

THE POSTCARD

Mark Crimmins

You sit on the bench in front of Sartre and de Beauvoir's grave and write the last postcard you will ever send to your mother, who is dying. It is a beautiful Sunday morning in Paris. Metro tickets are strewn across the grave behind you like big confetti. Handwritten messages to the philosophers are held in place with tiny stones. Across a forest of tombstones, Bartholdi's angel is taking flight from his grave and climbing into the sky. When you walked into the cemetery through the gate on the Rue Froidvaux, an old man approached you and said, *Monsieur, cherchez-vous Beckett?* He laughed with delight when you smiled and said, *Evidement!* You tell your mother about the old ladies who danced around the fountain pretending they were monsters when the opening chords of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' blasted through loudspeakers in the Place Contrescarpe. About the freelancing belly dancer going from table to table at the cafés on the Rue Mouffetard. About the homeless man in front of the Gare Montparnasse who – after you gave him a pocketful of change – thanked you, looked at your girlfriend, and exclaimed, *Votre femme est superbe!* You tell your mother you have not yet visited Père Lachaise. Forty years have come and gone since she took you there. She had loved the writings of Oscar Wilde and read them aloud to you from the time you were small. When she brought you to Paris, she took you to visit your first writer's grave. And now – sitting at the final resting place of Sartre – you celebrate Proust's birthday by remembering yourself as you stood before Wilde's grave with your mother when you were ten. You were dumbfounded by Epstein's tombstone – the winged Sphinx in flight – and asked your mother to explain it. 'Everyone has his own interpretation,' she said. 'For me, the sculpture is a phoenix.' But you had never heard of this

mythical creature. And so it was that in Père Lachaise you first heard the legend of the great bird that lived for five hundred years and, when it died, rose magnificently again into life from the dust of its own ashes.

THE GOOD LIFE OF AN INCIDENTAL CHARACTER

Paul Noonan

He was a gentleman of some moral courage, it might be said, on a small scale. For example, he declined lucrative work for a company whose overseas labor practices, he discovered, were coercive and unsound. Instead, he became a guidance counselor and assistant softball coach. He was a gifted father. He was funny and able to navigate shifting registers of conversation. Then, in his retirement, he put his car into drive instead of reverse at Halloran's Dairy Bar, pinning a child fatally against a concrete barrier, and ruined, really ruined, everything.