



The Driving Force (a book on movement)

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Sum ergo moveo

Bare spontaneous and violently loud (have a nice final day)

THIS station had been gutted and rebuilt in recent years, and Margaret still wasn't used to it. An award-winning architect with a large budget, desirous of glorification, ambitious for the work. The old building was hollowed out, cleaned, sterilised. Reformed in attenuated curves and a preponderance of light. The walls were a soft white, strangely not running to grubbiness yet. Long windows the length of one side, sunlight streaming through. A quadrangular play of brightness and shadow on the cool tiled floor. A high vaulted ceiling, the camber of antiquity, elegantly arched over the length of platforms one through seven. A triumph, they declared it; an almost perfect amalgam of classical themes and a funky post-modern sensibility.

Margaret clicked on her computer's internet icon at her desk in the back office, hidden away from the loudness and activity of the front desk. She held a mild contempt for the people who availed of the information service. Their stupid, repetitive questions, misshapen bags thrown up on the counter-top. Their sheepish smiles as her colleagues parroted, 'Have a nice day.' That phrase irritated her almost as much. 'Have a nice day': phony and American. The computer dialled into its external server, that horrible birth screech, and Margaret wondered why head office hadn't equipped them with broadband yet. She leaned back, swivelling the chair gently. Light and information zapping across the globe like a laser in a comic book, unimaginably fast, cyclonic and glowing, this latticed membrane.

She listened to the faint babble outside, enjoying the annoyance a little, feeding off it, then typed in the address of a news website.

(i see between the layers of these things i squeeze through like blood from cut skin)

Things were still moving. Damien fidgeted in his seat, moulded plastic uncomfortable against his back. He shut his eyes tight, squinted at the dancing orange spots, opened them. There was no change – things were still moving.

He had dropped acid two or three hours earlier – he couldn't place the time exactly – but that wasn't the bad idea. The bad idea was an embarrassingly public shouting match with his girlfriend outside the station, which resulted in her walking off into the traffic and the sunshine. Christ, what a dumb, ridiculous excuse for an argument. He had bought the tabs for both of them, but Marissa hadn't wanted to do it so early in the day, and was not pleased to discover that Damien had. 'The champion of breakfasts,' he had declared, grinning extravagantly. It had sounded funny under the circumstances.

Now things were moving and he had to deal with it on his own. Two more hours to his train and a long wait in store. No hallucinations, really – a weak brew, he smiled, relieved and aggrieved simultaneously – but gentle oscillations everywhere. He glanced over at a random fellow traveller, a fat woman in a sweat-soaked blouse: she was moving. Her head blurred from side to side, focusing and dissolving, like the fluctuation of a tuning fork. Hummmmm... Damien looked down the nearest platform: that was moving, the stone and iron vibrating, the movement rising, calming, reviving.

Normally he would relish an experience like this, an insight right into the core of things, the subcutaneous, the heart of all matter. But not on his own. Marissa was his rock, the devil of sense and balance on his shoulder, and she wasn't here. Damien tried to focus on his watch, and felt miserable; it was going to be a long afternoon.

'No, no, no. I don't care. Progress my hole. They should have left it.'

Charles Charles, being possessed of the same first and last name, was one of those people who, as the old saw has it, like to get in their retaliation first. His parents' woeful decision to lump him with such an absurd appellation had condemned Charles to a life of mockery and constant, tiresome explanation, but with one advantage: it had forced him

to become assertive. More than that: obnoxious. Wearing of the jibes and questions, and particularly the sympathy, Charles was a conversational bully, loud and forceful, an intruder on others' personal space. He bellowed his point first and at length, and tried not to listen too much. He did not give pause for reply.

'It's the beauty of old buildings,' he continued. 'You can never replace that, or build it up again. This, this...*renovation*. This abomination, if you ask me. They should have left it.'

His business partner, a bird-like, quavering man whom Charles referred to as Major, attempted a half-hearted interjection. 'Yes, but you see, you see, the thing...'

'I don't care, I tell you. It's a national bloody disgrace. Like touching up the colours on the Mona Lisa. The station was perfect before. That ruination, the old crumbling walls, cracks in the ceiling, dust and cobwebs. And those stained-glass windows...ah, the windows. Beautiful. And now, look, look...' He swept an imperial hand around the station. 'Modern. Spotless. *Coherent*. It's disgusting.'

