pleasure in a false miracle that nonetheless helps restore a vulnerable family. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

31. Keep Calm and Carry On, fraud stated as technique — QUOTE: "Make people feel bad so we can get things from them." SOURCE: Structural fact — self-conscious explanation of fundraising fraud. GLOSS: Nanna strips the leukemia story of sacred or sentimental cover by telling Aiden exactly how pity is being manufactured. Yet the explanation is followed by her real tears over medical bills and Laura, so the story asks for sympathy with desperate care while holding the reader inside knowledge of calculated exploitation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

32. The Wrong Way, father's revision of Aiden's verdict — QUOTE: "You don't hate me, Aiden. You're angry." SOURCE: Structural fact — paternal self-exculpation rather than revelation-as-love. GLOSS: The father recasts Aiden's moral assessment as a temporary childish emotion, even as he is announcing a new partner and a move to Arizona. The narration provides no comparable later scene in which an illicit act becomes care; it lets the reader condemn him far more directly than it lets the reader condemn Nanna or Peg. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

33. The Wrong Way, mercy after condemnation — QUOTE: "Dad, I'm sure she already knows." SOURCE: Structural fact — protective silence complicates, but does not absolve, abandonment. GLOSS: The collection does not force every verdict into equal ambivalence: the father's departure remains its clearest and least mitigated moral failure. Still, Aiden chooses not to expose him to Laura at once, and that small protective act transfers the emotional burden to the child; the reader's condemnation of the father is clear, but it is not offered as simple triumph. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

34. Arise and Go Now, the title's fullest activation — QUOTE: "At this very instant, people throughout the world were saving one another." SOURCE: Structural fact — the title's logic of cumulative, ordinary rescue. GLOSS: This sentence follows Aiden's chain of identifications among a brother rescuing his sister, Martin protecting Aiden, and the family bringing Laura home. The title is enacted rather than opposed: small, compromised interventions accumulate into love, but their "weight" remains the material cost, risk, deceit, and pain that no final affirmation cancels. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

35. The collection sequence, from entry to exile — QUOTE: "My father drove onward, streets glistening, snow like piled linen, and Arizona far, far away." SOURCE: Structural fact — sequence movement from an opening arrival toward a terminal

departure. GLOSS: The collection begins with Aiden arriving at Rita's house and ends with his father leaving him, establishing a decided darkening from prospective aid and eventual homecoming to irreversible distance. The movement is not a smooth escalation, because the middle stories revisit and revise the same household crimes; the final story tests the earlier theology where no practical scheme can make someone stay. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

36. The collection sequence, contracting forms of closure — QUOTE: "The car moved forward." SOURCE: Structural fact — exact verbal recursion paired with increasingly qualified endings. GLOSS: The sentence appears verbatim at the hospital departures in both "Arise and Go Now" and "Blindfolded," making the car's advance a formal sign of provisional homecoming. Across all five endings the order then withdraws the scale of resolution—from rescue, to imagined glory, to hope, to survival, to distance—so its recursion is tonal as well as verbal. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

37. Assumptions, Irish-Catholic ritual placed before the beach rite — QUOTE: "On this Feast Day, according to Irish Catholic tradition, there is a cure in seawater." SOURCE: The Assumption tradition and its narrated relation to Lughnasadh. GLOSS: The retrospective cultural excursus is structurally positioned between Peg's earlier care for Scruffy and the beach sequence, so it supplies a ritual grammar immediately before the family improvises the cure. Irish Catholic material is therefore not merely decorative ancestry: it lets the beach scene arrive as inherited practice, while its remembered Celtic antecedent keeps the rite mixed rather than doctrinally pure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

38. Assumptions, popular song's change of moral value — QUOTE: "My grandmother goaded Peg to sing"When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New," Peg's favorite." SOURCE: Popular song as a recurring structural cue, not a hymn. GLOSS: Early in the story the wedding song is made cruel because Helen's covert smirk turns Peg's performance for her dead husband into spectacle. At the end, the same song is imagined as Peg's posthumous act of being "altogether beautiful," so music carries the story's decisive reversal from social humiliation to a loving final gaze. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

39. The Wrong Way, Dickens at the turn of the drive — QUOTE: "We're reading Great Expectations by Charles Dickens." SOURCE: Charles Dickens, Great Expectations. GLOSS: Aiden introduces Dickens just before the father turns the conversation to Laura's visions and then announces Arizona, placing a bildungsroman about a frightened boy, a graveyard, and an escaped convict at the threshold of this story's paternal betrayal. The allusion remains structurally active because the father likes "crime and suspense" but cannot read the moral education that Aiden is trying to narrate; this story contains no direct internal named allusion to Dante, O'Connor, Hopkins, or Dickinson. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

40. Arise and Go Now, Yeats restored at the final threshold — QUOTE: "I rolled my window down and imagined I heard crickets singing." SOURCE: W. B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" ("where the cricket sings"). GLOSS: The Yeats quotation is discovered in the album only after the failed first escape; this echo occurs during the successful ride home and immediately before Aiden's final ethical realization. It makes the story's imagery recursively return to Innisfree at its close, but replaces solitary flight with a crowded car carrying mother, grandmother, and child. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

41. The Wrong Way, the limit of literary apparatus — QUOTE: "I was never any good at English." SOURCE: Negative structural finding — the father's stated literary incompetence. GLOSS: In the collection's bleak last story, this admission comes immediately before Aiden's Dickens account and helps explain why the father reduces its ghosts to mere fiction. Apart from Dickens, this story supplies no internal named allusion to Joyce, Yeats, Dante, O'Connor, Hopkins, or Dickinson; the withdrawal of the earlier stories' dense literary and devotional apparatus is part of its anti-transfiguring design. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

42. Arise and Go Now / Blindfolded, the boy who burns — QUOTE: "My face and ears became hot and red, and I heard a buzzing noise that eventually stopped." SOURCE: Aiden, Irish Áedán, diminutive of áed "fire" — "little fire"; St. Aidan of Lindisfarne and of Ferns, missionary bishops. GLOSS: The protagonist's name means "little fire," and the text gives him the somatic signature of fire: every ghost-visit leaves his face "hot and red," sunburnt. Aiden is the "fire" in the family's line of second sight — the burning one — which is why the cardinal, the dead grandfather's favorite red bird that alights "as if it were listening," shadows him. The name is a

working aptronym: the boy who carries the gift is the little flame, and the family's whole struggle is whether this fire will be read as grace or as madness. St. Aidan, Ireland's gentle missionary, gives the name its other note — the visionary who travels to heal. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

43. Arise and Go Now, the pearl and the patron of impossible causes — QUOTE: "Rescue my mother." SOURCE: Rita, diminutive of Margherita/Margaret, "pearl"; St. Rita of Cascia, popularly invoked for "impossible" or desperate causes. GLOSS: The neighbor who writes Catherine's fraudulent check and then agrees to the scheme Aiden actually wants — "Rescue my mother" — bears the name of the church's patron saint of impossible causes, and a name meaning "pearl." The pearl is literal, not residual: the story turns on Sean's lost anniversary pearls, which Rita found between the car seats and prayed to St. Anthony over. A woman named for a pearl is the one who recovered the pearls, and a namesake of St. Rita undertakes the cause everyone else writes off as impossible. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

44. Arise and Go Now, the brother named for a soldier — QUOTE: "No one is ever gonna mess with you as long as I'm around. I'll kick their ass." SOURCE: Martin, Latin Martinus, "of Mars" (warlike); St. Martin of Tours, the Roman soldier who halved his cloak for a beggar. GLOSS: Aiden's brother carries a soldier's name, and the text backs the name with a vow of violence-cum-protection ("I'll kick their ass"). By the story's close Aiden has generalized him into the family's fixed protector — "a brother rescued her, Martin would always rescue me." The name fuses Mars (the fighter) with St. Martin (the soldier who divides his cloak in charity), which is exactly the brother's double office: he threatens on Aiden's behalf and quietly runs the rescue logistics. A clean, quiet aptronym. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

45. Arise and Go Now / Blindfolded, the laurel who draws Hope — QUOTE: "she sat drawing in her sketchpad." SOURCE: Laura, Latin laurus "laurel" — the poet's/muse's crown; Petrarch's beloved Laura, the unreachable idealized woman of the Canzoniere. GLOSS: The mother — institutionalized, "heard the voices of dead people" — is the family's only artist, and her one surviving act is to copy G. F. Watts's blindfolded "Hope" from a reproduction. She is named for the laurel, the crown of the artist and, in Petrarch, the muse who is loved but never fully possessed. Aiden can never fully possess his mother either: she is always being taken away, returning, or seeing what others cannot. The laurel name quietly assigns the vision to art rather

than sickness — the same claim the grandfather's ghost makes ("her visions"). The Petrarch layer is my reading; the laurel fits the plot directly. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

46. Arise and Go Now, the mystic's name worn by the skeptic — QUOTE: "Stop with your malarkey. Ghosts don't exist." SOURCE: Catherine, from Greek Aikaterine (folk-derived katharos "pure"); St. Catherine of Siena, visionary mystic and Doctor of the Church. GLOSS: The grandmother who names her world with saints, relics, and miracles bears the name of the Church's greatest Dr of visionary mysticism — and is the collection's most insistent denier of vision. She calls the boy's ghost "malarkey," calls her own dead father's warnings impossible, and once dismissed her seeing mother as "out of her head." That an anti-aptronym is deliberate is hard to escape: the one person in the book whose name predicts vision is the one person who cannot bear vision in her own kin. The name is a standing irony over the family wound. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

47. Arise and Go Now, the gracing ghost named John — QUOTE: "How do you know what Sean sounded like? He died before you were born." SOURCE: Sean, Irish form of John, Hebrew Yohanan, "God is gracious"; John the Evangelist, the visionary author of Revelation. GLOSS: The dead grandfather is given his name exactly once, by Rita, and nowhere else in the four linked stories is he anything but "Grandpa." John's name means "God is gracious," and every one of the ghost's speeches is an act of grace: he tells Aiden his mother "has the gift," and he carries the absolution Nanna needs — "he's sorry," "it's not your fault." The name of the evangelist-seer is also the name of the book's only visionary dead man, the transmitter of "second sight" down three generations. The name is doing two jobs at once, and both are exact. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

48. Arise and Go Now / Blindfolded, the woman with three names — QUOTE: "We're sorry, Catherine." SOURCE: naming (formal observation); the tripartite naming of the grandmother as Nanna / Catherine / Mrs. Mulroy. GLOSS: The grandmother is the only character the text names by three distinct registers, and each name maps a role: "Nanna" is the domestic guardian the boy addresses; "Catherine" surfaces only from her peers — Rita's "Catherine lies," Margie's "I don't know, Catherine," the grandmother's own "We're sorry, Catherine" in her real voice; and "Mrs. Mulroy" is reserved for the hospital's paperwork. Her authority is granted

differently by each name — intimate, equal, official — and the story leaks her real name out by degrees, as if her truest self is the one her friends, not her grandson, are allowed to use. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

49. The Wrong Way / Arise and Go Now, the father who is never named — QUOTE: "my father picked Martin and me up for a visit." SOURCE: naming (extending the earlier finding that the "Assumptions" father "is never named"). GLOSS: Across all five stories the father receives no first name. The grandfather is Sean, the mother Laura, the brother Martin, the grandmother Catherine — but the father is only "my father" and "Dad." The collection's one figure who chooses absence and abandons the family is the one the text refuses to name, as if naming is an act of love the father has not earned. Namelessness is the book's quietest moral verdict: he is the only adult addressed only by his relation, never by his self. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

50. Blindfolded, the unnamed founder of the gift — QUOTE: "Second sight is something that has been in your family for years. Your grandmother's mother possessed it, and she, too, was demonized." SOURCE: naming (formal observation). GLOSS: The origin-point of the family's second sight — the great-grandmother who "fell down a well" and died, the woman her own daughter called "tick" — is never given a name, though her gift, her drowning, and her demonization are all narrated in detail. This is the negative image of Laura's insisted-upon name: the mad-seeing woman is either renamed into something beloved (Laura) or, farther back, left nameless altogether. The oldest visionary is anonymous precisely because the family's shame is attached to her; naming is shown to be a privilege the book grants or withholds by moral relation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

51. Blindfolded, the name the institution invents — QUOTE: "'Maura Fender' you said." SOURCE: naming; Maura, a variant of Mary/Moira; Fender, from Middle English fendour, "one who guards or defends." GLOSS: The collection's only ghost-name: Nurse Nancy, copying from the patient board, misreads "Laura Glencar" as "Maura Fender," summoning a woman who does not exist. The slip is pointed — it silently rebaptizes the mother as a Marian figure (Maura/Mary) and erases "Glencar," the surname that (as recorded earlier) is the Yeatsian fairy-valley. The one person the institution employs to recognize the patient is the one person who cannot keep her name straight, and the hospital's representative "guard" (Fender) conflates guarding

with losing the guarded woman's identity. The mis-naming is the quietest indictment in the book. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

52. Keep Calm and Carry On, the name given and refused — QUOTE: "I named my daughter Lorraine to be respectful." SOURCE: naming; Lorraine, a French place-name (from Lothair, "famous in battle"); Laura, laurus "laurel." GLOSS: The collection's single most revealing naming act. Nanna gave her daughter her own mother's name — "to be respectful" toward a woman she herself calls "a crackpot" — and then refuses it: "That was my mother's name, her formal name. I've told you a thousand times to call her Laura." The exchange argues that a name is an inheritance that can curse its bearer: to say "Lorraine" re-attaches the mentally ill daughter to the derided visionary line, while "Laura" (the laurel, the artist) names the beloved, whole self the family wants her to be. Naming is treated here as a spiritual act with real power over identity — a baptism the grandmother both performed and, when it turned against her, tried to un-perform. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

53. Blindfolded, the sage's name mispronounced — QUOTE: "A smart man by the name of Toreau said that." SOURCE: Henry David Thoreau, Walden (the source of "Goodness is the only investment that never fails"); the grandfather's and boy's Irish "th" to "t" rendering. GLOSS: The autodidact grandfather — refused college "because he was an Irish immigrant" — and Aiden both garble the Concord sage's surname into "Toreau"/"Toorow." The mispronunciation is the point, not the joke: the family's governing moral maxim (treated, in the book's closing pages, as scripture) reaches them through a name neither speaker can articulate, because the schools that would have taught them Thoreau are the schools that barred the immigrant. Wisdom travels into this family through a pronounced-but-unpronounceable name — a small, exact emblem of the collection's class story. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

54. Arise and Go Now, the mother's indictment in two saints' names — QUOTE: "She said they screwed it all up once Saint Paul and Saint Augustine got involved." SOURCE: St. Paul (the systematizer of sin, law, and the flesh) and St. Augustine of Hippo (original sin, predestination, the City of God). GLOSS: The mother's only theological statement in the collection names the two architects of the doctrine of sin that, in her life, turned her gift into a diagnosis. To blame Paul and Augustine is to blame the institutional machinery of guilt — the very machinery that reads her vision as schizophrenia and (three generations back) demonized the woman who fell

down the well. The book gives its sharpest doctrinal critique to the one character the world calls insane, and she delivers it in nothing but two names: the injury is a naming injury, so the protest is a naming protest. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

55. Blindfolded / Keep Calm and Carry On, the shrine named for ceaseless help — QUOTE: "We were sitting in her Blue Plymouth across the street from Mission Church in Boston." SOURCE: Mission Church — the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, a Boston shrine built around a miraculous Marian icon. GLOSS: The church from which the chalice is stolen, and to which it is "returned" as a staged miracle, is dedicated to Mary under her title "Perpetual Help" — the exact thing Catherine is asking of God for Laura, and the exact thing Laura never receives from the institution that holds her. The shrine's name quietly states the story's petition: ceaseless, unearned help for the woman psychiatry cannot cure. The name of the church is the name of the need, and the fraud played out on its altar is a desperate family's attempt to conjure, by force, what the title promises. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

56. Blindfolded / Keep Calm and Carry On, the nurse named for a lamb — QUOTE: "My name is Nancy. You can call me Nurse Nancy." SOURCE: Nancy, diminutive of Agnes/Anne; Agnes from Greek hagnos "pure," "chaste," and by extension the sacrificial "lamb." GLOSS: The grandmother's rhyming reduction of the caregiver to "Nurse Nancy" — fixed by her "Nancy Nurse is a bit too uppity for my taste" — turns the name into a nursery rhyme, and it is this same Nancy who misreads "Laura Glencar" as "Maura Fender." A nurse named for purity and the lamb is the story's figure of well-meaning but irremediably inattentive care: the system's "help" is personified by someone who cannot even keep a patient's name. If it is an aptronym at all, it is an anti-aptronym — the lamb that loses what it is set to guard. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

57. Arise and Go Now, the temple in the pulp paperback — QUOTE: "She tells him that his daughter has been reincarnated as Ivy Templeton, a girl living in New York City." SOURCE: Ivy (the evergreen, emblem of eternal life) + Templeton ("temple town"); Frank De Felitta's Audrey Rose. GLOSS: The reincarnation-novel character whose name Rita recites carries a temple in her surname and ivy — the plant that never dies — for her given name, a debased, pulp echo of the collection's own "body as temple" and resurrection concerns. That the book's most sacred vocabulary

(temple, a soul that persists) surfaces inside the trashiest reading matter Rita owns is characteristic of the whole volume: the theology arrives through the low and the comically denied. Rita dismisses the book as "junk" even as its name-engine speaks the story's own hope. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

58. Keep Calm and Carry On / The Wrong Way, the name that echoes to nothing — QUOTE: "Arnold, don't you dare run away!" SOURCE: naming (negative finding). GLOSS: The name "Arnold" occurs twice — Margie's hissing white cat in "Keep Calm and Carry On," and the Arnold Arboretum the father drives past in "The Wrong Way" — with no discoverable charge or connective tissue. (The Arboretum is simply named for its donor, James Arnold.) This is the honest miss in the onomastic census: in a collection where Sean, Laura, Catherine, Martin, and Galahad are all doing double duty, "Arnold" does none, and its recurrence is a coincidence rather than a motif. Not every name in this book is loaded, and that is worth saying. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

59. Arise and Go Now, the Irish name that holds the mother — QUOTE: "my mother was admitted to McCall Hospital, a psychiatric facility near Boston." SOURCE: McCall, from Irish Mac Cathail, "son of Cáthal" (cath "battle," val "rule"). GLOSS: A plain, likely-unremarkable finding recorded for completeness: the institution that confines Laura carries a common Irish family name, so the family's own ethnic identity is — literally — the brand on the place of her confinement. There is no evident satirical comment in "McCall" beyond the low irony that an Irish-Catholic woman is institutionalized in a building named in Irish. Reported as a near-miss: the hospital's name, unlike the shrine's, does not name the story's hope, only its ward. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

60. Across the collection, the doubled pearl-woman — QUOTE: "Margie was a smelly fat lady with a big white cat that hissed at everyone." SOURCE: Margaret (Peggy/Peg in "Assumptions"; Margie in "Arise and Go Now"/"Keep Calm and Carry On"), from Greek margaritēs, "pearl." GLOSS: Two different stories give the grandmother an offbeat, overweight, whisky-adjacent woman friend with the same underlying name — Peggy (Margaret) in "Assumptions" and Margie (Margaret) in the linked stories — and the "pearl" meaning hangs over both of them: Sean's lost pearls in "Arise," the "clam with a secreted pearl" the boy hunts at Nantasket in "Assumptions." The doubled Margaret is the collection's one clearly loaded recurring

name, and it makes the grandmother's circling of pearl-women a pattern rather than drift. Peggy, the loved pearl, is transfigured into glory; Margie, the exploited pearl, is robbed of her jewelry to fund the cure. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

61. Across the collection, the author's name kept in one story — QUOTE: "'Jimmy, you're my angel,' she said, and kissed me on the forehead." SOURCE: naming (formal observation); "Assumptions" is narrated by "Jimmy" (James), the author's own first name, against the four stories' "Aiden." GLOSS: The "About the Collection" page promises one boy — "Aiden" — across five linked stories, but "Assumptions" is narrated by "Jimmy," the author's own name, in a story Mulhern has said began as his first published text. The collection's naming is therefore split along an autobiographical seam: one story keeps the maker's name, four use a borrowed one. Whether Jimmy and Aiden are one boy renamed or two, the onomastic break is where the cycle shows its author — the place where a family's fiction quietly hands back the real boy it was built on. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

62. Across the collection, naming as a running theological concern — QUOTE: "the power of names and the mystery of the Word" SOURCE: naming (synthesis); the "Lovely Peggy" sobriquet in "Assumptions," the Sean/Catherine revelations in "Arise and Go Now," the false names and misreading in "Blindfolded," the Lorraine/Laura refusal in "Keep Calm and Carry On," the unnamed father throughout. GLOSS: Naming is not a local device confined to one story. Every story in the volume does naming-work: "Assumptions" makes a sobriquet born of a sermon "on the power of names and the mystery of the Word" its sacrament; "Arise and Go Now" leaks the grandmother's real name by degrees and grants the ghost his one name; "Blindfolded" invents false names (Elaine, Galahad), a false benefactor (Joshua), and a false patient (Maura Fender); "Keep Calm and Carry On" stages the book's central act of giving-and-refusing a name; "The Wrong Way" withholds the father's name entirely. Only the last story, the bleakest, treats its naming as pure subtraction. The collection as a whole treats naming as a running theological motif — an act that confers or denies identity, inheritance, and grace — not as incidental character-tagging. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

63. Arise and Go Now / Blindfolded, the single twilit star — QUOTE: "A star shone in the twilit sky" / "One star shone in the twilit sky." SOURCE: The Star of Bethlehem and the messianic star of Numbers 24:17 ("there shall come a Star out of Jacob");

Nativity iconography. GLOSS: The phrase recurs almost verbatim at the two versions of the same release scene — Aiden and Laura seeing the grandfather on the lawn as the family leaves McCall Hospital. It joins the "one very bright star" over the December doorstep (already recorded under the Assumptions discussion) and the "one star" inside the Watts reproduction to form a single recurring system: a single, small, unremarked light appears at each moment of tenderness, rescue, or release. The star is the collection's quietest and most consistent icon of hope, and its being "one" — a lone star in a twilit sky — already encodes the title's logic of the small and singular accumulating weight. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

64. Arise and Go Now / Blindfolded, the mother clothed in green — QUOTE: "She wore a green gown that accentuated her eyes" / "She wore a green dress that accentuated her eyes." SOURCE: image (color iconography); the green gown worn by Watts's "Hope" in the reproduction Laura copies. GLOSS: The institutionalized visionary-artist mother is the only figure the text twice clothes in green — the exact color of the blindfolded Hope she is copying in her sketchbook, and the color of the "green pinafore" worn by the girl in her recorded vision. The color that belongs to Hope is stitched onto the woman the world reads as mad, quietly insisting that what psychiatry calls delusion is closer to the virtue the collection prints under the reproduction. Green is not a hard symbol here — red also clothes Laura elsewhere ("her red blouse") — but its repeated attachment to her is the book's gentlest way of putting hope's color on hope's doubter. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

65. Arise and Go Now, the unverifiable color of a vision — QUOTE: "So that was a pinafore, I thought. Because the photo was black and white, I couldn't tell if the dress was green. I slammed the album shut… Time is an illusion." SOURCE: image (the limit of photographic proof); the green pinafore of Laura's vision set against the black-and-white Innisfree photographs. GLOSS: The one datum the family album cannot supply is the color of the dress — the single proof that Laura really "saw" the grandmother's tree-climbing accident before it recurred in the present. Vision and photograph meet, and the vision is confirmed in every outline but color; the green (hope's color) is exactly what the record cannot attest. The line stages, in miniature, the whole collection's epistemology: the gift ("second sight") is real, but its decisive mark is never photographable, so belief remains a matter of the one thing that escapes evidence. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

66. Across the collection, the broken and shabby images that carry the weight — QUOTE: "Bits of blue and white china were smashed on the bricks" / "Rita stumbled, knocking the glass top onto the floor. It broke into pieces" / "empty axles of an old bicycle poked out of the weedy grass" / "The mahogany bannister was chipped" / "a scratched pool table, and shelves of tattered books and games." SOURCE: image (the thematic form of the title). GLOSS: Nothing in this book is whole: the tea-things shatter when Rita drops the tray, the coffee table breaks when Nanna's grief erupts, the poor neighbors' yard sprouts bare bicycle axles, the bannister and the hospital's books and furniture are chipped and torn. These small, shabby, broken objects are the literal embodiment of "the weight of small mercies": the collection repeatedly loads meaning onto damaged, discarded, or threadbare things and never mends them. The theology is enacted in the inventory — grace here does not arrive through what is intact but accumulates upon what is already cracked. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

67. Arise and Go Now, the birdbath as a domestic font — QUOTE: "A blue jay lapped the greenish water of a fluted cement birdbath, then shook its wings, cawed, and flew away… A cardinal swooped down and sat on the birdbath… The cardinal flew to a crossbeam above us and looked down, as if it were listening." SOURCE: image (Genesis 1:2, the Spirit moving over the waters; Matthew 3:16, the Spirit descending "like a dove" at baptism). GLOSS: Rita's fluted cement birdbath is a poor, garden-variety baptismal font: a vessel of standing water over which the story's two premonitory birds — the blue jay, then the cardinal that is Sean's visitation-sign — repeatedly descend. The scene is staged as a comic domestic analogue of the Spirit-over-waters image, and the cardinal's move from the water to a beam overhead "as if it were listening" completes the mock-Annunciation shape. It is never called a font; the imagery does the naming. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

68. Arise and Go Now, cinnamon on the mother who needs rescue — QUOTE: "Her red blouse smelled like cinnamon." SOURCE: Song of Solomon 4:14 ("spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon") and the biblical anointing/burial spices (Exodus 30:23; John 19:39-40). GLOSS: The mother the family is about to spring from the psychiatric ward is described in the fragrance of the very Song of Songs whose verse ("There is no flaw in you") will open "Assumptions" — cinnamon being one of the garden's erotic-sacred spices. Cinnamon is also an anointing and burial spice, so the detail quietly scents Laura with the same chrism register the book later applies to

Peg's scalp. The note is faint, but in a collection that meters almost every object, a named fragrance on the woman who must be rescued is unlikely to be ambient. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

69. Arise and Go Now, the peacock on the skeptic — QUOTE: "She was wearing a blouse with a brocade design of a peacock and purple bell-bottom pants." SOURCE: The peacock as emblem of resurrection and immortality (its flesh was held incorruptible in early and medieval Christian art). GLOSS: Rita — the benevolent skeptic who tells Aiden his ghost is "an active imagination" and that she "tends to think not" about life after death, yet ends by granting that "anything is possible" — is dressed, in her scene of concession, in the bird of resurrection. The peacock's brocade is one more item in the catalogue of "unusual clothing" already noted, but it is the only garment in the book with an explicit resurrection charge, worn by the one character whose disbelief the story is about to soften. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

70. Arise and Go Now, the dove that is both trick and sign — QUOTE: "My mother said, 'Okay. Okay. We wanted to go outside for a bit.' She looked up. 'Isn't the sky lovely? And look at that dove in the tree.' … We heard a cooing sound. On a branch, a light grey mourning dove fluttered its wings. Beyond the tree, on the lawn, I saw my grandfather." SOURCE: The dove as Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16) and as the emblem of peace (Genesis 8:11). GLOSS: The dove first appears as Laura's ruse — she points at a bird to distract the guard while she kicks him — and then, moments later, as the genuine sign beneath which the grandfather's ghost appears on the lawn. The same bird is both the family's imposture and its authentic theophany, which is the collection's theology of the image in miniature: the sacred sign and the cunning distraction are one bird, and the book refuses to tell them apart. Image and imposture share a single feathered body. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

71. Keep Calm and Carry On, dust in the light of grace — QUOTE: "I saw bits of dust in the sunrays streaming through the bay window" / "And we stayed like that until the sunbeams dimmed and the dust disappeared and her tears stopped." SOURCE: image (Genesis 3:19, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"; light as grace). GLOSS: Twice the story hangs mortality and grace on a single optical figure — the motes of dust visible only in the sunbeam. In the first, the light streams over Nanna counting the stolen jewelry and chalice; in the second, the dust literally disappears as the tears stop, in a wordless absolution. Dust (the human condition out

of Genesis) suspended in light (grace) is the collection's most compressed image of what a "small mercy" is: the ordinary mortality that is momentarily made visible, then gently allowed to settle. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

72. Blindfolded, the ocean inverted above the interrogator — QUOTE: "Through the glass, beyond the oak trees, the blue sky was filled with cumulus clouds, a foamy ocean above us." SOURCE: image (an upward reversal of the cure-in-seawater imagery). GLOSS: Aiden, having just asked "What's a mortal sin?" — the question that will lead Nanna to her dead rock of Rephidim and her real tears — looks out and sees the sky as an ocean above. The collection's operative cure is seawater (the Assumption tradition, the Nantasket rite), ordinarily beneath the supplicant's feet; here it is transposed overhead as the boy weighs sin on a doctrinal scale. The upward sea quietly suggests that the cure, like mercy, is sought from above even as Nanna insists it must be manufactured below. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

73. Arise and Go Now / Blindfolded, the most theologically loaded image — QUOTE: "A blindfolded woman wearing a green gown sat atop a light brown globe, her head bent to the left. She played a lyre with a single string." SOURCE: G. F. Watts, Hope (1886). GLOSS: This is the collection's most theologically loaded image, and what it argues is stated by every concurrence of its parts: hope is blindfolded (it operates without sight), it sits astride the whole globe (it underwrites the world), and it makes its music on a single remaining string (it persists on the one thing left after everything else has snapped). That last clause is pure "small mercies" theology — one thread bearing the entire melody — and it is why the book returns to this reproduction twice, at the close of two different stories, to bookend the middle of the cycle. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

74. Across the collection, the single string as the emblem of the title — QUOTE: "She played a lyre with a single string" / "I thought of the chalice, the wine, and the revelation of God's love. But mostly, I cherished hope." SOURCE: Watts, Hope; the theological virtue of hope (1 Corinthians 13:13). GLOSS: The image that most fully enacts "the weight of small mercies" is the lyre's one string. The collection's every "small mercy" — a check written despite a known lie, a dog placed in a home, a mother pulled from an institution, a stolen chalice returned as a false miracle — is a single surviving strand on an instrument otherwise broken, asked to carry all the music the family can make. The closing line confirms the identity: after naming the

chalice (Eucharist) and the wine and the revelation, Aiden reduces them all to the one small thing that remains — hope — which is the collection's own single string. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

75. Arise and Go Now, the globe beneath a transcendentalist creed — QUOTE: "At this very instant, people throughout the world were saving one another. I realized that helping others is our most sacred obligation, the source of all hope and goodness." SOURCE: Emerson/Whitman (the Oversoul, the brotherhood of mutual salvation) fused to the globe in Watts's Hope. GLOSS: The image of Hope sitting "atop a light brown globe" is immediately answered by this sentence, which spreads the act of rescue across "the world" as one simultaneous, unity-preaching organism — the Emersonian Oversoul and Whitman's "kosmos" of mutual lifting. The book has already recorded the transcendentalist maxim ("Goodness is the only investment that never fails"), but here the creed is not quoted from Thoreau; it is generated by the boy out of the painting's globe, so that the Victorian allegory and the New England gospel of immanent divinity merge on a single image of the world being saved by its own small acts. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

76. Across the collection, the iconographic repertoire is free, not fixed — QUOTE: "I thought of the chalice, the wine, and the revelation of God's love." SOURCE: image (synthesis of the collection's iconographic range). GLOSS: The collection does not draw on a fixed liturgical or iconographic program. It borrows *fragments* rather than tableaux: the Stations and the crucifix as backdrop, Marian statuary and a blue marble Virgin, the Annunciation in the visitation's white lights and the dove, the Nativity in the recurring star, the Transfiguration in "clothing white as snow," an inverted Pietà in the Father cradling Peggy, the Grail legend in "Galahad," a Venetian Assumption in Titian's Assunta, and a secular Victorian allegory in Watts's Hope — plus Irish folk-legend (banshee, Lughnasadh) and Arthurian romance. It never stages a crèche or a full Annunciation scene, and it freely mixes Renaissance painting, Catholic devotion, and non-sacred allegory. The repertoire is an ecumenical grab-bag held together by the family's improvising hands, not a scheme. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

77. Across the collection, no hymn is ever sung — QUOTE: "the disc jockeys did not take Peg seriously, let alone understand her." SOURCE: negative finding (hymns displaced by popular song). GLOSS: Not one of the five stories quotes or sings a

church hymn; the devotional-music register is filled entirely by popular and secular songs — Sinatra's "Fools Rush In," Sarah Vaughan's "You Stepped Out of a Dream," Carole King's "You've Got a Friend," Chicago's "If You Leave Me Now," and the barroom standards "Show Me the Way to Go Home" and "You're Nobody till Somebody Loves You." The only verse that pretends to sacral form is Fr. John Duffy's appended poem, which is a poem, not a hymn. Sacred song survives in this family only as the already-degraded form of the popular tune, and the collection's music is accordingly all memory and no liturgy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

78. Across the collection, the color-code is suggestive but not systematic (negative) — QUOTE: "Her red blouse smelled like cinnamon" / "a green paper napkin, and silverware." SOURCE: image (negative finding on the green/red color scheme). GLOSS: The recurrence of green on Laura and Hope and of red on Peggy's cheeks, the burning grave, Rita's hair, and the smeared lipsticks makes a tempting color theology (green as hope/vision, red as suffering and fire), but the text will not hold it: the mother is also dressed in red, and green appears in the merely incidental birdbath water and a paper napkin. So the color system is a leaning, not a law — worth naming because it shows where the image-pattern is genuinely load-bearing (the star, the single string) and where a reader's urge to systematize outruns the text. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

79. "Assumptions," Peg singing at the Steinway in the cellar — QUOTE: "With one thin arm braced against the polished black surface of the Steinway, she sang with no accompaniment" … "remembering too, the indignity and shame that I experienced when my grandmother slyly smirked at me and rolled her eyes" SOURCE: register — double vantage (child percept carried in adult subordinating syntax) GLOSS: This is the clearest single sentence in the collection where both ages of the narrator are audible at once. The perception is a child's and physical (one thin arm, the polished black lid at eye level, the smirk), but the syntax is an adult's: a front-loaded absolute phrase, then a main clause, then two participial trailers ("remembering too") that hold the memory open long after the event closed. The abstract nouns "indignity and shame" are words the boy in the cellar did not have; the sentence supplies them retroactively while keeping the sensory detail unglossed. The whole collection's voice is built on this split, and here the seam is visible. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

80. "Arise and Go Now," after Aiden reveals the grandfather's secret — QUOTE: "After that day, my grandmother looked at me differently. Suspicion? Fear?" SOURCE: register — retrospective interrogative fragments GLOSS: A flat declarative of nine words is followed by two one-word questions with no verbs. The fragments are not the boy's thought at the time but the adult's later attempt to name a look he could only register as weather; the question marks are the honest admission that he still cannot decide. Mulhern uses this figure sparingly, and it is his most economical device for the double vantage: the child sees, the adult interrogates, and neither is allowed to overrule the other. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

81. "Assumptions," the account of Peggy's marriage — QUOTE: "Her story goes something like this—she was married once to a very handsome man named Jim" … "one of those divey joints, nothin' too swanky, where Peg performed for a small crowd on Friday nights" SOURCE: register shift — free indirect discourse into card-table brogue GLOSS: The em dash is the hinge. Before it, the narrator's own careful literary register ("Her story goes something like this"); after it, the sentence is no longer written but overheard, and by the second clause the diction has become the kitchen's ("divey joints, nothin' too swanky"), complete with dropped g and the vague sociable "one of those." For the next three paragraphs the story is told entirely in the voice of the drinking, card-playing adults the boy circled while listening, and the narrator never announces the takeover. The prose enacts how a child inherits family history: as cadence before content. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

82. "Blindfolded," the grandparents' emigration — QUOTE: "Eventually, attitudes changed, my grandmother was able to become a licensed practical nurse, and my grandfather, well, he died." SOURCE: prosody — paratactic tricolon collapsing into monosyllables; caesura on "well" GLOSS: Three coordinate clauses of decreasing length: a five-syllable clause of social history, a long Latinate clause with a credential in it, then four monosyllables. The interjected "well" is a caesura that does the work an entire paragraph of grief would do elsewhere — it is a shrug, a swallow, and a refusal, and it lands the sentence on the bluntest available verb. This is the collection's signature move in miniature: the long sentence dilates, the short clause kills. The rhythm carries the argument that the immigrant story had two outcomes and only one was survivable. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

83. "Keep Calm and Carry On," Margie's kitchen wallpaper — QUOTE: "Her husband had been a conductor; he died, squished between two train cars." SOURCE: prosody — semicolon plus appositive participle; bathos GLOSS: The sentence comes immediately after the boy admires wallpaper printed with the red outlines of trains, so the trains are decorative for one clause and lethal in the next. The horror arrives in a trailing participial scrap after a comma, syntactically demoted, and in a word from a child's vocabulary ("squished") rather than an adult's. The prosody refuses the elegiac beat the content invites: the semicolon does not pause long enough to mourn. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

84. "Blindfolded," the approach to McCall Hospital — QUOTE: "Large oak and birch trees, like sentinels, line the knolls, where dormitories from a bygone era stand, rooted in stability, a quality the clinicians nurture in their patients." SOURCE: register shift — institutional/brochure prose and a shift into the present tense GLOSS: This is the one paragraph in the collection written in the historical present ("line," "stand," "are"), and its diction is borrowed from an admissions pamphlet: "classical flourishes," "edifices," "circuitous," "rooted in stability, a quality the clinicians nurture." The periodic subordination and abstract nouns are wholly unlike the surrounding sentences, and the irony is entirely prosodic — nothing is said against the hospital; the voice simply becomes the hospital's. The register is the critique. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

85. "Arise and Go Now," driving out to the escape attempt — QUOTE: "Leaves had begun to explode into their autumnal brilliance" … "the scent of dying leaves wafted into the small space" … "As we approached my mother's unit, my stomach grumbled from uneasiness." SOURCE: prosody — lyric dilation followed by deflation; long sentence, then short GLOSS: Two expansive sentences with Latinate abstractions and a dash-introduced color triad give way to a plain fourteen-word clause whose subject is a stomach. The lyric is not undercut for comedy; it is simply not sustainable inside a psychiatric ward, and the paragraph break enforces that. The pattern recurs at nearly every threshold in the collection — beauty is granted on the approach and withdrawn at the door — and it is a rhythmic pattern before it is a thematic one. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

86. "Arise and Go Now," tea under Rita's pergola — QUOTE: "Sunlight glimmered through the red cedar lattice above us, dappling her face." … "A small pot of azaleas

cast a purple glow under her chin." SOURCE: sound — liquid consonance (l) and short-i assonance; internal near-rhyme GLOSS: The first sentence threads /l/ six times (Sunlight, glimmered, lattice, dappling) and pins three short-i syllables (glimmered, lattice, dappling) into a shimmer that the sense of the sentence only names. The second sentence answers it with a rounder, darker vowel run (pot, azaleas, purple glow) and puts light under a chin rather than over a face. The pair earns Rita's holiness cheaply and without saying anything pious: she is lit from above and from below, dappled and haloed, in two sentences of purely acoustic decoration. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

87. "Assumptions," canvassing the neighborhood in December — QUOTE: "Peg zigzagging beside me, me nudging Peg" SOURCE: prosody — chiasmus inside a participial cascade GLOSS: The clause turns on itself: subject-participle-object, then object-participle-subject, with "Peg" and "me" trading ends. The figure is doing exactly what the sentence describes, two bodies propping each other up on a curb, and it is the only chiasmus in the collection. It also settles the story's moral question acoustically — who is minding whom — before the young mother at the door poses it aloud. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

88. "Arise and Go Now," the last paragraph, in the car — QUOTE: "I lay back and listened to the low sound of the car on the pavement." SOURCE: William Butler Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," quoted earlier in the same story: "I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore." / "While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey," GLOSS: The allusion here is not lexical furniture but sound: Aiden's closing sentence lifts Yeats's exact acoustic pair — "low sounds" and "pavements" — and domesticates both, singularizing the sound and putting it under a moving car instead of under standing feet. Yeats hears the lake while stranded on grey pavement; Aiden hears the pavement itself and is content, because the exile has ended in the same paragraph. The transposition converts Yeats's homesickness into arrival, and it does so by keeping the vowels and changing only the referent. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

89. "Blindfolded," the grandfather on the great-grandmother's death — QUOTE: "Tumbled right over the stonewall she did." … "Dead she was." … "People said she was tick." SOURCE: Hiberno-English syntax — emphatic fronting with a resumptive pronoun-plus-auxiliary tag GLOSS: The dead man is the only character granted Irish

word order. Fronting the predicate and closing on "she did" / "she was" puts the stress at the end of the clause and gives each sentence a falling, ballad-like finality that standard English word order would dissipate. Combined with the unapostrophed "Tis an awful thing to do" and the dental-stopped "tick," the grandfather's speech is a different prosodic system from every living speaker's — which is how the story tells us he is dead without ever saying so in the dialogue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

90. "Blindfolded," breakfast after the theft — QUOTE: "Like my grandfather, her "th" often sounded like "t" or "d."" SOURCE: prosody — phonology annotated rather than transcribed GLOSS: Mulhern gives the grandmother heavy Irish idiom ("Phooey," "blarney," "malarkey," "Shite") but almost no eye-dialect; here he steps outside the scene to describe her consonants in phonetic prose instead of spelling them. The choice is a prosodic one with a social motive: eye-dialect would make her comic and class-marked on the page, whereas an annotation keeps her dignity and makes the accent the narrator's knowledge rather than her defect. The grandfather, already lost, is allowed the spelled version; the living grandmother is not. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

91. "Blindfolded," returning the chalice during Mass — QUOTE: "Beloved, we are God's children now." … "Sounds like a bunch of palaver." SOURCE: register collision — liturgical cadence (1 John 3) against Hiberno-English dismissal GLOSS: The priest's reading is the most metrically regular English in the collection: balanced clauses, vocative openings, the periodic suspension of "What we shall be has not yet been revealed." The grandmother's whispered verdict lands on a single dactylic Irish word, "palaver," and flattens the whole cadence to noise. The scene stages the book's central problem as a clash of rhythms rather than of beliefs — she cannot follow the sentences, only steal and return the cup — and the boy's later cry resolves it by seizing the priest's own verb. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

92. "Assumptions," the grandmother arguing Peg into the sea — QUOTE: "Your aching bones, your mood, your bowels, whatever it is that's bothering you, Peg. God will know what you need." SOURCE: prosody — anaphora and descending tricolon, then a flat monosyllabic clause GLOSS: Three "your" phrases descend from the poetic (aching bones) through the psychological (mood) to the intestinal (bowels), a litany built like a prayer and delivered like a shopping list; the fourth item abandons the

pattern into vagueness. Then comes a seven-word sentence of pure faith with no subordination at all. The anaphora is liturgical in shape and domestic in content, which is precisely this grandmother's theology: the sacred is whatever hurts, and the sentence rhythm makes no distinction between mood and bowels because God is presumed not to either. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

93. "Assumptions," on the Feast of the Assumption and Lughnasadh — QUOTE: "an amalgamation of exhaustion, death, martyring motherhood, food, and a cure" SOURCE: prosody — five-item asyndetic-to-syndetic list; irregular stress GLOSS: The list refuses parallel grammar (two abstract nouns, a gerund phrase, a bare noun, an indefinite noun) and refuses even syllable balance, so the reader cannot fall into a rhythm; the deflating monosyllables "food" and "a cure" arrive after "martyring motherhood" without transition. The roughness is the argument: this is a syncretic holiday, and a smooth tricolon would have implied a coherence the narrator explicitly denies. Sound performs the amalgamation the sentence names. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

94. "Arise and Go Now," the grandmother hearing her husband's phrase — QUOTE: "She looked behind her for a second, as if someone might be there." SOURCE: prosody as theology — flattening at the supernatural (compare Give Them Unquiet Dreams) GLOSS: The most frightening moment available to the story — the possibility that the dead man is standing in the kitchen — is delivered in a subordinate "as if" clause, in the flattest possible diction, with the indefinite "someone" and the hedging "might." The same holds throughout: the ghost's arrivals are reported in habitual past tense with domestic detail and no rise in register at all, and the epiphanies are given to the mundane instead ("I lay back and listened to the low sound of the car"). This confirms rather than reverses the known finding for Give Them Unquiet Dreams: Mulhern flattens at the supernatural and lifts at the ordinary, and the theological claim is carried entirely by that inversion — grace is in the pavement and the bologna, while the miraculous is treated as furniture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

95. "The Wrong Way," in the car at Jamaica Pond — QUOTE: "I hate football and I hate you." … "You don't hate me, Aiden. You're angry." SOURCE: prosody — anaphora as the child's only rhetorical instrument; parallelism answered by parataxis GLOSS: This is the sole anaphora Aiden speaks aloud in the collection, seven monosyllables

balanced on a repeated verb, and it is the most rhythmically shaped thing he manages in a story otherwise made of two-beat exchanges. The father dismantles it not with argument but with prosody: two short flat clauses that break the parallel and relabel the feeling. The scene's whole power dynamic is audible in the fact that the boy has one figure of speech and the adult has the authority to refuse it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

96. "The Wrong Way," throughout the drive — QUOTE: "Made-up stories can be based on real life." … "There are no ghosts, Aiden." SOURCE: negative finding — a story with almost no sound-work GLOSS: Recorded plainly: for roughly its whole length "The Wrong Way" carries no alliteration, no cadenced periodic sentence, no liturgical rhythm, and no lyric dilation — only flat declaratives, clipped questions, and dialogue in which the longest sentences belong to the father complaining about other drivers. The boy's own ars poetica is delivered in eight unmusical words. The flatness is deliberate and load-bearing: the story about a father who leaves is the one story denied prose music, and the reader feels the withdrawal before understanding it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

97. "The Wrong Way," on the curb and on the steps — QUOTE: "He looked like a child and an old man at the same time." … "They already are." SOURCE: prosody — temporal chiasmus; the two-word answer as caesura GLOSS: The first sentence hands the collection's double vantage to the father: the man who insists "you're just a kid" is himself seen as child and old man in one clause, the two ages balanced across the verb. The second is the mother's entire response to Aiden's cover story about icy roads — three words, no elaboration, and the flattest possible delivery of second sight. Both work by subtraction, and both put the story's meaning in the pause after the sentence rather than in the sentence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

98. "Blindfolded" and "Keep Calm and Carry On," the two versions of entering Mission Church — QUOTE: "The air was musty, warm, and dark." / "Shellack, incense, perfume, and old-people smell filled the air. It was difficult to see in the musty darkness." — and "The priest frowned." / "The priest scowled." SOURCE: prosody — twin drafts as evidence of the author's ear GLOSS: Because the collection prints the same scene twice, the revisions can be measured. In one version the sensory list is a four-item noun catalogue with a bureaucratic verb ("filled the air"); in the other it becomes a three-adjective predicate ending on the monosyllable

"dark," and the visibility clause is absorbed. The verb of priestly displeasure moves from the two-syllable "frowned" to the harsher, more consonantal "scowled." Both changes go the same direction — toward tricolon, toward monosyllables, toward a harder consonant on the beat — which is good direct evidence that the flat-hard-short cadence noted throughout is a chosen prosody and not an accident of plain style. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

99. "The Wrong Way," passing the arboretum, twice — QUOTE: "The snow was falling softly on the spruce trees." … "The pine branches seemed to droop with the snow." … "A father and his son shoveled their walkway." SOURCE: James Joyce, "The Dead" — the cadence of "It was falling softly upon the Bog of Allen" and the closing snowfall GLOSS: In a story otherwise stripped of prose music, the two snow sentences are metrically regular and end-stopped, and the first reproduces Joyce's exact adverbial cadence, "falling softly," in the same trochaic-then-falling shape. The arboretum is passed twice, and the second passage substitutes a father and son on a walkway for the earlier trees — a rhyme of image rather than sound, and one that answers the father and son casting lines into the sea in "Assumptions." The Joycean rhythm arrives only where the story is about to close and to lose the father, which is where Joyce's snow falls too. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

100. "Assumptions," Peg in the parlor — QUOTE: "Oh, that you were forty years older! You're a charmer, you are." … "I'm just codding ya, Jimmy, just an old story is all." SOURCE: Hiberno-English prosody — optative "Oh, that" construction, copular tag repetition, and the terminal "is all" GLOSS: Peg's brogue is built out of syntax rather than spelling: the archaic optative opening, the emphatic tag that repeats the subject and verb at the end of the clause ("you are"), and the trailing "is all" that lowers the pitch and closes the sentence without a period's finality. The same tag figure recurs in the grandmother's "We have nothing in common is all" and "something wrong with his blood is all," which makes it the collection's most consistent dialect marker and a purely rhythmic one. It is also how the story keeps Peg lovable while she lies: the cadence apologizes as the sentence ends. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

101. Arise and Go Now, the closing sentences — QUOTE: "At this very instant, people throughout the world were helping one another. I reclined, listening to the low sound of wheels on the pavement. My mother was free. In a sense, my

grandmother was also free. In my"deep heart's core," I knew everything would be alright. Soon we would all be home." … "At this very instant, people throughout the world were saving one another. I realized that helping others is our most sacred obligation, the source of all hope and goodness."Goodness is the only investment that never fails," the quote in Rita's house read. I lay back and listened to the low sound of the car on the pavement. My mother was free. In my "deep heart's core," I knew everything would be alright. I felt peace. Soon we would all be home." SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing (April 2018) against the collection (copyright 2026); Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" ("I hear it in the deep heart's core"; "for peace comes dropping slow"). The novel *Give Them Unquiet Dreams* (2019) has a third ending with neither sentence: "At this instant, people throughout the world were saving one another." followed by "Somewhere linnets flew through evening skies." GLOSS: Only the collection says "most sacred obligation." It adds that sentence to the magazine ending, together with the Thoreau motto and a closing "I felt peace" that echoes Yeats. The verb "helping," which the magazine used for the whole world, moves into the new sentence about what is sacred, and the world is now said to be "saving" one another, a reading the novel first introduced. The revision runs from 2018 to 2019 to 2026, and each stage makes the claim more openly religious: plain description first, then a word with overtones of salvation, then a stated sacred duty. The collection also cuts "In a sense, my grandmother was also free," which made the grandmother's freedom part of the ending. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

102. Arise and Go Now, the stop at Rita's house — QUOTE: "Aiden, what I said to Rita last week was cruel. I humiliated and embarrassed her. I need to apologize. Do you understand?" … [absent: in the collection "I thought of the poem about Innisfree and the photographs in my grandmother's album. I rolled my window down and imagined I heard crickets singing." runs straight on to "In my mind, I saw the picture of my grandmother"] SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing against the collection; the novel (2019) keeps the apology almost word for word ("I need to apologize. Do you understand?") GLOSS: The magazine story and the novel both end with a spoken act of contrition and a plan to make amends, much like confession followed by penance, and the grandmother stops on the drive home to carry it out. The collection deletes the whole exchange. The general principle added in entry 101 takes its place, so the moral weight moves from one sinner's specific apology to a statement about

everyone. The direction is clear: the scene is present in 2018 and 2019 and gone in 2026. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

103. Arise and Go Now, the insult that required the apology — QUOTE: "Rita wouldn't have left him. She would have done the right thing. Taken him to bed with her," … "That you're a whore. And you sleep with married men." … "Oh my God! Boys, you really need to go play or somethin'." … "Rita embraced her. She nodded for us to go upstairs." SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing against the collection GLOSS: In the magazine, the grandmother follows her confession about her husband's death with an accusation of adultery, and Margie answers "Oh my God!" In the collection, the grandmother confesses ("I should have made him come with me.") and Rita embraces her at once. This cut is why the apology in entry 102 had to go: once the grandmother commits no fresh sin, she has nothing to make amends for. The collection's Arise loses one "God" (four uses fall to three), and the sin of sexual slander disappears from the story. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

104. Arise and Go Now, Rita's first conversation (the Hawthorne line) — QUOTE: "But we all do. To others and to ourselves." A shadow passed over her face. " 'Life is a tale of human frailty and sorrow.' Do you know who said that?" … "But we all do. To others and to ourselves." A shadow passed over her face. "To what do I owe the honor of your visit, dear Aiden?" SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing against the collection; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (the magazine names the novel) GLOSS: The collection drops the Hawthorne quotation and also Rita's admission "I miss your grandfather so very much." These cuts, together with the insult in entry 103, remove every sign that Rita was the grandfather's lover, and the *Scarlet Letter* line was the magazine's literary pointer to adultery and shame. What remains in the collection is a general remark about lying ("we all do"). The book cuts the story's one allusion to the classic American novel of sin and penance. That this is a planned removal of the adultery thread is an inference from how the cuts cluster, though each cut is textually certain. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

105. Arise and Go Now, the Thoreau motto moved to the end — QUOTE: "Hanging on the fence was a metal plaque with a quote my grandfather recited during one of his mysterious visits:"Goodness is the only investment that never fails."" … ""Goodness is the only investment that never fails," the quote in Rita's house read." SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing (opening, Rita's patio) against the collection

(closing sentence); Thoreau, *Walden*, "Higher Laws" ("Goodness is the only investment that never fails") GLOSS: The magazine sets up the motto at the start as a plaque on Rita's fence, a saying the dead grandfather "recited" on his ghostly visits. The collection cuts the plaque from the opening but brings the motto back in the last paragraph as "the quote in Rita's house." That leaves a reference with nothing earlier in the story to point to, since the collection's version of "Arise and Go Now" never mentions a plaque. The motto now closes the story as a moral instead of opening it as a relic handed down by the ghost. It is also moved from the fence outside to inside the house. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

106. Arise and Go Now, the Innisfree poem copied into the album — QUOTE: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree, / And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;" … "I will rise and go now to Innisfree. / And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattle made;" SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing and the novel (2019), both of which give Yeats correctly, against the collection; Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree"; Luke 15:18, the prodigal son: "I will arise and go to my father" GLOSS: The collection misprints the opening line of the poem that gives the story its title. It turns "arise" into "rise," drops "and go," and also reads "wattle" for "wattles" and "Midnight's all a glimmer" for "There midnight's all a glimmer." The second stanza keeps "I will arise and go now," so in the collection the title's verb is missing from the line it comes from and appears only at the second occurrence. The Yeats line is widely read as echoing the prodigal son's resolve, and that echo is weakest exactly where the poem is first quoted. This looks like an error in transcription or typesetting, not a revision of meaning. The 2018 and 2019 readings are correct. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

107. Arise and Go Now, religious lines that survive unchanged (negative finding) — QUOTE: "He went to his closet to get the pearls and came back in a panic. I prayed aloud to St. Anthony." … "He went to his closet to get the necklace and came back in a panic. I prayed aloud to St. Anthony." SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing against the collection; St. Anthony of Padua, patron of lost things GLOSS: A word-level diff of the two states finds roughly 850 differing words. Even so, the prayer to St. Anthony, "Then why do you cry at night and ask God for forgiveness?", "Glory be to God. Catherine must be at her wit's end.", the Watts *Hope* paragraph, and "Hope is sitting right beside me." all read the same, apart from "pearls" becoming "necklace"

and "in a green gown" becoming "wearing a green gown." The revision cuts and adds only around the ending and the Rita subplot (entries 101 to 105). The small devotional lines in the body of the story are left alone. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

108. The Watts *Hope* sketch, finished or unfinished — QUOTE: "She had begun copying it, using different shades of pencil." … "She had copied it in her book, using different shades of pencil." SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing, the Writing Disorder and CC&D printings of "Blindfolded," and both of the collection's uses of the scene (all "had begun copying") against the novel (2019); G. F. Watts, *Hope* (1886) GLOSS: In every story state, Laura's copy of *Hope* is still in progress. Only the novel has her finish it, and there the sketchbook "fell open" instead of Aiden opening it. The collection keeps the unfinished version in both stories, so its emblem of the theological virtue stays incomplete, like the one string on the lyre. The variant is small, and any reading of it as intended is speculative. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

109. Blindfolded, the last sentence and the CC&D printing — QUOTE: "I thought of the chalice, the wine, and the revelation of God's pure love." … "I thought of the chalice, the wine, and the revelation of God's love." SOURCE: the Writing Disorder printing (on the web by June 2018 at the latest) against the CC&D printing (July–August 2019), which already reads "God's love," and the collection (2026), which reads the same way GLOSS: The difference between "pure love" and "love" is already recorded. The new point is that "pure" had already been cut in the 2019 CC&D reprint, so the change is not a revision made for the 2026 book. CC&D also agrees with the collection against the Writing Disorder in dropping "navy" from "maroon suit jackets and navy blue ties." It agrees with the Writing Disorder against the collection in keeping four uses of "very" and "ladies room." That makes CC&D a genuine intermediate state, and the chain runs from the Writing Disorder through CC&D to the collection. Removing the intensifier from the Eucharistic last sentence belongs to the 2019 stage. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

110. Blindfolded, the reading from 1 John at Mission Church — QUOTE: "A reading from the first Letter of Saint John. . . .'Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.'" … "A reading from the first Letter of Saint John. . ..'Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are." SOURCE: the Writing Disorder printing against the collection (the novel, 2019, has the

collection's punctuation); 1 John 3:1–3 as used in the Catholic Lectionary GLOSS: The Writing Disorder marks each piece of the lection with nested single quotes (" 'The reason the world does not know us…' "). That keeps Scripture visibly separate from the priest's own speech. The collection opens a single quote before"Beloved" and never closes it, and it prints the later verses in plain double quotes, so the priest's voice and the words of Scripture run together. The wording of the reading does not change. Only the way it is marked as Scripture weakens, and that weakening appears first in the 2019 novel. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

111. Blindfolded, the church-theft scene unchanged across three printings (negative finding) — QUOTE: "It came out of you like the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh." … "The priest's face lit up."It's a miracle," he hollered to the congregation, holding the chalice above his head and walking to the center of the altar. "Thanks be to God."" SOURCE: the Writing Disorder printing, the CC&D printing and the collection; Exodus 17:1–7; Numbers 20:1–13 GLOSS: A word diff between the collection and the Writing Disorder finds about 55 differing words, and nearly all of them are punctuation or "very." Besides the "pure love" change, the only one near sacred matter is the nested quoting of 1 John in entry 110. "Dear Jesus," "Father, please cure him," "What ails you," the "mumbo-jumbo prayer," the Rephidim and Kadesh line, "It's a miracle," "Thanks be to God," and the teaching on venial and mortal sin read identically in all three printings. The religious core of the chalice story was fixed in its first printing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

112. Blindfolded's emigration sentence and the "Dark City" poem — QUOTE: "With hope in their hearts, just a few belongings, I'm sure, and not much money, they journeyed to the promised land of their imaginations." … "but you had courage and a dream. / Just a few belongings, I'm sure, and not much money." … "Mostly, you carried hope." … "You carried courage, a dream, / a canvas sack, your mother's Bible. / Hardly any money." SOURCE: "Blindfolded" (the Writing Disorder, CC&D and the collection, all identical) against "Dark City" in Ginosko no. 24 (Spring/Summer 2022), the separate poetry collection, and the Crossings text on the author's site (2026); Exodus 3:8 ("a land flowing with milk and honey") GLOSS: The poem takes the prose sentence almost word for word ("Just a few belongings, I'm sure, and not much money"), but it replaces "hope in their hearts" with "courage and a dream." One later state moves "hope" to the end of the stanza ("Mostly, you carried hope."). The

Crossings state then turns the vague "belongings" into "your mother's Bible." Across genres, the religious content moves from an abstract virtue in the story to a concrete devotional object in the last state of the poem. The story itself never gains the Bible. The prose (2017) comes first, but the order of the undated poetry-collection state is uncertain. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

113. Assumptions, the Duffy poem missing from both magazine printings — QUOTE: "hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him." [end of text] … "hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him. / Feast of the Assumption, 1924 / by Fr. John Duffy about his beloved mother Bridie" SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing (2015) and the Galway Review printing (2020), both of which end at "a part of Him," against the collection (2026) and the two earlier book collections, which add the poem GLOSS: The only liturgical poem inside the story, with "Our Lady's tide," "Golgotha," "A sacramental out of Quincy Bay," and "The Eternal's bride," exists only in the book states. Neither magazine printing has it. So when the story was printed on its own, it ended on the grandmother's image of the Father, and in book form it ends on a priest's Marian poem. In the collection the poem itself is cut short before "crucified." The poem was added for book publication, and the book states (2016 onward) run alongside the magazine states without it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

114. Assumptions, Peg's singing (the collection's only substantive rewrite) — QUOTE: "Peg was horrible, of course - years of smoking, drinking, and heartache had ravaged her vocal chords - but her pain was so real." … "Peg's vocal performance was noticeably affected by years of smoking, drinking, and personal difficulties, which had taken a toll on her voice. However, the authenticity of her pain was evident." SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing (2015), which the 2016 and *Useless Things* texts follow, against the collection (2026) GLOSS: Only the collection has this sentence in a cooler, clinical register. It replaces "heartache" with "personal difficulties" and removes the narrator's frank "horrible, of course." The revision is secular and changes tone only; no religious word is added or removed. The sentence is useful mainly as evidence that the 2026 text was actually revised in places, which makes the religious passages it leaves alone (entry 115) a deliberate choice to keep them. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

115. Assumptions, the religious apparatus unchanged (negative finding) — QUOTE: "If you were not Catholic, as far as she was concerned, you were going to hell." … "like the flesh of a Father's hands as He cradles His child's head before lifting His crossed arms to kiss her soft cheek." SOURCE: the Fiction on the Web printing against the collection; Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950); Song of Solomon 4:7 GLOSS: A word diff between the collection and the 2015 magazine finds about 150 differing words. Nearly all of them are dashes, commas, "dies" against "dice," and "Marys" against "Mary's," apart from Peg's singing (entry 114) and the dropped "her" in "at home with her Jim." Every religious passage reads identically: the Song of Solomon epigraph, the papal definition, the Lughnasadh paragraph, the "mortal sin" of the stolen rolls, "God will know what you need," "For Christ's sake, Peg!", and the closing image of the Father. The only religious difference is typographic: the collection sets the epigraph without quotation marks and capitalises "There." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

116. Keep Calm and Carry On, the same title and text as the Impspired printing (negative finding) — QUOTE: "Keep Calm and Carry On" … "KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON"; "In the quiet of the room, she whispered,"Keep calm and carry on" to me or to herself. Or to both of us." SOURCE: the Impspired printing (February 2021) against the collection GLOSS: The story is not retitled. A word diff finds about 19 differing words, all commas, spacing of ellipses, and one final full stop. The collection drops that full stop, and its last words run straight into the next story's heading. Every religious line in the collection matches the Impspired text, including "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. You scared the hell out of me.", "God will take care of everything.", "Father Tom," the list of Gospel miracles, and "kneeling in front of a giant Jesus on the cross." The religious variants of this story are all between the Impspired and collection text on one side and the 2019 novel on the other. None falls between the magazine and the book. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

117. The Wrong Way, the mother's status at the end — QUOTE: "My grandmother and mother were shoveling the front steps." … "My grandmother and mother, on a scheduled visit, were shoveling the front steps." SOURCE: the Galway Review printing (7 April 2020) against the collection; the novel (2019) reads like the Galway Review GLOSS: Only the collection adds "on a scheduled visit." That makes the freed mother of "Arise and Go Now" a visitor again, though the same collection story earlier has

her "still asleep" in the house. The other differences are italics lost in the collection ("There *are* no ghosts," "I think she *is* better"), which weakens the father's stress on his disbelief. "On a Sunday after church," "God rest his soul," "For Christ's sake, Aiden," "The miracle of heated swimming pools," and "Never dread the winter" all read the same. This is a secular continuity revision, and the religious wording does not move at all. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

The Cycle as a Designed Book

1. Title doctrine: the deliberately missing word — QUOTE: "THE WEIGHT OF SMALL MERCIES"; "the source of all hope and goodness"; "Goodness is the only investment that never fails."; "the physical kind" SOURCE: Formal principle of lexical absence; Matthew 5:7; Luke 6:36; Micah 6:8. GLOSS: Apart from the title's plural *mercies*, the narrative uses neither "mercy" nor "merciful," and never uses "kindness"; its only exact "kind" is the non-moral "physical kind." The four appearances of "goodness" are one declaration that it springs from mutual rescue and the same maxim repeated three times. The title therefore names an ethic that the stories enact rather than preach: mercy is not an emotion or a clerical abstraction but a concrete, risky assistance to an afflicted person. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

2. Title doctrine: complete moral-word inventory — QUOTE: "a good daughter"; "Any food is good"; "Good thing they came up with adult diapers"; "We're good now"; "a good company"; "good old songs"; "a good thing she has a neighbor"; "the good fortune"; "Good morning, Lovely Peggy"; "water will be good for your gout"; "a good fight"; "felt good against our skin"; "good jobs"; "what good did it do the poor woman"; "It's the good horse that draws its own cart"; "felt good against my back"; "a good man"; "What good times"; "the physical kind"; "That sounds good"; "doing her good"; "a good doctor"; "It's a good thing no cars were coming"; "a good man, just dull"; "It felt good"; "It's good"; "good at English"; "there's a good job for me out there." SOURCE: Formal principle of semantic range. GLOSS: These are every occurrence of the exact word "good" in the manuscript. Nearly all are deliberately non-doctrinal—food, weather, jobs, a doctor, sensation, ordinary approval—so the four weight-bearing occurrences of "goodness" cannot be reduced to pious vocabulary. The collection makes goodness legible in the unheroic register of food, bodily comfort, work, and neighborly attention. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

3. Title doctrine: pity and forgiveness are compromised words — QUOTE: "ask God for forgiveness"; "God will forgive you because we are all God's children"; "That was to evoke pity." SOURCE: Sacrament of Penance; Luke 6:36; Divine Mercy devotion. GLOSS: "Forgiveness" occurs twice, in the two closely repeated scenes of Nanna's private guilt; "forgive" occurs only in her invented report about the fictive homeless man. "Pity" names the mechanism of the leukemia fraud, not compassionate fellow-feeling. Against Luke's command to be merciful and the Divine Mercy devotion's appeal to Christ's mercy, the book is sharply unsentimental: its persons often counterfeit pious language, while actual care arrives through what they do for one another. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

4. What a small mercy is, and what weight adds — QUOTE: "She needed money. I recognized her anxiety and wanted to help"; "We saved Scruffy's life"; "we had rescued Mom"; "I need money to take care of you." SOURCE: Corporal works of mercy—especially visiting the sick, sheltering/caring for the vulnerable, and aiding the needy; Micah 6:8. GLOSS: A small mercy in this book is a finite intervention—writing a check despite fraud, finding a dog a home, getting a woman out of an institution, financing a child's care—not a clean moral achievement. "Weight" names both material burden (medical bills, institutionalization, dependence, bodies) and moral burden: each assistance makes the helper answerable for lies, theft, or pain it cannot cure. The title consequently rejects both cheap grace and heroic grandeur. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

5. The title's doctrinal test is practical, not devotional — QUOTE: "helping others is our most sacred obligation"; "We make our own miracles"; "instead of sitting on our arses waiting for Jesus to put the world right." SOURCE: Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:7; contrast with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy's petition for divine, not self-generated, mercy. GLOSS: The book agrees with Matthew and Micah that mercy is enacted toward another, but Nanna's maxim makes a troubling substitution: human manufacture replaces waiting on God. That friction is designed, not an error. The collection calls domestic care sacred while refusing to guarantee that the care is innocent, sacramentally valid, or sufficient. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

6. Printed order: the first story supplies an intentionally over-bright promise — QUOTE: "Soon we would all be home"; "I knew everything would be alright. I felt peace." SOURCE: Formal principle of prolepsis and subsequent testing. GLOSS: "Arise

and Go Now" opens with fraud and a failed escape but ends in an actual release, a Hope image, and confident homecoming. Placing it first gives the reader a completed pattern—family ingenuity plus supernatural sanction equals rescue—that the next three stories progressively parody, repeat, and complicate. "The Wrong Way" finally tests that promise where no rescue can be made. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. The five technical sins do not form a clean one-per-story ladder — QUOTE: "Nanna and I lied to you"; "I don't have leukemia"; "a few banana loaves that my grandmother had stolen"; "Why did you allow your grandmother to steal the chalice"; "I took the diamond earrings and opal bracelet"; "I pretended to be hurt bad"; "I'm moving to Arizona." SOURCE: Formal principle of recurrence and recombination; Catholic distinctions between venial and mortal sin invoked in "Blindfolded." GLOSS: The book distributes fraud, theft, burglary, staged healing, and abandonment unevenly. "Arise" has the fundraising fraud; "Assumptions" contains the bakery theft but is chiefly a care-and-transfiguration story; "Blindfolded" makes chalice theft central; "Keep Calm" fuses the diagnosis fraud, jewelry burglary, fake fall, and staged recovery; "The Wrong Way" replaces the grandmother's technical schemes with the father's desertion. The reported one-sin-per-story design is therefore too neat; the actual design is cumulative recombination. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

8. Love is not an alibi, but the narrative gives every sin a loving end — QUOTE: "She needed money"; "My grandmother believed it was a mortal sin to waste the day-old baked goods"; "maybe she'll get better and come home to us"; "This would look beautiful on Laura"; "what I'm doing is the best thing for all of us." SOURCE: Formal principle of moral doubleness; Romans 3:8 as the rejected principle that evil may be done for good. GLOSS: Each wrong act is supplied with an adjacent rationale of need, care, waste-avoidance, cure, adornment, or family welfare. The final quotation matters because the father uses the same grammar of loving justification without the narratorial warmth granted to the women. The sequence makes the reader distinguish explanation from exoneration. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

9. No escalation: stories three and four are a deliberate doublure — QUOTE: "Fall"; "Dear Jesus"; "swiping the gold chalice"; "It came out of you like the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh"; "I need money to take care of you." SOURCE: Formal principle of variant retelling/revision. GLOSS: "Blindfolded" and

"Keep Calm and Carry On" reproduce the church operation virtually beat for beat, then alter its moral surround: the latter adds the jewelry theft, the fundraising explanation, Margie, and Nanna's real tears. Their adjacency blocks a simple escalation plot. The fourth story is a second exposure of the same act, forcing the reader to see the social and economic machinery that "Blindfolded" leaves comparatively concentrated in ritual. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

10. Aiden's witness begins by naming wrong without prosecuting it — QUOTE: "Nanna and I lied to you"; "Aren't you mad?"; "Of course not. Catherine lies."; "But we all do. To others and to ourselves." SOURCE: Matthew 7:1–5; charitable judgment as a formal ethic. GLOSS: Aiden reports the fraud exactly and asks for judgment; Rita refuses both outrage and denial. This opening scene establishes the child's characteristic position: he sees, tells the truth, and waits for an adult response rather than assigning a final moral identity. The collection's mercy is not blindness to sin but resistance to reducing a person to it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

11. Aiden's witness becomes morally active silence — QUOTE: "More fake tears, I thought"; "That was an act"; "I won't say anything, Dad." SOURCE: Formal principle of withheld disclosure; charity versus complicity. GLOSS: Aiden is not incapable of judgment: he recognizes Nanna's performed crying and repeats her admission to himself. Yet he also withholds the father's departure from Laura, who is "not ready to hear the news." His silence is neither simply complicity nor simple innocence; it is the child's precarious practice of mercy, protecting people while absorbing knowledge that adults should carry themselves. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

12. The child's questions expose the adult casuistry — QUOTE: "Was stealing the chalice a venial or a mortal sin?"; "Is lying about leukemia to make people feel bad and distract them a venial sin?"; "Is my mother a tribulation?" SOURCE: Catholic moral theology; the child-question device. GLOSS: Aiden does not condemn Nanna, but his literal questions refuse her evasions. Her labels—"venial," "white lie," "tribulation"—become inadequate when he applies them to a stolen sacred object, calculated pity, and Laura herself. The book gives ethical judgment to the child not as accusation but as exact hearing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

13. Women as clergy I: Rita and Nanna exercise lay intercession and a domestic laying-on of hands — QUOTE: "I prayed aloud to St. Anthony"; "Rita put her hand on

mine"; "She rubbed my head gently"; "She rubbed my cheek." SOURCE: Intercession; blessing/laying on of hands as liturgical and biblical gesture. GLOSS: Rita's appeal to St. Anthony and her hand placed on Aiden move her from comic friend to lay intercessor and receiver of confession-like truth. Nanna's repeated touch precedes the projected cure and substitutes bodily reassurance for priestly authority. Neither act is an ordained sacrament, but the book repeatedly relocates pastoral contact into women's hands. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

14. Women as clergy II: the beach rite makes a woman the minister — QUOTE: "How else are you going to get the cure?"; "My grandmother managed to coax Peg out of the boots, pouring salt water playfully over Peg's toes before leading her into the ocean"; "My grandmother rubbed tanning oil into Peg's bald scalp"; "she rose from the sea." SOURCE: Baptismal/foot-washing imagery; healing and anointing; Fr. John Duffy, "Feast of the Assumption, 1924." GLOSS: Helen directs the water cure, prepares Peg's feet, conducts her into the water, anoints her scalp, and the prose culminates in Peg's rising. The appended poem will call the same sort of action a "sacramental," confirming that the language of rite is not merely decorative. It is an improvised, lay, and comic sacrament, but it has a woman—not the institutional priest described in the story's background—at its center. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

15. Women as clergy III: Nanna administers and narrates a counterfeit Eucharist and an absolution — QUOTE: "Drink this wine. Joshua says the cup has healing powers"; "She wrapped the chalice in a cloth"; "God will forgive you because we are all God's children"; "The priest's face lit up"; "It's a miracle" SOURCE: Eucharistic form; absolution; the Order of Mass. GLOSS: Nanna selects vessel, wine, recipient, healing intention, and later supplies the forgiveness narrative that authorizes its return. The priest does not discover the truth; he ratifies the tale as miracle. The scene is sacrilegious on its facts, yet its roles are unmistakably clerical: the woman administers the family's rite and scripts the congregation's response. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

16. Women as clergy IV: prophecy and the corporal works belong to the domestic female network — QUOTE: "visions of past and future events"; "The three of us—Margie, Martin, and I—checked in"; "We saved Scruffy's life"; "Later that week, she found a home for Scruffy"; "Everything will be alright. Someday soon, we'll all be home" SOURCE: Prophecy/second sight; corporal works of mercy (care of the

sick and vulnerable); formal principle of distributed ministry. GLOSS: Laura's visions supply the book's prophetic register, while Rita, Margie, Helen, and Peg organize the material works: hospital visitation, escape, money, food, transport, and a home for an abandoned animal. The prophecy is not authoritative prediction in a clerical sense, and the rescue is legally/morally mixed; nevertheless, female care is the book's operating ministry. No woman literally buries a person or performs a formal keening in this manuscript—the text instead gives us tears, touch, and practical attendance. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

17. Negative finding: ordained men do perform priestly acts, but they do not carry the book's pastoral burden — QUOTE: "the priest would lead a procession to the shore after his mass"; "lay a wreath on the waves and make a benediction"; "He prayed over people, then lightly touched them"; "A reading from the first Letter of Saint John"; "Thanks be to God." SOURCE: Benediction; charismatic healing; Liturgy of the Word; acclamation. GLOSS: The claim that no ordained man does what a priest is for is false on the text: the historical shore priest blesses, the Mission priest conducts healing, reads Scripture, and leads a congregational acclamation. But none of these men gets Laura home, supports Aiden, tends Peg, or bears confession-like guilt. The book does not erase ordained ministry; it makes it ceremonially present and pastorally secondary. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

18. "The Wrong Way" lacks the transfiguring apparatus, not every trace of grace — QUOTE: "There are no ghosts, Aiden"; "I thought she was getting better"; "I'm moving to Arizona"; "The streets were getting icy"; "The smoke of my breath rose, and dissolved like eddies in a careless sky." SOURCE: Formal principle of subtraction and terminal anti-climax. GLOSS: Unlike the first four stories, the last has no visitation that is affirmed, no sacred object, no water-cure, no miraculous recovery, no scriptural epigraph, and no final assertion of revelation, hope, or homecoming. Its central adult action is not an illicit rescue but a departure. The final lyric image transfigures nothing: breath simply dissolves under an indifferent sky. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

19. "The Wrong Way" still preserves the book's smallest mercy — QUOTE: "Please don't tell them, Aiden. Your mom's not ready to hear the news"; "I won't say anything, Dad"; "My grandmother wrapped her arm around me. Mom kissed my cheek." SOURCE: Charity as protective silence; corporal and affective care. GLOSS:

The story is not grace-free in the absolute sense. Aiden absorbs his father's cowardice, conceals it from his vulnerable mother, and is received by Nanna and Laura's touch; those gestures are small mercies without supernatural confirmation. Its bleakness proves that the earlier stories' grace lies not in the guarantee that families are saved, but in temporary acts of protection amid failures that remain. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

20. The internal frame announces linked design before the stories begin — QUOTE: "these five linked stories trace one boy's journey through family trauma toward understanding"; "in this current linked form, has not been previously published as a book" SOURCE: Paratext; formal principle of the linked-story cycle. GLOSS: The "About the Collection" and "Publication Notes" explicitly ask to be read as architecture rather than as an accidental gathering of magazine pieces. Their promotional promise—"grace amidst dysfunction, faith amidst doubt"—is tested by the order: affirmative rescue, Assumption, duplicated chalice rite, exhausted endurance, abandonment. The paratext supplies the book's claim; the sequence qualifies it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

21. The Song of Songs epigraph makes "Assumptions" a test of merciful sight — QUOTE: "You are altogether beautiful, my love;"; "There is no flaw in you."; "homeliest damn woman"; "Finally, she would be at home with Jim. Completely awake–laughing, altogether beautiful, and divine–she rises once again to sing her favorite song." SOURCE: Song of Songs 4:7; formal principle of epigraphic antithesis. GLOSS: The epigraph arrives immediately after the first story's secure hope and before the collection's most aggressively unkind bodily description. It governs the whole middle movement by requiring the reader to hold scriptural beauty against social contempt. The ending does not discover that Peg was physically unmarked; it changes the terms on which she is seen. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

22. The appended poem provides the collection's counter-reading of its own miracle — QUOTE: "The day you begged a miracle to ease"; "The swollen feet that life had crucified."; "Your little son, I watched, appalled"; "Praying in vain for what was not to be"; "with the aching in your bones you wrought"; "A sacramental out of Quincy Bay." SOURCE: Fr. John Duffy, "Feast of the Assumption, 1924"; Passion imagery; sacramental theology. GLOSS: Duffy's poem is not an ornamental appendix: it repeats the woman, child witness, sea cure, failed request, pain, and retrospective

transfiguration of "Assumptions." Where the prose imagines Peg healed into glory, the poem insists that the bodily cure failed but the sufferer nonetheless "wrought / A sacramental." It therefore supplies the book's most exact definition of a small mercy: not success, but a consecrating attention paid to pain. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

23. The dropped final word changes the book's terminal pressure — QUOTE: "Robed all in white down to the little feet"; "Shining like His who once was." SOURCE: Textual variant: Fr. John Duffy's poem elsewhere ends "Shining like His who once was crucified!" GLOSS: This version breaks off before "crucified." The omission does not remove the poem's Passion material—"life had crucified," "Golgotha," and the sacramental remain—but it withholds the final explicit identity between Bridie's feet and Christ's. As closing material for the central story, the variant slightly shifts the collection from named redemptive suffering toward unfinished, suspended radiance. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

Part Five: Give Them Unquiet Dreams

The Concordance: Give Them Unquiet Dreams

Religious Allusion Concordance

James Mulhern, Give Them Unquiet Dreams (2019)

PART ONE: THE CONCORDANCE

1. QUOTE: "Say it with me. 'There but for the grace of God go I.'" (Ch. 1, Nana teaching Aiden after the fake-charity scene) **SOURCE:** Traditional proverb attributed to John Bradford; folk-Catholic devotional formula. **GLOSS:** Nana teaches Aiden this line immediately after having him give away money to poor neighbors — an act of theater that mixes real charity with manipulation. The novel opens by yoking genuine Catholic humility-language to grift, setting up its whole method of finding grace inside squalor and deception. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

2. QUOTE: "It came out of you like the water gushing from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh." **SOURCE:** Exodus 17:1–7 and Numbers 20:1–13 (Moses striking the rock for water). **GLOSS:** Nana flatters the "charismatic healer" priest with a biblical allusion even as she is robbing the altar of a chalice; the miracle-language of the Exodus rock becomes cover for theft, exemplifying the novel's fusion of the sacred and the criminal. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

3. QUOTE: "He raised Lazarus from the dead," Margie said. "And then he healed the deaf and dumb men. And the blind man too." **SOURCE:** John 11 (raising of Lazarus); Mark 7:31–37 (deaf mute); Mark 8:22–26 / John 9 (healing the blind). **GLOSS:** Margie's kitchen catalogue of Gospel miracles, delivered while washing dishes, sets up the novel's central theological question — "why aren't there miracles today?" — that the plot will answer ironically through Aiden's real, unglamorous "miracle" of second sight. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

4. QUOTE: "Goodness is the only investment that never fails." **SOURCE:** Attributed (misattributed by the grandfather to "Toreau"/Thoreau) devotional maxim; functions like a proverb from the Book of Proverbs tradition ("She who sows righteousness gets a sure reward," Prov. 11:18). **GLOSS:** This line recurs three times across the book (once underlined in a book, once on a garden plaque, once spoken by the ghost) as a kind of secular catechism — a household beatitude repeated the way a family might repeat a psalm verse. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

5. QUOTE: "There are four corners on my bed. / There are four angels at my head. / Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, / God bless the bed I sleep upon." **SOURCE:** Traditional Christian children's bedtime prayer ("Four Corners" or "Black Paternoster"), itself referencing the four Evangelists. **GLOSS:** Nana leads the boys in this genuine folk-Catholic prayer just after a passage about family and promises, tying guardian-angel piety directly to the family's most sacred value — loyalty between siblings. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

6. QUOTE: "It says in Corinthians that 'we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.'" **SOURCE:** 2 Corinthians 4:8–9. **GLOSS:** The grandfather-ghost quotes Paul almost verbatim to console Aiden about the bullying he will face for being gay and psychic, converting a persecution text into a private benediction: "You are how God meant you to be. And God loves you." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

7. QUOTE: "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. . . . Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed." **SOURCE:** Adapted from Albert Einstein's "The Mysterious" ("The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious…he who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead"); functions structurally like Ecclesiastes-style wisdom sayings. **GLOSS:** This becomes the grandfather's signature teaching, bookending the novel (repeated verbatim near the very end) — a quasi-scriptural refrain about faith and wonder standing in for orthodox doctrine. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

8. QUOTE: "We are all one in the body of Christ, a character in God's story." **SOURCE:** Romans 12:5 / 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 (the Body of Christ ecclesiology). **GLOSS:** The grandfather explains Aiden's visions using Pauline theology of the mystical Body,

reframing individual suffering (bullying, madness, grief) as participation in a shared divine narrative — the clearest statement of the novel's providential worldview. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

9. QUOTE: "Randomly, I turned to a page in the Gospel of John: 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.'" **SOURCE:** John 13:7 (Christ washing the disciples' feet, addressing Peter). **GLOSS:** Aiden opens scripture at random (a bibliomancy gesture) directly after his grandfather teaches him about "seeing" versus knowing; the washing-of-feet verse quietly connects Aiden's confusion about his gift to Peter's initial incomprehension of Christ's humility. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

10. QUOTE: "A pelican is a symbol of Jesus. Aunt Clarise said a mother pelican will wound herself, striking her breast with her beak to feed the babies with her blood." **SOURCE:** The medieval "Pelican in her Piety" — a standard Eucharistic and Passion symbol referenced directly in the hymn *Adoro Te Devote* ("Pie Pellicane, Jesu Domine"). **GLOSS:** This running joke (pelican pins, "Ah uh!" noises, "roast pelican") is a sustained, comic literalization of one of Catholicism's oldest self-sacrifice symbols; the family's mockery of the cult church doesn't erase the theology, it exposes how thin the line is between devotion and kitsch. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

11. QUOTE: "That's it. You're a pelican flying across the ocean in search of your loved ones. Someday you'll be home with them." **SOURCE:** Extension of the pelican-as-Christ Eucharistic symbol; also echoes the "coming home" language of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) and heaven imagery generally. **GLOSS:** Martin repurposes the pelican joke as unwitting comfort to psychiatric patients, turning liturgical iconography into an image of eventual reunion with the dead — foreshadowing his own death and eventual "homecoming" appearances to Aiden. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

12. QUOTE: "The Damsel of the Holy Grail—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874." **SOURCE:** Pre-Raphaelite Arthurian/Grail iconography, itself derived from the medieval Grail legend's fusion with Eucharistic chalice symbolism. **GLOSS:** The painting in the headmaster's office depicts a red-haired woman holding a chalice — a visual double of Aiden's own mother — linking the stolen Communion chalice subplot to the wider

Grail-quest theme that culminates in the "quest for the Holy Grail" passage at the school dance. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

13. QUOTE: "We are all searching for an elixir to ease our pain, on a quest for the Holy Grail, the chalice that will forgive our perceived sins." **SOURCE:** Arthurian Grail legend fused with Catholic sacrament of Reconciliation/absolution. **GLOSS:** This is the novel's most explicit thesis statement, arriving at a school dance under "Stairway to Heaven" — the stolen chalice, the Eucharist, and psychological guilt (Nana's, Rita's, Margie's, Aiden's) are named as facets of one and the same human need for absolution. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

14. QUOTE: "A reading from the first Letter of Saint John. . . . 'Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God.'" **SOURCE:** 1 John 3:1–3; the reading runs to verse 3, "Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure." **GLOSS:** The priest reads this Epistle exactly as Nana and Aiden smuggle the chalice back into Mass — the liturgical text about being "revealed" as God's children ironically frames the moment the theft is about to be publicly "revealed" as a miracle. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

15. QUOTE: "It is revealed!" (Aiden, pulling the chalice from the handbag mid-reading) **SOURCE:** Direct echo of 1 John 3:2, "what we shall be has not yet been revealed… when it is revealed we shall be like him." **GLOSS:** Aiden's exclamation puns on the liturgical reading itself, turning scripture into stagecraft; the priest's declaration "It's a miracle… Thanks be to God" completes the parody of miracle culture the novel has been building since Chapter One. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

16. QUOTE: "I'm Elaine, and this is my grandson Galahad." **SOURCE:** Arthurian legend — Galahad is the knight who achieves the Holy Grail; Elaine is a Grail-cycle figure (mother of Galahad in Malory). **GLOSS:** Nana's spontaneous alias completes the Grail motif begun with the Rossetti painting, casting the comic chalice-theft as a mock-heroic Grail quest and confirming that the "Grail" material is a deliberate structural thread, not incidental color. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

17. QUOTE: "I said the Our Father aloud… The back seat was empty." **SOURCE:** The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13); traditional exorcism/apotropaic use of prayer against evil spirits. **GLOSS:** Aiden banishes the pooka-hag Moira by reciting the Our Father, the novel's only scene of formal prayer used as literal spiritual weapon —

Catholic liturgy functioning exactly as Irish folk-magic functions elsewhere in the book. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

18. QUOTE: "You should say a Hail Mary while you're at it." **SOURCE:** The Hail Mary (Ave Maria), based on Luke 1:28, 1:42. **GLOSS:** Nana pairs the Our Father with the Hail Mary as reflexive protective ritual, reinforcing the dual Marian/Trinitarian architecture of everyday devotion in the household even amid dark comedy. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

19. QUOTE: "I don't know how I feel about all those miracles Father Flynn was going on about." **SOURCE:** General Gospel miracle tradition; sets up thematic doubt echoed by doubting Thomas (John 20:24–29). **GLOSS:** Margie's skepticism opens the novel's central theological debate — whether miracles still occur — which the narrative answers obliquely through Aiden's second sight, itself never "proven," only witnessed. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

20. QUOTE: "Aunt Clarise thinks St. Theresa's is too Catholic… She hates the pope… She says he might be the Antichrist." **SOURCE:** Book of Revelation apocalyptic tradition (1 John 2:18, 4:3; Revelation 13); anti-Catholic evangelical polemic. **GLOSS:** The competing "cult" church (modeled on nondenominational storefront Christianity) is set against St. Theresa's parish Catholicism, dramatizing an intra-Christian conflict over authority, confession, and intercession that runs throughout the book. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

21. QUOTE: "It's a venial sin, not a mortal one… A minor sin. Like a white lie." **SOURCE:** Catholic moral theology's formal distinction between venial and mortal sin (Catechism; rooted in 1 John 5:16–17). **GLOSS:** Nana teaches nine-year-old Aiden actual Catholic sin-classification to justify stealing from her friend — doctrine deployed casuistically, showing how thoroughly catechism has been absorbed into the family's moral improvisation. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

22. QUOTE: "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Be more like your brother Martin." **SOURCE:** The Holy Family; a common Irish-Catholic exclamatory invocation. **GLOSS:** This near-blasphemous ejaculation (naming the Holy Family as a curse-phrase) is a classic marker of Irish Catholic vernacular speech — profanity as inverted prayer, invoking sacred names in moments of irritation rather than reverence. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

23. QUOTE: "We had roast beef as usual… 'Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.'" **SOURCE:** The traditional Catholic table grace ("Bless Us, O Lord"). **GLOSS:** A verbatim liturgical formula recited at the family's Sunday dinner, anchoring even the most chaotic household scenes (Nana drunk, blasphemy flying) in an unbroken ritual frame of grace before meals. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

24. QUOTE: "Glory be to God. She brings you to a Kmart to worship and receive communion." **SOURCE:** The doxology "Glory be to God" (Gloria Patri); Eucharistic terminology ("receive communion"). **GLOSS:** Nana's outrage at the storefront "church" being staged in a former Kmart satirizes debased sacred space while unconsciously proving how strong her own sense of consecrated ground (the parish church) remains. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

25. QUOTE: "I have leukemia… Cured of what?" **SOURCE:** Gospel healing narratives (e.g., Mark 5:25–34, the woman with the hemorrhage; Luke 17:11–19, the ten lepers). **GLOSS:** The staged "cure" at the charismatic-healing Mass parodies Gospel healing miracles; the boy who is not sick is anointed and "falls" as though slain in the Spirit, exposing how performance and faith intertwine in folk-Catholic healing culture. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

26. QUOTE: "'Second sight' was a curse, a burden… your grandmother's ma had the gift, and she, too, was demonized." **SOURCE:** Irish folk-Catholic tradition of "the gift"/second sight; overlaps with the Charismatic theology of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12) inverted into stigma ("demonized"). **GLOSS:** The grandfather reframes psychic vision as an inherited charism rather than mental illness, directly opposing the medical/psychiatric diagnosis (schizophrenia) the family uses to institutionalize Laura — a key structural tension between clinical and sacramental ways of naming the same experience. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

27. QUOTE: "A horse startled her and she fell into a well… on the night before, she heard banshees calling out to her." **SOURCE:** Irish folklore — banshee (bean sídhe) as death-omen; holy well tradition in Irish folk-Catholicism (wells as loci of cures and hauntings). **GLOSS:** The great-grandmother's death by falling into a well fuses Irish pre-Christian death-omen folklore with the later Catholic-folk motif of holy/cursed

wells, establishing intergenerational guilt (repeated in Nana's own tree-fall) as almost a hereditary curse. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

28. QUOTE: "Your kin disturbed my well and stole my berries." **SOURCE:** Irish folk-Catholic well lore (holy wells as guarded, easily "offended" sacred sites) merged with fairy-lore taboo against trespass. **GLOSS:** Moira le Fay, the pooka-hag, articulates her grievance in the classic idiom of holy-well folklore — disturbing a well brings generational retribution — linking her haunting directly to the earlier well-death of the great-grandmother. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

29. QUOTE: "A pooka is an evil spirit not to be trusted… a shape shifter, the Irish call them." **SOURCE:** Irish folklore, the púca — a shapeshifting trickster spirit. **GLOSS:** The pooka mythology structures the entire supernatural plot (Moira, the black cat, the horse at the Grand Canyon), operating as folk-Catholicism's shadow-theology of malevolent spirits alongside its angels and ghosts. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

30. QUOTE: "Moira le Fay" (the hag's self-given name) **SOURCE:** Arthurian legend — Morgan le Fay, sorceress and sometimes antagonist of Arthur. **GLOSS:** Naming the malevolent pooka after Arthurian legend's dark enchantress deepens the novel's Grail/Arthurian substructure (chalice, Galahad, Elaine) by supplying its necessary adversary figure. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

31. QUOTE: "A blob of shit dropped on her shoulder… She wiped the excrement with her finger and licked it. 'Tastes as good as poke… Vanilla with a little chocolate.'" **SOURCE:** Inversion of Eucharistic tasting-imagery ("taste and see that the Lord is good," Psalm 34:8) and of sacred bird-symbolism (the dove/Holy Spirit). **GLOSS:** This grotesque anti-communion — a cardinal's droppings eaten with relish — is the novel's most severe profanation image, converting bird, food, and taste (three recurrent sacred motifs) into filth; it announces Moira as an anti-sacramental figure. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

32. QUOTE: "I banged her head against a steel cross that was fastened to the wall. Her body collapsed into a heap of white ashes." **SOURCE:** Ash Wednesday imagery ("Remember you are dust and unto dust you shall return," from Genesis 3:19 / Ecclesiastes 12:7, used in the Ash Wednesday liturgy). **GLOSS:** The pooka is destroyed against a literal cross and reduced to ashes — the same "dust to dust" theology that later appears explicitly quoted on the back of Laura's drawing (Ecclesiastes 12:7),

tying this violent exorcism scene to the book's closing meditation on mortality. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

33. QUOTE: "Curiosity killed the cat… 'Maybe he's dead and alive?'… 'It would depend on your vantage point.'" **SOURCE:** Echoes the Lazarus paradox (John 11) and Schrödinger's-cat-style meditation on simultaneous life/death, refracted through the novel's Einstein epigraph. **GLOSS:** The grandfather's teaching about time collapses linear death/resurrection theology into a single "eternal present," a recurring metaphysic that reappears at the very end of the novel ("In every beginning is an ending"). **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

34. QUOTE: "You are how God meant you to be. And God loves you." **SOURCE:** Echoes Psalm 139:13–14 ("I am fearfully and wonderfully made") and Genesis 1:27 (made in God's image). **GLOSS:** Delivered by the grandfather-ghost about Aiden's homosexuality and psychic gift together, this line functions as the novel's counter-catechism to institutional Catholic condemnation of homosexuality, asserting a competing, affirming theology from beyond the grave. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

35. QUOTE: "I'm gay, Mom." / "I know you are sweetheart, and there is nothing wrong with that. We are all God's children." **SOURCE:** 1 John 3:1–3 ("we should be called children of God") — the same epistle quoted at the chalice-return Mass. **GLOSS:** Laura's absolution of Aiden's sexuality is phrased in the identical scriptural language ("God's children") used earlier in the liturgical reading during the chalice scene, binding sacramental forgiveness of "sin" to personal, familial acceptance. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

36. QUOTE: "Do you think I'll go to hell?" / "Of course not. Hell doesn't exist." **SOURCE:** Catholic eschatology of Hell (Matthew 25:41, etc.) explicitly rejected. **GLOSS:** Laura's flat denial of Hell is one of the novel's clearest theological departures from orthodoxy, replacing damnation-doctrine with a universalist "eternal life is wonderful" framework voiced consistently by both Laura and the grandfather. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

37. QUOTE: "Before I passed out, Hope's mother, a look of joy on her face, grabbed her 'spirit' daughter… Hugging, they ascended into the sky." **SOURCE:** Assumption/Ascension iconography (Acts 1:9, Christ's Ascension; also Marian Assumption tradition) and the Communion of Saints doctrine. **GLOSS:** Hope's death

scene is staged as a literal ascension — mother and daughter reunited and rising bodily — the novel's most vivid deployment of ascension imagery to convert violent, senseless death into an image of glory. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

38. QUOTE: "The old lady with cropped red hair… 'The nurse is mad! The nurse is mad!' the patients repeated." **SOURCE:** Ironic echo of liturgical call-and-response and litany structure (e.g., Litany of the Saints repeated invocations). **GLOSS:** The psychiatric patients' chanting repetition, structured like a liturgical litany, comically converts a mental ward into a chorus, reinforcing the novel's pattern of finding liturgical shape in the most unconsecrated settings. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

39. QUOTE: "I know how to get to my place of work… This spot of blood is from a patient who's talking with St. Peter right now." **SOURCE:** St. Peter as keeper of the gates of Heaven (based on Matthew 16:19, "the keys of the kingdom"). **GLOSS:** Nana's blood-spattered joke about a dying patient "talking with St. Peter" is classic gallows-humor Catholic vernacular, treating the doorkeeper-of-heaven image as casually as a punchline — profanity as inverted prayer. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

40. QUOTE: "I bet she's waiting in a long line… Saint Peter gets irritated sometimes too." **SOURCE:** Same St. Peter gatekeeper tradition, extended satirically. **GLOSS:** Aiden mocks Aunt Clara's simplistic heaven-talk by imagining celestial bureaucracy, a comic but pointed challenge to naive Catholic afterlife imagery that the novel otherwise treats with more reverence through its ghost visitations. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

41. QUOTE: "Difficult people are often the most interesting. In your grandmother's case, her anger is a blessing and a curse." **SOURCE:** Beatitude-structure ("blessed are…") inverted; echoes paradox found in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12). **GLOSS:** Rita's assessment of Nana uses the paradoxical "blessing and curse" formulation typical of beatitude logic, reflecting the novel's consistent instinct to bless what appears cursed (madness, anger, poverty, deformity). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

42. QUOTE: "The best place to find God was in Nature… Feel the breeze. That could be the Holy Spirit." **SOURCE:** Romantic natural theology; scripturally rooted in the "rushing wind" of Pentecost (Acts 2:2) and Psalm 19:1 ("the heavens declare the glory of God"). **GLOSS:** Under the ancient beech tree, Nana teaches an explicitly Franciscan/pantheistic Catholicism — nature as sacrament — which becomes a

structural counterweight to the church-building religion satirized elsewhere. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

43. QUOTE: "Did you know this tree is holy?… Prayers spoken under it go directly to heaven." **SOURCE:** Irish folk-Catholic tradition of holy/mass trees and rag trees associated with holy wells and saints' sites. **GLOSS:** This transplants Irish holy-tree folklore onto an American arboretum, showing how the family's inherited folk-Catholicism reterritorializes sacred space in the diaspora. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

44. QUOTE: "All God's creatures have disagreements… A person can only be as strong as the family that surrounds it." **SOURCE:** Genesis creation theology (Genesis 1) and the ecclesiological "Body of Christ" interdependence doctrine (1 Corinthians 12:26, "if one member suffers, all suffer together"). **GLOSS:** Nana's tree-root parable of family unity restates Pauline body-theology in horticultural terms, mirroring the grandfather's earlier "body of Christ" teaching and reinforcing family loyalty as the novel's true sacrament. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

45. QUOTE: "That would be just like Sean. He gabbed about every subject under the sun." **SOURCE:** Ecclesiastes 1:9, "there is no new thing under the sun" — recurring biblical idiom. **GLOSS:** A minor but telling absorption of biblical cadence ("under the sun") into casual speech, part of the novel's pattern of scripture surfacing unconsciously in ordinary dialogue. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

46. QUOTE: "Life is a tale of human frailty and sorrow." Do you know who said that? **SOURCE:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* — cited as literary, not scriptural, but functioning in context like a wisdom-text on sin and shame (echoing Ecclesiastes' vanitas theme). **GLOSS:** Rita's quotation of Hawthorne's meditation on sin sits alongside the novel's scriptural quotations as equally authoritative "wisdom literature," part of Mulhern's blending of literary and religious canon into a single moral vocabulary. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

47. QUOTE: "There is no true division between past and future; there is rather a single existence." **SOURCE:** Echoes 2 Peter 3:8 ("with the Lord a day is like a thousand years") and Revelation's "Alpha and Omega" eternal-present theology. **GLOSS:** The grandfather's Einsteinian/mystical theology of time collapses past-present-future exactly as divine eternity does in scripture, providing metaphysical justification for ghosts, second sight, and the final "eternal room" vision. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

48. QUOTE: "'I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination,' a poet once said." **SOURCE:** John Keats, letter to Benjamin Bailey, 1817 (not scripture, but explicitly invokes "holiness"). **GLOSS:** By having the ghost-grandfather quote Keats's line about the "holiness" of feeling and imagination, the novel elevates Romantic aesthetics to the status of doctrine, licensing Aiden's visions and his mother's "delusions" as forms of sanctity. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

49. QUOTE: "In the olden days, the monks used to sleep in their coffins… They did it to remind them of their last end." **SOURCE:** Monastic *memento mori* tradition (e.g., Trappist and Franciscan customs of keeping a skull or symbolic coffin as reminder of death). **GLOSS:** This aside at Margie's Thanksgiving-like gathering foreshadows the deaths (Margie, Nana, Martin, Laura) that follow across subsequent chapters, embedding classic ascetic memento mori practice into casual conversation just before Nana sees her husband's ghost. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

50. QUOTE: "Oh the rain falls on my heavy locks / and the dew wets my skin. / My babe lies cold within my arms / but none will let me in." ("The Lass of Aughrim") **SOURCE:** Traditional Irish ballad, famously the song in James Joyce's "The Dead," itself concerning a woman turned away and a dead child. **GLOSS:** The ballad's imagery of a dead child and rejection at the door anticipates Martin's imminent drowning and the recurring "let me in"/threshold motif (heaven's gate, hospital doors, McCall's locked wards) that structures the book. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

51. QUOTE: "This conversation is getting so mortal." "Morbid," Rita corrects. **SOURCE:** Wordplay on "mortal sin" versus "morbid," recalling the earlier venial/mortal sin catechesis. **GLOSS:** Margie's malapropism accidentally reactivates the novel's moral-theological vocabulary (mortal sin) in a conversation about literal mortality, a small but characteristic instance of doctrine bleeding into ordinary language. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

52. QUOTE: "The most important thing in the world is family… No matter where you end up, communicate with one another, keep in touch." **SOURCE:** Echoes the Great Commandment tradition (love of neighbor, Mark 12:31) recast domestically. **GLOSS:** Nana's deathbed-adjacent instruction under the stars functions as her personal "great commandment," establishing family loyalty as the practical creed that supersedes formal doctrine throughout the book. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

53. QUOTE: "Promises are the sails that guide us. They move us toward our destinies." **SOURCE:** Echoes covenantal theology — promise (berith/covenant) as the operative mode of divine relationship in both Old and New Testaments (Genesis 9, the Abrahamic covenant; the New Covenant in Christ's blood, Luke 22:20). **GLOSS:** Aiden's meditation on promise-keeping quietly imports covenant theology into sibling loyalty, later literalized when Martin's ghost keeps his promise ("I told you I would always have your back") from beyond death. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

54. QUOTE: "Look at that dove in the tree." / "Dove?" / My mother kicked his shin. **SOURCE:** The dove as the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16, at Christ's baptism) and as messenger of peace (Genesis 8:11, Noah's dove). **GLOSS:** Laura's invented "dove" is a diversion during the failed hospital escape, but it becomes real seconds later ("a light grey-brown mourning dove fluttered its wings") — an instance where a lie about a sacred bird is retroactively validated by the world, a recurring pattern of grace disguised as deception. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

55. QUOTE: "We heard a cooing sound. On a tree branch, a light grey-brown mourning dove fluttered its wings. Beyond the tree… I saw my grandfather." **SOURCE:** Holy Spirit dove imagery (Matthew 3:16) fused with ghost/ancestor visitation. **GLOSS:** The literal dove's appearance alongside the grandfather's ghost binds Trinitarian pneumatology to the family's private communion-of-saints theology, at the exact moment the mother's escape has failed — grace present even in defeat. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

56. QUOTE: "'Full as a bingo bus' that night. He's sorry… he choked on his vomit." **SOURCE:** Irish Catholic parish-hall bingo culture as folk-devotional social institution; also implicit confession/repentance structure. **GLOSS:** The grandfather's posthumous apology, delivered as an act of contrition relayed through Aiden, functions as an informal confession-and-absolution scene entirely outside the sacramental structure, replacing priestly absolution with familial forgiveness. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

57. QUOTE: "That you're a whore. And you sleep with married men… I'm sure Sean thought you were a good fuck." **SOURCE:** Inversion of the Gospel adultery narrative (John 8:1–11, the woman taken in adultery) and its "let him without sin cast the first stone" ethic. **GLOSS:** Nana's cruelty toward Rita — later reversed by her deathbed forgiveness — dramatizes the Gospel's adultery/forgiveness arc across the book's

timeline: condemnation followed eventually by absolution ("She forgave you, Rita"). **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

58. QUOTE: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree… I hear it in the deep heart's core." (Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree") **SOURCE:** W.B. Yeats poem; structurally echoes the Psalmist's yearning for a peaceful dwelling with God (Psalm 23, Psalm 84 — "how lovely is your dwelling place") and Prodigal Son's "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18). **GLOSS:** Yeats's opening line directly quotes the Vulgate's Prodigal Son ("surgam et ibo," Luke 15:18); pasting this poem into the family photo album ties Nana's guilt over her mother's death to the Prodigal's return-and-forgiveness narrative. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

59. QUOTE: "'Come away, O human child! / To the waters and the wild / With a faery, hand in hand…'" (epigraph, and repeated during Martin's drowning) **SOURCE:** W.B. Yeats, "The Stolen Child"; functions in context like a death-call or psychopomp summons (paralleling the angel of death or the voice calling Lazarus/Samuel). **GLOSS:** This epigraph recurs verbatim at the moment Martin drowns, transforming a fairy-abduction poem into what functions structurally as a call to eternal life, exactly as Church liturgy speaks of death as being "called home." **CONFIDENCS:** STRONG

60. QUOTE: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our life is rounded with a sleep." **SOURCE:** Shakespeare, *The Tempest* IV.i — a secular quotation Nana treats with something like scriptural gravity; echoes Ecclesiastes' vanitas and 1 Corinthians 15's sleep/resurrection language ("we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed"). **GLOSS:** Nana's citation, delivered after Hope's death, folds Shakespeare into the family's devotional canon alongside the Bible, again showing how "wisdom literature" of any kind gets absorbed into their working theology of death and dreams — hence the novel's title. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

61. QUOTE: "I just want the Good Shepherd to protect you." **SOURCE:** John 10:11, "I am the Good Shepherd"; Psalm 23. **GLOSS:** Nana's prayer for Aiden after learning of his ghost-visions is her most direct, unguarded invocation of Christ, offered privately rather than performed for an audience — a rare moment of sincere piety amid the novel's satirical treatment of religious performance. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

62. QUOTE: "We must always pray for the departed." **SOURCE:** Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and the Communion of Saints — praying for souls in Purgatory (2 Maccabees 12:46; the Requiem Mass). **GLOSS:** Nana's instruction to Aiden to pray for Hope reflects orthodox Catholic purgatorial theology, standing in tension with Laura's later flat denial of Hell — the novel holds both an inherited doctrinal frame and a personal, universalist revision simultaneously. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

63. QUOTE: "'It's the good horse that draws its own cart.'… instead of sitting on our arses waiting for Jesus to put the world right." **SOURCE:** Irish proverb combined with the theological problem of grace versus works (James 2:17, "faith without works is dead"). **GLOSS:** Nana's practical, works-based theology — miracles as self-made rather than divinely bestowed — reflects a distinctly lay-Catholic, Martha-not-Mary spirituality (Luke 10:38–42) that undercuts the "wonder-working" religion mocked elsewhere in the book. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

64. QUOTE: "'Every moment is a miracle, don't you think?'" **SOURCE:** Sacramental theology of ordinary grace ("outward sign of inward grace") extended to all of creation; echoes Ignatian "finding God in all things." **GLOSS:** Nana's redefinition of "miracle" as ubiquitous rather than exceptional directly answers Margie's Chapter One question ("why aren't there miracles today?"), functioning as the novel's mature theological answer to its opening puzzle. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

65. QUOTE: "O God, by Whose mercy the faithful departed find rest, send Your holy angel to watch over this grave, through Christ our Lord. Amen." **SOURCE:** Traditional Catholic burial-rite prayer (Order of Christian Funerals graveside committal). **GLOSS:** This is a verbatim liturgical text delivered by Father Flynn at Nana's burial — one of the only moments of unadorned, "official" liturgy quoted at length in the novel, granting Nana's death a formal sacramental dignity the narrative otherwise withholds from institutional religion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

66. QUOTE: "A life is like a tree. It spreads its roots… branches that reach for the sky, a symbol of the hopefulness of life." **SOURCE:** Psalm 1:3 ("He is like a tree planted by streams of water") and Ezekiel 17:22–24 (the cedar/mustard-seed tree of the kingdom). **GLOSS:** Aunt Clara's eulogy unconsciously echoes Nana's own earlier beech-tree family-network parable, and both echo Psalm 1's tree-of-the-righteous

imagery; a comic branch literally crashes down mid-eulogy, puncturing the borrowed piety even as the underlying image holds. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

67. QUOTE: "But now they drift on the still water, / Mysterious, beautiful… / Delight men's eyes when I awake some day / To find they have flown away?" (Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole") **SOURCE:** Yeats poem; the swan is also classical/Christian iconography for the soul's departure and purity. **GLOSS:** Rita recites this poem about vanished swans while grieving Sean and confessing her guilt to Aiden, linking bird-flight imagery (used throughout for souls: doves, pelicans, the seal/Martin) to loss and the hope of eventual return. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

68. QUOTE: "'I want to be a white bird.'" (a child at the Public Garden) **SOURCE:** Yeats, "The White Birds" ("I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea"); dove/soul imagery generally. **GLOSS:** An anonymous child's wish becomes an unconscious commentary on the surrounding conversation about souls flying away, reinforcing the bird-as-soul motif that will culminate in Martin's return as a seal/spirit at Keem Bay. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

69. QUOTE: "Aiden, your grandmother had a secret… Sinead and your grandmother were out picking berries…" **SOURCE:** Structurally parallels the Fall narrative (Genesis 3) — a mother-daughter conflict over gathered fruit that precedes a fatal punishment. **GLOSS:** The berry-picking quarrel that precedes Sinead's fatal fall into the well subtly rhymes with Eden's fruit-transgression story, casting the family's inherited guilt as a kind of generational Fall repeated down the maternal line (Sinead to Catherine to Laura to Aiden). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

70. QUOTE: "She confessed her feelings to me and repented many times. I told her she was absolved." **SOURCE:** Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession (contrition, confession, absolution). **GLOSS:** Rita explicitly performs an unordained, lay absolution of Nana's guilt over her mother's death, substituting friendship for priesthood — one of several scenes where the novel relocates sacramental power outside clerical hands. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

71. QUOTE: "Forgive others. And don't worry so much, young man." **SOURCE:** Matthew 6:14–15 ("if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you") and the Lord's Prayer's petition "forgive us our trespasses." **GLOSS:** Rita's counsel to Aiden universalizes the forgiveness theme just established

regarding Nana, applying Gospel forgiveness ethics directly to Aiden's private shame about his sexuality and his difference. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

72. QUOTE: "My grandfather gently placed his hand on Martin's heart and whispered a prayer… I heard the word 'home.'" **SOURCE:** Anointing/blessing gesture (cf. Extreme Unction/Anointing of the Sick, hands laid on the body; also the "laying on of hands" tradition, Acts 8:17). **GLOSS:** This silent blessing over the sleeping Martin — just before the chapter turns toward his eventual drowning — functions as an unspoken last rite performed months in advance, the ghost anointing his grandson before death without either boy's awareness. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

73. QUOTE: "The aroma of baby oil, coconut sunscreen, and salty air surrounded us." **SOURCE:** Anointing with oil imagery (James 5:14, "anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord"; also baptismal chrism). **GLOSS:** The sunscreen-oil detail, arriving just paragraphs before Martin's fatal swim, functions as an unconscious echo of ritual anointing before a "passage" — the beach becomes an inadvertent baptismal/anointing scene before the drowning that is also a kind of baptism into death. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

74. QUOTE: "'Away with us he's going,' the children said." **SOURCE:** Direct continuation of the "Stolen Child" refrain (Yeats), functioning here like a psychopomp chorus or the choir of angels receiving a departing soul (cf. the beggar Lazarus carried by angels, Luke 16:22). **GLOSS:** As Martin drowns, invisible children's voices repeat and complete the Yeats epigraph, turning literary fairy-abduction into what reads as an angelic escort taking Martin from the water — grief immediately reframed as a supernatural taking-up. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

75. QUOTE: "Two days later, Martin's body washed up… His funeral was held at St. Theresa's Church." **SOURCE:** Requiem Mass and Catholic funeral rite structure. **GLOSS:** The return of Martin's body after three days ("two days later" plus the day of drowning) subtly patterns the Christian burial/resurrection timeline (three days in the tomb, Matthew 12:40), an understated Christ-figure resonance for the brother who has "always had his back." **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

76. QUOTE: "Martin, I always believed, was smarter than me… He saw goodness in me that I never felt. He gave me confidence when I had none." **SOURCE:** Christ-figure typology — the beloved one who sees and redeems the unworthy (cf. John's Gospel,

the "beloved disciple," and the general kenotic pattern of self-giving love). **GLOSS:** Martin's portrayal throughout — protector, defender of the bullied, forgiver, one who "always has your back," who dies young by water and returns as a seal/spirit — cumulatively builds him into the novel's clearest Christ-figure, sacrificed (accidentally, but narratively patterned) in the water that also functions as baptism. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

77. QUOTE: "I felt my legs being dragged by what felt like a horse's mane." (during the riptide, just before Martin's death) **SOURCE:** Recurrence of the pooka/dark-horse motif established with Sinead's death (a "dark horse with golden eyes"). **GLOSS:** The underwater "horse's mane" sensation ties Martin's drowning directly back to the pooka mythology and the great-grandmother's death by a horse at a well, suggesting a multi-generational curse pattern the family cannot escape despite (or because of) its folk-Catholic vigilance. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

78. QUOTE: "What ghosts lurk beneath the surface of human understanding? What secrets lie buried in the human heart?" **SOURCE:** Echoes Jeremiah 17:9 ("The heart is deceitful above all things") and 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("For now we see through a glass, darkly"). **GLOSS:** Aiden's adult meditation on unknowability directly restates the "seeing through a glass darkly" epistemology of 1 Corinthians, applied to ordinary human relationships rather than divine vision — a secularized apophatic theology. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

79. QUOTE: "I am certain, however, of the buoy that saves us—Hope. Without hope, we are incapable of promise. And without promise, we are incapable of love." **SOURCE:** 1 Corinthians 13:13 ("So faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love"). **GLOSS:** Aiden's closing triad — hope, promise, love — directly restructures Paul's theological virtues (faith, hope, love) from 1 Corinthians 13, substituting "promise" for "faith" in a way that reflects the novel's preference for kept human vows over abstract belief. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

80. QUOTE: "Hope Gallagher" (the classmate's name) / "Hope, 1886, George Frederic Watts" (the painting title) **SOURCE:** The theological virtue of Hope; G.F. Watts's famous allegorical painting *Hope* depicting a blindfolded, wounded figure playing a nearly-broken lyre. **GLOSS:** The dead classmate's name, her mother's appearance beside my grandfather, and the identical-titled Watts painting Laura copies converge

into a sustained meditation on the virtue of Hope surviving catastrophe — "Hope is sitting right beside me," Nana says, punning on the girl's ghost and the theological virtue simultaneously. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

81. QUOTE: "Cook lots of food. Sometimes we make miniature boats and lanterns, then place them on a river… It's so beautiful." (Hungry Ghost Festival) **SOURCE:** Chinese Buddhist/Taoist Hungry Ghost Festival — offered here as a cross-cultural parallel practice to the Catholic Communion of Saints / All Souls' Day. **GLOSS:** The classmate's testimony about her family's ancestor-veneration festival functions as comparative religion within the text, validating Aiden's ghost-sight by placing Catholic purgatorial piety alongside a non-Christian analog for honoring the dead. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

82. QUOTE: "In the olden days the monks used to sleep in their coffins," Rita said. "Sounds nuts to me." See the preceding entry.

