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The Old Sorrow

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The Old Sorrow

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

Emmett Schlenz

5 May 2016

(Printed with an unregistered version of Fade In)

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Written by
Emmett Schlenz

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Draft
Two

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(Printed with an unregistered version of Fade In)

ACT I

SCENE 1

NORTHERN IRELAND. BELFAST. THE LORD THOMAS ASHFORD HOSPITAL.

1972. THE SET IS IN TWO SEGMENTS: A WAITING AREA, WITH A RECEPTIONIST'S DESK AND A NUMBER OF CHAIRS AND TABLES. ABOVE THE DESK, A ROW OF THREE LIGHTS: YELLOW, GREEN, AND RED. IN THE WALL BEHIND THE DESK, A SET OF SUPPLY CUPBOARDS

ON A PLATFORM ABOVE THE WAITING AREA, A RECOVERY ROOM. THREE BEDS WITH A CHAIR BY THE FOOT OF EACH. STAIRS LEAD UP FROM THE RECEPTION ROOM TO THE RECOVERY ROOM STAGE LEFT. STAGE RIGHT IN THE RECOVERY ROOM IS A DOOR LEADING OFFSTAGE.

THE HOSPITAL (THE TASH) HAS A GOTHIC AESTHETIC. BADLY IN NEED OF REMODELING. EXPOSED PIPING, OLD STONE. AN 18TH CENTURY BUILDING THAT WAS REFURBISHED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH.

The curtain rises on a darkened tableau. MARTIN TYRONE sits motionless in a chair by the stage right bed of the Recovery Room. Middle-aged, gruff, working-class. His wife MARGARET lies comatose in the stage right bed. He leans over her, elbows on his knees and hands folded under his chin. AGNES BRENNAN, 50s, haggard, sits at the receptionist's desk, frozen over some files. NUALA O'SHEA, a fresh-faced rookie nurse, stands on the stage-left stairs. Nuala and Agnes dress in starched white nurse uniforms.

Over the tableau a riot outside the hospital sounds: furious shouting, thuds of plastic bullets, shattering glass, clash of metal. A spatter of machine gun fire from stage right breaks the tableau: Martin, Agnes, and Nuala all duck and look off stage right.

After the tableau break, the lights come up on the upstairs. Martin begins stroking Margaret's hair, Agnes flips through her folders, and Nuala climbs up the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

(singing in a deep,
husky, melancholic
baritone, "She Moved
Through the Fair")

My young love said to me, "My mother won't mind. And my father won't slight you for your lack of kind." And she stepped away from me and this she did say. "It will not be long, love, till our wedding day."

Nuala reaches the recovery room door and opens it just as Martin, his back to her, begins the next verse. She stands in the doorway, listening and smiling.

MARTIN

As she stepped away from me and she moved through the fair. And fondly I watched her move here and move there. And then she turned homeward with one star awake. Like the swan in the evening moves over the lake.

NUALA

Bit of a tragic song for a husband to sing at his wife's bedside, no?

MARTIN

(turns to look at
Nuala)

It was a favorite of hers. Is, I mean. She thinks it's romantic.

NUALA

Doesn't sound so romantic the way you sing it. Still lovely. Just sad.

MARTIN

Visiting hours are over, I take it?

NUALA

And all the ruckus on Falls Road just outside our door? No, Mr. Tyrone, I came up to say we think it best you stay here for the time being. Till the riot dies down.

Martin stands up from his chair.

NUALA

Matron O'Keen tell you that? Because she can stuff it.

MARTIN

She's off duty tonight. This is general hospital policy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

My daughter is home with a sitter. She'll be sick with worry.

NUALA

Take it up with Nurse Agnes downstairs, Mr. Tyrone, if you're so inclined. She's the Night Matron on duty, not me. But for now we strongly advise you to stay with your wife. Take the time to rest with her.

MARTIN

She doesn't need the time to rest. She's been resting long enough now.

(leans down and
kisses Margaret's
forehead)

Never thought the booming of a taig's bomb could lull a person to sleep for this long.

NUALA

Mr. Tyrone. The language, please. Many goodhearted, bombless Catholics will take offense.

(beat)

One of whom is doing her best to care for your wife.

MARTIN

Sorry, Miss O'Shea. I didn't mean -

NUALA

Nuala, please. And it's alright, just -

*A muffled blast and a ratatat of
gunfire. Nuala jolts but Martin,
prepared now, just glances in the
direction of the sound. He sits
back down, calm.*

MARTIN

Still new for you?

NUALA

New?

MARTIN

The bomb blasts.

NUALA

I grew up right here on the Falls. Same as a lot of the girls here. So believe me when I say I've heard worse than this. But the minute that bomb blasts stop being startling will be the minute I know I've lived here too long.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Looks like I've lived here too long, then.

An emergency siren sounds faintly and then grows louder. The yellow light above Agnes's desk begins to flash. Nuala bolts toward the door.

NUALA

Your wife might be getting a bunkmate.

Nuala dashes down the staircase, calling out to Agnes before she even reaches the bottom.

NUALA

What have we got?

AGNES

Yellow light. Riot injury.

NUALA

Shit.

Agnes reaches underneath the desk and pulls out a surgical mask and gloves, which she tosses to Nuala. She fumbles the gloves slightly as she puts them on.

AGNES

Deirdre picked the wrong night to take off.

NUALA

On a scale from one to fucking awful timing, that's fucking awful timing.

Commotion from just off stage left. Nuala looks over and straps the surgical mask over her mouth.

AGNES

Careful with the coarse language, Nuala. We're nurses. We're respectable fucking women.

SEAN, a burly paramedic, hurries a stretcher into the waiting room. On it lies FERGUS, his head bloodied, moaning. Beneath the blood he's a rugged type, with a face that's seen a few fistfights.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nuala rushes over to the Fergus and bends over him, peering.

SEAN

Shot with a rubber bullet not five minutes ago. No other wounds I can see.

NUALA

Head wound. Head wound.

Nuala reaches in her apron pocket and pulls out a roll of bandages. She unrolls some quickly and presses it against Fergus's head wound. He moans more loudly.

NUALA

Hang in there. We'll get you -

Fergus starts to convulse on the stretcher. Nuala flinches, looks at Agnes and then at Sean. Begins tearing through her bag. Confused. Fergus keeps convulsing.

SEAN

Do something! Jesus! You're the one with the meds.

NUALA

I don't - I...

The stage right door bursts open and DEIRDRE O'KEEN, the head nurse, storms onto the stage. Thirtyish and fiery. Her hair is wild beneath her cap and her nurse's uniform is only half on - her shirt is still unbuttoned, and she carries her apron in her hand.

NUALA

Deirdre! I just -

DEIRDRE

Nuala! Anti-convulsant now, if you would!

Deirdre chucks her apron at Sean, who catches it in the face. Nuala hands her a needle.

DEIRDRE

Sean, hold him the fuck down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sean leans in to hold Fergus still, but Fergus's flailing elbow slams into Sean's nose. He yells and stumbles back.

DEIRDRE

For fuck's sake.

Deirdre holds Fergus still with one arm and uses the other to jab the needle into his bicep. He calms instantly.

DEIRDRE

Nuala, dear, if you're only interested in holding things, you might find more career fulfillment as a fucking hatstand. Take the patient down to Trauma.

Nuala, rattled and upset, wheels Fergus off stage right.

SEAN

(still holding his
nose)

Jesus, Deirdre. That new batch of nurses. Isn't it your job to teach them how to do theirs?

DEIRDRE

Says the fucking punching bag. Jesus, Sean, it's her first week and there's already a riot. So fuck off.

AGNES

Deirdre, dear. Your shirt.

Deirdre buttons it up.

DEIRDRE

Came over right as I heard. Good thing, too.

AGNES

Too bad about your night off.

DEIRDRE

We're nurses in Belfast, Agnes. No such thing as an off night. Apron?

Sean hands Deirdre her nurse's apron. She ties it around her waist.

DEIRDRE

What do we know about our patient? Is the poor lad indeed a poor lad, or will he be trouble?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SEAN

Took a rubber bullet to the noggin in the riot, so I'll let you think about what that means. His buddy rode along with us in the ambulance. Should be coming along shortly. Might know more.

Deirdre walks over to Agnes's desk, reaches behind it, and pulls out her nametag. She fastens it on her chest.

DEIRDRE

Send him along, will you? Doubt that fellow will be the only major injury of the night.

AGNES

Think so?

Another smattering of distant gunfire in the riot outside. Some shouting. Glass smashes. Deirdre raises her eyebrow at Agnes?

AGNES

Guess you do.

DEIRDRE

Sean. The other man, please. If we're treating a gunman I want to know before those boys playing soldier do.

SEAN

Yes ma'am.

(under his breath)

Christ.

Sean exits stage left. Deirdre shakes her head.

DEIRDRE

Any sight of our houseguests in fatigues tonight, Agnes?

AGNES

A boy came by when the riot started. Said Colonel Percy himself would be keeping an eye on the front doors. Make sure we're safe.

DEIRDRE

Be honest with me, Agnes. Have you seen our patient before?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGNES

Didn't want to say anything in front of the prod.
(she jerks her head
toward stage right)
Never fucking know around here. Who might tell.

DEIRDRE

Agnes. Please.

AGNES

Come on, Deirdre. You heard what happened over at the Mater Infirmorum last month. How else do you think that poor woman got shot in her hospital bed if not because some prod bastard told the UVF where she was?

DEIRDRE

He's a hospital employee, Agnes, and so long as he is he's no more a prod bastard than you are taig bitch. You wouldn't give your son any information on one of our Protestant prisoners, would you?

AGNES

Of course not. I'm a nurse.

DEIRDRE

And he's a paramedic. So as much as I hate to say it, cut that arrogant fuckhead some slack. Now about the patient.

AGNES

You really don't know him?

DEIRDRE

Know him? Why would I -

CONLEY LYNCH enters from stage right - young, long coat, unlit cigarette behind his ear. He's shabbily dressed but consciously so, as if to give off a certain revolutionary aesthetic. He stops as soon as he sees Deirdre. They stare at each other.

CONLEY

Well shoot me in the heart and paint my body green. Deirdre O'Keen. My oh so shitty night just became a bit more tolerable.

DEIRDRE

I'd make a crack about all the hospitals in all of Belfast, Mr. Lynch, but you'd take it as innuendo.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

I'm Mr. Lynch, now? You called me a lot of foul names when you and Cathal and I were kids. Fuckhead. Dickbag. The Great Big Zit on the Nose of Ireland. Somehow 'Mr. Lynch' cuts deepest.

DEIRDRE

Agnes, would you mind running up and checking if Mr. and Mrs. Tyrone need anything? I'd do it myself but he never seems pleased to see me.

AGNES

Of course, Deirdre. Call if you need me.

Agnes heads up the stairs stage right, enters the tableaued scene in the patient's room, and freezes.

DEIRDRE

Fine, Conley Lynch. Conley. Fucking hell, you're as irritating as you ever were. Your man's the one with the head wound, I imagine?

CONLEY

Came here with him because I worried for his safety, with those gun toting British pricks prowling around the hospital.

DEIRDRE

You'll admit that you've a reason to be worried for your friend, then? That the army might have an interest in him?

Conley makes himself comfortable in one of the waiting room chairs.

CONLEY

I said nothing more than there are gun toting British pricks lurking about here, and I spoke the truth when I did so. I've said nothing about our dear, sweet, innocent Fergus.

DEIRDRE

Fergus?

CONLEY

Your patient is Fergus McCallum. Christ, Deirdre, didn't you recognize him? When you were eighteen you wouldn't shut up about that boy. You mentioned all sorts of unspeakable deeds, if I recall.

DEIRDRE

Well fuck. All the blood and convulsing and I didn't recognize that bastard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Conley straightens up in his chair. Deirdre takes a thick black book out from behind her desk and writes in it.

DEIRDRE

Fergus McCallum. God.

CONLEY

Convulsing? He was convulsing?

DEIRDRE

He's in surgery now, Conley. That nasty blow scrambled something in his head while he was busy being a sweet and innocent rioter.

Conley stands up and takes a step forward.

CONLEY

I figured you'd changed since I left for Boston College, Deirdre, but I didn't expect your blood to turn orange in the meantime.

DEIRDRE

My blood isn't orange, Conley. But it's sure as hell not green. Your man Fergus made sure I knew that. My blood's just sticky and red. He made sure I knew that too.

Conley cocks his head to the side, quizzically. At that moment COLONEL HARRY PERCY, mid 20s, a uniformed officer of the British army, enters stage left, flanked by two armed SOLDIERS in fatigues. Colonel Percy has a pistol at his side. He's haughty but unsure, quick to anger but well-intentioned. And scared.

Conley sits back down when Percy enters, crossing his arms and glaring at the soldiers.

COLONEL PERCY

Matron O'Keen. I've been informed of a new patient being entered into your care and I wish to speak with him.

Deirdre opens her mouth to answer but Conley cuts her off from the chair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

He's probably under a general anaesthetic right now thanks to you bunch of colonialist pigs, so I expect you'll have a hard time speaking with him about much at all. Even with your particularly "effective" conversationalist skills.

COLONEL PERCY

Tell me, Matron O'Keen, who is this man?

DEIRDRE

Somebody who really ought to learn when to shut up.

Conley stands up from his chair and stalks forward toward Colonel Percy. Percy's hand drifts toward his pistol, and the soldiers shift their rifles around.

CONLEY

Tell me, Colonel, if you're at a fancy British cocktail party and you're having trouble starting up a nice talk do you bust out your pliers and start ripping off fingernails right then and there? Or is that just for when you're keen on chatting up Irish Catholics?

COLONEL PERCY

Restrain him.

The two soldiers rush forward at Conley. Conley steps back but one of the soldiers punches him in the nose, and Conley drops to one knee. They grab him by the arms and force him into a kneel.

DEIRDRE

Colonel Percy. Harry. Please. His friend is seriously injured and he's upset. Leave him be.

COLONEL PERCY

I suspect he's an IRA sympathizer, Matron O'Keen.

DEIRDRE

Seems like a lot of the boys the British army punches in the face end up republicans, don't they? Let him alone, Colonel. This is a hospital, not a warzone.

Another ratatat of gunfire.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL PERCY

The ambient noise seems to disagree.
(he looks Conley up
and down)

Leave him be.

