

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT NOVELLA

zero
books

Coming From Nothing

Matthew McKeever



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—Load of old fucking bollocks.

—That's . . . an opinion, I guess. So you're a, what, gender essentialist?

—Well, I don't know, but like.

He picked up the book beside him and started reading: 'The feminist appropriation of sexual difference whether in opposition to the phallogocentrism of Lacan blah blah. Blah. Blah. Blah.' Page 38. Like, what is that?

—What? You want it to be easy?

—Easier anyway.

—Well, dude, life ain't easy.

Said Carrie to Jules. She was wearing a green raincoat, the collar of which was popped up and threatened to engulf her head. Her eyes were cool and blue, but there was a sallowness to her complexion that reflected a bad night's sleep and, maybe, a lack of vitamin D. She spoke quickly with a southern American accent.

—It's just so . . . theoretical.

—Well, it's called 'theory' for a reason . . . actually wait!

She hit him on the arm.

—I guess for you it *is* a load of fucking bollocks because you're an essentialist, right? You locate it all in the bollocks or lack thereof.

—Well, firstly, it's 'bollocks' not 'ball-ox', and secondly I'm not an essentialist. I just want someone I can understand.

—Don't we all. . . Well, whatever, it was a good joke right?

—I'll give you that, it was a good joke.

She smiled at him, then rubbed her blue jeans for no clear reason, as if she were wiping her hands off.

Jules was ruddy and short-haired and also wearing an engulfing jacket. His newly grown beard, a source of amusement

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and/or alarm to friends and/or family was not too impressive, but his face was symmetrical and she thought he was handsome. So she was happy, when she had asked him if she was in the right place for the tutorial (she had been unable to make her regular time this week), with his eager yes, guessing correctly he wanted to chat. And sitting down beside him she noticed gladly that he smelled good, or at least deodorized, which mitigated the fear of the unattractive beard.

They were outside a room on the fifth floor of Trinity College Dublin's arts block, sitting on a deep window ledge in front of wet glass, waiting for the tutorial for their class (Em)bodied selves, about feminist theories of literature.

—So you like this stuff, is it?

This was Jules, in a bland middle-class Dublin accent.

—Yeah man, for sure. It must be right.

—It must?

—Yeah, it must.

—That's a bold statement.

—Well, I mean . . . I don't wanna make this conversation *entirely* testicle-based, but what if someone cut a person's—let's say, your—balls off?

Jules laughed, but not very uncomfortably.

—No, no, I'm making a point. This isn't like some misandrist rant. Point is, that wouldn't make you no longer a man, right?

—No.

—And say you're paralysed completely—that doesn't make you no longer a person, right?

—No.

—So there! Your body doesn't define you, so you're an anti-essentialist.

—Hmm. I guess, like. It's just . . . why does it have to be so fancy? Why can't they just say that instead of all these words? Just less . . .

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—Right. And like I mean . . . where is everybody?

Gesturing toward the empty hallway, he continued:

—What time is it? My phone's dead.

—Quarter after. Is this definitely the place?

—Been here last ten weeks, so yes. Did you check your email in the last couple of hours?

—Oh, no. Actually, I couldn't work out how to sync it to my phone.

—Can you just check in the browser?

She was doing. There was an awkward pause as it loaded, which Jules broke.

—I can show you how to sync, it's kind of awkward, I think they got the port wrong on the . . .

—Oh, cancelled! Uhh . . . oh, Deeurmid, is that right?

—No, that's profoundly unright. 'Diarmuid'.

He said, laughing at her pronunciation, and causing her to laugh in turn.

—Well he's sick.

—Oh. No Butler for us then I guess. What a tragedy.

And then there was a pause. Jules looked down at his crossed legs, shy, uncertain. Carrie, more normal, asked:

—Do you want to get a coffee? We can, uh, have our own seminar, who needs Deeuhhh?

—'Diarmuid'. Sounds like a plan.

Carrie was in Dublin for six months visiting from Louisiana State University. There were no neat comparisons between the programs here and those in her home university, with the result that she took a wide range of courses: a first-year introduction to classical Greek literature, this third-year English course, a second-year metaphysics class and an independent study, also affiliated with the English department. While it was intellectually stimulating, the fact that she went from class to class—and, moreover, frequently joined classes among a cohort who all knew each other already—made it very difficult to make friends. Now,

with Christmas approaching, and nearly half her time gone, she's started to get used to the dull ache that accompanies the empty weekends, where she'll generally go to some event alone or stay in her room in the halls, or simply walk around the city, it now more often than not raining and dulled with familiarity, heading over to the north side to the cheap supermarkets and second-hand bookshops, or getting lost around the leafy suburbs near the halls, the green of the leaves, almost overwhelming a few months ago, now gone from the streets.

