

THE HURT WORLD

SHORT STORIES OF
THE TROUBLES

Edited by
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NAMING THE NAMES

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Abyssinia, Alma, Bosnia, Balaclava, Belgrade, Bombay. It was late summer – August, like the summer of the fire. He hadn't rung for three weeks.

I walked down the Falls towards the reconverted cinema: 'The largest second-hand bookshop in the world', the billboard read. Of course it wasn't. What we did have was a vast collection of historical manuscripts, myths and legends, political pamphlets, and we ran an exchange service for readers of crime, western and paperback romances. By far the most popular section for which Chrissie was responsible, since the local library had been petrol-bombed.

It was late when I arrived, the dossers from St Vincent de Paul hostel had already gone in to check the morning papers. I passed them sitting on the steps every working day: Isabella wore black fishnet tights and a small hat with a half-veil, and long black gloves even on the warmest day and eyed me from the feet up; Eileen, who was dumpy and smelt of meths and talcum powder, looked at everyone with the sad eyes of a cow. Tom was the thin wiry one, he would nod, and Harry, who was large and grey like his overcoat, and usually had a stubble, cleared his throat and spat before he spoke. Chrissie once told me when I started working there that both of the men were in love with Isabella and that was why Eileen always looked so sad. And usually too Mrs O'Hare from Spinner Street would still be

cleaning the brass handles and finger plates and waiting like the others for the papers, so that she could read the horoscopes before they got to the racing pages. On this particular day, however, the brasses had been cleaned and the steps were empty. I tried to remember what it had been like as a cinema, but couldn't. I only remember a film I'd seen there once, in black and white: *A Town like Alice*.

Sharleen McCabe was unpacking the contents of a shopping bag onto the counter. Chrissie was there with a cigarette in her hand flicking the ash into the cap of her Yves Saint Laurent perfume spray and shaking her head.

She looked up as I passed: 'Miss Macken isn't in yet, so if you hurry you'll be all right.'

She was very tanned – because she took her holidays early – and her pink lipstick matched her dress. Sharleen was gazing at her in admiration.

'Well?'

'I want three murders for my granny.'

I left my coat in the office and hurried back to the counter as Miss Macken arrived. I had carefully avoided looking at the office phone, but I remember thinking: I wonder if he'll ring today.

Miss Macken swept past: 'Good morning, ladies.'

'Bang goes my chance of another fag before break,' Chrissie said.

'I thought she was seeing a customer this morning.'

Sharleen was standing at the desk reading the dust covers of a pile of books, and rejecting each in turn: 'There's only one here she hasn't read.'

'How do you know?'

'Because her eyes is bad, I read them to her,' Sharleen said.

'Well, there's not much point in me looking if you're the only one who knows what she's read.'

'You said children weren't allowed in there!' she said, pointing to the auditorium.

'I've just given you permission,' Chrissie said.

Sharleen started off at a run.

'Popular fiction's on the stage,' Chrissie called after her. 'Children! When was that wee girl ever a child!'

'Finnula, the Irish section's like a holocaust! Would you like to do something about it. And would you please deal with these orders.'

'Yes, Miss Macken.'

'Christine, someone's just offered us a consignment of Mills and Boon. Would you check with the public library that they haven't been stolen.'

'Righto,' sighed Chrissie.

It could have been any other day.

Senior: *Orangeism in Britain and Ireland*; Sibbett: *Orangeism in Ireland and Throughout the Empire*. Ironic. That's what he was looking for the first time he came in. It started with an enquiry for two volumes of Sibbett. Being the Irish specialist, I knew every book in the section. I hadn't seen it. I looked at the name and address again to make sure. And then I asked him to call. I said I thought I knew where I could get it and invited him to come and see the rest of our collection. A few days later, a young man, tall, fair, with very fine dark eyes, as if they'd been underlined with a grey pencil, appeared. He wasn't what I expected. He said it was the first time he'd been on the Falls Road. I took him round the section and he bought a great many things from us. He was surprised that such a valuable collection of Irish historical manuscripts was housed in a run-down cinema and he said he was glad he'd called. He told me that he was a historian writing a thesis on Gladstone and the Home Rule Bills, and that he lived in Belfast in the summer but was at Oxford University.

He also left with me an extensive book list and I promised to try to get the other books he wanted. He gave me his phone number, so I could ring him and tell him when something he was looking for came in. It was Sibbett he was most anxious about. An antiquarian bookseller I knew of sent me the book two weeks later, in July. So I rang him and arranged to meet him with it at a café in town near the city hall.

