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Inventory and then

There have been Catholic nuns in my family, and there was a Catholic priest. Apparently he also wanted very much to believe in miracles.

The hall table has two shallow drawers and I had no trouble filling them, with information from the local Council, rubber-bands and fridge-magnets, tiny keys separated from their padlocks, notepads, stale lollies, and so on.

I assume that they are finally empty. But under the tattered drawer-liner I find a stiff, white envelope addressed to my mother. It has been opened, and sealed flat again, with great care. I am less-than-methodically packing to move house. Every hour I spend handling my belongings, moving them from one surface to another, then solidifying them differently into boxes, well, that is an hour that I will not have in the moist air of outside, under today's sky, or hearing the river and its birds. So I am not good company. But for what seems a long time I have shut myself out of company, anyway.

Inside the white envelope addressed to my mother is correspondence from a lawyer, whose office address is—or was—three suburbs away; the letter and documents date from some six years ago. I look at the folded, rectangular pages and feel run-down, only dully surprised. In general, when faced with black and white, or starkness like it, I am in the habit of being anxious.

AS AT THE 18TH APRIL 2000 INVENTORY OF ITEMS IN OUR POSSESSION

Father Osmund was my mother's uncle. He was ordained as a young man, and until his death he conserved as new a set of pocket-sized holy cards commemorating his ordination. The cards were gold-edged, and variously invoked the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, St Joseph (protector of the Universal Church), St Christopher (martyr), and St Teresa (mystic). At Father Osmund's funeral the cards were offered as mementos, and their sheen was cause for rather embarrassed comment within the family. As though by itself it raised the awful possibility that the deceased were guilty of conceit, or the sin of vanity.

Exactly where I am in the sunless hallway I sit on the floor, amid the dust that has rolled forward from its corners with my furniture. I begin to read past the heading INVENTORY, and Father Osmund's full name. Double-spaced over seven pages there follows a numbered list, a final list of one hundred and nineteen items.

The dispassionate attention to detail is soothing at first. Every object is portable.

- 1 x black walking stick
- 2 x shoe horn
- 1 x stand up wooden clock
- 1 x small Citizen clock
- 3 x pairs glasses
- 1 x silver bowl
- 1 x Braun razor
- 1 x plug (chord)
- 1 x Diary 1994
- 1 x brush
- 1 x pair cuff links
- 1 x small radio
- 2 x cassette tapes
- 1 x Diary 1996
- 2 x Address Books

How can I know—for at first I only infer—that the Reverend Father Osmund was concerned to be punctual

and neat in appearance, and reliable; to keep track of names and anniversaries, for instance.

There were cards printed to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Father Osmund's Ordination, on which were printed the names of five Parishes. And now I wonder, what was his home, and his not-home?

One of the Jubilee cards found its way into the glove-box of the family car. It was printed in Italy, also with a gold edge, and inscribed with the line 'What return shall I make the Lord for all He has given to me?' A fine enough expression of humility, yet I remember it and shudder—reminded of all the sanctimonious words that were spoken to me as a girl shut in a convent school. And of all such words that I chanted back, again and again, in perfect confidence, standing slightly forward in line, with very white socks and tight pigtailed, believing showy and solemn obedience to be a guarantee against any kind of trouble. Commonplace, yet terrible words, because delusional, discouraging a sense of responsibility for who and where it is possible to be in the world.

In the childish prayers that come to mind I know I must still unlearn them, and be doing so until I am old.

- 1 x broken rosary
- 14 x crosses
- 5 x buttons
- 3 x safety pins
- 1 x framed picture of Our Lady & Son
- 1 x small photo frame with picture of young child
- 1 x Our Lady statue (base broken)
- 1 x bottle opener
- 1 x box book-plates
- 1 x picture frame with prayer
- 1 x Christmas card
- half packet of Milanta tablets
- 1 x Jesus on Cross
- 8 x religious charms

And the seven typed pages continue; for all its randomness, the greater part of the lawyer's list is given over to religious images, actually, all apparently conventional, unremarkable, probably cheap.

So Father Osmund's existence, it seems to me, had no randomness: it is suddenly intensely appealing, as an existence undistracted and self-reliant; patient; compact, and unguarded by belongings. I am struck by the temptation to imagine this man as someone without secrets, truly modest; of modest needs, too, and only in this uncompromising.

1 x

A thousand and nineteen items I have surely packed; to count each of my cassette tapes, pieces of cutlery, pins, and photos would be to count perhaps ten—perhaps twenty thousand and nineteen. For what seems a long time I have shut myself out of company, and into things. For the moment I decide that I must haul myself to the other side of the front door, to the colour and different history of a grove of trees, or grass only infrequently mown.

Amongst the twenty-six items listed as the contents of Father Osmund's burgundy briefcase, there are two books—*A Bishop's Story*, by William J. McCarthy, and *Miracles Do Happen*, by Briege McKenna—1 x broken Seiko gold-plated watch, and 1 x small elephant statue with 2 little elephants attached.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Cynthia Troup.