

The Mustang Chronicles:

Irish Mustang

A Novella

by

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I

Mustang Duryea didn't answer the phone, as a rule.

The teenager couldn't stand when telemarketers launched into a scripted diatribe, hawking politicians, light bulbs, or cable television packages.

The rest of the time, the caller asked for Maggie or Joe, her parents.

So, why waste the energy?

She was duly surprised that chill February Saturday, when Maggie summoned her away from studying for Monday's English test, because the latest series of rings warranted her attention.

"Who is it?" Mustang queried.

The vague reply: "Long distance."

Plucking up the handset where her mother had balanced it on the paper towel rack, Mustang grumbled, "Hello?"

"Mustang? It's Peter," came the Irish brogue through the wire.

It took a moment for the girl to remember her cousin's step-father. "Peter O'Donnell? Are you back in the States?"

"No, I'm in Limerick. Something's happened..."

She panicked. "Is Rachel all right?"

"She's fine," O'Donnell chuckled. "She returned to Trinity last term, and is well on her way to getting a teaching degree."

"I'm glad. But, what..."

A different voice, a richly accented baritone, reached her ear. "Signorina Elizabeth, you need to come at once." An Italian plea, translated by her brain into English.

"Who is this?"

What sounded like a scuffle disrupted the conversation briefly, then O'Donnell could be heard once more. "Sorry about that, Mustang. I haven't been able to calm Giovanni down since we discovered our common bond."

"Giovanni? The Franciscan from Rome?"

"That's right."

"What bond could you two possibly have in common?"

He laughed again. "You, of course."

"Oh, hell." Mustang sank on one of the dinette chairs. "What's he doing in Ireland?"

"He can explain that when you get here."

"When I *what*?"

“I can have an airline ticket waiting at the Helena airport, and see you sometime late tomorrow - given the stop overs - or you can...”

“You mean, do that to myself on *purpose*?”

“I think you know me well enough I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t vitally important,” O’Donnell assured her.

“But you won’t tell me why?”

“Not on the phone. Too risky.”

“You make it sound like espionage,” groaned Mustang.

“You could put it that way. How soon will you be here?”

“Half an hour soon enough?”

“What, so long?”

She didn’t catch his joking tone. “I’d like to throw a few things in my backpack, and make sure I’ve got my wallet and passport...”

“Smart.”

“I *do* learn from my mistakes.” She glanced out the window at snow flurries blowing past the trees. “Two questions.”

“Shoot.”

“How warm is it there, and what are the nearest cross streets?”

“It’s chilly, so bring a heavy coat, and I’ll meet you at the corner of George’s Quay and Bridge Street.”

“Right.”

As an afterthought, O’Donnell added, “Be sure not to land in the River Shannon.”

Had she not such fond memories of her meeting with the Irishman and his step-daughter Rachel at Bryan Duryea’s funeral more than a year earlier, Mustang would have told Peter to take a flying leap, and waited to hear the splash. She broke the connection, and rose to find Maggie watching from the living room doorway.

“What was that all about?”

“Nothing.”

“A long distance call isn’t *nothing*, hon. Why don’t you feel you can confide in me?”

“Mom, please,” Mustang sighed. “If I *did* tell you, you’d just get upset.”

The older woman watched in dejected silence as her daughter tramped to her bedroom and closed the door. When the senior year English text slammed shut, the desk and walls shook.

Mustang muttered to herself as she rummaged through her closet for the frayed backpack she’d not used since her trip to Scotland, when Jack Parsons had

transferred his power over natural elements - and even time - to her at the conclusion of a bizarre series of rituals. Her passport still tucked in the zippered front pocket; at least that journey had been *planned*, unlike subsequent ones to Rome, Japan and World War II era Europe. She stuffed two pairs of jeans, some underwear, socks and sweatshirts into the main compartment, slipped on her sneakers, parka and knit gloves.

Rather than face her mother again or, worse, her father returning to the house after feeding the horses, Mustang raised the window, slid the screen upward, and climbed over the sill, bound for open space, where the lightning bolt which would transport her to Ireland wouldn't cause any damage.

She cringed at the thought of reinjuring her hands, months of healing all for naught. Peter's idea of important better be worth the pain, she decided.

Washing the breakfast dishes, Maggie saw the streak of light beyond the trees and grit her teeth.

While meteorologists in Montana tried in vain to determine the source of yet another weather anomaly near Helena, Saturday night revelers of Limerick stopped in their tracks as a sharp crack and blinding flash blackened the cobbles near Mathew Bridge. Before their eyes could, collectively, recover from the effect, a trenchcoat-clad Peter O'Donnell had stepped from a recessed pub doorway and whisked Mustang from view.

Knees mutated to jell-o from the unique mode of travel, the teen sank onto the closest bar stool. The pub interior was dimly lit, sparsely populated given the late hour, and stank of perspiration and greasy food. Gingerly cradling her aching head in charred hands, she now realized why she usually lost consciousness upon reaching her destination.

Movement nearby, visible through disheveled auburn tresses, broke her reverie. She recognized the tow-headed infirmarian Br. Giovanni, though he wore an uncustomary red flannel shirt and jeans.

"Last time I saw you, weren't you wearing brown robes?" she breathed.

The friar responded, "Last time you saw me, I wasn't in fear of my life."

Hearing his Italian in her native tongue, she still didn't believe it. "Huh?"

"It's not safe to talk here," O'Donnell interspersed. "Let's get back to the hotel."

He threw a few coins on the bar and led his companions into the brisk night air. Traversing Bridge Street, they continued up Merchant's Quay, drawing no attention to themselves, though Giovanni couldn't control his nervous twitching.

"What's up with you?" demanded Mustang. "I thought even the worst disaster couldn't disturb your inner peace."

“This is worse than the worst disaster,” the Franciscan admitted.

“If it isn’t already, it’s going to be, unless I get a straight answer from somebody...” She scowled. “Now, what are you doing in Ireland?”

“You remember Luigi?”

“How could I forget?” She forced herself to inhale slowly. “How is he?”

“Better. On medication, and getting regular treatment. No more talk of stigmata and miracles.”

“Sad, in a way. He did have an unmistakably... spiritual view of life.”

“Indeed. After that incident, Father Thomas started receiving more and more reports of mental... problems in the various provinces. Because I trained as a psychological nurse before joining the Order, he appointed me to investigate each case, and secure proper care for those with real needs.”