*The soldiers let Conley go and
return to Colonel Percy's side.
Conley staggers to his feet,
clutching his now bleeding nose.*

CONLEY

Fuckers.

DEIRDRE

You're really not helping, Conley, so please shut the fuck
up. Isn't there a riot for you to be keeping an eye on,
Colonel? I'll let you know when our patient is ready to talk
to you, don't you fret.

*Colonel Percy nods and leaves with
his soldiers stage right. Conley
sits down hard on one of the
waiting room chairs, holding his
bleeding nose still. Deirdre kneels
down in front of him and unzips her
medical bag.*

CONLEY

How the fuck can you run a hospital with those royalist
dickasses stalking about and waving their guns? Christ, it's
like looking at a trio of the queen's own dildoes dressed up
in military uniforms.

DEIRDRE

Conley. Jesus.

CONLEY

What? Am I wrong?

*Deirdre pulls out a wad of cotton
and dabs Conley's nose with it. He
winces.*

DEIRDRE

How much does that hurt? Badly?

CONLEY

Stings a bit. Not too much.

DEIRDRE

Good. Not broken then.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE (cont'd)
(she starts to wipe
away some of the
blood)

And no, Conley, you're not wrong. Just impolite.

CONLEY

You're telling me I'm impolite? Deirdre O'Keen, who once called a nun an 'icicle-nippled penguin' to her face, is telling me to be polite?

DEIRDRE

I was a kid then, Conley. I've grown up. Become more sensible.

Deirdre finishes mopping up the blood.

CONLEY

You mooned a cop the night of my American wake, for Christ's sake. Flashing your ass isn't exactly behavior fit for a sensible woman.

DEIRDRE

That American wake of yours was a long time ago.

CONLEY

It's just been six years.

DEIRDRE

If your six years were anything like my six years, they'd seem long to you too. But no, you left for Boston. You left us for Boston. You left your beloved Ireland for Boston.

CONLEY

Oh come off it, Deirdre. I didn't fucking abandon you all, I went to get a goddamn education. And I joined in the marches in '68 too, you know, I was just marching across the ocean. God, Deirdre, you should have heard the phone calls I had with your brother when I was away. The global revolution was going to start in Ireland and we were going to be lead, Cathal and I, waving the Plough and the Stars. We dreamed only in green.

DEIRDRE

You think Cathal's still dreaming in green now?

Conley falls silent and averts Deirdre's eyes. Deirdre stands up, walks over to a trash bin by the reception desk, and slams the bloody rag into it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

I didn't fucking think so.

She leans against the reception desk, crosses her arms, and glowers.

CONLEY

Heard from him lately?

DEIRDRE

Why do you want to know?

Conley stands up and steps toward Deirdre.

CONLEY

Cathal was my best mate, Deirdre. Christ, when they told me what happened -

DEIRDRE

They? Who is fucking "they"?

CONLEY

You know exactly who fucking they is. Don't be disingenuous.

DEIRDRE

Then I'm sure "they" told you all you need to know about Cathal.

Conley takes another step toward Deirdre.

CONLEY

Jesus, Deirdre, I'm not some dogmatic gunman, thumping the 1916 Proclamation like it's gospel and praying to Wolfe Tone like he's a fucking saint. I can think for my fucking self. And I know Cathal. I know why he left.

DEIRDRE

Do you now?

CONLEY

They don't tolerate deserters well, Deirdre, but they at least admitted that those poor people weren't supposed to be there. Just meant to be soldiers, they said. Cathal didn't mean to hurt any innocents. He didn't know.

DEIRDRE

I'm sure if you tell him that it'll make him feel all better. Just wash all the guilt of that man's death and that woman's coma clean off his soul. "Oh, don't worry, Cathal," you can tell him. "It was just a wee little accident. Come

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

back to Belfast, now, and try not to listen to their wailing when they visit you in your dreams."

CONLEY

Christ, Deirdre. You don't have to be so fucking hostile.

DEIRDRE

You're not the first man to come to me asking about my brother, Conley. The last wasn't as kind as you. Nor the one before that. Nor the one before him.

CONLEY

I didn't know, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE

They left that little plot point out of their story, huh? They'll tell the whole of Belfast how Cathal O'Keen betrayed the Irish Republican Army, but not a single peep about what they did afterwards.

CONLEY

It wasn't the whole army, surely. Can't hold the geese responsible for the couple of psychotic ducks hiding in their flock.

DEIRDRE

Yeah, well you happened to fly in with one of those ducks.

CONLEY

Fergus?

DEIRDRE

Who the fuck do you think?

Conley collapses back down. Then, a commotion off stage right.

BRONAGH

(off stage)

Get your fucking hands off me!

BRONAGH BODHRAN storms onstage. She's in her 60s and has a commanding air to her. She is followed by an irritated Colonel Percy and his two soldiers, then by a worried DOCTOR HECTOR MCALLISTER, the head surgeon.

When Bronagh comes onstage, Conley bursts to his feet, straightening out his attire and watching Bronagh. Behind the others comes

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE MCCAFFERTY, a young American journalist, scribbling on a pad of paper.

BRONAGH

I'm horrified, Dr. McAllister, that you would allow such militaristic procedures in your hospital. Allowing soldiers to wait outside a patient's room -- are we in Belfast or a gulag?

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

They are a security measure, Miss Bodhran. And they do not appreciate being harassed while on duty.

COLONEL PERCY

Harassed is putting it lightly, Dr. McAllister. She laid hands on one of my men.

BRONAGH

And you laid hands on a member of Parliament, elected by the Irish people of Belfast. If you or your men touch me again, I swear to God on High I will drag your career through the streets.

Colonel Percy opens his mouth to respond, then closes it. He motions to his men to leave.

BRONAGH

And you leave that patient alone, do you hear me? I have my eye on you, you Tommy bastards.

(she glares at Dr.
McAllister)

Not everyone in this hospital thinks so highly of the Queen.

Colonel Percy marches his men off stage left. Deirdre steps away from the reception desk.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

Matron O'Keen. Dr. Pearse requires your hands in surgery.

DEIRDRE

On my way.

Deirdre exits stage right.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

Ms. Bodhran. Apologies.

BRONAGH

I'd say you can apologize to my ass, doctor, but I don't consider you worthy of the view.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

Well. All the same. We'll see you in a few days.

*Doctor McAllister exits stage
right.*

BRONAGH

Christ. I hope your getting interesting material for your article, Anne.

ANNE

It's not what the Boston Globe sent me here for, but it's interesting nonetheless.

*Conley clears his throat. Anne and
Bronagh turn to look at him.
Throughout the conversation Anne
hangs back, quiet, scribbling away.*

CONLEY

Ms. Bodhran?

BRONAGH

If you're some loyalist snotrag come to spew at me misogyny veiled as free speech, sir, I humbly request that you fuck yourself up your teeny little pisshole.

CONLEY

Um. No. Ma'am. My name is Conley Lynch. Assistant editor of An Phoblacht.

BRONAGH

Oh! Christ, I'm sorry. Can't apologize enough. It's been a long, long day.

CONLEY

Don't trouble yourself, truly.

BRONAGH

Good paper, that An Phoblacht. You've been quite kind to me, even during that fiasco over in the United States.

CONLEY

Solidarity is solidarity, ma'am. If the Irish Americans can't see their responsibility to the oppressed of their own country, somebody ought to tell them. And you did quite a job of that.

BRONAGH

I appreciate your kind words, Mr. Lynch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

They're more than just kind words. I watched you on TV during the riots of 1969. You handled that bullhorn like you were delivering the Sermon in the Bog.

BRONAGH

I must say, though I'm a regular reader of An Phoblacht and I don't recognize your name.

CONLEY

I've only been there a few months, so hopefully that will change.

BRONAGH

I look forward to reading more of you.

More riot sounds. Bronagh looks off stage left.

BRONAGH

Dear God, I wish this riot would end so I won't be stuck here. Such an old place makes for an unsettling hospital. Half of it smells like a grave and the other smells like an antiseptic. And to think I'll have to be back here.

CONLEY

Do you know a patient here?

BRONAGH

Nothing as tragic as that. Just a slight problem with my eye I need fixed. Minor procedure, really, but not one I can do myself in front of the mirror. Anyhow, I do feel I ought to stretch my legs a bit. Find a cup of tea somewhere. But it was lovely meeting you.

CONLEY

Same to you, ma'am. Best of luck with the tea and the eye.

Bronagh exits stage left. Conley sits back down. Anne approaches, clearing her throat.

ANNE

Excuse me? Mr. Lynch, I think it was?

CONLEY

Mr. Lynch I know it is.

ANNE

Anne McCafferty. I'm with the Boston Globe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

The Globe? A fellow I knew at university works there now. Rick Katz. Know him?

ANNE

I do! Not well, but I've bumped elbows with him in the coffee room.

CONLEY

Good man, Rick. What brings you to Belfast all the way from America, Miss McCafferty?

ANNE

Anne, please. And I'm supposed to be here researching the medical advances here at Queen's Hospital.

CONLEY

Medical advances? I never expected the Irish Jonas Salk to be hidden away here, back bent over beakers and a great cry of 'eureka' building in his chest.

ANNE

You should give your home some more credit. Belfast is fast becoming the leader in treating victims of gunshot wounds and bomb blasts, given your...peculiar political situation.

CONLEY

Peculiar is just a touch to small-sounding a word, don't you think? "Peculiar" is how you describe that odd fellow at work you find more than a bit irritating but feel sorry for. "Peculiar" is a baby that looks uncomfortably like your President Nixon. I'd hesitate to use such a word as "peculiar" to describe Belfast.

ANNE

(readying her pad
and pen)

How would you describe it then?

CONLEY

(seeing Anne
prepared to write
his answer down)

Tragic, I think, would be the easiest word, and the one that's tossed about the most by Americans journalists who pretend to know this place.

ANNE

Not overly keen on being interviewed?

CONLEY

I'm used to the goings-on of Ireland being taken out of context.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

I can assure you, Mr. Lynch, I am a journalist of a most respectable character.

CONLEY

Assure me all you like, Miss McCafferty, but it's just breath, not a promise.

Anne sits down next to Conley.

ANNE

Look. I'll be in Belfast for another week. Talk to me a bit, give me some quotes, and before I leave I'll meet you and let you look over my article. Make sure you and Belfast have been represented honestly.

CONLEY

Why do you want to talk with me so badly?

ANNE

It's not so much you specifically, to be honest. You're not wrong about us foreign journalists taking Ireland out of context. My family back in Boston is a group of tricolor-waving, church-going Irish Catholics, so I'm high risk for thinking I understand this place, that I belong here, that I'm one of you. You seem like the sort of man to help remind me that I'm not.

CONLEY

Well. Alright then. Repeat your question, would you please?

ANNE

How would you describe the situation in Belfast, in a word? Since "peculiar" isn't all that palatable to your native tongue, and "tragic" is too easy.

CONLEY

I never said "tragic" was too easy, Miss McCafferty, just that it's the easiest.

ANNE

That's your word then?

CONLEY

Absolutely not. At least not in the Greek sense of the word. Tragedy demands catharsis. Oedipus certainly suffered greatly, what with all his mother fucking and his eye plucking, but at least the audience watching gets something out of the tragedy. A purgation of fear and pity, I believe is that Greek called it. And there is no purgation here. Purgatory, maybe, but no purgation. And God only knows what sin Ireland committed to get Ulster stuck in this British limbo.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

Your word, then?

CONLEY

Haunted, I'd say.

ANNE

Haunted?

CONLEY

There's no city in the world with more ghosts than Belfast. Every place, every person is haunted by somebody. Sooner or later everybody gets their ghost.

ANNE

And yours?

CONLEY

Mine's a little slow in arriving, it seems. Must be carrying a particularly heavy set of chains. But I've a sneaking suspicion that when that banshee gets here, oh, how loud she's going to wail.

ANNE

To be frank, Mr. Lynch, I can think of a number of cities with more dead than Belfast. Warsaw. Leningrad. Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

CONLEY

It's not we've more dead. Just more ghosts. And our ghosts stick around and breed.

A single gunshot, louder than all the others, rings out. Anne and Conley both jump.

CONLEY

Jesus!

An alarm goes off, and the green light above the reception desk starts flashing. The tableau breaks upstairs and Agnes bolts down the stairs.

Agnes sees the light. Sirens sound offstage and begin to grow louder.

AGNES

Shit.

The phone rings and Agnes answers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGNES

Yeah? Where? Christ. Bring him.

She sees Anne and Conley.

AGNES

Look, I'm going to very politely and humbly and firmly ask the both of you to get the fuck out of here for now. Grab a coffee or something.

CONLEY

Isn't this the waiting room? And aren't we waiting?

AGNES

Christ, Lynch, you're not making a political stand every time you don't do what somebody wants you to do. Sometimes, you're just being a dickass. You won't want to be here. Trust me.

CONLEY

Alright. Yeah. Alright.

ANNE

I'll buy you a coffee if you answer some more questions?

CONLEY

Gladly.

*Anne and Conley exit stage left.
Agnes hauls a massive medical bag
up from behind the desk.*

*Deirdre rushes in from stage left,
already strapping on gloves, with
her surgical mask dangling from
around her neck.*

DEIRDRE

How bad?

AGNES

One of Percy's boys.

DEIRDRE

Fuck. He'll be a nightmare.

AGNES

Because he's usually so dreamlike.

*Sean erupts in from stage right,
pushing a stretcher with RONALD
SHERMAN, 19, in fatigues, bleeding
profusely from the chest. Sean has*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

a bandage pressed against the wound. Colonel Percy follows, furious.

DEIRDRE

Christ. Sean, keep a hold on that wound.

Nuala enters from stage left.

DEIRDRE

Nuala, go prep one of the rooms for surgery.

NUALA

But -

DEIRDRE

Go!

Nuala runs off stage left again.

DEIRDRE

(to Agnes)

Scissors. Now.

Agnes pulls a long pair of scissors out of the medical bag and begins to cut away Ronald fatigues.

SEAN

I can't feel him breathing.

Deirdre steps in for Sean and begins to perform CPR, pumping up and down on his chest.

DEIRDRE

He needs to be in trauma now. Move.

Deirdre keeps pumping up and down on Ronald's chest as they begin to wheel him off stage left. Colonel Percy follows.

DEIRDRE

You wait here for the boy, Colonel.

COLONEL PERCY

His name is Ronald Sherman. He's not just a boy. And I'm coming.

