

Lactic acid blocked veins in Patrick's arms. Glowering yellow spores coerced blood cells, murmuring in chorus, 'hurts, hurts, hurts'. Ascent halted. Nodules mossed. Decussated limbs gripping the escarpment face, Patrick hunched against a lactic pain ceiling.

His lolled head saw floodwater still rising beneath his heels. He hoovered the surface for objective relief: thatch, foliage, carts, were tissues torn angrily; baskets, fresh produce, foals, imperceptibly dipped into froth. Above him, ten more yards of limestone to the escarpment edge.

Patrick roared against the rock face, for oxygen was everywhere! He swatted his cramped fingers towards a jutting ledge.

But the ledge disintegrated. Patrick's lactic pain ceiling marked a gulf beyond which the last portion of escarpment was suspended. The pole of time that prised apart the guilt of his betrayals and the problem of his survival collapsed, and clattered into the floodwater. Patrick was exhausted. Lactate lowered: 'hurts, hurts, hurts, hurts'.

Crushed, the weight of his body hanging from his stiffened fingers, Patrick's arms began to tear. However, at each torn tendon, Patrick was able to fold his newly dextrous arms upon each other to distribute better the weight of his despondent mass. His platted arms frayed into more and more platted threads, pinching veins, cutting off cells, and... at last, appeasing lactate. Bliss streamed in from fissures in the rock face, as his arms became insensate and strong as silk, and he relaxed under the support of his beautiful silk cable. For it was Spring! Birds nested where his hands had been, and Celts jostled him playfully, he heard the shrill cries of children at play, and fescues tickled his feet. The floodwater stilled and glistened.

Patrick sunk blindly into his fibrous cocoon, his temple leaning against its warm interior, and he fell into a deep sleep...

He would leave for Scilly at first light, and return at the end of the war. He looked out of the conservatory onto the privy: box and aromatic herbs comprised knotted lines, framed inside four square quadrants. Through the mist of his condensed breath, these lines described the course of an enormous, circular river, with people strewn along it placid as cows, blushing with gifts. The water's flow stopped and banged as the river's mouth accumulated at its source, flooding the base of the higher ground. Shocked and fearing, his breath deepening against the glass, the furiously rising floodwater burst into the conservatory. Patrick hurled himself forward and burst through the glass into the garden. Patrick was a butterfly.

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Bursting his cocoon, his fritillary wings turgid, Patrick ascended effortlessly over the escarpment edge, into view of a grass plateau with children playing unattended. The children were feral and illiterate. They shrieked and ran in knotted lines just like those in the privy, in patterns that conjured more and more children, each more feral and illiterate than the last. They were hunched, and weak-kneed. Their hands were sore, palms like copper mines, fingers like rice. They waved oily clumps of wool, pieces of yarn pricked with teasel, crooked wheels, and shortened stools. Patrick noticed their abandoned homes – rallies of cottages on the slopes of surrounding valleys, their tenterhooks rotting, their front gates pivoted, their streams overflowing with grime. A few simpler children still spun threadless wheels or carried empty bags downhill. In the sky,

parachuting parents negotiated apprenticeships for their children with the owners of the mills.

Glad, Patrick fluttered forward to reassure those older than six of their immanent return to employment. But, meeting his bulbous eyes and his ribboned thorax, the children turned, deaf to their raised shrieks, and ran away as fast as they could to the valleys below. As they ran, their toys one by one rolled from their contracted hands. Hammer water, Patrick flinched, as their toys hit the grass. Leaks, pollution, 'your things...', Patrick muttered, in the wake of the children. He tried to blow the useful downhill to be put to use in the mills. It horrified him, this escape from improvement, this opposite of survival. He felt a mob assemble in his chest, a mob of disdain; clap-hearted disdain; disdain, disdain, disdain. Disdain for the litter.