“You’re here as a part of that assignment?” Mustang inquired.

“Yes.”

“Is that why *I’m* here?”

“No,” spoke Peter.

“You understand Italian?”

“You *expect* me to understand Italian.”

There might be a connection, she reasoned, considering O’Donnell’s ESP.

“So, I’m here *why*?”

“I can’t *tell* you, but I can show you.”

“Can you, at least, tell me how you two met?” prodded the girl.

“That would spoil all the fun.”

Turning onto St. Augustine Street, they entered a brick warehouse, refurbished into a high-end hotel. Up one flight of stairs, the trio moved, single-file, along a balcony to the last door. A lavish suite lay within, cluttered with video cameras, editing equipment and piles of electrical wiring.

“I take it you were filming one of your travel documentaries?” Mustang observed.

“That’s right. Which is when I discovered this.” O’Donnell shed his coat and snatched a remote control off the end table beside an overstuffed sofa. He switched on a high definition plasma television anchored to the far wall. “You may want to sit down.”

Mustang complied, not because of his warning, but because she still felt unsteady from her journey.

A street scene, typical of many Irish towns, came into focus. An assortment of people passed to and fro. Mustang was about to object, when a weird kaleidoscope of colors scrambled the picture, as if photographic film had

been overexposed. Except, O'Donnell's recording was digital, and should not have been so affected.

Just when Mustang opened her mouth to question the phenomenon, a blurred figure passed the camera's lens: a human being, given the arms and legs, but flying above the brick pavement without the aid of artificial propulsion.

The image crackled into blackness.

"Okay..." was all Mustang could muster in reaction.

Giovanni tossed a stack of photos on the coffee table. All exhibited similar defects to the video.

"You were there when Peter was filming?" she wondered.

"Nowhere close. I shot those at Dublin's airport, when I first arrived. The anomaly was not visible to the naked eye. I didn't realize there was a problem until I got the roll developed. Peter and I met at the shop where my camera was being checked for malfunctions."

"And I had a technician doing the same with mine," injected Peter.

"So, you were in two different places, but experienced the same..."

They nodded in unison.

"What has this got to do with me?"

A stack of newspapers plopped on her lap. She rifled through them, every headline proclaiming inexplicable visual spectacles throughout the Emerald Isle. Descriptions of the flying human were widespread and consistent.

She shoved the pile aside. "Someone's flying around, freaking people out. I still don't..."

"And killing people," Giovanni added.

"Killing them *how*?"

Peter answered, "No one knows. None of the autopsies performed on the 97 victims found immediately after the sightings has been able to identify a definitive cause of death."

"This sounds like something Rachel could help with, given her visionary capabilities," suggested Mustang.

"She's already contributed to the investigation."

"Great. What did she see?"

"You confronting a behemoth so vile and fierce, she had no words to describe it."

"Which is why you called me?"

"In her vision, you're the only one who survives."

Mustang shuddered, not from anger, but from torment. She gazed down at her singed palms, then glimpsed the horror clouding O'Donnell's blue eyes.

"That's what they look like, fresh."

He ran trembling fingers through his blond mop. "If I'd known, I never..."

"It's okay. I've almost gotten used to it."

"I promise, you'll fly home by more conventional means, my treat."

"If you're still alive to pay for the ticket," she smirked. "Tell me more about this... situation."

"Giovanni has been in touch with the bishop here, and other priests," noted Peter.

"Benedictines, Franciscans, and diocesan," the friar detailed.

The filmmaker continued, "Some old contacts on various newspapers have sent me recordings of their interviews with witnesses. Everything we've heard is unsettling."

"What did these witnesses say?" prompted Mustang.

"The guy claims to be the Angel of Death."

"That would fit, if he's killing people."

"Three kids were able to tape his voice as he flew over their neighborhood in Cork."

"Do you have it?"

O'Donnell's expression remained neutral.

"Play it for her," Giovanni insisted. "Maybe she'll be able to translate."

"Translate?" echoed Mustang.

"It's a language I've never heard before, and with your... gift..."

Striding to a locked case, Peter selected a key and extracted an old Walkman with headphones. "You'll have to listen this way."

Mustang held one of the miniature speakers to her ear while nervous fingers pressed the "Play" button.

At first, it sounded like a garble of gibberish, unintelligible. When a spark lit Mustang's eyes, the two men knew she'd recognized something.

"What is it?" pleaded Giovanni.

"I've only heard it once before, so I can't be totally certain. Rewind, and run it again."

O'Donnell did as he was asked. She listened intently, then bit her lower lip.

"Well?"

"I don't know who on the planet could corroborate my guess, but I'm pretty sure it's Enochian."

II

“You’re making that up,” Giovanni censured the girl.

“No, she’s not,” countered Peter. “In my exploration of the metaphysical over the years, trying to get a grasp of my ESP, I came across the term...”

Mustang shrugged. “All I know is that Jack Parsons used this same language during rituals he performed at Boleskine House in Scotland, and he wrote about it in his journals.”

“His opinion?” O’Donnell urged.

“Enochian was supposedly the language spoken by the angels at the time of creation, if you believe such things. It was lost to humanity after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and rediscovered by John Dee and Edward Kelley, when the first Queen Elizabeth reigned. Parsons considered it may have been entirely invented by the two men - which is why the meanings don’t translate into English for me - but whatever its origins, he used it successfully in combination with Hebrew for his workings.”

“And this self-proclaimed Angel of Death is using it now?” puzzled Giovanni.

“There have been quite a few books written about Enochian, given the titles Parsons listed as sources. I don’t see where it would be too difficult for someone to study up and launch a killing spree using ‘black magick’ as a motivation.”

“Summoning demons instead of angels, you mean?” Peter speculated.

“In all honesty, I don’t know. I’ve never had to... worry about summoning anything to get done what I want done. I don’t visualize what I do as some nature sprite striking a match to a tree when I command it to burn, or some invisible colossus driving two SS guards to their knees, to put them in their place.”

O’Donnell bellowed, “What?”

“Long story. Past history.”

“I told you to use your powers in positive ways.”

“And, I have, except for a few... untimely accidents.”

“Like appearing in Rome from nowhere, unshod, and raising Francis of Assisi from the grave,” chortled Giovanni.

Peter glowered at the teen.

“I cleaned up after myself,” Mustang gushed. “No permanent damage was done.”