Charles hefted his suitcase onto a seat, brushed grit off the one beside. His considerable weight slammed into the hard plastic. He grimaced, a scrunched-up little boy face. Major stood before him, nervous, braced for the next instalment.

'That's the real underhistory, don't you see? Do you not understand that, Major?'

Charles shook his head softly, and thought of a place he had visited once in Berlin, a few years after the Wall came down. On the eastern side of the city, around the corner from an Irish pub. Fantastic, fantastical: a walled-in wasteland, a whole block that had been bombed to hell by the Allies and never rebuilt. He supposed the Communists hadn't had the money for it. And it was fabulous. People lived up there, in the husks of old buildings. Artists, hippies, probably criminal types; youngsters with beads in their hair. This carpet of golden powder, ruined buildings on all sides. And an airplane, its tail sticking up at a sixty degree angle, scarcely believable. Half-buried in the ground – it must have crashed right down out of the sky, and they just left it. People would pay good money

nowadays for something like that – some modern art monstrosity... But this was organic. This was living history; generations piled on generations. Graffiti, scorch-marks, a film of dust settled on everything...

‘Fuck it,’ Charles said. ‘You wouldn’t understand. You’re like the rest of this mob. With your...’ The same regal sweep. ‘...modernising. *Progress*. Tsch. *Progress* my hole.’

A cat flicked its eyes from side to side. It blinked, licked its pale-pink lips and yawned, its eyes rolling wildly towards the back of its head. The animal was marmalade in colour, white tufts under the chin and on the paws. It was a stray, but looked well-fed and healthy. The charity of a soft-hearted retiree with too much food in the house, or a child living in a fourth storey flat. The cat carried the natural wariness of the stray in its aspect, a sort of pre-tensed readiness, but was calm and unafraid. It slinked through a gap and hopped onto a low wall in the station yard, balancing there, settling itself into gravity and measurement, the languid Zen movement of its species.

It yawned again and gazed indifferently on a small man in worker’s overalls. He was hunched over, pulling on the heavy zip of a canvas hold-all, working it through a catch, grunting quietly with the effort. Finally the zip closed. The man stood and looked around, slowed his breathing. He met the cat’s gaze – patient, ancient. He smiled and threw a loose stone at the animal, calling, ‘Go home, cat. Go on. Home, home.’ The cat watched the stone sail past. It waited a few moments, establishing its dignity, then hissed and leaped away into oil-stained undergrowth.

(i see between the layers of these things i squeeze through like blood from cut skin this small event is a travesty a waste a fucking tragedy)

Whistles sounded, brakes squealed, the wheels and track slowed the tempo of their circular duet, but it still didn’t feel like a proper train journey for Claire. She clutched her bag tightly, checking again that the drawstrings were tied. She flicked a piece of food off the side, then untied the bag, making sure that her purse was safely ensconced inside, retying it,

clutching the drawstrings once more. Claire glanced at her watch: her father would be late, he had called to tell her. Wait in the station for half an hour. Buy a magazine. Get a cup of coffee. She didn't drink coffee, and wished she wasn't on her own.

The train lurched towards journey's end, jerky and uncomfortable, brakes applied and eased, that huge momentum grinding to a halt. They passed a grimy council estate, barricaded away behind high walls, and it looked the same as every other council estate Claire had ever seen. They always looked the same, with those peeling, stubby gates out front, black dust collecting in the pebbledash finish, rugged grass shooting out from cracks in the pavements.

A heavy middle-aged woman leaned across with a practised, reassuring smile and said, 'Those estates probably looked nice once.' Claire remembered her manners, replying, 'I beg your pardon?' The woman leaned closer, a cloud of perfume surrounding her, softly glowing pearls around her neck. 'Those council estates. They probably looked quite nice once upon a time. You know, when they were built. Everything looks nice when it's just been built, doesn't it?' She smiled again, conspiratorial, somehow ingratiating, and Claire couldn't think of a reply.

She looked out the window, as the outer reaches of the station slid past her vision, looked down at her bag, at the pulled drawstrings. She could feel the mild burn of embarrassment rise through her face, like dyed-red thermometer mercury. Massive square transit crates, stacks of iron and wood, discarded pallets, a tiny administrative hut, overhead wires, the loose flotsam of a railway yard. Claire gathered her courage and looked back up, but the woman was gone. She had stood in a line between the seats with the other impatient passengers, waiting for the slow halt to finally end, their bodies swaying erratically like saplings in the breeze.

'Did you see this? The thing in Limerick. Weird.'

