

New York Ahead

The first officer told me Albany was a city far up the Hudson River, capital of New York State. He said Albany had all the charm of Limerick, ha ha ha, a great place to die but not a place where you'd want to get married or rear children. He was from Dublin and knew I was from Limerick and when he sneered at Limerick I didn't know what to do. I'd like to destroy him with a smart remark but then I'd look at myself in the mirror, pimply face, sore eyes, and bad teeth and know I could never stand up to anyone, especially a first officer with a uniform and a promising future as master of his own ship. Then I'd say to myself, Why should I care what anyone says about Limerick anyway? All I had there was misery.

Then the peculiar thing would happen. I'd sit on a deck chair in the lovely October sun with the gorgeous blue Atlantic all around me and try to imagine what New York would be like. I'd try to see Fifth Avenue or Central Park or Greenwich Village where everyone looked like movie stars, powerful tans, gleaming white teeth. But Limerick would push me into the past. Instead of me sauntering up Fifth Avenue with the tan, the teeth, I'd be back in the lanes of Limerick, women standing at doors chatting away and pulling their shawls around their shoulders, children with faces dirty from bread and jam, playing and laughing and crying to their mothers. [...]

I'd sit on that deck chair and look into my head to see myself cycling around Limerick City and out into the country delivering telegrams. I'd see myself early in the morning riding along country roads with the mist rising in the fields and cows giving me the odd moo and dogs coming at me till I drove them away with rocks. I'd hear babies in farmhouses crying for their mothers and farmers whacking cows back to the fields after the milking.

And I'd start crying to myself on that deck chair with the gorgeous Atlantic all around me,
New York ahead, city of my dreams where I'd have the golden tan, the dazzling white teeth.
I'd wonder - what in God's name was wrong with me that I should be missing Limerick already,
city of gray miseries, the place where I dreamed of escape to New York. I'd hear my mother's
warning, The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know.

"Tis": A Memoir, Frank McCourt, 1999

Questions

A. Where does the scene take place? Give 2 elements. (2pts)

B. What do we know about the narrator? (3pts)

(Physical characteristics, hometown, goal, etc.)

C. What is “the peculiar thing”? (2pts)

D. What elements are associated with Limerick? Quote 2 elements. (2pts)

E. How does the narrator imagine New York? Quote 2 elements? (2pts)

F. What does America represent for him? (2pts)

G. What does his hometown represent for him? (2pts)

H. In your opinion, what is the meaning of the expression:

“The devil you know is better than the devil you don’t know”?

What is its link with the narrator’s situation? 60-70 words. (5pts)