



## Life Is Not Enough

This is the story of a hotel room. There are two characters. I am one of them. This is a love story, one of its final chapters.

The specifics – the unfurling of emotion and burying of ghosts – won't be of any interest to you, and besides I don't have the time to explain. She returned in May. She'd spent ten days in the Mojave and had 48 hours in Dublin before a flight to Stockholm. She'd rented a room in the Grafton Lodge on South Great Georges Street, which was strange and not strange since we shared a bedroom up the Liffey for years up until last autumn.

But I wanted to tell you about this room. It was so small. There was a bed and a dresser and the intimacy was claustrophobic and soothing. She guessed the place had been a bedsit once (there was a sink in the bedroom which was probably proof). It was room #2. She had chosen it over a mixed dorm in a hostel in Smithfield. We could not have had the conversation we had in a mixed dorm in a hostel in Smithfield. There were seven other bedrooms. Through the silence, I'd sometimes hear a television in the distance. An American home improvement infomercial was on somewhere. Beyond the walls, in the other hotel rooms, people listened to us.

We were in there for three hours. Talking mostly, but also not talking. Crying as well. She noticed a rash on my left eye that I had never seen before. I had a backpack with nothing in it but the equipment to change a punctured bike tyre, which I did not take off. Nor did I remove my coat. The heat in the room was oppressive. There were terrible paintings by someone named Etain and Eton in the bedroom and the hallways, paintings of abstracted forms that expressed the banal pleasantness of a Tuesday afternoon in suburban Belgium. They were all dated 2004. As you'd expect there was also wallpaper, though it was only on one wall. She sat on the bed while I leaned against the dresser. The other walls were white. We had never spoken to each other this way before, which is proof that something fundamental had changed between us.

When we'd emptied ourselves and it was time for me to leave, we went to the hotel's lounge to see if there were books to steal but there were only romance novels.

Joe Duggan's *Life Is Not Enough* also tells the story of a man and a woman, although there are cameos from a priest and Barabbas, a murderer. It is a seemingly simple story told through words (but not many) and images (mostly meticulously composed ones). It is a short story, as well as a familiar and bewildering one. An artist finds love, but sadly is killed at home by a burglar. His beloved's heart breaks and she never recovers.

It is a story that feels like it could fill a novel if we only had more details – the name of the art college the artist attended, the titles of the books that line his shelves, the name of the spectacular vista from which he and his beloved meet and ponder life together, the name of his beloved. Instead Duggan gives us visual documentation and the most relevant facts. And still, the story he tells via his images, of companionship, mourning and the magnetism of art and beauty, is haunting.

It ends as all love stories must. One scene recurs: that painted seaside backdrop: two shores yearning for each other across a narrow inlet. They are the venue for a courting and a marriage, and by the end, when love has died, or specifically, been killed, it appears again, without people to view it, and thus, without narrative or sense. Art is not enough.

I came upon this quote today from Camilo Jose Cela: 'Literature is the renunciation of the times in which one lives.' Literature is also the renunciation of life's bitter compact, of love's buoyant finiteness, of killers in the night.

The blue, LP-sized copy of *Life Is Not Enough* sits beside my bed. On top of it is a postcard. It is from Joshua Tree, a national park in the Mojave. A large cactus, *yucca brevifolia*, stands tall in the left corner of the photo. A path subtly slices through the wasteland of desert scrub. Thick grayish clouds hang low, promising a drop of desert rain. On the back, there is a drawing of a road. My address in Dublin – the house on the Liffey – is written down but there is no stamp. She gave me the

postcard that night, before we went back to the hotel. On the back, she wrote 'empty in a good way'

Donald Mahoney