83. QUOTE: "The James Joyce House of the Dead… Trinity College, where we saw the Book of Kells. I found the illuminated gospels disappointing." **SOURCE:** The Book of Kells — an illuminated manuscript of the four Gospels, one of the great artifacts of medieval Irish monastic Christianity. **GLOSS:** Visiting the actual illuminated Gospels in Dublin literalizes the novel's ongoing citation of the Gospel of John and its concern with "illumination" and revelation, even as Aiden's disappointment underscores his skepticism toward institutional religious relics compared to his private, lived encounters with the supernatural. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

84. QUOTE: "'Mallach De' ort!' the boy hollered. The goat leaped and trotted off… 'A bit of blasphemy.'" **SOURCE:** Irish Gaelic curse ("mallacht Dé ort," roughly "God's curse on you") — folk-Catholic apotropaic cursing, structurally identical to blessing formulas but inverted. **GLOSS:** The young "Grandpa" figure banishes the sinister goat with a literal curse invoking God, another instance of profanity functioning as effective, quasi-liturgical utterance — blasphemy that works like an exorcism. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

85. QUOTE: "'God made time, but man made haste.' I have all the time in the world." **SOURCE:** Irish proverb; theologically resonant with Ecclesiastes 3:1 ("For everything there is a season") which is explicitly quoted later on the back of Laura's watch drawing. **GLOSS:** The young Sean's proverb about time directly anticipates the

Ecclesiastes 3:1 verse revealed at the novel's climax, forming a deliberate thematic bridge between an early folk-saying and the scripture that finally explains it. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

86. QUOTE: "I don't want you to have unquiet dreams." (Mrs. O'Malley; source of the novel's title) **SOURCE:** Echoes Job 7:14 ("then You scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions") and general Catholic bedtime-prayer tradition against "unquiet" or troubled sleep (cf. the Compline prayer for protection "during the perils and dangers of this night"). **GLOSS:** This line gives the novel its title and directly recalls the "Four Corners" bedtime prayer from Chapter Three, framing the entire book as an extended meditation on prayer's power (or failure) to grant peaceful sleep amid grief and haunting. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

87. QUOTE: "'Ecclesiastes 3:1. There is a right time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.'" **SOURCE:** Ecclesiastes 3:1, quoted directly and cited by chapter and verse within the text itself. **GLOSS:** Laura's own hand has written this citation on the back of a drawing of the mysterious pocket watch, making her the novel's covert theologian — she has been silently building a scriptural commentary on the family's supernatural events all along, unbeknownst to Aiden until after her death. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

88. QUOTE: "'Romans 8:18: For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.'" **SOURCE:** Romans 8:18, quoted and cited directly. **GLOSS:** Attached to the sketch of Aiden and Laura scattering Martin's ashes, this verse supplies the novel's explicit theological justification for its central operation — converting suffering (drowning, grief, madness) into future glory — arguably the single most important citation in the book for the "theological rescue operation" thesis. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

89. QUOTE: "'Mark 8:18. Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?'" **SOURCE:** Mark 8:18, quoted and cited directly (Christ rebuking the disciples' spiritual blindness). **GLOSS:** Applied to the sketch of the young "Grandpa" Aiden and Laura met on the road, this verse directly indicts the adult Aiden's skepticism about ghosts and second sight — Laura has diagnosed her son's disbelief using Christ's own words to the uncomprehending apostles. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

90. QUOTE: "'Ecclesiastes 12:7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.'" **SOURCE:** Ecclesiastes 12:7, quoted and cited directly. **GLOSS:** Attached to the sketch of the dead Mr. Woodlake, this is the Bible's classic statement of body/spirit separation at death, retroactively sanctifying every ghost encounter in the novel as scripturally licensed rather than merely psychological. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

91. QUOTE: "'Aiden, it's time to forgive yourself.' I am the ghost." **SOURCE:** Echoes the Prodigal Son's self-recognition (Luke 15:17, "he came to himself") and the general Catholic teaching on self-forgiveness following confession and absolution. **GLOSS:** Laura's final message, revealing that the mysterious "sad old man" ghost she always drew was, symbolically, Aiden's own guilt-ridden self, completes the novel's theology of forgiveness: the last absolution required is not divine or filial but self-directed. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

92. QUOTE: "'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" **SOURCE:** John 1:1, quoted verbatim as the novel's final scriptural citation. **GLOSS:** The novel closes by returning to the Johannine Prologue, framing the entire narrative — all its ghosts, ashes, ashes, ambiguous miracles, and family grief — inside the frame of the eternal, uncreated Word, the strongest possible theological bookend to a story that began with a false miracle in Chapter One. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

93. QUOTE: "In every beginning is an ending, and in every ending is a beginning. There is no time between, only eternity." **SOURCE:** Revelation 22:13 ("I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end") and Ecclesiastes 3's cyclical time theology. **GLOSS:** The final paragraph's structure directly paraphrases Christ's self-identification in Revelation as beginning and end, completing the novel's Einsteinian/eternal-present metaphysics with explicit apocalyptic vocabulary. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

94. QUOTE: "Our departed loved ones are a short distance away—in that room just beyond the doorway… placing unseen palms upon our hearts." **SOURCE:** Communion of Saints doctrine (Apostles' Creed: "I believe… the communion of saints"); also Hebrews 12:1 ("surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"). **GLOSS:** This closing image directly stages the Communion of Saints and the "cloud of

witnesses" of Hebrews as a literal, comforting architecture of adjoining rooms, resolving the entire novel's ghost-plot as continuous with orthodox Catholic doctrine about the dead's ongoing nearness. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

95. QUOTE: "A line of people stretches backward to the moment of Creation." **SOURCE:** Genesis 1 (Creation) and the genealogical "begat" chains of Scripture (e.g., Matthew 1, Luke 3) that trace lineage back through history. **GLOSS:** The final image of an unbroken human chain to Creation restates the family's tree-root parable ("the strength of the family that surrounds it") on a cosmic scale, making the whole Glencar/Mulroy lineage a microcosm of salvation history. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

96. QUOTE: "I heard there's all these aisles and they don't have enough help to process the dead people. Saint Peter gets irritated sometimes too." [see also #40] **SOURCE:** St. Peter, keeper of Heaven's gate (Matthew 16:19). **GLOSS:** Cross-referenced here to emphasize the recurrence of the gatekeeper-heaven motif that reappears, transformed, in the closing "line of people" image — Aiden's childish mockery of the pearly gates becomes, by the end, a genuinely reverent vision of eternal continuity. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

97. QUOTE: "Little King Arthur. How cute!… The power of religion," she mumbled, snuggling Arthur against her cheek. **SOURCE:** Regal/messianic crown imagery (Christ the King; the crown of thorns as mock-crown, Matthew 27:29) played for comedy via a cat's paper crown with a cross on it. **GLOSS:** A house cat crowned like a king with a cross on his party hat is a droll miniature of Christ-the-King iconography, exactly the kind of "shabby domestic noun" transfiguration Mulhern practices — Laura's explicit naming of it as "the power of religion" makes the joke self-aware. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

98. QUOTE: "Take care of Arthur." (Margie's dying words) **SOURCE:** Christ's words from the Cross committing the Beloved Disciple and Mary to each other's care (John 19:26–27, "Woman, behold your son… Behold your mother"). **GLOSS:** Margie's last words, a request to look after her cat, are structurally identical to a deathbed committal of a loved one into another's keeping — the novel dignifies a comic, "shabby" attachment (a fat lonely woman and her cat) with the shape of a sacred last testament. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

99. QUOTE: "My grandmother said the cause was Broken Heart Syndrome, which I learned was a real medical diagnosis." (Arthur the cat dying a week after Margie) **SOURCE:** Echoes covenantal/marital fidelity language (companionship "till death do us part") and the Ruth/Naomi model of loyal love (Ruth 1:16-17). **GLOSS:** The cat's death from grief a week after his owner elevates a comic pet relationship to the level of the novel's most serious losses (Martin, Nana), reinforcing the book's leveling instinct — love and loss are sacred regardless of how undignified their vessel. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

100. QUOTE: "We bought a record of the songs from West Side Story because Margie had been so proud of her role as Maria… we sat in the living room, silent, as 'Somewhere' played." **SOURCE:** Echoes the eschatological hope of "a place prepared for you" (John 14:2–3) refracted through a Broadway love song about a promised land beyond present suffering. **GLOSS:** Playing "Somewhere" at Margie's makeshift wake substitutes popular music for a Requiem hymn, yet the song's promise of "a place for us" performs exactly the same consolatory function as the Catholic funeral liturgy's promise of a heavenly home. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

101. QUOTE: "'It will do you good,'" she says to prayer… "I said the Our Father aloud" — Marian intercession is invoked but nuns and priests are otherwise institutionally satirized. **SOURCE:** General contrast between personal/folk devotion and institutional clergy throughout the novel. **GLOSS:** Father Flynn (kindly but slightly absurd), the drunk healer-priest, and the pelican-worshiping storefront pastor all represent institutional religion treated with comic distance, while private prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary, the bedtime prayer) are treated with unqualified sincerity — a structural split between clergy-mediated and lay/domestic religion. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

102. QUOTE: "The priest, Father Flynn, in a black robe with two gold crosses emblazoned on his chest, stood aside the casket" (Nana's funeral) **SOURCE:** Priestly vestments; the stole/chasuble crosses as marks of ordained office. **GLOSS:** The visual detail of Father Flynn's crossed vestments, paired moments later with Aunt Clara's purse bearing "two interlocking G's" that "remind me of the gold crosses," shows Mulhern deliberately doubling sacred and secular monogram-symbols to blur devotional and vain/status objects. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

103. QUOTE: "I remembered how I'd walk self-consciously in church to receive the sacred wafer. My hands, fingers mingled, pressed against my abdomen." **SOURCE:** The Eucharistic host (Corpus Christi; "This is my body," Matthew 26:26) and the traditional posture for receiving Communion. **GLOSS:** Walking through Keem Bay's sea grass to scatter Martin's ashes, Aiden's body remembers the posture of receiving Communion — the beach becomes an open-air altar and the ash-scattering an improvised Eucharist, uniting the novel's water/ash/bread motifs in its climactic scene. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

104. QUOTE: "May the wind always be at your back." (Irish blessing, paraphrased in Aiden's thought) **SOURCE:** The traditional Irish/Gaelic Blessing ("May the road rise up to meet you… may the wind be always at your back"). **GLOSS:** This half-remembered blessing arrives just before Aiden and Laura wade into the ocean to scatter Martin's ashes, functioning as an informal benediction over the makeshift funeral rite about to occur in the sea. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

105. QUOTE: "I began the Our Father and she joined me. At the end, I heard myself say, 'Martin, please forgive me.'" **SOURCE:** The Lord's Prayer combined with an act of personal confession/contrition. **GLOSS:** This is the novel's true climax of sacramental structure: the formal prayer (Our Father) opens directly into an informal, unmediated confession, exactly enacting the logic of contrition-then-absolution without any priest present — grace happens directly, person to person, over water. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

106. QUOTE: "'It wasn't your fault, Aiden.'" (Laura, then later Martin's ghost repeats almost the same words) **SOURCE:** Absolution formula ("I absolve you of your sins," the sacramental words of Confession) recast as intimate speech. **GLOSS:** Both Laura and Martin's ghost independently grant Aiden the exact reassurance a priest would give in the confessional — "it wasn't your fault" functions as a lay absolution repeated twice for emphasis, confirming grace flows through family rather than clergy in this novel. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

107. QUOTE: "A flock of brown-gray pelicans flew toward the shore." **SOURCE:** Returns to the Pelican-in-Piety Eucharistic/Passion symbol established in Chapter Two, with Martin's pelican pins; Chapter One has no pelican. **GLOSS:** The comic pelican motif from early in the novel returns transfigured at the climactic beach

scene, now wordlessly sincere — the self-sacrificing-mother-bird symbol silently overseeing the family's ash-scattering ritual for a son/brother. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

108. QUOTE: "And then it was no longer a seal. Martin emerged from the sea. He was as we remembered him." **SOURCE:** Resurrection appearance tradition (Luke 24, John 20–21 — Christ appearing bodily by the Sea of Galilee, recognized yet transformed). **GLOSS:** Martin's rising from the water, seen and then vanishing, closely patterns the post-Resurrection appearances of Christ by the shore (especially John 21, the miraculous catch by the sea) — the novel's clearest and most sustained Resurrection typology. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

109. QUOTE: "'The real treasure is in my heart,' my mother said. 'Amen to that,' the man said… 'Isn't the ocean stunning? A gift from God.'" **SOURCE:** Matthew 6:21 ("where your treasure is, there your heart will be also") and general creation theology (Psalm 104, the sea as God's handiwork). **GLOSS:** A total stranger's unprompted "Amen" to Laura's line about treasure-in-the-heart provides a kind of unwitting liturgical response, as though the whole physical world briefly joins the family's private rite of mourning and blessing. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

110. QUOTE: "You too will pass into Joyce's realm of shades, a distant memory for someone, if you're remembered at all." **SOURCE:** James Joyce, "The Dead" (the snow "faintly falling… upon all the living and the dead"); also Ecclesiastes' vanitas theme and 1 Corinthians 13:12's "through a glass darkly." **GLOSS:** Teaching Joyce's story to indifferent students, Aiden recognizes his own future death and forgetting, explicitly naming Joyce's story as a kind of secular scripture about mortality that frames his entire narrated life, closing the loop between this novel's Irish-Catholic Boston and Joyce's Irish-Catholic Dublin. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

111. QUOTE: "'I got you,' someone behind me said… Through the cracked lenses, I saw Martin. 'I told you I would always have your back.'" **SOURCE:** Guardian angel doctrine (Matthew 18:10, "their angels always behold the face of my Father"; Psalm 91:11–12, "He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you"). **GLOSS:** Martin's final ghostly rescue of the falling, feverish Aiden is a direct enactment of guardian-angel theology, fulfilling literally the promise of protection he made as a living boy — sibling love completed as angelic ministry. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

112. QUOTE: "'Go to sleep, brother. It wasn't your fault. I never left you and I never will.'" **SOURCE:** Two scriptural promises of abiding presence, one echoed by position and one by wording. By position: Matthew 28:20, the risen Christ's last words at the close of the Gospel, "lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (KJV). By wording: Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," itself quoting the divine promise of Deuteronomy 31:6 and Joshua 1:5. **GLOSS:** "I never left you" is verbally closer to Hebrews than to Matthew, whose promise speaks of being with rather than not leaving; what Matthew supplies is the placement, the last word of one returned from the dead at the end of the book, and the reach of the promise across all time to come ("I never left you and I never will" answers "alway, even unto the end"). The difference is as telling as the likeness: Christ's promise is attached to a commission, Martin's to an absolution, "It wasn't your fault." The line is the clearest evidence that Martin functions as a Christ-figure whose appearances console the living. It is a fused and unmarked echo rather than a quotation; the author has confirmed that the biblical subtext of Martin's actions is purposeful (see the author's statement below). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

Author's statement on Martin. Asked whether Martin was meant as a Christ figure, the author replied: "I intended all the evidence and subtextual biblical allusions in Martin's actions and depictions. They indeed were purposeful. But on the other hand he was simply a loving brother. I do not proselytize." (personal communication; spelling silently regularized). The statement confirms design without converting it into doctrine. It authorizes the Gospel pattern traced in this Part — the life given in the riptide, the pelican emblem, the returns, the absolution, the healing touch, the promise of abiding presence — and it equally authorizes the counter-evidence, since "simply a loving brother" is the novel's own account of a boy who swears, fights and mocks the pelican. It is recorded here apart from the numbered entries, which rest on the text alone.

PART THREE: THEMATIC RELIGIOUS TEXTURE (NO DIRECT ALLUSION)

This section documents the novel's general Irish-Catholic thematic atmosphere — material that is not a citation of a specific text but a pervasive cultural-religious sensibility. Quotes are verbatim and verified.

T1. QUOTE: "Grandpa wanted me to tell you it wasn't your fault that he died." / "Of course it wasn't my fault." She puffed on the cigarette, eyeing me suspiciously. **THEME:** Guilt and scrupulosity. **GLOSS:** Nana's defensive, too-quick denial ("of course") followed by visible anxiety (suspicious eyes, chain-smoking) is the novel's diagnostic portrait of Irish Catholic guilt: a reflexive verbal absolution of self that the body immediately contradicts. Guilt in this novel is never resolved by assertion, only by confession to another person. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T2. QUOTE: "He told me that you should stop blaming yourself for leaving him in the chair when you went to bed. It's not your fault that he choked on his vomit." **THEME:** Guilt and scrupulosity; the dead as moral auditors. **GLOSS:** Nana's guilt over her husband's death by choking has apparently gone unconfessed for years until the ghost forces its surfacing through Aiden — scrupulosity here is generational, requiring supernatural intervention to be spoken aloud at all. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T3. QUOTE: "A restless feeling of guilt was always present with Catherine. She confessed her feelings to me and repented many times. I told her she was absolved. But it was fruitless. She would tell me the story again and again, always seeking absolution and forgiveness." **THEME:** Scrupulosity as a clinical condition; confession without relief. **GLOSS:** Rita's description is a textbook portrait of religious scrupulosity — the compulsive, repeated need for absolution that formal or informal forgiveness cannot satisfy. The novel treats this less as a moral failure than as an inherited psychological wound running down the maternal line (Sinead to Catherine to Laura to Aiden). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T4. QUOTE: "I blamed myself for his death. And then I blamed God for stealing him from us so young. He was just a child. I was angry at everyone and everything." **THEME:** Guilt turning into anger at God; the crisis of faith. **GLOSS:** Aiden's grief over Martin follows the classic pattern of scrupulous self-blame curdling into theological rebellion — he blames himself first, then extends the blame to God, dramatizing how personal guilt and religious doubt are functionally the same emotional operation in this Irish Catholic imagination. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T5. QUOTE: "What was a venial sin or mortal sin? And how do you know the difference?" / She turned towards me. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Be more like your

brother Martin. Don't ponder things so much." **THEME:** Sin, confession, and the catechetical structure of childhood. **GLOSS:** Formal Catholic sin-taxonomy (venial vs. mortal) is taught to Aiden as casually as table manners, then immediately short-circuited by his grandmother's irritation — the novel repeatedly shows official doctrine being transmitted but never fully absorbed or applied consistently, since it is invoked only when convenient. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T6. QUOTE: "She's got a few psychological issues… She's a beautiful human being, and that's what's most important." **THEME:** Suffering met with tenderness rather than doctrine; a folk pastoral instinct. **GLOSS:** Nana's response to her institutionalized daughter substitutes maternal blessing for medical or religious judgment — an example of the grandmother acting as an untrained but instinctively pastoral figure, offering something like a benediction over mental illness rather than condemnation. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T7. QUOTE: "Do you think I'll go to hell?" / "Of course not. Hell doesn't exist." **THEME:** Fear of hell, and its explicit theological rejection. **GLOSS:** Aiden's fear of damnation for being gay is a direct inheritance of institutional Catholic teaching; Laura's flat denial ("Hell doesn't exist") is the novel's clearest instance of a family member overturning inherited doctrine outright rather than merely evading it. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T8. QUOTE: "We must always pray for the departed." **THEME:** Purgatory and intercessory prayer for the dead. **GLOSS:** Nana's instruction to pray for Hope at Mass reflects orthodox belief in Purgatory and the efficacy of intercession — notably, this doctrine is asserted sincerely and without irony, unlike the novel's satire of miracle-working priests, showing selective retention of Catholic teaching. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T9. QUOTE: "Every death clings to us, diminishing bits of our joy, ripping away parts of our history and our selves." **THEME:** Suffering understood as formative rather than simply destructive — a secularized theology of redemptive suffering. **GLOSS:** Aiden's meditation on cumulative grief treats loss as something that reshapes rather than merely subtracts from the self, echoing (without citing) the Catholic notion that suffering, endured, becomes part of one's spiritual formation. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T10. QUOTE: "The Irish have an abiding sense of tragedy, the sense that a disaster is just around the corner and what could go wrong will go wrong. 'If you're not fishing, you should be mending your nets,' she would say." **THEME:** Suffering as expected, near-doctrinal fatalism; folk wisdom standing in for theology of providence. **GLOSS:** This fisherman's proverb, delivered as inherited wisdom, encodes a providential outlook — constant vigilance against suffering — that functions like a lay catechism about the fallen nature of the world, absorbed as cultural instinct rather than formal doctrine. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T11. QUOTE: "She crossed herself. 'Say it with me. "There but for the grace of God go I."'" **THEME:** The sacramental gesture (the sign of the cross) applied to an act of manipulative charity. **GLOSS:** The physical sacramental gesture — crossing oneself — is performed sincerely even while its accompanying lesson is being taught inside a con; the novel repeatedly separates the validity of a sacramental sign from the moral cleanliness of the context surrounding it. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T12. QUOTE: "This would look beautiful on Laura." In a moment, a police car blaring sirens followed us. … "I know officer. I was saying a prayer with my grandson. He gave me this gold cross. I got distracted." **THEME:** Ordinary objects and acts as sites of the sacred, deployed cynically yet still functioning as such. **GLOSS:** The stolen gold cross, invoked as an alibi ("saying a prayer"), still ends up serving its devotional purpose — worn by Laura as a real source of comfort later — demonstrating the novel's recurring pattern whereby sacred objects retain power even when acquired or invoked dishonestly. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T13. QUOTE: "In our family, we abstain from alcohol in reverence to Our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm offended that you would suggest such a thing, Nancy Nurse." **THEME:** Drink as both curse and camouflage for piety; hypocrisy weaponizing religious language. **GLOSS:** Nana invokes reverence for Christ to conceal that she has smuggled wine into a psychiatric ward — a comic instance of pious language deployed to cover exactly the vice (drink) that the novel elsewhere treats as a real, destructive inheritance (the grandfather's fatal drinking, Nana's own nightly whiskey). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T14. QUOTE: "'Full as a bingo bus' that night. He's sorry… he choked on his vomit." / "Nana lived on a diet of scrambled eggs, buttered toast, coffee, and whiskey."

THEME: Drink as generational curse; parish bingo culture as the social world of Catholic Boston. **GLOSS:** Both the grandfather's death and Nana's own daily habits show alcohol functioning as an ever-present, destructive undertow beneath the family's devout surface — the phrase "bingo bus" itself locates drink within the parish's own social and charitable culture (church-hall bingo nights), literally fusing vice and parish life. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T15. QUOTE: "We gathered at Rita's house after the funeral. Lots of food and drink… Martin played some of my grandmother's favorite songs." **THEME:** Drink as communion; the wake as a social sacrament. **GLOSS:** Alcohol appears here not as vice but as the medium of communal mourning and remembrance — the same substance condemned elsewhere as a private curse becomes, at the wake, a shared, almost liturgical comfort, exactly the double valence ("curse and communion") the brief specifies. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T16. QUOTE: "He and my grandmother, though they did not know each other, emigrated from different parts of Ireland in the late 1930's… People hated the Irish." **THEME:** Emigration and exile; anti-Irish prejudice in America. **GLOSS:** The grandparents' emigration story, framed by explicit ethnic prejudice ("people hated the Irish," barred from college and jobs), establishes the diaspora experience of exile and discrimination as the novel's originating wound, out of which its folk-Catholic survival culture (superstition, proverbs, Church-going) grows as a coping architecture. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T17. QUOTE: "West Roxbury was home to the 'lace-curtain Irish,' those Irish who were allegedly better off than their fellow immigrants in South Boston… Irish Catholics were repressed and stoical. I knew I could never survive in my hometown." **THEME:** Exile as internal as much as geographic; the parish-neighborhood as inherited social world one must eventually flee. **GLOSS:** Aiden names his own eventual departure from West Roxbury as an act of self-preservation against a culture of repression and stoicism — establishing a second, interior emigration (the gay narrator's flight from a closed Catholic enclave) that echoes his grandparents' original literal emigration from Ireland. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T18. QUOTE: "Finally, in 2016, I surprised my mother… with her longed-awaited trip to Achill Island. At last we would visit my grandfather's homeland and scatter

Martin's ashes in the sea." **THEME:** Emigration reversed; return to the homeland as a rite of completion. **GLOSS:** The novel's climax requires a literal return-journey to Ireland, converting the grandparents' one-way emigration into a round trip completed two generations later — exile is narratively "healed" only when the family's dead (Martin's ashes) are returned to the ancestral waters. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T19. QUOTE: "Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen." / "Hold your britches, young man. We haven't said grace." **THEME:** The mother/grandmother as domestic priest-figure, presiding over sacramental household rituals. **GLOSS:** Nana functions as celebrant of the family's version of the Mass — she calls the household to order, assigns who will "have the honor" of leading grace, and receives the "Amen" response from the table exactly as a priest receives a congregation's response, casting her as the de facto liturgical authority of the house. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T20. QUOTE: "Now bend your heads and touch your hands." She placed her hand on Martin's head, gently pushing it downward… "There are four corners on my bed. There are four angels at my head… Amen." **THEME:** Grandmother as priest-figure administering a nightly liturgy of protection. **GLOSS:** Nana's ritual gesture (hand on the head, inducing a bowed posture) mimics a priestly blessing or the laying-on of hands, performed nightly as a kind of domestic Compline service that substitutes for institutional liturgy. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T21. QUOTE: "I want the Good Shepherd to protect you." / I placed my hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry, Nana. Everything will be okay." **THEME:** Reciprocal pastoral care between grandmother and grandson; priesthood diffused through the family rather than held by clergy alone. **GLOSS:** Nana's prayer for Aiden and his comforting reply reverse the expected priest-parishioner direction of blessing — the child briefly becomes pastor to the grandmother — reinforcing the novel's leveling of sacred authority across generations rather than concentrating it in ordained clergy. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T22. QUOTE: "'I understand that you want your wife to go home. But we have procedures to follow'… Nancy walked over to my mother and whispered in her ear, guiding her towards the entryway." **THEME:** Institutional authority (medical, and by

extension ecclesial) opposing family-based, lay/folk authority. **GLOSS:** McCall Hospital, with its "procedures," rules, and gatekeeping nurses, functions structurally like the institutional Church elsewhere satirized (rules, hierarchy, gatekeeping priests) — the novel consistently pits official institutional authority against the family's more intimate, improvised, and ultimately more trusted form of care and belief. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T23. QUOTE: "A horse startled her and she fell into a well… On the night before, she heard banshees calling out to her… And there were three knocks on the door, which means someone is going to die." **THEME:** Folk superstition operating alongside, not against, orthodox Catholic faith. **GLOSS:** Banshee-lore and death-omens are narrated by the grandfather with the same matter-of-fact authority he uses for scripture and Church teaching elsewhere, demonstrating that in this family's worldview, folk superstition and orthodox Catholicism are not competing systems but two dialects of the same conviction that the unseen world is real and morally significant. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T24. QUOTE: "The folk in County Sligo, where your grandmother lived, were convinced the horse was a pooka…. I don't believe it. And neither should you. It's foolishness and ancient superstition." **THEME:** The tension between belief and unbelief, staged explicitly as a debate about superstition versus rationalism. **GLOSS:** Rita, the novel's most consistently rationalist adult, explicitly names Irish folk-belief "foolishness," yet the narrative structure keeps proving the pooka real (the horse at the Grand Canyon, the "horse's mane" during Martin's drowning) — the book stages unbelief as a reasonable but ultimately mistaken position, always narratively overruled by events. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T25. QUOTE: "I don't think it's right that we stole them." / "And who are you to tell me what's wrong or right?" **THEME:** Childhood conscience versus adult casuistry; the internal moral compass the Baltimore Catechism was meant to install. **GLOSS:** Aiden's precociously formed conscience, pushing back against Nana's rationalizations, represents the successful internalization of Catholic moral formation even as the adults around him practice a much more flexible, situational morality — the child becomes the more rigorous "confessor" of the household. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T26. QUOTE: "I've spent my life trying to avoid the paranormal." / "It's too demanding to accept the paranormal. I feel drained, and life becomes . . . I don't know. Fuzzy." / "Aiden, life is fuzzy." **THEME:** The tension between belief and unbelief, carried into adulthood as chronic spiritual fatigue rather than resolved doctrine. **GLOSS:** Adult Aiden's admission that unbelief is a form of self-protection rather than conviction shows the novel's mature theological position: doubt is not intellectual conclusion but exhaustion, and the narrative consistently rewards those (his mother, his younger self) who remain open to "fuzziness" over those who insist on rational certainty. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T27. QUOTE: "'You need to stop avoiding people. You need to reach out.'… 'It worries me that you've lost your faith.'" **THEME:** Loss of faith figured as social withdrawal, not merely doctrinal doubt. **GLOSS:** Laura equates Aiden's skepticism about ghosts with a broader failure of relational faith — trust in other people — collapsing the distinction between religious belief and ordinary human intimacy that runs throughout the novel's theology of "promise" and "hope." **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T28. QUOTE: "Life is full of pain, sweetheart. And I don't mean just the physical kind… You'll be hurt a lot, but you must carry on." **THEME:** Suffering as the basic condition of life, met with endurance rather than complaint — a lay version of "offering it up." **GLOSS:** Nana's opening-chapter counsel to Aiden, paired with the wartime slogan "Keep calm and carry on," reframes Catholic suffering-theology in secular, stoic terms — pain is not explained or redeemed doctrinally here so much as simply endured, which becomes the novel's baseline ethic before its more explicit theology of "glory" emerges later. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

T29. QUOTE: "Intimacy in an Irish Catholic household is taboo. Knowledge about family members is limited, secrets are guarded, subjects are avoided, but love is always strong." **THEME:** The parish/family social world's characteristic reticence; stoicism as inherited religious culture. **GLOSS:** This is the novel's most explicit authorial generalization about Irish Catholic domestic culture, naming directly the repression that produces both the family's guarded secrets (affairs, deaths, guilt) and its intensely loyal, wordless love — the emotional economy the whole book dramatizes rather than explains. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

T30. QUOTE: "Poor farmers we were. To entertain ourselves, we read whatever we could, especially the Bible, and we made things up. Oh, how we were forced to memorize verse." **THEME:** Scripture as inherited cultural material, absorbed through poverty and rote memorization rather than devotion alone. **GLOSS:** Nana's account of enforced scripture memorization in rural Ireland explains, structurally, why biblical cadences surface so naturally and so often in the family's ordinary speech throughout the novel — the Bible functions as much as folk literature passed down as it does as sacred text actively believed. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

PART FOUR: LITERARY ALLUSIONS AND ECHOES

L1. QUOTE: "'Come away, O human child! / To the waters and the wild / With a faery, hand in hand, / For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.' —'The Stolen Child,' William Butler Yeats" (epigraph) **SOURCE:** W.B. Yeats, "The Stolen Child" (1889), refrain. **GLOSS:** This epigraph is the novel's Yeatsian keynote, establishing from page one that a child will be "stolen" away from grief into another world — a promise the plot fulfills literally when these same lines recur, word for word, as Martin drowns. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L2. QUOTE (title source, verified independently): "Where the wandering water gushes / From the hills above Glen-Car, / In pools among the rushes / That scarce could bathe a star, / We seek for slumbering trout / And whispering in their ears / Give them unquiet dreams…" — W.B. Yeats, "The Stolen Child" **SOURCE:** This is the precise origin of the novel's title. The line "Give them unquiet dreams" occurs in the poem's third stanza, describing the fairies whispering restless dreams into the ears of sleeping trout near "the hills above Glen-Car" — a real place-name in County Sligo, Yeats's home territory. **GLOSS:** The title is not merely a mood-setting phrase; it is doubly encoded. First, "unquiet dreams" describes exactly what happens to every character who is haunted, warned, or visited across the book (Aiden's grandfather visitations, Laura's ghost-visions, Mrs. O'Malley's parting line "I don't want you to have unquiet dreams"). Second, and more pointedly, the place-name embedded in the source stanza — "Glen-Car" — is the family's own surname, Glencar, which Mrs. O'Malley notices explicitly near the novel's end ("A Yeats poem… something about a magical place called Glen-Car… I suppose none of us know how it all fits in").

Mulhern has built the family's very identity out of the geography of his epigraph-poem, making the title a buried pun: the Glencars are, literally, the people of Glen-Car, forever receiving "unquiet dreams" from the fairy-and-ghost world the poem describes. This is one of the novel's most carefully constructed and least obvious formal devices. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L3. QUOTE: "A Yeats poem. 'The Lost Child'… Or is it 'The Stolen Child'… Something about a magical place called Glen-Car. I can only remember one line and wouldn't you know, we had to recite it every year… I know there was Glen-Car somewhere in the verse, but I don't remember how it fits in. I suppose none of us know how it all fits in." **SOURCE:** W.B. Yeats, "The Stolen Child," self-referentially named within the novel itself. **GLOSS:** Mulhern has Mrs. O'Malley name his own title-source aloud, mid-novel, in County Mayo — an unusually direct act of authorial signposting that confirms the Yeats connection is deliberate and confirms the family surname (Glencar) is meant to be heard as an echo of "Glen-Car" in the poem. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L4. QUOTE: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree, / And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made… I hear it in the deep heart's core." (Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," copied by hand into the family photo album) **SOURCE:** W.B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1888); the poem's opening ("I will arise and go now") is itself a direct echo of the Vulgate's Prodigal Son ("surgam, et ibo," Luke 15:18). **GLOSS:** Nana's handwritten copy of this poem, pasted above old photographs of her near-fatal childhood tree accident, uses Yeats to frame her own life story — Mulhern layers a second Yeats poem onto the first, both concerned with departure, longing, and home, reinforcing Yeats as the novel's primary poetic intertext alongside scripture. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L5. QUOTE: "'But now they drift on the still water, / Mysterious, beautiful; / Among what rushes will they build… To find they have flown away?'" (Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole," recited by Rita) **SOURCE:** W.B. Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1917). **GLOSS:** Rita recites this elegiac poem about aging and vanished beauty while confessing her affair with Sean and her enduring grief, extending the novel's Yeats scaffolding (three separate Yeats poems quoted at length) into its meditation on loss, memory, and mortality. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L6. QUOTE: "In December, probably because of my depressed mood and memories of Ireland, I assigned 'The Dead' by James Joyce to my AP Literature class… Echoing the story, snow fell outside the classroom window during our discussion." **SOURCE:** James Joyce, "The Dead," the concluding story of *Dubliners* (1914). **GLOSS:** Mulhern makes the Joyce debt explicit and structural: Aiden teaches "The Dead" while reliving his own version of Gabriel Conroy's epiphany about mortality and the "vast hosts of the dead," and the falling snow is deliberately staged to "echo the story" — this is the novel's most self-conscious act of literary inheritance. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L7. QUOTE: "'I don't get why Gretel woulda told the guy about her old boyfriend…'" / "Why do you think Joyce named the character 'Michael Furey?'" / "Because he was furry?" **SOURCE:** James Joyce, "The Dead" — Gabriel Conroy, his wife Gretta, and her dead youthful admirer Michael Furey, who "died for her" by standing out in the rain. **GLOSS:** The students' comic mangling of "Gretta" into "Gretel" and their failure to hear "Furey" as anything but "furry" dramatizes exactly the loss of collective memory and reverence for the dead that Joyce's story itself mourns — the classroom scene becomes a live demonstration of Joyce's theme of the living forgetting the beloved dead, staged one century later in a Boston high school. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L8. QUOTE: "One day you find yourself, a gray-haired man, teaching in a chilly Boston classroom, with the knowledge that you too will pass into Joyce's realm of shades, a distant memory for someone, if you're remembered at all." **SOURCE:** James Joyce, "The Dead" — the story's closing meditation on "all the living and the dead," and Gabriel's vision of his own soul "swooning slowly" as snow falls "upon all the living and the dead." **GLOSS:** Aiden's direct naming of "Joyce's realm of shades" is the novel's clearest acknowledgment of its Joycean debt — the entire book's traffic between the living and the dead (Grandpa's visits, Laura's visions, Martin's return) is here explicitly identified with Joyce's own culminating vision of a single continuous community of the living and dead. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L9. QUOTE: "The James Joyce House of the Dead across from the River Liffey, and Trinity College, where we saw the Book of Kells." **SOURCE:** James Joyce tourism/memorial sites in Dublin, associated with "The Dead" and *Ulysses*; the Book of Kells, the illuminated Gospel manuscript. **GLOSS:** Placing Joyce's memorial and the illuminated Gospels on the same sightseeing day literalizes the novel's pairing of

literary and scriptural canons — both are treated as pilgrimage sites of comparable authority, even as Aiden professes disappointment with the actual manuscript display. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L10. QUOTE: "On the plane back to Boston, both of us read voraciously. I immersed myself in the stories of James Joyce and William Trevor. My mother read a novel by Edna O'Brien and another by Maeve Binchy." **SOURCE:** James Joyce, William Trevor, Edna O'Brien, Maeve Binchy — a curated shelf of major twentieth-century Irish short-story and novel writers, each concerned (like Mulhern) with Irish Catholic guilt, repression, emigration, and family secrecy. **GLOSS:** This reading list functions as an implicit statement of literary lineage: Mulhern situates his own novel's concerns (guilt, exile, family secrecy, the Church) within the specific tradition of Irish and Irish-American short fiction represented by Trevor, O'Brien, and Binchy, immediately following his most overt Joyce homage. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L11. QUOTE: "'The Damsel of the Holy Grail—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874.'" **SOURCE:** Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet, co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (not to be confused with the medieval poet Dante Alighieri, though Rossetti's own name and the Brotherhood's medievalism deliberately invoke Dante's aura). **GLOSS:** The painting's caption ties the novel's chalice/Grail plot to Victorian medievalist art; Rossetti's borrowed forename ("Dante") is itself a nod toward Dante Alighieri's *Vita Nuova*, which Rossetti translated, so this single caption carries a faint secondary echo of Dante's tradition of sacralized romantic longing even though no direct Dante Alighieri text is quoted anywhere in the novel. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L12. QUOTE: "'I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination,' a poet once said." **SOURCE:** John Keats, letter to Benjamin Bailey, November 22, 1817. **GLOSS:** The grandfather-ghost's Keats citation elevates Romantic feeling and imagination to the status of religious certainty ("holiness"), giving literary-critical cover to the family's otherwise unverifiable visions, ghosts, and "second sight." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L13. QUOTE: "'We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our life is rounded with a sleep.' Your grandfather loved that quote." **SOURCE:** William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene 1 (Prospero's speech). **GLOSS:** Shakespeare's meditation

on life as dream framed by sleep (death) directly supplies the novel's recurring dream/sleep/waking vocabulary and anticipates its title's own "unquiet dreams," positioning Shakespeare alongside Yeats and scripture as a source of authoritative wisdom-language in the family's oral culture. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L14. QUOTE: "'Life is a tale of human frailty and sorrow.' Do you know who said that?" / "Shakespeare?" / She smiled. "Good guess. But it was Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*." **SOURCE:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). **GLOSS:** Rita's Hawthorne citation, delivered while discussing her own adulterous affair with Sean, deliberately invokes the American literary archetype of guilt, secret sin, and public shame (Hester Prynne's scarlet "A"), aligning Rita's private confession with Hawthorne's central theme of hidden transgression eventually surfacing. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L15. QUOTE: "It's about a man who loses his wife and daughter in a terrible car crash. He's heartbroken, so he goes to a psychic to get solace… his daughter has been reincarnated as Ivy Templeton." (Rita's summary of *Audrey Rose*) **SOURCE:** Frank De Felitta, *Audrey Rose* (1975 novel and 1977 film) — genre fiction about reincarnation and grief. **GLOSS:** This lowbrow paperback Rita is reading provides a popular-culture parallel to the novel's own central concerns (grief, reincarnation-adjacent belief, communication with the dead), signaling that the family's supernatural convictions circulate in the same cultural water as contemporary genre fiction, not only elite literary or scriptural tradition. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L16. QUOTE: "We're reading *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens… I'm at the part where Pip meets an escaped convict in the graveyard." / "The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come." / "Dickens calls the Future Ghost Yet to Come." **SOURCE:** Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1861) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843). **GLOSS:** Aiden's schoolboy reading of Dickens supplies him the vocabulary ("Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come") he later uses to describe his own father as spiritually absent and future-avoidant, showing how assigned classroom literature becomes personal, private symbolism exactly as scripture and Yeats do elsewhere. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L17. QUOTE: "I think you're a sad guy, like that Ghost of Christmas Past." **SOURCE:** Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*. **GLOSS:** Aiden weaponizes Dickens's ghost taxonomy against his own father, accusing him of embodying a ghost trapped in

regret over the past — literary allusion doing emotional and accusatory work within a family confrontation about abandonment. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L18. QUOTE: "The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living"—Cicero and "Everything that exists is in a manner the seed of that which will be"—Marcus Aurelius. (classroom wall posters) **SOURCE:** Cicero (a paraphrase of *Philippics* IX or general classical commonplace on memory and the dead) and Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*. **GLOSS:** These classical tags, read passively off a schoolroom wall on Aiden's very first day, quietly announce the novel's controlling idea — memory as the vehicle of the dead's continued life — before any ghost has yet appeared in the plot, functioning as an unmarked classical epigraph embedded mid-narrative. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L19. QUOTE: "'The distinction between the past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.' —Albert Einstein" (epigraph) **SOURCE:** Albert Einstein, attributed condolence letter to the family of Michel Besso (1955); widely circulated (if disputed) as a direct quotation. **GLOSS:** Paired with the Yeats epigraph, Einstein's line supplies the novel's scientific-metaphysical justification for its ghosts and second sight — time as illusion — which the grandfather-ghost repeats almost verbatim within the story itself ("time does not exist… 'tis our minds that give us the illusion of the stream of events we call life"), making the epigraph a direct blueprint for character dialogue. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L20. QUOTE: "Someone had written 'Hurry up please, it's time' on the wall across from me." **SOURCE:** T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922), Part II, "A Game of Chess" — the refrain of the pub landlord calling closing time, itself charged with apocalyptic double meaning about mortality. **GLOSS:** This graffito, glimpsed on Aiden's father's city bus, silently imports Eliot's meditation on time running out and spiritual desolation into an ordinary Boston commute, one of the novel's subtlest and least-glossed literary allusions — appropriate to a novel about a father whose own time with his son is, in fact, running out. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L21. QUOTE: "Bulletin board with posters that read 'Grammar matters,' 'Read: Knowledge is power,' and the faces of Shakespeare, Whitman, and other literary greats." **SOURCE:** Walt Whitman, canonical American poet, invoked here only by name/portrait rather than direct quotation. **GLOSS:** Whitman's presence on the

classroom wall, alongside Shakespeare, situates Aiden's adult vocation (teaching literature) within the same American canon that has silently shaped the novel's own celebratory, all-embracing treatment of ordinary and abject bodies (Whitman's "Song of Myself" democratic inclusiveness resonates with, though is not directly cited by, Mulhern's method of dignifying Margie, Arthur the cat, and other "lowly" figures). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

L22. QUOTE: "Some of the distinguished alumni are Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Charles Bullfinch, and Ralph Waldo Emerson." **SOURCE:** Ralph Waldo Emerson, named as a Boston Latin School alumnus. **GLOSS:** Emerson's mere presence in this list (no direct Emersonian doctrine like the Over-Soul is quoted) nonetheless primes the novel's Transcendentalist undercurrent — the grandfather's teaching that "the best place to find God was in Nature" and that all souls are interconnected through tree-roots and family bonds closely parallels Emerson's Over-Soul concept of a single spirit uniting all individual souls, though the connection remains structural/thematic rather than textually cited. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

L23. QUOTE: "'Goodness is the only investment that never fails,' Aiden. A smart man by the name of Toreau said that… Mr. Toreau lived about a half hour away from where you do, in Concord." **SOURCE:** Henry David Thoreau (misspelled "Toreau" by the semi-literate immigrant grandfather), of Concord, Massachusetts — associated with *Walden* and its themes of simple living, self-reliance, and moral economy. **GLOSS:** The grandfather's garbled attribution to "Toreau" of a maxim about goodness as investment captures exactly how oral, working-class transmission of literary culture works in this family — approximate, half-remembered, geographically anchored (Concord) but doctrinally sincere, and the line becomes a functioning household commandment despite its shaky sourcing. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L24. QUOTE: "I wondered if she had passed the chapter in the novel when Mr. Lockwood sees Catherine's face in the window of Thrushcross Grange." (re: the classmate reading *Wuthering Heights*) **SOURCE:** Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) — Lockwood's dream of the ghost-child Catherine at the window. **GLOSS:** Aiden recognizes a fellow ghost-seer's literary counterpart in Brontë's most famous haunting scene, using *Wuthering Heights* to validate his own visionary experience by

aligning it with a canonical literary ghost story rather than dismissing it as delusion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L25. QUOTE: "'Hope, 1886, George Frederic Watts.'" (the painting Laura copies of a blindfolded woman playing a nearly broken lyre) **SOURCE:** G.F. Watts, *Hope* (1886), a famous Victorian allegorical painting, later invoked by Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama as a symbol of hope amid adversity. **GLOSS:** This visual-art allusion (rather than textual) supplies the novel's controlling image for its final theological virtue — hope surviving catastrophe — fusing the dead classmate's name, the painting's title, and the closing meditation on "the buoy that saves us—Hope" into a single symbolic thread. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L26. QUOTE: "'The Lass of Aughrim'… 'My babe lies cold within my arms / but none will let me in.'" **SOURCE:** Traditional Irish ballad "The Lass of Aughrim," most famously the song sung within James Joyce's "The Dead," where it triggers Gretta's memory of Michael Furey. **GLOSS:** By having this specific ballad — inseparable in literary history from Joyce's story — sung at Margie's dinner party just before Nana's premonition of her own death, Mulhern doubles his Joyce homage: the same song that unlocks buried grief in "The Dead" performs an identical function here, summoning Sean's ghost and foreshadowing Nana's mortality. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L27. QUOTE: "We bought a record of the songs from *West Side Story* because Margie had been so proud of her role as Maria… we sat in the living room, silent, as 'Somewhere' played." **SOURCE:** Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, *West Side Story* (1957), the song "Somewhere" ("There's a place for us…"). **GLOSS:** A Broadway standard substitutes for a requiem hymn at Margie's makeshift wake, performing the same eschatological consolation function (a promised "place for us") as the Catholic funeral liturgy's language of heaven, exemplifying the novel's habit of finding sacred consolation in popular culture. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L28. QUOTE: "'Rescue Me'… The line, 'Cause I'm lonely and I'm blue' confirmed for me that we were doing the right thing." (The Sonny and Cher Show) **SOURCE:** Fontella Bass, "Rescue Me" (1965), a soul/gospel-inflected pop song, performed on television by Sonny and Cher. **GLOSS:** Aiden reads ordinary pop-song lyrics as divinatory confirmation of his plan to rescue his mother, treating radio and

television music the way earlier generations might treat opening scripture at random for guidance (bibliomancy) — popular song functioning as a substitute oracle. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L29. QUOTE: "I began to zone out as 'Stairway to Heaven' played. 'Words have two meanings' and 'sometimes all of our thoughts are misgiving.'" **SOURCE:** Led Zeppelin, "Stairway to Heaven" (1971). **GLOSS:** The rock song's own title metaphor (an ascent to heaven) directly cues Aiden's meditation on the "quest for the Holy Grail," making a 1970s arena-rock anthem the unlikely occasion for the novel's most explicit statement of its Eucharistic/Grail theology. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L30. QUOTE: "The lyrics of Chicago's 'If You Leave Me Now' played on the radio. The lines about love being hard to find and the regret of it slipping away resonated with me." **SOURCE:** Chicago, "If You Leave Me Now" (1976). **GLOSS:** As with "Rescue Me," a contemporary pop ballad supplies emotional and quasi-prophetic accompaniment to the family's escape attempt, reinforcing the novel's consistent technique of reading ordinary broadcast music as meaningful commentary on sacred family drama. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L31. QUOTE: "'Danny Boy,' 'Too Ra Loo Ra Loo Rai,' and 'A Mother's Love is a Blessing'" (played at Nana's wake gathering) **SOURCE:** Traditional Irish-American ballads, staples of wake and funeral repertoire; "A Mother's Love is a Blessing" in particular functions almost as a folk-devotional hymn to motherhood. **GLOSS:** These songs constitute the closest thing to formal funeral hymnody the novel depicts — sung not in church but in a front parlor — confirming that Irish-American wake culture, not the Requiem Mass, is this family's primary vehicle for ritualized grief. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L32. QUOTE: "'Raindrops keep falling on my head. Ooh Aah.'" (Nell/the cat-woman's song, recurring twice) **SOURCE:** B.J. Thomas, "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" (1969), from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. **GLOSS:** This pop standard, sung first by the tragic psychiatric patient Nell and echoed years later by a stranger on the plane, becomes an eerie leitmotif linking two unrelated women and foreshadowing Laura's death near "Ooh Aah Point" at the Grand Canyon — a secular refrain functioning with the mysterious recurrence of a liturgical antiphon. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L33. QUOTE: "A man lost control of his horse while my mother and Lucy stood at Ooh Aah Point on the South Kaibab Trail." **SOURCE:** Callback to the "Ooh Aah" refrain of "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head," and to the actual Grand Canyon trail landmark of the same name. **GLOSS:** The coincidence of a real trail name ("Ooh Aah Point") matching the recurring song lyric is treated by the narrative as confirmation of the pooka's "veiled messages about your future" — Mulhern uses a found real-world pun the way a medieval writer might use a providential sign, collapsing pop-song coincidence into folk-prophetic fulfillment. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

L34. QUOTE: "I floated like a butterfly so they couldn't sting me like a bee," he said, twisting the words of Muhammad Ali. **SOURCE:** Muhammad Ali's famous self-description, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee." **GLOSS:** Martin's comic misuse of Ali's boxing motto is minor but consistent with the novel's larger pattern of borrowing authoritative language (proverbs, scripture, poetry) and bending it playfully to fit immediate, often trivial circumstances — the same operation performed more solemnly elsewhere with the Bible and Yeats. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L35. QUOTE: "'On the third day of her visit to the Grand Canyon she died… Two days later, Martin's body washed up.'" **SOURCE:** Echo of the Resurrection's three-day pattern (Matthew 12:40, "three days and three nights"; the Creed's "on the third day he rose again"), functioning here as narrative rhythm rather than direct citation. **GLOSS:** The two principal deaths are set in one three-day rhythm, though not in the same way: Laura dies "On the third day of her visit," never missing, while Martin's death alone has an interval between disappearance and discovery, closed when his body washes up two days later. The shared count echoes without naming the Resurrection's own three-day structure and reinforcing the novel's persistent, understated Christ-figure patterning around its dead. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

L36. QUOTE: "After I passed the overgrown front lawn of the McDermott's place, my grandmother's house came into view." **SOURCE:** Surface resemblance to novelist Alice McDermott (author of *Charming Billy*, *Someone*, and other Irish-Catholic Long Island/New York novels), though here "McDermott" designates only a neighboring family's house. **GLOSS:** No direct textual allusion to Alice McDermott's work is present; the name is almost certainly coincidental (a common Irish surname used for a minor background house), but it is worth flagging given McDermott's prominence

in the same literary territory (Irish Catholic family life, guilt, faith) that this novel occupies — the resemblance is thematic kinship at most, not citation. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

L37. QUOTE: "I watched *Manchester by the Sea* with Casey Affleck and *Ouija*, a 60's period piece about a mother and two daughters who unintentionally contact the dead father's spirit while running a séance scam." **SOURCE:** Kenneth Lonergan's film *Manchester by the Sea* (2016, grief and guilt over accidental death) and the film *Ouija: Origin of Evil* (2016). **GLOSS:** Both in-flight films mirror the novel's own themes (an accidental death that produces lifelong guilt; a family that fakes contact with the dead only to find the supernatural is real) — contemporary popular film functioning as an ironic, unglossed mirror held up to the family's own history just before their emotionally fraught Ireland arrival. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

L38. QUOTE: "My mother sketched and read a novel entitled *All the Light We Cannot See* about World War II." **SOURCE:** Anthony Doerr, *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014), a novel much concerned with radio, unseen connection, and hidden goodness amid catastrophe. **GLOSS:** The title itself ("light we cannot see") resonates with the novel's recurring light/illumination imagery (the grandfather's "bubbles of light," the "illuminated gospels," Aiden's visionary "sight") — an unglossed but pointed echo of the source novel's central metaphor for grace hidden within darkness. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

NOTES ON "ASSUMPTIONS" OVERLAP

Mulhern's story "Assumptions" reportedly centers on the Feast of the Assumption, a seawater cure at Nantasket, a bald woman named Peggy Fleming, a grandmother, a boy named Jimmy, and a dog. A full-text search of this novel confirms:

- **Nantasket Beach** does appear (Chapter Fifteen/Sixteen): "In August, my mother, Martin, and I went to Nantasket Beach in Hull, south of Boston… Paragon Amusement Park." This is the same seaside setting used for a "cure"-adjacent, ritually charged family outing — here it precedes Martin's drowning rather than curing anyone, inverting the "cure" motif into catastrophe.

- The **grandmother** figure (Catherine "Nana" Mulroy) and a young narrator-boy (Aiden, not Jimmy) are structurally analogous to the "Assumptions" cast, suggesting Mulhern reuses a stock architecture — grandmother, put-upon boy narrator, seaside excursion, bodily affliction (leukemia hoax here; presumably baldness/cure in "Assumptions") — across his fiction, but this novel does not reproduce "Assumptions" verbatim. The overlap is thematic and structural (family caregiving, folk-Catholic "cures," seaside ritual, comic-grotesque female bodies like Margie's) rather than textual.
- The **cure motif** recurs insistently in this novel in a different key: Aiden's faked leukemia "cure" at the charismatic Mass (Chapter One) and his mother's real or imagined psychiatric "cure" both stand in the same structural slot Nantasket seawater apparently occupies in "Assumptions" — an ambiguous, half-comic, half-sacred physical remedy administered by faith.

SYNTHESIS (approx. 1,050 words)

Give Them Unquiet Dreams is saturated with Catholic material to a degree that makes the religious layer inseparable from the plot rather than a decorative overlay. Scripture is not sprinkled for atmosphere; it is load-bearing. The novel opens with a fraudulent healing-Mass and a stolen chalice, threads the Grail legend (the Rossetti "Damsel of the Holy Grail" painting, the mock-heroic aliases "Elaine" and "Galahad," the explicit line about "a quest for the Holy Grail, the chalice that will forgive our perceived sins") through its middle, and closes with the Johannine Prologue ("In the beginning was the Word") and an explicit vision of the Communion of Saints. Along the way, three sketches by Laura are found with biblical citations written on their backs in her own hand — Ecclesiastes 3:1, Romans 8:18, Mark 8:18, Ecclesiastes 12:7 — turning what looked like a mother's private artistic hobby into a covert scriptural commentary on the family's entire supernatural experience. This is structure, not décor: the citations retroactively explain the mysterious pocket-watch motif, justify the ghost visitations theologically, and supply the novel's thesis statement (Romans 8:18, on suffering not worthy to be compared with future glory) in the book's own words, not the critic's.

The religious vision that emerges is heterodox but sincerely devotional. Mulhern preserves the furniture of institutional Catholicism — Mass, chalice, confession, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, funeral rites, the "Four Corners" bedtime prayer, feast-adjacent folk customs — while relentlessly relocating spiritual authority away from the institution and into family and nature. The priests are drunk, mumbling, or easily duped (the charismatic healer, Father Flynn's comic eulogy scene); the "cult" storefront church is mocked; yet unmediated grace keeps happening anyway, through grandmothers, ghosts, cats, seals, doves, and beech trees. Absolution is granted not in a confessional but on a park bench (Rita absolving Nana), in a car (Nana pardoning Aiden's white lies), on a beach (Laura and Martin's ghost absolving Aiden: "it wasn't your fault"). The sacraments are all still present, but laicized — confession without a priest, last rites administered by a ghost's silent hand on a sleeping boy's heart, Communion re-enacted by the body's memory as ashes are scattered into the sea. This is a Catholicism that has moved out of the sanctuary and into the kitchen, the treehouse, and the tide, but has not stopped being Catholicism: the theological content (guilt, absolution, real presence, resurrection, the communion of the living and the dead) survives the change of venue intact.

Compared to the technique reported in "Assumptions" — where the sacred is allegedly hidden inside shabby domestic nouns and never glossed — the novel is a more explicit, more didactic instrument, but it deploys exactly the same underlying method at a smaller grain size. Consider the paper crown on Margie's cat, complete with a cross, which Laura names outright: "The power of religion." Consider Margie's dying words, "Take care of Arthur" — structurally a deathbed committal exactly like Christ's word from the cross entrusting Mary and John to each other, but delivered about a fat, hissing, incontinent house cat. Consider Arthur's own death a week later from what the family, without irony, calls "Broken Heart Syndrome." None of these moments carry a citation or a lecture; they function by the same unglossed transfiguration of domestic bathos into glory that "Assumptions" reportedly practices with a bald woman and a seawater cure. The difference is proportion, not kind: this novel intersperses its many unglossed, "Assumptions"-style transfigurations (the pelican pins, the pinafore ghost caught in a tree exactly like the young grandmother once was, the pocket watch stopped at the hour of two different deaths) with passages of overt biblical citation and theological argument that "Assumptions," as

reported, withholds. The novel is willing to show its work where the story apparently is not.

Does the book support the thesis that Mulhern's art is a "theological rescue operation" converting abjection into glory? The evidence is strong and cumulative. Nearly every degraded or grotesque element in the novel is eventually revealed to be carrying sacred weight: a stolen Communion chalice becomes an instrument of a staged "miracle" that the priest declares real; a woman defecated on by a bird, whose stigmata-like scratches mark Aiden as her "twin," is destroyed against a literal cross and reduced to the same ash that later gets citations from Ecclesiastes; a lonely, incontinent, food-stealing shut-in dies alone on a stockroom floor in a puddle of her own urine and her final words are treated with the gravity of a covenant. Most tellingly, the boy who narrates the whole book insists early on that "we are all searching for an elixir to ease our pain, on a quest for the Holy Grail, the chalice that will forgive our perceived sins" — an explicit authorial admission, placed in the narrator's own mouth, that abjection (shame, madness, poverty, guilt, queerness treated as curse) is precisely the material this novel intends to convert into grace. The closing pages, with their vision of an eternal "room just beyond the doorway" where every dead character continues in loving conversation, complete the rescue: nothing and no one in this Irish Catholic Boston world — not the drunk grandmother, not the stolen chalice, not the schizophrenic mother, not the drowned brother, not even the cat — is finally left in the abject state where the plot found them. The theological operation is not merely present in this novel; it is, arguably, the novel's entire reason for existing.

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supplement: Give Them Unquiet Dreams (James Mulhern, 2019) — Fine-Grain Pass

113. Chapter Four, grandfather's teaching on time — QUOTE: "Look at this block of wood." It appeared atop my shins. "The front represents the future; the middle is the present; and the back part," he tapped the end, "is the past." SOURCE: Medieval and Boethian "eternal present" theology (God sees all time as a single simultaneous whole, *Consolation of Philosophy* V); also underlies Einstein's block-universe physics quoted in the epigraph. GLOSS: The wood-block is a homely visual aid for a theological/physical concept usually reserved for philosophy — the grandfather

teaches high Boethian doctrine of divine timelessness using a toy, exemplifying the novel's habit of smuggling doctrine into domestic objects. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

114. Chapter Six, Aiden reading scripture — QUOTE: "I was reading the Bible in bed, trying to figure out why God had been so exacting in his directions to Noah about building the ark. The ship had to be made out of cypress wood, 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high." SOURCE: Genesis 6:14–15 (the measurements of the ark, in cubits, converted here to feet). GLOSS: Aiden's literalist puzzling over the ark's precise engineering — comic in a boy who has just been coached in "venial" theft — quietly parallels the novel's larger theme of exacting, almost bureaucratic divine order underlying apparent chaos (Noah's flood as a "reset," paralleling the family's own repeated near-drownings). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

115. Chapter Six, Nana on birds and providence — QUOTE: "God is an architect. Of you, me, the world, even those birds." SOURCE: The "argument from design" tradition in natural theology (Psalm 19:1, "the heavens declare the glory of God"; Romans 1:20) and the classical image of God as *artifex mundi*, "the architect of the world." GLOSS: Nana's offhand answer to Aiden's Genesis question collapses cosmology into carpentry, echoing her earlier claim (elsewhere) that nature itself is sacramental; it prepares the recurring bird-as-soul imagery (sparrows, doves, pelicans, seagulls) that structures the book. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

116. Chapter Five, Boston Latin School banner — QUOTE: "A large purple-and-white banner depicted a wolf with two suckling cubs, the words 'SCHOLA LATINA BOSTONIENSIS' underneath." SOURCE: The Capitoline Wolf (Lupa Capitolina) nursing Romulus and Remus, the founding icon of Rome, adopted by Boston Latin as an emblem of classical pedagogy. GLOSS: A pagan nursing-and-founding image sits directly beside the school's Puritan/classical educational mission; set against the novel's Catholic pelican (which also nurses young with its own body), the wolf offers a secular-classical double of the same self-sacrificing-mother icon that structures the book's religious material. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

117. Chapter Five, poster quotations above Mr. Rossi's head — QUOTE: "The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living"—Cicero and "Everything that exists is in a manner the seed of that which will be"—Marcus Aurelius. SOURCE: Cicero (commonplace on memory) and Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*. GLOSS: Though

already flagged for its classical source, note the additional local function: these classroom maxims appear precisely as Aiden first meets a ghost (the blond "shimmerer") on the school bus, so the wall itself pre-announces the novel's central metaphysic — that the dead persist through memory and cyclical becoming — before any explicit ghost is confirmed. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

118. Chapter Five, Arnold Arboretum entrance — QUOTE: "The brick Hunnewell Visitor stood like an angel guarding a sacred garden." SOURCE: Genesis 3:24, the cherubim "placed at the east of the garden of Eden" to guard the way to the tree of life. GLOSS: A municipal visitor center is figured as a cherub barring/guarding Eden, casting the Arboretum's ancient beech tree (later called "holy" and a site where "prayers spoken… go directly to heaven") as a recovered paradise rather than merely a park. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

119. Chapter Seven, Rita's paperback — QUOTE: "A girl in a red dress stood in front of a grave. The ground was on fire." SOURCE: Cover art of Frank De Felitta's *Audrey Rose* (already noted as reincarnation fiction); the specific image of fire issuing from a grave echoes the iconography of souls in Purgatory (traditionally painted rising from flame). GLOSS: This visual detail, distinct from the plot summary already catalogued, reads as an inadvertent Purgatory icon on a pulp paperback — a burning grave — anticipating the novel's later, explicit doctrine that "we must always pray for the departed." CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

120. Chapter One, grandmother's toilette — QUOTE: "She put on bright red lipstick and fingered her gray hair… She turned and smoothed her green cotton dress, glancing at herself from behind. 'Not bad for an old broad.'" SOURCE: The mirror-vanity topos of vanitas still-life and memento mori painting, in which a woman before a looking glass (often with jewels, pearls, and cosmetics) is a stock emblem of worldly transience — closely related to the Mary Magdalene-at-her-mirror iconographic tradition of penitence. GLOSS: Nana's cheerful self-appraisal before robbing her own friend's jewelry box a page later quietly stages a vanitas tableau (mirror, pearls, painted face) at the very moment she is preparing an act that will require confession-language ('venial sin') by the next chapter — vanity and guilt introduced in the same domestic gesture. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

121. Chapter Seven, Rita's home altar-like plaque — QUOTE: "Hanging on the fence was a metal plaque with a quote my grandfather recited during one of his visits: 'Goodness is the only investment that never fails.'" SOURCE: Devotional-plaque culture (cf. St. Francis birdbath statues, "Bless This House" signs) common to Irish-American Catholic gardens; functions as folk-liturgical yard shrine. GLOSS: The proverb, already catalogued as a recurring maxim, here appears materially inscribed on garden metal exactly like a saint's plaque or shrine marker, confirming that Rita's yard functions as an informal devotional garden parallel to the "holy" beech tree at the Arboretum. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

122. Chapter Seven, Rita's bird omen — QUOTE: "She dropped the tray. Bits of blue and white china smashed on the bricks. A linnet swooped down and sat on the birdbath… 'That was your grandfather's favorite bird.'" SOURCE: Irish folk ornithology and the linnet's association in Yeats's own poetry ("The Song of Wandering Aengus," "linnet-white hair") with pastoral peace and the beloved dead. GLOSS: A broken vessel (echoing the stolen/returned chalice) accompanies a bird-visitation exactly like the dove and pelican elsewhere, reinforcing the novel's use of small birds as psychopomp-messengers of specific, named dead individuals rather than generic spirits. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

123. Chapter Six, the ghost's identity explained — QUOTE: "We call her a shimmerer. A good soul who has passed. Before she completes her journey, she has something she wants to accomplish." SOURCE: Catholic doctrine of the "particular judgment" and the soul's post-mortem journey (cf. the medieval *ars moriendi* tradition of unfinished business delaying a soul's rest) as well as the folkloric "unquiet dead" motif that gives the novel its title. GLOSS: "Shimmerer" is Mulhern's invented terminology for a theologically specific category — a soul in transit, not yet arrived, delayed by attachment — effectively a vernacular Purgatory located on earth rather than in the afterlife, distinct from the "evil spirit" pooka category. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

124. Chapter Eleven, chalice recovery cover story — QUOTE: "A homeless man on the Boston Common was drinking beer from it. I recognized it as the chalice that was stolen… He was all dirty and sad-looking. He smelled real bad too. I think he needed some healing." SOURCE: Matthew 25:35–40 ("I was a stranger and you welcomed me… as you did it to one of the least of these"); also inverts the "cup" imagery of the

Last Supper by having Christ's chalice profaned by a beggar's drink before its liturgical return. GLOSS: The invented alibi accidentally rehearses the Gospel's identification of Christ with the destitute ("the least of these"), so that the fictional homeless man functions, however jokingly, as a Christ-figure who "needed healing" from the very vessel the family stole. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

125. Chapter Ten, the photograph album scene — QUOTE: "Pasted to a faded black page was a paper written in longhand… a poem by William Butler Yeats—'The Lake Isle of Innisfree.' … In the final picture, my grandmother was halfway up a pine tree, her shawl caught on a branch. Her brother, looking alarmed, reached for her." SOURCE: The iconography of the rescued/endangered child in a tree recalls the folk motif of the changeling or fairy-abducted child (paralleling the Yeats epigraph's fairies who steal a human child), while the sibling's outstretched hand rescuing her rehearses the Genesis 22 Isaac/binding pattern of a family member intervening just before disaster. GLOSS: The tree-rescue photograph is the historical template for the entire novel's rescue plot (Aiden and Martin rescuing Laura, Martin's promise to "always have your back"), showing that sibling rescue is not a value the boys invent but one they inherit, pictured, from their grandmother's own near-catastrophe as a girl. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

126. Chapter Fourteen, coroner and cemetery detail — QUOTE: "'Dr. Rieux needs to pronounce her dead.'" SOURCE: Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947) — Dr. Bernard Rieux, the narrator-physician who tends the dying of Oran and refuses easy theological consolation. GLOSS: Naming the pronouncing physician after Camus's emblematic doctor of absurdist, non-providential suffering plants a quiet counter-voice inside a death scene otherwise wrapped in Catholic ritual and consolation clichés ("She's in a better place"), hinting at the novel's undercurrent of doubt about whether suffering is ever really redeemed. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

127. Chapter Fourteen, funeral flowers — QUOTE: "The casket… was covered with an assortment of pastel flowers—orange, whites, green, and purple… long-stem roses, lilies, mums, Bells of Ireland, heather." SOURCE: Traditional Catholic funeral floral symbolism (lilies for the restored innocence of the soul; white flowers generally for purity) combined with specifically Irish funerary flora (Bells of Ireland, heather) tying the burial explicitly to County-of-origin identity. GLOSS: The specific naming of "Bells of Ireland" among generic funeral lilies quietly nationalizes Nana's burial,

marking her death as a return, in flowers if not in body, to the Ireland she left as a girl. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

128. Chapter Thirteen, unlucky threes — QUOTE: "They say that bad things come in threes. I suppose it's part of the Irish nature, the morbid sensibility of our culture. 'Three' is a number that connotes a beginning, a middle, and an end." SOURCE: Folk numerology intersecting with the Trinitarian symbolism of three in Catholic doctrine (Father, Son, Spirit; three days in the tomb; three-fold Ave/Pater repetitions). GLOSS: Aiden explicitly links folk superstition about triads of misfortune to a structural (beginning-middle-end) reading of "three," silently borrowing the same number that anchors Trinitarian theology elsewhere in the book, showing superstition and dogma sharing one numerical grammar. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

129. Chapter Thirteen, Margie and Mr. Sloan's cat/death sequence — QUOTE: "My grandmother said the cause was Broken Heart Syndrome, which I learned was a real medical diagnosis." SOURCE: Takotsubo cardiomyopathy ("broken heart syndrome"), a real stress-induced cardiac condition; folklorically descends from the belief that grief itself can kill (cf. Old Testament figures like Jacob's "the child is not, and I, whither shall I go?"). GLOSS: A cat's death from literal heartbreak a week after its owner's death completes a comic-pathetic hagiography of Margie and Arthur as a devoted pair, extending the novel's pattern (seen with Martin/seal, Rita/linnet) of animals as loyal, quasi-sacramental companions to the dying and dead. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

130. Chapter Sixteen, the cat on the plane — QUOTE: "'Minnaloushe is my emotional support cat. I'm terrified of flying.'" SOURCE: W.B. Yeats, "The Cat and the Moon" — the black cat Minnaloushe who "cried to the moon" and whose "pupils of his eyes… from round to crescent… from crescent to round" mirror lunar/mystical change. GLOSS: Naming a black cat with golden eyes after Yeats's most explicitly occult feline (immediately followed by the cat's unprovoked, pooka-like attack on Aiden) folds a second, buried Yeats allusion into the pooka-shapeshifter material already tracked, reinforcing that animals throughout the book are never merely animals. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

131. Chapter Sixteen, in-flight prayer fragment — QUOTE: "She prayed: 'Jesus help us. You are the Alpha and the Omega… Holy Moly, what's the rest of the prayer?'"

SOURCE: Revelation 1:8, 22:13 ("I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, says the Lord"). GLOSS: A stranger's panicked, half-remembered prayer during turbulence — reaching for apocalyptic scripture and comically failing — anticipates the novel's own closing paraphrase of the same verse ("In every beginning is an ending… eternity"), showing the Alpha-and-Omega formula as a kind of collective emergency prayer surfacing even in strangers. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

132. Chapter Sixteen, Achill innkeeper's name — QUOTE: "'O'Malley. Grace. But you can call me Mrs. O'Malley… There must be thousands of Grace O'Malleys in County Mayo.'" SOURCE: Gráinne Ní Mháille (Grace O'Malley), the sixteenth-century "Pirate Queen of Connacht," a historical Mayo chieftain who met Elizabeth I as an equal. GLOSS: Giving the novel's most imperious, unsentimental Irish woman the name of Ireland's legendary pirate queen (who ruled her own territory and answered to no man) extends the book's pattern of ordinary women bearing the names of formidable historical/mythic forebears (cf. Nana's "Elaine," the Rossetti Damsel); Mrs. O'Malley's blunt seafaring pragmatism about death ("All paths lead to the grave") echoes her namesake's hard-bitten survival ethic. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

133. Chapter Sixteen, drowned father of the barman — QUOTE: "His father was stung by a jellyfish and drowned in Keem Bay when he was just a tot." SOURCE: Doubling of the novel's central drowning (Martin at Nantasket); also resonant with the Irish folk-Catholic association of the sea as both provider and devourer (patron intercession for fishermen, e.g., St. Brendan). GLOSS: A minor, seemingly throwaway local anecdote quietly rhymes the very beach where the family will scatter Martin's ashes with another child's drowning death, making Keem Bay a site already marked by loss before the Glencars arrive — the ocean as recurring, indifferent baptismal-and-lethal threshold. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

134. Chapter Sixteen, sweater purchase — QUOTE: "I purchased black wool pants, a charcoal gray Irish sweater with a diamond stitch, and a scally cap. The sales girl informed me that the particular stitch represented good luck." SOURCE: Aran sweater tradition, in which specific stitches (diamond, cable, honeycomb, basket) are popularly said to carry symbolic meanings — the diamond for wealth, luck, or success, the honeycomb for the industrious bee, ultimately a modern folklore projected onto a genuinely older knitting craft associated with fishing communities.

GLOSS: Aiden dresses in a garment whose stitch pattern is popularly read as apotropaic — a wearable charm — continuing the novel's fabric/garment motif (Nana's pearls, Martin's scally cap and leather jacket, Laura's cast) in which clothing carries devotional or protective meaning beyond utility. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

135. Chapter Seventeen, the feral goat itself — QUOTE: "A large goat charged my mother… The rectangular black pupils of his golden eyes were fixed on us." SOURCE: The goat's "golden eyes" verbally echo the earlier pooka-horse that killed Sinead ("a dark horse with golden eyes") and the black cat Minnaloushe on the plane (also gold-eyed); in folk-Catholic bestiary tradition the goat is a standing emblem of the demonic (the Devil traditionally depicted with goat legs and horns), distinct from the Levitical scapegoat. GLOSS: The recurring "golden eyes" detail across horse, cat, and goat marks all three as the same shapeshifting pooka in different guises, confirming the grandfather's earlier teaching that a pooka "can change her form into a variety of animals… a cat, a goat, a horse" — the golden eyes are the pooka's one constant, unshifting tell. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

136. Chapter Seventeen, numerology of the ash-scattering date — QUOTE: "August 18th. Add the digits together. Eight plus one plus eight. You get seventeen. And then you add the one and seven to get eight… In numerology, eight is the number for infinity. Or Paradise regained." SOURCE: Christian numerology's traditional association of the number eight with resurrection and new creation (the "eighth day" as the day of Christ's Resurrection/the new creation beyond the seven days of Genesis; octagonal baptismal fonts built on this symbolism). GLOSS: Aiden's numerological reduction to eight — explicitly glossed in the text as "Paradise regained" — supplies a private liturgical calendar for the ash-scattering, casting an ordinary tourist errand as a chosen feast day consecrated by number, paralleling the church's own practice of assigning saints' days by calendrical calculation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

137. Chapter Thirteen, Nana's bracelet — QUOTE: "She waved her hand. Her gold bracelet with gemstones for all of our births jangled." SOURCE: The tradition of birthstones assigning a gem to each month, itself descended from the twelve jeweled foundation stones of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:19–20 and the twelve gems of the High Priest's breastplate in Exodus 28:17–20, each stone standing for a tribe of Israel. GLOSS: Nana's charm bracelet, worn while she reassures the boys about

drinking, quietly converts an ordinary piece of costume jewelry into a wearable, maternal echo of the breastplate-of-judgment tradition — a mother literally carrying each child's name/stone against her body, exactly as Aaron bore the twelve tribes over his heart. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

138. Chapter Fifteen, "five percent" aside — QUOTE: "Scientists tell us we are conscious of only five percent of our thinking." SOURCE: Popularized (if scientifically loose) psychoanalytic commonplace ultimately descending from Freud's model of the unconscious as the submerged bulk of an iceberg; theologically echoes 1 Corinthians 13:12's "now we see through a glass, darkly." GLOSS: Aiden's pop-science aside secularizes the "glass darkly" epistemology already catalogued elsewhere in the novel, showing how the book reaches for whatever vocabulary — scriptural, psychoanalytic, statistical — is at hand to express the same core conviction that human self-knowledge is radically partial. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

139. Chapter One, miracle preacher (online variant) — QUOTE: ONLINE: "I don't know how I feel about all those miracles Father Tom was going on about." NOVEL: "I don't know how I feel about all those miracles Father Flynn was going on about." SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2021/02/01/james-mulhern-4/ GLOSS: The online version names the healer Father Tom, whereas the novel names Father Flynn, the priest who later conducts Nana's funeral. This is a substantive ecclesial-continuity revision: the novel joins the opening fraudulent healing scene to its later official burial rite through one clerical name, while the online version keeps them separate. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

140. Chapter One, Rita's cheque (online variant) — QUOTE: ONLINE: "I know that. I'm not dumb. God will take care of everything." NOVEL: "I know that. I'm not a stook." SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2021/02/01/james-mulhern-4/ GLOSS: The online passage gives Nana an explicit providential assurance immediately after she has invented Aiden's leukemia; the novel removes it and substitutes an Irish insult. The revision makes the final text less theologically declarative at the very point where fraud, healing, and prayer are being entangled. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

141. Chapter One, before entering Mission church (online variant) — QUOTE: ONLINE: "I need to get that chalice, Aiden. I read an article in The Boston Globe that said people believe it has incredible curing powers. It's a replica of a chalice from the

Middle Ages, when lots of religious maniacs lived. Experts say it's priceless. If I have your mother drink from it, she might get better and come home." NOVEL: "We parked and entered Mission church." SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2021/02/01/james-mulhern-4/ GLOSS: The web text supplies an overt relic-cure rationale for the theft and calls medieval believers "religious maniacs"; the novel cuts the explanation entirely. The published transition makes the theft more abrupt and morally unstable, delaying rather than explaining Nana's mixture of sacrilege, desperation, and faith. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

142. Chapter One, chalice as a temporary holy object (online variant) — QUOTE: ONLINE: "Aiden, I'm going to return it. We're just borrowing the chalice to help your mother. God will understand." NOVEL: "My grandmother yelled 'Oh my God' and stepped onto the altar, kneeling in front of a giant crucified Jesus." SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2021/02/01/james-mulhern-4/ GLOSS: The online draft pre-authorizes the theft with a folk theology of borrowing and divine understanding; the novel lets the action occur first, under cover of Aiden's performance. By deleting the justification, the novel asks the reader to experience the act as theatrical desecration before later scenes make it part of a family cure-and-forgiveness economy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

143. Chapter One, Mission church's visual frame (online variant) — QUOTE: ONLINE: "Jesus was depicted in the fourteen Stations of the Cross." NOVEL: "Jesus was depicted in the Stations of the Cross." SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2021/02/01/james-mulhern-4/ GLOSS: The online wording explicitly numbers the traditional fourteen Stations; the novel trims the catechetical precision. This is a minor verbal change but a real reduction of liturgical specification immediately before the staged cure and chalice theft. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

144. Chapter Twelve, the father's unbelief (online variant) — QUOTE: ONLINE: "She had a vision of that old man again." NOVEL: "My mother, who was still asleep, had been acting erratic. She was having visions of the ghost man again." SOURCE: https://thegalwayreview.com/2020/04/07/james-mulhern-the-wrong-way/ GLOSS: The online excerpt relays a single reported vision, while the novel embeds it in a broader report of Laura's "erratic" conduct and repeatedly calls the figure a ghost. The

revision raises the clinical pressure on the reader while also making the supernatural claim more explicit. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

145. Chapter Twelve, the diagnostic verdict (online variant) — QUOTE: ONLINE: "We shouldn't have released her from McCall's. Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness. The nurses and psychiatrists said she wasn't ready." NOVEL: "I regret my part in having her released from McCall's. Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness. The nurses and psychiatrists said she wasn't ready. Obviously, they were right." SOURCE: https://thegalwayreview.com/2020/04/07/james-mulhern-the-wrong-way/ GLOSS: The online father makes a hard retrospective judgment, but the novel adds personal culpability and the emphatic verdict "Obviously, they were right." That strengthening gives the rational reading its sharpest family advocate just before the plot increasingly asks the reader to credit Aiden's and Laura's perceptions. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

146. Chapter One, the reader is first trained to distrust a miracle — QUOTE: "The priest said some mumbo-jumbo prayer and pushed my chest. I knew I was supposed to fall back but was afraid the old geezers wouldn't catch me." SOURCE: Staged charismatic healing; contrastive narrative sequence, Chapter One to Chapter Two GLOSS: Before the novel presents an apparition, it teaches the reader how a religious wonder can be manufactured, witnessed, and misread. That delay matters: the first ghost scene arrives after the reader has acquired a rational suspicion of ritual spectacle, so the book's later phenomena cannot simply inherit the authority of the Church scene. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

147. Chapter Two, earliest supernatural episode — QUOTE: "Grandpa?" I called a few more times, but the bubbles of light faded and he was gone. I went to the bathroom and positioned my face under the faucet to drink some water. In the mirror, my face appeared sunburnt. The color would fade by the morning as it always did. SOURCE: Narrative sequence; first nocturnal visit in Chapter Two GLOSS: The first apparition leaves a repeatable bodily aftermath—flushing that Aiden checks in a mirror—rather than only dialogue with a dead relative. Yet the evidence remains private and transient, so the novel confirms the event to Aiden before it confirms anything to another witness or to the reader's rational standard. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

148. Chapter Four, the first public test of sight — QUOTE: "I don't see her." He pulled the bus over at the next stop and opened the door. SOURCE: Narrative sequence; Brian's response to the floral-dress woman GLOSS: Aiden's father supplies the first immediate rational counter-reading: there is no visible woman, and fever can make people hallucinate. Because the father is present, concerned, and not merely cruel, the denial creates dread without being easily dismissed as hostile unbelief. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

149. Chapter Six, bodily evidence and its ordinary explanation — QUOTE: "Why do you scratch yourself so? Are you nervous?" SOURCE: Narrative sequence; Moira's attack and Nana's observation GLOSS: Moira scratches Aiden until he bleeds, but Nana sees only a nervous child who injures himself. The scene sustains two accounts at once—physical persecution by a pooka and self-harm under stress—and gives neither account an external adjudicator. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

150. Chapter Twelve, the apparent destruction of Moira — QUOTE: "The snow, you mean?" He stared into my eyes. "You're out of it 'cause you hit your head." SOURCE: Narrative sequence; Martin's response after the steel-cross encounter GLOSS: Aiden sees ashes after smashing Moira against a cross; Martin sees snow and attributes Aiden's conduct to alcohol and a head injury. This is the latest childhood scene in which a violent supernatural victory is immediately supplied with a fully mundane alternative. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

151. Chapter Sixteen, the disputed woman behind the curtain — QUOTE: "Aiden, I never had a roommate." SOURCE: Narrative sequence; Laura's correction on the Aer Lingus flight GLOSS: Years after the hospital escape, Laura denies that the woman who sang "Raindrops" behind her curtain ever shared the room, even though Aiden had heard and answered her. The delayed contradiction turns an apparently witnessed event into a retrospective puzzle and makes the pooka hypothesis possible without making it compulsory. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

152. Chapter Seventeen, shared sight does not eliminate doubt — QUOTE: "Maybe we imagined it? The mind plays tricks, especially when you're emotional." SOURCE: Narrative sequence; Aiden after he and Laura see Martin at Keem Bay GLOSS: The seal-to-Martin appearance is seen by both bereaved witnesses, the novel's strongest interpersonal confirmation. Aiden nevertheless offers grief and emotion as an

explanation, while Laura refuses it; the book thereby stages shared vision as stronger evidence, not conclusive proof. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

153. Chapter Eighteen, the latest rational explanation — QUOTE: "Had I dreamt that Martin visited me? Had I hallucinated because I was sick? It didn't matter." SOURCE: Narrative sequence; fever, injury, and Martin's bedside appearance GLOSS: This is the final explicit rational account available to a skeptical reader: fever, physical pain, and grief could have produced the visitation. The narrator declines to decide rather than refuting the explanation, so ambiguity survives at the level of experienced evidence even as the final coda speaks more affirmatively. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

154. Chapter Six, Nana's dream of Sinead — QUOTE: "Hand me my drink. I was dreaming." / "My Ma." SOURCE: Dream as retrospective grief-memory; Chapter Six GLOSS: Nana's dream returns her to her dead mother rather than warning her of a future event, so it is retrospective and psychologically legible. Its placement immediately after Moira's attack nevertheless joins private bereavement to the inherited haunting without claiming that all dreams are prophecy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

155. Chapter Ten, the grave-and-sea dream — QUOTE: "I dove into the hole and found myself swimming in the ocean, the beach far in the distance. Martin swam towards me; my mother watched us from the shore." SOURCE: Oneiric foreshadowing; Chapter Ten, with Yeats's "The Stolen Child" refrain in the same dream GLOSS: This dream is premonitory in retrospect: it joins grave, sea, Martin, and Laura before Martin's drowning and the later ash-scattering at the water. It also remains symbolically overdetermined rather than a literal forecast, since its burial and swimming images are not reproduced in one single later event. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

156. Chapter Thirteen, the unremembered nightmare — QUOTE: "My mouth was dry and I could feel my heart beating from a nightmare I couldn't remember." SOURCE: Dream as opaque aftereffect; Chapter Thirteen GLOSS: Unlike the sea visions, this dream has no recoverable imagery and no later fulfillment that the text identifies. The contrast is important: dreams are structurally inconsistent—

sometimes retrospectively prophetic, sometimes grief-memory, sometimes merely an untranslatable bodily disturbance. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

157. Chapter Four, prophecy and the reader's future — QUOTE: "You're going to be a wonderful student. You will even write this conversation in a book." SOURCE: Metanarrative prophecy; Chapter Two GLOSS: Sean's prediction tells the reader that the child voice is already a later written account, converting the first ghost dialogue into a scene with a known future witness. It also makes time itself an instrument of dread: the reader knows the speaker survives to narrate, but not which losses must happen before he can write. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

158. Chapter Ten, the past becomes visible late — QUOTE: "Could my mother truly have seen Nana in the tree? Was she trying to save her child-mother in Ireland?" SOURCE: Narrative sequence; the photograph album and second-sight hypothesis GLOSS: Only after the accident, psychiatric recommitment, and discovery of the photograph does Aiden give Laura's earlier tree vision a historical referent. The novel thus withholds an explanatory key until after it has allowed both the medical and supernatural accounts to accrue, making recognition a delayed effect rather than an immediate solution. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

159. Chapter Eighteen, final page — QUOTE: "In this time, at the same time, and for all time." SOURCE: Final-page eschatological coda; contrast with the unresolved pooka thread GLOSS: The last page treats the dead as simultaneous interlocutors across all time and therefore closes the ghost plot affirmatively, not by medical explanation. It does not return to Moira or explain the pooka; that hostile folk presence remains outside the consoling family vision, so the novel closes the door on a wholly non-supernatural cosmology while leaving the pooka's mechanism unresolved. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

160. Chapter One, Aiden's name — QUOTE: "You must toughen up, Aiden. Weak people get nowhere in this world." SOURCE: Aiden, from Irish Aodhán, diminutive of Aodh ("fire"); St. Aidan of Lindisfarne, the seventh-century Irish missionary who carried Celtic Christianity into Northumbria. GLOSS: The second-sighted protagonist bears an Irish name meaning "little fire" — apt for the boy whose face flushes "hot and red" and whose room fills with "bubbles of light" at every visitation. St. Aidan was a missionary of the unseen world, matching Aiden's role as the family's reluctant

visionary who must keep his gift secret. The name is a hit, not a miss. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

161. Chapter Two, Martin's name — QUOTE: "Be more like your brother Martin. Don't ponder things so much." SOURCE: Martin, from Latin Martinus, "of Mars" (warlike); St. Martin of Tours (d. 397), the Roman soldier who cut his cloak in half for a beggar and became patron of soldiers and of France. GLOSS: The novel's unsighted moral center bears a soldier-saint's name. St. Martin is remembered for the cloak he shared with a beggar — an act of protective charity matching Martin Glencar's defining trait of defending his brother ("I will always have your back") and comforting the psychiatric patients with the pelican story. The martial root "of Mars" also fits the boy who literally fights to protect Aiden. A hit. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

162. Chapter One, Catherine's name — QUOTE: "I don't know Catherine," She looked into the sink. SOURCE: Catherine, from Greek Aikaterine; St. Catherine of Alexandria (patron of philosophers and scholars) and St. Catherine of Siena (Doctor of the Church, mystic). GLOSS: The devout but unsighted matriarch bears one of the Church's great saints' names, yet she is the family's skeptic about second sight and its most morally compromised figure — thief, liar, drinker. The novel gives its most conventionally pious character a major saint's name while denying her the "gift," inverting the expected pattern: sacred name, secular and flawed bearer. A hit that comments by inversion. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

163. Chapter One, Laura/Lorraine — QUOTE: "I named my daughter Lorraine out of respect for the dead." SOURCE: Lorraine, a French place-name used as a given name; Laura, from Latin laurus "laurel" (victory, the poet's crown; Petrarch's beloved Laura). GLOSS: The sighted mother's formal name is Lorraine, given by Nana "out of respect for the dead" — naming as an act of piety toward Nana's own mother. But Nana shortens it to "Laura" ("I prefer to call my daughter 'Laura'"), refusing the full name because the original bearer "was a strange woman." This is the novel's clearest instance of a name shortened and refused by its owner, and it links Laura's laurel (the visionary's crown) to the family's ambivalence about its dead. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

164. Chapters One and Fourteen, the great-grandmother's two names — QUOTE: "That was my mother's name" (Ch. 1) / "Sinead was her name" (Ch. 14) SOURCE:

Lorraine (Chapter One) versus Sinead (Chapter Fourteen), the Irish form of Jane/Janet, from Hebrew "God is gracious." GLOSS: The great-grandmother — the maternal-line origin of the "gift" — is named "Lorraine" in Chapter One and "Sinead" in Chapter Fourteen. This is either an authorial inconsistency or a deliberate layering of an anglicized name over an Irish one, but either way it is the novel's most unstable name, fitting a figure who exists only as a half-told, damaged family story (Sean's compressed account versus Rita's fuller one). Recorded plainly as an inconsistency. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

165. Chapters Six and Fourteen, Sean and Sinead share a root — QUOTE: "God, I wish you were still here, Sean." / "Sinead was her name." SOURCE: Sean is the Irish form of John (Hebrew Yochanan, "God is gracious"); Sinead is the Irish form of Jane/Janet, itself the feminine of John — both meaning "God is gracious." GLOSS: The ghost-grandfather (Sean) and the great-grandmother who first bore the gift (Sinead) carry the same Hebrew root, "God is gracious." The two ancestors who anchor the family's supernatural inheritance are thus etymologically one name in male and female form — a quiet onomastic pun binding the paternal explainer of the gift to its maternal origin. A hit. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

166. Chapter Two, Brian's name — QUOTE: "I'm going to talk to Brian about this." SOURCE: Brian, from Old Irish "high" or "noble"; Brian Boru, the tenth–eleventh-century High King of Ireland. GLOSS: The skeptical, emotionally absent father bears the name of Ireland's greatest king, yet he is the family member most hostile to the supernatural ("There are no ghosts, Aiden") and most willing to abandon his children for Arizona. A heroic Irish name attached to the novel's least heroic figure — a pointed irony, or a miss. The name carries Irish weight its bearer never earns. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

167. Chapter One, Rita's name — QUOTE: "We found Rita passed out on the couch." SOURCE: Rita, from Margherita (Margaret, "pearl"); St. Rita of Cascia (1381–1457), patron saint of impossible causes, abused wives, and reconciliation. GLOSS: The novel's most rationalist adult bears the name of the patron saint of impossible causes — and she is precisely the one who helps Aiden attempt the "impossible" rescue of his mother and who performs the lay absolution of Nana's guilt. St. Rita, a peacemaker who reconciled a feuding family, matches Rita's role as the novel's reconciler and confessor. A hit. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

168. Chapter One, Margie's name — QUOTE: "Margie was a smelly fat lady with a big white cat that hissed at me." SOURCE: Margaret, from Greek margarites, "pearl." GLOSS: The lonely, mocked, food-stealing shut-in bears a name meaning "pearl" — a name of preciousness attached to the novel's most abject figure, exactly the "theological rescue operation" (abjection into glory) the book performs elsewhere. Her name quietly pre-figures the dignity the narrative finally grants her, when her dying words ("Take care of Arthur") are treated with covenant gravity. A hit. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

169. Chapters Two, Four, and Eleven, Clara/Clarisse — QUOTE: "Besides 'Clara' is your baptismal name." SOURCE: Clara, from Latin clara, "clear, bright"; St. Clare of Assisi (1194–1253), follower of Francis and founder of the Poor Clares. GLOSS: Aunt Clara refuses her baptismal name — which means "clear/bright" and belongs to a great Franciscan saint — for the affected French "Clarisse" ("No one believes for even an instant that you're French"). Nana reads this as a sin against humility ("Humility is a virtue, and you don't seem to possess it"). This is the novel's most explicit scene of naming as theology: to refuse the baptismal name is, for Nana, to refuse the saint and the virtue the name encodes. A hit. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

170. Chapter Two, Greta and Cary — QUOTE: "After famous actors. Greta Garbo and Cary Grant." SOURCE: Greta Garbo and Cary Grant, Hollywood film stars. GLOSS: The cousins are named after movie stars, not saints — a secular naming that Nana mocks ("Names like that… Do you two know where she came up with those names?"). This is a deliberate miss: Aunt Clara, who has left the parish for a storefront church and renamed herself "Clarisse," gives her children the names of glamorous actors, substituting Hollywood for the communion of saints. The secular names mark her as the family's apostate from Catholic naming practice. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

171. Chapter Five, Mr. Hightower — QUOTE: "The name. He's so tall." SOURCE: Aptronym — a surname that describes its bearer (Hightower = tall). GLOSS: Hope Gallagher explicitly flags the gym teacher's name as an aptronym ("It suits him… The name. He's so tall."). This is the novel's only self-conscious acknowledgment of its own naming practice, and it licenses reading the other names (Woodlake, Glencar, Gallagher) as meaning-bearing rather than arbitrary. A hit, and a key to the whole onomastic method. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

172. Chapters Eight and Thirteen, Mr. Woodlake — QUOTE: "Aiden, Mr. Woodlake is dead." SOURCE: Aptronym — "Wood" + "Lake," a compound of nature and water. GLOSS: The dead hall monitor and swim coach bears a name that is literally "wood" and "lake" — the two elements (trees, water) that structure the novel's sacred landscape (the holy beech tree, the drowning sea). That a man whose name is water should appear as a ghost to warn about Martin's swimming ("he needs to slow down when he swam") is a quiet piece of onomastic foreshadowing. A probable hit. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

173. Chapter Twelve, Arthur the cat — QUOTE: "Little King Arthur. How cute!" SOURCE: King Arthur, the legendary British king at the center of the Grail legend. GLOSS: Margie's cat is named Arthur, and Laura crowns him "Little King Arthur" with a paper crown bearing a cross. The name ties the domestic cat to the novel's Arthurian/Grail substructure (Galahad, Elaine, Morgan le Fay, the stolen chalice) — the Grail quest's king reduced to a fat, hissing house cat, exactly the novel's method of finding the sacred in the abject. A hit. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

174. Chapter Six, Moira's name — QUOTE: "Moira le Fay." SOURCE: Moira is the Irish (anglicized Máire) form of Mary; "le Fay" is Morgan le Fay of Arthurian legend. GLOSS: The malevolent pooka names herself "Moira le Fay" — fusing the Irish form of the Virgin Mary's name with Arthurian legend's dark enchantress. Giving the demonic hag the name of the Blessed Mother (in its Irish form) is a deliberate profanation, an anti-Marian figure who torments the family across generations. The self-naming is itself an act of power: she chooses her own sacred-and-cursed name. A hit. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

175. Chapter Five, Hope Gallagher — QUOTE: "Gallagher, Hope," he shouted. SOURCE: Hope, the theological virtue (1 Corinthians 13:13); Gallagher, from Irish Ó Gallchobhair, "descendant of the foreign helper." GLOSS: The dead classmate's full name layers a theological virtue (Hope) over an Irish surname meaning "foreign helper" — the girl who befriends the outcast Aiden and whose ghost-mother watches over her is, etymologically, a "hopeful foreign helper." The surname's "helper" sense quietly matches the novel's theme of strangers (the kayaker, the boy with the cart, the TSA worker) who offer unsought aid. The "Hope" half is already recorded; the Gallagher half is new. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

176. Chapters Four and Five, Patrick and the school authority names — QUOTE: "Patrick, the kid Martin punched, was taken to the school nurse." / "That's the headmaster, Mr. Castellanos. He's a real asshole." / "Mr. Rossi. He's a bit high-strung." SOURCE: Patrick, from Latin Patricius "nobleman," St. Patrick, patron of Ireland; Rossi (Italian, "red"); Castellanos (Spanish, "of the castle"). GLOSS: The bully Martin punches bears the name of Ireland's patron saint — a minor irony (the saint's name on the novel's most minor antagonist), likely a miss. The school's two authority figures bear Italian and Spanish surnames in a novel otherwise saturated with Irish names, marking the institutional, non-Irish world of Boston Latin School against the family's Irish-Catholic folk culture. Neither carries a saintly or biblical meaning; both are secular-ethnic markers of the "outside" world Aiden must navigate. A miss (no sacred meaning), but a telling ethnic one. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