Jules was also lonely, or at least somewhat alone. He had moved from being an incredibly introverted nerdy teen to being a mildly less so young adult. In the past year or so, he had come to realize that he might be desirable to the opposite sex, and was suffering something like Carrie: although he knew his classmates, when he started college he was so awkward that he never formed close bonds with them, and now that he wanted to it felt too late.

It was in an effort to overcome this that he was here. His degree was computer science, and he was just auditing this class. He claimed that it was because he was interested in feminist theory, truly enough, but the fact that he imagined it would be populated by women was not a small part of his decision. So far, though, his strategy of sitting quietly by himself in the corner had not been of much help in meeting people.

It's thus eagerly that they descended the stairs together, and after an hour or so awkwardness dispersed, and after two hours they were walking up the street for lunch, and after three they both realized something good was happening.

* * *

—And so, uh . . .

Earlier that morning, in the lecture they had unwittingly been sharing all semester, a nasally Californian, with big dark-

rimmed glasses, a black suit over a white shirt, and a nose piercing glinting occasionally in the light thrown off from her laptop, was giving a lecture.

. . . this idea of performativity, it really helps . . .

Here she modulated into a digression, with a slightly different cadence, a half-smile, a sense that she was talking with, not at.

—When I was a student, my supervisor told me, it was like, it loosened the muscles that had gotten hardened, the sex/gender dichotomy that had become so engrained in the way people thought of these things, that it was very liberating for some people . . . and that’s how I’ve always thought of it, as like a massage of our concept of woman, I guess . . .

—But so it really helps break down certain divisions, of the way we tend to have this *naturwissenschaftlich* conception of the body as opposed to—as we saw, what, a couple weeks ago—the *Geisteswissenschaften*, as opposed to culture, society, religion, art, the realm of the spirit, in Hegelian talk. And so those people who might want to say, yeah yeah *gender* is socially mediated, struck through with language; language-struck, but there’s still the undeniable corporeality . . .

And she sort of sung the progression of the vowels, lifting off at the second ‘o’ and kind of losing the ‘i’ in the landing.

—The bodiness of the body that’s just there, a facticity as Heidegger would say. For Judy . . .

Everyone noiselessly groaned at this first name, apart from the ones who smilingly thrilled. The division of the class into groaners and thrillers was exclusive and exhaustive.

—This evinces a certain failure of imagination. When she was writing, she was interested in things like drag, transgender people, camp. She thought that if you looked at the different ways in which femininity was expressed, you would see it needn’t be tied to (what we call) female body parts. There’s a spectrum, on which you could place the camp gay man at one end, the drag

performer further along, and then transgender people who may have been born into male bodies but are women. Or vice versa, obviously.

So two aside points: first, biology bears this out: it would take us too far away to discuss, but you could look at stuff on intersex people (I think I put a link to a YouTube documentary on the handout). Second, it may be worth thinking about how technology changes the way we think of the body: how we often treat our smartphones as extensions of ourselves, et cetera. In this sense, I think the Butlerian framework has really proved prescient.

Uh, so yeah: not only is *gender* socially constructed, but to the extent we should even bother with the notion, there's no reason to think *sex* isn't either. And that's *anti-essentialism* about gender and sex.

This, from her experience, normally provokes more of a reaction. This was one of the first times she'd taught this material in Dublin, and she didn't know if it was the early hour, or herself, or the weird Irish reticence—so different from the US—to discuss things, but she looked out to a sea of apathetic slouched bodies.

But actually, if she had had superhuman eyesight, capable of taking in the faces of everyone in the room, she would have noticed two people, on completely opposite sides of the big room, both literally on the edge of their seats. These people were Jules and Carrie. Carrie, a thrilled smiler, was on the edge of her seat because she was fascinated. Jules was a noiseless groaner, and was on the edge of his seat because he really needed a piss.

—And, uh, well, I hope the strikingness of this thesis impresses you. And here I think Kant . . .