He was overjoyed and couldn't thank me enough, he said. And so it started. He told me that his father was a judge and that he lived with another student at Oxford called Susan. I told him that I lived with my grandmother until she died. And I also told him about my boyfriend Jack. So there didn't seem to be any danger.

We met twice a week in the café after that day; he explained something of his thesis to me: that the Protestant opposition to Gladstone and Home Rule was a rational one because Protestant industry at the time – shipbuilding and linen – was dependent on British markets. He told me how his grandfather had been an Ulster Volunteer. I told him of my granny's stories of the Black and Tans, and of how she once met de Valera on a Dublin train while he was on the run disguised as an old woman. He laughed and said my grandmother had a great imagination. He was fascinated that I knew so much history; he said he'd never heard of Parnell until he went to Oxford. And he pronounced 'Parnell' with a silent 'n', so that it sounded strange.

By the end of the month, the café owner knew us by sight, and the time came on one particular evening he arrived before me, and was sitting surrounded by books and papers, when the owner remarked, as the bell inside the door rang: 'Ah. Here's your young lady now.'

We blushed alarmingly. But it articulated the possibility I had

constantly been pushing to the back of my mind. And I knew I felt a sharp and secret thrill in that statement.

A few hours later, I stood on tiptoe to kiss him as I left for the bus – nothing odd about that. I often kissed him on the side of the face as I left. This time however I deliberately kissed his mouth, and somehow, the kiss went on and on; he didn't let me go. When I stepped back on my heels again I was reeling, and he had to catch me with his arm. I stood there staring at him on the pavement. I stammered 'goodbye' and walked off hurriedly towards the bus stop. He stood on the street looking after me – and I knew without turning round that he was smiling.

'Sharleen. *Murder in the Cathedral* is not exactly a murder story,' Chrissie was saying wearily.

'Well, why's it called that, then?'

'It's a play about' – Chrissie hesitated – 'martyrdom!'

'Oh.'

'This is just too, too grisly,' Chrissie said, examining the covers. 'Do they always have to be murders? Would you not like a nice love story?'

'She doesn't like love stories,' Sharleen said stubbornly. 'She only likes murders.'

At that moment Miss Macken reappeared: 'You two girls can go for tea now – what is that smell?'

'I can't smell anything,' Chrissie said.

'That's because you're wearing too much scent,' Miss Macken said. She was moving perfunctorily to the biography shelving, and it wasn't until I followed her that I became aware of a very strong smell of methylated spirits. Harry was tucked behind a newspaper drinking himself silly. He appeared to be quite alone.

'Outside! Outside immediately!' Miss Macken roared. 'Or

I shall have you forcibly removed.'

He rose up before us like a wounded bear whose sleep we had disturbed, and stood shaking his fist at her, and cursing all of us, Isabella included, he ran out.

'What's wrong with him?'

'Rejection. Isabella ran off with Tom this morning, and didn't tell him where she was going. He's only drowning his sorrows,' Chrissie said. 'Apparently they had a big win yesterday. Eileen told him they'd run off to get married. But they've only gone to Bangor for the day.'

'How do you know this?'

'Eileen told Mrs O'Hare and she told me.'

'What kind of supervision is it when you two let that man drink in here with that child wandering around?' Miss Macken said, coming back from seeing Harry off the premises.

We both apologised and went up for tea.

There was little on the Falls Road that Mrs O'Hare didn't know about. As she made her way up and down the road in the mornings on her way to work she would call in and out of the shops, the library, the hospital, until a whole range of people I had never met would enter my life in our tearoom by eleven o'clock. I knew that Mr Quincey, a Protestant, from the library, had met his second wife while burying his first at the City Cemetery one Saturday morning. I knew that Mr Downey, the gatehousekeeper at the hospital, had problems with his eldest daughter and didn't like her husband, and I was equally sure that thanks to Mrs O'Hare every detail of Chrissie's emotional entanglements were known by every ambulance driver at the Royal. As a result, I was very careful to say as little as possible in front of her. She didn't actually like me. It was Chrissie she bought buns for at tea time.

'Oh here! You'll never guess what Mrs McGlinchy at the

bakery told me -' She was pouring tea into cups, but her eyes were on us. 'Wait till you hear -' She looked down in time to see the tea pouring over the sides of the cup. She put the teapot down heavily on the table and continued: 'Quincey's being transferred to Ballymacarrett when the library's reopened.'

'Och, you don't say?'

'It's the new boss at Central - that Englishwoman. It's after the bomb.'

'But sure that was when everybody'd gone home.'

'I know but it's security, you know! She doesn't want any more staff crossing the peace line at night. Not after that young - but wait till you hear - he won't go!'