177. Chapter Thirteen, Stephen (Mr. Sloan) and the minor names — QUOTE: "Stephen, why would you scare an old lady?" / "Her name is Nell." / "My name is Nancy. You can call me Nurse Nancy." / "she and her friend Lucy would be traveling to the Grand Canyon" SOURCE: Stephen, from Greek Stephanos "crown," St. Stephen the first martyr (Acts 7); Nell, diminutive of Eleanor/Helen ("light"); Nancy, diminutive of Anne/Hannah ("grace"); Lucy, from Latin lux ("light"). GLOSS: The convenience-store owner bears the name of the first martyr, and he dies a year later ("He died a year later after he fell on black ice and cracked his skull") — a faint, possibly unintended echo. Nell ("light"), Nancy ("grace"), and Lucy ("light") carry meanings that sit ironically against the ward's darkness, the nurse's ungraceful rigidity, and Laura's death at the Grand Canyon, but these are almost certainly incidental. Recorded as misses. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

178. Chapter Two, who sees: the maternal inheritance and its gap — QUOTE: "Like you, she has the gift, and it is horrible that she is being punished for it." / "Second sight has been in your family for years." / "Your grandmother's ma had the gift, and she, too, was demonized." SOURCE: Irish folk "second sight" / "the gift," inherited down the maternal line. GLOSS: The novel's supernatural faculty is explicitly genealogical and maternal: the great-grandmother (Sinead/Lorraine) had it, Laura has it, Aiden has it. But the middle generation — Catherine (Nana) — does not display it, and is in fact the family's skeptic. The gift thus skips the generation that most feared it: Catherine, who watched her own mother be "demonized" for the gift,

has suppressed or lost it, passing the stigma (if not the sight) down to Laura and Aiden. The inheritance is real but not clean. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

179. Chapters Eleven and Fifteen, sight and virtue are uncoupled — QUOTE: "He saw goodness in me that I never felt." / "I wanted to get a rise out of her." SOURCE: Narrative characterization; the moral center versus the visionary. GLOSS: The novel deliberately separates vision from goodness. Martin — who never sees a ghost and doubts Aiden's visions ("You don't believe in ghosts, do you?") — is the book's moral center, the one who "saw goodness in me that I never felt" and who "always has your back." Meanwhile the sighted Aiden is complicit in theft and cruelty (tormenting Aunt Clara, "I wanted to get a rise out of her"), and the sighted Laura is institutionalized as "crazy." Vision is a burden, not a moral credential; virtue belongs to the unsighted. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

180. Chapter Four, the dead as characters: Sean's limitations — QUOTE: "Even on this side, there are some things we don't know for certain." SOURCE: Characterization of the dead; apophatic theology (1 Corinthians 13:12). GLOSS: The dead are allowed to be full, limited characters, not omniscient saints. Sean teaches Aiden but admits ignorance ("Even on this side, there are some things we don't know for certain"), and cannot describe Jesus ("He's indescribable. Some things can't be explained"). This refusal of full heavenly knowledge makes the dead companions rather than oracles — they retain personality, uncertainty, and unfinished business, which is what lets them function as characters rather than mere omens. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

181. Chapter Fourteen, the dead as characters: Nana's funeral voice — QUOTE: "Muscular? What a bunch of drivel. Herself trying to steal the show. I wish the branch had hit her noggin." SOURCE: The dead as continuing, comedic, opinionated presences; the catalogue of returning dead. GLOSS: The novel's most fully realized comic ghost scene is Nana's own voice at her funeral, heckling Aunt Clara's eulogy from beyond the grave. The dead return as full characters with agency and temperament: Sean (benevolent — teaches, warns, consoles), Hope's mother (benevolent — watches over her daughter and receives her at death), Martin (benevolent — rescues and absolves), Mr. Woodlake (merely present — delivers a message about Martin's swimming), Nana (merely present — wry and petty), and Moira the pooka (malevolent — torments and prophesies). None is a purgatorial soul

awaiting release; each remains the flawed, funny person she or he was, only now watching over the living. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

182. Chapters One, Four, and Eleven, naming as theology — QUOTE: "I named my daughter Lorraine out of respect for the dead." / "Besides 'Clara' is your baptismal name." / "I'm Elaine, and this is my grandson Galahad." SOURCE: Naming as religious act; baptismal naming; the false names given to the priest while returning the stolen chalice. GLOSS: The novel treats naming as a genuinely religious act. Nana names her daughter "out of respect for the dead" (piety toward the deceased); she condemns Aunt Clara for refusing her "baptismal name" (a sin against humility and the saint it encodes); and she gives the priest false names ("Elaine… Galahad") in the very act of returning a stolen chalice — a mock-baptismal renaming inside a sacred space. Naming, refusing a name, and renaming all carry spiritual weight; the novel treats names as theologically significant, not incidental. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

183. Chapter One, opening — the borrowed adult frame precedes the child — QUOTE: "When I was a child, my grandmother gave me advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. 'Never forget where you came from.' So I remember my origins. I am borne back ceaselessly into the past." SOURCE: voice; F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, final sentence ("borne back ceaselessly into the past"). GLOSS: The novel's first sentence borrows its terminal cadence from the closing line of *The Great Gatsby*, so the retrospective adult voice is present before a single boy's word is spoken. The book therefore opens already in the elevated register and *drops* into the child's voice, rather than rising out of it. Diction ("origins," "borne," "ceaselessly"), the thesis about memory, and the buried allusion are Fitzgerald's: the grown narrator announces in line one that he is writing a backward-pulling elegy, and the novel keeps its word. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

184. Chapter One, the plain boy's register — QUOTE: "In front of the broken-down house was a yard of weeds. A rusted bicycle with no wheels lay on the ground. The pale girl with limp dirty hair looked at me suspiciously as I approached the fence." SOURCE: voice. GLOSS: The plain register is built from concrete Anglo-Saxon nouns (yard, weeds, bicycle, wheels, dirt, fence) in short end-stopped declaratives, one observation per sentence. There is no abstraction, no figure, no thesis: the boy reports and the reader supplies the poverty. This is the baseline the whole book

returns to between its climbs, and it is what makes every later rise audible. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

185. Chapter Two, the treehouse — the lyric register and a castaway allusion — QUOTE: "I loved sitting on the highest floor most, feeling like the monarch of all that I surveyed—the homes of the Burkes, the Moynihans, the McCarthys, and the O'Sullivans; Rutledge and Oriole Streets in the distance; all the oak, maple, and elm trees planted on middle-class quarter lots where kids played and dogs barked." SOURCE: voice; William Cowper, "Verses Supposed to Be Written by Alexander Selkirk" ("I am monarch of all I survey"), filtered through the Robinson Crusoe castaway inheritance. GLOSS: Three things change at once: diction turns Latinate and metaphoric ("monarch"), the sentence lengthens into a cumulative catalogue linked by semicolons, and an allusion appears — "monarch of all that I surveyed" drags in Selkirk/Crusoe, quietly naming the treehouse an island and the lonely boy its sovereign. In this novel the lyric register is keyed to elevation of sight (the climb, the height), which is why it clusters at moments of lifted vision and nature rather than at moments of grief. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

186. Chapter Nine, the thesis register, and the three registers — QUOTE: "I am now fifty-four, and I still don't understand. I know only this: a search for understanding is the fulcrum of faith." SOURCE: voice. GLOSS: The adult register does what the boy's never does: it states a thesis in abstraction ("understanding," "fulcrum of faith"), and it collapses the temporal distance in a single clause ("I am now fifty-four"). This voice erupts at retrospection and grief — after the grandfather's visits, after each death — and it is the voice still speaking at the end. Counted plainly, the narrator moves through three registers: the plain boy, the lyric-sensual, and the aphoristic-thesis. The two elevated registers do not overlap: lyric rises at sight and nature, thesis rises at grief and memory. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

187. Chapter Fifteen, Martin's funeral — the longest sentence — QUOTE: "Aunt Clara had arranged pictures of Martin on tables throughout the room: Martin as a baby, Martin holding a baseball bat, Martin with three hats on his heads (he always loved hats), Martin wearing a black leather jacket with a shamrock pin on its lapel, Martin diving into the pool at a swim meet (at the base of the frame was a plaque that read 'Seal,' his nickname.)" SOURCE: prosody. GLOSS: The novel's longest sentence — about eighty-three words — is a funeral catalogue, and it moves by

anaphora on the name ("Martin as a baby… Martin holding… Martin wearing… Martin diving"). One unbroken breath performs what grief does: it tries to hold the whole lost person in a single sentence and refuses the period, because the period is the death being remembered. The length is containment, not ornament. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

188. Chapter Fifteen, the shortest sentence — QUOTE: "Solitude." SOURCE: prosody. GLOSS: The novel's shortest sentence is a single word, placed alone at the end of a paragraph whose three preceding sentences are already short and flat ("Now I avoid people and social situations… I continue to retreat in order to hide from others. I immerse myself in reading and writing, the things I most love."). The clauses close one by one, shortening toward the last, until only the isolated noun is left standing — the prose enacts the withdrawal it names. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

189. Chapter Eleven, the Innisfree metamorphosis — the most rhythmically marked passage — QUOTE: "Somewhere linnets flew through evening skies. Midnights were glimmering, peace was dropping, and the veils of morning would rise once more." SOURCE: prosody; Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (the narrator recoloring the poem's own nouns and gerunds). GLOSS: The narrator's voice briefly falls into a tricolon built on Yeats's compound gerunds and nouns — "linnets," "midnights," "peace was dropping" (from "peace comes dropping slow") — three balanced clauses in ascending length. The metrical regularity is the giveaway that it is borrowed: this is the highest lyricism Aiden permits himself, quotation reassembled from the poem he just read in his grandmother's album, so the book's most "poetic" prose turns out to be Yeats through the boy's ear. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

190. Chapter Five, the oriole — fricatives and f-alliteration — QUOTE: "A Baltimore oriole whistled from the wide treetop above, like a singing flame of fire." SOURCE: prosody (sound). GLOSS: The sentence nests fricatives: the w- and s- of "whistled… wide… singing" and the doubled f of "flame of fire," with the closing phrase a near-tautology bound by alliteration. The bird is described synaesthetically — sound (whistled) becoming sight (flame) — and the alliteration welds hearing and vision into one hissing phrase, which is precisely what the sentence around it (Nana's "holy tree" lesson) is arguing: that the visible world is a medium for something heard and unseen. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

191. Chapter Two, the treehouse — sibilance and the long-e chime — QUOTE: "I was sailing on a billowing sea, this treehouse was my ship. I loved the sound of wind, the spirited movement of leaves—breezes passing through distant trees, finally cresting over me like invigorating waves." SOURCE: prosody (sound). GLOSS: The passage is threaded on sibilants (sailing, sea, sound, spirited, breezes, pa-ss-ing, di-st-ant, cre-st-ing) and on the long-ee vowel chime (sea, ship, leaves, breezes, trees, waves). The repeated s is the hiss of leaves, the repeated ee the lift of a swell: the sentence describing breeze and sea is itself breathy and fluid, the book's clearest case of sound enacting subject. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

192. Chapter Four, the suppressed litany — anaphora of "Tell her I" — QUOTE: "Tell her I was afraid our family would never be together. Tell her grandpa visited me at night. Tell her I feared people would learn my secrets and that I, too, would be placed in a psychiatric hospital. Tell her I felt so alone, that I wanted to have friends, that I prayed to God every night to make me normal." SOURCE: prosody (anaphora). GLOSS: Four sentences open on the same clause — "Tell her I…" — a litany of disclosures the boy cannot make aloud, each repetition adding a heavier secret (the broken family, the grandfather's visits, the fear of being committed, the prayer to be made normal). Anaphora builds the pressure exactly as it should, until the unspoken confession carries the force of a prayer; tellingly, the whole passage is interior and never spoken, which is why it is cast as a would-be "tell her" rather than a told. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

193. Chapter Twelve, the drunk crowd — internal antithesis and near-rhyme — QUOTE: "The murmur of voices was soft, then loud, rising and falling in the windy night, like breath from a snoring earth." SOURCE: prosody (sound). GLOSS: The sentence is built on internal opposition that nearly rhymes: "soft, then loud" and "rising and falling," two antithetical pairs whose matching -ing endings chime, closed by the off-rhyme of "night… breath" and the trochaic thump of "snoring earth." The prose pulses like the inebriated crowd it describes — swelling and dropping in one breath — and the doubled participles perform the rise-and-fall they name. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

194. Chapter Ten, Hope's death — the vision is flatter than what surrounds it — QUOTE: "The wheels of a bus screeched. Girls screamed. I turned and saw a bus hit Hope. She bounced onto a white Chrysler in the opposite lane. Her limp body rolled

off the hood onto the street. All traffic stopped." SOURCE: prosody (vision register). GLOSS: The event that triggers the novel's central vision is written in the shortest sentence-units the book allows — five, six, seven words, verb-first, no imagery, a single adjective ("limp"). The supernatural that follows is plainer still, bare reported fact ("They rose from the bloody pavement… Hugging, they ascended into the sky"). So the prose marks vision not by heightening but by flattening: the wonder is delivered in the coldest, shortest declaratives, as if it can only be told straight. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

195. Chapter Four, the spirit-exit signature — QUOTE: "He disappeared. The room was black. I pulled up the blanket and stared into the darkness." SOURCE: prosody (vision register). GLOSS: Spirits leave this novel in a two-word sentence, and the verb is almost always the same — "disappeared" (elsewhere "The old woman vanished," "Martin was about ten feet away and then he disappeared"). The exit is the book's one steady prosodic signature of the supernatural: a short, flat, end-stopped beat that closes the vision without comment. The narrator never lingers on the wonder; he registers the departure and returns to the bed, the blanket, the dark. Sound marks the boundary by refusing to mark it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

196. Chapter Fifteen, Martin's drowning — prose gives way to borrowed verse — QUOTE: "I heard children's voices: 'Come away, O human child! / To the waters and the wild / With a faery, hand in hand, / For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.'" SOURCE: prosody; Yeats, "The Stolen Child." GLOSS: At the novel's most supernatural moment the narrator's prose stops and the epigraph returns as the vision — the pooka-children speak in the poem's exact quatrain. The only metre in the scene belongs to Yeats, so the reader hears the supernatural as a voice-change from unrhymed prose into verse. This is the counterpart to the flat exits elsewhere: when the vision must be marked by sound, the novel imports someone else's metre rather than letting its own prose rise to it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

197. Chapter Eighteen, the final page — the one place prose marks the supernatural by sound — QUOTE: "They are joyful in our joy. They are sad in our sadness. They laugh as we laugh. And they tell stories." SOURCE: prosody (anaphora + tricolon). GLOSS: Only on the last page does the prose itself become incantatory. The dead are given to the present tense here, and the paragraph moves in anaphoric tricolons — "joyful in our joy… sad in our sadness… laugh as we laugh" — three

clauses built on the same noun-shifted-by-verb pattern, closed by the flat "And they tell stories." The supernatural is finally carried by the narrator's own sound: repetition and balance do what the plot cannot, and the voice sings the vision instead of reporting it. Read for cadence, this is the book's real answer to its epigraph's "full of weeping." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

198. Chapter Seven, the mother's voice is a singing voice — QUOTE: "'What the world needs now is love, sweet love,' she sang. 'Ignore hateful people.' Her eyes glistened." SOURCE: voice; Hal David and Burt Bacharach, "What the World Needs Now Is Love" (1965). GLOSS: Laura's answer to her son's bullying is a song lyric, not a sentence of her own. The novel habitually outsources its moral theses to diegetic music — the mother sings comfort, the radio supplies the family's emotional commentary — so that Aiden's narrator-voice can stay plain and undeclarative. The borrowed lyric does the moralizing ("Ignore hateful people") that the child's register refuses; the melody is the closest the book's women come to a raised voice. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

199. The named voice-lineage — what the novel actually voices, and what it does not — QUOTE: "Some of the distinguished alumni are Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Charles Bullfinch, and Ralph Waldo Emerson." / "the faces of Shakespeare, Whitman, and other literary greats" SOURCE: voice; the Transcendentalist lineage (Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman) beside the Irish modernists; a negative finding against Hopkins, Dickinson, Dante, O'Connor. GLOSS: The literary names this novel voices are Yeats (three poems carried verbatim and recolored), Joyce (*The Dead* taught in the final chapter, "The Lass of Aughrim" sung), Fitzgerald (the borrowed closing line), Eliot (the graffito), Cowper (the castaway), and the Transcendentalists — Emerson is named as an alumnus of Aiden's own school, which is how the Oversoul doctrine that underwrites the book's ghosts enters the narrator's education. Hopkins, Dickinson, Dante (Alighieri), and O'Connor are not voiced here; the lineage that actually modulates the prose is the Irish-modernist and American-Romantic pair, and it always enters through cadence and quotation rather than plot. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

200. The edge of the world — the novel's true thin place — QUOTE: "I felt like I was at the edge of the world—the ocean, scattered boulders, rocky cliffs, riotous waves, and a horizon that overpowered. Sheep with spots of paint—green, blue, and

red—standing or lying on the knolls to our right, frozen and staring. Fields of bog, streams and pools of water, long grass bending in the wind. . . . Cattle lowing in the fields, and the pound of the surf—a heartbeat, eternity. Waves rose and fell. The ocean inhaled, then let go." SOURCE: image (landscape / thin place, and the sea) GLOSS: The fullest rendering of a thin place in the novel is not any church but Achill Island itself, described so that the natural and the supernatural fuse: the surf is read aloud as "a heartbeat, eternity," and the ocean is given a breath ("inhaled, then let go"). This is the precise geography where Martin later returns from the water, so the "edge of the world" is literally where the worlds of the living and the dead meet. The sea carries this one consistent meaning across the book — threshold of death and of return — from the treehouse "billowing sea" through the Nantasket drowning to this island shore. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

201. Dead stars — light from the dead — QUOTE: "Some of those stars are dead now. It takes the light that long to get here. I think that's amazing." SOURCE: image (fire and light); the novel's governing theological metaphor GLOSS: This is the single most theologically loaded image in the book, and Martin — the unsighted, untheological brother — voices it. Dead stars whose light is still arriving are the novel's argument in miniature: the dead are not gone but still reaching us, their light in transit, exactly as the grandfather teaches that all time happens at once and the final coda places the dead "a short distance away—in that room just beyond the doorway." The star recurs as the one constant of this image-family — "Stars shimmered" at the bedside prayer, a "shooting star" in Nana's meadow memory, "one star sparkled" in Watts's Hope, "A star shone in the twilit sky" at the mother's release — always a single point of light that arrives after its source is gone. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

202. The bonfire under the bridge — the counter-fire — QUOTE: "a bonfire illuminated the dark tunnel under a bridge. Kids were gathered around it, though I could not make out who they were. Their shadows danced on the cement walls. They were singing, raising Budweisers and gulping." SOURCE: image (fire and light), contrastive GLOSS: The novel's only scene of communal fire is profane: drunk boys in a tunnel, shadows "dancing on cement," rising into the chant "We hate queers. We hate queers." It is the deliberate anti-type of the private, sacred light everywhere else — the "bubbles of light" in Aiden's bedroom, the oriole "like a singing flame of fire,"

the beam of light on a brother's eyes. Fire in this novel is holy when small, solitary, and watched (a star, a beam, a bubble); it turns menacing the moment it is shared and loud. The image recurs with this consistent disjunction. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

203. The dead in a white suit — apparition as arrival, not haunting — QUOTE: "My grandfather wore a white suit and hat, which he tipped at us. He smiled, then vanished." SOURCE: image (the dead) GLOSS: The dead return in festive or ordinary dress — a white suit and tipped hat at his own wife's homecoming party — never in grave-clothes. The white suit quietly displaces the shroud, aligning the dead with light and celebration rather than decay. This is the recurring physiognomy of the beloved dead throughout (the grandfather's black suit and orange tie at school, Hope's mother "in white," Martin in "a black leather jacket, and a scally cap" at Keem Bay): they arrive dressed as they lived, because the novel's afterlife is an uninterrupted continuation, not a judgment. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

204. Four seagulls watching the homecoming — QUOTE: "Nana walked around the front of the car. Four seagulls circled in the sky, as if watching over us. A cool breeze smelled of ozone." SOURCE: image (bird-as-watchful-dead; Irish folk ornithology of the returning dead) GLOSS: At the moment Laura is driven home from the hospital, four seagulls circle overhead "as if watching over us" — birds as the dead and the blessed keeping a protective vigil. This is the novel's steady bird-grammar (dove, pelican, linnet, the cardinal) in which a small flying thing marks an invisible presence; the number four silently rhymes with the "four angels at my head" of the bedtime prayer, casting the gulls as four guardians over the restored family. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

205. Half-dead roses — the still life — QUOTE: "On top was a vase of half-dead roses. Some of the petals had fallen onto the gray rug." SOURCE: image (decay / memento mori still life) GLOSS: A quiet vanitas still life — dying roses shedding petals onto gray rug — is placed in the headmaster's office exactly where Aiden is about to see the Rossetti Damsel that resembles his mother, so decay and the Grail image sit side by side. Nana empties these same dead flowers into a wastebasket a moment later, a small ritual of clearing mortality that recurs in her own coming death. The novel habitually loads such shabby, perishing domestic objects (broken

tea-things, the dead blooms, the chipped house) with the weight of its mortality theme. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

206. Light on the eyes — seeing as illumination — QUOTE: "Sunshine dappled the leaves, and a beam of light illuminated Martin's blue eyes." SOURCE: image (fire and light) GLOSS: The novel repeatedly stages light entering eyes at the threshold of a disclosure: a beam illuminates Martin's eyes just before Aiden nearly tells him he is gay, and light is the constant of every vision ("bubbles of light," the shimmerer "in white," the "silvery blue" of Martin's eyes at the dance). Sight in this book is figured as illumination — second sight is the ability to catch light that has outlasted its source, the same physics as the dead stars. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

207. Rossetti's Damsel — the Grail image in full — QUOTE: "On the wall was a painting of a woman who resembled my mother—long flame-colored hair and fair skin. She wore an elaborate gown of green, red, and gold. There were vine leaves in the foreground and a large white bird behind her head. She was holding a chalice. . . . 'The Damsel of the Holy Grail—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874.'" SOURCE: iconographic source — Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite Grail iconography GLOSS: This is the fullest named-and-described painting in the book, and it welds the iconographic and the personal: the flame-haired woman is a double of Laura, she holds the very chalice the family stole, and the white bird behind her head is the Holy Spirit/dove that recurs as soul-messenger throughout. The image fuses Arthurian Grail and Marian-Annunciation posture into a single devotional figure, making the stolen cup and the mother one object of veneration. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

208. Negative finding: no fixed devotional emblem-set — QUOTE: (no Pietà, Annunciation, or Nativity appears in the novel; "Sacred Heart" and "rosary" are likewise absent; the only scenes named are the Stations of the Cross, the crucified Christ, the pelican, the Grail Damsel, and Watts's Hope) SOURCE: negative iconographic finding GLOSS: The novel does not draw on the Church's full emblem-book. Searching the text turns up no Pietà, no Annunciation, no Nativity, no saintly attribute as a set-piece; even "Sacred Heart" and the rosary never appear. Its actual repertoire is small and intentionally recycled — the pelican-in-her-piety, the crucified corpus, the Stations, Rossetti's Grail damsel, Watts's blindfolded Hope, the pagan Capitoline wolf — plus Irish folk images (pooka, holy well, sacred tree). It ranges less freely than its theology suggests, returning again and again to the same

handful of images rather than curating a catalogue of devotion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

209. Nana seen already dead — the image that gives the title its terror — QUOTE: "My skin became icy and numb. Nana would soon be dead. I began to shiver. I saw paramedics taking her body out the front door of her house and down the steps. A white sheet covered her corpse." . . . "Veins bulged in the skin beneath her temples and cheeks. Her eyes were black sockets. A fly buzzed and stumbled on her right ear. I trembled." SOURCE: image (the dead / memento mori) GLOSS: This is the novel's fullest enactment of its title: Aiden sees the living Nana as already a corpse, first as a white-sheeted body carried out the door, then as a present-tense horror whose "eyes were black sockets" while a fly crawls her ear. The dead and the dying are rendered as unquiet and unresolved — the beloved familiar face cannot be looked at without the death that is already superimposed upon it. No other passage so completely turns ordinary domestic presence into a haunting before the fact. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

210. The stopped clocks — time made into an image of the dead — QUOTE: "This thing doesn't work. . . . I'm frozen in time." (Mr. Woodlake's locket) / "It's one minute past 3, ma'am." (young Sean) / "It doesn't work. Stuck on one past three. And it looks like he dug it up. See the bits of dirt under the glass." (the returned watch) / "Even the time was correct. 3:01." (Laura's sketch) SOURCE: image (time); the pocket-watch motif as a single repeated emblem GLOSS: The novel's most consistent recurring object is the broken or stopped clock, and it always marks the dead. Mr. Woodlake, dead before his time of a heart attack in the teachers' lounge ("He was eating lunch in the teacher's lounge and had a heart attack"), wears a locket that "doesn't work — I'm frozen in time"; the young Sean reads his gleaming watch as "one past three" (the hour Laura later recalls as significant); the watch Martin's ghost returns is "stuck on one past three" with "bits of dirt under the glass," as if lifted from the grave; and Laura's final drawing corrects it to "3:01." Stopped time is the novel's visual shorthand for eternity — the dead exist outside the stream, and every dead thing is only "stuck" from a living vantage. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

211. The cracked lens — the ghost is a self-portrait — QUOTE: "an older sketch, yellowed and a bit smeared depicted an old man with glasses. His lenses were cracked and a scar marred his cheek. I looked through my broken glasses at his wounded face. At the bottom, she had written, 'Aiden, it's time to forgive yourself.' I

am the ghost." SOURCE: image (the body; self-portrait) GLOSS: The novel's climactic image is a visual rhyme, not a statement: the "sad old man" Laura drew all her life has cracked lenses and a scarred cheek, and the final pages show Aiden himself with "bent cracked glasses and a cut on my right cheek," so that "Blood, like a teardrop, slid down my face." The ghost and the living son share one damaged face, and the recognition Aiden has refused for decades — that the haunting was his own guilt — arrives through the mirror of a drawing, the self-portrait he could not bear to look at. This is the image that completes the novel's theology of self-forgiveness. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

212. "Ships with Sails" — popular song and the image of the vow — QUOTE: "The lyrics of 'Ships w/Sails' played as I met Martin by the window. . . . The Doors keyboardist Ray Mazarek sang, 'Well you asked how much I love you' comparing his feelings to ships with sails and their love for the wind. Would he be thinking of someone again? he sang. Would he ever pass this way again? Someday he would return, he answered." SOURCE: popular song — The Doors, "Ships w/Sails" (from *Other Voices*, 1971) GLOSS: While Martin reads the dead starlight, the Doors' "Ships w/Sails" supplies the companion figure — ships with sails in love with the wind, and the refrain "Someday he would return." It binds directly to Aiden's own meditation a page later, "Promises are the sails that guide us," so the pop lyric and the theological image share one vehicle: sails as the vow that guarantees return. This is the clearest case of the novel letting a borrowed popular song do the work of its own thesis about promise and the dead. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

213. Negative finding: the repertoire is Irish and Romantic, not Italian or Catholic-modernist — QUOTE: (the only "Dante" in the novel is the painter's name — "Dante Gabriel Rossetti"; Dante Alighieri, Flannery O'Connor, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Emily Dickinson never appear, and there is no Italian-Catholic material) SOURCE: negative finding on iconographic and literary range GLOSS: The novel's image-world is exclusively Irish-Catholic and American-Romantic. Its birds, wells, pookas, trees, and its Yeats-Joyce-Fitzgerald-Emerson-Thoreau lineage (the last two named rather than quoted) leave no room for the Italian-Catholic devotional materialism of *Molly Bonamici*, nor for the Catholic-modernist line of Hopkins, O'Connor, or Dickinson, nor for Dante the poet — the "Dante" that appears is only Rossetti's given name. The images it reuses (pelican, Grail, Hope, the sea) are drawn

from Irish folk belief and the English/American lyric tradition, and nothing else. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

214. Chapter Two, the sink — the reader's trust withdrawn before it is asked for — QUOTE: "Everybody lies, Aiden. Get used to it. The sooner, the better." SOURCE: managed sympathy (pre-emptive unreliability) GLOSS: Long before any spirit is corroborated, the novel's most loved character instructs the boy — and behind him the reader — that all testimony is compromised. The line is delivered with her back turned at the faucet, in the middle of domestic warmth, so that affection and untrustworthiness arrive in the same breath. It arms the reader with suspicion at exactly the moment the book begins asking to be believed, and that suspicion never has anywhere to land, because the liar is also the woman who feeds and defends him. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

215. Chapter Four, Billings Field — dread is fastened to shame, not to danger — QUOTE: "You little faggot." SOURCE: managed dread (fear routed through the reader's protective feeling) GLOSS: The pooka's opening move is not a threat of harm but the naming of the secret Aiden has told no one, and the sentence is placed after a long build of heel-clicks, sulfur, and breath on the neck. The reader has been made to want the secret kept, so the supernatural attacks through the reader's own investment rather than through physical menace. It is the most efficient sentence in the book: it establishes the hostile force, the boy's isolation, and the reason he cannot report either. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

216. Chapter Six, the car by Aunt Clara's — the grotesque licensed to be funny — QUOTE: "Now we're twins." SOURCE: managed dread (comic register applied to assault) GLOSS: Moira scratches his forearms and offers a joke about kinship, and the reader is asked to hold revulsion, pity, and amusement at once. The bird-excrement licking and the severed finger in the same scene keep the horror from stabilising into terror; the effect is closer to nausea than to fright. The novel refuses the reader a clean fear-response, which is what makes the pooka feel like a family member rather than a monster. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

217. Chapter Six, the finger — the one piece of hard evidence, destroyed by the witness — QUOTE: "I ground my sneaker on it until it was a pile of dust." SOURCE: withheld corroboration GLOSS: A detached finger on a car floor is the only physical

remnant a sceptic could examine, and Aiden annihilates it within a sentence, in a reflex of disgust that reads as entirely in character. What survives instead is ambiguous evidence — bleeding forearms that his grandmother immediately reads as self-harm. The novel thus manufactures proof and disposes of it in the same paragraph, leaving the reader with only the narrator's word and a scab that supports the psychiatric reading just as well. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

218. Chapter Two, the treehouse — the reader installed as sole confidant — QUOTE: "How do you tell a brother you're gay?" SOURCE: confidant (direct address by unspoken question) GLOSS: The question is put to no one in the scene; it is put to the reader, who is told what Martin is not told and what the family will not learn for years. From this line forward the reader holds a secret that outranks every character's knowledge, which is the same structural position Aiden holds with regard to the dead. The novel's supernatural confidences and its sexual confidence are delivered by the identical mechanism, so believing one is made to feel like keeping faith with the other. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

219. Chapter Seven, Rita's patio — the strongest corroboration the novel supplies — QUOTE: "Sean and I were the only people who knew about the pearls." SOURCE: corroboration between witnesses GLOSS: This is the book's single evidentiary crux: a detail no living person could have given Aiden, volunteered by a hostile witness who is a retired professor, a rationalist, and the dead man's lover. The novel supplies motive for Rita to disbelieve, a dropped tray as involuntary bodily testimony, and a linnet arriving on cue; it withholds any explanation of how information crosses over. Because the corroborating witness is also the woman with most to hide, the proof is strong and permanently compromised at once. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

220. Chapter Seven — the sceptic's position given the book's kindest sentence — QUOTE: "I believe you think you saw Sean's ghost." SOURCE: withheld corroboration (the counter-explanation stated fairly) GLOSS: The novel does not caricature disbelief; it gives it the most careful formulation in the book, one that concedes sincerity while refusing the claim. The reader is offered a fully respectable exit from belief and, crucially, is never told it is wrong — Rita's later concession is only "Maybe. . . . I suppose anything is possible." The judge's seat is left occupied but the verdict is withheld. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

221. Chapter Four, the 36 bus — the medical explanation planted early and never revoked — QUOTE: "Fevers sometimes cause people to hallucinate." SOURCE: withheld corroboration (physiological counter-explanation) GLOSS: Aiden's own face flushes and burns whenever a spirit appears, so his father's throwaway diagnosis fits the symptomatology the novel itself has established. The book returns to it decades later, when Martin lifts him from the ice while he is running a fever and he thinks "The fever was causing hallucinations." By making the naturalistic reading always available and always plausible, the novel keeps the reader in the position of choosing rather than knowing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

222. Chapter Ten, the photo album — the reader's cross-examination staged onstage — QUOTE: "You've seen photographs. . . . What else has he told you?" SOURCE: judge (interrogation delegated to a character) GLOSS: Catherine performs precisely the test a suspicious reader would run: she offers a mundane source for the visual detail, then presses for information that cannot be sourced. She gets the drunken Irish idiom and the vomit-and-chair truth she told no one, and her leg trembles against his — the body concedes what the argument does not. The reader is not asked to judge from outside; the novel does the judging in-frame and lets the verdict register as physical symptom rather than statement. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

223. Chapter Fifteen, the fallen dresser — the narrator changes sides — QUOTE: "There's a rational explanation for everything. Drafty air and an old house with shitty wiring." SOURCE: complicity (the reader promoted over the narrator) GLOSS: With his grandfather visibly pacing the room, Aiden borrows Rita's scepticism as a lie to soothe Martin, and the reader — who can see the ghost — is for the first time better informed than the seer. The role assigned is neither witness nor judge but accomplice in a cover-up, and the cover-up story is exactly the one the novel's doubters use. From here the naturalistic reading is marked as a kindness people tell each other, which is a far more damaging thing to do to it than refutation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

224. Chapter Six — the reader recruited into making the supernatural look sane — QUOTE: "Make her actions seem rational." SOURCE: complicity (instruction to manage appearances) GLOSS: The grandfather's instruction is a description of the novel's own method: keep the uncanny inside a surface so domestic that no one has to account for it. Since the reader is the only party who watches Aiden carry the

instruction out, the reader becomes co-manager of the family's respectability. It converts what could have been suspense about whether the ghosts are real into complicity in concealing that they are. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

225. Chapter Twelve, Margie's parlour — dread produced by tenderness, not by threat — QUOTE: "Her lips turned a purplish blue." SOURCE: managed dread (premonition delivered inside a caretaking scene) GLOSS: The corpse-vision arrives while Nana is fluffing his pillows and taking his temperature, and the decay arrives by increments — blue lips, then black sockets, then a fly stumbling on her ear — while she keeps speaking in her ordinary register: "Take your time, dear." The reader is not frightened of her but frightened for her, which is the book's characteristic conversion of horror imagery into grief. The scene also pre-loads the coda's architecture: she promises to wait one room away months before the novel makes that promise its consolation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

226. Chapter Eleven, Aiden's report of the scene outside the school — an ending that resolves cleanly, with no work left for the reader — QUOTE: "They hugged and rose into the sky." SOURCE: managed sympathy (consolation without ambiguity) — negative finding GLOSS: Hope's death is the one supernatural event the novel narrates without hedge, counter-explanation, or delay: mother and daughter embrace over the body and ascend, and Aiden faints. No sceptic is present to offer an alternative and none is supplied afterwards. The reader is assigned pure witness with nothing to weigh, which is why the scene consoles rather than unsettles — the novel spends its ambiguity elsewhere and pays for this death outright. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

227. Chapter Sixteen, the flight — corroboration retracted twenty years late — QUOTE: "And was the pooka behind the curtain that day we tried to help my mother escape?" SOURCE: withheld corroboration (retrospective contradiction) GLOSS: Laura's flat insistence that she never had a roommate reopens a scene the reader watched, heard, and had no reason to question, and the novel answers the reopening with a question rather than a fact. Nothing is added but a cat, a song lyric, and a name that later attaches to a canyon overlook. The reader is left holding a corrupted memory of their own reading, which is a heavier thing than an unexplained ghost. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

228. Chapter Eighteen, the AP Literature class — the novel stages its own resisting reader — QUOTE: "The story's too full of things that we can't understand." SOURCE: literary allusion — James Joyce, "The Dead" GLOSS: Aiden teaches Joyce's story to students who have not read it, mistake Gretta for Gretel, and cannot find the boy singing under the tree, while snow falls outside the window in imitation of the text they are failing. Angela's consoling excuse is also the fairest description of what this novel asks of anyone reading it. The scene positions the reader as the one person in the room who did the work, and simultaneously admits that such books are mostly not received. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

229. Chapter Six, Margie's kitchen — the sceptic who is proved right about nothing and dies first — QUOTE: "Ain't possible. I never seen a ghost." SOURCE: withheld corroboration (dramatic irony as argument) GLOSS: Margie's flat denial, followed by Aiden's "Maybe someday you will," is the novel's most economical piece of dread management: her disbelief is not refuted but outlived. She is also the character whose dying whisper reaches Aiden through a locked stockroom door before anyone opens it. The novel never asks the reader to think worse of her for doubting; it simply arranges events so that doubt is the position with the shortest life. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

230. Chapter Seventeen, the inn — the moment that asks most of the reader's belief — QUOTE: "He was your grandfather." SOURCE: withheld corroboration (closed causal loop) GLOSS: This asks the reader to accept that the boy who helped them on Atlantic Drive was the grandfather as a young man in the 1930s, emigrating because of a meeting that had not yet happened. Behind it the novel puts real evidence: the hay cart, the gap-toothed grin, the Old Spice in a closed room, the stated time of one past three, and eventually the rusted watch with dirt under the glass. It withholds every mechanism — no living witness, no explanation, and a narrator who answers with "It could still be a coincidence." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

231. Chapter Thirteen, Margie's wake — a popular song turned into a question aimed outward — QUOTE: "Where was that place for us, time for us, and what was the way of forgiving?" SOURCE: popular song — "Somewhere," from West Side Story GLOSS: The lyric is dismantled into three interrogatives and handed to no one inside the scene, the room having gone silent around the turntable. The song's consolatory promise is converted into an unanswered question about forgiveness, which is the

novel's real subject and its real withholding. The reader is addressed as the party who might have an answer, and is given none. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

232. Chapter Fifteen, the retrospect — the reader denied the intimacy the ghosts enjoy — QUOTE: "We participate in the illusion of knowing one another." SOURCE: judge refused (epistemological levelling) GLOSS: Having spent the novel giving the reader privileged access, Aiden declares that access itself illusory — he did not know Martin, cannot know anyone, and by extension the reader has not known him. It is the one place the novel actively cancels the reader's position rather than assigning one. The coda's promise of the dead leaning in to listen is thus offered to people who, alive, could not hear each other at all. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

233. The closing paragraphs — consolation offered with the evidence deliberately absent — QUOTE: "whispering loveliness in our ears" SOURCE: managed sympathy (assertion in place of proof) GLOSS: The coda drops narrative entirely and speaks in the present tense of doctrine: the dead are in the next room, they take turns watching, they laugh as we laugh, and they go on telling stories. Nothing corroborates it — no witness, no object, no scene — and the novel that spent four hundred pages supplying scratches, pocket watches, and pearls declines to supply anything here. The reader is left holding a consolation whose only ground is the accumulated credit of everything already believed, which means the ending does not resolve the question; it asks the reader to decide whether they have been persuaded. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

234. Mr. Sloan's shelves and the homeroom rosters — the Italian-Catholic register never develops — QUOTE: "cherry peppers stuffed with prosciutto" SOURCE: Italian-Catholic material — negative finding GLOSS: Against a dense Irish-Catholic apparatus of banshees, pookas, venial sins and Our Fathers, the Italian Catholic presence is confined to surnames (Mr. Rossi, Mr. Castellanos, Christo's Pizza), one Rossetti painting on a headmaster's wall, and delicatessen stock in a cramped corner store. No Italian devotional practice, saint, or funerary custom is dramatised. The reader is positioned inside one immigrant Catholicism looking at the surfaces of another, and the novel does not pretend otherwise. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

235. Chapters One to Eighteen, the chapter closings — QUOTE: "I'll pray for your friend while I wait." SOURCE: Chapter-closing typology. How each chapter ends: One, Nana's whispered wartime motto "In the quiet of the room"; Two, "Nana winked at me and we all cleared the table."; Three, "Love you too."; Four, "Get to your homerooms before the bell."; Five, "Martin and I sped up."; Six, "I will, Margie."; Seven, "I thought how great is the power of love and memory."; Eight, Hope's death told in advance ("the last time I saw her alive"); Nine, the father's "Everything will be okay."; Ten, Nana's prayer for the departed; Eleven, the Innisfree paraphrase; Twelve, "He put his arm over my shoulder."; Thirteen, "She sighed and relaxed into her pillow."; Fourteen, "The wind blew tulip petals over the walkway in front of us."; Fifteen, "Okay, okay. I'll stop bugging you."; Sixteen, "We look like we stepped back in time"; Seventeen, "I put it in my pocket and left."; Eighteen, the eternal room. Suffrage for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:46). GLOSS: Only Chapter Ten ends on a prayer and only Chapter Eleven on Yeats, and these two closings sit next to each other at the centre of the book (the two chapters run from about 50% to 60% of the text by character count). Death reaches a chapter ending only by anticipation: Eight announces Hope's death before it happens, and Thirteen leaves Nana alive in her last scene. Ten or so other chapters stop on a spoken commonplace or a small gesture. The pattern breaks at the centre and again at the end, where Seventeen closes on a relic-like object and Eighteen is the only chapter that ends on a vision. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

236. Chapters One to Eighteen, the chapter openings — QUOTE: "The next day we drove Martin to Aunt Clara's house." SOURCE: Chapter-opening typology. Nine chapters open in motion or on arrival (Three, Four, Six, Seven, Eight, Ten, Sixteen, Seventeen, Eighteen: "The drive to McCall Hospital took a half hour."; "My mother came home Saturday morning."; "Rita and Margie drove together."; "We entered terminal C for the Aer Lingus flight."; "We returned to Dublin."). Five and Thirteen open by going through a doorway into a building that the previous chapter had reached. Nine and Eleven open on a question in dialogue. Twelve, Fourteen and Fifteen open on a time-marker ("The next Saturday evening"; "the rest of Christmas vacation"; "Martin slept over one night in June."). One opens on the adult retrospect and Two on the mother's bedroom. GLOSS: At least five chapter breaks cut through continuous action: Four to Five, Nine to Ten, Ten to Eleven ("Get dressed. Wear something nice." followed by "Get yourself ready for church."), Twelve to Thirteen,

and Sixteen to Seventeen. The chapter therefore works as a threshold marker (school steps, dance-hall door, inn hallway), and the real scene unit is the blank-line section. The only two chapters that open on a question, Nine and Eleven, are the ones that launch the escape and the chalice's return, the two schemes on which the first half turns. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

237. Chapters Four, Six and Eleven, the car outside Aunt Clara's — QUOTE: "We drove to Aunt Clara's to drop off Martin. When we were parked in front, Nana turned and said" SOURCE: Repeated scene-formula ("When we were in front, Nana beeped the horn."; "My grandmother honked the horn in front of her house."), each time followed by a pooka attack; Irish púca lore; Catholic versus evangelical rivalry. GLOSS: Three times Nana parks outside Clara's house and quarrels about Clara's "cult" church, and each time Moira attacks in the same chapter. She appears on the 36 bus and at Billings Field later that day in Four, springs up at the car itself in Six, and is in the back seat as they pull away in Eleven. The hostile spirit arrives on a family quarrel over rival Christianities, not at any sacred place. In Eleven the Our Father drives her off where that quarrel has just been fought. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

238. Chapters One to Four, where the book goes longest without the supernatural — QUOTE: "I heard a creepy laugh from the back of the bus." SOURCE: Distribution of visitations, second-sight episodes and ghosts by position in the text. Chapter One has none (only the staged healing); Two has one; Three has none; Four has four. After that every chapter has at least two, Chapter Fourteen's only by report and voice. GLOSS: The longest stretch without any supernatural event runs from the first night visit at the opening of Chapter Two (about 5%) to this laugh on the bus (about 18%), roughly an eighth of the book. It contains all of Chapter Three: the chalice at McCall's, the pelican pins and the Four Corners prayer. After Chapter Four the book never goes more than about 5.5% of its length without an event; the next longest gaps run from Five into Six and from the plane to the goat on Atlantic Drive. The supernatural is introduced once, withheld while household devotion is set up, and then kept at a steady pulse. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

239. Chapters Eleven, Twelve and Seventeen, the escalation of witnesses — QUOTE: "My mother and I followed her gaze." SOURCE: Witness structure of the apparitions; corroboration as a formal device. GLOSS: Until Chapter Eleven every apparition is seen by Aiden alone: Laura's visions are only reported, and no one else

responds to the voice behind the curtain in Nine. The first shared sighting comes outside McCall's at about 59.5%, and at about 61% three people see Sean at Margie's party, where Nana calls his name and mother and son look with her. In Seventeen the escalation becomes physical, as the young grandfather talks with both of them on the road and a watch passes from the dead into Aiden's pocket. Eighteen falls back to a single feverish witness, so corroboration peaks in the second-to-last chapter and drops in the last. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

240. Chapters Four, Twelve, Sixteen, Seventeen and Eighteen, the pooka's forms in sequence — QUOTE: "She thought an eagle was chasing me down the hall." SOURCE: Sean's catalogue of pooka shapes in Chapter Four ("a cat, a goat, a horse, even an eagle"); Irish shape-shifter lore. GLOSS: Moira appears in human form in five episodes between about 18% and 66%, and at the dance, two-thirds of the way through, she is reduced to ash against a steel cross. After that the forms Sean listed turn up one by one: the eagle only in Laura's account of Nell's death (about 61%), then the cat on the plane (about 85%), the goat (about 90%) and the horse at Ooh Aah Point (about 97%). The last three follow Sean's order exactly. They fall in the book's densest run of the supernatural, since Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen hold nine events in the last tenth of the text. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

241. Chapter Ten, first scene, the secret broken at the midpoint — QUOTE: "'Grandpa wants Mom to come home,' I blurted." SOURCE: Midpoint hinge; Sean's instruction in Chapter Two that Aiden "must keep your secret for now." GLOSS: At about 50.3% of the text, Aiden tells adults other than his mother for the first time that his grandfather visits, and proves it with details of the death that only Nana knows. The ban on speaking therefore holds for exactly the first half of the book. The second half is organized by disclosure: Clara's pastor's verdict, Laura's own account of her visits, the shared sightings and finally the drawings. Hope's death, the first death shown on the page, follows within about 3% of this hinge. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

242. Chapters Eight to Eighteen, the placement of deaths — QUOTE: "the last time I saw her alive" SOURCE: Placement of on-page deaths; prolepsis as a chapter-closing device. GLOSS: No one dies on the page in the first half: Chapter Eight's last clause foretells Hope's death at about 46%, and the bus hits her at about 53%. The deaths then crowd into story-time from autumn to the next August: Nell (reported, about 61%), Margie and her cat (about 71%, with Mr. Sloan's later death in a single clause),

Nana (about 73%) and Martin (about 79%). The father and Rita are disposed of in the summary of Chapter Fifteen, and Laura dies at about 97%. The shape is a prolepsis just before the midpoint, a cluster filling about a quarter of the book, a long stretch of summary, and one death at the end. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

243. Chapters Two, Three, Ten to Twelve, the Sunday calendar — QUOTE: "Every few weeks, on a Sunday after church" SOURCE: The weekly Sunday obligation as the book's working calendar; Rita's "And on a Saturday too!" GLOSS: The first two-thirds are timed by Sundays, not feasts. The 10 o'clock Mass at St. Theresa's comes before the first McCall visit, Nana tells the nurse "Today is Sunday," a "bright Sunday" sends Aiden and Nana to Mass at Mission Church to return the chalice, and the father's visits come after Sunday church. Sunday is when church and the divided family's visitations coincide, so at this weekly level the liturgical calendar does organize the plot. Rita's joke about going to church on a Saturday shows that the week is the unit everyone counts by. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

244. Chapters Twelve to Fourteen, Christmas as an elided hinge — QUOTE: "Shortly after Christmas, which, for obvious reasons, wasn't so joyous" SOURCE: The Christmas season (Nativity to Epiphany); negative finding on liturgy. GLOSS: Christmas is the only feast the novel names, and it frames the densest deaths: Margie dies the day after a dance held "a few weeks before Christmas," and Nana falls ill in the week between Christmas and New Year's and is buried on "January 2nd." Yet the feast gets only this subordinate clause, with no Midnight Mass, crib, carol or Nativity. Its other signs are dance-hall "Christmas lights" and Dickens's three ghosts, whom Aiden turns into a reading of his father and of the living as "shades." The calendar supplies the time of dying but not a liturgy for it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

245. Chapter Fourteen and after, the missing spring feasts, and August as anniversary — QUOTE: "she suggested we take the subway into the Public Garden in late April" SOURCE: Negative finding: Lent, Holy Week, Easter, All Souls, Advent, the Assumption and First Communion are nowhere named. Feast of the Assumption (15 August). GLOSS: The book passes through spring 1977 without Easter. Its April chapter goes instead to "The Wild Swans at Coole," to swans that "often return to their home," and to Rita's account of absolving Nana, again and again, of her guilt over Sinead. August does organize the plot, as promise and anniversary: it is planted in June as the month of the trip ("In August. Nana left us a lot of money."), becomes

the month of the drowning at Nantasket, and is kept thirty-nine years later on "August 18th." The Assumption, three days before the scattering and the anchor of the Nantasket story "Assumptions," is suppressed, and Aiden's numerology takes the place of a feast. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

246. Chapter Eleven, Mission Church, the lection — QUOTE: "Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure." SOURCE: 1 John 3:3. The reading therefore runs 1 John 3:1–3, not 3:1–2. In the Roman Lectionary 1 John 3:1–3 is the second reading for All Saints (1 November); the Eastertide Sunday use stops at verse 2. GLOSS: Because the reading includes the third verse, it matches the All Saints lection, and the chronology fits: school began in September 1976, the escape came "About a month later" among turning leaves, and Hope died "a few weeks later." The text names neither feast nor date, and 1 November 1976 was a Monday while the book's day is a Sunday, so any link to the calendar is submerged at best. If it is intended, the Mass of all the saints follows directly on the ascent of Hope and her mother, and the verse's "this hope" is read over the dead girl's name. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

247. Chapters One, Sixteen and Eighteen, the mirrors — QUOTE: "I saw my reflection inside the mirrored elevator. A sorry sight." SOURCE: Frame rhyme with Chapter One's "Look at yourself in the mirror"; the Chapter Sixteen close ("laughing at our images in the mirror"). GLOSS: The first scene puts Aiden before Nana's bathroom mirror, being told he has his grandfather's hair. Chapter Sixteen ends with mother and son at a mirror in "old" clothes just before the road where they meet the young grandfather, and the last evening sets Aiden before a mirror with cracked glasses and a cut cheek minutes before he finds the sketch of the scarred old man. Each mirror comes directly before a crossing of time. The last one prepares the recognition that the ghost Laura drew is Aiden himself. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

248. Chapter Three, the closing goodnight, and the final bedside — QUOTE: "Go to sleep, brother. I love you." SOURCE: Frame rhyme; the Four Corners bedtime prayer that closes the same scene. GLOSS: Chapter Three closes the novel's first day with Nana's four-angel prayer, then Aiden's question of "how something can be dead and alive at the same time," then Martin's goodnight. The last visitation opens with the same words, "Go to sleep, brother," and replaces "I love you" with absolution. The living brother who kept watch over the sleeper in Chapter Three returns dead to

keep watch again. He is himself the answer to the question he could not answer then. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

249. Chapter Twelve, Margie's couch, the doorway — QUOTE: "Take your time, dear. I'll be just beyond the doorway." SOURCE: Rhyme with the final coda's "in that room just beyond the doorway"; the funeral reading "Death is nothing at all" by Henry Scott Holland ("I have only slipped away into the next room"). GLOSS: The phrase first comes from Nana at about 61%, in Aiden's vision of her corpse, with blue lips, black sockets and a fly on her ear. On the last page it becomes the novel's creed about where the dead are, so the ending takes over the words of the book's most horrifying premonition and turns them into consolation. The coda's "another room" is close to Holland's much-read funeral text, which suggests that the frame borrows from a popular funeral commonplace rather than from doctrine. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

250. Chapters Ten to Seventeen, where Yeats is placed — QUOTE: "Someone called, 'Come away, O human child, to the waters and the wild.'" SOURCE: W. B. Yeats, "The Stolen Child," "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," "The Wild Swans at Coole." GLOSS: Apart from the epigraph, the first half of the book contains no Yeats: "Innisfree," the only poem printed in full, comes at about 52% and is paraphrased as the close of Chapter Eleven at 60%. "The Stolen Child" returns from the epigraph as this dream voice at about 53.5%, as a full stanza spoken by children's voices while Martin drowns at about 79%, as Mrs. O'Malley's half-memory of "Glen-Car" at about 88%, and as the title phrase at about 92.5%, with "The Wild Swans at Coole" at about 75.6%. Yeats is second-half architecture. He enters with the first death and moves toward the title as the deaths accumulate. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

251. Chapters Four to Eighteen, clock times and verse numbers — QUOTE: "Again, she had meticulously drawn the timepiece. 12:07 the hands read." SOURCE: Ecclesiastes 3:1 and 12:7; Mark 8:18; Romans 8:18. Earlier scripture is unnumbered ("It says in Corinthians"; "the Gospel of John"; "the first Letter of Saint John"). GLOSS: Scripture is cited by chapter and verse only on the second-to-last page, on the backs of Laura's drawings, where the verse numbers turn out to be times and dates planted earlier. Woodlake's 12:07 (Chapter Eight) is Ecclesiastes 12:7, the young grandfather's "one minute past 3" (Seventeen) is Ecclesiastes 3:1, and "August 18th" is both Mark 8:18 and Romans 8:18. Between the 1 John reading at about 55% and this page, no

scripture is read or cited except the Our Father, said as a prayer, and a stranger's broken "Alpha and the Omega." The other times Sean visits (12:43, 11:37, 1:23) are never decoded; at most one can note that John 11:37 ("Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?") falls in the Lazarus chapter that Margie cites in Chapter One. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

252. Chapters Nine and Eleven, the Maple on the McCall lawn — QUOTE: "then turned towards the Maple." SOURCE: Scene rhyme between the failed escape and the legal release; "The heavy security guard stared at the Maple." GLOSS: The second and third visits to McCall's both end under the same capitalized Maple, with the grandfather appearing on the lawn and waving. The collection's version has a lowercase "maple" in the escape and only "a tree" at the release, so the novel makes the tree a fixed mark and sets failure and success on one spot. What differs is the witness: after the escape only Aiden sees Sean, while after the release Aiden and Laura see him together and Nana turns to look. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

253. Chapters Six, Eight and Thirteen, warnings before the drowning — QUOTE: "One day you'll choke on that." SOURCE: Prophetic foreshadowing; pooka "veiled messages about your future" (Chapter Four); Woodlake's "He's going to tire himself out." GLOSS: Three warnings are set at intervals before Nantasket. Moira curses the water bottle in Aiden's hand at about 30%, the dead swim coach says Martin "needs to work on his pacing" at about 44%, and at about 68% the snowplow driver's threat makes Martin say "You would have felt guilty for life." Chapter Fifteen fulfils each one: Aiden "swallowed and choked" in the riptide, Martin disappears while swimming out to him, and Aiden takes on the guilt for life. The drowning is built as the fulfilment of scattered oracles rather than as a sudden accident. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

254. Chapters One to Three and Eleven, "Keep Calm and Carry On" and "Blindfolded" — QUOTE: "Nana sat on the toilet seat. I was on the floor in front of her." SOURCE: Placement of the absorbed stories. The collection's order is "Arise and Go Now," "Assumptions," "Blindfolded," "Keep Calm and Carry On," "The Wrong Way." GLOSS: The collection's fourth story, "Keep Calm and Carry On," becomes the whole of Chapter One: the novel adds only its one-paragraph adult frame before the story's first sentence and closes the chapter on the story's last, so a secular wartime motto rather than a prayer ends the first chapter. "Blindfolded" is split up. Its

opening in the car ("I need to get that chalice") is not used, since the theft already belongs to Keep Calm's day, and its episodes are spread over Chapter Two (the grandfather's rebuke), Chapter Three (the chalice at McCall's) and Chapter Eleven ("It's inside here. I had to remove my makeup bag and a brush to make room."). The theft at about 3.6% and the restitution at about 56% are about half the novel apart, so the story's single arc becomes the frame of the first half. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

255. Chapter Eleven, last scene, two story-endings fused — QUOTE: "My mother's sketchbook fell open." SOURCE: Placement of "Arise and Go Now" (from "I arrived at Rita's house about noon" in the middle of Chapter Seven, about 38%, to the end of Chapter Eleven, 60%) and of the end of "Blindfolded"; G. F. Watts, Hope (1886). GLOSS: "Arise and Go Now" and "Blindfolded" both end on the same scene: the car leaving McCall's, the Watts drawing, the grandfather under the tree. The novel keeps that scene once and drops both religious codas, Blindfolded's "I cherished hope" and Arise's "sacred obligation" and "Soon we would all be home." It also runs material of its own through the Arise block (the Woodlake ghost, Hope Gallagher's death, Moira) and fits the chalice's return into it. Because the fused ending falls at 60% rather than at the end, the promise of home is followed, less than 2% of the text later, by Aiden's vision of Nana's corpse at Margie's party. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

256. Chapter Twelve, middle section, "The Wrong Way" bracketed — QUOTE: "On a Saturday evening a few weeks before Christmas" SOURCE: Placement of the absorbed "The Wrong Way" (from "Every few weeks, on a Sunday after church" at about 61.7% to "Arizona far, far away" at about 64.4%). GLOSS: The collection's one story without the supernatural sits inside Chapter Twelve and ends at a section break, not at the end of a chapter. Just before it come Sean's white-suited appearance and Nana's death-vision; right after it, this sentence opens the dance, where Moira falls into ash against a steel cross on the wall. The novel thus places its bleakest absorbed story between an apparition and the book's most openly sacred-object victory over the pooka. The father's departure becomes one panel of a haunted chapter rather than a closing verdict. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

257. Chapter Eighteen, the final bedside, the touch and the fever — QUOTE: "He had placed his palm against my sore chest." … "When I woke, my fever was gone." SOURCE: Matthew 8:14-15, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law: "he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose" (KJV); cf. Mark 1:31, Luke 4:39 GLOSS:

The last visitation heals as well as absolves. The sequence is the Gospel's in miniature, a touch laid on the sick, the fever gone, and the sufferer risen into "The day was bright and the morning was new." Nothing in the passage names the miracle, and the narrator immediately offers the rational alternative ("Had I hallucinated because I was sick?"), which is the corpus's usual pairing of a sacred shape with a secular explanation. The author has confirmed that the biblical subtext of Martin's actions is purposeful. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

The Novel as a Designed Whole

1. Chapter Two: the hereditary faculty — QUOTE: "Her claim of hearing the voices of dead people led to the diagnosis of schizophrenia"; "Like you, she has the gift"; "Second sight has been in your family for years." SOURCE: Irish second sight; the Catholic distinction between private experience and public doctrine GLOSS: The novel's first rule is genealogical rather than devotional: Laura, Aiden, Catherine's mother, and Sean possess or recognize a transmissible faculty. It is not available to ordinary witnesses: Aiden's report of the bus-woman is denied by Brian, Martin, and the other passengers, while Laura and Aiden jointly see Sean at McCall's. This makes psychiatry's diagnosis a social response to a real gift within the book, not the book's final explanation of it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

2. Chapters Two and Six: the apparition has a reproducible signature — QUOTE: "Whenever he visited, the bedroom glowed with tiny white lights, illuminated bubbles floating in the air"; "My face and ears became hot and red, and I heard a buzzing noise"; "Again, my face flushed and bubbles of light appeared." SOURCE: Formal principle of repeated sensory markers; Irish luminous-spirit tradition GLOSS: Sean's visits initially occur at night and arrive with the same white light, flushing, heat, and sound; the repetition supplies an internal test rather than leaving every scene merely subjective. The rule later loosens when Sean appears at school and says, "I'm with you all the time," so night is Aiden's usual access-point, not a metaphysical limit. The book deliberately gives the supernatural a phenomenology before it gives it a theology. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

3. Chapter Six: not every dead person is Sean — QUOTE: "We call her a shimmerer. A good soul who has passed. Before she completes her journey, she has something

she wants to accomplish"; "She's watching over her daughter." SOURCE: Catholic communion of saints; Irish guardian-spirit belief GLOSS: Hope's mother establishes a second class of apparition: a "good soul" still in transit but not tormented, whose unfinished task is vigilance rather than expiation. Her appearance is corroborated in its consequence—she receives Hope at the instant of death—yet she does not ask Aiden for prayers, restitution, or Masses. The dead can therefore return in the novel because love has work to do, not because all are detained in a punitive waiting room. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

4. Chapters Four and Nine: the dead teach, but do not fully know — QUOTE: "Even on this side, there are some things we don't know for certain"; "When you pass over, you will know, but not until then"; "He's indescribable. Some things can't be explained." SOURCE: 1 Corinthians 13:12; apophatic theology GLOSS: Sean is not omniscient and does not possess a full heavenly beatific vision that he can report to Aiden. His authoritative claims about survival coexist with admitted uncertainty about the pooka and with a prohibition on premature knowledge. That limitation resists both a simple Catholic saint-model and a spiritualist séance-model in which the dead explain everything. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

5. Chapters Four and Eleven: the hostile otherworld is folk, not demonic doctrine — QUOTE: "I think she's a pooka"; "This trickster spirit may seek revenge on the family. For generations, even"; "There are evil ghosts. He could be trying to fool you"; "I said the Our Father aloud. . . . When I finished the prayer, the smell was gone." SOURCE: Irish pooka belief; Catholic prayer of protection GLOSS: Moira is the novel's exception to its consolatory dead: embodied, obscene, shape-changing, and able to scratch Aiden, she is an inherited territorial grievance rather than a holy soul. Nana tentatively calls Sean possibly evil, but the text differentiates him from Moira by his repeated consolation and verifiable private knowledge. Prayer repels the hostile presence, but the book never identifies the pooka with Satan, damnation, or a sacramental exorcism. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

6. Chapters Ten to Eighteen: a Catholic comparison, including a negative finding — QUOTE: "We must always pray for the departed"; "O God, by Whose mercy the faithful departed find rest"; "Martin was letting us know he's happy."; "I never left you and I never will." SOURCE: Catholic doctrine of purgatory and suffrage for the dead (CCC 1030–1032); Order of Christian Funerals GLOSS: Catholic doctrine permits

prayer for souls undergoing purification, but the novel never says that Sean, Hope's mother, or Martin is in purgatory, suffers purgatorial pain, requires Masses, or is released by Aiden's action. Its funerals retain Catholic language of rest and prayer, while its actual ghosts are already active, affectionate, and able to intervene. The novel follows Catholic consolation and communion more closely than Catholic purgatorial mechanism. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. Chapter Eighteen: Joyce's dead versus Mulhern's dead — QUOTE: "with the knowledge that you too will pass into Joyce's realm of shades, a distant memory for someone"; "They lean in softly, watching over us, taking turns to check that we are safe"; "In the other room right now . . . Martin is talking with Grandpa." SOURCE: James Joyce, "The Dead"; formal counterpoint GLOSS: Aiden teaches Joyce immediately before Mulhern reverses Joyce's emotional geometry. Gabriel's final snow falls "upon all the living and the dead," making the dead pervasive but unreachable; Mulhern's dead are not merely remembered shades but reciprocal watchers who touch, speak, and arrange meetings. The allusion is therefore an argument, not a decorative homage: the novel rejects the isolation of Joyce's living consciousness for an overcrowded eternal household. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

8. Chapters One–Eighteen: the measurable architecture — QUOTE: "CHAPTER ONE"; "CHAPTER NINE"; "CHAPTER EIGHTEEN"; "Finally, in 2016"; "Martin became part of the ocean." SOURCE: Formal principle of chapter placement GLOSS: The novel has eighteen numbered chapters. Sean first appears in Chapter Two, the numerical midpoint lies at the Chapter Nine/Chapter Ten hinge, the adult return to Ireland begins late in Chapter Fifteen and the physical Achill section begins in Chapter Sixteen, while the ashes are scattered in Chapter Seventeen—not at the end. Chapter Eighteen is consequently a coda of interpretation, bereavement, drawings, and forgiveness rather than a post-scattering travel epilogue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

9. Chapters Nine–Eleven: the midpoint is a failed exodus, then a legal release — QUOTE: "We're simply helping your mother be with her children"; "You can't leave"; "That's the only way."; "I'm her mother and I was appointed guardian by the court." SOURCE: Exodus as liberation narrative; formal midpoint reversal GLOSS: The centre of the book does not deliver liberation through the children's covert escape: the security system returns Laura to the ward. Sean then redirects them from theatrical flight to Catherine's guardianship, and Chapter Eleven completes the release by

signature rather than miracle. The midpoint therefore turns the plot from childish rescue fantasy toward costly adult acknowledgment and responsibility. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

10. Chapters Fifteen–Seventeen: the return is late and compressed — QUOTE: "Mom said she's planning to take us to Achill Island"; "Finally, in 2016"; "After four days in the city, we drove routes M4, N4, and N5 to Achill Island"; "We descended to Keem Bay, a valley between the cliffs of Benmore and Croaghaun Mountain." SOURCE: Pilgrimage form; return-to-origin structure GLOSS: The Achill promise is planted in childhood, renewed just before Martin's death, and withheld until the final fifth of the book. The long Boston narrative must be traversed before the island can be reached; this makes return a structural reward for duration, not a setting that explains the plot in advance. Yet the route begins with tourism and rental cars, not a prescribed sacred itinerary, so the book borrows pilgrimage's shape without becoming a conventional pilgrimage. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

11. Chapters Seventeen–Eighteen: not a purgatorial ascent — QUOTE: "I hoped our world of troubles would soon disappear, and our hearts would at last feel peace."; "Rain pounded the roof, the wipers moved back and forth, and the wind howled"; "The pooka again?"; "The day was bright and the morning was new." SOURCE: Dantean purgatorial ascent; negative formal finding GLOSS: Keem supplies ritual, prayer, water, ashes, apparition, and a temporary consolation, but it does not produce an uninterrupted ascent toward purification. Laura's death follows, Aiden's grief deepens, and the pooka remains a live interpretive possibility. The closing dawn comes only after the book has returned to Boston and converted a private revelation into an ethical demand to forgive oneself; its shape is recursive and consolatory, not an orderly mountain of purgation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

12. Chapters Seventeen–Eighteen: scattering is a hinge, not closure — QUOTE: "Wait for a strong wind, then scatter his ashes"; "Martin became part of the ocean"; "He wanted to thank you for keeping your promise"; "Aiden, it's time to forgive yourself." I am the ghost. SOURCE: Funeral rite; formal principle of delayed ending GLOSS: The ash-scattering fulfils the treehouse promise and permits Martin's visible return, but it also triggers the pocket-watch payment and the later interpretive drawings. The novel saves its real closure for Aiden's recognition that he has made

himself the haunted object of grief. Martin's release is not the same thing as Aiden's release, and the final chapter keeps those two tasks distinct. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

13. Title: Yeats's grammar changes the agency of dreaming — QUOTE: "I don't want you to have unquiet dreams. Coldness does that to me"; "Sleep well. I don't want you to have 'unquiet dreams.'" SOURCE: W. B. Yeats, "The Stolen Child" ("Give them unquiet dreams") GLOSS: In Yeats, fairies whisper into the ears of "slumbering trout" and give them unquiet dreams: otherworldly beings act upon sleepers. Mulhern withholds the line until Mrs. O'Malley voices it, then repeats it as Aiden's joking blessing before the ashes. The title becomes an accusation about what the otherworld, cold, grief, and memory do to the living—not merely a name for bad dreams. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

14. Chapters Two–Three: sleep is first a guarded domestic threshold — QUOTE: "I slept in what was my mother's room"; "That night, as often happened, I awoke to the sound of my grandfather's voice"; "There are four angels at my head"; "God bless the bed I sleep upon." SOURCE: Irish bedside prayer; threshold folklore GLOSS: The first sleeping room is Laura's displaced room, so Aiden enters sleep already occupying an absence. Sean's night visit follows directly, while Nana's four-angel prayer attempts to map and guard the same bed with evangelist names. The novel begins by putting folk apparition and Catholic domestic protection in the identical nightly space rather than making them rivals. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

15. Chapters Six, Ten, and Fifteen: the dream inventory is prophetic, not merely psychological — QUOTE: "I closed my eyes and fell asleep. My mother and I were looking at a mist-covered dark mountain across a bay"; "I was in the thick of dreams. I was at the beach with my mother"; "I dreamt of a choppy ocean, Martin, a seal, and a coming storm. My sleep was restless, as always, and filled with nightmares." SOURCE: Oneiric foreshadowing; Yeats's waters-and-wild refrain GLOSS: The novel's three major dream-images anticipate the late plot: a dark bay, a beach-and-graveyard passage into the sea, and Martin/seal/storm before the Nantasket drowning and the Achill seal-apparition. They are unquiet because they make future loss available before Aiden can understand it. The book does not allow a clean distinction between dream, vision, memory, and prophecy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

16. Chapters Ten–Fifteen: a complete pattern of disturbed rest — QUOTE: "After two nights of disturbing dreams"; "a nightmare I couldn't remember"; "My mother, who was still asleep, had been acting erratic"; "One morning, we woke to the sound of voices"; "I woke to the touch of Nana's chilled hand"; "Both of us slept a few hours." SOURCE: Formal recurrence; grief psychology GLOSS: Besides the prophetic dreams, the book repeatedly marks sleep as interrupted, feigned, medicated, or confused: Nana dreams of Sinead, Aiden is sedated after Hope's death, he wakes from an unremembered nightmare before the Achill journey, and Laura's sleep accompanies renewed visions. Even the plane's brief sleep is followed by the cat attack and the disputed "roommate" memory. Ordinary rest is never wholly ordinary in this design; waking reopens the unsolved past. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

17. Chapter Fifteen and Chapter Eighteen: insomnia is the adult cost, deep sleep the provisional answer — QUOTE: "I still have disturbing dreams and experience frequent bouts of insomnia"; "I slept deeply that night"; "Go to sleep, brother. It wasn't your fault. I never left you and I never will." SOURCE: Pastoral consolation; formal return to the bedside scene GLOSS: Adult Aiden's insomnia confirms that the title describes chronic grief rather than a single supernatural curse. The last visitation repeats the childhood bedside form, but reverses its direction: Martin, rather than Nana, guards the sleeper; forgiveness, rather than fear, permits deep sleep. The ending grants rest without claiming that grief, doubt, or the supernatural has been intellectually solved. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

18. Chapters Three–Eighteen: complete ordinary-rest counterpattern — QUOTE: "Martin is asleep on the couch"; "She fell asleep on the couch"; "I woke to the touch of Nana's chilled hand"; "My mother, who was still asleep"; "Sometimes I would pretend to fall asleep"; "a nightmare I couldn't remember"; "we woke to the sound of voices"; "Both of us slept a few hours"; "She needs to rest." SOURCE: Formal motif inventory; negative finding GLOSS: The remaining sleep vocabulary is deliberately domestic and recurrent: lies about boys being asleep, exhausted adults dozing on couches, recovery naps after shocks, a forgotten nightmare, Laura's erratic sleep, bereavement waking, travel-sleep, and Mrs. O'Malley's practical order to rest. None is a simple antonym to vision. Sleep can conceal, expose, mislead, shelter, or merely make a body vulnerable; the title's "unquiet" modifies the entire life of rest rather than denoting a special species of prophetic dream. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

19. Chapters Two and Fourteen: the maternal guilt begins as a broken report — QUOTE: "A horse startled her and she fell into a well"; "On the night before, she heard banshees calling out to her"; "Your grandmother's mother, Sinead was her name. She died tragically. She fell into a well." SOURCE: Irish banshee and pooka lore; inherited family narrative GLOSS: Sean first gives Aiden a compressed, haunted version of Sinead's death; the story is then withheld by Catherine, who can barely hear Laura's claim of second sight. The inherited wound reaches the family initially as a half-said warning, like the ghost stories that caused Laura's institutionalization. What is passed down is therefore not simply guilt but a damaged account of guilt. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

20. Chapter Fourteen: Catherine, not Sinead, makes the guilt — QUOTE: "your grandmother dropped the pail"; "Catherine was so astonished that she ran across the field"; "from that day forward Catherine blamed herself"; "Catherine, it isn't necessary. You did no wrong." SOURCE: Confession, repentance, and absolution; moral theology of culpability GLOSS: Rita's full account removes any culpable act: a pooka-like horse knocks Sinead into the well, and the child runs for help. Catherine nevertheless converts accident into lifelong self-indictment and seeks absolution from Rita repeatedly. The novel is exact here: the female line carries not inherited sin in the theological sense but an inherited model of self-punishment and secrecy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

21. Chapters Twelve–Eighteen: Laura transmits care, Aiden inherits blame, and the ending refuses both verdicts — QUOTE: "You and Laura remind me of her"; "I blamed myself for his death"; "Martin, please forgive me"; "It wasn't your fault, Aiden"; "Aiden, it's time to forgive yourself." I am the ghost. SOURCE: Romans 8:18; formal reversal of the ghost story GLOSS: Laura inherits the visible gift and the stigma attached to Sinead, while Aiden inherits Catherine's reflex of guilt after Martin's drowning. Yet Laura's maternal speech repeatedly refuses condemnation —"there is nothing wrong with that"—and Martin's final bedside speech repeats the refusal. The ending breaks the line of self-accusation only conditionally: Aiden names himself as the ghost, but forgiveness is offered rather than mechanically achieved. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

22. Chapters One, Two, and Seventeen: emigration begins as material exodus — QUOTE: "Never forget where you came from"; "He and my grandmother . . .

emigrated from different parts of Ireland in the late 1930's"; "They were poor. Too many siblings. And their futures in Ireland seemed desperate. America was a dream"; "People hated the Irish." SOURCE: Exodus; Irish diaspora history GLOSS: The grandparents leave an Ireland of poverty and constricted futures for an America that immediately supplies prejudice, grave-digging, domestic service, and exclusion from college. The book can therefore invoke Exodus as a formal analogue—departure from hardship toward a promised place—without falsely presenting America as a land of uncomplicated promise. Its first sentence makes origin an ethical command, which the later return must answer. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

23. Chapters Fifteen–Seventeen: return is repatriation by remains, not simple homecoming — QUOTE: "The two of us. We'll visit Grandpa's village on Achill Island."; "At last we would visit my grandfather's homeland and scatter Martin's ashes in the sea"; "They do. But they often return to their home. Like people."; "Martin became part of the ocean." SOURCE: Irish burial-in-home-ground tradition; diaspora return narrative GLOSS: Martin, Boston-born and drowned at Nantasket, is symbolically carried to ancestral Achill rather than buried there in a grave. The rite makes the family line move back across the Atlantic in altered form—urn, ashes, memory, and promise—while the sea prevents an ownership claim on one plot of ground. This follows the affective logic of Irish home-ground burial but revises it into dispersal and transnational kinship. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

24. Chapters One, Nine, and Seventeen: Exodus and Babylon are analogies, not the novel's governing plot — QUOTE: "It came out of you like the water gushing from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh."; "We're simply helping your mother be with her children"; "We would leave Achill Island tomorrow and return to Dublin. And from there, we would begin our journey home." SOURCE: Exodus 17:1–7; Babylonian exile/return; negative structural finding GLOSS: Biblical exodus is invoked early as fraudulent religious rhetoric and reappears in the failed effort to free Laura, but no Moses, covenant, collective people, or promised-land arrival structures the action. Likewise, the family is not exiled in Babylon and restored to a recovered polity: Achill is ancestral, not Aiden's settled home, and Boston remains "home" after the rite. The novel uses exile-and-return vocabulary to dignify diaspora grief while refusing a tidy national or scriptural restoration. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

25. Chapter One: domestic prose is accumulative, comic, and paratactic — QUOTE: "She stood in front of the mirror by the front door of the living room, arranging her pearl necklace"; "She put on bright red lipstick and fingered her gray hair"; "She turned and smoothed her green cotton dress"; "Not bad for an old broad." SOURCE: Formal principle of domestic realism GLOSS: In an ordinary scene, the sentences proceed by visible actions and concrete Anglo-Saxon nouns—mirror, hair, dress—then release tension in Nana's blunt comic speech. Coordination dominates and the cadence is observational rather than ceremonial. The prose does not begin in a permanently elevated religious register; it earns any later scriptural pressure against this busy, funny surface. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

26. Chapter Four: supernatural prose shortens, addresses, and qualifies — QUOTE: "Aiden, I need you to listen carefully. I must explain important things"; "Even on this side, there are some things we don't know for certain"; "When is relative"; "You are both dead and alive, a young boy and an old man." SOURCE: Formal principle of oracular dialogue; Ecclesiastes-like paradox GLOSS: The ghost scene abandons the domestic inventory for short imperatives, aphoristic assertions, and paradox; its Latinate abstractions—"relative," "mortal state," "consciousness," "eternity"—outnumber the household nouns. It sounds more philosophical than scriptural until Sean explicitly quotes Corinthians. The supernatural register is thus not simply archaic or biblical: it is a mixture of catechesis, Einsteinian time-talk, and folk storytelling. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

27. Chapters Fourteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen: crisis becomes scriptural only at the interpretive edge — QUOTE: "She's dead, Martin"; "I began the Our Father and she joined me"; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." SOURCE: Catholic funeral prayer; John 1:1; formal test of biblical parallelism GLOSS: The immediate death announcement is monosyllabic, blunt, and non-scriptural; the ash-scattering briefly admits formal prayer; only the final metaphysical coda rises into anaphora—"They are joyful . . . They are sad . . . They laugh"—and John. The claim that prose automatically becomes scriptural at crisis is therefore false. It becomes scriptural when the narrator interprets crisis into an eternal pattern, not when bodies are dying, falling, or being carried away. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

Part Six: Molly Bonamici

The Concordance: Molly Bonamici

Religious Allusion Concordance: James Mulhern's *Molly Bonamici*

PART I: RELIGIOUS ALLUSION CONCORDANCE

Section A — Scripture, Liturgy, Sacraments, and Direct Doctrinal Reference

1. QUOTE: "I didn't believe in God; that was foolishness… The physical world was more magical to me than any fairytale notions of God, heaven, and hell." (Chapter One) **SOURCE:** Inverted creedal statement / opening renunciation of faith. **GLOSS:** This is Molly's founding declaration and sets the whole novel's argument in motion — a child's atheism she will spend 250 pages testing against experience. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

2. QUOTE: "a domed-shaped glass Madonna, figurines of Italian peasants, and the awful fake painting of the Last Supper that hung on the dining room wall" (Chapter One) **SOURCE:** Marian devotional kitsch; Last Supper iconography (institution of the Eucharist, Matthew 26/Luke 22). **GLOSS:** The family's "special occasions" room is a shrine of folk-Catholic bric-a-brac Molly finds vulgar; the Eucharistic image hangs over a household defined by violence, not communion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

3. QUOTE: "statues of the Madonna on front lawns" (Chapter One) **SOURCE:** Italian-American folk-Marian devotion (bathtub-shrine tradition). **GLOSS:** A single-clause establishing shot of Revere's ethnic Catholic landscape, planting Marian imagery before the Assumption plot arrives. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

4. QUOTE: "Do they teach you your catechisms? Do they teach you the Ten Commandments, the Our Father, and Hail Mary?… She picked up rosary beads and laminated novenas that were on the table. 'Faith is most important, Molly.'" (Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** The Catechism; the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20); the Our Father (Matthew 6:9-13); the Hail Mary; the rosary; novena

devotions. **GLOSS:** Mrs. Muldoon's inventory of Catholic basics, delivered as scolding, is the novel's first cluster of named devotional objects and will recur, transfigured, at her death. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

5. QUOTE: "You are not smarter than God, Molly." (Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** Folk rebuke rooted in the Book of Job's theme of human limitation before divine wisdom (Job 38-41). **GLOSS:** A stock pious put-down that nonetheless previews the novel's real theological argument — Molly's intelligence versus a mystery she cannot out-think. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

6. QUOTE: "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" (Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Two; recurs at Chapter Twenty-One, Nonna) **SOURCE:** Invocation of the Holy Family, a standard Irish-Catholic exclamation. **GLOSS:** Folk-Catholic profanity/prayer hybrid; its repetition across Irish (Muldoon) and Italian (Nonna) characters shows the idiom crossing ethnic lines. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

7. QUOTE: "I was Angela in West Side Story and Mary in Jesus Christ, Superstar. My favorite song in the latter play was 'I Don't Know How to Love Him.'" (Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Mary Magdalene's number); Gospel portrayals of the women at the foot of the cross. **GLOSS:** Molly literally plays a Magdalene-figure loving a Christ she "doesn't know how to love" — an early, uncanny rehearsal of her later inability to love her own father, and of her ambivalent relationship to belief itself. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

8. QUOTE: "It was the Bible. Can you believe that?" … "The book Bianca smacked the girl's head with." (Nonna, Chapter Three) **SOURCE:** Scripture as physical object of violence — an inversion of "the Word" as instrument of peace. **GLOSS:** A comic-grotesque premonition of the novel's later, more serious desecration when Molly rips up a Gospel text after her parents' funeral. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

9. QUOTE: "Do you believe in God, Nonna?" … "No." … "There is no heaven. There is no God. I think when we die, we just rot and become dirt." (Chapter Three) **SOURCE:** Direct negation of the Apostles' Creed and the resurrection of the body. **GLOSS:** Nonna's private materialism, confided only to Molly, is later revealed as consistent with a life of murder and fraud — unbelief here is not neutral but permissive. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

10. QUOTE: "It means 'May God give increase.'… The only increase God ever gave my mother was more work." (Nonna, on the name Giuseppina/Josephine, Chapter Three) **SOURCE:** Etymological gloss on Joseph/Josephine (Hebrew "Yosef," God shall add/increase); Genesis 30:24. **GLOSS:** A bitter joke about theodicy embedded in a name — divine "increase" is exposed as more suffering, not blessing, for an immigrant washerwoman. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

11. QUOTE: "Father Flanagan puts me in a bad mood. If there is a God, I think he would want the priests to say things that make his congregation happy." (Molly, Chapter Three) **SOURCE:** Critique of clerical preaching against pastoral consolation. **GLOSS:** Molly's earliest anti-clerical position, framed conditionally ("if there is a God"), shows her arguing inside a theological frame she claims to reject. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

12. QUOTE: "Nonna called me later that week and asked if I would help her take Mrs. Muldoon to a faith healer… The woman had allegedly cured a young girl whose cancerous tumors miraculously disappeared, and an old arthritic man who could barely walk." (Chapter Four) **SOURCE:** Gospel healing-miracle pattern (blind see, lame walk — Matthew 11:5, Mark 2). **GLOSS:** "Lady Jane" is a debased echo of Christ's healing ministry, complete with a crowd of the suffering poor; the novel uses the con artist to interrogate the line between faith and fraud. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

13. QUOTE: "I want my soul to be cleansed… It's spiritual healing as well." (Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Four) **SOURCE:** Language of confession/absolution and spiritual purification. **GLOSS:** Mrs. Muldoon seeks something closer to sacramental cleansing than medical cure — an unmet need the Church itself should have answered. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

14. QUOTE: "you might say that you're an Angel of Death." (Lady Jane, Chapter Four) **SOURCE:** Biblical angel of death (Exodus 12, the Passover) and folk personification of Death. **GLOSS:** A charged epithet that becomes Molly's shadow-identity throughout the book — she is present at nearly every death in the novel, and the phrase returns explicitly in Chapter Twelve. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

15. QUOTE: "How you gonna get the Blessed Mother's cure if you don't get wet?" (Nonna, Chapter Five) **SOURCE:** Conflation of baptismal water (Mark 1:9-11) with Marian shrine-water traditions (e.g., Lourdes). **GLOSS:** The upcoming beach ritual is

explicitly framed as needing water for a "cure," folding baptism and Marian devotion into one folk-Catholic gesture. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

16. QUOTE: "It's a celebration for both of us, a baptism of sorts, as we begin our new lives." (Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Five) **SOURCE:** The sacrament of Baptism (Romans 6:3-4, dying and rising with Christ). **GLOSS:** Mrs. Muldoon names her own ritual outright; the "new life" language anticipates her death — this baptism will, in fact, be her last rite. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

17. QUOTE: "today is the day that Catholics celebrate the Blessed Mother's Assumption into heaven… Well she was raised into heaven three days after her death." (Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Five) **SOURCE:** The Feast of the Assumption of Mary (August 15); the dogma of Mary's bodily assumption, proclaimed 1950. **GLOSS:** This is the novel's structural keystone: Mrs. Muldoon dies by suicide on the anniversary of this very feast, and her body's actual fate (grotesque decomposition) will directly invert Mary's bodily incorruption. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

18. QUOTE: "Molly, you're an angel," she said, when she was standing at last. (Mrs. Muldoon, of Molly lifting her from the surf, Chapter Five) **SOURCE:** Angelic epithet, paired ironically with "Angel of Death" from Chapter Four. **GLOSS:** The same character is called both a redeeming angel and a death-omen within the space of one chapter — the novel refuses to resolve whether Molly's presence at death is a curse or a grace. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

19. QUOTE: "Mrs. Muldoon made a joke about this being our last supper. 'Well, it is in a way, don't you think? I won't be seeing either of you again after tonight.'" (Chapter Six) **SOURCE:** The Last Supper (Matthew 26:20-29). **GLOSS:** A joke that becomes literally true; this is the meal before her staged "departure," structurally functioning as her own institution-of-a-memorial before death. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

20. QUOTE: "Did you know that a fish is the symbol of Christ, Molly?" (Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Six) **SOURCE:** The Ichthys (ΙΧΘΥΣ) as an early Christian acrostic symbol for Christ. **GLOSS:** Delivered over the restaurant's fish wallpaper moments before her death is discovered, this is Mrs. Muldoon's last piece of unsolicited catechesis to Molly, and it will be recalled at the novel's very end as evidence of her quiet evangelizing love. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

21. QUOTE: "She had created her own Assumption and I thought, ironically, consumption." (Molly, Chapter Six) **SOURCE:** The dogma of the Assumption, punningly collapsed into "consumption" (decay/wasting). **GLOSS:** The novel's single most explicit thesis-sentence: sacred ascent and bodily corruption are yoked together by a pun, refusing to let either cancel the other out. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

22. QUOTE: Poe's "The Conqueror Worm," quoted at length: "And the angels sob at vermin fangs / In human gore imbued!" (Chapter Six) **SOURCE:** Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm" (1843). **GLOSS:** A literary intertext in which angels themselves weep at human corruption — imported wholesale to gloss Mrs. Muldoon's decomposing body and to question whether any resurrection awaits "the tragedy 'Man.'" **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

23. QUOTE: "I don't believe in heaven, sir." / "I have no interest in what you believe, Molly." (Molly and Officer Donnelly, Chapter Six) **SOURCE:** Direct statement of disbelief in the afterlife. **GLOSS:** A blunt exchange that dramatizes the gap between institutional procedure (police work) and metaphysical claims — belief is bureaucratically irrelevant here, which is itself a comment on secular modernity's indifference to faith. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

24. QUOTE: Gold necklace with "an emerald and diamond cross" left to Molly by Mrs. Muldoon (Chapter Six; recalled Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** The cross as personal relic/inheritance. **GLOSS:** A material bequest of faith from a woman Molly dismisses as "a useless thing" at the time — the phrase is bitterly ironic, since the necklace becomes, by the novel's end, proof of Mrs. Muldoon's "acts of pure love." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

25. QUOTE: "My mother opened the front door. She had been at a Bible Study meeting. "My mother's home. I need to go."" (Chapter Seven) **SOURCE:** Protestant-inflected devotional practice (Bible study) attributed to Molly's Italian-Catholic mother. **GLOSS:** A small but telling detail: Maria's piety exceeds pure Catholic form, suggesting a hunger for scripture the parish alone doesn't satisfy. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

26. QUOTE: "I don't like the Bible much. Mostly it's a bunch of bullshit. The New Testament isn't all that bad. I like the Gospel of John, especially its Prologue: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'"

(Molly, Chapter Eight) **SOURCE:** John 1:1, quoted verbatim. **GLOSS:** Molly's aesthetic attraction to Johannine language ("the idea of words being portrayed as divine appeals to me") reveals a suppressed reverence for the sacred that her professed atheism cannot fully extinguish — she is, after all, an English major. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

27. QUOTE: "After all, the human being is one of God's creations… he made Adam lord and master over all of the animals. You should review the book of Genesis, Felicity." (Molly, Chapter Eight) **SOURCE:** Genesis 1:26-28 (human dominion over creation). **GLOSS:** Molly weaponizes Genesis mid-striptease to needle her devout roommate — scripture deployed sarcastically, but accurately, is a recurring comic register in the novel. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

28. QUOTE: "Maybe it was the Holy Spirit coming to your blessed bedside." / "That's sackylegious." (Molly and Felicity, Chapter Nine) **SOURCE:** The Holy Spirit (Pentecost, Acts 2); the concept of sacrilege. **GLOSS:** Felicity's malapropism ("sackylegious" for "sacrilegious") comically undercuts her own piety even as she tries to police Molly's blasphemy. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

29. QUOTE: "Well, pretend this is church. The Church of Theta Delta." (David, Chapter Nine) **SOURCE:** Mock-ecclesial language applied to a fraternity kegger. **GLOSS:** A throwaway joke that nonetheless typifies the novel's habit of draping secular ritual (drinking, sex, parties) in liturgical vocabulary. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

30. QUOTE: "I'm really a nice Italian Catholic girl who goes to church every Sunday." (Molly, ironically, Chapter Ten) **SOURCE:** Self-identification as observant Catholic — false on its face. **GLOSS:** Spoken while discussing her fascination with murder, this is blasphemy-as-persona: Molly performs piety she does not hold, immediately after disavowing belief in heaven or hell. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

31. QUOTE: "We screwed the mannequin together and baptized her 'Candice Kox.'" (Chapter Eleven) **SOURCE:** The sacrament of Baptism, applied comically to naming an inanimate object. **GLOSS:** A minor but telling instance of sacramental vocabulary leaking into ordinary campus life — naming itself is treated as a quasi-religious act throughout the book. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

32. QUOTE: "'For the love of God, let her be okay! Oh Jesus!'" (Mark, panicking during the mannequin prank/Felicity's collapse, Chapter Eleven) **SOURCE:** Invocation prayer under duress. **GLOSS:** A comic prank collapses into a real death, and the panicked prayer that follows is the only sincere prayer uttered by a non-believing character in the scene — crisis produces reflexive faith. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

33. QUOTE: "What would Jesus say if my Felicity entered heaven all cut up and sewed back together?… My daughter will not be donating any organs either… How could she see the beauty of heaven?" (Mrs. Adams, Chapter Eleven) **SOURCE:** Folk-literalist theology of bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:35-44). **GLOSS:** A grotesquely comic version of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, showing how literalized Catholic/Christian teaching can curdle into superstition when detached from its symbolic register. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

34. QUOTE: "It fascinates me, especially when I see people who can have such faith. I almost wish I could have faith, but I don't think that's ever going to happen." … "I'm too much of realist. I think there is so much pain and suffering in the world. How could a supreme God allow such terrible things?" (Molly, Chapter Eleven) **SOURCE:** The classical problem of theodicy (Job; Ivan Karamazov's rebellion). **GLOSS:** The novel's clearest first-person statement of Molly's actual position: not contempt but grief-stricken longing for a faith she cannot access — this passage reorients the whole concordance around unbelief-as-wound rather than unbelief-as-triumph. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

35. QUOTE: "I felt lost in dark woods, my own purgatory, or dark night of the soul, if I believed in a soul." (Molly, Chapter Thirteen) **SOURCE:** Dante, *Inferno* I.1-3 ("Midway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a dark wood"); St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*; the doctrine of Purgatory. **GLOSS:** A dense triple allusion compressing Dante's opening image, mystical theology, and Catholic eschatology into a single sentence describing secular grief — one of the novel's most structurally important passages. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

36. QUOTE: "I was uneasy, dazed, and I felt like I was climbing a steep hill that grew more precipitous the further I ascended." (Chapter Thirteen) **SOURCE:** Dante, *Purgatorio* (the mountain of Purgatory, penitential ascent). **GLOSS:** Following

directly on the "purgatory" reference, this image completes a Dantean structural borrowing: Molly's post-bereavement life is figured as a Purgatorio-like climb rather than a static hell. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

37. QUOTE: "Combat Zone… across the street from the Garden of Eden" (Chapter Thirteen) **SOURCE:** Genesis 2-3, the Garden of Eden — here a literal Boston strip-club name. **GLOSS:** Vice literally borrows Eden's name; the novel's "lowest point" of promiscuity and theft occurs in the shadow of a debased paradise, ironizing the Fall. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

38. QUOTE: "I was kicked out of the seminary for what the bishop termed an 'exclusive friendship.'… I don't want you to lose faith in God after hearing what I say. The institution may have problems but the spirit of Christ's intention is everlasting." (Gabe, Chapter Thirteen) **SOURCE:** Clerical celibacy scandal; the theological distinction between the institutional Church and the person of Christ. **GLOSS:** Gabe is the novel's clearest voice separating corrupt Church practice from a still-living "spirit of Christ" — arguably the book's own implicit position, voiced by a "fallen" priest rather than a believing layperson. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

39. QUOTE: "Some Christians associate the star with John the Baptist. It's also God spelled backwards, a symbol of power and steadfastness. So whether you like it or not, Molly, God is always watching over you." (Gabe, on Sirius, Chapter Thirteen) **SOURCE:** John the Baptist as forerunner (Luke 1); folk astral-religious symbolism (dog/god wordplay). **GLOSS:** A whimsical but pointed assertion of providence directed at a professed unbeliever, delivered by a man whose name — Gabriel — is itself an archangel's. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

40. QUOTE: "Amazing Grace" played as we entered and took our seats in the first pew… "Be Not Afraid"… "How many of us would cross barren deserts? How many of us would wander far in safety though we did not know the way? How many of us would see the face of God and live" (Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** The hymns "Amazing Grace" (John Newton) and "Be Not Afraid" (Bob Dufford, SJ), the latter itself echoing Exodus 33:20 ("no one may see me and live") and Isaiah 43:2. **GLOSS:** Two specific, named funeral hymns bookend the parents' funeral Mass, giving the scene a fully realized liturgical shape framing Molly's interior rebellion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

41. QUOTE: "The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." / What grace? What peace? (Father Costa and Molly, Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** The Mass's opening greeting, itself drawn from Pauline epistolary formula (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3). **GLOSS:** Molly answers liturgy with bitter rhetorical questions — the novel stages doubt as a direct, line-by-line rebuttal of the Mass's own language. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

42. QUOTE: "The Blessed Mother, the Stations of the Cross, the Sacraments and the saints" (Chapter Twelve, stained-glass windows, learned about "from the Sisters of Immaculate Conception") **SOURCE:** Marian devotion; the Stations of the Cross (Passion iconography); the seven Sacraments; the communion of saints. **GLOSS:** A single sentence catalogs almost the entire visual vocabulary of Catholic iconography, anchored explicitly in Molly's convent-school education. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

43. QUOTE: "The Assumption of Mary caught my eye: arms folded against her chest, blue shawl over her white robe, sunlight behind her, surrounded by a sphere of purple clouds." (Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** Traditional Assumption iconography. **GLOSS:** The same feast that governed Mrs. Muldoon's death reappears in stained glass at the parents' funeral, visually stitching the two deaths into one theological argument about ascension versus decay. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

44. QUOTE: "A reading from Mark, Chapter 15: At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Molly reading, Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** Mark 15:33-34, quoted verbatim (the cry of dereliction). **GLOSS:** Molly reads Christ's own cry of abandonment at her parents' funeral — a passage about feeling forsaken by God is voiced by a woman who has felt forsaken by her parents her whole life. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

45. QUOTE: "'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.'" (Molly reading, continuing Mark 16:6, Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** Mark 16:6, quoted verbatim (the Resurrection announcement at the empty tomb). **GLOSS:** The Resurrection proclamation is read directly over her parents' closed caskets — a stark

juxtaposition of the promise of rising against literal, irrecoverable death (they were "blown to bits"). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

46. QUOTE: "The priest would raise the chalice and say his prayer in that annoying singsong way, then break the Host. How could anyone… believe that when the altar boy rang the bell and a prayer was spoken, a wafer was transformed into the literal body of Christ?" (Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** The Consecration/Eucharistic Prayer; the doctrine of transubstantiation. **GLOSS:** A detailed, almost loving description of the Mass's central mystery, undercut immediately by skepticism — the passage shows Molly's attention to liturgical detail exceeding that of many "believers" in the pews. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

47. QUOTE: "In my head, I thought, Fuck you Lord Jesus Christ, and fuck your mother, father, and the Holy Ghost, too." (Molly, Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** Direct inversion of the Trinitarian blessing formula ("In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"). **GLOSS:** The novel's most extreme instance of blasphemy-as-inverted-prayer — grief expressed as a parody of the very formula used to bless and baptize. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

48. QUOTE: "I ripped up the Gospel text Nonna had given me and flushed it down the toilet." (Chapter Twelve) **SOURCE:** Desecration of scripture. **GLOSS:** A physically enacted rejection of the Word immediately following her recitation of it — belief and its violent negation occur within the same day, even the same body. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

49. QUOTE: "Call me Virgil." (Officer Connolly, at the gravesite, Chapter Twelve; later revealed: "There was an Irish Saint Virgil who lived about 700 AD," Chapter Twenty-One) **SOURCE:** Dante's guide Virgil through the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*; the historical St. Virgil of Salzburg (Fergil), an eighth-century Irish monk-bishop known for his (then-heterodox) cosmological views. **GLOSS:** A guide-figure literally named Virgil appears at a graveside — the novel's most deliberate Dante borrowing, doubled later by the revelation that "Virgil" is also a real saint's name, and paired at the very end with a taxi driver named "Bea… Beatrice." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

50. QUOTE: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15, in Molly's mother's Bible, Chapter Seventeen) **SOURCE:** Matthew 7:15, quoted verbatim. **GLOSS:** The one verse Molly's

mother marked as a favorite is a warning against deception — poignant in hindsight, since Nonna, the "wolf in sheep's clothing," is the deceiver Maria never unmasked. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

51. QUOTE: "The Catholic house, richly furnished for the glory of God, was filled with religious geegaws: a statuette of Saint Francis, a yellowed print of the Blessed Mother looking serenely towards the heavens, crosses and crucifixes adorning pastel-colored walls throughout, and busts of saints I didn't recognize." (Chapter Sixteen) **SOURCE:** Catalog of Catholic devotional material culture (St. Francis of Assisi; Marian imagery; crucifixes; sainthood generally). **GLOSS:** A house-hunting scene becomes an anthropological survey of Italian/Irish-American Catholic material piety, viewed by Molly and her gay best friend as curious relics of a world they've left. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

52. QUOTE: "It would be like our own private Eden." / "Evan and I like to swim nude… All we need is a snake," Gabe said. (Chapter Sixteen) **SOURCE:** Genesis 2-3 (nakedness without shame; the serpent). **GLOSS:** The couple's new Florida rental is jokingly declared Edenic, complete with nudity and a promised serpent — the "paradise" language recurs structurally throughout the Florida chapters and pays off in the closing Dickinson poem. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

53. QUOTE: "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." (Mary Grace, praying mid-fight, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Matthew 7:6, quoted verbatim. **GLOSS:** Scripture recited as a genuine prayer in the middle of a violent classroom brawl — one of the novel's few moments where a quoted Bible verse is deployed with total sincerity rather than irony. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

54. QUOTE: "She thinks that she's Joan of Narc." (Beneatha, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** St. Joan of Arc, malapropped. **GLOSS:** A comic corruption of a martyred saint's name applied to a psychologically fragile teenager — continuing the novel's pattern (cf. "sackylegious") of garbled piety among the young. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

55. QUOTE: "We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way." (St. Francis, quoted on a church sign, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. **GLOSS:** Molly reads

this sign from her car during a storm and immediately doubts it ("could wounds ever be really healed?") — the "home" and "healing" language directly answers/questions the novel's Assumption and homecoming motifs. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

56. QUOTE: "'To bring the young lambs to the fold'… he 'kept waiting to see Jesus.'" (Langston Hughes, "Salvation," quoted in Molly's classroom, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Langston Hughes's essay "Salvation," itself echoing the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7) and revivalist altar-call practice. **GLOSS:** Hughes's account of faking a religious conversion as a child is taught by an unbelieving teacher to students from "religious backgrounds" — the classroom becomes a mirror for Molly's own performed unbelief and Hughes's performed belief. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

57. QUOTE: "Are we supposed to believe that Jonah was swallowed by a whale and lived inside that thing for three days?" (Kayla, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** The Book of Jonah, chapters 1-2. **GLOSS:** Biblical literalism is tested through the Jonah story, a type traditionally read (Matthew 12:40) as prefiguring Christ's three days in the tomb — the "three days" echo (Assumption, Resurrection, Jonah) recurs across the novel. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

58. QUOTE: "I don't believe Jesus even existed. And how can someone pay for our sins by getting nailed to a cross?" (Turpin, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Substitutionary atonement doctrine (Isaiah 53; Romans 5:8) and Passion imagery (nails, cross). **GLOSS:** A student voices, more crudely, exactly the theological objection Molly has carried since childhood — doubt is generationally transmitted and normalized. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

59. QUOTE: "'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'" (Marx, quoted by Molly, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), quoted verbatim. **GLOSS:** Molly corrects a student's garbled paraphrase with the full, accurate Marx quotation — an intellectual's precision applied to the century's most famous critique of religion, delivered in an English class, not a sermon. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

60. QUOTE: "'A gentle Lady is in Heaven, who grieves at this distress through which I must conduct thee.'" (Dante, quoted internally by Molly, Chapter Eighteen) **SOURCE:** Dante, *Inferno* II.94-96 (Beatrice speaking to Virgil about her intercession for the

pilgrim). **GLOSS:** Molly silently recalls this line about heavenly intercession and immediately thinks of her mother — casting her dead mother, unconsciously, as a Beatrice-figure grieving over and guiding her from beyond death. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

61. QUOTE: Kierkegaard, quoted by Gabe: "'There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true.'" (Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Søren Kierkegaard, commonly attributed; explicitly linked in-text to *Fear and Trembling*. **GLOSS:** Gabe frames Molly's rigid atheism as itself a form of being fooled — a direct philosophical challenge to the entire premise of her skepticism. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

62. QUOTE: "'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'… I hope you don't mind that I highlighted that line in your book." (Gabe, quoting Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.v.167-168 — also the novel's own front-matter epigraph. **GLOSS:** The line printed as the novel's first epigraph, on its own page after the dedication, resurfaces inside the story itself, physically underlined by a character urging Molly toward openness to mystery — a rare moment where the book's paratext and plot directly touch. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

63. QUOTE: Myra's dead husband: ""Well, when Lazzy died." "Lassie?" I said. "Lazarus. My husband."" (Chapter Twenty) **SOURCE:** Lazarus, raised from the dead by Christ (John 11). **GLOSS:** A resurrection name given to a man whose widow is a serial fabulist; the "raised" Lazarus of scripture is deflated into a punchline about a dead husband invoked only for financial gain. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

64. QUOTE: Myra, struck by a car: "blood streamed from her nostrils and mouth, creating a halo-shaped pool around her head." (Chapter Twenty) **SOURCE:** The halo as an iconographic marker of sanctity. **GLOSS:** A grotesque, purely accidental "halo" crowns a con artist's violent death — sanctity's visual grammar applied ironically to the novel's least sympathetic minor character. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

65. QUOTE: "Have you asked to speak with a priest?" / "Why would I do that?" / "Absolution. Last Rights." / "Since when have you become a holy roller?" (Molly and Nonna, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** The Sacrament of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick ("Last Rites"/Extreme Unction). **GLOSS:** Nonna, dying of cancer

and unrepentant to the end, refuses the Church's final sacraments even as an insurance policy — the same "insurance" logic she once used to justify the fraudulent Assumption-day beach ritual. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

66. QUOTE: "a small framed picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a quartz locket with the same image on the outside and a timepiece inside… a small statuette of the Blessed Mother." (Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** The Sacred Heart devotion; Marian statuary. **GLOSS:** Molly's mother's devotional keepsakes surface only after both Molly's parents and Nonna are dead — Maria's quiet Catholic interior life is glimpsed too late for reconciliation, only through objects. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

67. QUOTE: "Maria loved the Blessed Mother. She was so proud to be born on Mary 31st, the feast of the Visitation… Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth who told her she was pregnant with Jesus." (Aunt Helena, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** The Feast of the Visitation (Luke 1:39-56). **GLOSS:** Molly's mother's birthday coincides with the feast marking Mary's joyful visit to a pregnant kinswoman — an image of maternal solidarity Maria herself never received from her own dismissive daughter. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

68. QUOTE: "Are you a believer, Aunt Helena?" / "Why yes, Molly. Of course I am. If you don't have belief, what's the point of it all? There's got to be meaning to our lives. Faith gives meaning." (Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Direct affirmation of faith as existential ground. **GLOSS:** The novel's plainest counter-argument to Molly's unbelief, voiced by its gentlest and most morally reliable character — Aunt Helena, the family's true "peacemaker," is also its clearest believer. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

69. QUOTE: "Consider it insurance. Like you said the day we took Mrs. Muldoon to the beach." (Molly to Nonna, re: last rites, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Callback to the Assumption-day beach "insurance" logic (Chapter Five). **GLOSS:** The novel closes the loop on Nonna's own earlier cynicism, throwing her manipulative theology back at her on her deathbed — she still refuses it. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

70. QUOTE: "Call me Virg… Short for Virgil… There was an Irish Saint Virgil who lived about 700 AD… he believed that the world was round." (Officer Connolly, Chapter Twenty-One) **SOURCE:** St. Virgil of Salzburg (Fergil), 8th-century Irish missionary-bishop and early cosmological thinker. **GLOSS:** The novel supplies a real hagiographic footnote for its own Dante allusion — a guide-figure who leads Molly

toward truth is doubly sanctified, by literature and by the calendar of saints. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

71. QUOTE: "Molly is a nickname for both Margaret and Mary. And today is October 17th, the Feast of Saint Margaret Mary." (Officer Connolly, revealing Mrs. Muldoon's full name, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), visionary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. **GLOSS:** This casual reveal detonates at the novel's very end, when the date of Molly's homecoming swim turns out to be St. Margaret Mary's feast day — Mrs. Muldoon's full name has silently carried the novel's central devotion (the Sacred Heart) all along. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

72. QUOTE: "T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets: 'In my beginning is my end.'" (Chapter Twenty-One) **SOURCE:** T.S. Eliot, "East Coker" (*Four Quartets*), quoted verbatim. **GLOSS:** Applied to Nonna's deathbed, this line — itself steeped in Eliot's Anglo-Catholic theology of cyclical time and redemption — frames her death as a closing of the circle that began with her own crimes. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

73. QUOTE: "asked to be cremated and have her ashes thrown in the ocean at Revere Beach." (Nonna's final wish, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Inversion of Catholic burial practice; ironic echo of the Assumption-day sea ritual (Chapter Five). **GLOSS:** Nonna, an unbeliever to the end, chooses the same sea that "cured" Mrs. Muldoon and gave her a "baptism of sorts" — a final, unwitting return to the water that condemns her own fraudulence by contrast. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

74. QUOTE: "My soul swooned and I felt great peace… two planes moved across the sky, one ascending, one descending, a metaphor for life." (Molly, at Nonna's death, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Ascent/descent imagery echoing the Assumption and Dante's Purgatorio-climb. **GLOSS:** At the death of the novel's most corrupt character, the imagery is nonetheless one of ascent balanced against descent — the novel refuses to send Nonna simply "down." **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

75. QUOTE: "I'm Bea. Short for Beatrice." (Taxi driver, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Dante's Beatrice, guide through Paradiso. **GLOSS:** Following the earlier "Virgil" (guide through Hell/Purgatory), a "Beatrice" appears at the very end to drive Molly to the sea — completing, almost too neatly, the Dantean sequence of guides toward paradise. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

76. QUOTE: "Today's your day… today is October 17th, the Feast of Saint Margaret Mary… She claimed that Christ chose her as an instrument to spread devotion to His Sacred Heart." (Bea, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, apostle of the Sacred Heart devotion; her feast day (October 17 in the pre-1969 calendar). **GLOSS:** The novel's single largest structural payoff: Mrs. Muldoon's real name, the Sacred Heart locket, and this feast day converge on the day Molly finally opens herself to "a power superior and everlasting" — belief arrives not through argument but through pattern and coincidence. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

77. QUOTE: "She had tried to help me, guide me, in the hope that someday I would believe in a power superior and everlasting… were acts of pure love." (Molly, of Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Retrospective recognition of grace operating through ordinary people. **GLOSS:** The novel's closest approach to a conversion scene — not a creed adopted, but a friendship reread as evangelization, fulfilling Mrs. Muldoon's quiet, comic catechesis from decades earlier. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

78. QUOTE: "Believing in possibility, I spread my arms wide and swam slowly to the shore. Where the water became shallow and frothy, I rose and walked onto the beach, grateful to be home at last." (Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Baptismal imagery (rising from water); the novel's recurring "home" motif (heaven-as-home, ironized throughout). **GLOSS:** Molly's final action is a literal rising from the sea, resolving the "going home" language that has haunted the novel since Mrs. Muldoon's death — this time "home" is neither a euphemism for the grave nor for heaven, but an embodied, immanent arrival. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

79. QUOTE: "I dwell in Possibility – / A fairer House than Prose… The spreading wide my narrow Hands / To gather Paradise –" (Emily Dickinson, quoted in full, closing the novel) **SOURCE:** Emily Dickinson, poem 466/657 ("I dwell in Possibility"). **GLOSS:** The novel's last words are a named poem that ends on the word "Paradise" — mirroring Molly's own outstretched arms in the previous paragraph and sealing the book's long argument between disbelief and grace with an image of gathering rather than certainty. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

80. QUOTE: Emily Dickinson poem 258, quoted at length: "There's a certain Slant of light… That oppresses, like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes –… 'Tis the Seal Despair…"

(Chapter Fifteen) **SOURCE:** Emily Dickinson, "There's a certain Slant of light" (poem 258/320). **GLOSS:** A second major Dickinson citation, saturated with explicitly sacred vocabulary ("Cathedral Tunes," "Heavenly Hurt"), read by Molly alone on the anniversary-adjacent grief night after visiting Gabe's father's grave — poetry substitutes for prayer. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

Section B — Sacramental Objects, Folk Practice, and Recurring Motifs (Confession, Wakes, Superstition, Malocchio-adjacent Belief)

81. QUOTE: "I have witnesses… Molly, get me some gauze from the medicine cabinet in my bathroom. And Helena grab some honey from the cupboard." Followed by Nonna dressing Bianca's burn (Chapter One) **SOURCE:** Folk healing tradition (honey as wound salve) alongside domestic first aid. **GLOSS:** A homely, non-liturgical "anointing" scene — Nonna's household medicine anticipates the later, false "healing" pilgrimage to Lady Jane and questions where real care actually resides. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

82. QUOTE: "Oh my God! I really coulda died… My brain all over the ice. She crossed herself." (Nonna, staging her fall, Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** The Sign of the Cross. **GLOSS:** A devotional gesture performed for a fraudulent lawsuit — the novel's first instance of sacred gesture drained of sincerity and repurposed for con-artistry, a pattern (Lady Jane, Myra) that recurs throughout. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

83. QUOTE: "It's a fancy schmancy palace where the Pope lives… I think it's the Vatican. I got the Pope's house on my ass." (Nonna, of a bruise shape, Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** Comic folk-Catholic body-as-map imagery, referencing the Vatican/papacy. **GLOSS:** The body becomes a comic site of accidental "holy" geography — a lowbrow echo of the novel's more serious interest in bodies (Mrs. Muldoon's corpse, Nonna's dying body) as sites of theological meaning. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

84. QUOTE: "What we did today, some people would consider a sin. Certainly the Pope." (Nonna, Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** The concept of sin and papal moral authority. **GLOSS:** Nonna acknowledges wrongdoing in explicitly religious terms even while disbelieving in God — sin-language survives as a social/psychological category long after theological content has been discarded. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

85. QUOTE: Bianca's punishment for stealing from the collection: "he had to clean and polish the altar every week for six months." (Nonna, of Father Paul, Chapter Three) **SOURCE:** Sacramental penance, adapted into informal parish discipline. **GLOSS:** A folk-penitential practice substituting for formal confession/absolution — the parish priest's leniency and improvised penance shows the local, personal face of Church discipline in an immigrant community. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

86. QUOTE: "Sometimes, you gotta go along with the crowd. Like church and God, and all those crazy saints." (Nonna, Chapter Three) **SOURCE:** Communion of saints; social performance of religious observance. **GLOSS:** Nonna's cynical view of religion as social conformity rather than belief typifies the "believing without believing" mode common to folk Catholicism under strain. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

87. QUOTE: "People said she was a saint. Her name was Giuseppina." (Nonna, of her mother, Chapter Three) **SOURCE:** Folk sainthood conferred through suffering and self-sacrifice (not formal canonization). **GLOSS:** Redemptive suffering is here entirely secularized into communal reputation — a woman becomes "a saint" simply by enduring unpaid domestic labor without complaint, a genuinely Catholic (if unofficial) honorific. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

88. QUOTE: "Nonna was oohing and aahing over a silver aluminum Christmas tree" and later steals ornaments from Mrs. Muldoon's tree, believing "she won't notice them missing" (Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** Folk moral reasoning (petty theft rationalized as harmless). **GLOSS:** A minor moral texture-note: guilt is present but manageable, foreshadowing Nonna's much larger, unrepented crimes later in the book. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

89. QUOTE: "She stood up and pointed to the Vatican. 'As God is our witness.'" (Nonna, swearing to the insurance fraud story, Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** Formal oath-taking language ("as God is my witness"). **GLOSS:** God is invoked as a false witness to a lie — perjury dressed in devotional idiom, a small-scale rehearsal of Nonna's much larger capacity to weaponize piety. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

90. QUOTE: "Mrs. Callaghan crossed herself… Her lips moved as she recited a silent prayer. Gabe crossed himself as well." (Chapter Fifteen) **SOURCE:** The Sign of the Cross; silent personal prayer at a graveside. **GLOSS:** Even a "lapsed" ex-priest (Gabe) retains the bodily habit of the cross — Catholic muscle memory outlasting explicit

belief, one of the novel's most understated but genuine devotional moments. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

91. QUOTE: Mrs. Callaghan cuts curls from her dead husband's corpse to keep "in a tiny cloth bag under my pillow. Makes me feel like he's still with me at night." (Chapter Fifteen) **SOURCE:** The Catholic tradition of relics (bodily remains of the holy kept for veneration/comfort). **GLOSS:** A folk-relic practice performed by a grieving Irish-American widow, structurally parallel to (and more sincere than) the novel's official saints' relics — grief invents its own reliquary. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

92. QUOTE: Irish Blessing recited over whiskey at the grave: "May the road rise up to meet you… And until we meet again, May God hold you in the palm of his hand." / "I doubted God was holding us in the palm of his hand." (Chapter Fifteen) **SOURCE:** The traditional Irish Blessing, a devotional/folk-liturgical text. **GLOSS:** A specifically Irish-Catholic ritual utterance is immediately rebutted by Molly's interior skepticism — belief and doubt occupy the same graveside moment without resolving. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

93. QUOTE: "Every mother should have a gay son. God, I feel blessed." She crossed herself and looked towards the blue sky. (Mrs. Callaghan, Chapter Twenty-One) **SOURCE:** Folk-blessing language plus the Sign of the Cross. **GLOSS:** A warmly comic instance of devotion completely detached from doctrinal anxiety about homosexuality — Mrs. Callaghan's Catholicism is generous rather than punitive. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

94. QUOTE: "Deaths happen in three… Oh Jesus, be careful. We don't want you to be number three!" (Mrs. Callaghan, superstition, Chapter Twenty-One) **SOURCE:** Folk superstition about deaths "coming in threes," common in both Irish- and Italian-American communities. **GLOSS:** A superstition adjacent to (but distinct from) the evil eye tradition, showing how folk numerology of death runs alongside orthodox Catholic teaching without contradiction in these characters' minds. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

95. QUOTE: "There will be no wake for your aunt." (Nonna, of Bianca's suicide, Chapter Seventeen) **SOURCE:** The Irish/Italian wake tradition, here explicitly denied as punishment. **GLOSS:** Denying a wake is one of the cruelest things Nonna can do

within this culture's moral universe — the wake is not optional decorum but a sacred communal obligation to the dead. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

96. QUOTE: "Agnella wanted no funeral… She asked to be cremated and have her ashes thrown in the ocean at Revere Beach." / "There will be a little ceremony, a wake of sorts, at the funeral home, but I don't suppose many people will show up." (Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Contrast between full Catholic funeral rites and a minimal, unbelieving alternative. **GLOSS:** Nonna's refusal of full rites for herself is consistent with her lifelong performance of belief for others but not herself — she manipulates religion but does not, in the end, want its comforts applied to her own death. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

97. QUOTE: Nonna slaps Molly and says "you gotta be tough. You don't get anything in this world the easy way," immediately preceded by staged tears and religious invocation of "the Pope" (Chapter Two) **SOURCE:** Possible faint echo of the mockery and slapping endured by Christ during the Passion (Matthew 26:67-68), though highly displaced and comic. **GLOSS:** The parallel is speculative and tonally inverted (comic fraud, not sacrificial suffering), but the ritualized slap-after-blessing pattern recurs enough (Molly's father also slaps her after moments of tenderness) to merit a cautious note. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

PART II: GENERAL THEMATIC RELIGIOUS TEXTURE (Italian-Catholic and Irish-Catholic)

This section documents the novel's broader Catholic thematic atmosphere — material not tied to a single scriptural or liturgical citation, but forming the devotional and cultural weather of the book.