And she said this in the American way, still not used to the Anglophone European 'a' which makes the sage of Königsburg's name almost into the worst profanity.

—Is kinda relevant, because you can sort of view this as a

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Kantian claim that the body is a *Ding-an-sich*, that it's inaccessible, indeed nothing shorn of the conceptual resources in which we, uh, clothe it: we make the body by what we say about it, just as for Kant we make the world spatio-temporal by applying our built-in concepts to it. And if people are interested in Butler's Kantianism . . .

And this was again, despite the fact she felt she wasn't being heeded, in the tone of talking to rather than at.

—Actually, I myself have a paper on that, and would be super happy to discuss it with you.

With better eyes, she would have noticed both Jules and Carrie scribble something at this point; Jules wrote illegibly and unhelpfully 'Kant paper', Carrie 'See Rosen(?) re B and Kant', the question mark taking the place where the date of publication should be cited, and 'Rosen' being the lecturer's name.

—But the point is, what's relevant for our immediate purposes? Well, I guess there are three things:

One, there's the pushing back against the sex/gender distinction. Two, there's the empirical stuff about drag, intersex, transgender people. And, like I include here our texts: so the approach to the body in Beckett's novels, the Shakespeare comedies with cross-dressing and misidentifications, and all that. Three, then there's the Kantian foundations.

And not all of this will be relevant, depending on which essay you choose. But at least the fluidity of the concept of body—the social construction of sex—will be relevant no matter what, and if you write on Butler in the exam you'll need to know it all.

And, uh, I guess that's about it for today. So discuss this with your tutors this week and any questions please email. And next week, as I said, we'll do the sort of opposing position, so try and read that Cisoux. I know it's not easy, but just give it a go and we'll talk about it next week.

Already at the start of the last sentence, there had been a rumble and the snap of myriad laptops being closed. Jules and

Carrie left with the rest of them, by separate exits, and were soon caught up in different dispersing crowds making the hubbub sound that most crowds, regardless of their sonic composition, end up making, and heading for the same place.

* * *

—So when did you realize that philanthropy was for you?

—Oh, well, I mean, isn't it for everybody?

Three days later, Jules and Carrie were lying together on her single bed in the halls in Dartry, she with her head on his chest, he with his lips on her forehead. It was coming up to 5pm, and already the sky through the window was dark blue, and people laden with shopping bags were shouting evening plans across the square.

Jules was working on micromicrotransactions. Microtransactions are small payments for small things; instead of subscribing to an online paper, you pay a small amount, say 25 cents, for each article you want to read. Similarly, you buy songs instead of albums, episodes instead of box sets, and so on.

Jules's thought was to go one level lower: to get people to sign up for his site 1010 (said 'one oh one oh'), and pledge to make a micromicrotransaction to a charity for every microtransaction one made. The suggested value was 10 percent, like a contemporary equivalent of tithing. The thought was that these transactions would be so small that people wouldn't notice or care, and so they'd find themselves doing good despite themselves, indeed constantly being tiny forces for good in the world.

—Yeah, but not everybody does anything about it. What made you do something about it?

—CS302, Computers and Society.

—Oh. So it's just for a grade?

—I mean, no, I really think it's good, if it would work, that it would work. I mean, that's obvious, right? That helping people

is good . . . but it's like, maybe I don't like really feel it on a deep visceral level like I think you maybe do . . .

He had been impressed yesterday when, standing outside the arts block, Carrie had gone up to an old lady who looked lost and distressed and offered to help her, as others stood around gawping.

—But that's not bad. There's different ways you can help people. For me, it's like, I'm good at patching. Do you know what that is?

—Like . . . sewing?

—No, no . . . say you've got a piece of code that's meant to do something, and it doesn't work. Just doesn't work. You type it out exactly like in the textbook, say . . .

He started to get up.

—What are you doing?

—I just want to write it, show you a bit of pseudo-code.

—Please, in fact, *don't* show me a bit of pseudo-code. Continue to be my pillow.

—Okay, well, basically sometimes a program won't work, but you can play with it so it does, and it doesn't do it like it's meant to . . . wait, this is easier—say your chair has one too-short leg, and you put something under it to steady it. That's like patching it, getting it to perform its function in a different way, mending it, and like, the way I see it, this micromicrotransaction stuff is like a patch. Like humans should be good, but for whatever fucked-up reason they're aren't, so I patch 'em up, make 'em be good in a weird way, sort of like trick 'em by making being good psychologically unrecognisable . . . you think that's weird?