'Good for him.'

'He says he's been on the Falls for forty years and if they transfer him now they might as well throw the keys of the library into the Republican Press Centre and the keys of the Royal Victoria Hospital in after them.'

'He's quite right. It's ghettoisation.'

'Yes, but it's inevitable,' I said.

'It's not inevitable, it's deliberate,' said Chrissie. 'It's exactly what the crowd want.'

'Who?'

'The Provos. They want a ghetto: the next thing they'll be issuing us with passes to come and go.'

'Security works both ways.'

'You're telling me.'

After that Chrissie left us to go down the yard to renew her suntan. Mrs O'Hare watched her from the window.

'She'd find the sun anywhere, that one.' She turned from the window. 'Don't take what she says too much to heart. She's Jewish, you know. She doesn't understand.'

I was glad when she went. She always felt a bit constrained with me. Because I didn't talk about my love life, as she called

it, like Chrissie. But then I couldn't. I never really talked at all, to any of them.

The room overlooked the roof tops and back yards of west Belfast.

Gibson, Granville, Garnet, Grosvenor, Theodore, Cape, Kashmir.

Alone again, I found myself thinking about the last time I had seen Jack. It was a long time ago: he was sitting at the end of the table. When things are not going well my emotions start playing truant. I wasn't surprised when he said: 'I've got an invitation to go to the States for six months.'

I was buttering my toast at the time and didn't look up.

'I'm afraid I'm rather ambivalent about this relationship.'

I started battering the top of my eggshell with a spoon.

'Finn! Are you listening?'

I nodded and asked: 'When do you go?'

'Four weeks from now.'

I knew the American trip was coming up.

'Very well. I'll move out until you've gone.'

I finished breakfast and we spoke not another word until he dropped me at the steps of the bookshop.

'Finn, for God's sake! Get yourself a flat somewhere out of it! I don't imagine I'll be coming back.' He said: 'If you need any money, write to me.'

I slammed the car door. Jack was always extremely practical: if you killed someone he would inform the police, get you legal aid, make arrangements for moving the body, he'd even clear up the mess if there was any – but he would never, never ask you why you did it. I'd thrown milk all over him once, some of it went on the floors and walls, and then I ran out of the house. When I came back he'd changed his clothes and mopped up the floor. Another time I'd smashed all the dinner dishes against the kitchen wall and locked myself in the bathroom,

when I came out he had swept up all the plates and asked me if I wanted a cup of tea. He was a very good journalist, I think, but somehow I never talked to him about anything important.

Because Mrs Cooper from Milan Street had been caught trying to walk out with sixteen stolen romances in a shopping bag and had thrown herself on the floor as if having a heart attack, saying: 'Oh holy Jay! Don't call the police. Oh holy Jay, my heart', Chrissie forgot to tell me about the phone call until nearly twelve o'clock.

'Oh, a customer rang, he wanted to talk to you about a book he said he was after. Sibbett. That was it. You were still at tea.' She said, 'I told him we were open to nine tonight and that you'd be here all day.'

For three weeks he hadn't rung. I only had to pick up the phone and ring him as I'd done on other occasions. But this time I hoped he would contact me first.

'Is something wrong?' Chrissie said.

'I have to make a phone call.'

After that first kiss on the street, the next time we met I took him to the house, about ten minutes' walk from the park.

'When did you say your granny died?' he asked, looking with surprise around the room.

'Oh, ages ago. I'm not very good at dates.'

'Well, you don't appear to have changed much since. It's as if an old lady still lived here.'

He found the relics, the Sacred Heart pictures and the water font strange. 'You really ought to dust in here occasionally,' he said, laughing. 'What else do you do apart from work in the bookshop?'

'I read, watch television. Oh, and I see Jack,' I said quickly, so as not to alarm him.

'Good Lord. Would you look at that web; it looks like it's been there for donkeys!'

A large web attaching itself in the greater part to the geraniums in the window had spread across a pile of books and ended up clinging heavily to the lace curtains.

'Yes. I like spiders,' I said. 'My granny used to say that a spider's web was a good omen. It means we're safe from the soldiers!'

'It just means that you never open the curtains!' he said, laughing. Still wandering round the small room he asked: 'Who is that lady? Is she your grandmother?'

'No. That's the Countess Markievicz.'

'I suppose your granny met her on a train in disguise – as an old man.'

'No. But she did visit her in prison.'

He shook his head: 'The trouble with you –' he began, then suddenly he had a very kind look in his eyes. 'You're improbable. No one would ever believe me.' He stopped, and began again. 'Sometimes I think' – he tapped me on the nose – 'you live in a dream, Finn.'