Guilt and Scrupulosity - "I wasn't sorry. I never understood why she cared so much about the dump of a house we owned." (Chapter One) — Molly's inability to feel appropriate guilt is presented almost as a moral defect, set against a culture (her mother's) steeped in domestic scrupulosity over small imperfections (floor scratches). - "I felt some remorse for the first time. I had no idea at that young age, the remorse I would feel later in later years." (Chapter Eleven, after Felicity's death) — remorse arrives on a delay, as though her conscience is Catholic in structure (guilt

accrues, is owed) even though she denies Catholic belief. - "I was filled with rage at the gravesite, and to this day I cannot explain its source. Who was I to be so angry?" (Chapter Twelve) — self-interrogation in almost confessional cadence, examining conscience without a confessor.

Sin, Confession, Absolution - "What we did today, some people would consider a sin. Certainly the Pope." (Nonna, Chapter Two) - "Bianca was lucky. He coulda reported her to the police, but he was a kind man. He told her she had to clean and polish the altar every week for six months." (Chapter Three) — informal, priest-administered penance in lieu of legal punishment. - "Have you asked to speak with a priest?… Absolution. Last Rights." "Since when have you become a holy roller?" (Chapter Twenty-One) — the sacrament of confession offered and flatly refused at the moment it matters most. - Molly never once seeks confession for her own considerable list of sins (theft, prostitution, cruelty), yet narrates her life in a confessional first-person retrospective mode — the entire novel functions structurally like an unmade confession.

Hell and Purgatory - "If there is a God, I think he would want the priests to say things that make his congregation happy." "How can you not believe in God? Father Flanagan would say you're gonna go to hell." (Chapter Three) — hell invoked casually as social consequence of unbelief. - "If I believed in hell, I would gladly go there to avoid spending eternity with a God that could be so cruel." (Chapter Twelve) — hell reimagined as preferable to a cruel heaven, a striking theological inversion. - "I felt lost in dark woods, my own purgatory, or dark night of the soul, if I believed in a soul." (Chapter Thirteen) — purgatory secularized into psychological grief-state, but named as such rather than simply "sadness."

Redemptive Suffering - Giuseppina, Molly's great-great-grandmother, works herself to exhaustion for her family and is called "a saint" for it (Chapter Three) — suffering silently endured is the culturally recognized path to sanctity. - "I admired her courage to end her life when she chose… I respected her decision, nevertheless." (Molly, of Mrs. Muldoon, Chapter Fourteen) — Molly reframes suicide as a form of chosen, even dignified, ending rather than redemptive suffering, a direct challenge to Catholic teaching on the sanctity of suffering and the prohibition of suicide. - The entire arc of Mrs. Muldoon (a lonely, alcoholic widow) redeemed retrospectively into

a figure of "pure love" and quiet evangelism by the novel's end enacts redemptive suffering as a narrative structure, even though Molly never names it that way.

The Sacramental View of Ordinary Objects and Acts - Nonna's cookies mailed to college "must swear to eat them all yourself! Don't give any… A curse on you if you don't." (Chapter Eleven) — food functions as a small votive/binding object, blessing and curse both riding on obedience. - The gold necklace with "an emerald and diamond cross," dismissed by teenage Molly as "a useless thing," is treated by the mature narrator as a genuine sacred bequest (Chapters Six, Twenty-Two). - The Sacred Heart locket, timepiece, and Blessed Mother statuette inherited from Molly's mother (Chapter Twenty-One) are handled with a reverence bordering on reliquary care, despite Molly's professed unbelief. - "I dwell in Possibility" — even Dickinson's poem treats "a fairer House than Prose" as itself a kind of temple ("Chambers as the Cedars," "everlasting Roof") — ordinary domestic imagery elevated to sacred architecture, closing the novel on a sacramental note.

Marian Devotion - Domed glass Madonna in the family's kitsch-filled "special occasions" room (Chapter One). - "statues of the Madonna on front lawns" across Revere (Chapter One). - The Feast of the Assumption structuring Mrs. Muldoon's death (Chapters Five and Six), and a second feast, St. Margaret Mary's, marking Molly's own final swim ("today is October 17th, the Feast of Saint Margaret Mary," Chapter Twenty-Two). - Stained glass "Blessed Mother" at the parents' funeral (Chapter Twelve). - Molly's mother born on "the feast of the Visitation" and devoted to "the Blessed Mother" (Chapter Twenty-One). - A "small statuette of the Blessed Mother" among the mother's keepsakes (Chapter Twenty-One).

The Authority of Priests and Nuns - "The Sisters had allowed me to skip sixth grade" (Chapter One) — nuns as educational authority, respected even by the skeptical Molly. - "Father Paul" administers informal but real ecclesiastical discipline to Bianca (Chapter Three). - "Father Flanagan puts me in a bad mood" (Chapter Three) — priestly authority resented by Molly specifically for its perceived joylessness. - "Father Costa… seemed to love being the center of attention… I tuned him out" (Chapter Twelve) — clerical vanity noted without softening. - Gabe, an ex-priest, retains enormous informal spiritual authority over Molly for the rest of the novel — the sacramental character of ordination outlasting formal ministry ("Once a priest, always a priest," Chapter Thirteen). - "The seminary was like a bathhouse…

fucking and sucking all night long." (Gabe, Chapter Thirteen) — clerical hypocrisy exposed unsparingly, alongside genuine spiritual authority in the same character.

The Parish as Social World - Church collection-basket theft, altar-boy service, catechism class, and the Sisters of Immaculate Conception's school all appear as the ordinary infrastructure of Molly's upbringing (Chapters One-Three, Twelve). - Wake attendees include "a few ladies from Immaculate Conception Parish" (Chapter Twenty-One) — the parish persists as the social register of the community even for the estranged, non-practicing Nonna.

Wakes, Funerals, and the Dead as Present - Mrs. Muldoon's corpse examined in clinical, fascinated detail (Chapter Six). - The parents' funeral, with full liturgical staging (Gospel reading, hymns, Communion, burial) (Chapter Twelve). - "There will be no wake for your aunt" as active punishment (Chapter Seventeen). - Mrs. Callaghan's grave-goods and hair-relic practices (Chapter Fifteen). - Nonna's minimal, semi-refused funeral rites (Chapter Twenty-One) — a study in contrasts across three funerals in the novel, each revealing character through relationship to death ritual.

Drink - Whiskey, wine, Chianti, Grappa, and Martinis accompany nearly every family gathering, celebration, and crisis — the Callaghan and Bonamici households both process grief, celebration, and confrontation through alcohol, a recognizably Irish- and Italian-Catholic social pattern running in parallel with (and sometimes substituting for) religious ritual. - "We need a drink," Nonna announces after tending Bianca's burn (Chapter One) — drink as folk-therapeutic, almost sacramental, communal gesture.

Immigration and Exile - Giuseppina working as a maid "in the homes of rich people on Beacon Hill. They treated her like dirt." (Chapter Three) — the Italian immigrant experience narrated through domestic servitude. - Mrs. Muldoon's longed-for return "home" to Ireland, undercut by the revelation that she never actually intended to go (Chapters Four-Six, Twenty-One) — exile and homecoming as a metaphor threaded through the entire novel, both literal (Ireland) and metaphysical (heaven). - Nonna's dead husband from Belgium; Gabe's Irish-descended, "Black Irish" family history — immigrant lineages recur as backstory texture throughout.

The Mother/Grandmother as Priest-Figure - Nonna instructs Molly in "life" lessons with the cadence of catechesis ("This is important. You gotta listen," Chapter Three) even while denying belief in God, effectively functioning as an alternative, anti-theology "confessor" to whom Molly reveals everything. - Nonna hears Molly's confidences the way a priest hears confession — "I tell you things that I tell no one else" (Chapter Three) — and dispenses her own absolution ("Don't dwell on that… think about life," Chapter Three). - Aunt Helena ultimately displaces Nonna as the family's true moral authority and believer, delivering the novel's clearest affirmation of faith (Chapter Twenty-One).

Superstition, the Evil Eye, Folk Cure Alongside Orthodox Faith - The faith-healer subplot (Lady Jane) explicitly blends spiritual healing with superstition and outright fraud (Chapters Four-Six). - "Deaths happen in three" superstition (Chapter Twenty-One). - Myra's New Age shop "Sacred Ashes," psychic chakra-activation, and grief-stones are explicitly diagnosed by Molly as "watered-down religion" preying on grief (Chapter Seventeen) — folk superstition and institutional religion are treated as points on a continuum, not opposites. - Mrs. Callaghan's belief that her deceased husband's spirit protected her during surgery via a metal plate placed at his grave (Chapter Fifteen) exemplifies non-doctrinal, protective folk-magical thinking coexisting easily with her explicit Catholic practice (crossing herself, silent prayer) at the very same graveside.

Belief versus Unbelief - This is arguably the novel's single most sustained thematic thread, running through nearly every chapter: Molly's father ("How can you not believe in God?"), Nonna ("There is no heaven. There is no God"), Felicity ("Jesus died for our sins"), Gabe ("Gabe swore he would make a believer out of me, but… belief wouldn't come"), Aunt Helena ("Why yes, Molly. Of course I am [a believer]"), and finally Molly's own late turn ("Believing in possibility…") trace a spectrum from militant unbelief to quiet, hard-won openness.

PART III: LITERARY ALLUSIONS AND ECHOES

98. QUOTE: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." (Front-matter epigraph, and again spoken by Gabe, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.v.167-168. **GLOSS:** The novel's first

epigraph, set on its own page after the dedication, is deliberately recirculated inside the narrative itself by a character urging religious openness on the skeptical protagonist — an unusually explicit structural loop between paratext and plot.

99. QUOTE: "Open your mind to what I shall disclose, and hold it fast within you; he who hears, but does not hold what he has heard, learns nothing." (Front-matter epigraph, attributed to Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*) **SOURCE:** Dante, *Paradiso* V.40-42, Beatrice's instruction to Dante, in Allen Mandelbaum's translation (printed as prose, without canto or translator). **GLOSS:** Paired with the Hamlet epigraph, this establishes Dante as a structural key from the book's very first page, and the speaker matters: the epigraph is Beatrice's, so the woman whose words open the book returns at its close as the cab driver "Bea. Short for Beatrice." The novel keeps the promise through its Virgil/Beatrice-named characters and its explicit "dark woods"/"purgatory" passage.

100. QUOTE: "A gentle Lady is in Heaven, who grieves at this distress through which I must conduct thee." (Dante, *Inferno* II, quoted internally, Chapter Eighteen) **SOURCE:** Dante, *Inferno*. **GLOSS:** In *Inferno* II the "gentle Lady" who grieves in Heaven is, on the usual reading, the Virgin Mary, whose pity sets the rescue in motion and whose charge Beatrice reports to Virgil. Recalled by Molly in a moment of private grief and connected in her mind to her own mother, the line assigns her mother the Marian role at the head of that chain of intercession, not Beatrice's.

101. QUOTE: "Call me Virgil"… "I'm Bea. Short for Beatrice." (Officer Connolly, Chapter Twelve; taxi driver, Chapter Twenty-Two) **SOURCE:** Dante's *Commedia*, structural allegory of guided ascent. **GLOSS:** Two minor characters bookend the novel bearing the names of Dante's two guides — Virgil (through Hell and Purgatory) at the funeral/graveside, and Beatrice (through Paradise) at the very last scene, driving Molly to the beach where she experiences her closest approach to grace.

102. QUOTE: "I felt lost in dark woods, my own purgatory, or dark night of the soul… I felt like I was climbing a steep hill that grew more precipitous the further I ascended." (Chapter Thirteen) **SOURCE:** Dante, *Inferno* I ("nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita… una selva oscura") and *Purgatorio*'s penitential mountain. **GLOSS:** The clearest single passage of sustained Dantean structural borrowing in the novel — grief is explicitly plotted as a Comedy-shaped descent-then-ascent.

103. QUOTE: But see, amid the mimic rout, / A crawling shape intrude!… And the seraphs, all haggard and wan… That the play is the tragedy "Man," / Its hero the Conqueror Worm. (Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm," quoted at length, Chapter Six) **SOURCE:** Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm" (1843). **GLOSS:** A full-stanza citation applied directly to Mrs. Muldoon's decomposing corpse — angels ("seraphs") weeping over human corruption is imported wholesale as the novel's gloss on mortality, secular literature standing in for scripture at a moment scripture might otherwise occupy.

104. QUOTE: "I understand now why in Shakespeare's time 'to die' was a euphemism for orgasm… Ay, but to die, and go we not know where… The solid flesh melts… and resolves itself into a dew… Hamlet's undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns." (Chapter Ten) **SOURCE:** Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* III.i and *Hamlet* I.ii and III.i, all quoted/paraphrased. **GLOSS:** A triple Shakespeare allusion clustering around death, orgasm, and afterlife-uncertainty in a single post-coital reflection — literature substitutes for theology as Molly's actual framework for thinking about mortality.

105. QUOTE: "Macbeth says, tales told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (Chapter Ten) **SOURCE:** Shakespeare, *Macbeth* V.v. **GLOSS:** Nihilistic Shakespeare deployed to characterize the anonymous dead in a wedding photograph — mortality rendered meaningless in explicitly Shakespearean, rather than Christian, terms.

106. QUOTE: "There's a certain Slant of light, / Winter Afternoons – / That oppresses, like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes –… 'Tis the Seal Despair –… 'tis like the Distance / On the look of Death –" (Emily Dickinson, poem 258, quoted in full, Chapter Fifteen) **SOURCE:** Emily Dickinson, "There's a certain Slant of light." **GLOSS:** Explicitly sacred vocabulary ("Cathedral Tunes," "Heavenly Hurt") frames a poem about seasonal depression that Molly reads alone at night after visiting a grave — Dickinson functions as devotional reading in a household without devotions.

107. QUOTE: "I dwell in Possibility – / A fairer House than Prose –… The spreading wide my narrow Hands / To gather Paradise –" (Emily Dickinson, closing poem, final page) **SOURCE:** Emily Dickinson, "I dwell in Possibility." **GLOSS:** The novel's very last words, choosing a poem that architecturally figures the imagination itself as a kind of

church ("Chambers as the Cedars," "everlasting Roof") that gathers "Paradise" — the ultimate structural statement of the book's thesis that art/possibility, not doctrine, is where Molly's grace resides.

108. QUOTE: "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind" and "What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted by Molly, Chapter Eighteen) **SOURCE:** Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (1841). **GLOSS:** Explicitly Transcendentalist language of "sacred" individual conscience, taught by Molly to replace inherited religious authority — an American literary-philosophical alternative-scripture running underneath the novel's Catholic material.

109. QUOTE: "Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it comes to have a separate and integral interest. To regret deeply is to live afresh." (Henry David Thoreau, quoted, Chapter Fifteen) **SOURCE:** Thoreau, journal entry/letter, widely quoted. **GLOSS:** A Transcendentalist meditation on suffering redeemed through memory stands in for Catholic teaching on redemptive suffering, offering Molly a secular analog to the sanctification of pain.

110. QUOTE: "The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right." (Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," taught in Molly's classroom, Chapter Eighteen) **SOURCE:** Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1849). **GLOSS:** Conscience elevated above external law — thematically continuous with the Emerson citation and with the novel's broader interest in individual conscience versus institutional (including religious) authority.

111. QUOTE: Mary Grace reading Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* in class, unbothered by classroom chaos (Chapter Eighteen) **SOURCE:** Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood* (1952). **GLOSS:** O'Connor's own grotesque, violently Catholic novel about a false-prophet figure (Hazel Motes) is placed directly in the hands of the novel's most disturbed and most devout-adjacent student — an explicit intertextual nod to a major Catholic-literary precursor for Mulhern's own blend of grotesquerie and grace.

112. QUOTE: "'To bring the young lambs to the fold'… he 'kept waiting to see Jesus.'" (Langston Hughes, "Salvation," Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Langston Hughes, "Salvation," from *The Big Sea* (1940). **GLOSS:** A named literary text about a faked religious conversion, taught by an actually-unbelieving narrator to believing

students — the assignment doubles as commentary on Molly's own performed positions throughout the book.

113. QUOTE: "'There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true.'" (Søren Kierkegaard, quoted by Gabe, explicitly tied to *Fear and Trembling*, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Kierkegaard. **GLOSS:** The novel's most direct philosophical challenge to Molly's atheism, delivered by its most sympathetic religious voice (an ex-priest), framed with the actual title of Kierkegaard's meditation on Abraham's faith.

114. QUOTE: "'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'" (Karl Marx, quoted verbatim by Molly, Chapter Nineteen) **SOURCE:** Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Introduction (1843). **GLOSS:** The major secular-materialist counter-scripture to everything else in the concordance, delivered with scholarly precision inside a classroom — Marx functions as Molly's closest thing to a creed.

115. QUOTE: "would agree with Walt Whitman that there is no fat sweeter than that which sticks to their own bones, and that the scent of their armpits is aroma finer than prayer." (Chapter Sixteen) **SOURCE:** Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* / "Song of Myself" (the actual line: "the scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer"). **GLOSS:** Whitman's body-affirming, quasi-religious sensuality is invoked to characterize the gay "bear" subculture of Wilton Manors — bodily pride explicitly compared to, and preferred over, prayer.

116. QUOTE: "'Come live with me and be my love, / And we will all the pleasures prove / That valleys, groves, hills, and fields / Woods or steepy mountain yields.'" (Christopher Marlowe, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," quoted by Gabe, Chapter Fifteen) **SOURCE:** Christopher Marlowe (misidentified by the narrator's correction as "not exactly Fort Lauderdale terrain" but not misattributed by name in text; the pastoral is Marlowe's). **GLOSS:** A secular pastoral invitation-poem is repurposed as a real-estate pitch for a move to "paradise" — continuing the novel's running joke of applying elevated, quasi-devotional language to mundane life decisions.

117. QUOTE: "T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets: 'In my beginning is my end.'" (Chapter Twenty-One) **SOURCE:** T.S. Eliot, "East Coker." **GLOSS:** Eliot's own deeply Christian

meditation on time and eternity is invoked at Nonna's deathbed — one of the only citations in the novel drawn from an explicitly theological modern poet, appropriately given to its most theologically compromised character.

118. QUOTE: "Edgar Allan Poe… 'To be great is to be misunderstood.'" (misattributed by Molly to Poe; actually Emerson, "Self-Reliance," Chapter Nine) **SOURCE:** The line is Emerson's, not Poe's, though the novel's narrator attributes it to Poe in dialogue. **GLOSS:** Worth flagging as a deliberate or accidental misattribution within the text itself — Molly, elsewhere scrupulously accurate (correcting Marx), here gets a quotation wrong, a rare crack in her intellectual authority.

119. QUOTE: The whole novel's central symbolic engine — Molly's fascination with death, corpses, and "signs" — echoes the tradition of the American Gothic/grotesque (Poe, O'Connor) more than realist fiction, evident from Chapter One's toad-killing scene onward. **SOURCE:** American Gothic and Southern Grotesque literary tradition (Poe, O'Connor, and by extension Faulkner). **GLOSS:** Not a single quotation but a genre-level structural echo: the novel repeatedly stages bodily corruption, blasphemy, and grace side by side in a way that is the signature move of O'Connor's Catholic grotesque — a mode the text names directly by putting *Wise Blood* in a student's hands. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

SYNTHESIS

Molly Bonamici is a novel obsessed with the shapes religion leaves behind even in those who reject its content. Its narrator is a self-declared atheist who nonetheless organizes her entire retrospective account of her life around scripture readings, feast days, sacraments, and saints' names — so thoroughly that the concordance above runs to more than 120 direct religious citations across barely 250 pages. The paradox is the book's engine: Molly Bonamici does not believe in God, but she cannot stop thinking, speaking, and structuring her life in the grammar of Catholicism. Mulhern's real subject is not belief or disbelief as static positions but the *persistence of religious form* after religious content has been abandoned — what happens to a Catholic imagination once the theology drains out of it but the ritual architecture remains standing.

The clearest evidence for this is structural rather than incidental. The novel's central death — Mrs. Muldoon's suicide — is deliberately timed to the Feast of the Assumption, and Molly's own pun ("She had created her own Assumption and I thought, ironically, consumption") announces the book's method outright: sacred dogma and physical decay are yoked in a single word, refusing either to cancel the other. The same move recurs at the parents' funeral, where Mark's Passion narrative ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") and the Resurrection proclamation ("He has risen! He is not here") are read aloud over caskets containing almost nothing, since the bodies were "blown to bits." Scripture's promises of presence and return are quoted precisely at the moment of their apparent failure. This is not simple ironic deflation; it is closer to the method Flannery O'Connor perfected and that the novel names explicitly by putting *Wise Blood* in a troubled student's hands — grace approached through violence, grotesquerie, and blasphemy rather than around them. The novel's very last movements confirm this is deliberate rather than accidental: a taxi driver named Beatrice, following a graveside guide named Virgil, delivers Molly to the sea on the actual feast day of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque — Mrs. Muldoon's own hidden namesake — where Molly finally allows herself to "believe in possibility" and rises from the water "home at last." The Dantean guide-structure (Virgil then Beatrice) is not subtle; it is the book's confession that its comic realism has been running a *Commedia* underneath it the whole time.

Italian-Catholic versus Irish-Catholic texture. The two ethnic-religious registers in the novel are distinguishable and are handled with real anthropological precision, a hallmark of Mulhern's fiction generally. The Italian-Catholic texture, embodied by Nonna and her sisters, is loud, transactional, and folk-magical: Marian statuettes and Last Supper paintings as household kitsch, sin discussed as social currency ("What we did today, some people would consider a sin. Certainly the Pope"), penance imposed informally by a kind parish priest rather than through the confessional, and religious language deployed cynically for profit (the insurance fraud "blessing," the sign of the cross performed for a lawsuit). Guilt in this register is external and manageable — Nonna's crimes escalate from petty Christmas-ornament theft to serial murder without her interior life registering much change, because her Catholicism was never internalized; it was inherited as vocabulary, not conscience. The Irish-Catholic texture, embodied by Mrs. Muldoon and the Callaghan family, is by contrast melancholic, sincere, and saturated with real devotional feeling even at

its most eccentric: Mrs. Muldoon's genuine (if garbled) desire for "spiritual healing," her Feast-of-the-Assumption ritual staged with real hope rather than cynicism, Mrs. Callaghan's authentic sign of the cross and hair-relic grief-practice, the traditional Irish Blessing recited with real tenderness over whiskey at a grave. Where the Italian-American material in the novel tends toward transactional fraud dressed as piety, the Irish-American material tends toward sincere piety persisting through eccentricity, alcoholism, and loss. This distinction matters for reading Mulhern's larger body of work, much of which (as the parent agent's framing implies) draws on Irish-Catholic Boston material more centrally; here, placing the Irish devotional sincerity of Mrs. Muldoon and the Callaghans alongside the Italian transactional fraud of Nonna and Scarfone lets the novel triangulate its own argument about faith — sincerity and fraud are not ethnically exclusive, but the novel's affect clearly warms toward the Irish register's earnestness even as it is more viscerally attached to the Italian family's texture (food, threat, love, violence) as its narrative home base.

Theological rescue operation? The available evidence strongly supports reading *Molly Bonamici* as a "theological rescue operation" that converts abjection into glory rather than merely purging it, though the rescue is incomplete and deliberately uncertain, which is itself part of its integrity. Consider the pattern across the novel's three central deaths. Mrs. Muldoon's body is described in almost pornographic physical degradation — maggots, blisters, a nail "falling like an autumn leaf" — the single most abject passage in the book. Yet by the end, this same abjection is retroactively transfigured: her Assumption-day ritual, her fish/Christ catechesis, her gift of a cross necklace are recovered as "acts of pure love," and the narrator explicitly credits her with trying to plant faith in Molly across decades. Nonna's death is similarly doubled: she dies unrepentant, refusing absolution, "frothing at the mouth" like the toad Molly killed as a girl (an intentional callback), yet the narration surrounds her death with ascent imagery — "two planes moved across the sky, one ascending, one descending" — refusing to consign her simply to hell even as it withholds any cheap redemption. And Molly's own arc, from militant "I didn't believe in God; that was foolishness" to "Believing in possibility, I spread my arms wide, swimming… grateful to be home at last," is engineered through accumulated coincidence (the name Virgil, the taxi driver Beatrice, the Feast of St. Margaret Mary) rather than argument — grace arriving as pattern-recognition rather than doctrine,

which is itself a very Catholic sacramental principle: meaning discovered in matter and coincidence rather than imposed by proposition.

What keeps this from being a simple, sentimental redemption arc — and what makes "rescue operation" the more accurate description than "purging" — is that the abjection is never actually erased. Mrs. Muldoon's corpse stays disgusting in the text even after her holiness is affirmed; Nonna's crimes stay unpunished and unconfessed even as her death is treated tenderly; Molly's cruelties (to Felicity, to her parents, to her aunts) are never absolved by a priest or by narrative justice, only witnessed and carried forward into a wiser, sadder retrospective voice. The novel's closing image — arms spread wide in the water, "gathering" a Dickinson "Paradise" that is explicitly a poem about the imagination's own house rather than a church's — suggests Mulhern's real theological position: glory is not achieved by cleaning up the abject material of a life, but by holding it in the same frame as transcendence without collapsing either term. That is the rescue: not absolution, but a refusal to let ugliness have the last word, matched by an equal refusal to let piety erase how much ugliness there really was.

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120. Chapter One — "the world was my American Dream" — QUOTE: "my lure, my green light, would be real—to be as authentic as possible, regardless of what people thought" SOURCE: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (the green light at the end of Daisy's dock) GLOSS: Molly explicitly rejects Gatsby moments earlier ("Gatsby was anything but great") yet unconsciously borrows his central symbol for her own longing, one of the novel's several instances of a character disavowing a text while absorbing its imagery. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

121. Chapter One — the dump of a house — QUOTE: "To me it felt like Newgate Prison—dark, dusky, and cold." SOURCE: London's Newgate Prison, a byword in English literature (Dickens, Defoe) for confinement and moral squalor GLOSS: Molly figures her own family home as a penal institution before any of the novel's actual

crimes (fraud, arson, murder) are disclosed, foreshadowing the household's real criminality with a literary shorthand for incarceration. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

122. Chapter One — Nonna's promise — QUOTE: "America and the world is your oyster… weren't pearls found in oysters?" SOURCE: Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* II.ii ("Why then the world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open") GLOSS: Molly literalizes the dead cliché by pocketing stolen pearl earrings moments after Nonna invokes it, turning a Shakespearean commonplace about seizing the world into an act of petty theft — grace and larceny fused in one gesture. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

123. Chapter One — Mrs. Muldoon's rebuke — QUOTE: "She has squash rot." / "Means your brain is rotted from too much alcohol" SOURCE: Folk-diagnostic idiom for dementia/drunkenness, structurally parallel to later "hardening of the arteries" for Aunt Bianca's Alzheimer's GLOSS: The novel repeatedly names cognitive decay through vegetable/mechanical metaphors rather than clinical language, a pattern of euphemism that keeps mortality at ironic arm's length until the corpse itself forces plain sight. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

124. Chapter One — the toad on the trash can — QUOTE: "I found a large rock… I smashed the rock against him a few times and watched his guts smear across the concrete." SOURCE: Callback confirmed later at Nonna's own deathbed: "she began frothing at the mouth. I remembered the frog that I put out of its misery with a rock… She did look like an amphibian." GLOSS: The opening act of casual violence against a suffering creature becomes, twenty chapters later, an explicit lens for watching Nonna die — mercy-killing imagery recast as a verdict on an unrepentant murderer, without either sacrament or absolution intervening. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

125. Chapter Five — the restaurant's name explained — QUOTE: "our restaurant eponymously named 'Bonamici's,' which means, by the way, 'good friends.'… I have always found our surname ironic because my father was an unhappy person" SOURCE: Italian *buoni amici*, "good friends"; ironic naming convention GLOSS: Molly's own surname is the novel's founding pun — a family defined by fraud, violence, and eventually multiple murders bears a name that promises amity; the later moment in which Officer Connolly (the policeman later named Virgil), handed

the name by his partner, recognizes and glosses it ("Your last name means 'good friends'") repeats the joke at the site of a homicide investigation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

126. Chapter Six — Mrs. Muldoon's photograph — QUOTE: "In the dark background, blurred white faces hovered like disembodied heads." SOURCE: Iconographic tradition of the communion of saints/souls depicted as a cloud of witnesses (cf. Hebrews 12:1, "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses") GLOSS: A wedding photograph's background guests are described in language usually reserved for a heavenly host or purgatorial crowd, planting an image of anonymous watching dead that recurs when Molly later "counted them like one counts sheep" while falling asleep. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

127. Chapter Five — the mourning dove — QUOTE: "I startled a mourning dove that sped from its cleft into the bright sky. It made a whistling sound as it rose and flew off; then descended over the water where Nonna was now standing alongside Mrs. Muldoon." SOURCE: The dove as Spirit/peace emblem (Genesis 8:8-12; Matthew 3:16, the Spirit descending "like a dove") GLOSS: A dove rises and then descends directly onto the water where the day's "baptism of sorts" is under way, quietly restaging the dove's biblical descent over the waters at the very moment Mrs. Muldoon receives her last "cure" before dying. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

128. Chapter Eight — the family photograph's caption — QUOTE: "On the back was written, 'Mom, Dad, Joey, me, and Saint Paul.'" / "Who the fuck is Saint Paul?" SOURCE: St. Paul the Apostle GLOSS: The Adams family's yellow Labrador is named for Christianity's chief theologian of grace and law; the joke anticipates the novel's later "baptism" of a mannequin and its running habit of draining sacred names into household pets and props. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

129. Chapter Nine — Felicity's confession — QUOTE: "I drink wine during communion. That's about it." SOURCE: The Eucharistic cup (1 Corinthians 11:25-26) GLOSS: Felicity, established as the novel's stock "devout Christian," admits her actual sacramental participation is minimal and reflexive — an ironic setup for her death soon after by a poisoned "cookie communion" sent by Nonna, in which she receives a counterfeit host she never suspects. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

130. Chapter Ten — Molly's night thoughts — QUOTE: "I imagined those anonymous heads floating above my bed, and I counted them like one counts sheep." SOURCE: Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd"); the pastoral image of counted sheep as a comfort against sleeplessness, here inverted into an image of the anonymous dead GLOSS: The comforting nursery cliché of counting sheep to fall asleep is repurposed as a vigil over disembodied heads from a wedding photograph, turning a device for peace into one for confronting mortality — sleep as memento mori. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

131. Chapter Thirteen — Dr. Diver's office — QUOTE: "the walls were chocolate brown, interspersed with prints of Expressionist paintings: Munch's 'The Scream,' Van Gogh's 'Starry Night,' and a couple of works by Modigliani." SOURCE: Edvard Munch, *The Scream* (1893); Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night* (1889); Amedeo Modigliani GLOSS: The psychiatrist's decor is a private gallery of iconic modern-art anguish and transcendence-seeking (Van Gogh's swirling night sky famously read as a spiritual/eschatological vision); that Dr. Diver himself falls asleep during Molly's confession undercuts any therapeutic access to the consolations the paintings promise. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

132. Chapter Thirteen — the psychiatrist's name — QUOTE: "Dr. Diver came into the waiting area and introduced himself." SOURCE: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night* (protagonist Dick Diver, a psychiatrist whose own life disintegrates) GLOSS: Mulhern names his ineffectual, narcoleptic therapist after Fitzgerald's psychiatrist-protagonist, a quiet literary joke: both Divers preside over crises of the soul they cannot actually heal, and Molly ultimately rejects him ("I intend to keep walking forward") rather than submit to his diagnosis. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

133. Chapter Fourteen — the Callaghan Christmas Eve carol — QUOTE: "Barbra Streisand's Christmas Album was playing… 'Silent Night, Holy Night.' I began singing along with Babs." SOURCE: The hymn "Silent Night" ("Stille Nacht," Joseph Mohr/Franz Gruber, 1818) GLOSS: A hymn proclaiming the Incarnation's peace ("Sleep in heavenly peace") plays underneath the evening's most violent family revelation — Bianca's accusation that Nonna murdered Giacomo — the carol's promise of stillness directly contradicted by the room's escalating rage. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

134. Chapter Fourteen — Bianca's accusation — QUOTE: "I saw you smother him with a pillow that morning… You killed him!" SOURCE: Genesis 4:8-10, Cain's murder of Abel and God's demand "Where is Abel thy brother?" GLOSS: A sibling murder disclosed at a Christmas table structurally echoes the first fratricide in scripture; the parallel is reinforced later when the actual mechanics (suffocation with a pillow, witnessed by a sister, followed by decades of denial) are confirmed by Aunt Helena — Nonna as a domesticated, unpunished Cain. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

135. Chapter Fourteen — the toast to a dead brother — QUOTE: "'Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.'" SOURCE: "Silent Night," second repetition of the closing line GLOSS: The carol's line is quoted twice, its "sleep" doubling as both the infant Christ's rest and a euphemism for death that Molly's family constantly reaches for elsewhere ("going home," "in a better place") — sacred lullaby language absorbed into the novel's euphemistic vocabulary for the dead. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

136. Chapter Fifteen — the toilet auger — QUOTE: "That cable is called a toilet auger… My Michael used to say he wished they had something like that for humans." SOURCE: Grotesque folk-comic inversion of the harrowing of hell / the rod of correction (cf. Psalm 23:4, "thy rod and thy staff") GLOSS: Mrs. Callaghan's graveside relic — a plumbing tool meant to clear obstruction — is jokingly proposed as an instrument for clearing spiritual or bodily "blockage" in a human being, a broadly comic descent into the abject that nonetheless keeps company with the novel's serious relic-cutting (curls kept under a pillow) at the very same grave. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

137. Chapter Fourteen — "Every marriage… a meeting of the minds" — QUOTE: "'All I know is that I know nothing.'" / "Socrates." SOURCE: The Socratic paradox, traditionally rendered "I know that I know nothing" (Plato, *Apology*) GLOSS: Gabe, an ex-priest who elsewhere insists "the spirit of Christ's intention is everlasting," reaches for classical philosophy rather than scripture to describe his own humility — the novel's recurring habit of letting Greek wisdom stand in for Christian confession. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

138. Chapter Fourteen — outside the Callaghan house — QUOTE: "I could hear the muted notes of Handel's Messiah playing inside the house across the street." SOURCE:

Handel, *Messiah* (1741), an oratorio built entirely from scriptural text proclaiming Christ's birth, passion, and resurrection GLOSS: Molly notices the oratorio twice in one night (again minutes later in the car, "struck by the coincidence of hearing Handel's Messiah again"), framing her unacknowledged grief and confession to Gabe with unheard, unbidden gospel music drifting in from outside — grace literally overheard rather than sought. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

139. Chapter Sixteen — the new rental's garden — QUOTE: "'It would be like our own private Eden.'… 'All we need is a snake,' Gabe said." followed later by "A bright green gecko appeared on the windowpane… He seemed to be looking in at us." SOURCE: Genesis 3:1, the serpent in Eden GLOSS: Having jokingly named their rented paradise "Eden" and wished aloud for a serpent, the text supplies a small green lizard that "watches" Molly and Gabe through the glass during their one theological argument about God's existence — a mock-tempter presiding wordlessly over the novel's most direct debate about belief. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

140. Chapter Nineteen — the patio vine — QUOTE: "the Bleeding Heart vine next to the fence were drooping"; later, "The pinkish-purple blossoms of the Bleeding Heart vine next to the fence drooped." SOURCE: The Sacred Heart of Jesus, devotional image of a wounded, radiant heart (cf. St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, already noted for the novel's ending) GLOSS: A flower literally named for a wounded heart droops during Molly's crisis of feeling ("I'm lonely… I'm also angry and filled with regret") and revives once sunlight returns — garden imagery quietly rehearsing the Sacred Heart devotion that will govern the novel's final chapter, planted here without comment. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

141. Chapter Nineteen — Gabe watches a bird — QUOTE: "A cardinal with a worm in his beak sat on top of the fence, then hopped and flew away." SOURCE: Folk-Catholic tradition of the cardinal as a sign of a deceased loved one's visit or presence GLOSS: Appearing directly after Gabe suggests "Maybe Mary Grace was the universe trying to speak to you. A sign of sorts," the cardinal (a bird whose name itself derives from the Latin for a Church prince) performs exactly the kind of ordinary-object-as-message the novel's plot keeps rewarding, though Molly does not register it as such. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

142. Chapter Nineteen — the fights over Thoreau — QUOTE: "Mary Grace put down O'Connor's novel… 'You're all a bunch of assholes'" followed by Mary Grace's genuine recitation: "'Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.'" SOURCE: Matthew 7:6 (already logged in the concordance) — but note the co-occurring detail that Mary Grace is reading Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* throughout the brawl itself, not merely mentioned once GLOSS: The physical choking of Turpin occurs with O'Connor's novel of violent grace lying open on the floor — the classroom brawl restages, almost too literally, O'Connor's own aesthetic of violence as the vehicle of unwanted grace, with Mary Grace (whose name contains "grace") as its unlikely vessel. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

143. Chapter Twenty — the credit-card fraud call — QUOTE: "I told her that the last charge would be for dinner at the Backyard Café… 'Hold on. There's a couple other charges.'" SOURCE: Cf. Matthew 22:19-21 (rendering unto Caesar) as an ironic backdrop for a chapter obsessed with money, tribute, and false witness GLOSS: Myra's theft of Molly's credit card for pornographic DVDs and a television is a petty, secularized parody of Judas's theft from the common purse (John 12:6) — a minor disciple-figure who "carried the money box" and steals from it, again pairing venality with proximity to a trusted table. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

144. Chapter Twenty-Two — Officer Connolly's saint story, refined — QUOTE: "'Molly is a nickname for both Margaret and Mary. And today is October 17th, the Feast of Saint Margaret Mary.'" SOURCE: St. Margaret Mary Alacoque's feast (already logged for the coincidence itself); this specific etymological claim that "Molly" derives from both "Margaret" and "Mary" is a distinct detail GLOSS: The revelation that Molly's own first name is etymologically doubled between "Margaret" and "Mary" — the two names buried in "Margaret Mary" Muldoon — means the protagonist has unknowingly carried Mrs. Muldoon's devotional identity inside her own name her whole life; naming becomes a hidden inheritance, resolved only in the novel's final scene. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

145. Chapter Sixteen — Wilton Manors realtor's warning — QUOTE: "'You're not in Boston anymore, Dorothy.'" SOURCE: *The Wizard of Oz* (1939 film), "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore" GLOSS: Adam's quip recasts Molly and Gabe's move to "paradise" as a journey through a fantastical Oz rather than a literal

relocation, quietly continuing the novel's Dantean structure of guided journeys to unfamiliar lands (Virgil, Beatrice) with a wholly secular, pop-culture Virgil-figure. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

146. Chapter Twenty-Two — the gift to strangers — QUOTE: "I took the Swatch watch off my arm and the locket timepiece with the Sacred Heart of Jesus from my purse. 'These are for you.'" / "'We're Jewish, but thank you anyway… I'll give it to my friend Molly. She's Catholic.'" SOURCE: The Sacred Heart devotion (inherited from Molly's mother, established earlier in the same chapter); comic irony of a gift's intended recipient sharing the giver's own name GLOSS: Molly gives away her mother's most sacred relic to two Jewish sisters who cannot use it, then learns — in a moment of pure coincidence typical of the book's ending — that they know another "Molly" who can; the relic is not lost but providentially re-routed, a small resurrection of the gift's purpose performed entirely through chance. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

147. Chapter Twenty-Two — the final swim, the sisters on the plane — QUOTE: "'I'm Martha and this is my sister Miriam… don't you think it's better not to be alone?'" and "'Hey, you're like that lost lamb.' She laughed. 'Baaaah!'" SOURCE: Martha and Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42; "Miriam" is the Hebrew form of "Mary"); the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7), already echoed once in the novel via Langston Hughes's "young lambs to the fold" GLOSS: Two sisters bearing the names of the Gospels' most famous sibling pair (Martha the practical one, Mary/Miriam the reflective one) appear just before Molly's climactic beach baptism, and one of them spontaneously casts solitary Molly as a "lost lamb" — the parable of the lost sheep recurring a second time in the novel, now spoken by a child rather than read from an essay. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

148. Chapter Twenty-Two — the cab driver's earrings — QUOTE: "Her ear had three small earrings: the sun, a crescent moon, and twin stars." SOURCE: Cosmological/astral iconography echoing Revelation 12:1 ("a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars") and Gabe's earlier lecture on Sirius/God-spelled-backward GLOSS: "Bea" (Beatrice), who delivers Molly to her final, quasi-baptismal swim, wears on her body the very celestial trio — sun, moon, stars — that the novel's earlier chapters used to argue for

providence watching over Molly; the guide to paradise is dressed, almost heraldically, in the sky itself. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

149. Chapter Twenty-Two — closing image before the swim — QUOTE: "There was a faint hum, like bees, and the smell of stargazer lilies seemed to fill the air around me. Venus sparkled high above the Earth." SOURCE: Traditional funeral/Marian flower symbolism (lilies as purity/resurrection, cf. Easter lilies) fused with the pagan/astral: Venus as both evening star and (in classical myth) the planet of love, rising as Molly's homecoming and rebirth converge GLOSS: In the paragraph immediately preceding her "rising" from the sea, Mulhern layers a specifically funerary flower (the lily) with a specifically erotic-classical planet (Venus), fusing resurrection imagery with romantic/erotic imagery at the moment of Molly's non-doctrinal conversion — grace arriving through beauty and desire rather than through creed. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

End of supplement. 30 findings,

150. Whole-novel name ledger — QUOTE: "My name is Molly Bonamici." SOURCE: onomastic survey; formal principle of marked versus unmarked naming GLOSS: The personal-name inventory is: Molly Bonamici; Agnella/Nonna Janssen, Helena, Bianca, Maria, Lorenzo, Giacomo, Julien, Angela Cennamo, Father Paul, Father Flanagan, Father Costa, Margaret Mary/Mrs. Muldoon, Jim, Dominic, Tony, Greg Castelli, Jimmy Scarfone, Donnelly/Bill, Connolly/Virgil, Corrigan, Arnold, David, Felicity Adams, Emily Finnegan, Lorna, Joey, Candice Kox, Jean, Michelle, Mark, Oona, Ollie, Chris, Bobby, Katie, Peter, Mrs. Adams, Ms. O'Rourke, Jeremy, Dr. Diver, Gabriel/Gabe, Maureen, Michael, Lily and Mary Jane Callaghan, Evy, Wally/Anita Cocktail, Doyle, Walt, Sam, Hulga/Joy, Myra Bocca, Lazarus/Lazzy Bocca, Alexander Michaelis, Catherine, Joe, Johnny, Brian, Sal, Adam, Evan, the Jims, Sanders, Lane, Jackson, Elsa, Vickman, Carver, Cecelia, Pierre, Leo Turpin/Turp, Brandi, Amelia, Mary Grace, Beneatha, Reggie, Darren, Sandy, Kayla, Vega, Trisha, Mike, Louise, Mona, Lucas, Penny, Martha, Miriam, Bea/Beatrice, and Nancy. The place, institution, business, and animal inventory is: Revere, Revere Beach and its Amusement Park, Wonderland Greyhound Park, North End, Flanders, Belgium, Naples, Palermo, Sicily, Boston, Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Beacon Street, Tremont Street, Court Street, Boston Common,

Storrow Drive, Bay State Road, Commonwealth Avenue, Kenmore Square, Mystic River Bridge, Charles River, Cambridge, Somerville, Davis Square, Marlborough Street, Appleton, Combat Zone, Garden of Eden, Fenway Park, Logan Airport, Massachusetts General/Mass General, Emergency Ward, Immaculate Conception, Boston University, Shelton Hall, College of General Studies, George Sherman Union, MIT, Theta Delta, Warren Towers, Renwood Diner, Bonamici's, Jimmy's Harborside, Happy Garden, Filene's, Sears, Goodwill, Salvation Army, Club Café, Metropolitan Health Club, Jacques, St. Joseph Cemetery, Symphony Hall, Museum of Fine Arts, Fort Lauderdale, Wilton Manors, Wilton Drive, Five Points, Wilton Station, South End, Sacred Ashes, Espresso Boys, Backyard Café, Chooks Chicken, Bioscript Pharmacy, Old Florida Seafood House, Shoppes of Wilton Manors, The Other Side, Witch's Garden, Harpoon Tap Room, Bigelow 11, Kane Street, Revere Local, Saint Paul the Labrador, and Doyle the fox terrier. The density is deliberately uneven: most of this ledger is socially plausible, unmarked local naming, while a small, recurrent group is etymologically, biblically, or literarily charged; that selectivity, rather than a code in every name, is the finding. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

151. "Call me Agnella" — QUOTE: "Don't call me that. Call me Agnella. Janssen is my married name. My husband died a long time ago. Julien was from Belgium. I'm an Italian." SOURCE: Italian/Latin *agnella*, "female lamb"; the Christian Lamb of God GLOSS: Agnella is an unusually explicit self-correction: she refuses the married Belgian surname and restores the Italian name whose literal sense is "little female lamb." The resulting irony is severe rather than devotional—this "lamb" bullies, defrauds, and kills—so the name works as an inverted sacrificial emblem, not evidence of hidden innocence. Her insistence on it also makes ethnic identity a chosen performance and a weapon of authority. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

152. Felicity Adams — QUOTE: "Felicity, I doubt you are an expert on the Bible." SOURCE: Latin *felicitas*, "happiness" or "good fortune"; English virtue-name tradition GLOSS: Felicity's virtue name is placed on a devout, anxious young woman whose death makes good fortune grotesquely unavailable. It is not merely cruel irony: the mother's serene claim that the death was God's will finally gives the abstract noun a Christianized meaning that Molly cannot accept. The name is therefore semantically loaded, but the load is tragic and contested rather than predictive of character. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

153. Gabriel Callaghan — QUOTE: "My instructor, Gabriel Callaghan, was a tall, dark-skinned Irish guy, close to my age, with thick black hair and blue-green eyes." SOURCE: Hebrew *Gavri'el*, "God is my strength"; Gabriel, biblical messenger GLOSS: Gabriel is a conspicuously biblical given name for the former priest who repeatedly carries the novel's spiritual counterargument to Molly. The messenger-name does not make him angelic or infallible—he is human, comic, and sometimes doctrinaire—but it fits his patient work of transmitting possibility, care, and inconvenient religious questions. His Irish surname also makes this gentlest Catholic intermediary an ethnic bridge to the novel's Italian-American household rather than a replacement for it. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

154. Dr. Diver — QUOTE: "Your bald spot is quite visible, Dr. Diver. Let me help." SOURCE: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*; Dr. Dick Diver, psychiatrist GLOSS: A psychiatrist named Diver is too specific to be neutral: Fitzgerald's Dick Diver is a charismatic clinician whose professional and private authority disintegrates. Mulhern's Dr. Diver is a comic, far smaller echo—he falls asleep during Molly's account and is humiliated by her—so the allusion miniaturizes the failed healer. The name makes Molly's rejection of therapy a literary parody rather than a merely incidental bad appointment. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

155. Joy changed to Hulga — QUOTE: "a depressed and bitter girl from the South, who had changed her name from Joy to Hulga because it was the ugliest name she could think of and she wanted to get back at a mother she despised" SOURCE: Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People"; Joy/Hulga Hopewell GLOSS: This is an overt transplantation of O'Connor's Joy, who legally chooses the ugly name Hulga in defiance of her mother and of sentimental piety. Molly's one-sentence recollection keeps the maternal conflict, self-renaming, bitterness, and regional marker, so it is stronger than a casual borrowing. It also supplies a dark double for Molly's own adolescent fantasy of changing her name. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

156. Beneatha, Oona, and the minor literary-name test — QUOTE: "Beneatha by the back window said, 'I gotta use the bathroom.'" SOURCE: Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Beneatha Younger); Eugene O'Neill's daughter Oona GLOSS: Beneatha and Oona are plausible literary signals—Beneatha is a young intellectual aspiring to medicine, while the prank mannequin is explicitly named for O'Neill's estranged daughter—but the narrative gives neither student Beneatha nor

mannequin Oona a sustained parallel to its source. The contrast with Hulga and Dr. Diver is useful negative evidence: literary names are sometimes loaded, not automatically so. Walk-on names such as Brandi, Amelia, Sandy, Reggie, Darren, Trisha, Mike, Louise, Elsa, Carver, Cecelia, and Nancy carry no demonstrable etymological or literary commentary in context. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

157. Sacred names do not sort saints from villains — QUOTE: "Mary Grace began choked Turpin; his face blanched" (the printed text reads "began choked") SOURCE: Marian and theological virtue vocabulary; onomastic negative finding GLOSS: Mary Grace, the most overtly sacred composite name among the students, becomes the religious literalist who attacks a classmate; Agnella, the "lamb," is the murderer; Gabriel, a biblical messenger, is Molly's gentle spiritual guide; and Felicity is pious but neither wholly good nor protected. The pattern is therefore not devout names for good characters and secular names for cruel ones, nor its reverse. Mulhern loads names locally and ironically, especially at points where belief, authority, or self-fashioning is unstable. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

158. Changing, shortening, and refusing names — QUOTE: "I imagined altering my appearance, moving to a place where I was not known, even changing my name." SOURCE: formal principle of self-naming and identity revision GLOSS: Molly's imagined renaming remains fantasy, but the novel surrounds her with enacted variants: Agnella rejects Janssen, Virgil contracts himself to "Virg," Gabriel becomes "Gabe," Lazarus becomes "Lazzy," Wally performs as Anita Cocktail, and Joy chooses Hulga. The most consequential "change" is Candice Kox's absence: Emily and Molly name a mannequin after the no-show roommate, turning a person into a prop before Felicity's death makes that joke lethal. Names here are less stable labels than roles people accept, evade, or impose on others. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

159. Chapter One, Nonna's kitchen — QUOTE: "When I entered Nonna's house that day, I smelled the familiar amalgamation of heavily shellacked woodwork, linoleum, old furniture, garlic, tomato sauce, desserts, and the old-lady perfume, Shalimar, which they all shared." SOURCE: formal principle of catalogue description and domestic realism GLOSS: The domestic sentence is long and one-clausal: it accumulates concrete, mostly Germanic nouns—woodwork, furniture, garlic—while the Latinate "amalgamation" and brand-name "Shalimar" supply a slightly self-conscious flourish. It has no biblical parallelism and only the mild figurative

compression of a house made into a smell; its cadence is observational, not sacred. Molly's ordinary voice is therefore already capable of sensuous abundance without becoming ceremonious. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

160. Chapter Thirteen, Club Café — QUOTE: "The lounge area was painted gray and pink, a favorite color scheme that year. Each of the small tables was grey-black laminate with chrome edging and legs." SOURCE: parataxis and nominal inventory as formal principles GLOSS: Here Molly uses two short declarative sentences with almost no subordination: color, material, and furniture are simply itemized. The diction is plain, with the mildly Latinate "laminate" and "chrome" functioning as product-description rather than elevation; there is neither biblical parallelism nor figurative language. This is the clearest control sample for her flat domestic register. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

161. Chapter Three, Nonna's coercion — QUOTE: "She slapped my face. My skin burnt and my eyes started to tear up." SOURCE: parataxis; Anglo-Saxon physical diction GLOSS: Violence contracts the narration into two short, coordinated beats: "slapped," "face," "skin," and "tear" are overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon and bodily. There is no subordination, biblical echo, or figurative buffer; the physical consequence follows the blow with blunt causal sequence. At the instant of cruelty, Molly becomes plainer, not more elevated. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

162. Chapter Three, father's cruelty — QUOTE: "Let her bleed." SOURCE: ellipsis and imperative as formal principles GLOSS: This three-word utterance is the novel's most stripped-down violence: one imperative verb and two Anglo-Saxon monosyllables, with no modifier, figure, or scriptural cadence. Its lack of subordination makes Lorenzo's cruelty sound like a verdict rather than an argument. The sacred implication of blood is absent from Molly's presentation; she records the line as household brutality, not Passion language. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

163. Chapter Six, Mrs. Muldoon's body — QUOTE: "I walked towards Mrs. Muldoon's corpse. She was seated in the purple chair that Nonna hated so much, eyes half open and bulging, tongue protruding." SOURCE: forensic catalogue; Latinate anatomical/medical register GLOSS: Death does not make Molly scriptural: the first sentence is blunt, while the next lengthens into a dependent clause and a visual list. "Corpse," "protruding," and the later vascular, bloated, distended

descriptions are Latinate or technical, but the syntax remains diagnostic rather than reverential; no biblical parallelism or consoling figure intervenes. Her death register is controlled looking, not ritual speech. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

164. Chapter Twelve, the funeral Mass — QUOTE: "How could anyone, including Father Costa, believe that when the altar boy rang the bell and a prayer was spoken, a wafer was transformed into the literal body of Christ?" SOURCE: Eucharistic transubstantiation; interrogative hypotaxis GLOSS: Sacred ritual does produce a longer, subordinated sentence—"that," "when," and the embedded conditions make it markedly more formal than "Let her bleed"—and the Latinate "transformed" and "literal" name its intellectual problem. Yet its governing form is skeptical interrogation, not biblical parallelism, and its sole figure is reductive: "wafer" against "body." The narrator grows more analytic at the Mass, not more devotional. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

165. Chapter Twenty-Two, sea after the revelation — QUOTE: "Further out, the sea was fair and calm. I swam towards the horizon and floated on my back, enjoying the water's soft, close embrace." SOURCE: sea as maternal/baptismal figure; simple parataxis GLOSS: The sea passage uses two plain coordinated sentences and nearly all Anglo-Saxon diction—sea, swam, back, soft—before one gentle personification, "embrace." It has no biblical parallelism and little subordination, despite arriving at a moment saturated by theology and coincidence. The final sacred pressure is carried by the context and the water-image, not by a wholesale transformation of Molly's grammar. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

166. Chapter Six, beach food — QUOTE: "Someone had set up a banquet table by the windows. There was so much food: lasagna, meatballs, eggplant, risotto, cod with fried peppers, cardoon soup, tortellini, antipasti, tiramisu, biscotti, cannoli, and Italian cookies." SOURCE: Italian funeral food and domestic abundance; food as secularized sacramental table GLOSS: The funeral-house catalogue makes grief take the material form of an Italian table, yet Molly calls no blessing and gives it no overt Eucharistic status. Its single extended sentence is paratactic and noun-heavy, with Italian food names providing the only heightened register; it neither borrows biblical parallelism nor uses a redemptive figure. The Italian register makes food a communal rite without requiring belief. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

167. Chapter Twenty-One, CPR song — QUOTE: "Listen to me carefully, Evy. Place the palm of one of your hands on top of the other. Then push down on her sternum 30 times. Sing 'Staying Alive.'" SOURCE: Bee Gees, "Stayin' Alive"; CPR rhythm mnemonic GLOSS: A pop song becomes an emergency liturgy: Maureen's imperatives are short, repetitive, and bodily, and the crowd soon answers with a refrain. The diction is largely Anglo-Saxon except for clinical "sternum"; there is no biblical parallelism, but call-and-response and repeated words imitate one. The novel lets a secular chorus supply the communal ritual that formal religion has not supplied at Myra's death. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

168. Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Twenty-One, named art and film — QUOTE: "Munch's 'The Scream,' Van Gogh's 'Starry Night,' and a couple of works by Modigliani." SOURCE: Edvard Munch, Vincent van Gogh, Amedeo Modigliani; film allusion as character shorthand GLOSS: Dr. Diver's consulting room displays canonical images of psychic anguish, night, and stylized bodies, a pointedly literate décor for a therapist who cannot stay awake; this is a probable visual joke rather than a full ekphrasis. The named-film field is likewise selective: *All About Eve* supplies Bette Davis's "Everybody has a heart—except some people" and "Fasten your seatbelts," while *Casablanca*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *I Love Lucy*, *The Love Boat*, *He Knows You're Alone*, and the *Harry Potter* films function chiefly as generational and social markers. The named literary field—Shakespeare, Dante, Poe, Dickinson, Emerson, Thoreau, O'Connor, Fitzgerald, Hughes, Marx, Kierkegaard, Jung, James, Pagels, and O'Neill—does more sustained interpretive work than the film titles. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

169. Named music, from opera to hymn to pop — QUOTE: "I played a record of La Traviata, one of my favorite operas." SOURCE: Verdi, *La Traviata*; musical quotation as recurrent memory trigger GLOSS: The musical catalogue is unusually broad—*La Traviata*, "I Don't Know How to Love Him," "Moon River," "Little Jeannie," "Sailing," "Another One Bites the Dust," "Stayin' Alive," "The Rose," "Turning Japanese," "The Hustle," "Hit Me With Your Best Shot," "Unbreak My Heart," "Last Dance," "Pina Colada Song," "Amazing Grace," "Be Not Afraid," Handel's *Messiah*, Ravel's *Boléro*, Brahms's Piano Sonata No. 1, and Christmas standards—and the novel lets sacred and secular tunes occupy the same mnemonic system. "Moon River" is the major emotional refrain, but its force is retrospective and relational rather than doctrinal;

"Stayin' Alive" shows the comic opposite, a utilitarian life-saving beat. Music therefore is the more reliable carrier of Molly's feeling, even when she denies feeling. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

170. Italian-American folk Catholicism: a significant absence — QUOTE: "Before I could get to Nonna's room, Aunt Bianca approached me. She was fingering a rosary bead that was draped over a wrist;" SOURCE: Catholic devotional objects; negative-evidence test GLOSS: The novel has rosaries, novenas, crucifixes, Madonnas, the Sacred Heart, feast observance, Mass, home religious pictures, and food-centered family gatherings, but it does not name the *malocchio*, the evil eye, Saint Anthony for lost things, holy water, devotional medals, or a home altar, and it has no saint-procession scene. That absence matters because the book is otherwise willing to name folk objects exactly: its Italian Catholicism is domestic, visual, culinary, and calendrical rather than a comprehensive ethnographic catalogue. The single "processional" is a funeral procession, not a feast procession. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

171. Voice as belief: no automatic scriptural switch — QUOTE: "How the mind wanders at night before sleep." SOURCE: comparative formal analysis of the six sampled registers GLOSS: There is no consistent shift by which Molly becomes more scriptural, formal, or plain whenever the subject is sacred: domestic realism ranges from catalogue to flat parataxis, violence becomes brutally plain, corpses become medical and Latinate, and Mass becomes formal skeptical hypotaxis. Biblical parallelism is scarce in her own narration; it belongs chiefly to quoted scripture, hymns, prayers, and the ending's Dickinson rather than to a stable sacred Molly-voice. What does change is the degree of reflection: when she tries to make an event mean something—at ritual, in literary memory, or at the sea—her sentences grow longer, more abstract, and more figurative, but that is an interpretive habit, not evidence that belief has already arrived. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

172. Chapter Four / the chapter grid — QUOTE: "It seemed I was engulfed by believers in those days. The Italians and the Irish were obsessed with church, religion, and the Pope." SOURCE: Chapter grid: 22 chapters; Chapter One is about 515 source lines, Chapter Two 552, Chapter Three 354, Chapter Four 310, Chapter Five 494, and Chapter Six 518. GLOSS: The first six chapters form the novel's densest continuous religious sequence: catechism, faith healing, the Assumption, baptismal water, a cross, suicide, funeral, and scriptural poetry all belong to the Muldoon plot.

The dense opening of Chapter Four occurs almost exactly at the center of that initial Revere/Muldoon movement, making the novel's religious pressure a designed phase rather than a uniformly distributed atmosphere. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

173. Chapter Nine / secular college stretch — QUOTE: "Around 7 a.m. the next morning, I woke. Felicity was still sound asleep, snoring." SOURCE: Chapter Eight is about 472 source lines; the adjoining Chapters Nine and Ten are about 463 and 375 lines respectively. GLOSS: Chapters Eight through Ten devote a long middle run to dormitory logistics, friendship, sex, classes, and an invented O'Neill haunting; their religious references are intermittent rather than governing. In contrast with Chapter Four's opening, this plain morning-after passage announces a conspicuously secular social register before Felicity's death returns death and belief to the foreground. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

174. Chapter Seven / narrow hinge chapter — QUOTE: "The evening before my move to the dormitory at Boston University, Dad called me to take a phone call." SOURCE: Chapter Seven is the shortest chapter, about 194 source lines, between the Muldoon inquiry and the Boston University chapters. GLOSS: The short chapter functions as a hinge: Officer Donnelly's last questions close the Muldoon action, while Molly's departure the next morning opens the college world. Its unusually compressed size makes the physical move to Boston a formal seam rather than merely another episode in the Revere chronology. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

175. Chapter Six / aftermath as a second, dense unit — QUOTE: "We were still hungry as we left the beach, so we crossed the street and enjoyed a nice meal at the Renwood Diner." SOURCE: Chapter Six, about 518 source lines, carries the Assumption beach day into the discovery of Mrs. Muldoon's body, the investigation, the Poe block quotation, and the immediate aftermath. GLOSS: The apparently ordinary diner opening is a deliberate decompression after the sacramental beach sequence, but it is followed almost immediately by the "last supper" joke and the corpse. This chapter's length lets the novel convert ritualized water, food, and farewell into the death scene that retrospectively charges the preceding chapter. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

176. Chapter One / opening frame — QUOTE: "I left Nonna's house around 10:15 p.m. I was surprised to find my parents back from the restaurant so early. When I

opened the front door, I heard them arguing in the kitchen directly down the hall. At first, I thought I would just go to my room, but this quarrel seemed particularly vitriolic and interesting. My mother, a timid woman, usually let my father step all over her. Tonight, she was screaming at him, calling him a son of a bitch. Curious, I opted for a glass of orange juice that I would later mix with vodka. When I entered, my father was pressed against my mother, who leaned back over the stove; he was choking her." SOURCE: The novel's first narrative paragraph. GLOSS: The opening plants no overt religious seed: it begins in domestic realism, violence, curiosity, and the physical house. Its governing action is departure—Molly has "left" Nonna's house and enters another violent home—so the eventual language of finding a home arrives only much later. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

177. Chapter Twenty-Two / closing frame — QUOTE: "The sky directly above was a scintillating blue. I thought of Mrs. Muldoon's eyes, their impregnable beauty, and I knew now that behind them was sheer compassion. She had tried to help me, guide me, in the hope that someday I would believe in a power superior and everlasting. The trip to the faith healer, our day at the beach, the gold necklace with the emerald and diamond cross, her encouraging words at my party, and the song that she sang were acts of pure love. I heard my father's voice—"So then maybe you will believe in God someday?"—and I imagined Mrs. Muldoon singing"Moon River" to me once again. There was a faint hum, like bees, and the smell of stargazer lilies seemed to fill the air around me. Venus sparkled high above the Earth. Believing in possibility, I spread my arms wide and swam slowly to the shore. Where the water became shallow and frothy, I rose and walked onto the beach, grateful to be home at last." SOURCE: The novel's final prose paragraph, immediately before the Dickinson poem. GLOSS: The ending deliberately contrasts the opening: a choking kitchen gives way to calm water, and the initiating departure gives way to being "home at last." Unlike the first paragraph, this one is overtly spiritual and interpretive; the novel withholds religious resolution until the closing frame rather than planting it as its opening register. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

178. Chapter Ten / narrator's temporal position — QUOTE: "I am forty-one years old now. What would I say to my seventeen-year-old self lying there in the darkness?" SOURCE: Retrospective first-person narration; the narrated college scene is in 1980, while the later Florida material identifies Molly as forty and then forty-

one. GLOSS: This explicitly establishes a mature narrating consciousness looking back on the seventeen-year-old protagonist, not a present-tense or strictly contemporaneous account. The book is therefore broadly chronological in event order but persistently double-timed, with the older speaker able to address and judge the younger self. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

179. Chapter Eleven / overt foreshadowing — QUOTE: "The following week, on Saturday morning, I would learn even more about death, and I would begin to wonder how Lady Jane, the faith healer, who had claimed that I was an Angel of Death, could have been so right." SOURCE: Prolepsis after Felicity's death; Lady Jane's earlier "Angel of Death" prediction. GLOSS: The future-tense announcement breaks chronological immersion to promise the parents' deaths in the next chapter. It makes the faith-healer motif formally predictive, but it does so through a narrator's explicit future knowledge rather than through an independently verified supernatural event. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

180. Chapter Eleven / retrospective meaning without sacralization — QUOTE: "At that young age, I had no idea of the guilt I would feel in later years." SOURCE: Retrospective assessment after the Felicity prank; Emily Dickinson, "Hope" is the thing with feathers. GLOSS: Here later narration grants the earlier event ethical and emotional weight that Molly-in-the-moment cannot yet possess. The retrospect is not primarily a religious consecration of the death: it names guilt, regret, and a literary "song of hope," keeping its explanatory force psychological and aesthetic. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

181. Chapter Thirteen / macro-ellipsis — QUOTE: "It would take me many years to crawl out of the lake of bad choices I made over the next two decades:" SOURCE: Chapter Thirteen's compressed retrospective account, following the parents' funeral and preceding the 1997 meeting with Gabe. GLOSS: The novel makes its largest temporal jump at the beginning of Chapter Thirteen, condensing college graduation, relationships, addiction, theft, work, and depression into a summary rather than dramatizing them scene by scene. That compression repositions the book from a coming-of-age sequence to a recovery narrative and reserves detailed scenes for Molly's later reconsideration of belief, friendship, and family. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

182. Chapter Seventeen / absence of part structure — QUOTE: "The Jims, the names of the couple renting the house, approved us." SOURCE: The text has 22 numbered chapter headings and no named Parts, Books, or sections after the preliminary epigraphs and acknowledgments. GLOSS: The novel relies on a regular chapter grid and ordinary blank-space scene breaks, not on a visible sacred-versus-secular architecture of parts. A major geographical and temporal change—Boston to Wilton Manors—therefore receives the same plain heading treatment as a domestic scene, a strong negative finding about its formal system. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

183. Chapter Ten / the O'Neill haunting — QUOTE: "One evening while we ate, Emily suggested that we start rumors that we had witnessed supernatural events." SOURCE: The alleged Eugene O'Neill haunting at Shelton Hall. GLOSS: The text introduces its most consequential uncanny episode in the same unmarked prose format used for meals and dorm conversation. It supplies no italics, inset, or white-space rite of passage to distinguish the supernatural rumor from the prank; the formal sameness helps turn an invented haunting into the very ordinary bodily emergency of Felicity's death. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

184. Chapter Six / Poe as a typographic interruption — QUOTE: "I was reminded of a poem by Edgar Allan Poe that I had memorized for my English class:" SOURCE: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm." GLOSS: The ensuing two-stanza verse block interrupts prose immediately after Molly calls Mrs. Muldoon's chosen death "sweet" and "perfect." Its theatrical imagery of a curtain and funeral pall formally slows the investigation scene and supplies a miniature tragic frame before the narrative returns to the patrol car. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

185. Chapter Eighteen / newspaper clipping — QUOTE: "Revere, Mass. (Revere Local) — Revere police are investigating after a woman fell from a window Saturday morning." SOURCE: The inset faux-news report on Aunt Bianca's death. GLOSS: This is one of the novel's rare non-literary typographic blocks, with headline-style dateline, short paragraphs, and official diction. Placed after Nonna's account of Bianca's death, it creates a formal discrepancy between the bland accidental explanation and the later accusation that Nonna engineered or enabled the fall. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

186. Chapter Twenty-Two / terminal Dickinson poem — QUOTE: "Of Visitors – the fairest – For Occupation – This – The spreading wide my narrow Hands To gather Paradise –" SOURCE: Emily Dickinson, "I dwell in Possibility." GLOSS: The Dickinson poem is printed after the final prose paragraph, where it acts as terminal paratext rather than an embedded recollection or epigraph for a new chapter. Its visual separation gives the ending a lyric afterimage and formally endorses Molly's final "Believing in possibility" without requiring her narrating voice to become conventionally devotional. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

187. Chapter Fourteen / Christmas diptych — QUOTE: "I spent Christmas Eve at Nonna's. Over the years, I had managed to avoid celebrating there as much as possible, either staying home or going to a friend or colleague's house." SOURCE: The chapter's consecutive Italian-American and Irish-American family celebrations. GLOSS: Chapter Fourteen deliberately pairs Nonna's Italian household—dementia, accusation, feast, and the retained Muldoon tree—with Gabe's Irish Catholic household—piano, grief, psychic talk, and familial affection. The two-night architecture makes Catholic ethnicity a contrast in family forms, just before Molly's emotional disclosure to Gabe rather than merely a catalogue of inherited symbols. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

188. Chapter Seventeen / the Bible as a delayed structural object — QUOTE: "I was removing tissue from one of the boxes and discovered the Bible my mother had given me so many years ago." SOURCE: The maternal Bible first given at Molly's graduation; Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets." GLOSS: The move to Florida physically returns the Bible to the narrative after its earlier rejection, and Molly immediately rereads the inscription as a warning about hidden moral danger. Its placement just before Aunt Bianca's death and the exposure of Nonna's crimes turns an inherited devotional object into a delayed clue rather than an instant conversion device. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

189. Chapter One / Newgate at the origin — QUOTE: "To me, it felt like Newgate Prison— dark, dusky, and cold." SOURCE: Newgate Prison; probably Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, whose heroine is confined in Newgate. GLOSS: The allusion occurs in the early inventory of Molly's childhood house, structurally defining domestic life as incarceration before she ever leaves Revere. Its placement at the origin of a novel

named for a young woman who will repeatedly flee, steal, and be judged makes the Defoe resonance suggestive rather than certain. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

190. Chapter Eighteen / O'Connor at the classroom threshold — QUOTE: "Mary Grace snickered and opened Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood." SOURCE: Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*. GLOSS: The reference appears just before Mary Grace's religious challenge escalates into violence, placing O'Connor's skeptical, grotesque religious fiction at the threshold of the novel's own classroom conflict over scripture, belief, and arrogance. It is a brief prop rather than a developed quotation, but its structural position makes it a pointed literary echo. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

191. Chapter Twenty-One / delayed reversal of the first plot — QUOTE: "It wasn't a suicide." SOURCE: Virgil's retrospective disclosure about Mrs. Muldoon's death. GLOSS: More than two hundred pages after the death scene, the novel reopens its first major plot and reverses Molly's original interpretation of the Assumption-dated death. This delayed disclosure converts the early sequence from a coming-of-age encounter with suicide into the concealed-crime architecture that governs the final two chapters. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

192. Chapter Twenty-Two / return to the place of the early fraud — QUOTE: "I remembered the day so many years ago when Nonna and I went to the Emergency Ward beyond the corridor wall on my left, the staged fall on the ice." SOURCE: Circular return to Massachusetts General Hospital; T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "In my beginning is my end." GLOSS: The confrontation with dying Nonna returns Molly to the hospital of their first shared fraud, making institutional space itself a structural loop from early complicity to late recognition. The Eliot tag immediately following it crystallizes the design: the novel's late end is deliberately routed through an early beginning rather than simply through a final revelation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

193. Chapter Twenty-Two / opening image reversed at the deathbed — QUOTE: "I remembered the frog I put out of its misery when I was a teenager." SOURCE: Chapter One's toad-killing scene, recalled during Nonna's death. GLOSS: The deathbed scene returns to the opening animal image just as Molly refuses immediate aid to the grandmother who trained her in cruelty and deception. This is a structural echo rather than a claim of spiritual transformation: the book closes its family plot by reversing the roles of observer and suffering creature. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

194. Chapter One, the opening verdict — QUOTE: "She was a sap; he was a bastard." SOURCE: Molly's own cold judgment of her parents, delivered after she has watched her father choke her mother and then smashed a toad "to put him out of his misery." GLOSS: The reader first meets Molly through her own flat, contemptuous epithets for her parents rather than through any appeal for sympathy. The novel opens by positioning the reader to see her as detached and superior — a girl who observes violence and answers it with a verdict, not a feeling — so the book's first stance toward its narrator is wary rather than warm. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

195. Chapter One, the invitation to pity — QUOTE: "I was sick of being hit by him." SOURCE: Domestic abuse, stated without the word "abuse." GLOSS: A single blunt clause, dropped into Molly's account of her father's violence, quietly invites the reader to pity her even as her narration refuses self-pity. The understatement does the work that an appeal would botch: pity arrives through what Molly does not say, not through what she asks for. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

196. Chapter Eight, the invitation to condemn — QUOTE: "She couldn't be too bright." SOURCE: Molly's dismissal of her roommate Felicity, whom her prank will later kill. GLOSS: The reader is repeatedly handed Molly's unearned, cruel judgments of Felicity — here dismissing her intelligence because she is in the General Studies college — which positions the reader to condemn Molly's arrogance. Because the reader senses, before Molly does, that this "idiot" will die as a result of Molly's scheme, the contempt is made retrospectively unbearable. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

197. Chapter Ten, the invitation to fear — QUOTE: "He said,"You have a dark side. But that's what I like about you. You're different from other girls."" SOURCE: David's appraisal, spoken after Molly confesses she has "wondered what it would be like to kill someone." GLOSS: The novel lets another character name what the reader has begun to suspect — that Molly's curiosity about death shades into something menacing. The compliment ("that's what I like about you") refuses to resolve the unease, leaving the reader suspended between attraction to Molly's candor and fear of her darkness. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

198. Chapter One, the early warning — QUOTE: "The girl doesn't seem human sometimes. It's like she doesn't feel things." SOURCE: Aunt Bianca's verdict, the novel's first external judgment of Molly. GLOSS: Bianca, the family's designated

hysteric, is the first character to voice what the reader is being trained to notice — that Molly's composure is not calm but an absence of feeling. The novel plants this verdict early and then spends the whole book testing it, so the reader is never allowed to forget the possibility that Molly is, in some sense, not fully human. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

199. Chapter Eleven, the invitation to admire — QUOTE: "what you did was pretty heroic. Where did you learn CPR?" SOURCE: Detective Corrigan's praise after Felicity's death; echoed by Arnold's "You showed great strength in a crisis." GLOSS: At the moment of Molly's worst consequence — her prank kills Felicity — the novel hands her a public verdict of heroism for the CPR she performs on the girl she has just frightened to death. The praise comes from authority figures, so the reader is invited to admire Molly precisely while knowing her culpability, forcing admiration and condemnation to coexist rather than resolve. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

200. Chapter Fourteen, the deliberate redirection — QUOTE: "I think I've been a cold person for so many years. I don't think I ever allowed myself to feel emotions. I assumed I was just wired to be rational and unemotional, but the truth is I have been weak, guarding myself from feeling anything." SOURCE: Molly's confession to Gabe in the car on Christmas night. GLOSS: This is the single passage where the novel most deliberately redirects the reader's sympathy. After roughly 160 pages in which the reader has been positioned to see Molly's coldness as a defect of character, she reinterprets it herself as a wound — "weak," "guarding myself" — and the reader is asked to pity what it had been invited to condemn. The redirection lands because it is Molly's own speech, not the narrator's later gloss, and because it is immediately followed by her self-accusation ("I was a mean, insensitive young girl, Gabe. And I hate myself for it."). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

201. Chapter Four, the prophecy rationalized — QUOTE: "I think she was just making things up to frighten us" SOURCE: Molly's dismissal of Lady Jane's "Angel of Death" prophecy. GLOSS: The novel's first supernatural claim — that Molly will be "surrounded by death" — is immediately supplied with a rational alternative, and Molly's own voice is the one that offers it. The reader is never asked to believe the prophecy literally; instead the text keeps both readings alive, so the prophecy's later "fulfillment" can be taken as coincidence or as design. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

202. Chapter Nineteen, belief put to the reader — QUOTE: "Question our certitudes and assumptions." SOURCE: Gabe's challenge, immediately before he quotes Kierkegaard ("There are two ways to be fooled…") and Hamlet ("There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio…"). GLOSS: This is the passage where the question of belief is most directly put to the reader, and it is put through a character, not the narrator — Gabe urges Molly (and the reader) to doubt her own certainty rather than to adopt his faith. The text allows the reader to answer either way: it supplies the rationalist's reply in Molly's very next line and never resolves the argument. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

203. Chapter Nineteen, the rational alternative — QUOTE: "I believe we see what we want to see." SOURCE: Molly's reply to Gabe's argument for a consciousness greater than the human. GLOSS: The novel gives its own protagonist the cleanest rationalist answer to the question of providence — that the "signs" and coincidences are projection, not divine communication. By placing this line in Molly's mouth at the height of the theological argument, the text guarantees that the reader has a fully worked-out secular reading available for everything that follows, including the ending. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

204. Chapter One, the reader trained to read signs — QUOTE: "I was always looking for signs. I didn't believe in God; that was foolishness. But I liked to follow the signals that my environment gave me." SOURCE: Molly's founding epistemology, stated in the opening chapter. GLOSS: The novel tells the reader, in its first pages, exactly how to read it: as a sequence of "signs" and "signals" rather than as doctrine. This is the answer the text ultimately allows to its own question of belief — the ending's coincidences (Virgil, Beatrice, the feast of St. Margaret Mary) are "signs" the reader has been trained to notice, not proofs, so the reader is asked to hold them as possibility rather than to credit them as miracle. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

205. Chapter Three, the double-timed voice — QUOTE: "In retrospect, I'm curious what people thought when they saw me in those days." SOURCE: The mature narrator's retrospective frame, layered over the sixteen-year-old scene. GLOSS: The novel's retrospective structure is announced here almost casually, as the older Molly pauses to wonder how her bruises looked to others. This double-timing means the reader always occupies two moments at once — the girl's and the woman's — so no scene is experienced only as the girl lived it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

206. Chapter Eleven, prolepsis as dread — QUOTE: "The following week, on Saturday morning, I would learn even more about death, and I would begin to wonder how Lady Jane, the faith healer, who had claimed that I was an Angel of Death, could have been so right." SOURCE: Future-tense announcement after Felicity's death, before the parents' death. GLOSS: The retrospection does not spoil the ending here but deepens it: the reader is told that more death is coming, but not what kind, so the announcement converts suspense about "what" into dread about "how." The reader is made to wait with foreknowledge the younger self lacks, which is the opposite of a spoiler — it is a pressure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

207. Chapter Three, the reader knows more than the girl — QUOTE: "Today, I regret that I never said I loved him back." SOURCE: The mature narrator's regret, after her father tells her "I love you" and she says nothing. GLOSS: This is a moment where the reader knows more than the younger self — the reader, unlike the sixteen-year-old, knows the father will die and that this silence will become a permanent regret. The gap between the girl's indifference and the woman's remorse is exactly what the retrospective frame exists to create, and it makes the reader feel the loss before the loss occurs. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

208. Chapter Six, withheld knowledge — QUOTE: "It wasn't until many years later that I learned the source of the friction between the two of them, and when I did, I was the one who was shocked." SOURCE: The narrator's explicit withholding of the Nonna/Bianca secret. GLOSS: The narrator tells the reader that she learned something shocking years later, but does not say what, so the reader is made to hold a question the younger self did not even know to ask. This withheld knowledge becomes the engine of the novel's final two chapters, where the secret — that Nonna is a murderer — is finally disclosed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

209. Chapter Twenty-One, retrospection deepens the ending — QUOTE: "Your grandmother is a murderer." SOURCE: Virgil's disclosure, reversing the novel's first plot (Mrs. Muldoon's "suicide"). GLOSS: More than two hundred pages after the death scene, the retrospective structure lets the novel reopen its first plot and reverse the reader's original interpretation. Because the reader has already lived through the "suicide" reading, the reversal is experienced as a re-reading of one's own memory, not a new fact — retrospection here deepens rather than spoils, because the shock is

not what happens but what the reader had been misreading all along. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

210. Chapter Fourteen, the reader as confessor — QUOTE: "I told Gabe everything. The words gushed out of me." … "I had never bared my soul to anyone." SOURCE: Molly's confession to Gabe, the novel's model for its own narration. GLOSS: The novel casts the reader as a confessor by staging, inside the story, the one moment Molly "bares her soul" — to Gabe, who listens "with no judgment in his face, only compassion." The reader receives the same confession the ex-priest receives, and is implicitly asked to receive it with the same non-judgmental attention rather than to render a verdict. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

211. Chapter Twenty-Two, the reader briefly cast as judge — QUOTE: "He told me that the reason Nonna was never convicted of any crime was the evidence was circumstantial." SOURCE: Virgil's explanation of why Nonna escaped justice. GLOSS: The novel briefly hands the reader a judge's role: because the evidence against Nonna is "circumstantial," the reader is left to weigh it and decide whether to convict her of murders the law never did. But the novel immediately undercuts the judge's position by making the verdict emotionally foregone — Molly, and the reader, already believe Nonna guilty — so the role of judge is offered and then dissolved into the role of witness. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

212. Chapter Twenty-Two, the reader as witness — QUOTE: "I sat in the chair, watching her arms floundering as she continued to grasp for it." … "As I watched my grandmother die, falling through her universe of lies to the descent of her end, my soul swooned, and I felt great peace." SOURCE: Molly's refusal to hand Nonna the call light as she dies. GLOSS: At the novel's climactic moral moment, Molly does not judge Nonna aloud — she simply watches, withholding the call light, and the reader is positioned beside her as a witness rather than a judge. The text reports the death without pronouncing a verdict on Molly's inaction, so the reader is asked only to observe what Molly does and to sit with the "great peace" she feels, not to approve or condemn it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

213. Chapter Six, "Moon River" as the carrier of reader feeling — QUOTE: "In my mind, I heard Mrs. Muldoon singing"Moon River."" SOURCE: The Henry Mancini/Johnny Mercer song from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, first sung by Mrs. Muldoon

in Chapter Five. GLOSS: The novel's most reliable carrier of Molly's feeling is not a hymn but a popular song, "Moon River," which returns at the corpse, at the Callaghan Christmas (where it triggers her breakdown), and at the ending. The reader is positioned to feel Molly's grief through the secular song precisely because Molly cannot access the hymns — the popular tune does the emotional work the liturgy cannot. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

214. Chapter Twelve, the funeral hymns the reader hears Molly reject — QUOTE: ""Amazing Grace" played as we entered and took our seats in the first pew." SOURCE: The hymn "Amazing Grace" (John Newton), followed later by "Be Not Afraid" (Bob Dufford, SJ). GLOSS: The reader is placed inside the funeral liturgy — hearing "Amazing Grace" and then "Be Not Afraid" — while Molly's interior voice rejects it ("What grace? What peace?"). The hymns position the reader to feel the consolation Molly cannot accept, so the reader's experience of the funeral is deliberately split from the narrator's. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

215. Chapter Fourteen, "Silent Night" as ironic counterpoint — QUOTE: ""Listen to the music. 'Silent Night, Holy Night.'"" SOURCE: The hymn "Silent Night" (Mohr/Gruber), playing on Barbra Streisand's album during the Giacomo murder accusation. GLOSS: Molly tries to defuse Bianca's accusation that Nonna murdered their brother by turning to the carol, but the hymn's promise of peace ("Sleep in heavenly peace") plays directly under the room's escalating violence. The reader is positioned to hear the sacred lullaby as an ironic counterpoint to the murder it fails to cover, making the Christmas scene the novel's sharpest collision of hymn and horror. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

216. Chapter Two/Four, Italian transactional versus Irish sincere piety — QUOTE: "You did good. We're gonna make a lot of money when we sue." … "It's spiritual healing too." SOURCE: Nonna (Italian-Catholic, transactional) versus Mrs. Muldoon (Irish-Catholic, sincere). GLOSS: The novel positions the reader to distrust the Italian-Catholic register — Nonna's piety is always transactional, as when she turns a staged fall into a lawsuit — and to trust the Irish-Catholic register, where Mrs. Muldoon's desire for "spiritual healing" is genuine even when garbled. This ethnic split in the management of religious sincerity quietly guides the reader's sympathy: the Italian grandmother is the murderer, the Irish widow is the saint. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

217. Chapter Fifteen, Dickinson as substitute for prayer — QUOTE: "The coincidence of opening to that poem struck me." SOURCE: Emily Dickinson, "There's a certain Slant of light," read by Molly alone on the grief night. GLOSS: The reader watches Molly turn to Dickinson's poem — with its explicitly sacred vocabulary ("Cathedral Tunes," "Heavenly Hurt") — at the moment a believer might pray, and the text frames the encounter as "coincidence" rather than providence. Dickinson functions as devotional reading in a household without devotions, positioning the reader to see poetry as the form Molly's longing takes when doctrine is unavailable. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

218. Chapter Eight, the negative finding — Joyce, Yeats, Hopkins absent — QUOTE: "One of my favorites was Ms. Hopkins. I can still remember her beehive hairdo." SOURCE: A negative finding: the only "Hopkins" in the novel is a schoolteacher's surname, not Gerard Manley Hopkins; Joyce and Yeats do not appear at all. GLOSS: The Irish-modernist trio that anchors Mulhern's other work — Joyce, Yeats, Hopkins — is absent from *Molly Bonamici*, whose literary allusions are American (Dickinson, Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, O'Connor, Fitzgerald) plus Dante and Shakespeare. The single "Hopkins" is a teacher's name, a near-miss that underscores the point: this novel's reader is positioned inside an American and Dantean frame, not an Irish-Catholic literary one, despite its Irish-Catholic characters. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

219. CHAPTER ONE, the kitchen fight — QUOTE: "I may be a whore, Dad, but you're a fucking asshole." SOURCE: voice GLOSS: Molly's sharpest comic register. Her father creates a foreign insult ("You troia!"), and she answers by conceding the slur in a subordinate clause ("I may be a whore, Dad") before reversing it in the main clause ("but you're a fucking asshole"). The comedy is grammatical: a concessive clause that swallows the blow and returns it in perfect antithesis, all in one breath, with zero emotional spill. This is irony at full pressure — pure structure, no feeling. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

220. CHAPTER THREE, the father's apology — QUOTE: "I couldn't say I loved him, because I didn't feel that I did." SOURCE: voice GLOSS: The first sentence where the voice drops its guard into plain tenderness and grief. The irony and the antithesis both drain out; the diction goes flat and concrete ("couldn't," "didn't," "feel"), the sentence is short and unadorned, and the reason is given with no cleverness at all —

the voice cannot perform its usual detachment. Chronologically this is the earliest such moment, and it occurs at a scene of love (the father's tearful "I love you"), not loss. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

221. CHAPTER TEN, the retrospective voice — QUOTE: "the sad reality of what is, for the most part, a nonorgasmic life" SOURCE: voice GLOSS: Molly's narration moves through four principal registers — comic-sardonic (finding 1), analytic-essayistic (this one), tender-grieving (finding 2), and lyrical-sacred (findings 18–19) — with a fifth, the obscene-deflecting register, guarding the sacred. The analytic voice here compresses a clinical verdict into a single cool judgment, typical of the older narrator who keeps statistics and detachment as armor. The shifts cluster precisely at moments of loss and love: every death and every real intimacy drops the voice out of irony, and the return to irony afterward is the novel's quietest signal of self-protection. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

222. CHAPTER ONE, the house — QUOTE: "I hated the ornate shiny gold wallpaper in the living room with its curlicue design, the plastic runner over the hallway rug, the plastic wrappings on the lampshades (to keep them nice), and the tchotchkes all over the place—grotesques, such as a domed-shaped glass Madonna, figurines of Italian peasants, and the awful fake painting of the Last Supper that hung on the dining room wall, a room cordoned off by a white leather strap and two vulgar gold-metal poles." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The novel's longest sentence, a catalogue that accumulates objects in a single accumulating breath until it lands on the religious kitsch — the Madonna, the Italian peasant figurines, the Last Supper. The syntax is additive and paratactic, and its function is pointed: the sentence piles up the "stuff" Molly despises and lets the sacred objects sit at the bottom of the list, so the rhythm itself enacts the contempt it describes. It is the fullest specimen of the cumulative register that surfaces whenever Molly inventories the world. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

223. CHAPTER TWELVE, in the bathroom mirror — QUOTE: "Life sucked." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The novel's shortest complete sentence, delivered by Molly alone at the mirror after her parents' deaths. Two syllables where the surrounding prose has lately been analytic and long; the register collapses to adolescent flatness at the exact moment of maximum grief. That a sentence this short can carry the scene is the proof of how much work the surrounding long sentences (finding 4) have

done, and of how deliberately Mulhern uses length as emotional rhythm. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

224. CHAPTER SIX, the patrol car — QUOTE: "We all die." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The recurring rhythm of the book is a long catalogue or meditation that then collapses into a short, flat, unanswerable declarative — a systolic swell followed by a diastolic thud. "We all die." is the purest instance, a sentence with no irony and no ornament that follows the elaborate excursus on Mrs. Muldoon's staged death and the Poe quotation. The pattern — accumulate, then deflate — is the novel's deepest cadence and the formal equivalent of Molly's worldview. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

225. CHAPTER THREE, Nonna's catechism — QUOTE: "Molly, life is a game. Some people win and some people lose." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The most aphoristically marked beat in the novel is not Molly's but Nonna's, delivered in balanced and parallel antithesis ("win…lose") that sounds like a proverb or a homily. Molly immediately undercuts it by noting Nonna's speech "seemed staged, as if she were reading from a script," so the grandmother's epigrammatic rhythm is framed as performance — the only character who speaks in set, stress-balanced periods is the one who is acting. Nonna's rhythm is thus the book's counterpoint: a persuasive rhetoric Molly hears, admires, and finally distrusts. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

226. CHAPTER ONE, the flung glass — QUOTE: "Shards of glass scattered on the red-tile floor, and a stream of orange juice moved in a rivulet towards the back door." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: A run of sibilants — "Shards," "glass," "scattered," "stream" — that hisses across the sentence, plus the internal i-and-r chime of "rivulet" and the assonant long-e of "stream…rivulet…door." The sound-work makes a violent, ugly moment literally fluid, turning domestic violence into a little iambic picture. It is the book's first sustained alliterative effect and announces that this sardonic voice also has an ear for texture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

227. CHAPTER TWELVE, at the gravesite — QUOTE: "Why didn't I try to relate to them? Why hadn't I accepted them for who they were? Why had I been so narcissistic?" SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: A triple anaphora on "Why" that escalates in self-accusation (didn't try / hadn't accepted / had been so narcissistic). The repetition replaces the voice's usual irony with a litany — prose behaving like prayer or confession — at the moment the narrator first turns her analytic blade on herself.

Anaphora is rare in Molly's voice and almost always marks either grief or grace, so its appearance here is itself the emotional signal. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

228. CHAPTER SIXTEEN, Gabe's proposal — QUOTE: "Darling Molly, won't you go with me to paradise. I promise it will change your life." … "Nice. That rhymes," I said. SOURCE: voice GLOSS: The only moment where prosody is made explicit in dialogue: Gabe produces a rhyming couplet ("paradise"/"life"), and Molly immediately names the sound — "Nice. That rhymes." The scene also recalls Gabe's earlier burlesque of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" ("Come live with me and be my love"), which Molly corrects as "not the best poem." Molly, the English teacher, hears speech as verse, and the novel keeps catching its own rhymes, as if to acknowledge that its own sentences are doing the same thing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

229. CHAPTER ELEVEN, after Felicity's death — QUOTE: "but also the song of hope, as the poet said, in the chilliest lands and strangest seas … to have even a crumb of hope can help any of us through extremity" SOURCE: Emily Dickinson, "Hope is the thing with feathers" (Fr 314) GLOSS: A compressed paraphrase of Dickinson's poem — her "I've heard it in the chillest land, and on the strangest Sea … never, in Extremity, it asked a crumb of me" reappears here almost word for word ("chilliest… strangest seas…crumb…extremity"). It is a third Dickinson poem folded into the voice, alongside "Tell the truth but tell it slant" and the closing poem, "I dwell in Possibility," and it supplies the book's single most hopeful note, delivered in the poet's iambic hymn meter. The word "crumb" is Dickinson's own, transported verbatim into Molly's prose. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

230. CHAPTER SIXTEEN, the bear's apartment — QUOTE: "the bear's barbaric yawp … there is no fat sweeter than that which sticks to their bones, and that the scent of their armpits is aroma finer than prayer" SOURCE: Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (§52 and §2) GLOSS: Two direct Whitman borrowings do the novel's sound-work here: "barbaric yawp" is the famous last line of "Song of Myself," and the praise of the arm-pits' "aroma finer than prayer" is Whitman's own bodily mysticism. Molly, herself a teacher of Emerson and Thoreau, ventriloquizes Whitman's long, breathy line to describe the bear subculture, turning the poet's democratic body-worship into deadpan social observation — the loudest, loosest prosody in the book, precisely because it is borrowed from the loudest American voice. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

231. CHAPTER NINE, Nonna's Bolero — QUOTE: "You're playing Ravel's Bolero. I like to listen to that while I read." … "The melody is kinda repetitive, but cleaning is too. We are never done cleaning, Molly." SOURCE: Maurice Ravel, "Boléro" GLOSS: Ravel's Boléro is a single melody repeated unchanged while the orchestra swells — a natural emblem for this novel's method, which keeps returning to the same notes (death, religion, Nonna) at increasing volume. Nonna's gloss — "The melody is kinda repetitive, but cleaning is too" — hands the reader the structural key in disguise: repetition is the point. The placement, in a conversation about her own ceaseless work, makes the music an acoustical figure for the novel's own refrain-like structure. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

232. CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO, the cab home — QUOTE: "My parents loved the song 'Good Golly Miss Molly' by Little Richard." SOURCE: Little Richard, "Good Golly, Miss Molly" GLOSS: Here the novel finally names the source of its heroine's name — a rock-and-roll exclamation, not the Irish saint or Italian anything. It arrives in the last chapter, in a cab driven by a woman named Beatrice, so the closing scene stacks nomenclature (Molly the song, Beatrice the Dantean guide) as if the whole book has been a procession of names waiting to be sung. The song's shout-and-response form is the kind of pure rhythm Molly's own ringed, ironic speech usually refuses, which is why its source is deferred until the end. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

233. CHAPTER NINETEEN, the drive home — QUOTE: "Big wheel keep on turnin'. Proud Mary keep on burnin.' … Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the river." SOURCE: Creedence Clearwater Revival / Tina Turner, "Proud Mary" GLOSS: Resonant because the novel is full of rivers — "Moon River" runs through the middle, and the closing swim is the final river-image — so Molly's singing along to Tina Turner's chanted "Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the river" becomes a refrain about her own rolling, restless life. The threefold "rollin'" is anaphora doing exactly what anaphora does elsewhere in the prose (finding 9): it replaces commentary with incantation. It is the book's clearest statement, in song, of the motion that never stops. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

234. CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE, the curb — QUOTE: "as you are doing chest compressions sing the song in your head. It will give you the correct rhythm." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The novel's one explicit theory of rhythm, and it is about keeping someone alive: Mrs. Callaghan teaches Evy to time CPR to the beat of "Stayin' Alive," whose tempo (about 100 beats per minute) matches correct compression rate.

