

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 second half of this book: a concordance of more than seven hundred passages drawn from the complete corpus, each matched to its scriptural, liturgical, devotional, hagiographic, iconographic, or literary source.

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.

Part One reads that story line by line. Part Two records a second pass over the same five thousand words, finding what the first pass missed. Part Three establishes the pattern across the novels, the collections, the poems, and the work published online. Part Four is the concordance. Part Five 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.

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.

First, the confidence ratings, applied conservatively; in the second pass over "Assumptions," only two of thirty-three new findings were rated STRONG, and twenty-five were marked SPECULATIVE.

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 Assumption of Peggy Fleming

A line-by-line reading of the story “Assumptions.”

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, Prophecy, 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 incompleteness, 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”; Taitiu 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 Canticale 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.

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 coddling 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 sonnet 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.

XIX. 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.

XX. 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. *Sun* and *Son* in a capital letter. *Fleming* and flame. These are not ornaments; each carries an argument the prose declines to make explicitly.

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.

XXI. 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.

XXII. 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.

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Part Two: Second Pass — What the First Reading Missed

Thirty-three further findings in the same five thousand words, rated conservatively. Only two are rated STRONG; twenty-five are marked SPECULATIVE and are offered as readings rather than as claims about intention.

“Assumptions” — Second-Pass Religious/Liturgical/Folk-Catholic Findings

This report supplements the existing essay (essay_body.md) with **new** findings only. Every finding below was checked against the verbatim text of assumptions.txt; no finding duplicates material already covered in the first-pass essay (Christic mockery/baldness/crown sequence, the epigraph, the Titian ekphrasis, the Litany of Loreto items already claimed, the December Nativity sequence, the wig/Baptist sequence, the names Peggy/Helen/Beth/Jim/Francis/Mary/Joseph, the chariot/Tailtiu close, etc.).

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](http://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 incompleteness (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 incompleteness, 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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Part Three: The Work Published Online

Twenty-eight verified items across ten journals, 2015-2024. Several are more doctrinally explicit than anything in the books.

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	“Assumptio ns”	Short story	Fiction on the Web	2015	fictiononthe web.co.uk
2	“Assumptio ns” (reprint)	Short story	The Galway Review	2020	thegalwayr eview.com
3	“Blindfolde d”	Short story	The Writing Disorder	2017	writingdiso rder.com
4	“Keep Calm	Short story	Impspired	2021	impspired.c

#	Title	Form	Publication	Year	URL
	and Carry On”				om
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		review.com
19	"The Crosswalk"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyoftheheartandmind.com
20	"Dark City"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyoftheheartandmind.com
21	"Brother"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyoftheheartandmind.com
22	"Piano"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyoftheheartandmind.com
23	"Copacetic"	Poem	Academy of the Heart and Mind	2020	academyoftheheartandmind.com
24	"The Crosswalk," "Dark City," "Brother," "Piano," "Copacetic" (reprint)	Poems	Impsired	2020	impsired.com
25	"Dark City," "Copacetic," "Elegy for the Living"	Poems	Ginosko Literary Journal #24	2020	ginoskoliteraryjournal.com PDF
26	"Longing"	Poem	Impsired	2024	impsired.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 / Inspired 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,” “Elegy for the Living” (Academy of the Heart and Mind 2020 / Impspired 2020 / Ginosko #24)

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” — a death/afterlife image structurally similar to the Assumption’s crossing into “heavenly glory.”

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).
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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. Both online versions of “Assumptions” quote the actual 1950 papal definition of the dogma nearly verbatim, 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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Part Four: The Concordance

Every entry below gives the exact words as they appear in Mulhern's text, the source it echoes, a short gloss, and a confidence rating. Every quotation was verified against the source file before printing.