And then he kissed me, and held me; he only complained that I was too quiet.

It was nine thirty when I left the building and shut it up for the night: Miss Macken had offered to drop me home as she was leaving, but I said I'd prefer to walk. There were no buses on the road after nine because a few nights before a group of youths had stoned a bus passing Divis flats, and the bus driver was hurt. The whole day was a torment to me after that phone call and I wanted to think and walk.

When I got to the park I was so giddy that I didn't care whether he came or not. My stomach was in a knot – and I realised it was because I hadn't eaten all day. The summer was

nearly over – I only knew that soon this too would be over. I had kept my feelings under control so well – I was always very good at that, contained, very contained – so well, that I thought if he even touched me I'd tell him – Oh run! Run for your life from me! At least I didn't tell him that I loved him or anything like that. Was it something to be glad about? And suddenly there were footsteps running behind me. I always listened for footsteps. I'd walked all through those streets at night but I had never been afraid until that moment.

I suddenly started to run when a voice called out: 'Finn! Wait!' It was his voice.

I stopped dead, and turned.

We stood by the grass verge.

'Why didn't you ring me?' I asked, listlessly, my head down in case he saw my eyes.

'Because I didn't think it was fair to you.'

'Fair?'

'Because, well –'

'Well?'

'I'm in England and you're here. It's not very satisfactory.'

'I see.'

'Look, there's something I should tell you. It's – Susan's been staying with us for the past three weeks.'

'I see.'

I couldn't possibly object since we were both supposed to have other lovers, there was no possibility of either of us complaining.

'But we could go to your place now if you like.'

I was weakening. He stooped to kiss me and the whole business began as it had started. He kissed me and I kissed him and it went on and on.

'I was just getting over you,' I said, standing up.

'I didn't know there was anything to get over. You're very good at saying nothing.'

And before I could stop myself I was saying: 'I think I've fallen in love with you.'

He dropped his head and hardly dared look at me – he looked so pained – and more than anything I regretted that statement.

'You never told me that before,' he said.

'I always felt constrained.'

He began very slowly: 'Look, there is something I have to say now. I'm getting married at the end of the summer.' And more quickly, 'But I can't give you up. I want to go on seeing you. Oh don't go! Please listen!'

It was very cold in the park. I had a piercing pain in my ear because of the wind. A tricolour hung at a jaunty angle from the top of the pensioner's bungalow, placed there by some lads. The army would take it down tomorrow in the morning. The swings, the trees and grass banks looked as thoroughly careworn as the surrounding streets.

Lincoln, Leeson, Marchioness and Mary, Slate, Sorella and Ward.

I used to name them in a skipping song.

The park had been my playplace as a child, I used to go there in the mornings and wait for someone to lead me across the road, to the first gate. Sometimes a passer-by would stop and take my hand, but most times the younger brother of the family who owned the bacon shop would cross with me.

'No road sense!' my grandmother used to say. 'None at all.'

In the afternoon he would come back for me. And I remember –

'Finn, are you listening? You mustn't stop talking to me, we could still be friends. I love being with you – Finn!'

I remember standing in the sawdust-filled shop waiting for him to finish his task – the smooth hiss of the slicing machine

and the thin strips of bacon falling pat on the greaseproof paper.

I began to walk away.

'Finn. I do love you.' He said it for the first time.

I pulled up the collar of my coat and walked home without looking back.

It should have ended before I was so overcome with him I wept. And he said: 'What's wrong?' and took me and held me again.

It should have ended before he said: 'Your soul has just smiled in your eyes at me – I've never seen it there before.'

Before, it should have ended before. He was my last link with life and what a way to find him. I closed my eyes and tried to forget, all vision gone, only sound left: the night noises came.

The raucous laughter of late-night walkers; the huddle of tom cats on the back-yard wall: someone somewhere is scraping a metal dustbin across a concrete yard; and far off in the distance a car screeches to a halt: a lone dog barks at an unseen presence, the night walkers pause in their walk past – the entry. Whose is the face at the empty window? – the shadows cast on the entry wall – the shape in the darkened doorway – the steps on the broken path – who pulled that curtain open quickly – and let it drop?

I woke with a start and the sound of brakes screeching in my ears – as if the screech had taken on a human voice and called my name in anguish: Finn! But when I listened, there was nothing. Only the sound of the night bells from St Paul's tolling in the distance.

I stayed awake until daybreak and with the light found some peace from dreams. At eight o'clock I went out. Every day of

summer had been going on around me, seen and unseen, I had drifted through those days like one possessed.

