

FRANK #1

and that it would absorb him just as long as his passion lasted. And then, I wondered, what then? But perhaps that was too stern a judgment.

And the second and much less worthy thought I had was this. No, not a thought; a phantom desire, a fantasy in my head; absurd, bizarre, because I knew only the barest outlines of her case, hadn't even examined her yet; the thought, the bizarre thought that perhaps, perhaps — up here in Donegal — not in Paris or Dallas or Vienna or Milan — but perhaps up here in remote Ballybeg was I about to be given — what is the vulgar parlance? — the chance of a lifetime, the one-in-a-thousand opportunity that can rescue a career — no, no, transform a career — dare I say it, restore a reputation? And if that opportunity were being offered to me and if after all these years I could pull myself together and measure up to it, and if, Oh my God if by some miracle pull it off perhaps ... *(He laughs in self-mockery.)*

Yes, I'm afraid so. People who live alone frequently enjoy an opulent fantasy life.

FRANK. One of the most fascinating discoveries I made when I was in the cheese business — well, perhaps not fascinating, but interesting, definitely interesting — one of the more interesting discoveries I made — this was long before I met Molly — for three and a half years I had a small goat farm on the island of Inis Beag off the Mayo coast — no, no not a farm for small goats — a farm for ordinary goats — well, extraordinary goats as a matter of fact because I imported two piebald Iranian goats; and the reason I wanted them, the reason I wanted Iranians, was that in all the research I had done and according to all the experts they were reputed to give the highest milk yield — untrue as it turned out — and because their pelts were in great demand as wall coverings in California — equally untrue, I'm afraid; and although they bred very successfully — eventually I had a herd of fourteen — they couldn't endure the Mayo winters with the result that I had to keep them indoors and feed them for six months of the

year — in Mayo the winter lasts for six months for God's sake — and of course that threw my whole financial planning into disarray. As you can imagine. And yes, as a matter of interest, they are small animals, Iranian goats. And, as I say, from Iran which, as you know, is an ancient civilization on South West ... Asia ...

But I was telling you about — what? The interesting discovery? Yes! Well, perhaps not an interesting discovery in any general sense but certainly of great interest to anybody who hopes to make cheese from the milk of imported Iranian goats, not that there are thousands of those people up and down the country! Anyhow — anyhow — what I discovered was this. I had those goats for three and a half years, and even after all that time their metabolism, their internal clock, stayed Iranian; never adjusted to Irish time. Their system never made the transition. They lived in a kind of perpetual jet-lag.

So what, you may ask? So for three and a half years I had to get up to feed them at three in the morning my time because that was 7:00 A.M. their time, their breakfast time! And worse — worse — they couldn't be kept awake and consequently couldn't be milked after eight in the evening because that was midnight their time — and they were lying there, dead out, snoring! Bizarre! Some imprint in the genes remained indelible and immutable. I read a brilliant article once by a professor in an American magazine and he called this imprint an engram, from the Greek word meaning something that is etched, inscribed, on something. He said it accounts for the mind's strange ability to recognise instantly somebody we haven't seen for maybe thirty years. Then he appears. The sight of him connects with the imprint, the engram. And bingo — instant recognition!

Interesting word — engram. The only other time I heard it used was by Mr. Rice, Molly's ophthalmologist. In that swanky Yankee accent of his — 'engram'. And he was born in the village of Kilmeedy in County Limerick for God's sake! I really never did warm to that man. No wonder his wife cleared off with another man. No, no, no, I don't mean that; I really don't mean that; that's a rotten thing to say; sorry; I

shouldn't have said that. But I was talking about the word engram and how he pronounced it. That was before any of the operations, and he was explaining that to Molly that if by some wonderful, miraculous good fortune her sight were restored, even partially restored, she would still have to learn to see and that would be an enormous and very difficult undertaking.

The way he explained it was this. She knew dozens of flowers; not to see; not by sight. She knew them only if she could touch them and smell them because those tactile engrams were implanted in her brain since she was a child. But if she weren't allowed to touch, to smell, she wouldn't know one flower from another; she wouldn't know a flower from a football. How could she?

And interestingly, interestingly, this very same problem was debated three hundred years ago by two philosophers, William Molyneux and his friend, John Locke. I came across this discussion in a Do-It-Yourself magazine of all places! Fascinating stuff, philosophy — absolutely fascinating. Anyhow — anyhow. If you are blind, said Molyneux, if you are blind you can learn to distinguish between a cube and a sphere just by touching them, by feeling them. Right! Right. Now, supposing your vision is suddenly restored, will you be able — by sight alone, without touching, without feeling — will you be able to tell which object is the cube and which the sphere? Sorry, friend, says Locke, you will not be able to tell which is which.

Then who comes along to join in the debate but another philosopher, Bishop George Berkeley, with his essay titled "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision." When the problem was put to the Lord Bishop, he came to the same conclusion as his friends. But he went even further. He said that there was no necessary connection *at all* between the tactile world — the world of touch — and the world of sight; and that any connection between the two could be established only by living, only by experience, only by learning the connection.

Which indeed, is really what Rice said to Molly three hundred years later. That most of us are born with all five senses; and with all the information they give us, we build up a sight world from the day we are born — a world of objects and ideas and meanings. We aren't given that world, he said. We make it ourselves — through our experience, by our memory, by making categories, by interconnections. Now Molly had only ten months of sight and what she had seen in that time was probably forgotten. So, if her sight were restored, everything would have to be learned anew: she would have to *learn* to see. She would have to build up a whole repertory of visual engrams and then, then she would have to establish connections between these new imprints and the tactile engrams she already possessed. Put it another way: she would have to create a whole new world of her own.

How in God's name did I get into all that? The goats! Engrams! Three o'clock every bloody morning! I'll tell you something: three and a half years on that damned island and I lost three stone weight. And not an ounce of cheese — ever!

Not that it mattered, I suppose. I didn't go into Inis Beag to make my fortune. God knows why I went. God knows why I've spent my life at dozens of mad schemes. Crazy ... Billy Hughes — Billy's an old pal of mine — Billy says I'm haunted for God's sake, always looking for ... whatever ...

Anyhow — anyhow. To go back for a second to our friend who knew what a cube was by touching it but couldn't identify it by sight alone. Rice talked a lot to Molly about all that stuff. He said neurologists had a word for people in that condition — seeing but not knowing, not recognising, what it is they see. He said that people in that condition are called agnostic. Yes. Agnostic. Strange; because I always thought that word had to do with believing or not believing.

MOLLY. I ~~didn't~~ like Mr. Rice when I first met him. But I got to like him. I suppose because I ~~tr~~usted him. Frank never warmed to him. He was put off by his manner and the way he spoke. But I thought that for all his assurance there was something ... unassured about him.