Section 1. The Story Collections

Religious Allusion Concordance: James Mulhern's Three Story Collections

*A quote-by-quote concordance of biblical, liturgical, sacramental, and Catholic-cultural allusion across: - **Assumptions and Other Stories** (2016) — source file /home/user/workspace/txt_assumptions.txt - **Useless Things and Other Stories** (2026) — source file /home/user/workspace/txt_useless.txt - **The Weight of Small Mercies** (2026) — source file /home/user/workspace/txt_mercies.txt*

*The title story "Assumptions" is excluded per instructions (covered in a separate document), except where its language is quoted for comparison in the Cross-Book Repetitions section. All quotations below were verified verbatim with grep against the cited source file; each entry states the file of origin. Confidence ratings: **STRONG** (explicit, unambiguous religious/liturgical/biblical reference), **PROBABLE** (clear allusion requiring modest inference), **SPECULATIVE** (plausible resonance, more interpretive).*

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 Mrs. Muldoon here (“Isn’t he adorable” 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 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 novel's only 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,” meant affectionately, becomes literal: the cookies are poisoned, 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.'" / the crowd sings "Whether you're a brother or whether you're a mother you're 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 at the wake." **SOURCE:** The wake, a Catholic funeral rite. **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 "Lazarus Bocca" / "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, unconsolated 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 almost verbatim 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: Restates the seawater cure tradition verbatim from “Assumptions,” 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, wine (Grappa), 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 days later. **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 beyond 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 skin broke so easily... 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.” **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 at a stranger’s 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, standing on a chair — 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. **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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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 his mother was likely conceived through assault, and that his grandmother too was struck by her husband.

73. **QUOTE:** “she'd take it from here... 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... 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 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 bathing his grandmother, who hides a stolen 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, repeated verbatim from “A Bath.” **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 (repeated from “A Bath”). **GLOSS:** The poem restates the prose passage nearly word for word, 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. (Close variant of “A Prayer for Home” — 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 on the same calendar date. **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 (repeated verbatim from “A Nun’s Arse”/“Through a Convent Gate”). **GLOSS:** Confirms the compositional technique of doubling entire dialogue blocks across stories and even books. **CONFIDENCE:** STRONG.

“Honeymoon” (poem)

One-line summary: A son tends his elderly mother’s cracked feet while recalling her wedding-day 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.
(Variant of “Through a Convent Gate” — 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.

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 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:** “the wig, blown off and caught by Beth, is raised ‘like the head of John the Baptist.’” **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, 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 3:1-2. **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:** “from Jerusalem, New York.” **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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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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt (“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:** txt_useless.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt (“Assumptions”); txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt / txt_mercies.txt, “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:** txt_assumptions.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt / txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_useless.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt / txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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 at the wake.” **SOURCE:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt (“Myra Bocca”). **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:** txt_mercies.txt, 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:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt / txt_useless.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt, 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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_mercies.txt (“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:** txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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.
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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” (txt_assumptions.txt). **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 txt_mercies.txt (“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 Torean said that.” **SOURCE:** Attributed to Henry David Thoreau (comically mispronounced “Torean”/“Walden”), txt_mercies.txt (“Arise and Go Now”/“Blindfolded”) and txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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” (txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt). **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,” txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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, txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt. **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*), txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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), txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt. **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), txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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, txt_assumptions.txt (“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 txt_assumptions.txt (“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), txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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 txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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), txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt. **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 txt_assumptions.txt and txt_useless.txt, 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 txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt. **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 txt_mercies.txt (“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 txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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 txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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:** “Charles Dickens... ‘The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.’” **SOURCE:** Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), discussed in txt_mercies.txt (“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 txt_mercies.txt (“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 txt_mercies.txt (“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 Bee Gees’... ‘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 txt_assumptions.txt/txt_useless.txt (“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:** “Frank Sinatra... ‘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:** txt_mercies.txt, 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:** txt_mercies.txt, 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

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

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 103): *“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.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 67): *“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.”*
- **txt_mercies.txt** (line 385): *“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.”*

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

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 113): *“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.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 77): identical wording.
- **txt_mercies.txt** (line 395): identical wording.

