

E 4

English

Chapter 1

From blackness the alarm bell woke me with a jolt and the transim of one's circumstance be/came to the for. I jostled up from under the covers into the cold morning air.

Aunty Winnie had breakfast set out ready for me,,, soft boiled eggs, soldiers, tomato sauce and a pot of black tea. She'd gotten up an hour earlier to do so, packing lunch for the journey.

“Have you packed your satchel?” she asked

“Yes, Auntie Winnie”

“You haven’t forgotten the script...”

“No. Of course not” She poured tea as the lark made its morning call heard.

“Pays to be sure” her words of wisdom reiterated yet again... I hated to sound so unappreciative, despondent even; the weariness of her nagging made a trip away evermore appealing. And the task ahead would not be made any less difficult by her incessant pandering... She faced away from me, doing dishes as she continued her educational rant.

In a dash as the blackbirds braving the brisk cold morning, whistled their morning chorus, I pecked Winnie’s cheek then made off out the house, down the path of opiac slabs and into the taxi. If i’d only known that’d be our last time together.

The first ferry to HollyIsland left at 5am. I stood on the farpoint of pier, seagulls airborne above me.

Sat on the high-rank of the ferry (alune. {Looked at the imperial ferry docked at dublin port) traversing the channel to foreign land watching Dublin shrink into mist. Then i followed the advice of my mentor and guardian, Winifred and revised my lines.

As my natural Mother died from complications during childbirth, my ageing grandma was burdened with my keep. From London, Nana had moved us to her sister's in Newcastle, County Dublin. I vaguely remember the time spent at our home in Ruislip Gardens. Nana passed when i was 4 and Aunt Winnie raised me as her own child. She had a daughter, Alice who was born with

Downs Syndrome severe enough to mean her permanent residence in nearby *Peamount Hospital*. Two years me senior, Alice had enjoyed regular home visits until horridly scolding herself on the old hob kettle.

From the Holyhead port on Holy island I must take a connecting bus to Liverpool Central then the train to Euston. At the bus stop sheltering from the drizzle & breeze; four of us waited for a carriage to arrive and deliver us out of the brisk cold to city's civilised eutopia. Myself and the other gentleman purveyed a somewhat smart demeanor, the lady in a dress looked like she'd just finished a late shift at the local hospital and her counterpart, younger, wore warm black tights and ankle socks. I noticed her calfs were slender.

By the time the bus pulled up at our stop, the sun was rising from behind sombre clouds.

On the bus I yearned only to sit back and watch the world blur by but shifted concentration onto my lines, revising for the audition - the glimmer of academic prosperity beckoning... Hamlet was one of the Shakesperian pieces I'd chosen to read...

“Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady... cloister mew'd,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
Thrice blessed they that master so their blood
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage”

I adopted an archaic English accent, perhaps inherent from my maternal Mother or instilled by Auntie... Either way my main objective in reading the prose was to avoid portrayal as a quirky, over-cocky teenager; zealous to one's own. One sought to reanimate what boring becometh, enthraling audiences with clear, lively, accentuated speech. Thereby pleasing Auntie, laying the foundations of a potentially illustrious career and filling a space in one's wallet. Wrought with nerves i read through the passage again and again!

Winnie'd always encouraged me to follow my dream despite being impeded by a childhood lisp I had outgrown gradually after puberty. A man anew. Those horrid 'crying' gags by pupils at Wye Primary forgiven, my newly stubbled chin clean shaven and perfumed; my attire, modish... Garments styled like the studs from Auntie's limelit showgirl days. Her books I'd read of an evening in with her. Those glamorous tales of performing before London's aristocracy ignited a passion for such more than any other academic subject. Under her guidance i was to find a room in London to house me while studying Archaic Theatre; Shakesperean and Greek. A path that could lead me to become a player of distinction in London's flamboyant West End... Winnie had guided me through her decadent years as a dancer in the jiving 50s. Post-wartime England saw an end to rationing, decadent fashions and jiving music swept ballrooms. A judder beneath then, out-of-control, the bus careered off the carriageway, over the verge into a hedge!

Chit-chat hummed as all us passengers waited outside that chilly morning for a replacement bus. The driver had informed us of

around an hour's wait. Rumour was echoed amongst us to what had happened and the conclusions one deduced were that the driver of a car in front, travelling from Poland through the night, had drifted off behind the wheel and, eye's shut asleep, veered into the path of a vehicle in the inner lane. Crash, bad accident! Our tenacious bus driver, foreseeing the smash, had swerved before breaking hence the judder. Some passengers complained of whiplash; an ambulance further up treated the injured from the colliding vehicle. The bus was deemed unroadworthy so a replacement was dispatched. This meant i would be late. I had to make this appointment, if I didn't my academic career would hit an untimely plateau; and one had binary motivation. Stressed, i sat on the motorway's hard-shoulder, my rehearsal papers still to hand.