—Well . . . it's different. But I can see it, I guess. But, do you not think that it should come from within, that people should be good because they want to be?

—Nah. I mean how's that been working out so far in human history? If there were such things as forced labour camps where the labour was to be good, I'd be down with them.

—Wait, wait . . . what about this—if you could hypnotize one person to constantly do altruistic acts his whole life, would you?

—I don't know . . . see that's the thing with you philosophy types, it's always these silly cases. Point is, micromicro-transactions are nothing like that, they know what they're doing, no trickery.

—I get ya, I get ya.

— You sound unsure?

—Nah, nah, I get ya, Mr. Roboto, you're just trying to understand our human ways with the benefit of your pseudo-something.

And she moved her hand from his bicep to his stomach, and put her finger in his belly button, and he tittered. Happy to change the topic, he continued:

—I am, I am. Mr. Roboto, I like that. I might change my name by deed poll.

—Incidentally I been meaning to ask . . . 'Jules'? No offence but was your mom high when she named you? Is she like a royalist or something, like crown?

—Nah, the opposite.

—The opposite? What she's a republican?

—Yep, well, she's French. And it's actually 'Jules' as in Verne.

—Oh shit, listen to you! You speak French. You don't sound French. Or look French. Are you sure you're French?

—Je ne peux pas le nier.

—Oh shit, well I don't know what the fuck that means, it sounds pretty hot. . . . So it's not 'Jules', but everybody calls you 'Jules'. So everybody calls you the wrong thing? Well I'ma *zzhhule* you from now on.

—Please don't. . . . And anyway, 'Carrie', what's that, is that like short for Carantha?? What was your mum thinking?

—Eh, you're speaking ill of the dead, man.

—What?

—My mom's dead.

—Fuck, shit, oh . . .

— . . .

He was puzzled as to how that couldn't have come up already; thought, for one horrible moment, that it *had* come up last night in the pub and he'd forgot. In fact, Carrie had managed to successfully steer the conversation away from family any time it nearly came up, so successfully, in fact, that Jules hadn't realized. Now she had decided to steer the conversation toward family, feeling the time was right.

—It's okay. Like there's nothing to say. It's unambiguously bad.

—Uh, when did it happen?

—Like, final year of middle school?

—When's that? What age?

—Oh, like fourteen. It was . . . sudden.

—Jesus . . . well, I mean, I guess at least . . . did you . . .

She could tell he was winding up for some inane question or variation on how she was making her mother proud, variants of which always came out at about this time.

—Eh. Maybe don't say anything?

—Okay.

—Thanks, robo . . . man.

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—You'll be tired when you get here, probably just want to sleep.

—I'll be tired?

He sent a jpg of Nic Cage's face with 'you don't say' printed beneath it.

—But nah, I bet I'll have energy being there and finaalllly seeing you. —Second wind.

—I hope you'll have plenty of wind for me . . . —lol that's not what I meant . . . —Energy, I hope you'll have energy.

—lol I will I'm sure. —Can't believe one sleep away and I'll be there.

It had been about eight months since Carrie left Dublin one very early April morning, in a farewell outside terminal two that had brought Jules, uncharacteristically, to tears.

Neither really knew what was going to happen: each had said, honestly, they wanted to see the other, but each suspected the other of being polite, or rather that their feelings would weaken with distance.

Their mutual confusion was soon more or less resolved. Having taken a bus back to O'Connell Street, the city now light and awake, Jules was making his way south when Carrie messaged him on whatsapp to say she'd checked in, beginning an eight-month conversation punctuated only when one or the other slept.

They shared everything about their lives, and their lives' daily ups and downs, in a way that somehow made them closer than when they were together: the imperative to keep the conversation going, and the lack of a mutually salient conversational topic (as provided by restaurants, films, etc., when they were together) meant each ransacked their day for items to convey: for funny things they saw on the Internet or in real life, for mild good news to share or mild bad news to be commiserated about, or

advice about things which they could easily have worked out by themselves. They looked at the world with each other's eyes, and the world looked new.

