

## **DEDICATIONS**

**Dedicated to the memory of the Tartans of Ballybeen, Ardcarne, Cherryhill, Tullycarnet, Newtownards, Comber, Bangor, The Newton, Woodstock, Tigers bay, Shore road, Rathcoole, Kilgooley, Shankill, Crumlin Rd, and all the rural Tartans, that have escaped my memories etc**

**Dedicated also to the RUC, who were in the front line doing an impossible job and man enough to make the sacrifice?**

**To all its former RUC and Army members, whether dead or alive we remember and honor you.**

**To all those Tartan members who are not around with us today, let us not forget your names, born into violent times and violence brought upon you not of your doing, and then the only thing we all only knew, was violence.**

## INTRODUCTION

The summer off 1972 at Portrush county Antrim Ulster Northern Ireland, all the Tartans united burying their hatchets for that day.

On that day, we showed our commitment to a cause in that brief period in our history. The cause for the best part was only our young energetic cause. Harnessing the fight in our blood and a will to keep our Protestant Scots Irish ways was at sixteen seventeen or eighteen secondary. We only needed a reason to belong to something and going somewhere if truth be told. Moreover, a cause that at the time conducted with our Tartan tactics.

We were much more at liberty in those days. Freedom to roam and trespass, nobody dared to stop us.

No surprise we took the streets, the streets that became our battlefields. It was there that we found our effectiveness; after all, what good was a Molotov cocktail served over grassy soccer field. The Molotov otherwise known as the petrol bomb was a kick in the bollocks and then some. However, most of all it is a Tartan perfection, though we got a little help from our catholic friends.

Grass extinguishes we had learnt from experience. Tar on the other hand, spreads and fires up. It would be better fun! So known as the infamous petrol bomb, it then became known as a Molotov cocktail because of its concoction of gasoline, tar, sugar, resin and maybe a little paraffin thrown in for spread effect along with sustaining effects of sugar, and god knows what else found its way in there also, I'll tell ya!

Better to see it crash then splinter all over the road, moreover, too see it spreading its lethal devils brew. Said, that the petrol bomb recipe acquired from the Old Nick himself, its all good for us. If you believed others, they say wailing Banshees brought it from the underworld. However, it sure had the fire of hell contained within, when concocted generously.

Men of drink, claim the recipe was exchanged by the whiten demons, for a bottle of Irish Bush whiskey.

One winter's night as a drunk slept in an old Ards graveyard, slipping him the evil replacement at the foot of a tombstone, they came and went.

Drunks ignored banshees from ancient graveyards, as they were places to sleep off the effects of drink, where their wit and when the fear is then out. Luckily, for that drunk, he heard not the wail off the Banshee.

You need to avert hearing its full wail you see, as that harbors the curse on the listening ear. They say, seeing is ok, but make sure you do not hear its abominable complete wail from hell.

In organized riots, the devils brew we believed would have maximum wickedness because of its source. 'Straight from the lake of Hades,' some would shout as they lobbed.

Yep! After a while, luck would have it for that drunk that the Banshees would leave be, since he was too drunk to hear their wail, thus averting the curse on his listening ear.

Nevertheless, most of the Tartan men in this reading are not around today. In addition, some say that is because they handled the Devil's brew brought by banshees, delivered by a graveyard drunk, of all others, who supposedly cheated them of the curse of the Banshees. But old folk say, the omen according to legend, is also carried too all those who handled the devils brew, on hearing the wail contained within as it soars through the air. Makes you wonder.

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To all you former Tartan members who still remember.  
 “We were those soldiers”

## **Prologue**

The R.U.C. initially viewed with suspicion by the protestant loyalist movement, and traditionally woven into the same fabric of identity and culture, are alone. Eventually they regained some ground with the loyalist, but it took blood sweat and tears to regain their trust. Arriving in the province, were the representatives of HM government and apparent misguided support towards the nationalist movement, along with protection from the Loyalists, and what appeared to be imminent civil war.

Their task of impartiality is all the more difficult, when a crackdown on loyalist Paramilitary activity occurred. This sometimes tipped over into what is by the loyalists thinking, betrayal. For that perceived disloyalty, enter the footmen of the Paramilitary loyalist cause, ‘The Bold Tartan Men of Ulster.’

Couple that with their aforementioned and you have Tartan mayhem

## **Chapter [1] The brew that Satan Drinks**

### **The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

This is a story based on true events set in the early nineteen seventies. I know them too be true, because it so happened that I was there.

Known as Glasgo, I have a story to tell.

Oh and this is not one of those whimsy tales for those who are hoping for a reprieve. Be warned, this is a story of hard men and violence, the hardest men I ever knew. So hang in there. You think things are crazy today. Maybe I was too. Though I remembered how things were, and believe me, those days were off absolute mayhem. But like I said, this is all true, give a bit of hype here or there.

‘So let’s take a wee walk, trust me, there is nothing to be afraid off, and I’ll tell ya more, on the way, eh?’

“Are ye awake?” the voice, abruptly, officiously, demanded.

My head dug deeper into the straw pillow and stayed there until the voice went away again. Below, unbeknown to me, blood seeped into my clothing from no seemingly painful source.

They were not words from my friends, or the words coming from my tiny bedroom, or the tiny living room where sometimes I dropped off. They were not from a mate who discovered me before enemy had. A theory still hard to formulate with the pain drumming in my head, and with no reprieve, I fell right back to what seemed like a nightmare. But I eventually knew from the shallow echo that bounced here and there, like a rattle in my head, where I found myself, and worse is to come.

I do remember the night before, and there is where my nightmare led me. Fragmented at first, patches of scenes, and then slowly emerges the voices of men. Protestant voices, and then came familiar ones and then more relief and chill out and sleep.

Nov 20th 1973 Craigtantlet Hills, Co. Down, Tues 1.50 a.m.

A pursued blue ford van raced for home after a night of dance, booze, and no loose women at Bangor. The men within, have been there before, but this time had no idea they would run a waiting gauntlet of Peelers and Brits.

“The blue flashin’ could be either one of the bastards,” Georgy cried, his voice banging of the tin interior.

“It’s the sirens that make the difference, isn’t that right Angel,” I shouted.

“I think I’ll know a RUC siren when I hear one,” cried Georgy over the van’s creaks, squeaks, and winding crankshaft.

The whine of the two-liter motor revved to a crescendo. At 100 mph, it could not go faster over the hills. Be it all our backyard, it is not the sort of place to be racing a stolen ford transit van up and down it’s sharp brows and bendy narrow by-roads.

“Alright, Glasgo, how was I too know it’s the fawkin’ razzers,” Angel said as he moved further over Georgy’s legs to get a better view.

Georgy let out a scream, as Angel misplaced an elbow on one of his funny bones.

“Take the next left, there!” Angel poked a finger out in front then bent it left.

“That’s a field?”

“Better than ambush alley, have you forgotten, Glasgo?” Angel threw me one of those Elvis leers.

My butt hit hard against the ribbed metal floor, as I held onto the back of the passenger seat. Angel thought it funny, as his head bumped once then twice of the ceiling when the van shook, rattled, and dived all the way down that damn field. Georgy suddenly threw the steering left then right over compensating like Steve Mc Queen. Again left where the van spun its rear wheels where traction caught, catapulting it forward leaving behind smoke whirling upwards from mud. He still had to learn that the clutch needed proper pressing, as it clunked into gear one more time. Angel still laughing, then moments later we realized why. Dumbstruck mustard was probably the right words, too express how we all felt at the point. Angel rolled down the passenger window. We thought for a moment he had other plans. Then came a heart attack, and next there was something else, the word escapes my vocabulary, but it wasn’t ‘pissed off,’ I know that, it went deeper than ‘Pissed Off’.

“What the fawk!” screamed Georgy, as Angel rotated a black Smith and Wesson up too his face, then withdrew it admiring its dimensions for the last time. He even licked its barrel, as I looked out the back portal and saw the armored Land Rover with its occupant’s race toward us. Georgy caught the looming vehicle closing in from his side mirror, and then sleeved the sweat from his brow.

All right, all right! I'm not going too, Okay, so relax!"

"Hurry the fawk up, will ye, and chuck that damn thing, I see their lights comin' up quick!"

Seconds later, we lost the Peelers as the van ascended and descended the other side of another hill. Angel then tossed the weapon askew.

"That outta do it, a good dollop of muck and cow shit will clean away prints, the bastards."

"I think we've given 'the bastards' the slip, fellas," I said.

"Very funny ha ha" Georgy quipped nervously, as he tried controlling the skidding and sliding.

"Wrong, fawk! It's the limey scum," Angel mimicked cockney as Georgy's foot downed all the way again.

"How'd they get past us, the bastards?" Georgy asked, as Angel popped a Wrigley into his big mouth.

"Never mind," said Angel, "make a right, not left, what's the matter with ye, make a right, fawk ye Georgy, you not believe me or sumpin?"

"Alright alright, ya big girl's blouse, keep your fawkin' hair on." Angel knew the hills better than anyone, but Georgy took his time too roll with the fact. Steve McQueen driver's mode had now kicked in and Georgy went personal with it. Quiet and resolute, his expression taking on his racing car grimace with usual exaggerated hand jerking the stick into place more than it needed.

Yeh, Angel and I liked old Georgy.

The heavy-duty van squealed at first skidding on contact with tar, as we beat haste to the top off the hill, then slipping from the field into night. Muck covered the van, providing a good camouflage, partially concealing our presence. Georgy cut the main lights too sidelights, and flashed the route ahead with his full beam.

It was then me and Angel saw that Georgy had a few tricks up his sleeve. It was very clever of him too give the impression we were another security vehicle by flashing the full beam. Give the idea it was another busy searchlight, I'll tell ya, at the same time we could escape with some light. Angel and I looked are each other, and needless to say we were impressed. Yeh, Angel and I liked old Georgy.

"Now will ye get outta my fawkin view, Angel," he cried, tossing his hair back, followed by an empty five ml bottle of Smirnoff that hit the metal floor. The ford lifted into the air, then contact with the usual patches of new tar that festooned rural roads around the hills. The

tires held out, but something fell off, as a din of clattering metal vanished into the mist. A searchlight blazed a beam to the source of the crashing metal.

“That’s done it,” I cried.

Being around two a.m. in the morning we couldn’t see what it had fallen off.

“What the bay-Jeezus was that?” I asked.

“Move to plan B.” demanded Angel.

“Hurry up will ye, plan B”

Georgy dropped a gear with a clunk,

” Slower”

Another gear, another clunk, and the speed dropped too under twenty mph.

“Fawkin’ more limey, and I think they may have seen us. Damn it!”

“Right, Glasgo.” Angel said focusing on a plan,” I have no idea what is. Ok!”

“I DIDN’T SAY SHIT.”

“No, but I could hear you thinkin’.”

He always did that, quotes my name, since we were in high school together, when he needed me too make a big decision with.

“Quick, switch off all the lights, Georgy!”

Maintaining speed at around twenty M.P.H. the van idled along for a couple of hundred yards. Georgy relied on his sixth sense and memory. We made it past the narrow link road, where the army Land Rover would be coming up the side of the hill too meet us. A few seconds on, and we are crossing the ramp that led up into their narrow slip road. We are relieved that there is no searchlight or worse, ambush.

“The stone-rows are a big help, or they would see us.”

“Well we can all admire stone-rows some other time, Glasgo.”

“Well said, Georgy,” sniggered Angel, holding his stomach.

“Okay I think we’re good to go,” said Georgy.

“That was close,” I said, lighting a fag quickly inhaling it’s effect.

**“That WAS close, now let’s get the fawk outta here if we can,” Angel said patting Georgy on the back off the neck, which irritated him.**

**The transit produced another hard clunk click, again jerked a little forward, and a metal grinding pierced the night as we sped a further mile. The van’s whining increased with speed. Georgy’s face fixed to the offside mirror, manipulating the foot pedals with a little too much of everything. A little too much throttle, then a little too much braking; and because his left foot needed coordination, he had a tendency to apply the foot brakes instead of the clutch, and always never enough clutch, but always too much brake.**

**“They have seen us, those bastards have seen us again!”**

**Angel seeing Georgy’s alarm, threw himself into the back, landing hard to assess the situation out of the back portal,**

**“Oh fawk! Nearly broke my fawkin’ neck.**

**Okay, I think you’re right, I think they’re on too us, Georgy.”**

**“Are ye awake yet?” the voice again from behind.**

**Behind, disappearing and reappearing all we could now hear, is the siren of the Army Land Rover mowing down on us. Each time closer, each time into eyeshot, as it rose and dipped along the hills. Nearby Angel, the chest of a man with a tartan scarf around his neck, heaved up and down on the metal flooring of the blue ford transit. He was out cold. It just happened to be the van’s owner, and he just happened to be trying to stop us stealing his work’s van when he lifted a sledgehammer. In addition, he just happened to be enemy Tartan. The rest is history.**

**Georgy in an effort to beat the Army ahead from the village is sure they will be intercepting us. He never drove, as fast going down a hill as steep until now, and the engine seemed like it would give up its flight and explode.**

**It is difficult to focus on anything, as two rows of trees seemed to appear and disappear that quickly. Whilst we held on for our lives, I scanned the main valley road ahead for the tell tale stream of flashing blue.**

**“Nothin’ yet,” I cried out.**

**“Step on it fawk’s sake, Georgy, the limey bastards are gainin’ on us again.”**

**“That’s a good sign, Angel.**

**It’s when they back off now, that we have a problem now.”**



From across the adjacent field the searchlight caught us intermittingly, as we dipped and rose, our pursuers like baying hounds locking on ever more to our scent. An eerie light blazed the van's interior like we were on a bombing mission from the 'Dam Busters'.

Angel, at times, couldn't resist laughing from the adrenaline rush, but tried to suppress it for Georgy.

"If our luck held out, we might just make it into the housing estate at the bottom, eh Georgy?"

"That's the plan!"

I thought, there'd be a price to pay if that happened, though it would be worth it, if we avoided the consequences of our actions tonight.

"Step on it will ye, they are catchin' up, they'll be getting support from the village below," I said.

"Hang on," snapped Georgy.

Angel checked the breathing of our unconscious passenger.

At that point, the sound that we didn't want to hear screamed at us personally from hinter.

Aaa warr, warr warr Warr WARR WARR

"What's that, Angel?" I asked, it being a first.

"That's the Limey sirens behind us, weird eh?

Not like our RUC boys eh, Georgy?" Angel said with another pat on his neck.

"Ang,, quit slappin' me on the fawkin' neck, fawk ye!"

"Step on it, Georgy!" I cried.

"Pray we hear the RUC sirens, isn't that right Angel" Georgy retorted.

I sensed they're both pullin' my chain by now.

If lifted, 'tartan lingo' for arrested, then it is a whole lot better the RUC does the liftin', according to Georgy.

Certain that the security are on their way to block our exit at the bottom of the hill, Georgy swerved hard, skidded round trying to keep control of the transit. The lights of the Spar market shot into view and something moving flashed past us into the shimmer of darken images.

CLANG clang clanging.

**“What now, fawk’s sake?” screamed Georgy.**

**Angel surveyed out of the rear portal.**

**“You didn’t see the fawkin’ diversion sign across the road, stupid egit, and quick into that field ahead, Georgy.”**

**Georgy wrestling with the steering wheel had made his final swerve at the bottom of the hill into a field. Switching off the lights, he made a mental note and hoped that we wouldn’t collide with tree or heap. Dashing his feet down hard on the worn brakes, the van coasted to a slippery halt and muck peppering up the sides. Solemnly, the last remaining puffs of exhaust emitted from behind. As the engines cut, the last dying sounds of motorized parts joined its own loss of life, with echoes of twist and breaks.**

**“Back in enemy tartan turf, perused out of another, twenty minutes earlier,” I laughed.**

**Then, the explosion up the hill, a plume of molten orange shot upwards and casting a reddened light from where we trio plus one had come five minutes before. Our pursuers give up their chase and beat a return haste. Rumbles of blast rolled down the hillside stirring the slumber of residents nearby. In disbelief, some were in awe, and some not even concerned or awakened by the melee. Strange place we were born into, I’ll tell ya. As if that wasn’t enough excitement for us, Angel loved every moment, and my fear, that we were now perpetrators to something we hadn’t planned for.**

**“FAWK” said Angel, falling back in convulsions of laughter and hysteria.**

**It didn’t take a degree in elephant manure to work out what had happened. Moreover, we are now deep in it, if that was what I’m thinking it was.**

**“What in the name of Jesus Christ was in that fawkin’ metal thing that fell off?” Angel asked, laughing.**

**“Was that what I think it was?” Georgy guessed, pulling something from the inside of his sheepskin.**

**He then spat a spent Wrigley to the ground.**

**“What do ya think it was then?” I asked**

**“Why, do you fawkin’ know somethin’ we don’t Glasgo?”**

**“I have a pretty good idea, but I’m not certain. Something tells me we’re goin’ too hear about this soon enough though.”**

**Georgy laughed a laugh that wasn’t really a laugh but more a stress noise.**

**“I hope it’s from the fawkin’ tele we hear it fellas, for our sake.” I said.**

Whether it was something I just said, but Angel and Georgy ceased laughing and looked grimly up at the hill fire.

Then, from his inside pocket, Georgy produced another ten-glass bottle of blue label Smirnoff. Angel snatching it with practiced fluency twisted the cap off, and gullied a lengthy flow before he handed it to me. I followed the momentum, our nerves soon quenched, and we all watched the glow above, which is now surrounded by limey vehicles.

“Now explain to me, how is it better when the limeys back off?” Angel finally confronted Georgy with his puzzle.

Six hours later.

The RUC and BRITS were waiting on us; it wasn't difficult to figure it out. Each Wednesday morning we would take the same route home after disco and girl huntin' in Bangor. Each Wednesday we would drop another stolen vehicle in the same church parking lot, intact with the keys on the front wheel. All the razzers had to do, is add one and two together and get the five they were looking for. A trap waiting to happen.

“Are any ye three whacky amigos awake?”

If it were not for the familiar sound of metal within concrete, I would have napped on. Then steel came, and iron, and finally jingling jangling chain.

I tried to bury myself in my own clothing, and allow only the silence of those few precious moments into my early morning world. But those were hours cruel to youth and unkind to a sleepy sore head.

I remember a damp old cell quite well and so do Georgy and Angel I expect. In addition, those engravings transfixed me back into that prehistoric cave more than once, the moment my eyes turned to sight. First, I saw the caveman 'Chizzo' whose name registered prominently on the cement wall next to me, carved with knife and strength, and below him is 'McGurran hates above' and center right is 'Mc Mann loves Mo,' and in larger white on the adjacent wall scribbled is 'Gallo hate's the been'. A red head skinhead, known as '*Tight Ass Gallo*' known for his lack of returning a drink but happy to accept others offers. Finally, Georgy who loves Mavis with heart and arrow piercing, to prove it how deep it went with him.

“Hey! Are you's-ones awake?”

Aren't any of ye two mavericks awake?”

“There are three of them, ya dumb-fawk peeler.” A lowly voice broke from another cell.

The distant chime heralded the time at one, two, three, four, five, and six.

It wasn't the first time we had spent the night in McGovern's unheated jail. A concrete ground, cold as a tart without shame, and a tricky rickety bunk-bed that stank of many a hard-man's bile from cheap vodka, gin, whisky and a multitude of other cheap shit drink. And the walls, damp as a scrubber on heat, I'll tell ya.

"Okay yous ones, who's awake down there?"

Georgy, now waking from his drunken state, squared his Doc Marten too my shank and Angel likewise to butt-center, and then for good measure both with their Doc Martens tossed myself up and out, crashing me to the concrete before I realized it. Talk about a wake-up call, I'll tell ya.

Standing, I unzipped me skinners took a piss on both and for good measure dropped a lit match on them with usual juvenility. That got them out of their wankin' chariot, I' tell ya. Unbridled hilarity broke the order of early morning and that wasn't good. Someone who occupied the next cell began screaming through the wall; someone too close, someone in meltdown.

"I'll take all three of ya, ya Ballybeen scum!"

Me, I just wanted outta that damn cell the second I heard that enemy voice. Not Angel or Georgy, they goaded whoever it was from that cell, and then some. What's that one about pickin' your friends?

"You're Ma's waitin' on you, ya weeboy."

"Where does yer girlfriend live?"

"Do you know who that is, in there?" I asked, knowin' the futility of my words already lost somewhere in hyperspace.

I'm thinkin' if he knew there are three of us, that had to be bad for a start, I'll tell ya. That he knew some of us were Ballybeen tartan, well, did I need to spell it out? I figured, if he knew how many there were of us, and then he must be our van owner from last night.

"Angel hide that quickly! Someone is comin'," I whispered frantic, before the burn should extend our incarceration. That steely sound again, accompanied by one of McGovern's men appeared with the same old grin as before. Steel against steel is like confirmation of your worse thoughts, and it usually meant more to follow.

*Clunk click*, I can never forget those big damn iron keys.

"Is it Aussieland or her Majesty's court, or home?" I asked knowing the reaction I would trigger.

"Here he goes again."

**“I am at one with geography, and ‘better edgucated’ too, not my fault, Subjects.”**

**A united chorus of insults rose up and we all laughed off our rough edges.**

**That is why we were best mates, because we could say those things to ourselves and enjoy the craic.**

**“ You are lucky this time, Sergeant is letting you go home,” said the constable, toying with the keys in his hands.**

**Angel, puffin’ his fag, retorted, “Oh really” with his usual sassy look, “I suppose it’s still old buggerlugs McGovern you’re talkin’ about?”**

**Shuddering, in the cold, before long, we could smell the Ulster fry carried by the agent of a draught into our cell.**

**It is vindictive and deliberate; the cold prison cell is payback, and for causing them the trouble in the first place, the hunger in our stomachs is to be enticed as further payback, as the smells of fried bacon, sausage and soda not to mention potato bread worked our insides over. After all, they couldn’t just let us short change them, not without Sergeant McGovern’s boys having some fun watching us squirm.**

**“Who the fawk, screwed up this time?” Georgy mumbled rubbin’ his head. Georgy would be the first to fold, him havin’ the biggest appetite tween us three.**

**Angel attemptin’ to light up his fag laid the blame at my feet.**

***“Him!”***

**We huddled and shuddered for a moment while inactivity allowed us to freeze. Georgy still rubbing his head, suffered in silence and Angel never seemed to suffer hangovers at all. I wrapped the cromby tightly about myself for heat, while the intoxicating smell of bacon, sausage and mushroom became too much.**

**“None of you fawked up this time, not you Glasgo, you Georgy, or even you Angel” the officer imparted sardonically, who managed to slip within earshot.**

**“But be satisfied that we happened upon you by the Spar as the Cherryhill Tartan was ready to kill ya.”**

**Then, blowing hot carbon into my hands for heat, I suddenly became aware of something most inordinate.**

**“My right hand, blood!”**

**Searching my person for the source, the cold air bit into my flesh like stabbing pins, and then withdrawn and repeated elsewhere I sought.**

**“Oh that’s from one of our own, continued the constable with typical RUC matter of factness, “who saved your lives probably.”**

**We pretended not to be aghast at the revelation, as though that happens every day to us. After all, we were hard men. Well except me for the time being. So I had to pretend a bit. My teeth shuttered, I felt unconvincing, and something told me we were morbid amusement.**

**“Oh yes, they would have, since you were all drunk as skunks acting like you all could perform better than the three Musketeers up there, ya daft lot,” said a known voice behind.**

**“Oh yeh! Georgy said,  
“Well next time we’ll look after us selves constable, nice to meet you too,  
“Right, Angel? eh, Glasgo?”**

**Igniting, as sulfur burns from a match, and quietly standing at the doorway of our cell, the increasingly familiar patriarchal face of wisdom. Behind him, the sniggering faces of a half dozen rookies. Beyond that, someone’s head butting the steel doors, to one of the other three cells.**

**‘Who’s that doin’ all the slobbering, Sarg?’ Georgy enquired tilting his head for his hard man look.**

**“Well George,” the sergeant coughed, his Antrim dialect rendering us intensely curious.  
“He’s the one who wanted to kill ya all last night, so we put that one in the dungeon.”**

**Ensued a momentary silence, both Angel and me eyed old McGovern for conviction before the old bugger began speaking again.**

**“Oh and by the way, he put three of my uniformed officers in the Ulster with a broken nose, a slash face, and one with a severe kick to the bullocks.”**

**“How is it that I don’t remember shit about that?” Demanded Angel**

**“That’s because you were too drunk and squealing for your mammy, sonny.”**

**Georgy glanced at Angel; Angel, caught the edge of McGovern’s tone, puffed his last puff, and flicked the butt to the ground and stomped the remaining sinders out. Eyes locked, the Sergeant eyed him out, and the greenpeas did a mocking snigger that didn’t go down well with Angel.**

**“Buggerlugs” one of them quipped, and more joined the assembled chorus of ridicule.**

**“My advice, stay away from the little guy with the broad shoulders, said the Sergeant.  
“Seems like he’s okay at first, don’t believe it, he’ll kill ya.**

Trust me on this one, he hates with a passion, and especially anything that comes from the Belfast projects.”

Ten minutes later we exited, freedom beckoned us onto the street, where home promised us an Ulster fry.

“Furthermore boys, be afraid of any those so called Paramilitaries.” McGovern shouted after us from his doorway. ‘*Fawk him*’ Angel articulated, while passing rookies stomped the old concrete floor off the office. Soon it’s oak counter festooned with carvings and colored ink, is surrounded with the morning shift officers.

Seconds later, we trio swaggered into the dawn twilight towards food.

“Next time Glasgo, I’ll tell yer Da.!”  
Old grey haired buggerlugs bellowed.

“I RESENT THAT SERGEANT.”

The sergeant brushed the air with a wave of his large hand!

“Resent!” Exclaimed Angel.  
Oh, I do resent that Sargy”

I RESENT that, Georgy.”

“I resent that too, Angel, let’s all Dance,

Let’s go a resentin’.”

Mockingly, Georgy and Angel both danced arms entwined around each other’s shoulders, singin’ as they went along,

” You resent me, and I’ll resent ya, and we’ll all go a resentin’ together.”  
Let’s resent ya’r da, and we’ll resent me Ma, and we’ll all go a resentin’ together.”

“Resentin’ resentin’ let’s all go a,,,,, Kissin’!

“Ha ha, very funny, do you think we could eat somewhere, fruity boys?”

“Always seemed like old McGovern, well, he had singled me out for some reason?”

I soon learned from Georgy, I couldn’t be further from the truth, though he did single me out, not for the reasons I thought.

“That’s cause you’re still a dumb-fawk villager, and thinks your worth savin’ from the likes of us.”

A swift smack and Georgy's long hair rose and flew in all directions, were some of the strands fell back over his ugly mug. He stared back in disbelief.

“Well whatta an improvement, you ugly son-of-a-byatch!”

Georgy received another swipe at the back of his head from Angel and that is how the day began. Not a care in the world, not even a word about the Tartan foe we laid out in the van, nor his whereabouts. We all ran towards the projects and screwed around until we all reached Georgy's home at around seven a.m. And what a home, I'll tell ya,

Little did we know the winds of change were already gathering on our horizons?

The Tartan person in the van never came back to trouble them, and neither of them troubled to ask after him. The station now silent, the sergeant now almost alone in the village barracks hobbled back to the unlocked dungeon door. There he saw fake blood splattered against the cell door. He made one of his *'Huhs'*, and hobbled three steps back to the ajar steel door of the now unoccupied cell. Officer Montgomery, a young and recent addition to the team at the village outpost, is eager to prove instrumentality can get you off to a good start, no matter what form it took.

“Was it okay, Sir?”

“Convincing Monte, convincing.” The sergeant said for the third time.

“You can join the others on the rounds now, oh and yes, great job!” The sergeant assured, his head now moving to other things.

“And before you ask again Monte, great job!”

Then the sergeant's eye spied what he is looking for.

Unobtrusively stashed under the top mattress, is a cigarette packet and foil paper protruding from it.

The stretch to retrieve the packet with one hobble almost felled him again, as zeal sometimes proved a burden to his movements.

He pulled out the contents, and unfolded the crumpled silver foil paper balancing on one leg.

*‘Thing somethink going down toonite, wil make Kontact lettat’.* McGovern made a mental note on spelling or better covert lessons, if he was to take his operative further in the role.

Home at sixteen isn't exactly my favorite place, I'll tell ya.

We stepped down from that barracks entrance into the dark cold December air, as though winter came to the village in the overnight express. Freezing, and not a sinner to be seen cept our own company, I'll tell ya. Our breath, not only a hum of foul stench, was most certainly in physical and moral decline.



Georgy's Ma stole away to the kitchen. I learnt later, not only to escape the stink we brought with us, but also to fetch his Da.

The neat cheap china, sparkling in a pristine environ, had been sudden.

Like a cold slip of stalactite ice, running down the back of my neck in the unheated room, I felt it stab at me. I was impressed that Georgy actually had parents, be it all a tad demented, but parents never the less.

"Jeesus Christ! What time is it?" Angel screamed.

"It's em, em, it's em, and yes em" I teased.

"Georgy! quick, what's the fawkin' time mate?"

"Hey! You're late anyhow, ya stupid wanker,  
What the fawk does it matter, you're Da'll still kill ya."

"Okay, Angel, save our ass plan, remember?"

"No I've forgotten, run it by me again, Glasgo?"

"We each show up and back each other up, with a story and our presence will probably swing it," I said hoping for a more acceptable modes operati.

"Modes fawk'n Operati?" repeated Georgy. "What the fawk is it?"

"Means a reason to do sumpin'!

They called modes operati in history last week, remember?"

"Thanks anyway Glasgo! You're a mate, but my old bugger doesn't give rat's ass if you are there with your Modes up-yer-Arse-i.

He probably give you a thrashin' then a kickin' too."

"Knowin' yer old man, he probably would too."

Thrashing, recently the rage amongst some of the community's parents, with Angel's Da the most brutal, I'll tell ya. This time Angel and I sat in Georgy's house usually feeling a sense of excitement, while his Ma made us tea. We listened to the music of Georgy's pain; most of it had the sound of bluff. Georgy exaggerated his pain. It is the one thing he could not stand, which made him all the more hostile toward hard men. Sometimes he just thought they threatened him too. I'll tell ya.

"He has to learn the hard way, sometimes."

"Yes Mrs. McDermott," we concurred.

"George isn't a bad boy really, just a little wayward you know."

**“Yes Mrs. McDermott.” We replied, hearing the pluralism whilst she rattled her china cup.**

**“If his father didn’t correct it now, well who knows, you know?” She said, looking at us. Angel was convinced she was offering him a freebie; I just read her differently.**

**“Yes Mrs. McDermott.”**

**Then she would look at us both seeming lost in her own words, dazed, before waltzing to the kitchen, to fetch us more tea and biscuits.**

**Yes, that was Georgy’s Ma, a yes woman. No was not an option in his house, seemed to us.**

**‘The parents from hell, working in tandem,’ said Angel.**

**Whack, whack whack, so on until Georgy’s Ma became so embarrassed, she through us both out. Five minutes later, we sauntered to Angel’s house around the corner, minus Georgy. Angel and myself performed our usual fooling around en-route, mimicking Georgy’s antics, myself rolling with laughter at Angel’s killer hilarity. The neighborhood at that early time were all in bed, suffering dehydrated heads that only an Irishman could endure on weekend basis. A projects mutt here and there snapped at the garden fences as we passed each silent household. Angel and I teased them as we went.**

**“I’ll never do it again, Da! Promise Da, I’ll kiss you’re Paramilitary arse Da, on second thoughts Da.”**

**“So he’s grounded, Glasgo, he’ll be out tonight, you wait and see.”**

**Angel knew Georgy well and that nothing would ground him and in fact, I hardly knew him at all. In Angel’s kitchen, I could still pick up the salty fish and chips that permeated the stale air that usually stayed around Saturday mornings. The brown carry-out bags, where in the same weekly spot, always containing more alcohol than they drank. The same Embassy cigarette packet lay open on the kitchen table presumably invaded by Angel’s cute sister, who I found very rogerable, I’ll tell ya, and told him too.**

**He laughed when I teased him about it, affirming my attraction to her with similar sentiment,**

**“If she wasn’t my sister mate,” he said, “I would roger her too and in fact I’d roger you, just to roger her. But she is, so keep your horny eyes of her and roger McGurran’s sister instead, ha”**

**“Roger.”**

**Oh by the way, roger was another way of saying fuck, but it could also mean in just to date someone. It had a double meaning, depending how you said it. We laughed quietly, as his sister always seemed to know when we would be home. But not today. It turned out that one of the hardmen, McDuggan is now rogering her, accordin’ Georgy. I never said anything to Angel, knowing how things were between some of them..**

Lucky for Angel, his parents were sleeping of the effects of drunkenness. He managed to escape the wrath of his Da's anger and the leather belt. Below the ubiquitous picture of Prince Charles and other Royals facing from the sink, is one that needed swiping. Therefore, Linda, in the first stages of color, and first signs of womanhood, smiled the smile and made me wonder from that day onwards. But girls like her don't like good guys like me, and she knew that secret before I had or was prepared for. Girls like here paired with bad guys, got abused, knocked up, ran home to mother, and repeated their lives like that, hatin' all men for the rest of their lives. They cursed men like me, the one who would have given her a better time. I grew up understanding the Devil better, than I understand the opposite sex, I'll tell ya.

Later it turned out, our village had been at risk, from something much worse than the Ballybeen Tartan.

Six p.m. and a winter's evening is keeping the neighbors quietly in their dens, seemingly safe. An official warning by the local Paramilitary is stamped on the lampposts around the housing estate.

**'STAY INDOORS, UDA OPERATIONS IMMINENT TONIGHT.'**

Any wonder the birthrate jumped tenfold, everyone is in bed having a bit of the other, if you know what I mean.

Unlike them, I took a wee walk to the nearby housing estate for some fun, you know 'how's your father fun' or, stealing cars, or something like that.

Anyway, it's a bone reaching cold night, my breath pluming before me like one of those Russian front war scenes.

Then, cut out.

All dark and frankly not too sure what to do, I'll tell ya!

Not just darkness, but terrifying darkness, when you don't know the others around you, and you has no fawkin' idea if they are friend or foe.

The early days of the troubles of Ulster usually started with the retaliation from the loyalists, which resulted in widespread rioting.

About to unfold now is one of those occasions.

The estate's miserable night lighting continued to blank out one grid at a time.

Blink, blink, blink, and again blink.

Over there, and there again, suddenly behind, so on and so forth until all is invisible.

Walking unseen, bursting into existence are fires, lots of them scattered across the designated zone.

The faraway flute man, whistled from somewhere, the sweetest orange tunes.

**“Oh when the Saints, go Marching by.” then ‘Marching up the Shankill.’ ‘Orange is the color’ and ‘on the slopes of the Boyne.’**

**Crackling fires mainly for heat and light here and there, bedecked the field, and voices murmured only to fizzle away.**

**Nervously I took a further step into a block of tenements, and as my heart raced, I slowly crept away to the open soccer field, as something else dwelt there.**

**‘It is on, Oh Bajeesus!’ I said to myself, nervously.**

**‘I could easy get over my head, Oh, Jesus, really need your help mate!**

**What if I could just turn around and head home, forgive me if I stay Jeesus, but you are partly to blame?’**

**The rat within, Jeesus how could you allow him to torment me?**

**That nasty little demon began pulling the angel and me one-way the other.**

**Why?**

**Why had they to exist at all? Hard as it is, home is where my Da thrashed me for things I did not understand. Eventually I would have to face that miserable existence, and it might as well be later.**

**I blame you Jeez, that home is where my Da thrashed me for things, I didn’t not understand.**

**Ten hours earlier, trying to creep through the kitchen door needed stealth and cunning. Da’s Rottweiler with some negotiating, was achieved with a few tasty morsels of salted pastie, swept from the kitchen table. Two minutes later, slipping under the sheets while my brother who slept beneath, is successfully short-changed from morbid fun. I had undressed as far as I dared to, before I entered the squat confines of our bedroom, careful not to wake the other demon in my life. The longer I stood around in the narrow landing, the sooner I knew my Da’s Rottweiler would pounce from somewhere. Holding the bedroom door handle upwards no more than an inch, averted the usual squeak that often betrayed me.**

**Three hours later and the other pain in my arse, shouted up the stairs demanding my attention at the breakfast table.**

**Sometimes me da spoke like a gangster, supposed to have better results with all his inferiors I imagined, and I supposed this from watching all those American untouchable episodes.**

**Aggressive sounds received higher octaves from me Da, and therefore the need for me to fake subservience, is the only way of dealing with the old bugger. Fifteen minutes later, we were at the table feeding ourselves, while my Da glued himself to the kitchen tele watching the UTV report on the usual sectarian violence. Me Ma smoked his breakfast into a dollop of fried tasteless shit every morning. Surprisingly the old bugger is still alive.**

**Porridge steamed on the stove next to the bacon, potato bread, soda, sausage, egg, veggie roll, liver, kidney and some arsenic with a bit of luck, the perfect Ulster fry. The smell wafted around the neighborhood, mixing with all the other airborne garbage. I patiently**

waited on the punch or the whack from the flat of his huge hand. Worse, the snaky line of wired cable, that left the mark of what our parents called discipline.

Then, after a longer than usual wait, the feeling of 'might-be' swept over me. There might be a possible stay of execution. Well, might-be my salvation, and might-be not. Equal rights had entered our home and there were no might-be's. My Da past the whacking's to me Ma, and I received a woman whipping, with the infamous wire flex, I'll tell ya. That was fun, I'll tell ya.

Now that is where Glasgo drew the line, I'll tell ya. You see, I don't see me Ma in the same light as me Da at sixteen years old, I'll tell ya! In many ways, she's a harder nut to crack. And in other ways, she isn't. Grounded by her, is unacceptable by the Tartan you see. So I adopted a policy, Angel called it that, he got these fancy terms from his Da, him being a UDA member. He picked up the strategy 'he called it that too' on how to retaliate without further whackings. They meanin' Angel and Georgy, would both intimidate her while me Da was at work by banging the front door. Someway, I found an excuse to pursue the culprits. A deeper hole for me sometimes and once me Ma and Da ended up having a gaud almighty row over it.

Angel said must be working if it has that effect on them and not myself, no need to worry about the deeper hole, just eat it.

So we called it the 'Eat Shit Policy, and we adopted the eat shit policy for the next three years. At least until common sense and maturity took an upwardly mobile stage in our hard and painful lives, I'll tell ya.

Then he went on to introduce the 'The Limited Damage Control' Collateral Damage, and another called, Parent Retaliation Policy, which entailed UDA signed mandates. 'That's what Angel called it' threatening any parent with consequences when punishing junior UDA or potential members in the name of the cause.