Margaret leaned back from the computer screen, rubbed her neck, glanced at Austin. He was her boss, though their relationship had evolved to one of mutual respect and, more importantly, mutual blindness. Austin had outlined it: 'You don't make any major fuck ups and don't pay too

much attention to the hours I might be keeping around here, and I don't notice you spending half the day on the phone to your sister. How does that sound? Then we're both happy.' Margaret had willingly agreed. Now she called his attention to the current lead story on the news website she frequented, its bleached-green headline glowing across most of the top of her screen. Austin shook his head, annoyed, and pulled on a suit jacket, checking the fit across his thin shoulders.

'Nah, nah, I haven't the time. Read it out to me. I'm late already for the golf dinner. Go on, read it out.'

Margaret said, "'Six hospitalised in suspected gas attack.'" That's the headline on it. The story then, it's basically, a quantity of poison gas was released into a café in Limerick city centre around closing time yesterday. So that was about seven in the evening. That's crazy, isn't it? The Guards haven't said what kind of gas it was yet, it says here, but it was let off into an air-conditioning vent. Jesus.'

'That's it?'

'No,' she continued, 'six people were sent to hospital "in a very serious condition". I'm quoting that from the Guards. And then they found a note, taped to the underside of one of the tables: "This is no longer the planet of sound."' She looked up again. "'The planet of sound?'" What's that supposed to mean?'

Austin checked his tie in an ornamental mirror hanging above his desk, bared his teeth, tilted his head, his face a distorted, rubbery approximation of an Aztec mask. He nodded in approval and turned back to Margaret, saying, 'So...what? That's it?'

'What do you mean, so what?'

'So did they catch the bastards or not?'

'No, they don't have a clue. Look, I'm only telling you, Austin. Don't get annoyed at me because the Guards don't know who did it.'

Austin sighed heavily and shook his head, jamming a pack of cigarettes and a lighter into his pants pocket. He reached for his mobile phone just as it rang.

'Yeah...? What? ...Aw, *what?* ...Fuck's sake. Fine, fine. I'll be there in five minutes.' He hung up and angrily reached for a cigarette, then

realised even more angrily that he couldn't smoke in here anymore.

'Considine wants me to stay on for a bit, the cunt. There's some problem with the signalling on platform seven or something.' Austin gave Margaret an imploring look; he seemed on the verge of tears. '*Fuck* it anyway. I'm already late.'

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Agatha liked to visit the station on sunny days. It seemed more alive then, a happier place, the bustle and racket suffused with that golden luminescence. She would notice dust motes drifting through shafts of sunlight, and always smile at the fresh pleasure this gave her. That hazy rain of dust, its leisurely descent.

And the windows. So bright and expansive, the sunlight a point on every bow and corner, every lovely imperfection. She had read somewhere that glass was a liquid, at some elementary chemical level; it moved, incredibly slowly, the molecules melting down to the frame. Old windows were infinitesimally thicker at the bottom than the top. This thought was beautiful to Agatha, to a degree that surprised her. She sometimes gazed at the tiny bubbles frozen in the glass, the hairline darkneses in its centre, and smiled at the fact that nobody alive today would see these windows lose their shape.

She reached for her sandwich and carefully peeled off the wrapping, taking a small bite. Crumbs broke from the bread, a tiny avalanche down her chest, bouncing off her coat's belt buckle. She smiled again and brushed them to the ground. Her hands were thin and bony, and she noticed liver spots she hadn't seen before.

Agatha sighed and took another small bite, then replaced the sandwich inside her bag. That would do for the cat later. She chewed thoughtfully, her eyes wandering from the digital information boards to the gleam of cleaning solvents on the tiled centre floor to the scruffy youngster

staring at his hand across the way. It was amusing: he stood, leaning slightly, long matted hair and a t-shirt emblazoned with the slogan ‘Jesus loves you – everyone else thinks you’re a prick’, staring intently as he moved his hand back and forth, slowly, before his eyes. The youngster frowned, concentrating and confused, moved his hand again, in and out, tilting his head for a different perspective. He shook his head and closed his eyes, smiling ruefully to himself. He sat back down.

‘May I sit here?’