Chapt2

Albeit a tad flustered arriving late in Stratford upon Avon I went to the JSC. Explaining to the front of house staff twas because of the near collision with a truck, and a driver asleep at the wheel... Aloft in the lobby was a painting of Old Bill Shakespeare himself. The receptionist who's name-badge read Alison reassured me it was of no concern, then a gentleman guided my to the auditorium, told me to wait for my name to be called. Between me and the stage were a handful adolescents here under the same guise as i. Somewhat overwrought I bore my weight on the wall hoping it might just suck me in. A voice bellowed from on-stage

“Romeo, Romeo” the actor was English and polished his monologue off splendiferously to a scant ovation. An authoritarian voice called out, “Thankyou Quentin, now, if we can have the next person...” a shuffling followed by, “Miss. Patterson. Your full name, the course you've applied for and then the part which you will be reading for us today.”

“Lyndsey Patterson, 16th Century theatre and Fine Art and i am reading, King's Lear's solliloquy.”

“Fire away”

Another well read piece did little to quill my nerves.

“What about you?” said the guy next to me after Lyndsey

Patterson had finished her rendition and after a hesitation, “what are you reading?”

“Midsummer Night's” I replied, “and you?”

“The same!”

“Which bit?”

“Where are you from?”

“Newcastle”

“you don't sound like a Geordie”

“Newcastle, County Dublin”

As we spoke the voice called out again for Mr. P and he went to read... I rehearsed the part and reread the script one final time.

“Next” said the voice of authority! Next meant me.

“Sorry, I have missed my audition slot earlier this afternoon. I came to read for you the part of Hamle”

“What are you waiting for; a personal invitation? Come on then, young man... read your part”

I was dishevelled by this man's curtness. My unequivocal respect for this literary peer(Baron) went out the window at the last comment.

“I had an accident,,; on the bus this morning the...”

“Wet your pants” the theatrical voice said jokingly,

“please, read” I sounded nervy not erudite.

I cleared my throat and began...

“Whether, if you yield not to your *father's choice*,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady...” I hesitated, “*cloister mewed*,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.

Thrice blessed they that master so their blood
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage” I completed.

Read not at my best but without any minor hiccups, the effort was appreciated by a handful of claps.

“Thank you Mr. Woddington. We'll be in touch”

“Well done;” said Toni in the wings...

“I was so nervous” i returned, then left the theatre and went for a drink in one of the bars on TCR.

That night I was booked to stay at a guest house. I checked in dropping my small suitcase in the lobby; the attendant was a little curt. The room was perhaps a touch too warm and foisty because of it. The lower price warranting some undesirable aspects. Flicking briefly through the T.V channels then off i flicked on the lamp and gathered papers to read in bed. Discarding the audition scripts, underneath was the Oxford Brookes college prospectus, my C.V and snippets of schoolwork. I reread and towelled my wet hair dry.

The next day I made hast to Oxford for another liaison this time with a tutor of English at Oxford Brookes...

“what were you reading?” the tutor enquired.

“A Midsummer Murder,” I misspoke.

“You may just be in luck, young David. We cover the play on this course” my optimism defered to query,

“Shouldn't plays be part of the Theatre Studies syllabus?”

“I think they probably are,” he said beginning a long-winded appraisal of their courses during which i started to daydream. seems one had not the erudition.

After the meeting i had a tour of the college and its classical grounds, stopping for coffee on Beaumont Street next to the Playhouse I perceived an academic career here. It was in the hands of the tutors and bureaucrats to decide my fate; though I might try to predict the future, i was no clairvoyant.

The job done in Oxford i set about my return trip home to Dublin. Left feeling gutted from the disappointing RSC audition, i recalled those 5 minutes in the limelight I had well and truly fucked! A scholarship at a reknowned theatre school would have been a ticket to the mainstream. Leaving academics and into adulthood. I had given my all at the audition yet failed miserably. Should I blame myself, the RSC tutors or that untimely road traffic accident?

Chap2.2

I arrived home parched so walked straight across to the Bull Pub. A seventeen year old ordering a drink by a dirty dozen; as I wasn't 18 until 22nd November. Inside were a few faces I recognized. As queued at the bar and bought a coke then made my way through the crowd of weekenders to a group of my school friends, together toasting an end to education and the beginning of a potentially never-ending summer holiday... Paul, Ron, O'Sullivan, Lisa and her elder sister, gathered together near the fruit machine, hollering over the din.

“wher've you been Woody”

“Just got back from Oxford”

“Your audition; how did it go?” I gave the thumbs down.

“Unlucky” O'Sullivan said sarcastically. I looked glum then Lisa said, “Oxford's bound to be stringent”.

“If at first you don't succeed try try again” added Lisa's elder sister, Claire. It was okay for them two, straight A-students swotting their way into a University of their choice. Girls seemed to fare better than boys at academics either through their own hard-work or teacher's-pet favouritism. Even being diagnosed dyslexic never warranted extra Brownie points. I swigged at my pint as Josh jostled my shoulders, shouting in one ear. Lifting my spirits as I summonsed energy for the final leg home.