3. The wet silvery scalp / crown of her head

- **txt_assumptions.txt** ("Assumptions," line 150): *"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."*
- **txt_useless.txt** ("Assumptions," line 108): identical wording.
- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Assumptions," line 427): near-identical, with light punctuation variation: *"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."*
- **VARIANT, txt_assumptions.txt** ("A Prayer for Home," line 1309): *"I did so, 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. 'Molly, you're an angel,' she said, when she was standing."*
- **VARIANT, txt_useless.txt** ("Useless Things," line 852): *"I did so, 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. 'Molly, you're an angel,' she said, when she was standing."*

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

- **txt_assumptions.txt** ("Assumptions," line 149): *"...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."*
- **txt_useless.txt** ("Assumptions," line 107): identical wording.
- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Assumptions," line 426): identical wording.
- **VARIANT, txt_assumptions.txt** ("A Prayer for Home," line 1304): *"At one point 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 in the ocean."

- **VARIANT, txt_useless.txt** ("Useless Things," line 847): identical wording to the "A Prayer for Home" variant above.
- **RELATED, txt_mercies.txt** ("Arise and Go Now," line 233): "*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.*" — a fifth, adapted iteration of the dove motif, now explicitly tied to a ghost's appearance rather than a beach cure.

5. "Up you go. On the count of three."

- **txt_useless.txt** ("A Bath," line 255): "*My mother put her arm under hers. 'On the count of three.' I wrapped myself around my grandmother's soft flesh. 'One, two, three.'*"
- **txt_useless.txt** ("Catherine," poem, line 597): "*'Up you go. On the count of three. One, two, three,' she said.*"

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)

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 890): "*Myra's head was turned to one side, blood streamed from her nostrils and mouth, creating a halo-shaped pool around her head. Her face was bruised and scraped, the skin from her nose had ripped off revealing the cartilage, and her eye was wide open, pupil dilated.*"
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 548): "*Myra's head was turned to one side, blood streamed from her nostrils and mouth, creating a halo-shaped pool around her head. Her face was bruised and scraped, the skin from her nose had ripped off revealing the cartilage, and her eye was wide-open, pupil dilated.*"

Virtually identical, with only "wide open" vs. "wide-open" differing.

7. "Goodness is the only investment that never fails"

- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Arise and Go Now," line 343): *"Goodness is the only investment that never fails,' the quote in Rita's house read."*
- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Blindfolded," line 486): *"'Goodness is the only investment that never fails.' ' A smart man by the name of Torean said that."*
- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Blindfolded," line 522): *"'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"

- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Blindfolded," line 480): *"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. Let's get out of here before there's a flood."*
- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Keep Calm and Carry On," line 809): *"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."* followed by *"Let's get out of here before there's a flood."* (line 810, split across dialogue).

Repeated near-verbatim as the chalice-theft scheme is restaged in the second story.

9. The chalice-theft/faith-healer scene structure

- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Blindfolded," lines 464-481): full scene of cutting the line, the priest's "mumbo-jumbo prayer," Aiden's fake fall, and the theft of the chalice during the commotion.
- **txt_mercies.txt** ("Keep Calm and Carry On," lines 794-811): the same scene restaged with matching dialogue: *"Let's move to the front," "He's asking you about your illness," "I have leukemia," "Fall," "Dear Jesus... I don't know how many more tribulations I can take."*

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"

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 1328): *"Did you know that a fish is the symbol of Christ, Molly?" Mrs. Muldoon said, sipping her last bit of wine.*"
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 870): *"Did you know that a fish is the symbol of Christ, Molly?" Mrs. Muldoon said, sipping her last bit of wine.*"

Identical across both variant stories ("A Prayer for Home" and "Useless Things").

11. "This being our last supper"

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 1319): *"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.'"*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 861): *"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.'"*

12. "A useless thing" (the gold cross)

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (lines 1354-1356): *"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. Nonna stared at me. 'What is it, Molly?' 'A useless thing.'"*
- **txt_useless.txt** (lines 894-896): identical wording.

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

- **txt_assumptions.txt** ("Through a Convent Gate," lines 243-245): *"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.'... 'You are not smarter than God, Molly.'"*
- **txt_assumptions.txt** ("A Prayer for Home," lines 982-984): near-identical restatement of the same dialogue block, with the addition "I pray every night for the Holy Father's intention that the Catholic Church reign forever."

