

Matthew Reilly's running late. It's early morning, he's about to fly, his cab's waiting. Last night he dreamt about Valerie. Glancing in the mirror, he smooths back his thinning hair before he heads out the rectory door. There's a chill in the air, autumn's coming, but the clear sky's indigo blue, edged with dawn. He notices a fading star or two, perhaps a planet. In his youth, when Valerie had been his lover, she'd taught him the names of a few bright stars. He wonders if she still recalls them. By the grace of the Internet, she'd come back into his life again. Email, he thinks, is a blessing — it allows one to keep a distance. He'd have to remember to ask her about the stars.

In the cab, Matt recalls how he felt last night, busy to the point of desperation, knowing that what ailed him was an old dread, an unnameable fear of chaos made worse by exhaustion. Due for a vacation, he'd been packing for this early morning flight, a visit to his sister on the coast. In his carry-on: laptop, breviary, academic journal, cell phone. He'd set out his black slacks and short-sleeved shirt, his Roman collar for the morning. His identifying dress would get him good service in Boston, nods of respect at the airport (even from guys in turbans), a quicker-than-average pass through security as they'd give him a look-see. A decent, trustworthy man, *the body doesn't lie*, as they say.

Matt had a degree in psych and he knew how they trained those guards. A screener would see a trim man with blond hair, blue eyes, a ruddy complexion, a smile that was kind enough, perhaps a shade cold. The metal detector would swipe his chest and shriek at a small silver crucifix on a chain. That would be it.

He packed a few pairs of running shorts and sweat socks. Exercise paid off — he looked good on TV. Yet when he'd watch his videos or DVDs, he was perceptive enough to notice a hardening of his expression, that dreaded priestly visage of youthfulness stiffening into old age without the ripeness of maturity. On the screen he'd glimpse a man who was absent from his longings.