

MUSINGS

by FR. SEÁN ÓLAOIRE, PHD - 2016, VOLUME 8

A Child's Christmas in Cork



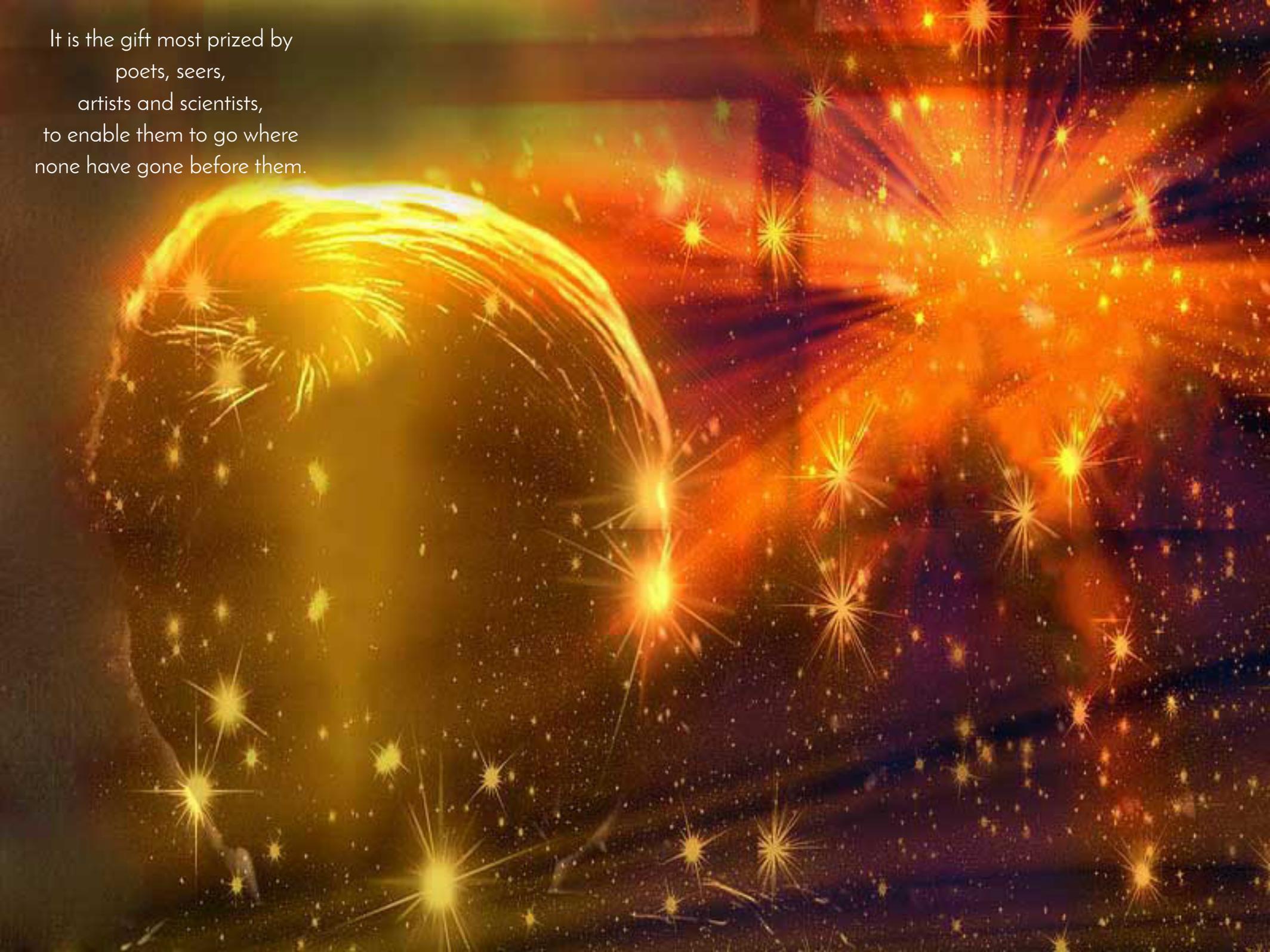
A photograph of a child's head and shoulders from behind, looking out a window. The child has dark hair and is wearing a dark jacket. The window shows a bright sunburst effect, with rays of light and a warm, orange glow. The scene is dimly lit, with the light from the window illuminating the child's hair and the window frame.