As an A student i had pinned dreams of acquiring a part in a West End production, had prepared meticulously for it, motivated by the work ethic Aunt Winnie instilled in me. She would be as dissappointed as i, probably more.

Walked the public footpath home; the scenic route that could be sludgy after rainfall and spooky at night. Drunken courage meant flouting inhibitions and a staggered slalom home. I was botherd, I had faced the dissapointment at the audition and looked-forward not to breaking the news, dissapointing Aunti. I would sooner bypass her inquisition but had no way to avoid such.

I went inside and made some sobering tea, tiptoeing quietly around the kitchen as best as a drunken teenager can, then clumsily up the staircase into the bathroom. Expecting a resound greeting while urinating in and around the toilet. A disconserting

foreboding came over me as I prepared for bed, brushing teeth. Had Auntie Winnie not heard my intoxicated clamour? Where was the curious ballyhoo; questioning how my audition went and perhaps scolding for coming home drunk! Opening the door to my bedroom, alarm bells rang.

“Aunt Winnie;” I said with volume then opened her door a slant, i repeated a beckoning call to her, then moved to her bed. She lay motionless. “Auntie!”

I cried a bucket; then spent six hours digging a hole in the garden. Her will, her wishes were to be laid to rest juxtapose the azaleas, only a crucifix marking the grave.

Gouging ground underneath the apple tree in our back garden, I contemplated the extraordinary events of the last 24hours which had undoubtedly been the most perturbing in all my years. What was i to go from here, what should I do now? There was only one thing for it. Like Clark Kent in Superman i went back in the house upstairs into the attic; delved through old, idiosyncratic junk. Quaint hoarded items, many of which outdated me... Jargon-filled dusty books, bought but never read, one titled, More Than I Do... A collection of works by Spike Milligan, more things of no interest to oneself, stuff that had shared a part of the spare room below years earlier, adjacent to the rocking horse and my toys, action men, Obi Wan Kanobi & R2D2 , and then with excitement i uncovered what I searched for. A series of papers binded together. Draft copies of letters, telegrams and diary notes dating back as far as the '30s. A filofax stashed adventitiously in an ottoman; its contents sealed with a lock. Lacking the key and out of respect i chose not to force it open but

brought it along with the other documents and descended back down the ladder; the dust of this cold, damp loft penetrated my breathing enough to quickly concede and conclude...

Aunt Winifred had acquired these items following her wartime career in Telegram Messaging. Bi-lingual from childhood she had undertaken this career at the age of 19 when Britain and France declared war on Germany. Winnifred's Mother was of Scandinavian descent and had spoken a Nordic tongue in the family home, much to the dislike of her autocratic father.

Downstairs in the kitchen over a cup of tea I browsed some of the documents from the loft. Many of which pertained to Uncle Jack, a beguiling man who flitted through the house on seldom occasions, his absence attributed to career commitments. The Scandinavian who's full-name a child as I, struggled to pronounce.

In the folder was some of Auntie's work from her days as a translator, some letters typed on her old office typewriter, *I noticed the misprinted letter 'k' a fault due to usage. Alongside these transmissions was some of her notes, words exposing classified material and her opinions on such. Work that could have been amalgamated to form a book, an unfinished expose.

And many sentimental pieces regarding Winnie's affair with the Norwegian. Their relationship recorded through letters had been rekindled here; memories recorded from the war of worlds and sus...

A relationship sustained during and after the war.

One of the letters to Aunt Winifred from Jack dated 3rd September 1962.

Signed Jan/Jack the man from my childhood, Aunt Winnifred's companion, my role model who's presence i'd embedded in memory. Visiting our home, he'd embraced an impressionable young soul. I would always remember answering the front-door to an unexpected caller one dark night, a bearded foreigner before me. With an amic greeting I was introduced to this fascinatingly illuvis character who had wooed my young aunt abroad. I still remember tales conversed between the pair, one ear I kept open to their chattering late into the night.

On the cover read '**Confidential**' Jan, a Norwegian

*My Dearest Winnie,
Hasn't the time apart been so unbearable!*

I have secured some accomodation.

I loved to hear the tales as much as she loved to tell them though
....Winnie's recollection became a tad namby-pamby.
Yawning, I would sprawl out on the couch, while they sat up late
talking of time past.

I packed the chapbook diary- weighted and aged from writings.
Decided I should undertake the reading and reeducating of my
adopted family tree. I could even visit Jack himself at his home in
Norway, though I recall of his work commitments taking him to
Eastern Germany's capital city, Berlin. Should I be able to locate
the geriatric? That would be an adventure!