Strange how quickly we are reassured by ordinariness: Isabella and Tom, Harry and Eileen, waiting on the steps. And Mrs O'Hare at the counter with her polishing cloth, and Miss Macken discussing her holiday plans with Chrissie. Externally, at least, it could have been the same as the day before, yesterday – the day before I left him in the park. But I saw it differently. I saw it in a haze, and it didn't seem to have anything to do with me.

'The body was discovered by bin men early this morning,' Miss Macken said. 'He was dumped in an entry.'

'Oh, Finn, it's awful news,' said Chrissie, turning.

'It's the last straw as far as I am concerned,' Miss Macken said.

'Mr Downey said it's the one thing that turned him – he'll not be back to the Royal after this.'

'We knew him,' Chrissie said.

'Who?'

'That young man. The one who looked like a girl.'

'The police think he was coming from the Falls Road,' Miss Macken said.

'They said it was because he was a judge's son,' said Chrissie.

'The theory is,' said Miss Macken, 'that he was lured there by a woman. I expect they'll be coming to talk to us.'

'Aye, they're all over the road this morning,' said Mrs O'Hare.

At lunch time they came.

'Miss McQuillen, I wonder?'

A noisy row between Isabella and Eileen distracted me – Eileen was insisting that Isabella owed her five pounds.

'Miss McQuillen, I wonder if you wouldn't mind answering a few questions?'

'How well did you know...?'

'When did you last see him?'

'What time did you leave him?'

'What exactly did he say?'

'Have you any connection with...?'

Osman, Serbia, Sultan, Raglan, Bosnia, Belgrade, Rumania, Sebastopol.

The names roll off my tongue like a litany.

'Has that something to do with Gladstone's foreign policy?' he used to laugh and ask.

'No. Those are the streets of west Belfast.'

Alma, Omar, Conway and Dunlewey, Dunville, Lady and McDonnell.

Pray for us. (I used to say, just to please my grandmother.) Now and at the hour.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the previous day, a man I knew came into the bookshop. I put the book he was selling on the counter in front of me and began to check the pages. It was so still you could hear the pages turn: 'I think I can get him to the park,' I said.

Eileen had Isabella by the hair and she stopped. The policeman who was writing – stopped.

Miss Macken was at the counter with Chrissie, she was frowning – she looked over at me, and stopped. Chrissie suddenly turned and looked in my direction. No one spoke. We walked through the door on to the street.

Still no one spoke. .

Mrs O'Hare was coming along the road from the bread shop, she raised her hand to wave and then stopped.

Harry had just tumbled out of the bookies followed by Tom. They were laughing. And they stopped.

We passed the block where the baby-clothes shop had been, and at the other end the undertaker's: everything from birth to death on that road. Once. But gone now – just stumps where the buildings used to be – stumps like tombstones.

'Jesus. That was a thump in the stomach if ever I felt one,' one policeman said to the other.

Already they were talking as if I didn't exist.

There were four or five people in the interview room.

A policewoman stood against the wall. The muscles in my face twitched. I put up my hand to stop it.

'Why did you pick him?'

'I didn't pick him. He was chosen. It was his father they were after. He's a judge.'

'They?'

'I. I recognised the address when he wrote to me. Then he walked in.'

'Who are the others? What are their names?'

'Abyssinia, Alma, Balaclava, Balkan.'

'How did you become involved?'

'It goes back a long way.'

'Miss McQuillen. You have a captive audience!'

'On the fourteenth of August 1969 I was escorting an English journalist through the Falls: his name was Jack McHenry.'

'How did you meet him?'

'I am coming to that. I met him on the previous night, the thirteenth; there was a meeting outside Divis flats to protest about the police in the Bogside. The meeting took a petition to Springfield Road police station. But the police refused to open the door. Part of the crowd broke away and marched back down to Divis to Hastings Street police station and began

throwing stones. There was trouble on the road all night because of roaming gangs. They stoned or petrol-bombed a car with two fire chiefs in it and burnt down a Protestant show-room at the bottom of Conway Street. I actually tried to stop it happening. He was there, at Balaclava Street, when it happened. He stopped me and asked if I'd show him around the Falls. He felt uneasy, being an Englishman, and he didn't know his way around without a map. I said I'd be happy to.'

'Were you a member of an illegal organisation?'

'What organisation? There were half a dozen guns in the Falls in '69 and a lot of old men who couldn't even deliver the *United Irishman* on time. And the women's section had been disbanded during the previous year because there was nothing for them to do but run around after the men and make tea for the ceilidhs. He asked me the same question that night, and I told him truthfully that I was not – then.