She looked up at a small man in overalls, smiling pleasantly and pointing at the seat next to hers. Agatha shifted position automatically, said, ‘Of course, of course.’ He sat and smiled in thanks, dropping his bag and pulling an orange from his pocket. Juice misted into the air as he cracked the peel, followed by a suffusion of the fruit’s sweet/tangy aroma. Agatha linked her fingers and sat back, contented in the moment. She stole glances at her neighbour: short hair, thick eyebrows, handsome if unremarkable. He had the sort of boyish face that looked younger than its years, punctuated by deep-set eyes that marked the true age. They sat together, not speaking, the noisy rhythms of a busy station receded to a distant burble.

The young man smiled and said, ‘The station is nice now, isn’t it? Looks nice.’

‘Yes, it’s lovely. Lots of light. It was very rundown before. It’s nicer to draw now.’ She stopped and smiled, a little abashed. ‘I’m not very good. I just, you know. It passes the time.’

‘No, that’s a good hobby to have. I’ve always liked art.’

Agatha chuckled, saying, ‘What I produce is not art. It’s far from art. Ach, it’s relaxing.’

The young man nodded in thought and said, ‘I like it when stations are empty. You know, at night, or very early. When there’s hardly anyone around. I like the quietness.’

‘Oh, yes?’

‘Yeah... I’m sorry, would you like some?’

He offered her the orange; she declined with a shake of her hand.

‘Mm. The quietness...that’s what I like. There’s too much noise in the world now. Look at that fellow over there.’

He pointed towards a florid-faced man sitting with a suitcase, bellowing at a thin, nervous-looking creature who stood before him. The young man said, ‘He’s too loud. Isn’t he? Roaring and shouting at his poor friend there. And about what? It’s all just noise. Pointless white noise.’ He turned back to her. ‘Did you ever think about how quiet the earth must have been before humans? Before we came along with our speech and our machines and cars and televisions. There must have been far less sound on the planet before the advent of man. A few animals howling, the wind, the rain, volcanoes and earthquakes...what else? There was hardly any noise.’

Agatha laughed gently. ‘You may be right. But I’m afraid I’m probably the opposite to you. It’s the babble and the movement I mainly come here for. I like it, the people milling around, all that life and business. It’s...’ She paused. ‘You don’t feel lonely while you’re in the middle of that.’

He stood and wiped his hands on his overalls, saying, ‘That’s okay. It’s okay to feel like that. I know what you mean.’ He stopped, looking around. ‘Listen. There’s going to be some work done here later on. Maintenance and so on.’

‘I thought you worked here, alright. With the overalls and the bag.’

‘Yeah, that’s right. Anyway, it’s, ah, there’s going to be a lot of dust and dirt and stuff in the air, lot of commotion, so I’d suggest you tip off home soon enough. Just for your own sake, like. Lot of, ah, pollutants and dust and things in the air, you know. Bad for the lungs. We’ll be clearing out the area anyway, but just for your own sake. Okay?’

He picked up his bag and smiled, nodding goodbye. Agatha said, ‘I’ll do that, thank you. Thanks for the advice.’ The young man moved away, his body leaning with the downward pull of the bag.

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in cold rain my hands glow a sandy colour they are flecked with alien matter)

Sounds of an argument wafted towards Claire as she walked along the platform. Her legs felt a little unsteady, that mild approximation of seasickness occasioned by the slalom of the train as it pulled in. Nausea settled in the hollow of her stomach, and she hoped her father wouldn't be late.

The argument grew louder, a fog of soundwaves clarifying into words, pauses, emphases, and then Claire was passing them, two men in official-looking blazers. The heavier of the two was jabbing a finger at the other's chest, vein pulsing in his temple, the glint of precious metal in a tooth filling. He said, 'This is *your* responsibility. Yours. Not someone else's. Yours.' The other man shifted back a few feet, eyes up towards an advertising placard. He muttered something about a speech he had to give at a social function that evening. The heavy man raised a hand flat before him, the semaphore of 'Stop.' He shook his head violently and said, 'No, Austin. It *can't* get done tomorrow. I don't give a flying shit about your golf dinner, and this must get sorted out today. *Now*. So do it.' The thin man bit his lip, defeated and sullen, eventually nodding acquiescence. His superior turned on his heel, calling back, 'And don't think this is the end of it. I've had it up to here with your fucking attitude, union be damned. You'll be hearing more about this.' The thin man waited until the other was at a safe distance, then contorted his face into a childish moue and recited, 'You'll hear more about this. You'll hear more about this.' He noticed Claire, and stopped; Claire noticed that she was staring, and carried on.

