



WHISKEY FOR THE HOLY GHOST

Edward Mullany

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“Piano Lessons,” “I Wasn’t,” and “The House Inside the House”

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Westport, NY

“Nothing is ever the same as they said it was. It’s what I’ve never seen before that I recognize.”

—Diane Arbus

“Silence is so accurate.”

—Mark Rothko

For Alida

And to the memory of Scarlett O'Loughlin

CONTENTS

WRITERS

One Last Novel	3
Doreen	5
The Ashtray	7
The Last of the Mohicans	9
The Book About Angels	11
The House Inside the House	13
East is East	15
The Ocean at Night	17
Ozymandias	19
Basho's Ghost	21
Orpheus at Rest	23
Translated from the French	25
Red Hook	27
Story For Grace Paley	29
Goethe's Fire	33

DRIFTERS

Bailey	67
Ummagumma	71
A Movie I Fell Asleep Watching	73
House-sitting in Arizona	75
In the Financial District	77
The Thirty-ninth Floor	79
Thunder on the Mountain	81
Vanderbilt and Atlantic	83
Out of Sand	85
How Green was my Valley	87
The Humanities	89
Maggie	91
Some of the Dharma	93
Flemington	95
Crossing the Prairie	97

PAINTERS

Bill	37
Red Flowers	39
Cezanne's Apples	41
The Seventh Demon	43
The Golden Fleece	45
Daniel	47
Okay, Yes, Sure	49
Gog and Magog	51
No One	53
Oranges and Lemons	55
West with the Night	57
Blackbird	61
The Two El Grecos	63

DRINKERS

My Friend Kate	101
The Last Bodhisattva	103
A True Story	105
Sharlene	107
Count Westwest	109
Sunset Park	111
Chattanooga	113
The Riddler	115
Gowanus	117
Carbon Prevails	119

FAMILIES

A Denouement	123
The Unseen Shore	125
In the Park	127
Five	129
Arapahoe	131
The Sky and the Garden and the	
Road	133
Kite	135
I Wasn't	137
Ode to Joy	139
Betty Sue	141
My Great Aunt	143
Mom	145
The Three of Us	147
On Every Street	149
Nantucket	151

MADNESS

Overcoat and Fedora	155
Hades at Night	157
Piano Lessons	159
A Strange Case	161
From the Ramparts of the Castle	163
Jim	165
Wednesday	167
A Mountain in the Distance	169
The Parable of the Lovers	171
Landscape with Figures	173
Albert Camus	175
Kafka's Axe	177
A Story My Landlord Told Me While	
Fixing My Sink	179
The Lion and the Martyr	181

PARAMOURS

A Photograph of You	185
Sparky and Tom	187
Bruno	189
No Quarter	191
Our Tree	193
A Story Without an Ending	195
In Michigan	197
Some Plants	199
Michiko	201
The Girl Who Fainted at Church	203
Evelyn	205
Love Over Gold	207
Another Version of the Truth	211
Bessie in White	213
Bessie in Yellow	215
Brighton Beach	217
Somewhere in the Forest	219
Beside You in Time	221