In my room, out of the wardrobe I grabbed some essential
fashions... Sweatvests, courdoroy's, just in case my jeans got too
dirty or dug in to the thighs. Cycling shorts, albeit a smidgen too
tight - bought in the end of season sale in Tiscos; a light canvass
material. All imperviously compacted in the inner compartments
of a padded back'n'shoulder-pack. Enough to keep me warm,
offering alternative attires for separate occasions; the beach, the
social evenings in bars and eateries... as clean and smart as one
could be. And must I not forget the writings, some light reading
material for the journey, to reacquaint myself with the man from
memory- Jack the western ragabond wayferer, Jan the defecting
Scandinavian soldier. After the Berlin Wall fell, he had
dissapeared.

In 1933 when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, Heindrig joined the Nasjonal Samling, the Hind; a Norwegian Nationalist party.

But when news spread of the Nazis persecution of honest people he sought to retract the political allegiance, in defiance of his Father and conspired against the Fascist regime. Accordingl, Jan became a key player in Norway's National defence in Oslo. When the Wehrmacht seized the city on 8th April 1940, Jan formed part of the resistance and stood their ground to defend the capital. In the onslaught he was wounded by a German gunman and taken for treatment in the hospital, only hours before it came underseige! Fighting a losing battle many fled the city by vessel from Drobak - into the Atlantic Ocean and down to Denmark.

Under Hitler's jurisdiction Norway's capital was handed to the German Reich Commissariat for the Occupied Norwegian Territories. It marked a milestone in the battle for the Baltic regions; Britain had planned to invade Norway in April 1940. Aware of this, the Nazis made a military counter-move, seiging Oslo only days earlier, thereby sealing Sweden's valuable iron ore mines in doing so.

Jan himself told me of his escapades, travelling by foot and in trucks to France.

Late one night he crept into the Chateau garden of a rich French family for whom Winifred worked for. Cold & exhausted from his alpine footslog he fell fast asleep in a bush with only a frosted fleece. Jan dared not to risk venturing into a local bar of this occupied village. ~In morning cockcrow, the dogs were let out and spotting Jan asleep, flat out in a bed of azaleas. The hounds let out what Auntie described as a canine cacophony; an alarm call that woke her. Vigilent as in wartime, the servant of the house dashed to phone the Policia, while Jan, paralytic with pneumonia, did his utmost to elope. Monsiuer caught Jan as he struggled to climb the fence and dragged him inside with the help of Michelle and Winifred. But fortunately for Hindy Ms. B stopped them from calling the Policia stating she wanted not the unnessasary attention from the military police scrutinizing their home. As they did not know they identity of the man asleep in the flowerbed or how he had come to be there, they would not hand him over to the guard. He was placed under house arrest, locked in the windowless room and monitered hourly.

A bed's rest and warm meal brought the young, fit man back to his vivacious self.

Quizzed as to the reasons for his detiorated state caught trespassing their garden, Jan had concocted a elaborate alibi...

Fa;hre Lost, Jan had fled the under-seiged city of Oslo, a refugee evading the wrath of an amassing Nazi army.

Meanwhile the Nazis were pressing their conquest across Europe, in adversity to the Allies.

Berlin was most vulnerable from the Baltic sea, therefore continued allegiance to their Scandanavian counterparts was key to avoiding a naval assault. Adolf feared British Navy seals could

battle for Rosstock. His Commandant's had alledgedly foiled our airborne effort to drop seals by parachute into Tegel, a lake 50kms north by north east of the capital.

Chap 3

In my hand luggage on the coach along with mouthwash and deoderant was some notes from the loft. I was to read the personal saga, a relationship blighted by war.

If one wants to have a good holiday, booking through a reputable agency would absolve undesirable inconvenieces... The 18-30 cloub should have suited an overzealous 17year old down to the ground... Why was I still introvertedly ...WALLOWing just for somewhere to walk to... I think the onset of fatigue had quoshed spirits. What does one do as a sole traveller touring foreign waters... sight-seeing, keepsake buying... I had embarked on a journey to pasteurs green... Seems Normandy met me halfway.

The sun shone a welcoming warmth interspersed with cloudy spells and chilling sea breezes, that cooled then woke me from

dosing as the sky covered over... My ice cream melted and coca cola flat i went inland to try and find some frogs legs to eat... The waiter spoke English and in a warm tone to the sole English traveller alone in his joint... he translated one then two items off the menu and I chose the latter, a seafood dish- they had no frogs-legs.

“Je voudrais un biere, Garcon” I added, incorporating a little French. Jan used to speak conversations in Deutsch with Mam, across the table, toward my uninterested ear, conscious even when half sleeping, sprawled out on two parts of our couch. All or any of their conversation, dubbed and in Deutsch, as deemed inappropriate for one's ‘little ears’. I scoffed prawn cocktail down with lager and lime then sat digesting, enervated from the cross-channel journey.

