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The Old Sorrow

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The Old Sorrow

Written by
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Draft
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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)
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 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.
My daughter is home with a sitter. She'll be sick with worry.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

Still new for you?

New?

The bomb blasts.

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.
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.

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?
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?
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.
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.

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.

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.

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?

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

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.

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.

Fergus?

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.

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

(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)
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.

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

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.

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?

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.

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

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

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.
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.

(CONTINUED)
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)
DEIRDRE
I didn't fucking think so.

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

Conley stands up and steps toward Deirdre.

DEIRDRE
Why do you want to know?

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

DEIRDRE
They? Who is fucking "they"?

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

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

Conley takes another step toward Deirdre.

Conley, 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?

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)
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!

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
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 aplogize to my ass, doctor, but I don't consider you worthy of the view.
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 snortag 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.
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.
I can assure you, Mr. Lynch, I am a journalist of a most respectable character.

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

Anne sits down next to Conley.

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.

Why do you want to talk with me so badly?

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.

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

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.

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

That's your word then?

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.
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.
AGNES


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


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)
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.
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?
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.

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:

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

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

And if it proved troublesome?

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

If cooperating were troublesome, I mean.

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

You've no time for courtesy.

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

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

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.

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

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.

You're out of line.

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?
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)
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 solder 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.
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.

I heard her.

HAMMOND
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.
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)
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)
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.

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.

Oh. Condolences.
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)
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)
An Phoblacht.

CONLEY

Martin turns back to face Conley. Eyes him.

Uh-huh.

MARTIN

You one of our readers?

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.
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.
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.
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.

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)
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)
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)
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?
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.

My ma baked Fergus a fucking cake when we heard.

For kneecapping a man?

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.

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

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

Me of all people?

Ah. I see.

You see? Are my eyes failing?

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.

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

"Drama" seems like a light word.
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.

And what if she was?

DEVIN
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.
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.
I have lots of talks with lots of people.

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.

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

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.

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

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

You think it's a battleground?

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, unmoving, 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.

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

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

Truly? I think it's impossible. Nobody could do it. But the staff of the Tash is doing the best job anybody could.
Agnes rests her head on Devin's shoulder.

Can I be frank?

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

Agnes lifts her head off his shoulder and glares.

Trying to lighten the mood. Sorry. Be frank.

Agnes settles her head on his shoulder again.

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.

Blame who?

Nobody, dearie. Don't you worry.

Deirdre shrugs.

Bed all set for our patient?

Nuala was in charge of that.

Should I make sure everything's in order?

She is our rookie.

Deirdre shrugs and starts up the stairs.

Ought to be off. King of the Porters needs to see to his realm.
Thanks for staying, 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.

Keeping wake over these two, Conley?

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

We've been over this.

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

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.

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?

It's visiting hours.

Go visit with somebody else.

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
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.

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.
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
(waggling 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?
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.

Might I ask his name?

Martin Tyrone, it is.

Anne leans in closer.

(whispers)

Martin Tyrone? Which Martin Tyrone?

Don't know another.

Anne nods her thanks and sits next to Martin.

Mr. Tyrone?

You're the reporter?

Anne holds up her notebook.


Anne shakes Martin's hand.

Yeah.

Visiting somebody?

Yeah.

You're not a chatter, Mr. Tyrone.

It's been said.
Think you could overcome that and answer a few questions?

Martin looks her over.

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

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

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.

What about?

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.

Not a patient.

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

Huh.

Christ, you're laconic.

Do you want me to answer questions or what?

Anne flips open her notebook and shuffles to a page.

Can I ask what brings you here?

My wife.

She ill?
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.

Yeah?

(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.

(CONTINUED)
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?
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.
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?
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.

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.
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...
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,
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.

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.

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

Was Benjamin Franklin...

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

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."

And he just laughed.

And you punched him in the throat?

No.

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

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.
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.
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.

Slán leat.

BRONAGH

CONLEY

Slán leat.

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

(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)
Jesus Christ.

CONLEY

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

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

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.

I'm not sure...

Not sure what?

*Nuala glances at Agnes. Agnes nods.*

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

They grumble?

More than grumble.

People can more than grumble about me all they like. People 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.

You really don't mind?

I'd lose my mind if I minded.

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.*
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)
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)
ENOC
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 bagpipes 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)
That's a little morbid, 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.

Coffee?

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.

So what's so beautiful about funerals?

Excuse me?

I said what's so beautiful about funerals?

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

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

It's eight in the morning.

It's been a very long night.

How long have you been here?

Deirdre just pours herself another mug of coffee.

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

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

NUALA

Devin raises his hands in surrender.

(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 they rest of us were getting our hearts torn out at St. Malachy's.
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)
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?
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)
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)
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.
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.

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:

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.
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.

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

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

AGNES
You don't live in the hospital.

ANNE
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

NUALA
How do you know about that?

Anne shrugs.

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

Clearly.

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

AGNES
You seem to be implying something.
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)
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.
Yes. Sorry.

(to Martin, very formally)

Good morning to Her Majesty's Arselicker.

Martin jabs a finger at Conley.

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

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.

Fuck.

Is that your people?

My people? The fuck does that mean?

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

Prep the rooms. Fucking bombing again. Christ.

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

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

Do you need us?

You volunteering?

We are.

Clear some fucking -

(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)
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.

Fucking hell...

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.
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 sentence with them. You'd write, "I went to the store!" And "Conley's an asswipe!" 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 cliche? 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)
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.

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)
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.