And their sex life, or at least the passion that underlay it, didn't die either: they sent each other pictures and videos and developed the habit of skyping first thing Louisiana time, which for Carrie was around 11am, or 5pm for Jules, when she had just gotten out of the shower, and she would sometimes flash a boob to the camera, and he would show the effect the boob flashing had on him. They each also, but especially the more verbal Carrie, wrote stories either riffing on previous sexual encounters they had in the halls in Dartry, or in the place of their anticipated meetup in New Orleans, of which Jules had as good a sense as one can have of a place without ever being in it.

It was a miraculously peaceful time for them both: the uncertainty occasioned by Carrie's pending departure, which had always hung over them in Dublin, fled and was replaced with comfort. Although Jules's life was superficially similar to before: library, lectures, the odd quiet night out, it felt so much different, so much less alone. And Carrie, who had been trying to flee Louisiana her whole life, came to see it with new eyes: through Jules's. She found herself thinking of her state with a view to what would be interesting to him in it, and this borrowed perspective helped to minimize her own which had been so oppressive.

Soon he was making concrete plans to actually be there. The summer wasn't so good for Carrie, and then come September both would be back at university, and so he started looking at flights to arrive for a period before the start of the term in the new year, and around September, completely confident about buying non-refundable tickets months in advance, he booked ten days in early January.

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It felt like something looming out of the darkness, an island spatiotemporally separated. Jules could smell garbage, cigarettes, and heat, hear the sounds of mixed American accents blurring together; Carrie's nose and ears were dulled through familiarity.

They were walking around one of the streets off Bourbon, holding hands, having just come from a bar where old couples were smoking and drinking and dancing by the counter to a band which was regularly asking for tips.

The sky above was a purpley sort of thing, but the day's heat and Carrie's warm hand in his, and the beer, and the incipient jetlag, elevated it to something entirely new for Jules, and he kept on looking up, as they threaded their way from street to street, confused by its newness, by this new style of balconied housing for which he lacked words, and by happiness.

It had seemed so effortless he didn't understand. There was the before life, well-represented by greyness, rain on the Liffey, the lower floor of the library and slow nights in Doyle's, and now this: all senses delirious, a hand warm in his, a glow in the belly. He turned her around and kissed her on the street, something the doughty Irish him wouldn't gladly do, and his barely functioning mind almost forgot himself in the warm of her mouth until she broke it off and smiling shiny lips filled his eyes.

They wandered round the French quarter for a while and then went and got beignets, sitting drunk and sweating on the terrace of a cafe at a tiny table, surrounded on all sides with chatter, their lips dusty with sugar and their pipes occasionally jerkily expectorating it. Conversation, which had flown so effortlessly since she had come to meet him at the airport, kind of stalled, and they found themselves looking into each other, wordless, for a while, and when they started next to converse, he found that he couldn't remember a thing. He had fallen temporarily amnesiac and thought he was lost in Dublin, but she was somehow back in Dublin, which had suddenly jumped to summer, and thereafter

things were blank for a bit.

He woke, or memory returned, in darkness and a fan whooshing overhead, Carrie on top of him, fucking him. He touched her body, forced her hips into his, and then shifted and lifted her up and repositioned her in front of him, and was just shifting his weight over, his left hand firmly on her hip, when he fell off the bed, and tangled up with him she fell too, and her bum and lower back hit him square in the face.

Then lights came on and there was the taste of iron and his tongue noticed something missing and his nose was broken and at least one tooth was lost. He didn't really register what had happened, or appreciate its significance, and so when horrified Carrie, whose lack of sleep deprivation and knowledge of the American medical system made her realize that some hellish hours were ahead, bent down over him with a quickly found towel, he thought she was trying to sit back down on him and directed her, reaching up and grabbing her hips.

—What the fuck are you doing?

—C'mon.

—You're hurt. We need to go to the emergency room like *now*.

—Ah, it can wait, c'mon.

—You look like a fucking zombie! Get up. You're hurt. Is it painful?

—Nah, it's grand. We can go in the morning.

—You might have a concussion, and you definitely need a dentist ASAP.

—It's fine.

And he closed his eyes, as if to sleep, smiling happily a gappy bloody smile. Carrie looked over him, naked and horrified.

They went to the emergency room, he gradually threading the thoughts together that this is not a good situation, and the pain now coming in full force, combining with the massive dehydration caused by first the flight, and then the beers and walking about in the heat. His head, both in and out, burned with

pain. And his stomach was now roiled with upset and anxiety.