“Can we get back to the matter at hand?” asserted Giovanni. “All will be forgiven, I think, if you can help us stop this madman’s rampage.”

More calmly, O'Donnell concurred.

"But, why you two, and why drag me into it?" asked Mustang. "It's not like we know any of the victims personally, or our lives are directly threatened."

"No one else has a chance," Peter rationalized. "Read the news reports. Police have emptied clip after clip of ammunition, yet the man escapes, unharmed. Flame throwers proved ineffective; chains couldn't hold him. Very much like you."

Slumped on the beige sofa, Mustang contemplated their dilemma. She knew, in her heart, the Irishman was right; she also knew she possessed insufficient control over her power to face such an adversary and emerge victorious.

The lanky blond settled beside her on the cushions. "I really want to apologize for not keeping in touch this past year. My schedule has been hectic, prepping and filming three different projects..."

"It's okay," Mustang whispered.

"No, it's not. When we first met, I wanted you to trust me, to be able to entrust your deepest thoughts and concerns to me. I've not been the good friend I intended."

"It's okay, really."

"Whether it is or isn't, I need you to tell me - now - how your powers have manifested since I last saw you."

It wasn't a request, it was an order.

"We don't have time..." protested Giovanni.

Mustang gazed at the Franciscan. "Peter will make sure we *do* have time. There can be no doubt in his mind I won't inadvertently destroy his beloved homeland."

Frustrated, the Italian flopped onto a leather recliner, while Mustang turned her attention to her cousin's step-father.

She openly recounted sixteen months of unintentional and near-disastrous use of the power Jack Parsons had thrust upon her. Though Giovanni was familiar with most of the tale involving St. Francis and the mentally unstable friar Luigi, his interest piqued when she related her trip to Japan with the roving blacksmith Rick Shimoto, then of the two years spent within a German soldier's body during World War II.

The image of Mahatma Gandhi in the bathtub brought smiles to all three. Peter quickly sobered, however.

"You are a dangerous child, to be sure. Perhaps I was wrong..."

“Whether you were wrong or right, Mustang is here because you asked her to come,” Giovanni snapped. “She may be our only hope, and her unpredictability may be the very asset we need.”

“One thing I *have* learned,” the girl announced. “Maintaining personal balance is far more advantageous than acting from anger or fear.” She rose, resolve coursing through her veins, hazel eyes flashing determination. “So, how do we find this guy?”

Rummaging through the stack of newsprint, Peter extracted that morning’s Dublin *Times*. On the inside front page, a map of Ireland displayed colored dots, with dates and times beside them covering a two week span. This Angel of Death had traveled all over, often more than a hundred miles in a matter of minutes. People in Dublin, Cong, Tuam, Cobh, Drogheda, Churchtown and a host of other villages and cities had seen his destruction.

“This chart indicates no apparent logic to his movements,” remarked O’Donnell.

Giovanni ventured, “It’s as if he’s randomly searching for something.”

“Or, someone,” concluded Mustang.

Both men stared at her.

“Were any... unusual events reported in these cities, say, a day or two before the guy showed up there?” she asked, pacing near French doors leading onto a balcony.

“Such as...” hinted Peter.

“I don’t know. A fatal car accident. A prominent official suffering a stroke. Anything which might bring the media to the area...”

The Italian beamed with understanding. “So he could be certain of being seen?”

“Could be.”

“I didn’t see anything like that in the news,” O’Donnell stated. “What about atypical weather occurrences?”

“For example?”

“Along the west coast last Tuesday, there was a slight ground tremor...”

“An earthquake?” Mustang gasped.

“I felt it while filming north of here.”

She mused, “If he’s anything like me, he could’ve caused it himself.”

“Or, thought it had been caused by someone... with... equal powers?” muttered Giovanni.

“Oh, hell...”

Peter followed their train of thought all too well. “Then, the lightning bolt which brought you here may bring him...”

“Maybe,” Mustang agreed.

Giovanni yawned. ““Scusa. Do you think there’s any danger imminent, that we must keep vigil through the night?”

“I’m not tired,” replied Peter, “but you get some sleep.”

“Grazie. If anything happens, be sure to wake me.”

The Franciscan shuffled into the adjoining bedroom and closed the door. Peter and Mustang exhaled simultaneously.

“This won’t be as simple as the cattle stampede you instigated back in Boise,” O’Donnell declared.

“I already gathered that much. Whatever happened to Kristi, anyway?”

“She went through Bryan’s money like water, mortgaged the house, then lost it to foreclosure. That was right before Christmas.”

“And your drinking buddy, Thomas Burton?”

“When he realized how she would ruin him financially, he had the brains to rejoin the Shakespearian touring company. Last I heard, he was doing the Stratford Festival in Ontario.” O’Donnell peered at Mustang quizzically. “Do you think about that night often?”

“On rare occasions, especially during school, when I see couples lip-locked in the cafeteria or copping a feel in the stairwell.”

“If I told you Thomas lived in Ireland when he’s not touring, would you search for him?”

Her mouth quivered tentatively. “No. It was an enlightening experience, for a first kiss, yet I could tell he’d be a handful, day in, day out.”

“You’re right, and I applaud you for reading him so well. Besides, you’ll need to maintain your focus throughout this ordeal.” He stretched broadly. “The slightest distraction could spell disaster.”

“You *are* tired.”

“It’s been a long day. I calculate our Angel of Death won’t show himself until sunrise - he seems to relish the spotlight - but I don’t want to take any chances.”

“Look, I’m wide awake, given it’s early afternoon back in Montana. Why don’t you sack out for awhile, and I’ll take the first watch.”

Peter stood, crossing to the French doors and drawing heavy curtains closed, blocking the sparkling night view of Limerick - and Limerick’s view of Mustang. “If so much as a mouse sneezes, you call me,” he commanded.

“I’d be more concerned if I heard dogs barking.”

“Good girl.” He patted her shoulder. “The canine’s sensitivity to supernatural phenomena might well be the initial alarm of his approach.”

Once the bedroom door closed, Mustang scanned the huge, lavish living space. She was more accustomed to simple decor, not expensive furniture and Impressionist paintings on the walls. To better concentrate on the impending confrontation, she switched off the lights, and reopened the curtains. The teen could watch the sky that way, and nearby streets, enjoying the peace offered by the three-quarter moon.