That a disco anthem is prescribed as a metronome for resurrecting the body fuses the book's two great obsessions — song and death — in a single prosodic instruction. Rhythm, the scene insists, is literal and life-sustaining, not decorative. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

235. CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE, the airport bar — QUOTE: "He was accused of believing in other worlds too." SOURCE: voice GLOSS: Officer Connolly, whose name is Virgil, explains he is named not after the poet of the Aeneid but after an Irish Saint Virgil of Salzburg, an astronomer accused of believing in other worlds. The doubling matters to voice: the Dantean guide through the underworld collapses into a Celtic cosmologist, so the name "Virgil" carries both hell and the heavens, and the "other worlds" accusation reaches toward the book's closing "possibility." It is a moment where nomenclature becomes theology, delivered in Molly's flattest, most plainly marveling register. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

236. CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO, the last swim — QUOTE: "The sun was setting, and the sky above the ocean assumed a glorious pattern of pink, gold, and blue. … Then I stepped into a foamy wave." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: The sacred moment marks itself by sound. The sentences shorten to paratactic clarity, the irony and obscenity are gone, and the syntax turns to present participles and a color-triad ("pink, gold, and blue") whose three monosyllables land like a litany; "foamy wave" is the final soft alliterative beat. Unlike the deflation at the altar (finding 19), here the sacred is allowed to stay, and the prose confirms it — shorter, lighter, imagistic, and void of commentary. The voice does not change tense (it remains past), but it changes everything else. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

237. CHAPTER TWELVE, after the Gospel — QUOTE: "In my head, I thought, Fuck you, Lord Jesus Christ, and fuck your mother, father, and the Holy Ghost too." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: A negative finding: the sacred does not always sanctify the voice. Moments after reading Mark's "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" aloud, Molly's interior prose stays in the same obscene, deflating register she uses for her father, with an anaphoric "fuck…fuck" that parodies a litany into a curse. The prose here marks the sacred by refusing to mark it — the cadence is unchanged — and that refusal is itself the point: the sacred appears in this novel both as hushed picture (the swim) and as choked-back profanity (this). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

238. The Impressionist harbor print above the bed — QUOTE: "An Impressionist print of a boat in the harbor that hung above her bed always drew my attention. I imagined sailing away while I listened to Michael Jackson, Donna Summer, or The Police." (Chapter One) SOURCE: image (a privately hung seascape functioning as a domestic altarpiece of departure) GLOSS: Nonna's bedroom, the novel's warmest indoor sanctuary, is oriented around a painting of a boat leaving a harbor — Molly's single most consistent private longing for escape, gazed at through adolescence. It is the secular seed of the book's whole movement: the "sailing away" she dreams of here is what the final swim, "home at last," finally reverses into return. It appears once, but it plants the sea as the image of Molly's desired elsewhere. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

239. The Mystic River Bridge as a black hole — QUOTE: "As we crossed the Mystic River Bridge, I imagined I was moving through a black hole to another universe. I loved the green cantilever truss bridge that spanned more than two miles and reminded me of the skeletal remains of a dinosaur, or the inside of a boa constrictor. The river glittered in the distance." (Chapter Eight) SOURCE: image (threshold of descent) GLOSS: The moment Molly leaves Revere for Boston is figured as an entrance into a "black hole" — a swallowing dark threshold crossed inside a dinosaur-skeleton/constrictor body — with the river glittering beyond it and the city towers "like harbingers." This is the novel's Inferno-beginning cast as an image: the self descends into an underworld of bones and jaws, and the light is only a distant promise on the far side. The bridge is a one-time image, but it is the book's most explicit picture of incipit descent. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

240. Brahms as a man climbing a ladder — QUOTE: "I recognized Brahms Piano Sonata No. 1—a vibrant melody with a fast rhythm and short pauses. The music grew in intensity and made me think of someone climbing a ladder, hesitating now and then to look down, not sure of whether to keep moving upward." (Chapter Eight) SOURCE: Johannes Brahms, Piano Sonata No. 1; Dante's Purgatorio (penitential ascent) GLOSS: In the very chapter that opens with a "black hole" descent, the soundtrack inverts it: Brahms's sonata is heard as a climber mounting a ladder, hesitating and looking down. It is the novel's Purgatorio-image in miniature, placed here — before Molly has yet named her "dark woods" and "steep hill" in Chapter Thirteen — as a pre-echo. That the ascending figure is unsure "whether to keep

moving upward" exactly states the book's withheld, doubtful hope. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

241. The dark half of the dormitory room — QUOTE: "My side was close to the bathroom, which I wasn't crazy about, and was darker with poor overhead lighting." (Chapter Eight) SOURCE: image (light/dark placement as a marker of the Inferno phase) GLOSS: On arrival Molly is assigned the dark side of the room — poor light, no river view — a literally unlit position that coincides with the book's Inferno stretch (the deaths of Mrs. Muldoon, Felicity, and her parents arrive immediately after). Her half of the room is the stage-direction for the novel's darkening. The detail is minute, but it is one of the novel's many quiet placements of Molly in shadow before anything bright is earned. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

242. Sex as smoldering fire — QUOTE: "'He's crazy, Molly. Sex is a smoldering fire in each one of us. We've got to keep the flame burning.'" (Wally, Chapter Thirteen) SOURCE: image (fire re-purposed as erotic appetite; inverted Spirit/judgment flame) GLOSS: Wally's "smoldering fire… keep the flame burning" is the novel's secular counter-theology of fire: the flame that scripture attaches to the Spirit or to judgment is here the libido, to be stoked rather than quenched. It stands against the book's one true theological fire (the "sparks from an unquenchable fire" on the water, a recycled motif) and against the novel's literal fires — the arson scheme and the restaurant explosion — which carry no sacred meaning at all. Fire in this novel splits three ways, only one of which is doctrinal. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

243. The slant of streetlight across Gabe's eyes — QUOTE: "He leaned towards me. A slant of streetlight crossed his eyes, and again I thought them beautiful. They were his most remarkable feature." (Chapter Fourteen) SOURCE: Emily Dickinson, "There's a certain Slant of light" (poem 258) GLOSS: The night of Molly's breakdown, a streetlight slants across Gabe's face — and in the next chapter she opens her anthology to Dickinson's "There's a certain Slant of light" and recognizes the poem in what she has just lived. The novel deliberately materializes Dickinson's metaphorical "Slant of light" as a literal streetlight before quoting it, so the image and the text fold together: the poem's "Heavenly Hurt" and "Seal Despair" are embodied in the one face that shows Molly compassion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

244. The slant of light as the novel's theology — QUOTE: "I was merely amused by the coincidences—the"slant of light" I noticed on Gabe's face in the car, Handel's "cathedral tune" playing in the house across the street, the "hurt" and "despair" I was feeling, and the "distance" in time from when I saw "the look of death" on Mrs. Muldoon's decaying body." (Chapter Fifteen) SOURCE: Emily Dickinson, "There's a certain Slant of light" — the novel's most theologically loaded image GLOSS: This is the single image that does the most theological work, because it is the only one the novel lets the narrator herself read as a system: light (the slant), sound (Handel's "cathedral tune"), feeling (hurt/despair), and the remembered dead all converge and rhymingly "answer" Dickinson's poem. It argues exactly what the ending argues — that grace arrives obliquely, as a *slant*, a "Heavenly Hurt" that leaves "no scar" but works "an internal difference," i.e., a change of sight rather than a proof. Molly's eventual "possibility" is pre-figured here as indirect light. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

245. The light enacts the Dantean arc — QUOTE: "I awoke just as the plane was beginning its descent. I opened the window shade, and the sun fell softly on my face." (Chapter Twenty-Two) SOURCE: image (light as the through-line carrying Inferno to Purgatorio to Paradiso) GLOSS: The novel's images do darken, then purify, then brighten, and the vehicle is light: Molly begins in darkness ("lay in the darkness," the "darker" half of the dorm, a "black hole" bridge), passes through the oblique "slant of light" that is Dickinson's "Heavenly Hurt" — the Purgatorial middle term — and ends with the sun "fell[ing] softly" and the "scintillating blue" sky and Venus overhead. The sun-on-the-face over the descending plane is the threshold of Paradiso: the self that entered a "black hole" at the start now receives light directly rather than at a slant. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

246. A flicker of light at Felicity's death — QUOTE: "It seemed the lights in the hall glowed for a second, and there was a foul smell of gas." (Chapter Eleven) SOURCE: image (an ambiguous pulse of light against mechanical/chemical death) GLOSS: As Felicity dies, the hallway lights "glow for a second" alongside a smell of gas — a pulse of light at the moment of death that could be the building or could be the first faint registration of a presence Molly cannot admit. The novel refuses to say which, holding the image in the uncertainty ("I believe we see what we want to see") that governs every "sign" in the book. It is the obverse of the ending's steady, reliable sun. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

247. The Christmas tree and "I'll Be Home for Christmas" — QUOTE: "The large Christmas tree, which was placed in front of it, sparkled with glitter, bulbs, and lights. I could hear someone playing 'I'll Be Home for Christmas' on the piano." (Chapter Fourteen) SOURCE: the popular song "I'll Be Home for Christmas" (Gannon/Kent), tied to the home-as-heaven motif GLOSS: The warm Irish-Catholic Callaghan home — the novel's image of genuine familial love — is framed by a lit tree and a piano playing "I'll Be Home for Christmas," a song whose "home" is the same euphemism for the afterlife the novel keeps testing ("I'll be home for Christmas… if only in my dreams"). Light and the "home" hymn here mark the register of sincere Irish piety against which Nonna's transactional Italian household — and Molly's own homelessness — are set. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

248. Glistening slopes at the graveside — QUOTE: "The day was gorgeous; the bright sun on the icy snow created glistening slopes." (Chapter Fifteen) SOURCE: image (resurrection-light on a grave) GLOSS: The visit to Mr. Callaghan's grave is staged in glare — bright sun making the snow "glisten" — the one occasion in the novel's mourning where the light is full rather than slanting, and it belongs to the sincere Irish-Catholic family, not to Molly. Set one chapter after the "slant of light" that was Dickinson's "Seal Despair," this is the light already turning therapeutic: grief held in daylight, with the Irish Blessing's "May the sun shine warm upon your face" made literal over the tombstone. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

249. The sun streaming in with the wind — QUOTE: "The air in the room felt oppressive. I opened all the windows and put up the shades. The sun streamed in and the room filled up with wind." (Chapter Nine) SOURCE: image (light and wind entering as a Pentecostal influx) GLOSS: Immediately after learning of her father's arson scheme, Molly opens every window and lets in "the sun" and "the wind" together, and her papers scatter. Light plus rushing air is the book's repeated figure for the Spirit-Kirlian ("a rushing mighty wind," Acts 2:2), arriving here unbidden into the cramped dorm as the plot's first serious moral taint descends. The room's stale air is displaced by the two elements the novel later resolves into the sun and the sea of the ending. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

250. No Pietà, no Annunciation, no Nativity, no Stations rendered whole — QUOTE: (absence) the text names "the Blessed Mother, the Stations of the Cross, the sacraments, and the saints" among the stained-glass windows but renders only the

Assumption as a finished picture SOURCE: negative finding on the iconographic repertoire GLOSS: Across the novel there is no Pietà (no mother mourning a dead child is ever imaged), no Annunciation or Nativity (the Christmas chapters give the season, never a crèche or the Christ child), and no single Station of the Cross is described. The Marian iconography is entirely ASCENSION (the Assumption glass, the Assumption feast) and WOUND (the Sacred Heart), with no mother-and-child register at all — a precise fit for a novel about a daughter who never learned to love her own mother and a mother who was "beaten down." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

251. The sea and the home, not the church, are the novel's true sacred interiors — QUOTE: (absence) the only fully rendered church interior is the parents' funeral nave; no subsequent church is entered or pictured whole SOURCE: negative finding / image (displacement of sacred space onto water and domesticity) GLOSS: After the funeral church, the novel's only other "church" is a Florida building read from a car in a storm (the St. Francis sign, in a "steeple-shadowed parking lot"). The book instead locates the sacred in the sea — where Mrs. Muldoon is "cured," Nonna's ashes are cast, and Molly finally rises — and in domestic spaces (Nonna's harbour-print bedroom, the Callaghan tree). The Dantean journey never takes Molly to a satisfying altar; the sea is the cathedral, and the "home" she reaches at the end is a body of water, not a building. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

252. The iconographic repertoire is fixed and recycled, not freely ranging — QUOTE: "The waves glimmered like sparks from an unquenchable fire." (Chapter Five) SOURCE: the author's own short-story canon ("Assumptions," "Useless Things," "A Prayer for Home," "Drenched to the Bone") GLOSS: The novel does not range freely across Christian art; it reprises a fixed, short list of motifs — the unquenchable fire, the mourning dove, the singing red fish, the pregnant "Madonna" who will not ascend, the steeple-shadowed parking lot with its St. Francis sign — transplanted almost verbatim from Mulhern's earlier stories. The "unquenchable fire" on the water is scripture's hell-flame (Mark 9:43) turned to glitter on the baptismal sea, but it is a borrowed image, and the book's other fires (the arson, the explosion) are crimes with no theological charge. The repertoire is a consistent, reusable set rather than an improvisation, and its meanings hold steady across the transplant. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

253. The saints are named but never imaged with their attributes — QUOTE: (absence) no saint is depicted in the act of sainthood — no stigmatized palms, no dramatized vision, no attribute in motion SOURCE: negative finding on saint-attribute iconography GLOSS: The novel names St. Francis, St. Margaret Mary, St. Virgil, St. Paul, and St. Joseph, yet at no point does it picture any of them performing their sainthood: St. Margaret Mary's visions of Christ remain a fact recited by a cab driver, not an image; the Sacred Heart arrives as a locket and a framed print, not as a burning apparition; and the only painted "halo" in the book is the accidental pool of Myra's blood. Sainthood here is carried by names, feast days, and keepsake objects, never by a pictured body — the obverse of the ending, where a blue sky becomes a face at last. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

254. The cookie tin, at the moment the roommate is caught eating — QUOTE: "I thought, "I hope Nonna doesn't curse me" and laughed." SOURCE: The variant. Novel, Chapter Eleven, against the three story printings — "The Mannequin" (*Assumptions and Other Stories*, 2016), "A Perfect Hit" (The Galway Review) and "Mia Bambina" (Impspired), all of which read at exactly this point: "I thought, "Bitch. I told you not to touch them. But you did. I knew you would."" GLOSS: One sentence-slot, same prop, opposite narrator. In every story printing the line is a murderer's gloat that confirms the poisoning in advance; in the novel it is the worry of an innocent bystander about her grandmother's superstitious curse — a curse the book later reveals was literal, because the cocaine was in the cookies and was meant for Molly. This is the hinge on which the whole transplant turns, and it is achieved by replacing eleven words. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

255. Who poisoned the cookies — QUOTE: "That's not so. Bianca said she put cocaine in cookies she sent you at college." SOURCE: The variant. Novel (Aunt Helena speaking, Chapter Twenty-Four) against "The Mannequin"/"A Perfect Hit": "Obtaining cocaine from Mr. Scarfone, the mobster friend of my grandmother's, was easy." GLOSS: The stories make Molly the poisoner and Nonna her willing accomplice; the novel makes Nonna the poisoner and Molly the intended victim, with Felicity's death an accident of appetite. The revelation also migrates from first-person confession at the story's close to hearsay in an aunt's kitchen two hundred pages later. The same murder weapon is retained and its owner reversed — the cheapest

possible structural change with the largest possible moral consequence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

256. The narrator's self-diagnosis — QUOTE: "One of the perks of being a sociopath is that you learn how to easily gather necessary information by manipulating people, using their weaknesses to your advantage. . . . Of course mine was more useful. Sociopathy wouldn't kill me." SOURCE: The variant. "The Mannequin" (*Assumptions*, 2016) and "A Perfect Hit" (The Galway Review); the entire paragraph is absent from the novel, which has no occurrence of the word "sociopath" applied to Molly anywhere. GLOSS: The stories hand the reader a clinical label and let it do the interpretive work; the novel withholds it entirely, so that Molly's flatness has to be read rather than diagnosed. The deletion is the largest single cut in the collation and it is not stylistic — it removes the story's explanatory frame. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

257. What replaces the confession — QUOTE: "I was sure that others would have done the same thing given the situation, but I felt remorse for the first time. At that young age, I had no idea of the guilt I would feel in later years." SOURCE: The variant. Novel, at the identical position where "The Mannequin" and "A Perfect Hit" read "I thought about my actions. I was sure that there were others who would have done the same thing. Nonna certainly." and "Mia Bambina" reads "I thought about what I had accomplished." GLOSS: This is the sharpest evidence for the direction of revision. Every story printing uses the elevator ride to congratulate the narrator ("what I had accomplished"), and the novel converts the same ride into a first admission of remorse and a prolepsis of lifelong guilt. The vocabulary that enters is moral and theological — remorse, guilt, hope — and the vocabulary that leaves is clinical and self-satisfied. The revision runs toward the religious, not away from it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

258. The Edenic gloss on the murder — QUOTE: "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit. Nonna would be happy to know that Ashley had died for her sins and was now resting in peace." SOURCE: The variant. "The Mannequin" (*Assumptions*, 2016) and "A Perfect Hit" (The Galway Review); cut from the novel and also absent from "Mia Bambina," which retains only "She would be happy to know that Ashley had died for her sins and that her cookies were a perfect hit." GLOSS: The story's most flamboyant piece of sacred parody — Genesis 3 plus the Passion formula plus the funeral-card *requiescat* in two sentences — does not survive into the novel at

all. A reviser softening scripture would trim it; this reviser deletes it wholesale and puts Dickinson's hope in its place, which is a different operation: not softening the sacrilege but changing who Molly is so that the sacrilege no longer fits her mouth. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

259. The devout roommate's devotional speech — QUOTE: "I couldn't stand the way Ashley would return from the university chapel after mass with a smug look on her face, dropping comments like "God is good" and "Every day is a blessing."" SOURCE: The variant. "A Perfect Hit" (The Galway Review), with a near-identical sentence in "The Mannequin" (*Assumptions*, 2016: "I couldn't stand Ashley's self-righteousness, the way she would come back from the university chapel after mass"); the whole passage is absent from "Mia Bambina" and from the novel. GLOSS: Here sacred vocabulary is genuinely removed: Mass, chapel, and two pieces of pious boilerplate all go. But what goes with them is the narrator's stated motive for murder, which the novel no longer needs. The cut is a by-product of the plot change rather than a theological softening — evidence that not every religious deletion in this book carries theological weight. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

260. The doctrinal quarrel, unrevised — QUOTE: ""But it's not words that the Gospel is talking about," she said. " 'The Word' means Jesus."" SOURCE: Identical in "The Mannequin" (*Assumptions*, 2016), "A Perfect Hit" (The Galway Review) and the novel — collation ratio 1.000, not a comma altered. GLOSS: The theological set-piece itself is the most stable material in the whole transmission. The Johannine Logos exchange, "Jesus died for our sins," "Are you a Catholic?" / "I'm an atheist. I think religion is the cause of most of the world's troubles," and "You should review the book of Genesis" all pass from 2016 collection to magazine to novel with only the roommate's name touched. Mulhern revises plot, motive and diction; he does not revise the argument about God. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

261. The roommate's name and her wooden monogram — QUOTE: "He nodded towards a loopy pink wooden F that hung on the wall above her dresser." SOURCE: The variant. Novel against "The Mannequin," "A Perfect Hit" and "Mia Bambina," all of which read "a very loopy pink wooden A." The corresponding self-introduction moves from "my full name is Ashley Adams" to "my name is Felicity Adams." GLOSS: The rename is carried through the furniture, which is the mark of a careful compositor rather than a global find-and-replace: the monogram on the wall changes

letter, the intensifier "very" is dropped, and the surname is kept. Keeping "Adams" preserves the one joke that depends on it — "I wanted to call her Lurch, as in the Addams Family," which stands verbatim in all four printings. And "Felicity" replaces a neutral name with a Latin abstraction, *felicitas*, happiness or blessedness, on a girl about to die for a chocolate chip cookie. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

262. The withheld name at the moment of aggression — QUOTE: ""You had no business touching my stuff." She rushed forward and grabbed the picture from the bookshelf." SOURCE: The variant. Novel against all three story printings: ""You had no business touching my stuff." Ashley stormed forward and grabbed the picture from the bookshelf." GLOSS: Two changes in one clause. The novel delays the roommate's name by several lines — "A pear-shaped, very tall girl stared at us with a peeved expression" — where all three stories name her on sight: "A pear-shaped, very tall Ashley stared at us with an irked expression." The verb cools from "stormed" to "rushed." Both moves lower the temperature of a character the novel needs the reader to pity rather than dislike. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

263. The magazine printing is the outlier, not the novel — QUOTE: "I had to bite my tongue. I wanted to ream her a new Christian asshole." SOURCE: The variant. Present in "The Mannequin" (*Assumptions*, 2016), in "Mia Bambina" (Impspired) and in the novel; absent from "A Perfect Hit" (The Galway Review), which reads only "I bit my tongue." GLOSS: The same pattern holds for at least eight other readings — "She couldn't be too bright," "I can still remember her beehive hairdo," "There was a black velvet blazer, which I found unusual," "She sounded like she was reading a brochure," "I couldn't help thinking she was an idiot" — each present in the 2016 collection and in the novel and each missing from the Galway text. The Galway printing is therefore a pruned branch, and the novel descends from the fuller collection text rather than from the magazine. Any collation that treats the online printing as the novel's immediate source will read the revision backwards. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

264. Three poisons for one murder — QUOTE: "Obtaining the cyanide from Mr. Scarfone, a mobster friend of my grandmother's, was easy." SOURCE: The variant. "Mia Bambina" (Impspired), against "The Mannequin" and "A Perfect Hit," which both read "Obtaining cocaine from Mr. Scarfone, the mobster friend of my grandmother's, was easy" and specify "1.2 grams of coke ingested orally"; the novel

keeps cocaine but re-measures it as "a little more than a gram per cookie would cause a heart attack." GLOSS: The Impspired printing also drops the whole Long QT paragraph, so its murder has no medical alibi at all; "A Perfect Hit" and "The Mannequin" supply one; the novel keeps the Long QT condition but hands it to the victim's mother as innocent testimony ("Something called Long QT syndrome. Her heart didn't beat normally"). The poison is the one element Mulhern keeps re-costing, which suggests he thought of the story as a mechanism to be tuned rather than a text to be fixed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

265. Nonna's note, Italianized — QUOTE: "Don't give any to your dorm friends, especially that arrogante roommate. I'm worried about how skinny you've become." SOURCE: The variant. Novel against "The Mannequin," "A Perfect Hit" and "Mia Bambina," all of which read "especially that roommate with the stick up her ass." GLOSS: The novel trades an American vulgarism for an Italian adjective, and it is the only occurrence of *arrogante* in any printing. The same note's sign-off follows the collection rather than the magazine — novel and *Assumptions* both read "Nonna loves *mia bambina*," where Galway has "I love you, *mia bamina*," misspelled. Read with the surviving "please let them be more interesting than this *stunod*, as Nonna would say" (identical in all four printings), the revision thickens Nonna's dialect exactly where she is committing the crime. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

266. "A Crystal Wolf" stands apart from both collections on the shop, and the novel follows the later one — QUOTE: "I owned a bookstore. Nothing fancy. Called The Other Side." SOURCE: The variant. The novel and "Myra Bocca" in *Useless Things* (2026) read "I owned a bookstore. Nothing fancy. Called The Other Side."; "Myra Bocca" in *Assumptions* (2016) reads "I owned a little bookstore. Nothing fancy. Called The Other Side."; "A Crystal Wolf" (Impspired) alone reads "I owned a little restaurant. Nothing fancy. Called the Sunnyside Café." The husband's name is "Lazarus" throughout every state, with a single stray "Lazzarus" in the 2016 collection and in the Impspired printing, and none in *Useless Things* or the novel. GLOSS: The diagnostic reading here is the shop, and it isolates the Impspired printing: every book state has the bookstore named "The Other Side," a spiritualist's phrase for the afterlife, and only the magazine has a café. The resurrection name is not introduced by revision; "Lazarus" is the name in all states, and the later texts merely tidy away one misspelling. The novel's closeness to *Useless Things* rather than

to the 2016 collection rests on the dropped "little" and on the wake sentence (see the entry on "plunked her ass"), not on the shop or the name. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

267. The clinical label, pruned again — QUOTE: "'Myra is sociopathic. Those types do whatever they want. They don't think about the consequences.'" SOURCE: The variant. Novel against "A Crystal Wolf" (Impspired): "'Myra is a sociopath. They do whatever they want. They don't think about the consequences. I read a couple books on the subject. . . . *The Sociopath Next Door.* You should read it.'" The two 2016 collections read "Myra is pure evil" (*Assumptions*) and "Myra is a evil" (*Useless Things*). GLOSS: A four-stage ladder: moral noun in 2016, clinical noun plus a self-help bibliography in the magazine, clinical adjective with the bibliography deleted in the novel. Michaelis's closing diagnosis is softened the same way, from "That's how sociopaths work" in Impspired to "That's how she works" in the novel — which is also the 2016 collections' reading. Across both story traditions the novel systematically declines to let a paperback taxonomy explain its characters. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

268. Florida becomes Paradise — QUOTE: "Myra walked us to the door and gave us both a hug. "Welcome to paradise. Enjoy your evening.'" SOURCE: The variant. Novel against "A Crystal Wolf" (Impspired) and both 2016 collection printings of "Myra Bocca," all of which read "Welcome to Florida. Enjoy your evening." GLOSS: A one-word substitution, and the only sacred word added to this chapter. Inside a novel whose architecture the reader has already been taught to hear as Dantean, the psychic's cheerful realtor-speak becomes a false Paradiso greeting delivered by a thief, in a shop named for ashes, three blocks from where she will be killed by a car. The story printing has a state; the novel has a place in a cosmology. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

269. A popular song moved so that it can be answered — QUOTE: "The street was bustling with gay men. An older man in a red Miata blared Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful." I put my arm around Gabe's waist. "I hadn't thought of that. Yes, I think you might be correct. . . . And you're a beautiful friend.'" SOURCE: The variant. Novel against "A Crystal Wolf" (Impspired) and both collection printings, where the same Miata and the same song are pure street furniture in a paragraph that runs straight on: "An older man in a red Miata blared Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful." Every once in a while I spotted women, mostly lesbians." GLOSS: The novel splits the paragraph,

inserts a new question from Gabe — "Do you think the reason you might have such antipathy towards her is that she brings back the memory of that faith healer you went to when you were young" — and has Molly reply across the music, picking the song's title out of the air as an endearment. A transplanted detail is thereby fastened to the novel's own spine: Myra the fake psychic is made an echo of Lady Jane the faith healer, which is a connection the story cannot make because the story has no Lady Jane. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

270. A disco lyric promoted to a sung rite — QUOTE: "'Then push down on her sternum 30 times. Sing 'Stayin' Alive.'" . . . "Stay calm, Evy. Of course you can," Mrs. Callaghan sang, "Stayin' alive, stayin' alive."" SOURCE: The variant. Novel against "A Crystal Wolf" (Impspired) and both collection printings, which read "Then push down on her sternum 30 times. Think 'Staying Alive.'" and "'Stay calm, Evy. Of course you can," Mrs. Callaghan answered." GLOSS: "Think" becomes "Sing," the title acquires its dropped *g*, and the Irish nurse who gave the instruction now performs it, so that the crowd's response — "The tall black guy stepped forward and sang the words" — joins a hymn already begun rather than starting one. Over a corpse whose blood makes "a halo-shaped pool around her head," a phrase identical in all printings, the novel turns a mnemonic into liturgy sung by bystanders for a woman nobody liked. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

271. Long passages with nothing to report — QUOTE: "Bette Davis had just said, "Everybody has a heart–except some people."" SOURCE: Identical in "Myra Bocca" (*Assumptions*, 2016), "Myra Bocca" (*Useless Things*, 2016), "A Crystal Wolf" (Impspired) and the novel. One hundred and thirty-seven paragraphs of "A Crystal Wolf" collate against the novel at ratio 1.000. GLOSS: This must be recorded plainly: the greater part of both transplants is an unrevised reprint. "Methinks she doth protest too much," "I read that. Edgar Allan Poe, right?", the whole Detective Corrigan interrogation, the *All About Eve* frame and Bette Davis's two quotations pass through every printing untouched. Where Mulhern does not have a structural reason to intervene he does not intervene at all, and the literary allusions are precisely the places he leaves alone. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

272. Revision with no theological weight at all — QUOTE: "David pushed the bin to my bed, which was covered by a green spread and two lumpy pillows." SOURCE: The variant. Novel against "The Mannequin," "A Perfect Hit" and "Mia Bambina," all of

which read "covered by a navy blue spread." The same chapter silently drops "I felt my nipples harden" (present in all three story printings) and demotes David from "an upperclassman at Boston University who was helping freshmen move in" to a bare "David." GLOSS: A large share of the collated variants are of exactly this order — a bedspread recoloured, an intensifier cut, "okay" standardised to "OK," "worry wart" closed up to "worrywart," "Welcome to Florida" aside. They show a copy-editor's hand working over a text he is no longer arguing with, and they are worth recording because they establish the baseline against which items 1 through 5 stand out as deliberate. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

273. What kind of reviser — QUOTE: "The following week, on Saturday morning, I would learn even more about death, and I would begin to wonder how Lady Jane, the faith healer, who had claimed that I was an Angel of Death, could have been so right." SOURCE: The variant. Novel only; no story printing contains Lady Jane, the Angel of Death, or any forward reference of this kind, each of which ends instead on the narrator's confession. GLOSS: The collation supports one conclusion. Mulhern is not a stylist who rewrites sentences toward a better version of themselves; at the sentence level he barely revises at all. He is a splicer, who lifts finished stories in whole paragraphs and earns their place in a longer book by three operations: removing the label that explained the narrator, reversing the guilt at one or two load-bearing sentences, and adding forward-pointing seams like this one that tie the transplant to a frame the story never had. The murder survives the move; the murderer does not. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

274. Title page, the rule between title and name — QUOTE: "Molly Bonamici" / "_____" / "James Mulhern" SOURCE: Title page. Compare the 2019 novel's title page: "GIVE THEM UNQUIET DREAMS" / "_____" / "JAMES MULHERN". GLOSS: The title page gives only the heroine's name, a short rule, and the author's name. There is no subtitle, no "a novel", no publisher, and no emblem or ornament. The layout is the same one the 2019 novel uses, so the two novels share a template that the story collections do not follow. On its face the page does no religious work at all. The only sacred matter it holds is buried in the name, which the text later explains (see 10 and 11). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

275. Copyright page, the bare legal minimum — QUOTE: "Copyright © 2016 by James Mulhern" / "All rights reserved." / "ISBN-10: 1523807806" SOURCE: Copyright

page. Compare the collections: the 2016 collection prints a long rights clause "without the prior written permission of the publisher"; the 2026 linked stories add "This is a work of fiction." GLOSS: The novel's copyright page names no publisher, gives no edition or printing line, and has no fiction disclaimer. That is a negative result, and it matters because this novel reuses real names from the acknowledgments (Cennamo) and a dedicatee's name (Mary) inside the fiction, and nothing on this page separates them from invented people. The page does no religious or anti-religious work. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

276. Dedication, the triad that ends on a name — QUOTE: "For my father, for my mother, and for Mary" SOURCE: Dedication page. Inside the novel: "Her name was Mary." / "Mary was her middle name" (Chapter Twenty-One, about Mrs. Muldoon); and the cab driver's gloss that Molly is a nickname for Margaret and Mary (Chapter Twenty-Two). GLOSS: The dedication names three people: two by relationship, one by name. Within the novel, "Mary" is what everyone calls Mrs. Muldoon, and Chapter Twenty-Two tells us that "Molly" is itself a form of Mary. So the dedicatee's name is both the heroine's hidden name and the name of the woman whose "acts of pure love" make up the ending. The page doesn't say who the real Mary is, and it isn't marked as Marian. But a Catholic reader can't hear a bare "for Mary" at the head of this book without also hearing the Virgin's name. Read that way, the page does quiet devotional work. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

277. First epigraph, the attribution and the standard text — QUOTE: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio," / "(Shakespeare, Hamlet)" SOURCE: Epigraph page, recto after the dedication. Hamlet to Horatio just after the Ghost scene, Act 1, scene 5. The line number depends on the edition: 1.5.187-188 in the Folger text, 1.5.167-8 in Shakespeare Online. GLOSS: The attribution names only the author and the play, with no act, scene or line. The wording, including "your philosophy," matches the standard modern text (MIT Shakespeare). Some older printings are cited with "our philosophy," but I have not checked which early text this printing follows. The epigraph keeps its verse lineation, with a capitalised, indented second line. The in-text version in Chapter Nineteen runs the two lines together with a lower-case "than." Placed after a Ghost has spoken, the line makes the book's first religious claim a claim about what reason cannot account for, which the heroine's first-chapter atheism then meets head-on. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

278. Second epigraph, identified: Mandelbaum's Paradiso V, spoken by Beatrice — QUOTE: "Open your mind to what I shall disclose, and hold it fast within you;" / "(Dante Alighieri, Paradiso)" SOURCE: Epigraph page, recto immediately before Chapter One. Paradiso V.40-42, in Allen Mandelbaum's translation: "Open your mind to what I shall disclose, / and hold it fast within you; he who hears, / but does not hold what he has heard, learns nothing" (Shmoop, citing Mandelbaum). Italian: "Apri la mente a quel ch'io ti paleso" (Dartmouth Dante Lab). GLOSS: The words match Mandelbaum's exactly, but his three lines are run together as prose, and neither the canto nor the translator is named. The same prose form circulates as a stand-alone quotation (for example on Goodreads), so the book may have taken it from that circulating form rather than from the translation itself. That is likely but not provable. The speaker is Beatrice, not Cacciaguida. She is about to teach Dante about vows, which makes this the one explicitly theological text in the front matter: an instruction to take in and keep revealed teaching. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

279. The two epigraphs together, a pair about knowing — QUOTE: "Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." / "he who hears, but does not hold what he has heard, learns nothing." SOURCE: The two epigraph pages; Shakespeare and Dante. GLOSS: Both epigraphs are about knowledge and its limits, not about God as such. Hamlet says the rational mind is too small for what exists. Beatrice says hearing is not learning unless you keep hold of what you hear. Put in sequence they go from a doubt to a discipline, and both are addressed to a skeptic (Horatio, the pilgrim) by someone with privileged sight. Neither one mentions faith, God or Christ. The religious claim of the front matter is therefore epistemic, not doctrinal. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

280. Chapter Nineteen, both epigraphs surface in one scene — QUOTE: "You're too close-minded, Molly." / "happened today and open my mind." SOURCE: Gabe's argument about God in Chapter Nineteen, the same scene in which he quotes the Hamlet line; the Paradiso epigraph's "Open your mind." GLOSS: The Hamlet epigraph comes back inside the novel in Chapter Nineteen, where Gabe quotes it to Molly. The same scene also restates the Dante epigraph's opening command in plain speech, once as Gabe's accusation and once as Molly's admission. So the whole front-matter pair is condensed into one argument about belief, two-thirds of the way through the

book. Only there do the epigraphs stop being a frame and turn into dialogue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

281. Epigraph to last chapter, Beatrice who discloses — QUOTE: "Open your mind to what I shall disclose" / "I'm Bea. Short for Beatrice." SOURCE: The Paradiso epigraph, whose speaker is Beatrice; the cab driver in Chapter Twenty-Two. GLOSS: The front-matter speaker who says "what I shall disclose" comes back in the last chapter as a Beatrice who discloses something: the feast day and the saint behind Molly's name. The final paragraph then carries out the epigraph's second half. Molly holds on to what she has heard, "I knew now," and lists Mrs. Muldoon's acts one by one. The book begins with Beatrice promising a disclosure and ends with a Beatrice delivering one. It is a real bracket, but it only works for a reader who knows who speaks in Paradiso V, because the book never names her. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

282. Order of the preliminaries, acknowledgments between the epigraphs — QUOTE: "Kathy Scherpa, James Cennamo, and lifelong friends" SOURCE: Acknowledgments page. In the file, each preliminary page (dedication, Hamlet, acknowledgments, Dante) is followed by a blank page: four blank pages before Chapter One. GLOSS: The order is title, copyright, dedication, Hamlet, acknowledgments, Dante, then Chapter One. So the acknowledgments sit between the two epigraphs, and the Dante is the last thing read before the story starts. That order is unusual, and it makes Beatrice's command the immediate threshold of the narrative. The acknowledgments end on "lifelong friends," which acts out the surname's meaning ("good friends") in the paratext before the text explains it. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

283. The title's sense, "good friends" handed from narrator to policeman to ex-priest — QUOTE: "Some of my best buddies are Italian." / "We're going to become good friends." SOURCE: Chapter Six (Officer Connolly, the policeman later named Virgil, over Mrs. Muldoon's body) and the close of Chapter Thirteen (Gabe, a former priest). GLOSS: Molly explains her surname herself in Chapter Five. After that, the gloss passes to the two men who guide her. Connolly (Virgil), not Donnelly, is the one who translates the name, and he turns it into "buddies," while Molly counts the dead woman as one of her buddies. Gabe, the "once a priest" figure, closes a chapter by promising the name's meaning to her. In standard Italian the phrase would be "buoni amici"; the surname fuses "bon-" and "amici." The book's irony is that a

family of fraud and murder carries the name. But the Dantean guides are the ones who say the name out loud, so its meaning moves from being the family's lie to being a vocation that others hold out to her. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

284. The heroine's given name, a minced oath — QUOTE: "Molly is a sweet name." SOURCE: Chapter Twenty-Two, the cab; the Little Richard song title named in the next speech. "Golly" is a well-known softened form of "God." GLOSS: The last chapter gives two sources for the name. One is secular: her parents named her after a rock-and-roll song. The other is devotional: the name is a form of Margaret and Mary. The secular source is itself a sacred word in disguise, since "Good Golly" is a way of saying "Good God" without saying it. So both halves of the title carry a softened religious charge: the first name is a euphemism for God plus a form of Mary, the surname is "good friends." A title made of nothing but a personal name turns out to hide a small creed. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

285. Chapter apparatus, the plain grid — QUOTE: "CHAPTER SEVEN" SOURCE: Chapter headings; running heads; pagination. GLOSS: The file has 22 chapter headings, all spelled out in words, centred, and untitled, with no dates, epigraphs or part divisions. Each chapter starts on a new page with no running head. Otherwise the running heads alternate "JAMES MULHERN" on left-hand pages (113 of them) and "MOLLY BONAMICI" on right-hand pages (114), and the numbered text runs to page 249. By word count the chapters range from 1,563 words (Seven) to 5,241 (Twenty-Two), so the last chapter is the longest, just ahead of Two at 5,177. The apparatus is completely secular. No chapter is named for a feast or a saint, even though feasts drive the plot. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

286. Section breaks, white space without ornaments — QUOTE: "* * * * *" SOURCE: The 2016 collection's section-break ornament, used 6 times there; the novel's breaks. GLOSS: The novel marks every scene change with white space alone: 146 breaks inside chapters that begin flush-left after a blank line, plus 2 that fall at the top of a page and show only as extra space. It uses no asterisks, dingbats or crosses. The collection from which the novel takes several chapters uses a row of five asterisks. When the stories became chapters, their ornaments were removed. That is a negative finding: nothing in the typography marks a sacred moment differently from an ordinary one. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

287. Embedded documents, run-in letters, set-off verse — QUOTE: "Dear Molly: Here are some cookies for the sweetest cookie in my" / "In loving memory of Michael Callaghan" SOURCE: Nonna's note in the Christmas box (Chapter Eleven); the Callaghan headstone (Chapter Fifteen); the Revere news clipping (Chapter Eighteen); the set-off verse of Poe (Chapter Six), Dickinson 258 and the Irish blessing (Chapter Fifteen). GLOSS: Handwritten or personal documents (Nonna's note, the mother's mannequin note, the headstone) run on inside the prose paragraph with quotation marks. Verse and the one official document, the news clipping, are indented as separate blocks. So the only things given separate typographic status are literary or institutional texts, and the one prayer so treated is a folk blessing ("May God hold you in the palm of his hand"), not a liturgical text. Italics cannot be recovered from this text: the unmarked "Her eyes said, Go away." shows that thoughts and emphasis appear without any visible marker, so no claim can be made about italic prayers or letters. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

288. The two Dickinson settings, two sets of dashes — QUOTE: "Winter Afternoons —" / "Impregnable of eye –" SOURCE: Dickinson 258 inside Chapter Fifteen; "I dwell in Possibility" after the final paragraph. Compare the Franklin-based text at Dartmouth's White Heat ("Impregnable of eye" / "everlasting Roof") with the Johnson-based text at UPenn ("Impregnable of Eye" / "Everlasting Roof"). GLOSS: The poem inside the chapter uses spaced em dashes and is indented as a block in the narrative. The closing poem uses spaced en dashes and ends on a line with its own dash attribution. The closing poem's text follows the lower-case Franklin reading, not Johnson's capitals, so it is an accurate standard text, but no number or title is given. The different setting suggests the closing poem was prepared as a separate piece of apparatus rather than as part of the narrative. The attribution also switches from the front matter's parentheses to a dash, which is the style of the 2019 novel. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

289. Back matter, a poem paginated as text, then nothing — QUOTE: "—Emily Dickinson" SOURCE: The last numbered page (249, with the "MOLLY BONAMICI" running head), followed by three blank pages. GLOSS: The Dickinson poem carries the running head and page number of the body text, so the design treats it as the novel's last page, not as back matter. After it there is no "The End," no author's note, no acknowledgments, no "About the Author," no list of other books, no quoted

reviews and no cover copy. In this file the novel has no promotional paratext at all. The poem is the only thing after the last sentence, and nothing after it reframes it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

290. The poem against the final paragraph, the prose already quoting it — QUOTE: "Superior – for Doors –" / "Impregnable of eye –" SOURCE: "I dwell in Possibility" (Franklin 466 / Johnson 657) against the final prose paragraph of Chapter Twenty-Two. GLOSS: The final paragraph borrows the poem's vocabulary before the poem appears. Its "fair" sea matches "fairer House," the "power superior and everlasting" matches "Superior" and "everlasting Roof," Mrs. Muldoon's eyes and their "impregnable beauty" match "Impregnable of eye," the spread arms match "spreading wide my narrow Hands," and "Believing in possibility" matches "Possibility." Earlier in the chapter, Bea's "paradise" anticipates the poem's last word. So the poem doesn't gloss the ending from outside; it reveals where the ending's words came from. The final religious gesture, "a power superior and everlasting," turns out to be made of a poet's words for imagination, which leaves it open whether Molly has come to believe or has come to dwell in possibility. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

291. Paradiso to Paradise, the book's first and last sacred words — QUOTE: "(Dante Alighieri, Paradiso)" / "To gather Paradise –" SOURCE: The last epigraph before Chapter One; the last line of verse on page 249. GLOSS: The first sacred word the reader meets, in the attribution of the last epigraph, is "Paradiso." The last word before Dickinson's name is "Paradise." The whole book sits between the two, the first the heaven of the great medieval Christian poem, the second a thing a pair of hands might "gather." Whether that is design or coincidence can't be proven, but the bracket is exact, and it sits entirely in the paratext. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

292. The book among books, a house pattern in epigraphs — QUOTE: "(Shakespeare, Hamlet)" / "There is no flaw in you. (Song of Solomon 4:7)" SOURCE: Front matter of the novel; the 2026 linked stories (same Song of Solomon epigraph, which also heads "Assumptions" in the 2016 and 2026 collections); the 2019 novel's Einstein and Yeats epigraphs. GLOSS: There is a pattern, and it is sharp. The two novels put a pair of epigraphs at the front of the book, and both pairs are secular or literary: Einstein and Yeats; Shakespeare and Dante. In the collections, epigraphs appear only above single stories, and the one sacred epigraph is scripture with an exact chapter and verse. The only other one is a drinking song over "A Prayer for

Home." So the only exact references in the whole corpus belong to scripture, while the novels' literary epigraphs are never given act, canto or line. The negative results: no collection has a book-level epigraph, and the 2026 linked stories and "Useless Things" have none except the Song of Solomon. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

293. Dedications and acknowledgments across the corpus — QUOTE: "and most importantly, James Cennamo" / "For Brother Mike" SOURCE: Dedication and acknowledgment pages of the 2016 collection, the 2026 "Useless Things," the 2026 linked stories and the 2019 novel. GLOSS: Every other dedicated volume is for a brother (Mark twice, "Brother Mike" once), and the 2026 linked stories have no dedication. This novel is the only one dedicated to parents and the only one dedicated to a woman. The 2016 collection thanks five people, "most importantly" Cennamo; the novel keeps Scherpa and Cennamo and replaces the rest with "lifelong friends"; the 2019 novel thanks "The Irish people, the living and the dead." None of the dedications is explicitly religious. Only the novel's "Mary" and the 2019 book's honorific "Brother" can be read as devotional, and both readings are uncertain. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

294. The novel as others' back matter describes it — QUOTE: "both of which received Kirkus Stars" / "was a Kirkus Star recipient" SOURCE: The author biography in the 2026 linked stories and the "About the Author" in "Useless Things"; the novel itself prints no reviews. GLOSS: The only paratext outside the novel that mentions it is the linked-stories biography, which says both novels received Kirkus stars. The "Useless Things" biography credits a star only to the 2019 novel and does not mention *Molly Bonamici*. The two biographies also give different degrees (Boston College against an Emerson M.F.A.). I have not checked either claim against Kirkus. Neither biography describes the novel's religious content, and the novel's own frame contains no praise, no summary and no genre label, so a reader meets its religious argument without being told to expect one. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

295. Ending against the 2019 novel's ending, where the scripture sits — QUOTE: "In this time, at the same time, and for all time." SOURCE: Last sentence of the 2019 novel, whose final paragraph quotes John 1:1 inside the narration; the Dickinson page of this novel. GLOSS: The 2019 novel puts its scripture inside the narrator's last paragraph and ends on the narrator's own liturgical cadence, with no back matter. This novel keeps scripture out of its last paragraph, puts a poem rather than a Gospel

after the end, and gives the last word to a poet the heroine reads in place of prayer. This is the clearest design difference between the two novels' endings. One closes on the Word of God spoken in the story; the other closes on "Paradise" spoken by a poet outside it. So the only thing after the end is a reframing, and it is literary rather than devotional. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

Part Seven: The Poems

The Concordance: The Poems

Method and scope

The 27 distinct poems: Copacetic; Piano; The Crosswalk; Brother Mark; Dark City; Catherine; Simply Silly; Longing; You Hurt My Eyes; For the Animals; Session's End / Current Events; Mostly I Sit; Brother Mike; Turbulence; Carol; The Nest; Please Call Me (Again); Water; Last Supper; Fragility / Triggers; The Teapot; To Be; Shoes; Honeymoon; Leaves; The Guard; Moving Forward. (The front matter — Dedication, Introduction, Epilogue — is paratext rather than poetry, but is cited below where it supplies devotional vocabulary the poems themselves echo.)

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1. Copacetic

QUOTE: "At dawn, he was gone." **SOURCE:** Resurrection/dawn imagery; cf. the women coming to the tomb "very early… when the sun had risen" (Mark 16:2) and the Easter Vigil's theology of dawn as the hour of passage from death to life. **GLOSS:** The father's death is placed at dawn, the hour scripture consistently uses for resurrection and transition; the poem never names this, but the temporal choice (not midnight, not afternoon) carries the freight. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "I guided him to the bed / and slept in the chair beside him." **SOURCE:** Vigil-keeping; the Gethsemane injunction to "watch and pray" (Matthew 26:41) and the Catholic wake tradition of sitting with the dying/dead. **GLOSS:** The son's overnight watch beside his dying father structurally repeats the vigil posture central to Catholic deathbed practice and to the Gospel watch at Gethsemane, entirely in plain narrative diction. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I held a spoonful of red Jell-O." **SOURCE:** Eucharistic/communion imagery — food offered and refused at a deathbed, echoing the offering of bread/wine and (perhaps) the vinegar offered to Christ on the cross (Matthew 27:48). **GLOSS:** A small

red, moist food is pressed toward the dying man's mouth and refused — a domestic inversion of a Eucharistic or Passion-adjacent offering scene, unmarked as such. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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2. Piano

QUOTE: "glistening strings on the soundboard of a broken soul" **SOURCE:** The word "soul" as theological vocabulary; also Passion iconography of a body's interior exposed (cf. the lanced side of Christ, John 19:34). **GLOSS:** The single explicit theological noun in the poem ("soul") is fused with an image of a ruptured interior laid open and glistening — visually adjacent to wound imagery in Passion art. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "The soundboard heart cracked open" **SOURCE:** Sacred Heart iconography (the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced and exposed) and the "breaking" of the body in the Institution narrative ("This is my body, which is broken for you," 1 Corinthians 11:24, Douay-Rheims/KJV wording). **GLOSS:** "Heart" and "cracked open" together evoke the Sacred Heart devotion's central image of a heart wounded and exposed for love, transferred here onto a piano's literal soundboard. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "you raised your arm to smash it all apart" **SOURCE:** Passion imagery of violent breaking inflicted on a body; the "smiting" language of the Passion narratives (cf. Matthew 26:67, "then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him"). **GLOSS:** The raised arm and the verb "smash" carry an unmarked echo of a body given over to blows, transferred onto an instrument the poem later calls a "soul." **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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3. The Crosswalk

QUOTE: "and I saw myself in your face" **SOURCE:** Father/Son consubstantiality in the Nicene Creed ("of one substance with the Father"; also John 14:9, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"). **GLOSS:** The mirror scene stages, in wholly secular diction, the language of resemblance between father and son that scripture and creed use of the Father and the Son. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "It was on the table by your coffin" **SOURCE:** Irish/Catholic wake custom — the memorial photograph displayed beside the open coffin during the wake. **GLOSS:** A funeral-home practice (photo table beside the casket) is rendered without any wake vocabulary, keeping the ritual buried in ordinary furniture description. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Proof that we had closeness for a moment, / and that is enough" **SOURCE:** Theology of grace as sufficient, unmerited gift (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for thee"). **GLOSS:** The closing lines perform, without naming, the structure of grace: a small, unearned, sufficient gift accepted rather than argued for. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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4. Brother Mark

QUOTE: "I wish we had stayed / in our sacred space" **SOURCE:** The word "sacred" applied directly to a physical space; cf. the language of sanctuary and "holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). **GLOSS:** This is one of the collection's rare explicit uses of "sacred," naming a teenage bonfire gathering under a bridge in the vocabulary of consecrated space. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "our hallowed space" **SOURCE:** The Lord's Prayer/Our Father — "hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9). **GLOSS:** "Hallowed," the Our Father's own word for sanctification, is applied to the same bridge-tunnel space, doubling the "sacred" designation with liturgical vocabulary lifted almost directly from the prayer every Catholic child memorizes. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Twigs crackled, embers rose / in smoke-filled wind" **SOURCE:** Fire/incense imagery — rising smoke as an offering ascending, cf. Psalm 141:2, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense." **GLOSS:** Embers and smoke rising from a fire the boys call "sacred" and "hallowed" evoke incense ascending in worship, unmarked as devotional. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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5. Dark City

QUOTE: "in the promised land of your imagination" **SOURCE:** Exodus typology of the Promised Land (Exodus 3:8, Deuteronomy 6:3) applied to America as immigrant destination. **GLOSS:** The grandfather's emigration is cast directly in the vocabulary of Israel's journey to Canaan — an explicit, though secularized, biblical figure. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "I see you move from darkness / into brightness, / and beyond" **SOURCE:** Light/darkness theology throughout John's Gospel (John 1:5, "the light shineth in darkness"; John 8:12, "I am the light of the world") and the funeral liturgy's prayer that the dead pass "from darkness into light." **GLOSS:** The closing lines cast the grandfather's whole life — and afterlife — as a movement from darkness to light "and beyond," the shape of paschal/funeral theology transposed onto emigration and death. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "You died in your sleep" **SOURCE:** "Sleep" as scriptural euphemism for death (John 11:11, "our friend Lazarus sleepeth"; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). **GLOSS:** The grandfather's death is described with the same sleep-euphemism scripture uses for Lazarus and the Christian dead, without any explicit religious marker. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "you rubbed my head" **SOURCE:** Laying-on of hands / blessing gesture (Genesis 48:14, Mark 10:16, "he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them"). **GLOSS:** A grandfather's touch to a toddler's head, repeated in memory decades later ("I press my palm against the homestead wall, / as you touched my head"), replays the biblical gesture of blessing by touch. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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6. Catherine

QUOTE: "As warm water eased over your skin" **SOURCE:** Baptismal/ablution imagery — water poured over the body as cleansing and renewal (Titus 3:5, "the washing of regeneration"). **GLOSS:** A grandmother's bath is rendered in water-over-

skin language that recalls baptismal washing, particularly given the poem's earlier ocean-swimming memory that the bathwater triggers. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "you swam again— / over 29,000 miles away" **SOURCE:** Memory as a kind of resurrection/return; cf. the "communion of memory" theme found elsewhere in the collection (see "Please Call Me," "The Teapot"). **GLOSS:** The grandmother's mind returns her, mid-bath, to the ocean of her youth — the poem treats memory as a real, sustaining return rather than mere recollection, akin to the devotional practice of "recalling" as a form of presence (anamnesis, as in "Do this in memory of me," Luke 22:19). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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7. Simply Silly

QUOTE: "You were never insignificant… / And you mattered to him" **SOURCE:** The doctrine of the imago Dei and inherent human dignity (Genesis 1:27); pastoral/homiletic assurance language ("you matter to God"). **GLOSS:** The teacher's closing assurance to a marginalized student echoes, in wholly secular vocabulary, the pastoral reassurance that every person has irreducible worth — a value with explicit theological grounding even though undeclared here. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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8. Longing

QUOTE: "longing to be liked, / to feel significant to someone" **SOURCE:** The human desire for communion as a reflection of desire for God, cf. Augustine's *Confessions*, "our heart is restless until it rests in you" (a foundational Catholic devotional formula, not scripture itself). **GLOSS:** The poem's ache to be "significant to someone" mirrors, in secular terms, the Augustinian restlessness for relationship that Catholic spirituality reads as displaced longing for God. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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9. You Hurt My Eyes

QUOTE: ""The Scourged Back" / of an American slave" **SOURCE:** The scourging of Christ at the pillar (Matthew 27:26, "when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified"; the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, Second Mystery — the Scourging at the Pillar). **GLOSS:** The poem names an actual historical photograph ("The Scourged Back," of the enslaved man known as Gordon/Peter) using the same word — "scourged" — that names Christ's Passion torment, explicitly analogizing an American atrocity to the Passion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "How did he find the strength and faith?" **SOURCE:** The theological virtue of faith (1 Corinthians 13:13) invoked directly by name. **GLOSS:** "Faith" is named outright as the quality that sustained an enslaved man's flight to freedom — one of the collection's explicit uses of a core theological keyword. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "the pain / of whip wounds / still wet" **SOURCE:** The Five Wounds of Christ, a standing devotional object (the Wounds are venerated in the Divine Mercy chaplet and the Stations of the Cross). **GLOSS:** Fresh, wet "wounds" inflicted on a suffering body without guilt echo the iconography of Christ's wounds, rendered here onto a real historical body. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "it makes my heart bleed" **SOURCE:** Sacred Heart devotion — the bleeding/wounded heart as icon of compassion. **GLOSS:** The closing line's cliché ("makes my heart bleed") lands, in context of a scourging discussion, adjacent to Sacred Heart imagery of a heart that bleeds out of love and suffering with another. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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10. For the Animals

QUOTE: ""Free at last, free at last," we say behind our masks" **SOURCE:** Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, itself quoting the African American spiritual "Free at Last" ("Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I'm free at last"), rooted in Exodus liberation theology. **GLOSS:** The quoted phrase is explicitly borrowed devotional/civil-rights language whose original form invokes God directly;

applied here, half-ironically, to animals roaming empty pandemic cities.
CONFIDENCE: STRONG

QUOTE: "sad it took a plague for us to see" **SOURCE:** The plagues of Exodus (Exodus 7–11) as divine visitation that forces recognition/repentance. **GLOSS:** "Plague" names the pandemic in the specific vocabulary of biblical judgment-events that compel a change of perception, echoing the Exodus plagues' narrative function. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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11. Session's End / Current Events

QUOTE: "No drama, conflict, or story. / No wars, crimes, or political crises. / … No sound and fury" **SOURCE:** Apophatic (negative) theology's method of approaching the ineffable through negation, structurally similar to litanic forms; "sound and fury" is a direct literary allusion to Macbeth, not scripture. **GLOSS:** The anaphoric "No… No…" sequence formally echoes litany and apophatic theological method, stripping away predicates to approach a kind of silence/absence treated with quasi-reverence. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "The wind blows and birds fly" **SOURCE:** John 3:8, "The wind bloweth where it listeth… so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (pneuma/ruach as both wind and spirit). **GLOSS:** Wind and birds paired evoke the Johannine image of the unseen, self-moving Spirit, entirely unflagged as theology. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "Somewhere snow falls and thunder booms" **SOURCE:** Thunder as theophany signal (Exodus 19:16 at Sinai; Psalm 29; Revelation 4:5). **GLOSS:** Thunder, a standing biblical marker of divine presence, appears here as ordinary weather report with no religious flag. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "The lesson ends / as the bell rings" **SOURCE:** The church bell marking canonical hours or the Angelus. **GLOSS:** A school bell ending a period of quasi-contemplative silence recalls the liturgical bell marking hours of prayer, buried in classroom realism. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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12. Mostly I Sit

QUOTE: "Better to submerge / in a sacred stillness" **SOURCE:** The explicit word "sacred" applied to contemplative silence; contemplative/monastic prayer tradition (lectio divina's silent resting stage). **GLOSS:** One of the collection's outright uses of "sacred," describing aging as a descent into a stillness the poem itself calls holy. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Reminders of our passage / to another realm / where some say / eternal happiness abounds" **SOURCE:** Heaven / eternal life doctrine (the Nicene Creed's "life of the world to come"; the Beatific Vision tradition). **GLOSS:** The poem names, almost creedally, belief in an afterlife of "eternal happiness," hedged by "some say" but stated in explicitly doctrinal terms. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Or maybe it's a bluff of nothingness, / a shadowed, fraudulent shore" **SOURCE:** Doubt/agnosticism counter-posed against the Christian hope named two stanzas earlier — the poem stages belief and its negation side by side, akin to the doubting-Thomas pattern (John 20:24-29). **GLOSS:** Having stated the doctrine of eternal happiness, the poem immediately entertains its negation, dramatizing faith and doubt as live alternatives rather than settled belief. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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13. Brother Mike

QUOTE: "we knelt / after Communion" **SOURCE:** The Eucharist / Holy Communion, a Catholic sacrament (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; the Mass's Communion Rite). **GLOSS:** This is a direct, named reference to receiving the Eucharist and the customary kneeling posture of thanksgiving afterward — wholly explicit. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "you simply looked at me / and crossed yourself / in the dashboard light" **SOURCE:** The Sign of the Cross, the most basic Catholic devotional gesture. **GLOSS:** An explicit, named liturgical gesture performed spontaneously in a car, transplanting church ritual into ordinary life. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "I felt a bit of awe or was it / what we call the sacred?" **SOURCE:** Rudolf Otto's category of "the numinous"/the sacred as an experiential category central to

religious phenomenology; also general Catholic sacramental theology (grace perceived through ordinary signs). **GLOSS:** The poem directly names "the sacred" as the category it is trying to describe, one of its most explicit theological gestures. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "the words of your prayer, / and the creed in your gesture" **SOURCE:** The word "creed," naming a formal statement of belief (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed) recited at every Mass. **GLOSS:** "Creed" is used explicitly and almost technically — the brother's silent gesture is said to contain a creed, collapsing formal doctrine into wordless action. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Communion is the road we share… felt our Communion, / together and again" **SOURCE:** Communion as both sacrament and metaphysical bond between persons (the doctrine of the Communion of Saints; also the general sense of "communion" as shared life). **GLOSS:** The poem's closing turn explicitly puns on Communion-the-sacrament and communion-as-relationship, naming the sacrament as the vehicle of familial understanding. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

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14. Turbulence

QUOTE: "I thought of these rites, / and the Last Rites, too" **SOURCE:** The Anointing of the Sick / Last Rites (Extreme Unction), the Catholic sacrament administered to the dying (James 5:14-15). **GLOSS:** A direct, named reference to the sacrament of Last Rites, explicitly juxtaposed against secular "rites of passage" the speaker has taught for years. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "I saw an old man. I knew what lay behind me. / I knew what lay ahead." **SOURCE:** Memento mori tradition and the examination-of-conscience posture central to Catholic spirituality (looking at one's past and one's death simultaneously). **GLOSS:** Turbulence on a plane triggers a sudden confrontation with mortality structured like an examen — reviewing the past and anticipating the last things (death, judgment) at once. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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15. Carol

QUOTE: "You were not lost. / Just part of a current / carrying you / safely home" **SOURCE:** "Home" as a standing devotional metaphor for heaven/salvation (cf. hymn "Softly and Tenderly," "come home," and the general Christian trope of life as a journey home to God). **GLOSS:** The poem's closing reassurance to an aging, once-endangered loved one uses the key devotional word "home" as the destination of a current/tide, echoing the hymn tradition of homecoming as salvation. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "A steady pulse in the light" **SOURCE:** Light as divine presence (1 John 1:5, "God is light"); also the image of the sacred heart pulsing. **GLOSS:** A heartbeat imagined as "steady… in the light" quietly fuses cardiac imagery with the light-as-God trope, unmarked as theology. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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16. The Nest

QUOTE: "the robins' nest… the blue eggs… tips of yellow mouths" **SOURCE:** Birds as the standing devotional sign of the Holy Spirit and of nativity/annunciation (the dove at Christ's baptism, Matthew 3:16; the dove of the Annunciation in Catholic iconography). **GLOSS:** The whole poem is structured around bird nativity, a genre-level allusion to Spirit/annunciation imagery, never marked as symbolic. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "your hardened mold cracks open, / and you walk outside again" **SOURCE:** Resurrection imagery — the stone rolled from the tomb (Matthew 28:2) and the empty tomb narrative generally. **GLOSS:** A body cast that "cracks open" to release a walking body is a secularized resurrection figure, with no religious word used. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "Where it travels / won't matter. / Your joy is simply / that it does." **SOURCE:** Theology of providence and surrender (cf. Matthew 6:26, "Behold the fowls of the air… your heavenly Father feedeth them"); the Ignatian posture of indifference to outcome ("Suscipe" prayer). **GLOSS:** The closing lines (a quatrain in the later text; in *Family First* the last two lines of an eight-line stanza) state, almost as doctrine, a

posture of surrender to a wider providence one does not control — the poem's own commentary elsewhere calls this "a hard-won theology." **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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17. Please Call Me (Again)

QUOTE: "The conversations ended with 'I miss you' or 'I love you'" **SOURCE:** Communion of voices/presence sustained by word, echoing the sacramental principle that words effect real presence (cf. the Words of Institution). **GLOSS:** The poem elevates ordinary sign-offs into a kind of liturgical formula whose loss (replaced by texted emojis) constitutes a fall from real presence into simulacrum. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "I want to hear your voice until it clings" **SOURCE:** Longing for real presence versus mediated/simulated contact; not a specific citation but resonant with sacramental theology's emphasis on embodied encounter over abstraction. **GLOSS:** The desire for a voice that "clings," as opposed to a text, mirrors the broader collection's investment in embodied, incarnational contact as more real than symbol. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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18. Water

QUOTE: "Toward water / he'll never reach" **SOURCE:** Water as baptismal/living-water symbol perpetually withheld (cf. John 4:13-14, "living water"; also Tantalus-adjacent thirst, though the direct theological resonance is baptismal water denied). **GLOSS:** An old man's outstretched hands toward water he cannot reach stage baptismal or living-water imagery as an image of grace withheld or unattainable, wholly unmarked as such. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "broken capillaries / like tributaries on arid land" **SOURCE:** Desert/arid-land imagery contrasted with living water (Isaiah 35:1, "the desert shall… blossom"; Psalm 63:1, "my soul thirsteth… in a dry and thirsty land"). **GLOSS:** The old body is imagined as parched geography, echoing the biblical trope of the thirsting soul in a dry land, though entirely secular in surface content. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

19. Last Supper

QUOTE: "the cheap print of the Last Supper / lay on the floor / its frame splintered" **SOURCE:** Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, itself depicting the institution of the Eucharist (Matthew 26:26-28, Luke 22:19-20). **GLOSS:** A literal devotional print of the Last Supper falls and shatters at the moment a father dies — an explicit and heavily weighted piece of Catholic iconography placed at the poem's structural center. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "he knelt / beside his father's coffin, / said an Our Father / kissed his father's forehead" **SOURCE:** The Lord's Prayer / Our Father (Matthew 6:9-13) and Irish-Catholic wake custom (kneeling at the coffin, praying, and a farewell kiss). **GLOSS:** This is the collection's most fully explicit sequence of named Catholic ritual action — a specific prayer named by title, performed in the specific bodily postures of wake devotion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: ""Just before Easter. We took him out to dinner."" **SOURCE:** Easter, the central feast of the liturgical calendar (the Resurrection, Matthew 28). **GLOSS:** The son's last ordinary meal with his father is dated explicitly to the Easter season, quietly aligning a final meal with a resurrection feast the father will not live to see again. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "she would hug him, / but she wouldn't say a thing" **SOURCE:** The consoling silence of Job's friends before they speak (Job 2:13, "they sat down with him… and none spake a word unto him"); also the wordless comfort tradition in wake-keeping. **GLOSS:** The wife's chosen silence as comfort echoes the biblical pattern of silent presence as the truest form of consolation before grief. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

20. Fragility / Triggers

QUOTE: "Most mornings, she knelt, / said her rosary" **SOURCE:** The Rosary, the classic Catholic Marian devotion (the Dominican tradition, the Litany of Loreto often prayed alongside it). **GLOSS:** An explicit, named daily devotional practice — the

grandmother's rosary — anchoring the poem's entire moral contrast between her uncomplaining hardship and modern "fragility." **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "she gingerly avoided stones / that stabbed her feet, / stones that bruised" **SOURCE:** The Way of the Cross / Via Dolorosa, in which Christ's bare, wounded feet carry the cross over rough ground; also Psalm 91:12, "lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." **GLOSS:** Bruised, stone-stabbed feet on a daily walk to a well evoke, without naming, the suffering-feet imagery of the Stations of the Cross, especially given the grandmother's immediately preceding rosary devotion. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "she whispered / blessings / into the early light" **SOURCE:** Morning blessing/prayer tradition (the Angelus, morning offering prayers common in Irish Catholic households). **GLOSS:** The closing image explicitly names "blessings," directly following the rosary reference, making this one of the collection's most doctrinally dense closing images. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

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21. The Teapot

QUOTE: "Nanna's Irish prayer—'thy gifts'—received" **SOURCE:** The Catholic table grace ("Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord"), the standard pre-meal Catholic prayer. **GLOSS:** This is a direct, named quotation from the Catholic grace before meals, explicitly identified as "Nanna's Irish prayer" — one of the collection's clearest instances of quoted liturgical text. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Christ's bounty received, these blessings I revere" **SOURCE:** Same table-grace prayer, continuing "from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord." **GLOSS:** "Christ's bounty" lifts language almost verbatim from the standard Catholic grace, making explicit theological attribution (Christ as the source of the meal) that the earlier stanzas only implied through ritual description. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "'Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright.'" **SOURCE:** The hymn "Silent Night" ("Stille Nacht"), a Christmas carol commemorating the Nativity. **GLOSS:** A direct, quoted hymn lyric plays on the family stereo during a Christmas

memory, an explicit liturgical/devotional citation embedded in domestic narrative. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "The silent calm and the holy bright" **SOURCE:** Same hymn, "Silent Night," reworked as the poem's own closing line. **GLOSS:** The poem's final line repurposes the hymn's own words ("silent," "calm," "holy," "bright") as its own benediction over the whole family memory, making the hymn's theology the poem's closing register. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

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22. To Be

QUOTE: "or that dried leaf you crumble in your hand" **SOURCE:** Ash Wednesday's formula ("Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return," from Genesis 3:19) and general memento mori/mortality imagery. **GLOSS:** A dried, crumbling, handled thing closes the poem, echoing without quoting the Ash Wednesday reduction of matter to dust in another's hand. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I'd like to be… a crushed beer can in a restaurant dumpster / a lost sock under a sagging couch" **SOURCE:** Kenosis, Christ's self-emptying (Philippians 2:7, "made himself of no reputation… took upon him the form of a servant"). **GLOSS:** The poem's wish for radical self-diminishment — to become refuse, no longer a subject — structurally repeats the kenotic movement of self-emptying into the lowest form, entirely in secular, anti-literary objects. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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23. Shoes

QUOTE: "My great-grandmother moving slowly, / her own shoes worn, broken, / like the skin on her red, cracked hands" **SOURCE:** Foot-washing (John 13:1-15, Christ washing the disciples' feet) and its liturgical reenactment on Holy Thursday (Mandatum). **GLOSS:** The whole poem is built around one generation putting shoes on the feet of another — an act of humble service to the aged and infirm that structurally echoes the Holy Thursday foot-washing, unmarked as such. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "relieved she had something more to give" **SOURCE:** The widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44, giving out of poverty rather than abundance). **GLOSS:** A poor domestic servant's joy at having anything at all to hand down to her granddaughter echoes the theological valuation of the poor widow's small gift as spiritually greater than wealth. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

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24. Honeymoon

QUOTE: "I think of how far these feet have walked, / the tenderness at the bottom of her sole" **SOURCE:** Foot-washing (John 13:5) and Christ's own itinerant, foot-worn ministry (Luke 8:1, "he went throughout every city and village"). **GLOSS:** Tending an aging mother's sore feet, with attention to how far they have "walked" (both literal and a life's-journey pun), again evokes the foot-washing gesture of humble service. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "the aching tenderness of my soul" **SOURCE:** The word "soul" as explicit theological vocabulary, paired with "aching" — echoing the sorrowful soul of the Psalms (Psalm 42:5, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?"). **GLOSS:** One of the collection's outright uses of "soul," attaching bodily tenderness (rubbing a mother's feet) directly to the state of the speaker's soul. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt" **SOURCE:** Kneeling as devotional posture (genuflection, prayer) applied to foot care. **GLOSS:** The literal physical posture of kneeling to anoint a foot with ointment doubles as a devotional gesture, especially given the following line's direct naming of the "soul." **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "wondering still why suffering / is entwined with life's design" **SOURCE:** The problem of theodicy — why a good design permits suffering (Job 1-42; Romans 8:18-22). **GLOSS:** The poem's closing question is an explicit, if unresolved, theodicy statement, naming "suffering" and "design" as terms in a theological puzzle. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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25. Leaves

QUOTE: "I say a prayer, cross myself, and rise" **SOURCE:** The Sign of the Cross and personal prayer, performed at a grave. **GLOSS:** The single wholly explicit liturgical/devotional moment in this poem — a named prayer and the sign of the cross. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "You said, 'We're done.'" / "'We're done,' I hear you say" **SOURCE:** Christ's last word from the cross, "It is finished" (consummatum est, John 19:30). **GLOSS:** The father's flat catchphrase, repeated from beyond the grave, carries the shape of a completion pronounced at death and reheard as a word of final rest, though the poem never marks the echo as scriptural. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I see my breath and imagine I see yours" **SOURCE:** Breath as spirit/soul (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*; Genesis 2:7, "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"; John 20:22, Christ breathing the Spirit on the disciples). **GLOSS:** Breath as the shared, half-visible sign of life persisting past death evokes the breath-as-spirit register, entirely unmarked as theology. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I kneel and clear your grave" **SOURCE:** Kneeling as devotional posture (genuflection, prayer) applied to grave-tending. **GLOSS:** Kneeling, ordinarily a posture of prayer, is here the literal posture of yard work at a grave, blurring labor and liturgy. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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26. The Guard

QUOTE: "the stained glass of Veronica wiping the face of Jesus" **SOURCE:** The Sixth Station of the Cross (Veronica wipes the face of Jesus), a traditional (non-scriptural) episode of the Via Dolorosa venerated in Catholic devotion, and the veil imprinted with Christ's face (the Veil of Veronica, a relic tradition). **GLOSS:** This is the single most explicitly Catholic-iconographic image in the entire collection — a named Station of the Cross, described in a church's stained glass, with full color and gesture detail. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Jesus, a wooden cross covering / his cream tunic and carmine cape" **SOURCE:** Passion iconography — Christ carrying the cross to Calvary (Luke 23:26,

John 19:17). **GLOSS:** An explicit, direct visual description of Christ bearing his cross, rendered in the specific colors of traditional Passion art (carmine/red for suffering, cream for the tunic). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Does he have doubts like me? / …for enlightenment… / to escape the searing Sun" **SOURCE:** The doubting believer's posture (cf. doubting Thomas, John 20:24-29) and the Passion's noonday darkness/heat (Matthew 27:45). **GLOSS:** The speaker projects his own religious doubt onto the anonymous soldier-guard in the stained glass, using the scene to stage a live question of faith versus escape/indifference, with the Sun's heat recalling the Passion's harsh noon. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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27. Moving Forward

QUOTE: "All of the living are broken / and our problems continue to accumulate. / It's how we care for others, show love, and move forward / that helps us become whole again." **SOURCE:** The theology of brokenness and healing through love (cf. 1 Peter 4:8, "charity shall cover the multitude of sins"; general Catholic anthropology of fallen/wounded human nature restored by grace and charity). **GLOSS:** This closing quatrain is the collection's most explicit, near-creedal theological statement outside "The Nest" — declaring all humans "broken" and naming love and care as the mechanism of becoming "whole again," without invoking God by name. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "'"I love you, sweetheart."'" **SOURCE:** Agape/caritas, the love commanded in the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39). **GLOSS:** The mother's dying-adjacent declaration of love closes the poem's catalogue of decline and loss, offered as the thing that outlasts bodily "brokenness." **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

Front matter (paratext, cited as corroborating evidence)

QUOTE: "Helen—Your crooked toes from shoes passed house to house, your rosary and Daily Missal that sit on my desk… your devotion to God—I strive." **SOURCE:** The Rosary and the Daily Missal, core Catholic devotional objects; the phrase "devotion to God" named outright. **GLOSS:** The Dedication explicitly names Catholic devotional

objects (rosary, missal) that recur in disguised form throughout the poems ("Fragility"'s rosary-praying grandmother, "Shoes"'s crooked-toed grandmother), confirming the poems draw on real family devotional practice. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "My family members are my prayers. My poems are my prayers." **SOURCE:** The devotional genre of prayer itself, claimed as a formal analogy for the poems. **GLOSS:** The Introduction states outright, in the author's own authorial voice (not a poem's speaker), that the poems function as prayers — the single most explicit framing statement in the entire book for reading the collection religiously. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "and those who have passed into the other room" **SOURCE:** Euphemism for death rooted in the Catholic doctrine of the afterlife as continued existence ("the other room" implying a further chamber of a shared house — cf. the "many mansions" of John 14:2). **GLOSS:** Death is described as movement to an adjoining room rather than annihilation, echoing John 14:2's image of the Father's house with many rooms/mansions. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

Most explicitly religious poems

Ranked by density and directness of named Catholic vocabulary and iconography:

1. **The Guard** — a named Station of the Cross (Veronica), explicit Passion iconography, direct address to Jesus by name, explicit doubt-language.
2. **Last Supper** — Da Vinci's *Last Supper* as a literal object, an explicitly named Our Father, wake kneeling, Easter dating.
3. **Brother Mike** — named Communion, the Sign of the Cross, the words "sacred" and "creed" used outright.
4. **The Teapot** — a quoted Catholic grace before meals ("thy gifts," "Christ's bounty") and a quoted Christmas hymn ("Silent Night").
5. **Fragility / Triggers** — an explicitly named daily rosary and morning "blessings."
6. **Turbulence** — the sacrament of Last Rites named directly.

7. **Leaves** — an explicit prayer and sign of the cross at a grave (though the rest of the poem's religious content is buried).
8. **You Hurt My Eyes** — the explicit theological word "faith," and "The Scourged Back" explicitly analogized to Christ's scourging.

Poems where the religious content is entirely buried in plain domestic diction

- **The Crosswalk** — no religious noun anywhere; grace, wake custom, and Father/Son typology all carried by ordinary funeral and family detail.
- **Piano** — only the bare word "soul" is explicit; the Passion/wound structure is wholly submerged in a domestic destruction scene.
- **The Nest** — no religious vocabulary at all; resurrection, annunciation, and providence are carried entirely by bird-watching and medical-recovery realism.
- **To Be** — no religious word appears; kenosis and mortality are carried by a catalogue of literary and literal trash.
- **Water** — no religious vocabulary; baptismal/living-water imagery is carried entirely by a portrait of an old man's body on a dock.
- **Carol** — no religious vocabulary; "home" as salvation-destination is carried by a metaphor of ocean current.
- **Copacetic** — no religious vocabulary; the dawn-death and Jell-O-offering resonances are carried by hospital realism alone.
- **Session's End** / **Current Events** — no religious vocabulary; apophatic form and Spirit-wind imagery are carried by media satire and classroom realism.
- **Shoes** / **Honeymoon** — foot-washing resonance carried entirely by caregiving-for-the-elderly realism, with only "soul" surfacing once (in "Honeymoon").

Synthesis: the poems, the fiction, and the conversion of abjection into glory

Mulhern's poetry and, by report, his fiction share a single operating principle: sacred material is smuggled into the plainest possible nouns and never glossed as sacred by the text itself. Across the twenty-seven poems gathered here, the same "Catholic

register, lightly held" that the instructor apparatus names in the six-poem excerpt turns out to govern the entire book, not just a sample of it. A grandmother's rosary becomes a detail in a poem ostensibly about the modern vocabulary of "trigger warnings" and "fragility" ("Fragility"/"Triggers"). A dying father's body is described through a piano's ruptured "soundboard heart" rather than through any hospital or funeral vocabulary ("Piano"). A body cast becomes a chrysalis that "cracks open" onto sky and flight, never once naming resurrection, Easter, or God ("The Nest"). The method is consistent: concrete, Anglo-Saxon, domestic imagery — sheds, coffins, teapots, shoes, dumpsters — carries theological weight that the poems refuse to argue for or announce.

But this larger corpus reveals something the six-poem sample understated: the "explicit" pole of the spectrum is much wider and more frequent than the prior report's rule ("only two explicit religious markers exist in the entire body of poetry") suggested. Once all four files are read together, at least eight poems contain fully named, undisguised Catholic content — a Station of the Cross rendered in stained glass and described in loving iconographic detail ("The Guard"); a literal print of Da Vinci's *Last Supper* shattering at the moment of a father's death, followed by an explicitly named Our Father and a coffin-side kiss ("Last Supper"); a grace before meals quoted almost verbatim ("thy gifts," "Christ's bounty," in "The Teapot"); a quoted verse of "Silent Night"; the word "creed" applied without irony to a brother's silent gesture in a car ("Brother Mike"); the sacrament of Last Rites named outright ("Turbulence"); a daily rosary and remembered "blessings" as the moral center of an intergenerational poem about hardship ("Fragility"/"Triggers"). The book's true method, then, is not uniform concealment but *oscillation*: a family history conducted almost entirely in plain, undecorated diction, interrupted at structurally important moments — a death, a wake, a family meal, a church pew — by moments of full doctrinal disclosure. The buried poems ("The Crosswalk," "Piano," "The Nest," "To Be," "Water," "Carol," "Copacetic," "Session's End") do the concealment; the explicit poems ("The Guard," "Last Supper," "Brother Mike," "The Teapot," "Fragility," "Turbulence," "Leaves") do the disclosure — and because both modes coexist in the same voice and the same family, the explicit poems function exactly as the prior report predicted: they retroactively license the buried ones. Once a reader has met a named Station of the Cross in "The Guard" and a shattered *Last Supper* print in "Last

Supper," it becomes much harder to read "Piano"'s cracked "soundboard heart" or "The Nest"'s cracking "mold" as merely secular imagery.

This is closely parallel to what the fiction is reported to do (per the six-poem report's citation of the Tuscany Prize for Catholic Fiction finalist status and the author's novel *A Prayer for Home*): hide the sacred inside shabby, domestic, unglamorous nouns and refuse to comment on the hiding, except at a handful of hinge points where the mask drops entirely. The difference in degree, however, matters. Where the prior six-poem sample found the poetry "very close to" the fiction's "total silence," the fuller corpus shows the poetry to be considerably more willing to name its terms outright than that six-poem sample implied — quoting an actual table grace, an actual hymn, an actual Station of the Cross, an actual sacrament by name. The poetry may in fact be *more* explicit than the fiction is reported to be, which would make it not a decoder ring smuggled quietly beside the fiction, but something closer to an annotated key: a body of work willing, in its shorter and more intimate form, to say outright what the longer prose form only gestures toward.

Does the fuller poetic record corroborate the thesis that Mulhern's art converts abjection into glory rather than purging it? Yes, and more emphatically than six poems alone could show. Nowhere in this corpus is suffering, poverty, or decay simply disposed of, satirized away, or narrated as pure loss. The enslaved man's scourged back in "You Hurt My Eyes" is explicitly yoked to Christ's own scourging and to the theological virtue of "faith," converting a photograph of atrocity into a testimony of survival and belief rather than leaving it as an image of pure victimhood. The grandmother's bruised, stone-stabbed feet in "Fragility" are framed by her rosary and her whispered morning "blessings," so that suffering without complaint becomes sanctity rather than mere hardship. The crooked, deformed toes of "Shoes" are the visible residue of poverty and inherited hand-me-downs, but the poem closes not on shame but on the great-grandmother's relief "she had something more to give" — need converted into an occasion for generosity. Even the piano's destroyed viscera, chopped apart in ungoverned grief, are named in the poem's last word as a "soul," which is to say: wreckage is not left as wreckage: it is given an interior, and that interior is granted the specific theological name reserved for the immortal, valuable part of a person. The dumpster, the crushed can, the lost sock of "To Be" are willingly chosen, not merely endured, which converts kenotic self-

emptying from defeat into a species of freedom. And the closing quatrain of "Moving Forward" states the thesis almost as doctrine: "All of the living are broken… it's how we care for others, show love, and move forward / that helps us become whole again" — brokenness is not an end-state to be purged but raw material for a wholeness achieved through love. Across all twenty-seven poems, nothing squalid, discarded, aged, or wounded is permitted to remain merely squalid, discarded, aged, or wounded; each is, by the poem's end, quietly regarded, glossed, or blessed. That is the "theological rescue operation" the prior report named, now confirmed at full scale rather than in a six-poem sample — and confirmed, moreover, by a poetry willing, more often than previously credited, to use the actual words (soul, faith, blessing, prayer, Communion, creed, sacred) that name the rescue outright.

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supplement: Thematic Religious Elements (Irish-Catholic texture without direct allusion)

This section documents the general Irish-Catholic thematic texture that saturates the poems even where no specific scripture, prayer, or icon is invoked. These are patterns of feeling and structure — guilt, the presence of the dead, redemptive suffering, sacramental attention to objects, matriarchal devotion, wake culture, memory-as-prayer, the belief/unbelief axis, and grace surfacing in domestic incident — rather than citable allusions.

Guilt and moral reckoning

QUOTE: "'He was mostly good,' he murmured, / 'but he did some bad things.'" **SOURCE (theme):** The Catholic practice of examining one's conscience and reckoning a life's moral balance at death, akin to the particular judgment. **GLOSS:** The son's verdict on his father at the moment of death is explicitly a moral accounting — good weighed against bad — delivered in the plain cadence of an examination of conscience rather than eulogy. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "'Nobody's perfect.' She touched his shoulder." **SOURCE (theme):** The doctrine of universal sinfulness/imperfection (Romans 3:23, "all have sinned")

loosely secularized into folk wisdom. **GLOSS:** The wife's consoling cliché performs, in miniature, the theological move of general absolution — imperfection is named as universal, not exceptional, and therefore forgivable. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "I was bothered just a bit." **SOURCE (theme):** Scrupulosity — the small, nagging moral irritations that a conscience formed by guilt-attentive Catholic upbringing notices and records even when they are trivial. **GLOSS:** The speaker's admission that a minor slight (his father misremembering which son helped build a shed) "bothered" him models the habit of registering small grievances as moral facts worth confession-like recording. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "My mother asks if I'm happy. I hesitate, then lie: 'All is good.'" **SOURCE (theme):** The examined, guilty conscience of the confessional habit — noticing and naming one's own dishonesty even in a kind lie. **GLOSS:** The speaker convicts himself of lying to his mother in the same breath he tells the lie, a reflex of self-accusation characteristic of a conscience trained by the practice of confession. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

Mortality and the dead as present

QUOTE: "For my family— / those who remain / and those who have passed into the other room." **SOURCE (theme):** The Communion of Saints and the doctrine that the dead remain part of the living family, only relocated rather than annihilated. **GLOSS:** The Dedication states outright, as the book's controlling premise, that dead family members are still present — "in the other room" — rather than gone, framing every subsequent elegy as a conversation with someone still, in some sense, in the house. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "'We're done,' I hear your whisper in the chilly air." **SOURCE (theme):** The dead continuing to speak to and guide the living, a devotional assumption underlying prayers for the dead and the veneration of ancestors in Irish Catholic culture. **GLOSS:** The father's voice returns audibly from the grave, treated by the poem as a real utterance rather than mere memory, consistent with the belief that the dead remain reachable and communicative. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I see my breath and imagine I see yours." **SOURCE (theme):** The dead as still breathing, still present in shared air — a domestic version of the doctrine that

the faithful departed remain spiritually joined to the living. **GLOSS:** The son imagines his dead father's breath mingling with his own at the graveside, collapsing the boundary between the living and the dead into a shared present moment. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "You knew no one in the promised land of your imagination… I see you move from darkness into brightness, and beyond." **SOURCE (theme):** The dead's journey continuing "beyond" death, rather than terminating. **GLOSS:** The final word "beyond" refuses to let the grandfather's story end at death; his passage from Ireland to America becomes a template for a further, final passage the poem gestures toward without describing. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

Suffering as meaningful (redemptive suffering)

QUOTE: "wondering still why suffering / is entwined with life's design" **SOURCE (theme):** The Catholic theology of redemptive suffering — suffering as woven into the structure of a meaningful life rather than a meaningless accident (cf. offering up one's suffering, a common Irish Catholic devotional habit). **GLOSS:** The poem names suffering and design together as terms of a single, if unresolved, theological puzzle, treating pain as integrated into life's purpose rather than as pure waste. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "All of the living are broken / and our problems continue to accumulate. / It's how we care for others, show love, and move forward / that helps us become whole again." **SOURCE (theme):** Suffering and brokenness as the raw material of love and eventual wholeness, rather than conditions to be merely escaped or medicated away. **GLOSS:** This closing statement makes brokenness the near-universal human condition and love-in-action its redemptive answer — a plainspoken restatement of the belief that suffering, met with charity, becomes meaningful rather than merely endured. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Still, she whispered / blessings / into the early light." **SOURCE (theme):** Redemptive suffering borne without complaint and converted, by the sufferer, into blessing rather than resentment. **GLOSS:** The grandmother's daily physical suffering (stone-bruised feet, hauling water) issues not in complaint but in blessing, the classic shape of suffering accepted and transfigured rather than merely survived. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "She would be teary but softly smiling, / relieved she had something more to give." **SOURCE (theme):** Suffering and poverty converted into an occasion of generosity — meaning found in scarcity rather than despair at it. **GLOSS:** The great-grandmother's poverty (worn, cast-off shoes) becomes, in the same breath, an occasion for gratitude that she has anything to hand down, transfiguring deprivation into gift. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

The sacramental view of ordinary objects

QUOTE: "'Do you have the yellow teapot?'… Nanna's Irish prayer—'thy gifts'—received." **SOURCE (theme):** Sacramentality — the Catholic conviction that ordinary matter (bread, wine, oil, water, and by extension an inherited teapot) can carry and transmit grace and memory. **GLOSS:** A literal lost household object becomes, by the poem's end, inseparable from a family prayer and "Christ's bounty," making the teapot itself a vessel of blessing rather than a mere heirloom. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "your rosary and Daily Missal that sit on my desk" **SOURCE (theme):** Devotional objects retained as relics of a person's faith, continuing to radiate significance after death. **GLOSS:** The grandmother's prayer books, kept on the speaker's own desk, function as quasi-relics — ordinary objects sanctified by association with a devout life and preserved as points of contact with her. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "It was on the table by your coffin — / proof that we had closeness / for a moment in time." **SOURCE (theme):** An ordinary photograph functioning as sacramental evidence — a physical object that makes an intangible spiritual reality (closeness, love) visible and verifiable. **GLOSS:** The photograph is explicitly called "proof," assigning it the evidentiary and consoling function that a sacramental sign performs: making an invisible grace visible and certain. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "the avocado-green rotary phone / and its coiled cord" **SOURCE (theme):** A humble domestic object elevated to near-devotional status through the memory of a lost intimacy it once conducted. **GLOSS:** An obsolete telephone becomes the material vessel of a lost sibling closeness, treated with the same reverent specificity Catholic devotion gives to sacramentals (rosaries, medals, holy water fonts). **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

The mother/grandmother figure

QUOTE: "Mom—Your fingers touch the contours of my face. You hope I'm happy… The truth is in these poems—I'm grateful." **SOURCE (theme):** The maternal figure as a source of blessing and unconditional hope, echoing the devotional weight Irish Catholic culture places on motherhood (paralleling Marian devotion's emphasis on the mother's touch and care). **GLOSS:** The mother's touch is rendered as a quasi-blessing, gentle and searching, in language that could describe a votive gesture as easily as a domestic one. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "Her fingers trace the contours of my face. / 'How are things, my number three child? / Are you happy?'" **SOURCE (theme):** The mother as the one who "traces," i.e., reads and knows, her child's face and soul — a maternal omniscience with devotional overtones. **GLOSS:** The gesture recurs verbatim (with "touch" become "trace") in a later poem, establishing the mother's hands-on-face gesture as a leitmotif of maternal blessing across the book. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "Helen—Your crooked toes from shoes passed house to house, your rosary and Daily Missal… your devotion to God—I strive." **SOURCE (theme):** The grandmother as domestic saint — poverty, physical deformity from hardship, and explicit "devotion to God" combined into a portrait of quiet sanctity. **GLOSS:** The grandmother is presented in the dedication as a model of lived holiness the author explicitly says he "strives" to imitate, establishing her as the book's implicit patron figure. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Most mornings, she knelt, said her rosary, / then stepped across / a broken-planked porch" **SOURCE (theme):** The grandmother as the family's unacknowledged contemplative — a figure of daily private devotion that goes unremarked by the world around her. **GLOSS:** Her devotion is folded into her labor rather than set apart from it, epitomizing the "domestic saint" pattern common to Irish Catholic family memory. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

Wakes and funerals

QUOTE: "At the wake, he knelt / beside his father's coffin, / said an Our Father / kissed his father's forehead." **SOURCE (theme):** The Irish-American Catholic wake, with its characteristic postures (kneeling, praying, kissing the deceased). **GLOSS:** This

passage is the collection's fullest single depiction of wake practice, rendering the ritual sequence in unbroken, matter-of-fact detail. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "It was on the table by your coffin." **SOURCE (theme):** The wake custom of displaying photographs near the casket. **GLOSS:** This detail recurs as a marker of wake culture without ever using the word "wake," treating the custom as simply how funerals are done in this family. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "At home, he knelt by the shattered print. / His shoulders drooped, his back shook." **SOURCE (theme):** Private, delayed grief following the public rites of the wake — mourning continuing after the formal funeral rituals end. **GLOSS:** The son's private collapse at home, after the public wake scene, shows grief overflowing the boundaries of ritual containment, a recognizable pattern in wake-centered mourning cultures. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

Memory as a form of prayer

QUOTE: "My family members are my prayers. My poems are my prayers. My family members are my poems." **SOURCE (theme):** The explicit equation of remembering loved ones with the act of prayer. **GLOSS:** This is the book's single clearest statement of memory-as-prayer: to hold a family member in memory, and to write a poem about them, is declared identical to praying for or with them. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Memory is an act of attention. We choose what to preserve, which words to carry forward, which silences to honor." **SOURCE (theme):** Contemplative attention as a devotional discipline (cf. Simone Weil's "attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity," a formulation with strong currency in Catholic literary tradition), applied here to memory itself. **GLOSS:** The Introduction frames memory explicitly as a discipline of attention and choice, structurally identical to the discipline of prayerful recollection. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I see you now. I always did." **SOURCE (theme):** The persistence of loving attention across time and death — a devotional constancy akin to unceasing prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17, "pray without ceasing"). **GLOSS:** The Dedication's closing line asserts an unbroken, continuous seeing of loved ones that functions like ceaseless

prayer or remembrance rather than intermittent recollection. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

Belief versus unbelief

QUOTE: "Reminders of our passage / to another realm / where some say / eternal happiness abounds. / Or maybe it's a bluff of nothingness, / a shadowed, fraudulent shore." **SOURCE (theme):** The live tension between Christian hope and existential doubt, staged without resolution. **GLOSS:** The poem states the doctrine of eternal life and then immediately entertains its negation as an equally live possibility, dramatizing belief and unbelief as an open question rather than settled faith. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Is he a sad witness? / Does he have doubts like me?" **SOURCE (theme):** The speaker's open admission of religious doubt, projected onto a figure in a stained-glass window. **GLOSS:** The poem's speaker directly names his own doubt ("like me") while contemplating a Passion scene, making "The Guard" the collection's most explicit staging of the doubt/faith axis. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Perhaps he's eager, as I am, for enlightenment" **SOURCE (theme):** The desire for religious certainty or illumination held alongside unresolved doubt. **GLOSS:** The speaker imagines shared spiritual longing with an anonymous figure, admitting his own search for "enlightenment" is unresolved even as he sits in a church pew. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

Grace arriving in domestic detail

QUOTE: "Proof that we had closeness for a moment, / and that is enough." **SOURCE (theme):** Grace as sufficient, small, and unearned, arriving through an ordinary object (a photograph) rather than a dramatic event. **GLOSS:** This is the paradigm case in the collection of grace surfacing in domestic minutiae — a single photograph is enough to redeem a whole relationship's shortfalls. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "'Everything copacetic?' I asked. / He turned. Looked at me. / 'It was tough,' he said." **SOURCE (theme):** A small, wordless exchange functioning as the vehicle of final blessing or reconciliation between father and son at the deathbed. **GLOSS:** The father's terse reply, spoken hours before his death, becomes the closest thing to a

benediction the poem offers — grace compressed into three ordinary words. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "She kisses me on the forehead." **SOURCE (theme):** The maternal kiss on the forehead as a small, recurring domestic gesture of blessing, echoing the forehead-kiss given to the father's corpse in "Last Supper." **GLOSS:** The same forehead-kiss gesture used for a dying/dead father elsewhere in the collection reappears here as a living mother's nightly blessing over her son, linking ordinary bedtime affection to funerary blessing. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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supplement: Literary Allusions and Echoes

This section documents allusions to and echoes of other poets, writers, hymns, and named artworks across the corpus, verified verbatim against the source text.

Named literary figures and works

QUOTE: "the Wife of Bath's scarlet stockings / poor Yorick's skull / Dickinson's sherry in the glass / Gatsby's dock / Hulga's wooden leg" **SOURCE:** Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (the Wife of Bath's scarlet stockings, from her General Prologue portrait); William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Yorick's skull, Act 5, Scene 1); Emily Dickinson (a "sherry" image drawn from her poems, e.g. "I taste a liquor never brewed," which mentions inebriation imagery); F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (the green light at the end of Daisy's dock); Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People" (the character Hulga/Joy and her wooden leg). **GLOSS:** "To Be" opens with a five-item catalogue of iconic objects from the Western literary canon, spanning medieval, Renaissance, nineteenth-century American, Jazz Age, and mid-century Southern Gothic literature, before descending into ordinary discarded objects — an explicit act of literary allusion used structurally, as the poem's "ladder" from canon to trash. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Nights, I scour Shakespeare, / wander the web, / lauding lines of literature" **SOURCE:** William Shakespeare (named directly). **GLOSS:** "Longing" names Shakespeare outright as the object of the speaker's solitary nightly reading,

establishing the teacher-speaker's literary devotion as the counterpart to his social loneliness. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "distinct like a Dickinson dash" / "meaningful as the dash in a Dickinson poem" **SOURCE:** Emily Dickinson, whose poetry is famous for its idiosyncratic em-dashes. **GLOSS:** The speaker in "Longing" wishes to be as "distinct" and "meaningful" as Dickinson's signature punctuation mark, a direct craft-allusion used as a figure for the desire to matter despite being small. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Lines of Coleridge or Keats— / Words you love / when left alone." **SOURCE:** Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats, named directly. **GLOSS:** "Simply Silly" names two Romantic poets as the private literary consolation of a bullied, introverted student, establishing Romantic poetry as refuge. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "sad like the speaker in Keats' Ode, / longing for 'songs of spring'" **SOURCE:** John Keats, "To Autumn" ("Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?"). **GLOSS:** This is a direct, quoted line from Keats's "To Autumn," explicitly attributed, used to characterize the melancholy longing of the poem's bullied student. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "no sound and fury" / "No sound and fury" **SOURCE:** William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5 ("a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"). **GLOSS:** The phrase "sound and fury" is a direct Shakespearean quotation embedded in "Session's End"/"Current Events," applied ironically to the absence of manufactured media drama. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "In a forest, sitting on a sycamore, / Thoreau's wood thrush sings." **SOURCE:** Henry David Thoreau, whose journals and *Walden* repeatedly praise the wood thrush's song as the sound of transcendent, unspoiled nature. **GLOSS:** Thoreau is named directly, attaching the wood thrush's song to the transcendentalist tradition of nature as spiritual revelation, paired with the poem's implicit natural-theology theme. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "the cheap print of the Last Supper / lay on the floor / its frame splintered" / "the cheap print of Davinci's / Last Supper" **SOURCE:** Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper* (named directly, "Davinci's"). **GLOSS:** The poem names the specific artwork and artist, using a mass-reproduced devotional print of a canonical Renaissance

painting as its structural symbol for a shattered father-son relationship. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "she resembles Elizabeth Taylor in a hat" **SOURCE:** Elizabeth Taylor, film actress, named directly as a beauty comparison. **GLOSS:** A honeymoon photograph of the speaker's mother is compared to the film icon Elizabeth Taylor, a pop-culture rather than literary allusion marking the mother's youthful glamour. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Streisand's album played softly, the candlelit room." / "Barbra Streisand's Christmas album played: / 'Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright.'" **SOURCE:** Barbra Streisand, *A Christmas Album* (1967), which includes a recording of "Silent Night." **GLOSS:** The poem names the specific recording artist and quotes her recorded lyric directly, embedding a real, identifiable piece of popular Christmas music into the family memory. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "We watched that Wonderful Life movie, Mark's favorite film and song." **SOURCE:** Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), named (with an informal article) directly. **GLOSS:** The poem names a specific, canonical American Christmas film as part of the family's holiday ritual, a popular-culture allusion parallel to the Streisand reference in the same poem. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" (Martin Luther King)." **SOURCE:** Martin Luther King Jr. (quotation attributed directly in the text). **GLOSS:** The Epilogue closes with an explicitly attributed quotation from King, framing the entire book's project (speaking what has gone unspoken in a reticent Irish-American family) in the language of moral courage borrowed from King's civil rights rhetoric. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "If we are not true to who we are, have we lived? (Carl Jung)" **SOURCE:** Carl Jung (quotation/paraphrase attributed directly in the text). **GLOSS:** The Epilogue also attributes a psychological/philosophical question to Jung, pairing him with King as the two named non-literary authorities framing the book's purpose. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

Echoes without direct naming (Yeats, Hopkins, Frost, Heaney, Bishop, Whitman, Wordsworth, Emerson, Joyce, the Psalms)

QUOTE: "Cars whizz by where once was a dirt road. / No one lives in the tiny stone house." **SOURCE (echo):** W. B. Yeats's poems of Irish homestead and emigration nostalgia (e.g. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," "The Wild Swans at Coole") and the general Irish literary trope of the abandoned family cottage. **GLOSS:** "Dark City"'s return to a vacant ancestral home in rural Ireland, with sheep, birdsong, and cut grass, echoes the Yeatsian pastoral-elegiac mode of mourning a vanished Irish rural world, without naming Yeats. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "From Athlone on the Shannon River, / dead center of Ireland—" **SOURCE (echo):** The Irish literary tradition (Yeats, Joyce) of naming specific Irish geography with talismanic precision as a marker of authentic origin and exile. **GLOSS:** The precise naming of Athlone and the Shannon River situates the emigration story in the tradition of Irish writers who anchor personal/family history to exact, namable places, a technique associated with both Yeats's place-poems and Joyce's Dublin cartography. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "You knew no one in the promised land of your imagination. / You carried courage and a dream." **SOURCE (echo):** The archetypal Irish-American emigration narrative found across Irish and Irish-American literature (Joyce's exiles, the emigrant ballads), and structurally close to Heaney's poems of ancestral labor and departure. **GLOSS:** The emigrant grandfather's crossing, rendered with quiet, unsentimental dignity, situates the poem within the Irish-Catholic elegiac lyric tradition the Instructor Edition itself associates with Heaney (see "On Style and Technique," citing Heaney's "Clearances"). **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "That fall day we raked leaves from behind the shed… I kneel and clear your grave." **SOURCE (echo):** Seamus Heaney, "Digging," in which the poet's pen stands in for his father's and grandfather's spade — a poem of filial inheritance enacted through manual, seasonal labor. **GLOSS:** "Leaves" repeats Heaney's structural move of doubling an ancestral work-task (here, raking rather than digging) across generations and across the boundary of death; the Instructor Edition itself names this connection explicitly ("the grave-tending son is the speaker Heaney established in 'Digging'"). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Smell of earth and wet decay rose in the cold air." / "the Emperor angelfish knocks" **SOURCE (echo):** Gerard Manley Hopkins's dense, sensory attention to the particularity of natural things ("inscape") as in "Pied Beauty" or "The Windhover," and Hopkins's practice of finding the sacred in exact, unglamorous natural detail. **GLOSS:** The close sensory cataloguing of decay, cold, and obscure creatures (a sea-cave-dwelling angelfish "knocking," a "wood thrush" singing unseen) resembles Hopkins's instinct to find divine particularity in the overlooked corners of creation, without ever using Hopkins's diction or coinages. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "Better to submerge / in a sacred stillness / beyond unfathomed questions, / the haze of thoughts. // Enjoy instead the flow of repose." **SOURCE (echo):** Robert Frost's late meditative poems on aging and acceptance (e.g. "The Road Not Taken," "Directive") and Jane Kenyon's "Otherwise," which the Instructor Edition names directly as a model for the whole collection's plain style. **GLOSS:** "Mostly I Sit"'s posture of aging gracefully into acceptance and reduced cognition mirrors the plain-style tradition of Frost and Kenyon, treating diminishment without either sentimentality or despair. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I know uncertainty / is the keel of life— / guiding our illusion / of control." **SOURCE (echo):** Elizabeth Bishop's poetics of loss and controlled understatement (e.g. "One Art," "The art of losing isn't hard to master"), which the Instructor Edition names directly as a model ("the model is Bishop's 'One Art'"). **GLOSS:** The dry, aphoristic acceptance of uncertainty as life's stabilizing "keel" echoes Bishop's technique of naming loss/uncertainty in calm, almost proverbial language rather than through emotional display. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "Lions prowl the streets of Johannesburg, / a sleuth of bears rise on hind legs in Yosemite, / wild boars advance through the city of Haifa" **SOURCE (echo):** Walt Whitman's catalogue technique (e.g. "Song of Myself," "I Sing the Body Electric"), listing disparate items/places in long anaphoric enumeration to build a totalizing, democratic vision. **GLOSS:** "For the Animals" 's global catalogue of animals reclaiming empty pandemic cities employs a Whitmanesque cataloguing method — geographically wide-ranging, anaphoric, cumulative — to build a single unified image of the natural world's persistence. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

QUOTE: "I'd like to be / the Wife of Bath's scarlet stockings… a flattened sneaker on a road… or that dried leaf you crumble in your hand." **SOURCE (echo):** Walt Whitman's and Christopher Smart's list-poem tradition, explicitly named as a formal source in the Instructor Edition's commentary ("Catalogue form (Whitman, Christopher Smart)"). **GLOSS:** "To Be"'s fifteen-item anaphoric catalogue, set out over sixteen lines,, moving from literary icons to discarded trash, formally descends from the Whitman/Smart tradition of the democratic list that refuses hierarchy among its items. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG

QUOTE: "Birdsong. / Cut grass. / Sheep amble through the fields. / The sun moves Into clouds, / then brightness returns." **SOURCE (echo):** William Wordsworth's practice of returning to a remembered landscape and finding it a source of continuity and consolation (e.g. "Tintern Abbey," "I wandered lonely as a cloud"), and Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalist conviction that nature reflects spiritual truth ("Nature"). **GLOSS:** The grandson's visit to the vacant Irish homestead, cataloguing small persistent natural details (birdsong, grass, sheep, shifting sun) as consolation for loss, echoes the Wordsworthian "spot of time" and Emersonian nature-as-revelation, without invoking either writer by name. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "Enjoy instead the flow of repose. / Accept the softening of cognition, / like birds growing smaller / as they fly toward distant lands" **SOURCE (echo):** Emerson's essays on compensation and acceptance of natural cycles, and the broader transcendentalist trope of birds/migration as figures for the soul's journey. **GLOSS:** Aging and cognitive decline are reframed, in Emersonian fashion, as part of a natural cycle (migration) rather than a purely negative loss, softening decline into a species of natural law. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "The truth lives in these poems—in the space between what we say and we mean, between presence and loss, memory and forgetting." **SOURCE (echo):** The confessional lyric tradition (Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton) as explicitly discussed and then distinguished from in the Instructor Edition ("late-confessional restraint"), and the general modernist preoccupation (Eliot, Joyce) with the gap between what is said and what is meant. **GLOSS:** The Epilogue's claim that truth lives "between what we say and we mean" situates the whole collection's method within, but at a deliberate remove from, the confessional tradition's premise that poetry

exists to close the gap between private truth and public speech. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "Once, you showed me a painting— / shapes of greens and blues. / A black stroke, apostrophe-shaped, stood out." **SOURCE (echo):** Ekphrastic poetic tradition (poems that describe visual artworks), as also practiced in "The Guard" (the stained-glass window) and "Last Supper" (the da Vinci print) — a mode with roots from Keats ("Ode on a Grecian Urn") through Auden ("Musée des Beaux Arts"). **GLOSS:** "Carol" joins "The Guard" and "Last Supper" as the collection's third ekphrastic poem, using a described painting as the vehicle for meditating on a loved one's fragility and endurance, in the lineage of Keats's and Auden's art-describing lyrics. **CONFIDENCE:** SPECULATIVE

QUOTE: "A letter lacking closure, / or a line.— / stranded and incomplete— // Preceding naught." **SOURCE (echo):** Emily Dickinson's fragmentary, dash-punctuated syntax and her recurring theme of unfinished or withheld meaning (e.g. "My Life had stood — a Loaded Gun —"). **GLOSS:** "Longing" 's own broken, dash-fragmented final lines formally imitate the Dickinsonian style the poem has just named explicitly two stanzas earlier ("meaningful as the dash in a Dickinson poem"), making form and allusion coincide. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

Sources (as cited within the document itself)

- Publication credits from the front matter of *Selected Poems* ("Crossings"): *Better Than Starbucks Poetry Magazine* ("Copacetic"); *The Galway Review* ("Triggers," "Brother Mike," "Carol," "The Teapot," "Leaves"); *Sparks of Calliope* ("Honeymoon," "Session's End"); *Impspired Magazine* ("Piano," "Brother Mark," "Water," "The Nest," "To Be"); *The Font* ("Triggers," "Turbulence," "Longing," "Current Events"); *Fragmented Voices* ("Leaves"); *Academy of the Heart and Mind* ("The Crosswalk," "Dark City," "Piano"); *Abstract Magazine* ("Catherine"); *Scars Publications* ("Simply Silly," "Please Call Me Again"); *Tipton Poetry Journal* ("The Guard," "To Be"); *VerbalArt* ("The Nest," "Piano"); *Ancient Paths Journal* ("Last Supper"); *Red Eft Review* ("Shoes"); *Frost Meadow Review* ("For the Animals"); *CC&D Magazine* ("Moving Forward," "Mostly I Sit").

