Amblin's Daughter

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For six minutes and twenty-three seconds, Amblin held the only child he would ever have firmly in his arms, and he felt everything except true happiness. He kissed his daughter's forehead, kissed her left cheek, and kissed her right cheek. He thought about the far-off look his mother had on her face when she died, and it disturbed him to see it again in his daughter's face, because the last time he saw it, his wife was trying to give birth.

Megan pulled away and was gone into the corridor. Amblin sank to his knees. It was the gravity of the last important era of his life. He knew he'd sacrificed too much, and raised his daughter too well. He knew that from this day on, Megan would visit him only a few weeks out of every year until the day he died, and that those few weeks would turn into one or two weeks, if her life turned out as good as he had planned. Amblin screamed at two old ladies. They threatened to beat the living Christ out of him with their steel walking ladders.
He realized the greatest moment of his life was occurring right now. So he screamed again and ran into the smoking room. Out of all the times she would come visit him, there would be only a few minutes per day, at most, in which Amblin could reach out and touch her, and smell her hair. At least, without appearing obsessive to her and the handsome boy she'd bring along when she came home. He would hope to feel her touching him back whenever those few minutes ran their course, scattered in seconds across the hours. In his despair, Amblin imagined that the young man would do everything to his daughter that he ever wanted to do, and it horrified Amblin to accept, at last, that this younger version of him would go even further than Amblin ever dared to dream.

She was eighteen years old. Her birthday was March 14th, 1992. And her mother was from Láirge.
Megan's first American freeway was the 105 West and her second was the 110 South. The moment her taxi climbed the three hundred foot Harbor Freeway Interchange, she laid her eyes on the smog jungle of the Los Angeles Basin, and squinted into the haze to find its ominous skyscrapers set against the faint wall of the San Gabriel Mountains. And she felt predestined. She had known exactly what the next four years would be like, but now she also knew that she'd go on to graduate school. It would have to be somewhere prettier, and cleaner, probably Yale, or at least Cornell. For every Plan B, Megan had Plans C to F. She was no longer just sure of her future. She wanted it to happen faster.

I suppose she felt the same way when she saw me for the first time. I had seen her first, of course, walking up the street on my way to the party, and that was when Megan jumped out of the taxi, paid the driver, and had him hit the trunk switch. She threw her luggage onto the
curb. One of the bags didn't quite make it, so she kicked it. Then said she was done and thank you and you can go now. The driver drove on, though it hurt him to leave after all the times he had looked at her in the rear-view mirror because she was too absorbed in the ugly city she'd just stepped into. He turned the corner and lived the rest of his life in relative loneliness, and peace, if you could call it that.

I was at the front gates of the luxury apartments by now, and I was ready to go through them to the party without stopping to help her, but unfortunately, she spotted me glancing back at her, and immediately asked if I was going inside, and then asked if I could carry one of the awfully heavy cases. I thought nothing about it. I'd help this very cute girl with the very cute accent move some stuff, and then turn my own corner like the taxi driver. She asked me where her room was and I led the way. I did not feel her staring at my back the whole time, but as it turns out, something was happening as Megan looked at me.

She approved of my nape, for one thing. And the curve of my shoulders, and the curve of my back. And my butt. She didn't notice I was in the very early stages of
bald spot development, because she was already hopelessly in love with me. I was an American boy, sculpted like a porcelain doll of Chinese romanticism. Megan had seen a fair share of Chinese people on television and computer screens in her life. But she never knew they could look as close to being White as I did. I never told her I was Vietnamese, of course, because she never asked. But I do know a lot about her.

She was born in Galway, which is a city and a county in Ireland. She had never left Galway until the day she left home. On that day, Megan's father, Amblin, took his brother's 1988 white Datsun pickup truck and drove his daughter all the way to Dublin International Airport for a total of 214 kilometers, paid five euros to park it for an hour, carried his daughter's fifty pounds of luggage to the check-in, and held her hand as they walked to the departure gate.

Amblin's idea, which seemed brilliant at the time, but gutted him after that he thought about it, was that he would not only save money by driving from Galway to Dublin and back, even if it cost him over a quid a liter, but he could use this time to finally tell Megan everything he had ever wanted to tell her, yet couldn't.
That's not how it went. Megan fell asleep as she always did on long trips, but especially on that day, because she could not get any rest thinking about how much better life would be starting from the day after. It would be like turning eighteen all over again, except this time, she's doing it in America. Amblin stopped the truck several times and tried to wake her up. He bought her several cups of coffee, and Megan drank it before the coffee powder melted. She knew nothing her father said now could make light of the insult he had felt at her acceptance into St. Andrew's, and the even stranger look on his face when she told him she'd accepted admission into an expensive private university in California, and she knew how fleeting bitterness could be.

For once in his life, Amblin ranked Scotland as the second worst country to lose your daughter to.