'On the evening of the fourteenth we walked up the Falls Road, it was early, we had been walking round all day, we were on our way back to his hotel – the Grand Central in Royal Avenue – he wanted to phone his editor and give an early report about events on the road. As we walked up the Falls from Divis towards Leeson Street, we passed a group of children in pyjamas going from Dover Street towards the flats. Further up the road at Conway Street a neighbour of ours was crossing the road to Balaclava Street with his children; he said he was taking them to Sultan Street hall for the night. Everything seemed quiet. We walked on down Leeson Street and into town through the Grosvenor Road: the town centre was quiet too. He phoned his paper and then took me to dinner to a Chinese restaurant across the road from the hotel. I remember it because there was a false ceiling in the restaurant, like a sky with fake star constellations. We sat in a velvet alcove and there were roses on the table. After dinner we went to his hotel and went to

bed. At five o'clock in the morning the phone rang. I thought it was an alarm call he'd placed. He slammed down the phone and jumped up and shouted at me: "Get up quickly. All hell's broken loose in the Falls!"

'We walked quickly to the bottom of Castle Street and began to walk hurriedly up the road. At Divis Street I noticed that five or six shops around me had been destroyed by fire. At Divis flats a group of men stood, it was light by this time. When they heard that Jack was a journalist they began telling him about the firing. It had been going on all night, they said, and several people were dead, including a child in the flats. They took him to see the bullet holes in the walls. The child was in a cot at the time. And the walls were thin. I left him there at Divis and hurried up the road to Conway Street. There was a large crowd there as well, my own people. I looked up the street to the top. There was another crowd at the junction of Ashmore Street – this crowd was from the Shankill – they were setting fire to a bar at the corner and looting it. Then some of the men began running down the street and breaking windows of the houses in Conway Street. They used brush handles. At the same time as the bar was burning, a number of the houses at the top of the street also caught fire in Conway Street. The crowd were throwing petrol bombs in after they broke the windows. I began to run up towards the fire. Several of the crowd also started running with me.

'Then I noticed for the first time, because my attention had been fixed on the burning houses, that two turreted police vehicles were moving slowly down the street on either side. Somebody shouted: "The gun turrets are pointed towards us!" And everybody ran back. I didn't. I was left standing in the middle of the street, when a policeman, standing in a doorway, called to me: "Get back! Get out of here before you get hurt."

'The vehicles were moving slowly down Conway Street

towards the Falls Road with the crowd behind them, burning houses as they went. I ran into the top of Balaclava Street at the bottom of Conway Street where our crowd were. A man started shouting at the top of his voice: "They're going to fire. They're going to fire on us!"

'And our crowd ran off down the street again.

'A woman called to me from an upstairs window: "Get out of the mouth of the street." Something like that.

'I shouted: "But the people! The people in the houses!"

'A man ran out and dragged me into a doorway. "They're empty!" he said. "They got out last night!" Then we both ran down to the bottom of Balaclava Street and turned the corner into Raglan Street. If he hadn't been holding me by the arm then that was the moment when I would have run back up towards the fires.'

'Why did you want to do that? Why did you want to run back into Conway Street?'

'My grandmother lived there – near the top. He took me to Sultan Street refugee centre. "She's looking for her granny," he told a girl with a St John Ambulance armband on. She was a form below me at school. My grandmother wasn't there. The girl told me not to worry because everyone had got out of Conway Street. But I didn't believe her. An ambulance from the Royal arrived to take some of the wounded to hospital. She put me in the ambulance as well. It was the only transport on the road other than the police vehicles. "Go to the hospital and ask for her there," she said.

'It was eight o'clock in the morning when I found her sleeping in a quiet room at the Royal. The nurse said she was tired, suffering from shock and a few cuts from flying glass. I stayed with her most of the day. I don't remember that she spoke to me. And then about six I had a cup of tea and wandered on to the road up towards the park. Jack McHenry was there, writing

it all down: "It's all over," he said. "The army are here." We both looked down the Falls, there were several mills that I could see burning: the Spinning Mill and the Great Northern, and the British Army were marching in formation down the Falls Road. After that I turned and walked along the Grosvenor Road into town and spent the night with him at his hotel. There was nowhere else for me to go.'

I was suddenly very tired; more tired than on the day I sat in her room watching her sleep; more tired than on the day Jack left; infinitely more tired than I'd ever been in my life. I waited for someone else to speak. The room was warm and heavy and full of smoke. They waited. So I went on.