WRITERS



ONE LAST NOVEL

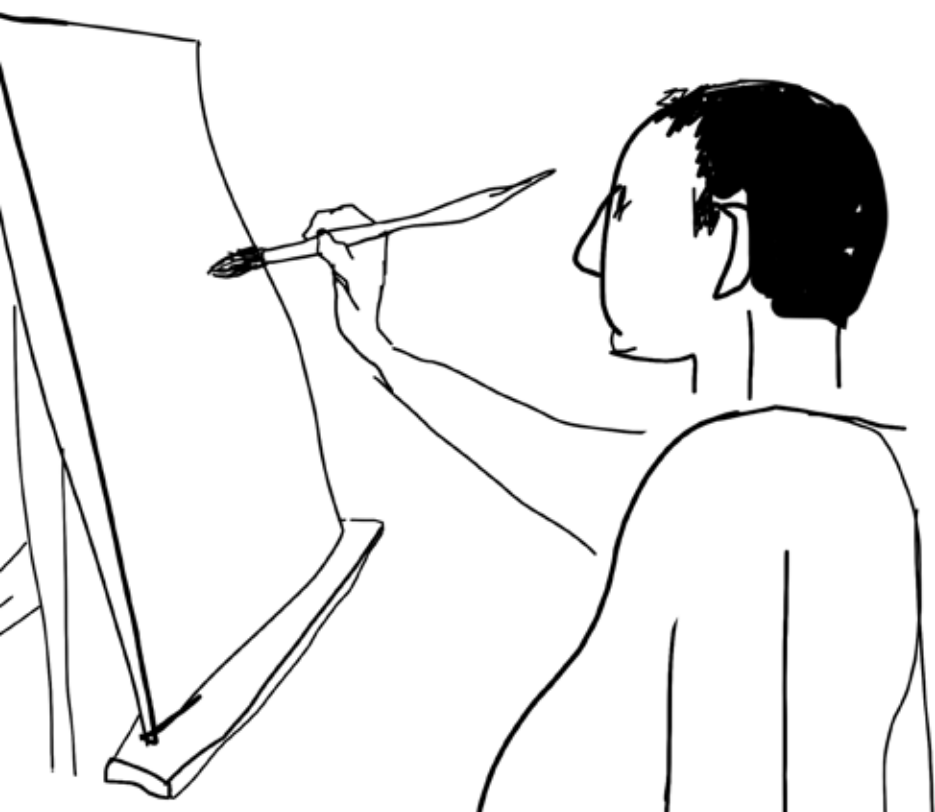
There was a novelist who, once she'd reached old age, could not decide whether she wanted to attempt to write one last novel before the event of her death, which she'd assumed would be occurring soon, although, after she'd decided in favor of the attempt, and in fact had succeeded in it, not only writing this one last novel and completing it, but also seeing it published, and being witness to its reception in the press and by her audience, which at that point in her career was quite loyal, she discovered that she was still alive, and even older than she was before, and that she was now again faced with the question of whether she should attempt to write one more last novel before she died.



DOREEN

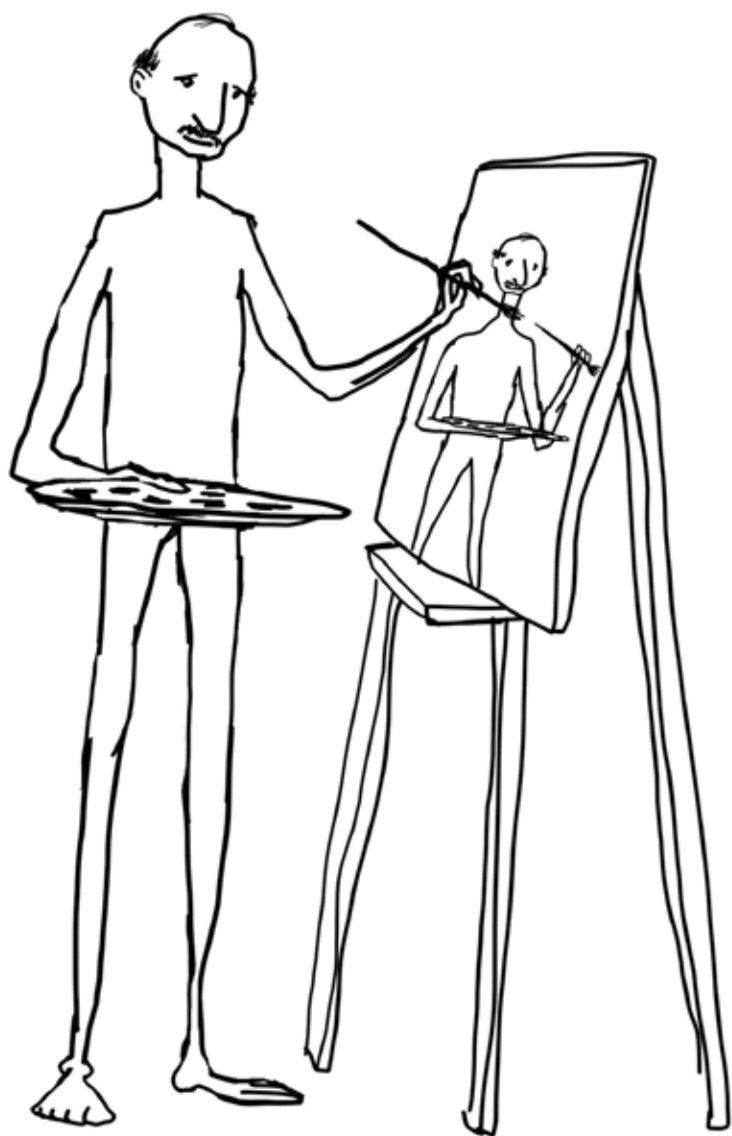
I was in front of my computer, at my desk, working on my novel, when I heard someone knocking at the door of my apartment, though I hadn't heard anyone coming up or down the stairwell inside the building, and when I went to the door and opened it, and looked out onto the landing, no one was there, though on the floorboards at my feet I saw a large manila envelope that seemed to have been left by whoever had been knocking, and that I discovered, on opening it, contained a black and white photo of me sitting at my computer, at my desk, working on my novel.