The best stories of all
are "re-magined" ones.
Re-magining is when
you cross-fertilize
remembering
with imagining.
It is the child
who can turn
ordinary events
into exotic adventures,
transforming drab,
black-and-white
photos...

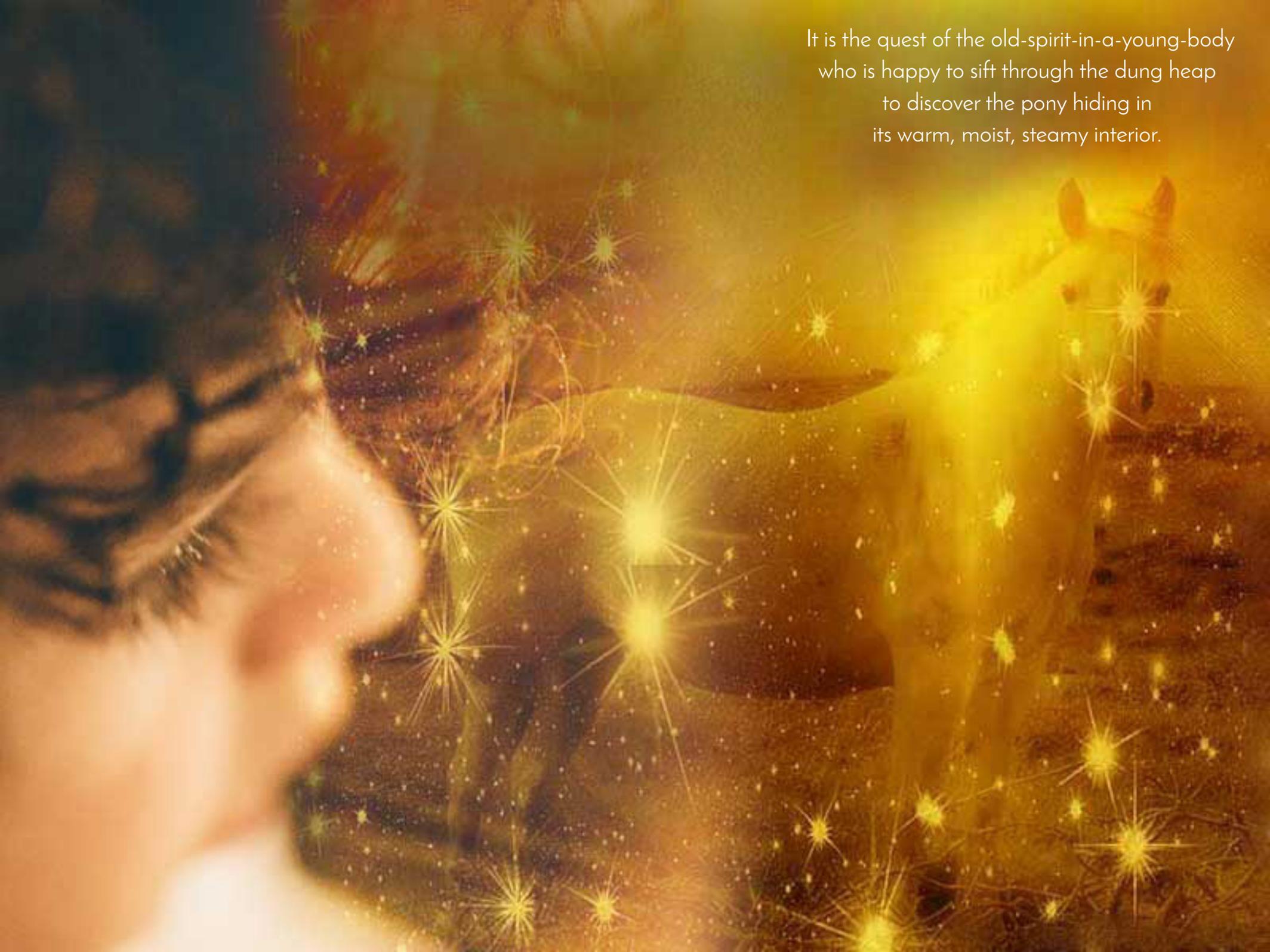
...into colorful,
3-D
holographic
videos.