'Up until I met Jack McHenry I'd been screwing around like there was no tomorrow. I only went with him because there was no one else left. He stayed in Belfast because it was news. I never went back to school again. I had six O levels and nothing else.'

'Is that when you got involved?'

'No, not immediately. My first reaction was to get the hell out of it. It wasn't until the summer of '71 that I found myself on the Falls Road again. I got a job in the new second-hand bookshop where I now work. Or did. One day a man came in looking for something: "Don't I know you?" he said. He had been a neighbour of ours at one time. "I carried your granny out of Conway Street." He told me that at about eleven o'clock on the night of August fourteenth, there were two families trapped at the top of Conway Street. One of them, a family of eight, was escorted out of their house by a policeman and this man. Bottles and stones were thrown at them from a crowd at the top of the street. The policeman was cut on the head as he took the children out. The other family, a woman, with her two teenage daughters, refused to leave her house because of her furniture. Eventually they were forced to run down the

back entry into David Street to escape. It was she who told him that Mrs McQuillen was still in the house. He went back up the street on his own this time. Because the lights in our house were out he hadn't realised there was anyone there. He got scared at the size of the crowd ahead and was going to run back when he heard her call out: "Finn! Finn!" He carried her down Conway Street running all the way. He asked me how she was keeping these days. I told him that she had recently died. Her heart gave up. She always had a weak heart.

'A few weeks later Jack took me on holiday to Greece with him. I don't really think he wanted me to go with him, he took me out of guilt. I'd rather forced the situation on him. We were sitting at a harbour café one afternoon, he was very moody and I'd had a tantrum because I found out about his latest girlfriend. I got up and walked away from him along the harbour front. I remember passing a man reading a newspaper at another café table, a few hundred yards along the quay. I saw a headline that made me turn back.

'"The army have introduced internment in Belfast," I said.

'We went home a few days later and I walked into a house in Andersonstown of a man I knew: "Is there anything for me to do?" I said. And that was how I became involved.'

'And the man's name?'

'You already know his name. He was arrested by the army at the beginning of the summer. I was coming up the street by the park at the time, when he jumped out of an army Saracen and ran towards me. A soldier called out to him to stop, but he ran on. He was shot in the back. He was a well-known member of the Provisional IRA on the run. I was on my way to see him. His father was the man who carried my grandmother out of Conway Street. He used to own a bacon shop.'

'Did Jack McHenry know of your involvement?'

'No. He didn't know what was happening to me. Eventually

we drifted apart. He made me feel that in some way I had disappointed him.'

'What sort of operations were you involved in?'

'My first job was during internment. Someone would come into the shop, the paymaster, he gave me money to deliver once a week to the wives of the men interned. The women would then come into the shop to collect it. It meant that nobody called at their houses, which were being watched. These were the old republicans. The real movement was re-forming in Andersonstown.'

'And the names? The names of the people involved?'

'There are no names. Only places.'

'Perhaps you'll tell us the names later.'

When they left me alone in the room I began to remember a dream I'd had towards the end of the time I was living with Jack. I slept very badly then, I never knew whether I was asleep or awake. One night it seemed to me that I was sitting up in bed with him. I was smoking, he was writing something, when an old woman whom I didn't recognise came towards me with her hands outstretched. I was horrified; I didn't know where she came from or how she got into our bedroom. I tried to make Jack see her but he couldn't. She just kept coming towards me. I had my back against the headboard of the bed and tried to fight her off. She grasped my hand and kept pulling me from the bed. She had very strong hands, like a man's, and she pulled and pulled and I struggled to release my hands. I called out for help of every sort, from God, from Jack. But she would not let me go and I could not get my hands free. The struggle between us was so furious that it woke Jack. I realised then that I was dreaming. He put his hands on me to steady me: 'You're having a fit. You're having a fit!' he kept saying. I still had my eyes closed even though I knew I was awake. I asked him not to let

WHAT WAS THIS DREAM REPRESENT

me see him. Until it had passed. I began to be terribly afraid, and when I was sure it had passed, I had to ask him to take me to the toilet. He never asked any questions but did exactly what I asked. He took me by the hand and led me to the bathroom, where he waited with me. After that he took me back to bed again. As we passed the mirror on the bedroom door I asked him not to let me see it. The room was full of mirrors, he went round covering them all up. Then he got into bed and took my hand again.

'Now please don't let me go,' I said. 'Whatever happens don't let go of my hand.'

'I promise you. I won't,' he said.

But I knew that he was frightened.

I closed my eyes and the old woman came towards me again. It was my grandmother; she was walking. I didn't recognise her the first time because - she had been in a wheelchair all her life.

