One last time the light spat and sputtered out. Darkness dropped on the hall-body. Judith Wade stumbled toward the straight line of cracked light that marked the position of a window. She drew back the boards a little; sunlight leaked into the chamber catching scents of fat smoke that flowed from the extinguished rush-light. The tang of kitchen grease hung in the thickening air. Judith regrettet not using a finer candle to light her way. She shivered toward the stone fireplace, the fire had not been lit for many days and a cold lay unswept. The room rested in a great grey silence. The stone of the fire surround was cold under her fingers — she recalled papers in her hand. She had only just found this loose shred at the back of a closet next to her uncle’s writing table, discarded among scattered papers of little regard. She recognised his penmanship, it was a firm hand not the scrawl of old age, and the marks were quick and urgent. Smears of ink punctuated the script where the edge of Benjamin’s hand had flecked small puddles of ink. A triangular blot marked where he had hastily folded the paper before the ink had dried.

Last Thursday, a typically chill February evening, Benjamin’s usual friends had arrived for dinner. He was in good cheer and as well as he had been for many years. The govt had not troubled him for some months and they had all enjoyed much meat and drink. He got up from the dining table, swaying a little from the effects of wine. As was his practice after a meal he made his way to his fireside chair. Wade lowered himself down with a long, thick sigh but as he came to rest the very life had gone out of him. Despite his great age it was unexpected. News travelled fast on the lips of his whispering friends. Here in this empty hall, Judith felt the burden of her own years. She had run the household as best she could; arriving at her uncle’s house such a long time ago, on the death of his beloved Edith. Life at Newgrange Hall had been harmonious with little strife or strained relations. But this memorandum, this shred of paper would not go on she thought. She glanced once more at the tattered shred of paper, perhaps it was better that Benjamin’s voice should be heard one last time…