DEIRDRE

No room for you. You'll stay here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL PERCY

He's my man, Matron, and I will -

DEIRDRE

You'll stay the fuck here, Colonel.

Deirdre, Sean, and Agnes wheel Ronald off, and Colonel Percy stands a bit dazed. He walks to the nearest chair and sits down, staring off.

DEVIN CREEDON, 40s, dressed in white overalls and carrying a mop and a bucket on rollers, enters stage left, whistling an Irish reel. Colonel Percy shoots him a look. Devin smiles and keeps whistling, and starts to mop up.

COLONEL PERCY

Good God, would you please stop that whistling?

DEVIN

Last I checked the queen hasn't made whistling illegal in Belfast yet, boyo.

Devin takes a closer look at the Colonel. He notices the man's distress, glances back off stage left, and then at the Colonel again.

DEVIN

But you seem to be having something of a day, what with who I'm assuming was your man getting wheeled by me just now, so out of a keen sense of my own Irish hospitality I'll extend you the courtesy of cutting short my whistling.

COLONEL PERCY

Thank you.

DEVIN

How has your first week in Belfast been, eh? Boyo?

COLONEL PERCY

I would prefer you address me as "colonel."

DEVIN

You're not my colonel. Boyo. But how has your first week been?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL PERCY

Do I know you or something, sir? Have we had some sort of interaction to justify your intrusive level of familiarity with a British officer?

DEVIN

Don't believe we've ever met, truly. Devin Creedon. Porter here at the Tash.

(he walks over and
offers his hand, and
the Colonel shakes
it)

I've been here since the start of things, so I've seen a lot of you colonels come and go.

COLONEL PERCY

And is that supposed to mean something?

DEVIN

Just that I've seen a lot of you come and go. Nothing more.

COLONEL PERCY

I get the impression you're suggesting something, Mr. Creedon.

DEVIN

I can't possibly help it if you read too much into what I'm saying. Though, truly, I do hope your man turns out okay.

COLONEL PERCY

Do you?

DEVIN

Of course I do. I just hate to see the British army with heavy souls and anger-filled hearts, because that's an occasion usually paired with heavy boots and bullet-filled guns and frequent little site seeing trips to Catholic homes on the Falls.

*Colonel Percy stands up, glaring.
Devin leans against his mop and
raises an eyebrow.*

DEVIN

And it's always a pity when young boys like that die. Not his fault he's here now, is it? Signed up to defend his country, not to prop up the Union Jack on the last few meters of an eroding empire. Generates a wee bit of pathos, that boy does. A wee bit, let's be clear, but a bit nonetheless.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL PERCY

I hope the sympathy I hear in your voice isn't disguising mockery.

DEVIN

This is a hospital, Colonel. Those of us who work here, all our hearts beat in time to Hippocrates' metronome. Beat in a way that encourages others to keep beating. Find me on the Falls and put your ear to my chest, and my heartbeat might rumble at a different rhythm.

Devin pushes his bucket and his mop off stage right, whistling his way off.

Colonel Percy sits back down.

Deirdre and Conley enter stage right, already speaking.

CONLEY

How can you not know?

DEIRDRE

Head wound like that, Conley, and your man could either wake up in a few hours ready for a pint or he could not wake up at all. He's not yet stable.

CONLEY

When can I see him?

DEIRDRE

He's still in surgery. When there's a development one way or the other, tragic or no, I'll let you know personally.

CONLEY

Jesus.

Deirdre starts to head up the stairs. Conley moves toward the chairs but stops when he sees Colonel Percy. They eye each other.

Deirdre keeps going up the stairs, and when she opens the door the tableau breaks. In their conversation Deirdre is tense, careful, while Martin is gruff and dismissive.

DEIRDRE

Mr. Tyrone?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Thought you were off duty tonight.

DEIRDRE

Felt I was needed, what with the riot, so I came by. That a problem?

MARTIN

Can I leave now? My little girl is waiting for me.

DEIRDRE

There's a phone downstairs you can use to make a call, if you like. But you're stuck here until the riot ends.

MARTIN

I'll stay here.

DEIRDRE

You won't, actually. We've got patients who might need this room, if they're lucky. And besides, visiting hours ended long ago.

MARTIN

There any fucking Fenians like your brother down there?

DEIRDRE

You know what, mister - you know what, Martin, you fucking asshole? Your sullen verbal sniping is wearing me thin - and besides, I hear machine guns are more your style.

MARTIN

You stay out of my past.

DEIRDRE

Why the fuck should I? I'll be the first to tell you that I'm swimming around in the muck, but I cannot stand to listen to people like you with their noses just above the filth pretending like they're on dry land.

MARTIN

You've got some fucking nerve.

DEIRDRE

I really do. Now get the fuck downstairs. This is the Tash, and while Thomas Ashford's face might be on the coat of arms, I'm the lord of this place. So do what I tell you.

Martin glares, then stands up and shoulders his way past Deirdre and down the stairs. As he stomps down, Deirdre walks over to Margaret and adjusts her blanket, then follows Martin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Conley sits down when he hears Martin coming. Martin plops himself down into a chair himself, arms folded.

Deirdre reaches the bottom. Colonel Percy stands up when he sees her.

DEIRDRE

Still very much in surgery, Colonel. I'm sorry. You'll be the first to know.

Deirdre exits. The three men sit silently - the Irish republican, the British officer, and Martin.

CURTAIN CLOSES.

Act II

SCENE I

The curtain rises on Nuala, Devin, and Agnes chatting by the reception desk - Agnes seated behind it, Nuala leaning against it, and Devin seated atop it, feet kicking. It's daytime and quiet.

Upstairs in the recovery room, Margaret remains motionless, as always, in her bed. Another figure, face bandaged up, lies in the bed next to her, motionless as well.

Devin grins at Nuala as he talks to her, mischievous. Nuala listens, a bit bemused, and Agnes tries to ignore the both of them behind the desk, poring over and marking up a ledger.

DEVIN

I get the prickly impression that you think this true-life story of mine isn't so much packed with pathos and sorrow as it is full of shit.

NUALA

It's amusing. Which is a kinder way to describe it.

Devin leans away from Nuala in mock offense. Agnes glances up at him

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*and shakes her head before
returning to the ledger.*

DEVIN

Let me finish at least, whether you believe me or no. You're but a wee rookie here, dear Nuala, and my wholesome wish is that you understand fully the sort of spook-infested place into which you walk smiling every morning.

AGNES

Spook-infested? It's a hospital, Devin, for Christ's sake. It's not haunted.

DEVIN

It curdles the blood, so it does, if you leave yourself exposed to its chilly drafts and eerie sounds for too long. And how long have you been here, Miss Agnes?

AGNES

Twenty years over at the Mater Infirmorum and ten years here.

DEVIN

I'm rounding on the middle of my twenty-eighth right here at the Tash, thank you very much. Started here the night after drinking my first ever pint down at the Old Sorrow, that's how long I've been here.

(to Nuala)

So consider for yourself which of us constitutes the real authority on this place - me, Devin Creedon, grizzled hospital veteran and King of the Porters, or the comparatively babyfaced and innocent Agnes.

NUALA

I would love to hear the end of your story, Devin. Truly, I would.

*Devin looks exaggeratedly at Agnes,
grinning as he waits for her to
respond. She looks up and sighs,
the picture of begrudging
tolerance. She shuts her ledger.*

AGNES

We might as well enjoy the quiet of the day, I suppose. Go on and entertain us with your foolishness, Mr. Creedon.

*Devin settles himself, clears his
throat, and leans conspiratorially
toward Nuala.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVIN

So. The hospital nurses, in days gone by - the days being the 1950s, mind, during the old IRA's Border Campaign - took about as well to the poor girl's wailing and crying in the halls as her crotchiness herself, Matron O'Keen, would take now, so they brought her down here away from her da's room and slipped her a pill or two to lull her off to a silent sleep. Me, though, this being my first night shift on the job, and coming as I did from old Inishmaan in the west and being a stranger in this even stranger place, felt very well spooked by the whole occasion. Perhaps some folks who grew up in Belfast -

(he shoots Agnes a
pointed look)

- might think themselves too civilized for the old fairy stories, but if you would pardon a casual coarseness of the tongue, those folks would be right fucking full of shit. They're woven into the fabric of who we are, the fairies, real or not, and asking me to forget them would be like asking the Greeks to forget Hades, or the Americans to forget about...whoever it is that they have.

NUALA

My ma sent me off to sleep reading from Yeats, for what it's worth. I know the stories.

DEVIN

Right well that she did, for that means you might have picked up on what I did that night. Banshees don't often appear in the flesh - truth be told, I can't think of a story other than mine in which they do - but I swear to the dear Lord that this poor girl's wailing and keening outside her da's door was the wailing and keening of a girl stepped beyond the veil in her grief for her poor da and driven mad by knowing the things the living ought not to know. And I was the only one about when she woke, see, and I found her crouched in a corner, bawling and muttering and -

*Deirdre and Conley enter from stage
right, bickering already, and Devin
shuts up as soon as he sees
Deirdre, eyeing her.*

DEIRDRE

I'm not going to sign off on your muscle-flexing, dick-measuring, hyper-masculine ego trip.

CONLEY

Ego trip? We're worried for Fergus's fucking safety. Just let me keep an eye on him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

I already told you. Stay as long as you like during visiting hours.

CONLEY

Jesus, Deirdre, it's like you haven't looked out a window since the riot! You have to understand what it's like for us out there!

DEIRDRE

I understand. I understand you keenly. I've seen the soldiers on the Falls kicking down doors all along my street, hunting whoever killed that boy of Percy's. And those wee kids banging on their rubbish lids to warn the world of the British army wake me up every goddamn morning. But that doesn't mean I want a fucking IRA gunman in here watching a patient. Especially if that gunman's you.

Conley stops, shocked.

CONLEY

I'm a writer, Deirdre. Christ. I'm no gunman.

DEIRDRE

You wouldn't be the first Irish writer to get romantic ideas about taking up arms - or didn't you read your Sean O'Casey in university? Christ, folks always say that the sword pales next to the pen, but then they see an Armalite rifle and suddenly they're spilling more than ink.

CONLEY

(sees Devin, Nuala,
and Agnes)

Could we not bicker about this here? Rumors and bullets both are always flying around Belfast. I'd rather not get hit by either.

Deirdre steps up close to Conley.

DEIRDRE

No fucking guards. Do you hear me? Not you and not any others. Now take a seat and wait.

*Conley sits down in one of the
chairs, crossing his arms.*

CONLEY

This isn't settled.

DEIRDRE

Feel free to think that, if it gets you out of my goddamn hair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Deirdre walks to the reception desk.

DEIRDRE

Do none of you have anything meaningful to do?

AGNES

Quiet afternoon. Dr. McAllister himself told us to wait about until needed, so he did. Shoot the shit, he said, since it's a rare day today that nobody seems to be shooting much else.

DEIRDRE

(to Devin)

And you? No beds to make? No smelly, hairy men to wash?

DEVIN

Not a one. Goodness, Deirdre, you see me catching my breath here for a minute and having a bit of craic with these two ladies and you assume I'm shirking my duties.

DEIRDRE

I'd prefer you call me Matron O'Keen.

DEVIN

I'd prefer to call you some other things, too, but I think I'll stick with Deirdre for the sake of politeness.

At that moment Colonel Percy enters, composed and proper but with a helpless fury smoldering beneath his British manner.

COLONEL PERCY

Matron O'Keen. A word, if you may. Away from the...your subordinates.

DEVIN

Who's a subordinate to whom, now?

DEIRDRE

Devin, please. Would the three of you go whip up some tea, please?

Nuala heads offstage right first, unbothered. Devin glowers back at Colonel Percy as he goes. Agnes remains behind for a moment, raising her eyebrow at Deirdre and glancing at Colonel Percy. Deirdre nods, and Agnes exits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL PERCY

I appreciate your cooperation, Matron O'Keen. It doesn't go unnoted.

DEIRDRE

Don't think too much of it. Sending them off for tea is no trouble to me.

COLONEL PERCY

And if it proved troublesome?

DEIRDRE

Tea? Troublesome? I thought you were British, Colonel.

COLONEL PERCY

If cooperating were troublesome, I mean.

DEIRDRE

Ah. Well. I spot some suspicious feet behind the curtains of that question, now. Care to drag step out into the light?

COLONEL PERCY

You've no time for courtesy.

DEIRDRE

I haven't much time for anything. Your question, Colonel.

COLONEL PERCY

You've a certain patient that I still have yet to interview.

DEIRDRE

Interview? Rumor is we have a journalist running about, but I hear she is girlish and American, and you're neither. Journalists interview. Colonels interrogate.

COLONEL PERCY

Don't fuss over words with me, Matron Raglan.

DEIRDRE

And don't equivocate with me, Colonel Percy. You're new here. I am not. I've seen many a British officer march in here since the Troubles started, thinking their big gun and their bigger dick constitutes some form of authority. I hope you don't take offense when I say I'm not overly impressed with either of those things.

COLONEL PERCY

You're out of line.

DEIRDRE

That so? Show me that fucking line, then, because the only line I see here is the borderline between my island and yours, and which one of us crossed that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL PERCY

You're sounding like a fucking Fenian.

DEIRDRE

Oh you go ask an actual fucking Fenian and they'll set you straight about me. They'll teach you a whole new set of swear words in the meantime, too. Even fucking dumbshits barely know how to spell suddenly become walking thesauruses when you ask them about me.

COLONEL PERCY

If you're not one of them, then good God, why are you protecting this man? This Mr. Fergus McCallum? Do you know the things he's done?

DEIRDRE

The things you think he's done. If you knew he'd done them, you wouldn't need me to let you "talk" to him.

COLONEL PERCY

Well we're pretty goddamn sure he bombed one of our convoys about a year back. Killed a civilian in the process and put that poor woman upstairs in a coma. Odds are he's done a lot worse than that. That's the man you're protecting. A murderer and a terrorist.

A pair of suspicious characters enter stage right: ENOCH, squinty and shifty, and HAMMOND, thick and thuggish. They are dressed in leather jackets with their hands in their jacket pockets, and amble their way down to the waiting room, glancing about but not saying anything. Conley eyes them, and they eye him right back. They sit down opposite Conley: Enoch leaning back in his chair, legs crossed and hands folded in his lap, and Hammond leaning forward with his knees supporting his elbows and his clasped hands supporting his chin.