Rainstorms refreshed the countryside somewhere to the south. She saw the periodic afterglow of lightning strikes, being too far away to hear the thunder. Only two cars drove past in the course of six hours, very much like small towns near her parents’ horse ranch, which seemed to “roll up the sidewalks” each evening at 9:00.

Mustang had nearly dozed off when a plethora of colors illuminated the sky miles distant. Reminded of a video her astronomy class had watched on the northern lights, she realized it was both the wrong season and the wrong direction for that spectacle.

“Oh, hell...”

Instantly alert, she crept out to the balcony for a better view, thankful the French doors didn’t creak when she opened them. It didn’t matter, though, moments later, Giovanni yanked her back inside.

“Did you not read the papers?” he scolded. “This is how every incident has started. Before the hands of the clock have advanced an hour, many people are dead.”

“So, he’s coming.” Mustang wriggled free of the Italian’s grip. “We expected he would.”

“We want to maintain our advantage, nonetheless. To stand in the open is to invite trouble before we have gathered the resources to defeat him. If he doesn’t know exactly where you are...”

“He’ll kill more people in the process of finding me,” she spat. “Besides, aren’t *I* the resource you two are counting on to end this tragedy?”

“She’s right, you know,” acknowledged Peter, emerging from the bedroom, still groggy. “My one concern is whether she’s in the proper frame of mind to tackle this crisis.”

“And what frame of mind is that?” she snorted.

“One where you think before you speak, to prevent any... untimely accidents.”

“If you want to avoid accidents, I’d prefer a less populated setting.”

Peter tossed Giovanni his key ring. “Brother, bring the car around, please.”

Slipping on his sneakers, the tow-headed friar complied. O’Donnell joined Mustang on the balcony. “Any ideas?”

“Not until I see what I’m up against. What about you? Hasn’t your ESP kicked in with any insights?”

“Nothing. Had I to guess, I’d say our Angel surrounds himself with some type of damping field, blocking receptive folk from sensing his presence in advance.”

“Then, why the sky show?” retorted Mustang, thrusting her finger toward the horizon.

“What I’ve heard, the display ordinarily occurs mere seconds before the devastation commences. People were caught off guard by the beauty of it, initially, so he had stunned victims who put up no resistance. He almost seemed to prefer, after the tale started circulating, the hysteria of the crowds. Today... he may be hoping you’ll pack it in and go home.”

“He’ll be disappointed, then.”

Peter kept quiet while Mustang muttered a few sentences. Abruptly, his mind cleared, and he could detect a veil of glistening dew surrounding the former warehouse.

“My God, it’s beautiful!”

“You can see it?” pondered Mustang.

“Yes. What it is?”

“A protective barrier. Not knowing what methods he uses, I don’t want him to get in the first blow.”

“His methods?” O’Donnell echoed.

“I know he uses Enochian incantations, but the way he manipulates those energies may make him vulnerable. I don’t believe he uses words alone. He may use hand gestures, a wand or staff...”

“You don’t.”

She turned indoors. “Because of how I acquired the power, I think. I didn’t discover it through years of studying old books and performing ancient rituals. Centuries ago, they must’ve liked waving their arms and yelling unintelligible syllables to the four points of the compass, embedding energies in stones, sigils and medallions. They grew dependent on those outward expressions for their power, as did their students through the years. For me, plainly speaking the words works, so I never adopted the Harry Potter or *Bewitched* styles of magick.”

“What if you were prevented from speaking?”

“You mean, like bound and gagged?”

He nodded.

“If I want something to happen, the deliberate thought itself is enough, I’ve found. It’s when I speak on impulse, the mishaps occur.”

“Then, I recommend you keep your mouth shut, and not let the Angel uncover *your* methods.”

Giovanni appeared on the threshold, panting. “The frenzy has already started.”

“What?” queried Peter. “How?”

“Early risers on their way to Sunday Mass, most likely. It seems every resident is fleeing the city.”

The filmmaker’s blue eyes met Mustang’s steady orbs. She strode to the edge of the balcony. Her lips barely moving, Peter’s mind sensed the protective barrier extending over the settlement, and a soothing lavender aroma wafting between the buildings. Below, they noticed people who had, seconds before, been running chaotically along the streets, slow their pace. The clamor of frightened voices faded to normal levels.

“We’ve got to draw him off,” instructed the girl. “The energy spread so thin, it’ll only last a few minutes.”

“The car’s waiting,” Giovanni confirmed.

Pausing only to grab their coats and her backpack, Mustang followed the men toward the stairs, descending rapidly. The morning air jarred them with its biting chill as they passed through the glass revolving door...

To halt well short of the shiny black Toyota.

Standing on the car’s bonnet, a glowing figure wrapped in a sparkling silver cloak.

“Oh, hell,” the trio chorused.

III

“Is this what you brought me, Brother Giovanni?” rumbled the figure, faceless within the brilliance. “A mere child?”

The Franciscan became the recipient of Peter and Mustang’s suspicious glares. “I told you she was young,” he replied, easing away from his companions.

“You said she was powerful. It takes decades to attain a level of mastery equal to my own. You have wasted my time...”

A withered hand flinched almost imperceptibly, and Mustang had what she needed. She stepped boldly in front of Giovanni.

“Tone it down already, eh?” she directed.

Their adversary’s aura dimmed in a heartbeat, leaving them to view his balding head and wrinkled mien - far less imposing than the first impression, and flustered by this embarrassing cessation of his splendor.

“Peter,” said Mustang, not taking her eyes from the cloaked elder, “where can we take this to prevent any... collateral damage?”

“There’s plenty of grassy countryside around Adare, a few miles west of here.”

“Then, to Adare with you, and we’ll meet on the field of honor in one hour,” she told the man.

He scowled. “As you wish.”

With a clap of his hands, he vanished.

“Bet you can’t do that,” chuckled Peter, dragging Giovanni toward the Toyota.

Mustang sniffed, “Bet I can.”

“At least, now I know how the kaleidoscope effect was created,” the filmmaker purported.

“How?”

“The refraction of sunlight off that silver fabric would cause a dazzling rainbow of colors.”

“So, nothing extraordinary there.”

“Nope.”

While O’Donnell navigated Limerick’s winding lanes toward open roads, Mustang grilled Giovanni in the back seat. “All right, why’d you lie?”