After school, most days I danced to the sound of the 'Man who sold the world' and even though Lulu sang it well on top of the pops, I preferred David Bowie's version. My Tartan scarf hung from my neck loving that feel of coarse wool, and while getting into my levis, the mark of parent violence in all its hideous black and ghastly blue on skin, took me unexpectedly. My brother, who saw the marks, too embarrassed, remained peering through the crack in the door. I'll never forget the look of trying to deal with it. Then Ziggy came to the rescue, and I danced to the sound with total devotion and bluffed my way with the Bay City Rollers remembering Sha la la la. and only Sha la la la'. The posters preferred by my brother could not have made the distinction between us more; Elvis dominated the middle of the bedroom, skirted by David Bowie in all his various forms and stages with Alice cooper centered underneath. Overhead, the scarves of allegiance and loyalties. Apart from my Tartan scarf, the blues football team, known in these parts as Linfield. Yet, in only a couple more years, our lives would experience a wider wedge between us, I'll tell ya!

Meanwhile back at the soccer field, all the recent talk of a province- wide operation is going too finally happen, tonight!

Sensing it, as a gift that you knew would eventually come to you, you know the one someone else has already told you about, and has warned you what will happen if you squeal on him or her.

Then, but for the sound of bye bye baby in a distant bedroom, lowly I could hear men talk of their plans.

More talking then more and more, only more like whispering, as I approached.

Somewhere in the hidden ahead parchments of black, a walkie-talkie crackled into earshot.

Figures were pacing back and forth.

Halting, eyeing all moving strangers, as much as my eyes would allow, some did not see me come amongst them.

Camouflaged against the dark, I have trouble following them too.

Again walking, listening, eager for whatever happened or is going to happen.

“Are you sure, Ardcar, Tullicarnet, and the Newton Tartans are ready, Alfie?” I heard someone hidden in the black, murmur from the middle.

Trying to control his youthful adrenalin, someone answered, excitedly into the mouthpiece nearby,

“Yes, all of the east, along with the fawk’n Woodstock and all them other ones round there.”

“Good, then we ARE ready,” breathing a sigh, a man said relieved with the logistics.”

Men soon passed the word around.

“It’s on.”

“We are ready!” Said another.

On the other end of the middle field, someone began beating a drum as moral picked up.

Boom, boom, boom, he drummed triumphantly, until he received a hard kick to the buttock for his stupidity.

Behind in the dark corners of the estate, I could hear the sound of shouts and curses come forth and echo out.

Carried along with the wind and changing gusts, are the distant sounds.

This way that way, and this way again, repeatedly, like far off wails from inside the zone of youth’s mischievous intentions. Not like that of men sometimes, but real sounds all the same.

White nylon flapping flags centered with the red hand, where dug in the damp ground.

The union flag reminding us of what we were fighting for.

Tangoing back and forth as though blown by some entity, it seemed like some performance unfolding, unsettling, hiding and displaying their symbolic red hands stained with the blood of clansmen. Sashaying between them, patches of smoke.

Reminiscent of watching one of those silent shots from a WW1 battlefield, I especially remembered, sensing my way forward as if I am in a minefield.

Odious fumes from petrol and charcoal were a whiff to make you a man in such moments, I’ll tell ya.

Soon the white handkerchiefs would offer some reprieve, while one hand held it over the mouth and the other, free to lob.

An ornery mother hanging over from a darkened block began cursing some young men who just made her nervous.

Her unconcerned noisy echoes disturbed the enclosed tenement block, waking others, and triggering the dogs into a frenzy of barking. They too sensed the change around them.

“Shut the fawk up, kids r tryin’ to sleep, and I’ll call the Peelers for disturbance ya cheeky wee bastards.”

She is promptly hushed told by someone to disappear and keep her big bake and screaming brat silenced.

Then, a strange mechanical sound, like a generator began cranking up, a kinda freaky sound, I’ll tell ya..

Flash, flash, flash, and then flash again.

A cordon of bright searchlights, beamed from the entrance on the other side of the soccer field

Their rays casting an eerie ambience, coupled with the mist and smoke.

Helmets moving around in the cosmic haze as if they had just landed from some alien craft.

Then, strange voices collectively echoing around the acoustics of the Cul –de- sacs, then fading away.

A body of darkened men from the action group had silently occupied the middle of the soccer field at Davarr Avenue.

I never got the chance to make my exit.

“Glasgo?” announced the voice with a recognizable familiarity.

Angel appeared out of the mist and patchy smoke with his usual fakey piss-taking sneer. From his wrap-around Tartan scarf, protruded a nose that seemed Italian, always sniffing for something. Long and curved at the end, detracting from his more familiar face. A scarf that can reveal as well as hide features, which he began unwrapping to show himself.

I imagined him wearing a cloak of black with red lining and a top hat with a white face. Instead, he transformed to wearing a broad smile with denim skinnies, probably stolen from the best Belfast boutique. He had cloaked himself in a black cromby coat, a bowler hat that sat slightly to one side, and a Tartan scarf that hung loosely around his thin scrawny neck. We both lightly butted heads and smacked each other on the right side of our faces.

“Angel, you look like fawk’n Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.”

“Ha, how the fawk do you know that I am not?”

“Well, come to think of it, you’re as ugly AS HE IS.”

**“That is not what your girlfriend said while I was on top of her last night, and she screamin’ how much she loved me, ha-ha.”**

**“Ah, but she is blind, and her legs open for anyone who she thinks is my friend, annn’d she has the clap.”**

**“Ah ha.”**

**We both laughed in unison as usual.**

**“I walked into your combat zone and didn’t know it, WOW.”**

**“It was too late, exclaimed he, you have to join us for some fun, NOW.”**

**“You ARE fun, Angel, and I want to have fun,  
Nevertheless, this is different, and I want to run,  
And besides, there were others around I cannot see,  
That makes me nervous, as this for me, is enemy terri’ toe’REE.”**

**“Do not worry, Glasgo, says he, you’re going to be all right, WITH ME.”**

**Sensing my doubt, he bit on his bottom lip and took a step closer, breaking our rhyme.**

**“That is supposed to make me feel better?” I asked.**

**“There are others here who like you, like McGurran, eh, ha ha.”**

**“McGurran! Are you serious? He’s never fawk’n sober.**

**He head-butted my neighbor’s brat night before, and called him a fruity boy and then he stole his Zippo, Angel!”**

**“Yeh, he hates fawkin’ homos, ever since one followed him home.”**

**“And Georgy, the big dope, he nearly killed us this mornin’, in case you forget,  
Now that’s fawk’d up Angel!”**

**“I know, I know, I’ll talk with the big fawkin’ dope, too watch out for you.”**

**Georgy looked like a Viking warrior on the go, you could say.**

**His long straight blond mane stretched all the way down to his arse cheeks. Mine curled around my head like some fruit from some Greek mural. It didn’t bring me any compliments. I’ll tell ya!**

**Georgy ribbed me no end on that one.**

**“When they look at me, they see muscles, seven incher, and balls.**

**When they look at you, they see a boy not quite a man!”**



Sometimes Georgy is just a real pain in the butt, not because he was right, but because he said it like things were, and got away with it. He had blonde hair and larger muscles that made him seem hunky to girls in some weird macho way. But what really turned the girls on, were his eyeteeth and muscles. The mother of all eyeteeth and muscles, were Georgy's, I'll tell ya.

It also brought him some unwanted attention from fruits.

However, he usually saw them off with a kick in the arse for being born and no real harm, as long they give up their fags.

Cigarettes that is, not faggets. He just moved to the neighborhood and colored Tartan tattoos adorned both his forearms, that he displayed but one, the one with a naked red and purple female. He would show her off with a teasing leer, and the usual bearing of his eyeteeth.

It came with the name 'Mavis' in green on the right forearm.

Though my attention always on the left forearm, where another tattoo just hid outta view, normally a cuff from his blue denim shirt concealed it.

'Mavis!' laughed Angel, "What mother would name her fawkin' ba, a name like Mavis?" Angel would tease.

Angel was allowed to. Truth is, Georgy found the name funny too, but he hid this, as he hid his love for Mavis. But let no man utter her name in jest or distaste, other than that of Angel.

Introduced into our class at the High for Boys, he immediately had felt an urge to prove his worth.

"This is a hard man's school," told by the local hard men. "That is how things are," he had been goaded, until he got tired of it. One day he proved that he is a hard man too. A somewhat growing reputation, all said and done, he soon locked on to myself of all people, from the entire screwed up class too scrap with. Others came later, and he dispatched them with results that were more aggressive. The rest is the usual story and we soon realized we were not natural enemies and formed our own little private allegiance. We even made an oath too all three of us.

I would tell him who is who in the tartan, as I got to know them, and where they were in the rank and file for a tenner. He climbed his way into their confidence, and kept an ear open for Angel and myself along the way. No one could be trusted, as rivalry after rivalry waited their turn too test how hard you were in the tartan. In the afternoons, Angel, Georgy and I would spend our time shoplifting and pick -pocketing for fun in the town of Ards, not to mention stealing the odd car to get home from a disco. We always made sure that the car was the way we found it. We would give back the wallets to their owners too, if we were too close to home, much to Georgy's annoyance. You see, it is all about fun, nothing bad, if you know what I mean. For some, Ards had some attraction, for us it is thievin' candy, for others it is for the visitors and Grammar House snobs. For us it is the scrubbers amongst them. For others, flyers and wanna-be sailors, for us discovery of sex and easy pickings.

**Nothin' bad.**

**Meanwhile the loyalist paramilitaries still in their infancy are now organizing hastily, because of the urgency defending their communities. Inside the riot cordon, an elder controlled the younger Tartan men. He ordered withdrawal from the dark flanks, thought by him to have no tactical edge. Those from the middle relieved him from his command. The word passed silently along to the outer edges of the combat zone by other men,**

**“Tell them ones to get their arses outta off Danure Park, will ye.”**

**One called Denwoodin, who blind to the finer requirements, screamed,**

**“Hey You One's, Big Davey Says, Get The Fawk Outta There!”**

**Not the delivery wished for, but it had achieved the aim. He too received a hard kick to the arse for stupidity. Everyone now knew that vigilant mothers were ready to let everyone have the better of their mouths, I'll tell ya!**

**The men in the middle, Angel told me, were uneasy about raising their own voices, and it became clear why they used the silent method to silence the others. Moreover, they knew that they needed the silent support, or the whole operation could be put at risk. The men in the middle ground demanded much of everyone, ordering everyone to the operation zone around them.**

**Arses got kicked, heads were butted, and dissenters got a summary kickin' by the men in the upper Tartan or the junior UDA, depending how you looked at it.**

**That usually restored Paramilitary discipline I'll tell ya! At least for a while until the Paramilitary were pleased with the results. Obedience, Angel called it, eventually got through the liquor and most dumb headed. It only took one phone call from someone now, and the whole operation would be fawk'd up, said Angel.**

**“What's happenin' Angel, are they going to riot?”**

**“Ah!”**

**“For what reason this time?”**

**“My da says they are pickin' on us Prods and not the fawkin' Taigs again.”**

**“Well that's a good reason to go to war.”**

**“And you wanna me to join your chicken shit operation.” I said, teasing and searching his face.**

**Producing a cigarette packet, he tossed me one along with a mischievous glint in his eye. Generously he then handed out the contents to others who crowded him too take advantage of a smoke.**

**“Get back to your posts! And Angel that includes you!” A voice from the darkened middle ordered.**

**“What a wanker.” said Angel lowly, afraid his voice carried in the betraying breeze?**

**“Wasn’t that your da?”**

**“Ayh, and he’s wanker too!”**

**Georgy, appeared with a huge smirk across his huge face, revealing huge yellowish teeth, that were all the front of his huge mouth. The large eyeteeth added a primeval feature that scared the hell out of the local dogs. And he was bit a few times for that, I’ll tell ya. Once by my Da’s Rottweiler, that had chased his arse up the path and all the way outta of my Da’s nursery. Never seen my Da laugh as much.**

**“Boy, that was fun,” he said referring to the kickin’ someone got for disobeyin’ an order.**

**He peg-legged towards us, lifting his huge weight, as though his right foot is weighed down with lead, and swift as storm trooper.**

**“Fawk’s sake Georgy, you scared the fawkin’ crap outta me!” Angel snapped with his usual attention to profanity.**

**“Well, Glasgo, you decided to join us,” he teased, ignorin’ Angel’s reaction, tilting his head at right angles accommodating the weight from his heavy blond mane. His mane caught by the wind as it swept across his face, catching strands on his broad wart spotted nose, and then returning without pissing him off.**

**“Didn’t get a chance in our, dem’o, democracy to change my mind, Georgo!” I said throwin’ a brief look toward Angel.**

**“That’s a big word for us to get a hold off there!” Ribbed Angel.**

**“What other new words did ya get outta that encyclo, en,,psycho?”**

**“Encyclopedia, Angel.”**

**“Ah, Encyclopedia.”**

**“Well if ya hadn’t we would have been disappointed.” Georgy said snatching a fag from Angel’s mouth.**

**While he sucked in the smoke, the others dashed back to their positions as another round of rubber bullet burst.**

**Crackle crackle and then a thud from a body that took a hit.**

**A grumbled in terrible pain from the rolling trunk somewhere in the darkness, groaned out in obvious suffering.**

**The Viking caught off guard, heard the voice of a friend call out, but was none the wiser from the raven black.**

**For all his shortcomings, Georgy was a big softy. A big hard man sort of softy.**

**A softy and a hardman softy is Georgy. Don't get me wrong, he is one of those hard-man softy's, But no one got the better of him when he got mad, and we mean no one. I'll tell ya.**

**However, there is something else about Georgy, and one day soon, I'll be able to put my finger on it.**

**Angel seeing his chance snatched his cigarette back from Georgy with such speed in his usual fakey flakey evil laughter. Georgy looked comical. One minute a fag in his face, the next gone. That Angel can go too far, from Georgy's 'almost Angel look' on his face, It occurred to me, that Georgy was in love with his long hair, and he had other reasons for growing it.**

**Everyone now into a mixture of skinhead, suede-head, and any other head that was short, now to be tattooed, or scared with blood brother knife. Whatever made you look mean and scary, worked with the Tartan.**

**Georgy wasn't like that. Nevertheless, he is one of the hardest men there without having to buying into the gambit.**

**The firelight caught the stranger's angry grimace,**

**"Get outta of the light, you stupid wankers, and no slobbering." He bellowed.**

**Then our attention quickly transferred to the hail of rubber finding their mark amongst some of the men.**

**Cursing the outcome, they then cursed the pigs, then themselves as they began ducking, listening hard to the lamenting excruciating injuries, making its way across the crow dark patches in the zone like some medieval plague. Four R.U.C vehicles then at breakneck speed entering the estate short of Davarr Avenue barricade drew the mob forward from behind me. Scared the hell outta me seeing all of a sudden a large number of ready Tartan men with all sorts of weaponry, I'll tell ya!**

**Braking hard in the dust and dirt at the other end of the soccer field, the RUC vehicles came to a big dusty halt.**

**The smell of heavy-duty engine burn caught the breeze, then swept over all who were gathering around.**

**The sudden white rays of vehicular light, illuminating the dispersal of airborne dirt, took a few moments to settle.**

**"Tonight the dust is settling, exposing the reality of being a 'Man' and not the 'Boy' of yesterday," the voice from the middle bellowed.**

**"Remember the cause and defend it with all your power," he continued vehemently, instilling the drive that he would need from them.**

**Then, RUC commencement.**

Flash, flash, flash..., and flash again began exploding from the large searchlights that were perched on the RUC turrets.

Rayed light beaming across the conflict zone like invading alien spacecrafts.

The zone fell into tense silence, leaving only the fires to spit and crackle. We loved fires we Tartans. It is like our rallying point beginning there and ending there.

Behind me a mean voice caught the sail of the wind.

“They are up to somethin’, the bastards.”

The Tartan-men began making balaclavas out of their Tartan scarves, readying themselves for operations.

Georgy did not have one, and so he went without covering his identity from the surveillance.

Gripping the catapult tightly in his left hand, Angel’s tone suddenly sounded bitterer, whose face hid behind his Tartan scarf?

“We’ll put their lights out if they don’t!”

A loudspeaker cranked up in the inanimate R.U.C. zone.

“YOUR LAST CHANCE FOR A PEACEFUL OUTCOME HAS BEEN REACHED,

WE URGE RINGLEADERS TO THINK AGAIN,  
OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES.”

11.30 p.m. and it began.

Some using their cigarettes began igniting the gasoline sodden linen. Cheering and coaching them, the men in the middle egged them on.

Chanting, “REMEMBER THE BOYNE, REMEMBER THE BOYNE!” though a great slogan, kinda outta place, since we’re engaging a protestant group this time.

And Georgy, who is still proving how hard he is, in all his Viking glory, rose up with the Red-Hand banner that he would often carry into Tartan battle and sang out, unheeded and unhooded.

“NO SURRENDER THEN, AND NO SURRENDER NOW,”

Historical words in all its glory still mattered today.

He got a momentary standin’ ovation from the newbies before that was discouraged by the middle with the threat of a kickin’.

He was remembering the battle of 1690 fought and won by some fella called King William of Orange against the ‘Fenian’ King James 1<sup>st</sup>.

At least, that’s what Angel said.

Who would have thought it mattered today. Most of us, I’ll tell ya, didn’t know shit about history. But Angel, well, what can I say, it was like he had to know it word for word, detail for detail, tarnished with a few of his Da’s slurs.

Myself, well I didn’t know history like Angel, maybe or maybe not, there being so much bull-shitting going on these days.

## **CHAPTER [2] The Letting of Operations**

### **The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

The overhead devils brew began the beginning of another assault. Watching them soar through the chill of the night with increasing precision, each one seeming to bring improvement..

It started off the way intended, heightened with pent up frustration and too much drink. Satisfied praise from the nearby peer groups began to develop.

A Tartan member, appeared from behind the firelight, his face a dazzle of red, gripped a cigarette between his lips, and then lowering himself to the fire, lit his Molotov. Then, simultaneously withdrawing his left arm, lobbed the beer bottle forward and knelt again, caught some fire on his fag, sucking hard for the effect.

“Drink that ya black scum,” shouted Jacko.

Flicker, flicker, flicker, soared the glass bottle until the last flick disappeared into the dark behind a pig vehicle.

For a moment nothing and then came, “IGNITION” then excitement.

From that moment, I wanted in bad, for the fun, if only for the fun.

Oh that fun, I wanted it all, even if that meant joining them. I’ll tell ya.

A single blanket of flame spread across and up into a plume of genie proportions, revealing a satisfied Satan, the fancy of our myths. Amid the crimson, dark orange and parathion blue, no demon showed itself, that others could witness.

Instead, appearing is the ghastly licking tongue of reddish orange and the threat of excruciating suffering.

Insufferable pain caused by the perpetrator nearby. I wasn’t sure at first whether I could be like them, that violent, that detached from their actions.

Then the drug took effect. The same drug that knows where to drive a man hungry for action is the same that drives a man too enjoy the thrill of it. Just like a fix. Soon I found the detachment from my actions. It became kinda easier the more I practiced. If you cannot see the enemy, then you cannot see the effects of your own actions, and another salvo of Molotovs followed.

Crashing all over the RUC line, and then came the constant renewal. Again began that hideous tongue, licking out furiously at whoever came close enough for its hideous burn.

Most enjoyed the truculent display of others actions, their juvenile thirst hardly quenched with the excitement.

I never saw anything that made men convinced they were right with such a cause as ours.

Exploding cacophonies of smashing glass and rock, “Observe Glasgo,” a voice cried from the hidden inky dark. The deathly release of the devil’s brew time and time again, lighting up the nighttime sky, to a rain of flickering spangle orange.

I am not sure to whom the voice belonged too, but it’s not anyone I recognize.

Some clearly elated with the commencement of operations began their energetic antics of bravado.

It reminded me of bonfire night on July 11th. Surprising that we would celebrate the tradition with the Pope’s effigy burnt on a pile of junk after all these centuries. Precipitated by King William of Orange’s victory over the Irish King James catholic forces, and then celebrated the next day on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Otherwise, most had no idea why or what it stood for.

Unbeknown, an observer had come amongst us and not a stranger to our kind of mayhem and danger. Covert surveillance by the security forces became more and more frequent as the troubles picked up, though we were not aware of them.

Droplets of escaping gasoline began to create danger under the line of tracer fire.

Nevertheless, we are so drunk on testosterone, alcohol, and indifference to notice.

Through the fire-zone, we could see razzers panicking through the haze of the firelight.

Screaming for support, some of them were ablaze and attempts by their colleagues to help them, not apparent.

Nevertheless, trained to put out any fires independently that penetrated their own person when required, usually succeeded.

It would entail rolling over the grass to extinguish their person from the deadly flames of hell.

Others ran back and forth, whilst others doggedly sustained fire with rubber bullets to quell the onslaught.

“Ya can down this as well, scum bastards,” shouted someone.

Another brew soared through the night sky driven by the same drive of the night.

Mockers, an obnoxious pipsqueak, lobbed the jagged teeth from pavements broken and heaped for battle, relentlessly. His imagination playing tricks from too much drink, claiming Old Nick with red drilling eyes, kept appearing to him, spitting his own bloody teeth out before him,

“Hasten now Tartanman, use my teeth, he mimicked, they are for you in the defense of your cause, see how jagged they are. Now use them for your cause, or forfeit your mortal tongue Mockers.”

Mockers, claimed to hide the rest of Satan’s plan, playing mind games with others around him. His existence and the paranoia growing within, to his constant annoyance claimed the devil teased him saying, ‘soon you’ll be free.’

He lobbed all he could at the pigs and concealed his secret. Free from what, was anyone's guess. At that moment, he beseeched a serpent of Satan for forgiveness, like a man possessed with too much poteen. I'll tell ya!

Then there is McGurran, and a bigger specimen too behold.

Chief of the Davarr barricade, relishing the action, even though a little under the influence of drink too, began lobbing. His teeth smashed against the helmets of pigs with remarkable accuracy, and his scar I saw in the light reflection, just enough to see, that he too got with his plan and secrecy.

Angel, producing his self-fashioned catapult, and with others commenced targeting the searchlights with some successes.

In addition, McMann, now pumped up, led the newbies by his own example into battle with renewed vigor, bullying them into lobbing missiles all the way.

Coupled with this line of attack, are the sinister barricades.

The R.U.C and Brits very often underestimated them. 'Made by the most evil of men of the time' they would say.

Built of barbwire and broken furniture and apart from defensive shields, they were concealing certain evil if breached that came with a heavy price. Not only broken jagged pavement rock heaped together, or when the Molotovs ran out, but also concealing another hideous weapon, I'll tell ya, and one never before used, that I can remember.

Puff and puff again, and other Molotovs hit the ground flaming up into clouds of ghastly yellow and purple.

Mockers, a sneer etching across his face, praised one of his own for bold action in the field. Specimens of this type, capable of such dastardly activities, unbeknown to me, I am now destined to rub shoulders with. The commitment to bond with such grows more demanding with each moment that I am there.

RUC rubber bullets, spinning towards us foe, downs more with increasing ferocity.

Nevertheless, 'rubber bullets were just that, only rubber bullets, we are tartan, and harder than rubber,' goaded McGurran.

Some simply lobbed back, but some were kept for other reasons.

The devils brew possessed the two-fold aim of revealing enemy location and dispatching them from the riot zone. However, that did not always pan out, especially if they were the Brits. Another huge flare up licking the sides of armored vehicles ensued further along the RUC cordon.

Then the heat. We could feel it begin to creep up and over our cold sweaty skin in the crisp November eve.

"Swallow it," McGurran barked, "as men do!"

"For us Tartan, this is a kinda rite of passage, like a gang initiation you could say.

You know the one where they get ya to run the kickin' gauntlet. That is the Tartan way too. On the other hand, if you don't, you will pay, and."



He liked to wind-up the newbies that Angel, I, ll tell ya.

**“SHUT THE FAWK UP ANGEL AND GET BACK TO THE FIGHT.”** Growled McGurran.

Down at the village, the sound of heavy footsteps broke the silence running past the barrack’s window.

A shout rose up and a subordinate officer waited impatiently for the steel grey security gate to unlock and release the catch that would render it ajar.

Pushing his weight through and not waiting to close the gate, he hastily faced the sentry tower.

Pausing, he wiped his forehead with the cuff of his green all-weather jacket, identifying himself by face, and then enters the building.

With a cursory knock, he began announcing the crisis as he trudged into the mess.

**“Jesus!”** he gasps heavily, trying to compose himself.

**“It’s like the battle of Little Big Horn up there, Sir.”**

The steely look on his commanding officer’s face left little room for inaction.

The senior officer then turned on his heels and stomped rapidly over to the opposite room, not closing the door carefully behind as they were accustomed.

Officer Graham without knocking began entering, then partially march stepping up to McGovern’s desk.

**“We’ll need the Limeys, Sir,”** interrupted the corporal.

The sergeant already assessing the urgency’s entrance is poised for remedial action.

**“You mean the help of her Majesty’s forces, Corporal Graham?”**

Sergeant McGovern needed to shift his whole body to eyeball from the table, and further analyze his standing subordinate.

For a moment, he saw his subordinate was someone different and he shrugged it off, irritating him as usual.

**“Sergeant McGovern, I hate to say it, Sir.”**

**“Then do not!”**

**“We are being beaten back with sustained attack and with some injuries,”** insisted Graham.

**“Actually, a lot of injuries, Sarg!**

**In addition,”**

**“Yes, Graham?”**

**“I hate to say it, from the Tartan thugs.**

**I thought we had the backbone amongst our own to avoid the need for the army.”**

**“And I thought I told you before, it is not about backbone Corporal, and we have plenty of that,” reassured McGovern, “now what else had he to report?”**

**“Only that we need the Limey, sorry, Sarg, ‘The Army’ double quick, accordin’ to Constable Mulholland.”**

**“Ok I want you to take command, Graham, assist your comrades and assess the situation.**

**I will have the Green Beret lot support brought up from Hollywood.**

**But only when you ask for it, Graham, ok, that way we know for sure.” McGovern asserted pointedly.**

**Graham enjoyed the recent surges of esteem he felt from his commanding officer.**

**It left a feeling of confidence and ahead in the stakes with his peers.**

**“Therefore, Constable, you are to relieve Mulholland and accomplish our immediate objective.**

**Get going!”**

**Graham swiveled round and was about to stomp forward when,**

**“Oh, Corporal, who other than the Tartan clan did officer Mulholland see?”**

**“Can’t see anything up there, it’s that dark, Sir.”**

**“What?”**

**“All our main searchlights have been rendered inoperable with shot from catapults, we think.**

**My Guess there is more experienced men there, what with the injuries we are getting Sir.”**

**“Would you say they are using weapons then, Corporal?”**

**“For sure, Sir, though like I said, it is too dark to see anyone up there.”**

**“Okay, remember your mission as we discussed earlier.**

**Perform that before we do anything, Graham.”**

**“Yes Sir”**

**“We cannot do anything until he makes contact with us first, and make sure you have a loaded revolver.”**

Corporal Graham acknowledged hastily with his right arm a cursory salute, and swiftly headed for his riot gear in the mess room.

The sergeant lifting his left arm, glanced at the silver pocket watch in his large palm. It read 11. 50 p.m.

Corporal Graham, emerging from the mess room some three minutes later is adjusting his bulletproof jacket, when McGovern appeared in the doorway of his office.

“I’ve been informed you should see some sort of contact in about ten minutes.”

“Yes Sir”

“So get going and keep me posted, in addition, pull any injured officers out of there.”

11.58 p.m.

R.U.C officer Graham arrived after 5 minutes and managed to duck the sniping ball bearings.

Experienced more than most with this sort of disturbance, he never winced at the developments that met him on arrival.

He is a model of what McGovern considered, perfect for this predicament. Soon his very presence will enhance any lagging confidence. Graham had been dealing with this type of conflict up the Falls Road for the past year, and is well seasoned with riot conditions. A salvo of petrol bombs had ignited his immediate environ. He did not startle, as others would have,

Steadfastly he jumped into the driver’s seat of a Police armored vehicle. The seat being somewhat squat, had become stretched to the hard wearing as another rip tears from his sudden butt weight.

It would be patched with plastic tape like all the others.

Inside the cockpit reaching forward, he snatched at a black communication handset. He then pressed hard on the alert button. No connection, only static, and then voices of panic and interference from other divisions squiggled from the microphone.

Five minutes later, the handset found clearance and then a connection. Relaying to his sergeant that his plant had just made contact, he then felt satisfied his mission would be soon accomplished. His men thought he was giving the green light to the army given the delay in the vehicle. They were wrong.

Confirmation needed delivering. First duty completed then, he would pull his men out.

‘CRASH’ and immediately a petrol bomb fired up.

Enveloping the roof and down the sides, a petrol bomb covered the whole vehicle in flames that whipped up also from under his door.

“SIR, sir, you are not going stay in that, it has caught the belly.”

**GET OUT, FOR GOD’S SAKE! GET OUT NOW!” Bellowed a officer Bingham.”**  
Forcing Officer Graham to make a decision to stay or jump, Graham rattled of a bunch of instructions to his men and slammed the door shut.

### **Chapter [3] The Tip off** **The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

Meanwhile away from the conflict zone, down at the RUC barracks, the tranquility of the village went undisturbed. A shroud of mist and smoke blanketed the village. Flash lamps beamed two rays of circles onto the headstones of the local graveyard from the 17<sup>TH</sup> century. Constable Argyle was intrigued while Constable McDowell wandered.

Tall and bent shapes from the five thick oaks at the petrified church green made all seemed sinister hiding places.

Constable Argyle satisfied that the task he has been given is groundless, is about to leave when something causes him to linger.

The intrepid officers doing the nightly village rounds are now uneasy about a certain odor. Strange smells assaulted their nostrils as they searched further for its source.

As their stress level climbed, the junior officer who usually relied on humor, found it easier dealing with the tension. Argyle had become accustomed to tolerating it.

“Drifting in from the hinter ground, it seems, Holmes,” said McDowell quietly into the small-attached handset on his tunic lapel. Whilst sensing a change of climate that came with each step, he put one foot in front of the other intrepidly.

His amused colleague, who had grown stoic to his Holmes humor, did not react, now more preoccupied with something that pulled his interest elsewhere.

Then, a blood-curdling howl menaced the otherwise calm air.

“Did you hear that ‘Holmes? tis the sound of the Baskerville Hound.”

All again fell quiet.

Over the mounds and tombs towards a small old church came a sound of the illegal. Other than the stillness, even the night shrill, is not now heard. McDowell started to wander off towards it, while Argyle stayed put.

“What is that awful stink, Sir?” enquired the younger Mc Dowell into his R.C

“McDowell, stay there, until we know what it is.”

The P.A. crackled, then quiet, then crackle again.

“Bejesus, I’m ready if you’re okay with it, Sir,

Anyway, where are we supposed to be looking?” Constable McDowell asked his voice noticeably wary.

“Somewhere around the Travillian Mausoleum.” confirmed Argyle.

“That’s over behind the old church, Sam.”

The old moat dwarfed the medieval church that Officer McDowell began investigating. Known as the village landmark, it housed many mysteries as the village children endlessly pursued endless journeys on endless discoveries.

The moat, it is said, is where lies either a Norman or sometimes a Viking chieftain with all his retinue, depending who it is heard from, and how drunk they were.

Lurking closer between the ancient Presbyterian and Methodist churches from the green, are shadows from the past. However, not of men it seems.

Rays from flashlights that cast a silhouette here and there were reassuring, as darkness crept back into spheres occupied by perched Gargoyles above.

The icon of light, from Argyle’s flash lamp, blew up the granite headstone carving on the resting place of one Connor. The surname being indistinct from years of corrosion and mold read,

HERE LIES THE DECEASED  
CLAN CHIEFTAIN CONNOR TRAVILLIAN  
Next his wife Bethesda 1655 and next their Son Joelantony who  
departed 1632 age 23 years whose death was owed to the sea of e stern Atlantic during a boyage  
tothe Scottis island called Doric.

Suddenly Constable Argyle could smell sweat. It had the ring of repetitiveness, from the same source from his earlier experience. Standing up, he steadied himself, stiffening his back and running his nose along his own person until satisfied it came from elsewhere. In all his thirty-three years it is not, a smell he is accustomed too. Reassured that he is not its source, he concluded it likely to be animal. Having checked the immediate area with his flash lamp, he felt assured that nothing posed any immediate threat to him. Frantically, returning his attention to the archaic scribe, he continued deciphering.

Stealthily, a figure not more than ten meters away, testing the new night vision mini-scope, held Argyle in its green circle. Like one of those Victorian movie reels, the eyes of the laird on the other, watched studiously. Until the mist made it difficult to observe any further, the watcher held his hounds back, short of uncertainty.

When that certainty of a threat to his clandestine arms supply would return, he will release his hounds. He adjusted the earphone cables again for comfort, at the same time turning down the CB frequency to a comfortable decibel just above audible.

The odor more pungent and Officer McDowell too pumped up to notice the malevolent presence nearby, found the wooden door in a subdivision of the church at the rear. Descending the stone steps allowing the beam of light to guide him towards it, a breeze suddenly followed him down the steps with a rustle from the branches of an oak tree behind.

Nearby an owl hooted high up from the mausoleum occupied by the 14<sup>th</sup> century Travillian family.

Then suddenly, an abrupt breeze scattered leaves into the arched entrance against the heavy mahogany door, he had been pushing.

His hand gripped the old rounded bronze handle, at first resisting any attempt to turning, woke with a miniscule whine.

Then turning it to the right again, the door this time mournfully opened.

The autumn leaves, varied in their color and shape, rushing in before him, settled as though nature had right of way.

Before long, he began following the beam of flashlight inside and instantly the sinister odor grew stronger.

Reaching for his issued walther pistol, he checked that it is loaded after unlocking the safety catch.

*'Click'* the low mechanical din echoed.

Feeling for the floorboards with his feet that squeaked and sank slightly, he edged cautiously forward.

Adjusting his eyes, they narrowed at taking in the strange incongruous pews and columns. The unseasoned McDowell moved among them allowing them into his head and soon he began waning from his objective.

Creeping suspicion got the better of him and he attempted summoning his colleague from the C.R. when,

“CRUNCH”

His foot, sinking through the rotten floorboard heightened the fear off coming to rest on a solid rounded object. He relished neither its touch nor mass, for he knew what lay under.

Meanwhile, again officer Argyle called out for his colleague.

“McDowell?”

Craning his neck, his eyes squinting and then lifting his nose to get a better sample of the pungent odor, he curiously sniffed again.

Realizing he is unheard, he turned back to the tablet of stone that seemed to darken further in those few moments.

He knelt closer into it, his eyes ablaze with curiosity, his nose flaring sniffing it for any telltale sign of suspicion.

Something more visible in the right corner at the foot of the stone drew his interest further. Kneeling in toward it, he centered his flashlight on an inscription. In the darkness, almost tearing his eyes out, the failing light caught the ancient symbol of the ‘Black Tartan Brotherhood’.

A crossbow with words, then something else pulled him in closer.

Ancient words of the land-burning fraternity, small, so small that it was hard to decipher.

Words that meant to conceal something instead of revealing.

Then from behind him somewhere,  
“GRUNT” another grunt.

Argyle continued hurriedly, finding himself almost powerless to break away from the inscription.

**‘ Here lyth one of o r own, and one whoeth giveth his own to the order of the black Tartan,**

Instinctively, he shone his flash lamp on all nearby headstones and drew back at the shock of a multiple realization.

A realization, that he had stumbled upon something strange in the air, that came with this night only.

A realization that at no time had he noticed the inscriptions before. And the realization that he just realized something he could not repeat for the risk of his sanity.

That Argyle got off on old graveyards is no secret. In fact, it is true that he accumulated significant pride in his hobby over the years.

Back at the barracks, he took some heat for it.

Unable to control his zeal on each new detailed discovery, usually was matched by an initial chorus of “*Here we go again.*” from his colleagues.

Again, he attempted to gain a better view of the decaying scribe but darkness was cheating him out of it.

He hurriedly summoned into his mouthpiece again,

“Officer McDowell, will ye answer your dam R.C.?”

Then, the mouth communication on Constable Argyle’s green lapel burst into a violent crackle amid the night cemetery.

The grunting, looming ever nearer toward Argyle, closed in for the kill.

From the sepia of misty smoke wafting down from the conflict zone, it hid itself, panting unlike any canine he before experienced; a canine that might be more than dog or hound, and an odor more than sweat, that embodied another environment.

GRUNT, grunt, grunting closer, silence, snort, a pause,

Then they leaped from the mist destined for blood and flesh, hunger imposed on them, transforming them into killers of men.

The flashlight fell against the tombstone of the laird Connor smashing into pieces beyond salvage.

Argyle had been ready for them.

**BANG!** and then bang again rang out in the misty mounds of headstones and tombs.

Officer McDowell froze, struck with reality of what he is hearing.  
From inside the 15<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical structure his voice bounced off the ancient walls.

*“WHAT IN GOD’S WILL HAS HE DEMANDED OF US?”*

Officer Argyle’s mouth device crackled again, and then spoke.

“Is everything okay Sam?” McDowell’s voice echoed round and round the hollow interior.

“I think so.”

Then another analog squiggle interrupted their two-way contact and then quiet.

“Are you there McDowell?”

“Yes, what happened?”

“I will make a report later, what’s up, Bertie?” Argyle asked, his voice hard.

“You had better get up here,  
I think you are going to be interested in this!”

“Ok, I presume you are in the old church?”

“Yes, if that’s what you call it.”

“On my way, stay right there.”

From the pew behind Officer McDowell, a shadowy figure emerges. McDowell never had a moment to collect his thoughts.

Only the touch of long older sweaty hands under his chin, his last sensation, and the blood flow skillfully prevented from reaching his head.

The security nightlights at Dundonald police barracks threw out a beacon in the gloomy darkness. Like that of the lonesome lighthouse waiting for those who needed its refuge.

At the front of the white building with its bright lighting, is the ubiquitous gray mesh. Commonly, these were to shield the barracks from explosives thrown from passing vehicles. Annexed to the left side near the entrance is the yard hidden by a wall that housed police vehicles. Nobody went out on such a night, and the police knew that it was due largely to Paramilitary threats and intimidation.

That evening the radios crackled on all officers on duty, who had walkie-talkies. However, any maintaining or displaying a green glow is generally out of limits to them, between hours on certain days and dates. But Not Argyle or McDowell.



Only certain constables who were relevant to covert operations that involved a green light could respond to them.

On the other end of the call sat a black phone on a wooden oak table with a black cow-leather surface.

It rang in the warm office of the night duty sergeant.

Grabbing quickly, he had its mouthpiece in place like a well-practiced administrator.

“Sergeant McGovern!”

Dragging his eyes from the daily recording log, he ceased writing listening closely to his surveillance report.

Apart from the intermittent drip drip of lifeline water in the corner sink used for endless lifeline tea, his office after a long day came to a welcome still.

12: 05 a.m.

Breathing hard down the phone is an anticipated voice.

“Our man is in place, sergeant.” The corporal panted heavily.

The sergeant, his hand tightening around his official pen, cleared his throat from pipe smoke and tea, wishing he had not made the mistake of using the black phone.

“You’re sure?”

“Yes, Sir, he had removed his balaclava and I could see him with the night vision.”

“Good, Graham.”