PAINTERS



BILL

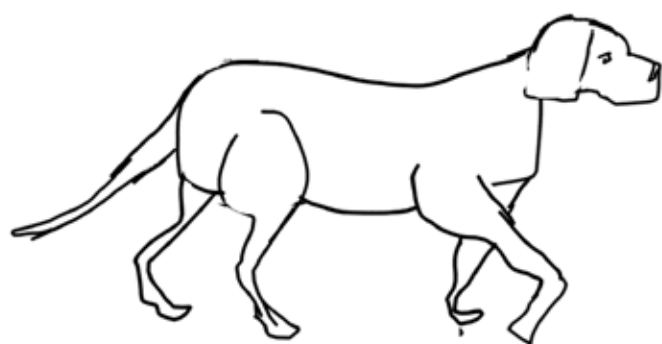
I know an older man who, on sunny afternoons, drives out into the countryside with his brushes and his oils and his canvases, and sets himself up, in the presence of a view, or an overlook, on a wooden chair, in front of an easel, so that he can copy, or represent, that which he is looking at, the way painters used to do, and sometimes still do, though he often expresses the concern to me, in conversation, that the younger generations, of which he considers me a part, no longer appreciate what he does, and that they prefer more trifling occupations and amusements.



RED FLOWERS

The paintings my father did have brought him much fame, although, because he died when I was young, before his paintings began to sell at auctions for large sums of money, so that now they can be found only in private collections and museums, I suppose it is more accurate to say that his paintings have brought fame to his name, which, because I share it, has also brought fame to me, though I suppose the better word here might be recognition, insofar as people I meet often recognize the name when they see it or hear it, if I happen to be introduced to them, though I myself have done nothing that is worthy of recognition, though I have tried, and am still trying.