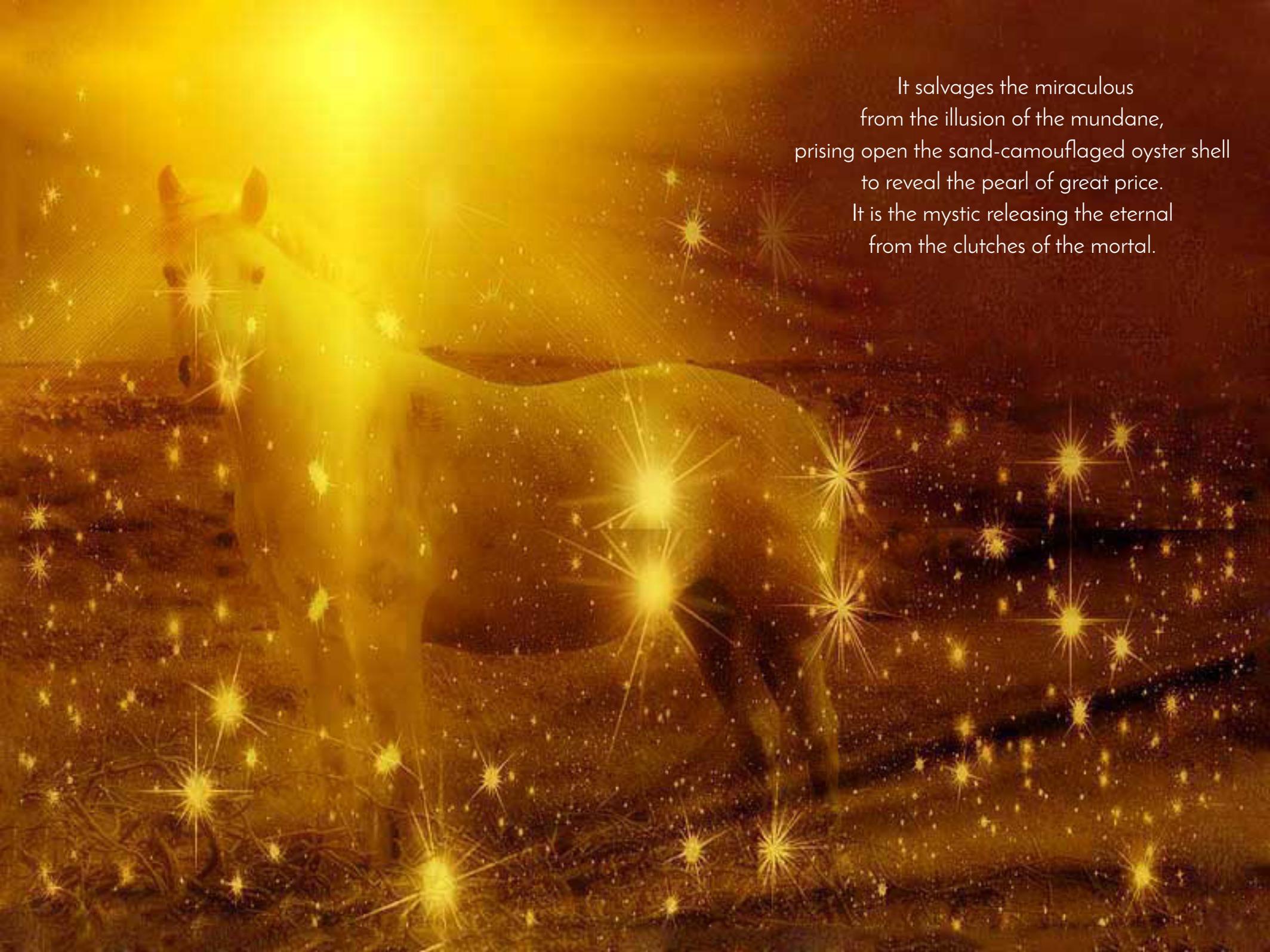


It is the gift most prized by
poets, seers,
artists and scientists,
to enable them to go where
none have gone before them.