Before Constable Graham’s eyes, the bulletproof glass started crackling and buckling. The ball bearings hitting the sides caused his sergeant some alarm, even though the shot had decreased.

“It sounds like you are being shot at, Graham.

Are you under sustain fire?” McGovern demanded loudly.

“Sort of Sir, but from ball bearings.” Graham scoffed pulling his handkerchief from his pocket to cover his mouth and nose.

“Okay pull the men out and get back here, immediately.”

Returning the phone onto the handset, he wrote in the logbook, *‘SURVEILLANCE CONTACT REPORTED AT,* he glanced at the wall clock, and continued,, *Nov 21<sup>ST</sup> 12.05 a.m. Constable Admin Number 22345*

Then he poured over it once more just to ensure all was correct. Again, the black phone sprung into action, jingling a moment or two at 12-06 am.

McGovern's right hand finishing a correction, glided across to lift it.

Corporal Graham, realizing the heat was having an effect on his breathing ability, soon passed from his conscious self, unable to complete his call.

The corporal wanted to ask his sergeant if the army were being unleashed, but was unable to muster the energy.

The gasping voice on the other side fell away; McGovern continued checking for any admin errors, intuitively holding the handle of the black phone.

The doors flew open, after gases inside forced pressure against the interior weak spots.

Dragging him from the looming explosion, Officer Bingham found a secure patch of grass behind another vehicle.

There he began resuscitating him.

The men never received the order to pull out.

Officer Bingham ordered some of his men to assist him.

"Montgomery, don't just stand there! Start the other Vehicle.

McCausland give us a hand and Davidson you're now in charge here."

Then needing to get to the nearest hospital, fearing Officer Graham's life maybe lost, McGovern who had been listening hard from his C.R. commanded,

"Officer Bingham?"

Bingham sprang attentively, unsure if the voice is McGovern.

"Yes Sarg?" Graham's R.C announced.

"Forget about them! Get him off to the Hospital.

NOW!"

Constable Graham had not cut out his radio.

When disturbances developed, he would sometimes allow McGovern to catch the mood by not cutting out his CM for a moment. The old vet had the unusual habit of holding on. So he was going to return the call anyway, after he noticed something wasn't quite right.

Constable Graham somehow knew it as another idiosyncrasy that came with the old vet and earlier life. McGovern noticed and made the usual mental notes on his boys.

The gray paint on the armored vehicle began melting from the roof, gradually striping down the walls onto the ground. The tires began bursting dropping the hulk like a felled elephant onto its hunches.

Then they started up the engine of the other and drove pass the stricken vehicle striking out for the Ulster hospital in Dundonald. As they did, the whole thing blew like a planned SAS operation. Mustering all his remaining strength, Officer Graham came round for a few moments.

With some difficulty, he raised his head glimpsing the explosion as if he needed the action to sustain him.

**“Pull the men out, Bingham!” He ordered, his voice slipping away to another state of consciousness.**

**“HEY! Graham! What do you call a thousand Tartan assholes chained to a chapel on the Falls?**

**C’mon Graham, don’t leave me here with all these rookies.”**

**Graham dropped off into oblivion.**

**“At least he is alive.” Bingham said checking his pulse.**

**McGovern holding the C.M was relieved. Then to the sound of static after squiggling for a moment, he released the alert button.**

**Officer Bingham fell against the interior of the RUC vehicle for rest, also releasing his finger.**

## **Chapter [4] The Find** **The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

**12.14 a.m. McGovern lifted the black office headset.**

**“Sergeant McGovern?” A voice demanded hurriedly.**

**“Yes! This is McGovern.”**

**“Officer Argyle, Sir.”**

**“Call me back on the red phone, Sam,” McGovern said lowly.**

**McGovern then replaced the black handset.**

**From a drawer below his desk, he opened and retrieved a red phone and sat it on top.**

**Redirected from the central office at Castlereagh, his red phone only jangled once before the sergeant scooped up the handgrip.**

**A tiny green light within a small clear plastic case on top of the phone lit up brightly.**

**“It seems you’re correct, Sir,” the voice confirmed.**

**After a moment’s pause, McGovern swallowed hard, and then asked fearing the worst.**

**“How much of it, Sam?”**

**Argyle paused, his voice shaky, then said.**

**“Significant, Sir.”**

**“How much?”**

**“Not like a usual Provo find, Sir, but enough to blow our barracks to kingdom come.”**

**‘Maybe the village’ McGovern thought.**

**Again he swallowed the burn of tobacco; the thought that Argyle’s report had a grain of truth than he probably realized. He would play it down with the others. However, inside his head, there is one of his hunches screaming back, that it is exactly a realization of his worst fear...**

**“Officer McDowell needs hospital treatment though. He is out cold, Sir.” Argyle said steering McGovern’s attention.**

**“Thank Christ the Lord.” McGovern said, his customary restraint finding little control.**

**Argyle somewhat perplexed, shot McGovern the evil eye down the phone. McGovern seemed to pick it up as if it beamed from the mouthpiece itself.**

**“Pardon, Sir?”**

**“I mean that he is still alive, Sam.**

**Listen; keep this under your belt, until we know what we are up against, Ok?”**

**“You had trouble from the Paramilitary?” McGovern cautiously maneuvered the discussion away.**

**“No, Sir.”**

**“But you could not really see, right, Sam?”**

**“No, Sir, I couldn’t, that’s correct.”**

**McGovern screeched to halt pausing for what seemed an eternity for Argyle.**

**“Ok, speak to no one about this, constable.”**

**“Is he moveable?”**

**“Think so, Sir.”**

**“I will have an ambulance sent down immediately!  
Where is he now?”**

**“I moved him to here, the green, Sir.”**

**“Good, I will be with you soon,  
No!**

**On second thoughts you report back here immediately after the ambulance gets there,  
Remember, you found nothing, not even God.”**

Constable Argyle waited a moment until he was sure, that Sergeant McGovern had finished.

With the rumble of his Ballybegs dialect still ringing in his ear, he released his thumb from the button.

McGovern pausing, unsure if he had all the answers he needed, reluctantly held the phone tight against his chest.

Argyle, from county down, hated talking to him on the mouthpiece as it seemed like he was going to war with some part of Scotland.

Face to face, he liked McGovern’s dialect, embodying all that seemed masculine with its no bullshit overtones. On the phone or R.C however, it was a nightmare.

McGovern as usual, very slowly returned the red handset in thought.

The green light returned to red then to nothing.

For a moment, still second-guessing everything from the information he had received, he paused and pondered over every scrap of detail dissecting it here and there for clues.

*“I don’t believe it.”* He had said! Words went round like a pinball in his head, but now not the time to press his touchy young constable. One thing he did know about officer Argyle. He sometimes went independent on things, meaning what he deemed as unimportant went omitted until pressed harder.

Now action is what needed doing. Old fashion S.W.R.

Swift Remedial Action.

January 1<sup>st</sup> 1974, and retirement, which would be official, is not a bunch of days away. Although in reality, he could take earlier retirement, if he wanted, however, what would be the point since it is only a matter of days? Any strange decisions now might raise an eye that he did not need.

He made again an insertion into the logbook; It read; 12-12 a.m. *Officer 22234 [Argyle-] made contact from the church Green, ‘Nothing to report’.*

The obvious omissions he would have to come back to them soon, before someone noticed, and resolve. However, it would buy him some time as officer McDowell and Graham would be convalescing for at least a week or two.

Until now, McGovern never felt compelled to make a lasting mark in the village.

In fact, up until he met a woman on a hill, he was not particularly interested in having anything to do with the village. Not even during his spell at the front, did he feel the compelling need to stay on anywhere until now.

Then again, he never felt that he would take up residence because of a woman like Mary Mav McNamara, as singlehood often beckoned him onward.

Now seventy-five years old, and despite his attributes for a looming civil war, the brass knew they could not expect him to extend his service indefinitely.

Despite his agility for the job, he was gradually finding the body not so willing each day that passed. The vestiges of a familiar environment were already taking second place, as he prepared to zone in on a new life with renewed vigor.

He thought about the guilt he carried, and the people whom he came to love and respect in the village. Most of all, the woman whom had velvet clasp on his heart from the get go and their future happiness. He found that if not for her, he could not have made it this far staying on in the village.

Introverted, private and positive, keeping herself to herself, he loved most about her, because she had what he hoped for, and that other thing he called 'the sixth sense'.

Reassuring for him, she would protect his interests, and there he felt more support than from his own brass. Acting as though she owned him, she did and he knew it. She had the rare quality of elusiveness, which he found different but attractive and her knowledge of armaments that he rarely found in a woman, in some way, the icing on the cake. Still discovering more treasures the deeper they both went with each other, whilst she handled his new mat-black issued ruger, as if it turned her on. It fell into her hand with ease, and then she checked the chamber and that it stayed loaded, which did not go by his experienced eye or his good ear. He listened from the bathroom shaving, and watched her from the mirror that she had already strategically positioned to catch the hallway mirror, both missing nothing in their mounting game of love.

“What happens to the Walther?” she asked from his bedroom.

“Oh that’s a better one Mary,” he answered, and she knew how he answered, that is how things were going to be regarding his revolvers.

Moreover, he knew too, for leaving things be, not pushing the envelope, he loved her even more. It is growing into something beautiful and both knew it.

Two nights before, tired and his leg playing up, she for the first time, undressed him, ran a bath and after that, they both partook a meal for the first time. From then on, both knew their ownership of each other is now a very real prospect.

Sometimes he thought about the mothers off sons from the projects, and their vulnerability. From the paramilitary’s web of manipulation and influence, McGovern obsessed with the idea of rescuing them all from the troubles. However, he knew that could not be. He also pondered disloyalty, and that he would have to take seriously, in order to save lives. Enough to toss his mother in her grave and maybe bring her back to life. His code of conduct and the titanic respect he had now built for himself, is now putting the family name in peril.

“Remember where you are now, and where you have left to go, don’t throw it all away now.” The words as usual, spoke from the picture on his wall.

All he had done for queen and country, and that at the end of his service and sacrifice, all he wanted to do now, is set down his own priorities, which to him seemed due-able. He thought about the sons that he lost, who he never brought home with him, and the ones he never had. He is for sure, a man who has suffered enough.

Doubled with that, he seen what happened to towns and villages after they became a target by either side of the current divisions. In addition, that in mind, it would be imperative for his survival to avoid exposure by the media companies.

It had to be that way, which he knew there is no other. Upping the ante, McGovern prepared himself starting with a ban on the media. A media he had all too long considered one real pain in his butt. He hated the media, and considered them satellites for terrorist monitoring. He would not approve of his men speaking to strangers, much less if they were going to expose him or themselves on television. Therefore, he banned all television interviews. In fact, he even went as far as making sure that television did not access the village. He felt uncomfortable with too much radio exposure and he banned them too, for good measure. In addition, he would ban any and all other media from the village, which included private.

Finally, he then called his men together to the mess room and gathering them around, read the riot act, and then poised them on a high-level security alert.

## Chapter [5] Bringing it on The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster

With the experience of life, McGovern knew that the decisions he was about to make would only find success, if his timing were perfect and that he remained anonymous.

His survival paramount for the survival of the village, he now stood before a meeting with his men.

“So fellas, I have it on good authority that we, as a location are probably being assessed by the Provos as a target of strategic importance.”

Stomachs sank the atmosphere instantly frosty, and then came stirrings in the lines.

“On whose authority?” asked a cadet intrepidly?

McGovern habitually swallowed the taste of tobacco that ran a burn down his throat, before he began his reasoning,

“*My authority!*”

Those that gathered in the room suddenly murmured to a quiet, amid a nervous hiccup here and a stressful cough there. The assessing of McGovern’s demeanor began in earnest. Especially when they seen that rare serious look on his face grow into something they did not see often.

After a second or two, the light coughing and throat clearing drowned away before the melodic voice of McGovern took on another tone.

“I know what you are all thinking, and yes it sounds beyond our area of police work.”

“All I ask is that you trust me on this,” he said somewhat beseeching.

**“And what strategic target do you mean, Sir?”**

**Officer Argyle stepped forward at that point.**

**“Trust me, you don’t want to go there Reilly!”**

**“Yes we do, Sir?” another rookie pressed.**

**Outside, the northern wind carried the sounds of approaching officers with their boots steeled against the concrete pavement. At the security gate, another double click, and a few seconds later entered the figures of two concerned constables. Both sensed the intensity as they entered the room and observing the attentive body language of their colleagues, tried chilling out. The fumes from the match hazed, as McGovern took a moment to relight his pipe, the vapor extending to them with a hint of tobacco. They were used to it, and they knew too, it usually meant McGovern’s moment to step forward.**

**He spoke earnestly in his manner of togetherness, pulling his men forward, allowing those who wanted to smoke. Gathering the men in, as if McGovern wanted to deny even the walls privy to what he had to say.**

**“I believe you all know what I mean when I say Gelignite?”**

**A few seconds of whispering ensued, McGovern waited for at least one question, when,,**

**“I have heard you smell it before you see it, Sir?” McGovern knew it was a greenpea question one of his cadets posed, he could not see amongst the other young faces.**

**“Welcome to the real world of police work, and this is where you all get on board, tonight.”**

**“It is a substance that can blow us all to kingdom come,” Argyle said, eyeing for any reaction,.**

**“Thank you, Officer Argyle.” McGovern acknowledged, all be it indignantly, stepping backward on his left foot, which found the same practiced spot each time they had a get together.**

**“At some point in the future, you can bet, there will be worse to come too!” Argyle barked.**

**At that point, McGovern beckoned to Argyle to continue briefing the men on the media ban.**

**Concluded by deploying two teams on the beat, one daytime and one nighttime, paying strict attention to anything that seemed outside the normal village life. Reminding his men the importance of secrecy, and the possibility that he had on good authority Provo eyes and ears are already in the village. He also reminded them that explosives usually emitted an odor and to be vigilant. Then he thanked them for their cooperation. It was then that Argyle threw him a look. It finally hit home regarding their earlier discussion, some things**



were not going to go away or get resolved now. That something is different about this development, which made Argyle once again uncomfortable. Could it have been the feeling of doing what is essentially army work, and beyond what his training is capable of? Either way, it was too late, now locked into oath and family tradition, Argyle could not walk away from it or McGovern. However, McGovern knew exactly what bothered him. If truth be told, it was the omitted mention of danger and danger money, which would have been nice. However, that had been compensated by his intent on skillful negotiations and not thinking from outside the box. That was where McGovern kept him in order to keep his mouth shut, and get his support. The older wiser fox, who knew the terrain better, had royally outsmarted Argyle, and it went deep.

Back in the warmth of his office, McGovern thought about the imminent day and how much leverage he must accomplish before retiring.

By making his move soon, it would be beneficial; otherwise, the alternative he knew would be permanent failure. He had to move to the next stage of his game plan ASAP.

How long he had to evade the loyalist paramilitary, who would waste no time tracking him down could be anytime soon. By now, the absent armaments will be raising hell among the east Belfast leadership. Soon they will eventually process who is responsible for denying them their edge in their current operations. They will from that point, eventually pass it on to the appropriate individuals, and from there, it would be beyond the point of reversal.

With the wheels now in motion, he needed to make his move soon. At first, the day seemed to pass slowly with each hour sounding with a dong, each dong adding more stress to his heavy aging frame, which would have killed other men at his age.

Seeing his task more clearly and objectively regarding his village, the police officer within breathed with solace. The hunch squealed from in his head that he would need the leverage of the arms find for bargaining, as sure as his life now depended on it. For the soldier in him, solace had been not so forthcoming. Eminent betrayal to the realm though he concluded justified, regarding the arm's collateral nature, had not allayed the guilt that he now carried.

McGovern, he thought to himself, the brass is going to have to trust me a little harder on this one.

ON the evening off Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> the veteran climbed the fifty five wooden steps with the aid of his rickety old walking stick, that he double-up as a blind man's tapper in darkness.

Pausing halfway, glancing above at the swirling mass of clouds, he observed there reminiscent deformity collecting lower and lower toward the old moat. He continued tapping his stick against the next wooded step in haste, as the wind now seemed to threaten his steady leg. At the summit, the knock knock against wood carried the familiar sound to a stranger. A rendezvous had been prearranged to meet him on the ancient moat overlooking the old church at 7.30 p.m. He had fifteen minutes to get back before Argyle would know he was absent. At the summit, the informer was sitting hunched and dressed in a dark duffle coat and hood, which extended over most of his face, except for an eye, nose, and mouth. The semi grey pants were old style pleated baggies and nothing about him

resembled anything Protestant. The figure contrasted the dark green arron sweater he wore with the dark green duffle coat. At first barely visible against the summit grass, he appeared to be smoking a small cigar, the ribbon of smoke from his head, streaming away in the breeze. McGovern hobbled forward and rounded cautiously on the man under the hood. The red glow replaced another then another in fast sequence. He removed his hood, and the long light hair for a moment hid the face, before the east wind disheveled it aside.

The informer sat on the edge, and McGovern felt a little pang of vertigo as it had been a long time since he had been of the ground. A curious odor wafted upside from the tall grass, where the hound hid in the grass.

The ashen face of his informer remained unmoved. McGovern who been looking down on the rooks mausoleum thought he saw someone else below at the old church. Someone gangly and tall, then something else from a very distant recess of his mind seemed to stride about. McGovern thought it could not be and shook the delusion off.

A rook squawked, feathers fluttered, and the wings carried it away.

“You’re late” said the stranger.

McGovern missed the comment, and returned his head to evade the wind.

“What’s that?”

“You’re late.”

McGovern did not care. He just wanted to know how far in his plant was with the target group. A need existed to speed things up, get to the confidence of the group, ensuring speedier intelligence before something catastrophic goes down.

The usual one way passing of info took place, and the plant at first did not like the idea of an induction on covert operations, which would touch on code communications.

Clandestinely, the figure checked the cash for any mistakes knowing there would not be any, before McGovern observed him disappeared down the side of the moat into the long grass.

12.15 a.m. The Ballybeen conflict zone.

“There would be no baton charge from them tonight.” commented a hard Belfast dialect.

CRACK, crack, and again crackled the flash of errant rubber bullets sniping the front flanks of the Tartan loobers.

Span the spinning sparkles from out of the black, with unseen results dropping one here and another there and then another over there. Rolling somewhere on the green pastures where they fell, the lament of men in pain frequently becoming a drain on the will of other men.

Some managed to get up, dust themselves down, and collect their rubber trophy for posterity. Others not.

**“Pissing in the wind and getting us with it, the black bastards!” The unseen figure again cursed.**

**We thought of the Peelers black in those days, because off their dark B-Special type uniforms coupled with the trickery off dark colors. For those who don’t know what a B-Special was, can be said that they were distant off shoot from the Black and Tan presence that came back from the Great War, according to Angel. They then got turned into the B-specials. A type of police force predominated by Protestants.**

**Despite the appearance of seeming black, the Peelers wore an envious shade of green.**

**I loved that green, I’ll tell ya.**

**Historically, the RUC had learnt that to their benefit as the night developed into a bitterer feud, it would have to become an army responsibility.**

**That is exactly what the paramilitary middlemen wanted.**

## **Chapter [6] A Matter of Timing** **The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

**12.30 p.m. Nov 22nd;**

**McGovern was on the phone, finishing with the night matron enquiring after officers Mc Dowell and Graham, when corporal Argyle gingerly entered.**

**He strode over too his desk whilst McGovern handed him the latest Bulletin from the army.**

**IT READ;**

**18th Nov 1973.**

**To the Administrators off Her Majesty’s Law and Justice.**

**Her Majesty’s armed forces in Northern Ireland would like to inform you off the arrival of Major Braithwaite commanding the 14th Paratroop Regiment at Palace Barracks, Holywood, Co. Down, Ulster, Northern Ireland.**

**McGovern replaced the handset and rolled his eyes putting on his bi-focals, .**

**He observed closely the young constable for a reaction and quickly realized that it seemed too mean nothing too him.**

**‘Whom he is kidding,’ thought McGovern.**

**Stony-faced, Argyle perfected his new act in preparation for an opportunity like the one he faced now.**

**“No fuss, frills or pageantry, all very normal and customary, Sam, said McGovern.**

**“However, there is nothing normal about the 14-Para Regiment, Sam!**

**Nothing!” McGovern affirmed.**

Argyle okay with the first name terms instantly fell under its spell. In addition, as a recent different path by McGovern, officer Argyle resigned himself to it, in order to see where it would all end up.

McGovern spoke quietly at first with dulcet tones that he used to manipulative effect.

The flexibility of word enunciation that many found difficult, he articulated even with a rural dialect such as his was. In addition, a voice, he could wield like a rubber mallet, with plenty off thumps but avoiding knockouts. A voice he recently wondered about; being the asset that many men lacked, had been recently underperforming like an opera that is running out off its own steam.

Influenced by such a voice in his world, men both subordinate and superior usually were.

Although he is now not sure if it was mellowing from old age or his own ability to hear. He is certain off one thing. Recently he found it increasingly difficult to hear his own words. This meant he would often follow up with a check that the listener had understood him.

Nevertheless, the bottom line is, he knew he could not hide this new chink in his armor forever.

Impassioned, carefully taking one-step at a time, almost making the mistake of putting his large heavy hand onto his subordinate's narrow shoulder, he said

“There is nothing legitimate in the complete British army like these fellas under Braithwaite.

Do you understand me, Sam?”

Argyle nodded unassumingly, unsure where the path is heading next.

Continuing too lecture on, resisting the urge to get too close, McGovern talked to the son he never had. Any thunder that Argyle had before entering McGovern's office dissolved fast.

A man, who never revealed his secrets to everyone, is a man that Argyle found easily to replace his own father at times.

Nevertheless, Argyle reminded himself of his own goals, and that he is in the business of getting what he could out of life.

Little did he know, that squared perfectly with McGovern's game plan?

“The Parachute regiment has an unwritten license to shoot up the town if they wanted, understand Sam?”

Argyle again nodded still unsure where and when the waffle would start, and where it would end. For Argyle, it is a first for him to get together on a one to one with the village patriarch. For a moment, he frowned at McGovern's assertions, but realized that this is because of his own uneasiness with the subject matter. Then, the pain began creeping in, his concentration waned from fatigue, and he struggled to stay focused. The point he now waited for, is taking too long to enter the discussion.

“Sir, would you mind coming to the point?”

McGovern took a breath and pausing for a moment said.

**“Off course, Sam.”**

**“These men,” started McGovern, his tone sterner, “come with a killer instinct; it is in their DNA. We engage these fellas, we are asking for trouble, trust me, we need to be more than careful before we do.**

**We need to get it right, do you understand, Sam?”**

**Argyle thought he knew waffle when he heard it.**

**However, this is now a completely new level of bullshit from the Vet. Effective though, he thought.**

**On hearing it, he is now hearing it from the man whose every word he hung on too. In addition, this was not normal for him or any doubts now about what the old veteran is waffling on about.**

**“What are you trying to say, Sir?”**

**McGovern hesitating, threw him a sharp glance, then dropping his head, took a breath and said deeply,**

**“I know you will think that it is an unusual request, but that weapons find must be kept under lock and key for a couple more weeks.”**

**Constable Argyle, expecting something not so unorthodox, almost lost his cool. The spell from McGovern must have been working its magic on him. Clearing his cluttered mind with a slight fakey cough,**

**“Don’t you want to know what exactly we had found?”**

**“Not particularly, said McGovern dismissively.**

**“A gun is a gun and grenade is a grenade, they all do no good. The only difference is that no one gets too use it.**

**Is that not our ultimate aim?”**

**“But this, this is more than a few revolvers or rifles and grenades, and that other stuff had an odor and looked different, Sir.**

**Surely it’s still army jurisdiction.” Argyle insisted, realizing the folly off preaching to man like McGovern.**

**“Sorry Sir.” Argyle said.**

**McGovern transfixed the younger man, holding his pipe steady puffing harder, unaware of the smoke pluming around the office.**

**It occurred to him, that young Argyle threw him for a loop. He did not expect this impressive resistance, but he is tired and seemed to be in some discomfort noticed**

**McGovern. The office room for a few moments is still. Nothing said and nothing moved. Only the fireplace crackled and splintered forth its sound on such a very cold night. McGovern making the first move standing up went straight to his rational one more time.**

**“I understand your frustration, but I have a plan that needs your help, so we can avert any danger to the village.”**

**Argyle listened, be it all up to now nonchalantly.**

**“Did you say the village, Sir?”**

**“Indeed, I have dreadful suspicion there is more too this than a bunch of loyalists trying to outdo the Provos. I want you to keep this quiet and spearhead a surveillance team on that place until I know, exactly who is involved.”**

**Argyle thought hard and finally saw his opportunity to turn things in his favor. To start a climb on the totem pole and increase his income in one action.**

**“Let me understand you, Sir? You are asking for significant support and me too make a significant commitment, and by doing so that would ensure significant career movement off some significant kind, Sir, are you not?”**

**McGovern pretended to pause.**

**“Yes”**

**“There would be no negative reactions from the big boys like Graham and Bingham, for my loyalty, Sir!”**

**“NO”**

**“Nothing personal, Sir, why would I, after all we are both already in danger?” snapped Argyle.**

**McGovern pegged him well and seen through the act before it became an act.**

**“I mean, why are we doing something we’re not equipped to deal with?”**

**McGovern stamped his clenched fist hard on the table and averted the question, as if the last hurdle would bring him tumbling down.**

**“Then, Sam, then.”**

**For Sam Argyle, this was a pivotal moment in his career.**

**He had managed to steam-roll his commanding officer to a point where he wanted, or so he thought. For Argyle, it is first sway over his seemingly mild mannered boss. Little did he know his act paled in comparison?**

**“THEN!”** said McGovern, slamming his fist down again, **“We will call in the army, may God be my witness, Sam,”** he concluded eyeballing his young subordinate.

**Argyle pushed the envelope as far as he dared.**

**He reflected on the brand new red 1800cc 12-bore Rallye Sporte Escort parked in the courtyard and the latest RS turbo in his sights.**

**He almost congratulated himself, gloating, how he used his father’s negotiating tactics so well with the Ford sales representative. Now with McGovern and nearly a grimace of another gloat, cutting across his fine features.**

**His father had bartered and bargained over sheep, cattle, sheepdogs, and even the odd tractor.**

**“It has got to be like that.”** McGovern persisted; his self-control tested more than he wanted.

**“If we call in the Para’s now, it will be a bloodbath!”**

**McGovern’s brow arched. For a moment neither man spoke. Observing Argyle for any comeback, he then began to gradually gear down his pitch.**

**Argyle reflected again on all the material acquisitions he wanted bad, whilst McGovern reflected on the broader picture. A picture not to be seen through the eyes of a greenpea officer, plus one that had broader consequences than just another weapons haul. One that demanded something that only dwells behind the experienced eye of a man like McGovern. It is one thing seeing shallow rewards of an ordinary man. It is another to see the shadow of an operative in the midst of your community, hell bent on something still unknown, but evil beyond a rookie’s comprehension.**

**“We will be left, Sam, after they leave for England, to clean up the mess, like they always have, since the days of the Black and Tans, and in case you haven’t heard of them, ask your father.**

**If we expose this to the army too soon, we might be biting off more than we can chew later. Trust me. I know exactly what I am doing”**

**“But understand this, Sam, sometimes it is not always clear who the real enemy is, I have learnt that it is not always the men your seniority think.”**

**McGovern knew he had his subordinate in the bag, and decided on a conclusion to their chat. A climate of inaction followed the end of his pitch. He allowed the silence to sway towards his goal. A keen observer, he had watched how at the farmer’s market, things had been done and how Argyle’s father would seal a deal.**

**Argyle sensed his senior ahead of the game plan, and looked for what he could get from the negotiations.**

**McGovern readied to extend his right hand, waiting for the right moment too lock him in and close.**

**“So what is your intention, Sir?”** Argyle asked pensively.

**“I need to discuss our predicament with the Major Braithwaite first. As the one in command here, the need to make sure they know what we expect from them, before we engage them, is crucial. Understand me, Sam, our first priority is that blasted riot in Ballybeen, not the arms find. It is too important to allow it scant intrusion.”**

**Argyle did not even suspect the two incidents may even be related, and McGovern wanted it that way, at least for the time being.**

**McGovern came to a stop, Argyle decided to play out the rest of his game plan.**

**“What else is there, Sir?”**

**McGovern caught off guard, clasped his hands together over his walking stick, as if they were about to possess the Holy Grail. He wiped his brow with a clean white handkerchief, and then his hands, placing his stick aside against an open drawer.**

**He turned towards the wall and stared at the pictures of the only women who came to know him best.**

**To him, they all came alive the more he reached out at times like this.**

**Preoccupied, removing his bi-focals with his right hand, lowering his head, slowly, humbly, limped around his desk and sat down. All three shared his pain.**

**Officer Argyle waited, then at first spoke awkwardly, whilst the vet reached for his Pipe. Again rolling it a couple of times with his left hand listening with his good ear, like the fox to out-manuever the pack.**

**“It’s no secret Sergeant that, well that you are soon to take leave from the force.”**

**“Men do talk, officer Argyle.”**

**“And we talk about you, Sir, quite a bit.**

**What you are going to do with the rest of your life after such a colorful one.” Argyle diligently navigated.**

**“Me and the others hope you’ll let us know when, Sir?”**

**The stage set, his turn to influence things around the table had presented itself...**

**“Some say, you will take up home with ‘Ma Mc Namara’, sorry, I meant Miss. McNamara.”**

**McGovern is not surprised that he knew off his cautious liaisons with the woman up on the hill. He expected Argyle and the other officers too know at some point, if they were any sort of police officers at all. Growing more awkward, Argyle started to shift sideways on his feet while McGovern lit his Pipe, sucked hard, eyeing the young officer with some concealed surprise. McGovern knew then that his wishes would be a secret and Argyle, would roll with it.**



**“Oh, we weren’t,” Argyle wanted to say, now conscious of massaging perspiration into his blooded hands.**

**“It’s okay, Sam, McGovern assured him,  
I know, relax, and sit down,” he motioned with his pipe.**

**McGovern then pulled out a bottle of McKibbins rum from below bought six months ago, and went straight to the pour.**

**“Here! Go on, relax, you have had a rough day.  
Besides, she would not mind,” he said, motioning his left hand at the young Queen whose picture hung on the adjacent wall.**

**The Constable, crestfallen, grasped the bottle and in one motion, chinked the neck to a small glass that accompanied it, poured more and threw it back in one.**

**McGovern then waited for the point with baited anticipation.**

**Then he eventually saw the blood on his Argyle’s hands and for the moment, pigeonholed questioning on it. Paramount now is an aim to gain trust and allegiance from him. With that, he could move too plan B and safeguard the village from becoming a suspected Provo target, satisfied. Argyle had no idea how instrumental he had become. In the past, others had failed to attach any significance to the media exposure. McGovern was not going to repeat that, especially on his home run. Aware of the enemy mindset, he had reason to suspect the Provo’s were using the media, as one would use their GPS to find there destined location. However, not always the way most would think. Anything remotely connecting his name to such an execution is zero option, if there was to be a normal afterlife for him and the village.**

**“Well I feel it is more than that!” continued Argyle.**

**“Such as?”**

**“Some say you are attempting to keep us off the Provo radar, Sir.”**

**“Some say or you say, constable?” probed McGovern.**

**“Well, Sir, me actually,” said Argyle, struggling for more control of his nerves.**

**“How?” McGovern asked, puffing smoke to his left.**

**“That the less controversy we have in the village the less like,,**

**“Continue.”**

**“Well, less we will be seen, as a loyalist stronghold by the Provos,” Argyle asserted unsure who was waffling who.**

**“And?”**

**“Well,, an arms find here will inevitably mean media coverage, and I believe, well, you wish to avoid that for reasons connected to a threat,” Argyle concluded lamely.**

**McGovern was impressed. He knew more than he thought and grew more confident that any danger from Argyle to his plan he could now eliminate. After all why else is he here. At least he seemed unaware of his coming retirement, and that would be imperative. His opinion of Argyle was gradually giving way to a better one. Beyond a little nosiness by his subordinates, he felt at least reassured his choice of a woman he hardly had known two whole years, seemed acceptable around the barracks and more importantly the village. Nevertheless, what he feared most at this stage, never got mentioned.**

**He went for Argyle’s jugular.**

**“And you think that is not a positive decision?”**

**“ABSOLUTELY positive, Sir!”**

**Sensing another opportunity, removing his pipe and turning his right ear for maximum hearing, McGovern asked casually as he stretched his large arm across his desk.**

**“You will then assist me, Sam, with this find?”**

**Argyle indicated neither yes nor no at first.**

**“The way I want it done, if I recommend you for four annual pay bonuses?”**

**Again, Argyle indicated neutrality, though now it had key interests for him.**

**“Okay, if I put you on my recommendation list?” said McGovern smoothly.**

**Finally, Argyle caved in.**

**Acting stunned, McGovern staying in his face, saw the nerve twitch in his eye, and held a confident smile. A moment later, he closed the debate up with a little face saving.**

**“Is that not what we both want, Sam?” said McGovern, resisting any sense of upmanship.**

**Both finally shook hands, be it all a flakey one from Argyle.**

**The more he considered the deal, Constable Argyle became less frosty, and almost restoring the wretched smile that occupied his deadpan features, breaking with a seldom-pathetic smirk. There were times when McGovern wanted to slap those features into some kind of life. Nevertheless, any notion that Argyle is getting one over on his senior officer, now at best only a figment off his own ambitious mindset. McGovern picked his man**

deliberately right from the get go. He knew that eventually young Argyle would find the conditions that he now just faced, and attempt to negotiate a career move. He observed how his father operated in the farmers' market and how the man usually got what he wanted. That being not always what everyone else wanted? Nevertheless, conditions and timing being key, even with Argyle's involvement, McGovern knew the odds were better when he could bargain with a rookie than a seasoned man, and secure a win win or a win lose. Most of the time, they never knew the difference anyway, especially the way he finagled it. Nevertheless, if one thing he learnt, Argyle is not the half-assed rookie he thought he was once. Imperatively, once senior Argyle shook your hand, farmers in the region knew it was a done deal and the commitments he made, would be. McGovern liked that part the best, which made him, feel better. Like father like son, he thought to himself. The way to go Vincent.

He also second-guessed himself, that at the end of the month he Sergeant McGovern would cease to be officer 44423. Additionally he would not be around too worry about the consequences, or too take the flack. That made him chuckle a tad and now life seemed easier. Everything to gain, and everything to lose, he thought to himself. Argyle would now make the whole process more comfortable.

Rubbing his hands together under the table he had just realized how comfortable it seemed conceding too McGovern's game plan. Argyle finally agreed and broke with another lame smile.

"Yes, Sir I suppose so."

"GOOD, Sam, we will be both the more fortunate for it.

Now I want you to go home and *GET SOME SLEEP*," insisted McGovern standing up.

"I know you are normally on the night beat, but I want you to get some rest and back here tomorrow morning.

So get outta here!"

'Timing, he said to himself, is everything, Francis me boy.'

A crestfallen Argyle, with a little dignity tried to leave without further fuss. McGovern who, just about too plant his tired posterior in his seat, is forced to suspend sitting when Argyle almost forgot to mention one last detail. Informing the sergeant, he had too discharge his revolver on the grounds of two attacking large hounds. One managed to take a bite out of his wrist, before he repelled them, both.

"Yes, I was wondering about the care you were taking with that.

Two you say?" Asked McGovern recovering his posture.

"Sure it was two, I mean you saw them *both*?"

McGovern needed no further convincing that he saw only one hound, and told him to get some medical attention ASAP.

However, not before he asked Argyle to look in on Ma McNamara on his way home with a little good-natured sarcasm. McGovern, though satisfied with the cause for the blood on his wrist, is not okay with what had caused it.

Though normally he would have found the grounds for it difficult to swallow, it would have gone down eventually. Somehow, this incident had the grain of resonance growing within him.

Why did Argyle say two hounds so convincingly? When he saw only one that attacked him? Pondered McGovern? It was dark, misty, no lighting and camouflaged.

It is possible, but highly improbable.

On later reflection of their discussion, McGovern realized that he had just been relieved of two areas of difficulty,

[A] That he now had a bona-fide allegiance with Argyle galvanizing all he needed from him to act.

[B] Within a very short time, leverage that he would eventually need to bargain with, as sure as his hunch would squeal for its own death, should finally pan out.

There was no need to impede his own code of ethics by tricking Argyle to accomplish it. Professional manipulation maybe, but definitely within the realm of the right stuff, he convinced himself. Graham, now too to be the new commanding officer at the barracks, meant therefore at will to promote or demote people. It will inevitably have an enviable effect on Argyle too. After all, thought McGovern, Graham was doing his bit for queen and country and his courage squared well with him and his colleagues. It will force him to concede to peer pressure, all be it reluctantly. Anyway, they both needed a little rivalry and it would be good to have little healthy competition around the barracks.

An easy outcome he thought, as he dabbled for the last time with the forthcoming recommendations.

McGovern's thoughts were now quickly moving on to his impending plan of action. He hastily dispatched Officer Montgomery back to the church, at the village green to keep it under surveillance. From there to report anyone who comes to the ancient structure through the night, and then he would be replaced first light.

12 .50 a.m.

McGovern settled back again and relit his pipe.

He checked for the time and once more became troubled, as there is still no call from Mary. The more he thought about her particular circumstances, the more troubled he became.

In addition, somewhere in the interaction between himself and Argyle there existed another seed of irk.

Something is not quite correct with Argyle's report. McGovern inhaled the smoke partially, until realizing the mention of a large hound resonated more than Argyle thought. Then, awash suddenly with reminiscent images of his distant past, he thought of his old comrade Kelly. If the seed of paranoia had not made him feel like a lunatic, his overdeveloped sense of suspicion at times would. He pinched himself, dismissing his comrade totally KIA.

Strange, he thought, of all men Kelly always seemed a survivor. In those days Kelly was always advising the men, 'success of a soldier,' he would say, 'did not always favor the brave remember that, try being smart.'

McGovern's thoughts deepened on the source of his present annoyances.

Where had the arms find come from? What source was there possibly out there at this stage in the game?

Could the loyalist paramilitaries exploit an arms supply from abroad? He dismissed both theories certain they had neither the foreign resources nor the contact base.

Unless, somehow they finally managed to secure one at home with an unknown independent source who had sufficient wealth, and know how to do it for them. Could someone or some group have forged a business relationship with them more than he wanted to believe? Worse still, could they forge a business alliance with the enemy, to a mutually beneficial outcome? However, where is the money coming from? The pros do not have any. Worse again, if they are seen by whoever as a possible ally, since they seemed to have the same current goals, this would have long-term implications. Then it would indeed need someone who is well off. It needed a multi millionaire, and on the Island of Ireland, south or north of the border, they are rare as hens teeth.