Throwing caution to the wind and drinking before dinner had brought on fatigue temporized with the excitement of the new venture... i'd adjusted to the road... now I wanted sleep, some solitude. In the toilets i brushed my teeth, then left. Wandering drunkenly until i found somewhere to sleep

I had tried hard all afternoon to find a guest house to stay in but after seeing the inflated prices decided to save money. Hostels in the city were a fraction of the price of the more exclusive seafront BnB's in De Panne. I took a gamble to save money, had already spent £40 on food and drink that day.

Half asleep on the beach, writhing, moulding the sand into one's asymmetric body shape... like a free memory-foam mattress only not as comfy.

I passed out then woke again, my ear jutting into the hard ground i jostled some clothes up, my trousers and jumper, folded and

crumpled, pressed my head onto them, an improvised pillow; thought to buy an inflatable in the morning.

Waking again through the night, still the waves crashed repeatedly rhythmically up the beach, and when my conscious resumed i noticed i'd been robbed! My bag my bike packs had been taken out of the blue... despite exhaustion i jumped up and scanned the area, the sinking feeling dawning on me... Sound asleep and oblivious, i had been fleeced on my first fucking night in France. Out of my sleeping bag despite the cold I felt, vulnerable, violated, then blamed my own pseudo camaraderie cum niavete for having taken the risk... what had i been on? I had to face the outcome of my decadence...

Someone had taken pulled a cheap stunt and taken advantage of an inexperienced young foreigner with a lot to lose.. How could i've let this happen, idiot; epic insummount!

But the questionable, disbelieving impulses were soon quilled by the cold reality... i stripped the sleeper from around my body to a pair of hipster trunks then waded in to the icy ocean, still beating its oblivious tempo... Lost for breath as the chills engulfed my upper body i swam like a jellyfish, bolting again as my head went under, lapping waves... This is me, Dave. This is my youth, my legacy... My ... salty...

Struggling against the forceful tide peturbed me and I made haste ashore, doggy-paddling until able to clasp sand undertow, wading the last leg, buffered by a stronger wave, mocking my measly piscine effort. Up beach then, left, drifted, undertowed further... I scanned for a mound of clothes... and my umbrella... Further up I walk then back, no it can't be; now some

theif has stolen my clothes, my sleeping bag and my socks and shoes... the bastards are watching my every move! Great so now im gonna walk inland for breakfast in my y-fronts... thank god i've still my passport... - tucked into the elastic... Admitting stupidity beyond vunerable, I waddled off the beach on route to the station Policia whatever... This was not part of the plan; all because of one stupid drunken act of carelessness, some bastard has stolen virtually every item I brought with me... I'm surely bound to call this off now and go home to Britain, back to that miserable, haunted house alone! Yet damn would i be pleased to be there now... I could snuggle up in my bed with a blanket to hide my fleshy bits... make some beans on toast and a cup of tea... I've lost all my money and Jan's book,,; Auntie would be devastated and angry to know they'd been stolen.

Reaching the edge of the sand before the perimeter wall i saw red... my cycle bags, dumped by the bins still holding some of my stuff! A quick rummage found my shorts which I put on immediately, my towel also and Jan's book with the traveller's cheques hidden, folded between pages 23&24... hahaha the bastards didn't take the sentimental items, though they've left a bear fraction of what i brought, at least its something... I've retrieved some items, am no longer virtually naked and can walk to the police in a better frame of mind. and can pinpoint the route those thieving perpetrators took off the beach; no doubt there's cameras around here. Just should have bought those flip-flops. I tiptoed along the concrete pavement; brittle stones painng my sole, a piece of chewing gum stuck to my foot.

Still disbelieving and stressed, churning the events over in my head, post hence, the consequences relayed through my mind;

Relieved I had found some remnants stashed behind the bin I thought to move on. Calming nerves brought on feelings of hunger and a longing for the home comforts of our little council house in Newcastle; hot tea and toast.

Pacing, I came upon la pâtisserie. Parked outside a van delivered croissants, mademoiselle stocked up inside... Humbly I caught their attention and hesitantly asked for une petite paine, a donation for a traveller robbed of his belongings, but they looked unsympathetic, unable to understand my **broken French**.

“La Policia” I asked.

“Tout droit,” Raising an arm in one direction they nodded straight ahead and so I pressed on. By 7am I was making a statement. At the front desk I reported the facts, that I was an Englishman, new to Normandie, sleeping off a drunken slur on the beach when, at some point during the night, had been robbed of my belongings... I could not be sure of the time at which it was taken, only realising it missing on waking. As I was clarifying that I could pin-point the whereabouts of my gear when taken and the route they had left the beach from, assuming they’d ditched my red cycle bag as they absconded – the official stopped me.

“Non possible” he shook his head, “You must wait till 10am, morning” she insisted, “Translator will speak English for you, Monsieur” Ok, I moved to a waiting room as said, surprised they had not taken my statement as evidence to search for the thieves in an attempt to retrieve my things. Regardless, I was here, telling myself to be grateful I was not hurt, though my belongings were taken, one had not been assaulted, or injured. Decided that it was silly to sleep, so well equipped in a open spot and to have been so obvious as to removing my watch, socks & trousers when going in the channel to swim. That someone, even perhaps the thief, had

still been watching. That my own stupidity and carelessness had allowed this to happen but I must know move on... If only i'd faired better at that audition at the RSC.