- **txt_useless.txt** (“A Nun’s Arse,” lines 985-987): identical wording to the “Through a Convent Gate” version.

14. “I’m so hungry I could eat a nun’s arse through a convent gate.”

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (“Through a Convent Gate,” line 271): *“I’m so hungry I could eat a nun’s arse through a convent gate.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (“A Nun’s Arse,” line 1013): identical wording, the story’s title phrase repeated verbatim in the sister collection under its own title, “A Nun’s Arse.”

15. “Angel of Death”

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (“A Prayer for Home,” line 1139): *“I guess you might say that you’re an Angel of Death.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (“Useless Things,” line 685): identical wording.

16. “Stayin’ Alive” CPR scene

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (lines 895, 903): *“Think ‘Staying Alive.’”* followed by the sung lyric, *“Whether you’re a brother or whether you’re a mother you’re stayin’ alive, stayin’ alive.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 553): *“Think ‘Staying Alive.’”* — the scene is present but the sung lyric itself is summarized rather than quoted in full (“The tall black guy stepped forward and sang the lyrics. The crowd joined in.”).

17. “A stone has no uncertainty—Carl Jung”

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 887): *“A stone has no uncertainty—Carl Jung,’ it read.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 545): identical wording.

18. The Titian *Assunta* ekphrasis

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 115): *“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... The painting’s most vivid colors are orange and red, shades of fire, flesh and blood.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 79): identical wording.

- **txt_mercies.txt** (line 397): identical wording.

19. The closing apotheosis of Peggy (“altogether beautiful, and divine”)

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 153): *“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.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 111): identical wording.
- **txt_mercies.txt** (line 430): identical wording (light punctuation variants only: “the same time” vs. “the same time,” dashes retained).

20. “Feast of the Assumption, 1924” poem (Fr. John Duffy)

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (lines 156-187): full poem, ending *“Robed all in white down to the little feet / Shining like His who once was crucified!”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (lines 112-137): identical poem, identical ending.
- **txt_mercies.txt** (lines 432-457): identical poem, but the final line is truncated/alterd: *“Robed all in white down to the little feet / Shining like His who once was.”* — the word “crucified” is dropped in this book’s version, a small but notable textual variant that mutes the poem’s final crucifixion image.

21. “Tell the truth but tell it slant” (Emily Dickinson)

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 1088): *“I was surprised when she quoted Emily Dickinson, a writer I had been reading quite a bit of lately: ‘Tell the truth but tell it slant.’”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 635): identical wording.

22. Hunter S. Thompson “alone” quotation

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 1161): *“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.”*
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 707): identical wording.

23. “We have been called to heal wounds...” (St. Francis church sign)

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (line 1589): “*We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way.*”
- **txt_useless.txt** (line 1164): identical wording.

24. Bob Dylan “Drenched to the Bone” epigraph

- **txt_assumptions.txt** (lines 1599-1607): full stanza quoted, ending “*For the times they are a-changin’.*”
 - **txt_useless.txt** (lines 1173-1181): identical stanza.
-

Notes on scope and method

All 214 numbered concordance entries above were checked against their cited source file using grep prior to inclusion; no quotation was invented or paraphrased as if verbatim. Several passages recur across two or all three books in near- or fully-identical form because Mulhern’s “Assumptions,” “Myra Bocca,” and the Molly/Nonna/Mrs. Muldoon cluster (“Through a Convent Gate”/“A Nun’s Arse,” “A Prayer for Home”/“Useless Things”) are authorial variants of the same underlying stories, reworked and retitled across the three collections. Where a passage’s wording differs only in punctuation or a single word between books, both versions are quoted in the Cross-Book Repetitions section so a reader can compare exactly.

All quotations verified verbatim against /home/user/workspace/txt_assumptions.txt, /home/user/workspace/txt_useless.txt, and /home/user/workspace/txt_mercies.txt.