Then the question begged, why then did his well-buried source seemingly not have the skinny on it? Worse again, if he had, why had they not informed him? Alternatively, could he himself be making the mistake of trying too hard, second-guessing everyone and everything too much too soon? Fatigue, paranoia, products of McGovern predicament, where men with this on his plate at his age, would buckle. McGovern the veteran, experience of war too draw on, knew, if his hunch proved correct, another door would eventually open, that would lead him to the mystery behind the arms find. Perhaps too a lot more mystery than he had bargained for. However, it needed that door to open soon. Soon like two weeks soon. He would have to move faster, deducing that he had exactly two weeks to wrap up the whole affair in order to retain his anonymity.

Two weeks to stamp out the riot on his patch and then two weeks, that would see many top Paramilitary ringleaders arrested and behind bars.

Two weeks before they would register any hint of out-manoeuvring from the village barracks.

Two weeks to hold the arms find until some savvy media bloodsucker got wind of it, and wanted too carelessly expose for all and sundry.

Finally, before the ability of recognizing him by appearance would be available by an omnipresent media. For loss of their haul and donated funds towards their cause, a hired assassin, probably an independent mercenary would trek him down and eliminate him. It would not be the first time collusion happened between foes.

By Dec 6th 1973, Dinosaur McGovern would be an endangered species, needing out of her Majesty's services, after sixty odd years trying to stay alive. He contemplates his wounds and has decided; finally, he has too many, both visible and invisible, and some he even kept secret. The battle with muscle and bones were not as eager to climb, quickstep, bend, or fight back as once they had.

Outside the barracks, the night air is thick with the acrid taste of burning rubber and tar. Against the white building is a carefully located hazy lighting, casting down an eerie ambience around the grey steel mesh of the barracks. Coupled with the lonely generator

struggling to crank up somewhere at the back of the building, it is now a melancholic sound. The upper Newtownards road outside that runs through the village now deserted, awaits the arrival of the mechanized beast off the fourteenth Paratroop Regiment. The main artery that led to the conflict zone would soon rumble and quake with the sound off heavy-duty vehicles. The village residents waited to see how the night's events would pan out, and how the lonesome huddle of men within would protect them.

Ten minutes earlier, as a tired Samuel Argyle stepped outside and left constable Argyle Admin no 23332 behind, someone watched him in the night vision. At twenty-two years old, he is pleased with himself. He did everything his father told him. With the exception of being a constable in her majesty's service, it amounted to one thing and one thing only. Whatever McGovern wanted, fight him when possible and he will look after you, said Argyle senior. He liked conviction in a man, and if you had no conviction, then you were a fake. It seemed his father was marginally correct, which was unusual. But senior Argyle knew McGovern took an interested in the farming community, and occasionally made the odd purchase. It would be difficult to miss the chance off such a presence in their midst in action. Pleased with himself that he now negotiated the next step in his career, it would take care of any financial worries for the near future at least.

1.25 a.m.

He checked his watch and made a mental note determining how much sleep time he had. Five hours sleep, given breakfast, before hauling his butt down the hill for the next morning at eight a.m. drove him homeward.

At 1.30 a.m. he arrived at the foot of Cherryhill Park mounting the hill too his father's home. Halfway up the hill, he paused half turning in the direction of the Ballybeen projects.

He surveyed the distant battlefield of leaping and intermittent orange-yellow glow, and with no regret climbed on.

Fatigue refused to budge and slumber would soon to be his reward, as his bed became a real imminent prospect.

Growing darker, Argyle retrieved a flash lamp that he carried inside his inner breast pocket. Fumbling, he switched it on and realized that the batteries needed exchanging, but was happy for the light that it did produce given the conditions. Some of the hedgerows that crisscrossed a pattern up the parks gardens shook here and there from some movements. Small animals making their way around in the night suddenly seemed to Argyle they were running from something than going somewhere. Then, as he took his next step, his eyebrows arched at something that resembled small red pools below him subduing any of his remaining jubilation.

*Blood!*

*Lots of Blood!*

Stretching his right arm forward for balance, he knelt to zoom in, pain now evident and spreading to his body language. A predator would seize their chance, triggered by those predatory instincts nearby. Observing the crimson liquid dripping numbly from his fingertips, like the injured jackal now in the nostrils of the hyena.

At a doorway across the road to a vacant house where a Catholic family previously occupied, stood their distant patriarch. A rich man, and a resourceful rich man and one that is a danger to all in uniform of the realm. A profoundly committed operative gone amok. Breakaway, loose cannon, a man who now took matters into his own hands. But not AWOL.

Because you cannot have someone at his level of killership awol. In fact, he is a man of importance. He commands others, and pays money to others to do dirty work. Even though he does not quite fit into the profile of a typical back street Provo assassin. Then again, he is not. On the same side maybe: Definitely IRA, old school IRA, official IRA, same difference, at the heels of the hunt, but different all the same.

The eyes ferreted too almost a slit of shimmering green, watery green that turned inextricably to a cruel mixture of bloodshot, when the mood of revenge slipped over him like the cloak off the laird he once was. The wrath now lay within the most brutal of men, and only one man knew how brutal. King and country had lead him down a road of destruction and failure, and now he is presently on the trail off settling old scores.

Revenge, he thought, oh how sweet, that he could taste it like the savoring of life's oxygen, whence from the bottom of a lake he had been tossed by foe . Revenge, that also brought with it strength, strength he pondered, that could easy tear the head off a man's shoulders with one simple ugly vengeful jerk.

Revenge and strength, that now only his foe would know soon enough. Gladly that dish, that he would serve cold to him, and all the others come their day off departure. How it filled him with desire, only his contempt would know how much.

However, a professional man would rationalize strength needed discipline and rational thought to keep his wrath in check. Moreover, the death of one of his hounds though a distraction, but also a barrier to his long-term aims, precipitated by an insignificant runt of a police officer. Why should he care about some greenpea cop who did not know his arse from his elbow or a big doggy? This foe is now modern, and with it, a contemporary professional; and the ancient spirit within during those early army years, he had learnt to subdue it then, why not now. After all, he had all the time in the world to do what he had to do. McGovern on the other hand, well.

Argyle's predator rationalized it a vulgar display of power, and not an elimination he really wanted, at least not yet. Revenge he now chained, knowing chains would soon come loose, and he would have his day.

Young Argyle would see his day out. Lucky fucking Orange Saxon, thought the avenger, nearby.

Mistakenly for Argyle, not more than two hours before he created an adversary, now destined to meet with him again.

For timing is everything, now is not the time. The trail had followed him a three quarter way up the hill.

There he stood up straighter, took a breath of cleaner air before he climbed on. He returned his flash lamp to his inner pocket, and then paused to unwrap and rewrap his bandaging. He satisfied himself that some of the Tartan members from the neighborhood were probably injured helping each other escape.

He concluded they had skulked up the hill to their homes to lick their wounds, leaving a trail of blood. Smirking at their stupidity, he finally reached and stopped outside number

thirty-one. Raising his head aside of the hedge blocking his view, he began looking for any signs of life. Peering at the living room next to the kitchen with great intensity, he saw that the lamps were still on in both areas of the house. Then with further intensity, he saw a dark shadow gliding across the living room, believing that of Mrs. McNamara herself.

Probably in her nightgown he thought, her impression surprising him, with the change to her usual evening appearance. He peeked many times before, passing her window, more out of curiosity than nosiness, and usually saw nothing.

For Argyle, this time sleep and pain beckoned him on.

Then as he began his ascent to the brow of the hill toward his own home, he stopped one more time and sniffed the air. Thought told him, he caught the miniscule nasty whiff, already known to him. He paused, then backtracking he sniffed further something gross and more convincing. Walther now in hand, he tiptoed along the neighboring hedgerow. Missing his detection, the crimson liquid trail curved into the home of Mrs. Mary Mauv McNamara. However, not from any skulking Tartan members.

There, the injured beast could prey on him from the void of a garden shed, at the side of her house. It breathed laboriously, its carnivorous teeth exposed while studiously eyeing the movements of a familiar foe. It held its nerve, nearby its master held it at bay, with the sound of a whistle above human hearing and a black leather leash. The constable's luck would again hold out, while he deliberated his next move homeward bound.

Argyle's boots then clicked clacked to the other side of Cherryhill park road. There he glanced back as he rounded the corner on the brow to his father's farmhouse.

Ten minutes later, he was in bed, partially clothed, unconscious.

## Chapter [7] Behind the Barricade The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster

Observing in a tenement block from an empty flat overlooking the operation, a shadowy figure is eyes and ears for a suspicious source. McGovern's plant seemed to be serving him well up until the arms find. The informer is now ready to up the ante, and attempt access further into the Paramilitary groups. He had also enlisted others to assist him, unbeknown to them. They were too busy with the operation or sweating the small stuff to notice. Sometimes he could not make contact with McGovern for reasons connected to his safety or the operation.

Georgy and I trying to fall back dodged the fireballs around us. Most where flaring up over there and then nearby as we tangoed between and around them. Then again, the RUC had been showered from an improved targeted salvo. Scorched earth policy had come to Ballybeen earlier than other places, I'll tell ya.

The flames licking the sides of pig vehicles soon heard the ping and pang of huge ball bearings from those using catapults.

Whoosh, then another whoosh at the RUC cordon. It pinged with ball bearings off the armored steel and Perspex shields finding their targets progressively.

Crack, crack crack and then came inexperience and confusion.



**“They’re shooting at us with guns, corporal?”**

**“If they were, you’d be in worse shit.”**

**The steel balls hit helmets, but most leaving nothing more than a dent and some doing no damage at all.**

**Now that the Tartan was kinda locked into the sway of battle, and high on success, confidence grew along with over-confidence.**

**And that became our mistake.**

**Some of the new members tread too far from the body of the attack, breaking the rules and where swiftly arrested by covert officers in hiding.**

**The razzers soon dragged them back into that black pool of disciplined uniformity, some screamin’ for a mate and some their brothers.**

**Cryin’ “brother! brother!” cursin’ and spittin’ at the police tenacity, like a bated badger caught with trickery.**

**Nothin’ got up my nose than someone who couldn’t take it. I’ll tell ya.**

**“It’s now on again!” Shouted someone yonder.**

**“Republican rioters were occasionally shot dead by soldiers for carryin’ arms,” a newbie said.**

**“Isn’t that part of the fun though, that it could happen, along with the risk,” someone replied.**

**Thoughts were many, but some not what I needed to hear right now.**

**“They fear it might happen tonight with us,” said the trembling voice behind the barricade.**

**‘Fenians’ is the Tartan slur we used to offend our Catholic enemies. I often wondered what their slurs were. Not good either I imagine.**

**“They don’t have any for us, because they aren’t as smart like us,” Angel would say.**

**Trust Angel, he would have to go and rain on their parades once, and announced to the whole clan whilst under the influence of drink, we were all Fenians. That didn’t go down well, I’ll tell ya.**

**“Doesn’t then that mean we’re also dumbasses like you Angel then?” Jacko asked.**

**That was a wake-up call for all of us, judgin’ the look of some of our more loyalist members. Lucky for Angel he is well connected, I’ll tell ya!**

**Anyone else and he had a quick kickin’ for that.**

That Angel, someday I'll slip him a permanent 'shut the fawk up pill'. I say that because, well he's like the brother I never had. You know the one you wanna look out for, cause he can be a little, well dumb-like.

Secretly, I was laughing my nuts off at their stupefied expressions, I'll tell ya, shouldda seen McGurran's face.

"You're now saying I'm Fenian, Angel," He would growl every now and again. No wonder Angel developed a nervous disposition around McGurran.

"Okay, McGurran, we need some of your boys" the man in the middle commanded.

"Okay, newbie one, two and three there, and you Mockers and McCann, get out there and help the boys.

Here, take some of these with ya."

Endeavoring by the middle zone to draw the RUC into a baton charge, failed. Swearing voices eerily bounced back along the tenement walls with a flurry of vengeful rubber bullets.

Then a group of men suddenly from nowhere ducked to the defenses of the barricade.

The way I remember it in such circumstances, we were all soon dumping in our pants.

Boy, dare we admit that, I'll tell ya, that would not go down well at all.

All these so-called hardmen ready to show their worth to the Paramilitary brass, and we're all secretly dumping ourselves. Made me almost laugh. Again too many thoughts, need to watch out for that.

Fags soon passed round, and soon lit by those who took possession of the latest fad of Zippo lighters. Things got possessed with us Tartan; we rarely bought or spent money, accept with fags and rags.

Amid commands yelled all over the operation zone, the sound of what I took for a heavy-duty construction truck rose out of the dark. Then not.

Zippos lighters, fashionable then, taken from the hippies who were bullied, fetched a few bob. Georgy's pockets were filled with them. Soon I got to see that he had another reason for acquiring them. He now had a ongoing business selling them around the neighborhood, shouting Nothin' better than Zippo to light that Molotov Bombo'. If the hippies ran the kicking gauntlets, they got to keep their Zippos, if not, well they got to keep nothing, not even the shirt on their backs. Some made to walk through the estate naked, were a puny lot with too much dam body hair. And that was no laugh, I tell ya.

Around the barricade, savoring the effects of nicotine would be difficult to resist, and the temptation of a new habit.

Some learning to blow smoke rings had little chance from the persistent breezes that got caught by the cross winds blowing in from the north. I am glad being able to calm my nerves with a fag. Some newbies are so nervous they were crapping themselves uncontrollably, as rubber bullets were whizzing over our heads.

McGurran ushered, “Quick! Put those fawkin’ fags out, here come, The Boys. If they see that smoke rising from here, they’ll kick our arses, quick for fawk’s sake!”

“Men lost their lives from other riots” one of the newbies whispered. Some of the seasoned men heard him, speared him a hard glance, and told them all to shut the fawk up on hearing such words. The barricade soon became an invasion of space and obligation; keeping spirits up with careful vigilance, the boys grew acutely aware of the main men and their roles in the group.

Those who were there to get results, were making their purposes clear just by being there; threatening and hard lookin’ us newbies if we did not comply.

Men like McGurran is the Paramilitary way, I came to learn, results through scarin’ and control. Heighten their fear and boys do get scared. Ensuring they did, well so it works for a wee while anyway, until they make a run for it. Must say, the thought began to cross my mind more and more. The truck seemed to offer me some hiding place on the other side of the zone. Trouble is, what is the middle planning to do with it.

It conjured up an ominous impression parked there, in the dark as if waiting an arrival of a driver.

Women too near the battle zone, received a flat butt kick, and sent home for their stupidity by their boyfriends. Women turning up to see their boyfriends performin’ in battle, Georgy said turned them on. Yeh! he said some actually got off on it with male agro.

He said he knows, cause he had some girl who wouldn’t leave him alone in another riot once. Sioux women during the Indian wars in America, I read somewhere, visited their warrior men at the battle-ground with food parcels just in case they got hungry while scalping their enemies.

“Can ya picture that here “Georgy said, here you go Winter Wolf darlin’, have a wee bite before yo scalp the peeler there,” I’ll tell ya, what a laugh that would be.

Some of the Tartan sniggered and began teasing.

“Whose Trog is that with the voice like a freight train?” Teased McDuggan.

“That’s Angel’s Trog! And we thought he didn’t like women,” teased Madman. Everyone around the barricade derided Angel.

Angel retaliated, “At least I get my fawkin’ ‘how’s your father’ every night.” And then the usual mocking antics came.

“What is ‘how’s your father?’” a newbie asked. The sound of innocence had no place at that moment, when so many others had already lost theirs. I’ll tell ya.

Unbearable for them who had forgotten what innocent had been like once, silence crept malevolently across the barricade, and eventually a lull in the conflict seemed to follow. A

stony climate of soundless dread fell over the newbie like his last moments on earth had arrived. Amid the swearin' and endless spittin', McGurran looked the other way, sayin'...

"Make it fawkin' quick, Will YE" The decision had been made. There was to be a kickin'.

As the belts came off, and the knuckle-dusters fixed, the bulk of men standin' up, closed in on the newbie.

It wasn't hard to figure out what was comin'.

"No bottles Mockers" snarled McGurran, and Jacko tossed his behind, before McGurran found a reason to deck him, as it smashed onto the road.

A sudden punch caught the newbie on his chin from another. Dazed but otherwise on his feet, he avoided the looming kickin' just in time.

In fact the others were just forming a circle, for a fight to take place between the unfortunate newcomer and another. Nevertheless, he would surely fail. That is why they encircled him. As they were to make sure he did.

Angel came to the rescue in his own formidable way.

"Thank you, thank you, there really is a God for Ulster and his cause IS FOR everyone, he has appointed me to speak on behalf of the uniniti,, I mean our kid here.

Who is only trying to prove that he has the balls of Jacko there or you Madman, and even you mad Mockers."

"You sayin' mines are that small?"

"What about me, don't I have any balls?" Georgy joked

"You have the biggest Georgy, along with McGurran there."

McGurran spat, "Hurry the fawk up Angel, before them in the middle come over, Just give him a quickie kickin'."

Angel tossed McGurran a fag, in the hope to humor him and the barricade soon became a circle of boozy fascination.

As fags puffed and smoke spiraled upwards, liquor bottles were tipped with the concentration of men's faces this way and that way, as Angel used the space to present his case.

"This court is now in session, so shut the fawk up everyone!"

Madman waved his head side to side in disbelief and buried it in his large tattooed hands.

A deeper silence ensued, before Mad Mockers broke out into his usual forced laughter and attempted derision.

No one fell for his sham; eyes turned to daggers and he soon fell silent, with a hard man glare from McGurran and Madman.

**“Ok Ok, this is newbie, what’s your name, our kid?”**

**“You should know its Mitch.” He replied holding his sore chin.  
Angel winked his unseen eye at the newbie.**

**“Newbie Mitch verses the Ballybeen Tartan.” Angel announced to the circle of tartan-men.**

**‘Belchhhhhh, McGurran threw up over the barricade, and thought nothing of it. Angel, pointing his hand in the air, paused, glanced at him irritated, and then proceeded.**

**“It’s a hard to be a newbie in these times with the Ballybeen Tartan,” he said winking to Georgy and myself.**

**“That is the best way to treat it,” Georgy muffled under his hand.**

**“A newbie can easily get a kickin’ in these places for just bringin’ attention to themseves.”**

**Angel continued.**

**“He did not exist,” Angel lifted his shoulders as though makin’ a point we should all hear.**

**“And no newbie really did exist, as they were persona non grata until they proved themselves in battle with the enemies of the Tartan.”**

**“Wot the fawk does that mean?”**

**“Wait” said Madman.**

**‘Person non fawk’n gratta’ is wot you just said, Angel?**

**Angel knowin’ Madman as he did, came back quickly.**

**” It means he’s a person of no fawkin’ importance, least not like you Madman, now will ya let me finish?”**

**Madman speared those who thought about mockin’ a one of those ‘just dare glances’.**

**Angel’s hands and arms flailed about, as if attempting to support his spoken words like an actor.**

**“Newbies under no conditions are introduced to members, as it broke our first rule of thumb. It is their job to find themselves through natural sele, selec,tion.” Angel had found his ether. It was the first time I saw the other side to him. Funny thing, as he continued to speak with his hands, the quieter everyone became. Ether, a word his da would use, as he watched Paisley on his soapbox. Ether he would say is the difference of someone hearing the real message and another missing it.**

**“They were,, in a word, A NOBODY!”**

**“So let’s just think of it as a little tension in his excitement to make friends with the hardest Tartan in the east.**

**Who can, let's not forget, CAN ALSO BE forgivin' in such moments."  
He paused.**

**Some waited for the final sentence of bullshit from Angel with baited breath or laughter. He loosened of his Tartan scarf from around his neck, letting it fall down at the sides.**

**"Let's not forget also, newbies are initiated with the upmost extreme tactics. They took kickin's on a daily basis, some who were tough enough, made it, others were dispatched to the hospitals never to return, or they joined less stronger Tartans."**

**McGurran looked away toward the battleground, preferring its violence than the sissies he considered around him.**

**After a moment, some of the gang tickled with Angel's hilarity, began sniggering at the newbie, and that made Angel more okay with the way things were going.**

**"Go on get outta here, go home ta your mammy; she'll clean your arse for ya!" Madman snarled raisin' his head from his hands. No one saw that he was angry. In fact, he was furious, that he had been denied his usual platform.**

**Angel had managed to sway the lynch mob, and then he turned to wink at us both. It did not go unnoticed by others.**

**By the time he had finished, most were too inebriated to lift their heads, or too tired of the bullshit that they had been subject to. Either way, Angel managed to change the highly charged climate to one of resignation. He tiptoed away from his soapbox.**

**"Phew, that was close; my uncle wouldn't let that go by, if he knew I was present."**

**"You mean that was your cousin?" gasped Georgy.**

**"Do you think that I'm goin' out onna fawkin' limb for a little jerk I don't know?"**

**I needed to get to the group's pulse before they turned on me like that. Timing had its rewards and it had its poisons and I needed to use what leverage I had through Angel and Georgy.**

**I started observing Madman, a mate of Angel's who acted like one of the main men around the place.**

**Slightly hunched, broad shouldered with a swagger of a hard man. In this neighborhood, an automatic tag awarded by the crowd, in his case, by his peers, same difference.**

**A mop of black hair bedecked his rather large head.**

**Hair that was noticeably darker than the rest, curly bangs bordered a broad forehead, producing the hint of a Neanderthal look.**

**He walked with gusto energy, his bandy legs seeming like they were for powering on a horse.**

**He wore his wrangle denims like McGurran, tight but unlike Mc Garran, with less muscled forearms and legs.**

Others would assume he developed a scrapping reputation in order to prove he is a hardman reputation. In his case, I am not so sure.

His eyes were green unlike the most of us, and true to the Belfast mouth, lipless. His fists often clenched, he used them often on his punch bag, Angel. Unlike McGurran, there were no noticeable Tattoos. These he added as he gained deeper confidence with the men in the middle; as some Tartan members got closer with them, the more tattoos they added to themselves.

He had a wide nose with the usual blackheads that dark hair people have. Unlike McGurran, he did not seem to have the appearance of fractures that are common amongst Tartan hard men. His Jacket was short, preferring it just above his waistline, Enabling his denim jeans to display his studded belt and buckle, not to mention the weakness of vanity. At around five feet ten inches, height was not as important as breadth to the Tartan followers. He had the swagger, and the look that unnerved others. Who would consider taking him on? I'll tell ya. He scared others just by looking at them, I'll tell ya.

Though Madman had all the attributes, it never caused wonder to his lack of proof in the arena. Although important in a strange way, it just didn't seem to matter with him.

It never ceased to amaze me, how appearance played its part, and I didn't mean attire, just good old play-acting. I watched Madman pull hard on a No six cigarette, and thought to myself, you crafty bugger. Observing him, I swigged from a five-ounce bottle of poteen that someone handed to me, not realizing the effect it would have on me.

## Chapter [8] The Recruiters

### The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster

The voice entered the barricade confines along with a foul breath.

“How are ya, Glasgo,” whispering into my right ear, the smarmy voice off one called Mad Mockers.

My ear twitched uncontrollably from his spray spit-, and screaming to wipe it away with my right shoulder, an absolute need.

“Oh! Sorry, do I cause you some annoyance?”

‘You seem unconcerned about your lacking hygiene,’ I'll tell ya. No, I didn't say that, though that is what I wanted to say.

“No!” I said. He did not push for a response.

“Something needs to happen out there, you know! He said gingerly, as he entered taking in all the sweaty dirty scarred faces with a deep survey of the squat environ. Then a minute later, he began moving to the other side of the barricade. As he did so, he retrieved his bottle of poteen simultaneously from Madman as he passed, keepin’ his attention curiously on us.

Small, broad and with the usual gait of a hard man, he spoke with a less Belfast dialect than the others did. Preferring to sit at the darkest part of the barricade, lacking light, his voice, shot from the void of inky black.

“Who am I, you’re askin’ yourselves?

“I am Mockers! He croaked.

Sometimes known as Mad Mockers, because I rake the hell out of everyone, and cause them mayhem, ha.

When, they don’t do what I tell them mind!”

*Swig,*

“I know, ‘swig’ who you are?

All of ya?”

*Swig again.*

Then he appeared forward, just enough for the sparse light to catch his facial profile and bottle. The purity of clear potato liquid, ebbing around in a clear ten-mil bottle, seeming to be a source of great affinity, tucked tightly into his groin like a loved one.

The shiny mousey thick hair waved itself down to his forehead like some roman emperor.

His ears seemed to stick out as if he instantly commanded attention, he looked Puckish, and that made me almost giggle.

At first it made me wonder, who or what he was, I’ll tell ya.

Secretly, the barricade newbies were all in accord, that he is an IT and not quite like the other hard men.

They hid their amusement well, as they were all acutely aware of the meanest man who had a commanding presence, seemed a pussy. McGurran watching everyone for a reason is not clear what secret motives are hidden, until brought out for surprise attack. The question is, on who? He is not a man known to hold neither his aggression, nor his talent for violence on others. So why I asked myself, do they have McGurran here, and not on the field where his talents would be fulfilled.

A knack for creeping into a person’s space without being noticed or heard, Mockers is then next to me, as I turned to look over the barricade. He used the moment to get nearer.

Blue eyes that had the look of a wicked glint seemed to flash than blink, leaving you with the impression of something deeper stirring in his soul than what others had. But there is something else there, and for moment I thought I saw the look of someone beseeching. Imploring something that vanished as McGurran caught his attention.



I did have my doubts wondering if he is a fruit, and if he should try something, I'll tell ya, that's where I draw the line.

Elfish in appearance and a name for being the messenger of grim news, I gotta admit it, I am a tad wary of him. Who wouldn't be!

He lavishly licks his bottom lips as he speaks. The newbies put this down to a drunken state, but then newbies put everythin' down to the effects of drink, and truth is, they knew shit.

That is why they were newbies.

Rethinking about my bonding with him, I changed my mind on that one, I'll tell ya. I pretended not hearing him, only the distant leaders in the zone.

He then listened and heard panicky instructions screaming from some of the less experienced Paramilitary leaders, reflected and judged them incompetent with a bunch of cuss-words.

He then began to speak about how they needed members to join the junior paramilitary wing of the UDA, my ear pricked up, which he saw and he began to reflect on that instead. Only I could not read his mind.

I thought it a strange place to talk of such things, during an operation. With seeming sincere intensity he maintained his posture, croaked casually, and was okay with us, all things being' equal.

Least, up until now.

“Some men fell to rubber bullets like being punched in the balls, and some not” He reported like an expert...

“Them razzers know where to get maximum pain when they aim, and others took it like they hadn't been hit at all, or they were in fawkin' shock.” he said lighting up a fag.

“Or they are too drunk to know the difference,” I said.

I held my breath; I had actually found a reason to respond to him.

We both looked at each other in one prolonging moment of uncertainty in the flash of fire.

“Ha! You stole the words from me, Glasgo,” he exclaimed mischievously.

Realizing that there were only the two of us for most of the time, it wasn't long before I soon grew uneasy with the set-up that seemed to be developing. At first not just from him, but the circumstances that now grew more suspicious. More and more for most of the time I spent with Mockers, the weirder it got. In addition, McGurran would hang just because he could. At least, that is how he made it look at first.

But then again maybe not, he is after all the clan-leader at the barricade or is there a part he has in the game-plan.

The others, eager for action, would flee back into the theatre of mayhem, or from him until the confines became empty but for Mockers, McGurran and me.

When I tried to join with the others for bit of bagga that is when I knew I could not.

At that moment, and confined to close quarters, I could smell the washing powder from McGurran clothes. I reflected on it. Funny thing him being clean and smelling good. If I were honest, my urge to bond with the Tartan, now began to weaken cause of him and the present lack of fun too. There was no rush to kick me out into the theatre of fun and mayhem like he did with others.

Then I wasn't about to screw around with McGurran, I'll tell ya.

"How come you are down here with us and not with the Cherryhill, Glasgo?" interrogated Mockers smirking, as if Cherryhill carried a distasteful connotation.

"After all, you're not from the Ballybeen, are ye?"

I remained silent, careful not to ignore or make prolonged eye contact. His attitude grew a tad testy for my liking and with a sense of hostility that came and went like he is playing with your head.

I did wonder how the little prick knew what neighborhood I came from though.

Then I decided to get the hell outta here ASAP, as soon as the chance came my way.

A chance is maybe not too far away in the shape of the scarred and dented figure of the builder's truck, where first driven too, like it waited some dastardly deed.

An awkward moment, as I am captivated by the truck's role, while I attempted replying to his questions. Wasn't easy, I'll tell ya.

"I went to the high school with a lot of fellas from here, who are now my mates."

"Who? Angel, and that other wanker Georgy, Hah, Probably will be your undoing hangin' out with those two wankers, huh!

'Better them than the wanker, who sat before me now,' I thought

Though you're Ok, Glasgo, I don't care what the others say about ya!" He said trying to sound like he is doing me a favor,

Swig.

Bonding between us ebbed and bobbed along for the time we were in each other's proximity. Soon something would have to give, as keeping up the bluff is getting too risky. He would lick the sides of his bottom lip almost uncontrollably, believing maybe he had me in the bag for something I could only imagine. But, like I said, I had made my decision, so I mislead him, knowing I had to hang in there for some information that would gain leverage at the rendezvous with Georgy. After all, we did have an allegiance, and Georgy would drop me a tenner, no questions asked.

That smarmy smirk with many other emotions would follow on the change of his tone, as it seemed he could change the mood between us like magic. Kinda freaky, I'll tell ya,

Then one of those sneers that crept across his face as if I had something he wanted. In that moment, I knew I had to get the hell outta there sooner, and before others who would surely join him. Others who would be more accustomed to getting their own way violently. You hear many things around a barricade.

“Listen, I'm not sure this is for us.

Why don't we just sit this out?” He said shuffling forward, too close, too uneasy.

Therefore, I played along, who wouldn't.  
I'll tell ya.

“You mean you and me just sit tight,” I asked, suspiciously.

“Yes, who wants to get arrested anyway eh?  
That's how these events turn out, isn't it?”

After all, we are not exactly like them lot, you know, dumb like?”

I caught McGurran throwing Mockers a look and then shift uneasily. I soon learnt later that he was right. There is no one like him, and Mockers was up to something. But that didn't matter anymore, cause I could now see, that they were both in it, whatever it is, Over the next hour, he would excuse himself and vanish again into the mist, to the middle ground at least 4 times, and return with a change of tactics.

Then Mockers would reappear moving clumsily in the dark from some other angle with his usual smirk. My guess, he was doing a pact with someone, something hard-core, and I needed to tell it to Georgy. Georgy and I had an allegiance after all. Looking about, he began whispering to me, before producing a can of harp lager, which he then offered to me, that I accepted. McGurran snatched the can out of my hands, Mockers threw him a dirty look. McGurran grabbed him by the throat, Mockers reminded him of something, and he released him with a few cuss words. Mockers produced another can, and again offered it to me.

Now it seemed to me McGurran had a grudge. It also seemed they had a together to do task, and it is of some importance to McGurran. This became apparent every now and again. He would throw his back toward us and forward in disdain and frustration.

Swigging for lubrication, my dried throat loosened quickly from burning gasoline fumes. Grateful, I pushed my luck and began swigging more until it was nearly empty. Mockers then produced a packet of No six fags, which he carried in his denim wrangler breast pocket.

“Would you like one of these?” he asked. He and body language were buddies, for he read me well, and the opportunity for his well-honed opening technique, already at work. I didn't know that then.

I accepted his offer and slowly took it.

“Thanks,” I said allowing a brief smile not to convey my true feelings. I had only been smoking on and off for about a month and now I am now hard-core enjoying the sedative

effect it had on my nervous system. Warily I lit it, dragging on it slowly, at the same time ensuring a moment's intoxicating enjoyment.

He did so too, and began blowing a neat little succession of smoke rings that got bigger and bigger until they turned into halos that hovered. Downwards he blew, one after the other recoiling in white, as they escaped the higher whirling breezes of conflict. Then he lifted his head and sniggered, as though deriding something I could not see.

The bluff I tried to continue, well, I sniggered also.

Hoping the nicotine effects would sort out my nerves, panic came and went lulling the sense of danger of being stuck with maybe the most evil person I had ever known. Then swiping the harp can back from me, he began drowning it aggressively in one quick greedy swig. It then got tossed it over the barricade, he let out a belch that lasted more than normal. He farted, when done, sat down with his head almost dropping into his hands when he caught himself.

I thought it best to get out into the action when the chance came, and forget what knowledge I could glean further for a tenner. That could only be when Mockers would make one of his clandestine visits to the middle ground.

Georgy and I did have an allegiance though. However, I decided to pass on the allegiance and the damn tenner. Something was going down, and I wanted out before it happened.

“Ok, I'll finish this fag, and then throw some Molotovs at the razzers, maybe then head home for the night,” I continued, raising my shoulders, trying hard to hide any giveaway signals.

It didn't work. Sometimes my mouth ventured nervously into overdrive and out shot too many words.

“Nope, don't think so, Glasgo.

This is not a one nighter ya know, in fact this is a weekend operation, so don't get too comfortable.”

McGurran barked.

“And don't worry about some action, there is always tomorrow night!”

Peering at the mayhem, from the safety of the barricade, now seemed less safe. I hoped Angel and Georgy were still out there somewhere and would soon come by.

It occurred to me, that Mockers is no rush to join the others in the conflict zone either and that made me more nervous, I'll tell ya.

His Tartan scarf, tied to his right wrist was short and covered a multitude of tattoos. I observed him wipe his nose at least four times with it, then his mouth at least twice, and his brow countless times.

“Another smoke?” he offered

“Nah Thanks!”

He struggled for finger positioning on his fag and almost lost it, then, once the sinders caught and sparked, sucked feverishly.

“Tartan men usually smoke small cigarettes,” he said.

“They were conscious that a larger cigarette took too long to smoke.”

This rational he based on the stresses of their work that often got them caught in certain predicaments.

In fact, the Peelers on a stake out had snared a former Tartan member recently, because of how long it took him to smoke a cigarette, according to him.

He is now languishing in a borstal for naughty boys somewhere down by the sea at Millisle. Mockers said, smoking a larger cigarette whilst on a stake out was down to the amount of cigarette one had to smoke you see. That went against the rules, he said.

Because he spent more time tryin’ to finish it, when the night guard stumbled upon them and arrested his accomplice.

“That was one dumb jackass!”

I thought of Angel.

He then began sucking smoke in fast succession, one after the other. It caused some of the returning newbies to study the action as though he was performing some act.

Once done, he bulleted his butt to the damp grass carelessly flicking his index finger and thumb. White-hot sparking and our location revealed, he broke another of the rules. Whatever his agenda inside the Tartan is, I thought him unsuccessful at it.

Every fag he puffed is, as if he would never get the chance to smoke again. Then exhaling the smoke, he lifted his backside, and peered nervously over the barricade, resetting it repeatedly. Oblivious to the white clouds of smoke gathering above and around him, he puffed on, tossing each spent butt where he liked.

I imagined he arrived into the world the same way, sort of spent, and aimless.

Unlike everyone else, Mockers concerned himself with the strange men from the middle and not the enemy from the opposite end. He is a man in reverse to everyone around him.

“Boy that’s a stinker, eh?”

I didn’t respond.

Spitting out a piece of loose tobacco, was if he had been poisoned, caught me on the hand. I chose to ignore it.

It is then I noticed a black tattoo on his left wrist. I couldn’t make out the sketch at first, but it seemed the same as the others. I searched the darkness for mates. All the time McGurran kept me in eyeshot and in place with one of those looks of his. He stepped over and whispered in Mockers ear, and then again stepped away.

“Have you thought about joining ‘The Boys,’ Glasgo?” asked Mockers.

As I suspected, eventually McGurran’s impatience reveals the real reasons why I am here behind the barricade. I didn’t ask for clarity,

**“Isn’t that why I am here?”**

**“Do you know who I am talkin’ about, when I say,  
‘The Boys’ Glasgo?”**

**“Not really, Mockers,” I said trembling. However, I did, but I wanted to buy some time and maybe more info for Georgy. Georgy would pay a tenner for it, besides I need to play out the bluff.**

**The puny face broke into a wry smile, ensuring I picked up emphasis.**

**“THE BOYS”**

**Repeating it again as if I shouldn’t get any leverage from its sharpness,**

**“THE BOYS!**

**The Boys, Glasgo, do you know who they are?”**

**“Depends what are you talkin’ about?” I asked stalling to clear my mind.**

**“Footmen level, if you like,” he said lifting his arm to install another Number six into his twisted lipless mouth.**

**Then I saw it. For the first time I saw it. He didn’t know I saw it at first. Something tattooed on the right hand ‘Hand of Death,’ and something else, like rubber, with lots of little lumps in his palm. Another tattoo, though something round and lumpy and then a ring, at first an unfamiliar ring; A strange ring attached to something.**

**Then he saw that I saw it, exposed, and quickly concealed it, dropping his left hand to cover it with his loosened scarf. It didn’t take a lot to figure out what it is. I kicked myself for not seeing it sooner. Now it all made sense, why I was coerced to stay here. Then I thought of the explosion on the hill and the possibility of a connection. Tattoos were a storyline that said many things with these fellas. I guess I can cut myself a little slack, as to the degree someone is prepared to go to hide such things.**

**The grim bringer of bad tidings is now fast becoming the bringer of destruction. But, there is more to him, something that drives him, which may not be coming from him.**

**Nowhere to run and cornered with only one option. Mockers is not disappearing and reappearing to the middle ground. Hidden agendas and moving around the barricade hatching his next plan had run its course. Something else is on his mind, and could not be good. He had gone full circle and the barricade seemed his trap as well mine. In a sense, the barricade had now offered refuge to him for the last time. It seemed he is now required to fulfill something bad, and I sensed it. Locked in that damn barricade, and no stopping him now, I played along carefully. Little did he know that I also had an agenda? The only difference, if he knew, well it is anyone’s guess. McGurran, his eyes flashing with madness, steered anyone coming there away from him. Except me.**

Nevertheless, I would have refused whatever he had in mind. I did have an allegiance with Georgy.

A sudden melee and echoes of men bounced from the walls of tenement buildings on the far side of the soccer field.

They would peter out into the distant estate somewhere, to be lost until new ones replaced them again. Eerily some would bounce back again in a strange way, that startled the unsuspecting.

Amid the mayhem, I wondered could Mockers himself want to get out of this.

“Me, I have a question, Mockers?  
What exactly are you all about here?”

“I mean, you have been askin’ me all sorts of questions, so what gives with you?”

“If I didn’t know better, me, I’d say you are up to somethin’?”

Then, looking intensely at others, his countenance stiff, his mouth tight-lipped, seemingly he had made some diabolical pact with someone.

His elfin face looked back at me grimly, and snapped out words into the night. But then I saw in his eyes, something not of his doing, but his act hid it.

“Not now, not now, they are watchin’ us,” he said returning his gaze to the middle ground for something about to go down.

An order from the middle bellowed at him.

*”NOW MOCKERS NOW!”*

Standing forward focused, he knelt into the assembled broken furniture and tires that formed the barricade. From it, he withdrew the wooden ordinance box, within it, something immorally profoundly diabolically rolled. It or they rolled around dashing its interior like a studded omen. I held my breath, terrified with the hideousness off a man’s scheme. Holding the box up, as if he held a sacrificial first-born, Mockers elfin features then broke into a lickerish snarl. It was like something moved in and took over, something that had influence over him, something that possessed him at will.