It is the quest of the old-spirit-in-a-young-body
who is happy to sift through the dung heap
to discover the pony hiding in
its warm, moist, steamy interior.



A white horse stands in a field of golden sparkles. The horse is the central focus, facing left. The background is a dark, textured field filled with numerous bright, multi-pointed golden stars of varying sizes. The overall lighting is warm and golden, creating a magical and ethereal atmosphere.

It salvages the miraculous
from the illusion of the mundane,
prising open the sand-camouflaged oyster shell
to reveal the pearl of great price.
It is the mystic releasing the eternal
from the clutches of the mortal.

And it is the charism I will use
to recall my Christmas of 1950,
when I had just turned four and
lived in a suburb of Cork City
called Gurrabraher
with my grandparents
and my uncle Noel, who is
two months younger than me.



A vintage telephone kiosk with a sign that says "TELEPHONE" is positioned on the left side of the image. The background shows a night view of a town with many lights, creating a starburst effect. The overall scene is illuminated with a warm, golden light.

TELEPHONE

Back then, Ireland was, economically,
a very poor place.

In fact there was only one phone
- a stand-alone kiosk -
serving all of Gurrabraher's
3,000 plus residents.



Nobody phoned out,
we couldn't afford to;
but there would be queues
each evening
to receive calls from
our many emigrant relatives
in the USA,
Canada
England
and
Australia.

Freiwillig!