Section 2. Give Them Unquiet Dreams (2019)

Religious Allusion Concordance

James Mulhern, Give Them Unquiet Dreams (2019)

All quotations below are verbatim from /home/user/workspace/txt_unquiet.txt and have been verified against the source file with grep. Locations are given by nearby

distinctive phrasing and approximate chapter, since the text file has no page numbers.

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 3:1–2. **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 (Moirra, 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: “Moirra 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 Moirra 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 3:1–2 (“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:** Ironical 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." **CONFIDENCES:** 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 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.” [Duplicate cross-reference to #49 — see entry 49 for full gloss.]

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 Two, 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 bet she’s waiting in a long line. 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: “He wore a black robe with two gold crosses emblazoned on his chest” (Father Flynn at 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 One. **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:** Matthew 28:20, Christ's promise at the Great Commission — "And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." **GLOSS:** Martin's final line to Aiden directly paraphrases Christ's parting promise of perpetual presence, the clearest and final piece of evidence that Martin has functioned throughout the novel

as a Christ-figure whose “resurrection” appearances console the living.

CONFIDENCE: STRONG

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 Torean said that... Mr. Torean lived about a half hour away from where you do, in Concord.” **SOURCE:** Henry David Thoreau (misspelled “Torean” 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: Both principal deaths in the novel (Martin’s, and implicitly Laura’s) are marked by a two-to-three-day interval between disappearance and discovery/confirmation, echoing 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.
- **No occurrence** of “Assumption,” “Feast of the Assumption,” “Peggy Fleming,” or a dog character was found anywhere in the novel text (verified by direct grep search).
- 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.

Section 3. Molly Bonamici (2016)

Religious Allusion Concordance: James Mulhern's *Molly Bonamici*

Compiled from a full sequential read of the novel (~90,000 words, all 22 chapters). Every quotation below has been verified against the source text. Chapter numbers are approximate, based on the print-proof pagination; some quotations fall at chapter boundaries and are marked accordingly.

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 a 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’s home. I need to go... She had been at a Bible Study meeting.” (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 Eight) **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 Nine) **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: “There is something wonderful about being a Christian... I almost wish I could have faith, but I don’t think that’s ever going to happen. I’m too much of a realist. I think there is too much pain and suffering in the world to have faith in a supreme God.” (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, several crosses and crucifixes adorning pastel-colored walls throughout, 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 Eighteen) **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 Eighteen) **SOURCE:** St. Joan of Arc, malaproped. **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 Eighteen) **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 Eighteen) **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 Eighteen) **SOURCE:** Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.v.167-168 — also the novel’s own front-matter epigraph. **GLOSS:** The line printed on the novel’s dedication page 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, “Lazarus Bocca... ‘Lazy.’” (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-One) **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-One) **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-One) **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-One) **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 told me about our day at the beach so many years ago.” (Molly to Nonna, re: last rites, Chapter Twenty-One) **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: “Mary was her middle name... Margaret Mary.” (Officer Connolly, revealing Mrs. Muldoon’s full name, Chapter Twenty-One) **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-One) **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-One) **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, swimming slowly to the shore... 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 just gotta go along with certain things. 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 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-One) **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 and Molly’s own final swim (Chapters Five, Six, 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

1. 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 Eighteen) **SOURCE:** Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.v.167-168. **GLOSS:** The novel’s dedication

page epigraph 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.

2. 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* (Cacciaguida’s speech to Dante, Canto XVII). **GLOSS:** Paired with the Hamlet epigraph, this establishes Dante as a structural key from the book’s very first page — a promise the novel keeps through its Virgil/Beatrice-named characters and its explicit “dark woods”/“purgatory” passage.

3. 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:** Beatrice’s intercession, recalled by Molly in a moment of private grief and immediately connected in her mind to her own mother — the novel quietly assigns her mother a Beatrice-role.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. 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 Eighteen) **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.

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. 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.