Then, that sneer cut across to dine with his eyes, only this time, staying there. Eyes shining with gleeful contempt, he then lowered the box to marvel, pulled the lid off, as an impatient child would with its Christmas contents.

Stricken with consternation on seeing what he held in his right hand, I almost called out on seeing the kill of men within his grasp.

NO, Mockers don’t I thought, but almost said yes.

I stood, almost egging him onward, ‘Mockers do it! Do it now, knowing it otherwise futile and be done with it. And courage, what courage, my chance for getting outta here whilst

his mind is elsewhere is now a real possibility. Why dash those hopes now, while the clutches of McGurran seemed unrelenting.

The Elf the newbies named IT, licked again his bottom lips, and spat, snarled a sound strangely, and swigged from a bottle of poteen, that McGurran held up to him. He then laughed derisively, his brain swimming in his own insanity. Eyeing upward, said something at the dark Viking clouds above. My protests would have fell on deaf ears, so I kept my thoughts concealed, as McGurran observed all and despite half drunk, missed little. He danced, bottle in hand like a man possessed.

Mockers now standing erect, holding up in his hands the crumpled lead devices for launch, sneered down once more at me, resigned to his evil task.

“Are you ready to join The Boys of the grenade or not?” he asked coercively, his stubby finger poised curled in the ring.

On seeing that I had not attempted to join him, he turned his gaze back toward his enemy. Holding his arm above his head with one grenade gripped in his right hand, and one in the other, turned eastward toward the only lights in the conflict zone, and beat a path off ten steps forward. Strangely entertaining, almost game-like, surreal, and pivotal to the night and its operation, I did nothing, knowing how it would be with the men from the middle.

Seconds later, he counted from the right hand his first three fingers, whilst pacing back toward the barricade. The hideous drum of two explosive dins, puffing up behind into a plume of fiendish misery for anyone too close to them. Then, swigging another mouthful of poteen he sniggered, satisfied.

McGurran, well, he found another reason too have a drink. They both swigged feverishly the remaining poteen, soon falling about with the rush of adrenaline. Relief was mine when both explosions fell short. However, that did not matter, nor was it the goal. It was the bravado and the balls for doing it that mattered. Someday it might be for real.

Like it or not, being present, I am now hard-core with the cause. However, unbeknown to me, is someone close to me, very close, but not with the same cause, instructed to get me on board. The question for both off us, how are we to outwit the men in the middle, with so many eyes on us?

**Chapter[9] The reality of the struggle**

**The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

The crudely painted sign said;

**ATTENTION BRITS AND RUC SCUM**

**“Enter this loyalist estate, at your own risk”**



Assembled crude barricades and hooded Paramilitary from the estate controlled the vehicles entering and leaving.

Vigilante youths and older men thought there a need to prevent Provo and R.U.C maneuvers in the area. It also underscored the continuing loss of confidence in a mainly protestant police force, which seemed with each day that passed, increasingly anti Loyalist. The estate's paramilitary operation manifested itself into a vacuum off tricks, sucking people like Glasgo into something much more than he realized. Witnessing Mockers grenade antics is his first reality check, making him realize for the first time, with whom he actually gotten himself involved. In it for the fun maybe, but that sort of fun is not what he had in mind, least not throwing grenades with certifiable basket cases.

I just wanted to throw things with mates, ya' know, something innocent, like petrol bombs, as long as I didn't actually hurt anyone. Then when things are about to heat up and real trouble comes, we could walk away from it.

Not so easy, I soon learnt, I'll tell ya.

Angel told me there would be moments like this. Certain activities were for existing members who were looking to get in with 'The Boys' 'for the big doe,' as he put it, whatever that is.

I thought of Georgy in that way somehow, in it for the cabbage.

Well, they may want in but I want outta this dam barricade when I can get the chance, I had told him.

I am heading for home, to face me Da, whose demands I'd rather face compared to McGurran's. I never realized how difficult that would become. Somehow, I sense McGurran is behind it. His role in all this seems more central than I had realized. In addition, he seems to have an agenda controlling others and me. Just the length he goes to keep me here; the fact that he never leaves the barricade or allows myself too, and he only has to look at me in a certain way too. Can't be because I'm a newbie, not all other newbies are treated the same way. Cannot think off a worse person too bond with right now, in order to get membership to the tartan? Georgy liked that though, me being here, that I have an ear on things. Georgy and I do have that allegiance, in case you forgot, 'the pay's good too he would say.' In exchange for a little info, I kept telling myself, a tenner here and there isn't bad cabbage. Can be in my interests, also too help him, apart from the money, him being a buddie?

I heard a truck. Stranger still, is now the sound of another worker's trunk opposite, coasting into the space beside the other.

Now two trucks looked menacingly across the pitch off darkness. Their lights cut too a monstrous outline of some impending intended task.

Sometimes that quietness is so quiet, I really only learnt what silence can do to your head. As night edged toward midnight, lamented the suffering of youth. Maybe stupid, maybe naïve, maybe just like me, looking for fun. Maybe in some strange way, McGurran is coming to his senses and he will throw in the towel. Not, the likes of McGurran though. 'He couldn't be human if he tried,' I heard Georgy often say; maybe Georgy's wrong this time. Before us, is the prospect that got a mention at the last barricade brief, something about

the devils breath? That nausea that gripped your entrails like an iron grasp and threw out whatever is there. It also attacked the head, and rendered it useless. If the RUC Police saw us all throwing up, well that's anyone's guess. McGurran never gets sick, just paralytic.

"Don't forget to use your scarves for breathing," a hooded man I recall said, "it'll keep the devils breath from gettin' to you," he said, "or you will be very sick men, I promise you."

Five or six hours of burning rubber, gasoline, metal, engine chemicals, and the drink we're carryin' in our bellies, doesn't mix.

Did we listen, I'll tell ya!

I already heard men throwing up and then almost myself. That warnin' was a little too late for most of us though.

Then it struck me that everything had gone quieter. The RUC ceased firing rubber bullets, and their P.A system had silenced. From our side, the smashing glass, shouting, jeering, began to die off, but from other reasons.

"I guess the fawkin' Peelers were no different from us?" Someone commented.

Then, that creepy silence began working against us, making us take stock off our predicament, but triggering others to make a dash for it.

Bad move.

'Runners had no fawkin' chance,' Angel told me, 'When it gets to that stage, better too stay where you are, and use the safety off numbers at the barricade'. I did, and hoped he would be right. He is.

The soccer field that occupied the main thrust off the operations is now a heaving plateau of mud and dislodged sods. Grip and traction became so difficult that it is now slowing engagements down.

The border to the conflict zone is on one side occupied by the Peelers, and elsewhere by the Para-loyalists, making escape from the zone impossible for any of us. I needed to find Georgy and Angel a.s.a.p., finding myself more uncomfortable whilst lured into league with the likes of McGurran.

Then suddenly a grunt, cranking up one of the truck's motors, followed by the other, like awakening monsters, opening their eyes. Bright and illuminating casting a beam of ray toward the RUC cordon, were they could be seen.

The evening due and mist added to difficulties, causing some of the Tartan men to slip and fall. It became more and more difficult to maintain a sustained attack, without getting ourselves picked off by the RUC rubbers.

"Ready, McGurran?" demanded the hooded figure.

"Ok, you!" bawled McGurran, happy to be bullying again, "join the red hair limey over by them trucks."

I didn't need it explained to me... I had expected something all along. I knew I had been held back for sumpin' but nothin' like this. I'm not sure now I wanted a piece of it. Escape

is one thing, but joining a bunch of dangerous men in order to get away from McGurran, another? However, if it is the only way, it meant escape though from him, and some fun with Angel and Georgy, then maybe, knowing my luck, which would be too easy.

“Me Da would say, ‘Better the Devil ya know than the one ya don’t.’ That seemed to fit, I’ll tell ya.

Pigs soon improved their rubber hits on the Tartan lobbers, who became easier targets whilst finding it harder to continue in the mud.

Though other barricades were down the main corridor of the estate on Drumadoon drive, they were too use them only when confronted by army and not with the RUC operation...

The strategy now is too attempt drawing the army into the zone with the use of hand pick men from the middle mainly, too take the fight too them. The trucks were too be used for this purpose. We were too begin bulldozing the RUC out of the estate by giving them a taste of juggernaut medicine. That meant up close and personal, stick it to them. The plan being that eventually, they would be compelled to ask the army for support.

The shadowy figure from the tenement flat, observed the trucks arrival, conspicuously brought up to the front line, just below a hundred or so meters to the front, where he watched, as classical music played in the background.

Black phone jingles in the village police barracks.

“Officer Graham!”

“Constable Bingham, Sir, you’re out then?”

“Is it about the trucks?”

“Yes, Sir, but?”

“We do have others watching your back, Bingham, now listen to me.

They are going for the ram and chase strategy, make sure you keep your back doors closed, understand Bingham? Closed.”

“If fired at, then use the open and close strategy? Get it?”

“Why, do they have guns or somethin?”

“No definitely not, jagged rock, hard nuts, and maybe a grenade.”

“I’m only kidding Bingham.”

“That’s funny ha ha. So you don’t want us to pull out?”

“Yes, but make them think they have you on the run, and let the Bastards chase you all over craigantlet.

Oh yes, before I forget, thanks.”

“You’d do the same.”

“Yes you’re right, I would.”

Meanwhile back at Davarr barricade.

“It’s almost time, come on ya bastards, hurry the fawk up,” McGurran hollered.

With mounting tension and turning to face us, again said,  
“For those of you who don’t know, we are about to give the fawkin’ RUC scum a lesson they won’t forget.”

Jacko protested.  
McGurran ignored him.

Jacko again protested.

“Shut the fawk up, for once.” McGurran threatened.

“Barricades are for a tactical retreat and not for places of shelter so soon into the operation.”

“We have to push the bastards out off our estate instead of hiding here” McGurran scowled, reaching, and grabbing Jacko’s throat.

Jacko’s face reddened, and before McGurran realized, he had half choked him before he released his grip. He collapsed to the ground writhing, gasping for air.

“The three R’s.” continued McGurran “Running riot and retreat, only when up against the limeys, get’s you dumbfucks home!” McGurran reminded us. Then he chased the others back into the fray with the end of his Doc Martens.

Findin’ myself now alone with him and with a bottle of whisky, I sensed his growing madness, as Mockers again left the confines of the barricade with Jacko.

“Did you know that yer man was a Taig once ‘hic-cup?” he declared.

“He changed to a prod.” he said, “but he’s still a Taig in my books.”

I sucked on one of Mockers No Six fags, contemplating making good on his growing drunkenness.

“Ya mean Mockers.” I said, trying hard not to make eye contact.

A man like McGurran when out of his head with drink is a danger to everyone around him, regardless if he is a Prod or Taig.

Better to let him have the sway of any chitchat, I thought.

"That red head fella there, though?" he said waving a five-ounce bottle of grouse, "he's an English Taig."

"He trains Mockers in fawkin' grenade use, so that makes him one of us, for now. Don't like that wanker though, Mockers!"

"Don't you?"

"NO!"

I rolled along with the drink talk, keeping my responses succinct but preferably too myself...

"We heard!" I said carefully.

"How?"

Swig!

"How?" He repeated, his voice hinting now off no sober return.

Swig!

For a moment I blanked, feeling the conviction of the question like a sudden whack on the back of my head.

Hearing him try to open me up with a 'why, I thought the drink forced him too loosen his tight menacing mouth longer than usual.

"Well, someone told me." I said, watching his eyes glaze from alcohol.

Any moment now, and he should be out of it, or he'll end up deckin' me, I thought. Then it occurred too me that he wasn't drinking the poteen this time.

*How?* He demanded Again, and another swig of Grouse whiskey followed the one before.

Pausing, carefully choosing a convincing piece of lengthy B.S, bluffing ahead, uneasy,

"How the conditions can be turned against us," I said, as I began to tiptoe sideways to escape.

"Such as?"

I paused, looking upwards then said hesitatingly.

"The street lamps being turned off for instance!"

**“What the fawk are you sayin’?”**

**We did that, didn’t ya know, so we could operate under cover of dar?”**

**Not liking the path I chose, a real need now to tiptoe outta here ASAP, before the others returned.**

**“Didn’t we?” slurred McGurran, “if we didn’t, we’re fawkin’ dead already then! Hey? What’s your fawkin’ name anyway? ”**

**Falling back against the barricade, his bottle in his hand, McGurran went horizontal. He reminded me of Rooster Cogburn lying there, with that boozy expression stretch across his hard features. I almost burst into laughter, affected by the comical side of drunkenness, and John Wayne’s Rooster Cogburn.**

**What made me nervous, I’ll tell ya, is gettin’ some control with the hardest man around the place, especially one under the influence of drink. More importantly, the intelligence I had unbeknown to me at the time, which I learnt later, could have gotten me in deep shit. Georgy seemingly knew too much, so we did an oath thing, and that guaranteed me a pay rise to a twenty quid a pop on info. I’ll tell ya. Oh and the oath thing, well that is to keep my mouth to myself from now on. All part of the allegiance we had.**

**“Didn’t we?” he slurred, slipping away swallowed by a bloodstream of alcohol.**

**Finally, I breathed easy.**

**Sensing the alcohol had begun its work, I checked the immediate area for escape too the trucks that now waited use. Then in seconds, I could see movement off hooded men, too the back off each truck, probably seasoned combatants. Each seemed to carry something in each of their hands as they boarded each of the trucks. I didn’t expect to see Georgy or Angel there amongst hardened men like that. Moreover, I didn’t expect to join them myself with or without both. Then, I looked down at McGurran, and an urge to join them became too much. The heavy engines roared, then died too idle, next, their eyes lit up bright and illuminating a ray of hope at last, and what is too come, if I have the balls to jump on board. The way ahead laid before me outta my present hell.**

**I never saw Madman approach me from behind.**

**“I have been told to keep an eye on ya, by who, I hear you ask?**

**That made ya fawkin’ jump, did you not jump?**

**Don’t fawkin’ worry, it is only me, Madman, I hear you say.**

**McGurran bin drinkin’ on the job again.**

**Never learns.”**

**In a blink of an eye, someone swooped from behind him and tried to acquire McGurran’s small amber bottle.**

Madman turned around, shoved the other aside, and revealed himself as the second in command of the Tartan.

Who am I to argue?

“So who told me ‘Glasgo? I hear you ask, too watch out for someone, as important as YOU?”

Swigging from the five oz bottle, he gratled and then released his spit on the ground. Then he stood searching my eyes for reaction.

“Them lot maybe, I hear you ask me, do I not?” he beckoned his head toward the looming group.

I thought it better to ride the storm out, as I was too wary to attempt any BS or escape. He again gratled and spat to the ground, and shot me a hardman look. I now felt checked into the natural order of things with him and the Tartan. I had the distinct feeling; an initiation process would soon begin.

Out from the smoldering mist the returning group came towards the barricade. After a moment pushing and shoving each other around, they huddled into their positions. I never expected to see Angel and Georgy appearing from the group.

“Boy am I glad to see you both.”

“Okay we are going to get outta here and have some fun on the workman trucks.” Said Georgy

“Are ye with us?” asked Angel

“Try and stop me.” I replied chomping to go.

Georgy popped a Wrigley and clarified,

“But we must wait our moment, okay? They’ll blast the horns for us to make our move, okay?”

“How long will that take?” I asked hurriedly.

“Maybe ten minutes maybe fifteen” said Georgy

“FIFTEEN MINUTES? I whispered loudly.

I told them about chitchat between McGurran and myself. Georgy said I said too much and that we’ll have to ride it out, as we had no other option.

I observed the new Doc Marten boots, their new wrangler jackets, and skinnners they suddenly acquired, and wondered. Angel played from pinky, David Bowie’s ‘Starman’. Madman let it slide.

“The tricks of the dark were never far away,” Mockers said gloomily whilst he crouched into the darkest position, still receiving praise from his peers.

**“What does he mean, I asked Angel?”**

**Angel sucked a breath off air gulped and began waffling.**

**“I saw a shadow against the walls Glasgo, a tall one, too tall; give me the feelin’ someone else is watching us.”**

**“Shut the fawk up Angel will ye!” Jacko cursed as he scrambled for his place. “You are givin’ me the heebie jeebies.”**

**“Who the fawk is givin’ you the heebie jeebies?”**

**McGurran slowly waking again from his stupor landed a punch into his palm, as if he just realized that he fucked up again.**

**“Fawkin’ SOMEBODY doesn’t like me?” he said slurring to himself.**

**“Freakin, Angel.” said Jacko, “he’s full of it, McGurran!”**

**“He won’t fawkin’ believe me when I tell him that I saw someone watching our movements.” Angel responded.**

**“But you didn’t see them Angel, only faucin’ shadows?” Insisted Madman gratling.  
Plonk!**

**Angel held his breath for the attention.**

**He loved attention.**

**He didn’t get it a home from his parents, nor a girlfriend as finding a girlfriend had been near on impossible for him.**

**He craved it from his mates, and that was our secret. He worked on their attention, and they fell for it every time, I’ll tell ya.**

**“It was a peeler,” he said, “It must have been a Peeler spying on us?”**

**“Hey ‘Georgy, here is a Tartan scarf for ye, to keep yar big man-tits warm.” Jacko teased smirking and winking at Madman.**

**“Thanks Asshole, but nah thanks.” Georgy didn’t like Jacko and tossed it back.**

**“Angel, you wouldn’t know a Peeler in uniform if he came and bit on your smelly balls,” teased Mockers.**

**The newbies now giggling and sniggering, the ‘Elf Miserable’ who attempted to reduce Angel to a clown, caught the narrowing eyes off Georgy, who then shot the newbies a threatening look.**

**Georgy didn’t like Mockers, seemingly for something personal.**

**Mockers knew it was the wrong thing to say too Angel, especially with the Viking nearby. He waited for the return cheap shot that might cause him too belt Angel in the mouth,**



suspecting that he might have a friend in Madman tonight. Mockers then saw the sneak glance from Angel, who was not long coming back with his brand of derision.

“How do you know they are smelly anyway, Mockers?  
Maybe your smelly girlfriend told ya last night while you rogered her?”

Mockers erupted, leapin’ at Angel, I’ll tell ya, boy did he!.  
In turn, Madman, of all people, hard punches Mockers in the shoulder. Jacko kicked out at Angel who receives a sore kick too his shin from Georgy. Then Mockers attempting to stand up to the Viking is sent reeling hard to the ground.

In addition, Angel being Angel, well he just could not let go all off that lovely attention.

“Augh sure you couldn’t smell your own arse if it farted in your own face, Mockers.”

His tactic not as dumb as it seemed, as he played his turning the tables’ strategy when Madman is around. Nevertheless, revenge is sweet, and sweeter with each one. A sudden surge of bravado came and went only when Madman came and went, and Angel was not a person who turned the other cheek, with such conditions in his favor. I heard Mockers swore eternal revenge under his breath. He pulled away from fear of Madman, who would never side with him against Angel. McGurran, mumbling and rumbling, now coming round with a very sore head, producing a sound that everyone close to him knew too well, I’ll tell ya!

McGurran is renowned as a hard man.

He got himself known as one off the hardest men in Ballybeen.

I heard from others that his tally off scraps was wins usually when he had others too support him, mostly bullying, and a lot of bluffing. Nevertheless, I had seen enough tonight to change that idea. As for him being a hardman, I drew this judgment mainly on his swagger and physical appearance. We tiptoed carefully around him and tried not to cross him in the process. He could pass for a year or so older than the rest of us, and easily two score years or more. A broad shoulder man, with a length off thick dirty dark red hair accompanied a toughened face that omitted the usual signs off effeminate youth. He emanated malevolent masculinity in his features, not found on others around him.

With a flattened nose and protruding eyebrows, lending him the appearance of a street fighter, and said he has done his fair share of that too.

His mouth tight, his lips thin, and his breath usually fuming from hard liquor, spat as he talked the drink happy fighting man. His gimmick would be scaring the newbies with a lit match, while he sprayed poteen onto it, as a dragon would use fire, then fart methane from his arse to complete his act.

He spent most of his life being ornery, and to describe him as a happy spirit would be stretching it. I learned that is part of his game plan, known by those he allowed close to him. His was an act. Reputation is king, and he wore it as a skinhead wore his neo appearance. He wore his denims tight, making his body seem leaner and muscled more than the others.

Because of this, his developed forearms exposed not only enviable muscles and signs of hate, but punching power.

Red hand and other usual political Tartan tattoos etched into his skin on both wrists were his constant allegiances.

These included U.V.F. so prominently displayed across the knuckles on the left hand and U.D.A. on the other. A red hand, his proudest etch, occupied his right forearm.

For Queen and country etched on the sides off the tattoo shield, and in the middle underneath the red hand, Black Tartan unity. Statements that said many things how he felt about the cause. Moreover, it stated that he had made a commitment beyond the leadership of mainly a youthful Tartan.

It also meant that McGurran is ahead in the game and scheme of things, while others were in it for the fun. Juveniles around him whilst in it for a reason to their miserable lives, were too naïve to see the motives, from the likes of the McGurran.

Even his few buddies said, he curses the names of his intended rivals while drinking. Some say hate keeps him going. Then McGurran hated 24/7 He only spoke when he wanted to say who he hated or sway consensus, or else he was drunk. Usually that would end up in drunken brawl with enemy Tartan outside the village pubs.

The barricade debate still raged on,

“I know someone, probably UVF,” said Angel’ “who just needed a bit more time before he would tire of it.”

Jacko and Madman privately concluded that Angel is acting peculiar and tonight a bit touched.

“I know Angel well, and he would sometimes waffle his way out of situations.”

“You believe his bullshit?” asked Jacko half scared that a Provo sniper is in the area.

“Hah! Not when it comes from Angel’s waffling mouth,” retorted Madman.

Jacko looked unconvinced and nervously began scanning the entire neighborhood, and thought maybe, “Angel a touched man.”

Truth was, Angel knew how to get under the skin of Jacko, and this was one of his ploys. This time he petrified him with the story of an IRA gunman looking for revenge in the hood.

Madman words rolled round in my head, spoken like it is, and not what he was supposed to say. Now there’s leadership, I thought.

However, many times my head thought good things about someone, and strangers hid there when I was wrong about them.

Usually I had an imagination problem, least that is what me da said.

Such is the affect of alcohol on location and conditions that created a world of deception. Darkness and walls with long unseen columns mocked even the hearing and sight of youth in this my present world. Soon the barricade, taken over by at least another ten members of the Ballybeen Tartan became a refuge of high spirits, among them, one called McDuggan.

A surge of jealousy, then rivalry, when I finally saw the pulling power he would have with a girl like Linda. The rivalry did not last long, and soon it melted away the more I accepted how things were going to be with Angel's sister.

He dropped a red plastic case normally used for beer storage in the middle escaping no one's notice. A sense of impending consequences drew a moments silence from all who had gathered there.

McMann, then grasping the case with both his large hands, slowly stood up staring at the bewildered newbies for their attention,

**"THE FAWKIN' DEVIL'S BREW"** he barked.

In that moment, roared the motors off the trucks on the far side off the operations zone. Any hopes I had climbed Everest and descended just as quick. I looked toward Georgy and Angel, and Georgy signaled me to relax. Not yet! Not yet!

**"I can't wait another minute,"** I frustrated across to Georgy.

A moment in and the tension McMann instilled climbed coercively. I looked Angel and Georgy again, **"Aren't we ready."** But before I could get the low down" I caught McGurran staring at me in a manner of transfixed eye lock.

**"Don't worry, Glasgo, we have time, on the third engine rev up, we move!"** whispered Angel.

Georgy, waved his hands in front of McGurran eyes, and saw only blankness. I was relieved with the good intention, which he had read well from me.

**"Strange, he's out cold,"** said Angel, **"are you sure he drank only whiskey, Glasgo?"**

McMann became a figure to behold and a figure of many ghastly scars in the translucent light. As if just, too drive home the situation, ghastly flames descended upon our huddled confines. They seemed too illuminate him as he spoke, and I have not seen better performances on stage.

A purposeful misaimed Molotov crashed nearby, and a concealed McDuggan the perpetrator, hid on the other side off the barricade. Even here, tedium had a part to play and boredom set in until the next commands from the middle.

McMann remained unmoved while the fire flash lit up exposing an image off someone who meant rampage was how he wanted things done. Then, a disturbance from the barricade entrance drew McMann's raging eye, as he gripped the case tightly, the plastic cracking in his hands. A young newbie took flight like a bat outta hell and headed for the hills. Another tried to prevent him, and another took off also.

**"Let him go, we only want real men here,"** McMann scowled as he threw each newbie a flash of eye-rage.

Making the most of the firelight, he continued his performance.

**“We’ll catch up with him later, as sure as the devil is out there tonight, and don’t anyone think about runnin’ off ta your mammy.”**

**Thunder above struck and at first teemed rain down moments later, onto the faces off all who had made it this far. McMann peering upwards, pausing at the blacken rapture, seemed to have real blessing from the Viking god to us.**

**“Get it?” he threatened, and just too make his point stick, began stamping his heel into the ground and twisting it with all the contempt of Odin, casting again the evil eye on all.**

**Then, faintly, a gradual murmur, then more and while the rain covered his face and its scarred features, he dropped to his knees chanting softly some alien lingo. I think Latin.**

**Angel looked across from the barricade and winked, which is Angel’s way of saying that it is all BS.**

**“Not for me, I’ll tell ya, B.S. or no B.S, I am outta here, on that third engine rev-up,” I whispered, hoping he read my lips.**

**I decided to bluff this one out, and tried to look compliant, when I noticed from the dark side, that Madman had been watching all three of us.**

**Angel again blinked, signaling me too connect with him out in the conflict zone, as soon as we could hear the rev-up.**

**“I am ready now,” I said whispering “just say the word, damn it.”**

**An opportune glance saw that he is still watching us, absorbed with something as he did so.**

**The red beer case McMann held, this time had not contained Molotov cocktails. Smoke rose upward from it, and something lay dead within.**

**McMann a man with a large broken nose flat against his cheeks spoke, as if he had a problem getting his words passed it.**

**Teeth that were once white now broken stained with tobacco, possessing a Flintstone appearance each time he opened his large mouth.**

**To me, he looked like boxer who failed with scars around his face that proved it.**

**If he seemed a rough type, it seemed to McGurran that he could take a punch rather than give one. With the look of a battered bull, he came with the frame off an athlete and the look off a Gippo. Gippos I thought, had a look that said something that fitted their habitat, and McMann had that same look. With the Gippo wild brown hair of stringy twine about his head, and the round Gippo face eclipsed by bushy Gippo locks. Emerging from behind wide of his Gippo broad nose, large brownish Gippo eyes were slightly lopsided like a Gippo. As if that wasn’t enough, a Gippo walk, as though he would attack you in a heartbeat if things did not go his way. At five feet and ten inches tall, he was leaner and broader than myself and because of that, I was not about too call him on it, I’ll tell ya. I had watched him play soccer at our school and he was more interested in sport, than playing out the part off a hardman. Though tough, he is human, and that is how I will remember McMann. But I dare not let him know my secret. He never wore the Tartan, and that said a lot about him. Probably as he came from a larger family and besides, money to purchase frivolous things isn’t there. At least he didn’t stink like Mockers.**

**Me Da said that he was stronger, tougher man than most of the Tartan assholes, as he was his own man and never bought into to the gang deal. For once, I agree with me da.**

McMann released his grip and the caseload of spent rubber bullets fell from his large hands. Still smoking, some emanating an odor vile to unseasoned bellies, causing some newbies to throw up violently, and McMann cursed their Ma's for giving them birth. McGurran, who had still not come too, clenched his teeth and swore vengeance on all his enemies from slumber.

I waited nervously for the moment that he would remember our brief interaction, but none came, and my prayers up until now had been answered.

The bickering, chitchat, and teasing suddenly ceased, all went quiet over the conflict zone again. The bottle of poteen finally reached me via Jacko from Madman, and I swigged for reprieve than anything else, and an end to my disguised trembling.

The acute psychological impact began turning boys into men, just when the middle now needed men. Some had passed that stage and it did not go unnoticed by the men in the middle zone.

Then, a bus abandoned by its driver, burst into flames lighting up the entire zone. The other groups were hard at work, and soon it would be our turn again.

Exposing the middle, were hooded men milling around fulfilling their clandestine tasks but going nowhere.

McMann, whose sweaty face blackened by the airborne soot and handling of black rubber, took on another dimension of grotesqueness.

Slowly he bent too pick one bullet off harden rubber, holding it up, studying the spent smoking six-inch object.

“Reminds you off sumpin’, McMann?” The crack from Madman did not hit home, but the one from Angel did.

“Looks like your Ma’s Dildo, eh McMann.” Angel teased..

The jibe prompted a giggle from Madman and Mockers, who triggered the usual revelry. McMann hid his fury, then turned to face the fire-bus, and turned back to face his audience.

“This one hit me in the nuts,” he said loudly as his dirty hand ran down the left side of his groin.

McGurran opened his glazed eye and contacted with Madman, who in turn with McDuggan and he with Mockers, who blowing perfect smoke rings in succession before he faced Jacko, who, turned to face Angel, and he to Georgy. Angel eye contacted with me, blinked one more time, and I knew he is about to do something he might regret. Instead nodded in McGurran's direction. Some of the newbies nervously stole a glance from each other, uncertain how to react, and I froze where I sat, as McGurran seemed to come too, but again fell off, and another stay of execution seemed granted.

“I’ll hold him, McMann, you can kick him in the bollocks,” goaded Jacko.

Angel well braced, as he had practiced it so many times before, and fled the barricade. Madman had pulled at his Tartan scarf and it unraveled off his neck, as he took flight into the darkness, laughing as he went.

*“He’ll be back!”* said Madman like he knew how things would happen. Nevertheless, he too began to laugh, as he did so, Jacko burst into laughter until eventually everyone tripped with the same bawdy convulsions of laughter.

Except McMann. After all, it had involved his mother, and that meant a score to settle. The excitement ebbed away with the tired realization of our predicament, and for me personally, how to get home before me Da came looking for me. I now had enough fun and my plan of escape too the truck now waited the signal.

Madman, knowing Angel well, who did come back, but with his da this time, who a Paramilitary leader, had slipped McGurran’s mind. McGurran’s butt received a hard kick, and then Angel’s da proceeded to have a few words with him, which is also verbal kick in the bollocks. Some weaker remaining newbies were chased home with a kick to the arse. And me, well McGurran had trouble remembering our little debate. I knew it was only a matter of time, when his cloudy mind would surely clear away, and a memory would give it up.

*“I’d like a drink?”* asked a newbie, his voice a distant melodic echo.

*“What, them bottles? Retorted a voice.*

*“They’re not beer, ya egett, them’s petrol bombs waitin’ to be loaded on to them trucks o’er there”* said the same voice.

*“I wish that was the real stuff, I could do with a wee drink myself,”* Georgy said tiredly.

I felt better that a friend was now nearby, and to clarify as to the role of the trucks.

*“You could do with a wee kick in the arse, ya scotch bastard,”* McGurran mouthed as he came too, still liquored up.

*“I am not a Scot, McGurran, I am from Ballymena Antrim.”*

*“Oh didn’t see ya there, Georgy.”*

*“Ah alright, ya’re still a fawkin’ caveman though,”* said Georgy.

*“Ah, then there is two of us who can still recognize his own kind, especially from behind that hippy yippy fawkin’ hair.”*

*“Yeh, why don’t ya git a skinhead like we’re doing this Saturday, Georgy?”*

*“I will, if you pay for it, Angel?”*

*“You’re lucky ya don’t have me Da,”* said Angel, *“stickler for a short hair on men.”*

**“Isn’t that the truth, ‘men’ being the word?” said Mockers sardonically.  
If Saturday ever fawkin’ comes and hell doesn’t freeze over first.”**

**“Wise up Mockers will ye? Reacted Jacko.  
We need to stay opto, optomi.”**

**“Optimistic,” said Mockers disdainfully.**

**“We need ta stay opti opti, hang on till I turn me brain on,  
There we go, see I really have a brain.” Angel mocked.**

**Jacko fell quiet, embarrassed, humiliated, unable.**

**I was impressed with at least Mockers attempt,**

**“Well, we might be trapped, added Mockers with little reassurance,  
“And you Angel, nobody in their right fawkin’ mind would want a Da like yours after that display.”**

**“It’s not his fault, that we’re trapped.”**

**“It is, if the fawkin’ army decide to jump in now, when we’re tired and weakened by lesser numbers.”**

**Strangers I was amongst, where just that, and the solution, another welcome swig of more potato juice. Every drink brought me closer to them. Fermenting in someone’s inside pocket it had done its fiendish work. Soon the fun had ebbed away, fatigue crept in, and my mind drifted back and forth between snippets of this that and the other events. Each Molotov bottle with its innocent fluffy cotton wick, protruding from each glass neck, wove a tapestry off the scenes I had been privy too in my head. With each, its own ‘Hades Water,’ is definitely not to be confused with the look of potato juice. This stuff had the kick of a mule, and right now, that kick had just done its work.**

**“WAKE UP GLASGO!” Angel shook desperately.**

**However, the state of unconsciousness had kicked in big, rendering Glasgo null and void.  
His vision now on a lake saw the fires that filled him with wonders of youth.**

**Said that the petrol bomb recipe been acquired from the Lake of Hades, Glasgo in his unconscious state, now saw himself float towards its source.**

**Then emerges, wailing Banshees bringing it up from the underworld on a black and golden tray and Glasgo now saw its value to mortal men.**

**Containing the souls of hell within, when concocted generously with gasoline, sugar and Satan’s curse it is said, Glasgo accepted the tray and flowed away into the orange. His visions clear and understanding sharper, he saw many things on his horizon. He saw men of drink who claimed the recipe exchanged by the alabaster demons, for a bottle of their promised soul, is a lie. He saw one winter’s night, as a fellow drunk slept, slipping him the evil replacement for a whisky bottle at the foot of a tombstone, was also a lie. On realizing**

the trickery, he saw the drunk waking to the sinister fumes, and that he saw the potential for an endless supply of the stuff through bluff with the Devil, another lie. Drunks in pacts with banshees from ancient graveyards were places to sleep off the effects of drink. To barter with demons and survive as long as they slept more blarney. He saw such liaisons with enlightenment, some that were true, and many others untrue, to take back to where he was going.

In organized riots legend says, the devils brew would have maximum wickedness because of its source. 'Straight from the lake of Hades.' Use it well.'

"Glasgo wake up! Angel urged again, did you not hear the trucks signal, ya dumb fawk."

Glasgo looking up at the deepening black vortex above saw anger in the puffy tissues of charcoal. How beautiful he thought, such colors are the jewelry of the Viking Gods were. His thoughts drifting in and out of a bottle with flames, he was back to the now. Without further thoughts, he awoke void of his surroundings, senseless, his matter spongy, his vision now seeing Angel slapping each of his cheeks.

"Okay, okay, I'm awake, fawk ye!"

"Did you not hear the engines rev the last signal to come?" Angel said with the urgency. "I thought you were a goner somehow."

"Hit the deck everyone" shouted Georgy.  
A search beam swooped from an unexpected location.

"It's the Limey pigs," whispered someone.

"No it's not, ya stupid wanker," McGurran's familiar bark, jumpstarted Glasgo's brain.

"You will know when the limey arrives," barked the voice of an elder beyond the barricade, "With those damn twings and twangs of theirs."

"Yeh, you can hear their sirens coming anyway," said Georgy popping his tenth Wrigley.

"Not when a riot is active," said Mockers swigging a drink.

"That's right, smart ass."

"Why thanks, Georgy Boy,"

"Right, they are not going to announce when they are going in for the kill"?

"Exactly." reiterated Mockers sneeringly.

"Who said that?"



Was that you, Mockers?" Demanded McGurran.  
"It fawk'n' better not be."

"Not fawkin' me," responded Mockers angrily.

"One of the Para leaders maybe out over there listening to ya! OK."

"Mockers?" Barked McGurran again, spitting as he did so.  
"Do you hear me?!"

**BOOM, boom and boom again**

Somewhere from one of the tenements a baby began sobbing.  
Dogs that were barking from all over the estate had fallen silent from fear. Then the thunder drums boomed above.

"Oh that's great, all we need now are the skies too take a piss on us at our finest hour," murmured Mockers, as he sat back in despair.

"C'mon, we can still make for one off the trucks." Said Georgy

It is not long before we three stole into the darken zone. I looked back one more time, and saw Mockers and Madman gaze in our direction. Exhilaration restored, I felt my heart race with the impending excitement that accompanied our laughter and the thrill of mischief again.

Now looking back, what he was up too and why he would spend so much time with me was kinda freaky, I'll tell ya. We had spent hours sitting behind a barricade when everyone else had been doing their shit. Mockers had entertained me, so to speak, with his offer off endless fags and booze and no one had objected. Our conversation had been for the most part, tense but bonding, when others have been hostile, he had not, at least not in comparison. Until I realized his gameplan in grenade usage and others to join him. Georgy jumped into the driver's seat.

When others had been assholes, McGurran hadn't except from the effects off drunkenness. Not until after, Angel heard from his Paramilitary Da, that he been coerced into recruiting a bunch of able newbies including myself for 'The Boys'.

My Dad used to say, that if it smells like something isn't right, then it usually isn't, I'll tell ya. Angel agreed.

Then it occurred to me, that maybe, just maybe, I am fulfilling their secret motives after all.

Then the sound of the truck's ignition; Then the engine cranked and I climbed aboard the second truck.

Another clatter of thunder overhead roared without warning.  
A decreasing clatter of launchers maintained a barrage of rubber bullets.

Those in excruciating pain dropped on the field, forcing others to hear their insufferable whining, proving the enemy pigs had been improving their aim.

Then the scream zenith, at the top of its power, the first truck appeared from the darkness heading straight for the RUC line. Men from the truck-bed began firing off catapults and cross bows. You could hear the shot hit on the shielded community of uniform not far from our position.

SMASH! ping ping, ping ping And then the reality of the large looming truck is now so advanced, the RUC had only time to withdraw to the shield of their vehicles.

It suddenly slid its rear in the muck at the RUC line, and reversing furiously proceeded to pulverize the grey reinforced metal of the nearest Land Rover defender. A shower of muck found the ready row off Perspex shields whilst men, save for a few, saw their chance to withdraw to the main road outside the perimeter of f the housing projects.

There were times I'd imagine scenes from war, now slipping away, as the truck became more apparent as our tank.

Boyish thoughts of liberating French towns and villages, allied forces suffering losses from the diehard waffen, were now absent.

The German waffen began retreating from French cities, fleeing in the open farmland, slowly no more the fancy of my mind.

Hedgerows, crises crossing French landscape ahead of the allies were now just diminishing figments of imagination.

The racket of fakey bullets reverberated all around the burning walls and ditches, now a cloudy scene.