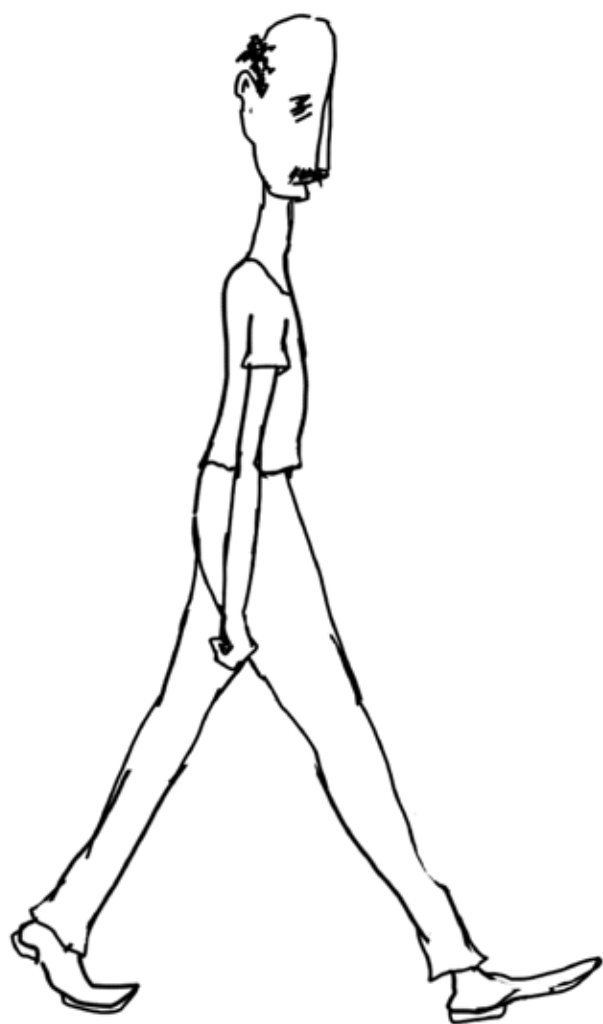
DRIFTERS



BAILEY

I have a dog that ended up with me after a friend of mine from grad school had left it with me one summer, so that he could travel overseas, not as an indulgence, or because he wanted to have fun (though if fun presented itself to him, he'd said, he of course imagined he'd enjoy it), but because the dissertation that he was working on, toward his degree, required him to do research in a country on a different continent, and he felt that to bring the animal with him might be more trouble than it was worth, for he did not know whether the places he would be lodging would allow him to keep a pet, and, besides, he would not be remaining in one location, after he landed, but would be moving around to different sites, within that country, often enough that he would have neither the energy nor the time to attend to the dog in even the most cursory ways, all of which was understandable to me, and which I in fact agreed with, and encouraged, as a line of thinking, for I was fond of the dog, and was happy at the prospect of walking it in the park each day, during that summer, and then returning it to my friend when he got back; but even though my friend did eventually get back, and showed up at my apartment one evening to say hello to me and to his dog, and to in fact hug the dog, who was ecstatic to see him, and jumping up and down with

its tail wagging, and so forth, my friend explained to me, once the drama had subsided, that he had not arrived to definitively take the dog back, but, if I would allow him, to say goodbye to it, and to ask me if I would keep it, and take care of it as he had, for while he was away he had fallen in love with a woman who was a citizen of the country in which he'd been doing his research, and, crazy as it might sound, had married this woman, and had decided to start a life with her over there, without his dog, on that continent, and not even bother with finishing his dissertation, or obtaining his degree, which he'd realized, over the summer, had meant nothing to him, except inasmuch as it had led him to the circumstance he was now in, though he understood, he said, how it might mean something to friends of his, like myself, who were enrolled in the same program as he'd been enrolled in, and who perhaps were destined for a different life than that for which he himself was destined, though by 'destined' he did not mean, he explained, anything particularly extraordinary, or grandiose, but merely the paths of existence that each of us, including himself, could not help but take.



UMMAGUMMA

One night, when I couldn't sleep, I got up and pulled on my clothes and went down the stairwell in the building where my apartment is and started along the sidewalk in the direction of the neighborhood where is one of the bridges that spans the body of water that separates the borough I live in from the city toward which I was heading, though by the time I'd reached the bridge, and had begun to cross it, so that the view of the sky was no longer obstructed, and I could see to a greater distance than I could from any other location that I might have found myself during this excursion from my home, I realized that the night was almost over, and that morning was about to begin, though it was still early enough that I passed very few pedestrians on the bridge, and those I did pass seemed to express, in the way they carried themselves, as well as in the way that they returned my gaze, or avoided returning it, some mood or feeling that was elusive and inarticulate, but of which I was also conscious in myself.