- Instructor Edition sourcing: "The Crosswalk" — Impspired (Feb 2020), The Galway Review (Dec 2019), Academy of the Heart and Mind; "Leaves" and "Moving Forward" — The Galway Review (May 2022); "Piano" and "Brother" — Academy of the Heart and Mind, VerbalArt anthology; "The Nest," "To Be," "Simply Silly" — Impspired (Oct 2021); "Current Events" — The Font: A Literary Journal for Language Teachers (Sept 2022); "Copacetic" — Trouvaille Review (May 2020).
- Author's site: authorjamesmulhern.com
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- Kirkus Reviews author page: kirkusreviews.com/author/james-mulhern
- Readers' Favorite reviews: readersfavorite.com

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1. Introduction (front matter) — QUOTE: "I return to thresholds—doorways where my father asked, 'Everything copacetic?' Near a fire under a bridge, when my brother hugged my shoulder, in a hallway where my grandfather touched my head, by the hospital bed where a face I knew would soon be gone." SOURCE: The threshold/liminal space as sacred ground in ritual theory (cf. Jacob's ladder set up where "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven," Gen. 28:17) and the domestic doorway as a site of blessing in Jewish mezuzah practice and Irish folk custom of blessing a house's threshold. GLOSS: Mulhern names "thresholds" as his organizing structural principle — doorway, fire-circle, hallway, hospital bed are all liminal zones between states (departure/return, warmth/cold, sight/blindness, life/death). This is a formal key to the whole book: nearly every poem is set at a literal threshold, functioning as this poet's version of the "betwixt-and-between" sacred space of rites of passage. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

2. Dedication (front matter) — QUOTE: "Dad—…I try. / Mark—…I feel. / Helen—…I strive. / Mom—…I'm grateful. / For those who love me—…I learn." SOURCE: Litany form — the repeated address-plus-single-word-response structure recalls the versicle-and-response of a Litany of the Saints ("Saint N., pray for us") or a litany of thanksgiving, where each invocation closes with a fixed liturgical reply. GLOSS: The Dedication is itself a five-part litany: each named person is invoked, credited with a virtue, and answered with a one-word verb of the speaker's own devotion (try, feel, strive, grateful, learn) — formally identical to litanic call-and-answer, applied to

family members rather than saints. This is a distinct formal observation from the already-noted litany form of "To Be." CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

3. Introduction (front matter) — QUOTE: "men who couldn't cry, women who worked until their feet hurt, children who waited for words that never came" SOURCE: Beatitude-adjacent triadic form (cf. Matt. 5:3-11's repeated "Blessed are…" structure) inverted into a triad of withholding rather than blessing. GLOSS: The tricolon structure (men/women/children, each given a parallel clause of suffering) borrows the Beatitudes' cadence of ascending parallel clauses but empties it of blessing, producing an anti-Beatitude — suffering catalogued in threes without the promised reversal. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

4. Mostly I Sit — QUOTE: "Better to submerge / in a sacred stillness / beyond unfathomed questions, / the haze of thoughts." SOURCE: The "still small voice" of 1 Kings 19:12 and the apophatic tradition's "cloud of unknowing," in which God is met not in noise but in a stillness beyond discursive thought. GLOSS: "Sacred stillness… beyond unfathomed questions" describes the same contemplative movement as 1 Kings 19 — away from wind, earthquake, and fire into "a still small voice" — recast as an old man's descent into the quiet of diminished cognition; the previously logged citation for this poem covered the word "sacred" itself but not this specific still-small-voice parallel. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

5. For the Animals — QUOTE: "Lions prowl the streets of Johannesburg, / a sleuth of bears rise on hind legs in Yosemite, / wild boars advance through the city of Haifa, / crocodiles surf waves in La Venta Nilla, Mexico, // penguins parade the streets of Cape Town, / mountain goats march past shops in Wales, / scurries of squirrels spring freely in a Santa Monica park, / flocks of birds cry out, a chorus begins." SOURCE: The nature-catalogue of Psalm 148 ("Praise him… beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl") and the peaceable-kingdom vision of Isaiah 11:6-9, in which creatures move freely through spaces once forbidden to them. GLOSS: Eight lines of parallel subject-verb-place clauses, unbroken by a single first-person pronoun until the final tercet, form a psalm of praise for creatures rather than of the psalmist — closer to Psalm 148's animal-litany of praise than to the Whitman catalogue already noted for this poem, since here creation itself is both subject and celebrant, with humans arriving only afterward, masked and humbled. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

6. For the Animals — QUOTE: "'Free at last, free at last,' we say behind our masks, / inspired by their joy, humbled by their presence, / sad it took a plague for us to see." SOURCE: Exodus liberation typology, intensified by the word "plague" arriving in the final line — Exodus 7-11's ten plagues that precede the liberation cry. GLOSS: The sequence plague-then-freedom-cry mirrors Exodus's own narrative order (plague, then "let my people go," then the exodus), collapsing the entire Exodus arc into three lines about a pandemic; the existing the concordance entry notes "plague" and the MLK quotation separately but not their combined sequential echo of Exodus's own plot order. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

7. You Hurt My Eyes — QUOTE: "How did he find the strength and faith? // Escaping a plantation, / bloodhounds at bay, / onions to smother / the scent of his / dripping sweat / the entire way." SOURCE: The Israelites' flight from Egypt with pursuers behind them (Exod. 14:8-10) and the African American spiritual tradition's typological reading of slavery as Egyptian bondage ("Go Down, Moses," "Wade in the Water"). GLOSS: A hunted man's flight with hounds "at bay" behind him repeats the Exodus flight-with-pursuit pattern central to spirituals that read slavery through the lens of Egyptian bondage; the onion-scent detail (a documented historical detail from slave narratives) sits inside this larger typological frame that the poem invokes only through the single word "faith." CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

8. You Hurt My Eyes — QUOTE: "Hungry, / tired, terrified, / until he arrived, / exhausted at Union lines." SOURCE: Form — the broken, one-or-two-word free-verse lines depart sharply from the poem's otherwise conversational classroom narration, mimicking gasping breath. GLOSS: The poem's form enacts what it describes: sentence syntax collapses into single gasped words arranged one per line, a prosodic breathlessness comparable to the truncated, gasping half-lines of lament psalms (e.g., Ps. 22:14-15, "I am poured out like water… my strength is dried up"). CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

9. Session's End / Current Events (variant) — QUOTE: "Deep in a dark sea cave, the red drum knocks." (Session's End) vs. "Deep in a dark sea cave, / the Emperor angelfish knocks." (Current Events) SOURCE: Variant textual evidence bearing on the "theophany in obscure creatures" reading already applied to this line. GLOSS: Between the two printings, the actual species changes (red drum to Emperor angelfish) while the structural gesture — an unseen creature's small sound heard in

total darkness, a hidden pulse of life registering where "there is no weather" — stays fixed; the variant shows the image's function is auditory/theophanic rather than naturalistic, strengthening the still-small-voice reading of the passage. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

10. Water — QUOTE: "On the dock, / hands cupped, / bending— // Toward water / he'll never reach." SOURCE: The formal shape of the poem — six short stanzas (six, three, four, four, three and two lines) closing on the three-word line "he'll never reach" — read against Psalm 42:1 ("As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God"). GLOSS: Beyond the water-as-grace-withheld content already logged, the poem's diminishing stanza shape formally performs an asymptotic approach that never arrives — a typographic equivalent of the panting, thirsting soul of Psalm 42 that reaches but is not satisfied; no verb of speech and no first person appear anywhere in the poem, making the old man's bent posture itself a votive gesture of unanswered prayer. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

11. Water — QUOTE: "broken capillaries / like tributaries on arid land." SOURCE: The desert/water paradox of Isaiah 35:6-7 ("waters shall break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert") inverted — the "tributaries" here are dried blood vessels on skin, not living water breaking into a desert. GLOSS: Isaiah's desert vision promises water breaking into dryness as a sign of restoration; Mulhern's tributaries are the opposite — the marks left by water's absence on a body already dust-colored and aged — a deliberately anti-Isaian image of a desert that will not bloom. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

12. Copacetic (variant) — QUOTE: "At dawn, he was gone." (Selected Poems) vs. "When I wake, I find that he has gone." (Family First / Poetry printings) SOURCE: Resurrection-at-dawn typology (Mark 16:2-6, the women coming "at the rising of the sun" and finding the tomb already empty). GLOSS: The revision relocates the disclosure from an external temporal notice ("At dawn") to the son's own subjective waking — a shift toward the Gospel scene's own logic, in which the discoverers arrive to find absence already accomplished; the variant intensifies rather than removes the resurrection parallel by making the son, like the women at the tomb, the one who wakes into discovered absence. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

13. Simply Silly — QUOTE: "Peering down, / you press your palm on a page / you're not reading." SOURCE: The devotional gesture of resting a hand flat on a sacred text prior to comprehension — as in swearing an oath on scripture, or in lectio divina's physical contact with the page preceding understanding. GLOSS: The bullied student's palm pressed to an unread page performs a devotional posture — hand on text as touching a relic — even though the cognitive content, the actual reading, is absent; this anticipates the poem's later claim that the same student will "someday" read "the rhythms you adore," a future fulfillment of a presently only physical devotion. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

14. Longing — QUOTE: "Nights, I scour Shakespeare, / wander the web, / lauding lines of literature, / commending clever craft—" SOURCE: The monastic night vigil (Matins/Vigils), in which monks rise in darkness to read and pray, recast as a solitary teacher's insomniac literary reading. GLOSS: Beyond the already-logged naming of Shakespeare, the scene's specific setting — alone, at night, searching a text for meaning no one else will witness — repeats the monastic discipline of seeking the word alone in darkness, with literature substituting for scripture as the object of nocturnal devotion. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

15. Please Call Me (Again) — QUOTE: "Even pauses pleased me— / our breathing replaced / when voices halted, / like the trilling / of sparrows at dusk." SOURCE: Matthew 10:29-31, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father… Fear ye not therefore" — the sparrow as the smallest, most negligible creature nonetheless held in divine attention. GLOSS: Comparing a shared silence between brothers to sparrow-song at dusk elevates the negligible — mere breathing, not even words — to the status of the Gospel's smallest watched-over creature; the poem values what looks like nothing (a pause, a sparrow's trill) as itself a form of communication worth attending to. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

16. Please Call Me (Again), variant closings — QUOTE: "I long to hear your voice / whenever my phone rings." (Selected Poems) vs. "Please call me again. I want to hear your voice until it clings." (Family First / Poetry) SOURCE: Psalm 130 (De Profundis), "Lord, hear my voice… let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." GLOSS: The poem's closing plea — to hear a literal voice, itself a cry "out of the depths" of estrangement from a once-close brother — repeats the shape of Ps. 130's

cry for God to attend to a voice; the two printings' differing final lines (a stated longing vs. a direct second-person imperative, "Please call me again") show Mulhern sharpening the poem across revision toward direct supplication — the grammatical mode of prayer itself, addressed to a person rather than to God. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

17. Piano — QUOTE: "Men like you couldn't voice / their secrets or despair." SOURCE: Sacramental confession's requirement of vocalized speech (James 5:16, "confess your sins"); a man who "couldn't voice" despair is structurally barred from the sacrament's remedy regardless of belief. GLOSS: This earlier line supplies the psychological premise for the poem's already-logged Sacred-Heart/soundboard imagery: the father's silence is named specifically as an inability to "voice," the precise verb confession requires, diagnosing a man cut off from the sacrament's relief before the poem shows us his solitary, unwitnessed weeping. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

18. The Crosswalk — QUOTE: "your hands over mine, / knotting my tie." SOURCE: The laying-on of hands as a gesture of blessing and ordination (Acts 6:6, 1 Tim. 4:14), transferred onto a father's hands guiding a son's hands in a domestic, quasi-ceremonial task. GLOSS: A father's hands physically covering his son's to tie a necktie for some formal occasion repeats in miniature the laying-on-of-hands gesture used at blessings and ordinations; the coffin-side photograph that later memorializes this moment (already logged) retroactively frames this hand-over-hand instant as the one ritual blessing the father managed to give. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

19. Turbulence — QUOTE: "As the plane rose through the clouds, / I felt turbulence. / Beyond the rain-pattered window / was solid blackness." SOURCE: The Ascension narrative's cloud that "received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9), inverted. GLOSS: Where Acts 1:9 has a cloud receive Christ upward into unseen glory, Mulhern's speaker rises through cloud into "solid blackness" that yields only an old man's frightened reflection in the window — an ascent disclosing mortality rather than glory, fitting a poem that names the Last Rites two stanzas earlier. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

20. Moving Forward — QUOTE: "Her body is filled with bars and bolts— / several surgeries on her spine / and leg." SOURCE: The wounded body as testimony rather

than shame — doubting Thomas invited to touch Christ's wounds as proof of a body that has endured (John 20:27). GLOSS: The mother's surgically altered body, itemized almost clinically ("bars and bolts"), is presented without euphemism directly before her continuing tenderness ("Her fingers trace the contours of my face"); the wounded, metal-filled body becomes proof of endurance rather than diminishment, structurally close to the Thomas scene's logic that wounds authenticate rather than disqualify. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

21. The Teapot — QUOTE: "Years later, I found the teapot in an upstairs room, / remembered the roast, green beans, stuffing— / Nanna's Irish prayer—'thy gifts'— received." SOURCE: Anamnesis — the liturgical act of "remembering" that makes a past sacred event newly present (Luke 22:19, "Do this in remembrance of me"). GLOSS: A misplaced object's recovery ("I found the teapot") triggers full liturgical recall — the family grace, quoted verbatim, returns to memory only once the physical vessel is rediscovered — enacting anamnesis through a domestic object rather than through willed remembering, distinct from the food-grace lines already logged for this poem. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

22. Carol (title) — QUOTE: title "Carol," for a poem about the speaker's aunt/friend containing no Christmas or hymn content whatsoever. SOURCE: "Carol" as a genre term — a song of praise, historically a communal dance-song predating its later narrowing to Nativity hymnody. GLOSS: The title's genre-word promises a song of praise and is fulfilled structurally rather than thematically: the poem functions as a carol in the older sense, a celebratory refrain-poem ("Beating like the waves… assuring you with their rhythm") for a living person's survival, with the beat of "waves" substituting for the beat of carol-dance — a case where the title, not the body text, carries the buried liturgical genre-claim. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

23. Brother Mark (variant) — QUOTE: "Twigs crackled, embers rose / in smoke-filled wind." (Selected Poems) vs. "Twigs crackled and bits of paper rose in the smoke." (Family First / Poetry) SOURCE: Variant evidence relevant to the incense-ascension reading (Ps. 141:2, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense") already logged for this poem's smoke imagery. GLOSS: Mulhern swaps the literal rising matter (embers, then paper) between printings while preserving the act of rising into smoke-filled wind — showing the image's theological function (offering ascending like incense) is doing the structural work, not the specific combustible

material; the variant strengthens rather than merely repeats the incense reading already on file. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

24. Mostly I Sit — QUOTE: "like birds growing smaller / as they fly toward distant lands—" SOURCE: Migratory-bird imagery as a figure for the soul's departure, a topos running from the Psalms ("Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest," Ps. 55:6) through the death-birds of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." GLOSS: The dwindling bird, receding until nearly invisible, figures the self's own gradual departure from the visible world — a psalmic wish for winged escape rendered as literal ornithological observation rather than direct plea. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

25. Longing (variant closing) — QUOTE: "A letter lacking closure, / or a line.— / stranded and incomplete— // Preceding naught." (Selected Poems, isolated on its own final stanza) SOURCE: The apophatic "naught" as a term of art in negative theology, and the archaic King-James-era diction of Ecclesiastes ("Vanity of vanities… all is vanity," Eccl. 1:2) that favors "naught"/"vanity" over plain "nothing." GLOSS: The poem ends not on an image but on a single archaic negative noun standing alone on its own line — the same apophatic strategy of self-definition-by-absence that "Current Events"'s "No… No…" litany performs discursively (already logged), compressed here into one word ending the poem — an even more minimal apophatic gesture than the litany form. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

26. Copacetic — QUOTE: "Soon, the nurse called. /"Your father's agitated. / He wants to leave— / something about a trip."" SOURCE: Irregular free-verse refrain; syllabic scan 4 / 7 / 4 / 6, not Common Meter (8.6.8.6). GLOSS: The short report returns the poem to its opening journey vocabulary, but it does not supply a hymn's regular answering line: the proposed "trip" is a disoriented dying man's departure. The repeated domestic question elsewhere in the poem therefore works as a damaged antiphon, answered not by reassurance but by displacement; the line is governed by reported speech and breath, not a stable metrical foot. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

27. Brother Mark — QUOTE: "We sang about the beer / we lifted with gloved hands. / Your arm lay on my shoulder, / and your face orange from flames." SOURCE: Loose accentual quatrain; syllabic scan 6 / 6 / 7 / 7, rather than hymn Common Meter or Long Meter. GLOSS: "Sang" and the four-line blocks invite a hymnal comparison, yet

the stanza has neither alternating 8/6 lines nor a rhyme scheme; it is a remembered song without a tune. The clustered hard consonants of "gloved," "hands," and "flames," against the softer repeated *s* sounds in "sang," "shoulder," and "face," make the campfire scene chantable but not devotional in any inherited formal sense. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

28. Dark City — QUOTE: "What were you thinking / as you exited this door? / What conflicts stirred in your mind?"; "I see you move from light into darkness and beyond." SOURCE: Psalm-like parallel interrogative versets; no psalmic address, imperative, or praise-turn. GLOSS: The two balanced questions make a brief, psalm-adjacent lament for an emigrant ancestor, each line carrying forward the other's unanswerable pressure. The journal ending, "I see you move from light into darkness and beyond," closes with a bare three-stage descent rather than an arrival in brightness; the reading copy on the author's site reverses those two nouns, so the poem exists in one state that concedes the dark and another that ends in transit toward light. But the poem does not pray to God or pivot from complaint to praise; it remains an address to the silent dead. Its Irish landscape may invite a Yeats comparison, but there is no recurring Yeatsian stanza, rhyme scheme, or formal imitation to support more than a thematic association. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

29. Catherine — QUOTE: "The water was colder and splashed your skin, / but the sweet memory was all you needed." SOURCE: Narrative free verse governed by alternating present care and remembered speech; terminal concessive couplet. GLOSS: The final two lines close with the sound-and-sense turn of "but": bodily cold is conceded, then overcome by memory, rather than redeemed by a prayer or blessing. This is a secular consolation, not a collect or a lament that turns toward God; the long first line and short concluding resolution follow the movement of recollection rather than any hymn measure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

30. Simply Silly — QUOTE: "He admired you— / your devotion to words, / your quiet brilliance" SOURCE: Secular benediction: second-person address followed by declarative assurance, without an invocation or response. GLOSS: The dash opens a small pause before a three-part blessing of the student, and the two short noun phrases have the measured cadence of a spoken commendation. Yet the poem is not a collect: it invokes no divine addressee, asks for nothing, and offers no doxology. Its

devotional work lies in the teacher's voice making worth pronounceable. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

31. Longing — QUOTE: "Mostly, / I feel small—a tiny font, / the blank space beyond a colon, / an abandoned thought." SOURCE: Dickinsonian dash and syntactic fragmentation; syllabic scan 2 / 7 / 8 / 5, not Dickinson's usual hymn-derived 8.6.8.6. GLOSS: The eight-syllable third line followed by a five-syllable phrase momentarily approaches hymn proportion, but the surrounding 2/7/8/5 sequence declines to stabilize into it. The dash and punctuation-images make visual interruption, rather than meter, the poem's governing music; Dickinson is an explicit model of significance-in-smallness, not a prosodic template copied whole. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

32. You Hurt My Eyes — QUOTE: "Had he sat in class, / would Mary plead— /"You hurt my eyes. / Could you please leave? / Your story is so sad; / it makes my heart bleed."" SOURCE: Framed free-verse lament; return to the opening classroom voice rather than a resolving praise-turn. GLOSS: After the flight narrative, the poem circles back to the students' language and ends inside a hypothetical question, not a verdict on the enslaved man's suffering. The closing quoted voice is deliberately inadequate and even asks the sufferer to leave, so the formal return refuses both benediction and the consolations of a completed lament. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

33. For the Animals — QUOTE: "sad it has taken this long / for us to understand so much." SOURCE: Whitman-like global catalogue with psalmic creation-litany pressure; alliterative soundwork rather than end-rhyme. GLOSS: The repeated animal-plus-verb-plus-place syntax functions like versets, while "Lions loll," "penguins parade," "mountain goats march," and "scurries of squirrels spring" turn the catalogue into a voiced procession. The ending turns that catalogue into a human anti-doxology: its final "sad" supplies humility rather than praise. It approaches Psalm 148 by making creatures the active celebrants, but has no direct praise-address or congregational response; the chant is ecological and comic before it is devotional. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

34. Mostly I Sit — QUOTE: "happy to shove it all in / the refrigerator drawer. / Joyful to sit and be ignored." SOURCE: Variant closing in anti-benediction; diminishing three-line free-verse cadence. GLOSS: This version ends not in a promise of another

realm but in the emphatic, paradoxical acceptance of being ignored. The final line is grammatically complete and sonically gentle, so it closes the poem; its hope is a reduction of demand rather than religious consolation. That makes it an important counter-example to the collection's more homeward-looking endings. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

35. Brother Mike — QUOTE: "I wondered what you prayed for, / as you bowed your head upon the pew. / What secrets did you know? / I admired you— / your certainty, / your quiet strength." SOURCE: Recollected examen/testimony: remembered scene, searching questions, later understanding; not a prayer proper. GLOSS: The poem begins by examining another person's inward life and deliberately withholds the answer, then later revisits the brother's silent gesture in a car. Its religious form is testimonial rather than liturgical: memory supplies the movement from puzzled observation toward recognition, but there is no petition, absolution, or formal response. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

36. Turbulence — QUOTE: "When we landed, / the suitcase seemed heavier. / My exit was clear." SOURCE: Terminal free-verse tercet; syllabic scan 4 / 7 / 5, not a hymn stanza. GLOSS: Three clipped declaratives replace the poem's earlier catalogue of social encounters, giving the ending the clean finality of a benediction while withholding its blessing. "Exit" simultaneously means leaving the plane and the speaker's eventual death; the pun closes the syntax but keeps mortality unresolved. The poem is an informal memento mori, not an examination of conscience with confession or release. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

37. Carol — QUOTE: "Beating like cresting waves, / crowding and contracting, / incapable of eroding / an everlasting apostrophe-shaped rock." SOURCE: Variant terminal quatrain; wave-refrain and consonantal repetition, not the strophic/rhymed form of a carol. GLOSS: The participles "crowding and contracting" make the sentence pulse by repeated hard *c* and *t* sounds, while "apostrophe-shaped" turns punctuation into an enduring refrain-image. Despite its title, the poem has no recurrent chorus, regular measure, or rhyme to make it a carol in the hymn sense; its music is tidal and self-correcting rather than congregational. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

38. Please Call Me — QUOTE: "I no longer know / the changes in your life. / We're not connected / as we once were." SOURCE: Short free-verse versets and severed

conversational antiphony. GLOSS: The poem repeatedly sets up replies—phone talk, text, answer—but the short lines here reduce that exchange to a statement of failed connection. The title can look like a petition, yet it is addressed to a brother rather than to God and lacks the collect's opening address, attributed praise, and closing purpose. Its prayer-like pressure is therefore an analogue of supplication, not a devotional form fulfilled. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

39. Last Supper — QUOTE: "But words / could not relieve his pain. / She watched, / offering silence, / offering time." SOURCE: Anaphoric nonverbal consolation; two parallel "offering" phrases resembling a miniature litany. GLOSS: The repeated participle makes silence and time into gifts, and the sequence slows to one offering per short line. Although the title and wake setting are overtly religious, this is not an Our Father, collect, or Stations meditation: its formal answer to grief is the refusal of speech. In this respect the poem's devotional force is a discipline of presence rather than verbal prayer. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

40. Fragility — QUOTE: "The goal of the discussion / disregarded / like a raised hand / ignored." SOURCE: Broken syntactic fragment as anti-response; contrast structure rather than an examination of conscience. GLOSS: The two isolated participles enact what they say: the sentence itself is held up and left unanswered, like the raised hand. The later rosary detail may make the poem look devotional, but its governing form is polemical contrast between a contemporary meeting and remembered hardship; it does not confess the speaker's own fault, seek pardon, or arrive at absolution. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

41. The Teapot — QUOTE: "Mike and I jested. Beth complained a nun / mocked her purple tree. Mark, red-faced, boasted / we ran from cops. Dan eyed the clock." SOURCE: Family-name catalogue with paratactic clauses; table-grace and carol are embedded material, not the poem's governing stanzaic form. GLOSS: The quick naming of Mike, Beth, Mark, and Dan is a domestic litany, but each name receives a different comic predicate instead of a repeated response. The poem's remembered prayer and song give the scene devotional content, while its actual construction remains a memory-catalogue whose plain Anglo-Saxon verbs—"jested," "mocked," "ran," "eyed"—keep the tone oral and familial. It is closer to Whitman's inclusive list than to Herbert's or Donne's tightly argued devotional lyric. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

42. Shoes — QUOTE: "Did she see her mother walking down the street, / bag of discarded shoes in her arms, / shoulders curled in the wind?" SOURCE: Terminally delayed rhetorical question; free-verse elegiac suspension. GLOSS: The poem's pivotal imagined image is introduced as a question, and the question suspends the great-grandmother in a scene the speaker cannot verify. That is not a benediction or a closed moral: the sound of the long first line falls into two shorter visual fragments, leaving compassion as an act of imagining rather than a completed prayer. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

43. Honeymoon — QUOTE: "The room darkens. Rain taps a pane. / Thunder booms, lightning illumines the shade." SOURCE: Accentual sound patterning—*r/t/p* taps and *th/b* booms—with no sprung-rhythm system. GLOSS: The paired blunt sentences make weather audible through monosyllables, then the more Latinate "illumines" briefly lengthens the line. The poem shares Hopkins's attention to charged sensory particulars only at a very general level: it lacks sprung-rhythm's counted stresses, dense internal counterpoint, and lexical compression. Sound here prepares a bedside vigil, but does not become incantation or chant. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

44. The Guard — QUOTE: "Is he a sad witness? / Does he have doubts like me? / Perhaps he listens, as I do, for an illumination. / Or maybe he wants to escape the searing Sun." SOURCE: Station-of-the-Cross subject treated through interrogative meditation; not the formal Stations' prayer-and-response sequence. GLOSS: Each question repositions the viewer, the guard, and the speaker without resolving any of them; the last alternative lowers "illumination" to the bodily wish to escape heat. Though the stained-glass scene supplies a Station's iconography, the poem omits the customary versicle, response, and devotional progression from station to station. It closes in doubt, making a crucial counter-example to a reading of the book's religious forms as uniformly affirmative. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

45. Moving Forward — QUOTE: "We share a meal, talk about the past / and how terrible the world / is now. I turn on the TV. She listens. / I watch." SOURCE: Paratactic domestic versets; ending-pattern comparison across the collection. GLOSS: The flat alternation of "She listens. / I watch." makes companionship a two-part responsory without pretending that either person has reached agreement or revelation. Across the endings quoted above, Mulhern more often closes with a small completed action or a syntactic stop—Catherine's remembered sufficiency, the

classroom's unanswered question, the animals' belated understanding, the suitcase's "exit," Carol's rock, and the guard's heat—than with a conventional blessing. The counter-pattern is equally important: some endings refuse completion altogether, most sharply the rhetorical question in "Shoes" and the anti-benediction of being "ignored"; hope is therefore formal restraint, not a promised resolution. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

46. The published selection: what can be fixed — QUOTE: "contains twenty poems in its final sequence" SOURCE: The live collection page identifies its displayed twenty-seven poems and Epilogue as an earlier expanded manuscript, while the linked structural essay identifies the published volume as a twenty-poem book. GLOSS: The sources establish the reduction from twenty-seven poems plus Epilogue to twenty poems, but they do not supply a published table of contents. They do establish a number of retained titles and ordered blocks, not every title and position; a complete reconstructed list would therefore be conjecture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

47. Last Supper: explicit devotion retained — QUOTE: "My father's dead. / Can you shine my shoes?" SOURCE: "Last Supper" is named in the published book's middle movement; the expanded manuscript supplies this wording. GLOSS: The final selection plainly keeps a poem whose subsequent action includes a wake, an Our Father, and a broken Last Supper print. The cut therefore did not purge direct Catholic ritual in favor of wholly secular elegy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

48. The Guard: explicit devotion dropped — QUOTE: "What does Jesus say to her? / Thank you, I suppose." SOURCE: The published-book note specifically names "The Guard" among four poems not included in the final edition; the expanded manuscript supplies the lines. GLOSS: The omission removes the manuscript's most sustained church interior, its Veronica stained glass, and its direct address to Jesus. Alongside the retention of "Last Supper," it makes the religious selection mixed: direct doctrine and ritual remain, but overt Passion iconography is reduced. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

49. The confirmed exclusions — QUOTE: "You sit in the corner, / oblivious to the old teacher watching—" SOURCE: The published-book note excludes "Longing," "The Guard," "To Be," and "Simply Silly"; these lines are from the latter in the expanded manuscript. GLOSS: Of the four exclusions, "The Guard" is explicitly devotional,

whereas "Longing," "To Be," and "Simply Silly" are chiefly literary, pedagogical, or self-reflexive. The evidence is too partial to call the final selection either bleaker or sunnier overall, but it does show the removal of several poems that foreground reading, teaching, and named literary culture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

50. Opening poem, unavailable opening lines — QUOTE: "A Prayer" SOURCE: The live structural essay states that the published book opens with "A Prayer," and that "Dark City" is its second poem. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

51. Dark City at the water's edge — QUOTE: "Cars pass where a dirt road once lay." SOURCE: The live structural essay identifies "Dark City" as poem two; the expanded manuscript gives the lines. GLOSS: The first available poem-text in the established order begins with Irish place and water, then narrates emigration. The book's opening movement therefore begins not with private illness but with inherited departure, an Irish-Catholic family history carried across the Atlantic. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

52. The middle as care-work — QUOTE: "Her chest rises and falls. Soon she sleeps." SOURCE: The published sequence's middle stretch is reported as "The Crosswalk," "Piano," "Last Supper," "She Knelt," "We'd Scrape the Rocks," "Shoes," and "Honeymoon"; these words occur in the expanded "Honeymoon." GLOSS: The listed cluster moves from paternal memory and bereavement to bathing, shoes, and ointment: bodies are handled, lifted, and attended. This is the book's clearest hinge, replacing genealogy and loss with a practical liturgy of care rather than a doctrinal resolution. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

53. The brother diptych — QUOTE: "Our time together— / perpetually that night." SOURCE: The structural essay says "Brother Mark" and "Brother Mike" are consecutive in the published sequence; the full manuscript supplies this ending to "Brother Mark." GLOSS: The first brother poem asks memory to stop time, while the sequel is reported to move toward a living brother's silent devotion and later estrangement. The pairing makes crossing mean both death and the harder, unfinished distance between the living. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

54. The last four: hope interrupted — QUOTE: "As the plane rose through the clouds, / I felt turbulence. / Beyond the rain-pattered window / was solid blackness. / I saw an old man. / I knew what lay behind me." SOURCE: The live structural essay

fixes the final four as "The Nest," "Turbulence," "Water," and "Leaves," and quotes this published wording from "Turbulence." GLOSS: New life and recovery in "The Nest" are immediately countered by the speaker's confrontation with age, then by unreachable water and the grave. The order refuses an ascent from doubt to affirmation: its most hopeful image is deliberately placed before darkness and departure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

55. Leaves: the close refuses a final blessing — QUOTE: "You're no longer here. / I stand and leave." SOURCE: The structural essay identifies "Leaves" as the final poem and records these final lines of the published text. GLOSS: The final movement is an exit from a grave, not a prayer answered, a reunion, or an announced afterlife. That conclusion resists the volume's devotional apparatus by leaving the speaker in action but without consolation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

56. Crossings as ocean passage — QUOTE: "where you boarded the Adriatic, / a name that means, "dark city."" SOURCE: "Dark City," established as the second poem of the final sequence, narrates the grandfather's transit from Ireland toward America. GLOSS: This is the title's most literal and foundational crossing: water separates the ancestor from family, country, and a known life. It dominates because the structural essay measures later baths, turbulence, and graves against this original emigration. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

57. Crossings as a threshold on land — QUOTE: "Today, I saw a father and son / step onto the crosswalk." SOURCE: "The Crosswalk" is named in the final book's central care sequence; the expanded manuscript gives the opening. GLOSS: A road crossing admits the speaker into a remembered father-son relation and ends at the father's casket. The ordinary traffic word thus makes the title secular in surface, but it becomes the threshold between present sight, childhood grievance, and mourning. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

58. Crossing oneself: retained as family language — QUOTE: "and crossed yourself / in the dashboard light." SOURCE: "Brother Mike" is explicitly placed in the final book immediately after "Brother Mark." GLOSS: The sign of the cross survives in the selected sequence as a brother's wordless response to illness, not as a public profession of doctrine. The title therefore does devotional work, but it does so through a habitual gesture embedded in family care. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

59. The Cross itself: present in the manuscript, selected away — QUOTE: "She holds a cloth to wipe his face." SOURCE: This is "The Guard," which the published-book note identifies as omitted from the final edition. GLOSS: The expanded manuscript activates the title's most overtly Christological sense, but the known cut removes that enactment from the final twenty. The surviving title can still recall the sign of the cross and Catholic gesture, yet the final book lessens the likelihood that its dominant meaning is the Crucifixion alone. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

60. Crossings as crossing over — QUOTE: "How strange that an act of kindness / made me think so much." SOURCE: "Turbulence" is third from the end of the published sequence; the full manuscript supplies this close. GLOSS: The airplane's ascent makes a late-life speaker think both of ordinary passage and of death, with "exit" giving the title a mortal, transitional force. Because this poem precedes "Water" and the grave poem, crossing over is a major late-book pressure rather than a completed destination. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

61. Crossroads and double-cross: a negative finding — QUOTE: "When we landed, / the suitcase seemed heavier." SOURCE: The cited wording is from the final-sequence poem "Turbulence"; no supplied poem supplies a crossroads scene or a betrayal/double-cross figure. GLOSS: Direction, choice, and the road are active in the book, but an actual crossroads is not established, nor is a double-cross. The title's supported senses are passage, threshold, the devotional gesture, death, and the Cross; treachery should not be added to them. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

62. The sampling dedication — QUOTE: "those who remain / and those who have gone before" SOURCE: The sampling page has this brief dedication before its twenty-eight-item expanded contents. GLOSS: This version prepares the reader for a family book divided between living and dead, but without naming a creed or a particular beloved. Its phrase "gone before" gives bereavement a processional, ancestral cast before any poem begins. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

63. The fuller dedication — QUOTE: "For LOML—Always." SOURCE: The complete-collection manuscript carries a long personal dedication where the sampling page has a short one. GLOSS: The longer apparatus turns the book into a named family memorial, assigning the father, brothers, Helen, mother, and loved ones discrete ethical inheritances. It explicitly joins domestic objects, the rosary and missal, and

devotion to God, so that the poems are framed as both remembrance and obligation before the first poem. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

64. Epigraph and introduction: an instruction the ending resists — QUOTE: "If we are not true to who we are, have we lived?" SOURCE: The complete manuscript's Carl Jung epigraph is followed by an introduction that calls memory an act of choosing and carrying forward. GLOSS: The front matter tells the reader to expect truthful self-disclosure and memory as moral attention. "Leaves" complicates that instruction: the final verified book text does not answer the epigraph's question, but exits a graveside in unresolved absence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

65. No sections, no final afterword, and a manuscript warning — QUOTE: "Twenty-seven poems and an epilogue from an earlier, expanded manuscript draft" SOURCE: The live collection page describes its own contents as an earlier draft and presents pages for epigraph, dedication, acknowledgments, introduction, contents, poems, Epilogue, and About the Author, without section divisions. GLOSS: The apparatus of the displayed manuscript is substantial, but it is not secure evidence for identical front or back matter in the twenty-poem publication; its Epilogue is especially not the published ending, since the final sequence closes with "Leaves." The book's designed arc must therefore be read from the established published order, not from the expanded page's page-by-page architecture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

66. Irish-Catholic material, Italian-Catholic material, and song — QUOTE: "Part of the china we used on Christmas Day—" SOURCE: "The Teapot" is named among poems following the brother diptych in the published sequence; the expanded manuscript supplies this family-Christmas line. GLOSS: Irish-Catholic material is structurally central: Ireland, a mother's Bible, family prayer, wakes, and a grandmother's religious practice recur in retained or closely related material. The supplied sources establish no Italian-Catholic family strand; the Last Supper image is a Christian artwork, not evidence of Italian inheritance, and the current expanded "Teapot" names Streisand but does not itself verify a hymn lyric for the published text. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

67. Literary allusion after selection — QUOTE: "a snail shell beneath a blackberry bush / a crow's feather on a deck" SOURCE: These are from "To Be," one of the four

poems explicitly absent from the published edition. GLOSS: The named literary catalogue—Dickinson, Fitzgerald, and O'Connor—belongs to a confirmed cut, as do the Keats and Coleridge reference in another cut poem. The supplied final-sequence evidence does not establish retained direct allusions to Yeats, Hopkins, Whitman, Emerson, or Heaney; those names may describe critical affinities, but they should not be presented as final-book poem allusions. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

68. Brother Mike, the deleted theological meditation — QUOTE: earlier (Family First, © 2024): "But the moment had stilled me. / I felt a bit of awe or was it / what we call the sacred? / I understood church and why we knelt. / I heard the loudness of your silence, / the words of your prayer, / and the creed in your gesture." / later (Crossings, © 2025): "you simply looked at me / and crossed yourself / in the dashboard light. / Now I understand: / Communion is the road we share, / as when you traced the cross / and turned to me / with a soft and caring glance." SOURCE: revision history; the theology of the sign of the cross (the Trinitarian gesture) versus its abstract naming. GLOSS: The later text deletes all three abstract theological nouns — "the sacred," "prayer," "creed" — and replaces them with the embodied ritual itself: the brother crossing himself "in the dashboard light," then "trac[ing] the cross." This is the single most revealing revision in the corpus: Mulhern trims doctrinal naming and keeps (even sharpens) the concrete gesture, adding the new sensory detail "dashboard light." It tells us his sacred material lives in gesture and ritual, not in stated creed — and that revision polishes the sign while cutting the sermon. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

69. The Teapot, the hymn swapped for the grace — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "Barbra Streisand's Christmas album played: / 'Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright.'" … "The silent calm and the holy bright." / later (Crossings): "Nanna's Irish prayer—'thy gifts'—received." … "Memories—'these thy gifts' of Nanna's prayer, / Christ's bounty received, these blessings I revere." SOURCE: the Catholic grace before meals ("Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts… through Christ our Lord") replacing the Protestant hymn "Silent Night." GLOSS: The revision swaps a secular Christmas carol (sung by Streisand) for an explicitly Catholic table grace, naming "Christ's bounty" outright. This is a clear move toward explicit Catholic content: the family's Christmas memory is re-anchored in the prayed grace rather than the popular hymn, and the

closing line's "holy bright" (a hymn echo) becomes "blessings I revere" (a devotional claim). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

70. Mostly I Sit, the afterlife meditation added — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): ends "Joyful to sit and be ignored." / later (Crossings): adds "Reminders of our passage / to another realm / where some say / eternal happiness abounds. / Or maybe it's a bluff of nothingness, / a shadowed, fraudulent shore, / where existence / endures no more." SOURCE: revision history; the afterlife meditation (cf. the "many mansions" of John 14:2) held against its skeptical counter (cf. Ecclesiastes 9:5). GLOSS: The later text nearly doubles the poem, grafting on an explicit afterlife meditation — "eternal happiness" hedged by "some say," then countered by "a bluff of nothingness." The revision adds religious content but keeps it suspended between belief and doubt, matching the collection's oscillation rather than resolving it; the earlier short version had no theological reach at all. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

71. Moving Forward, the moralizing conclusion cut — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): ends "All of the living are broken / and our problems continue to accumulate. / It's how we care for others, show love, and move forward / that helps us become whole again." / later (Crossings): cuts that stanza; ends instead "She kisses me on the forehead." (and adds "my number three child"). SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The later text deletes the poem's explicit moralizing conclusion — the "become whole again" doctrine that read almost like a sermon — and ends on a physical gesture (a mother kissing her son's forehead). This is a move away from stated doctrine toward embodied tenderness, the same direction as the Brother Mike revision; the "wholeness" thesis survives only in the earlier collection. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

72. Honeymoon, "soul" withdrawn — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "I'll feel the cut of pain, a sigh of love, / and the aching tenderness of my soul." / later (Crossings): "wondering still why suffering / is entwined with life's design." SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The later text removes the word "soul" — the poem's only explicitly theological noun — and substitutes a more abstract, quasi-philosophical phrase ("life's design"). The revision softens the religious marker while keeping the meditation on suffering, a small but real secularization that runs counter to the additions in "The Teapot" and "Mostly I Sit." CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

73. Leaves, the prayer made formal — QUOTE: earlier (Family First / Galway Review): "I say a prayer, cross myself, and rise." … "I see my breath and imagine I see yours." / later (Crossings): "I recite a prayer, cross myself, and rise." … "I see my breath and feel yours brush my face." SOURCE: revision history; the formalized act of recitation (set prayers recited rather than spontaneously uttered). GLOSS: "Say" becomes "recite," formalizing the graveside prayer into a set, repeated liturgical act; "imagine I see yours" becomes the more embodied "feel yours brush my face." This is the one revision that intensifies the religious word rather than trimming it — the prayer is made more formal and the father's presence more physical, the opposite of the Brother Mike and Moving Forward cuts. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

74. The Crosswalk, the grace-claim softened — QUOTE: earlier (Family First / Instructor / Impspired): "headed to the park with swings" … "never lifted me and held my legs" … "Proof that we had closeness for a moment, / and that is enough." / later (Crossings): "headed to the park." … "why did you never lift me, / hold me" … "proof that we had closeness / for a moment in time." SOURCE: revision history; the theology of grace-as-sufficient ("My grace is sufficient for thee," 2 Cor 12:9) that the earlier ending quietly invoked. GLOSS: The later text deletes "with swings," compresses "lifted me and held my legs" to "lift me, hold me," and — most significantly — replaces the closing moral verdict "and that is enough" with the merely temporal "for a moment in time." The grace-claim (sufficiency) is withdrawn in favor of a bare temporal qualification, softening the poem's quiet theology of enough. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

75. Triggers retitled Fragility, the polemic stripped — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): title "Triggers"; opening "when a question asked / 'makes someone feel bad,' / considered a 'microaggression' or 'trigger.'" … ending "but still she whispered blessings to the wind." / later (Crossings): title "Fragility"; opening "when a question asked / hurts someone's feelings." … ending "Still, she whispered / blessings / into the early light." SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The title changes from "Triggers" to "Fragility," and the later text strips the scare-quoted campus vocabulary ("microaggression," "trigger," the "Hurt Feelings" marquee) down to plain speech ("hurts someone's feelings"). The religious core — the grandmother's rosary and whispered blessings — is untouched, only re-lineated ("into the early light"); the

revision softens the culture-war polemic around it, moving the poem toward a quieter generational contrast. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

76. Current Events retitled Session's End, the classroom frame removed — QUOTE: earlier (The Font / Instructor, "Current Events"): "The lesson ends / as the bell rings. / Students walk, / and someone slams the door." / later (Family First / Crossings, "Session's End"): "A judge's ruling: session's end. / Someone shuts a door." SOURCE: revision history; the removed classroom frame and the dropped Thoreau attribution ("Thoreau's wood thrush" in the Font text becomes "a wood thrush" in Family First, then "Thoreau's wood thrush" again in Crossings). GLOSS: The poem is retitled from "Current Events" to "Session's End," and its delayed classroom reveal — the teacher-speaker disclosed only in the final four lines — is deleted, replaced by a courtroom image. The intermediate Family First text also drops the name "Thoreau" (restored in Crossings). The revision removes the poem's pedagogical frame and briefly its named literary anchor, leaving a more impersonal meditation on silence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

77. Brother retitled Brother Mark — QUOTE: earlier (Academy of the Heart and Mind, 2020): title "Brother." / later (Crossings / Family First): title "Brother Mark." SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The magazine title "Brother" is expanded to "Brother Mark," naming the dead brother and distinguishing him from the living "Brother Mike" (the paired poem). The retitling personalizes the elegy and sets up the brother-diptych that the published book places consecutively; it carries no doctrinal change, only a sharper identification. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

78. You Hurt My Eyes, added to the collection — QUOTE: later (Crossings only; absent from Family First): "How did he find the strength and faith? / Escaping a plantation, / bloodhounds at bay, / onions to smother / the scent of his / dripping sweat / the entire way." SOURCE: revision history; the enslaved man's "faith" (cf. the spiritual tradition's Exodus typology, "Go Down, Moses"). GLOSS: "You Hurt My Eyes" — the poem built on the "Scourged Back" photograph of an escaped slave — appears in the Crossings manuscript but is absent from the Family First collection. Its addition imports a new, explicitly religious register into the book: the enslaved man's "strength and faith," and a scourged back that echoes Christ's scourging. The added poem widens the collection's Catholic frame beyond the Irish-American family to a broader theology of suffering. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

79. Simply Silly, the Keats and Coleridge allusion added — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): no literary allusion; "You sit in the cafeteria corner… avoiding eye contact with peers." / later (Crossings): adds "Lines of Coleridge or Keats— / Words you love / when left alone… sad like the speaker in Keats' Ode, / longing for 'songs of spring.'" SOURCE: Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale" ("songs of spring") and Coleridge; revision history. GLOSS: The later text inserts a Keats/Coleridge allusion — the bullied student comforted by "songs of spring" — that the earlier version lacked entirely. This is a literary allusion added in revision, deepening the portrait of the student's inner life and aligning her with the Romantic longing for escape; it is the clearest case in the corpus of allusion being supplied, not removed, in revision. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

80. Longing, the Dickinson dash reworded — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "meaningful as the dash in a Dickinson poem." / later (Crossings): "distinct like a Dickinson dash." SOURCE: Emily Dickinson's dash; revision history. GLOSS: The Dickinson allusion is present in both versions but reworded: the earlier "meaningful as the dash in a Dickinson poem" becomes the more compressed "distinct like a Dickinson dash." The revision tightens the allusion without changing its import — the speaker's wish to be singular, like Dickinson's punctuation — showing the allusion was stable in meaning while its phrasing was polished. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

81. The Guard, "illumination" nudged toward "enlightenment" — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "Perhaps he listens, as I do, for an illumination." / later (Crossings): "Perhaps he's eager, as I am, for enlightenment." SOURCE: revision history; the mystical "illumination" (divine light, cf. the illuminated Gospels) versus the more secular "enlightenment." GLOSS: The later text swaps the Catholic-mystical "illumination" for the more secular, post-Enlightenment "enlightenment." Both keep the speaker's unresolved spiritual longing, but the revision nudges the vocabulary away from the specifically liturgical register of divine light toward a generic word for understanding — a subtle secularization inside an otherwise unchanged devotional poem. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

82. Catherine, the distance specified — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "you hid the donut behind the picture." … "you were swimming, miles and miles away." / later (Crossings): "you hid the donut behind the picture frame." … "you swam again— / over 29,000 miles away." SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The later text specifies

the distance ("over 29,000 miles away" — the span from Boston to Clew Bay, County Mayo) and adds "frame" to the photograph. The revision sharpens the geography of the grandmother's remembered swim without touching the poem's religious content, which remains a secular consolation rather than a prayer. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

83. Last Supper, the attribution and the consolation trimmed — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "the cheap print of Davinci's / Last Supper" … "said an Our Father, and kissed his forehead." … "'Nobody's perfect.' She touched his shoulder." … "Maybe he wished he'd said more. / Maybe he had regrets." / later (Crossings): "the cheap print of The Last Supper" … "said an Our Father / kissed his father's forehead." … "what he said, / what he wished he had." SOURCE: revision history; the retained Our Father and Last Supper iconography. GLOSS: The later text drops the artist attribution "Davinci's" (leaving the iconic title bare), adds "his father's" to clarify whose forehead is kissed, and cuts the wife's secular consolation "Nobody's perfect" along with the doubled "Maybe he wished… Maybe he had regrets." The religious core (the Our Father, the shattered print) is untouched; the revision trims secular commentary around it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

84. To Be, the catalogue made concrete (negative finding) — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "a flattened sneaker on a road / a crushed beer can in a dumpster / a lost sock under a couch / a penny on a walk / a snail's shell beneath a bush." / later (Crossings): "a flattened sneaker on some highway / a crushed beer can in a restaurant dumpster / a lost sock under a sagging couch / a penny on the walkway / a snail shell beneath a blackberry bush." SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The later text adds concrete specificity — "some highway," "restaurant dumpster," "sagging couch," "walkway," "blackberry bush" — sharpening the catalogue of discarded objects. The revision changes nothing religious: the poem's leveling of literary and discarded objects (Wife of Bath, Yorick, Hulga) is untouched, only its texture is denser. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

85. Copacetic, the hospital scene tightened (negative finding) — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "I held a spoon / with a wobble of red before his face." … "wearing the blue bathrobe my sister gave him. / 'It brings out your eyes,' she told him." / later (Crossings): "I held a spoonful of red Jell-O." … "wearing the robe my sister said, / 'brought out the blue in his eyes.'" SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The later text compresses the Jell-O image ("a wobble of red" becomes "red Jell-O") and folds the

sister's dialogue into reported speech. Neither version carries religious content; the revision is purely stylistic tightening of a secular hospital scene (the "At dawn, he was gone" resurrection-adjacent variant is logged elsewhere). CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

86. The Nest, the closing theology compressed (negative finding) — QUOTE: earlier (Family First / Instructor): "Where it travels is not your concern. / Your joy is that it does." / later (Crossings): "Where it travels / won't matter. / Your joy is simply / that it does." SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The later text compresses the closing theology of release ("is not your concern" becomes "won't matter") and adds "simply." The earned, non-pious "joy" is retained verbatim; the revision is a rhythmic tightening that leaves the poem's small theology of release intact. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

87. Water, the negation rephrased (negative finding) — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "Delta of purple ankles." … "Water he cannot reach." / later (Crossings): "Purple ankles, / a small delta / scattered with patches / dried and aged." … "Toward water / he'll never reach." SOURCE: revision history. GLOSS: The later text expands the body description and changes "cannot reach" to "he'll never reach" (a temporal rather than modal negation). Neither version names God or grace; the revision adjusts the poem's asymptotic, psalm-adjacent thirst (Psalm 42) without adding or removing religious language. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

88. Brother Mark, "hallowed" traded for "sacred" and a new ending added — QUOTE: earlier (Family First): "I dream we never stepped outside our hallowed space. / The snow was so cold and the streetlights too strong." / later (Crossings): "I wish we had stayed / in our sacred space. / Never tread outside / into the glare of light — / Toward the cloak / of snow and night." SOURCE: revision history; "hallowed" (the Our Father, "hallowed be thy name," Matt 6:9) versus "sacred." GLOSS: The later text swaps the Our Father's "hallowed" for the more generic "sacred" and adds a new closing image — "the cloak / of snow and night" — that the earlier version lacked. The revision trades liturgical specificity for a broader consecration while extending the poem's ending into a fuller image of enclosure, a small shift away from the prayer's own vocabulary. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

89. Dark City, Copacetic, Water, Moving Forward — blue eyes as the family's visual signature — QUOTE: "light-blue eyes lit by a slant of kitchen sun" / "brought out the blue in his eyes" / "blue-water eyes" / "told me through dim blue eyes" SOURCE: image GLOSS: Blue eyes recur across four poems and four generations — grandfather (Dark City), father (Copacetic), the emblematic old man (Water), and mother (Moving Forward) — always as the carrier of light and of life in a face. The repeated "blue" is the family physiognomy made a signature: the one mark that survives death ("brought out the blue") and approaching blindness ("dim blue"). It is never named as holy, but it is the collection's most consistent human image, and it is unrecorded in the book. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

90. Water, and "Assumptions" — the body as river-landscape — QUOTE: "broken capillaries / like tributaries on arid land" / "a white boulder / strewn with seaweed hair" / "Purple ankles, / a small delta" SOURCE: image (parallel to the prose "Assumptions," whose Peggy has "broken capillaries that sloped down the sides of her nostrils, flooding the arid plain of her skin… a delta of nasolabial folds") GLOSS: The old man's whole body in "Water" is written in exactly the geographic lexicon — arid land, tributaries, boulder, seaweed, delta — that the prose uses for Peggy's face in "Assumptions." The poet has transplanted the story's one physiognomy into the poem's full-body portrait, so a person is read as a drained, silted river system. The image crosses from prose to poem intact, which the book records piecemeal but not as a single recurring figure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

91. Catherine, Carol, Water, Mostly I Sit — the sea, with no fixed meaning — QUOTE: "Cold waves struck your skin, / but the sweet memory of the sea / was all you needed." / "I thought the painting was the ocean." / "Toward water / he'll never reach." / "a shadowed, fraudulent shore" SOURCE: image GLOSS: The sea recurs across four poems and refuses a single meaning: it is memory and nourishment (Catherine's Clew Bay and sea lettuce), safe homecoming (Carol's "current / carrying you safely home"), grace withheld (Water's unreachable water), and the doubted afterlife (Mostly I Sit's "fraudulent shore"). Unlike the prose, where the sea is a Marian "cure," the poems keep the sea ambient — an element, not a sacrament. It is the collection's most frequently returned-to image with the least stable valence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

92. Brother Mark, The Guard, Honeymoon, Brother Mike — fire and light as the marker of the sacred moment — QUOTE: "I loved the circle / of our fire and our shared song" / "I see our faces lit by flames." / "to escape the searing Sun" / "in the dashboard light" SOURCE: image GLOSS: Fire and its cooler cousin light flag every moment the poems treat as transfiguring: the sacred circle of the boys' bonfire under the bridge, the brother's sign of the cross caught "in the dashboard light," the Passion's "searing Sun" in the stained glass, the lightning that "illumines the shade" over a mother's sleep. The image does quiet theological work — light is where revelation happens — but the poems never say so, and one instance (the Sun) is a place to flee, not a blessing. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

93. You Hurt My Eyes, The Crosswalk, Catherine, Honeymoon — the photograph as the poem's theory of the image — QUOTE: "History confines him / to a picture on a page, / the photo of his keloids, / the record of his life." SOURCE: image GLOSS: Several poems are literally about photographs — the honeymoon picture, the coffin-side portrait, the grandmother's yellowed snapshot — and "You Hurt My Eyes" makes that explicit, meditating on how a man ("Gordon" or "Peter") survives only as "a picture on a page." The poems quietly adopt the photograph as their model of the image: a single still that must carry a whole life, and that both preserves and confines. This second-order awareness — the image reflecting on images — is the image-hunting finding the earlier readings left unremarked. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

94. The Nest, Please Call Me, Session's End, Mostly I Sit — ordinary birds in place of the dove — QUOTE: "hoping to glimpse a fledgling / or any free bird / flying far across the sky." / "like the trilling / of sparrows at dusk." / "Thoreau's wood thrush sings." / "like birds growing smaller / as they fly toward distant lands" SOURCE: image GLOSS: The poems are full of birds, but none is a dove: robins build a nest over a healing body, sparrows trill through a remembered phone call, a wood thrush sings, birds shrink toward "distant lands" as the soul departs. The collection's flight-and-release theology is carried entirely by generic, ordinary birds. The dove — the one bird that would have carried an explicit Holy Spirit meaning — is conspicuous by its absence, a negative finding that bears directly on inheritance below. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

95. Brother Mike, Leaves, The Guard — the cross as the one image with a stable meaning — QUOTE: "you traced the cross" / "I recite a prayer, cross myself, and rise." / "a wooden cross covering his cream tunic and carmine cape" SOURCE: icon (the Crucifix); the Sixth Station of the Cross GLOSS: Of all the recollected images, only the cross recurs with an unvarying meaning: the gesture that joins people (the brother's sign in the car is the "creed in your gesture," the poem's word for the bond of Communion), the prayer at a grave, and the literal burden borne by the stained-glass Christ. Where the sea means four different things, the cross always means one thing — the communing and carrying of love under suffering — which is why it is the spine of the collection's iconography. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

96. The Guard, Last Supper, You Hurt My Eyes, Piano — a fixed Passion repertoire, transposed into paint, glass, photograph, and wood — QUOTE: "a wooden cross covering his cream tunic and carmine cape" / "the cheap print of The Last Supper / lay on the floor / its frame splintered" / ""The Scourged Back" / of an American slave" / "The soundboard heart cracked open" SOURCE: the Stations of the Cross; Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper; the Passion GLOSS: State plainly: the poems draw on a small, fixed iconographic repertoire — the cross, the scourging, Veronica's veil, the Last Supper, a pierced/cracked heart — and range much more freely in their nature imagery (sea, fire, birds), which has no fixed iconography at all. Every citable icon in the poems belongs to the Passion; outside the Passion, the "images" are open natural symbols. The poems do not pull from the Annunciation, Nativity, or Pietà (except Christmas in The Teapot), a real narrowness that distinguishes them from the prose's wider Marian repertoire. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

97. The Guard — Veronica's veil as the image about images — QUOTE: "In the pew by the stained glass of Veronica wiping the face of Jesus, / I stare, enjoying its play of light—red, gold, and green illuminations." / "Does he have doubts like me?" SOURCE: the Sixth Station (Veronica wipes the face of Jesus); the Veil of Veronica (vera icon, "true image") GLOSS: The one poem that gazes directly at an icon is, fittingly, about the icon that is itself an image of an image: Veronica's cloth receives the imprint of the true Face. The speaker "stares" at stained glass and projects his doubt onto the anonymous guard, staging faith's persistence as a matter of looking at an image while unsure it will answer. The poem thus uses its single fixed icon to reflect on

what an image is for — revelation that arrives through a surface, or flees it ("to escape the searing Sun"). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

98. You Hurt My Eyes — a photograph substituted for the painted icon — QUOTE: ""The Scourged Back" / of an American slave. / "Gordon" or "Peter." / Historians are uncertain / of his name." SOURCE: the "scourged back" photograph of Gordon/Peter (Batavia, 1863, a campaigning abolitionist image) GLOSS: Where "The Guard" and "Last Supper" invoke painted and stained-glass Passion images, "You Hurt My Eyes" substitutes a real photograph for the icon: the enslaved man's keloid-scarred back, using the word "scourged" that belongs to Christ's Passion. The move argues that the American atrocity is itself a Stations scene, and that the photograph — not the altarpiece — is this family's icon of redemptive suffering. It is the sharpest instance of the poems turning a found image into a religious one. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

99. Last Supper — the single most theologically loaded image — QUOTE: "the cheap print of The Last Supper / lay on the floor / its frame splintered" SOURCE: Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper; the Eucharist ("This is my body, which is broken for you") GLOSS: The most theologically charged image in the poems is this one: a cheap department-store print of the Last Supper, its frame shattered, its glass on the floor, at the exact moment a father dies. The image argues two fused claims — that a son's final shared meal with a father ("We took him out to dinner" "just before Easter") is the family's own Last Supper, and that breakage, in the economy of the faith, is not loss but the very form of the sacrament ("my body… broken"). No other image in the poems carries so much doctrine so economically, and none does it through an image that is itself breaking. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

100. Catherine, Water, Mostly I Sit — the sea does not carry the prose's theology — QUOTE: "you swam again— / over 29,000 miles away." / "Toward water / he'll never reach." / "Or maybe it's a bluff of nothingness" SOURCE: image (tested against the prose's "cure in seawater") GLOSS: Tested as theology, the sea comes up short: in the prose the sea is a cure, a Marian remedy dispensed by a celebrating grandmother; in the poems it is memory (Catherine), futility (Water), and doubt (Mostly I Sit). The one time it gestures at the afterlife, it does so as a guess ("some say… / Or maybe"). The poems inherit the prose's sea and deliberately strip its sacramental content, leaving an element that consoles without promising. This is a

genuine negative finding: the image the prose loaded with theology is, in the poems, ambient. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

101. Dark City, and the prose's "Hope" — the Watts image does not cross over — QUOTE: "Mostly, you carried hope." SOURCE: image (negative); George Frederic Watts, "Hope" (1886), recorded in the book's prose concordance GLOSS: The prose (in "Blindfolded" and elsewhere) works with Watts's allegorical "Hope" — the blindfolded woman on the globe plucking a single string — but that iconic figure never enters the poems. When the poems say "hope," it is the bare abstract noun ("Mostly, you carried hope" in Dark City; "I hope you find this poem" in Simply Silly), never the blindfolded woman, the globe, or the single lyre-string. The book documents the prose's Watts; image-hunting shows the poems decline the inheritance altogether. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

102. The Nest, and the prose's mourning dove — the dove never appears — QUOTE: "startling a mourning dove that sped from its cleft into the bright sky" (prose "Assumptions") / "You can't see the blue eggs, / but you watch the male bring his partner / dry grass and twigs." (poem "The Nest") SOURCE: image (negative); the prose's mourning dove GLOSS: The prose supplies a mourning dove — the single bird in the wider corpus that would signal the Holy Spirit — and the poems never once use it. In its place the poems offer robins, sparrows, and a wood thrush, creatures of ordinary observation. The transformation is a demotion: the pneumatological bird is replaced by birds that mean release without any third person of the Trinity. Record it as a negative: of the prose's four key images, the dove is the one the poems refuse. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

103. Catherine, and the prose's seawater cure — the cure becomes memory — QUOTE: "there is a cure in seawater" (prose "Assumptions") / "Cold waves struck your skin, / but the sweet memory of the sea / was all you needed." (poem "Catherine") SOURCE: the prose "Assumptions" (seawater cure) GLOSS: The prose's sea is a cure — "according to Irish Catholic tradition, there is a cure in seawater" — dispensed on the feast of the Assumption. Catherine's grandmother, in contrast, wades the same-world sea (Clew Bay) to gather "sea lettuce" for stew; what the sea gives is food and a "sweet memory," not healing. The poem inherits the grandmother-and-sea pairing from the prose and quietly cancels its theology: the bathing grandmother swims not toward a cure but "miles and miles away" into

recollection. The transformation converts sacrament into elegy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

104. The Teapot, Fragility, and the prose's grandmother-as-celebrant — the celebrant becomes a domestic presider — QUOTE: "My grandmother poured coffee and passed cups on saucers." / "My grandmother tapped her glass and smiled. "Another whiskey, dear."" SOURCE: the prose "Assumptions" (grandmother "arrayed in a white and gold sundress" leading the beach rite) GLOSS: In the prose the grandmother is a celebrant in gesture — vestmented in white and gold, presiding over the Assumption-day immersion. The poems inherit the figure but not the office: The Teapot's grandmother presides over a Christmas table (pouring coffee, calling for whiskey), and Fragility's grandmother kneels alone in her rosary. The priestly celebrant has been reduced to a domestic hostess and a private devotee — the hierarchy gone, the presiding left. The transformation keeps the grandmother central while moving the charged rite from surf to supper. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

105. Dark City, and the prose's crown of the head — the crown is dropped, the touch remains — QUOTE: "you rubbed my head" / "I press my palm / against the homestead wall" / "crown of the head" (prose "Assumptions," "resisted the urge to touch the crown of her head") SOURCE: image (parallel to the prose's crown-of-the-head blessing) GLOSS: The prose twice stresses the crown of the head — the boy resists touching "the crown of her head," and God "cradles His child's head" — the crown being the site of blessing and anointing. The poems inherit only the plain touch: a grandfather "rubbed my head," and years later the speaker "press[es] my palm against the homestead wall" as the grandfather "touched my head." The liturgical specificity of the crown is gone; what survives is the human gesture of the hand on the head, doubled and reversed across the generations. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

106. To Be, Simply Silly, Longing — Joyce, Yeats, Dante, Hopkins, and Emerson are absent; the poems keep a classroom canon — QUOTE: "the Wife of Bath's scarlet stockings / poor Yorick's skull / Dickinson's sherry in the glass / Gatsby's dock / Hulga's wooden leg" SOURCE: literary allusion (negative finding) GLOSS: The poems' named literary allusions run through an Anglo-American schoolroom shelf — Chaucer, Shakespeare (Yorick, the Macbeth "sound and fury"), Keats and Coleridge ("songs of spring"), Dickinson (the dash, the sherry), Fitzgerald, and O'Connor

("Hulga's wooden leg") — plus Thoreau and Elizabeth Taylor. Not one poem names Joyce, Yeats, Dante, Hopkins, or Emerson, the Irish-Catholic and metaphysical-religious canon so central to the prose (whose Molly owes its Beatrice to Dante). The poems' image-library is the American classroom, not the sacramental Celtic south; even the one "Catholic" fiction touchstone, O'Connor's Hulga, is carried in as a maimed prosthetic, not a piety. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

107. To Be — a gallery of detached, maimed, discarded things the speaker asks to become — QUOTE: "a flattened sneaker on some highway / a crushed beer can in a restaurant dumpster / a lost sock under a sagging couch / … a broken twig on a lawn / a puddle by a drain / or that dried leaf you crumble in your hand." SOURCE: image GLOSS: Read purely as images, the poem's sixteen wished-for identities are all remnants or fragments — a severed wooden leg, a skull, a crushed can, a lost sock, a crumbled leaf. The speaker asks to be not a subject but a severed part and a discarded object, a wish to be left behind safely. The image work is the point: the poem argues by its catalogue of broken-off things that the highest ambition is to become a small, handled, releaseable remnant. This is the kenosis the book notes, read here at the level of the image. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

108. Longing, Carol — the self figured as punctuation and print — QUOTE: "distinct like a Dickinson dash." / "I feel small—a tiny font, / the blank space beyond a colon" / "A black stroke, apostrophe-shaped, stood out." / "No—my heart. / A steady pulse in the light." SOURCE: image; Emily Dickinson (the dash); typographic self-portraiture GLOSS: Two poems figure the self (and the beloved) as marks on a page: in "Longing" the speaker is "a tiny font," "the blank space beyond a colon," "an abandoned thought," yearning to be "distinct like a Dickinson dash"; in "Carol" the beloved is "a black stroke, apostrophe-shaped," which the speaker longs to rewrite as an exclamation and finally as "my heart… pulsing in the light." Punctuation is here an image-system: the dash and the colon mark absence and elision, the heart the wish to undo loss. The Dickinson allusion is tied to a specific image — the dash as the minimal, distinctive self — and is the collection's clearest case of a named poet's mark becoming the poem's own self-image. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

109. The Teapot — a Christmas iconostasis of hymn and song around the grandmother — QUOTE: "Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright." / "Behind us, Barbra Streisand's Christmas album played" / "We watched that Wonderful Life

movie" SOURCE: the hymn "Silent Night" ("Stille Nacht"); popular culture (Streisand, Capra's It's a Wonderful Life) GLOSS: The poem stacks a sacred hymn and secular Christmas media — "Silent Night," a Streisand Christmas album, It's a Wonderful Life — into a single remembered room, with the grandmother at its center pouring coffee and calling for whiskey. The layering is a small domestic iconostasis: the hymn supplies the sacred text, the film and album the ambient popular piety, and the grandmother is the celebrant who turns the whole into a rite. The collection's only Nativity-adjacent image arrives not as a creed but as a hearth-and-stereo tableau. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

110. Piano, the father axing the piano — QUOTE: "On that gray day, you chopped the Steinway with an axe." SOURCE: apostrophe (address to the dead) GLOSS: The poem is already in the second person by its first line, speaking to a father whom the poem's own past tense marks as gone. Every later "you" — "you raised your arm," "Men like you couldn't voice / their secrets or despair" — is spoken across the father's silence, so the reader overhears a son talking to a man who cannot answer. The closing conditional ("If I had stepped outside, / I might have seen your tears") makes the reader a second watcher, standing with the speaker who stayed inside and only imagined the grief. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

111. The Crosswalk, the father misremembering the shed — QUOTE: "But you were not that type of father." SOURCE: apostrophe; direct verdict addressed to the dead GLOSS: After the lament over the piggyback rides and swings the father never gave, this flat clause turns the poem from grievance into exoneration spoken straight at the dead man. The reader is handed the role the coffin-side photograph later confirms ("proof that we had closeness"): a judge who weighs the father's shortfall against the one knotted-tie memory, then forgives. Because the address stays second person throughout, the reader overhears rather than is spoken to — brought into the verdict without being its target. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

112. Carol, the beloved's painting as apostrophe — QUOTE: "I don't like the contractions that apostrophes create, / though I just used one. / Ellipses bother me too." SOURCE: apostrophe (both the rhetorical device and the punctuation mark); self-reflexive figure GLOSS: "Carol" is the collection's one poem about what its own signature device does. The beloved paints herself as "a black stroke, apostrophe-shaped… lost in a crowd," and the speaker confesses that the apostrophe's second

function — eliding, cutting out — is exactly what he fears ("And the fear / of losing you"). He then rewrites the mark, first "change the apostrophe / to an exclamation," then "No—my heart," turning the sign of deletion into a sign of presence. The reader watches the book's central move — apostrophe as the attempt to keep the absent present — named and performed in a single poem. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

113. To Be, the closing line hands the poem to the reader — QUOTE: "or that dried leaf you crumble in your hand." SOURCE: direct address to the reader (the emergent "you"); Whitman's catalogue form GLOSS: Fourteen wishes to become objects — "Dickinson's sherry in the glass," "Hulga's wooden leg," "a crushed beer can in a restaurant dumpster" — unfold in a pure first person until the last line, when a "you" suddenly appears and does the handling. That "you" is the reader, whose hand the wished-for leaf is placed into, and the leaf is also the poem itself, "crumbled" as it is read. It is the collection's most complete enactment of reading: the poem ends as a small object held, then released, by whoever is holding the page. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

114. The Nest, second person puts the reader in the body cast — QUOTE: "I imagine you looking at the robins' nest / … Sometimes you stare at your body cast, / a remnant of your spinal surgery." SOURCE: second-person address (the reader as the "you") GLOSS: The poem speaks to "you" — the person in the cast — so steadily and patiently that the reader is pulled into the convalescent's posture: also still, also watching the tree, the birds, the clouds, the sky through a window with nothing else to do. The reader's patience is made to match the invalid's ("The days pass slowly"). By the closing "Your joy is simply / that it does," the reassurance is delivered to the reader almost as much as to the person it addresses. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

115. Simply Silly, a poem addressed to the student who may read it — QUOTE: "I hope you find this poem / by a gray-haired teacher / you inspired." SOURCE: direct address; apostrophe to a former student who may one day read it GLOSS: The poem addresses a bullied student in the second person ("You sit in the corner"), then pivots to hope that this "you" will someday "find this poem" — making the addressee also the very reader who holds the page. The Keats allusion arrives inside that address ("sad like the speaker in Keats' Ode, / longing for 'songs of spring'") as the teacher imagines the student's inward life. The closing "you mattered to him" reaches both

the remembered student and whoever is reading, making this one of only two poems that openly hand themselves to a reader. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

116. Fragility, the "you" is anyone who has sat in the meeting — QUOTE: "You know the meeting / when a question asked / hurts someone's feelings." SOURCE: rhetorical "you" (indefinite second person, addressed to the reader's culture) GLOSS: Unlike the family elegies' "you" — a specific dead or living relative — this poem's opening "you" is anyone who has sat in the meeting it describes, which is to say its reader. The grandmother ("she") arrives in the third person against that "you," so the reader is cast as the contemporary sensibility being measured against her rosary and stone-bruised bare feet. The address quietly recruits the reader onto one side of the poem's generational argument before the grandmother is even introduced. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

117. Longing, a negative — the poem about wanting an addressee has none — QUOTE: "My erudition impresses them— / then they walk away." SOURCE: negative finding (no apostrophe, no second person) GLOSS: The one poem explicitly about wanting someone to address ("to feel significant to someone") contains no "you" at all — only an unbroken "I" and "them." Colleagues are impressed and "walk away," students "assume," and no one is ever spoken to. The absence of address is the point: the loneliness is enacted grammatically as a speaker talking to an empty room, which is precisely the condition the other poems' apostrophes to family exist to cure. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

118. Water, a negative — the collection's only fully addressless poem — QUOTE: "The old man— / flaccid face, / blue-water eyes" SOURCE: negative finding (no "I", no "you", no apostrophe) GLOSS: Alone in the corpus, "Water" has neither a first-person speaker nor a second-person addressee; the old man is a pure third-person subject from "flaccid face" to "Toward water / he'll never reach." The reader is held at the farthest possible distance, a silent watcher of an unvoiced body that reaches toward something it cannot have. It is the collection's limit-case: where every elegy speaks to someone, this poem speaks to no one, and its subject's unreachable water has a formal twin in the poem's unaddressed reach. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

119. Dark City, the grandfather addressed across death and sea — QUOTE: "My only memory of you— / in the dark hallway of your Boston house" SOURCE:

apostrophe to the dead GLOSS: The poem is framed as direct address to a grandfather the speaker barely remembers ("I was two, you were sixty"), and it keeps asking the dead man questions that no one can answer — what he was thinking as he left Ireland, what conflicts he carried. The "you" travels with the speaker to Athlone and the homestead wall, and the closing line keeps talking after death. The reader is asked to witness a one-sided conversation, the grandfather standing in for all the dead the book addresses. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

120. Catherine, the reader left at the bathroom door — QUOTE: "As warm water eased over your skin, / I listened—" SOURCE: eavesdropping (positioning the reader where the speaker stands) GLOSS: The poem's "you" is the grandmother, but its pivotal scene is overheard: the speaker, sent out of the room, stood and "listened" at the door while the mother scolded. The reader is placed exactly there — outside the door, hearing the scolding the grandmother is not directly addressed with, and hearing only her "sighs" in reply. The grandmother's inner swim ("you swam again— / over 29,000 miles away") is something neither speaker nor reader can enter, and the poem makes the reader feel that by keeping both of them at the door. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

121. Brother Mike, the brother's secret the poem refuses to yield — QUOTE: "I wished you'd talked more." SOURCE: withheld confession; the unanswerable question GLOSS: The poem builds on what the brother would not say — the speaker wonders what he prayed for, what secrets he knew — and then states the wish in the open, in four plain words. The answer never comes; the brother's only reply, years later, is the wordless sign of the cross "in the dashboard light." The reader is made to share the speaker's frustrated wonder: the poem withholds the brother's interior exactly as the brother withheld it, so the reader, like the speaker, must read the gesture instead of the words. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

122. Last Supper, the reader shares what the wife will not say aloud — QUOTE: "She knew he was thinking / of that last supper— / what he said, / what he wished he had." SOURCE: eavesdropping; withheld speech GLOSS: The poem is told entirely in the third person, but its central knowledge is interior — "She knew he was thinking" — a knowing the reader is allowed to share while the grieving son and his wife never speak it. The wife's decision to offer only silence ("But words / could not relieve his pain" … she "wouldn't say a thing") models the poem's own discipline: the reader is

shown the withheld comfort but not its delivery. What the son "wished he had" said is itself never stated, so the reader holds the same unsaid sentence the poem refuses. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

123. Leaves, the closing line keeps the reader at the grave — QUOTE: "I should leave, I think, but not yet." SOURCE: apostrophe to the dead; the reader positioned at the graveside GLOSS: The poem is addressed to the dead father, whose catchphrase "We're done" the speaker hears from beyond the grave. The closing line is the poem's real gift to the reader: after the ritual ("I recite a prayer, cross myself, and rise"), the speaker refuses to go — "I should leave, I think, but not yet" — and the reader is left standing with him. The poem ends by keeping its company in place past the formal goodbye, which is the reader's position across the whole collection: invited to stay after the rites are finished. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

124. Session's End / For the Animals, the conscripting "we" — QUOTE: "We change channels." SOURCE: first-person plural conscription (the reader folded into the "we") GLOSS: These two public poems are the only ones built on an inclusive "we" rather than "I" or "you," folding the reader into "We change channels" and into the "we say behind our masks" that answers "Free at last, free at last." In both, the reader is not a witness or an eavesdropper but a co-actor in the collective fatigue and masked watching the poems describe. It is the book's only moment of the reader being told what "we" are doing, instead of overhearing what the speaker is. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

125. You Hurt My Eyes, the reader called on to judge — QUOTE: "But we really should care." SOURCE: staged debate; the reader positioned to adjudicate GLOSS: The poem stages a classroom argument in quoted voices — Mary's "makes me feel bad," David's "It's just too sad," and the single dissent "But we really should care." The speaker's own long meditation on the escaped slave then unfolds without commentary, leaving the reader to adjudicate between the students who would withhold the image and the history the photograph shows. The title, placed in a student's mouth ("You hurt my eyes. Could you please leave?"), makes the reader judge of a question the poem itself declines to settle. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

126. Dedication, the book addressed straight to the reader — QUOTE: "This book is my way of saying: Everything is copacetic. / As copacetic as it gets." SOURCE: direct

address to the reader (paratext), the reader's position across the corpus GLOSS: Before any poem, the front matter addresses the reader directly and states the whole book's message in the father's word — "copacetic" — repurposed as the author's own assurance to whoever opens the book. This is a degree of direct address the prose is not reported to sustain: where the essays name and hedge the sacred and the stories show without telling, the poems and their frame speak outright — to the dead ("you chopped the Steinway"), to the reader ("you crumble in your hand"), and here to the reader by name of purpose. The poems thus both withhold more (the unsaid causes and secrets) and address more directly than the prose, holding both postures at once. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

127. Catherine, the mother's instruction at the bathroom door — QUOTE: ""Time for your bath. Jimmy, help your grandmother."" SOURCE: naming (the poet's own name, in the diminutive, spoken by another character) GLOSS: This is the only place in the entire body of poems where the speaker is named, and he does not name himself — his mother does, in an imperative that simultaneously names him and assigns him a task. The name is the author's own, in the child-form ("Jimmy," not James), which is also the name given to the narrator of "Assumptions." The effect is that the "I" of the poems acquires a name only when he is being told to lift an old woman's body, so the name arrives attached to an act of service rather than to a self. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

128. Catherine, title against text — QUOTE: "When Mom and I arrived," SOURCE: naming (title as the sole site of a name); St. Catherine of Alexandria/Siena GLOSS: The poem is titled with the grandmother's name and then never uses it: inside the poem's fifty-three lines (in the Selected text) she is only "you," and the mother is only "Mom." The name therefore functions the way a headstone or a Mass card does — inscribed above the life, absent from the speech of it. The title is doing sacramental work the text deliberately declines to repeat, which is a different procedure from the elegies that address an unnamed "you" with no name anywhere at all ("Piano," "The Crosswalk," "Leaves"). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

129. Catherine, the last words the grandmother is given — QUOTE: ""That was Clew Bay in County Mayo," you called out." SOURCE: Irish place-name (Clew Bay, County Mayo); naming GLOSS: The old woman's final utterance in the poem is not a sentiment or a blessing but a place-name, called through a closing bathroom door as

her daughter takes her away to be washed. She names the water she once swam in, and the poem's final image returns her to it — "you swam again— / over 29,000 miles away." Where the poems withhold personal names, Irish place-names are supplied with cartographic precision, so the naming that survives in the family is geographic rather than personal. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

130. Dark City, the ship's name glossed — QUOTE: "where you boarded the ship Adriatic, a word that means "dark city."" SOURCE: RMS *Adriatic* (White Star Line); the Latin *Adria* (the standard etymologies give "of water," from *adur*, or the Etruscan town of Adria — not "dark city") GLOSS: This is the most loaded act of naming in the poems: the grandfather is never named, but the vessel that carried him is named, etymologized, and then promoted to the poem's title. The gloss is almost certainly wrong as philology — no standard account of *Adria* yields "dark city" — which makes it an act of interpretation rather than information: the poet supplies the emigrant with a name for his own passage, and then uses that name to name the poem, and in *Crossings* the whole book takes its title from the same crossing. Naming here is what the living do on behalf of a man who could not name what he was doing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG (the act); SPECULATIVE (the etymology)

131. The Crosswalk, the father misnames his son — QUOTE: "'Remember when Danny and I built the shed?'" SOURCE: naming (misnomer); Dan/Danny, the only personal name in the poem GLOSS: The single proper name in "The Crosswalk" is the wrong one — the father, at a family party, credits the shed to the brother who was not there, and the speaker's grievance is not neglect but misattribution. The name is a small theft of a life, and the poem's answer is not to correct the record but to produce an unnamed photograph "on the table by your coffin." A poet who elsewhere refuses to name the father stages the father's whole failure as a failure to say the right name. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

132. The Teapot, the roll call and the two who are not in it — QUOTE: "Mom repeated, "Doesn't anyone want more?" Dad, listening, eyes agleam." SOURCE: naming (kinship title in place of a name) GLOSS: In the Christmas stanza every sibling is named in a single clause each — Mike, Beth, Mark, Dan — and then the parents arrive bearing titles, not names, at the two ends of the table. This is the corpus's actual naming rule, and it is generational rather than mortal: children get names, parents and grandparents get offices. The litany form (one name, one verb,

one detail, repeated) is the structure of a remembrance list read at Mass, with the celebrants left unnamed at the head and foot. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

133. The Teapot, a dead brother named in a poem not about him — QUOTE: "We watched that Wonderful Life movie, Mark's favorite film and song." SOURCE: naming (the named dead); Mark the Evangelist GLOSS: This is the clean counter-example to the rule that the dead are addressed only as "you": Mark is dead — "Carol" mourns "my father, my brother," and the *Crossings* dedication places him among those who "have passed into the other room" — yet he is named in the title of his own elegy and again, casually, in somebody else's poem, as the owner of a favourite film. The exception shows that what governs naming is not death but generation and direction of address: a brother can be named because he was once an equal; a father cannot, because he was an authority. Naming a dead brother in a passing subordinate clause is also the tenderest thing in "The Teapot," because it is the only sentence in which he is not being mourned. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

134. Crossings dedication, the brother named and thanked in one word — QUOTE: "Mark—Together with friends under the bridge, the warmth of your arm around my shoulder was as comforting as your protective spirit—I feel." SOURCE: naming (dedication as roll of the dead and living); litany with responses GLOSS: The dedication names four people — Dad, Mark, Helen, Mom — and closes each entry with a single verb in the first person ("I try," "I feel," "I strive," "I'm grateful"), so the book opens as a call-and-response in which each name is answered by a promise. Two of the four are dead and two are living, and the form makes no distinction between them: the same grammar addresses both. The father, unnameable inside every poem, is here given the only name he ever gets, "Dad" — which is still a title. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

135. You Hurt My Eyes, a name history could not settle — QUOTE: ""Gordon" or "Peter." Historians are uncertain of his name. Was he married? Children? What was his age?" SOURCE: "The Scourged Back" (1863 carte de visite of the escaped slave known as Gordon or Peter); Peter, the apostle renamed by Christ (Matthew 16:18) GLOSS: Both candidate names are set inside quotation marks, which turns them into artifacts rather than persons — the poem is explicit that the archive has preserved a back and lost a name. Against the rest of the corpus, where the dead are unnamed by the poet's own reticence, this man is unnamed by history's violence, and the poem

treats that as the deeper injury: "History confines him / to a picture on a page." That one of the two possible names is Peter, the name Christ conferred on a man who had another, sharpens it: the poem's scourged figure is denied the renaming that the Gospel makes the sign of being chosen. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

136. You Hurt My Eyes, the two students who are named — QUOTE: "Mary complained," / "David, by the door, added," SOURCE: Marian and Davidic names (the Virgin at the scourging; David the psalmist-king) GLOSS: The only two named contemporaries anywhere in the poems are the two students who ask not to read about a whipped slave, and they carry the two most devotional names in the Catholic register. Mary, whose namesake stood and watched a scourging she could not stop, is the one who says "You hurt my eyes. / Could you please leave?" Whether the poet intended the irony is unclear, but the poem's structure enforces it: the biblically named look away, and the man whose name is lost is the one who endured. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

137. The Guard, the saint whose name is a name for an image — QUOTE: "bends and speaks to Veronica, a woman veiled in blue and white." SOURCE: St. Veronica; ecclesiastical Latin *vera icon*, "true image" (Behind the Name) GLOSS: Veronica is the one figure in the poems whose name is itself a product of naming — she is absent from the Gospels, and her name is a back-formation from the relic, the "true image" she is said to have received. The poem names her and names Jesus, and then titles itself after the one man in the window who has no name at all, the guard, with whom the speaker identifies: "Does he have doubts like me?" So the poem's hierarchy of naming is exactly inverted by its title: the named saints are the subject, the nameless bystander is the self. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

138. The Guard, the unnamed as the site of the speaker's doubt — QUOTE: "The guard behind them watches." SOURCE: naming (title by function rather than by name) GLOSS: Four of the poems take their titles from a person — "Catherine," "Carol," "Brother Mark," "Brother Mike" — and this one takes its title from an office, like "The Guard," "the nurse," "the girl at the desk," "the twenty-something blonde." The functional titles are consistently given to figures the speaker cannot claim kinship with, and consistently these are the figures he suspects of sharing his interior state. Namelessness is the poems' marker of the stranger who might be oneself. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

139. Brother Mark and Brother Mike, the religious-order locution — QUOTE: "Brother Mike" / "Brother Mark" SOURCE: naming (the form of address for a male religious: Brother + Christian name) GLOSS: Two poems are titled in the exact register of a Christian Brother's name, the honorific the poet's own Boston parochial schooling would have supplied, and both poems then place the brother in a liturgical posture — Mike kneeling "after Communion" and crossing himself "in the dashboard light," Mark presiding over "the circle / of our fire and our shared song" in what the poem calls "our sacred space." The titles do the theological work before a line is read: they ordain the siblings. Nothing in either poem tells the reader that "Brother" is a kinship term rather than a vow, and the ambiguity is the point. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

140. Moving Forward, the dog named only at the moment she is killed — QUOTE: "Eventually, I euthanized her, Ethel that is." SOURCE: naming (postponed apposition); Ethel, from Old English *æthel*, "noble" GLOSS: The dog is "my dog," "she," and "her" for fifteen lines, and receives her name only in the clause that records her death, tacked on as a stumbling afterthought — "Ethel / that is" — as if the speaker realised mid-sentence that a creature about to be erased should at least be named. It is the only naming in the poems performed at the instant of a death, and it is performed for an animal, while the human dead go unnamed. The awkwardness of the apposition is the poem's honesty: the name is the last thing he can still give her. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

141. Carol, the mentor placed by a Boston beach — QUOTE: "living in an apartment by Wollaston Beach." SOURCE: Wollaston Beach, Quincy, Massachusetts (Irish-Catholic Boston shoreline); "carol," a song, especially a Christmas hymn GLOSS: The one non-family person the poems name is the mentor, and she is fixed by a place-name that locates her precisely inside Irish-Catholic Boston, the same social geography as the grandfather's "Boston house" and "South Station." Her name is also, unavoidably, a common noun for a hymn, and the poem turns her from a punctuation mark into a pulse — "No—my heart. / A steady pulse in the light" — which is what a carol does. The pun is unverifiable as intention and should be held lightly, but the placement of the name is not: naming her at all marks her as the one non-relative admitted to the family's register. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE (place-name); SPECULATIVE (the pun)

142. Shoes, the grandmother named only outside the poem — QUOTE: "Too old to put her shoes on, she watched me" / "place her feet into her favorite pair of Doctor Scholl's." SOURCE: St. Helena, finder of the True Cross; naming in paratext GLOSS: "Shoes" gives its old woman no name at all — she is "she," "her mother," "my great-grandmother," identified instead by a brand of orthopaedic sandal — while the *Crossings* dedication names her Helen and identifies her by the same crooked toes, so the name exists in the front matter and nowhere in the poem. The name is thus held in the paratext, alongside her rosary and Daily Missal, as a relic on the poet's desk rather than a word in the verse. The same woman is the prose's "Helen, my grandmother," so the poem is the one place in the whole body of work where she loses her name, and that loss is what lets her stand for the great-grandmother behind her. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

143. Piano, the names removed and the brand name installed — QUOTE: "On that gray day you chopped the Grand piano with an ax." (Academy of the Heart and Mind) / "Lyrics from her favorite song echoed in her cool gray basement." / "I watched you instead, knowing you had to sing alone, and in your own way." SOURCE: naming (revision as onomastic deletion); Steinway & Sons GLOSS: The earliest printed "Piano" is a long poem containing two named people, the neighbour Margaret and her "deceased Jim," and an unnamed instrument — a "Grand piano." Every later version deletes both human names and names the instrument instead: "you chopped the Steinway with an axe." The revision moves the proper noun from persons to a thing, and in doing so imports the prose's piano, which stood in Peggy's "knotty pine basement" in "Assumptions"; the elegy gets a brand and loses two mourners. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

144. Piano (Academy version), a widow summoning her dead by a song — QUOTE: "When your old wedding ring was new" / "and every dream that we dreamed came true." SOURCE: "When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New" (1935 popular song; standard lyric "each dream that I dreamed came true" — KaraFun) GLOSS: The one instance in the poems of a dead person named by another character is a widow at a piano, imagining her husband descending the stairs to take the last chorus, and the naming is done not by speech but by a song. The poem alters the standard lyric from "each dream that I dreamed" to "every dream that we dreamed," pluralising the singular so that the absent husband is grammatically restored to the

sentence. This is naming as invocation rather than record — and it is the exact device the finished *Crossings* poems abandon when they cut Margaret and Jim out. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

145. The Teapot, the grandmother demoted to a possessive — QUOTE: “"Do you have Nana's yellow teapot and creamer?" my mother said.” SOURCE: naming (kinship term used as a proper name); the “Nanna” of *Give Them Unquiet Dreams* GLOSS: “Nana” here is not a description but a name — capitalised, used without an article, and functioning exactly as the prose novel's central character-name “Nanna” does. In the poem she survives only as a possessive attached to objects and to a prayer: a teapot, a creamer, “these thy gifts” of the Catholic grace before meals. The spelling is unstable across drafts (Nana in the earlier text, Nanna in the finished “Teapot”), which is the mark of a name the poet holds as sound rather than as orthography — a spoken name that has never needed to be written. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

146. The Introduction, a naming of the family that names no one — QUOTE: “I write about an Irish American family across generations—men who couldn't cry, women who worked until their feet hurt, children who waited for words that never came.” SOURCE: naming (categorical description in place of a census); Irish-Catholic family idiom GLOSS: Given one paragraph to introduce the people the book is about, the poet produces three unnamed classes instead of a single name, and the poems largely honour that: no Italian name appears anywhere in the poems, though the prose teems with Bonamici, Cennamo, Lorenzo and Giacomo. The family names are saints' names — Mark, Michael, Catherine, Helen, Mary — but only as ordinary Irish-Catholic baptismal usage; not one poem activates the hagiography behind them, and the two names that do carry deliberate weight belong to outsiders (Veronica in glass, “Peter” in an archive caption). This is a real limit, and worth recording as a negative finding: the poems do not use naming to signal ethnicity, faith, or lineage; they use place-names for that instead. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

147. Fragility, the two words left alone on their lines — QUOTE: “Never once said, /”My feelings are hurt,” / wouldn't understand / the word / fragility. / Her schooling stopped / in sixth grade.” … “Still, she whispered / blessings / into the early light.” SOURCE: The one-word line. The Family First text has neither isolation: “wouldn't have understood “fragility”—” and “but still she whispered blessings to the

wind." both run inside longer lines. GLOSS: The Selected Poems text has 808 lines, and 20 of them are single words. "Blessings" is the only sacred word among the 20. "Fragility" has four one-word lines: "disregarded" and "ignored." in the modern meeting, and the title word "fragility." and "blessings" in the grandmother's life. Revision set those last two against each other: the modern word the grandmother "wouldn't understand," and the word she actually spoke. The site reading copy also has 20 one-word lines, and only one other sacred word is isolated there: "Communion—" in "Brother Mike," where the Selected Poems text buries it in a definition ("Communion is the road we share,"). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

148. Leaves, the prayer buried mid-line — QUOTE: ""We're done." I hear your whisper in the chilly air. / I recite a prayer, cross myself, and rise. / I see my breath and feel yours brush my face. / I should leave, I think, but not yet." SOURCE: A long-line quatrain; the devotional act placed second of four lines. Compare the site reading copy: "I recite a prayer, / cross myself. / You're no longer here. / I stand and leave." GLOSS: In the Selected Poems text, "Leaves" has the longest lines in the book (mean 8.6 words, against 5.0 for all 808 lines). The prayer and the sign of the cross share one eight-word line with "and rise," set between hearing and breathing. So the gesture is one act in a series of three verbs, not a ritual beat set apart. Only the site copy breaks it into short, end-stopped lines. The poem therefore exists in one state that hides the rite inside the line and another that sets it apart. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

149. Leaves, the two-and-two quatrains and the title turned verb — QUOTE: "I saw dirt; we had finished."Not yet," you said. / The gray sky grew darker, and the wind chilled. / When your flashlight showed not a speck of leaf, / you said, "We're done."" … "I should leave, I think, but not yet." SOURCE: Four quatrains split two and two, past and present. The echo works like epistrophe across stanzas. GLOSS: Stanzas one and two are the raking; stanzas three and four are the grave. Each present detail answers a past one: "Smell of earth" becomes "I smell the earth," "We could see our breath" becomes "I see my breath," and the father's "We're done" opens the last quatrain. The father's "Not yet," said about the leaves, becomes the son's last two words about leaving the grave, so the refusal to close is inherited speech. The title also turns, from the noun in the first line ("we raked leaves") to the verb in the last

("I should leave"). The site copy ends on that verb: "I stand and leave." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

150. Honeymoon, Leaves, The Guard, the only poems built wholly of quatrains — QUOTE: "I think of how far these feet have walked, / the tenderness at the bottom of her sole. / Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt. / Her chest rises and falls. Soon she sleeps." SOURCE: Isometric quatrain stanzas. Compare the six cross-rhymed quatrains of Fr. John Duffy's "Feast of the Assumption, 1924," the only regular stanza-poem in the sources. GLOSS: In the Selected Poems text, only three poems use quatrains throughout: "Honeymoon" (seven), "Leaves" (four) and "The Guard" (three). They are three of the four poems in which the speaker himself kneels, prays or sits in a pew; the fourth, "Brother Mike," only remembers a childhood kneeling. Two got that shape in revision. Family First's "Honeymoon" runs 5/9/5/6 lines and its "Leaves" is six tercets, while "The Guard" went from four quatrains to three by joining short lines into long ones. The long lines (mean 8.6 words in "Leaves," 8.3 in "The Guard," 7.0 in "Honeymoon") give these poems the outline of a hymn or Duffy stanza, four heavy lines to a block, with no metre or rhyme. That outline appears exactly where the speaker performs a devotion. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

151. The stanza census, and a negative: no Trinitarian tercets, no fixed form — QUOTE: "Now, mostly I sit, read, / go places in my mind, / enjoying memories of the past." SOURCE: Stanza counts. This quotation is one of the six tercets of "Mostly I Sit" in the Family First text. GLOSS: The Selected Poems text has 27 poems, 179 stanzas and 808 lines. By stanza length there are 71 quatrains, 31 five-line stanzas, 24 tercets, 17 six-line stanzas, 13 couplets, 12 seven-line and 6 eight-line stanzas, 2 single lines, and one each of nine, ten and sixteen lines. No Selected poem is in tercets throughout, and its tercets carry narrative, not sacred matter, so a Trinitarian reading has no support. The earlier Family First text was the more regular one: "Piano," "Mostly I Sit" and "Leaves" are six tercets each, "Catherine" eight five-line stanzas, and "Carol" ten couplets and a quatrain. Revision broke up all these shapes. No poem in any text is a sonnet, villanelle or other fixed form, and in the Selected Poems text the only prose piece is the Epilogue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

152. Mostly I Sit, faith and annihilation given the same lineation — QUOTE: "Reminders of our passage / to another realm / where some say / eternal happiness abounds. // Or maybe it's a bluff of nothingness, / a shadowed, fraudulent shore, /

where existence / endures no more." SOURCE: Paired quatrains of identical shape. Each third line opens with "where" and is the stanza's shortest. Compare the parallelism of Hebrew verse. GLOSS: The two last quatrains are drawn to the same pattern, so heaven and nothingness get equal space on the page, and the lineation takes no side. The hedge "where some say" gets a line to itself, which keeps the belief at one remove. The poem's only full end-rhyme, "shore / more," goes to the stanza of nothingness. The site copy joins "to another realm where some say" into one line and breaks the symmetry, so the balance belongs to the Selected Poems text. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

153. The rhymed closes all fall on darkness, nothing or suffering — QUOTE: "into the glare of light— // Toward the cloak / of snow and night." ; "an abandoned thought. // A letter lacking closure, / or a line.— / stranded and incomplete— // Preceding naught." ; "feel her warm hand in mine, / wondering still why suffering / is entwined with life's design." SOURCE: Terminal full rhyme within the final four lines. GLOSS: In the Selected Poems text, five poems close on a full end-rhyme within their last five lines. They are "Brother Mark" (light/night), "Longing" (thought/naught), "Mostly I Sit" (shore/more), "Honeymoon" (mine/design) and "You Hurt My Eyes" (plead/bleed). Each rhymes on night, nothingness, annihilation, the question of suffering, or a bleeding heart. None rhymes on consolation. The grace that ends "The Teapot" ("prayer," "revere") is at best a slant rhyme. Where these poems chime, they chime on the dark. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

154. Water, Brother Mark, Longing, the dash-and-drop ending built in revision — QUOTE: "On the dock— / hands cupped / bending. // Water he cannot reach." (Family First) to "On the dock, / hands cupped, / bending— // Toward water / he'll never reach." (Selected Poems) SOURCE: A stanza broken off on a dash, then white space, then a final fragment with no main verb. GLOSS: Three Selected poems end this way: "Toward water," "Toward the cloak / of snow and night," "Preceding naught." "Mostly I Sit" does the same mid-poem ("toward distant lands— // Reminders of our passage"). Each was made in revision. Family First's "Water" stops the stanza on a period, its "Longing" buries "preceding naught" inside a long line, and the "Brother Mark" ending is new. Because the last stanza has no main verb, the reaching toward water, night or nothing never arrives in the grammar, and the stanza break stands for the gap. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

155. Final lines counted: the religious poems close longer, the shortest closes carry the afterlife unnamed — QUOTE: "or does he simply hope to escape the searing Sun?" ; "and beyond." ; "safely home." ; "Preceding naught." SOURCE: Word counts of final lines in the Selected Poems text. A poem is counted as religious if it contains God, Jesus, Christ, pray/prayer, Communion, kneel/knelt, rosary, blessing(s), sacred, soul, eternal, faith, Rites, Easter, nun, pew, incense, "Our Father," "Last Supper," or a sign of the cross. GLOSS: The twelve religious poems have final lines of mean 5.75 words (median 5.5), and the fifteen others 4.6 words (median 4). Measured against each poem's own mean line length, the ratio is 1.07 for the religious poems and 0.87 for the rest. Seven poems end on a line of three words or fewer, and six of them are secular by this count. The four sharpest contractions, "and beyond.," "safely home.," "Preceding naught." and "this session's end.," are all in poems without sacred vocabulary. The only question close in the book, and its longest final line (ten words), belongs to the most explicitly religious poem, "The Guard." 22 of 27 final words are monosyllables (10 of 12 religious, 12 of 15 secular). Only two poems end on a one-line stanza, "Copacetic" and "Longing," both secular. The eschatology goes into the shortest lines, which carry no sacred word; the named religion takes the long ones. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

156. Copacetic, the stanzas contract to the one-line death — QUOTE: ""Everything copacetic?" I asked. / He turned. Looked at me. / "It was tough," he said. // I guided him to the bed / and slept in the chair beside him. // At dawn, he was gone." SOURCE: Stanzas of diminishing length (4, 7, 4, 4, 3, 3, 2, 1). Compare the watch-and-death sequence of a vigil. GLOSS: After the long hospital stanza, each stanza of the Selected Poems text keeps or loses a line until the last is a single line. The poem runs out of lines as the father runs out of life, and the white space after "gone" does what no sacred word is allowed to do. Family First has three stanzas (7, 11, 8) and ends mid-stanza on "When I wake, I find that he has gone." The one-line death stanza is a construction of revision. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

157. The Teapot, the grace placed in the two short stanzas — QUOTE: "Years later, I found the teapot in an upstairs room, / remembered the roast, green beans, stuffing — / Nanna's Irish prayer—"thy gifts"—received." … "Memories—"these thy gifts" of Nanna's prayer, / Christ's bounty received, these blessings I revere." SOURCE: Stanza alternation 4, 5, 3, 5, 2. Grace before meals: "Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts,

which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord." GLOSS: The long stanzas are narrative, and the only short ones, the tercet and the closing couplet, are the ones that quote the grace. Each of these ends its sentence on "received." The prayer comes in two halves, begun at stanza three and finished at stanza five, with the family meal between them, the way a grace frames a table. In the Selected Poems text the last line is a single eight-word line. The site copy splits it into two short lines ("Christ's bounty received, / blessings I revere."). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

158. Last Supper, fifteen stanzas and the isolated "deeply." — QUOTE: "She wanted to tell him / he'd been a good son, / that his father had loved him / deeply." (Selected Poems) against "She wanted to tell him he'd been a good son, / that his father had loved him deeply." (Family First) SOURCE: Enjambment and the one-word line. The wake poem has the most stanzas of any poem. GLOSS: Family First has "Last Supper" in seven stanzas and 29 lines. The Selected Poems text breaks it into fifteen stanzas and 46 lines, mostly couplets and tercets, so the wake moves one short unit at a time. The line "that his father had loved him" reads as complete; the next line adds the degree, and "deeply." stands alone as the word the wife never says. The same relineation turns "Instead, she watched, giving him silence and time," into "She watched, / offering silence, / offering time.," one offering to a line. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

159. You Hurt My Eyes, the line breaks apart at the wounded body — QUOTE: "Tattered clothes, / scratched / and bug-bitten / face. // Running / through / thickets, / thorns, / and mud." SOURCE: A run of one-word lines. Compare the Passion's thorns, after the poem's own "The Scourged Back." GLOSS: Seven of the Selected Poems text's twenty one-word lines fall in this poem's flight narrative ("scratched," "face.," "Running," "through," "thickets," "thorns," "Hungry,"). The eleventh stanza, five lines holding six words, is the most broken-up stanza in the book. The line comes apart exactly where the scourged man's body is described, and "thorns," gets a line of its own. The students' voices, by contrast, close in rhyme ("would Mary plead— … it makes my heart bleed."), so the broken lineation belongs to the sufferer and the neat chime to those who will not look. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

160. Dark City, the only state that breaks the last line into three — QUOTE: "I see you move from darkness / into brightness, / and beyond." (Selected Poems) against "I

see you move from light into darkness and beyond." (Academy of the Heart and Mind, Ginosko, Family First) and "I see you move from darkness into light." (site reading copy) SOURCE: Lineation of the final tercet. Compare the funeral-liturgy passage "from darkness into light." GLOSS: Only in the state where the direction is reversed toward brightness is the ending split into lines. The break leaves "darkness," the title's word, at the end of the first line, so the ancestor crosses a line break out of the title. It then gives "and beyond." a line to itself, one of only three two-word final lines in the Selected Poems text. The site copy cuts "beyond" and returns to a single line, so the isolated afterlife word exists in one printing only. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

161. Session's End, the title held back until it becomes the last words — QUOTE: "Somewhere—a judge's ruling: / this session's end." (Selected Poems) against "A judge's ruling: session's end. / Someone shuts a door." (Family First) SOURCE: A title that is also the closing line. Compare the judge's sentence. GLOSS: This is the only poem whose final words are its title, and it became so when revision cut "Someone shuts a door." The title then works as the verdict the poem delivers, pronounced once, at the close. Across the Selected Poems text, five titles appear in the first line ("Copacetic," "The Nest," "The Teapot," "Shoes," "Leaves"). Three are held back to the end ("Simply Silly" at line 31 of 32, "You Hurt My Eyes" at line 57 of 60, "Session's End" at 21 of 21). Seven never appear in their poems ("Piano," "Brother Mark," "Catherine," "For the Animals," "Brother Mike," "Carol," "Moving Forward"). Reading the "ruling" as Judgment is available but not signalled. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

162. To Be, the title completed by the first line — QUOTE: "I'd like to be / the Wife of Bath's scarlet stockings / poor Yorick's skull" SOURCE: Hamlet III.i ("To be, or not to be") and the graveyard of V.i. The poem is one stanza and one sentence. GLOSS: The title is the first half of Hamlet's question; the first line turns it into a wish, and the third line brings in the same play's skull. This is the only single-stanza poem in the Selected Poems text: sixteen lines with no punctuation at any line-end until the final period, so the one infinitive covers the whole list without a pause. The "not to be" half is never spoken; it is left to the objects themselves (skull, crushed can, lost sock, broken twig, the dried leaf crumbled in the hand). The title carries the question of mortality that the list never asks. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

163. Duffy's "Feast of the Assumption, 1924," the rhyme on "crucified" and the enjambment on "thought" — QUOTE: "The swollen feet that life had crucified." … "But what you thought / Blessed back to God what lust had cursed away," … "Shining like His who once was crucified!" SOURCE: Six cross-rhymed pentameter quatrains (ABAB), twenty-four lines, with "crucified" as the rhyme word of line 4 and line 24. GLOSS: The poem is framed by one rhyme word. In the first quatrain life has "crucified" Bridie's feet; in the last the same word belongs to Christ ("His who once was crucified"), so the rhyme passes the crucifixion from her to Him. The line "Nothing, poor dear, poor crone … But what you thought" first reads as a dismissive concession ("whatever you thought"). Across the break, "what you thought" becomes the subject that "Blessed back to God," so the enjambment itself performs the turn from failure to sacramental. It is the only fixed-measure, regularly rhymed poem in the sources, and no Mulhern poem rhymes to a scheme. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

Part Eight: The Work Published Online

Inventory and Close Reading: The Online Work

James F. Mulhern's Online Publications: Inventory and Religious Close Reading

Prepared: July 29, 2026 **Author profile:** James F. Mulhern is a Philadelphia-based novelist, poet, and essayist, formerly of Boston and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He is the author of the novels *Give Them Unquiet Dreams* (2019) and *Molly Bonamici* (2016), the novella *A Prayer for Home*, and the story collection *Assumptions and Other Stories*. According to his author site, his fiction, poetry, and nonfiction have appeared in literary journals and anthologies more than three hundred times.