She reached out and caught my hands again and the struggle between us began: she pulled and I held on. She pulled and I still held on.

'Come back!' Jack said. 'Wherever you are, come back!'

She pulled with great force.

'Let go of me!' I cried.

Jack let go of my hand.

The policewoman who had been standing silently against the wall all the time stepped forward quickly. When I woke I was lying on the floor. There were several people in the room, and a doctor.

'Are you sure you're fit to continue?'

'Yes.'

'What about the names?'

'My father and grandmother didn't speak for years: because he married my mother. I used to go and visit him. One night

SHAN VON BUCH
W. RICHOLD (W. RICHOLD)

as I was getting ready to go there, I must have been about seven or eight at the time, my grandmother said, "Get your father something for his birthday for me" – she handed me three shillings – "but you don't have to tell him it's from me. Get him something for his cough."

'At the end of Norfolk Street was a sweet shop. I bought a tin of barley sugar. The tin was tartan: red and blue and green and black. They wrapped it in a twist of brown paper. I gave it to my mother when I arrived. "It's for my daddy for his birthday in the morning."

' "From whom?"

' "From me."

' "Can I look?"

' "Yes."

'She opened the paper: "Why it's beautiful," she said. I remember her excitement over it. "He'll be so pleased." She seemed very happy. I remember that. Because she was never very happy again. He died of consumption before his next birthday.'

'Why did you live with your grandmother?'

'Because our house was too small.'

'But the names? The names of the people in your organisation?'

'Conway, Cupar, David, Percy, Dover and Divis. Mary, Merrion, Milan, McDonnell, Osman, Raglan, Ross, Rumania, Serbia, Slate, Sorella, Sultan, Theodore, Varna and Ward Street.'

When I finished they had gone out of the room again. Only the policewoman remained. It is not the people but the streets I name.

The door opened again.

'There's someone to see you,' they said.

Jack stood before me.

'In God's name, Finn. How and why?'

He wasn't supposed to ask that question. He shook his head and sighed: 'I nearly married you.'

Let's just say it was historical.

'I ask myself over and over what kind of woman are you, and I have to remind myself that I knew you, or thought I knew you, and that I loved you once.'

Once, once upon a time.

'Anything is better than what you did, Finn. Anything! A bomb in a pub I could understand – not forgive, just understand – because of the arbitrariness of it. But – you caused the death of someone you had grown to know!'

I could not save him. I could only give him time.

'You should never have let me go!' I said, for the first time in ten years.

He looked puzzled: 'But you weren't happy with me. You didn't seem very happy.'

He stood watching for a minute and said: 'Where are you, Finn? Where are you?'

The door closed. An endless vista of solitude before me, of sleeping and waking alone in the dark – in the corner a spider was spinning a new web. I watched him move from angle to angle. An endless confinement before me and all too soon a slow gnawing hunger inside for something – I watched him weave the angles of his world in the space of the corner.

Once more they came back for the names, and I began: 'Abyssinia, Alma, Balaclava, Balkan, Belgrade, Bosnia', naming the names: empty and broken and beaten places. I know no others.

Gone and going all the time.

Redevelopment. Nothing more dramatic than that; the planners are our bombers now. There is no heart in the Falls these days.

'But the names? The names of the people who murdered him? The others?'

'I know no others.'

The gradual and deliberate processes weave their way in the dark corners of all our rooms, and when the finger is pointed, the hand turned, the face at the end of the finger is my face, the hand at the end of the arm that points is my hand, and the only account I can give is this: that if I lived for ever I could not tell: I could only glimpse what fatal visions stir that web's dark pattern, I do not know their names. I only know for certain what my part was, that even on the eve, on such a day, I took him there.

THE WAY-PAVER

ANNE DEVLIN

I rang my sister on the morning the baby was due and said: 'How are you feeling?'
'Bored.' She said.

I wondered then if I should tell her.

My sister has the habit of sadness. She was the second-born. The first-born child was me. My mother said the births were difficult – my third sister was left too long in the birth channel and suffered... they didn't have the equipment, they locked the forceps in a cupboard and couldn't find the key... was kept too long – that's when the brain damage occurred.

We were driving to the hospital, between the prison and the hospital, when I said: 'I must get some flowers.'

'Try Kennedy's at Carlisle Circus,' my mother said. 'We get all our wreaths from there.'

'I don't think that's quite the right place, is it?'

'It's still a florist.'

I tiptoed through the lily wreaths and told the girl I was looking for a spray for my sister.

'She's just had a baby', but I stood looking round.

'Why didn't you tell Maeve she was one of twins and the other was born dead?'