DRINKERS



MY FRIEND KATE

I am at a bar with my friend Kate, who has just told the bartender that she is mourning the death of her mother, though her mother is still alive, and though Kate is laughing as she says this, so that even if her mother were *not* alive her statement that she is mourning would seem untrue, or disingenuous, or, anyway, uttered by someone so inebriated or troubled that her words could not be taken at face value, which is what the bartender seems to be implying now, as he raises one of his eyebrows at us, while he draws a beer into the glass that he has taken from Kate and is refilling, from the tap, at her request.



THE LAST BODHISATTVA

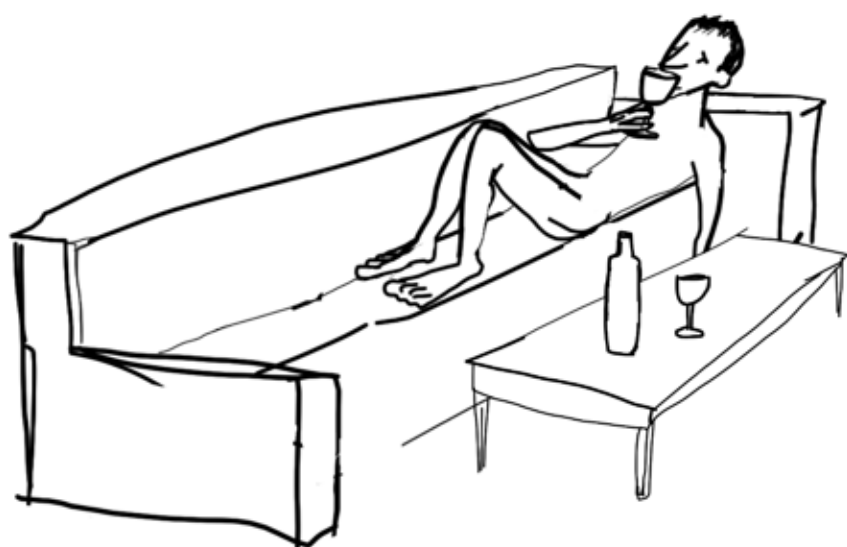
“I am the last bodhisattva,” says a man, to me, at the party to which I’ve gone with a friend who I lost track of almost as soon as we entered the apartment, which is so crowded that I’ve decided to stay where I am, in the kitchen, drinking beer from a red plastic cup that the man who is speaking to me, and who is unbelievably drunk, continues to refill, from a hose connected to a keg that is immersed in a bucket of ice.

FAMILIES



A DENOUEMENT

When our dog, Lulu, died, we were without a dog for a long time, so that our house was empty except for the two of us, though finally we began to talk about getting another dog after one of our two daughters, the older one, had asked you one night, when you'd gone in the car to collect her from the airport into which she'd flown, during a break in a semester at college, when she was visiting us, whether you and I had thought about doing just that, getting another dog, though after her break was over, and we'd dropped her again at the airport, so that she could fly back to the city in which was the college at which she was enrolled, we slowly ceased to talk about the idea, without coming to a decision or resolution, though by this point in our lives we'd ceased to talk about almost anything, and mostly did not talk at all.



THE UNSEEN SHORE

Occasionally I can convince you, if our two daughters are already asleep, and if neither of us has much going on at work the next day, even if we do have some things going on, to stay up late with me and have a glass of wine and to talk about things the way we used to, when we first met, before we knew so much about each other that we began to feel as though there was nothing that one of us could reveal that the other didn't already know, although, when we do this, one of our daughters, the younger one, will often wake when she hears us and will come on down the hall and will make her way to the living room, where we are sitting together or lying together on the sofa, and will want to know why we're still up, and we'll smile at her and tell her, and then one of us, whoever happens to be closer, will get up and pick her up and carry her back to her bed and tuck her in, and after a few minutes will return to where the other of us is, still waiting, though at this point, although we are happy, we usually put the wine away and turn off the lights and go to bed ourselves.