A couple came into the waiting room, English, talking about _____, I deduced they had been robbed also, that somehow had lost their passports, a man assisting them went away, as inept at English as the receptionist who'd seen to my issue. I put my feet up on my cycle bag, rested my head awkwardly on the vel-cushioned arm rest and dozed for a moment.

I was woken with a prod, then another. A policemon; he told me to sit up straight, that I were not to lie and rest my feet on the seating. It was on my bag, the shoes not tarnishing the upholstery but regardless, they'd seen me on the camera and told me to not! I looded at the clock on the wall. 8am

At 10am I went back to the reception desk to ask if the translator had arrived. Another gentleman came out from inside the office. He handed me a form and told me to fill it in. I was given a International number to call to report the loss of my visa/passport] After the call I went outside for a cigarette. The sun at full-noon now emanated heat, hotter than a most brilliant English summer's day in Wexham. Not cold or wet, but moist from sweat, my clothes itchy from the journey. The resolution for the day was to find a abode. I started back inside the station asking as, if due to my predicament, there may be a place for me to stay, a vacant cell, I joked to the English speaking one. He shook his head, "Non, possibla"

Dismayed, i returned, "wouldn't you have room if I stuck one on you," he failed to understand my accent, I left at that and went to

the waiting room to retrieve my bag. On departing, la mademoiselle handed one a card with an address written on it; seemingly from the translator's prompt. You can stay here, Monsiuer, tell them we sent you," she said and smiled. The card, read,

**Sleep Inn,
21 Rue Hegel,
Lille,
Normandie**

"Comment puis-je y arriver?"

"With the train" the contrôler answered.

Within the remains of my gear I made for the station, stepping out into sunlight from the canopy's shade, down the stone steps climbed in a state. As I elighted a ragged-looking man crossed the road wearing my flowery shirt and sunglasses. I noticed the embroidered pattern and thought to make chase

"Stop, thief!" I shouted as he made off. I was too laiden, my bag cumbersome, hampered me, making one vunerable should the assailant fight back. Should I return quick and report this to the Ploicia? I thought not, doubting they would act.

I arrived in Lille around 4ish.... On travelling I stopped to ask a young female for directions. Perhaps she wasn't so young, around my age; its hard to tell so I asked, " have you just finished work"

"Non," she replied, "la college"

"Do you know of the Sleep Inn on Jansveld?!"

"I know of it... are you...?"

“You see, I’m travelling from England and have nowhere to stay tonight... I’ve been robbed of some things and am in need of.... ‘shleter”

“Monsiuer, you have spoken to the right person I live just on Jansvled just opposite the place... we can walk together.”
I was in my element at this mademoiselle. She was slim and pretty with frilly....

“perhaps you may like to have coffee with me...”

“Sure” I thought though doubted she lived in a posh apartment like this alone, expected either a partner, parent or... chien.

“I’m claustrophobic too” I said

“You’re English is very good!”

“Merci”

Chap 4

The Sleep Inn was located in the city's centre, a canal crossing from St. Charles' Church and after some enquiries i found the shelter relatively easily. Using the print-out from the police station i was able to check in just as you would a hotel.. The lady on duty appeared unamused by a foreigner acquiring local welfare as if i were a simple tourist cum miser or exasperated spendthrift reduced to such sort accomodation designed for the homeless and socially defunkt.

I had arrived at the Sleep Inn just before supper time. After such a stressful day in which i'd missed meals, i sat down and waited for the food. I was joined at the table by three other gentlemen who all dashed to the counter when the hatch rose. We filled our plates with warm baguettes, butter, jambon and fromage and washed it down with instant coffee. Sat at the table, masticating i averted the glances from the shelter's other patrons; a ragabond entourage of male dominance; some elder to those around my age. A shaved-headed man adjacent to us appearing more Eastern European, stared at me. I heard comments muffled in French and through eye movement deduced they were discussing myself,

“Garçon” commented one in a diswelcoming tone. I ignored this browbeating.

“Ignore it!” said the friendly young man next to me as I continued to eat.

“Pierre” he said. I wiped butter onto a serviette then shook hands. “David”

“Bon appetite” he exclaimed

“Merci”

After dinner, I followed others to the smoking area, offered a Gauloises cigarette. A non-smoker I accepted only to fit in; suppressed a cough as I exhaled. I tried to make conversation with another man, local no doubt, but he failed to understand my accent and I retorted.

The bedrooms consisted of 3 bunk beds catering for up to six males. Under the bunks some had laid baggage, plastic bags. One long-haired gentleman drank a bottle of soda-pop, another lay up in a top bunk reading. The other bunks appeared to be free, I chose

one beneath the ceiling light, removed my shoes, socks, jumper and trousers then lay down. Curious to hear more about Hindy I took out some belles-lettres brought from home, began to read.