I could no longer deny my predicament. The truck we were in, hoping for our turn, went nowhere. Then, screaming out from behind a darken parking lot, the other at breakneck, dashing the first armored RUC juggernaut repeatedly, forcing it a hasty retreat, then it failing. Now two sets of mechanical heavies screaming and dushing it out, at first on road, gas fumes bellowing from the rears, churning in whirls of equal brutality on men's throats and eyes. Then onto the morass until the land rover caught a grip, and took the vantage of traction.

Soon, the worker's truck was giving chase exiting the estate, heading for the hills in hot pursuit.

## **CHAPTER [ 10 ] Meet the Clan**

### **The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

With a usual slap on the back, Angel sat down beside me as though his butt seemed to bounce as he did so.

Following a handshake, with the customary juvenile B.S, I could see that he had something on his mind.

“How do you get to sit this fawkin’ one out ‘mate, what’s fawkin’ special about you then?” he asked.

Then at the mouth of the truck's bed, a sulphuric orange flash lit up the familiar leering gaze of Mockers.

Angel turning to see, caught the smell first, then the body odor, fags, sulfur and with a hint of methane came on board fast. There were the features, one unfamiliar hideous feature, and previously one that before went unnoticed. It was the feature called vengeance.

"Oh that's what makes you special,"  
Mockers came on board lighting another no.6.

"Still think I'm special?" I asked Angel.

Angel aghast, not expecting the void to reveal its occupant, went to accept the lit fag. Mockers trying to conceal his vengeful anger from the shadowy corner, smiled the flakey grin and dragged on the offered cigarette instead. Another time Angel, he thought, his way, a vibe, an air and Angel seeing him seething with revenge, hastily rose to dismiss himself. A cat does the same when it scents pit-bull terror in the look of McGurran's face, ominously behind him, smelling of booze, and with equal intensity.

McGurran, who appeared looked the other way, resigned to developments.

"Boy I never saw Angel look so pale like that before that," said McGurran sniggering.

"Hurry the fawk up Georgy, and let's get goin' eh" He shouted slapping the side.

"We can't, we haven't bin given the fawkin' green light yet, from the middle."

"That's right McGurran; he hasn't been given the green light from us yet."

Mockers influence, sufficient to cause Angel to leave, I now knew had to be more than a Tartan member. An clan order I yet barely knew and one I had to key in the code to unlock who is who and where is each in the structure of things. McGurran seemed to be in charge around the place. No one appointed him, it just seemed that way; he just assumed the leadership and things from him were done. When he spoke, they all listened, except Georgy; and when he commanded, none had confronted his tactics, and when he spat others would as well, like Madman for instance or Mockers. He would speak when the urge had come over him, even when it seemed unnecessary. None of them, who spat as he did, confronted his directions. Spitting became a subconscious habit, and was their way of buying into and concurring with hardmen, and they knew it. During the operation, McGurran broke the rules he imposed on others, such as drinking. I noticed also, he seemed not to have a great bond with Mockers at times appearing to be a bitterly tolerant of him; hardly interacting with him at all sometimes. Shooting him the occasional evil eye behind his back, as though he harbored a grudge too. However, here they both were, and that had to be bad, if not unusual.

The engine started to choke, then choke again until on the third turn. Then it coughed into life, spluttering out the spew from old diesel.

Madman, I had noticed, would show up and throw his weight around at the barricade by goading others. Victims such as Jacko appeared to have a semblance of bonding with McGurran, though there were times I thought McGurran was going for his blood. So he was partially protected. This allowed Madman assume the status off the next in the line off leadership, as McGurran remained noticeably consigned. Affording him an opportunity at stamping his authority with his bullying boy approach, he looked for a new victim each time. He was unfulfilled regarding myself, and therefore he was unfulfilled regarding himself. Angel also his mate, had a friend in us both. Georgy, too whom he secretly feared, and who had a seed off a mate in McGurran, was a surprise. Be it all contemptible. Madman a mate of Mockers, in short, surprisnigly had no more mates than myself, all said and done. I observed the friendship he afforded both Angel and strangely Mockers, which didn't make sense either, since neither of them seemed to bond well with each other at first. I sometimes wondered what common ground had they. Later, prevailing in that oddest relationship with youth, is the moment Metal Guru burst from the Angel's sister's pink radio. So not always did the Bay City Boys have it their way bringing two lone wolves, the other being Mockers, together in chorus of T-Rex's hits and howls. They passed on Deborah, but sang Children of the Revolution, then 'I loved ta Bogey, but most of all hummed and sang Ride a White Swan, currently at No1.

Angel was intruding, and left to join Georgy in the cab of the truck, and I myself wished he hadn't. The Elf had been standing looking over at the first truck, when I quickly retrieved the paper note from the bed among the discarded debris. The note that Angel had meant too place in my hand, when taken off guard, had missed its intended delivery. Mockers ducked suddenly, as a rubber bullet passed over his head.

Gone were the features off deception, I had become accustom too.

Gone the offer off cigarettes, and gone the easy composure and attitude. It is as if another Mockers had moved in and possessed the elfin energy that occupied it before.

Sweat beaded around his fringe and at times, he wiped it away with his Tartan scarf cursing others I could not hear.

His blond curls lost to a disheveled appearance, and his eyes flashed furiously. Then another summoning from the middle, and then climbed out of the truck to the sound of another command and vanished.

Like a god send, I was never so glad to see him leave, I'll tell ya.

Then came a voice from the middle and a hooded figure ran towards us shouting.

I quickly unfolded the paper.

It read;

They are trying to get you to join 'THE BOYS'.

*'Mockers is their recruiter, he is not your friend, but he is also under their control, be warned!'*

The figure with the balaclava, holding a large wooden stick tagged the truck with it, speaking momentarily with whoever sat in the driver's seat.

"How do you know that wanker Angel, Glasgo?" whispered Mockers from behind me, snatching the white note from my left hand.

I froze.

"Glasgo? Did you not hear me? He repeated.

It didn't matter who wrote it, my response was all he needed. At least now he was forced to come clean, too tell me what exactly he is up to. And by allowing me privy to that, is the same, as knowing if I was up for joining the 'The boys'. However, something told me about the way he said things, which said something about his game plan, that he is averting mention off. Recruiter is one thing, recruiter for what is another.

Now that the cat was out off the bag, there was no way of going back for either of us. McGurran, who accompanied him, tightened his grip around the neck of a bottle off Bush whisky and spat profusely on the ground. He wanted agro, and we could see he had gone too long without decking someone. Unbeknown, he had no time for Mockers either, or his bullshit.

Then Madman and McDuggan stood menacingly behind the Elf, livid at his lack of progress.

McGurran had taken them to task, took stock, and now set the goalpost for Mockers to do whatever he is supposed to.

"Glasgo it's time, ta join the Boys." Scowled McGurran swaggering to position himself, tossing the empty whisky bottle aside.

"I've had enough of waitin' Mockers."

The three climbed on aboard, menacingly close to me, too close, their positioning deliberate. I began praying for Angel and Georgy to show up, and tried to hold my nerve.

There I am and no back up plan. Not now Glasgo, not now, I said to myself, stand up to the bastards, stand up and show them, who's a hard man. Then, that voice again, his all-knowing gnawing infant voice, menacing me repeatedly.

"Now what did I want from you, is your membership to 'The Boy's,' you know heavy duty stuff.

"Least, that's what we were told." Mockers said.

Devoid of any positive vibes, as though whatever bonding had been there before had now gone.

The recruiter's mug creased into a devilish leer as one knows the outcome of his dastardly task before its execution.

Angel's note came to mind clarifying much in few words.

**“Do you know what I do for “The Boys?”  
The ring of men suddenly moved a tad forward, signaling intensions.**

**“The Boys of the Grenade?” He said.**

**“Support and comradely is wonderful and reassuring; making the mistake of procrastinating with us can be, well, fatal.”**

**I heard the chorus of swear come from the cab below and an unrecognizable voice thrust the heavy stick shift forward into first. The three men standing dropped hard to the bed, with McGurran crashing onto metal, cursing drunken vengeance to whoever give birth to the driver.**

**Truck fumes pervaded the whole area, as we then give chase to an RUC Land Rover. Feeling at home already, I felt the speed pick up after a dropped gear cranked her up, and shot her forward in order to get along the side the pig's armored vehicle.**

**The driver had shown a lot of bottle when he swerved the truck from the soccer field onto Davarr Avenue in hot pursuit. Angel from the cab began sniping into the open rear door of the RUC land rover. The Peelers, who overestimated the protection of their helmets, where having difficulty attempting to reach the armored doors to be closed. Angel hung from the open door ignoring the dangers, as alcohol is now rushing around in his blood**

**At the same time, I nervously popped my head up over the lorry's cab and then from my left observed an accomplice.**

**Carefully placing a well-contoured smooth ball bearing into the holster of his catapult, the red headed man with the limey accent enjoyed the return to some childhood mischief. Letting rip his ball bearings with superb marksmanship we then ducked, as a rubber bullet loosened off at us.**

**Swiftly he rose to take aim with the precision of a sniper, and in the same motion released his missile.**

**I sprang up to watched it zooming into the open armored vehicle. The Peelers were caught like rats in a trap, each time their land rover swerved, their door failing to stay closed.**

**“What a shot.” I exclaimed filled with excitement!**

**I felt, to be just there in that beaten old builders truck, when that night among mostly seasoned paramilitary, I became a man. Now I had to watch my back. McGurran had managed to join in the teeth lobbing at the perused RUC vehicle.**

**A large hand gripping my left shoulder like a iron vice, with one powerful pull, forced me to the cold steel flooring,**

**“Are you waiting for them to fill your face with rubber, whoever you are,?” he said with northern English accent.**

**My companion had reloaded his weapon with a certain professionalism that left me in awe.**

**“You’re fawkin’ killer with that thing” I said.**

**Again, I watched one of his bearings spin off and enter inside the pig mobile, until I heard someone scream out in pain.**

**“Couldn’t see the his face,” he said regretfully, “That doesn’t count.”**

**The RUC finally managed to slam their armored doors.**

**‘Who is driving this thing, kid?’ He asked curiously.**

**“Georgy” I said. Truth was I just assumed it was him, though I was wrong.**

**“Does he know how decisive this action is?”**

**English Terry, he called himself, tried to get a glimpse from the lorry’s mirror. He swung again onto Drumadoon Avenue and I lost my grip on the cab’s lip at the rear. I slid the length of the bed where I came too almost sliding through the flip. McGurran who I now found myself beside, never look so close and ready for something, as he had in that moment. Instead, he just spat, and seemed amused.**

**The tipper then rose, and not realizing why at first we were suddenly all piling up on each other, it soon became clear.**

**Then the tipper started to rise at pace.**

**Everyone screamed at the driver.**

**‘DRIVER! For Christ’s sake turn of the tipper you crazy idiot.’**

**Suddenly the tipper came to halt half way, and after a threatening jolt, it began to descend.**

**A minute later we were tailgating the RUC land rover onto the upper Newtownards road from Davarr like it was running on adrenalin and shear testosterone. The RUC Land Rover vanished down the main road to the village. We were jubilant.**

**After a moment, now horizontal, McGurran glanced at everyone around the truck’s bed. Mockers did not get the chance to press home his cross-examination, as Georgy saw his chance, climbed aboard and approaches Mockers. Georgy in flight from behind, and in fine Viking stealth, swiftly knocks Mockers down with a swift uppercut on the chin,**

**“That’s for recruitin’ on the sly.”**

**Now this isn’t the way it seemed; An opportunity for Georgy to gain some respect by acquiring some power over one of their inner core had opened up. No one had challenged him, not Madman, or anyone else. Georgy winked me for the feedback, whispered to keep it up, and then slipped me a tenner. Like I said, Georgy and me had an allegiance. It was now worth seeing it through.**

**The truck began to shoot forward again, and this time we were heading back to the Davarr Avenue barricade. On the approach, the tipper once again climbed and unceremoniously**

dumped us in a heap onto the morass of the soccer field. It is now clear, that a hooded operative had commandeered the old battered lorry, ensuring some results that they feared would be missed, with Georgy in the driver's seat.

It is the first time McGurran, Madman, Georgy, and then Angel ended up laughing in one spontaneous reaction to our sudden departure from the truck's tipper.

But not Mockers.

It is now when secrets came out, and for the first time I sensed a closer bond with the men. Now I was not so sure I wanted to escape from them after all.

This was a strange turn of events for me, as I gained a closer link that had been previously missing, with the likes of McGurran and Madman.

McGurran boxes on Georgy in jest, and they both wrestled each other to the dirt, until distracted by a command from the middle.

Two balaclavered individuals are swiftly on us, slapping McGurran about for losing control of his barricade. They are not happy with the way things are going.

Then they began smacking a few others before making their exit back to the operation zone. Madman for the first time, Angel noticed, had swallowed his pride and said nothing about the Georgy's maneuver. After all it is clear that Madman and Mockers were mates and Mockers is still sore about the fracas on the truck. But he is, according to Angel, now more curious about Georgy's intentions and his own position within the group.

McGurran back in charge, now a liability, lowly shot a volume of inflammatory words at the middle zone.

At first, I thought there was no God, and then there is salvation. I lamented the loss of Mockers former spirit like the loss of a gift from the poison chalice. I'll tell ya.

Then there is a God, and he seems to be everywhere. Okay, maybe escape will have to wait a little longer, as a bonding had made things more comfortable, since we all shared in an experience together. Angel had a finger on Madman's pulse more than even McGurran.

So God does work in the weird ways after all.

Amid the smoke from the burning tires and launching rubber bullets, I found myself in need of salvation again.

Mockers jumped up and made a move toward Georgy, who is cheated from a double whammy.

McGurran leapt at Mockers, practically lifting him by the scruff of the neck and threw him hard into the morass of muddy earth jamming him under his boot with a steely glare.

***“OKAY! SHUT THE FAWK UP EVERYONE!”***

McGurran, didn't hear the command, Madman held him back from burying him under his Doc Marten.

Angel, now waffling to some of the newbies who just arrived, received a kick to his rump by the usually quiet McDuggan, who just arrived from the zone of operation mysteriously hooded.

Angel looked aggrieved, scratching his butt to relieve the pain not knowing how to react. McDuggan eyed him out.

“You too Angel, OK! said McDuggan.



Georgy rounded his lips and Shoo shooed everyone, expelling hard, like we had become an endangered species

“Do you hear that?”

Silence descended the riot zone.

The RUC line starting to move rapidly began extinguishing all the fires around their line. As though dormant for centuries, their motors then began coughing and spluttering to life, and the first sign off an end to the riot became apparent. It seemed at first, the limeys had failed to take the bait.

“What is happening, is now anyone’s guess,” Jacko uttered, studying the RUC line as though he had some financial investment in it.

*“It’s not my fault the fawkin’ RUC scumbags are leaving without engagement.”*

Said a disgruntled McGurran, confirming it was obvious that our leaders were not happy with the lack of RUC encounter, and that something is suspicious.

“Three Pig Jeeps leavin’, McDuggan,” recorded Jacko, “and no sign of the limeys yet. Oh, there’s that bastard McKee without his helmet on. If I had one of those rubber guns now?”

“How about just a rubber, will that work instead?” Angel said sarcastically.

Jacko, too involved in the RUC movement, ignored the comment.

“Wait, do I see that other bastard Bingham? I do believe that is!”

“What’s he doing up here?”

He’s usually up the falls with Graham!” said Madman scornfully.

Angel quietly persisted waffling.

“There is another fawkin’ reason we chose the streets, Glasgo?

“You see, it made escape through our supporter’s homes and backstreets easier, with their cooperation.”

“Only those who knew their neighborhoods could do that.” Madman said to me.

The hooded man climbed over part off the barricade to address us.

“Take note of the time, Angel!” McDuggan ordered uncloaking himself as he took over from Madman.

“It is exactly 11.25 p.m.”

“What’s happenin’ , Jacko?”

“Don’t know yet, McDuggan!”

“Mockers get something on that cut, better still, fall back with the middle.”

Mockers, now a shadow of his former self, left obediently with his pride dragging behind like a limp tail.

“What time is it now, Angel?”

“11.26 p.m.”

Heavy from lobbing Molotov’s, and hanging about their waists, limbs soon where too exhausted to move any more. Three remaining newbies rubbing their eyes from fatigue, found it difficult to exert themselves any further. McDuggan shooting a frantic glance at McGurran dismissed them before he came too.

“Go on; get outta here before he comes too,” said Madman

After the flight of many newbie pussies, all-fell quiet on the northern front once again, whilst McGurran again cognizant minutes later, ran his hands over his head at first to see if he still had one. His eye seized on McDuggan and before his leadership had a chance; found too much pain pounding at the back of his head. Trying to hear what the middle might convey, McGurran looked at Madman who caught it, and looked the other way.

An obdurate voice barked from McDuggan. McDuggan is now UDA and not Tartan no more. It all happened that quickly, on the battlefield. That for McGurran was a moment to reflect on, before he did or said anything stupid.

“RIGHT everyone, back to the cause!

Eh McGurran?”

Chapter [11] Village of silence

The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster

11.30. p.m.

At the Dundonald village RUC barracks, they knew all too well how these things would pan out. For some unlike these days, usually remembering how they just went at it; wham bam and a thank you Mam, done deal, good job boys that will teach them pope-loving bastards. Unlike the days of the largely Protestant B specials then, they now had to adjust to the conduct of the modern protestant RUC discipline today, or fade away into retirement. Some of these former B special men, like McGovern, embraced the changes and some not.

Whatever it had become, it never expected to attract many Catholics or conflict with its own people, mainly from the Presbyterian Protestants culture.

Protocol had a Major part and the likes of McGovern where inherent to that policy and implementation. His biggest fear, that the Brass would have difficulty letting him go if the current disquiet continued, which could be a real possibility. ‘Sometimes it paid to be a bad boy,’ McGovern often said to his peers at the annual R.U.C. Ball.

McGovern sat behind a worn oak table with a full fireplace glowing behind him. Relaxing, he turned his large frame on the wooden chair towards the raging blaze. He sat back relieving the imminent aches and pains from the day’s excursions.

He is a man of six feet and five inches tall. Big for his time and even at his age he is still a man of impressive stature. The wooden floorboards creaked and squeaked under his wooden chair, as he inclined it against the oak table.

Propping his chair against the table he found the niche and breathed a sigh. Glancing at the standard issue wall clock above all the matriarchs, he took a note of the time, ‘11-35 p.m.’

He took out from his breast pocket a mahogany pipe that came with the scent of a lifetime’s smoking. He remembered with reflection, it as a present from his brother each time he handled it.

Rewarded for joining the war, he would often reflect on it with recent disdain. That came with decoration for going above and beyond. He suffered wounds, not from the enemy, but from screwed up emotions he had been harboring for a very long time. Guilt and old age were his enemy’s to-day and they were winning the battle he was now fighting. Other than that, he managed to get through the war with only a lodged bullet some shell shock and bad hearing in the left ear. He had soon learnt when to take risks and when not, when to hold your tongue and when to play the war game. If learning one thing early in life, McGovern knew as long as you did what you were expected to do and then a tad some, the brass could not only do anything about it, but they will probably line you up for promotion. It was different in the b- specials. There you had it made, if you were for the preservation of Ulster, and ‘No Surrender mindset’, and a good protestant name to boot. Although Vincent McGovern could go either way. To him, service was always a no brainer; he told his men both catholic and protestant. ‘Side with whoever feeds you and your children’. To others it had not always been that easy to encapsulate. For them, always some principle or loyalty got in the way. Fifty some years after the war, his only aim now is to make it through with as many of his men as possible, without getting embroiled in a full-scale civil war. The need to appease those feelings of remorse, the closer his own tomb loomed. Time to make a pay-back of some kind in Vincent McGovern’s remaining years, increasingly dominated his thoughts. Nineteen seventy-three and civil war became more of a likelihood. He knew also that he needed to get out of the RUC before the brass would change their minds again. Otherwise the anonymity he worked towards, would be in vain. Men of his age usually retired way back there somewhere. However, not all men had his credentials, and especially now more than ever his understanding of enemy thinking. ‘Psychology of the Foe’ had been a part of the cadet induction for about three years and although generic supposedly, it needed his services from time to time.

He reminded himself of its catastrophic consequences back in the day of the official uprising in the nineteen twenties, when only one faction of the Irish republican army took up arms. Today, it is not so uncomplicated, nor straightforward. Then, maintenance of the family tradition was all that mattered. Father had always drummed it into him 'Brass first' 'Men Second.' at least until you had friends in both camps. Later in life, that did not help him come to terms with the men he lost under his command. He served with the Ulster Volunteer Force, which was initially an expeditionary force made up of men chomping for action. Managing to survive the trenches on Flanders and the Somme with cunning and bold timing, he received a sniper's bullet in the right thigh. Other minor side effects developed later in life.

He considered himself lucky, as Kelly his best pal took a hit between the butt-flaps, which made him less inclined to fart or sit on hard surfaces. He often thought about Kelly since the war, and whether if he managed to survive it or not. The last time he heard anything on him was when he became a captive, attempting a raid behind enemy lines on an armaments dump. He liked Kelly, except his politics, and where republicans fighting on the side of the British, he drew a blank. Nevertheless, Kelly was different, almost as deep as history itself, and not only in the way he had fought his battles.

Today, on a cold sunny November morning, McGovern sat in that same cosy warm office at the village barracks, without the need to leave it, and was thankful. Duties kept him indoors mostly and that afforded him more anonymity and less heat from the villagers that he needed more and more. As for anonymity, he was going to need it, as a Shepherd needed a thicket to kill the wolf. Leaves started gathering at the doorway, as his early rookies poured through for their orders from him.

Wood for the blazing fire behind, endless, like the mugs of Punjana tea his subordinates provided each time they began their shifts.

Late and after a relatively uneventful day, he then from the desk drawer produced a silver cube packed with Gallagher's tobacco. It was his fix and only vice apart from the occasional drop of McKibbins. Packing his pipe with his left hand, he simultaneously reached for the official black Phone as it jingled jangled of the hook at 11.45 p.m. Smiling, he betted who it would be at such a late hour, and instantly felt the love stirring the few remaining sensations in his tired body.

With his left hand, he raised the phone crossing his chest to his right undamaged ear, where he wedged it between his shoulder and cheek and continued pipe packing.

"Almost morning Mrs. McNamara," he said as he inhaled heavily from his pipe attempting to light it. Then with all the reprieving smoke his pipe could muster, he sucked at it desperately. She did not mind the pipe or the sound of sucking pipe. Indeed, she got off on it, and it was never offensive of him to smoke it around her either. He knew from experience why things would happen during the witching hour and months. Mrs. McNamara was accustomed to the sergeant guessing it would be her. In fact, she got off on that as well.

"Aren't you familiar to the many ghosts of this village yet?"

**“Only one and she never seem to sleep.”**

**“Sergeant, you are aware of the stench wafting down from the estate?”**

**McGovern realized making a lame complaint down the phone was her secret permission to engage in discussion. He cleared his throat before interjection.**

**“Moreover, why most of the battles and riots were in winter, Mrs. Mc Namara, and in the Belfast projects, not the cosy enclaves of suburbia like ours.”**

**Always addressing her 'Mrs.' at the beginning of their chitchat, the rest he played by ear.**

**“Unlike trench warfare, the paramilitaries would exploit early darkness and streetlight shut down replaced with fire. You see, recognition by helicopter surveillance would then be zero.**

**That is where the fumes are likely coming from.”**

**For a moment neither spoke.**

**“In addition, Mrs. McNamara, escape through your house is an effective option they would exploit, given the chance, etcetera, etcetera.”**

**The picture suddenly started to form an unattractive thought in her head; the sergeant heard the absent voice with the relish of another suck from his pipe. She heard it and he knew she heard it.**

**“Mrs. McNamara, if there is a concern about the stink coming from the estate, well let me see what I can do about that!”**

**Mary McNamara was used to his lines and only the love of his northern accented voice allowed such long-winded rants.**

**Most of it nerves, and she got ok with it too.**

**‘Ok Sergeant McGovern, you can now drop the officious nonsense he said to himself.’**

**“Are you not lucky that you live in the village?” He said with a hint of sarcasm.**

**It was not the first time the sergeant had explained this before to her. He never really understood why, and she always forgave him for providing more information than she cared to hear. This was the ritual they both had to pursue to get anywhere in their growing relationship. Moreover, they both knew it, and both he and she were comfortable with the approach.**

**“Especially, a stranger entering someone's house in order to benefit from a quick exit from our men,” he continued.**

**“Aren’t you lucky that you are secure down here in Cherryhill and myself to watch over you, Mary?”**

**“You haven’t used my name for such a while, Vincent?”**

**“Well, I never had an occasion to use it probably, Mary,  
You do not object I hope?”**

**“As a matter of fact,” she said, teasingly holding her breath.  
“ I do not.”**

**‘Ah you make my heart miss a beat, with your way, Mary, he thought.’**

**She thought the same, but kept her own council on such things.**

**Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1975 6.15 a.m.**

**Palace Barracks. Holywood. Co. Down; Key Army operations center for east Belfast.**

**Rain pelted the columns of green army vehicles that came and went from the manned barrier. At times, it sounded like bullets and some of the rookies within were the butt of banter, from their seasoned colleagues.**

**Unrelenting thunder overhead increased and decreased its torrents with fury. The gunshots from the twenty-four seven shooting range at the rear, paled in comparison. The Palace housed around 3000, including the newly formed UDR members. The Ulster Defense Regiment was another fancy name for another branch of the British army. It consisted of local men and women, with local knowledge invaluable to the security forces. However, the number at the Palace would greatly increase as civil war loomed. From here, they trained, accommodated, and interrogated suspects from both factions. Indeed, it is more of a packaged fortification than a regular depot. Nevertheless, it still had its weaknesses, the Provos knew that, and it laid in the surrounding craigantlet hills.**

**It was, at the height of the troubles, akin to that of spaghetti junction. The next set of vehicles that approached the barrier is a fleet from the newly arrived 14th Paratroop Regiment.**

**The sentry, wearing an army Mack hastily stepped out of the outpost into the heavy downpour, holding in his left hand an entry log. He planed along the barrier with his right hand, scooping up the rain as he did so. He seemed unaware of the redcaps studying him through their bulletproofed portals, from a line of heavy-duty Saracens. The sergeant, a mean spirited man, observing him, lowered his window when the sentry reached him, rattled of his rank, outfit Id, and the purpose of their assignment.**

**“You don’t come to Ireland for the sun, sonny, do you?”**

**“No Sir, ya don’t, and if you don’t mind me sayin’, you are not in Ireland, if you’ll listen to some of the locals.”**

**“Ah, I hear a tip do I not?”**

Major Braithwaite their commanding officer is a product of the occupying mentality that came with empire building. He thought big from an early age and that dictated his actions from there on, throughout his adult life. He saw his role as one where he would bring order no matter where, and then followed by subjugation. Assigned to the Cyprus crisis, under his command many of the local gripes concerning his tactics never got very far. In the 14th paratroop regiment, it is thought the further from home, the further you were from the rules.

However, he is also aware that Ulster is part of the home turf, and eager not to make stupid mistakes were now increasingly uppermost in his mind. In addition, he would not find it easier to evade the survey of others or their rules. In short, he now had to behave himself, like a good little boy. Nevertheless, his men sometimes had different ideas about the rules. For some of them there were none. Most formed the notion all Irishmen were enemies because they were all Irish in the current state of things. In addition, all things Irish in their working class beliefs system, were IRA men and therefore to be repelled. They did not give a rat's ass, what, how, or where allegiances lay, and Orangemen, well, who the hell are they?

Braithwaite and his sergeant, already briefed on the rioting, were intent in bringing swift pre-emptive strikes where needed.

Alarmed colleagues at Army Holywood, disturbed by the inaction of the RUC at Dundonald, thought their general Custer would change their worrying development.

Moreover, they saw fit to confront McGovern of his seemingly reluctance to call in the army for support, and therefore arranged a meeting.

Braithwaite ordered the pilot to circle around the Craigantlet hills and swoop into valleys, which led into hidden glens below. He was having a bit of fun, and had to savor the freshness of vegetation all around that Cyrus lacked.

Soon he was in the picture from the reconnaissance pilot on their approach to yesterday's conflict zone. He was surprised at first how low the pilot could go, which made the flight more exhilarating.

In addition, it was a rare let up from the usual tedium of the job and therefore, he let it slide without self protest.

He asked the pilot the usual dumb questions, and from time to time, the Major soon developed a sense of stupidity that came with army beginnings.

This was more acute by the patient compliance of the pilot, who got off on patronizing the brass without the guilt.

“Are we not a target from snipers and RPG's from below?” The Major asked.

Again, the pilot reminded the Major that they were essentially in friendly territory, confusing as it was.

Equally, it would be unlikely the loyalist had such weapons at this stage in the game. Unlike the Provo's.

**“How do we know we are in ‘Friendly Loyalist’ Territory?” He asked suppressing a sarcastic tone. Many of the answers were equally embarrassing for him, as they were explained again. The pilot tried tactfully pointing out the presence of the union jacks or its colors, usually adorning the walls of tenement buildings. At this stage, detailed and more acceptable murals were still in their infancy. Colors were all that mattered.**

**“Just look for the colors Major; they paint them over their homes. Red white and blue mean our friends, green white gold mean ‘not friends’ were told, although I have heard the gold is supposed to be orange.”**

**“Clear as muck, isn’t it?”**

**The Major did not see colors. He was not going to attach to much significance to them either, least not at this stage.**

**The pilot informed the Major how cautious they would have to be in republican strongholds, and again how to recognize their neighborhoods around Belfast. Depending on a pilot to bring him up to speed, is something the Major rarely did. The Pilot knew enough about inductions for newcomers like the Major, and he also knew the Major was one of those unorthodox sort, who preferred to tackle the issues his own way.**

**‘Who was the local sheriff?’**

**‘What was the strength of the local RUC division at the village that he found difficult to pronounce?’**

**‘The strength of the local cowboys and whether they were friendly or hostile?’**

**‘Who is who and where are they in the structure of rank at the Palace?’**

**Finally, ‘was not Saint Paddy really an Orangeman trying to convert the Catholics?’**

**It was clear to the Pilot, that this was the Major’s first tour of duty to the province from some of his inane questions.**

**Not only the inane questions, but also that he was unable to answer most of them, especially those of a specialist nature.**

**The pilot found himself almost breaking into laughter and sympathizing with the Major.**

**He brought the man up to power on the local ‘friendly’ factions such as the U.V.F. - U.D.A. and the youth Tartan clans. He also explained where their loyalties were, and that it could change on the whim of some historical hang-up, or some link with the usual problems of inbreeding. The Major tactfully asked him to confine his personal remarks to the mess room. The Major thought at first that the UDA were Catholic and therefore the enemy, whilst some he was unsure whose side they were on.**

**However the pilot cut him slack, realizing that the Major is only keen to get to grips with the situation, and had not yet even reported to the Palace.**

**Otherwise, they would have insisted on a speedy induction on the subject.**



After 10 minutes, cutting away from the hills at the rear of the estate, the small Westland scout rounded in and followed through onto the upper Newtownards road.

“If you don’t mind, Sir?”

“No, by all means,” The Major said, uncertain what his pilot had in mind.

The pilot checked the Major’s strapping and then his own. Then he descended another 100 feet bringing them closer to the rooftops at Brookland's redbrick estate.

The Major enjoyed the drop jolt and nervously forced a smile for his comrade. Then he fumbled over a pocket map that he retrieved from one of his many pockets. Seconds later the Westi flew over and into the largely bright colored brickwork of Ballybeen, where they skirted its rooftops for a moment.

Below the first barricade, an image of a Skeleton with the scythe and the words,

**‘Death to all RUC and BRITS’** whitened on the road.

At 6.30 a.m., the barricade is unmanned and Braithwaite enjoyed some credit, from his predication. Before them, lay the entrances to the estate at Davarr Avenue and Brooklands. In addition, evidence of the previous nights disturbance. Covering the ground were the many burnt tar patches and jagged glass coupled with other projectile junk.

The Pilot sensing it a relevant scene then stretched out and flicked back a camera button cover on the end of a metal extension lead. A cubic monitor screen then lit up, simulating the same scene.

The helicopter's heavy-duty camera began clicking automatically, not unlike a cannon firing, and shot each scene with precision. Braithwaite took over after a beckon from the pilot. When happy with the target objects on the screen, he pressed on the red button that turned green, with directions from his sidekick.

Completed, he sat back impressed with his own achievement. Then the scout’s turbines suddenly soaring up at 685 shp bulleted the Westi upwards, then down with the ease that the Major found not only a relief, exciting too. Fully realizing the safety reason why the pilot had performed the maneuver, the Major paid him no concern. However, he found the experience hard to conceal and struggled to remain business like, as the Westi lynx flew around 300 mph.

Ball-bearings pinged of the chopper from a house somewhere below and dogs soon showed up to let them have a piece of their mind The relieved pilot and Major were soon swooping up and away like an overjoyed swallow.

Then the pilot demanding the Major to hold on, indicating to him a forward motion, thrust the throttle stick forward.

Screeching to a crescendo above the mechanized sounds, the turbo charger kicked in again boosting speed like a bolt out of a crossbow. Then it cut out, as quickly as it leveled out at around 180 naught losing speed, and then more, then slower, still slower, almost stopping, then stationary. It hovered high up above the puffy clouds where the pilot began waiting for his next task, holding the chopper there.

Relieved, Braithwaite collecting his breath and then his focus, excitedly loosened his collar.

“Let us look down Drumadoon drive into the estate?” he said, pointing westward from his map.

Stay at this height if you don’t mind corporal?”

Then they buzzed off in the direction of Drumadoon drive at a higher altitude too plot the location and pattern of barricades below. He also noted the side alleyways from Inchmarnock drive all the way down to Dalkeith gardens taking in Durnock Park and Durness walk. It would hover halting here and there, mostly on an opportunistic desire from the Major to check on something.

Once uncovered, it would bumble over to another specimen for examination, forgetting about the height they dropped. The Major gradually grew impervious to the beauty of the surrounding countryside beyond, as he assessed from his monitor what he would be up against. Nevertheless, once beauty of a different sort entered his life. Secretly he knew beauty from the get go and all its nobility, because his eyes informed him. In addition, none more rewarding when he decided tracking down the Cypriot butterfly that led him through the walled alleyways and secret tunnels, to land on the home of peasants.

Relaxed eyes came when he languished at a noble picture; but today, sixteen months later, it is when his wife went walking round their home naked, or when she wore that initial favorite dress and once again, becoming the butterfly that leads him astray. If the muscles in his eyes had more work to do when captivated, then he knew he had to stop and take a closer look. It happened to him when he met his Cypriot wife.

He had stopped for a closer look, and she teased him, not too much, but just enough to secure a sexual interest. He had seen her in the main port city of Iaya Napa and after a dignified pursuit, managed to study her immediate detail in more relaxed mode. He even produced a magnifying glass to study her shoulders, and that was the moment she laughed and had been snared, and they both knew it.

Over dinner, he studied her narrow forehead with its absence of frown lines, and then the color of the brown in her eyes. The thick dark lashes that cast a shadow below them. Then next, the dark fragranced strands of wavy scented hair that wandered down the sides of her face, curling at the end. Never had he seen such a specimen, so removed from the humdrum of Caucasian females around the Barracks. Smitten by the prominence of her well-formed hourglass curves, he opted for her like a well sought after piece of pottery. Satisfied with his investment, he then set about the final capture, as though he was about to perform some type of covert operation.

Little did he know, she already had the hots for him and a master plan. Consequently, he failed miserably with the woman who soon reduced him to an emotional wretch.

Moreover, since she had made improvements in her English, she could not conceal her thoughts anymore. He grew to know and love her more. In addition, that made his social life a lot easier with the intros and gatherings of gossipers, snobs, flirts, and old fuck-buddies. With a man like the Major, she made appeasement on his ego easier. Moreover, life in the army whole lot better. An old colleague informed of marriage, ‘to practice her English, is his progress as much as hers.’ He was right. Everything got better.

She could not resist the intrigue of curly blond hair, blue eyes, and his Germanic looks. However, without his robust energy his looks alone would not have prevailed on her. She needed it all.

Sooner than preferably later for her parents, she came on with surprisingly low Greek resistance. Moreover, three months later, she accepted his proposal of devoted love according to Greek protocol. Success and he had finally won his reward. In addition, they both fell madly in love even more.

In Cypress, and the surrounding desert, his eyes worked hard constantly, and the muscles were always tired and trying to keep up.

Major Braithwaite would be quite happy if the pilot played 'The Dance of the Bumblebee' as a reward to his eyes and ears.

At the job ahead of him, what are a few miserly moments to come to terms with the dichotomy of mixed emotions since his arrival? Some appealing to the soldier in him, and others to another corner of his soul, he had forgotten about. He had not liked the Irish, especially since they blew up and shot close friends. That is where he would have trouble. Music and lovemaking was his remedy to those feelings he kept way down inside.

Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> 7.10 a.m.

Meanwhile back at the Holywood barrier, the detained staff sergeant grew impatient as he and his men were tired, ornery, and hungry.

Now holding down his frustration with all the discipline he could muster, cursing the Major's impetuosity with seething working class distinction, he lit the tenth Benson and Hedges to calm himself.

The sentry needing the sergeant's assistance, on his commanding officer's profile, withdrew with scant information.

Confirmation on whom and which Major he is, would be sufficient for now. Where, when, what will he arrive in, later?

Pressing now is question number one. Where was their regiment's commander?

Question number two, whom would he be with?

After all, this is dumb-fawk Mick Ireland and not quite like home England, thought his men. There are stories of people in uniform who derived dirty looks from the locals for such a sin.

At 7.33 a.m., the westy scout landed in the hinter ground of the Palace barracks. The Major gratefully shaking hands with his pilot sprang down and hurriedly craned forward to get with the matter in hand.

To get with the matter and a whole lot of operation, needed a miracle and the autonomy that he had been promised.

The induction had to be over and done by 8.15 a.m. and then he would quickly freshen up and breakfast before his first briefing.

At 8.45 a.m. outside the operation's room sat a summoned McGovern and a troubled man. Outside, the humdrum of passing military life had now awakened and jostled en-route in convoy columns. The heavy mechanized din of shouting and engines turning over while the patrols formed, faced the growing uncertainty of another Irish civil war. By comparison,

inside where McGovern sat, tranquility and silence. In the background, Marla played quietly that it seemed, as if the man in the senior RUC uniform sat paradoxically in outer space. Moreover, music thought the veteran, suddenly hard to conceive in such a paradoxically opposing sound, typical with the usual violence of adagio, in his tenth, his most supreme, could then be so deceitfully kind to him at the same time.

Conditions perfect for thought and reflection, played its part in a confused head. The reassurance that his subordinate verified of Mrs. Mc Namara's appearance, still had a ring of inconsistency about it. In addition, each time he thought negatively or positively of her, his heart sank further into unfathomable blues.

She usually went to bed after their late flirt chat. But they had none this time. McGovern deduced, even if they had, she would still be in bed an hour before Argyle would see her. In addition, he could not remember seeing her wear dark clothing during the day or evening. Normally she wore brighter eye catching and sophisticated clothing for a woman of her age. Although he had not quite made it to her bedroom, he was prepared to bet on that arrangement as well.