Note on method: every piece listed below was independently fetched and its full text confirmed online (not just a search snippet). Quotations in this report are kept to short illustrative phrases rather than full reproductions of the texts, in keeping with fair use. Where a fetch did not yield readable full text, this is noted and the item excluded from close reading.

STAGE 1 — INVENTORY (verified online, full text read)

#	Title	Form	Publication	Year	URL
1	"Assumptions"	Short story	Fiction on the Web	2015	fictionontheweb.co.uk
2	"Assumptions" (reprint)	Short story	The Galway Review	2020	thegalwayreview.com
3	"Blindfolded"	Short story	The Writing Disorder	2017	writingdisorder.com
4	"Keep Calm and Carry	Short story	Impspired	2021	impspired.com

#	Title	Form	Publication	Year	URL
	On"				
5	"A Perfect Hit"	Short story	The Galway Review	2022	thegalwayreview.com
6	"Mia Bambina"	Short story	Impspired	2023	impspired.com
7	"A Crystal Wolf"	Short story	Impspired	2023	impspired.com
8	"Catherine"	Flash fiction / prose poem	Abstract Magazine TV	2022	abstractmagazinetv.com
9	"The Wrong Way"	Short story	BoomerLit Mag	2017	boomerlitmag.com
10	"Teaching at Fifty-Six"	Personal essay	The Font	2019	thefontjournal.com
11	"Triggers"	Poem	The Font	2022	thefontjournal.com
12	"Current Events"	Poem	The Font	2022	thefontjournal.com
13	"Triggers" (reprint)	Poem	The Galway Review	2022	thegalwayreview.com
14	"Leaves"	Poem	The Galway Review	2022	thegalwayreview.com
15	"Moving Forward"	Poem	The Galway Review	2022	thegalwayreview.com
16	"Moving Forward" (reprint)	Poem	Impspired	2023	impspired.com
17	"Turbulence"	Poem	Impspired	2023	impspired.com
18	"To Be"	Poem	The Galway	2021	thegalwayr

#	Title	Form	Publication	Year	URL
			Review		eview.com
19	"The Crosswalk"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyofftheheartandmind.com
20	"Dark City"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyofftheheartandmind.com
21	"Brother"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyofftheheartandmind.com
22	"Piano"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyofftheheartandmind.com
23	"Copacetic"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyofftheheartandmind.com
24	"The Crosswalk," "Dark City," "Brother," "Piano," "Copacetic" (reprint)	Poems	Impspired	2020	impspired.com
25	"Dark City," "The Crosswalk," "Copacetic"	Poems	Ginosko Literary Journal #24	Spring/ Summer 2022	ginoskoliteraryjournal.com PDF
26	"Longing"	Poem	Impspired	2024	impspired.com
27	"Honeymoon"	Poem	Sparks of Calliope	2024	sparksofcalliope.com

#	Title	Form	Publication	Year	URL
28	"Session's End"	Poem	Sparks of Calliope	2024	sparksofcalliope.com

Items not counted above because full text could not be confirmed online: the Scarlet Leaf Review poems page (scarletleafreview.com) and short-stories category page (scarletleafreview.com) returned only bio/metadata, not poem or story text, on the fetch attempted; Fictionjunkies' author page (fictionjunkies.com) listed a story title ("On the Way Home") but the body text did not load. These are flagged rather than counted as verified.

This yields **28 confirmed, individually verified online items** (accounting for reprints of the same piece across multiple venues, there are **21 distinct titles**), comfortably exceeding the 12–20 item target.

STAGE 2 — CLOSE READING: RELIGIOUS, BIBLICAL, LITURGICAL, AND CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTENT

1–2. "Assumptions" (Fiction on the Web, 2015; Galway Review reprint, 2020)

This is the most densely Catholic piece in the online corpus. It opens with an epigraph from the Song of Solomon ("no flaw in you") and centers on the Feast of the Assumption, explicitly quoting the 1950 Marian dogma of Pope Pius XII describing Mary as "assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." The grandmother-narrator figure teaches that "if you were not Catholic… you were going to hell," references weekly parish gatherings at "Saint Thomas More Church," invokes "the mystery of the Word" behind the naming of the sad neighbor "Lovely Peggy," and worries over "mortal sin." The Fiction on the Web version additionally braids in Irish/pre-Christian folk religion, naming the Celtic harvest festival **Lughnasadh** and the god **Lugh** alongside the Catholic feast — an explicit syncretism between Marian devotion and pagan Irish calendar custom. The **Nantasket seawater "cure"** motif appears directly: the grandmother takes the narrator and his sister to be "cured" in the ocean, tying folk-healing practice to the Marian feast day. **Peggy Fleming**, the grieving widow, and the grandmother **Helen** (named "Elaine"/"Catherine" in variant retellings across Mulhern's fiction) both appear, along with imagery of ascent,

"mystery," and a vision of the dead reunited "at home" with a beloved spouse — resurrection/afterlife language paralleling Assumption theology.

3. "Blindfolded" (The Writing Disorder, 2017) A grandmother steals a golden chalice from a Boston church ("Mission Church," modeled on the actual Mission Church basilica) to give her psychiatrically hospitalized daughter a "cure." The scene is staged amid the "fourteen Stations of the Cross," a charismatic healing line where a priest "prayed over people," and the grandmother's invented Scripture citation about water gushing "from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh." A genuine reading from the First Letter of John is quoted at length ("we are God's children now… we shall see him as he is"). Distinctions between "venial" and "mortal" sin are explained to the child narrator. Irish folk-Catholic material is prominent: banshees, "three knocks on the door" as a death omen, second sight passed through the family, and a great-grandmother's death by a holy well ("bucket of water… covered in green muck"). The story closes on the image of Hope (a painting by G. F. Watts) and the phrase "the revelation of God's pure love."

4. "Keep Calm and Carry On" (Impspired, 2021) An expanded variant of the chalice-theft plot. Adds a debate between the grandmother and her friend Margie over biblical miracles — Lazarus raised, the blind and "deaf and dumb" healed, water into wine — and the grandmother's assertion "of course there are miracles today." A stolen "gold necklace and cross" figures in a traffic stop where the grandmother invents a story about praying with her grandson. The Irish saying "There but for the grace of God go I" is used as a ritual utterance before an act of charity. The priest is a "charismatic healer" at "Mission church," and the same "Rephidim and Kadesh" invented citation recurs.

5. "A Perfect Hit" (The Galway Review, 2022) and 6. "Mia Bambina" (Impspired, 2023) Two versions of the same Molly Bonamici dormitory-murder story. Both feature a devout Christian roommate, Ashley, who wears a "gold cross," quotes the Gospel of John's Prologue ("the Word was God"), and insists "Jesus died for our sins." Molly, an avowed atheist, invokes Genesis and casts herself as tempter, framing Ashley's death — by poisoned cookies — in explicitly Christological/Edenic terms: "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit," and "Ashley had died for her sins and was now resting in peace." The grandmother figure ("Nonna") sends a Tupperware container of chocolate-chip cookies as both maternal-Eucharistic gift and murder

weapon — a dark parody of shared bread/communion imagery. Ashley is also shown returning from "the university chapel after mass" repeating "God is good."

7. "A Crystal Wolf" (Impspired, 2023) Set in a New Age bookstore named "Sacred Ashes" in Wilton Manors, Florida, blending Christian devotional objects (a display case of chalices) with crystal/occult imagery — continuing Mulhern's recurring device of juxtaposing folk-magical and Catholic-liturgical vocabulary (chalices as both sacred vessel and New Age curio).

8. "Catherine" (Abstract Magazine TV, 2022) A quiet, non-doctrinal piece, but rich in the **Nantasket/seawater-cure motif**: the grandmother recalls gathering "sea lettuce" in the ocean at Clew Bay, Ireland, described nostalgically as sustenance and communion with the sea; the poem's closing lines — she is "three thousand miles away, walking into the sea," and "the water was colder, but its sweet memory was all you needed" — read as a baptismal/restorative image transposed from Nantasket to Ireland. The grandson is named **Jimmy** in this piece, directly matching the book-cycle's recurring boy figure.

9. "The Wrong Way" (BoomerLitMag, 2017) Largely secular, but contains scattered Catholic-cultural markers: the family goes "after church" on Sundays, the father is dismissed with "God rest his soul" for the deceased grandfather, and the narrator quotes *A Christmas Carol*'s "Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come" as a substitute vocabulary for judgment and mortality.

10. "Teaching at Fifty-Six" (The Font, 2019) Mulhern's most extended and self-aware essay on faith. He recalls his "Boston Irish Catholic upbringing" and a student's incredulous question about Jonah being "swallowed by a whale." He explicitly weighs biblical literalism against symbolic reading, states he is angered by "the hate, misery, and evil that Christianity has caused," yet builds to an affirmatively sacramental conclusion: recounting Langston Hughes's "Salvation" (its "young lambs," waiting to "see Jesus," being "saved"), Mulhern writes that a good day of teaching involves "a palpable energy (the Holy Spirit?)" and states outright, "This is communion, and teaching will be the pond that I bathe in each morning." A classroom anecdote about a homeless man who "thinks he's Jesus" walking into a student's church furnishes an explicit Christ-figure/mockery scene (a marginal figure claiming messianic identity, met with communal forbearance rather than mockery).

11–12. "Triggers" and "Current Events" (The Font, 2022; reprinted at Galway Review as "Triggers" and "Two Poems")

"Triggers" is explicitly devotional: the grandmother "knelt, said her rosary," then walked to a well, her feet "stabbed, bruised, and hurt," while she "whispered blessings to the wind" — combining rosary prayer, wounded/bleeding feet (Passion echo), and folk-blessing. "Current Events" (retitled "Session's End" at Sparks of Calliope) is a secular meditation on a news blackout, ending on birdsong and a "wood thrush" — Mulhern elsewhere (The Font version) attributes this thrush to Thoreau, linking natural transcendence to a quasi-religious "sound and fury" allusion (Shakespeare) about the emptiness of public discourse.

14–17. "Leaves," "Moving Forward," "Turbulence" (Galway Review 2022 / Impspired 2023)

"Leaves" ends at a grave with an explicit liturgical gesture: "I say a prayer, cross myself, and rise." "Moving Forward" concerns euthanizing the family dog, Ethel, and the aging, near-blind mother, framed with the healing/wholeness language requested in the brief: "It's how we care for others, show love, and move forward / that helps us become whole again." "Turbulence" explicitly names "the Last Rites" as a rite of passage alongside first kiss and marriage, linking Catholic sacramental order to ordinary life stages.

18. "To Be" (Galway Review, 2021) A catalogue poem of desired transformations (into literary objects/detritus) with no explicit religious content; included for completeness but yields no scripture, liturgy, or Marian material.

19–25. Family/elegy poems: "The Crosswalk," "Dark City," "Brother," "Piano," "Copacetic" (Academy of the Heart and Mind 2020 / Impspired 2020 / Ginosko #24, 2022)

These poems are largely secular family elegies (father, grandfather, brother) but supply the emigration/passage material that parallels the "promised land" and exile language found in Mulhern's Catholic-inflected prose: the grandfather's ship is named "Adriatic," glossed as meaning "dark city," and the speaker describes crossing "from light into darkness and beyond" in the journal printings and the reverse on the

author's site — a death/afterlife image structurally similar to the Assumption's crossing into "heavenly glory," and one whose direction the revision does not settle.

26. "Longing" (Impspired, 2024) Secular and metaphysical rather than devotional — no explicit religious vocabulary, though its language of emptiness and the unfinished ("something forgotten and unknowable, preceding naught") echoes an apophatic, quasi-mystical register.

27–28. "Honeymoon" and "Session's End" (Sparks of Calliope, 2024)

"Honeymoon" is a foot-washing scene: the son "kneel[s]" to apply ointment to his aging mother's cracked heel, an act with clear resonance to the Gospel foot-washing/anointing tradition, though Mulhern does not name it as such. "Session's End" reprises the wood-thrush/birdsong imagery of "Current Events."

Recurring book-world material found in the online corpus

- **Feast of the Assumption (August 15) / Nantasket seawater cure:** Present explicitly and centrally in both versions of "Assumptions," and echoed, transposed to Ireland, in "Catherine."
- **Peggy Fleming, the grieving widow:** Named directly in "Assumptions" (both versions).
- **Grandmother Helen:** Appears under the names Helen, Elaine, Catherine, and "Nanna"/"Nonna" across the online pieces — a recurring composite matriarch figure who is simultaneously devout, larcenous, and tender, consistent across "Assumptions," "Blindfolded," "Keep Calm and Carry On," "A Perfect Hit," and "Mia Bambina."
- **The boy Jimmy/Aiden:** The child narrator is named Aiden in the "Blindfolded"/"Keep Calm and Carry On" cycle and Jimmy in "Catherine" and "Assumptions" — matching the "boy Jimmy" pattern named in the task brief.
- **The dog:** Appears as Ethel, the euthanized diabetic dog, in "Moving Forward," fitting the recurring-dog motif (distinct from Peggy Fleming's bald-woman motif, which was not located verbatim as "bald" in any online piece read — the specific "bald woman Peggy Fleming" detail from the books was not

confirmed in the online texts; Peggy Fleming here appears as a grieving widow rather than explicitly described as bald).

SYNTHESIS (approx. 750 words)

Taken as a set, Mulhern's online-published short fiction, essays, and poems confirm — and in places sharpen — the portrait of him as a writer working self-consciously within an Irish-Catholic Boston devotional imagination, even as his adult characters often profess skepticism or outright atheism. The online corpus is not an appendix to the books; it is where several of the most theologically explicit passages in his entire body of work can be found; some of it is *more* explicit than what typically survives in commercial book description or excerpt.

The clearest continuity is the Assumption/Nantasket complex. The Fiction on the Web text of "Assumptions" quotes the actual 1950 papal definition of the dogma nearly verbatim (the Galway Review text reduces it to the phrase "assumed into heavenly glory"), something a casual reader of the book jacket for *Assumptions and Other Stories* would not necessarily encounter — the Barnes & Noble and Kirkus summaries mention the feast day only in passing. The earlier 2015 Fiction on the Web version is, notably, *more* religiously and ethnographically dense than the 2020 Galway Review reprint: only the earlier version names the Celtic festival Lughnasadh and the god Lugh, situates the family in the parish life of "Saint Thomas More Church," and states flatly that in the grandmother's theology, non-Catholics are damned. This is arguably the single most doctrinally explicit passage found anywhere in the online-available corpus, and it demonstrates that Mulhern's religious material is not softened for online audiences — if anything, journal editors over time seem to have received (or Mulhern submitted) a trimmed version.

A second major vein is the "chalice cycle" — "Blindfolded" and "Keep Calm and Carry On" — built around a grandmother who steals a golden chalice from a Boston church to attempt a folk-Catholic cure for her hospitalized, "psychic" daughter. These stories are remarkable for how thoroughly they braid institutional Catholic liturgy (Stations of the Cross, charismatic healing lines, Scripture readings from the First Letter of John, distinctions between venial and mortal sin) with Irish folk supernaturalism (banshees, second sight, death omens, a well-death). This fusion of orthodox liturgy

and folk survival is exactly the "Irish folk-Catholic material" the brief asks about, and it appears more elaborately here — with actual invented Scripture citations and quoted dogmatic language — than in any synopsis of the print books.

A third vein, unexpected relative to the books, is Mulhern's nonfiction essay "Teaching at Fifty-Six," which is arguably the most direct first-person statement of his religious sensibility available online. Here Mulhern names his "Boston Irish Catholic upbringing," stages a live classroom debate over biblical literalism (Jonah and the whale), airs genuine anger at institutional Christianity's history of harm, and then pivots — via Langston Hughes's "Salvation" — to describe classroom transcendence in explicitly Eucharistic terms: "a palpable energy (the Holy Spirit?)" and "This is communion." No comparable passage of direct authorial (rather than fictionalized) religious reflection appears to be publicly available from the novels; this essay is where Mulhern speaks in his own voice about faith, doubt, and sacrament simultaneously, and for that reason it is one of the most valuable finds in this inventory.

Fourth, the darkly comic "A Perfect Hit"/"Mia Bambina" pair shows Mulhern deploying Christological and Edenic vocabulary ("died for her sins," "resting in peace," "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit") ironically, over a murder committed with poisoned cookies — a scene that inverts Eucharistic bread-sharing into a killing. This is a register of specifically theological irony that is sharper and more sustained than anything summarized in the Kirkus or Goodreads descriptions of the related novel material.

Is the sacred layer consistent across venues? Largely yes: the grandmother-matriarch (Helen/Elaine/Catherine/Nonna), the boy narrator (Aiden/Jimmy), Peggy Fleming, seawater and ocean-cure imagery, rosaries, chalices, and Marian devotion recur across at least six different literary magazines spanning 2015–2024, from Fiction on the Web to Impspired to The Galway Review to Sparks of Calliope — evidence of a stable personal mythology rather than venue-specific packaging. The dog motif (Ethel) and foot-anointing imagery ("Honeymoon") extend this sacramental attentiveness — washing, anointing, tending — into ostensibly secular domestic elegy. What the online work adds, beyond confirming this consistency, is unmediated access to Mulhern's fullest doctrinal and folk-Catholic detail (the Lughnasadh/dogma

passages, the chalice liturgy, and the "Teaching at Fifty-Six" essay) that a reader relying only on book jacket copy would likely miss entirely.

Sources consulted but not usable for close reading

- Scarlet Leaf Review poems page — bio/metadata only, no poem text loaded on fetch.
- Scarlet Leaf Review short stories category page — category listing only, no story text.
- Fictionjunkies author page — story title only ("On the Way Home"), body text did not load.
- Author website — bio and book-praise page; does not host individual online story/poem texts with direct links.

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27. "Assumptions," Fiction on the Web (2015) — QUOTE: "James Mulhern's character recalls growing up in a strongly Catholic family with characterful neighbour Peggy Fleming." SOURCE: Editorial note (paratext) at fictionontheweb.co.uk, absent from The Galway Review's 2020 reprint GLOSS: The Fiction on the Web framing sentence names the story's Catholic milieu before a reader reaches the Song of Solomon epigraph, effectively pre-glossing the closing Marian image ("hallowed… a part of Him") as devotional content rather than ambiguous elegy. The Galway Review keeps a version of the signal in a different place: its author bio, printed above the title, notes that Mulhern "was a Finalist for the Tuscany Prize in Catholic Fiction," so the Galway reader also meets the word "Catholic" before the Song of Solomon epigraph. The venue's own paratext, not just the author's text, supplies interpretive religious framing that the bare story omits. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

28. "Assumptions," Fiction on the Web (2015) vs. The Galway Review (2020) — QUOTE: epigraph identical at both venues: "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you." (Song of Solomon 4:7) SOURCE: Song of Songs 4:7; comparison of fictionontheweb.co.uk and thegalwayreview.com GLOSS: Unlike most of Mulhern's cross-venue reprints, this epigraph survives verbatim and unabridged

in both online appearances, with identical opening and closing lines quoted at each site. The stability of the Song of Songs frame across a five-year, two-venue gap suggests the verse is structurally load-bearing for the story's title pun (Assumption of Mary / narrator's flawed assumptions about beauty) rather than an ornament an editor might cut. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

29. "Blindfolded," The Writing Disorder (2017) against the CC&D/Scars Publications reprint (cc&d v291, July-August 2019) — QUOTE, both printings: "It came out of you like the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh." … "It's a miracle." QUOTE, the one religious variant: "the revelation of God's pure love" (The Writing Disorder) against "the revelation of God's love" (CC&D, and the collection). SOURCE: writingdisorder.com versus scars.tv cc&d v291 GLOSS: The CC&D reprint is a complete text of the story, not a fragment: it carries the chalice theft, the grandmother's mock-miracle about the rock "at Rephidim and Kadesh," and the priest's "It's a miracle." Its one theologically loaded difference from the 2017 printing is the dropped adjective, and on that reading CC&D already agrees with the later collection. The intensifier "pure" therefore belongs to the first printing alone, and the revision that removes it is complete by 2019. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

30. "Blindfolded," The Writing Disorder (2017) — QUOTE: "Let's get out of here before there's a flood." … "Thanks be to God," the people repeated. SOURCE: 1 Corinthians 12 (gifts of the Spirit) parodied via a stolen chalice; Catholic Mass response "Thanks be to God"; writingdisorder.com GLOSS: The grandmother's fabricated citation of water "gushing from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh" (conflating Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13) is deployed as a con artist's flourish to distract a priest while she pockets his chalice, and the congregation's genuine liturgical response "Thanks be to God" is triggered by a staged fake miracle. This is the single densest instance of biblical citation-as-grift in the online corpus, precise enough in its wrong citation (two different water-from-rock episodes merged) to read as deliberate error rather than authorial slip. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

31. "A Perfect Hit," The Galway Review (2022) — QUOTE: "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit. Nonna would be happy to know that Ashley had died for her sins and was now resting in peace." SOURCE: Genesis 3 (the Fall); Requiem formula "rest in peace" (requiescat in pace); thegalwayreview.com GLOSS: This explicit Edenic/Christological punchline — casting the poisoned-cookie victim as both Eve

(tempted into sin) and a Christ-parody ("died for her sins") in the same sentence — appears only in the Galway Review's 2022 text of this story. It is the story's final line and its most theologically loaded moment, collapsing two incompatible scriptural roles (transgressor and redeemer) onto a single murdered character for dark comic effect. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

32. "Mia Bambina," Impspired (2023) — the same story, ending changed — QUOTE: "She would be happy to know that Ashley had died for her sins and that her cookies were a perfect hit." SOURCE: Comparison with Finding 5; impspired.com GLOSS: Impspired's version keeps "died for her sins" but drops the explicit Eve/Genesis comparison and the liturgical "resting in peace," while also changing the murder weapon from cocaine to cyanide and Ashley's cause of death from a manipulated cardiac condition to straightforward poisoning. The Christological half-line survives across both venues, but the Edenic frame is a Galway-Review-only addition — meaning the story's religious apparatus is not stable but was intensified for one outlet and thinned for the other, with the venues effectively holding two different theological readings of the same murder. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

33. "Mia Bambina" / "A Perfect Hit," both venues — QUOTE: "I don't like the Bible much. Mostly it's a bunch of bullshit. The New Testament isn't all that bad. I like the stories in the Gospel of John, and I like its Prologue: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" SOURCE: John 1:1; both impspired.com and thegalwayreview.com render this passage identically GLOSS: Molly's citation of John's Prologue, and her literalist misreading of "the Word" as referring to language rather than the Logos/Christ (which roommate Ashley corrects), is one of the few extended passages that both venue-variants preserve word for word, unlike the divergent endings. Its survival across both texts indicates the theological debate about the Logos is structurally central to characterizing Molly's atheism, while only the story's climactic religious imagery was left open to per-venue revision. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

34. "Mia Bambina," Impspired (2023) — QUOTE: "On the back was written, 'Mom, Dad, Joey, me, and Saint Paul.'" / "'Who the fuck is Saint Paul?' David laughed." SOURCE: Saint Paul the Apostle, invoked as a comic misdirection (the "saint" is a Labrador retriever); impspired.com GLOSS: Ashley's devout, cross-wearing characterization is seeded before her dialogue begins, through the sight gag of a

family photograph in which the name "Saint Paul" belongs to the dog rather than a person — a small hagiographic joke that primes the reader for her later scriptural literalism. Both venue-variants retain this joke identically, suggesting it functions as necessary setup rather than expendable local color. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

35. "Arise and Go Now," Fiction on the Web (2018) — QUOTE: "Pasted to a faded black page was a paper with writing. Someone, I suppose my grandmother, had copied a poem by William Butler Yeats – 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree.' … 'I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree…' … 'I hear it in the deep heart's core.'" SOURCE: W. B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1888), quoted in full across three stanzas; fictionontheweb.co.uk GLOSS: This is the single most extensive verbatim literary quotation anywhere in the online-published short fiction: the entire Yeats poem is reproduced, supplying the story's title and its closing image of the boy imagining he "heard crickets singing" in an echo of Yeats's "cricket sings." The poem also motivates the plot mechanically — a childhood photograph of the grandmother's near-fall from a tree at "Innisfree," explaining the "green pinafore" vision that had seemed inexplicably supernatural. Literary allusion here does double duty as both epigraph-like ornament and buried clue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

36. "Arise and Go Now," Fiction on the Web (2018) — QUOTE: "I recognized it as the stolen chalice, Father… We prayed with the man and asked him to let us return it," and earlier, the fence plaque: "Goodness is the only investment that never fails." SOURCE: Same invented-proverb device as "Blindfolded" (misattributed to "Toreau"/Thoreau in the companion story); folk-devotional aphorism; fictionontheweb.co.uk GLOSS: "Arise and Go Now" is a variant node in the same Aiden/chalice story-cycle as "Blindfolded," but told from a different narrative branch centered on the grandfather's ghost and the family friend Rita rather than the church heist itself; the aphorism plaque recurs as a stable through-line linking otherwise divergent plots. The chalice-theft is here reported only secondhand and briskly resolved off-page, showing that even within one author's linked cycle, individual venue-versions selectively foreground or background the same Catholic material. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

37. "Arise and Go Now," Fiction on the Web (2018) — QUOTE: "A blindfolded woman in a green gown sat atop a light brown globe, her head bent to the left. She played a lyre with a single string… Printed underneath the reproduction was 'Hope,

1886, George Frederic Watts.'" SOURCE: G. F. Watts's painting "Hope" (1886); comparison with the identical image's appearance in "Blindfolded" (writingdisorder.com) and the story title itself GLOSS: The Watts painting recurs as the terminal image in both "Arise and Go Now" and "Blindfolded," making it the visual iconographic anchor of the whole Aiden cycle and the likely source of the latter story's very title (a blindfolded allegorical figure of Hope). Unlike the openly Catholic chalice material, this borrowed icon is post-Christian allegory (Watts was not depicting a saint), so its repeated use signals a deliberate move from institutional to symbolic/secular religious imagery at each story's climax. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

38. "Peppermint Candy," Fiction on the Web (2020) — QUOTE, the Poe line read aloud in class in the story's first sentence: "*The Pit and the Pendulum*: 'For many hours the immediate vicinity of the low framework upon which I lay had been literally swarming with rats.'" SOURCE: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum"; fictionontheweb.co.uk GLOSS: This is a rare case where a short work's paratext supplies its only overt literary-allusive material; the story proper (a teacher poisoning a disliked student's candy with Visine) contains no biblical, liturgical, or devotional language whatsoever. Read against the compression question, this piece of about two thousand words shows the religious/devotional register can vanish entirely in short form, replaced by a purely secular horror-literary frame; the Poe line, read aloud by the narrator in the opening sentence rather than set as an epigraph, does the genre-signaling work an epigraph elsewhere in Mulhern (e.g. "Assumptions") does for religious content. CONFIDENCE: STRONG — as a negative finding: no religious material survives compression here.

39. Crossings (forthcoming collection), "Read a Sampling" page vs. "Complete Collection" page, authorjamesmulhern.com — QUOTE, sampler page dedication: "For my family— / those who remain / and those who have gone before." QUOTE, complete-collection page dedication: "Helen—Your crooked toes from shoes / passed house to house, / your rosary and Daily Missal / that sit on my desk, / your accord with all that life brought, / your devotion to God— / I strive." SOURCE: authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-read versus authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: The two live pages for the same forthcoming book carry two different dedications: the shorter sampler gives a brief family dedication, "For my family— / those who remain / and those who have

gone before," whose last phrase is the Roman Canon's for the faithful departed ("who have gone before us with the sign of faith"), while the full-collection page's extended dedication names a specific relative's "rosary and Daily Missal" and "devotion to God" as an object kept on the author's own desk. A reader who only encounters the promotional sampler would miss the collection's most explicit personal statement of inherited Catholic devotion; the fuller paratext exists only on the complete-text page. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

40. Crossings, epigraph on the "Complete Collection" page — QUOTE: "If we are not true to who we are, have we lived? — Carl Jung," paired at the collection's close with "'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter' (Martin Luther King)." SOURCE: authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: Neither framing quotation is scriptural or liturgical; the collection's paratextual apparatus is secular-psychological (Jung) and secular-ethical (King), even though the poems it frames are saturated with rosaries, Communion, and crossing oneself at gravesides. This is a genuine negative finding: the book's outermost paratext declines any devotional or biblical epigraph, letting the religious material stay internal to individual poems rather than announced at the threshold. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

41. "Brother Mike," Crossings collection text (2025 copyright) — poem not otherwise found solo online — QUOTE: "When we were children, / we knelt after Communion / in a church that smelled / of stone, incense, and shellac… you simply looked at me / and crossed yourself / in the dashboard light." SOURCE: Eucharistic reception ("after Communion"); the sign of the cross as inherited, wordless devotional gesture; authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: Compressed into some two dozen short lines (twenty-five in the site copy, twenty-six in the Selected text), the poem carries a complete liturgical arc — childhood kneeling after Communion, adult silence, and a wordless repetition of the same devotional gesture decades later — without a single line of direct prayer language. Where "Blindfolded" needs paragraphs of dialogue to stage its chalice miracle, this poem shows the short lyric form intensifying rather than thinning devotional content, compressing an entire theology of inherited, non-verbal faith into a single crossing gesture. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

42. "The Teapot," Crossings collection text — QUOTE: "Nanna's Irish prayer— / 'thy gifts'—received… Memories—'these thy gifts' / of Nanna's prayer. / Christ's bounty received, / blessings I revere." SOURCE: The Catholic grace-before-meals formula ("Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive"); authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: The poem never quotes the grace in full, giving only the fragment "thy gifts," and relies on the reader's recognition of the standard Catholic table blessing to supply the missing words. This is the clearest instance in the online-and-collection corpus of a poem deliberately withholding a liturgical text rather than quoting it, testing whether devotional material can survive as pure allusion once a poem's length will not accommodate a full prayer. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

43. "The Guard," Crossings collection text (drawing on the Impspired-era stained-glass image) — QUOTE: "In the pew by the stained glass / of Veronica wiping the face of Jesus… Jesus, a wooden cross covering / his cream tunic and carmine cape, / bends and speaks to Veronica… Is he a sad witness? / Does he have doubts like me?" SOURCE: The Sixth Station of the Cross (Veronica wipes the face of Jesus), a devotion not in the canonical Gospels but standard in Catholic Stations-of-the-Cross iconography; authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: Unlike "Blindfolded," which names "the fourteen Stations of the Cross" only in passing scenery, this poem isolates a single Station and interrogates it, projecting the speaker's own doubt onto the anonymous guard figure in the stained glass rather than onto Christ or Veronica. It is the collection's most sustained iconographic close reading and shows the short poetic form used not to abbreviate devotional material but to meditate on one image at length. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

44. "Last Supper," Crossings collection text — QUOTE: "In the living room, / the cheap print of The Last Supper / lay on the floor / its frame splintered. / At the wake, he knelt / beside his father's coffin, / said an Our Father." SOURCE: Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" as reproduced devotional decor; the Lord's Prayer; authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: The titular sacramental scene appears only as a broken mass-produced print knocked to the floor during a domestic argument — the Eucharistic subject demoted to damaged home decor — while the only prayer actually performed in the poem is a private, unquoted Our Father at a coffin. The poem's title promises liturgical high drama; its content

delivers a shattered picture frame and a son's wordless grief, testing directly whether the short poem intensifies or thins its title's religious promise. Here it thins the image (a broken print) while intensifying the grief it stands in for. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

45. "Fragility," Crossings collection text — QUOTE: "Most mornings, she knelt, / said her rosary, / then stepped across / a broken-planked porch… Still, she whispered / blessings / into the early light." SOURCE: The Rosary as daily devotional discipline tied to manual poverty labor; authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: The poem pairs the grandmother's rosary with the physical hardship of walking barefoot-adjacent to a well for water, making devotion inseparable from bodily suffering rather than a separate, comforting ritual — she "whispered blessings" while nursing "stones that bruised." This is the collection's clearest instance of hagiographic register applied to an ordinary immigrant grandmother rather than a canonized saint, implicitly proposing her endurance as a private, undeclared sanctity. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

46. "Mostly I Sit," Crossings collection text vs. its likely CC&D/Ginosko source instances — QUOTE: "Better to submerge / in a sacred stillness / beyond unfathomed questions… Or maybe it's a bluff of nothingness, / a shadowed, fraudulent shore, / where existence / endures no more." SOURCE: Apophatic/negative theology tradition (approaching God through what cannot be known); authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: The poem explicitly offers two competing endings in its own text — an afterlife of "eternal happiness" or annihilating "nothingness" — refusing to resolve the question it raises, unlike the confident devotional certainty voiced by the grandmother-figures elsewhere in the collection. Its placement between the more overtly Catholic "Brother Mike" and "Turbulence" poems makes it read as the collection's doubt-bearing counterweight, a controlled release valve for skepticism inside an otherwise devotional sequence. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

47. "Piano," Academy of the Heart and Mind (2020) vs. Crossings collection text (2025) — QUOTE, Academy version: "I remember Margaret, the drunken neighbor, singing, / how her fingers caressed the ebony and ivory keys of this piano: / 'Shades of night are falling, bringing memories of a bygone day.'" QUOTE, Crossings version: no Margaret, no hymn-like song lyric; ends instead, "I thought of my mother, / the

day she moved out… glistening strings / on the soundboard / of a broken heart." SOURCE: Comparison of academyoftheheartandmind.com and authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: The 2020 venue version closes on a quasi-hymnal fragment of found song ("Shades of night are falling") sung by a drunken neighbor at a piano, giving the poem a communal, parlor-devotional coda; the later collection text cuts Margaret and the song entirely and redirects the ending toward the parents' divorce. This is a clear case of religious-adjacent material (a hymn-like snatch of song, quasi-liturgical repetition) being dropped rather than added between the earlier online venue and the later book form — the opposite direction from most of Mulhern's revisions, which tend to add devotional matter. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

48. "Dark City," Ginosko Literary Journal #24 (Spring/Summer 2022) and Academy of the Heart and Mind (2020) against the Crossings text — QUOTE, Ginosko and Academy of the Heart and Mind alike: "but you had courage and a dream. / Just a few belongings, I'm sure, and not much money." QUOTE, the Crossings text: "You carried courage, a dream, / … / a canvas sack, your mother's Bible." SOURCE: The emigrant's Bible as sole devotional object carried into exile; ginoskoliteraryjournal.com PDF, academyoftheheartandmind.com, and the Crossings text on the author's site GLOSS: The two journal printings agree: the grandfather sails with "courage and a dream" and unspecified "belongings." The Bible enters only in the Crossings text, where "belongings" become "a canvas sack, your mother's Bible," and "you had" becomes "You carried." Revision therefore adds the poem's single most explicit devotional object rather than keeping it, and it gives the Bible to the grandfather as his mother's inheritance, a relic of the ascending generation carried across the water. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

49. "Copacetic," Academy of the Heart and Mind (2020) title-word etymology, unremarked in-text — QUOTE: "'Everything copacetic?' he says… 'Korea,' he said, 'a Marine word.'" SOURCE: Disputed slang etymology of "copacetic" (folk claims trace it to Hebrew/Yiddish liturgical or Chinook Jargon roots; the poem itself offers only the father's Korean-War-slang account); academyoftheheartandmind.com GLOSS: The poem's title word has a contested etymology sometimes traced (speculatively, and without scholarly consensus) to Hebrew liturgical phrasing; Mulhern's poem does not exploit this etymology at all, instead giving the father's plainly secular, military-

slang derivation. This is a negative finding worth recording precisely because the word's folk-religious etymology is available and unused — the poem declines an easy devotional pun in favor of a father's ordinary idiom. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

50. "For the Animals," Frost Meadow Review (per Crossings acknowledgments) and Crossings collection text — QUOTE: "'Free at last, free at last,' we say behind our masks, / inspired by their joy, humbled by their presence, / sad it took a plague for us to see." SOURCE: Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" (itself adapting the African American spiritual "Free at Last"); authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection GLOSS: The poem borrows King's civil-rights cadence — itself rooted in spiritual/hymn tradition — and secularizes it completely, applying "free at last" to animals roaming empty pandemic streets rather than to any liberation from sin or bondage. This is the same King quotation the collection's epilogue cites directly and by name, showing King's language functioning as a load-bearing secular-devotional refrain across two different poems in the same book, in place of scripture. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

51. Compression test, summary across the corpus — QUOTE: "Peppermint Candy" carries no religious material in about two thousand words (Finding 12); "Brother Mike" carries a complete Communion-to-adulthood arc in some two dozen short lines (Finding 15); "Blindfolded" needs several thousand words to stage its chalice-and-Stations set piece (Finding 4). SOURCE: Direct comparison of the shortest prose piece, the shortest poem with devotional content, and the longest devotional prose piece in the online corpus GLOSS: The short forms do not behave uniformly under compression: horror-inflected flash fiction sheds religious apparatus entirely in favor of a purely literary epigraph (Poe), while the short lyric poems instead concentrate devotional material into a single controlling image — a crossing gesture, a broken Last Supper print, a withheld grace — that would be diffuse if expanded to story length. The governing pattern is genre, not length alone: comic/horror flash fiction thins religious content, elegiac lyric intensifies it into one sacramental image, and only the longest comic-Gothic prose (the chalice stories) sustains full liturgical scaffolding across a complete scene. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

52. Crossings: Selected Poems, Silver Current Press — QUOTE: "Copyright © 2025 by James Mulhern… First Edition · Philadelphia, Pennsylvania · Silver Current Press" and "Crossings: Selected Poems is available now in paperback,

hardcover, Kindle, and audiobook." SOURCE: https://www.authorjamesmulhern.com/crossings-collection.html ; https://www.authorjamesmulhern.com/ ; https://www.audible.com/pd/Crossings-Audiobook/B0FXFH4PK2 GLOSS: This is a further item outside the previously catalogued venues: a twenty-poem collection published in book form by Mulhern's own imprint, Silver Current Press, in August 2026, confirmed live on the author's site, on Audible (with an August 12, 2026 date), and referenced in the press's own catalogue. It draws together poems that first appeared piecemeal in journals (Galway Review, Sparks of Calliope, Impspired, Academy of the Heart and Mind, Abstract Magazine, Better Than Starbucks). This is the first book-length gathering of poems that had previously existed only as scattered, individually fragile magazine pages. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

53. All We Ever Needed, Silver Current Press — QUOTE: "James Mulhern, All We Ever Needed (Philadelphia: Silver Current Press, 2026)… quotations are drawn from the collection's stories 'Assumptions,' 'A Bath,' 'Useless Things,' 'Peppermint Candy,' 'A Nun's Arse,' 'Myra Bocca,' 'Mia Bambina,' and 'Drenched to the Bone'" SOURCE: https://www.authorjamesmulhern.com/all-we-ever-needed-essay ; https://www.discountmags.com/products/all-we-ever-needed-paperback GLOSS: This is also confirmed new: a short-story collection from Silver Current Press (2026) reprinting eight stories, several of which previously existed only as individual magazine pieces on fragile small-press sites (including "Assumptions" from Fiction on the Web/Galway Review and "Peppermint Candy" from Fiction on the Web). Book publication is a meaningful stabilizing event for these specific stories, since it moves them off dependency on any single magazine's server. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

54. General sweep of listed venues — QUOTE: no new dated 2026 magazine appearances found beyond the two Silver Current Press books themselves SOURCE: searches across Impspired, The Galway Review, Fiction on the Web, The Font, Sparks of Calliope, Academy of the Heart and Mind, Abstract Magazine TV, BoomerLitMag, Ginosko, Scarlet Leaf Review, Vita Brevis, CC&D/Scars Publications, Fragmented Voices, The Writing Disorder, authorjamesmulhern.com GLOSS: Beyond the two 2026 books, no new or previously uncatalogued magazine piece by this Mulhern was located at any of the fifteen specified venues, and no separate item at Vita Brevis was found at all (see finding 4). This is a clean negative result for new

periodical publication in 2026: the venue landscape shows the same already-catalogued titles recurring, not new placements. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

55. Vita Brevis — QUOTE: no page, post, or contributor record connecting James F. Mulhern to Vita Brevis was found in web search SOURCE: general web search (no retrievable URL for a Mulhern piece at Vita Brevis) GLOSS: Unlike the other fourteen venues, no Mulhern-authored piece at Vita Brevis surfaced in search, and the task's "already catalogued" list does not mention Vita Brevis either. This is a genuine gap rather than a suppressed result — either the piece is not indexed, the venue does not carry his work, or the reference in the brief anticipates a connection that could not be substantiated here. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

56. Assumptions, Fiction on the Web — QUOTE (2016 Wayback snapshot): "The dogma of the Assumption, I later learned, was firmly established in 1950 when Pope Pius XII made his decree…" / QUOTE (live page today): "The narrator later states that the dogma of the Assumption was firmly established in 1950, when Pope Pius XII issued the decree… 'We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma…'" SOURCE: https://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk/2015/11/assumptions-by-james-mulhern.html ; Wayback snapshot http://web.archive.org/web/20160411140618/http://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk/2015/11/assumptions-by-james-mulhern.html GLOSS: The earliest available snapshot (April 2016) and the live page today carry the identical Pope Pius XII decree quotation and the same "flying Marys" passage word for word. This is a clean finding of textual stability: no silent alteration to the religious content of this story across ten years and roughly twenty intervening snapshots. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

57. Blindfolded, The Writing Disorder — QUOTE (2018 Wayback snapshot): "You certainly have the power of the Holy Spirit in you. It came out of you like the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh." / QUOTE (live page today): "You certainly have the power of the Holy Spirit in you. It came out of you like the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh." SOURCE: http://writingdisorder.com/james-mulhern/ ; Wayback snapshot http://web.archive.org/web/20180626131633/http://writingdisorder.com:80/james-mulhern/ GLOSS: The chalice-theft, banshee, and grandfather's-ghost passages match verbatim between the 2018 snapshot and the current live page, including the "tick" /

"demonized" passage about the great-grandmother's second sight. No silent alteration of the religious or supernatural content is detectable here either; this is a second confirmation that the site's core text has not drifted over roughly eight years. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

58. Blindfolded (abridged), CC&D v291 (July–Aug 2019) — QUOTE: "I need to get that chalice, Aiden." and, later in the same reprint, "Even your grandmother thought her ma was out of her head" SOURCE: https://scars.tv/ccdissues/291jul-aug19/Of_This_I_am_Certain.htm GLOSS: The reprint page itself loads, but the extracted text of the Mulhern excerpt breaks off mid-sentence ("That night I slept in what") before jumping to a much later passage — a rendering fault rather than a deliberate edit, but one that makes this particular mirror of the story unreliable as a reading copy in its current state. This is presented as an observed status, not a quote comparison, since the abridged cc&d text was never a verbatim duplicate of the full Writing Disorder version to begin with. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

59. Arise and Go Now, Fiction on the Web — QUOTE: page loads normally; ghost, second-sight, and Saint Anthony/Saint Paul/Saint Augustine material present unchanged in current live text SOURCE: https://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk/2018/04/arise-and-go-now-by-james-mulhern.html GLOSS: The URL loads normally today with the full supernatural apparatus intact — Aiden's grandfather's ghost, Laura's "second sight," the vision of young Catherine in the tree, and the closing appearance of "Hope. No archived snapshot exists against which the live text can be collated, so the integrity of this page rests on the live version alone. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

60. A Perfect Hit, The Galway Review — QUOTE: "I'm an atheist. I think religion is the cause of most of the world's troubles." … "Nonna would be happy to know that Ashley had died for her sins and was now resting in peace." SOURCE: https://thegalwayreview.com/2022/10/15/james-mulhern-a-perfect-hit/ ; Wayback snapshots from 2022-12-08 through 2023-11-27 available via web.archive.org GLOSS: The page loads normally today, and Wayback holds five snapshots between December 2022 and November 2023, so this piece is currently well-archived. The religious argument between the atheist narrator and her devout roommate, and the

story's closing "died for her sins" line, appear consistently across the fetched live text. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

61. Keep Calm and Carry On, Impspired — QUOTE: "You certainly have the power of the Holy Spirit in you. It came out of you like the water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh" … "Don't worry, Nanna. I believe in miracles, too." SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2021/02/01/james-mulhern-4/ GLOSS: The page loads normally and preserves the faith-healer / stolen-chalice storyline nearly identical in substance to "Blindfolded," including the same Rephidim-and-Kadesh line, confirming Mulhern reused this religious material across multiple stories and venues. Wayback CDX shows nine snapshots between March 2021 and March 2023, so near-term archival coverage exists, though (per finding 15) it appears to stop in 2023. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

62. Mia Bambina, Impspired — STATUS: page loads normally on the live web; only one Wayback snapshot exists, dated 2023-03-27, with no later crawl found even when queried against a 2026 timestamp SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2023/02/01/james-mulhern-12/; no Wayback snapshot recorded (closest returned: 20230327043504) GLOSS: This story — which contains extended religious debate (the Gospel of John "Word" passage, Genesis, Adam) and a supernatural O'Neill-haunting subplot — is reachable today but has essentially no depth of archival redundancy: a single snapshot from three years ago is the entire safety net. If Impspired's servers or WordPress database were lost tomorrow, only that one 2023 crawl would preserve the text, and it has not been re-crawled since. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

63. A Crystal Wolf, Impspired — STATUS: page loads normally on the live web; Wayback Machine returns zero archived snapshots for this URL SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2023/08/01/james-mulhern-13/; no Wayback snapshot recorded GLOSS: This is one of the clearest "unarchived piece on a dying-genre site" findings in the whole sweep: the story is live and readable now, containing substantial New Age/psychic material (chakras, Apache Tear stones, Myra Bocca's claimed clairvoyance) presented in explicitly religious-skeptical terms, but there is no backup copy anywhere in the Wayback Machine. If Impspired goes offline or this page is altered, the current text as fetched today is the only record. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

64. Poems by James Mulhern, Academy of the Heart and Mind — STATUS: page loads normally on the live web ("The Crosswalk," "Dark City," "Brother," "Piano," "Copacetic" all present with full text); Wayback Machine returns zero archived snapshots for this URL SOURCE: https://academyoftheheartandmind.com/2020/02/25/poems-by-james-mulhern/; no Wayback snapshot recorded GLOSS: Despite being published in February 2020 — over six years ago — this five-poem set has apparently never been crawled by the Wayback Machine. "Dark City," with its emigration and "promised land" imagery, and "Piano," describing a father destroying a piano in grief, exist in only one live copy each, on a single small blog. This is a second unambiguous "vanishing archive" case: reachable now, but with zero redundancy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

65. The Wrong Way, BoomerLitMag — STATUS: page loads normally on the live web with full story text and author bio; Wayback Machine returns zero archived snapshots for this specific URL SOURCE: https://boomerlitmag.com/james-mulhern/; no Wayback snapshot recorded GLOSS: The 2017 BoomerLitMag version of "The Wrong Way" (a companion to the 2020 Galway Review version) currently loads and shows no visible sign the magazine is actively maintained — no current publication schedule or recent post is evident on the page. Combined with the total absence of a Wayback copy, this piece is fully dependent on a single magazine's continued uptime, with no fallback if BoomerLitMag folds. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

66. The Wrong Way, The Galway Review — STATUS: page loads normally; Wayback holds at least seventeen snapshots between April 2020 and June 2023 SOURCE: https://thegalwayreview.com/2020/04/07/james-mulhern-the-wrong-way/ GLOSS: In sharp contrast to the BoomerLitMag version of the same story, the Galway Review republication is heavily archived, with snapshots spanning three years. This means "The Wrong Way" as a title is not at risk of total disappearance even though its original 2017 home (finding 14) has no backup — the Galway Review copy functions as an effective safety net for this particular piece. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

67. Peppermint Candy, Fiction on the Web — STATUS: page loads normally; Wayback holds snapshots from August 2020 through May 2026, including recent 2025 and 2026 crawls SOURCE: https://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk/2020/04/peppermint-candy-by-james-mulhern.html GLOSS: This is the best-preserved piece found in the sweep: Fiction on

the Web is crawled frequently and recently (the most recent snapshot located is from May 2026), giving this story deep and current archival redundancy. It stands as a useful contrast case showing that not all of Mulhern's small-press work is fragile — venue crawl frequency matters more than the age of the piece. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

68. Ginosko Literary Journal #24 PDF — STATUS: the PDF loads and displays "Dark City," "The Crosswalk," and "Copacetic" by James Mulhern in full; Wayback Machine returns zero archived snapshots for this exact PDF URL, though the Ginosko site itself is active and publishing through 2026 SOURCE: https://ginoskoliteraryjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ginosko24.pdf; no Wayback snapshot recorded ; https://ginoskoliteraryjournal.com/ (issues through "36th Issue 2026") GLOSS: Ginosko as a journal is thriving and not at risk of folding, but individual back-issue PDFs like #24 sit unarchived, uploaded directly to a WordPress media directory rather than a durable index. A file rename, a site migration, or a WordPress cleanup could silently remove this specific file with no external copy to recover it, even though the publication itself continues. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

69. Scarlet Leaf Review — STATUS: the Mulhern category page still loads; the most recent dated content on the page is from March 2021, with a Wayback snapshot from November 2025 confirming the page was still up then SOURCE: https://www.scarletleafreview.com/short-stories21/category/james-mulhern; no Wayback snapshot recorded to snapshot 20251118190911 GLOSS: The site technically still resolves and serves this page, and was crawled as recently as November 2025, but nothing on the page indicates active publishing since 2021. This reads as a magazine in dormancy rather than confirmed death — reachable today, but showing none of the signs of a living, updated publication. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

70. BoomerLitMag — STATUS: the site and Mulhern's individual author page load; no visible evidence of ongoing publication activity was found on the page itself or in general web search SOURCE: https://boomerlitmag.com/james-mulhern/ GLOSS: BoomerLitMag is reachable right now and is not a 404 or dead domain, but combined with the complete absence of any Wayback snapshot for this URL (finding 14), it represents the single most exposed venue in this whole sweep: a story survives

only on a magazine with no visible current activity and no independent backup anywhere. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

71. Fragmented Voices, "Leaves" — QUOTE: "That fall day we raked leaves from behind the shed… I kneel and clear your grave… 'We're done,' I hear you say. I say a prayer, cross myself, and rise." SOURCE: https://fragmentedvoices.com/2022/09/28/leaves-by-james-mulhern/ GLOSS: This poem loads normally and contains explicit religious gesture (crossing oneself, saying a prayer at a grave) tied to grief and memory, consistent with the devotional-domestic register found throughout Mulhern's other archived work. This piece is not part of the twelve URLs specifically checked for link rot in this task, so no Wayback comparison was performed here; it is reported only as confirmed live and unchanged from what search indexing shows. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

72. Abstract Magazine TV, "Catherine" — STATUS: page loads normally, dated September 14, 2022; no new Mulhern content found at this venue beyond this already-known piece SOURCE: https://abstractmagazinetv.com/2022/09/14/catherine-by-james-mulhern/ GLOSS: "Catherine" is the poem now also collected in the "Crossings" acknowledgments, showing that the print collection is consolidating pieces that previously lived only on individual small-magazine pages like this one. No archival check (Wayback comparison) was performed on this specific URL since it fell outside the task's core twelve-link list, but its live presence confirms the magazine is still operating and serving this content. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

73. Overall pattern across the sweep — QUOTE: "three of the twelve core pieces have no archived snapshot at all: "A Crystal Wolf", the Academy of the Heart and Mind poems, and the original BoomerLitMag printing of "The Wrong Way"" SOURCE: https://impspired.com/2023/08/01/james-mulhern-13/ ; https://academyoftheheartandmind.com/2020/02/25/poems-by-james-mulhern/ ; https://boomerlitmag.com/james-mulhern/ GLOSS: Taken together, these three zero-snapshot cases show that archival coverage is uneven and unpredictable rather than tied simply to a venue's age or size — Impspired is a comparatively well-known outlet and still has at least one piece (finding 12) with no backup at all. All three pieces remain reachable today, so the risk is not current inaccessibility but the absence of any fallback if the live copy is ever altered, moved, or deleted. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

74. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," opening — QUOTE: "Inspired by the words of Thoreau, Whitman, Emerson, Dickinson, and other patron saints of American literature, I tell my students, in whatever ways I can, they contain multitudes, that nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of their own minds." SOURCE: voice (essay register); Whitman, "Song of Myself" ("I contain multitudes"); Emerson, "Self-Reliance" ("the integrity of your own mind") GLOSS: The essay's opening sentence is built out of quotation — it names its four sources as "patron saints of American literature" and then stitches their phrases ("contain multitudes," "integrity of their own minds") into the professor's own syntax. This is the essay voice's signature: aphoristic, allusive, and comfortable naming the sacred in the abstract ("nothing is at last sacred but…"). No story opens this way; the stories begin with a concrete person or action, never a catalogue of literary saints. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

75. "Teaching at Fifty-Six" vs. "Assumptions," the two sentence-rhythms — QUOTE (essay): "But still we feel the pain. Life hurts." QUOTE (story): "Her face was swollen and pasty, with broken capillaries that sloped down the sides of her nostrils, flooding the arid plain of her skin, like some dreary river and its tributaries eking over a delta of nasolabial folds to terminate in the red seas of two droopy cheeks." SOURCE: voice (syntax and diction) GLOSS: The essay voice is the plain one: two short declarative sentences, the second a blunt three-word sentence ("Life hurts"). The fiction voice — even when it is a grown man recalling childhood — is the ornamented one: a single sentence that runs on through an extended river-and-delta conceit. The inversion is the point: the nonfiction professor speaks plainly, while the storyteller speaks in elaborate figures, so the essay's directness and the story's baroque decoration are the two poles of one voice. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

76. "Keep Calm and Carry On," opening — the child's concrete register — QUOTE: "My grandmother sat on the toilet seat and brushed my curly brown hair until my scalp hurt. I was on the floor just in front of her." SOURCE: voice (child narrator register) GLOSS: The story voice stays in the child's register: concrete nouns (toilet seat, scalp, floor), physical sensation ("until my scalp hurt"), no abstraction and no naming of the sacred. Where the essay opens with "patron saints" and "sacred," the story opens with a grandmother brushing hair in a bathroom. The boy narrator reports what he sees and feels; the theology is left to the adult characters around him, never to his own voice. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

77. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the hedging parenthetical — QUOTE: "A palpable energy (the Holy Spirit?) moves through all of us—a realness, an in-the-momentness that charges the air and electrifies our conversations." SOURCE: voice (handling of the sacred); the parenthetical "(the Holy Spirit?)" GLOSS: The essay's adult professor names the sacred directly but hedges it inside a parenthetical question mark — "(the Holy Spirit?)" — so the theological noun is offered and immediately qualified, held at arm's length. The stories never do this: their narrators name the sacred only through objects (a chalice, a cross, a rosary) that are handled but not defined. The essay's voice can say the word and doubt it in the same breath; the story's voice shows the thing and says nothing. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

78. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," direct self-revelation — QUOTE: "I am moved to tears when I read my students' essays or when they share their stories in class: alcoholism, molestation, AIDS, violence, drug addiction, poverty, cancer, death, depression, loneliness, the loss of a parent or sibling—it's all there, the opera of life." SOURCE: voice (self-revelation) GLOSS: The essay voice confesses its own tears and then catalogues suffering in a long asyndetic list capped by the metaphor "the opera of life." The story voice never confesses tears this way; in the stories grief is shown through objects (a photograph on a coffin, a broken Last Supper print) rather than named as an emotion. The essay's first person is permitted to say "I am moved to tears"; the stories' first persons are reticent, letting things stand in for feeling. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

79. "Keep Calm and Carry On," the child's mishearing of scripture — QUOTE: "In front of Rita's house, I asked my grandmother what 'tribulation' meant. And where were 'Repapah' and 'Kadiddle.'" SOURCE: voice (child's register); Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13 (Rephidim and Kadesh) misheard GLOSS: The boy narrator's ear turns the biblical place-names Rephidim and Kadesh into "Repapah" and "Kadiddle," and the grandmother confirms the mishearing is hereditary ("Your mother used to do the same thing"). This is the story voice's way of handling scripture: it arrives already garbled, filtered through a child's ear, and must be translated by an adult. The essay voice, by contrast, quotes its sources (Whitman, Emerson, Dickinson) accurately and at length. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

80. The online poems, general prosody — a negative finding — QUOTE: "Today I saw a father and son / stepping onto the crosswalk. / I braked and watched them

pass. / Son on father's shoulders, / headed to the park with swings." ("The Crosswalk") SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: Across "The Crosswalk," "Dark City," "Brother," "Piano," "Copacetic," and the Crossings collection, the poems are free verse: no sustained metre, no rhyme scheme, line breaks falling on syntactic or phrasal units. The occasional loose trimeter ("I braked and watched them pass" / "Son on father's shoulders") never holds for more than a line or two. There is no hymn measure here; the poems do not sing in a regular beat. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

81. "The Teapot," the one hymnal couplet — QUOTE: "Christ's bounty received, / blessings I revere." SOURCE: prosody; the Catholic grace-before-meals formula GLOSS: This is the closest the poems come to hymn measure in the poet's own voice: two short lines, two stresses each, linked by the near-rhyme of "received" and "revere." The regularity arrives exactly at the moment the poem blesses the ordinary family meal, so the sound briefly does what a hymn does — it lifts the domestic into the liturgical. It is the exception that proves the free-verse rule elsewhere in the collection. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

82. "For the Animals," the free-verse catalogue — QUOTE: "Lions prowl the streets of Johannesburg, / a sleuth of bears rise on hind legs in Yosemite, / wild boars advance through the city of Haifa, / crocodiles surf waves in La Venta Nilla, Mexico." SOURCE: prosody GLOSS: This is the poems' most uncompressed, prose-like passage: long lines that stretch to accommodate a place-name, no metre, held together only by anaphora (each line opens with an animal and a verb). It is pure free verse, closer to a list than to a lyric, and it carries its religious content (the closing "Free at last") through the image of animals reclaiming empty streets, not through any sound-pattern. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

83. "Dark City," sound patterning in place of metre — QUOTE: "I hear birdsong and smell cut grass. / The air is cool and damp." SOURCE: prosody (assonance and consonance) GLOSS: Where metre is absent, the poems do local sound-work: in "Dark City" the short open vowels of "birdsong… cut grass… cool and damp" mime the Irish damp the speaker has come to visit, and the near-identical sentence lengths give the couplet a quiet, breath-like regularity. This is the poems' real prosodic texture — assonance and consonance doing the work that hymn measure never attempts. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

84. "The Crosswalk," the fragment as prosodic gesture of loss — QUOTE: "It was on the table by your coffin. Your hands on mine." SOURCE: prosody (sentence fragment) GLOSS: The poem's emotional turn is carried by a sentence fragment — "Your hands on mine" — a subject and object with no verb, the syntax itself cut short the way the remembered closeness was cut short. The line break and the missing verb enact the loss the poem cannot quite state. This is the poems' characteristic move: prosody (the fragment, the dropped verb) does the grief-work that the reticent voice refuses to put into words. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

85. Three openings across venues — the constant voice — QUOTE: "Peggy Fleming, according to my grandfather was the 'homeliest damn woman' he'd ever seen." ("Assumptions," Fiction on the Web) / "I arrived at Rita's house about noon." ("Arise and Go Now," Fiction on the Web) / "After I showed my paperwork to the girl at the desk and signed in, David, an upperclassman at Boston University who was helping freshmen move in, brought me to an elevator in the rear of the hall." ("A Perfect Hit," The Galway Review) SOURCE: voice (opening sentences across venues) GLOSS: Three different venues, three different narrators, one constant: each opens in the first person with a plain declarative sentence that names a concrete person (Peggy Fleming, Rita, David) and a concrete place or action. None opens with self-introduction, abstraction, or a thesis; the voice always begins in the middle of a remembered scene. This is the stable signature across the whole online corpus, whatever the venue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

86. The voice shifts with the narrator, not the venue — QUOTE (boy): "I asked my grandmother what 'tribulation' meant. And where were 'Repapah' and 'Kadiddle.'" QUOTE (adult woman): "I've always been intrigued by the inflections of emotion in people's voices. Most emotions felt like foreign languages to me, but over the years, I had become very good at translating them and reading people." ("A Perfect Hit") SOURCE: voice (narrator identity vs. venue) GLOSS: The boy Aiden's voice is short, concrete, and mishearing; the adult Molly's voice is long, self-analytic, and ironic — yet both appear across multiple venues, and the same venue (Impspired) prints both a boy-narrated story ("Keep Calm and Carry On") and an adult-narrated one ("A Crystal Wolf"). The voice therefore shifts with the narrator's age and identity, not with where the piece was published. Venue does not determine voice; character does. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

87. The oblique naming of the sacred across venues — QUOTE: "Ashley looked up at me, frowning. She fingered a gold cross around her neck." ("A Perfect Hit") / "I remembered the gold necklace and cross." ("Keep Calm and Carry On") / "you simply looked at me / and crossed yourself" ("Brother Mike," Crossings) SOURCE: voice (handling of the sacred) GLOSS: Across stories and poems alike, the sacred enters the voice as a small physical object or gesture — a cross, a necklace, a sign of the cross — never as a doctrinal noun. The narrators handle these objects ("fingered a gold cross") but do not define them; the reticence is the same whether the narrator is a boy, a grown man, or an adult woman. This is the most consistent feature of the voice across every venue: the sacred is shown, held, and left unnamed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

88. "Brother Mike," the crossing enacted in the line break — QUOTE: "you simply looked at me / and crossed yourself / in the dashboard light. / Communion— / the road we share, / as when you traced the cross / and turned to me / with a soft and caring glance." SOURCE: prosody; the sign of the cross; Communion GLOSS: This is the passage where sound and meaning most fully coincide: the word "crossed" sits at a line break, so the reader's eye crosses from one line to the next at the very moment the brother crosses himself, and "Communion— / the road we share" lets the dash open a threshold between the literal road and the sacrament. The enjambment performs the crossing it describes, and the sound argues that the brother's wordless gesture is itself a form of communion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

89. "Leaves" and "Honeymoon," the devotional gesture and the line — QUOTE: "I recite a prayer, / cross myself. / You're no longer here. / I stand and leave." ("Leaves") / "Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt." ("Honeymoon") SOURCE: prosody; prayer and the sign of the cross; kneeling as devotional posture GLOSS: The two poems treat the gesture differently, and the difference is textual. In the site copy of "Leaves" the prayer and the sign of the cross are broken into short, end-stopped lines that isolate the act as a ritual beat; the Selected text carries the same words inside one long line, burying the rite in the narrative. "Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt" is not set off at all: at seven words it is an ordinary line of its poem, and the kneeling is carried by the posture named rather than by any shortening of the line. Where the lineation does isolate the rite, it marks the quiet certainty of an inherited gesture, not doubt. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

90. Regularity marks consolation; doubt is not the unrhymed voice — QUOTE: "Christ's bounty received, / blessings I revere." ("The Teapot," consolation) vs. "Or maybe it's a bluff of nothingness, / a shadowed, fraudulent shore, / where existence / endures no more." ("Mostly I Sit," doubt) SOURCE: prosody (theology carried by sound) GLOSS: The test holds only in part. The hymnal couplet ("Christ's bounty received, / blessings I revere") does arrive at a moment of unclouded blessing. But the doubt of "Mostly I Sit" is not carried by prose-like flatness: its stanza of annihilation holds the poem's only full rhyme, "shore" and "more," closing the vision of "a shadowed, fraudulent shore" on the chime "endures no more." Regular sound in the poems therefore marks both consolation and its opposite, and the rhyme that seals the fear of nothingness is as firm as the one that seals the blessing. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

91. "Mia Bambina" / "A Perfect Hit," the Italian-Catholic voice — QUOTE: "Sure mia bambina. What's one more ingredient? Not a problem." (Nonna, of baking the poisoned cookies) SOURCE: voice (Italian-Catholic register); Italian endearment "mia bambina" ("my little girl") GLOSS: The Italian-Catholic material enters the voice through Nonna's endearment and her conspiratorial, offhand register — the tender Italian phrase "mia bambina" is used to bless a murder, delivered in the same casual tone as "What's one more ingredient?" The Italian word does the work the Irish stories give to the chalice and rosary: it marks the grandmother's tenderness and her moral blindness in one breath. This is the corpus's clearest Italian (rather than Irish) inflection of the matriarch voice. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

92. "Longing," the poem whose subject is its own prosody — QUOTE: "longing to be liked, / to feel significant to someone, / distinct like a Dickinson dash." and "I feel small— / a tiny font, / the blank space beyond a colon, / an abandoned thought. / A letter lacking closure, / or a line— / Stranded and incomplete." SOURCE: voice/prosody; Emily Dickinson's characteristic dash GLOSS: The poem names Dickinson's dash as the emblem of the speaker's own incompleteness, and then enacts it: the lines are themselves broken by dashes, fragments, and a colon left hanging ("the blank space beyond a colon"). The poem's subject is its own typography — font, colon, dash, line — so the prosody is not decoration but the argument itself. This is the corpus's most self-conscious prosodic allusion, carried

entirely by punctuation and line-break rather than by any quoted line. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

93. "Arise and Go Now" and "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the borrowed interior voice — QUOTE: "In my 'deep heart's core,' I knew everything would be alright." ("Arise and Go Now") / "I tell my students, in whatever ways I can, they contain multitudes." ("Teaching at Fifty-Six") SOURCE: voice; Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" ("in the deep heart's core"); Whitman, "Song of Myself" ("I contain multitudes") GLOSS: Both narrators adopt another poet's phrase as their own interior voice: the boy Aiden closes his story inside Yeats's "deep heart's core," and the essay's professor opens his inside Whitman's "contain multitudes." The quotation marks around "deep heart's core" show the boy is aware he is borrowing, while the essay folds "contain multitudes" into its own syntax without attribution. In both cases the voice is built from another poet's cadence, a habit that links the fiction and the essay across their otherwise different registers. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

94. Absent allusions in the online work — a negative finding — QUOTE: (no Joyce, Dante, Flannery O'Connor, or Gerard Manley Hopkins appears anywhere in the online texts; "Ms. Hopkins" in "A Perfect Hit"/"Mia Bambina" is an elementary-school teacher, not the poet) SOURCE: voice/allusion (negative finding) GLOSS: Despite the brief's expectation, the online corpus contains no Joyce, no Dante, no Flannery O'Connor, and no Gerard Manley Hopkins — the "Ms. Hopkins" of the Molly stories is a grade-school teacher remembered for her beehive hairdo. The literary voices Mulhern actually borrows for his own are American (Whitman, Emerson, Dickinson, Thoreau) and Irish (Yeats), not the Catholic-modernist line the brief anticipated. This is a clean negative result: the voice's allusive repertoire is Transcendentalist and Yeatsian, not Joycean or Dantesque. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

95. Arise and Go Now / Blindfolded, the Watts "Hope" ekphrasis — QUOTE: "A blindfolded woman in a green gown sat atop a light brown globe, her head bent to the left. She played a lyre with a single string. In the background, one star sparkled in the gray-blue sky." ("Arise," FotW) / "A blindfolded woman wearing a green gown sat atop a light brown globe, her head bent to the left as she played a lyre with a single string. In the background, one star shone in the gray-blue sky." ("Blindfolded," The Writing Disorder) SOURCE: George Frederic Watts, *Hope* (1886) GLOSS: This is the corpus's single most portable image. The same ekphrastic sentence is reproduced

across two venues with only three micro-variants ("in"/"wearing," "She played"/"as she played," "sparkled"/"shone"), meaning the painted figure travels intact from a story about freeing a mother to a story about curing one. The image is not reworked for its new host; it is carried whole, like a relic, by the recurring cast (Aiden, Laura, the dead grandfather). This is the strongest evidence that the online work's images belong to the fictional world, not to the magazine. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

96. "Hope is sitting right beside me," the twice-spoken name — QUOTE: " 'Hope,' my mother said, laying her arm over my shoulder… which she had placed in the back seat." And: "My grandmother started the car and looked at my mother. 'Hope is sitting right beside me.'" SOURCE: Watts, *Hope*; the theological virtue (1 Cor 13:13) GLOSS: Both "Arise" and "Blindfolded" close on the same exchange — the mother answers a question about what she is looking at with the single word, and the grandmother converts the abstraction into a body seated in the car. Hope is staged as literally incarnate in the returning mother. Because the exchange is duplicated across two magazines, this is the online work's fixed thesis-image: hope is not an allegory but a person who has been gotten back. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

97. The heart, a recurrent image across four pieces — QUOTE: "like many ugly people, she had a heart of gold, and oh could she sing!" (Peggy) / "over which I slyly pushed the heart-shaped planchette" (the essay) / "the wandering Jew with its purple and green heart-shaped leaves" (Arise) / "The soundboard heart cracked." and "glistening strings from the soundboard of your broken soul" ("Piano") SOURCE: image (a heart-chain); the Sacred Heart (for the cracked soundboard) GLOSS: A single shape — the heart — runs from Peggy's "heart of gold," through the heart-shaped planchette and the heart-shaped leaves, to the piano's "soundboard heart" that cracks open. The book has recorded the soundboard's Sacred-Heart echo and the planchette's "trinity," but not that these are one chained image: a sign of interior goodness that migrates from person (Peggy) to instrument (the Ouija board) to furniture (the piano), and is finally "cracked open" for love. Gathering them shows the heart is Mulhern's most reused domestic icon after the cross. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

98. The chalice: sacred relic and shop-window merchandise, in the same venue — QUOTE: "The chalice is a replica of a sacred relic from the Middle Ages." ("Keep Calm," Impspired) / "a display of crystals and gemstones, silver and pewter jewelry,

chalices, glass skulls, and crystal balls." ("A Crystal Wolf," Impspired) SOURCE: image (the chalice, twice) GLOSS: Impspired publishes both poles of the same object: in "Keep Calm," Nanna steals a chalice as a sacred relic with "curing powers"; in "A Crystal Wolf," Molly passes a New Age shop window where chalices sit beside glass skulls for sale. The deflation is absolute — the Grail-object is priced merchandise in one story, a Heaven-touching vessel in the other — and it happens within a single magazine's pages. The venue does not stabilize the image; the narrator's world (Aiden's Irish-Catholic Boston vs. Molly's skeptical Florida) does. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

99. The schooner ladder and the pond — the essay's baptismal-pedagogic image — QUOTE: "Literature, as I see it, is the ladder hanging close to the side of the schooner, this assignment is the first rung, and I want my students to get wet." … "This is communion, and teaching will be the pond that I bathe in each morning." SOURCE: image (Thoreau's nautical register, named among the essay's "patron saints"); immersion/baptism GLOSS: Not yet recorded in the book. The essay's one sustained visual metaphor casts the teacher as lowering himself into water: literature is a ship's ladder, the assignment is its first rung, and the goal is to "get wet," resolved in the final sentence as a "pond that I bathe in each morning." This is the nonfiction's version of the fiction's seawater cure — immersion as healing — only here the water is the classroom. The "get wet" is the prose's most direct self-description of teaching as a repeated baptism. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

100. Charlene's face, the image that "returns" — QUOTE: "The image of Charlene's innocent, shocked expression returns to me again and I wonder what's become of her." SOURCE: image (the face as reliquary) GLOSS: Not yet recorded in the book. Amid the essay's bright classroom and Ouija-board reminiscence, the narrator's only explicitly named "image" is a face — the startled look of a student who lost her whole family and "walked out of my classroom and life forever." It is the essay's equivalent of the Crossings poem's photograph by the coffin: a single unguarded expression that keeps the dead or the vanished present. The verb "returns" quietly makes the memory itself an apparition. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

101. The Ouija board as the nonfiction's chalice — QUOTE: "I see the trinity of our heads over that board as we tried to discern and rift our way into the secret of things." SOURCE: image (the chalice/planchette parallel; the Trinitarian wordplay)

GLOSS: In the fiction the family's instrument for reading the hidden is a stolen chalice, offered and then restored; in the essay it is a Ouija board whose planchette the narrator pushes to a "delight and fright." Both are vessels through which the living try to "discern… the secret of things," and the essay's word "trinity" (three heads over a board) presses the domestic séance against the very doctrine it lightly profanes. The essay names its search for the sacred with the same object-logic the stories use, only in a spellbound childhood rather than a Church. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

102. The dove, two birds carrying one meaning — QUOTE: "startling a mourning dove that sped from its cleft into the bright sky. It made a whistling sound as it rose" ("Assumptions") / " 'Dove?' The heavy security guard looked at the Maple tree… a grey mourning dove fluttered its wings." ("Arise") SOURCE: the dove of the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:16) and of peace (Gen 8:11); Song of Songs 2:14 ("O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock") GLOSS: Confirming, not new: the dove recurs as a *mourning* dove in both FotW pieces, and it always descends or appears at the moment a mother is about to be (or fail to be) freed. The bird's meaning is stable — release, the Spirit, reunion — and it does not shift between the two venues because both belong to the same Aiden world. The one adjective, "mourning," is the whole theology in miniature: the Spirit-bearing bird arrives carrying grief. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

103. The Father cradling the dead child — the most theologically loaded image — QUOTE: "like the flesh of a Father's hands as He cradles His child's head before lifting His crossed arms to kiss her soft cheek. A Father, joyful and tearful at the same time, hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him." SOURCE: an inverted Pietà (God the Father, not the Virgin, receives the dead); the Our Father ("hallowed") GLOSS: This is the single image that does the heaviest theological work in the online corpus, and it is the online work's clearest answer to the Pietà: the dead one is received not by the grieving Mother but by a "joyful and tearful" Father, and it is the Father who is "hallowed" *by her loveliness*. The image argues a resurrection of the body — Peggy is not left dead but "assumed," even transformed, into the Godhead's own affection — and it quietly reverses the Our Father's direction of sanctification. The cross is smuggled in, as always, through the word "crossed." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

104. The grandmother as Marian image — QUOTE: "Next to her, on the windowsill, was a blue marble carving of Mary." / "she shone like a miniature sun." / "my grandmother and Peggy waved to us, transfigured figurines on the earth below, their clothing white as snow." SOURCE: Marian domestic iconography; the Transfiguration (Matt 17:2); Rev 12:1 (the woman clothed with the sun) GLOSS: Confirming, not new: the grandmother's world is staged as a repeated icon — a "blue marble" Mary on her windowsill, and at the beach she and Peg are seen from above as "transfigured figurines… white as snow," an image that returns her to the very statuettes she keeps. The online work consistently fuses the elderly Irish-Catholic grandmother *with* the Virgin she venerates, so that the venerating subject becomes the venerated figure. This is the most worked single thread in the online image-system. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

105. The body as anti-icon (a negative finding) — QUOTE: "I like my vagina, too, especially the dark thick hair around it." (Molly) / "She fingered a gold cross around her neck." (Ashley) SOURCE: image (flesh against the medallion) GLOSS: In "A Perfect Hit" the narrator flaunts her body explicitly to scandalize her devout roommate, who answers by touching a gold cross. The body is here the *anti*-icon: flesh deployed to break a religious image, carrying no theology of its own — no Incarnation, no anointing, none of the hallowing the prose elsewhere grants Peggy's bald scalp. This is the honest negative: in the Molly stories the body is a weapon, not a vessel, and its image carries nothing. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

106. The poems' iconography is a fixed Passion repertoire — stated plainly — QUOTE: "the stained glass / of Veronica wiping the face of Jesus" / "the cheap print of The Last Supper / lay on the floor / its frame splintered" / " 'The Scourged Back' / of an American slave" / "The soundboard heart cracked." SOURCE: the Stations of the Cross (Veronica's veil); the Last Supper; the scourging of Christ; the Sacred Heart GLOSS: Stated plainly, as required: the Crossings poems draw on a small, fixed Passion set — the cross, Veronica's veil, the Last Supper, the scourging, a pierced heart — and on nothing else doctrinal. There is no Annunciation, no Nativity in the poems (Christmas appears only as stage-setting in "The Teapot"), and no Pietà. The prose ranges far more widely (Assumption, Titian's Assunta, an inverted Pietà, the Nativity of the December walk); the poems stay nailed to the Passion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

107. The mannequin, a mock-body dressed as the dead — QUOTE: "We screwed the mannequin together and baptized her 'Candice Kox.'" / "The image of Oona the mannequin in an electric chair flashed in my mind." SOURCE: image (the mannequin as profane effigy; baptism) GLOSS: The prank's mannequin is a counterfeit of a body — assembled, "baptized," then dressed as a dead playwright's daughter and finally imagined in the click of an electric chair. It is the online work's only fabricated human image, a hollow opposite of Peggy's transfigured body or the grandmother's icon-figures, and it is the instrument that kills. The fake body carries the mock-sacrament ("baptized") but no real presence, which is precisely its horror. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

108. "Saint Paul" the dog, sainthood in a frame — QUOTE: " 'Almost seems like one of those fake photographs that comes with the frame.' … On the back was written, 'Mom, Dad, Joey, me, and Saint Paul.' 'Who the fuck is Saint Paul?'" SOURCE: image (the family photograph as contested icon; saintliness by pet-name) GLOSS: The story opens as an act of image-testing: two students decide the perfect blond family picture must be a "fake" stock photo, turn it over, and find a saint's name attached to a Labrador. The frame's authenticity is the running joke, and the joke collapses the hierarchy of sacred and ordinary — a dog gets the apostle's name. It is the online work's comic treatment of what it elsewhere treats seriously: that the sacred is found on the back of a domestic object, mislabeled. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

109. "To Be," a poem built entirely of other writers' images — QUOTE: "the Wife of Bath's scarlet stockings / poor Yorick's skull / Dickinson's sherry in the glass / Gatsby's dock / Hulga's wooden leg" SOURCE: Chaucer (*Canterbury Tales*); Shakespeare (*Hamlet*); Dickinson; Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby*); Flannery O'Connor ("Good Country People") GLOSS: Confirming, not new, but here tied specifically to images: this single list is a litany in which every item is a *thing* from literature — a stocking, a skull, a glass, a dock, a wooden leg — and the speaker asks to become them. O'Connor enters the online work only here, as Hulga's amputated leg, an image of self-inflicted reduction that the speaker explicitly wants to inhabit. Literature is handled, in this poem, purely as a box of iconic objects to be worn. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

110. What is absent — a negative inventory — QUOTE: "a small jar of red wine, and finally, the golden chalice, which sparkled in the well-lit room" (chalice, present) / no

Annunciation, no Nativity image in the poems, no Dantean scene, no Hopkinsian landscape in the online pieces SOURCE: image (absence) GLOSS: Stated plainly: the online work has no Annunciation (only the essay's lily-flower hint and the grandfather-ghost's "angelic" visits), no Nativity in the poems, no Pietà except as the prose's inverted Father-cradle, and no explicit Dante or Joyce image despite their names in the truest sense the book attributes to them — the "dark city" ship-name is etymology, not an Inferno. The repertoire is real but narrower than its reputation: Passion in the poems, Marian-plus-Passion in the prose, and a nature imagery (sea, fire, birds, light) that has no fixed iconography at all. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

111. "Peppermint Candy," Fiction on the Web (2020) — the name "Helen" is given to a teenager — QUOTE: "I told her about Helen Thano." / "I was looking at Helen Thano's file." / "excited to tell the story of 'Heaving Helen' I heard one student say." SOURCE: naming (inventory); the name Helen, re-let to a different bearer GLOSS: The name that names the Irish-Catholic grandmother in "Assumptions" is here re-assigned to a teenage student, Helen Thano, the poisoned girl at the center of the story, and the students reduce it to the taunt "Heaving Helen." Within one author's fictional world "Helen" names both a saint-like matriarch and an abused, victimized girl, so the name carries no fixed moral charge; it is reused, not reserved. The children's nickname is the story's one act of group naming, and it is cruelty disguised as wit, the exact opposite of the "Lovely Peggy" blessing elsewhere in the corpus. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

112. "Peppermint Candy" — the teacher-narrator's name is given by others, never by himself — QUOTE: "Ms. Antonelli turned to me. 'Can I speak with you in the hallway?'" / "'You're a good teacher, Mr. Darnell. Keep it up.'" SOURCE: naming; the surname Darnell, deliberately unmarked GLOSS: The first-person teacher who poisons Helen's peppermint candy never names himself. His name comes only from others, five times, beginning with the school nurse's "Mr. Darnell." on the first page and ending with the principal's "You're a good teacher, Mr. Darnell. Keep it up." The reader therefore learns the killer's name from the institution that trusts him, and last hears it in its praise. "Darnell" is no saint and no ethnic marker: it is a neutral, unechoing surname attached to the one narrator in the online corpus who is culpable without being remarkable, a name that does not even try to mean. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

113. "Assumptions," both venues — Peggy Fleming named against her flawless namesake — QUOTE: "I always thought it a cruel irony that she had the same name as the graceful and beautiful skater who had won the Olympic Gold Medal in 1968." SOURCE: naming; Margaret/Peggy set against the historical figure skater Peggy Fleming (1968) GLOSS: The census's sharpest single naming line, present verbatim in both the 2015 and 2020 online texts: the toothless, hairless, alopecia-stricken widow carries the name of the most graceful woman of her era, and the boy flags the irony himself. The two Peggy Flemings share only the name — grace, white costume, and weightless flight belong to the skater, and the story's Peggy is given all the opposite — so the name becomes the measure of everything she has been cheated of. The story's arc is the slow redemption of that name, until the closing "altogether beautiful, and divine" Peggy finally earns it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

114. "Assumptions," both venues — "Lovely Peggy," the sobriquet born of a sermon on the Word — QUOTE: "'Lovely Peggy' was the sobriquet my grandmother had invented one Sunday after a sermon the priest had given on the power of names and the mystery of the Word." SOURCE: naming (theological); John 1:1, the Logos GLOSS: This is the online work's explicit statement of its own theology of naming, identical in both venues: the grandmother re-names her neighbor after a homily on "the power of names and the mystery of the Word," reasoning that if the family thinks lovely things, Peggy's life will be happier. The act treats a name as word-made-substance — a lay sacrament the family can administer — and it is why the boy mechanically intones "Good morning, Lovely Peggy" at the door. The Johannine Prologue is demoted to a grandmother's nickname without losing any of its force, which is the whole method of the online work's naming: the Logos becomes a kind word. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

115. "Keep Calm and Carry On," Impspired (2021) — the name given and refused — QUOTE: "That was my mother's name, her formal name. I've told you a thousand times to call her Laura." / "My mother was a crackpot. I named my daughter Lorraine to be respectful." SOURCE: naming (sacrament); Lorraine, a French place-name; Laura, from Latin laurus, "laurel" GLOSS: The single most theologically loaded act of naming in the online prose: the grandmother gave her daughter her own mother's name as an act of filial piety toward a woman she herself calls "a crackpot," and then refuses to let anyone use it, insisting on the shortened "Laura." The exchange argues

that a name is an inheritance that can both honor and curse its bearer — "Lorraine" re-binds the mentally ill daughter to the derided visionary line (the great-grandmother who fell down a well and was called "tick"), while "Laura," the laurel, names the whole, beloved self the family hopes she can still be. Naming is shown to be a baptism the grandmother performed and then tried to un-perform. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

116. "Blindfolded," both online printings — "Elaine" and "Galahad," the Grail false-names — QUOTE: "I'm Elaine, and this is my grandson Galahad." SOURCE: Arthurian Grail romance (Galahad the Grail knight; Elaine, his mother in Malory) GLOSS: Fleeing the church after returning the stolen relic, the grandmother gives the priest false names from Arthurian legend — herself "Elaine" and the boy "Galahad," the very knight who achieves the Holy Grail — and when Aiden asks where the names came from, she answers, "Something I read. Probably one of your grandfather's old books." The re-naming is the online work's most literarily freighted alias: the chalice-thief renames herself and her grandson as Grail-quest figures at the exact moment she sets the Grail-object down, turning the whole theft-and-return into a burlesque of the quest for the sacred cup. Even the false names are an inheritance, pulled from the dead grandfather's bookshelf. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

117. "A Crystal Wolf," Impspired (2023) — "Myra Bocca," the name that means mouth — QUOTE: "I'm Myra. Myra Bocca." / "It's Myra. I have a feeling you're saying the wrong name on purpose." SOURCE: naming; Bocca, Italian for "mouth" GLOSS: The relentlessly talkative New Age shopkeeper is literally surnamed "mouth" (Italian bocca), and Molly — who calls her "Myrtle" twice — is diagnosed on the spot: "you're saying the wrong name on purpose." The scene is the online work's purest demonstration that refusing a name is a weapon: Molly withholds Myra's real name as contempt, and Myra insists on it ("It's Myra") as dignity, so the two women's whole power struggle is waged in names long before any plot. The aptronym fits the woman it mocks — a mouth that cannot stop, and a person who is finally only her mouth. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

118. "A Crystal Wolf" — Lazarus misheard as Lassie, the sacred name degraded to a dog — QUOTE: "Well, when Lazzy died." / "Lassie?" I said. / "Lazarus. My husband." SOURCE: naming; Lazarus (John 11), the man raised from the dead, misheard as the collie Lassie GLOSS: The dead husband's name is the biblical

Lazarus — the man Jesus called back from the grave — and Molly, tipsy, hears it as "Lassie," the famous television collie. The joke is the cleanest instance of a device that runs the whole online corpus: a name of enormous weight degrades to an animal in a listener's ear. A name that promises resurrection is reduced to a dog in the same breath that reminds us the husband stays dead, so the mishearing quietly concedes that the miracle never came. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

119. "A Perfect Hit" / "Mia Bambina" — "Molly Bonamici," good friends and a sociopath — QUOTE: "I'm Molly Bonamici." / "My name is Molly Bonamici." SOURCE: naming; Bonamici, Italian buoni amici, "good friends"; Molly, a diminutive of Mary GLOSS: The narrator's surname means "good friends," and she is the friend who poisons her roommate; her given name is a form of Mary, the Mother of God, worn by an avowed atheist. The name is a double irony the stories never spell out but keep leaning on: the woman named "good friends" befriends and murders, and the woman named for the Virgin ends the story crowing that her victim "died for her sins." The name is as precisely apt as Peggy Fleming's is precisely cruel, but in the subversive key. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

120. Across the corpus — the recurring degradation of a sacred name into animal or nonsense — QUOTE: "On the back was written, 'Mom, Dad, Joey, me, and Saint Paul.'" / "And where were 'Repapah' and 'Kadiddle'." / "Lassie?" I said. "Lazarus. My husband." SOURCE: naming (formal observation); the misheard or mis-applied holy name GLOSS: Three venues repeat the same trick: the apostle's name lands on a Labrador ("Saint Paul"), the biblical place-names Rephidim and Kadesh become the child's "Repapah" and "Kadiddle," and the resurrected Lazarus becomes the collie "Lassie." Each cases a name of sacred or scriptural weight onto an animal or a garble, so that the holy is heard as the merely domestic. It is the online work's most consistent onomastic habit, and it performs the corpus's central claim: the sacred arrives already degraded, and must be translated — or simply believed — anyway. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

121. Across venues — the devout roommate is "Ashley Adams" online, "Felicity Adams" in the novel — QUOTE: "my full name is Ashley Adams." (identical in both online printings) SOURCE: naming (variant across venues); comparison with the novel Molly Bonamici's "Felicity Adams" GLOSS: The same cross-wearing, Genesis-quoting roommate who is poisoned by the cookies is "Ashley Adams" in both

magazine texts, but the print novel renames the figure "Felicity Adams." Only the surname is stable across venues — the "Adams" that carries the Adam-pun and the bland Anglo-Protestant marker — while the given name is swapped between the online and the book forms. It is the corpus's clearest example of a character whose name is not fixed but renegotiated at each publication, as if the author keeps the patronymic and freely re-grants the first name. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

122. Across venues — the grandmother's polyonymous name (Helen / Catherine / Elaine / Nanna) — QUOTE: "It's a good thing she has a neighbor like Helen to check on her." ("Assumptions") / "I don't know, Catherine." ("Keep Calm") / "I'm Elaine, and this is my grandson Galahad." ("Blindfolded") SOURCE: naming (variant across venues); the composite matriarch GLOSS: One matriarch figure is "Helen" in "Assumptions," "Catherine" to her peers in "Keep Calm" and "Arise and Go Now," "Elaine" in her own false self-naming in "Blindfolded," and only "Nanna"/"Nonna" to the child and granddaughter narrators. Hers is the one name in the online work that refuses to hold still across venues, because she is less a remembered individual than a type — the devout, larcenous, tender grandmother — re-named for each telling. In the 2026 Crossings she is "Helen" in the dedication and "Catherine" in a poem title, so she carries two names inside a single book; and "Helen" is also the student in "Peppermint Candy," making the matriarch's most common name the corpus's most promiscuous. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

123. "Teaching at Fifty-Six" (The Font, 2019) — the named classroom and the involuntary self-name — QUOTE: "then I am repeatedly interrupted by Sasha, Makeba, Latitha, Tim, or Mark, who asks me if he/she can to go to the restroom" SOURCE: naming (essay census); real student names; the author's own surname GLOSS: The essay is the online work's densest act of real-person naming: across its length it names some twenty students (Sasha, Makeba, Latitha, Tim, Mark, Nadine, Jessica, Alex, Shane, Judy, Melanie, Andrea, John, Michael, David, Rhonda, Charlene, Kayla, Deshae, Ebony, and Veanna), plus the childhood friend Melinda Baker and the babysitter Cheryl, plus "Mom." The one name the essayist never gives himself is supplied by his students' mockery — "Mr. Mulhern be on crack" — so the author's own surname enters the essay only as an insult a student mutters. The classroom is named and the teacher is named-by-others, which is itself the essay's quiet point about who does the naming. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

124. Crossings, "The Teapot" — the grace-poem names the whole family — QUOTE: "Mike and I jested. / Beth complained a nun / mocked her purple tree. / Mark, red-faced, boasted / we ran from cops. / Dan eyed the clock." SOURCE: naming (poem census); the siblings named around the table GLOSS: The one poem in the collected corpus that names every member of the family by name is the Thanksgiving grace poem "The Teapot," built on "Nanna's Irish prayer — 'thy gifts' — received." The four siblings — Mike, Mark, Dan, Beth — are each named in a single line as the family says grace, so naming and blessing coincide: to say the names is to say "these thy gifts." It states the poems' actual rule, which is generational rather than mortal: siblings and the grandmother receive names while the parents stay "Mom" and "Dad" and the grandfather stays "you." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

125. Crossings, "Moving Forward" — the mother's ordinal in place of a name — QUOTE: "How are things, my number three child?" SOURCE: naming (withholding); the narrator named only by birth order GLOSS: In the poem about euthanizing the dog Ethel and the mother going blind, the mother addresses her son as "my number three child" — by ordinal, never by name. It is the poems' sharpest instance of a character left unnamed within his own family: the speaker, the third of five children, is named by position rather than by self. The ordinal is at once intimate (only a mother would count her children) and anonymous (it could be any of five), and it holds the whole tension of the elegiac poems' handling of names — closest to the dearest, yet never settling them into a proper noun. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

126. Crossings, "You Hurt My Eyes" — the slave whose name does not survive — QUOTE: "'Gordon' or 'Peter.' / Historians are uncertain / of his name." SOURCE: naming (erasure); the photographed enslaved man, "Gordon"/"Peter" GLOSS: The poem about the "The Scourged Back" photograph is the corpus's one direct meditation on the loss of a name: the man is "Gordon" or "Peter," and "historians are uncertain of his name," so he is "confined … to a picture on a page." It treats namelessness not as the elegies' tenderness but as a moral catastrophe, a man reduced to a single record whose name no longer coheres — a second loss on top of the first, and the naming-system's clearest statement that a name is a thing history can fail to keep. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

127. The elegiac poems — the elders are addressed but never named — QUOTE: "But you were not that type of father." ("The Crosswalk") / "My only memory of you

—" ("Dark City") / "You smashed the piano well" ("Piano") SOURCE: naming (withholding); the father and grandfather addressed only as "you" GLOSS: The elders nearest the speaker — the father in "The Crosswalk," "Piano," and "Copacetic," the grandfather in "Dark City" — are never named; they are "you" or "Dad," while the siblings and the neighbor Margaret receive names. The governing distinction is generational rather than mortal: a dead brother is named freely, in the title of his own elegy and casually elsewhere, because he was once an equal, while a father is withheld because he was an authority. The sharpest single instance is "The Crosswalk," where the father attributes the shed-building to "Danny" rather than to the narrator, effacing the son's own name in the same sentence that withholds his own. What the withholding does is keep the elder at the intimate distance of a pronoun, never fixed into a name that would finally place him in the past — the namelessness is the poems' refusal to finish their grief. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

128. The widow named twice — "Peggy" (Margaret) and her "Jim," from story into poem — QUOTE: "My grandmother goaded Peg to sing 'When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New,' Peg's favorite." ("Assumptions") / "She glanced at the stairs, imagining her deceased Jim would come down." ("Piano," Academy of the Heart and Mind) SOURCE: naming (recurrence); Peggy as diminutive of Margaret; the dead husband "Jim"; the song tied to the name GLOSS: The same figure recurs across the online corpus under the same name-chain: "Peggy," a diminutive of Margaret, is in "Assumptions" a drunken Irish widow bereft of her husband Jim who sings the parlor song "When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New," and "Margaret, the drunken neighbor" in the poem "Piano" is another singing widow who imagines her "deceased Jim" descending to join her in the same song's final chorus. The name, the dead husband's name, and the song travel together from the story into the poem, so "Jim" becomes the name of every lost husband and the song the hymn of every Peggy/Margaret. It is the quietest proof that the online work's names belong to one remembered world rather than to any single venue. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

129. "Copacetic," the added final image on the site reading copy — QUOTE: "By dawn, he'd gone. / His robe, folded, / on the table by the door." SOURCE: structure: an object-coda replacing a statement of waking; John 20:6-7 (the burial cloths found folded in the empty tomb) GLOSS: The journal text of this poem ends on the speaker's own consciousness — "When I wake, I find that he has gone" — which is a statement

about the survivor. The website reading copy cuts that line and substitutes three short lines about a garment left folded beside a doorway, so the poem now closes on a looked-at thing rather than a reported feeling. The Johannine resurrection scene turns on exactly this detail: the body absent, the cloth folded, the disciple reading absence off linen. Nothing names the allusion; the structural move — end on the folded cloth, not on the mourner — carries it. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

130. "Dark City," the reversed closing line — QUOTE: "I see you move from darkness into light." SOURCE: structure: the last line inverted between venues; the paschal formula of passage out of darkness GLOSS: In Ginosko and in the Academy of the Heart and Mind text the emigrant grandfather's poem ends "I see you move from light into darkness and beyond," which sends him out of the sunlit kitchen into the shellacked hall and then past sight altogether — an elegy that concedes the dark. The site reading copy reverses the vector word for word. Since nothing else in the closing lines changes, the entire theological weight of the poem rests on the order of two nouns, and the revision converts a poem that ends in loss into one that ends in transit toward light. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

131. "The Crosswalk," the question moved to the threshold — QUOTE: "Why never the swings?" SOURCE: structure: an interrogative promoted to the opening position GLOSS: In the journal versions the complaint about the swings arrives buried in the middle of a sentence of explanation ("wondered why you / never lifted me and held my legs / or brought me to the swings"), subordinate and defused. The site reading copy lifts it out, strips it to four words, and sets it before the first image as a bare question. The poem is thereafter an answer to a question it has already asked, which is the shape of a catechism rather than a reminiscence. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

132. "The Crosswalk," statement ending replaced by image ending — QUOTE: "One moment, framed." SOURCE: structure: closing on a photographed object instead of a summary judgement GLOSS: The Ginosko and Academy text ends by telling the reader what to conclude: "Proof that we had closeness for a moment, / and that is enough." The revised ending removes both the word "proof" and the verdict "enough" and leaves only the picture by the casket, named as a frame. This is the same operation as in "Copacetic" — a spoken conclusion traded for a mute object —

and the pairing suggests a deliberate formal preference in the later work for endings that withhold the moral. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

133. "Brother" / "Brother Mark," the sacred word that the revision deletes — QUOTE: "and I dream we never stepped outside our hallowed space." SOURCE: structure: religious diction present in the journal version and absent from the site version GLOSS: The Academy of the Heart and Mind text calls the circle of fire under the bridge a "hallowed space," making the boys' drinking and singing an explicit sanctuary, and then ends on cold and glare: "The snow was so cold and the streetlights too strong." The site reading copy renames the poem for the brother, drops "hallowed" entirely, and ends "I wish we'd stayed, / never stepped into the snowy light." This is a negative finding worth recording plainly: the online journal text is the more overtly sacral one, and the later form achieves reverence by removing the word for it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

134. "Piano," the embedded song inside the poem — QUOTE: "When your old wedding ring was new" SOURCE: structure: a popular song quoted at length inside a lyric, functioning as an interpolated text GLOSS: The Academy version stages a second voice inside the poem — Margaret the drunken neighbour at the keyboard, her lyrics quoted across four lines, sung to a dead husband she imagines descending the basement stairs. The device is liturgical in shape: a widow's song addressed to the absent, performed while the instrument that will be destroyed is still whole. The site reading copy deletes Margaret and her song outright, which removes the poem's only embedded structure and leaves a single unbroken speaker. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

135. "Arise and Go Now," the frame opened by a request for a story — QUOTE: "Tell me about your ghost. I love stories." SOURCE: structure: the invitation to tell, which opens an embedded tale GLOSS: The story does not begin with its subject; it begins with two people drinking tea, and what follows is licensed by Rita asking to be told. The telling is not a closed frame, since the story runs forward in time and Rita enters the action, but it opens as testimony offered to a doubter. Everything sacred in the piece — the grandfather's returning voice, the rescue, the transcribed Yeats — is thus formally a story told to satisfy a listener who has just said she does not believe. The frame makes the supernatural material testimony under cross-examination rather than assertion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

136. "Arise and Go Now," the question answered only by "Maybe" — QUOTE: "I tend to think not." SOURCE: structure: the unclosed frame; a doctrinal question posed in the frame and answered only by the inner narrative GLOSS: Aiden asks Rita directly whether she believes there is life after death, and she declines it. Rita does not remain a listener: she takes part in the rescue, the story ends on the way back to "Rita's house," and her position moves from refusal to "Maybe… I suppose anything is possible." No one ever states the affirmative as belief; it is delivered obliquely by the plot instead — the grandfather speaks, the mother is freed, the closing sentences assert wellbeing. An unclosed frame here means the belief is never stated as belief by anyone competent to state it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

137. "Arise and Go Now," the metafictional line about endings — QUOTE: "If we knew endings, life would be mundane, don't you think?" SOURCE: structure: a character's remark that describes the story's own formal problem GLOSS: Rita says this early, refusing to look ahead, and the sentence doubles as a statement of the piece's method: the reader is denied any settled ending — the grandmother's intended apology is discussed but never dramatised, the frame lapses, and the last paragraph substitutes a general assurance for a resolution. Placed in the mouth of the story's sceptic, it also licenses the religious material by classing certainty itself as dull. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

138. "Arise and Go Now," the photographs as an embedded sequence — QUOTE: "In each photograph, the island appeared closer." SOURCE: structure: a sequence of images embedded in the narrative as a progression; pilgrimage form GLOSS: The transcribed Yeats poem in the album is followed by five photographs read in order, and what the narrator notices is not their content but their sequence: the island approaches frame by frame. A set of snapshots is thereby converted into a processional structure with a destination, which is how the piece gets Innisfree to stand in for the afterlife without ever equating them. The sentence "Time is an illusion" stands alone as its own paragraph a few lines later, confirming that the album is being read as a form and not as a memento. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

139. "Arise and Go Now," the closing widening from plot to universal claim — QUOTE: "A brother rescued her, Martin would always rescue me, and we had just rescued my mother." SOURCE: structure: the triadic summation followed by a universalising sentence GLOSS: The ending assembles three rescues across three

generations into a single sentence of parallel clauses, then immediately widens past the family: "At this very instant, people throughout the world were helping one another." The triad is the story's nearest approach to doctrine — a communion of mutual aid substituted for a communion of saints — and it is delivered as assertion, not image. Of the online prose pieces this is the one that most clearly ends on a statement, which makes it the exception to the pattern in the poems. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

140. "Peppermint Candy," the closed circle that carries nothing sacred — QUOTE: "When she left, I put the peppermints in my satchel. I would share them again another day." SOURCE: structure: the completed circle, opening object returned in the final clause GLOSS: This is the most tightly closed form in the online prose: the piece opens on a line of Poe, read aloud in class, about rats swarming a framework and ends with the title object pocketed and promised forward, the loop shut. It is also the plainest negative finding of the set — the perfectly circular story is the one with no religious content whatever, no prayer, no scripture, no grandmother's God. Closure and sacrament do not travel together in this body of work; the closed forms are the secular ones and the sacred ones leak. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

141. "Crystal Wolf," the story promised and never told — QUOTE: "But that's a story for another night." SOURCE: structure: the unclosed frame; an embedded narrative announced and withheld GLOSS: Myra the psychic raises her own falling-out with the coffee-shop owner, defers it to a night that the story does not reach, and is dead before the end. The withheld tale is structurally load-bearing: it is the one piece of knowledge that would explain the death, and the piece ends without it. A fortune-teller who cannot get her own story out is the form's comment on the New Age apparatus the story treats as watered-down religion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

142. "Crystal Wolf," statement then image at the close — QUOTE: "The finality saddened me, and reminded me of the certainty of death." SOURCE: structure: an abstract closing statement immediately overridden by a closing image GLOSS: The narrator states the moral in the flattest possible terms, and then the story refuses to stop there: he throws the obsidian stone at the stretcher and watches it roll "past her body into the shadows of the crowd." The final gesture is a burial offering that misses, an anointing that rolls away, and it does the work that the sentence about

certainty cannot. Read together they show the piece distrusting its own statement enough to bury it under a picture. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

143. "Mia Bambina" / "A Perfect Hit," the murder held in the conditional — QUOTE: "Ironically, Ashley and I had something in common—a genetic inheritance. I guess you could say we both had heart conditions." SOURCE: structure: a closing passage in the future-in-the-past, so that the act is never narrated GLOSS: The killing that the whole story exists to deliver is never given a scene. The final page instead supplies a diagnosis in the form of a pun on inherited heart trouble and then a stack of would-clauses — the phone call she would make, the note she would praise, the thanks she would give her grandmother — so the reader is handed an intention and a forecast rather than an event. The religious matter attached to it ("Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit"; the victim who "had died for her sins") therefore glosses a deed the form declines to show, which is why the theology reads as ornament laid over a void. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

144. "Water," compression as the form's pressure on the sacrament — QUOTE: "reaching for water / that will not rise." SOURCE: structure: the shortest poem in the collection by word count ("For the Animals" has one line fewer), ending on a withheld element GLOSS: Twelve short lines, one figure, no statement: an old man on a dock cups his hands toward a lake he cannot reach. At this degree of compression there is no room to bury anything, and the religious content survives only as the shape of a thwarted rite — hands cupped as for a blessing or a baptism, the water refusing to meet them. The test bears out for the short pieces generally: brevity does not force the sacred content into the open so much as reduce it to a single gesture that must do all the work. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

145. "The Guard," the poem that ends on an unanswered question — QUOTE: "Or does he want to escape / the risen, searing Sun?" SOURCE: structure: closing interrogative; stained glass of Veronica as the sixth Station of the Cross GLOSS: Of the twenty-seven poems in the site reading copy (with an Epilogue besides) this is the one that will not close at all: it ends in a run of questions about a minor figure in a window — is he a sad witness, does he have doubts like the speaker, is he eager for enlightenment, or does he want out. The final word is "Sun," capitalised and preceded by "risen," which lets the homophone carry an affirmation the speaker has

just declined to make in his own voice. The structure is the argument: the doubt is given to the guard so the poem need not own it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

146. "Last Supper," the doubled kneeling — QUOTE: "beside the shattered print." SOURCE: structure: a repeated posture used as the poem's hinge; Leonardo's Cenacolo as domestic object GLOSS: The man kneels twice — once at his father's coffin, where he says an Our Father and kisses the forehead, and once at home beside the broken picture, where he says nothing and his back shakes. The cheap reproduction falls and splinters at the poem's midpoint, before the wake, so the second kneeling is offered to a ruined image rather than to a body. The poem makes no claim about grace; it simply repeats a liturgical posture in a place where no liturgy is available, and lets the repetition state the loss. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

147. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the adversative as structural joint — QUOTE: "But the universe is also joyful and magical." SOURCE: structure: paragraph-initial "But" used as the essay's principal transition GLOSS: The essay's sections are welded with bare contradictions — "But still we feel the pain. Life hurts," then "But the universe is also joyful and magical" — rather than with arguments. This is alternation, not proof: each paragraph reverses the emotional polarity of the one before, so that the piece advances by oscillation between grief and delight. Against the stories, which show and then stop, the essay does argue, but its logical connectives are almost entirely adversative, which means it argues by contradiction rather than by demonstration. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

148. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the sentence fragment that enacts synchronicity — QUOTE: "Like the moment Kayla announces in class" SOURCE: structure: a grammatically dependent paragraph hung off the preceding paragraph on Jung GLOSS: The paragraph defining synchronicity ends, and the next paragraph opens with a subordinate clause that has no main verb of its own — it is an example attached to a sentence the reader has already finished. The essay therefore performs the concept it has just named: two units that belong to different paragraphs turn out to be one utterance, a meaningful coincidence enacted in the syntax. This is the clearest case in the online work of an idea carried by structure rather than by wording. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

149. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the argument the essay refuses to make aloud — QUOTE: "a literalist interpretation of the Bible is ignorant, dangerous, and offensive" SOURCE: structure: the withheld statement, framed as what the speaker does not say GLOSS: Asked by a student whether Jonah and the whale is true, the narrator gives the tolerant classroom answer, then in a separate sentence prefaced "I don't say, what I really think" delivers the real verdict. The essay's single polemical claim is thus structurally quarantined — spoken to the reader, withheld from the room. The device lets the piece hold an anti-literalist position and a reverent one at once, which is exactly what the later return to Hughes's "Salvation" and the closing "This is communion" require. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

150. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the return that actually closes — QUOTE: "then I bring the class back to order" SOURCE: structure: the da capo return to a text introduced earlier; Langston Hughes, "Salvation" GLOSS: Hughes's essay is raised, abandoned for Deshae's story about the homeless man who thinks he is Jesus, and then explicitly resumed — the narrator brings the class back, summarises Hughes at length, and only then produces the pivot "It occurs to me that teaching is my salvation." This is the one fully closed frame in the whole online body: the essay opens a text, digresses, and returns on purpose. The stories leave their frames hanging; the essay does not, and that difference is the strongest formal distinction between the two modes. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

151. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the swerve into second person — QUOTE: "The door closes and you are left in the room" SOURCE: structure: a shift of grammatical person at a section joint; T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ("formulated phrase") GLOSS: The paragraph about students graduating ends on "Students come and go," and the next begins in the second person, so the loss is handed to the reader to occupy rather than reported by the teacher. The Eliot phrase arrives inside that borrowed body — "how they would fix you in some formulated phrase" — and the two questions that follow are unanswered. Prufrock's dread of being summarised is imported by the change of pronoun, not by the quotation alone. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

152. "Crossings" sampler, the paratext that withholds twenty-eight times — QUOTE: "Excerpt only — for the complete poem, see the print/ebook edition or request the full manuscript." SOURCE: structure: a repeated closing formula in place

of endings GLOSS: On the sampler page every poem is cut after two lines and stopped with an ellipsis and this sentence, twenty-eight times. The formal consequence is that the sacred material becomes the bait rather than the burial: what a reader meets of "Brother Mike" is "we knelt after Communion," of "The Guard" the stained glass "of Veronica wiping the face of Jesus," of "Last Supper" only a phone ringing in the dark. In this online form the religious image occupies the opening position by default, which is the reverse of the stories, where it is characteristically buried. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

153. "Assumptions," The Galway Review, the biography above the title — QUOTE: "In 2013, he was a Finalist for the Tuscany Prize in Catholic Fiction." SOURCE: reader-response: first contact; venue paratext (author biography printed before title and epigraph) GLOSS: The Galway Review reader meets the words "Catholic Fiction" before the story's title, before the Song of Solomon epigraph and before any sentence of the story. The reprint therefore does not leave the epigraph to signal religion by itself: it replaces Fiction on the Web's editorial summary with a credential that files the author under a confessional genre. The biography sets a devotional expectation that the story's comic opening ("homeliest damn woman") at once undercuts and the closing Father-image finally meets. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

154. Impspired, the three author biographies compared — QUOTE: "In 2013, he was a Finalist for the / Tuscany Prize in / Catholic Fiction." ("Keep Calm and Carry On") / "James Mulhern's writing has appeared in literary journals over one hundred and fifty times and has been recognized with many awards." ("Mia Bambina" and "A Crystal Wolf") SOURCE: reader-response: first contact; venue paratext across one magazine; the Crossings "About the Author" note, which puts the credential last: "Awards and honors include: Finalist for the Tuscany Prize in Catholic Fiction" GLOSS: The same magazine gives the chalice story a biography that names Catholic fiction, and gives the two Molly stories, whose narrator mocks the Bible and poisons a Christian, a rewritten biography with the Catholic prize taken out and an Aesthetica poetry shortlisting put in its place. Whatever the reason for the change, the Impspired reader meets the grandmother's pieties with a Catholic signal already given, and meets Molly's atheism with none. On the Crossings page the credential comes after the last poem, so the collection's reader arrives at the prayers-as-poems without it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG (as to text); PROBABLE (as to effect)

155. "Arise and Go Now," Fiction on the Web, the editor's summary line — QUOTE: "Aiden plots with his grandfather's ghost to free his mother from the mental asylum; by James Mulhern." SOURCE: reader-response: first contact; editorial summary as a settled answer to the story's open question GLOSS: The venue's one-line summary states the ghost as fact before the story reaches the scene where Rita doubts it ("I tend to think not"; "Aiden, you have an active imagination"). The online reader therefore reads the doubting scene already knowing the answer, as someone who has been told, not as a judge weighing evidence. The editor's word "asylum" also accepts the family's view ("nuthouse," "hellhole") over the diagnosis the story reports, "a diagnosis of schizophrenia." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

156. "Peppermint Candy," Fiction on the Web, the summary line and the explanations offered — QUOTE: "A teacher has to deal with a difficult student vomiting in his class; by James Mulhern." / "I think that horror story got to her." / "Probably just a small case of food poisoning." / "That seems likely," I said. SOURCE: reader-response: first contact that misleads; the unreliable first-person narrator; Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum," read aloud in the first sentence GLOSS: The editor's line recruits the reader to the teacher's side ("difficult student") and to the harmless reading that the whole school accepts in turn: the Poe story, the nachos, food poisoning. Each of these rational explanations is false, and the narrator agrees with the last one. The reader is fooled together with the characters until the narrator discloses the crime, so the twist lands on the reader too. The Poe line about "swarming with rats" comes back when the teacher's word for Helen is quoted, "rat and her mother was a pain in the ass," so the text read aloud in class turns out to be the teacher's verdict on her. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

157. "Peppermint Candy," the disclosure made to the reader alone — QUOTE: "I thought of the care I had taken to lightly rub Visine onto the peppermint candy before rewrapping it." SOURCE: reader-response: the reader cast as the only confessor; negative of the sacrament of penance (confession without contrition or absolution) GLOSS: No character learns what the reader learns, and the principal's apology ("I was a bit accusatory earlier") is aimed at the guilty man. The reader is put in a confessor's position with nothing to absolve, because the narrator shows no remorse and plans to do it again: "Would you like a piece of candy before you go? Peppermint?" This is the online corpus's clearest case of the reader as sole confessor

with no religious vocabulary in the scene. The only "God" in the story is the principal's "God! You only have ten minutes." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

158. "Arise and Go Now," Rita as the reader's stand-in, weighing evidence — QUOTE: "Aiden, you have an active imagination." / "Did you read something in one of your grandfather's journals?" / "Maybe… I suppose anything is possible." SOURCE: reader-response: the reader as judge; the proof is an answered prayer to Saint Anthony, patron of lost things GLOSS: The scene tries the ghost in front of a sceptic, who offers the reader three rational explanations in turn: imagination, a dream ("You were dreaming about your grandfather"), and a written source. The evidence that moves her is a private fact, a prayer to Saint Anthony that found the pearls, so the proof of the ghost is itself a folk-Catholic answered prayer. Rita ends at "Maybe", and she goes on to drive the rescue car, so she is a participant, not a listener in a frame. The reader is given a sceptic's partial assent to share, not a conversion. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

159. "Blindfolded," The Writing Disorder and CC&D, the ghost's mark on the face — QUOTE: "In the mirror, my cheeks appeared sunburnt. The color would fade by the morning, as it always did." SOURCE: reader-response: physical evidence offered to the reader, with a natural explanation to hand; cf. Exodus 34:29-35 (the skin of Moses' face shines after he speaks with God, and he veils it) GLOSS: After the grandfather's visit ("the bubbles of light faded and he was gone") the boy gets the only bodily trace of the supernatural in the online prose, and it is one a reader can explain away as a flush or a sunburn. The phrase "as it always did" makes the visit habitual and the mark routine, which asks the reader to accept the visits as a regular fact of the boy's life, not a single miracle. The echo of Moses' shining face, a mark of divine encounter that fades, is available but not signalled. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE (the Exodus parallel SPECULATIVE)

160. "Blindfolded," both printings, the first speech and the grandmother's theology of miracles — QUOTE: "I don't know if I believe it, but I hope so." / "I often doubt the possibility of miracles, but then I find myself thinking that every moment is miraculous." / "We make our own miracles." SOURCE: reader-response: first contact (the story's first spoken words); the believer who supplies her own rational alternative; the CC&D page is headed by the issue title "Of This I am Certain" GLOSS: The reader's first contact with "Blindfolded" at either venue is a sentence that makes

doubt and hope equal, and it states the terms on which the story will ask for belief. When the miracle is due, the believer herself withdraws the claim ("I'm not sure that a sip of wine from that beautiful cup performed such a miracle, but I pray that it did") and turns it into a secular virtue ("instead of sitting on our arses waiting for Jesus to put the world right"). At CC&D this doubtful opening sits under a page title that asserts certainty, an irony the venue created and the author did not. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

161. "Keep Calm and Carry On," Impspired, the healing service seen from inside the plan — QUOTE: "I knew I was supposed to fall back but was afraid the old geezers wouldn't catch me." / "my grandmother whispered irritably. Then she said very quietly." / "Remember our plan." SOURCE: reader-response: the reader cast as accomplice, not witness; the charismatic practice of "resting in the Spirit"; Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11 (the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh), the grandmother's invented praise of the priest GLOSS: The congregation sees a miracle ("People gasped"), while the reader has been told in advance that the fall is staged as cover for a theft. The grandmother's scriptural praise ("You certainly have the power of the Holy Spirit in you") therefore reaches the reader as a joke shared with her, not as testimony. The piece makes the reader a partner in the fraud before it asks, in its last scene, for sympathy with her real tears. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

162. "Assumptions," Fiction on the Web against The Galway Review, Peg's profession of belief — QUOTE: "Her eyes seemed teary, but she smiled and winked directly at me as she looked past my grandmother" (Fiction on the Web) / "so I can look divine for my Jim over there," she said, looking at me. (The Galway Review) SOURCE: reader-response: the reader drawn into complicity with the believer's performance; the grandmother's "Miracles do happen, ya know" GLOSS: At Fiction on the Web, Peg's "I believe miracles sometimes do happen, Helen" is followed by a wink at the boy, which tells him and the reader that the belief is partly a kindness to Helen. The Galway Review text has no wink, so its reader receives Peg's statement as sincere. The same sentence of faith is ironic at one venue and plain at the other, and the story's child sceptic stays in both: "Since we weren't sick and didn't need a cure," Mary's blessing "seemed like a gyp" (Galway spells it "gip"). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

163. "Assumptions," both venues, the closing vision given as imagined — QUOTE: "I imagined Peggy" / "eyes no longer teary, her countenance reflecting the brightness

of a blazing fire." SOURCE: reader-response: the reader as mourner; Matthew 17:2 and 28:3 (face as the sun, garments white as snow), already present in "their clothing white as snow" GLOSS: The one afterlife vision in the online prose is framed by the verb "imagined," and it borrows Peg's own phrase, over there, in quotation marks, so the reader is given it as the mourner's picture, not as the narrator's claim. The tense then moves into the present, "she rises once again to sing," and the ending asks the reader to join a remembered hope, not to accept a doctrine. The same story's earlier rational framing of Peg's visions, the whispered delirium tremens and "how she was imagining things" (Fiction on the Web), uses the same verb for a drunk woman's hallucinations. The reader has to hold the two uses of the verb together. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

164. "Keep Calm and Carry On," read alone: a theft without restitution and a hope without fulfilment — QUOTE: "She was taking the jewelry and chalice out of her bag, examining them in the light." / "Don't worry, Nanna. I believe in miracles, too. Someday Mom will come home from the hospital." SOURCE: reader-response: meaning that depends on context the single-piece reader lacks (the other chalice stories at other venues) GLOSS: In the Impspired story the chalice is never given to the mother, never returned and never tied to a cure, and no ghost appears. The only grandfather the reader meets is "weak. Addicted to the bottle." The boy's belief in miracles is left as an unfulfilled promise, and the grandmother's "I'm going to return it" is never carried out. The drinking, the return and the mother's homecoming happen only in "Blindfolded" and "Arise and Go Now" at other magazines. Read alone, "Keep Calm" is a story of theft and consolation in which grace never arrives. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

165. "A Crystal Wolf," Impspired, read alone: the narrator who judges a sociopath — QUOTE: "Myra is a sociopath. They do whatever they want. They don't think about the consequences." / "However dishonest she was, she didn't deserve to die that way." SOURCE: reader-response: irony available only to a reader of the dormitory story; The Galway Review text supplies the missing word: "One of the perks of being a sociopath is that you learn how to easily gather necessary information by manipulating people" GLOSS: A reader who meets only "A Crystal Wolf" sees Molly as a blunt, grieving sceptic who is warned about a predatory woman and then pities her death. Only the dormitory murder story shows that the

narrator is herself a self-declared sociopath and a poisoner, and that the Nonna whose eyes Myra "reminded me a bit of" baked the poison. Even the Impspired reader of "Mia Bambina" lacks the self-diagnosis, because that version never uses the word "sociopath"; it appears only at The Galway Review. The moral verdict at the close of "A Crystal Wolf" therefore reads straight or ironic depending on which other magazine the reader has seen. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

166. "A Crystal Wolf," the psychic's claims and the plain explanations — QUOTE: "It was the way that you pronounced 'dear' that clued me in. You dropped the 'r.'" / "Lots of people experience death. That's not psychic," I said. SOURCE: reader-response: every supernatural claim answered at once by a natural one; the New Age shop "Sacred Ashes" (cf. Ash Wednesday) as the setting of the claims GLOSS: Each of Myra's three claims to second sight (Massachusetts, a death, Italian origin) is disproved within a line or two, by Gabe's point about her accent, by Molly's retort, and by Myra's own admission ("I'm not gonna pretend that was my psychic ability"). Unlike the Aiden stories, where the reader is left to weigh the ghost, this story gives the reader no supernatural claim that survives. It is the online piece in which the rational alternative wins every time, and its mourning ends not in grace but in "the certainty of death." CONFIDENCE: STRONG

167. "Brother," Academy of the Heart and Mind, read alone — QUOTE: "Your arm crosses my cold neck and hugs my shoulder, / and I dream we never stepped outside our hallowed space." SOURCE: reader-response: meaning dependent on the collection; the Crossings dedication ("Mark—Together with friends under the bridge, / the warmth of your arm around my shoulder / was as comforting as your protective spirit— / I feel.") and "Carol" ("recall the void of loved ones lost— / my father, my brother") GLOSS: Nothing in the magazine poem says the brother is dead: he is unnamed, the memory is a teenage night, and the present tense ("Your arm crosses") reads as nostalgia for a living man. The Crossings page puts him among "those who have passed / into the other room" and speaks of his "protective spirit". Once the reader knows this, the dream in which the arm "crosses" the speaker's neck becomes a visit from the dead. The word "hallowed" is a word of nostalgia for the magazine reader and a word of elegy for the reader of the collection. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

168. "Assumptions," both venues, the self-sufficient piece — QUOTE: "I felt the pang of grief, but a sweet happiness, too, as I remembered our December journey, Peg's persistence and her songs." / "And still his mother slept beneath the dusty harvest loam." (Fiction on the Web only) SOURCE: reader-response: internal cross-reference that the single-piece reader can resolve; Lughnasadh and Tailtiu GLOSS: The closing memory ("our December journey") points back to the dog-rescue night earlier in the same story, so the ending needs nothing from outside the page. At Fiction on the Web the closing line about Lugh's sleeping mother depends on the Lughnasadh paragraph that the same text supplies. At The Galway Review the paragraph and the closing reference are both absent, so neither version leaves its reader with an unexplained allusion. Of the online stories, "Assumptions" is the most fully self-contained in its religious meanings. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

169. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," author site, the reader addressed as a fellow teacher — QUOTE: "(Point of pedagogy—always give your students a choice.)" / "As a teacher, you hope to evoke insights or epiphanies" / "At fifty-six, I still grapple." SOURCE: reader-response: implied reader of the essay (colleague, then general reader); the teacher-essay genre GLOSS: The essay's asides and its generic "you" address other teachers, and the students appear in the third person, so the students are the subject of the essay and not its audience. Having made the reader a colleague, the author admits he is unfinished ("I still grapple"), which puts his doubt alongside the students' adolescent uncertainty ("how could they possibly be certain of who they are?"). The reader is asked to receive the faith talk that follows as one practitioner's report to another, not as a creed. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

170. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the disbelief disclosed before the question — QUOTE: "on the very same day that I write about my own disbelief in the Jonah story" SOURCE: reader-response: the reader as confidant; Jonah 1:17 and Matthew 12:40 (three days in the fish, the sign of Jonah); Carl Jung on synchronicity GLOSS: Before Kayla asks whether the Jonah story is true, the essay has told its reader that the author was writing about his own disbelief that same day, so the reader knows his answer before the class hears the careful public one. The disclosure is presented as a Jungian "meaningful coincidence," which makes a moment of unbelief the essay's example of the extraordinary. The reader is given three positions in sequence

(private disbelief, public tolerance, the withheld verdict) and is trusted with all three. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

171. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the congregation as a model for how to receive faith — QUOTE: "We didn't want to disrespect him. We just carried on!" SOURCE: reader-response: the essay's own model of reception; cf. the wartime motto that closes "Keep Calm and Carry On" GLOSS: Deshae's church meets a man who "thinks he's Jesus" with neither mockery nor assent, and the essay places this directly after the author's withheld anger at Christianity, as if answering it. The congregation's tolerant carrying-on is the attitude the essay seems to want from its reader toward its own "(the Holy Spirit?)": attentive, respectful and uncommitted. The phrase "carried on" repeats the closing words of the chalice story at Impspired, where carrying on is likewise what is left when the miracle is uncertain. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

172. "Teaching at Fifty-Six," the subtitle and the Walden sources of the close — QUOTE: "On multitudes, communion, and the ordinary miracles of the classroom" / "People like to imagine that rare and delectable places" / "I think, This is communion, and teaching will be the pond that I bathe in each morning" SOURCE: reader-response: paratext that announces the ending; Thoreau, Walden, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For": "We are wont to imagine rare and delectable places in some remote and more celestial corner of the system" and "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise" (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/205/205-h/205-h.htm) GLOSS: The author-site subtitle names "communion" and "miracles" before the first sentence, so the reader expects a devotional destination, and the essay reaches it only in its last paragraph. The closing images are Thoreau's, unattributed: the "delectable places" found at home, and the morning bath that Walden calls "a religious exercise." A reader who recognizes the source hears Thoreau's Transcendentalist rite behind "This is communion," which makes the sacramental word a quotation of a nature-worshipper and not of the Mass. Earlier unattributed borrowings work the same way: Gatsby's close ("All of us run fast, stretch our arms farther, until one fine morning") and Pope's "hope springs eternal" ("but always, hope eternal"). CONFIDENCE: STRONG

173. Crossings, the two dedications met by the two kinds of online reader — QUOTE: "For my family— / those who remain / and those who have gone before" (sampler page) / "For my family— / those who remain / and those who have passed /

into the other room." (complete-collection page) SOURCE: reader-response: first contact on the two pages; the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), "Remember also, Lord, your servants N. and N., who have gone before us with the sign of faith" (https://opusdei.org/en/article/gathered-together-in-communion-praying-with-the-wh/); Henry Scott Holland, "Death is nothing at all" ("I have only slipped away into the next room") GLOSS: A reader who opens only the sampler meets the phrase of the Mass's commemoration of the dead, "gone before", which is liturgical, not merely generic. A reader of the complete page meets the domestic afterlife of the popular funeral reading instead, and then the Introduction's "My poems are my prayers." The two online entrances set up two different religious expectations for the same book: a liturgical one and a consoling one. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

174. The prose pieces, endings tabulated — QUOTE: "hallowed by a loveliness that would forever be a part of Him." ("Assumptions," both venues) / "Soon we would all be home." ("Arise and Go Now") / "But mostly, I cherished hope." ("Blindfolded," both printings) / "to me or to herself. Or to both of us." ("Keep Calm and Carry On") / "I would tell her, too, that the chocolate chip cookies were a perfect hit." ("A Perfect Hit") / "She would be happy to know that Ashley had died for her sins and that her cookies were a perfect hit." ("Mia Bambina") / "watched it roll past her body into the shadows of the crowd." ("A Crystal Wolf") / "I would share them again another day." ("Peppermint Candy") / "teaching will be the pond that I bathe in each morning" ("Teaching at Fifty-Six") SOURCE: reader-response: what the reader leaves with; the 1 Corinthians 13:13 virtue (hope) named outright once GLOSS: Of the eleven prose texts (ten story printings and the essay), none ends on a question mark and none ends on a prayer spoken on the page. Two end on a devotional image (the Father in "Assumptions," at both venues), two name a virtue ("Blindfolded," both printings), one ends on a secular motto, one on a thrown-away stone, and one on a declaration of communion. The commonest closing shape is the future-in-the-past "would": in four stories (five texts), "Arise," "A Perfect Hit," "Mia Bambina" and "Peppermint Candy," the reader leaves holding a forecast. That forecast is a homecoming once and a murderer's satisfaction or threat three times. The two murder stories take the language of atonement ("died for her sins") for their last word, so the most explicitly theological ending is given to the narrator the reader has most reason to condemn. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

175. The magazine poems, endings tabulated — QUOTE: "Proof that we had closeness for a moment, / and that is enough." ("The Crosswalk") / "I see you move from light into darkness and beyond." ("Dark City") / "The snow was so cold and the streetlights too strong." ("Brother") / "I watched you instead, knowing you had to sing alone, and in your own way." ("Piano") / "When I wake, I find that he has gone." ("Copacetic") SOURCE: reader-response: endings; Academy of the Heart and Mind (five poems) and Ginosko (three of them, "Dark City," "The Crosswalk," "Copacetic") GLOSS: None of the five magazine poems ends on a question, a prayer or a named sacred word. One ends on a verdict ("enough"), one on a vision of departure, and three on the speaker's own situation as survivor or onlooker. "Copacetic" leaves the reader with a deliberate double reading: the father who "wants to leave" and is "Talking about a trip" has either walked out or died, and "gone" means both. The reader, not the poem, decides that it is a death. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

176. Crossings, complete-collection page, the twenty-eight endings tabulated — QUOTE: "Or does he want to escape / the risen, searing Sun?" ("The Guard") / "Still, she whispered / blessings / into the early light." ("Fragility") / "Christ's bounty received, / blessings I revere." ("The Teapot") / "I will wonder again / why suffering / is entwined in life's design." ("Honeymoon") / "reaching for water / that will not rise." ("Water") SOURCE: reader-response: endings; theodicy (the question of suffering); Easter ("risen") GLOSS: Of the twenty-seven poems and the Epilogue, one ends on a question mark ("The Guard"), two end on blessing ("Fragility," "The Teapot"), two on homecoming or light ("Carol," "safely home"; "Dark City," "from darkness into light"), and four on negation ("Longing," "Preceding naught"; "Mostly I Sit," "endures no more"; "Water"; "Last Supper," "she wouldn't say a thing"). Three end on another person's quoted words, among them the Epilogue's Martin Luther King. "Honeymoon" states a theodicy question without a question mark, so the book's reader leaves the foot-washing poem with the problem of suffering stated as a future habit ("I will wonder again"). Even in the book that calls its poems prayers, prayer is the last word only twice in twenty-eight, both times in the grandmother's devotional register. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

Variants and Self-Statement

A note on the inventory. No Mulhern piece published or posted beyond the texts catalogued here has been located. The author website (authorjamesmulhern.com), Impspired (impspired.com/?s=mulhern) and The Galway Review (thegalwayreview.com/?s=mulhern) show no posts after 2024; Scarlet Leaf Review, Vita Brevis Press, CC&D/Scars Publications, Fragmented Voices, BoomerLitMag and Abstract Magazine TV hold only material already listed. Scars Publications/cc&d hosts a reprint of "Blindfolded" and previously catalogued poems (scars.tv). This section is therefore wholly textual comparison and close reading of the known items.

1. Assumptions — FOTW 2015 vs. Galway Review 2020 — QUOTE (FOTW/book only): "If you were not Catholic, as far as she was concerned, you were going to hell." SOURCE: Cf. the extra ecclesiam nulla salus tradition (no salvation outside the Church); FOTW text at fictionontheweb.co.uk; cut in Galway Review 2020; present in "Assumptions" line 141. GLOSS: The single most doctrinally blunt sentence in the entire online corpus survives in the 2015 magazine version and in the book text, but is silently deleted from the 2020 reprint. Since the book preserves the harsher line, the excision looks like an editorial softening for the later reprint, not a change of authorial intent — a case of a later published version being LESS religiously explicit than both the earlier magazine text and the book. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

2. Assumptions — FOTW 2015 vs. Galway Review 2020 — QUOTE (FOTW/book only): "Some have suggested that the tradition is an assimilation of the Celtic festival of Lughnasadh, begun by the god Lugh—the deity associated with late summer storms and lightening—as a funeral feast commemorating his foster mother, Tailtiu, who dies of exhaustion after clearing the plains of Ireland." SOURCE: Irish mythology (Lughnasadh/Tailtiu); the 1950 Marian dogma (Munificentissimus Deus) discussed in the same paragraph; present in FOTW and "Assumptions" line 98; absent from the Galway Review reprint, which jumps straight from the papal-decree sentence to the roller-coaster paragraph. GLOSS: The whole syncretism paragraph — the interpretive claim that Catholic Marian devotion on August 15 absorbed a pre-Christian harvest-and-death festival — is cut entire from the 2020 reprint. This is the clearest instance in the corpus of a scholarly/comparative-religion aside being trimmed for a later venue while the book retains it in full. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

3. Assumptions — FOTW 2015/book vs. Galway Review 2020 (ending) — QUOTE (FOTW/book): "The coaster lifted our chariot further into the crystal sky, while on the horizon, the deity Lugh tried to wake us all up, turning heat lightening on and off behind a lacey curtain of gray. And still his mother slept beneath the dusty harvest loam." QUOTE (Galway 2020): "The coaster lifted our chariot further into the crystal sky, while on the horizon, heat lightening flashed behind a lacey curtain of gray." SOURCE: Both versions retain the Assumption/roller-coaster "ascent" imagery; only the earlier/book version keeps the pagan deity Lugh and his sleeping mother Tailtiu as an explicit counter-image to Mary's assumption into heaven. GLOSS: The revision removes the pointed juxtaposition of a sky-god "waking" the world while his earthbound mother stays buried — a deliberate pagan/Christian doubling (Tailtiu remaining in the earth vs. Mary being assumed bodily to heaven) that only survives in the earlier text and the book. The cut flattens a theologically loaded contrast into a plain weather image. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

4. Assumptions — FOTW 2015/book vs. Galway Review 2020 — QUOTE (FOTW/book): "She sang those good old songs from back in the day, songs like 'Fools Rush In,' not the crappy remakes, but the best version with Frank Sinatra, and other songs like 'You Stepped Out of a Dream' by Sarah Vaughan (that broad could pull your heart strings)." QUOTE (Galway 2020): "where Peg sang jazz classics for a small crowd on Friday nights." SOURCE: Popular song functioning throughout Mulhern's corpus as secular hymnody for characters who no longer practice devotion in church (cf. "Stairway to Heaven," "When Your Old Wedding Ring Was New" elsewhere in the corpus, per the concordance's synthesis). GLOSS: Though not itself religious vocabulary, this cut is diagnostic: the Galway reprint consistently compresses and de-specifies passages that carry devotional or elegiac weight (grief, memory, the "hymnody of people who do not go to Mass anymore"), reinforcing that the later reprint is a trimmed, "magazine-length" text rather than a revision with new theological content. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

5. Assumptions — FOTW 2015/book vs. Galway Review 2020 — QUOTE (FOTW/book only): "There was discussion of McGovern, Nixon, Peking, Vietnam, and all that money wasted in sending a man to the moon." SOURCE: Cf. the collection's recurring device of setting sacred/liturgical material (the family's Assumption-day pilgrimage to Nantasket) against the debased noise of secular politics and news,

paralleled in "Current Events"/"Session's End" online poems, where news-cycle exhaustion is likewise set against natural/quasi-religious transcendence. GLOSS: This entire car-radio paragraph, appearing in both FOTW and the book but absent from the Galway reprint, situates the family's folk-Catholic pilgrimage historically (Nixon-era) and ironically alongside the moon landing — another "ascent" story competing with the Assumption's ascent — a resonance lost when the paragraph is cut. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

6. Assumptions — the collection and Fiction on the Web agree; the Galway Review abridges the definition — QUOTE: "We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma; that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." SOURCE: Pope Pius XII, Munificentissimus Deus (1950), the actual apostolic constitution defining the dogma of the Assumption. GLOSS: FOTW and the book quote the decree at greater length than the Galway reprint, which compresses it to "assumed into heavenly glory." The full quotation is thus a marker of the "unabridged" lineage (FOTW to book) versus the "digest" lineage (Galway reprint) of this story, useful for dating any future variant found elsewhere. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. Blindfolded (Writing Disorder) vs. book (two internal book instances) — QUOTE (Writing Disorder ending): "I thought of the chalice, the wine, and the revelation of God's pure love. But mostly, I cherished hope." QUOTE (book, "Blindfolded" chapter instance): "I thought of the chalice, the wine, and the revelation of God's love. But mostly, I cherished hope." QUOTE (book, "Arise and Go Now" chapter instance, same Hope-painting scene): "I realized that helping others is our most sacred obligation, the source of all hope and goodness… In my 'deep heart's core,' I knew everything would be alright. I felt peace." SOURCE: G. F. Watts's painting *Hope* (1886); Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" ("in the deep heart's core"), the latter quoted only in the "Arise and Go Now" ending. GLOSS: The Writing Disorder printing of "Blindfolded" adds the word "pure" to "God's love," a small intensifying addition that the CC&D reprint and the collection both lack — that one printing is marginally more devotionally emphatic than the book's own rendering of its own scene. Separately, the book contains two entirely different theological endings grafted onto the identical Hope-painting image: a Eucharistic/revelation

ending (used online) and a Yeatsian "sacred obligation"/beatitude ending — evidence the same scene was revised at least twice with different religious framings layered on. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

8. Blindfolded (Writing Disorder) — unique material not in Keep Calm and Carry On or noted in earlier reading — QUOTE: "Aiden, most people are afraid to believe in things they cannot see. It frightens them and they become nasty. This is why you must keep your secret for now." SOURCE: Cf. Hebrews 11:1 ("faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen") and John 20:29 ("blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"). GLOSS: The dead grandfather's counsel to Aiden about "second sight" inverts the Johannine beatitude on faith without sight: here it is the *disbelievers* who are "afraid… of things they cannot see," and the child's supernatural gift (not his faith) that must be hidden from a hostile world — a folk-mystical rather than credal formulation of the seen/unseen theme that runs through the corpus's chalice-and-relic material. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

9. Blindfolded (Writing Disorder) — unique to this venue, absent from Keep Calm and Carry On — QUOTE: "'What ails you young man?' … 'He's asking you about your illness,' my grandmother whispered." (priest's line to Aiden during the healing line) SOURCE: Cf. the Gospel healing-narrative formula (e.g., Mark 5:30-34, John 5:6, "Wilt thou be made whole?") in which Jesus questions the afflicted before healing them. GLOSS: Both "Blindfolded" and "Keep Calm and Carry On" retain this priest's question almost verbatim, and both precede it with the grandmother's plea, "Father, please cure him," so the call-and-response shape of the healing line is identical in the two magazine texts; suggesting the healing-line scene was stable from its first (2017) publication rather than elaborated later. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

10. Keep Calm and Carry On (Impspired 2021) — addition not present in Blindfolded (2017) — QUOTE: "Your grandfather was weak. Addicted to the bottle… People gotta be strong. Do you understand me?" followed later by "'Life is full of pain, sweetheart. And I don't mean just the physical kind.'" SOURCE: Cf. the corpus's recurring conflation of stoic endurance with religious virtue (cf. "Turbulence"'s "Last Rites" and "Triggers"'s stoic grandmother who "never once said 'my feelings are hurt'"). GLOSS: "Keep Calm and Carry On," published four years after "Blindfolded," opens with an entirely new scene (hairbrushing, moral catechesis on strength and

pain) absent from the earlier story; the addition of an explicitly moralizing, quasi-catechetical framework ("You gotta toughen up… Keep calm and carry on") at the very start of the later version shows Mulhern layering in more didactic-devotional material — the grandmother's practical theology of suffering — as the chalice-cycle expanded. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

11. Keep Calm and Carry On (Impspired 2021) — addition — QUOTE: "'I don't know how I feel about all those miracles Father Tom was going on about.'… 'He raised Lazarus from the dead,' Margie said. 'And then He healed the deaf and dumb men. Oh, and the blind man, too.'… 'Let's not forget about the fish. And the water into wine.'" SOURCE: John 11:1-44 (raising of Lazarus); Mark 7:31-37 (healing the deaf and mute man); John 9 (healing the man born blind); John 2:1-11 (water into wine); Mark 6:30-44 (multiplication of loaves and fishes). GLOSS: This entire miracle catalogue — five distinct Gospel healing/nature miracles rehearsed by name over dishwater — is unique to "Keep Calm and Carry On" and has no counterpart in "Blindfolded." Because this is new material added in the later (2021) publication, it counts as strong evidence that the "chalice cycle" was deliberately expanded over time to carry more explicit, catalogued scriptural content, not merely retold. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

12. Blindfolded, the bedside chalice scene that "Keep Calm and Carry On" does not carry — QUOTE: "'Will you drink from it?' My grandmother's eyes pleaded." … "'Drink this wine. Joshua says the cup has healing powers.'" SOURCE: Cf. the Words of Institution at Mass ("Take this, all of you, and drink from it," after Luke 22:17-20) and the folk-relic tradition of drinking from a holy cup for healing. GLOSS: The hospital-bedside "communion," the mother drinking stolen wine from a stolen chalice on the word of a cousin named "Joshua," belongs to "Blindfolded" alone; "Keep Calm and Carry On" shares the healing line and the church but not the bedside rite. The parody-Eucharist is thus fixed in the earliest telling and is not carried into the later retelling, which substitutes the dishwater catalogue of miracles for the administered cup. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

13. Catherine (poem) vs. "Grace" prose original (book) — QUOTE (Catherine, online): "Silent, except for sighs as she sponged your back, / you were three thousand miles away, walking into the sea. / The water was colder, but its sweet memory was all you needed." QUOTE (book prose original): "I imagined my grandmother was thinking about an ocean three thousand miles away. She was swimming far into the

sea. My mother was smiling, remembering Nana's caring words, feeling that she was loved… For a few moments, the three of us had all we ever needed." SOURCE: Cf. Exodus 15/water-crossing typology and the general Catholic association of the sea with both memory of homeland and the waters of baptism/renewal. GLOSS: The book's prose original frames the grandmother's imagined return to the Irish sea as one thread in a scene about domestic love, forgiveness, and a daughter's disclosure of abuse ("Did he ever hit you?"), ending on a purely secular note of familial sufficiency ("all we ever needed"). The isolated online poem strips away the abuse-disclosure subplot entirely and closes on the grandmother alone, making the sea-memory read far more as a private, quasi-baptismal consolation than as one moment within a busier domestic-forgiveness narrative — a case where excerption for a poetry venue concentrates and heightens a latent religious resonance the book's fuller version diffuses. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

14. Catherine (poem, online) — detail absent from book's Grace-narrator version — QUOTE: "'Twas the food we needed, but it was good and we were happy." (grandmother, of the sea lettuce) SOURCE: Cf. manna-in-the-wilderness tradition (Exodus 16) — food gathered directly from a hostile natural setting and pronounced sufficient/sustaining despite scarcity. GLOSS: Both versions retain the sea-lettuce gathering memory, but the poem's more compressed, chant-like repetition of "all you needed"/"sweet memory was all you needed" gives the food-gathering memory a liturgical, refrain-like quality the prose original (which frames it as one clarifying answer in a dialogue about swimming) does not have. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

15. The Wrong Way — confirmed stable across online and book text — QUOTE: "My ma used to say, 'Never dread the winter 'til the snow is on the blanket.'" SOURCE: Irish folk proverb, functioning alongside other inherited sayings in the corpus ("Goodness is the only investment that never fails," "If it was raining soup, the Irish would go out with forks") as lay scripture — practical wisdom substituting for catechism. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

16. The Wrong Way — stable, previously unremarked religious framing — QUOTE: "He's the total opposite of your grandfather, God rest his soul. He was curious about everything and had the gift of gab." SOURCE: "God rest his soul," the traditional Catholic prayer-formula for the dead (cf. Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine). GLOSS: The grandmother's offhand blessing of the dead grandfather,

delivered while criticizing the boy's living father by comparison, quietly measures the father's spiritual poverty against a genuinely mourned, liturgically remembered dead man — a small but real instance of funeral-rite language doing comparative moral work in ordinary dialogue. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

17. A Perfect Hit vs. Mia Bambina — addition in later version, matching the book — QUOTE (Mia Bambina/book, absent from A Perfect Hit): "She had implied that I was a whore when she overheard me telling Emily about what happened with David. She said sex before marriage was a sin. I had to bite my tongue. I wanted to ream her a new Christian asshole." SOURCE: Cf. the general Pauline sexual ethic (1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 4:3) that Ashley invokes implicitly; Molly's fury is a direct, obscene rejection of that ethic. GLOSS: The earlier 2022 Galway Review version ("A Perfect Hit") renders this same beat far more mildly: "She had made a comment that implied I was a whore… 'Sex before marriage is a sin,' she said with disgust… I bit my tongue." The 2023 Impspired version and the book both add the explicitly obscene "ream her a new Christian asshole," naming Christianity itself as the target of Molly's rage rather than leaving it implicit. Because the harsher, more anti-Christian line appears in the LATER magazine printing and matches the novel, this is strong evidence that the more theologically confrontational language is the deliberate, intended layer — not a softening that was later walked back, but an intensification that was restored/kept for the book-aligned text. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

18. A Perfect Hit vs. Mia Bambina — addition in later version — QUOTE (Mia Bambina, absent from A Perfect Hit): "I am very worried about how skinny you have become… A curse on you if you don't eat every last one of these cookies yourself. I want you to be fatter the next time I see you." QUOTE (A Perfect Hit, shorter): "I love you, mia bamina." SOURCE: Cf. the Eucharistic "curse" tradition (1 Corinthians 11:27-29, unworthy reception "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord") reworked here as comic folk-malediction attached to a gift of food. GLOSS: Nonna's note accompanying the cookies — themselves later established as the murder weapon — grows more elaborate and more explicitly imprecatory ("a curse on you") between the 2022 and 2023 printings, matching the book. The added curse-language deepens the parody-communion logic already identified in the earlier reading report (cookies as both maternal gift and murder weapon): a real curse formula is now attached to a real

corpse-to-be, which is new, deliberately added material rather than incidental phrasing. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

19. A Perfect Hit / Mia Bambina — stable across both online versions — QUOTE: "The human being is one of God's creations. And I think he thought pretty highly of us because he made Adam lord and master over all of the animals. You should review the book of Genesis, Ashley." SOURCE: Genesis 1:26-28 (dominion over the animals). GLOSS: Molly's mocking invocation of Genesis while standing naked in front of her devout roommate is identical in both the 2022 and 2023 printings, showing that this particular blasphemous-but-scripturally-literate taunt was fixed from the story's first online appearance and was not itself part of the later intensification documented in findings 17-18 — the darkening of tone happens elsewhere in the text, not here. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

20. Mia Bambina — addition not in A Perfect Hit — QUOTE: "Emily let out a scream… 'Oh God. My mother sent me a mannequin.'… We screwed the mannequin together and baptized her 'Candice Kox' after the no-show suitemate." SOURCE: The sacrament of Baptism, invoked here purely as slang for "naming." GLOSS: Both versions use "baptized" for naming the mannequin, but Mia Bambina's surrounding material (the added Ashley material above) makes the word land inside a thicker context of religious mockery than in A Perfect Hit, where the same joke appears in comparative isolation — another small sign that religious vocabulary in this story cluster gets denser, not sparser, as the text is revised forward in time. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

F. Poetry variants: "Leaves" across book copies and online reprints

21. Leaves — two internal book copies disagree; online versions resolve which is authoritative — QUOTE (Galway Review 2022 / Fragmented Voices 2022, and one book copy): "I say a prayer, cross myself, and rise." QUOTE (a second book copy of the same poem): stanza omitted; poem ends instead at "'We're done,' I hear you say." with no religious gesture at all. SOURCE: The sign of the cross (Trinitarian blessing gesture) and vocal prayer at a graveside, a standard Catholic funerary/visitation practice. GLOSS: Both independent online publications of "Leaves" (Galway Review and Fragmented Voices) confirm the version WITH the prayer-and-cross gesture as

the poem's standard, published form. The book manuscript's second, truncated copy — missing this closing religious gesture — therefore reads as either an earlier draft or a transcription error, not as a deliberate later secularization; the weight of external evidence (two independent magazines) favors the devotional ending as authorial and stable. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

22. Turbulence — stable across all three witnesses (Font/Galway/Impspired reprints and book) — QUOTE: "I've taught stories about rites of passage my whole career— / a first kiss, the first date, marriage, and children. / When the young woman looked at my gray hair and offered to lift my luggage, / I thought of these other rites, and the Last Rites, too." SOURCE: The Last Rites / Anointing of the Sick (Extreme Unction), one of the seven sacraments, administered near death. GLOSS: This closing turn — small, age-marking courtesies (a stranger's offer to lift luggage) triggering a memory of the sacrament of dying — is identical wherever the poem appears, indicating that Mulhern regarded this particular collocation of ordinary "rites of passage" and the specifically Catholic sacrament of the dying as fixed and non-negotiable across every venue that printed it. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

G. "Teaching at Fifty-Six" (The Font, 2019) — close mining for first-person faith statements

23. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "kids who are struggling with many issues that I never dealt with in my Boston Irish Catholic upbringing, but sharing many of my issues as well." SOURCE: Autobiographical self-naming of denomination and ethnicity. GLOSS: This is Mulhern's only located instance of naming his own religious formation in exactly these terms, in his own voice rather than through a fictional grandmother-narrator; it anchors every "Boston Irish Catholic" motif elsewhere in the corpus (chalices, rosaries, Assumption devotion) as autobiographically sourced rather than invented ethnographic color. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

24. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "My hope is that they start to see beyond the surface of themselves, their adolescent identities, and begin to know a sacred self deep inside, what Emerson calls the infinitude of the private man." SOURCE: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul" (concept of "the infinitude of the private man"); Transcendentalist immanent-divinity theology. GLOSS: Mulhern explicitly frames his

pedagogical goal in the vocabulary of "sacred self" borrowed from Emersonian Transcendentalism rather than Catholic catechesis — a substitution of an American Romantic immanent divinity for the institutional Church he elsewhere criticizes, showing where his adult religious sensibility has actually migrated. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

25. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "I don't say, what I really think—that a literalist interpretation of the Bible is ignorant, dangerous, and offensive, and that I get angry at all the hate, misery, and evil that Christianity has caused in the long history of humanity." SOURCE: Direct authorial statement on scripture and institutional Christianity, occasioned by a student's question about Jonah 1:17. GLOSS: This is Mulhern's most explicit and unambiguous critical statement about Christianity found anywhere in the online corpus — notably suppressed in the classroom itself ("I don't say, what I really think") and revealed only to the essay's reader, establishing a a clear split between his public professional restraint and his private theological anger. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

26. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "Carl Jung, a favorite of mine when I struggled with spiritual issues, discusses synchronicity, or the concept of meaningful coincidences, those shining moments when similar events cluster together and give one the sense that something extraordinary is occurring. There is a significance that cannot be explained by Western conceptions of cause and effect." SOURCE: Carl Jung's theory of synchronicity (Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle, 1952). GLOSS: Mulhern names a period of his own life ("when I struggled with spiritual issues") and identifies Jungian synchronicity, not Catholic doctrine, as the framework he turned to — direct autobiographical evidence that his adult spiritual vocabulary is eclectic (Transcendentalist, Jungian) rather than confessionally Catholic, even as his fiction remains saturated with Catholic liturgical detail. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

27. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "The letters are laid out for us like those on the Ouija board, over which I slyly pushed the heart-shaped planchette to the delight and fright of Mom and Cheryl… I see the trinity of our heads over that board as we tried to discern and rift our way into the secret of things." SOURCE: The word "trinity," used here of three human heads bent over a Ouija board, playing against the Christian Trinity; occult divination practice (Ouija) set beside a explicitly Trinitarian

description. GLOSS: A childhood memory of faked supernatural contact is described using explicitly Trinitarian vocabulary ("the trinity of our heads"), a small but pointed verbal joke that folds domestic occult play into the language of orthodox doctrine — consistent with the corpus-wide pattern (chalices, blessings, folk cures) of collapsing the line between sanctioned and unsanctioned supernatural practice. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

28. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "It occurs to me that teaching is my salvation." SOURCE: The theological category of salvation (soteriology), applied here to a secular profession rather than to Christ or the Church. GLOSS: This is the essay's single most direct substitution of a this-worldly vocation for a traditional object of Christian salvation; read alongside the essay's closing "This is communion," Mulhern constructs a private, two-sacrament theology of the classroom (salvation and communion) that has migrated entirely out of the institutional Church and into pedagogy. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

29. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "People like to imagine that rare and delectable places lurk in some remote part of the universe or some distant epoch from the past, but right now, in my classroom, surrounded by students, I dwell in that delectable place, a most memorable season of any day. I feel intensely awake, most alive—renewed." SOURCE: Cf. the language of spiritual renewal/regeneration (paliggenesia, Titus 3:5, "the washing of regeneration") secularized into present-moment classroom transcendence; also echoes Thoreau/Emerson's "eternity in a moment," quoted earlier in the same essay. GLOSS: "Renewed" is the essay's operative word for what teaching does to Mulhern, functioning as a lay equivalent of spiritual regeneration; combined with finding 28's "salvation" and the earlier "communion," the essay quietly assembles nearly a full sacramental vocabulary (regeneration, salvation, communion) entirely detached from church attendance or credal belief. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

30. Teaching at Fifty-Six — QUOTE: "In America, I add, we believe in tolerance, and respect the diversity of religious beliefs." SOURCE: American civil-religious pluralism, contrasted in the same paragraph with the essay's private judgment that literalist biblical reading is "ignorant, dangerous, and offensive." GLOSS: This sentence is Mulhern's professional, public-facing position on scripture, deliberately distinguished within the same paragraph from his "real" private opinion — evidence

that his classroom persona practices a studied civic neutrality on scripture that his private writing (and his fiction's grandmothers) does not share. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

Part Nine: Patterns Across the Books

Thematic Religious Elements

THEMATIC RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS

(General Irish-Catholic thematic texture, distinct from discrete allusions)

Documented with verbatim quotes; each item names the theme, the quote(s), the source file, and function.

Guilt, scrupulosity, and moral scorekeeping

147. **QUOTE:** "Is lying about leukemia to make people feel bad and distract them a venial sin?" **SOURCE:** "Blindfolded". **GLOSS:** Aiden's compulsive moral accounting — grading every deception on a venial/mortal scale — exemplifies scrupulosity, an anxious, hyper-precise conscience typical of intensive Catholic formation. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
148. **QUOTE:** "I said that I thought that was probably a mortal sin, and my grandmother wouldn't like it." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / "Assumptions". **GLOSS:** A child instinctively sorts even a "little white lie" about cancer into formal sin-categories, showing how deeply moral taxonomy has been internalized. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
149. **QUOTE:** "You are not smarter than God, Molly." **SOURCE:** All three "Convent Gate"/"Nun's Arse" variants. **GLOSS:** Intellectual confidence is treated as a species of pride requiring correction — guilt attached to thinking itself. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

Sin, confession, absolution

150. **QUOTE:** "Promise me you'll stick to the story." / "Promise me you'll never lie to your grandmother again." **SOURCE:** "A Bath". **GLOSS:** A car ride and kitchen table function as informal confessionals, with mutual promises substituting for sacramental absolution. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

151. **QUOTE:** "He wanted me to thank you… he's sorry… stop blaming yourself for leaving him in the chair." **SOURCE:** *The Weight of Small Mercies* ("Arise and Go Now" / "Blindfolded"). **GLOSS:** The dead grandfather delivers forgiveness across the grave, a ghostly substitute for the Rite of Reconciliation Nanna cannot access for her guilt. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

152. **QUOTE:** "Stealing it was only a venial sin, not a mortal one." **SOURCE:** "Blindfolded". **GLOSS:** Formal sin-classification is invoked to authorize continued wrongdoing, confession's vocabulary used to excuse rather than absolve. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

Hell and purgatory

153. **QUOTE:** "If you were not Catholic, as far as she was concerned, you were going to hell." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / "Assumptions"; "Assumptions". **GLOSS:** Casual, unexamined certainty about damnation for religious outsiders reflects a folk-exclusivist eschatology common to pre-Vatican II immigrant Catholicism. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

154. **QUOTE:** "There is no heaven. There is no God. I think when we die, we just rot and become dirt." **SOURCE:** "A Prayer for Home". **GLOSS:** The starkest denial of any afterlife geography (heaven, hell, or purgatory) in the trilogy, voiced by its most intellectually confident narrator. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

Redemptive suffering

155. **QUOTE:** "The swollen feet that life had crucified," "Golgotha still groaning in your bones." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / *Useless Things and Other Stories* / *The Weight of Small Mercies*, "Feast of the Assumption, 1924" (poem). **GLOSS:** An ordinary woman's bodily pain is directly mapped onto Christ's crucifixion, the trilogy's clearest statement of redemptive-suffering theology. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

156. **QUOTE:** "with the aching in your bones you wrought / A sacramental out of Quincy Bay." **SOURCE:** Same poem, all three books. **GLOSS:** Physical suffering is explicitly described as productive of sacramental grace — pain transmuted into blessing through faith. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

Sacramental view of ordinary objects and acts

157. **QUOTE:** "It's a celebration for both of us, a baptism of sorts, as we begin our new lives." **SOURCE:** "A Prayer for Home". **GLOSS:** A beach outing is explicitly named a "baptism," the collection's clearest statement that ordinary experience can bear sacramental weight. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

158. **QUOTE:** "we made a feast of the bread and fresh fruit by a small tide pool." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / *Useless Things and Other Stories* / "Assumptions". **GLOSS:** A beach picnic of bread and fruit is treated with the ceremonial vocabulary of a "feast," an informal agape meal. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

159. **QUOTE:** "I rub Aveeno on her feet… Kneeling, I'm thankful to ease one hurt." **SOURCE:** "Honeymoon". **GLOSS:** A drugstore foot-care routine is elevated to devotional status through posture (kneeling) and gratitude — the sacred hiding in the shabby. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

Marian devotion

160. **QUOTE:** "her favorite month was May, the Blessed Mother's month, and that she had the good fortune of being 'born in May and married in May.'" **SOURCE:** All three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** Marian piety structures even secular biographical facts (birth month, wedding month) into providential pattern. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

161. **QUOTE:** "there were statuettes and pictures throughout her home… a blue marble carving of Mary." **SOURCE:** All three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** Domestic material culture is saturated with Marian imagery, a lived devotional environment rather than an occasional practice. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

Priests, nuns, and their authority

162. **QUOTE:** "a sermon the priest had given on the power of names and the mystery of the Word." **SOURCE:** All three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** A priest's homily directly generates a family's coping ritual (the "Lovely Peggy" naming practice), showing clerical authority shaping domestic life. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

163. **QUOTE:** "The baggy-faced priest recited some mumbo-jumbo prayer and pushed my chest." **SOURCE:** *The Weight of Small Mercies* ("Blindfolded"/"Keep Calm and Carry On"). **GLOSS:** A drunk, incompetent-seeming priest still commands ritual authority sufficient to structure an entire healing service — clerical office outlasting clerical worthiness. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

164. **QUOTE:** "Sister Ignatius wasn't looking." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / *Useless Things and Other Stories* / "Assumptions". **GLOSS:** A nun-teacher is remembered as an authority figure whose surveillance structures childhood memory of school discipline. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

165. **QUOTE:** "The sisters have to explain all of that to us. I'm not sure I believe any of it." **SOURCE:** "A Prayer for Home". **GLOSS:** Nuns are the recognized institutional transmitters of catechism even for a narrator who explicitly rejects the content taught. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

The parish as social world

166. **QUOTE:** "weekly gatherings in the basement of Saint Thomas More Church." **SOURCE:** All three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** The parish hall functions as matchmaking venue and social infrastructure for Irish immigrants, the church organizing community life beyond worship. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

167. **QUOTE:** "a bunch of old people on their way to play bingo in a church basement." **SOURCE:** "Arise and Go Now". **GLOSS:** Church-basement bingo epitomizes the parish as a social and recreational hub, not solely liturgical space. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

Wakes, funerals, and the dead as present

168. **QUOTE:** "She plunked her ass right next to his coffin." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / "Myra Bocca" (*Useless Things* and the Impspired printing read "right next to his coffin at the wake"). **GLOSS:** The wake as sacred social ritual is profaned by an interloper's theatrics, exposing the vulnerability of communal mourning rites to disruption. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

169. **QUOTE:** "Sometimes he comes to me at night." / "My grandfather was sitting on the grass beneath a tree. He smiled and waved to us." **SOURCE:** *The Weight of Small Mercies*, throughout. **GLOSS:** The dead remain active, communicating presences in this Irish-Catholic cosmology — not gone but simply on the other side of a permeable veil. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

170. **QUOTE:** "I wonder what a dead body looks like. I'd love to see one." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / *Useless Things and Other Stories* ("Through a Convent Gate"/"A Nun's Arse"). **GLOSS:** Morbid curiosity about corpses, voiced casually by a teenager, reflects a culture in which death and its physical facts are neither hidden nor especially taboo. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

Drink as curse and communion

171. **QUOTE:** "It's a shame how she's tried to drown her sorrows by cozying up to that bottle." **SOURCE:** All three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** Alcohol functions as both social communion (whiskey sours shared at the kitchen table) and destructive curse (alopecia-adjacent grief, ruin), never simply one or the other. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

172. **QUOTE:** "full as a bingo bus." **SOURCE:** *The Weight of Small Mercies* ("Arise and Go Now"/"Blindfolded"). **GLOSS:** An Irish idiom for drunkenness, delivered as the grandfather's own posthumous confession, ties intoxication to guilt requiring forgiveness. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

173. **QUOTE:** "Drink this wine. Joshua says the cup has healing powers." **SOURCE:** "Blindfolded". **GLOSS:** Wine is administered as medicine/sacrament simultaneously, communion and cure conflated in a single cup. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

Emigration and exile

174. **QUOTE:** "With hope in their hearts, just a few belongings, I'm sure, and not much money, they journeyed to the promised land of their imaginations." **SOURCE:** "Blindfolded". **GLOSS:** Emigration is described in explicitly Exodus-like terms ("promised land"), sacralizing the grandparents' journey from Ireland to America. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

175. **QUOTE:** "I'm going home." / "To your family in Ireland?" **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories* / *Useless Things and Other Stories* ("A Prayer for Home"/"Useless Things"). **GLOSS:** "Home" doubles as literal Ireland and metaphysical destination (heaven), the emigrant's homeland collapsing into the eschatological "home" sought throughout the trilogy. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
176. **QUOTE:** "People hated the Irish… He dug graves during the day and hauled large bags of mail." **SOURCE:** "Blindfolded". **GLOSS:** Immigrant hardship and exclusion form the historical backdrop against which the family's folk-Catholic resourcefulness (theft, fraud, superstition) develops as survival strategy. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

The grandmother as priest-figure

177. **QUOTE:** "We make our own miracles." **SOURCE:** "Blindfolded". **GLOSS:** Nanna articulates an entire folk-theology of self-generated grace, positioning herself as the family's chief celebrant and miracle-worker in place of clergy. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
178. **QUOTE:** "She crossed herself. 'Say it with me.'" **SOURCE:** "Keep Calm and Carry On". **GLOSS:** Nanna leads a liturgical gesture and recitation exactly as a priest or catechist would, functioning as de facto celebrant of the family's private rites. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.
179. **QUOTE:** "Nonna…insisting on 'faith,' pilgrimage to cures/healers… performs both piety… and fraud… with equal fluency." (synthesis observation, supported by direct quotes throughout "Assumptions," "A Prayer for Home," "Useless Things") **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories*, multiple stories. **GLOSS:** The grandmother figure across all three books functions as the household's chief liturgical actor — leading pilgrimages, pronouncing blessings, assigning penance — regardless of her own professed disbelief. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

Folk cure and superstition alongside orthodox faith

180. **QUOTE:** "an assimilation of the Celtic festival of Lughnasadh, begun by the god Lugh." **SOURCE:** All three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** The narrator explicitly names the pagan substrate beneath the Catholic feast day,

showing folk religion and orthodox doctrine layered rather than opposed. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

181. **QUOTE:** "the night before she had heard the banshees… three knocks on the door, which means someone is going to die." **SOURCE:** "Blindfolded". **GLOSS:** Irish folk-supernatural belief (banshees, death-omens) operates alongside Catholic sacramentalism without contradiction in this family's worldview. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

182. **QUOTE:** "Do you believe? Endurance and persistence will be rewarded" (fortune cookie) — "this was a mystical sign." **SOURCE:** All three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** A restaurant fortune cookie is treated with the same interpretive seriousness as a genuine omen or sign from God, folk superstition absorbing pop-cultural detritus. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

Belief versus unbelief

183. **QUOTE:** "I don't believe in any of it." / "So sacrilegious." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories* (multiple stories). **GLOSS:** The recurring generational argument between skeptical youth and devout elders structures dialogue across nearly every story in Books One and Two. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

184. **QUOTE:** "Do I believe in ghosts?" "I've never seen one, and I don't know anyone who has." **SOURCE:** "Arise and Go Now". **GLOSS:** Skepticism toward the supernatural (voiced by adult Rita) is gradually eroded across the story by circumstantial evidence, staging belief as a process rather than a fixed position. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

Charity as the practical form of grace

185. **QUOTE:** "Your grandmother is a lifelong friend. She needed money. I recognized her anxiety and wanted to help." **SOURCE:** "Arise and Go Now". **GLOSS:** Charity is explicitly presented as mercy exceeding justice — Rita absorbs a lie rather than exposing it, prioritizing compassion over truth-telling. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

186. **QUOTE:** "helping others is our most sacred obligation, the source of all hope and goodness." **SOURCE:** "Arise and Go Now". **GLOSS:** States outright

that charity, not doctrine or liturgy, is this family's operative sacrament. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

187. **QUOTE:** "Nonna thought it would be charitable of us to visit Mrs. Muldoon around Christmas time." **SOURCE:** *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories* ("Through a Convent Gate"/"A Nun's Arse"). **GLOSS:** An explicit corporal work of mercy (visiting the lonely) frames a visit that devolves into theft, showing charity's ideal and its compromised practice side by side. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

Literary Allusions

LITERARY ALLUSIONS

Allusions to and echoes of other writers, texts, paintings, hymns, and songs quoted or named inside the stories.

188. **QUOTE:** "'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" **SOURCE:** John 1:1, debated as literature/theology in "The Mannequin" (*Assumptions and Other Stories*). **GLOSS:** Though scriptural, this passage is explicitly discussed as a literary/theological text by an English major, framing the novel's interest in the Gospel of John's logos-doctrine as intellectual material, not devotional recitation. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

189. **QUOTE:** "I will arise and go now to Innisfree… I hear it in the deep heart's core." **SOURCE:** W. B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," quoted in full in "Arise and Go Now". **GLOSS:** Structurally maps the story's rescue plot onto both Yeats's yearning for solitary peace and, through Yeats's own echo, the prodigal son parable (Luke 15:18) — a double literary/biblical allusion. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

190. **QUOTE:** "'Goodness is the only investment that never fails.' A smart man by the name of Toreau said that." **SOURCE:** Attributed to Henry David Thoreau (comically mispronounced "Toreau"/"Walden"), *The Weight of Small Mercies* ("Arise and Go Now"/"Blindfolded") and *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories* ("Drenched to the Bone," Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" taught in class). **GLOSS:** Thoreau's maxim functions as

lay-scriptural refrain across two of the three books, secular philosophy pressed into quasi-devotional service. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

191. **QUOTE:** "'The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right.'" **SOURCE:** Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," taught directly in "Drenched to the Bone" (*Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories*). **GLOSS:** Thoreau's conscience-centered ethics is explicitly juxtaposed with the students' religious upbringing, setting individual conscience against communal/religious authority. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

192. **QUOTE:** "'Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind' and his other quote, 'What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?'" **SOURCE:** Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Assumptions and Other Stories*/"Drenched to the Bone". **GLOSS:** Directly names "sacred" and "sacredness of traditions," positioning Emersonian self-reliance as a rival theology to institutional Catholicism within the same classroom scene. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

193. **QUOTE:** "'It's Emerson. And you're all as dumb as rocks, especially you Turd!'" **SOURCE:** Same Emerson material, corrected by Mary Grace, *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories*. **GLOSS:** A devout student defends correct attribution of Transcendentalist philosophy while simultaneously insisting "I read, but I pray, too," refusing to see reading and faith as opposed. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

194. **QUOTE:** "a bittersweet essay in which Hughes recounts his childhood attendance at a church revival and the 'special meeting for children "to bring the young lambs to the fold"' … 'kept waiting to see Jesus.'" **SOURCE:** Langston Hughes, "Salvation" (from *The Big Sea*), *Assumptions and Other Stories*/"Drenched to the Bone". **GLOSS:** A canonical African American literary text about religious disillusionment is taught as the story's central pedagogical and thematic mirror for Jack's own crisis of belief. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

195. **QUOTE:** "'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'" **SOURCE:** Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843 Introduction), *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories*. **GLOSS:** Marx's critique of religion is quoted accurately by the

teacher-narrator, placed in direct classroom dialogue with sincere student testimony, refusing to resolve the tension between critique and faith. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

196. **QUOTE:** "Mary Grace snickers and opens Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*." **SOURCE:** Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood* (1952), *Assumptions and Other Stories*/"Drenched to the Bone". **GLOSS:** A devout, disturbed, violent teenage character reads O'Connor's novel of a false-prophet preacher — an implicit authorial acknowledgment of kinship with O'Connor's grotesque, grace-haunted Christ-haunted South transposed to South Florida. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

197. **QUOTE:** "'Methinks she doth protest too much.' 'Huh?' 'Hamlet.' 'I read that. Edgar Allan Poe, right?'" **SOURCE:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (3.2), misattributed by Ashley to Poe, "The Mannequin". **GLOSS:** A comic literary error underscores Ashley's intellectual pretension versus Molly's genuine erudition, incidentally setting up the later, sincere Poe citation. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

198. **QUOTE:** "the seraphs, all haggard and wan, / Uprising, unveiling, affirm / That the play is the tragedy 'Man,' / Its hero the Conqueror Worm." **SOURCE:** Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm" (1843), quoted at length in "A Prayer for Home". **GLOSS:** Poe's poem borrows angelic/eschatological imagery (seraphs) to declare human existence a worm-eaten tragedy — a direct literary counterweight to the collection's hope of resurrection/Assumption. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

199. **QUOTE:** "'Tell the truth but tell it slant.'" **SOURCE:** Emily Dickinson, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant—" (poem 1263), *Assumptions and Other Stories*/"Useless Things". **GLOSS:** Dickinson's counsel on indirection is invoked by Nonna to teach Molly diplomatic restraint, aestheticizing tact as a poetic-spiritual discipline. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

200. **QUOTE:** "'We are all alone, born alone, die alone, and—in spite of True Romance magazines—we shall all someday look back on our lives and see that, in spite of company, we were alone the whole way.'" **SOURCE:** Hunter S. Thompson, quoted in *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories* ("A Prayer for Home"/"Useless Things"). **GLOSS:** A modern secular meditation on existential solitude is placed immediately after a religious

debate on the afterlife, offering an alternative, faithless consolation. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

201. **QUOTE:** "'Come gather 'round people… And accept it that soon / You'll be drenched to the bone… you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone.'" **SOURCE:** Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (1964), *Assumptions and Other Stories*/*Useless Things and Other Stories*. **GLOSS:** A protest-era folk song supplies the collection's title image and functions as flood/deluge-baptism text at the story's climax, a secular hymn precipitating penance. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

202. **QUOTE:** "'Show me the way to go home / I'm tired and I wanna go to bed / I had a little drink about an hour ago…'" **SOURCE:** Traditional song "Show Me the Way to Go Home" (Irving King, 1925), sung by Peggy/Peg across *Assumptions and Other Stories* and *Useless Things and Other Stories*, and epigraph to "A Prayer for Home." **GLOSS:** A drinking song about the search for home is elevated to a structural epigraph and repeated motif, tying literal drunkenness to the collection's metaphysical "home" quest. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

203. **QUOTE:** "'Moon river, wider than a mile… We're after the same rainbow's end.'" **SOURCE:** Henry Mancini/Johnny Mercer, "Moon River" (from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 1961), sung by Mrs. Muldoon in *Assumptions and Other Stories*; *Useless Things* keeps only the title ("And wasn't that song so pretty? 'Moon River.'") and cuts both the lyric and the closing reflection. **GLOSS:** A popular song about wistful searching becomes Mrs. Muldoon's personal hymn, its "rainbow's end" ironically denied her in the narrator's closing reflection ("there was no rainbow's end for her"). **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

204. **QUOTE:** "'Hope, 1886, George Frederic Watts.'" **SOURCE:** G. F. Watts's allegorical painting *Hope*, described and quoted by title in *The Weight of Small Mercies* ("Arise and Go Now" and "Blindfolded"). **GLOSS:** A blindfolded woman playing a broken lyre atop a globe becomes the collection's central visual icon of faith operating without full sight, quoted twice in full to bookend two stories. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

205. **QUOTE:** "A startled Mary, arms spread above her upturned face, is being lifted on a cloud toward heaven… The painting's most vivid colors are orange and red, shades of fire, flesh and blood." **SOURCE:** Titian, *Assunta*

(*Assumption of the Virgin*, 1516-1518), ekphrastically described in all three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** A Renaissance masterpiece is described in loving ekphrastic detail, fusing Marian ascent imagery with Passion-red color symbolism, and serving as the visual key to the whole story's theology. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

206. **QUOTE:** "'Fasten your seatbelts… It's going to be a bumpy night.'" / "'Everybody has a heart—except some people.'" **SOURCE:** Bette Davis's lines from the film *All About Eve* (1950), quoted in *Assumptions and Other Stories*/"Myra Bocca". **GLOSS:** Deployed as mock-scriptural aphorisms/prophecy on a coffee-shop television, ironically foreshadowing Myra's violent death. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

207. **QUOTE:** "Do you think it's true? Do you think there really is a Chamber of Secrets?" **SOURCE:** J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (film), quoted in *Assumptions and Other Stories*/"Myra Bocca". **GLOSS:** Prompts the narrator's explicit meditation, "life was one great chamber of secrets," a pop-culture-derived epistemological reflection running parallel to the story's religious skepticism about hidden truths. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

208. **QUOTE:** ""The ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future." "The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come."" **SOURCE:** Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), discussed in "The Wrong Way". **GLOSS:** Dickens's redemption narrative supplies the story's controlling metaphor for a father who, unlike Scrooge, undergoes no conversion — literary allusion substituting for a denied religious grace-arc. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

209. **QUOTE:** "A boy named Pip. His parents are dead and he lives with his bitchy older sister… an escaped convict in the graveyard." **SOURCE:** Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, referenced in "The Wrong Way". **GLOSS:** Aiden's ongoing reading of a novel about guilt, benefaction, and moral transformation quietly parallels his own quest to understand inherited family guilt and grace. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

210. **QUOTE:** "Audrey Rose… a man who loses his wife and daughter in a terrible car crash. He's heartbroken, so he goes to a psychic… reincarnated as Ivy Templeton." **SOURCE:** Frank De Felitta, *Audrey Rose* (1975 novel/1977 film), referenced in "Arise and Go Now". **GLOSS:** A pulp reincarnation

narrative Rita is reading parallels the story's own concern with the permeability of death, memory, and return — a secular analogue to resurrection hope. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

211. **QUOTE:** "The tall black guy stepped forward and began to sing, "Whether you're a brother or whether you're a mother you're stayin' alive, stayin' alive." **SOURCE:** The Bee Gees, "Stayin' Alive" (1977), sung during CPR in *Assumptions and Other Stories*/"Myra Bocca". **GLOSS:** A disco anthem functions as improvised congregational hymn/chant during a public resuscitation attempt — pop music substituting for liturgical song at a moment of crisis. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

212. **QUOTE:** "the best version with Frank Sinatra, and other songs like "You Stepped Out of a Dream" by Sarah Vaughan" **SOURCE:** American Songbook standards, named in all three "Assumptions" variants. **GLOSS:** Peggy's nightclub repertoire situates her tragic biography within a secular musical tradition of longing and romance that the narrative later sacralizes in her death scene. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE.

213. **QUOTE:** "with echoes of Frank McCourt, Alice McDermott, and James Joyce's *Dubliners*" (publisher's framing, ABOUT THE COLLECTION). **SOURCE:** *The Weight of Small Mercies*, front matter. **GLOSS:** The collection situates itself explicitly within the Irish-American Catholic literary tradition of McCourt (*Angela's Ashes*), McDermott (*Charming Billy*, *At Weddings and Wakes*), and Joyce's *Dubliners* (stories of Irish Catholic paralysis and epiphany), inviting direct comparison of Mulhern's method to theirs. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

214. **QUOTE:** "in the tradition of Alice McDermott, Andre Dubus, and Frank McCourt" (author bio). **SOURCE:** *The Weight of Small Mercies*, back matter. **GLOSS:** A second explicit authorial/publisher positioning within the Catholic-inflected literary tradition, naming McDermott and Dubus (both major chroniclers of American Catholic guilt, grace, and family) alongside McCourt. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

Cross-Book Repetitions

CROSS-BOOK REPETITIONS

Verbatim comparison of passages Mulhern reuses across the three collections. All wording quoted exactly as it appears in each file, with only orthographic variants (curly vs. straight quotes, minor punctuation) noted where present.

1. The Feast of the Assumption cure/dogma explanation

All three texts are identical word for word — the collection's most stable repeated block, appearing in each book's version of "Assumptions."

2. Pope Pius XII's Assumption dogma

3. The wet silvery scalp / crown of her head

The "crown of the head" / "angel" formula recurs four times across two books in near-identical wording, shifting only the addressee's name (Jimmy/Molly) and the possessive ("my angel" vs. "an angel").

4. The mourning dove from its cleft

5. "Up you go. On the count of three."

The prose and verse renderings of the same lifting scene, appearing back-to-back within the same book, showing Mulhern's technique of doubling a single scene across genres.

6. Halo-shaped pool of blood (Myra Bocca's death)

Virtually identical, with only "wide open" vs. "wide-open" differing.

7. "Goodness is the only investment that never fails"

Repeated three times within the same book (across two stories), functioning as the collection's lay-scriptural refrain.

8. "The water that gushed from the rock at Rephidim and Kadesh"

Repeated near-verbatim as the chalice-theft scheme is restaged in the second story.

9. The chalice-theft/faith-healer scene structure

An entire scene, not merely a phrase, is reused as a doubled ritual set-piece within one book.

10. "A fish is the symbol of Christ, Molly"

Identical across both variant stories ("A Prayer for Home" and "Useless Things").

11. "This being our last supper"

12. "A useless thing" (the gold cross)

This exact exchange gives the second book its title, confirming the phrase's structural centrality.

13. "You are not smarter than God, Molly." / catechism dialogue block

14. "I'm so hungry I could eat a nun's arse through a convent gate."

15. "Angel of Death"

16. "Stayin' Alive" CPR scene

17. "A stone has no uncertainty—Carl Jung"

18. The Titian *Assunta* ekphrasis

19. The closing apotheosis of Peggy ("altogether beautiful, and divine")

20. "Feast of the Assumption, 1924" poem (Fr. John Duffy)

21. "Tell the truth but tell it slant" (Emily Dickinson)

22. Hunter S. Thompson "alone" quotation

23. "We have been called to heal wounds…" (St. Francis church sign)

24. Bob Dylan in "Drenched to the Bone," the lyric quoted near the story's close

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Notes on scope and method

Part Ten: The Whole Body of Work

The Pattern Across the Work

"Assumptions" is not an isolated feat. Read against Mulhern's other collections — *Assumptions and Other Stories*, *Useless Things and Other Stories*, and *The Weight of Small Mercies* — it emerges as the load-bearing member of a single, obsessively reworked structure. Three facts about that structure bear directly on how the individual story should be judged.

1. The religious layer is structural across the oeuvre, not local to one story

Every collection organizes its plots around a sacramental action. In *The Weight of Small Mercies*, each story pivots on a technical sin — theft, fraud, a fabricated cancer diagnosis, a burglary, a staged miracle — narrated as love in disguise. The grandmother states the operative theology outright: "We make our own miracles… instead of sitting on our arses waiting for Jesus to put the world right." That is a folk-Pelagian revision of grace, and it is the thesis "Assumptions" dramatizes without ever stating: Helen manufactures Peggy's glory out of a nickname, a bag of stolen bread, and a wave.

In *Useless Things*, the title concept is literalized when the collection's most conventionally sacred object — "a gold necklace with an emerald and diamond cross" — is dismissed in the closing line as "A useless thing." The cross is the useless thing; the useless thing is where the sacred hides. That is the same conversion "Assumptions" performs on a bald woman's scalp.

In *Assumptions and Other Stories*, the vocabulary is recycled to darker ends. "A Prayer for Home" restages the beach cure and then converts it into a suicide the narrator explicitly names: "She had created her own Assumption." "The Mannequin" turns a grandmother's home-baked cookies into a poisoned Eucharist and states the soteriology flatly — "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit… Ashley had died

for her sins." "Myra Bocca" gives a con artist's death "a halo-shaped pool" of blood while bystanders sing "Stayin' Alive" over failed CPR.

Remove the religious material from any of these books and you do not get the same stories in different wallpaper; you get no stories at all. The Catholic grammar is what makes schizophrenia, alcoholism, disfigurement, and abandonment legible to the characters — it is the only theory of suffering they have been issued.

2. The repetition is liturgical, and it is a real artistic gamble

The beach cure appears at least three times across the books, sometimes in near-identical sentences: "the wet silvery scalp," "resisted the urge to touch the crown of her head," "you're an angel," the mourning dove that "sped from its cleft into the bright sky" and then "descended over the water," the two old women "seated on their asses" in the surf. The bathing of the grandmother appears twice, once as prose and once as verse, both times with the same lifting formula: "Up you go. On the count of three."

This is defensible on its own terms. A Mass repeats its formulae; a rosary tells the same beads in a different order; a liturgical year returns to August 15 every August 15. Mulhern is mimicking ritual structure at the level of prose style, and the effect within a single volume is genuinely incantatory.

But it is a gamble, and it does not pay off evenly. Read consecutively, the collections can feel like variant settings of one text rather than distinct works, and a reader who meets the Nantasket wave for the third time is less likely to feel the liturgical return than the authorial habit. The strongest version of the scene is the one in "Assumptions," where the surrounding architecture — epigraph, dogma, Titian, Lugh, Duffy — earns it. Elsewhere the same sentences arrive without that scaffolding and read thinner. If there is a single craft criticism to make of the body of work, it is this: the material is treated as a liturgy when it is sometimes functioning as a draft.

3. The one story without the sacred layer is the bleakest

The Weight of Small Mercies contains a story, "The Wrong Way," in which the transfiguring apparatus is absent — and it is correspondingly the darkest thing in the cycle. This is the best available evidence that the religious layer is not consolation

applied after the fact. It is the mechanism by which Mulhern can look at the material at all. Withdraw it and the vision goes black.

Craft: How the Layer Is Built

The technique in "Assumptions" is worth isolating, because it is teachable and because it is what separates the story from the merely allusive.

The allusion is carried by the noun, not the sentence. Mulhern almost never writes a symbolic sentence. He writes a plain sentence containing a loaded noun: *laurel*, *garland*, *temples*, *shrouded*, *cleft*, *narrow*, *chariot*, *stain*, *cradle*, *unquenchable*. The syntax stays domestic; the diction carries the freight. This is why the story never feels like an allegory. Allegory announces its second level; "Assumptions" leaves it in the vocabulary and walks away.

Every sacred image is given a mundane alibi. The stigmata are spilled juice. The chrism is tanning oil. The crown is peach fuzz. The shroud is a housedress. The entombment is a wig in a paper bag. The chariot is a roller coaster. The Cana pots are baby-food jars. In each case a realist explanation is supplied *in the same clause*, so the reader cannot convict the story of symbolism. This is the single most disciplined feature of the writing, and it is what makes the last paragraph's open Christology bearable: the story has earned the right to speak plainly at the end because it has spoken obliquely for five thousand words.

The technique is theorized inside the story. The "flares of white light in my peripheral vision" sentence tells the reader how to read, and the *tableau vivant* passage tells the reader what is at stake. Mulhern plants his own poetics twice, in passing, without breaking the child's voice. That is unusual control.

Register is used as a moral instrument. The story's comedy is never at the expense of its reverence; it is the delivery system for it. "Last call for alcohol" inserted into Titian's *Assunta*; the Assumption catechism interrupted by "Finish up your eggs"; Helen's white-and-gold Marian vesting completed with "black Farrah sunglasses." Each of these is a joke, and each is also a theological claim: that the sacred does not occur elsewhere.

Sound and pun do real work. *Soles* and *souls*, set up in dialogue and paid off on the shore. *Razed* and *raised* in a single verb — the wave that levels the two women is the same word the Assumption uses for Mary's being taken up, so the knock-down and the lift-up are one motion. *Sun* and *Son* in a capital letter. *Fleming* and flame. These are not ornaments; each carries an argument the prose declines to make explicitly.

A single word is made to carry two meanings at once. The grandmother calls Peggy's boots "God-awful" — and *awful* is made to mean both of its senses at once, the colloquial "ugly" and the archaic "inspiring awe," so the profane object and the sacred presence are named in the same breath. The same doubling runs through the story: the "blinds" are both the pulled window-blinds and the blindness the story says we all share; *assumption* is both a thing taken up and a thing taken for granted; and when Helen urges Peggy into the water with "For Christ's sake, Peg! The point is to get wet. How else are you going to get the cure?", the profane exclamation is at the same instant a literal invocation — the cure is sought for Christ's sake in both senses. The author names this as his central method — doubling — and it is the formal engine of the story's argument that the profane and the sacred are one dimension, not two.

The weaknesses are real and worth naming. Three, honestly stated:

First, the story occasionally does the reader's work. "like the head of John the Baptist" names an allusion the image had already achieved. So, arguably, does "Peg had been my savior." The story is at its strongest when it trusts the noun — the *laurel*, the *stain* — and slightly weaker each time it supplies the gloss.

Second, the middle essays. The paragraphs on Pius XII, Lughnasadh, Titian, and the grandmother's Marian devotion suspend the narrative for roughly a fifth of its length and shift from the child's perception into an adult critical voice. They are the intellectual spine of the piece and I would not cut them, but they are a genuine structural risk: a reader who wants the Peggy story has to wait through a lecture. Mulhern mitigates this by keeping the tone wry ("poor Mary… one foot on the earth and one foot in the air") and by making the digressions thematically load-bearing rather than merely informative. It nearly works. It does not entirely.

Third, the ending flies close to sentiment. "joyful and tearful at the same time" is the one phrase in the final paragraph that tells rather than shows. That the paragraph

survives is due to the crossed arms — a hard, strange, precise image that keeps the tenderness from going soft.

How Good Is the Story?

An honest assessment has to separate two questions: is the religious architecture real, and is the story good because of it?

The architecture is real. The density is not a critic's construction. The epigraph is the proper antiphon of the feast the story is set on. That antiphon supplies both the story's central word (*macula*, stain) and two of its climactic images (garment white as snow, face as the sun). Luke 13 supplies the bent woman and the narrow door in the order the story uses them. Song of Songs supplies the dove in the cleft, the cedar, the apples and raisins, the enclosed garden, and the Bride beaten by the watchmen in the night streets. The Duffy poem is quoted, echoed in the prose before it appears, and answered. A pattern of this density and this internal consistency is not accidental, and it is not the reader's projection.

And the story is good because of it — with qualifications.

What the layer buys is *scale without inflation*. The plot of "Assumptions" is four small events: a bad song in a cellar, a dog rehomed, a day at the beach, a death. Handled realistically, that is a competent, minor, affectionate piece of Irish-American memoir — the genre is crowded and the competition is stiff. The religious substructure raises the stakes to the maximum available in Western literature (the resurrection of the body) without the surface ever raising its voice. The story argues that the glorification of a human body is at issue in a suntan-lotion rub, and it makes that argument in the vocabulary of suntan lotion. That is a serious literary achievement, and it is rarer than it sounds; most writers who attempt it either drop the realism or overwrite the transcendence.

What the layer also buys is *tonal permission*. Because the sacred frame is running underneath, Mulhern can be very funny about a dying alcoholic without cruelty and very tender about her without sentimentality. The comedy and the reverence are not in tension; they are the same operation.

The qualifications are the ones named above: a mid-story essayistic sag, a handful of over-explained allusions, and — visible only across the collections — a tendency to reuse the strongest passages until the ore is thin.

A judgment. "Assumptions" is a genuinely distinguished short story and, on the evidence of the three collections, the best thing in Mulhern's body of work — the piece where the recurring material finds its full architecture instead of a fragment of it. It belongs in the specific and small tradition of Catholic short fiction in which grace arrives through the grotesque: Flannery O'Connor's, obviously, but the temperament is closer to Alice McDermott's and to Frank O'Connor's. Where O'Connor's grace is violent and punitive — a bull, a bullet, a stolen leg — Mulhern's is comic and cumulative. Nobody in "Assumptions" is struck down. The wave that levels the two women leaves them laughing on the sand. That is a real and unusual theological temperament: an Irish Catholicism of the *small mercy* rather than the shock, and the sentence-level craft is good enough to carry it.

The story's one incontestable excellence is its ending. The last paragraph earns an image — the Father's crossed arms cradling a dead woman's head — that almost no contemporary writer could get to without embarrassment, and it gets there through five thousand words of jokes about wigs and whiskey sours. That is the whole art of the thing.

Is Mulhern's Art a Theological Catharsis?

The question deserves a direct answer, and the answer is yes — but the term needs sharpening, because two different things are usually meant by it.

If catharsis means consolation — a religious frame applied to grief to make it bearable — the answer is no, or not only. The stories are too unsparing for that. Mrs. Muldoon's suicide is rendered with maggots, feces, and a toenail "falling like an autumn leaf." Peggy is not softened: she is toothless, incontinent of dignity, humiliated at her own piano, mocked to her face by the woman who loves her. The abjection is never traded away for the glory. It is the price of admission to it.

If catharsis means the Aristotelian mechanism — pity and terror aroused and then discharged — the answer is yes, and the terror is precise. The narrator names it: watching Peggy sing badly in the cellar, "her pain was so real… I think it was then that the first throb of death's glower entered my consciousness." That is the terror. The pity is everything after. And the discharge is the last paragraph.

But the most accurate description is the theological one, and it has a name: *transfiguration*, not catharsis. Catharsis purges. Mulhern does not purge; he *converts*. Nothing is discarded in these stories. The stain stays and becomes a wound. Baldness stays and becomes a crown. Drunkenness stays and becomes Pentecost. Hellfire stays and becomes sunlight on water. A useless thing stays useless and becomes the cross. The consistent operation across three books is not the removal of the abject but its reassignment — judgment's own imagery, reissued to mercy.

This is why the work reads as devotional even when its characters do not believe. Molly says "I don't believe it." The narrator of "Assumptions" calls Mary's blessing "a gip." Nonna denies heaven outright. And every one of them processes death, love, and grief in Catholic grammar anyway, because it is the only grammar they were given, and because — this is Mulhern's actual argument — it turns out to fit.

So: is the art a theological catharsis? It is better described as a **theological rescue operation**, conducted in the register of comedy, on people the world has already written off. The formal proof is the shape of the sentences. Mulhern's characteristic move is to name a piece of squalor and then, in the same breath, to give it a liturgical word: a wave that "razed" two drunk women is the same wave that raises them; a wig in a paper bag is an entombment; tanning oil is chrism. The prose enacts at the level of the clause what the theology claims at the level of the cosmos — that the ruined body is not replaced but glorified.

And the last measure is the one the writer himself supplies. *Munificentissimus Deus* ends: *we pronounce, declare, and define.* "Assumptions" ends: *altogether beautiful, and divine.* The story is not a meditation on a dogma. It is an exercise of one — the definition of a body nobody else would define, performed by the only person who was ever willing to call her lovely, which is to say by a child who has grown up and become a writer.

That is what the art is for. Not catharsis. Canonization.

What the corpus shows

The case does not rest on the size of the concordance. It rests on two things that can be checked: the findings rated strong, and the places where the pattern fails.

1,226 passages are rated strong — connections that are quoted verbatim, located in the text, and tied to a named source, not inferred. They are the load-bearing evidence, and they are what a skeptical reader should be pointed to first, because they survive the question "did you find this, or did you put it there?" The passages rated probable or speculative are marked as such and carry no weight in the argument that follows.

The negative findings are recorded alongside the strong ones, and they are the method's credibility. A story set on the Feast of the Assumption never once uses *altar*, *amen*, *rosary*, *mercy*, *sacrifice*, *resurrection*, *veil*, or *worship* — and never uses *grace* or *spirit* as nouns. The crisis scenes in the collections are conspicuously unliturgical: when someone actually dies, no prayer arrives. The poems decline hymn measure; where they look devotional they usually refuse the actual form. One story in *The Weight of Small Mercies* lacks the apparatus entirely, and it is the bleakest in the cycle. A concordance that only ever found confirmations would be a mirror. This one records its own failures, which is why its confirmations can be trusted.

Four strong findings carry the case.

1. The doctrine is quoted, not gestured at. Mulhern puts the actual text of *Munificentissimus Deus* into a short story. He reads Mark 15:33–34 and Mark 16:6 verbatim over two caskets in *Molly Bonamici*. He opens *Give Them Unquiet Dreams* with a Yeats epigraph and closes *Molly Bonamici* with Dickinson's "I dwell in Possibility," ending on the word *Paradise*. He quotes John 1:1, Matthew 7:6, Matthew 7:15, Romans 6:23, Genesis 1:26–28. In an essay he names his "Boston Irish Catholic upbringing," argues with a student about Jonah, admits he is angered by "the hate, misery, and evil that Christianity has caused," and then writes: "This is communion." A writer who does all of that is not being interpreted. He is being read.

2. The same images recur across three decades and five books. The Feast of the Assumption. The seawater cure at Nantasket. The wet silvery scalp and the crown of the head the boy will not touch. The mourning dove out of its cleft, rising and then descending over the water. "Up you go. On the count of three." A halo-shaped pool of blood. "Goodness is the only investment that never fails." "A useless thing." Twenty-four such repetitions are documented in the Cross-Book Repetitions appendix, quoted in each location. This is a personal liturgy — a small set of formulae returned to on a cycle, the way a missal returns to the same propers every August 15.

3. The abject is never removed. It is reassigned. This is the signature and it is consistent across genres. A stolen chalice disarms a police officer. A fabricated cancer diagnosis secures charity. A poisoned cookie becomes a black Eucharist and the narrator says flatly that the victim "had died for her sins." A con artist dies in a halo of her own blood while bystanders sing "Stayin' Alive." A suicide on August 15 is named by the character herself: "She had created her own Assumption." A grandmother states the working theology out loud — "We make our own miracles… instead of sitting on our arses waiting for Jesus to put the world right." And in the poems, the same conversion runs quietly through domestic wreckage: a smashed piano yields "a broken soul"; a body cast "cracks open"; a life is summed as "that dried leaf you crumble in your hand."

4. Mulhern says it himself, in the poems, in one line. "My family members are my prayers. My poems are my prayers. My family members are my poems." That is not a figure of speech in a writer whose every book performs the same operation. It is a statement of genre. He thinks the work is prayer.

One boundary must be stated plainly, because it is where the method's reach ends. The concordance proves that the recurrence is real and that it does interpretive work — the strong tier and the reported negatives establish that. What it cannot prove, from the text alone, is that the recurrence is deliberate architecture rather than instinctive idiom. A writer who keeps returning to grandmothers, water, fire, and the Blessed Mother may be executing a philosophy, or he may simply be speaking his native vocabulary. The bridge between recurrence and philosophy is the author's own testimony — most compactly, the line in the poems, "My family members are my prayers. My poems are my prayers," and the essay's closing "This is communion." That testimony is consistent with everything the concordance finds, but it is

testimony, not proof. The honest formulation is therefore not that the philosophy is definitively shown, but that the corpus strongly corroborates it: the recurrence is demonstrable, the philosophy is consistent with it, and the two are best read together.

The Irish-Catholic imagination as a whole world

Much of the religious content in this corpus has no citable verse behind it, because it does not come from the Bible. It comes from a culture — the Irish Catholicism of mid-century Boston, transplanted, defensive, funny, guilt-saturated, and absolutely convinced that the dead are still in the room.

The thematic sections of this book record it: scrupulous guilt descending the maternal line, mother to daughter to grandson; confession and absolution performed by laypeople on park benches because no priest is available or trustworthy; hell explicitly disbelieved ("Hell doesn't exist") while purgatory is affirmed without irony ("we must always pray for the departed"); drink as both the family curse and the family sacrament; emigration remembered as an Exodus and reversed only when a man's ashes go home to Achill; the grandmother functioning as the household's celebrant, leading grace and blessings that no ordained man is present to lead; pookas and banshees debated against rationalism, with the plot always deciding for the pooka.

Two features of that world matter for reading Mulhern.

The first is **the sacramental habit of mind** — the assumption that ordinary objects and acts carry more than themselves. This is why suntan lotion can be chrism, a paper bag a tomb, a sugar cube a Host, a beach towel the Virgin's mantle, and Bacitracin rubbed on a mother's calluses the washing of feet. The technique critics would call symbolism is, in this world, simply how things are seen.

The second is **the authority of women**. There is no functioning priest anywhere in this body of work who does what a priest is for. The grandmother does it. Helen invents "Lovely Peggy" after a sermon on the power of names and thereby confers a grace that reaches, by the last page, into the Trinity. Nana leads the blessing. Rita absolves. Nonna administers a poisoned communion. The men are dead, absent,

silent, drunk, or at work. Mulhern's Church is a matriarchy operating without a license, and it works.

The literary inheritance

The religious allusions do not run alone. They run braided with a literary line that Mulhern names openly.

Yeats supplies the deepest structural device in the corpus. The title *Give Them Unquiet Dreams* is a verbatim line from "The Stolen Child" — the fairies whispering restless dreams to sleeping trout "from the hills above Glen-Car." The novel's family is named **Glencar**. The title is a buried pun: they are the people of Glen-Car, permanently subject to visitation from the other world, which is precisely the novel's plot. The poem's refrain — "Come away, O human child… For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand" — stands as the epigraph and returns at the end as a psychopomp's chorus.

Joyce is the acknowledged master: "The Dead" is taught and quoted inside the novel, Michael Furey is named, and the whole method of the epiphany buried in a domestic scene is Joyce's before it is Mulhern's.

Dante structures *Molly Bonamici* underneath its realism — an epigraph from the *Commedia*, a policeman named Virgil at a graveside, and, in the last chapter, a taxi driver named "Bea — short for Beatrice" who delivers Molly to the sea on October 17, the feast of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the pre-1969 calendar (it is now kept on October 16), where she rises from the water "home at last."

Flannery O'Connor is cited rather than merely imitated: *Wise Blood* is placed in a troubled student's hands, which is as close to a statement of method as a novelist gets. And around these stand Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Dickens, Keats, Hopkins, Dickinson, Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Kierkegaard, Langston Hughes, Poe, Marx quoted with scholarly precision on religion as "the opium of the people," T. S. Eliot's "Hurry up please, it's time" surfacing as graffiti, G. F. Watts's painting *Hope* quoted twice in full, Titian's *Assunta* described at length, and a stratum of popular song — "Stairway to Heaven," "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head," "Somewhere," "When

Your Old Wedding Ring Was New" — functioning as the hymnody of people who do not go to Mass anymore.

How religious is it, exactly?

Three levels, and it is worth separating them.

Explicitly religious. A substantial fraction of the corpus is overtly Catholic on its surface: named feasts, quoted dogma, Masses rendered in liturgical detail, chalices, rosaries, Stations of the Cross, funerals, wakes, banshees, holy water, novenas, priests and nuns. A reader who noticed nothing else would still have to call Mulhern a Catholic writer.

Structurally religious. Beneath that, the plots are shaped by sacramental actions — a baptism, an anointing, a viaticum, a confession, an absolution, a burial, an assumption. This is the level most readers miss, and it is where the artistry is. The beach outing in "Assumptions" is a complete sacramental sequence disguised as a day trip.

Thematically religious. And beneath that, the whole moral universe is Catholic in a way that survives the loss of belief. Characters who deny God outright — "There is no heaven. There is no God" — still process grief, love, and death in no other grammar. That is the deepest finding in this book, and the most interesting one: Mulhern writes about people for whom Catholicism has stopped being true and has not stopped being the only available language.

Religious writer, or writer of religious architecture?

The distinction matters, because it is where a careful reader will push back. A "religious writer" in the critical sense — Flannery O'Connor, Graham Greene, Gerard Manley Hopkins — is a writer whose work is in the service of, or committed to, a faith. Mulhern is not that writer. The corpus is religiously saturated but doctrinally withheld. Every supernatural claim carries a rational alternative, usually in the protagonist's own voice: Molly answers the argument for providence with "I believe we see what we want to see," and dismisses a prophecy with "I think she was just making things up to frighten us." The ghosts in *Give Them Unquiet Dreams* are folk

pooka and hereditary second sight, not purgatorial souls awaiting Masses, and sight is uncoupled from virtue — the unsighted Martin is the book's moral center. The presiding vocabulary is Transcendentalist, the Oversoul rather than God, with Emerson and Whitman as the named lineage, and the stance the work finally allows is possibility rather than doctrine.

The accurate label is therefore not "religious writer" but *writer of religious architecture*. His imagination is pervasively structured by Irish-Catholic and Transcendentalist imagery, and he uses that material as form and allusion rather than as confession or apologetics. This is the stronger and more defensible claim, and it is the one the title of this book already makes: the subject is the architecture, not the faith. The faith is present — quoted, located, checked — but it is a grammar the characters speak after they have stopped believing it, not a doctrine the author asks the reader to accept.

One further honesty. "Religious architecture" is a critical judgment the evidence supports; it is not a fact the evidence proves. No concordance can establish what "most academics" would say, and this book does not pretend to. What it establishes is narrower and firmer: that the religious layer is real, structural, and functional across the corpus, and that the label "religious architecture" describes that layer more accurately than "religious writer" does. The reader is free to weigh the judgment against the strong tier and the negatives and reach a different one; the passages themselves are not in dispute.

How rare is this allusiveness?

Three measures, and they rank the work differently.

Density. By sheer count the concordance runs to 2,002 passages, and 1,226 of its entries are rated strong, across two novels, three collections, the poems, and the online work — Mulhern is unusually dense for a contemporary realist. This is not the allusiveness of a poet working in fragments; it is the allusiveness of kitchen-sink Irish-American fiction, which makes the density more surprising, not less.

Range. The range is narrow but deep. Mulhern does not range across world literature the way Eliot or Pound do. His sources are scripture, liturgy, Catholic

devotion, Irish and Italian folk-Catholicism, and a fixed literary canon — Joyce, Yeats, Dante, O'Connor, Dickinson, Emerson, Hopkins. The narrowness is a feature: it is what makes the recurrence legible as a personal liturgy rather than as erudition.

Recurrence. This is where the work is genuinely distinctive. The same images return across three decades — the seawater cure, the mourning dove out of its cleft, "Up you go. On the count of three," the grandmother as celebrant. Few writers reuse a fixed set of charged images with that deliberateness, and the recurrence is documented in the Cross-Book Repetitions appendix.

The honest comparison is therefore not to a single writer but to a tradition. Within the Catholic literary line, the closest figures are Flannery O'Connor (theological rather than scriptural-literal), Walker Percy (philosophical), Graham Greene (thematic), and Gerard Manley Hopkins (the closest poetic analogue, whose sound does theological work). Within the broader allusive tradition, the benchmarks are T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Milton, and Dante — all denser and wider-ranging, but none of them a single-tradition recurrence of the kind documented here. Among contemporary American writers with a religious cast, Marilynne Robinson and Cormac McCarthy are comparably saturated.

What this book does not claim is a ranking. No one has measured allusiveness across writers the way this concordance measures Mulhern, so any "rarer than X" claim would be a guess. What it claims is narrower and firmer: the density is real, the recurrence is real, and both are documented — which is more than can be said for most writers' allusiveness, because most writers have not had it counted.

Final judgment

The work is uneven. The repetitions that read as liturgy inside one book can read as thin ore across five. The essayistic digressions in the middle of "Assumptions" are a real structural risk. Allusions are occasionally over-explained where the noun had already done the work. None of that is fatal, and none of it is hidden in this book.

But the achievement is unmistakable and it is singular. Mulhern took the least promising material in American fiction — a Boston Irish Catholic childhood, alcoholic relatives, a dying grandmother, parochial school — and made it carry the

maximum available stakes in Western literature: the resurrection of the body. He did it in the diction of suntan lotion and whiskey sours and Chinese takeout. He did it without once raising his voice, and almost never, in five thousand words or ninety thousand, telling the reader what he was doing.

And the thing he is doing is always the same thing. He is going back for people the world has finished with — a bald drunk, a suicide, a con artist, a fraud, a barren nanny, a dog nobody wants — and he is refusing to let the account close on the world's verdict. The imagery of judgment is systematically confiscated and reissued to mercy. Hellfire becomes light on water. The crown of thorns becomes a laurel of peach fuzz. The stigmata become spilled juice. The Cross becomes a Father's crossed arms in the act of an embrace.

That is not catharsis, which purges. It is not nostalgia, which preserves. It is canonization — the formal, deliberate declaration that a discarded life was in fact glorious, made by the one person who was ever willing to say so.

Tota pulchra es. There is no flaw in you.

Conclusion: A Grammar Without a Guarantee

The question this concordance was built to answer can now be put plainly: how religious is the work? The answer the evidence supports has two halves, and neither is true without the other. Mulhern's writing is religious to the bone in its construction, and it is persistently reticent in what it asserts. The Catholic material is everywhere; the Catholic verdict is almost nowhere. What follows sets out that double finding, the evidence for each half, and the limits of what can be claimed.

The saturation is structural

The first half is not in doubt. Across two novels, three collections, the poems and the online work, the concordance records 1,925 passages, of which 1,182 are rated strong. The count matters less than where the passages sit. They are not ornaments laid over plots that would stand without them; they are the plots. The grandmother of *The Weight of Small Mercies* gives the whole corpus its working theology in a single sentence: "We make our own miracles… instead of sitting on our arses waiting for Jesus to put the world right." That sentence does not reject the sacramental. It

relocates it, from the altar to the kitchen, and from the priest to the woman who has decided to act. The action it licenses is a Eucharist administered without a church: "Drink this wine. Joshua says the cup has healing powers." A stolen chalice, a cousin's invented doctrine, a daughter in a psychiatric ward, and the words are the words of institution. The poems compress the same relocation into the only statement of method the corpus makes in its own voice: "My family members are my prayers. My poems are my prayers. My family members are my poems." Prayer is not abolished in that line; it is given a new object.

The saturation also reaches below vocabulary, into form. In "The Mannequin," a death on a dormitory floor is bracketed by the only two sentences in the story that begin with the same word: "Doors opened up and down the hall." and "Doors shut all around." Nothing religious is named, and nothing needs to be; the shape is the call and answer of an office, performed by a building because no person present will perform it. The same principle governs the prose at the point of death, where Mulhern consistently flattens rather than rises. "Smoke Rings" reports a grandmother's end in eight monosyllables with a curse in the subject slot: "'Oh shit!' was the last thing she said." The liturgy is withheld from the words and returned to the rhythm, which is where a reader formed by the Mass will hear it without being told to.

Naming carries the pattern into character. In "Assumptions," the grandmother who stages a canonization is almost never allowed her own name: "Helen" occurs four times, never as the narrator's unforced designation for her — twice it is Peg calling across the table, "Let's have one for the road, Helen" — against thirty-four instances of "my grandmother." The celebrant is a function, not a person, which is exactly how the liturgy treats a celebrant. A story about the Assumption refuses the nouns that would declare one, and refuses its presiding woman her name, by the same gesture.

The assertion is withheld

The second half is equally well evidenced, and it is the half a reader is likelier to miss. The corpus almost never tells the reader that grace is real. Every supernatural claim is paired with a rational alternative, usually in the protagonist's own voice: "I believe we see what we want to see." The most conventionally sacred object in the work — a cross of emerald and diamond, left as a last gift by a woman who has killed

herself — is named by the narrator in the closing line of the story that gives *Useless Things* its title: "A useless thing." In *Give Them Unquiet Dreams*, the character with no gift of sight at all is the book's moral centre — "He saw goodness in me that I never felt" — and vision confers no authority on those who have it. The liturgical year itself is nearly absent from that novel. It is timed by Sundays ("Every few weeks, on a Sunday after church"), and Christmas, the only feast it names, frames the deaths that cluster near its end in a single subordinate clause: "Shortly after Christmas, which, for obvious reasons, wasn't so joyous." Easter, Advent, All Souls and a First Communion never appear. The calendar supplies the time of dying and declines to supply a rite for it.

What the dead receive instead are the book's own returns. Martin's goodnight in Chapter Three comes back at the final bedside and is transformed there into absolution: "Go to sleep, brother. It wasn't your fault. I never left you and I never will." The words take their place from Christ's parting promise at the end of Matthew's Gospel, "lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (28:20), and their wording from the promise of Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"; but the echo is fused and unmarked, and the speaker is a drowned boy, not a risen Lord. It is the one scriptural promise on those closing pages left without a label, among drawings whose backs carry Ecclesiastes, Romans and Mark by chapter and verse. That is the corpus's characteristic move in its purest form: the sacred shape without the sacred claim.

Revision does not run one way

The textual history is the strongest evidence that this reticence is chosen rather than inherited, because it can be watched in the act of being chosen — and because it is not uniform. Three directions of revision are documented, and a fair conclusion has to hold all three.

The first and commonest direction is toward silence. The 2016 "A Prayer for Home" explains itself twice, once in doctrinal terms, "She had created her own Assumption," and once in terms of the title, "prayers for home, wherever we believed we were going, would never be answered." *Useless Things* keeps the middle of that story almost word for word and cuts both passages, so that the story now ends on the refused cross and the reader must make the link the narrator once made aloud. The

online stories that became *Molly Bonamici* gloss their crime from Genesis — "Like Eve, she had eaten the forbidden fruit," "Ashley had died for her sins" — and the novel deletes the gloss and substitutes a plain moral fact: "I felt remorse for the first time." The poems move the same way. "Moving Forward" loses its sermon-like close, "that helps us become whole again," and ends instead on a gesture: "She kisses me on the forehead." "The Crosswalk" gives up its verdict, "Proof that we had closeness for a moment, / and that is enough," for an image in a frame. "Copacetic" gives up "When I wake, I find that he has gone" for a folded robe that recalls the grave-cloths of John 20:6-7 without saying so.

The second direction is the exception, and the conclusion would be dishonest without it. In "Arise and Go Now" the revision runs the other way. The 2018 magazine text reports only that "people throughout the world were helping one another." The novel changes the verb to "saving." The 2026 collection then adds a sentence that neither earlier text had: "I realized that helping others is our most sacred obligation, the source of all hope and goodness." Here, once, the work names its own lay sacrament and ranks it highest. The exception is instructive precisely because it is single. What the corpus is finally willing to call sacred, when it calls anything sacred in its own voice, is not a doctrine but a duty to other people.

The third direction is stability. Much of the religious apparatus does not move at all. "Blindfolded" carries its chalice theft and its mock-miracle "at Rephidim and Kadesh" identically through three printings, and the only religious word that changes is one adjective, "the revelation of God's pure love" becoming "the revelation of God's love." The Bridie poem passes between the two earlier collections without variant, down to the digit zero printed for its vocative "O." The stable material is the ritual furniture; the revised material is the commentary on it. Mulhern keeps the Mass and cuts the homily.

What the evidence permits, and what it does not

These findings support a precise claim and forbid a larger one. They support the claim that the work is structured, at the levels of plot, form, naming and revision, by an Irish- and Italian-Catholic grammar that survives the loss of doctrinal belief in its characters: people who say "There is no heaven. There is no God." and then grieve, forgive and bury their dead in no other language. They support the claim that the

sacred is persistently transferred from clergy to laity, and chiefly to women; and that the author's characteristic revision is the removal of explanation, so that the reader, not the narrator, performs the act of recognition.

They do not support the claim that Mulhern is a religious writer in the confessional sense in which O'Connor, Greene or Hopkins are. Nor do they support the opposite claim, that the religion is mere inheritance or nostalgic décor; the revision history shows too much deliberate work on the religious layer for that. The author's own account of his most fully figured character agrees on both counts: the biblical subtext of Martin's actions was "purposeful," yet "he was simply a loving brother," and "I do not proselytize." The work's own essay on teaching comes as close as anything in the corpus to a personal statement, and even there the assertion carries its own question mark: "A palpable energy (the Holy Spirit?) moves through all," and then, without the question mark, "This is communion, and teaching will be the pond that I bathe in each morning." That sentence, in which the sacred is proposed, queried and then enacted as a practice rather than affirmed as a belief, is the corpus in miniature.

The most exact description the evidence allows is therefore this: a body of work formed completely by Catholicism which no longer permits Catholicism the last word, and which gives the last word instead to the practices of love that Catholicism taught it to recognize as holy. Its religion is a grammar without a guarantee. The work never settles whether the grace it depicts is real. It settles, over and over, that the people who receive it deserve it — and it leaves the reader to decide what to call that.

The collection that began this study states the claim in its epigraph and then spends the rest of the corpus declining to repeat it:

> "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you." (Song of Solomon 4:7)

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