DEIRDRE

Says the man carrying a gun inside a hospital. And besides, he's a patient. And I am a nurse.

COLONEL PERCY

I thought nurses were supposed to be impartial.

DEIRDRE

Impartiality doesn't equal apathy. Now if you don't mind I do in fact have things to do, so please be on your way. And

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

I swear to God, if I even smell you or one of your men near my patient's room you will look on the IRA as a sweet relief from me.

Deirdre begins to walk off stage right but Colonel Percy grabs her arm and stops her.

COLONEL PERCY

How does it feel to protect a terrorist?

DEIRDRE

How does it feel to be the model for a thousand bad Hollywood villains? Get your filthy fucking English pig hand off me.

Deirdre wrenches herself away from Colonel Percy.

DEIRDRE

Christ, no wonder people in this city keep trying to kill you folks.

She marches downstage to where Conley is. Colonel Percy storms off stage right.

DEIRDRE

Conley. You can go up now if you like. And if a single solitary fucking -

(she glances at Enoch and Hammond)

-sorry. A single solitary soldier comes by, you alert me immediately, alright?

CONLEY

That's the sort of thing I like to hear.

Conley gets up from his chair, looks over the Suspicious Characters one more time, then heads upstairs and sits by the head of the middle bed. Meanwhile, Deirdre squints at Enoch and Hammond.

DEIRDRE

Can I help you two?

ENOCH

Just waiting for a friend, dear. Shouldn't be too much longer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

Can I ask who you're waiting for?

ENOCH

No. You can't.

Hammond stares straight ahead during all of this, not looking at Deirdre once. Enoch smiles up at Deirdre. She glares at him until the phone rings.

DEIRDRE

Christ, I have neither the time nor the patience to deal with you pair of crusty twats today.

Deirdre heads back to the reception desk and picks up the phone.

DEIRDRE

O'Keen. Yes, certainly, I made sure her bed would be all set this morning. Absolutely. I'll bring her up myself, just give me a few minutes.

Deirdre moves to exit stage right, glances back at Enoch and Hammond, then exits fully.

Enoch and Hammond sit in silence for a moment, then Hammond turns his head slowly to face Enoch.

HAMMOND

Did she call us a pair of crusty twats?

ENOCH

Wasn't sure you'd heard her.

HAMMOND

I heard her.

ENOCH

Proud of your restraint. Were we back on the Shankill she'd have a broken something or other right about now.

HAMMOND

Not here to make a scene.

ENOCH

Yet.

HAMMOND

Yet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Enoch and Hammond return to silence for another moment before Martin enters from stage left. Enoch and Hammond turn and see him, and stand up immediately. Martin stops dead, half in a smile, half confused.

ENOCH

Martin Tyrone!

MARTIN

Enoch! And Hammond! God, feels like it's been ages.

HAMMOND

Two years.

MARTIN

I'm sorry?

HAMMOND

Two years. Since those fucks put Margaret in here. Haven't seen you since.

ENOCH

Come on, Hammond. A hello would do nicely.

Hammond approaches Martin and gives him a long, gruff, genuine hug. Enoch watches.

HAMMOND

Good to see you, Martin. You're missed.

MARTIN

Yeah. Well. My daughter's only really got me now, you know? Not a lot of time for... and I already missed out on enough with her as it is.

ENOCH

Don't worry. Us and the other boys more than understand. A man says "family first and Ulster second," and that man has his priorities prim and proper.

HAMMOND

You did your time, we all figure.

ENOCH

More ways than one.

MARTIN

You both...uh, here to see Margaret?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*Enoch and Hammond exchange a look
and don't say anything at first.*

ENOCH

You'll have to forgive us. You're out of the game, and we all respect that, but the game's not over.

HAMMOND

Not while those fucking papists are out there killing us and our own.

MARTIN

Ah.

*Enoch takes a step toward Martin,
putting a hand on his shoulder.
Martin stares at the hand, then
back at Enoch.*

ENOCH

You wouldn't happen to know if, say, somebody important were staying here in the hospital, where they might be?

(Martin shakes his
head)

Well. Happen to think of something, let us know, yeah? We'll be around.

HAMMOND

Around and about. See you, Martin.

*Enoch and Hammond exit stage left.
Martin stands still, hands in his
pockets, staring at the floor.
Nuala enters stage left but Martin
doesn't hear her.*

NUALA

Mr. Tyrone?

MARTIN

Ah. Sorry. I was someplace else.

NUALA

You're more than welcome to go and visit your Margaret now, if you like. Just be warned that she'll be getting another roommate today.

MARTIN

Do you think the roommate will be a problem?

NUALA

Her? Oh, not at all. Just didn't want to surprise you, is all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Well thank you. Appreciate it.

Nuala smiles and nods.

NUALA

Give Margaret my best, Mr. Tyrone.

Nuala heads to the receptionist's desk, sits down, and begins to go over the ledger there.

Martin heads up the stairs to the Recovery Room, which breaks tableau when he walks in. Conley has his elbows resting on his knees, head bowed, rosary dangling from his hands. He looks up at Martin when he comes in and puts the rosary away. Martin stays by the door.

MARTIN

Oh. Sorry to interrupt.

CONLEY

Don't worry about it. More of a habit than anything else, really.

MARTIN

Ah.

CONLEY

When I was a boy my mother used to give me a sip of her Guinness at dinner if I said ten rosaries that day. And I felt pretty grown up drinking the Guinness, so I got used to the rosaries. It helps me think. Plus my ma would be glad knowing I still do it, even if it's not for the sake of my immortal soul.

MARTIN

(gesturing at Fergus)

Is that...

CONLEY

My mother? God no. Just me and my da now for about nine years. My ma's slipping sips of Guinness to Jesus himself at the Lord's table.

MARTIN

Oh. Condolences.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

Don't worry about that either. It's been nearly a decade. She ripped a hole in the world when she left, but you know what Camus wrote.

Martin walks over to Margaret and sits down next to her.

MARTIN

Not much of a reader.

CONLEY

He said that after a while a person can get used to anything.

MARTIN

(taking Margaret's hand)

Not sure I believe that. Or think that it's a good thing.

CONLEY

I don't know. Sometimes the only way not to be driven mad by that hole in your world is to turn it into a carefully-curtained window.

MARTIN

(staring at Margaret)

Maybe.

CONLEY

Oh. Christ. I'm sorry. You probably didn't want to hear all that, considering. I'll shut up now.

MARTIN

It's your turn not to worry. Nice to have some company up here for once. It's usually just me alone. Well, not alone.

CONLEY

Well. Pleased to be your change of pace, then. I'm Conley.

MARTIN

Martin. Good to meet you.

CONLEY

And the same to you.

Conley peers over at Martin.

CONLEY

Have to say, you look pretty familiar. Do we know each other?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Can't say we do.

CONLEY

You promise you're not the da of some girl I went with? I'd hate to nod off here and have some angry father of a scorned woman in the room.

MARTIN

I'm not that much older than you, boy.

*A silence falls over the two men.
Martin holds Margaret's hand,
motionless, while Conley shifts in
his seat, fidgeting.*

CONLEY

And your sure it's not my turn to worry? About chattering on, that is.

MARTIN

Chatter on.

CONLEY

You'd figure in Belfast I'd take all the silent moments I can get, yet I find them a wee bit unsettling. Can't shake the feeling that if there's a person there in the room with you, you really ought to talk to them. You know?

MARTIN

Don't much share that sentiment, no. But I appreciate it in others.

CONLEY

Can I ask what you do, Martin?

MARTIN

Used to be a dockworker.

CONLEY

Used to be?

MARTIN

The whys and hows of the used-to-be aren't something I'm keen on chatting over, to be frank.

CONLEY

I understand. I'm a newspaper man, myself. If we're getting to know each other.

MARTIN

The *Telegraph*?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

An Phoblacht.

*Martin turns back to face Conley.
Eyes him.*

MARTIN

Uh-huh.

CONLEY

You one of our readers?

MARTIN

Not so much.

*Conley realizes who he has been
talking to.*

CONLEY

Oh. Christ.

MARTIN

I'm revoking my invitation for you to open your fucking Fenian mouth.

*Silence returns. Conley squints at
Martin as something slowly dawns on
him. He points.*

CONLEY

Well I'll be fucked! You're Martin fucking Tyrone. That's who you are. Shouldn't your Brit-loving arse be in prison?

MARTIN

I don't know what you're talking about.

CONLEY

You fucking well do. Christ, how many good Catholics was it that you killed in the Parnell's Arms that night? Four? You're a fucking monster, you.

MARTIN

I did my goddamn time.

CONLEY

Did you ever learn their names? The people you killed. Which do you remember? Do you remember Francis McCracken? The ma of one of my schoolmates, she was. Used to make us tea and biscuits after our long days and into our long nights. I cried on her shoulder when my own ma died, and I cried on somebody else's when you turned her into naught but smoke.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Martin stands up and moves toward the door. Conley stands up as well.

CONLEY

You're leaving now, Martin? Big bad Ulster Volunteer, red-handed with Catholic blood, skittering off and leaving his wife behind when the poor folks he turned into dusky ghosts start rising up from the dirty dust?

Martin stops with his hand on the doorknob. Conley steps toward him.

CONLEY

I hope she haunts you forever, you Prod fuck. I hope the wailing and keening of Francis McCracken blows nightly into your ears so that you can't get not a wink of sleep. And that it drives you mad nice and slow, until you can't keep what visions rattle around in your lunatic brain separate from the hard facts of this world.

Conley puts a finger on Martin's chest.

CONLEY

I hope you live a long life of madness and guilt, you Queen-preening bastard.

Martin punches Conley in the face. Conley drops to the ground. Martin stands over him, fuming. Conley props himself up on his elbow, touching his jaw.

CONLEY

People like you are why people like me join the other side.

MARTIN

Bastards like you are why people like me are like me. You people blow up our wives, put them in comas, make our daughters sit and stare at them and wonder why their dear ma is right there, just right there, but they can't hold her or tell her she loves them. And then you wonder why we hit you back.

CONLEY

Somebody hit first. And somebody's swinging with the whole of the British Army behind them.

Nuala enters the reception area from stage right. She starts up the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Your people have killed children.

CONLEY

So have yours. So has the army. It's a dirty goddamn fucking war.

Nuala enters the recovery room and sees Conley on the floor.

NUALA

Goodness, Mr. Lynch. Are you alright?

Conley looks at Martin. He picks himself up off the floor.

CONLEY

Had myself a bit of a fall. You're not to be troubled by it. My body can take a few knocks without complaining.

NUALA

Well we're about to get another patient in here, if you don't mind the company.

Nuala begins to arrange things on the empty third bed.

Martin and Conley exchange a look.

MARTIN

I was just leaving anyway. Good day to you both.

CONLEY

Slán abhaile, Martin.

Martin exits through the recovery room door, heads downstairs, and exits stage left.

Conley sits down at the foot of Fergus's bed.

CONLEY

Cantankerous little fella, isn't he?

NUALA

Who? That Mr. Tyrone? Did he give you any trouble?

CONLEY

Nothing that I probably didn't deserve anyway.

Nuala begins straightening up the sheets on the empty bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA

It's a good thing he left when he did. Not sure he'd be overly pleased to see our new patient.

CONLEY

Wouldn't he?

Nuala shakes her head and finishes tidying the bed.

NUAL

Sit tight and be kind when Matron O'Keen brings her in, alright?

Nuala exits down the stairs. The reception room falls into tableau.

As Nuala gets behind the desk, Agnes and Devin both enter from stage right. Devin carries a broom and pushes a laundry cart.

AGNES

It's unnerving. Truly. The way he's just raging about back there. He's armed, for Christ's sake.

DEVIN

Do you know what Deirdre said to him?

AGNES

Must not have been polite, whatever it was.

DEVIN

She does have her good moments, doesn't she?

NUALA

Everything okay back there?

Devin shrugs and starts sweeping out the reception area.

DEVIN

Colonel Percy's fuming like wet leaves on a fire.

NUALA

He's always so calm.

DEVIN

Not when he doesn't get what he wants. I'm glad I wasn't there when some poor bastard told him he'd be stationed in fucking Belfast.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA

It's not such a bad city, Devin.

AGNES

It's a city at war. Heaven itself would look like a shithole if the British invaded it.

DEVIN

No glory to be had here, either. Percy probably grew up hearing stories about how his uncle saved London during the Blitz and how his da came this close to punching Hitler right in the face, and then he follows their stories and ends up here. Beating up civilians and getting shot at from windows.

AGNES

Must be strange, signing up to be a hero and finding yourself out to be a villainous son of a bitch.

Agnes grabs a couple boxes out of the cupboard and plops them on the desk. She gets a clipboard out and starts rummaging around in the boxes, checking things off.

AGNES

Some sheets need folding there, Nuala. Mind?

NUALA

Not at all.

Nuala begins pulling sheets out of the laundry basket and folding them.

NUALA

How's that Fergus McCallum going to turn out, do you think?

DEVIN

You mean as a hero or a villainous son of a bitch?

NUALA

No. Of course not. I mean do you think he'll wake up?

AGNES

A bit touch and go, dear, at the moment. That's what Deirdre says, anyway.

NUALA

Oh.

DEVIN

Oh?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA

Yes. Oh. Can a girl not say "oh?"

DEVIN

Not so much the "oh" as the way you said it.

NUALA

And how did I say it?

AGNES

Like you had a particular investment in Mr. McCallum's well being.

NUALA

I barely know him.

DEVIN

Barely?

Nuala bullwhips out one of her sheets, angry.

NUALA

Well I haven't fucking married the man, now, have I? I don't keep little journals with "Nuala McCallum" crayoned in the margins, dreaming of the day when I can marry a real live provo.

AGNES

Christ, Nuala..

NUALA

Okay. Fine. Fine. If you both are going to push me on this. You know my twin sister, right? Grainne?

DEVIN

The one that looks like you but isn't?

Agnes and Nuala pointedly ignore him.

NUALA

Grainne was walking home one night from her work at the florist's one night. We'd told her not to go alone, but you know Grainne.

DEVIN

I don't. Actually.

AGNES

I met her at a Christmas party once, I think? But I thought she was you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA

Whatever. Fine. She went alone anyway, and she ends up getting harassed by this guy. Creepy fucker, he was. She managed to get away, but only just. What he had in mind was...decidedly unchristian, Protestant or Catholic. My da wanted to report it to the constabulary, but my ma talked him out of it.