However, that was not quite relevant and he caught himself with a tad surprise. Moreover, when he enquired with his young subordinate, Argyle said that the kitchen light was on after bedtime. Also out of character for the woman, he had known for the last two years. Unless she had company.

Then something about the blood on the sidewalk of the hill deepened that furrowed brow others sometimes mistook for a battle scar. That same furrow that began back in the trenches. Forming that morning, when an empty German trench that stank of death, which he will never forget. When he knew that innocuous as it might appear, danger lurked closer than ever from that same trench. However, not from the Hun.

Argyle had not been thinking straight that day. Then it was late and he did have a troubled day, not to mention probably weakened from fatigue. He thought it his own blood or someone else's connected to the Tartan disturbance. Again, Argyle made a worrying assumption for a police constable, which McGovern would have to check.

Growing uneasy and profusely sweating around his neck, precipitating him deeper into his troubled mind, the veteran permutated this for that, and verse visa, but always came back to the original annoying thought.

That the one thing he knew about this recent unfolding story: That these two events were too coincidental to be isolated. To relative with the developments that now battled away in his mind.

For it never ceased to impress him, that the woman he fell in love with, knew more about guns that he could not now overlook as incidental.

All came back to the same source and suspicion digging deeper into a head full of jigsaw. Emotionally, a very complicated jigsaw, although psychologically, patently simple.

His mind lucid with the simplicity of the jigsaw that occupied it, now ignited. Could it possibly be, that a daughter of an Antrim farmer, know so much about German guns. Although she had not claimed to know, somehow he just knew she did. He knew because of the way she handled his old luger one evening when she had not seen him, observing her

beauty at fifty four years and then some. The speed she unloaded the stock and studied it before hastily replacing it. Knowing how to unlock the safely catch let alone where it was housed, without asking. Where to drop the clip, carefully avoiding mentioning other aspects, such as the sight when she held to the bedroom mirror while he was shaving. She even seemed to check the striker for wear. On the other hand, maybe it is the paranoia creeping in with old age.

Veteran McGovern attempted to pigeonhole it, committing it to further examination later with his younger colleague.

A second into his decision, and the burden of suspicion grew too much. For the first time, since Michel de Larva, he had it bad. Standing up, his worse fears beginning that paralyzing effect under that category of emotions dare he say it? He began grappling for his PA on his belt, stopped to better breathe, and took stock of sanity.

Composing himself, he summoned; *“Officer Argyle, respond immediately?”*

In a blink of an eyelid, the black RC crackled a response.

Scratch “Yes, Sir!” scratch.

“Two things?”

I want you to check with Mrs. Mc McNamara A.S.A.P. this time, and Constable, knock down her damn door if you have to, and enter the building.”

“Yes, Sir, may I ask what’s up?”

“That blood, you saw on the hill.

I am willing to bet it is not yours or anyone else’s.”

“And the next, Sir?” Argyle asked, this time allowing reasoning to pass.

“Oh, double up Monty at the church with that new fella, Johnson,

Oh! and make sure they are both armed.”

“I have already done that, and it’s JohnSTON Sir!”

*“CONSTABLE, eh!”*

The radio communicator still in Argyle’s hand remained silent for a few seconds, while the Ballybegs overtones worked on Argyles inner ear.

‘Thank you for that, Sir, he said to himself.’

“*Okay?*” concluded McGovern, still holding the radio com to his right ear, not hearing the door from behind open.

Then in his very tired confused head, he tried pigeonholing it, but it refused. Being all concerns equal and all other possibilities eliminated from the armaments discovery to her absence, his suspicion cruelly deduced entanglement to the heart. The ‘what if’s’ and ‘can’t be’s’ began to slide away quickly. McGovern fought the thought and then the obsession,

and then the loathing himself for even going there. Nevertheless, it was always the same when he knew, that he knew, that he would probably be right. The seed of irk had now budded, and it grew rapidly within him.

Cops were cops for reasons associated with hunches he reminded himself, and there is no room to discriminate any objective that came from suspicion, meaning anyone or anything. For McGovern it now became impossible. A need to know, even though it might lead him to where he really did not want to go. It could not have come at the worst time. If only this once he said to himself, just this once, his everything could refused to follow the years of being correct or fulfilling final obligations. His whole life accumulating to the hitherto crossroads and the next two weeks, needed to play out with the woman who had ownership of him. Even now on his well earned home run, he is maybe about to be cheated out of that. The risk to his risqué plans, he would let be and bite the bullet for her freedom. He would trade one for the other and either way, his hunch would at least be finally realized. But, would it be worth it all said and done now? Was there something about Mary that only Mary could know, that could change everything.

The very expensive arms delivery could have come from a loyalist's faction he supposed. And it could have come from the Provo's he supposed. Alternatively, what other sources is there left as he thought outside the box, desperate for an atom of plausibility.

How could intrinsically opposed forces draw up such an allegiance, no longer how he would or should look at his conundrum? Alternatively, could it simply have come from an independent source closer than he was prepared to acknowledge.

A source that maybe had both factions in their bag.

After all, independent sources were historically quite common, though not heard of these days. Maybe someone closer to him, so close that they seemed too distant to be considered psychologically involved with him.

Could it be also, that somewhere in his soul he is afraid. Afraid of what he might discover that prevented him previously from going there. There was already enough room in his soul for such fears.

Hearing a voice, McGovern returned the silent walkie-talkie to its holster still being tugged by preoccupations.

At the top of his itinerary, the impending meeting with Braithwaite coupled with his other nightmares. Camouflaged red-capped soldiers clubbing you with their truncheons and rifle butting in the present conditions can be a scary prospect. In addition, one that he McGovern could ill afford if any of the Tartan youth to be seriously injured. Not that he give a horse's ass about a bunch of jackass's. More important is from whom they sprung and many he considered should not have joined the human race.

Many of the Tartan had fathers in the paramilitaries such as the imminent UDA. Factoring in that they are able to escape the main assault, crucial, to the long-term positive and one that would have permanent outcome. Importantly trust that they had previously lost with the orange community, at the very least some could be now regained. The Tartan clan's escape from the disturbances would send a signal. And others would follow.

Therefore, concentration would be on the manipulative men of the paramilitaries. In short, the bigger fish on the menu, and then a derisory prison sentence of a couple of months.

He considered the Tartan stupid young men who just wanted a bit of excitement. In short, bottom feeders who were not on the menu.

Much as he tried, McGovern manifested a very ugly sense of dread that would haunt him until satisfaction. Only when Mary Mc Namara would eventually get to register Okay status, is now all that he wanted back is his life, one way or another.

At 8.30 p.m. his thoughts were disturbed again, when the door to the operations room, opened as though an exit is not quite certain to proceed.

McGovern caught the glimpse of a man slipping away from the crack in a large door to his right.

Ten minutes earlier, Braithwaite's one more run through, had touched on the subject of the main players for the tenth time.

In addition, he had asked many informed sensible questions already, and demonstrated better knowledge than some of the others there three hours before. He had stepped up his game-plan, and no detail had escaped his meticulous focus. He had already found his ether, and wasn't going to let go.

A tall Braithwaite emerging with his old sidekick staff sergeant, strode across the main reception extending a presumptuous hand. Sergeant McGovern finally resigned himself to army assistance, be it all unwillingly. He would allow himself to affirm Braithwaite's pointed questioning. However, he too would need to find favor immediately, as the Major swooped toward him from the large operations room. First stop and Braithwaite took in the stature of the man with a walking stick. The dossier in his hand describing a crippled man with a glowing track record. Observing the tall blond hair man precipitously craning towards him extending his hand, McGovern stood up attentively.

Braithwaite then led the way to the operations room, his sidekick following at a respectful distance, behind.

They entered the operations room engaging each other in cordial exchanges. The sidekick attended to the large mahogany door until it closed behind, sending a slight draught across the polished tongue and groove boards.

A door from one of the adjoining two rooms silently changed its status from ajar, to a quiet close.

Remembering that first riot, we managed to have gotten lucky that night I learnt later. However, the night after, well it turned out that there was only one teenager arrested by the army over that weekend. Guess who that was.

Then I found out that Georgy, also in cuffs would be joining me. Well he did, but they let him go.

And me, I was only concerned about how my Da would see things.

Old man McGovern, well he must have been able to rest easy with that percentage. Nevertheless, I must confess that I never thought as a villager's son, I would be cuffed and beaten whilst on his shift.

But then, he is the shift, every day of it.

**‘So be damn if you do and be damned if you don’t.’ McGovern didn’t need too tease when he saw me. The look on his face was enough, referring to the stupidity of hanging with the Paramilitary types didn’t need repeated. I cursed the old weasel for a week or two after that until I realized he did me a favor. Ya see, ya have had to get inside the head of the old weasel to see where he is going, and that is the hard part.**

**Ballybeen council estate was constructed around the mid nineteen sixties. At one time became the second largest housing estate in the UK. It was also subordinate to Rathcoole estate to the northeast of Belfast, constructed at the same time, equally loyalist.**

**Although it never possessed the spirit of the impassionate loyalists of Ballybeen, is owing to its belligerent characters.**

**Over on the other side of the green pastures for many villagers, the tranquility of their village finally collapsed that weekend of violence to the ugly city of Belfast. This was a reference to a Belfast housing estate’s presence. Because of them, the village had lost its status. Indeed the new transplants from the capital, referred to as ‘the ones up there’ became the crux of the villager’s secret derision.**

**It was located to the south of the ancient Norman village of Dundonald. The main road of Upper Newtownards road, which meandered along the old main Belfast road, accessed it from the north passage. It had many access points from around its borders.**

**So many where there, that not everyone living there knew them all.**

**The council estate occupied an area of 4 square miles.**

**The hills that formed the Castlereagh and Craigantlet greenbelts surrounded it. For many of the local villagers it was a curse.**

**The city planners, who located it in such an incongruous region, must have been on the drink when they drew up the plans, they often said.**

**‘Those were the ones, who put an end to the village,’ some claimed.**

**It is with similar cock-ups elsewhere, that Ulster council planners have come to be known. The new Belfast inhabitants were different to the extent; most of the village kids spoke hardly a cuss word until their arrival.**

**In addition, with it came a completely new dictionary of cuss words heard through the airways, passing villagers on the street nonchalantly, open windows, even from the more police recruits, whom seemingly were unaware of their new vocabulary. Moreover, for some others in the village, the city sub-culture being the real and a hidden curse so deceitfully hatched by the planners on the villagers. It has been thought that villagers were resented by city planners because of their exclusion mindset.**

**Far removed from the passive genteel characteristics of the local villagers, the new inhabitants were not exactly of the same spots. Same religion maybe, Protestant culture, yes, but not the same spots. Certainly not. Even their boys fought with the dirtiest tactics that the village boys found unmanly. They used their feet, while the local kids where taught to use their fists. They spat a lot, they smoked too, and worst of all they drank alcohol like sailors. So in came a more city aggressive culture and with it, all their religious bitterness**



and other hang-ups. The death of an Irish village began some would say, when they built the projects at Dundonald.

Often the subject of many villagers, who would often argue the estate's illegal incursion inside the greenbelt. But the charge diminished with the passage of time. Though not the derisory pedigree labeled by some villagers on the transplants from Belfast. In the clandestine gossip of village life, the new transplants rarely heard these secrets or the curses that most took to their graves.

Mind you with some validity, others were to learn later.

The estate had been built on part of an old chieftain; some say a Norman prince or Viking invader who usurped the land of an Irish chief and his clan.

He swiftly massacred the complete resident Celtic clan and spared their retinue for himself. The old moat, some say, that occupies the high ground to the northern entrance of the village, is their resting place. Nevertheless, according to old man Mckitrick, a village elder, the rest is the village, built on the actual fiefdom of the original Celtic clan.

The name of the fiefdom, old man Mckitrick could not recall.

Not exactly a place where a housing project should have been built, with the hate and division that once accompanied it.

To the east of the estate and now a main access to the riot zone, was the main road. Recently named the upper Newtownards road, where most normally gained access to Davarr Avenue. The Paramilitary leaders assumed that the army would be no different and would use this artery to access the riot zone.

This was evident from the air where the Major saw the concentration of barricades. These were built at the main Davarr entrance, and then falling back down too and along Drumadoon road into the maze of alleyways and cull -de- sacs. Unknown to them, army surveillance had already noted their logistics during the daylight as a precursor to engagement.

The old Belfast road used as a racetrack back in the thirties, once stole the thunder of Bentley and Mercedes monsters, at speeds over 100 mph. Racers had once come from all over Europe. Today all that remains are their ghosts that made old men smile, as they visited from all over the country. Many elders from the village, privy to their haunting as they walked by, at times were witnessed talking to themselves.

However, that history had gone with the wind like many other relics of the past. To its north, were the green hills and valleys of Craigtlet? Hills swanning down to the main arteries entering and exiting the village. For the kids, it brought them a sense of freedom with the open country. The vixens heard in summer evenings, along the rivers, and the tranquility on a clear morn, now lost to the merciless traffic.

The hills still hid the one or two glens that offered a journey of discovery for the boys of the village, and that eventually made life bearable for young people as they entered their teens. Escape needed its refuges, and like all teens, they needed theirs.

The climate as McGovern entered the room is warm, reserved and unlike the smell of dank and old timbers from basic confines of a police barracks.

Festooning the walls are the regiment's many accomplishments and accolades, and the men they swore to keep alive in their memory.

He halted three steps in and saw that he is well expected.

He pulled on the bottom of his tunic while holding his walking stick with each hand in turn. He touched on the shiny leather holster that housed his new Glock, a habit he picked up in his army days.

He then removed his cap and wedged it under his upper left arm. There were around ten uniforms standing and three sitting behind the large mahogany table that separated rank.

In the middle of the mess stood a very large assimilated logistical table that troubled McGovern slightly, because of its implication than its existence. Major Braithwaite had it transformed into the surrounding topography of Dundonald.

In the operations room that the others were accustomed with, McGovern saw only the war room at the Somme front. Tan uniforms milled around, and then for a moment it seemed like home again. The usual German bombardment outside and Kelly's hound howling from the throws of battle, striding back and forth along the muddy trench, the blood let driving it madder. All wore their helmets along with caps of color, and the smell of gunpowder almost regained a choke in his throat.

There were men loading their enfields with relatively small stock that he loathed imposing on them, and with such an inferior rifle. He almost called out to Kelly for the skinny on the last upgrade when, one of those superficial respectful coughs brought him back to the present, and he apologized with the usual tip of an Irishman's head.

“Ah, you finally decided to give us a shout, Sergeant?”

Here we go, now starts the cross-examination. McGovern surmised too much and pinched himself, *“There you go again, stupid old bugger, attempting to second guess their questioning.”*

Even back then, he reflected, he had thought and acted independently at times. He thought he saw Kelly his old friend, ghosting for a second from behind them, salute and then vanish with his wolfhound. The irony of such a man, who saved others in battle now gone, and forgotten in another battle that didn't even make the real history books. A man, or maybe a German traitor, who should be alive and sitting before him now, than those who sat there now. Extraordinary choice of slur, and again he loathed himself for the thought undeserving the man.

He smiled wryly, grateful for the ability to remember such memories. The stench of corpses and damp that accompanied the apparition, no longer in his nostrils, diminished just as fast. In addition, the distant artillery became another lost sound and dropped off. War did not just invade a man's memory unannounced; it possessed the whole of men like McGovern. He had already grown accustomed with those moments that were part of his other world. The world he kept to himself, with one exception, and she knew that part too.

“Are you alright Sir?”

Sergeant McGovern, are you alright, Sir?” probed the English overtones of a consoling Braithwaite.

Then, finally making contact with Major Braithwaite, he made a movement with the usual tip of the head.

It is then he realized an important absence, and instantly felt a surge of appreciation. Normally the army would only recognize above the rank of sergeant, usually with Inspector officer in matters of policy. He made a mental note that his Inspector officer is not present. He also had prepared his case well in advance of any anticipated objections, or changes he could think of. Limping forward to the table occupied by the commanding officers of rank, who were now waiting patiently, McGovern managed to bring his boots to an attention. A brief salute, then he regained his balance following up with his introduction. He cited his rank, force number, his station barracks along with duties and responsibility. Braithwaite threw his superiors a glance indicating to commence the discussion. Offered comfortable seating for which he accepted, Major Braithwaite promptly followed up behind him with his own leather seat.

An amiable comment offered by one of them, broke the ice. The vibes got better as they went along and veteran McGovern started to feel easier. Satisfied that they finally had the appropriate RUC officer in their midst, they proceeded to welcome him warmly with the usual sentiments of their supporting role as McGovern knew all too well. He thought of the few aces up his sleeve, and the ones he considered to play should he need to defend his actions.

The dossier passed along each of the three and then back to the middle. Each time closing it and reopening, as if they all had their own menu on him and did not like what was on the others.

Finally, “We see you are a decorated vet of the first war Sir, and at only twenty?”

McGovern sat contemplative, pausing before dropping his attention to the floor for a moment. Then lifting and tipping slightly his head left, made contact with the speaker and paid him a cursory acknowledgment. A man of about the same age and schooling, sporting wide darkened wings of old school moustache, extending pass the sides of his dehydrated face. It was obvious he dyed it. Hats remained on their silvery heads, and the medals did not go unnoticed. One that struck him as a tad incongruous. German, a Harken Kreutz known mainly as an ‘Iron Cross’ for sure. He didn’t recognize which one, surveying the line of men in front more intensely, as the reading of men began now in earnest. From the get go, he read them, as they read him, the only difference that more were reading him.

“We see that you were decorated again with the RUC,  
Why even the Krauts decorated you, like old Charley here?”

The haughty voice limped across the table like a Chelsea pensioner, compelling McGovern to jut his head forward, too process with more effort than usual.

The receptors in his head altering to accommodate the voices working away below, like a ship’s engine room. Adjusting to the sharp change of dialects, and then fine-tuning too the ching and sing of English accents he managed, just. The tempo he needed to adjust a tad and the delivery got heard. At this point now he found himself feeling, as one may have been in a foreign country.

Again, McGovern dropped his eyes to the ground and thought of all the young German soldiers he had to kill for a country.

However, the medal came with an unexpected turn, and another brave act he had forgotten that saved men from both sides this time. This time he was presented with it sitting and the Major did the honors. It was brief, hastily attached, and one that got stored with all the others, since knowledge of their whereabouts thin after demobilization.

“We also see that you are a man who does not always like to call on us for support, Sergeant McGovern?”

“Like all old soldiers we feel that we can still show up the young ones and win wars alone!” another said to a light cough.

The three older men chuckled, and then McGovern thanked them with a tip of his head for their camaraderie. Nevertheless, he now concerned himself with how much did they know of his independent activities?. In addition, how long before they caught up with that information, if not already.

The time to make his exit might be still a possible, if he played his cards right before they nailed him. Thirty minutes went by and nothing remotely connected with his secret shannaticans mentioned. Braithwaite impressed with the large cool-headed man, decided to make his move. He strolled around to the table and facing him, offered the vet a drink.

Intuitively he began searching for a pulse that would unlock his introversion, though his suspicions were beginning to evaporate.

The Major smirked too the others “*Still a soldier, Sergeant?*”, he said overlooking the deception of the RUC uniform.

He then studiously circled each side of McGovern.

“You are still one of us really, Sergeant, aren’t you?”

“I suppose somewhere deep down Major, it is sometimes difficult to let go some things.”

“Isn’t that the truth,” remarked one of the three opposite.

“ We want you to know, you are among friends, Sergeant.”

The Major fancied the idea that in some distant window, he is looking at himself, and that he too one day would end up like McGovern. A survivor who made it to influence events was better than one who just earned medals, and then met with death. Like death himself had been waiting for men like the ones who sat before him. A hero to his colleagues and instead of the medals, that he would too make do with his wounds. He too acted independently and sometimes reticent with his colleagues. Nevertheless, he had to be at least grateful to his superiors. They left him alone on certain tasks just as McGovern’s had with him. The brass simply knew better than that. He simply got the job done where others had failed. For Major Braithwaite it is the same. Now, more pressing than life itself, is how to get a handle on the Irishman and finally peg him tonight? Somewhere under that thick

seasoned veneer searching hard for a pulse, Braithwaite knew, that his next chance will be long in coming. McGovern's allegiance is crucial. He needed all that the old vet knew, because here is a man that knew more than most, and that being central to his own designs. After all, he had been thrown in at the deep end in the province.

“Would you like a McKibbins, Sergeant?”

The Sergeant accepted and asked if he could smoke and they permitted. Noticing how the old vet turned his head slightly to the right, the Major asked him if the left side was giving him trouble. Inconspicuously, one of the older men again flipped open the dossier, and again scanned the bio, and then nodded at Braithwaite. A glass then is put into his hand where the rum flowed freely. McGovern tasted it approvingly, tipping his head as usual. After asking him for any questions he might have, they assured McGovern that his service and rank to his country enabled exception of an inspector's presence. It wouldn't have mattered, but he was glad anyway, as he didn't particularly like his superior.

“Respect for old soldiers died a death in civilian life, don't you think Sergeant?” They asked confidentially. McGovern seen the nod of the head, that they thought he hadn't.

Braithwaite shot them a look. A 'hold your wagging tongues' look.

With that, he cautiously steered the way to the operational assimilation of the surrounding topography and conflict zone. He didn't want any more risky blabbering from a bunch of old suffering geriatrics. He would commence briefing McGovern on his plan of attack and every detail verbatim, including the entrances he intended to use. In addition, McGovern insisted he respect the ages of those who are under the control of the Paramilitaries. He stood and pausing to ensure he had balance, peg legged towards the large table. That they were still only impressionable young men, he felt a policy of cutting them slack, might be the difference between a cycle of Paramilitary recruitment and wiser choices.

“Quite, Sergeant.”

“Thank you, Major.”

McGovern tactfully reminded him, of his informed better on the subject of local affairs. Braithwaite uncharacteristically, sounded affably cooperative almost subservient. The Major then pointed to the strategic use of grassy areas from the soccer fields in the zone. Then the location of the barricades in relation to where his men would strike. He attempted leading McGovern around the assimilation and found resistance here and there until ambiguities got clarification. Pointing here and there, he allowed McGovern to interrogate him another twenty minutes, until he reassured himself of seventy per cent factual, and got comfortable with the average.

The younger man had precluded how things would pan out, overcoming anticipatory objections before they became obstacles. Moreover, were the round up would take place, with the use of dead end streets and street lighting blackouts.

McGovern reminded the younger man off those who had not always followed the rules before him. Braithwaite assured him, that he would follow his wishes to the letter, and he would be happy to change the course of history with his help. A few more demands, they then headed off too lunch at 12.30 p.m. and in one accord, hungry.

The subject of snatch squads did not invade the Major's code of ethics, and he felt the delivery on a simulated operations table after lunch, would slide through better.

Dining on mash spuds and various assorted greens, they would discuss the various religious factions, paramilitaries, Tartan and terrorist groups and who were friend and foe.

McGovern relieved that Braithwaite showed some informed knowledge grew more relaxed, at last sensing that he could now begin accomplishing some of his immediate goals.

In addition, for Braithwaite the pulse he needed from McGovern, now seemed apparent. McGovern had met a thousand Braithwaite's before and did not need reminding, a thorough not to mention a tenacious man, is also an ambitious man. It occurred to McGovern, not too completely overlook him as a possible threat to his designs. The old vet chose his moment to impact him during and after lunch, and demanded that there would be no media coverage on the grounds off village security.

Reminding him off no officer ego tripping on the box or claiming all sorts of army kudles for himself, then ultimately, 'that he is not in England now'. The sergeant qualified this on the premise, that they have to live with the fallout and that there might be a risk of putting them all on the Provo radar if he did not comply. Braithwaite remained seemingly affable and cooperative.

At 1.30 p.m. they were back at the mock- up surveying the plan of attack.

"How do you intend to engage the Tartan hard-nuts without unnecessary severity, Major?" The Englishman's felt McGovern's eyes drill too the back of his head. It was back too business.

McGovern impatient, repeated his demand, "how do you intend to deal with the Tartan rabble, Major?" he asked.

Scanning the layout beneath him, the Major evaded eye contact a little longer than allowed. Again, he forgot the deception of uniform and the existence of a wiser man. Reaching above, he flipped an overhead switch, and a support light aided his view of the logistics below.

Clearing his throat, he tried to speak convincingly.

"Well, Sir, I intend to use these darker side lanes on Drumadoon too move in and arrest the die-hards, after the main thrust back here," Braithwaite quickly asserted with the point of jabbing cane.

McGovern read the Major like he did others with a game-plan, knowing one like Braithwaite normally needed fished expertly. He had wanted Braithwaite to ratify the use of a snatch and grab policy. However, a sense of being over defensive against such a policy, notwithstanding one within army code of conduct, persuaded him to let it slide.

After his pre-emptive lunchtime assault, McGovern again had Braithwaite ratify no media interviews on radio either.

In addition, his men were too practice radio silence when patrolling near his jurisdiction. His premise is that, the Provos are using the airwaves to assess potential strategic targets.

Scare tactics were all fine and dandy with Braithwaite, who not exactly a greenpea officer, would need more pacing. An unseasoned battalion in Ulster is all-good with McGovern, and he could only nail the Major so much today. He was not certain about a Provo stakeout or even using the airwaves, just a hunch and some mind games that his army days taught him. The briefing seeming to be working too his favor, and fearing his luck might run out, McGovern saw the envelope had been pushed as far as he dared. Braithwaite, brow beaten, complied politely, happy in the knowledge that he would have only a day or so left until the disturbances was finally overcome. However what he still didn't know, was he had only two weeks of bullying from veteran McGovern before his retirement, period.

McGovern congratulated himself. He could still pull a long overdue heap off good honest army bullshit, out off the bag. The sort of army bullshit he knew they would eat up; Army bullshit that still worked for him. Not every day that he had the army eating out off his hand.

At 2.15 p.m. with a driver escort, McGovern departed the Palace at Hollywood, sitting back comfortably carefully lighting his pipe. He thumbed the power window button, and it slid down quietly with a in-rush of cold December air. The leather felt good, and even his old wounds temporarily diminished. Braithwaite's private black jaguar too the sound off Mahler's symphony No five rolled silently past the sentry who smiled a tad, lifting the barrier. The veteran finally allowed himself to relax, with all that he needed on paper in a worn personal brown briefcase. He began to feel much better and enjoyed the ride out off the lion's den like a man reprieved from the gallows. Little did he know, that two others hiding in the shadows, stood at polar corners from each other, watched him leave. Only one knowing about the other and both knowing Vet McGovern, and one with a score. Leaving Braithwaite later than he wanted, McGovern left with only what he thought he needed. It was obvious to him that it would be just the nature of Braithwaite to make his move soon, whether McGovern green-lighted him or not. If read correctly, the impetuous Major would find some basis to throw his weight in and start making a name for himself. Worse, he second-guessed the Englishman would doubtless know of his imminent departure from the RUC, and where he should have attempted to probe the Major more. After thought, always a pain, told him that he should have asked this and that and what if he knows that or did he know this. Further thought and McGovern concluded retirement seemed not a bad development after all, especially now that he met with the likes of Braithwaite.

In fact, it would take the heat off and free him from certain inauspicious sources, fall-out, responsibilities, and space to find his possible betrothal.

At 2.05 p.m. the large mahogany door received a hard knock, and in entered McGovern's insider. He had information for the English. The previous evening McGovern had put him on notice with pay, and all monies due, with the agreement to perform his duties to the end of his contract, outside, on a moat, in wintertime. Shit happens, thought the informer. And that was why he is here, for employment, and that the Englishman might like to know a few

things he'd pay for. Besides he needed the beer money and he possessed an expensive taste for expensive cigars.

At first, the low lighting made him rub his eyes, and searching the interior for any familiarity difficult. Braithwaite motioned his left hand tersely at him to be seated, without eye contact, which he ignored. Tossing his hair to one side, a single bloodshot eye sized up his prospective employer at a distance. Expecting him sitting, the Major looked up to see the eye of a bulletproof customer, hotwired to end and save lives staring back. The insider felt vibes at get go and he saw only a pompous SOB, taking all of him in with practiced efficiency, and when he went to spit, couldn't, increasing his uneasiness. From the brass buttons and stripes on his tunic, he noticed his graying blond hair color to the buttonholes that laced his Sandhurst boots, under the large wooden table. The Major was to feel vulnerable only momentarily, enough to feel the edge of the stranger's presence. The absence of wretchedness is equal relief, and one that isn't to be repeated, thought Braithwaite. He had been curiously studying Braithwaite's boots. And the Major equally stared back at long hair, dirty jeans, not to mention the grey duffle coat he wore with muddy black Doc Martens, that did not at first go down well. The smell of black bush soon wafted toward the Englishman, and the insider waited to see what reaction might come forth. Not just to the smell of liquor, but to the whole deliberate offensive karma that he prepared. He didn't have to wait long.

Did Braithwaite like the look of incognito staring at him? Incognito had been etched with the mark of menace in those deep forming features that had been put there by wit and sly. Who is it to judge others in their domain, and who have been disposed to less salubrious beginnings than he? One who just arrived in that troubled land, that is not even the land of his birth. Incognito, who had not failed to observe the newly arrived division under Braithwaite. Braithwaite might be a tad green, but he was quick, and he knew these fellas don't come knocking on your door for nothing. Deduction had its logic, and logic said he had to be on his game plan since he knew something, worthy of audience.

A trifle uncertain if they were on the same side, Braithwaite asked politely, "*loyalist?*" Downing his pen thinking that allies he often came across, had some similarity to the others in the holding cells.

The test had been set, and the Major waited to see if he would fall sooner than later. The stranger did not need to answer. It needed more than words. It now needed more than non-verbal communication or a battle of wits. It now needed a pulse on how things are. The world they would both be working in, needed fewer words, having a finger on pulses through actions, imperative. Equally, an eye on how to read the minds of men would also be imperative. It had to be pulse activation or Major Braithwaite is going down, Majorly, sooner than he thought.

The real world of Ulster's underground, secret codes and clandestine operations had arrived at Braithwaite's big fancy desk, and it took no prisoners.

Braithwaite had the distinct feeling that he is the one under scrutiny. The insider knew he did not need to do or say anything, or even the one who needed reassurance. Braithwaite then remembered during his induction, that local groups usually distinguished themselves by the insignia they wore on their skin or clothing. It is then he noticed the red hand tattoo



displayed deliberately on the side of his visitor's neck. Moments earlier, his long hair had been flung to the other side after entering. The Major had missed that one. First blunder. 'You can do that off handed officious shit in Cypress, but not here in Ulster, Northern Ireland. Eyes need to be on the ball from the get go.' After all, thought the insider, 'I could have easily been an assassin, and you'd be a fawkin' dead man.'

'That'll teach ya, ya limey Sonna-of-a-baboon.'

The Major second-guessed he might be thinking something unfavorable after realizing how dumb he had been. Cyprus still with him, needed change, pronto.

*'Perfect,' at last someone just right,* thought Braithwaite, shifting on his seat hiding his awkwardness. The insider read his thoughts and began to relax with someone who he knew, would prove to be another asshole he could work with.

Circumstances then offered the stranger an opportune cigarette, allowing the Major's need for a closer look, compelling the insider ten steps forward. The informer stretch over and accepted the lit cigarette from him checking the brand. He then backed off two steps and inhaled his fix. Braithwaite had a good look.

The presence of mind to avoid answering the Englishman's stupid questions, usually would not have been kosher. But this was different. The Major allowed the insider to slide into his confidence a little sooner, as his fears abated. The insider had sensed the Englishman attempting control and backed off. However, it brought a reassuring smile to the Major that his training is beginning to kick in. The insider sensed the pang of the Englishman's disguised urgency, and knew his visit would be easier than he first thought. He quickly identified the black case on the Englishman's princely desk and knew then, where his life is going. The Major reassured that McGovern's man could be trusted, reminded him that he could continue with his present status, until the old Veteran's retirement. Which was good info, and one that sealed the employment prospects for the future new boy. But he was still on a three month trail. Some traditions will never change he thought. Things were looking up for both men.

The interviewee realized how he could easily jip himself, but it had to be better whatever the case contained.

Braithwaite had read his mind, knowing he thought he had hit the big time. He also knew the pay would be a lot more than he currently is in receipt from McGovern. In fact, until now, he had been in employment with little prospects. He had been getting only pocket money from his activities, because it was deemed of no real danger to his life. That was about to change. At first he would use the pretext of limited job prospects, no pay increases working for the RUC, to cope with the cost of living. In addition, a reason to any questioning why he wanted to jump ship. Truth is, it wasn't, and in this case the truth had stronger conviction. He had read the memo on McGovern's desk announcing the arrival of the 14th Para regiment. He had kept his eye on the ball and waited and waited knowing the army would treat him more serious for his services. All he had to do is assume the outcome would be to his advantage, if he just played along. But this time, he knew he would be expected to step up to the table a lot more than before, and things were about to get more hairier.

**‘After all, you don’t set a meeting like this up, just to talk about the feckin’ weather,’ thought the informer.**

**The Major’s final gameplan intended to clarify the subject of his employment status. Reminding him also how dangerous life could get for him, should some off his cohorts find out about his activities. In other words just keep your head down, and no lippy stuff too anyone, accept him, or else. The plant realized where the Major’s mind-game was going. In short, that it could be safer working for him than an untrusting employer and uncertain paychecks. Unlike his life would be, if working in the underworld of dodgy paramilitaries. He qualified this on the basis that he would have him shadowed at all times, but declined to expand on the grounds of classification. Stolen from some of his thunder and reminded that things were performed a little differently than on some Greek island, the Major is told he preferred to work alone. Elaboration on how he knew where the Major had been stationed before his arrival and how he knew of his assignment followed. Again the Major is humbled enough realizing that, as a novice to Irish espionage, he needed to read Irish men closer. “Irish espionage is not too be construed the same as feckin’ Greek,” he said to the Major. He could have told the Englishman too fuck off back to England, but he needed this job bad, as he had other ambitions for bigger stuff. Besides, now that he had some cabbage, he now could go and get laid in some Dutch city in a couple of weeks. He liked the German Fraulines better, and it had been a while since he saw Bergot in Venlo, just over the Deutsch Dutch border from Germany. There the shit was good and the Dutch were as hospitable as a Paddy in need of a drink.**

**If there was a time that brought two diversely tailored men with both their destinies on tapestry together, it could not have been more incongruous at this meeting of minds.**

**The rain outside pelted the roof and could now be heard since things got quieter. A well-timed pause for thought, thought Braithwaite. The moment, yielding insufficiently for the Major at times, then suddenly enough to affect another course of thinking, compelled both too finally dig deep for trust and just bite the bullet.**

**“One last thing I have to ask you. Would you mind exposing the other side of your neck please?”**

**The informer heard his tone tense, and tossed again his long lank hair, hiding an urge to snigger behind the few errant strands that caught across his face.**

**Braithwaite’s induction told him, that the signs of friend and foe where usually omnipresent on the flesh, and only rarely omitted. Loyalties changed, and in the world of paid informers, sometimes there were no loyalties. All you had to do is look for the mark of betrayal. Up to now he passed the Major’s test.**

**Assurance with each second that now passed, the Englishman had decided to face the inevitable, when adjusting his posture just enough to signal something going down.**

**He then pushed the case a little further towards the informer. Looking at it, mentioning how much more there could be in it, for his services rendered. He pushed the case a little further again. Braithwaite then sat back and felt that the outcome would be positive.**

**“I think you’ll find more there than you are getting with Sergeant McGovern!**

**One condition though. Any danger to the old boy I have to know off it ASAP.”**

Just as the informer moved too touch his reward, he stopped short and shot the Major a analytical look from behind a lock of hair.

”Listen English, I am not a feckin’ Spasmo like you think,  
We both fawkin’ understand each other better than that.  
So stop playing me for a feckin’ dumbass.

Now what I.D. do you want me to use?”

Braithwaite with an air of the all conquering hero said, “How does Red Hand One, sound?”

“ Fair enough,” said the informer. “At least you’re learnin’.”

“ One last thing my Mick orange friend. You bollocks around with our agreement, and Ill drop you like a sack of HORSE CACK in Provo country.”

“ Fair enough, is this a verbal, then?”

“ For the time being. I’ll arrange for a more formal contract when your notice ends with the Vet.”

“ Fair enough.”

**Chapter[12] The moment of reality**

**The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

The conception off Sergeant McGovern’s juggling act would not have the conviction, for some of the seasoned officers until the following night.

For some them, it would be bittersweet, enabling his tactical goal to be a deferred for a double whammy, which went against some off his men’s type off policing.

“Only the demons off the trenches could teach a man such devious things,” old-timer Dan said.

“This was beyond the realm of present policing policy,” another colleague pontificated.

“Sounds like one off his army moves,” another confided.

“I say we should go and get’em bastards now, why wait for them to break off after what they’ve done,” protested another.

Nevertheless, most had by now come to accept his ways, and despite their belly aching, thought better with the devil they knew than one they did not. Besides their fears, he did have a good record of accomplishment with conflict at this level. At least that is how officer Argyle finagled it; most off it gained Pre-RUC when he had been an active B-Special member, and that usually shut them up. There being much more to McGovern than his young subordinates cared for, with the exception of one or two, they usually went no further than the examples of leadership in crime prevention. Limiting their preoccupations was a godsend for McGovern, as they had not much time for anything else. The troubles were increasingly demanding much of their time. Therefore, he could get away with clandestine activities where he otherwise may have raised suspicion. In addition, he would soon pass them by, like another relic from the past. Why now should he care what they thought now? That is exactly where he placed more importance. He learnt from early days, how to leave things. That was McGovern, doing it different from all the rest.

The office light suddenly exchanged for the lamplight. It did not go unnoticed by those in the adjacent room. The big grandfather dinged midnight from McGovern's right corner twelve times. Their eyes now and then, leveled on the ribbon off telltale light at the bottom of the opposite door. Officer Argyle had demanded that their mess door remain ajar, mainly for expediency and not for eavesdropping. They were after all on high alert.

The atmosphere quiet, is anticipatory and unbearably tense, while accustomed too sitting around the open fire grouped together, spinning yarns and enjoying the craic..

Tonight is different. The belly aching had run its course and needing a distraction to cope with the tension, the officers began discussing every basket case from the village. Tonight, they were in conversation over a local hard nut. He put three of their numbers in hospital the previous weekend. It took six of them too overcome his skillful punching, head butting, kicking, and slashing wine bottle. Eventually, each of them conceded to laughter off each other's antics in doing so. It turned out their subject matter is a member of the Cherryhill Tartan clan, by the name of Mad Chizzo.

Boot steps Clicked clacked towards their main door.

Then the phone once again jingled jangled.

Lifting the red phone from its secret drawer, a large hand gently gripped the handset.

*“McGovern,”* he said privately, turning away towards the fireplace.

*“It's on!”* The caller hung-up.

Relieved, McGovern then stepped outside for a breath off air, but there is none.

There, filled with the stench of diesel, burning petrol, his eyes began stinging from fumes. He spat out the remnants of smoked tobacco and sour tea, and then turned to go back indoors.

