

Trees, Woods and Literature—14

One night Otto Beck left the back cottage door open and made his way to the plantation. He walked along the narrow path until he came to the foot of a high pine tree. It rose to more than a hundred feet, the first fifteen feet bare of any foothold or branch whatsoever. Alongside it grew a laurel, its upper branches caught about the big tree. Otto stuffed the ends of his trousers into his socks as though for cycling and swung himself into the laurel; from there he gained access to the pine tree. Above him now its branches sprouted out with the regularity of rungs on a telegraph pole. He climbed upwards hand over fist, a mariner ascending into the main royal.

As he went higher the branches grew thinner, set closer together. He had to climb round the circumference of the narrowing trunk looking for supports for his hands and feet. When at last he could climb no higher, looking down he saw the meadow set out innocently below him, the beech and the sycamore throwing their heavy shadows before the house. It was a clear night towards the end of July. The house stood in its own dark shadows. The two main bedrooms were on either side of the balcony, divided by the main hall, above drawing-room and dining-room.

From *Langrishe, Go Down* by Aidan Higgins (Calder and Boyars, 1966), reprinted by kind permission of John Calder Ltd.

Langrishe, Go Down is a novel concerning a declining family of middle-aged spinster sisters in the neighbourhood of Celbridge, Co. Kildare in the 1930s. Otto Beck is a native of Bavaria, a perennial student of Philosophy with a Ph.D. thesis which he hopes to finish "in perhaps four years time", sometime forestry worker in Glencree, who becomes involved in a relationship with one of the sisters.

Aidan Higgins was born in Celbridge in 1927, educated at Clongowes Wood, and worked in factories in London before travelling widely throughout the world. He has published short stories (*Felo de se*) and another novel (*Balcony of Europe*, 1972).