400 St. St. Wäfer mit

und Stroem, mlt lya id

von Jundar Valentio

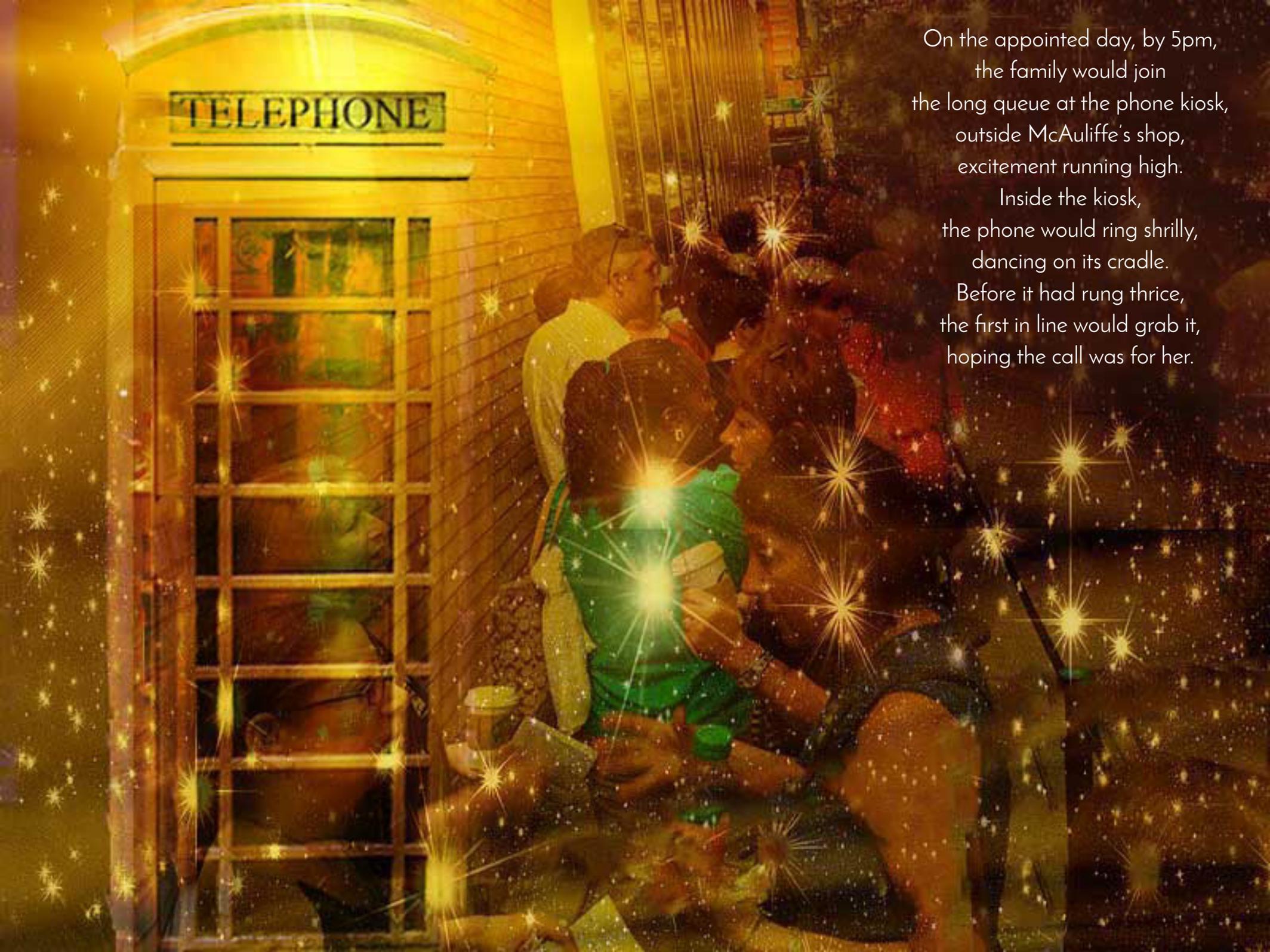
— her mydallan fort

— kmpstygk.

TELEPHONE

Rimserberg am 29. 10. 1900

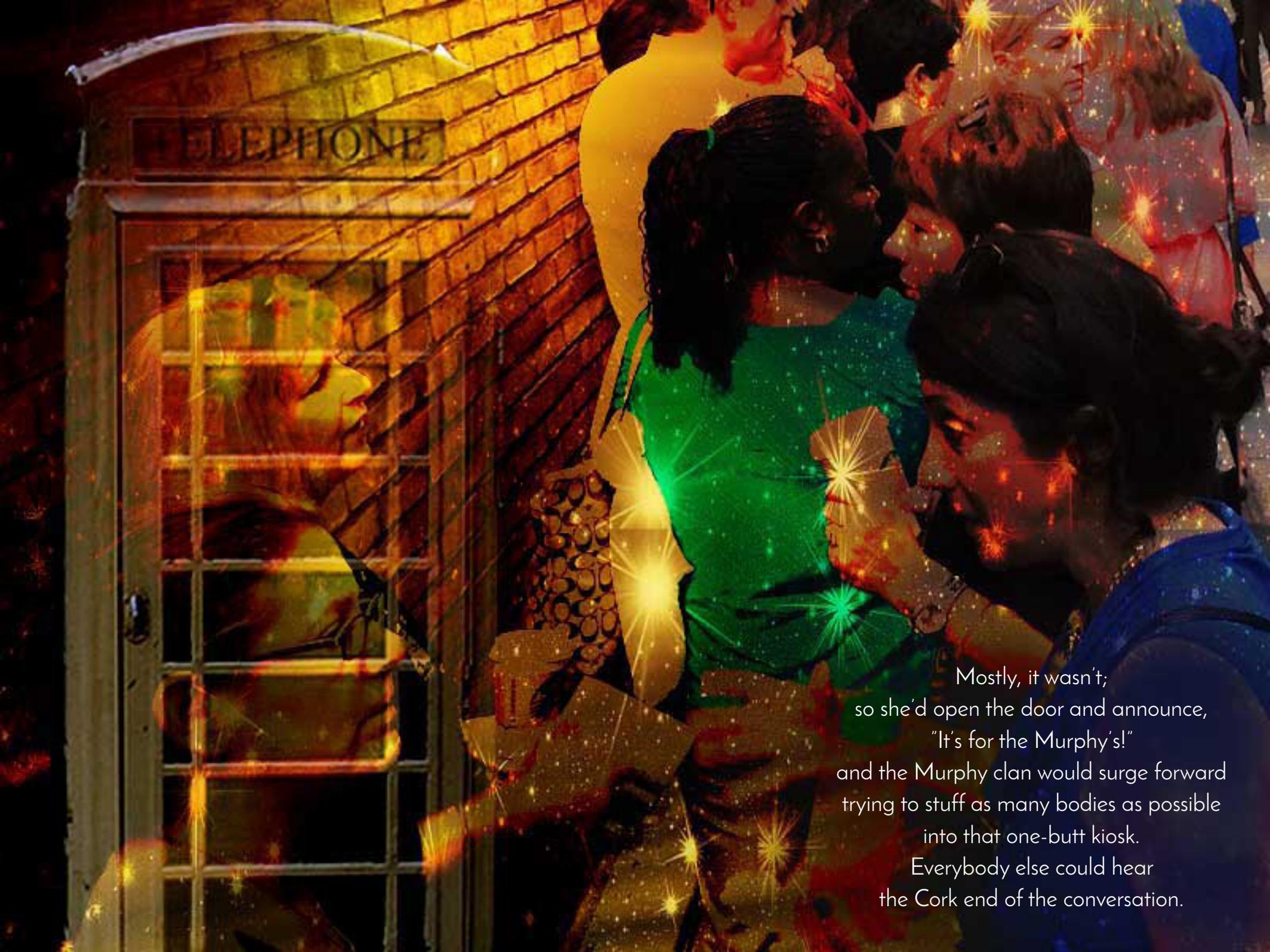
The system went like this. An emigrant daughter would write home and say, "I will phone you at 6pm on July 19th." She would have to give us several weeks warning to make sure the letter arrived well before the phone date.