MADNESS



OVERCOAT AND FEDORA

One morning there was a knock at my apartment door, though when I opened it I found no one on the landing, though I could hear footsteps in the stairwell, and could see, when I stepped to the banister and looked down, the man to whom the footsteps belonged, hurrying away, as if he'd wanted to wake me but had not wanted me to engage him, or try to detain him.



HADES AT NIGHT

There is a rumbling that comes from far away, near the horizon, though after the rumbling has ceased nothing seems to occur, and there is no sound until morning, at which point a red sun begins to rise, and all the creatures that have been standing there in the landscape become visible to each other, and commence yelling and roaring and screaming.

PARAMOURS



A PHOTOGRAPH OF YOU

I have a photograph of you in which you are standing in someone's back yard, during what looks like a barbecue, or an afternoon cookout, talking to a dog that is looking at you intently, as if it understands what you are saying to it, or as if it wants to understand, though I don't know what you could've been saying to it, and though I don't know, either, who took the picture, or whose house the back yard belongs to, or whether that person still lives there, or where it was, or when, though you seem in the photo to be only a little younger than you are now, though I know that this will not always be true, and that one day the photo will seem to me like it was taken long ago.



SPARKY AND TOM

This morning, when I got out of bed and went into the kitchen to make coffee for us, I saw one of our two cats, but not the other, which was unusual, because they tend to be together in the mornings, having slept somewhere on the floor in the living room, or in the hallway that extends between the living room and our bedroom, so before I made the coffee I picked up the one cat, who was purring, and looked around the apartment for the other, but I couldn't find him, so I went back to our bedroom to tell you that I couldn't find him, because he is your favorite and I knew that you would want to know, though you'd also have wanted to know if I'd been unable to find the other, the one that I was holding and that was purring, because it was true that you loved them both, even if one of them was your favorite, and it turned out that the one I was looking for was already in the bedroom with you, having slipped in through the door somehow, as I'd walked out, and having jumped up onto the bed and flopped down on my pillow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward Mullany is the author of three previous books with Publishing Genius—*If I Falter at the Gallows*, *Figures for an Apocalypse*, and *The Three Sunrises*. He is also the creator of the comic strip *Rachel and Ben*, and an unpublished graphic novel *Sursum Corda*.

"I can't help but describe this work as ministering. What else do you call something as nourishing, as consoling, as *Whiskey for the Holy Ghost*? The stories and sketches of this book buzz with Mullany's singularly humane absurdism. There's something so generous in how each page begins anew, opening and closing with a quixotic faith in the next logical step... We're never much more than a sketch, it turns out, a moment with nowhere to land, and no one honors the awakening of that moment with more tenderness and humor than Edward Mullany."

—Jacob White, author of *Being Dead in South Carolina*

"Whimsical and deeply soulful, Mullany's book presents the complex human experience in vignettes that are humorous, sorrowful, shocking, and heartening. Written in a style that's been burnished to sound like pure human thinking, these fantastical tableaux are our real thoughts and feelings, the rare art that shows us our strangeness, and makes the world new."

—Craig Beaven, author of *In Arcadia*, *Natural History*, and *Teaching the Baby to Say I Love You*

"Like Cubist pictures, which are complete in themselves ... the collection becomes living fiction, as close to a truly organic text as we are likely to see."

—W. Lawrence Hogue, Moores Professor of English, Emeritus,
University of Houston

"Edward Mullany pulls the structure of the narrative out of limitations that had never occurred to me... His drawing and writing share the expressive warmth and friendly bite of a fountain pen on a napkin between friends at a bar. Immensely readable in any location or mood."

—Maggie Umber, author of the graphic novels *Chrysanthemum* and *Under the Waves* and *Sound of Snow Falling*



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