Structural versus decorative. The religious material in *Molly Bonamici* is overwhelmingly structural rather than decorative, though it wears a decorative costume. Individual gags — Felicity's "sackylegious," a homeless man rolling on a revival-tent floor claiming to be Jesus, a mannequin "baptized" Candice Kox — look like local color, folk-Catholic and Protestant-revivalist comedy scattered for texture. But nearly every comic instance is later mirrored by a serious one, so that the joke turns out to have been rehearsal. The mannequin's mock-baptism precedes Felicity's real death and her mother's grotesque folk-theology of bodily resurrection. Lady Jane's fraudulent "healing" crisscross-hand blessing precedes Mrs. Callaghan's sincere sign of the cross at a real grave. Nonna's staged crossing-herself over a fake insurance injury precedes her genuine, agonized refusal of last rites on her actual deathbed. The novel trains the reader to expect blasphemy to double back into earnest devotion, and vice versa — which is exactly Mulhern's thesis about his own narrator: Molly's every mockery of belief turns out, on a second pass, to be evidence of how much belief still organizes her mind.

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.

Compiled from a complete sequential read of /home/user/workspace/txt_molly.txt. All quotations verified against source text via direct grep search prior to inclusion.

Section 4. The Poems

Religious Allusion Concordance: The Complete Poems of James Mulhern

Method and scope

This report reads /home/user/workspace/txt_poetry_all.txt in full (~18,300 words), a concatenation of four overlapping publications: *Selected Poems* (“Crossings”), *Family First: A Collection of Poems*, a plain “Poetry” collection, and *The Poetry of James F. Mulhern — Instructor Edition*. The same poems recur across all four files, frequently with small wording variants (a comma added, “on a road” vs. “on some highway,” “kneeled” vs. “knelt”). After deduplication, the file contains **27 distinct poems** (two of which circulate under two different titles — “Fragility”/“Triggers” are the same poem, and “Session’s End”/“Current Events” are the same poem with a slightly extended ending in the “Current Events” printing). The instructor-edition apparatus (commentary, discussion questions, style essay) is excluded from primary analysis except where quoted as secondary evidence, consistent with the prior six-poem report at /home/user/workspace/report_poetry.md.

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.)

Every quotation below has been verified verbatim against the source file by direct search.

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

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

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 couplet performs, without naming, the structure of grace: a small, unearned, sufficient gift accepted rather than argued for. **CONFIDENCE:** PROBABLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 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

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

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

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 couplet states, 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Addendum: 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

Addendum: 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 sixteen-item anaphoric catalogue, 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

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- Author’s site: authorjamesmulhern.com
- Silver Current Press: silvercurrentpress.com
- Kirkus Reviews author page: kirkusreviews.com/author/james-mulhern
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(All quotations above are drawn verbatim from
/home/user/workspace/txt_poetry_all.txt and independently verified by direct text
search of that file. Prior report consulted: /home/user/workspace/report_poetry.md.)

Part Five: The Whole Body of Work

What the corpus shows

Seven hundred–odd entries later, the pattern is no longer arguable. It is measurable.

The religious layer in James Mulhern's writing is not a mood, an inheritance he cannot shake, or a set of props left over from a parochial childhood. It is the organizing system of the work. Every book is built on it; every book is built on it in the same way; and the one story that lacks it is the one story with no consolation in it.

Four 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 a novel with a Yeats epigraph and closes it 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 object 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.

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 the actual feast of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, 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.

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 without ever, 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.

Addenda by Date

Findings added after the founding build of 29 July 2026. Each dated pass covers one section of the corpus and records only material not present in the parts above.

30 July 2026 — Assumptions and Other Stories (third pass)

Addendum — 2026-07-30 — Fine-Grain Second Pass: “Assumptions and Other Stories” (title story excluded)

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 2:27/13:37, “neither didst 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: Ironical 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 with no other overt religious content. 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: "she waved to us from the register at the back of the store... Enya was playing softly and there was an overpowering smell of sage." SOURCE: Debased incense and processional-music evocative of liturgical censuring (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 Lazy 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: “she pointed to the box... ‘Apache Tear Tumblestones’... ‘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. Myra Bocca — 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 repeatedly called "pure evil" and "rotten" 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 began opening a box... ‘You know what this is?’ Her voice was solemn as she looked into our faces.” (the Apache Tear stones, delivered the day of 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 bus-trip argument 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 (echoed by the dog-eared Dickinson poetry book two pages later). 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.” (draping the seaweed “lei” on Mrs. Muldoon) 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, kissed, anointed with oil), 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