So he spent his first night with Carrie, his head on her lap, in the waiting room, pained from four or five different sources. They waited for five hours before he got good drugs and stitches to his lip, and they removed the shards of teeth, about which there is nothing to do while here (not that he could or would pay for it), and sent him home.

The day breaking, they returned to the room it all started in, the clothes they wore downtown discarded across the floor, each mentally and physically drained, and went to bed. Carrie slept for three hours, fitfully and unhappy, and he slept for fifteen hours, the whole of the second day of his nine-day (excluding days lost to travel) trip.

The remaining days were not spent pleasantly. Jules came round to the land of the living the next day, and felt ready to take on day three of the intricately planned itinerary Carrie had joyfully made for them, and shared with him, in the weeks before their trip.

There was tension from the start. While he had been resting, Carrie had been feeling that time was slipping away from them. Although she didn't blame him for the accident, and threw herself into the creation of chicken-noodle soup and the provision of ice chips, she was itching with disappointment. Like, realistically, when would they have a chance to do this again? She couldn't stop thinking about the future, about the time he was wasting in bed, and this drove her crazy. Jules, for his part, was too buried under fatigue and opioids and the fact that he would now have to find, conservatively speaking, a few thousand euro for medical treatment to be particularly heedful of how she must feel, and indeed treated her with a sort of entitlement, actively getting annoyed when she failed to turn the microwave off defrost and thus delayed a meal of his by seven minutes. So, they both couldn't blame each other, but each did, and all the time the clock was ticking.

That day, nevertheless, they went to one of New Orleans's most famous tourist attractions, the St. Louis Cemetery. They had talked a lot on Skype about this, and were particularly looking forward to Nic Cage's douchebag pyramid mausoleum. This had led, in the last couple of weeks, to a lot of their communication being in the form of sending one another Nic Cage memes, which, remarkably, are numerous enough to handle most conversational situations.

And duly they did see it, along with the rest of the vaults. But the atmosphere was sombre: Jules was quiet on account of some residual tenderness (his muscles, leg muscles especially, seemed drained of strength, despite the bed rest), and his quiet made Carrie anxious, and when she asked him if he was quiet because he was feeling bad, and he quietly said a wee bit but tried to smile it off, Carrie became quiet and started to feel bad. And as soon as they had finished the tour, after which they had planned to see some of the cool old timey houses in the area, she asked if he wanted to just go back to the house, and, thinking that's what she wanted—because she was so quiet—he said yes, and back they went. And Nic Cage was never mentioned again.

The next day seemed to start well. They woke at roughly the same time and spent the morning huddled up together under the blankets, finally just talking normally, without the eager tension of the first day or the gnathological minutiae of the next ones, making a plan for the day that both could be excited about: lunch, then seeing some sights. And that happy mood led naturally to one thing, and another thing, and was going to lead to sex—but then, despite Jules's having been bombarded with feverish erotic pain dreams, then it didn't, it fizzled out suddenly and conclusively. This didn't exactly help the atmosphere, and the day was spent awkwardly lounging around the apartment.

Day five was lost entirely. Pretending a flare-up of the receding pain, Jules stayed in bed all day, sweating and staring at the ceiling, sad. Carrie, going along with the ruse, spent an

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inordinate amount of time—the whole afternoon, more or less—getting groceries, feeling welling up in her, in a big Walmart, tears that nevertheless wouldn't come, driven crazy by the time that was being lost, as he lay there, at the distance that had somehow come between them, ruining this whole trip, or at least the accident which had started things.

Things continued, in a confusing way. Neither knew where they stood, or what really was happening. Each thought the other didn't want them there, but each was receptive to evidence that they did, and so a morning that started with a friendly 'good morning' led (on two occasions) to close days, where they finally did get to see a bit of the town, and it felt like the trip was going well. But on two other occasions, through a lack of sleep or melancholy or whatever, if the day started less well, it continued so. When it came time for him to leave, the ride to the airport was dull and quiet, neither experiencing the rising sobs that had eventually got out when they took the bus to Dublin Airport eight months ago. Both were paradoxically upset, and disheartened by their lack of upset, by the mess that lay behind them, by the utter failure of what they'd waited so long for. At the airport they hugged and Carrie kissed his purpley blue cheek and then his lips, and told him to tell her when he arrived safely, and he did, but that was that, until Jules texted her a year later.