23rd Nov 1939

It is with great regret that my time recuperating with the French in their townhouse has come to an end but now I must attend to travelling, specifically south towards Switzerland. So difficult in this epoch of suspission! Border-crossings monitoring makes international journeys so less endearing. Regardless, I am duly bound to proceed as far as humanly possible. Though we parted company I can still feel your lifted by your companionship. As if you walk with me, Winifred. I can smell your sweet aroma... your constant giggling still rings in my ear. I know you will be worried about me but fear not as I am safe and plan to keep it that way. The Bosch won't get me. Keep smiling and look forward to our reunion.

Jack

To protect Winifred Heindrig signed his letters with his American English alias. Jan also boasted that he was able to pass himself off as a native American, a flawless Yankee accent he'd acquired at Uni.

There seemed to be more folk down at breakfast. Around 12 including two females, plus three staff who served tea and filter coffee from the bar. And on the table were the same sachets of jam and butter as at supper last night. There were croissants and cereal and the guests stuffed food in themselves as if ravenous.

I sat next to Pierre and a long dark-haired man and an elder greying man with stubble and a hoakey throat who rolled his vowels as only Frenchmen do, chattering. I struggled to comprehend them. Copying Pierre I spread chocolate sauce thickly on the bread and dunked it in my cereal, then i eructated. “Excuse moi!”

Rules meant we all had to check out by 10am. I decided to take a walk along the canal, taking some extra bread with me for lunch.

I decided to visit Tourcoing for the day and alleviate some of the boredom of the Inn.

Walking through town I found a pack of cigarettes on the ground, bending over to look inside i saw there were 5 or 6 that had presumably been dropped. I put them in my pocket so as to have one at hand should anyone ask me for one after dinner at the Sleep Inn.

“Ou habit tu?” i asked. She guided me using a combination of French, English and sign language.

The air smelled fresh, though with a tinge of odour from the stagnant water of the canal.

I returned to the shelter at 8pm for supper and tea, the same as last night but with omelettes instead of the cheese and bread, and pate – a blotchy pink, browned at the rim. Sat at the round table I was joined this time by a colored man, Caribbean it seemed in a smart purple suit. He spoke good English and commenced a three-way conversation with myself and the young homey.

“How'd you come to be in here?” he inquired.

“I was robbed” I said, “on the beach”

“Dunkirk!”

“Yes. They took all my things”

“You were asleep,” piped Homey and i nodded.

“You hmust be careful, there are a lot of thieves in those places... keep your things close by you!”

“I know that know,” I said as they continued to give more advice, “in this place also, people can steal, yes, a lot of people steal. If you're sleeping, best keep your bag beneath you; use it as your pillow, then they cannot take.”

“It will wake you if they try to do so”

I said nothing, eating while being lectured. The suited man touched my elbow then pointed to his forehead, i noticed his cuff-links, showing the Jack of Clubs, “if you are wise, you will keep safe”

Incessant talking gained volume and before us a fight broke out. The eastern looking male punched a man who had fallen to the ground. A table screeched on the floor as the figure sprawled, spilling cups of tea or coffee in the ricochet. People stood gawping until some staff interviened, grabbing hold of the hot-headed man, his hair shaven to the scalp.

After the commotion we went outside to smoke then i went straight up to the dorm rooms to sleep. I assumed the young hooligan would be barred from the shelter but on passing through the eating area, passed him, sat alone and subdued. Upstairs I noticed the door to the ladies dorm room was ajar. I peered through the slit to see the dark-skinned lady slipping into her nightdress; her body petit and slender.

In bed I lay fantasizing about the woman i in the dorm across the way. Perhaps tomorrow i would try to make conversation with her and rehearsed a little speech should the opportunity present itself. Then i fell sound asleep, only to be woken up by the indecipherable ramblings of an old man, supposed to be sleeping juxtapose my bunk.

My slumber was interrupted at midnight once again, by the incessant ramblings of the drunken old man. The only word recognisable, 'merde' amplified from his cursed tongue. Grating on me as i had been wakened I was compelled to complain, so got out of bed and went to confront him directly, asking him politely to allow others to sleep... Then the man sharing my bunk awoke and leaned his head into my space, ordering me to shut up and sleep 'a la tete' he growled menacingly. I retorted back to slumber.

In the morning i awoke with a sore throat, my glands swollen and infected. The place was warm and clammy and it seemed i had caught the old amn's chesty cough. Acustomed to the routine, i joined the same entourage for breakfast but didn't feel like eating

sweets with my thyroid swelled; so just sipped juice then had a smoke which seemed only to confound my ailment.

The foul-mouthed Frenchman sat at another table, his head in a bowl of cornflakes; we both avoided eye contact. I sat back down with Pierre, “Guten Morgen” I said and noted that these French though I nothing unusual to drink coffee from a bowl or eat cereal from a cup.