Damien finished his cigarette, sucking the hotness from the butt-end, that cloudy burn, and returned inside the station. The strap of the rucksack dug into his shoulder-blade. He wriggled his shoulders, grimacing, trying to shift the weight of the bag, but it made little difference. He glanced at his watch again: forty-five more minutes to wait. The watch hands pulsed softly under the glass casing, in tune with Damien's heartbeat. He smiled

in appreciation for a few seconds, despite his annoyance. An announcement squalled over the tannoy, but all Damien registered was the fuzzy ‘bing-bong’ at the beginning and end – the rest was just noise.

‘Bill Gates is so rich, apparently – get this now – he’s so rich that there’s not enough dollars in the world should he decide to cash in his wealth. Hah? Not enough actual paper money to give him what he’d be owed. Now there’s a man I could admire.’

Charles was riffing on another rant, this one about the inequities of the tax system and the masses of whining socialists who had, he believed, infiltrated the proper political parties. Major chewed three sticks of gum at once, stepping lightly from foot to foot, nodding metronomically as Charles held forth.

‘But there’s you, Major, with your soft spot for the “underclasses”, quote-unquote, and your benefits and education. With your *understanding*. ’Tis all a load of rubbish. I blame the religious; they were always too soft. Do you think the likes of that eejit over there appreciates what bleeding hearts like you try to do for him? The state of him.’

Major glanced over at a young man smiling giddily at his fingers as he wriggled them before his eyes, slow ropes swimming through the air. He looked around at other travellers, grinning dumbly, vague entreaties to share in the spectacle. Major sighed heavily and pulled a cigarette from the packet. He seemed about to speak, but nodded at Charles instead. He put the cigarette in his mouth, sighed, removed it and said, ‘I might...pop outside for a smoke, will I?’

Charles harrumphed and said, ‘Go on, then. You might as well.’ He turned and peered at the departures board. ‘Christ almighty. How much longer have we to wait for that bloody train?’

The display board was changing, digital characters, numbers and letters, their constituent points of light rearranged. One train had arrived, been checked and cleaned and refuelled, and was now ready for its outward journey. A message rolled across the top of the departures section of the board: the next train to Galway would now leave from platform three,

twenty-five minutes later than planned, and not platform seven. An accompanying verbal announcement explained that station personnel were currently experiencing some minor signalling difficulties, and thanked passengers for their co-operation.

Claire looked away from the board, bored and tense. She bit her fingernail and sucked apple juice through a straw. Her father still hadn't arrived.

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'You're late. You were meant to be here twenty...' Austin stopped, taking a second look at the man with the bag, properly noticing him only now. 'You're not the engineer. The engineer doesn't wear overalls.' The man stood there, stocky, a passive expression, clutching a canvas hold-all. He didn't speak. Austin frowned and said, 'Well – who are you, then? Come on, dummy. Speak. Did maintenance send you down here?'

The man nodded and placed the bag on the ground. He said, 'That's right. Boss's orders. Asked me to check out the, ah, the generator down here.'

'The generator? What fucking generator? ...That fucking Considine. He's only doing this to annoy me. That's it. Here – hold this.' Austin handed the man a slim manual and a torch. 'We'll fucking see about a generator.' He took off towards the inner station, talking over his shoulder. 'If you see the engineer, tell him it's this platform, alright? He knows what to do.'

The man smiled and saluted. He waited a few seconds, then walked briskly towards a small stand-alone hut, twenty yards down the platform. He checked nobody was watching and ducked behind the hut, bending and reaching into a thick undergrowth of weeds and rubbish. The man felt

around, concentrating on touch-information, and finally smiled. He had found what he was searching for.

Margaret locked her office door, giving the key an extra wriggle for insurance. It was unlikely that someone would break into an office in a train station, but in these dangerous, unpredictable times, one could never be sure. Her sister had agreed with her, talking on the phone five minutes before: the world was gone to hell. She passed the front desk, nodding in greeting to the girl working it today, and noticed how much she was perspiring already. Margaret was significantly overweight. She knew this, and pledged to rectify matters as soon as she had more time.

Weightwatchers, maybe, or that other thing, like yoga, the thing Madonna was fond of.

But that could wait. She walked towards the snack kiosk in the centre of the station, a functional, plasticky-looking structure, reminiscent of a fast-food chain. Another signifier of the encroaching Americanisation of the country, she angrily noted. Margaret was fumbling for change in her pocket when a tall, crazy-looking man in a profane t-shirt stepped in front of her, a rapturous smile on his face, his eyes looking beyond her.