On the appointed day, by 5pm,
the family would join
the long queue at the phone kiosk,
outside McAuliffe's shop,
excitement running high.

Inside the kiosk,
the phone would ring shrilly,
dancing on its cradle.

Before it had rung thrice,
the first in line would grab it,
hoping the call was for her.



Mostly, it wasn't;
so she'd open the door and announce,
"It's for the Murphy's!"
and the Murphy clan would surge forward
trying to stuff as many bodies as possible
into that one-butt kiosk.
Everybody else could hear
the Cork end of the conversation.



Soon the rest of us
would grow impatient and murmur,
“Hurry up, we’re expecting a call at six o’clock!”
This ritual would be repeated several times,
and we’d be lucky if our call
managed to find a gap before 8pm.



Kinsler's

Dear Santa Claus

400 St. John's St.

Dear Santa Claus

400 St. John's St.

Dear Santa Claus

Dear Santa Claus

Given, then, the state of communication -
no computers, faxes nor iPads,
and only one phone for all of Gurrabraher -
establishing contact with Santa Claus
(or "Santy" as he was known in Cork)
was rather tricky.

Even snail mail was costly;
the postage to the North Pole was prohibitive,
so "Santy" had devised a special arrangement
for the children of Ireland.

Here's how it went.
Sometime during the last week
before Christmas, after school was out,
you'd tear a clean page out
of your "copy book" and write...

Dear Santy,

My name is Seán.

I live in number 34, Saint Rita's Avenue,
across the road from the O'Donnells.