“I had no choice,” sputtered the Italian, his entire body trembling. “The man arrived at the Generalate in Rome a few days after your trip to Assisi. He told me he’d seen Francis’ sermon on the cable news, and traveled to Santa Maria degli Angeli, questioning priests and tourists who had witnessed the great saint’s reappearance personally. Someone told him about the near destruction of the basilica itself - your little earthquake, and then your repairs to the building - and he demanded to know who you were and where he could find you. When I told him I knew only your name, he threatened to kill my brothers in the community one by one, unless I promised to arrange a meeting.

“Keeping this inner torture secret from Father Thomas all those months was the worst part, worse than getting little sleep and spending my nights

searching the internet for any trace of you. When my superiors did learn of my disobedience to the Rule - and the reason - I was suspended from the Order.”

“Which is why you no longer wear your robes,” Peter commented, grasping the truth.

“Yes.” continued Giovanni, “With the limited funds I had available, I planned to fly to America and seek you out, but he caught me during a layover in Dublin, tired of the delays. He accused me of deception, and swore he’d lay waste to the country, unless I produced you in 30 days. I fled, but he followed, and only by chance did I meet Peter, and discover he knew how to reach you...”

Peter braked at a traffic signal, spinning in the seat. “You *used* me to get to Mustang?”

“To my eternal shame. I am most truly sorry, Signorina.”

“Did he tell you his name?”

Giovanni didn’t quite understand. “They call him the Angel of Death.”

“I don’t care about what others call him. How does he refer to himself?”

“I asked him that many times, and he avoided the question. Just once, when he was especially enraged at my failure, did he say, ‘I am Abbondio Carneficina, destroying those who heed not my word.’”

“Abundant Carnage,” grunted O’Donnell. “Appropriate.”

Mustang sank on the brushed leather upholstery. “Not his real name, I’d lay odds. He’d keep that secret, given what Jack Parsons wrote in his journal. Knowledge of a person’s true name gives you power over him.”

“If I could do anything to stop this...” Giovanni mourned.

“Get out of the car,” she grumbled. As his feet touched the sidewalk, she added, “Go back to Rome.”

A spontaneous funnel of wind and dust enveloped the friar, sucking him into the atmosphere. Peter craned his neck, watching through the wind screen, as Mustang climbed into the passenger seat.

“Was that wise?” O’Donnell contended.

“At least, it’ll be less painful than the way I travel,” came the reply, her blackened palms upturned.

“Touche.”

They proceeded through scant traffic to the pleasant village of Adare.

The best part of the whole situation, Peter remarked as the Toyota coasted down Main Street, was tourist season had not yet begun. What happened in the unplanted fields beyond the town would merit few, if any, spectators, unless...

The media had been warned of the event.

Videographers standing atop television vans held steadicams shoulder-high as Abbondio Carneficina materialized from a cluster of low clouds. He poised himself atop a wide rock wall overlooking the verdant plain; none of the reporters risked approaching him with their microphones.

O'Donnell parked the car on the berm, restraining Mustang, her fingers on the door handle.

"I won't be much help to you, I'm afraid," he confessed. "I'm willing to stand beside you, if you need the moral support, or..."

"If you got hurt, Rachel would never forgive me. Stay by the car, and if the worst happens, get the hell out."

Both driver and passenger doors popped open, and the pair alighted to a barrage of flash bulbs. Voices hollered at the auburn-haired teen, who presented no danger in her parka, jeans and ratty sneakers, backpack slung over one shoulder.

"Shut up!" she shouted, and quiet encompassed the gathering - their vocal cords involuntarily stilled. "The best advice I can give is for you to put considerable distance between this place and yourselves. I guarantee none of your cameras will capture any clear images, nor will you be able to record any audio. The ink in your pens has solidified, so taking notes will be impossible. Publicizing this guy's antics has done nothing but stroke his ego and upset the good Irish people. When this day is over, peace will return to Ireland, and I will be long gone. So, collect your equipment and get moving."

Their voices freed of constraint, one relentless woman squeaked, "Are you saying you're going to die?"

"We'll all die eventually, and it could be your turn today, if you don't listen to me."

Ten minutes later, the satellite-feed vehicles had repositioned themselves a mile along the road, at the top of a rise, where zoom lenses might be able to pick up some detail of the field. Mustang respected their dedication. In the editor's booths of many television stations, nonetheless, blank screens would be visible, and producers would scurry to diagnose nonexistent technical problems.

She sauntered across the rich, black loam of dormant acreage, hands thrust in her coat pockets, stopping 20 yards from where Carneficina resembled a statue enshrined over the forthcoming plowing. "Hey, Angel of Death, where are your wings?"

Leaning on the Toyota's boot, Peter covered his face with his hands. "Don't antagonize him!" he prayed.

“The audience is gone,” she persisted. “Come down from your perch and get real.”

Unseen hands propelled him gracefully off the rocks. “Giovanni was correct,” he observed. “You *do* have great power.”

“Is that why you’ve killed dozens of people, and had me travel thousands of miles? Just to determine the limits of my control over the elements?”

“Then, you understand the source of your magick?”

“Yes, and no. Heredity may be part of it...”

“You had ancestors with the gift?” he queried.

“I’m not 100 percent positive.”

Through grit teeth, he barked, “Do not trifle with me, girl! I must know the truth!”

“Don’t think you can intimidate me with that tone. If Adolf Hitler couldn’t, there’s no way you can.”

This statement rattled the gnarled oldster. “Hitler? You’re not old enough to have met that murderer...”

“Look who’s talking about murder. At any rate, age isn’t a factor when it comes to what I can do.”

“I have been told you raise the dead.”

“Let’s say, I have materialized the spirits of those who have died.”

“And you cause earthquakes and storms...”

“Not on purpose. I won’t deliberately alter the weather’s natural course. Peter taught me that.”

Carneficina’s gaze moved to O’Donnell. “Ah, yes, your friend. Would you kill to save him?”

“What kind of question is *that*?”

“Aren’t Secret Service agents required to ‘take a bullet for the President’, if necessary? I’m asking if you would protect your friend, should he be placed in danger?”

“In Peter’s case, I already have.” Mustang was growing bored with the banter. “Get to the point. What do you want from me? If it’s my power, it’s not for me to give, though I would if I could. It’s more trouble than it’s worth, most days. Whatever I have to do to get you to stop this butchery and disappear somewhere for good...”

His left hand flicked toward Peter, and she cried, “Return from whence you came!”

A ripple of energy surged past her, coursing in a boomerang-type pattern back to Carneficina. The impact threw him, full-force, into the wall, dislodging boulders and scattering smaller stones. He lay, chest heaving, among the rubble.

