

That day had been hot in Dolour. As had every day for months and lifetimes. A scattered few Dolourish people remembered how magnanimously the green clover had once borne the orange crocus. The rest read about it in books and accepted Dolour's withered, peaty greyness. They accepted the malevolent sunshine that leached every trickle. They accepted the dusts and the barrenness. They accepted the pain of their land as it wretched its raw stomach, having no more to yield.

Gottisttot looked across the water to Cape Clear Island. He had no thought for the view, high in the tower where the searing bulb had once warned ships off Fastnet Rock. Now, barely a vessel deigned to journey north or across the wide ocean to dock in Dolour's ports. The lighthouse was long converted. Overzealous ECT machines brought a flickering fluorescence. The sold-out sacrilegious mewled themselves into foetal balls. And the fragrance of corporeal decay was not masked by the stink of medical-grade disinfectant. All these things filled the gaps in memory of the time when Fastnet Rock had been a place of benefit.

Gottisttot remembered the old coloured Dolour before the greyness. He remembered the time before the sweltry sea when the water had licenced both wake and wave. He remembered the breezes, and when a heavy cloud might have been persuaded to wring itself and slake all raspy throats. He could remember, because it was back then that he appeared. It was back then that he installed himself on this island part of the world.

The air-con rattled. The sun had thieved the blue from the evening sky and it was that time of unbroken pastel. But Gottisttot was his own light. On hot nights like this, he would sit, glowing; raking through tendrils of purest white that spun off him like floss at the freakshow. He shook back the lustrous hair from his cheek and licked the fluid suppurating from the backs of his perfectly viral hands. Lifting his chair, he turned north towards where Malin Head bustled four-hundred miles away, and he sat down.

He gathered himself. Or tried to. The mendicant prayers of the blasphemers rose up the tower from their cells under the rock. The ashes of corpses fizzled from fingerlike chimney stacks: grey into greyness; sulphur in nostrils.

Dayshift had ended. Night staff were less inclined to wander. He closed his eyes, dropped through trance, and sought his mark in the realm of detachment, coma, dream and spirit. Above the soulful lanes and highways, Gottisttot found him: body asleep; mind receptive. He relayed his thoughts, almost fawning, as a spiritual tenant cajoling the landlord. Pimping his incubus dictates as valid dreams, Gottisttot formed a sentiment: "Adore the assassin."