AGNES

Why?

NUALA

They're basically fucking Brits. Sure, you got a few good ones, believing in peace through law and all that shit, but most of them are loyalist pricks using the badge as a shield. And even the good ones think peace through law means keeping people from resisting oppression. I know you trust them as much as we did, Agnes. Which was as far as we could throw them. Which wasn't fucking far.

AGNES

You still could've reported.

NUALA

And then what? Had them say "no harm done," when my sister was up in her room beneath a blanket day after day, jumping at the noises the mice made in the walls, needing me to walk her down to the bathroom and to wait outside till she was done. You know what it's like, having to listen to your twin sister piss because she's too afraid to do it alone? Fucking weird, fucking gross, and fucking devastating, all at the same goddamn time. She was broken, she was, and the rest of us were furious. So my ma contacted the IRA. Said the police had done jack shit, and they weren't surprised. So they sent a fella over to take down some details from our Grainne.

DEVIN

Fergus?

NUALA

Of course. And he was nothing but a gentleman. Delicate in his questions. Kept smiling at Grainne and saying how brave she was. Treated my sister like a real lady. And he got a good description of the fucker out of her, too. Turns out the bastard was from the Falls. Daniel O'Hare.

AGNES

Oh. Daniel O'Hare.

DEVIN

You know him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGNES

I was on duty one night. Got a call - voice said prep surgery, there'd be a shooting soon. And not ten minutes later they bring a guy in with bullets in both his kneecaps. Note pinned to his jacket. "Rapist," it read.

NUALA

My ma baked Fergus a fucking cake when we heard.

AGNES

For kneecapping a man?

NUALA

For doing what the police couldn't! Or wouldn't. Or whatever the fuck their excuse would have been. Besides, it's not like they killed him. What's lawful and what's right aren't always the same. So yeah, simply put, I have a particular fucking investment in his well-fucking-being.

DEVIN

That's reading loud and clear, there, dearie.

NUALA

So you of all people could understand why I'm doubly concerned, then. Given the conditions.

DEVIN

Me of all people?

AGNES

Ah. I see.

DEVIN

You see? Are my eyes failing?

AGNES

All those happenings with Deirdre, Devin. Goodness. You of all people.

*Agnes deposits her boxes back in
the cupboard and starts helping
Nuala fold sheets.*

DEVIN

What happenings? You mean all that drama with her and her brother?

AGNES

"Drama" seems like a light word.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA

Cathal and Fergus were close. It was the two of them on that job that went bad. And word is the one didn't take too keenly to the other's leaving the IRA.

DEVIN

Wait. Back the old conspiracy truck up just one fucking second, because a far fetched fucking fairy fable just fell off the back. You can't seriously be implying that Deirdre O'Keen will fuck over that comatose man upstairs?

NUALA

I heard her say she wouldn't let any extra security guard him.

AGNES

And he was a right royal bastard to her after Cathal skipped town. The man might have been one of God's own to your family, Nuala, but Hell itself sent him to Deirdre.

NUALA

Can you blame him? She could have been hiding her brother.

AGNES

But she wasn't!

NUALA

But she could have been! Not an unreasonable fear, I don't think.

DEVIN

And what if she was?

NUALA

Christ, don't you remember the fucking Brits on our streets after Cathal's disappearance? They were fucking hauling poor souls off left and right, and sure, most of them ended up released a day or two later, but after what horrors? And if Cathal had given them names... who knows how many of our boys could have been sent to rot for life in Long Kesh?

DEVIN

Prison ain't a death sentence, Nuala.

NUALA

My own ma was a hunger striker down in Armagh Gaol. I visited her and the others, once. The prison of the fucking dead, it looked like. So don't you fucking trivialize it, Devin Creedon. If your boyish Samhain story about that banshee chills your bones, but the thought of a loved one in prison doesn't, then sir, you've been reading too much Poe and not enough of the papers.

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CONTINUED:

DEVIN

I don't like you lecturing -

AGNES

Both of you! Christ! Just shut the fuck up! This is the Tash. Not the place for such bickering.

DEVIN

All we do is bicker here. We bicker and we save people.

AGNES

Well it's not the time, then, because sure as sure I don't want to fucking hear it. Fucking hell.

DEVIN

Fine.

NUALA

Fine.

AGNES

Nuala. Do you truly doubt that Deirdre O'Keen - our Deirdre O'Keen - will behave any less than admirably with that Fergus McCallum?

NUALA

I...

Agnes grabs the sheet out of Nuala's hands.

AGNES

There are bed pans that need changing, Nuala. Get to them.

Nuala hesitates, glancing from face to face, then exits stage right.

Agnes slumps up against the reception desk.

AGNES

Fucking hell.

Devin slumps next to her.

DEVIN

Fucking hell.

AGNES

You remember that talk we had? All of us. Back when this was just starting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVIN

I have lots of talks with lots of people.

AGNES

You, me, Deirdre, Nurse Constance, Dr. Blair. Fucking four in the morning, after that old bar got bombed on Queen's and St. George's.

DEVIN

Yes. Right. Long fucking night, that was. Never been more grateful for shitty coffee.

AGNES

And we all huddled together after it was all over, after we saved who we could and failed to forget about who we couldn't. Dr. Blair kept handing out cup after cup after cup of that horrid tea.

DEVIN

It was rank. Even more grateful for that shitty coffee, I was.

AGNES

Remember what we talked about that night? About making sure this place stayed what it was: a hospital, and not some sterile battleground?

DEVIN

You think it's a battleground?

AGNES

I think it's hard for it not to be. We can try to leave our lives at the door, to become other people, better people, Irish stoics, unmovable, when we put on our nurses' whites or our doctor's stethoscopes or our porter's clothes. But we come up against situation like Fergus McCallum and we're thrown back into ourselves. The Falls and the Shankill just flood right in, and we're plugging the cracks with our fingers and thumbs. And we only have ten each, and it seems like every week there's a new hole in the walls.

DEVIN

Always was an impossible task, Agnes. Staying wholeheartedly neutral.

AGNES

You don't think we can do it? Truly?

DEVIN

Truly? I think it's impossible. Nobody could do it. But the staff of the Tash is doing the best job anybody could.

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CONTINUED:

Agnes rests her head on Devin's shoulder.

AGNES

Can I be frank?

DEVIN

Frank's a real bastard, so I'd rather you not.

Agnes lifts her head off his shoulder and glares.

DEVIN

Trying to lighten the mood. Sorry. Be frank.

Agnes settles her head on his shoulder again.

AGNES

I have my doubts about Deirdre. Nuala didn't see the bruises on her after Fergus paid her his first visit, never mind his third. And I'm not sure I would blame her for faltering here.

Deirdre enters from stage right, and Agnes jolts away from Devin.

DEIRDRE

Blame who?

AGNES

Nobody, dearie. Don't you worry.

Deirdre shrugs.

DEIRDRE

Bed all set for our patient?

AGNES

Nuala was in charge of that.

DEIRDRE

Should I make sure everything's in order?

AGNES

She is our rookie.

Deirdre shrugs and starts up the stairs.

DEVIN

Ought to be off. King of the Porters needs to see to his realm.

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CONTINUED:

AGNES

Thanks for staying, Devin.

DEVIN

Always here, Agnes. Always here.

Devin exits stage right just as Deirdre opens the door to the recovery room, breaking the tableau. Agnes begins to flip through some folders.

Conley stands up as she enters.

DEIRDRE

Keeping wake over these two, Conley?

CONLEY

They're not dead. But I sure am keeping watch.

DEIRDRE

We've been over this.

CONLEY

Can I ask you why? Why you can't just let me station one of the lads outside his door?

DEIRDRE

We're a fucking hospital, Conley. We're not some wartime clinic for the provos. If we don't stay neutral, we won't stay open.

Conley opens his mouth to speak.

DEIRDRE

Don't you toss out another one of your silly arguments, Conley Lynch. That American reporter who's been puppydogging you about this place is looking for you. Go find her and leave me to my work, yeah?

CONLEY

It's visiting hours.

DEIRDRE

Go visit with somebody else.

CONLEY

I remember when all we wanted was to visit each other. Christ, the way things have gone, Deirdre.

Conley exits. Deirdre begins tightening sheets and examining the

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*room as Conley goes downstairs.
Agnes looks up.*

CONLEY

Seen that reporter around anywhere?

AGNES

That Anne McCafferty? She's been following around Dr. Blair, I believe. Getting a feel for the hospital.

CONLEY

Thanks.

*Conley exits stage right. Agnes
falls into tableau. Up in the
Recovery Room, Agnes tidies up the
sheets on Margaret's bed.*

DEIRDRE

Conley's right, of course. You're not dead. Neither of you. Not dead at all. But you're not quite alive, either. In the clinical sense you are, sure, but to be honest your liveliness seems muddled. It's like you've got one foot on either side of the door, split in half by the frame. Waving to folks on both sides, and nobody knows if theirs is the hello or the goodbye.

*Deirdre sits down in the chair
between Margaret and Fergus.*

DEIRDRE

I don't believe in ghosts the way Devin talks about them. Always trying to spook our new nurses with chilly tales of raggedy banshees keening in the dormitories and rattling their bones down our lonely hallways. But the real enough way both of you have been haunting me ever since Cathal left is making me reconsider the whole ghoulish notion. And now you're lying here together, quiet and still enough so that a person could forget you're not both corpses. So I think you are ghosts. But ghosts like an afterimage, like the spots in your eyes after looking at the sun. They flicker and dance but they're not real, not there, all in your head, and at the same time they are real, are there, right there, the lingering touch of the bright and painful thing you couldn't and can't bear to look away from. A ghost is a memory with its own life. So you're both ghosts to me. Hovering just out of sight, moaning just loud enough for me to hear you, reminding me how I stand here in Belfast. Where I stand. Grendel's sister. The dead reaching out for me from their open graves, like the stalks of so many rotting, putrid flowers. I did not plant the arms of the dead. But they tear me apart all the same.

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CONTINUED:

Nuala pokes her head through the stage right door to the Recovery Room.

NUALA

They're nearly done, Deirdre. Doctor Blair wants to go over just a few things before they finish.

Deirdre nods and follows Nuala out the door.

As Deirdre exits, Martin enters the Reception Room, breaking the tableau. He walks up to the desk holding a disposable coffee cup.

AGNES

Mr. Tyrone. I thought you left for the evening.

MARTIN

(wagging the coffee)

Just left for a walk, ma'am. Still some hours of visiting time, yeah?

AGNES

A few, yes, but you'll have to wait a while yet. We're moving a new patient in and would prefer to give her some privacy at first.

MARTIN

How long?

AGNES

Not sure, dear. Why don't you take a seat and I'll let you know?

Martin sits in one of the waiting room. He sips his coffee.

Anne enters, clutching her notepad, glancing about. She approaches the reception desk.

ANNE

Excuse me. Has a Mr. Conley Lynch been by at all lately?

AGNES

He was here not long ago at all. Whole world seems to be just barely missing each other, seems like.

ANNE

Should I jump back into the depths to find him?

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CONTINUED:

AGNES

They say when you're lost you ought to stay put, so I say you take a seat with that man there and wait for Mr. Lynch to come back. And Mr. Lynch always comes back.

ANNE

Might I ask his name?

AGNES

Martin Tyrone, it is.

Anne leans in closer.

ANNE

(whispers)

Martin Tyrone? Which Martin Tyrone?

AGNES

Don't know another.

Anne nods her thanks and sits next to Martin.

ANNE

Mr. Tyrone?

MARTIN

You're the reporter?

Anne holds up her notebook.

ANNE

Accent and the notebook gave it away, huh? Anne McCafferty. Boston Globe.

Anne shakes Martin's hand.

MARTIN

Yeah.

ANNE

Visiting somebody?

MARTIN

Yeah.

ANNE

You're not a chatter, Mr. Tyrone.

MARTIN

It's been said.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

Think you could overcome that and answer a few questions?

Martin looks her over.

ANNE

I know, I know, American reporter. Sensationalism. Capitalizing on Irish trouble and blood.

MARTIN

That's a mighty strong case you're making for yourself.

ANNE

Others have talked to me in here. Don't you want me to hear your perspective? Come on, Mr. Tyrone. Just a few questions.

Martin takes a long sip of his coffee.

MARTIN

What about?

ANNE

Your experiences with the hospital. I'm writing a story about the staff here, but the thoughts of some patients too would really flesh things out.

MARTIN

Not a patient.

ANNE

No, but you're not staff. That's close enough.

MARTIN

Huh.

ANNE

Christ, you're laconic.

MARTIN

Do you want me to answer questions or what?

Anne flips open her notebook and shuffles to a page.

ANNE

Can I ask what brings you here?

MARTIN

My wife.

ANNE

She ill?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Coma.

ANNE

From the conflict?

MARTIN

Not a conflict, ma'am. It's a war.

ANNE

One and the same.

MARTIN

I bicker with my daughter about her bedtime, that's a conflict. And nobody gets blown to hell.

Anne scribbles something in her notebook.

ANNE

That's what happened to your wife?

MARTIN

Bombing. Few years back.

ANNE

That your only connection to the con...to the war?

Martin leans away from Anne, crossing his arms.

MARTIN

You seem to already know the answer to that.

ANNE

I did my research on the patients here. Their stories.

MARTIN

You best remember that my wife's story isn't yours to have.

Anne nods.

MARTIN

Don't you smile and nod and scurry on back across the ocean to pen some dumbshit novel about the poor woman married to a UVF gunman, either. Don't mine her for tears.

ANNE

I'm not interested in her, Mr. Tyrone. It's you I want to talk to.

MARTIN

Yeah?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

You clearly have some concerns about how you might be represented.

MARTIN

No shit.

Anne taps her notebook.

ANNE

Here's your chance, then. Let the world know what you want it to know.

MARTIN

You might twist what I say.

ANNE

Be anonymous, if you like. And if I'm going to twist anything, I've got more than enough fodder already. Talking to me can only help.

Martin ponders.

MARTIN

No names.

ANNE

Done.

Martin pauses, thinking. Anne bends over her notebook, poised to write.

But Martin keeps thinking. Silent. After a long moment Anne looks around, confused. Then Martin begins to speak, and Anne writes furiously.