“An honorable man would have the guts to fight fair, not target innocent bystanders,” Mustang scolded.

Wheezing, he mumbled an Enochian phrase - an expletive or an incantation - which she didn't comprehend. A cone of fire burst from the earth directly beneath the Toyota, exploding the gas tank.

“Peter, move!” screamed the teen.

Too late. O'Donnell caught the force of the blast full in the face. At least, Mustang was able to prevent shards of flying metal from mangling his body, sending the shower of shrapnel in the opposite direction. “Rain, douse the blaze!” she added.

Wispy clouds overhead congealed into droplets, pouring down on the vehicle no differently than a bucket of water thrown on a campfire. Sizzling and sparks soon diminished, acrid grey smoke the sole evidence of the calamity.

Perhaps not a good idea to turn her back on Carneficina, but Mustang had no choice. Severely burned, Peter would die without immediate treatment. She bolted from the field to kneel near the smoldering, deformed Toyota ruins. The filmmaker's countenance lay, devoid of recognizable flesh, as were his chest and legs, where his clothes had been blown to shreds. Afraid to feel for a pulse, she detected the last vestiges of life in his slowly blinking, lashless eyelids.

Blind orbs stared at nothing. His pulpish hand groped for hers. “Mustang, is that you?”

“I'm here, Peter. I'm so, so sorry.”

“It's for me to apologize. I shouldn't have listened to Giovanni, shouldn't have rang you...”

“You're not going to die, Peter.” Indeed, sirens could be heard in the distance. The media, though their cameras recorded nothing, must have seen the explosion, and called the authorities. Forgetting to disable their cell phones was a fortunate accident, Mustang realized.

“I've never felt pain like this,” puffed O'Donnell.

“I can heal the wounds, Peter, if you want.”

He managed a weak chuckle. “That's a really stupid thing to say. Don't you think I want to see Rachel again?”

She laughed with him. By the time the ambulance arrived, Peter was sitting upright, buttoning a bulky flannel shirt Mustang had pulled from her backpack.

Meanwhile, Carneficina had recovered his composure, watching the tender scene from the rock pile. As the irate girl marched toward him, he hissed, “So, you *can* heal.”

“All you had to do was ask, idiot!”

“Without lifting a finger.”

“That’s right. You got a heart condition you want cured, you old bastard?”

“No. Inoperable brain cancer.”

Ready with another sharp comeback, Mustang suddenly closed her mouth. The pair scrutinized each other in silence.

“That’s it, isn’t it?” she finally chided. “You’re scared to die...”

“Not at all. I do have a message for the world before I shuffle off this mortal coil, though.”

“What, that you can indiscriminately murder innocent souls?”

“If they fail to heed my warnings, yes.”

“What warnings?”

“The impending end of the world.”

Mustang raised her eyes skyward. “Oh, hell.”

“Do not doubt me, girl! I have ample proof.”

“So did hundreds of others over the centuries.”

“They were not like me.” He set off at a brisk pace, tracing a large circle counter-clockwise in the dirt with his black leather boots. As the silver cape billowed behind him, Mustang glimpsed a plain t-shirt and grey slacks draped on an emaciated frame.

She also recognized his ploy. Jack Parsons had created such circles around his hillside altar on the Boleskine House grounds at the start of his rituals, supposedly securing what lay within from that without. She would not allow herself to be trapped in Carneficina’s magickal sphere. She moved casually, ending up beyond his markings near the rock wall.

He rambled, “I chanced upon a copy of John Dee’s writings in the British Library fifty years ago, doing student research after serving in the Army during the Korean War. I used the Angelic Keys to achieve public success in every endeavor, until 1972, when my wife and child died in a train wreck.”

Mustang waited. There had to be more.

“The focus of my rituals changed from selfish endeavors to bringing my family back to life. When that failed, I suffered a nervous breakdown and, confined to bed, was plagued by visions of the world’s destruction. I thought I’d

gone completely insane, until random passages from a myriad of books I read combined to substantiate the visions.”

“But, no one would listen,” supplied Mustang.

“Precisely. I’ve been struggling all these years to get the required publicity - a book deal, something - to spread the word. I’m tired of having doors slammed in my face, and people deride me.”

“One thing I’ve learned about my power: I can’t change people’s minds about anything. They’ll believe what they want, even if they see the truth with their own eyes.”

“That, I don’t believe,” erupted Carneficina. “If they will not acknowledge the truth, they will die before the decimation of the planet consumes them.”

He had completed the circle, and strode to its center, facing east. His voice surprisingly clear, given his advanced years, he commenced the greeting of the pillars, exactly as Jack Parsons had done in Mustang’s presence those October mornings in Scotland.

What happened next had no similarity to Parsons’ rituals, however. Where the California occultist and rocket scientist had caused rain or wind, even unfueled fires, Carneficina conjured a man.

And not just any man.

Disoriented and weak-kneed, the square-jawed, bronze-haired Thomas Burton - in heavy blue sweater, ragged jeans and loafers, holding an empty glass - squinted at Mustang, terrified.

IV

The tumbler dropped from Burton’s fingers, shattering at his feet, as snakes emerged from the dirt, coiling around his ankles - living shackles.

Peter rushed to Mustang’s side, his strength restored. The ambulance attendants and police stood, seemingly frozen in time by the display.

“How’d he know we were talking about Thomas just a few hours ago?” Mustang grieved.

“Thrown in with everything else, Carneficina must have a touch of ESP, or be adept at reading minds,” said O’Donnell.

“You told me Thomas was back in Ireland. Where’s he been living?”

“I’m not certain. In the old days, his family owned a house up near the border...”

“Border? What border?”

“Between us and Northern Ireland.”

Not that Mustang had studied much European history, but she did recall news reports of periodic cease-fires and bombings between factions in the far north section of the island.

“What do you want, old man?” she hollered into the circle.

“You will cure my cancer, and ensure my access to every world leader.”

“What’s to stop me from killing you right now?”

He guffawed, “I’m untouchable in this realm between the worlds, but any hostile offensive will result in the death of your lover, here.”

“He’s not my lover.”

“The feelings you share for one another indicate otherwise.”

Mustang lowered her head. “Oh, hell.”