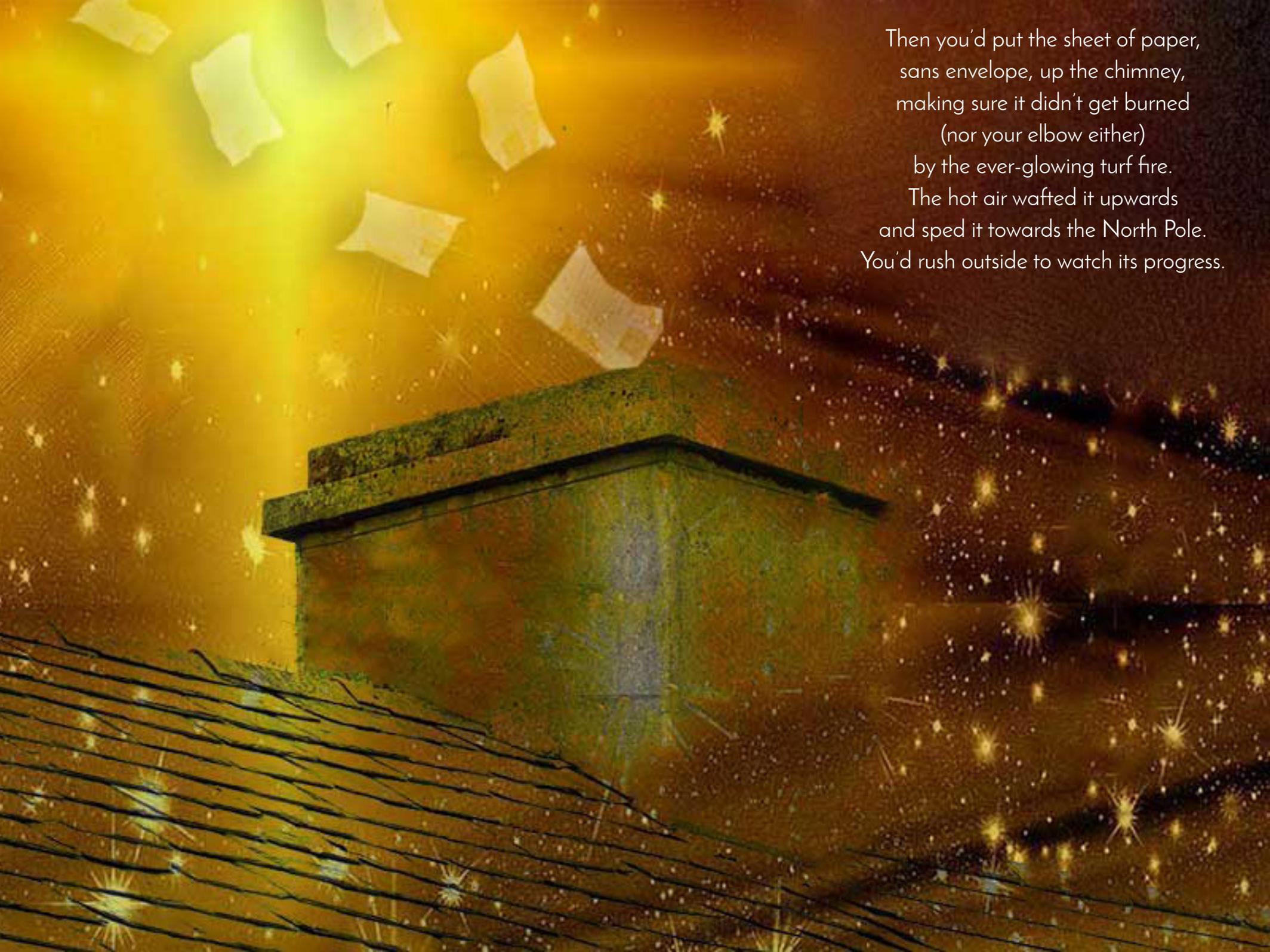
Please can you bring me a gun and holster?
My uncle Noel is writing to you as well.
He wants a gun and holster too.

But he's left-handed
so don't get the holsters mixed up.

I love you.

Seán.





Then you'd put the sheet of paper,
sans envelope, up the chimney,
making sure it didn't get burned
(nor your elbow either)
by the ever-glowing turf fire.
The hot air wafted it upwards
and sped it towards the North Pole.
You'd rush outside to watch its progress.



Sometimes it would be snowing
and you'd have a gaggle
of street urchins like yourself,
standing on Saint Rita's Avenue
watching the snowflakes
float down
and the Santa letters
float up
like speckled salmon
fighting against the rapids
on their journey home.
They always made it.

Namasté,

Seán

Tír na nÓg
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