MARTIN

Feel like a prophet, sometimes. Wandering the streets in camel hair and begging God to stop showing me His plans. But He does, and when He does I see the ground change beneath my feet. Grass shifts color, mountains become rivers become forests and back again. My country becomes a new country. And I can't find myself in it. I fade away. What's worse is that I don't see my daughter in them. And what's worst, what's absolute worst, is that I do see a woman who looks like my daughter but isn't. Same voice, but older, same face, but older, walking the changed hills with a changed history and a changed notion of who she is. So I don't fight because I hate Catholics. Didn't fight, I mean. I fight same reasons they do - keep my country from giving up the ghost.

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CONTINUED:

*Martin falls quiet. Looks down.
Looks up.*

MARTIN

All that's metaphorical, mind. Don't actually see mountains become rivers.

ANNE

Didn't think so.

MARTIN

Good.

ANNE

Mr. Tyrone, I -

*Conley enters stage right and
interrupts, arms crossed.*

CONLEY

Martin.

MARTIN

Conley.

CONLEY

You were looking for me, Anne?

Anne stands to greet Conley.

ANNE

Yes. Sorry, Mr. Tyrone, he and I have an appointment. But I'm very grateful for your time.

*Martin nods. Stands up. Shakes
Anne's hand and walks toward the
reception desk.*

*Conley and Anne sit down in the
reception area.*

AGNES

Should be soon, Mr. Tyrone.

MARTIN

I'll head home, I think. Want to see my daughter's face while I still know it. Margaret's will stay the same, at least.

Martin exits stage left.

ANNE

You know Mr. Tyrone?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Conley rubs his jaw.

CONLEY

We met, yeah. Get anything particularly foul from him?

ANNE

Foul?

CONLEY

He's a murdering loyalist bastard, Anne. Doesn't spend his time petting rabbits and darning socks.

ANNE

He's a man with his own story, Conley. He'd say it's not all that different from yours.

CONLEY

Well he'd be real fucking wrong, then. What, did he wax tragic about how he's just defending his country? That he's bleeding three colors same as me, except his are blue and white and red and mine are green and orange and white?

ANNE

Something like that.

CONLEY

Easy for him to say when his colors have spent centuries trying to wash out mine.

ANNE

Try to see it from his perspective, though.

CONLEY

His perspective? Typical.

ANNE

Typical?

CONLEY

Typical American response, trouncing in here and telling us that if we just learn to love each other we could put down the gun and everything will be fine. It's not some cultural conflict, Anne. We understand each other just fine. This is an anti-imperialist war. We're not fighting some poor man with a different religion than ours, waving a different flag. We're fighting the British fucking empire.

ANNE

Conley...

CONLEY

We'll talk later, alright? Christ.

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CONTINUED:

Conley stands up.

CONLEY

He punched me in the face, you know. Not an hour ago. Real friendly fucker.

Conley stomps up to the reception desk.

AGNES

Not quite time yet, Mr. Lynch.

CONLEY

Look, can I just go check on him? I'll come right back down and wait patiently down here.

Agnes checks her watch. Shrugs.

AGNES

Fine. Come right back. Got it?

CONLEY

Thank you.

Anne stands up and watches Conley head up the stairs before exiting stage right.

Conley enters the Recovery Room, and the Reception Area falls to tableau.

Conley lays a hand on Fergus's head.

CONLEY

Wake up soon, boyo. This place is wearing on me.

Deirdre enters through the stage right Recovery Room door.

DEIRDRE

Fucking hell, Conley! This room is supposed to be clear.

NUALA

(offstage)

Just think, Ms. Bodhran. A nice hot cup of tea and perhaps one of our dear staff members reading to you.

DEIRDRE

(to Conley)

Just sit quiet for a minute, will you?

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CONTINUED:

Nuala leads Bronagh through the door, hand on her elbow. Bronagh has bandages wrapped around both of her eyes.

Conley sits down at the foot of Fergus's bed, watching Bronagh. Deirdre shakes her head.

BRONAGH

How long did you say I'd have to keep these on?

DEIRDRE

Only a day or two.

Nuala sits Bronagh down on her bed, guiding her so she could sit up against the wall.

BRONAGH

A day or two is a long time to spend blind.

DEIRDRE

Just think of it as an exceptionally long nap, then.

(to Nuala)

Thank you, dear. Go see to Dr. Pearse, see if he needs us.

NUALA

I wish you a speedy recovery, Ms. Bodhran.

BRONAGH

Thank you for all your help. You're a tribute to Belfast.

Nuala exits back through the stage right door.

Deirdre looks at Conley and points to the door to the stairs.

DEIRDRE

Would you mind, Conley? Christ.

BRONAGH

Conley? Conley Lynch? Are you here?

CONLEY

Right next to you, ma'am.

DEIRDRE

You know him?

CONLEY

We met the night of the riot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRONAGH

Nurse O'Keen, if it's all the same to you, I'd like Mr. Lynch to stay.

DEIRDRE

You're not worried his chattering will give your ears the same trouble your eyes suffered?

BRONAGH

Goodness, Matron O'Keen. That seems a bit harsh.

CONLEY

Don't take it too seriously, ma'am. We're old friends. Aren't we, Deirdre?

DEIRDRE

Old friends, yeah.

CONLEY

Grew up on the Falls together.

BRONAGH

I'd love to hear a bit about it. If you've got the time, Matron O'Keen.

DEIRDRE

Really?

BRONAGH

Truly. Not all stories from Belfast have to be about bombings and shootings and funerals. Tell me something of your wild adventures together.

DEIRDRE

Not sure how wild they were.

CONLEY

Don't sell yourself short, Deirdre. They didn't call you the Hound of West Belfast for nothing.

DEIRDRE

How do you know about that?

CONLEY

Cathal. How else?

BRONAGH

The Hound of West Belfast? This sick old woman would love to hear that story.

DEIRDRE

I'm really not sure...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Bronagh exaggerates a cough.

BRONAGH

Do you hear? I'm suffering from medical complications. It's a rare conditions. The only cure is hearing the bark of the Hound of West Belfast.

CONLEY

It's your duty as a nurse.

DEIRDRE

Jesus.

*She sits down on the edge of
Bronagh's bed. Clears her throat.*

DEIRDRE

When myself and Conley here were just wee little things, not yet seventeen, my older brother Cathal would take us down to this pub on the Falls called "The Old Sorrow." You know it?

BRONAGH

Never had the pleasure.

CONLEY

Lovely place. Great big fireplace. Terrific pint. Not too crowded. All these nooks to hide yourself away in if you're interested in slipping between the covers of a book, or trying to slip between somebody else's covers later.

DEIRDRE

Conley.

BRONAGH

I'm a grown woman and a parliamentarian. I can handle a little color in my stories.

DEIRDRE

Well. It's certainly a wonderful little pub.

BRONAGH

As soon as I get these bandages off, The Old Sorrow is my priority.

CONLEY

Anyhow. So Deirdre and I were there this one night, making good use of -

Deirdre scowls at Conley.

DEIRDRE

-the nooks for reading. Big readers, he and I both. And with Conley here was about to go off to university in Boston,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

this was a night of particular import. My brother was on his way to meet us. It was supposed to be a quiet night. But this table of American tourists across the way clearly had other intentions. Terrible fake accents, stupid little jigs, and kept butchering Gaelic. Loud, too. Loud as a closet full of geese.

CONLEY

And one of them looks over at us and gets up and interrupts the whole thing to hit on Deirdre here. Kept calling her a "bonnie lass" the whole time and ignored everything I said.

DEIRDRE

His name was Franklin. "After the president," he kept saying.

BRONAGH

Was Benjamin Franklin...

CONLEY

Nope. Which really ought to tell you all you need to know about this asshole.

BRONAGH

So he kept up his drunken flirtation, and I kept rejecting, and he wouldn't go the fuck away. And then he put his arm around my shoulders and I said to him, "Franklin, if you don't fuck off right this second, I will punch you in the throat."

CONLEY

And he just laughed.

BRONAGH

And you punched him in the throat?

DEIRDRE

No.

BRONAGH

No?

DEIRDRE

I elbowed him in the throat and slammed my fist into his balls. Then I shoved him out of our booth.

CONLEY

So he's writhing around on the ground, right, and we're laughing, because he's a sexually predatory dickass, but his pack of sexually predatory dickass friends don't take too kindly to this. So they get up and yank us out of the booth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

But then my brother Cathal shows up and sees what's happening and comes at them from behind. And there's this terrific brawl, but the whole fucking pub had been seeing what was happening and everybody joins in on our side. Cathal and Conley and me take a few punches, sure, but pretty soon all of The Old Sorrow is helping us throw these fuckers out the door.

CONLEY

And Deirdre was full on howling and biting and kicking and scratching. She fought like a wolf, the bartender said, and everybody toasted to her. Apparently by the next week everybody was calling her the Hound of West Belfast.

DEIRDRE

Proudest moment of my life, getting toasted like that.

CONLEY

Bartender gave her free drinks for life there, too.

BRONAGH

So after I recover you'll be covering our drinks there, yeah?

DEIRDRE

Well...

CONLEY

Come on, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE

The barkeep wouldn't like it.

CONLEY

Big Archie? I'm sure he wouldn't mind extending those free drinks to a good republican such as Bronagh here.

DEIRDRE

Big Archie wouldn't. But Big Archie died a few years back.

CONLEY

Oh. Christ. Really?

DEIRDRE

No, Conley, I'm lying about the death of a mutual friend for giggles. Fucking of course he did.

CONLEY

How?

DEIRDRE

Heart attack.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Conley crosses himself. Deirdre looks at him askance.

CONLEY

God. Good guy, Big Archie was. Nearly ripped one of the arms of those assholes that night himself.

BRONAGH

And the new proprietor doesn't remember you as the Hound of West Belfast?

DEIRDRE

Yeah. You could say that, yeah.

CONLEY

Tad cryptic.

DEIRDRE

Just no more free drinks, alright? Christ, it's nothing to worry about.

CONLEY

Just concerned is all, Deirdre. Jesus. You don't have to snap at me.

DEIRDRE

I'm not snapping at you!

Bronagh shifts in her bed.

BRONAGH

I appreciate the story, Deirdre, very much so. But I think the drugs are kicking in and I wouldn't mind wrangling myself something of a snooze, if you don't mind?

DEIRDRE

Yes. Of course. Sorry if I...

BRONAGH

Don't think on it for a single second. Thank you for keeping me company, Mr. Lynch.

CONLEY

My pleasure. I'll be by again soon. Rest well.

BRONAGH

Slán leat.

CONLEY

Slán leat.

Deirdre and Conley exit. Conley opens his mouth to speak as they

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*start down the stairs, glances back
at the door to the Recovery Room,
and gets halfway down.*

CONLEY

What the fuck, Deirdre?

DEIRDRE

There's nothing for you to "what the fuck about"! So I don't get free drinks at the Old Sorrow since Big Archie died. I don't get free drinks at every other place. Why is this such a big deal?

CONLEY

They had your fucking picture on the wall. You with a cigarette between your lips, flipping off the camera. Right up there next to Wolfe Tone and Pearse. The old heroes and the new.

*Deirdre and Conley reach the bottom
of the stairs. Nuala busies herself
with some folders, actively not
listening.*

DEIRDRE

It was only a stupid picture. Big Archie just thought it was funny.

CONLEY

Big Archie thought it was fucking hilarious. So what humorless dickbag took over his place when he died?

DEIRDRE

Conley...

CONLEY

Is it because you're a woman? Christ, is that why this asshole didn't want you up there with the rest of the pantheon? Fucking hell, I thought humorless was bad enough. Now he's a sexist dickbag.

DEIRDRE

It's because of Cathal, Conley. Christ almighty.

CONLEY

Cathal? Why did Cathal want it down?

DEIRDRE

When Cathal skipped town, and everybody thought he ratted - which he didn't, thank you very much, though sometimes I wish he did - that's when they yanked it. Because I wouldn't give up my traitor of a brother, they said. As if he told me where he was going.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

Jesus Christ.

Deirdre crosses away from the stairs and sits down in a waiting room chair.

DEIRDRE

You know you say his name a lot for a lapsed Catholic.

CONLEY

What makes you think I'm lapsed?

DEIRDRE

Your da dodged my hello again in Sunday mass. You weren't there to nudge him back in my direction.

CONLEY

Could have gone to a different church.

DEIRDRE

A Lynch taking communion somewhere other than St. Malachy's? From somebody other than Fr. Riordan?

CONLEY

I hear Fr. Riordan's been tottering about the altar lately. Hands a-trembling with the weight of his eighty three years. Will the Lynches swear off the Church when he's gone?

DEIRDRE

He's not quite dead yet, Conley.

CONLEY

Unless there's a door in the sacristy to Tír na nÓg, and he visits the immortal land daily to refresh himself, he'll die eventually. Even Peter didn't live forever.

DEIRDRE

You're stalling.

CONLEY

So I am.

DEIRDRE

And rather callously. Fr. Riordan has always been kind to you.

CONLEY

And to you? When your brother left, did the good father turn his back to the O'Keens like the rest of our people seem to have?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

We're talking about your relationship with your God, Conley, not my relationship with Belfast.

Conley sits down next to Deirdre.

CONLEY

I can't ever really leave the church, Deirdre. Not when I've worn grooves from praying in my bedroom floor. It's a beautiful thing. It's just not mine anymore.

DEIRDRE

Does your da know?

CONLEY

My da knows I haven't gone Protestant on him, and I think that amounts to a consolation for the moment.

DEIRDRE

If you ever want to talk about it...

CONLEY

You'll be the first I'll call.

DEIRDRE

I'm not kidding, Conley.

CONLEY

Neither am I.

Conley stands up.

CONLEY

That reporter wanted me to wear her ear out a bit more, so I ought to find her. But it was lovely chatting with you, Deirdre. Almost like the old days.

DEIRDRE

Almost like.

CONLEY

See you around.

Agnes enters stage left as Conley exits that way. She moves to the Reception Desk and Deirdre rises to meet her there.

DEIRDRE

(to Nuala)

How much of that conversation did you hear?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA

Only the parts of it that were at full speaking volume.
Which was all of it.

AGNES

It's rude to eavesdrop, dear.

NUALA

Does it count as eavesdropping if you don't have to drop
down from the eaves to hear it?

*Nuala pauses for a moment. Shuffles
her papers.*

NUALA

That's pretty hard news about your brother, though. I'm
sorry.