In a small room on the ground floor (of the shelter) were second-hand garments hung on a metallic horse, a free clothes-exchange so of no financial cost to guests. I browsed their selection, sliding coathangers along the rail until a fawn mac with shoulder pads caught me eye. A touch to big but of a certain class. Its worn out appearance, of no concern – in fact, to the contrary, ideal for a spot of begging on Rue de high in the afternoon.

I sat begging for half an hour, my cap before me as I had observed other beggars and buskers doing; some spare change in it to stop the wind blowing it away. After forty-five minutes I gave up, a mere Euro twenty cents in my hat!

That evening I got really drunk, spending the 5 euros I'd earned begging on booze from a shop . Having gotten lost I arrived late back at the shelter and they refused to let me in!

On the fourth day, exhausted from the consecutive endeavours coupled with interrupted nights asleep I beseeched the staff once again to let a foreigner volunteer to clean the dorm rooms and stay for lunch, even feigning illness for sympathy. On this occasion they allowed it and I was allocated a cleaning detail and instructed as to the correct method.

Just as I was appreciating the sanctity of this welfare place, alarms bells rang as my bag had been taken from under the bunks, in it was some of the wartime writings. Suspecting the old man, I ran downstairs to report the theft. Maybe it was the guy who told me to be quiet when I was complaining about the old man cursing. It couldn't be Pierre. Once again I explained to the staff as best I could that my belongings had been taken. The gentleman, Brian went off into the office and returned with my stuff!→ Seems unbeknown to me they had put it there for safe keeping. Relieved I went back to work, scrubbing the washbasins. Afterwhich I lay in my bunk and snoozed then did some reading.

While ending such a easy day, with chamomile tea and cakes in the evening, a lady made a speech to the guests, all in French. Chattering on for a few minutes i recognised barely one word, Dimanche.

“There is a meal on Sunday, a special event for the anniversary of a charity” Pierre filled me in after the Madam had finished. Well that was something to look forward to... I had planned a trip into Belgium, to sample their famed white beer but should postpone it for a while. I would catch the bus to Kortrijk another time and stay and enjoy the food with mon amis.

On Sunday they did a fine rDe Panne ; (beach north of) Dunkirk ... :u dint have passport? go back to england.. there is welfare in Lillye... WHEN 1 first set off,, envisaged being stuck up on intercity night trains jetting around parts of Eastern Europe, Antwerp-calais; but i can't be arsed. i'm enjoying it here... onnly a little sick of the custard, but its Thursday tomorrow which if im

right in antipating, means waffle's. 'Toffee this time Dave; or jam?'

After reading more of the journals I was compelled to go to Arras, to visit a cemetery of war-graves from both of the 20th Centuries' Worldly Wars. A museum also there marks the battlefield where German and British troops clashed, a confrontation for the west end of Europe. In 1940 Britain counter-attacked the Blitzkrieg. The consequences were a bloody battle in Dunkirk. A week after Hitler seized Paris, the Brits turned their guns on the French at Oran.

I took a dekko at the map and then was advised by a member of staff that the bus would take me there for \$5 but as I was leaving one of the rudeboys summonsed me over outside. He offered me the use of his bicycle bartering to sell it to me for \$20, a reasonable price for the old Brompton. That stroke of luck meant I needed the map and dashed back into the Sleep House to retrieve it from my shelf. Miss G refused to readmit me, adamant the place was know closed until 8pm. It took me some deliberation to persuade her to allow me in and when she did I nipped back up to grab it and also exchanged my mac for a more aero-dynamic jacket and left my refillable flask, figuring i could buy a beverage on the route to Arras, some 35kms away.

The Commonwealth WW Cemetary located in Beaurains, caters for 1,700,000 men and women, now deceased. I browsed the museum and paid respect to the servicemen who lost their lives, a sombre moment. i reflected on the implications of conflict as the sun set. I decided not to return to Lille that night, or to Arras.

Instead i'd bought a sleeping bag from a Army surplus store in the city and slept really rough.

In twilight I began to read Jan's compendious account of his escapades in France; the danger he had faced acting as he did was very real and imminent. Out in the brisk night air, I felt as he would have done, trekking

A summery spell meant a change of direction. Instead of continuing south toward Leon I veered east;,, briefly across the tail-end of Belgium and into Luxembourg. From there I could proceed to Frankfurt

“Why do you want to know?” the German asked, hetedly.
“I'm researching a book” I forthcame

“The truth is not that Hitler wanted World dominance. To win the war, yes ofcourse, but not to destroy it. It was the French and the Dutch who set about domination of the globe... Colonization you call it”

How dare he! To think of all the goodness that has come out of our country, “you were the ones killing innocent people!” I stated, “The jews in Auswitsch” should he need reminding.

“English!” he rasped/, “do you think that the world wanted you to win the war?”