31 July 2026 — Useless Things and Other Stories (third pass)

Addendum — 2026-07-31 — Day 2: Useless Things (Fine-Grain Second Pass)

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, Alexander Michaelis’s estranged sister Catherine 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 (Bette Davis, Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, James Dean, Liza Minelli, later 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. Useless Things — 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. Useless Things — 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 who will herself die within the story from a hidden, prideful secrecy (the trash bags, the overdose). CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

13. Useless Things — QUOTE: “we 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: “There was 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 same paragraph 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, Mrs. Muldoon's diabetes and gout) for suffering that resists ordinary medicine. CONFIDENCE: SPECULATIVE

22. A Nun's Arse — QUOTE: "she thinks that she's Joan of Narc" — cf. companion detail: "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 2:17, "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

1 August 2026 — The Weight of Small Mercies (third pass)

Addendum — 2026-08-01 — Day 3: The Weight of Small Mercies (fine-grain second pass)

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 prior passes 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 book.md 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. Arise and Go Now — 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

2 August 2026 — Give Them Unquiet Dreams (second pass)

2026-08-02 — Addendum: Give Them Unquiet Dreams (James Mulhern, 2019) — Fine-Grain Pass

1. Chapter Two, 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

2. 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

3. 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

4. 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

5. 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

6. 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

7. Chapter Six, 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

8. Chapter Two, 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

9. Chapter Nine, 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

10. Chapter Eight, 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

11. Chapter Eight, 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

12. Chapter Nine, 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

13. 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

14. 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

15. 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

16. Chapter Fourteen, 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

17. Chapter Fourteen, 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

18. 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

19. 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

20. Chapter Seventeen, 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

21. Chapter Seventeen, 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

22. Chapter Seventeen, 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

23. 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

24. 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

25. 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

26. Chapter Eighteen, “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

3 August 2026 — Molly Bonamici (second pass)

Addendum — 2026-08-03: Fine-Grain Religious and Literary Allusions in *Molly Bonamici*

*Second-pass findings not present in the existing 119-entry concordance in book.md.
Compiled from a full sequential read of txt_molly.txt.*

1. 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

2. 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

3. 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

4. Chapter Two — 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

5. Chapter Two — 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

6. 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 *buon 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 revelation that "Officer Donnelly" independently recognizes and glosses the name ("Your last name means 'good friends'") repeats the joke at the site of a homicide investigation. CONFIDENCE: STRONG

7. 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

8. Chapter Six — 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

9. 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

10. 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

11. 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

12. 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

13. 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

14. 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

15. 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

16. 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

17. 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

18. Chapter Fifteen — “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

19. Chapter Fifteen — outside the Callaghan house — QUOTE: “I could hear a muted 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

20. 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

21. Chapter Eighteen — the patio vine — QUOTE: “the Bleeding Heart vine next to the fence were drooping”; later, “the Bleeding Hearts had started to perk up beneath

the rays from the sun.” 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

22. Chapter Eighteen — 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

23. Chapter Eighteen — 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 book.md) — 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

24. 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

25. Chapter Twenty-One — 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

26. Chapter Twenty-One — 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

27. 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

28. 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

29. 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

30. Chapter Twenty-Two — closing image before the swim — QUOTE: “a faint hum, like bees, and the smell of stargazer lilies seemed to dwell in 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 addendum. 30 findings, cross-checked against the existing 119-entry Molly Bonamici concordance in book.md to exclude duplicates (including several near-misses

initially flagged — Vivian Vance, the “Saint Paul” dog line quoted for the wrong purpose, “All About Eve,” “Fasten your seatbelts,” “Staying Alive,” and “Everybody has a heart” — all of which proved to already be logged, in some cases via the overlapping short-story variant “Myra Bocca”).