DEIRDRE

Oh, Christ.

AGNES

Cathal? Have you heard from him?

DEIRDRE

Of course not.

NUALA

Why didn't you ever tell us about what's been going on?

Deirdre gesticulates around.

DEIRDRE

This! This is why! When have I ever liked to talk about my
feelings?

Nuala and Agnes exchange a look.

NUALA

All the time.

AGNES

All the fucking time.

DEIRDRE

I do not.

AGNES

You once kept me in the showers for an extra ten minutes
because you were angry about the ending of that new movie
you watched.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

You hated the *The Aristocats* too, Agnes. Perfectly lovely movie ruined by racial stereotypes.

NUALA

We had a whole long conversation about that boy you were thinking of dating not a month past.

DEIRDRE

Okay. Fine. I can chatter on about unimportant things, then. Cartoons and silly men. When it comes to those subjects I'm more than happy to pass my heart around for people to sniff and prod at and otherwise examine. Talking about my brother is a wholly different matter.

NUALA

I'm not sure...

DEIRDRE

Not sure what?

Nuala glances at Agnes. Agnes nods.

NUALA

I'm not sure keeping quiet about your brother is the best call, Deirdre. People know who you are. And they grumble.

DEIRDRE

They grumble?

AGNES

More than grumble.

DEIRDRE

People can more than grumble about me all they like. People can can whisper and they can gossip and they can quack like a flock of fucking ducks for all that it matters to me. So long as they shut it when I stitch them the fuck up.

NUALA

You really don't mind?

DEIRDRE

I'd lose my mind if I minded.

AGNES

Do you really mean to say that you can barrel through your days here not heeding a single muttering about you harboring a terrorist or a traitor?

Deirdre crosses her arms and stalks away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

Goddamn it, Agnes, did you have to word it like that? Of course I can't barrel through my day! Fucking Christ, I tell myself I don't mind so I don't suffocate in this mound of horseshit that Cathal heaped on me when he left.

She whips back to face Nuala and Agnes.

DEIRDRE

I'm unmoored. Just floating in this dark Irish sea. And I can't go back to where I came from, because they themselves cast me adrift, and I can't go to the other shore, because they won't have me and I won't have them. So here I sit in my little existential dinghy just trying not to drown. Okay? Is that honest enough for you both? Now that we've kumbay-fucking-ya'd all the livelong goddamn day? Because all your questions just churn the waters and storm the sea and really rock my fucking boat. Leaves me gripping the fucking sides and feeling seasick. So if you don't mind.

Deirdre storms off stage right. Agnes and Nuala avoid eye contact with each other.

Enoch inches his way onto the stage from the right, mockingly sheepish about having overheard. Hammond hulks in behind him. They peer off in the direction Deirdre took.

ENOCH

My, my. Cathal O'Keen's little sister's taking things a bit hard, isn't she?

AGNES

Can we help you?

ENOCH

We're supposed to meet our friend Martin here. Has he been by recently?

NUALA

He left not long ago.

ENOCH

Ah. Well would you mind if spring up ourselves to visit his wife? She's an old friend.

NUALA

I'm not sure...

Nuala glances at Agnes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ENOCH

It is still visiting hours, correct? Or am I mistaken?

AGNES

Go on up. But please keep your visit brief and quiet. We have a new patient resting up there and we'd rather you not disturb her.

ENOCH

We'll be quiet as mice. Isn't that right?

Hammond pretends to zip his lips.

ENOCH

Just this way, yeah?

Enoch and Hammond begin to go up the staircase to the recovery room.

Once they are out of sight, they pull black knitted hats out of their pockets and tug them over their heads. They keep them rolled so that their face is uncovered.

They enter the Recovery Room. Enoch stays by the door. Bronagh shifts in her sleep. Hammond immediately goes to Margaret and puts a hand on her shoulder.

HAMMOND

We haven't forgotten you, Margaret.

Hammond walks back to Enoch. He gestures to Fergus.

HAMMOND

Who's that guy?

ENOCH

No idea. Shouldn't be a problem, looks like.

HAMMOND

Let's get it done with.

They tug their knitted hats over their faces - balaclavas. Hammond and Enoch stand on either side of Bronagh's bed and each pull out a pair of pistols.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ENOCH

For God and Ulster.

HAMMOND

For Margaret Tyrone. For poor Private Sherman.

Hammond and Enoch aim their pistols at Bronagh's head. She rustles awake. Moves her blinded head around, listening.

BRONAGH

I'm sorry. Who's there?

Hammond and Enoch cock their pistols.

Lights cut. In the darkness, two gunshots.

CURTAIN CLOSES

ACT III

SCENE I

Curtain rises. Deirdre sitting on top of the reception desk, hand hovering over the phone. A carafe and a mug sit next to her.

Bagpipes wail in the distance. Deirdre listens.

Devin wheels his bucket full of water on from stage right, mop over his shoulder. He listens to the bag pipes too, humming along.

DEIRDRE

Thought you'd be with the others headed to St. Malachy's.

DEVIN

A fella can't go to every funeral in Belfast. Wouldn't leave him time for much else.

Devin cocks his head, listening. He smiles.

There is something rather lovely about funerals though. Especially Belfast ones.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

That's a little morbid, Devin.

DEVIN

The world is a Gothic novel. Might as well try to find something beautiful in it before it kills you.

Deirdre sighs. She picks up the carafe.

DEIRDRE

Coffee?

DEVIN

Would love some. Thank you.

Deirdre grabs another mug from beneath the desk. She pours some coffee in and he comes over to grab it.

DEIRDRE

So what's so beautiful about funerals?

DEVIN

Excuse me?

DEIRDRE

I said what's so beautiful about funerals?

DEVIN

No, I heard you. I'm just surprised you are inquiring after my thoughts and feelings.

DEIRDRE

I could use the distraction. It's been a long night.

DEVIN

It's eight in the morning.

DEIRDRE

It's been a very long night.

DEVIN

How long have you been here?

Deirdre just pours herself another mug of coffee.

DEVIN

Alright. Well if you truly want to know...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

I truly do.

DEVIN

There's a lovely sort of sense of an ending to a funeral. Especially a big grand one like this morning's, with its drums and its bagpipes and its marching mourners. And everybody shuffling into the cold and quiet church, asses shifting on them hard pews, with Father Riordan up in the pulpit going on about Ezekiel and his dry bones. Or Lazarus stumbling about like a mummy. Or Christ himself taken with doubt, wondering why his da forsook him in his direst need. The funerals are always a wee bit different, but always mostly the same. Like a sort of punctuation mark in the human grammar. The last wee little period at the end of our own wee little stories. And unless you're Jesus or James Joyce, the black dot ends us all the same way.

DEIRDRE

There's a peculiar beauty to that, I suppose.

DEVIN

A terrible beauty, more like, but a beauty nonetheless. I can wax all I want about the aesthetic potential of kicking the bucket, see, but actually dying is another thing entirely.

DEIRDRE

Even still. It seems like life's great tragedy is that you'll never be around to see your own funeral. Everybody gets to know your ending except for you.

Devin toasts her with his mug.

DEVIN

This is no pint at the Old Sorrow, granted, but I'll drink to that. And what about yourself? Why aren't you at the funeral with the rest of the staff? I was expecting to sail with a skeleton crew this morning.

DEIRDRE

I'm the skeleton, seems like. If somebody has to hang back, it might as well be me.

DEVIN

You didn't want to go?

The telephone rings. Deirdre picks it up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

(into phone)

Queen's Hospital. This is Matron O'Keen. No, we do not have a statement prepared at this time. Your paper will be contacted with the time and date of our press conference, when it is confirmed. Have a good day.

Deirdre hangs up.

DEIRDRE

Eleventh one this morning. Another two dozen last night. Poor woman really rattled the city.

DEVIN

You're not keen on attending the funeral, though?

DEIRDRE

Devin. You of all people know it's them that weren't keen on me attending.

DEVIN

Always with the 'you of all people!' Why am I always being measured up against all people? Why can't I just be taken as I am? 'You of all people' my arse.

DEIRDRE

You've been kind to me today, and I to you, and that hasn't gone unappreciated on a morning approaching such a grotesque level of shitty as this one. But don't pretend you're my friend, Devin. It's disingenuous.

DEVIN

Deirdre O'Keen. I do think you're an arrogant control freak. I do think you enjoy bossing people around. I don't think you're a traitor. I might not like you, but you're one of us. Don't let them tell you otherwise.

DEIRDRE

Doesn't seem up to me, honestly.

Nuala and Agnes enter stage left, wearing overcoats. Nuala has her arm around Agnes, who is sniffing.

DEVIN

Agnes! And here I was under the impression that old battle axes like yourself would rust if they got tears on them.

NUALA

Would you leave off, Devin? Just once? Christ.

Devin raises his hands in surrender.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVIN

I didn't mean anything by it. Jesus. Did you go to Bronagh Bodhran's funeral or the funeral for your sense of humor?

NUALA

Goddamn it, Devin! It's not the fucking time!

Agnes shrugs off Nuala's arm and pats her shoulder.

AGNES

It's alright, Nuala. He's just trying to lighten things up. In his own idiotic way.

She wipes her nose on her sleeve.

AGNES

It was a lovely funeral, Devin. Truly. You'd have bawled like you were a baby and back in your mama's arms.

DEVIN

Tragic I missed it then. But alas. You can't have all the fun in the world - got to skip a funeral here and there. For the sake of fairness.

AGNES

For fairness, yes.

Devin plops his mop in his bucket.

DEVIN

There are some things needing portering all around, so I'll be off to do my actual job. But you all take care now, yeah? And Deirdre. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Devin wheels his bucket off stage right.

NUALA

Don't let anyone tell you what?

DEIRDRE

You know, Devin can be a rather decent guy when he's not busy being an utter fucking professional-grade gobshite. Of course that's how he spends most of his time, gobshiting about this place like that's what he's hired to do, but one time out of every hundred he's almost even sweet.

AGNES

Glad you two had some craic here while the rest of us were getting our hearts torn out at St. Malachy's.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

You said it was a lovely funeral.

AGNES

Sometimes it's good to get your heart torn out.

NUALA

All that extra space lets you reorganize before sticking it back in. But what did he say to you? If you...if you don't mind me asking. I don't want to stick my nose someplace where it might get bitten off.

DEIRDRE

Look, Nuala. Agnes. I'm sorry for losing my shit. Not overly professional of me.

Deirdre pulls two more mugs out from under the desk. She fills them with coffee and offers them up.

DEIRDRE

This is my blood. I give it up to you in penance.

Agnes and Nuala take the coffee. Agnes sips.

AGNES

Wonder how different the church would be if they drank coffee at the Last Supper?

NUALA

At least nobody would fall asleep at mass anymore.

Deirdre shifts in her seat on the desk.

DEIRDRE

Did...were people asking after me at the funeral? Did somebody say anything?

AGNES

About what, dear?

DEIRDRE

About me and Bronagh Bodhran. That I...

Deirdre looks down at her feet. Nuala and Agnes exchange a look, and Agnes moves in closer.

AGNES

Nobody had a bad word to weigh against you, Deirdre.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

Any good words?

NUALA

Somebody called you a 'mostly loyalist lickarse.' Which is better than entirely a loyalist lickarse. Right?

Agnes glares.

NUALA

Joking. Sorry. Devin must be getting to me.

DEIRDRE

So no good words, then?

AGNES

It was a funeral, dearie. The only good words spoken was the Good Word. And a fine eulogy by one of the Sinn Fein fellas. You barely came up.

DEIRDRE

But when I did?

AGNES

Nobody's blaming you, dearie. Not anybody out there, and for fuck's sake, not anybody in here. You know that.

DEIRDRE

But I did come up. You said I came up.

AGNES

You come up when you come up, Deirdre, and when you do it's rarely positive unless we're here. That's not new information. But they don't treat you like the goddamn bogeywoman of Belfast. Nobody's telling their kids if they don't behave, Deirdre O'Keen will come for them. They don't like you, sure, they might even hate you, but they don't think you're a monster. They're not going to come at you with pitchforks and torches.

DEIRDRE

Good? I guess?

NUALA

You seem particularly sensitive this morning.

DEIRDRE

Long night. Long time to think. Long time spent alone in this building.

NUALA

Too much time, maybe? Think you should head home?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

Not too interested.

AGNES

You really ought to head back. Get some rest.

DEIRDRE

I can rest here. This is where I want to be. This is where I can be who I am now. Where I don't have to be Cathal's sister because I'm a nurse first and everything else a distant, distant second.

AGNES

I can make up a bed for you in the back room, if you want. Nuala can take the desk.

DEIRDRE

(not listening)

The walls here are part of the human grammar. You know how parentheticals are set apart from the rest of the sentence? That's what the walls do. They bracket me and let me tell the story I want to tell about myself. A new one. No provos, no army, no Cathal, no struggle. Just me and my starched whites and my stethoscope and you all.

NUALA

That's actually sweet, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE

I'm not all surgical gloves and shouting. Was Conley at the funeral?

AGNES

Saw him talking sitting with that Fergus. Christ. I can't wait to get that man out of here.

DEIRDRE

Didn't think I'd hear that coming from you.

AGNES

Gunfire in a hospital is like screaming at a wedding. Ruins the illusion of meant-to-be-ness. And Fergus was an invitation for gunfire.

DEIRDRE

And Conley?

NUALA

Didn't talk to him. But I -

Conley enters stage left, hands in his pockets, grinning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

You're looking for me, Deirdre O'Keen?

Deirdre gestures for Conley to follow her. She leads him to the staircase and pulls him up a few steps.

CONLEY

Deirdre, what are you doing?

DEIRDRE

The Old Sorrow tonight. Let's go.

CONLEY

Sorry?

DEIRDRE

Me and you. We never got to finish what we started six years ago.

CONLEY

What do you mean?

DEIRDRE

I mean fucking, Conley.

Nuala and Agnes glance at each other, listening.

DEIRDRE

Christ. And all that used to come with it back when I was the old me and you were the old you.

CONLEY

I wasn't expecting this.

DEIRDRE

Neither was I. Never thought I'd go back there. But I'm fucking sick of dealing with their shit. If I hate it there, then I hate it there and I won't go back. But I'm not going to hide from the Old Sorrow. I'm not a child.

She starts back down the stairs, then turns and touches Conley's arm.

