

## In Suspension: Short Stories + Type Tangents

**John C. Tarpey**

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*In Suspension is a refreshing collection in which parochial life is addressed with hope and style.*

The short stories and graphic art of John Tarpey's *In Suspension* are set in rural Ireland.

Bored patrons and the senior citizens congregate in bars in a small town outside of Dublin. Over the course of a few days: a team in a pub assembles to plan an act of dramatic vengeance on the unruly neighbors of a community elder; and Ninja Paddy, a bar entertainer and charity fundraiser, gets ready for his final show. While figuring what to do about their ailing father, Ninja's brother wonders how to tell Ninja about his impending separation; his wife, back in Dublin, decides whether to leave him or stay. The Sub, known for begging in pubs, gets caught in a counterfeit operation just as his girlfriend reaches the end of her patience. The collection works toward a redemptive effort by Ninja Paddy and his friend, a graphic artist.

Evoking connectivity through its overlapping storylines, the book's pairs of characters share commonalities. The cohort plotting to defend the Suit and the group privy to The Sub's counterfeit possession resemble one another in their pursuit of cheap entertainment, while Ninja and the Sub are both at career crossroads. The Sub wants to stop begging and finally get a job; Ninja responds to cues that his acting days are over. The Suit and Ninja's father, both venerated members of the village, face their limitations and vulnerabilities in the modern world. These foils create intrigue between the narratives and give stories meaning in relation to one another.

In each entry, action is centered around changes of heart. After they execute their revenge scheme, The Suit's bar friends doubt its nobility and effectiveness. Their mindsets shift; this becomes the story's focus. Elsewhere, Brother's wife strolls Dublin, making sense of her marriage; the reprieve from her husband broadens her perspective. These introspective inquiries contribute to the book's contemplative tone and provide comic reprieve from its pub antics. The pacing is everywhere measured, spanning a few days of careful construction. The stories are poem-like in length and breadth.

Slips of paper feature in to several stories. Sub's girlfriend plants an incriminating note in his wallet; Ninja finds a kind note in his van glove box. Tattered posters advertising Ninja's performances are tacked up around town as a reminder of Ninja's graphic artist friend. These clever props are subtle additions.

Within the book, the print fits on each page without leftover space at the beginning or end. One page of each story is taken up with "type tangents," or a highlight of the story that's lifted out in a manipulated font style and size, enhanced with lines and symbols. New ways of relating to their words elevate the stories into art.

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MARI CARLSON (April 15, 2020)

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