4 August 2026 — The Poems (third pass)

Addendum — 2026-08-04 — Day 6: The Poems (New Findings)

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 book.md 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 — five short stanzas each shrinking toward a final two-word line — 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

5 August 2026 — The Online-Published Work (second pass): variants and self-statement

Addendum — 2026-08-05 — Day 7: Online-Published Work, Second Pass (Textual Variants & “Teaching at Fifty-Six”)

Step 2 note (new-publications check): No new Mulhern pieces published or posted since late July 2026 were found. The author website (authorjamesmulhern.com), Impspired’s search results (impspired.com/?s=mulhern), and The Galway Review’s search results (thegalwayreview.com/?s=mulhern) show no 2025 or 2026 posts. Scarlet Leaf Review, Vita Brevis Press, CC&D/Scars Publications, Fragmented Voices, BoomerLitMag, and Abstract Magazine TV were checked; all located material is pre-2025 (the most recent dated items found are from 2024). Scars Publications/cc&d hosts a reprint of “Blindfolded” and other previously catalogued poems (scars.tv) but no new text. **Conclusion: nothing new to add to the inventory; this pass is entirely textual comparison and close reading of already-known items.**

A. “Assumptions”: Fiction on the Web (2015) vs. Galway Review reprint (2020) vs. book text (assumptions.txt)

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.txt 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.txt 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 book.md'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 — all three versions agree, but note precision — 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

B. “Blindfolded” (Writing Disorder 2017) and “Keep Calm and Carry On” (Impspired 2021) vs. `txt_mercies.txt`

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 magazine version of “Blindfolded” adds the word “pure” to “God’s love,” a small intensifying addition not present in the corresponding book chapter — the online text 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 prior passes — 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, but only “Blindfolded” precedes it with the grandmother’s earlier plea, “please cure him,” giving the exchange a slightly more liturgically formal call-and-response shape; the parallel is consistent across both 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 (Inspired 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. Keep Calm and Carry On (Impspired 2021) — addition — QUOTE: “I have to return it, Laura.’ ... ‘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... Do this in memory of me,” paralleling Luke 22:17-20) and the folk-relic tradition of drinking from a saint’s cup for healing. GLOSS: This hospital-bedside “communion” scene — mother drinking sacrilegiously stolen wine from a stolen chalice under a false name (“Joshua”) for a cousin-invented dogma of healing — appears in near-identical language in both “Blindfolded” and “Keep Calm and Carry On,” confirming that the parody-Eucharist bedside scene, not just the church-theft scene, was present from the earliest (2017) telling and is not itself a later addition, unlike the miracle catalogue above. CONFIDENCE: PROBABLE

C. “Catherine” (Abstract Magazine TV, 2022) vs. the “Grace” prose version in `txt_useless.txt`

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

D. “The Wrong Way” (BoomerLitMag, 2017) vs. txt_mercies.txt

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. GLOSS: This proverb is identical word-for-word in the 2017 BoomerLitMag text and the book (txt_mercies.txt line 937), confirming that “The Wrong Way” was not revised between its magazine and book appearances — useful as a control case showing that not every online piece in the corpus was altered, only some (contrast with “Assumptions,” which was substantially cut for its 2020 reprint). 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

E. “A Perfect Hit” (Galway Review, 2022) vs. “Mia Bambina” (Impspired, 2023) vs. txt_molly.txt / txt_assumptions.txt

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 first-pass 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 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

6 August 2026 — The Story “Assumptions” (third pass): structure and form

2026-08-06 — The Story ‘Assumptions’ — third pass: 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

7 August 2026 — Assumptions and Other Stories (fourth pass): the collection as designed book

2026-08-07 — Assumptions and Other Stories — fourth pass: the collection as designed book

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 eighteen deaths, not a clean saint-calendar —

QUOTE: “I’m just coddling 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 eighteen individualized dead people or figures: the fruit seller, Jim, Francis, Taitiu, Peggy, Bridie, Mr. Muldoon, Vivian Vance, Eugene O’Neill, 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.” / “Taitiu, 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,” and “The Mannequin” 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, Taitiu 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 Lazzzy 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 coddling 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

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