DEIRDRE

Nine o'clock, yeah?

CONLEY

Nine o'clock. Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Deirdre grips his arm. Smiles. Conley starts to move his head toward hers. She smiles wider and ducks away.

DEIRDRE

See you, Conley.

Deirdre leaves Conley motionless on the stairs. She approaches the reception desk. Nuala raises her eyebrow.

DEIRDRE

What?

NUALA

You know maintenance hasn't gotten around to installing that bubble of silence around the stairs?

DEIRDRE

Oh God.

AGNES

Maybe I won't make up that bed for you. Other people'd have to sleep in it later, and who knows what you'll use it for?

DEIRDRE

Keep giving me shit. I'll laugh myself all the way to an orgasm.

Deirdre snags her bag out from behind. She takes off her watch with the leather strap, drops it in the bag, pulls out her silver watch and straps it on her wrist.

NUALA

The outside world isn't in a different time zone, Deirdre. I don't know why you always switch watches.

DEIRDRE

When I first started here I'd wake up in the middle of the night and not know if I was supposed to be on a shift. Started wearing two different watches to keep track of which world I was in.

NUALA

You always wear one?

DEIRDRE

Always.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGNES

They say time goes slower during sex. Or faster. Got a third watch in there to see which?

Deirdre smiles wide and flips them both off. She throws the bag over her shoulder.

DEIRDRE

Got my eye on a slinky black dress.

NUALA

Think Conley there prefers green.

DEIRDRE

Trust me. He'll like this one. See you both tomorrow.

NUALA

With stories.

Deirdre starts moving toward the exit.

DEIRDRE

Do any of us come in without them?

Deirdre waves goodbye and exits stage left. Nuala and Agnes stare after her.

NUALA

Wow.

AGNES

She's jollier than Santa at a beard fetish convention.

Conley steps out of the staircase and passes the reception desk. Nuala and Agnes raise their eyebrows at him. He stops.

CONLEY

What?

AGNES

You know what, Mr. Lynch. Don't be selfish tonight, you hear?

CONLEY

Oh God.

NUALA

Just what Deirdre said.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGNES

(to Nuala)

Just what Deirdre will be saying, if he does his job right.

CONLEY

Okay. Well then.

*Conley hustles off stage right.
Agnes and Nuala laugh after him.*

NUALA

You're in a mood yourself, Agnes. Seem to have recovered.

AGNES

Funerals make me think. Bloody tragedy isn't the only kind of story life can be. Can be bloody funny, if you tell it that way.

NUALA

If you tell it that way.

AGNES

And you can't always. But I can now.

Doctor McAllister strides in, Anne following behind him, scribbling in her notebook.

Agnes and Nuala make themselves busy behind the desk, sorting papers and doing clerical things.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

I don't have time for this, Miss McCafferty. Truly. Now if you would...

Doctor McAllister points at the exit.

ANNE

You're off duty, Doctor.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

I am most certainly not.

ANNE

You most certainly are. I stole one of your schedules precisely so I would know when you were free to talk.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

You didn't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

The Globe didn't hire me for my winning personality.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

Fine. Take this as your comment and then leave me alone, alright?

Anne readies her pen and writes as McAllister speaks.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

We at the Lord Thomas Ashford Hospital are horrified to see such violence occur within our walls. The hospital is supposed to be a neutral ground, somewhere safe for everyone in Belfast. And that safety and neutrality has been threatened.

ANNE

Thrilling.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

You're very sarcastic for a guest of the hospital, Miss McCafferty.

ANNE

I don't take well to being avoided.

DOCTOR MCALLISTER

I'm just trying to get out of here. Alright? Hard enough fucking coming in here every day. All the violence bursting out of the street next door. I'm glad I make it home every night. So please, woman, leave me be.

Doctor McAllister storms off stage left. Anne, rattled, looks back at Agnes and Nuala, who chuckle.

ANNE

None of that sounded terribly funny.

AGNES

Well, no. Not so much what he said.

NUALA

More who said it.

ANNE

Am I missing out on the doctor's latent comedic talent?

AGNES

Look. He's a good doctor, that McAllister. Cares a lot. Seen him make a double amputee laugh out loud a day after
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGNES (cont'd)

surgery. But it's like the man says. He gets to go home. We don't.

ANNE

You don't live in the hospital.

NUALA

But we live on the Falls. Or near it. Lots of us nurses too. Loads of the ancillary staff. And the doctors do great work here, night and day, save thousands of people. And collapse exhausted in their beds in the safe, posh parts of the city. Away from the gunfire and the bombings, for the most part.

AGNES

We don't get to leave the Troubles.

ANNE

Some do, though. Right?

A silence.

AGNES

Are you talking about Cathal?

ANNE

Matron O'Keen's brother. Does that complicate things around here?

AGNES

How do you mean?

ANNE

Emotionally. Psychologically. Spiritually. Must be tough on Matron O'Keen. Especially with that Fergus McCallum upstairs.

NUALA

How do you know about that?

Anne shrugs.

ANNE

Like I said. Didn't get this job through personality.

NUALA

Clearly.

ANNE

Does Matron O'Keen seem to be reacting to the pressure at all?

AGNES

You seem to be implying something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

It would be totally understandable if -

Nuala steps out from behind the desk to face Anne.

NUALA

Look. You've been getting along just fine with most people here. And you won't be here much longer. Don't ruin it by sticking your nose in shit you can't understand.

ANNE

I'm just asking a simple -

NUALA

What's simple is this. I've never known a better nurse than Deirdre O'Keen. Her poise and self-control under pressure and, I'll have you know, under actual gunfire, is something I will never stop admiring. This whole city would crumble without people like her. Put that in your paper, if you like, but you won't be hearing anything more from us.

Anne closes her notebook and raises her hands.

ANNE

Sorry. Didn't know I'd hit a nerve.

NUALA

If you were as good a nurse as Deirdre, you might have figured out where that nerve was before you poked it.

ANNE

Right. Well.

Anne starts for the stage right exit.

ANNE

See you.

Anne exits. Nuala turns back to Agnes, who nods.

AGNES

Nuala O'Shea. You've changed your tone.

NUALA

You saw her up there. With Bronagh. All that blood... Picking brains off the floor with her own hands, cradling it like a little bird she could breath life back into. I could never do what she did. What she does. Fuck Cathal, fuck

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA (cont'd)

Fergus. If Deirdre O'Keen ever breaks, then the rest of us will have broken long before.

Agnes comes out from behind the desk and claps Nuala on the shoulder.

AGNES

Good to hear you say, Nuala.

Martin enters stage right, carrying a large, childishly-drawn picture.

MARTIN

Morning, Nurse O'Shea. Nurse McCarthy.

AGNES

Mr. Tyrone. Didn't know you had such a striking taste in art.

Martin holds up the picture and smiles. He points to some detail.

MARTIN

My daughter seems to think I'm as tall as a tree. Which I'll take as a compliment.

Conley enters stage right. He stops near Agnes and Nuala.

CONLEY

Martin.

MARTIN

Conley.

NUALA

You don't have to say each other's names every time you meet, you know. There are other ways of saying hello in the same vaguely angry manner.

Agnes whacks Nuala's arm.

AGNES

Be professional.

MARTIN

No, it's alright. Sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY

Yes. Sorry.

(to Martin, very
formally)

Good morning to Her Majesty's Arselicker.

Martin jabs a finger at Conley.

MARTIN

You're a right Fenian bastard, you know that?

CONLEY

And you're a -

*In the distance, the dull but
unmistakable booming of a bomb
blast. Everything stops as the
characters look around, tensed,
knowing exactly what it is.*

CONLEY

Fuck.

MARTIN

Is that your people?

CONLEY

My people? The fuck does that mean?

*The red light begins to flash over
the reception desk. Agnes picks up
the phone and dials.*

AGNES

Prep the rooms. Fucking bombing again. Christ.

*She hangs up the phone and hurries
to the waiting area.*

NUALA

You'll have to leave right now. I'm sorry.

CONLEY

Do you need us?

AGNES

You volunteering?

MARTIN

We are.

AGNES

Clear some fucking -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*A second bomb blast thuds, echoing.
Everybody freezes again.*

AGNES

Clear some fucking space, then.

*Martin and Conley push coffee
tables and chairs to the side,
opening up the reception area.*

*Agnes hauls a hefty medical bag
from beneath the counter.*

AGNES

Shouldn't be long. Sounded like city center.

NUALA

How can you know that?

AGNES

Compare the loudness of the blast to the most likely target at that distance. You learn to estimate, when you're worked here long -

*Another bomb blast. And another.
And another.*

*Everyone stands stock still.
Silent.*

*The phone starts to ring. Agnes
picks it up.*

AGNES

Nurse McCarthy. Yeah. Jesus Christ. Alright, yeah. Ready as we'll be.

Agnes hangs up.

AGNES

Anybody got any prayers to pray, say them now. Myself, all I got are words that start with "F." And they're not "father."

*SIRENS wail closer and closer.
Everyone stands still, listening.
The WHEELING of a gurney.*

*Sean explodes on stage left with a
gurney. A BOMB VICTIM lies atop it,
screaming. Sean leaves the gurney
and hurries back off stage left.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Agnes takes charge, directing Nuala, Martin, and Conley about.

Sean keeps coming back with more and more bloodied VICTIMS. Nothing can be heard over their screams, so Agnes's directions to the others can only be seen.

Doctor McAllister bursts in, too, and Agnes puts him to work.

One of the gurneys Sean wheels in has a body with a sheet already covering it. In the chaos, Nuala bumps into it. An arm flops down from beneath the sheet. On the wrist: a silver watch.

No one notices. One by one they get the victims under control. Nuala wheels each one off stage right until there's just two: the body under the sheet and one last patient.

The last patient writhes and moans as Agnes and Dr. McAllister treat him. Martin and Conley hang back, now unneeded and feeling so.

Nuala runs back onstage.

NUALA

Dr. Pearse is ready for the last one.

Agnes and Doctor McAllister begin to wheel the last patient offstage.

AGNES

More syringes under the desk. Grab them.

Agnes and Doctor McAllister exit with the last patient.

Nuala hurries to the desk, grabs a small box from underneath it, and stops on her way back when she spots the watch.

She lifts back the sheet. Deirdre lies bloody and cold on the gurney.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NUALA

Oh.

AGNES
(offstage)

Nuala!

NUALA

Oh my God.

Martin and Conley start to approach the gurney. Nuala blocks their immediate sight of Deirdre's body.

AGNES
(offstage)

NUALA! Now!

Nuala looks at Deirdre, then off stage right, and runs off to Agnes.

Martin and Conley recognize Deirdre at the same time.

CONLEY

Jesus. Jesus Christ.

MARTIN

Fucking hell...

CONLEY

Deirdre...

MARTIN

Fuck...

Both men move to stand on either side of the corpse. The lighting shifts. All is dark except for three lights - one on Martin, one on Conley, one on Deirdre.

Martin and Conley begin to speak, their monologue's interweaving, neither of them hearing the other.

CONLEY

I'm...I can't...

(deep breath)

You finally shut me up, it seems. And you won't be here to enjoy the silence. Not today, or tomorrow, or tomorrow, or tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

I wonder who will tell your brother. I wonder what he'll do.

CONLEY

Lying there like a bloodied exclamation point. Body the stem, head the dot. I remember in school you used to end every other sentences with them. You'd write, "I went to the store!" And "Conley's an asshole!" Cathal always told you it was tacky, ending too sentences with exclamation points. Telling the reader what to feel. He'd hate your life got punctuated with one.

MARTIN

If everybody dies, Deirdre, then isn't death literature's biggest cliché? You can tell when you're reading a book that it's nearing the end, and were I to read the book of somebody's life, I wouldn't hit the last page and be shocked that it magically didn't go on for another hundred. I can only imagine you'd be pissed you got stuck with such a hackneyed ending. But as much as you can write your whole life story, somebody else always writes your last page. Our last syllable is never our own.

CONLEY

Who was it that killed you, Deirdre? Us or them? Does it matter? Doubt it matters to you, but it matters to us. To me. You're either a victim or a martyr. Life taken by the enemy or life sacrificed for the struggle. I either avenge you or memorialize you. Up to the living to make meaning out of the sound and fury that snuffed you from the world.

MARTIN

My daughter told me last night she wants to be a nurse. You were always kind to her and I think you impressed her, towering in your starched nurse's whites. She has a good heart, my little one. And I look down at you, dead as sod, and I don't see you at all. I see her. Cut down by this war. And I've seen days when I could have protected her, taken up the gun. But I am old now. Older than I'd like, anyway. And Belfast has spoiled me.

CONLEY

Up to the living. Up to the breathing to make something of your breathlessness.

Conley pulls a balaclava out of his pocket. Stretches it in his hands.

CONLEY

Fergus gave me this before the riot. Leadership has its eye on me, he said. I make quality noise at the paper and they think I can do a lot of good in the struggle. And I know

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONLEY (cont'd)

what you'd say. I can even see you saying it. But you'd be wrong.

MARTIN

I don't want her to grow up in this. I'm not alone in that. No one wants their kid to grow up with bombs and gunfire as childhood companions. But Margaret has cousins down south. On the coast. Don't much like me, but they love our daughter. So think it's time to leave.

CONLEY

I think it's time to join, Deirdre. Take up the gun. If I believe in the cause, I ought to fight for it. For you.

MARTIN

It's not that I don't believe in the cause anymore. I just believe in my daughter more. So if you want to haunt me...

CONLEY

If you want to haunt me I'll be at the Old Sorrow.

MARTIN

...I'll be taking a ride out to the sea.

CONLEY

Look there.

MARTIN

Look there.

Martin bends his head and starts to sing "She Moved Through the Fair."

MARTIN

(singing)

The people were saying no two e'er were wed. But one has a sorrow that never was said. And she smiled as she passed me with her goods and her gear, and that was the last that I saw of my dear.

As Martin, Conley pulls the balaclava over his face, slow, careful. He touches Deirdre's forehead, crosses himself, and exits, low and mournful

MARTIN

(singing)

I dreamed it last night that my true love came in. So softly she entered her feet made no din. She came close beside me and this she did say: "It will not be long, love, till our wedding day."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:
MARTIN (cont'd)

Martin nods and exits. The light shifts again - one light on Deirdre, one on Margaret, one on Fergus. Deirdre is framed between the two above.

CURTAIN.