More snakes appeared - not real, but mulch magickally transformed into writhing, fanged creatures. They curled around Burton’s legs, one atop the other, reached his torso and chest, resembling a mummy’s wrappings. Petrified, Thomas neither moved nor screamed, in fear of being bitten by the poisonous vipers, or smothered, as they mounted his broad shoulders and tightened around his throat.

“He picked the wrong imagery,” oozed Mustang.

Beside her, Peter recoiled at his friend’s anguish. “Huh?”

“There are no snakes in Ireland.”

“Does that mean you can stop him?”

“It means the amount of energy he’s using to sustain the constructs is enormous, as opposed to, say, mice or birds. At his age, he’ll be tapped out before long.”

“In time to save Thomas?”

“I don’t know.”

“Can’t you neutralize this imaginary enclosure?” Peter exhorted.

“Sure,” Mustang breathed. “Carneficina will see it coming, though, and finish Thomas with a snap of his fingers.”

“Is there anything I can do...”

“Walk over to what’s left of the car, and start poking through my backpack.”

“Any particular reason?”

With an ethereal calm, she asked, “If he can read minds, do you really want me to tell you?”

“No.” O’Donnell did as instructed, the elder’s dark eyes shifting from Burton’s agony to the fabricated search.

“Fire and wind,” Mustang spoke, her adversary thus distracted, “divide the circle between the two men with an impenetrable wall.”

Flames shot up from the ground, and nearby trees bent double with the force of a violent microburst. Carneficina stumbled backward, caught off guard. Burton stared in awe at the flickering lattice; snakes cascaded to earth, dust once more. Mustang sprinted past, grabbing his arm and dragging him to safety.

“What in hell is going on?” the Shakespearian actor snapped.

“Nothing you’ll remember in the morning,” answered the teen. “If I hold even the tiniest place in your heart, stay here, and don’t say a word.”

“But...”

She raised a finger to his lips. “Not now, please.”

Carneficina’s features contorted by anger - and the wavering palpitations of the elemental wall - Mustang took up a position opposite as he exhausted his efforts to dispel the obstruction. His arms waved maniacally; veins bulged on his forehead. Enochian spewed forth, desperate calls to the elements, all unheeded.

“Be gone, with my thanks, dear friends,” the girl uttered quietly; the interlocked mesh of fire and wind evaporated into nothingness.

Two strides closed the gap between a spent Carneficina and herself. She tore off his cloak and seized a handful of t-shirt. “You are a very lucky man not to be dead right now. You’re even luckier because, once this day is over, thousands of people will remember the past two weeks merely as disturbing nightmare. The lives you took, though, I cannot restore, and you will have to pay for your crimes - which may mean spending the rest of your days in a mental institution.”

“No building of brick and mortar will ever hold me...”

“Except, your memory will be wiped clean of the knowledge regarding these powers, and your fantasies about the end of the world. Only the guilt will remain.”

“You would not dare...”

She’d had enough of his ridiculous conceit. The police had formed a cordon around the field; media vans sped down the hill, their non-functional equipment notwithstanding. “Tell me your name, or you’ll die behind bars, a cancer-ridden psychopath.”

“I won’t!”

With a resigned smirk, Mustang turned away. The ordeal concluded, she linked arms with a still-flustered Thomas, strolling easily toward Peter and the charred Toyota shell.

Carneficina clutched at her shoulder moments later, gasping. “I am... Misha Epstein, from Brooklyn, son of immigrant Russian Jews.”

Mustang chose her phrasing with great care. “Well, then, Misha Epstein, be cured in body and sound in mind, your sole memory the horrendous stupidity which cost countless lives.”

His expression altered in that moment, and he collapsed, sobbing with remorse, as two Irish Garda took him into custody. The trio remained on the side of the road as a horde of vehicles gradually departed.

“I’m very proud of you,” Peter complimented the teen. “You used your power in positive ways, and harmed no one.”

“Will you *please* tell me what happened?” Thomas begged. “One second, I’m watching Manchester United football on the telly, next I’m a tree for serpents...”

“The more I tell you, the more you’ll have to forget,” grinned Mustang. She clasped Peter’s hand. “We didn’t have any breakfast, you know. How ‘bout a quiet Sunday dinner?”

“Won’t you take care of that, first?” O’Donnell insisted, pointing to the car.

“Was it a rental?”

“No. It was Rachel’s. I borrowed it while mine was in for repairs.”

“Insured?”

“Yes, but how would I make a claim?”

She squeezed his fingers. “Have you enough to buy Rachel a new one?”

“More than enough.”

Before their eyes, the remnants of the engine and frame disintegrated, metallic dust scattered across the countryside by a light breeze.

“I need a good, stiff whiskey,” Burton announced.

O’Donnell roared. “I never knew a day you didn’t, my friend.”

“You used to match me, shot for shot. Marriage ruined you.”

“That explosion ruined my trousers. Before we eat - or drink - I need to buy some new threads.”

“Doubtful the shops in town will be open.”

“Fortunate for you, the pubs are.”

Their sarcastic exchange shortened the two mile trek to Adare. In defiance of the biblical edict to keep the Sabbath holy, one resident had washed laundry, and hung the clothes out to dry - more likely to freeze, given the temperature. Leaving Mustang as sentry in the front yard, Thomas and Peter leapt over the picket fence, selected the most likely pair of jeans to fit the tall, lean blond, then made a mad dash into a stand of trees, laughing with every step. A ten Euro note fluttered from the clip they left behind on the line.

“How old are you two?” queried Mustang when they rejoined her. “Because I’m sure any witnesses to the theft would identify two college pranksters, not middle-aged men.”

“That’s why I’ve loved you these many months,” Burton responded.

Peter retorted, “And your undying devotion to Kristi?”

“Don’t go spoilin’ the fun, now, Peter. We’re half a block from liquid comfort and welcome respite from the day’s misfortune...”

A small crowd occupied stools and tables inside the homey Cohan’s Pub. The Irish being suspicious of newcomers, an awkward lull claimed the room until the whiskey was served, and a pint of cider for Mustang. Glasses in hand, the three claimed seats at a corner table near the crackling fire, warming bones too long exposed to the February cold.

Thomas emptied his double-shot of Jameson in one gulp. Peter mimicked the feat. Mustang watched, wide-eyed, recollections of a pleasant evening in Boise brought to mind. “Come midnight, they will forget all this,” she murmured. “Giovanni will forget he ever left Rome, or aided a sick man with this twisted plot. His superiors will forget they suspended him from their community. All the internet news files covering the Angel of Death will be corrupted, and the paper copies reduced to mush...” And I’ve got to be in school first thing tomorrow, without studying for that damned English test.

