

SPARKEY'S HOUSE

The northeast winds blew up from across the lake. The cold pierced soft and bleeding deep into Sparkey's mouth. It was stuffed with blood-soaked cotton wool. Sparkey spat out on the semi-frozen ground, his heart was racing and he was feeling very alone and weak. Looking over his right shoulder he could hear, or imagine he could hear his father shouting at his brother.

The pain in his mouth was intense. He took out a packet from his pocket and quickly popped a couple of red and grey coloured pills. Jamming them in between the blood soaked cotton wool on one side of his mouth. Walking on into the field he heard the sound of birds probably crows. These were the most common sorts in these parts of the country. Stepping forward he attempted to raise the double barrel shotgun he was carrying, broken down on his arm. In an instance he feels his finger squeeze on the trigger, the gun discharges its first barrel, then its second. He reloads and fires both barrels straight ahead of him.

In the eastern sky the sun is setting on the multicoloured light shattered horizon something is summoning Sparky's mind to listen, to the answer to the confusion he is feeling. He does not react to his surroundings. Taking a deep breath he stuffs two more pills into his mouth and walks off in the direction of the northern sky. The race between reason and pain is being run on different race tracks in Sparky's mind. He asks himself out loud, "What can I do, they won't listen to me and they won't believe me?"

Relaxing the brainstorm in his mind he wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead and straightens the cloth cap he wears to reveal a long white bandage that is wrapped around his head like a turban.

The sleety winds flail across Sparky's face forcing him to rethink his journey to the place his father called West Point. There he would get temporary shelter from the elements. He liked atmospheric places and West Point was one such place where, as a young child he went with father and they always had a purpose; to fix a fence that had been broken down by the fowlers on the first day of shooting, or maybe to turn back a neighbour's cow or calf that had grazed on our farm unnoticed and self-welcome made.

Standing on the hill overlooking West Point he could see light from the far shore. The inhabitants of those houses on the other side of the lake were getting ready to settle in for the evening, just like any other evening to them but to Sparky it was a common sight that filled him with foreboding and it took him a long time afterwards to figure out why. Soon all the lights were on and the lake reflected their glow. To Sparky there was something in this sight that was memorable and inexorable. He didn't know why but he could feel it and one day he would express it and feel proud to be one of the great Breffni clan. No one would ever take that away from him.

Sparky thought of going home to his house, but then his mind started to wander again. The earth felt crisp like under his feet and a new surge of energy took over his body. He wanted to walk around the land; his father's land the family smallholding. He wanted to discover something. He felt like a man who was going blind and he wanted

to remember everything; to feel, to be at one again with his Mother Earth, to name again lovingly the fields of his childhood. He called out their names aloud. Echoes darted across the sky over the lake into the woods below.

“The Far Hill”, “the Lawn”, “The Lower Lawn”, “The Fields at the Gate”, “The Well Meadow”, “The Bog Meadow”, “The Smoothing Iron”. He stopped took a deep breath and sighed. “The Horses Field”, “The Briary Hill”, “The Field over the Lake”, and of course West Point. Hearing himself call out their names gave him a sense of belonging, and at the same time a great sadness welled up inside him. Here like the poets before him was his kingdom many miles wide and very, very deep, this could not be forgotten. The snow started to fall evenly over the dimly lit countryside, soon, total darkness enveloped the land, except for the reflected light from the houses round the lake on both sides. In this horseshoe of hope, this necklace of serenity; Sparky cast a stone into the darkness and heard it zip through the snow laden trees, then plunge into the cold waters of the lake. This he knew was the winter side of the land, but there was another side, the summer; and just like himself, this side had another personality and come May Day every year was only too willing to prove it. By now the frosty wind and piercing night air was turning his hands and face numb; he felt no pain. It was time to return home, he looked at his watch, which he could barely hold in his hands; the timepiece said ten past seven. He headed home to have his tea. He waved goodbye to his winter land, and started his journey back to his house. As he approached the farmyard through the haggard gate he could hear the sounds of his father working, and his brother helping him to do the milking in the byre. The sound of the new milking machine echoed around the farmyard and gave the place an air of normality. He joined his brother at the dairy door and took hold of one of the milking buckets, which glistened in the now emerging sunlight. Sparky’s brother said; “Where to fuck were you? You should not have been out in the fields, just after coming from the dentist, you will end up with lockjaw, and then we will all be fucked”. Sparky said nothing but looked up at the moon, “Look Daddy it is winking at us”. “It’s time Sparky went into the house” his brother said. “oh an troth it is” said his father. “Right Daddy” said Sparky. “I will go and join Mother Earth in the house and we will wink at the moon together”.

“Here, get into the house” said Sparky’s brother “and mind yourself, we have a busy day tomorrow, there is going to be a lot of people here, looking at the land, and I will be away in the early morning”. Sparky looked into his brother’s bloodshot eyes and thought ‘Great, we will have visitors at last, Mother will like that and I will put on my best smile for them’.

Inside the farmhouse Sparky could see his mother busily moving around the kitchen in the light of the fire that was burning brightly in the hearth, she was like a ballet dancer with a paint brush in her hands, as if she was looking at an imaginary painting; that she was about to put the finishing touches to. Sparky came into the kitchen and looked at his mother, but she was so engrossed in her work that she did not notice him until he coughed loudly. “Ah aha is that you Sparky, were you on a journey, you look famished; but you are a good boy. Did you bring me any sweets” “Oh yes Mother, don’t I always bring you sweets”. “What are you doing”, enquired Sparky. “Just adding the finishing touches son, that’s all, it’s time”.