He said, 'Everything, everything. It's all moving. Fucking hell. Can you see it?' and caught her by the shoulders. His smile broadened as he said, 'Whoa. You're moving too. Fucking great. Excellent.'

Margaret recoiled and slapped his hands away, snarling, 'Get your hands off me, you tramp.' The man spun away, going low on one knee and coming up with a strange grace, and started pointing at random objects around him. She looked around for the security guard, that dozy young fellow who was more interested in ogling the girls than paying attention to his job. There was no sign of him. Margaret set off towards the lost baggage office and was stopped by a small man in overalls. He nodded behind her, in the direction of the lunatic with the long hair.

'I saw what happened there,' the man said. 'Don't worry about him.'

'Oh. Right?'

‘Mm-hm. I’ll take care of it. You needn’t worry about him anymore.’

‘Well...alright. Thank you.’

The man noticed someone in the distance, smiled at Margaret and moved away. She stood there for a moment, feeling oddly self-conscious, then moved herself. A skinny young girl stood between the kiosk and a rubbish bin, speaking *sotto voce* into her mobile phone as she gazed about the station, fretful, close to tears. The girl said, ‘...told him I didn’t like waiting on my own but he just said he’d be late. He said buy a magazine and wait for him. And I’m waiting nearly an hour now but he’s still not here.’

Margaret noticed that the girl had turned away from her bag, a large canvas hold-all, where it lay on the ground some ten feet from her. She thought of warning her to keep an eye on it, but decided to wait until the girl’s call had ended. Margaret picked up a chocolate bar and stood in line, delving into the depths of her pocket for payment. Her peripheral vision caught a commotion near the front desk: the crazy in the lewd t-shirt was aggravating a heavy-set man, pulling at the handle of his suitcase and laughing dizzily. The big man looked close to violence, his thick hands balled into fists and rage in his face. A diminutive fellow in a smart suit stood between them, pacifying the man with the suitcase. Margaret tutted, seeking out the maintenance man who had promised to sort the situation out. He, like the useless security guard, was nowhere to be seen.

The girl working the kiosk, a pretty, flighty thing with a high ponytail and blond streaks, was giving change to the customer in front. She beamed and said, ‘Have a nice day, sir.’ The argument by the front desk was escalating, noises of trouble seeping like an electric tension throughout the building. Margaret dropped the chocolate and scanned the place for the security guard. She saw Austin then, at the far side, placing his hand on Mr. Considine’s shoulder, spinning him around, getting in close to his face, angry, verbose. Mr. Considine seemed shocked, before recovering his bearings, fighting back.

Margaret groaned and held her head in her hands for a moment, then struck out towards the two men. Their private feud would have to

wait – there were more pressing matters to sort out. She noticed the man in overalls strolling out a side exit, his face darkened in the interior’s shadow, then the cold brilliance of the sunshine like an interstellar beam into which he ascended.

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‘How are you? I saw you leave there, just said I’d come over.’

Agatha turned in surprise, then smiled when she saw her friend from earlier. He was now without his bag. He smiled also, the same placid, non-committal expression as before. Agatha said, ‘Oh, hello. Yes, I’m taking your advice. ... When are you starting your work?’

He checked his watch and said, ‘Ooh, not too long now. Should be all happening very soon.’

‘Righto. Well, I’ll be on my way. I think I see my cat going home ahead of me there. He’s not my cat, he’s a stray, but I feed him sometimes.’ She smiled again, a little embarrassed. ‘Well. Sure, I’ll let you back to it. Take care.’

‘Yeah, take care yourself, now.’

The young man began walking away from Agatha, away from the station. She watched him momentarily, shrugged and turned for home. She fixed her coat buckle more comfortably on her midriff and headed towards her bungalow. She mulled over whether to give the cat some fish or meat for its dinner this evening, settling on both. The young man crossed the road, walked thirty yards and stopped at a post box. He pulled a letter from his pocket, marked urgent and addressed to the local Garda station, and slipped it in the slot. He stepped out of his overalls, rolling them into a neat bundle, and started walking again.

He was almost out of earshot when a row of elegant, elevated windows exploded outwards in a nebula of glass fragments and rent matter and glittering dust. One enormous eruption, chaos and distant screams in its wake; then silence fell.

Two hundred yards away Agatha gasped. She didn't turn around.

(my heart stops it stops)

(this is no longer the planet of sound)

I see between the layers of these things
I squeeze through like blood from cut skin