“Are you two going to eat,” she inquired above the din, “or just get drunk?”

“Steaks and potatoes, all ‘round, and another!” cried O’Donnell, holding up his glass.

The publican signaled acceptance of the order from behind the long, polished bar.

“While we’re waiting, do you mind telling me how I’m going to get home after this... debacle?” wondered Burton.

Peter suggested, “Plane, train, bus or rental car.”

“I came away without me wallet.”

“Not a pleasant experience, is it?” Mustang admitted. “Leaves you feeling kind of naked.”

O’Donnell shushed the girl.

“What?”

“Peter knows how I’d reply to such a comment,” Thomas quipped.

His friend remarked, “Something similar to, ‘I’d like to see you naked,’ eh?”

“Ordinarily, yes. In Elizabeth’s case, though, the mystery of what lies within heightens the attraction.”

Mustang blushed.

Peter changed the subject. “What’s your next production?”

The men debated the merits of Shakespeare’s comedies until their food arrived. All three tucked in to the meal with gusto, starving after hours without sustenance.

“It’s a grand coincidence, us meeting up like this.” Peter nudged Thomas two drinks later. “I was going to ring your agent next week, so he could set you up to narrate this documentary I’m filming.”

Burton chimed in, “Even grander, because you’re paying for the drinks!”

Already, the pair’s memory of recent hours was blurring, Mustang noted. Or was the liquor having that effect?

One undeniable effect of the liquor, as the early winter sunset shone pink through the pub’s windows: Peter fell asleep. Mustang yawned, too, having not been to bed for nearly 24 hours. The delicious sirloin, fried potatoes and salad augmented this relaxed state, her stomach no longer growling.

Thomas had maneuvered his chair close to Mustang; leaning forward, his warm breath tickled her ear. “I thought I’d never see you again.”

“Same here.”

“How long have you and Peter been together?”

“We’re not! This was an... unplanned trip.”

“When do you return to the States?”

“Tonight.”

He scooped her hands in his. “Don’t go. Last time, I couldn’t ask you to stay with me, because you were too young. Now, I suspect you’re 18, and fully a woman, more beautiful than ever.”

“You’ve got my age right, but I don’t know about being ‘fully a woman,’” she whispered pensively.

“No mere child could haunt my dreams the way you have,” professed Burton. “Fleeting apparitions of an embrace, and the very planet shattered with the passion of it...”

“You’ll forget that, too.”

“You keep saying I’ll forget. Do you think me so shallow?”

“No, Thomas. It’s for the best, however, we all forget this day.”

“Can you be so certain I’ll forget this?” Unyielding fingers shifted her chin toward him; he kissed her fiercely.

She tried to quell the rising tide of emotion, unsuccessfully. Floor boards chattered, plates and glasses rattled. Oak beams overhead jolted and split; the regular patrons abandoned their drinks and rushed for the exit.

Peter's chair toppled, and he rolled onto his back, glaring up at his companions. "Not again!" he moaned.

Thomas had drawn Mustang onto his lap, clutching her as if to never let go. Peter managed to rise, unsteady both from the whiskey and the motion of the building, prying his friend's arms from around the girl.

"You want the roof to crush us, fool?" O'Donnell bellowed.

He finally resorted to grabbing Thomas' auburn-tinged bronze mane, yanking his head backward with enough force to snap the actor's neck. Blue eyes met star-lit grey-green orbs. Peter saw little hope of reaching the entranced romantic.

A panting Mustang retreated from the table, and stillness reigned once more. "Sorry, Peter. He..."

"I know, I know," snarled O'Donnell. "What's wrong with him?"

"What's always wrong with him, from what you've told me? He's drunk."

"He looks dead."

"If he is, he died happy."

Her humor was not appreciated in that moment. Peter slapped Thomas hard on the cheek twice, three times. Only when a deep belch resounded did they know he would be all right.

The publican sole witness to this scene, the Irishman grinned sheepishly while Mustang stooped to collect broken shards of boneware and stray potatoes. "Fix it," O'Donnell instructed under his breath.

"What, now?"

"No, in two years. If everyone is going to forget what happened, it won't matter if he sees..."

She sighed. "Wood, be mended, and dishes be whole."

A miniature tornado circulated through the dining room and, when it dissipated, all was as it had been scant minutes before. Peter tossed a hundred Euros on the bar, roughly escorting Mustang and Thomas outdoors.

"Why is it, you two see each other, and wind up in a clinch?" O'Donnell ranted, pulling the pair along the darkened street.

"You're jealous!" drawled Burton.

Mustang stopped, forcing the others to do likewise. She caressed Peter's frown. "I truly am sorry, about all this."

"If I asked you to kiss me, the way you kissed him, would you?"

“You won’t remember in the morning.”

“My mind may not, but I’ve a feeling my heart will.”

Thomas slumped against a haberdasher’s front window as Peter took Mustang in his arms. The concrete pitched and cracked; rain poured down from cloudless skies. Drenched to the skin, the pair separated.

Thomas sobered abruptly, viewing the embrace with displeasure. “Now, you understand?”

“Yes,” Peter agreed, awestruck. “Yes, indeed.”

In the dimness, the pair couldn’t see Mustang’s cheeks redden anew. “I... better go.”

“You can fly out of Shannon Airport in the morning.”

“No, thanks.” She backed along the sidewalk. “I’ve got to get home in time for school.”

Both men swiped at her hands, she remained beyond their reach.

“It wouldn’t be wise for you to stand too close when I... you know.”

“True, true,” O’Donnell agreed.

He and Thomas lingered on the street corner until the girl vanished from sight. They decided to seek lodgings for the night - rather than try to find transportation back to Limerick - when a sudden flash of lightning two blocks over startled them.

Monday morning, Mustang Duryea woke when her alarm clock jangled. It had been a long night, with bizarre dreams. She rolled onto her side and closed her eyes.

Maggie poked her head in the door. “You don’t want to miss your bus, hon.”

“Right, Mom.”

Fifteen minutes later, she snatched her English book off the desk and headed out the door. The end to another boring weekend, the beginning of another boring week of classes.

She didn’t remember the last command she’d uttered before calling the lightning to bring her home from Ireland: “We all will forget this day.”

Still, her hands stung, and a corner of her heart ached for no definable reason...