*“Evening Sir, Sergeant McGovern?”* For a moment, he saw no one, until a junior officer appeared from the darkness.

*“God bless you young McDade.”*

**“Thank you, Sir,” McDade answered, surprised to see his commanding officer standing without his tunic in the cold air.**

**“The limeys and the UDR are findin’ things stretched to the max tonight I heard, Sir!**

**The Prods were plannin’ riots all over the outer suburbs including Ballybeen, and the left-Leggars are rioting all over the center including the markets.”**

**The sentry above in the security tower, acknowledged McDade’s approach with the usual clunk click unlocking, followed by the little buzz the security gates make. The Sergeant had noticed a propensity by greenpea McDade to speak too much when he should be thinking. McGovern made mental note of speaking with him later. In addition, something perturbed him by his intelligence on the planned disturbances; not to mention many of his best friends and colleagues were left-Leggars, and he preferred their proper name. ‘Catholics.’ Not a distasteful word like it seemed with some of his young cadets. Nevertheless, preoccupying McGovern’s mind is crunch time, whether to give the green light to a waiting Para division or again pass. He would have to weigh his decision carefully. A mistake now and all would be lost. The Tartan clan were yet again a headache, not because of throwing a few Molotovs, but because they are in the way to a longer objective. Additionally, their vulnerability amongst the paramilitaries is an extra pain he really did not need. At least no longer an obstacle to accomplishing his first goal soon: It is the second and third of his goals that worried him. Enough rope with convincing resistance last night, ought to do it, he thought to himself. McGovern hoped the outcome would be a slam dunk. It worked before, many times, but then that was a battlefield somewhere in Europe.**

**However, would it work one last time that would see his term out that smoothly?**

**He knew deep within his intuitive wiring system, that life told him, it could go either way this time. It seemed that the odds were not against him, just not for him like before.**

**McGovern the police officer is definitely not like what the R.U.C. brass was accustomed too: especially when he could be a little unconventional in his methods, and for the current seventies.**

**However, the Brass was often relieved when he ended conflicts without casualties, and because he could do it better than everyone else could. Therefore, they offered him exceptional extended service. Others thought different, feeling they simply needed more army intervention and too rid the RUC off war relics. Their goal, to bring on board a better role model for modern policing and less like him as civil war loomed. Eventually expediency and common sense prevailed. They became more resolved to avoid cutting him and others loose, especially in light off increased Provo activity to the east of the capitol.**

**Normally it would be midnight before he was able too humor Mary McNamara up in the hill. She would be saying the usual things, reminding him that he did not want to jeopardize all that he had achieved in the village community. In addition, reminding him at this point he would leave a positive legacy. RUC constable, a soldier and a former B-Special, not to mention a hero who saved people’s lives..**

Younger men were waiting on the chance of dead man shoes she would conclude...

*“Forget everything else Vincent, focus from this day onward till your last what you can do for your own officers now. Civil unrest! Let them deal with that Vincent, their cryin’ for you to hang up yer boots and get outta their way.”*

In such moments alone, all the faces came back to him; men that he loved as brothers and respected, who were no longer with him. Moreover, how it always ended with the woman they all loved. He then thought about that French wife, now another distant chapter, somewhere over a hill on a distant field in a foreign distant country. He lived a life of lonesomeness since then, and did not like it. That a woman’s love had once again entered his life was a blessing at his age. At such an uncertain stage, he thanked God for the gift. It was all he needed to remedy the lonely isolation that he faced at times like this. In one week and four days he would face the inevitability of isolation again. He knew this time he would not be able to, and promised himself that it needed remedying.

This time the jingle jangle came from the red phone. He knew that, by the sound of its ring. Zealously, sliding his feet across from where he had been rummaging in the cupboard, he hobbled the last few, without his walking stick toward his desk, and managed to anchor himself. Scrambling his hands for the bottom drawer, he gripped in his right hand the handset, as if he could strangle whoever began speaking to him in a manner he did not want or like.

“Vincent I want you to agree with me?”

It took a second for the voice to unravel from all the other new recent dialects.

*“I’LL COME AND GET YA,  
DAM IT, MARY! WHERE ARE YA?”*

“You are not listening, Darlin’, please hear me out?”

“Okay, Mary, Okay, I will pull my men off.”

Mary was not stunned that he would break with discipline. She already knew he would have guessed this phone call would have come, and why.

She knew he would be desperate too. That is why he said what he just said without any investigation.

He too, always knew the next stage before it would happen. That is why he is alive probably, and she the same.

Timing and anticipation of time had been important too both of them, in their respective careers. She too, is now in love, and knew that from the get go. The contract she held in her left hand. Well that’s anyone’s guess.

“Tonight, Vincent, tonight he wants to have his haul back!

Or he says, you won’t see me again!”

**“Who, Mary?”**

**The phone’s static became louder, and then a dial tone and it ceased to be the tool that brought and held them together.**

**Again, she is gone, unbearably gone, and this time gone deep, deeper than before.**

**The sergeant fell back into his now cushioned seat once more, his head aside. The men, who had been trying to eavesdrop, returned to their mess while he took a needy nap too rid himself off the blues. In times like this, when alone, things happened. Sometimes the rookies thought he must have passed over, on the job. Other times ‘drunk’, since it was after midnight, and it is one of his special concessions.**

**As the lonely fire spat and crackled, the breath at the back of his neck came, went, and came again.**

**Sometimes she would breathe the same air close by with a fragrance he once bought her, which signaled presence.**

**The gentle kiss while he napped and snoozed at his usual time, often woke him up after she left. But not this time. She did not now see a tired seventy-five year old veteran; only the young tall dark-haired man with broad shoulders, that embraced her, as they stood ready for love. Forever a love with Michele de Larva’s ghost. Ghosts usually do not weep they say, but once and again away from the world outside McGovern’s, never seen by him, this time brought one forth.**

**In such moments when the fire rose up and died away he smiled, and knew all would be good. For that, he was grateful.**

**Either way he would end his final days, knowing how it would be, as Michele de Larve waited on him.**

**Nevertheless, too have survived when so many he had loved had gone so much earlier, sometimes filled him with too much guilt.**

**How could he have survived so many conflicts, always a constant thought with him?**

**Kelly back then, adopted adages in the trenches to help the men deal with stress, ‘You are up when your time is up, acceptance will set you free’ he would say. McGovern used it, like a drug to fix the remorse off so many dead men under his command.**

**This time he woke up grateful, and somehow knew this time, he almost slipped away with her. Stroking his short grey beard, he knew he was no more afraid.**

**The roughness had not often got in the way of women.**

**Not with Mary McNamara. Nevertheless, he preferred it smoother, which is why he stroked it too see if it would change texture with the ascent of age and touch. Mulling over such a union did have its appeal without the present distractions, especially when you feel alone. He looked at first to the picture of his wife that hung level to the Queen Elizabeth the second, adjacent to the entrance.**

***“Michele de Larve, if only you had chosen another German boyfriend?”***

**Madam De Larve grew attached to the Ulster battalion at the French town of Somme La Vive. Their lack of constraint with social intercourse and friendly fighting spirit lacked the German discipline and uber-alles mindset, with a breath of fresh air.**

Moreover, soon they all loved her and she loved them. Before them, the German division, and the same, all be it limited, human association existed but was short lived from the allied bombardment.

The Germans had been bombed out of the tiny French village, where the Ulsterman and Michele de Larve married hurriedly under resistant sniper fire.

McGovern's love-smile was short.

No one else heard the sound of the one single nondescript crack of an assassin's bullet, as the Scots-Irishman had been all too familiar with, like he had. At the altar, some of his men rushed forward. McGovern realized before they realized, it was a done deal.

The groom inconsolable and overcome with helplessness lamented the likes of no other life, outside of his mother. For three weeks no one, not even Kelly could any longer have consoled him. Men heard a night of lament and anguish, seldom heard from Ulstermen.

Kelly releasing his hounds to rout out any remaining German snipers, from the vacated buildings of the village, knew a relished spree of slaughter is to take place.

Michele de Larve never saw the beginning or the end of her honeymoon night, the men had elaborately prepared for them both, in an off limits wooden pill box. The candles blew in the wind, and the French dish of Pommies, Peta Pia, and Escargot went uneaten along with the untouched bottle of Chardonnay wine.

On that same day, ex German boyfriend took refuge with his sniper's Mauser in the town square across from the chapel. He would in a fit of unbridled jealousy, ensure where her heart belonged and would himself, pay the ultimate price for it.

The bullet punctured her heart as he kissed the love he never fully possessed. Henning Mueller then turned his luger pistol on himself, and tasted ore for the first time at the back of his mouth, before his brain disengaged life. Young McGovern tore across too the town hall Kelly had brought him. He stripped the uniform from his former nemesis, as if peace he would never see in his life again, if he had not. Kelly hung the burning limbless corpse for all others to see, and 'Henning Mueller' would never come back to haunt his friend's thoughts.

She lay in a military hospital for six weeks. Prolonged by love, that kept her heart beating for the handsome Ulsterman, who knew the look of death too often. Eventually it came with a breath of life's release and the traditional flutter of a thorn-bird from its cage.

Above both women hung the last picture in the order.

That of his Mother. She occupied the looking down position. He meant it to be like that, intended to be part of his constant problem solving strategy. Where he could remind himself of likely matriarchal thoughts on issues, as the one he faced tonight. In addition, he would surely hear her dictating words, as the bottle took a hold in his bloodstream.

"Wait Junior and think about the pride you have been awarded by the nation. There are younger men subordinate to yourself, only too happy to do this dirty business, just like yourself once. Besides, you are not a young man these days?"



**‘And what about Mary McNamara, a catholic in the family?’ he cried out, now holding up his dark bottle of McKibbins. He swigged and swallowed defiantly.**

**The men heard it, but Argyle held them back. “Lighten up; it’s the drink talking with his Ma again.”**

**They heard many things on other nights. Often he would get rightly, and the men would have a bit of craic hearing him nattering with his ma. Or so they thought. But this time McGovern is speaking to his mother of approval. This needed hearing, and even officer Argyle became intrigued, and is no longer able to restrain the others or himself.**

**‘Oh yes, Mother, That Mary,’ he said scornfully, as though memory and love didn’t mix with her suddenly.**

**That she raised him and his brother to do the right thing above all the other things, and happiness above all is what she always wanted for them both. Why now did she seem to stall? In addition, his core values of right and wrong more than mattered, seemingly more than his devotion to the crown. He held his rum up and saluted all three before the glass cracked against his lower denture, and swallowed more than normal**

**‘Bargaining for the love of Mary Mc Namara, he would make use of the collateral he had acquired. And that, he would take to his grave, and that was that, Mother!’**

**“TA, TA HELL WITH THE LOTTA OF YA!”**

**Argyle saw the look of growing confusion on the other men. “Like I said, it’s the liquor talkin’.”**

**The glass smashed into the fireplace, and the mess door now closing with Argyle’s back against it, drowned the sound.**

**For going beyond, McGovern considered his reward with a sense off finality.**

**The others had sensed it, and even Argyle could not hold them off forever. Sometime soon, he knew some bright spark would get a whiff of their agreement and the mystery of the woman on the hill. Screw the RUC its rules and all the other customary protocols. This is how his life is and it now needed rescuing. At seventy-five, he did not need the additional pressure anyway. He would soon be a free man. He had committed himself; too deliver on his commitment to rescuing their village, Mary and this time himself for once. In addition, that too would be his final choice if he could just finagle it. This time, he was going to his ‘La Grande Debouche’ in confidential style. No big day celebrations, or old-hand get-together’s with other old-hands. He would ensure no surprise attacks from the administrative women down at headquarters; no secret admiring cards for being charming and a good example of what real men and been like once. The no no’s too his admin cohort to ensure that everything had to be that tight. At least for the time being.**

**Contrary to opinion, it was sometimes very like him too have not taken sooner remedial action on the paramilitary activities.**

**McGovern’s men frustrated by inaction became restless and troubled. They did not know that he came with a Carte Blanche from the top brass too kick butt when he needed too. Moreover, he never told them either. He also manages to conceal his big day by disposing**

off the brown letter that made the annual announcement off those soon to be taking their leave.

“That is how THESE soldiers were,” said one.

“To him, we are just the local peeler,” said another.

“He’s up too somethin’ he hasn’t told us about!”

“Yes, we think in terms of the immediate, ya know, the community.”

“ Maybe it’s time for a change of tactics?” said another old timer.

“Not like him at all, in my opinion,” said one of the men against the hearth puffing on his pipe.

“He hasn’t me bluffed,” said another.

“I remembered a time when he have’d moved in reinforcements by now,” said another reflectively.

“That was when we had only wee boys ta deal with,” said another.

“Well, I know another who was with him in France. From what I know about Mr. McGovern, he is on that very same battlefield again!”

There is a mumble, heads tipped in acknowledgement, and a united consensus hummed among the seasoned men who still remembered such days.

They spoke silently and listen intently, as the atmosphere in the mess grew more acutely distant from the adjacent office.

Even though some of their voices carried through the old buildings pipe-work and down into the McGovern’s office, emerging from the blazing fire, he heard it all before. As the debate went on, the sergeant could only hear German voices as Christmas now drew nearer, and the rum took hold once again.

## Chapter [13] The Shot From The Past.

### The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster

To the sound of the bugler heralding the action stations, young Major McGovern sprang from a makeshift bed in army fatigues and tramped forward. Beneath him, mud sucked and gripped his boots, which came loose with practice necessity, permitting him to join with his second in command. Summoning him by name he bellowed...

**“McCracken?”**

**The gray darkening skies over the Flemish battlefield were giving way to a yonder early flash of pale blue.**

**McGovern drank in the view with a bottle of stout over the Prussian front.**

**“He wants to play football, Sir,” Informed his commanding officer.**

**“He Wah?”**

**“The Hun, Sir, he wishes to play a game of Fuessball, German for soccer.”**

**“Tell him to dream on, corporal McCracken!”**

**McGovern immediately reached for his issued breast pocket watch.**

**5.30 a.m. He was too tired to enquire why the action stations alarm, and decided to talk with the new boy later, who was still a bit skittish.**

**“I might have known they would be up at this gaud awful hour.”**

**A sudden loudspeaker din blasted from the Hun line.**

**“Bitten Sie Herr McGovern, bei Veinachten Die Irlanda sind nicht unsere Feind, Lassen Sie uns mit freundlichen gruessen Fuessball spielen, wir wollen es mal durchgehen lassen,,**

**“Ist es not Christmas in Irland too, like in Germany?”**

**“What did he say, what did he say?”**

**“As far as I could make out, he said that it is Xmas Major, and have a good one on us.”**

**“No No, what did he say fore that, surely all that wasn’t to say happy Xmas?”**

**“ Oh that part? He said don’t you want a piece of xmas like his lot.?”**

**Conviction from a foreign voice, McGovern had not heard for some time. Especially from the enemy who were winning the battle. With fresh reinforcements and superior weaponry, which they both knew, would tip the balance in favor off the Hun. They had our attention, McGovern thought. Why now would the winning side want to cut us slack.**

**“Men should not have to die at Christmas Major, so what about a game off football and then a drink between soldiers?” Lied McCracken binoculars in hand.**

McGovern released one of his rare smirks before conceding to the gist off Xmas, that the enemy held in higher esteem than he or his men. Impressed with German efficiency and surprising Celtic pragmatism, he considered their game-plan. Surveying down the lines at the lackluster body language of his own men, by now thirsty, who had been eyeing him back in contemplative mercy. The loudspeaker had fallen silent. The men, maintaining a defiant look, like a thousand erect snowy lances, closed in on McGovern's final response.

"Getting this lot to play football in place of a drink," he said to McCracken, "asking them to fetch the crown jewels would be easier."

McCracken concurred with equal sarcasm.

*"Do you still want me to tell them too dream on Sir?"* McCracken asked, lifting his loudspeaker.

McGovern held his response and again glanced down at his men in the snowed trench. Trotting silently in the snow, swiftly a killer from his rear mounted the wooded barrier where he stood. Cromwell, it's large grey hairy head paralleling McGovern's, is in killer mode and until his master commands otherwise, he remains so. The sound of his heaving nostrils, inhaling and expelling oxygen into plumes of carbon left little room to breathe around him. It never troubled McGovern. 'Even you too Cromwell eh!' McGovern thought.

*"Hiel!"*

Cromwell a wolfhound of noble strain, obediently dropped countenance cowering back to its master. The thick black studded leather leash with a hook for easy connection, found his collar with a restrained tug.

"Not so hasty McCracken," said Kelly, "the men are tired and with little aforethought, the Hun plan might not be a bad idea.

I'll have to check them out first!" he said, jumping onto a heap that shifted under a canopy from his weight.

The voice Kelly's, the relief is McGovern's.

McGovern did not know the name off the Prussian officer. In fact, it is not without good reason. One thing Prussian officers were well known for, is their efforts to remain unknown to the enemy. However, Kelly felt it was time they had to get acquainted. Glad to yield little too an obviously better equipped foe, knowing how important some opportunities are when they arise: He pondered Kelly's idea not such a bad trade off, in order to get close to the enemy for once. Notwithstanding they would be better off cautious, especially at this stage in the exchange of battle. The Germans had just reinforced their lines with the latest rifles and the fearful machine gun, that their own brass rejected. A

peek might be prudent. In addition, something he felt the brass would look the other way on, if by somehow it got back.

It would be easy for Kelly to overcome objections with them, since the recent indications appeared on the German lines. He liked their armory, and through that became accustomed with diplomatic ventures thereafter, on McGovern's endorsement.

Each winter since McGovern recalled words like poetry from Yeats himself. Since then each year, he felt obliged and picked up a few more words in German too acquaint himself with his host and family more than he really wanted. Initially German seemed harsh, and too monotone compared to the lilt of an Irish brogue.

However, written German took on another dimension, and nothing more poetic.

*“Let us in good faith enjoy the spirit of this day,  
As brothers instead of rushing to our tombs,  
Ah, Christmas we should all say!  
Has no enemies, just men who lost their way.  
Together a game of soccer, no longer lost, men come to play.”*

Recalling those peaceful words when he felt his leadership seemed to now wane, brought back a recurring old smile. Words spoken in German, as poetically written, as in English or Celtic. Words that ended conflict be it all for the spirit of Christmas, Herr Steiner had something that all soldiers needed. Magic in the delivery of words; words that disarmed men.

If only he could share his secret now.

Nothing McGovern would relish more than the cessation of conflict for all Irishmen, from each side, as he neared his own end he called, ‘The Grand Exit’.

Herr OberLautenant Steiner from the first Prussian FieldArtillerie and a colored Major from first Expeditionary Ulster Volunteer Force, inevitably became friends.

Each Christmas on Dec 22 both would meet in Belgium.

Exchanging coffee and a little whiskey from a thermal at the field off their dead, both lamented the loss of so many good men. Then always the inevitable attempt to come to terms with their survival. Followed by their part in legalized slaughter. Each watching that same football game, as though they had the ability to bring it too life each time. And for a few precious moments, they forgave themselves.

*“Und da spielt Johan, und dort jetz Mueller, harked Herr Steiner.*

*“There is my man, Kelly, and big Buchanan saving those goals from your Mueller,” Harked McGovern.*

As usual, Kelly failed to slip a thought by McGovern, without deep reflection. His countenance dropping in the usual way when things weighed heavy. In that moment the

friend, who sat next to him, knew the burden, and the urge to lift his weight of his shoulders almost happened. However, the oath he took held him back.

The Ulsterman almost demanded what happened to his old comrade, when second thoughts off spoiling the moment, compelled him to let it slide. Over the years, he heard this for that and when that contradicted this, he then had again only diddily squat, and once more, the then subject fizzle away.

After the Mercedes sedan arrived in his forest home, Herr Steiner took the annual Christmas stroll around the forest path with his former adversary. Whilst the deer flitted here and there amongst the undergrowth, snowflakes fell lightly escaping through the canopy above.

For Herr Steiner, it might suddenly become the same annual contrast of an incinerator like last time, furiously burning the last remaining corpses from a nearby camp. Each time he visited the woods he hoped they would never return. They did, and the images also, sometimes too gruesome, even for him. He too had his war demons, and none more than the ones that haunted him on his return to the family home.

After the war, he discovered hidden in the forest, there had been a concentration camp. Out of bounds to the public, on the grounds of governmental property, anyone trespassing would be shot where they stood.

The sign said,

*[Gefahr, Hiermit Besetz die Grunde des Buros, Jeder Trespassing erschossen werden wird.]*

Simple and direct, enough for a German. He had eventually torn it down as though he would erase the nightmares from his head.

One time when he had taken a walk alone, his demons came without warning, leaving their permanent calling card. The shocks from the ghoulish phantoms were vengeful. The scar from that, which carved a piece out off his brain, is permanent. His wife from that day on saw something that only a wife would, and the end of something that was no more.

Sometimes just out of curiosity he would seek them out, as though he could help their souls and appease his own post-war guilt. However, that too was part of the brain cut out, and with each visit, he became more delusional. Veteran McGovern, as best he could, pointed this out to her. With his wife, Herr Steiner found some other route to meander, and she saw a piece of the old husband slowly return.

The evening dusk slipped in without either noticing, and headlights beamed between the conifers neutral intermittent contrasts with each that passed. Both returned to finish the bottle of Snapps that waited emptying. Frau Steiner prepared the table with potato salad and an assortment off spam's, hams and egg based party bits.

On Christmas Eve, all would attend the annual opera '*Der Rosen Cavalier*' at the Cologne Opera near the famous cathedral, 'Der Dom.'

They then would venture to the old quarter and enjoy a meal with the family of Herr Steiner. They would take their customary meander through the old city, until a Bar/Restaurant that is still open, and one that they all had a consensus with had been finalized. Once discovered, and in usual German fashion, enter uneasily, awkwardly

dominating a seating area, and start with some local pilsner cheering or proasting each other to death. Prevailing with an over abundance off tasty grilles, the resistance to probing the local schnitzel became too much. Happy to stay and eat at the *'Zur Schwartzke Kirche'*, Herr Steiner decided to order a portion for everyone. His eyes searched the range of the interior for a table Fraulein.

It wasn't long before his roving eye caught the sight off a face with equal intensity, looking back at him from the reflection. Unsure off his brief attention to his guest, checked he had not been noticed, or his connection with the curly grey haired man from a bar mirror. Drinking stout surreptitiously in the corner of the Guinness mirror, is a man they both knew well, in fact, very well. Had Herr Steiner broke with the oath, or had he stuck to it, preoccupied the mind of the man.

This year McGovern had hoped not too be alone when he took his trip. He planned to ask Mary too accompany him this time. He still hoped that would be possible. Though gradually he had prepared himself, in his usual acquiescence off another lonesome trip.

This would have released Frau Steiner pairing him off with one of her attractive designer Fraulines. The thought of making his Irish Brogue less endurable was a welcoming turn of events. Often, he would suffer it in silence on how difficult this was for him.

Herr Steiner knew over the years that his colleague rarely indulged getting laid. Perhaps the gammy leg had something to do with it, perhaps not. He let it slide, as he sensed that this was the Irish side of his friend's nature.

*'At seventy-four, that was still a possibility with the right woman'* McGovern had sheepishly teased.

Germans rarely suffered guilt from any sexual hang-ups, McGovern observed, and wished he had some of that detached guilt for himself. In addition, all found the sexual chitchat funny in a German sort of way. Lots sympathy without the amusement off the Irish awkwardness on the subject.

*'Geil fur mich, ist Alterer Manner,'* said one frauline, *'Prima ist Der Mann Der immer noch Kann,* said another. But such words meant nothing too him. They were words of sex and nothing to do with the love that occupied deep down inside like a hidden world of joy. He had it bad with the woman on the hill.

Though McGovern was unable to decline the hospitality off women, no matter who she was, he found it difficult to understand why they found him so interesting. Except with Mary. Crippled and not exactly in the youth department, and to top it all, no expert on romantic German lingo either. Sex a minefield of guilt and hardship, and one he would rather avoid in favor off the battlefield. So be it, with careful planning around the repeat conditions that Herr Steiner created for him, on each off his visits, he hoped he would succeed this time.

Meanwhile back at the barracks, the open fire raged like a July 11<sup>th</sup> bonfire. The dark bottle of Mckibbin's rum sat on the table opened, less a couple of inches below the rim,. Troubling him is the imminent use of gun and bomb warfare, churning up old feelings that still lurked dormant from his days of attrition. In addition, it troubled him the sort of trouble that may trouble the brass. However, he checked himself again for second-guessing

something that probably would not pan out. Mary in her absence proved she never left him with his own thoughts, that troubled him further.

It became increasingly difficult for him as a police officer in such developing conditions. Especially with Braithwaite's arrival.

Now that the cause on both sides grew more militaristic, he feared how far they would both be prepared to go with it. Worse, how far he is prepared. Neutralization loomed closer and with each step he could now hear the screaming curses from the enemy. They would be desperate. East Belfast UDA Headquarters would be by now on fire with late night analysis, head-storming and getting nowhere for a while. It bought McGovern time as he planned. Only just. Just only until they nailed him, and then a talk with an independent enemy source. Wouldn't be the first time. After all somebody was denying them their weapons. He also feared his departure from the RUC might not go as smooth as planned. His troubles tonight were not the fear of his plans being discovered by the wrong people. Nor the arms find ever being prematurely disclosed to Braithwaite. If Braithwaite did not already know, then he soon would. When he did know, McGovern guessed, he might just let it slide on the home run towards his retirement. In addition, having him out of the way would probably be an option he couldn't turn down. The idea he hoped that his intensive actions back at the Palace at being an unnecessary pain in the butt, might work in his favor.

Another night of possibilities and the red phone sprang into action below.

"McGovern!"

"They have been in touch with east Belfast Headquarters,|" a voice said.

"So they will go through their elimination process in the usual way till it stops, with me. Anything on the supplier yet?"

"Not yet, but this one stinks, like fawkin' Provo stink, not like north of the border."

"Why do you say that?"

"Cause I would usually have known somethin' by now."

"Okay, just keep sniffing around up there and keep your nerve, remember, they have nothing on us.

Even the paramilitaries need proof too finger somebody."

A more transparent profound dread manifested itself from that early seed of irk. Somehow, a hunch wrestled with the idea, that his threatened betrothal linked to it. Coordination. Something all uniforms knew something about. Coordination he thought. As he pondered such possibilities rooted in a distant past, his lower drawer jingled jangled again at 11.40 p.m. He did not stall.



The drawer below was gently withdrawn to the end of its runner, and in a second the handle of the red phone is back in his grip.

Hesitating, he gingerly held it up to his right side without announcement.

Nothing.

“Sergeant McGovern!” he said.

Again nothing.

Then,,

“*Vincent?*”

The voice whimpered apologetically from the red phone.

## Chapter [14] Tough Guys The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster

Six hours earlier.

McGurran, at the head with his Tartan guard, McDuggan, Jacko, Madman, Mockers, and McMann were all at the Davarr barricade. They were all troubled. Troubled at failing to have the army lured into their trap. They wanted to engage the fawkin’ Brits with the naivety off believing that they could, on their terms. Now that’s dumb.

I know this, because Angel tells me everything. Now, if there is one thing even I knew, is that the army are the big boys in the department that we the wee boys, are not smart enough for.

Questions came fast and furious, mostly the when’s, where’s, whys, the who’s. Moreover, answers came slower. Strangely I thought, that no newbie asked why, when, where or what we were rioting in the first place. But then peer pressure, ‘me Ma called it that, a funny thing, it makes ya do things you don’t really want to do. I am no different. I held my tongue too. Especially, when McGurran is observing you breathe from the dark side of the barricade, like you were about to breathe your last. I’ll tell ya.

The big man with the blue balaclava and the Ak47 made it clear he was not exactly disappointed with the outcome of last night’s operation. I noticed McGurran’s heart grew blacker in such places, and he felt perfectly at home with such people around.

“Nevertheless, it could have been a lot more effective,” he said.

I wasn't about to argue with that one, I'll tell ya!

I asked myself one question, what if I had stayed at home?

The answer appeared as sudden as the question. Angel glanced from the other side of the platform and winked me one of those winks that said nothing. Then he sneered the hard man sneer. Nothing unusual, just Angel being Angel, nothing out of the ordinary. But I was wrong. He was nervous. Then the man with the Ak47 came from behind. He climbed the steps to face us. Then he described their motives and set the picture straight, least I think he had!

He said, "Their grounds for their operations is the 'internment of loyalists, don't forget that," he said, "who bravely acted only in the defense of the cause against Provo threats and attacks."

Bollocks! we wanted to flex our muscles, 'I thought to myself,' at the old foe and get some fun, simple as that. For me, we all had our day of fun and sins fulfilled, and I didn't give a rat's ass who was disappointed or what reasons they had. I'll tell ya

For me, fun over, and time to go home. But the rest wanted a piece of the action.

I now wanted out as things got steamed up. It was then I really knew what me Ma meant by peer pressure, and so did the man with the AK47, I'll tell ya.

11.55 p.m.

Meanwhile at the barricade McGurran is listening with one ear in the middle field, and the other for any sign off the Limeys. More Tartan men began returning to the barricade. In addition, he persuaded reinforcements from the Tullycarnet Tartan clan to join us, which didn't take a hill of beans, and he acquired three more cases off Molotovs agreed by the middle hierarchy. The pig line is now down to three vehicles, and their occupiers were firing off rubber bullets at random into the middle when they could. Mockers continued to press me on my involvement with Angel. I wanted to shut him up with a five d one. But I felt under threat with so many assholes around, namely McGurran. I'll tell ya. Little did I know that there was an agenda to keep me there, and McGurran is head off that agenda?

I didn't get the chance to tell Angel or even Georgy. On top of that, it finally hit home, why? I wasn't allowed free access to the battle zone, since I was still a stranger with the right reasons, but they needed to check me out first. After all I could have been a plant for the Provos. Mockers had been charged with the vetting, and that's why he left and returned since he hadn't a fawkin' clue what questions to ask. But that wasn't all. I was no different from the other newbies who'd been vetted on the battlefield, and yet I was still held back.

"How do you two know each other?" Mockers asked.

"Angel you mean?"

We met at school and then we both ended up at Ards Tech together."

I caught McGurran listening, and he turned back towards the violence.

"Why?" I asked him, but he ignored the question.

**“Interrogative tongue doesn’t work with that asshole.” Angel whispered in my ear.**

**“Is that right, Angel bullocks?” Mockers caught Angel’s words.**

**“I prefer Angel,” he retorted.**

**“Is Glasgo your fawkin’ fudge-packer then?”**

**“Aye and Nah!” Angel laughed.**

**“You mean, you’re his fudge packer, and no he can’t take up the ass like Jacko there?” He said laughing derisively.**

**Jacko looked hard at Angel, before confusion showed on his face.**

**“No Mockers, I mean, I let him loose to fudge-pack other little no-prinks like you, cept you stink too much.”**

**“Mockers! Get the fawkin’ word on this, go on get going!” McGurran scowled.**

**“Why can’t fawkin’ Angel go?” Mockers spat from his tight mouth, brimming with revenge, seething with cuss that others found hard to find.**

**“Why can’t Angel go?” mimicked Angel.**

**“Because you know them all out there better, now GET THE Fawk, will ye!” McGurran barked again more and more inebriated.**

**Mockers reluctantly clambered over the barricade and vanished into the smoked darkness with a backward glance. Angel sneered back at him, then he sat next to me checking that no one is watching.**

**“Have you been sleeping?”**

**“I am not sure that I was sleeping. More like unconscious awake.”  
Angel looked at me as though I didn’t catch his jist.**

**“Are you dumb or somethin’?  
What’s he been asking you fawk’s sake?”**

**“Why? What’s up?”**

**Angel’s expression transformed to a seldom expression.**

**“Okay, okay, how do I know you and why am I here, he kept askin’?”**

**“Why, have I a got a part in Broadway or sumpin?”**

**Angel said almost laughingly, “You’ll have a part in another show, and won’t be fawkin’ Broadway. Listen, you need to keep out of his way, okay!**

**Get off side before he recruits ya for somethin’ you’ll regret. I just got the low-down on this asshole; you can’t do what he does.**

**They don’t call him the recruiter for nothin’.”**

**“Why, what’s up?”**

**“I’ll tell you later!**

**Here he comes,” Angel nervously lit a butt.**

**Just keep outta of the little wanker’s way!” He whispered.**

**Out of the mist, Mockers hopped quickly back into his usual spot, like a rabbit escaping the clutches of a predator.**

**He had a habit of being just in time, like he knew something ahead of time.**

**“Okay, the word is we are all to split!”**

**“Why for fawk’s sake?” Seethed McGurran.**

**“Big Sandy says too many are fawkin’ injured with rubber bullets.”**

**“This rain’s goin’ ta get heavier anyway.”**

**McGurran, wit out and alcohol in, only heard what he wanted.**

**“Well” big Sandy’s a pussy then”**

**“But we are too meet at the Drumadoon Barricade the same time tomorrow.” said Mockers**

**McGurran cursed and spat on the ground! He cursed again, swigged whiskey and then lit up a fag. The five-ounce bottle soon emptied and tossed at the Razzers in one furious arm movement.**

**Out in the middle of the riot zone something caused me to move closer. Squatting forward to hear from the middle field, I made a glance back behind at McGurran, who by now is not a man to take your eyes off. Or any of the others, come to that.**

**I could now only think about sleep at Angel’s place, as trying to get home would be too dangerous. Then fists clenched, and I saw his eyes form hideously. Then a grim feature that formed down the right side of his jaw line was caught in the fire flash.**

**The mood soon became like a bed of eggshells, each of us tiptoeing away from McGurran like the devil himself had entered the barricade.**

**“Go on, get the fawk outta here, all off ye.**

**NOW! Fawk off home!” He cursed the middle and grabbing newbies and anyone else nearby, kicking them over the pile of junk to the darkness. He punched a couple more until**

he had a vacant barricade. Then producing a second source of alcohol, a mini thermal, he unscrewed the cap, and then began to swig a mouthful of whisky.

He spat on the ground! “*Fawkin’ Scotch*” and again lost it.

Whisky did things to him, transforming him into a crazed lunatic more than the Poteen.

“Ok you wankers, go home to your mummies!

Go On, GET OUTTA ERE! Alla of you!

There’s no man left in ya! go on getta outta here before I kick your heads in.

Make sure you meet here tomorrow at the Drumadoon barricade for a brief, or I’ll make sure you won’t wank again.”

“Ya hear me Angel?” McGurran shouted and spat, as he fell back against the barricade.

He spat again holding the bottle, eyeing Angel expecting his usual smart-ass answer. Then unconscious of the activities around him, became no more and then eye shut down. He dropped back into the barricade hard.

“I had a wank already McGurran.” Angel snapped sardonically.

“How can ye? said Jacko, you have no dick?”

“That’s not what your girlfriend said last night Jacko!”

“OH Oh Oh Oh, Angel, you’re for it now!” Goaded Madman.

Teasing Jacko, everyone jumped on his case, no one more than Mockers.

“Ha ha ha, JackO has no DicKO to satisfy old Mo MO.”

Jacko landed a punch on Angel’s shoulder, throwing him a killer look. Mockers jumped on Jacko’s case and piled on the derision.

Noticeably, came no evil eye from Jacko.

Madman saw the chance to make Angel seem that he had the better of Jacko, and attempted to stir it up more.

His hope, that Jacko will start something with Angel, didn’t pan out. However, Angel could sense what Madman wanted and buckled.

“I’m only teasin’ ye Jacko.”

The scrap would have lasted a minute, when Madman was not around. By now, Jacko knew Madman’s tactics, and the dynamics that were working against him. He quickly withdrew from the trap.

“Oh Yea,, well I’m not.” said Madman hard lookin’ Jacko.

Jacko caved in and looked away.

I learnt, unbeknown to Mockers, that he is fast becoming the focus of a drunken McGurran who didn't like him for something I didn't understand. Nevertheless, McGurran had an agenda from the middle, and that I did learn. A back-up plan to support Mockers, that no one knew about which he almost blew, because of being drunk.

I saw Madman slide a hand round McMann's balls and grab him gently.

"Is that where that rubber bullet got ya? ya lyin' bastard, Ha?  
Are we really hurtin' down there, ha?" he teased, deep in his face.

McMann held his reaction until unable to control his urge to laugh at the elaborate bluff; Madman found a tickle, and they burst into laughter as they both withdrew to leave homeward.

"Did you see their faces Madman?" Jacko asked, his voice fading into dark, making their way laughing.

Everything around the barricade soon came to a standstill.

At the riot zone, the Tartan clan began vanishing into the downpour. Above the clouds opened, and Thor rising to a crescendo of drumming soon fell silent.

Soon no one remained, except a drunk, a newbie and a big ugly uncertainty.

### November 22<sup>nd</sup>

At 7.30 p.m. the informer left Braithwaite's office apparently inebriated. Outside in the cold shock off a winter's eve, he reached his hand across to the left side off his neck and removed the band-aid that exposed the green white and orange off the republican colors. It is now in the sights of a marks-man, before the informer let his long hair cascade back into place concealing his double identity.

Succumbing to a Drambue every 10 minutes from the Major's personal bar, he soon seemed to be eating out of the Major's hand. After the third shot, he seemed to be in a state off imminent inebriation. He seemingly left inebriated, and he entered the waiting dark gray Ford XR3i seemingly inebriated and gloated all the way back to the village seemingly quite sober unaware of the device within. He had somehow refused Braithwaite's personal official jaguar and remembered his briefcase containing the wages of his sins, seemingly inebriated.

Braithwaite still thought dumb with the Irish, and fell into his own stupid trap, thinking he could loosen a tongue further with drink.

In the Craigtantlet hills, the Swiss army high performance binoculars with intensive night vision were both a gift, and the best in the Euro market.

They peeked out off the camouflaged fly approximately 1.5 miles up behind the Palace on a green hill. Digitally focused, and so advanced even before the west ever managed to have its

blue print copied. The stranger from the cemetery observed the seemingly drunken informer leave, like he had his old comrade an hour earlier. Checking the telescopic sight one more time, he is singularly impressed with their detail clarity, especially at a distance. Not only could they see up too one mile in such superior detail, but also they made spying easier. And he recognized a drunk when he saw one. This wasn't one. It came with a one and half mile infrared camera range to boot.

On the last shipment off stolen M16's that he had taken delivery off, they accompanied his share, as token of good faith.

Recently he found doing business with the Americans a trifle difficult. Prioritizing, key too his success, and expedience has its pay-off. He shifted his attention to the old foe, eastern Germany for his gun running concerns.

Now that the British government is getting it down pat with the US using the good ally card, he foresaw a time when other sources would tender more favorably.

Though depending who was in the oval office at the time, would continue to have a direct impact with supply and demand. He would play that card when things improved in the US, and for the moment is satisfied with his present interim supplier.

At 7.30 a.m. on November 23rd 1973, Ballybeen was like any other normal housing projects in winter. Except for the debris of broken slabs of concrete, glass, empty gasoline drums, alcoholic and beverage cans plus a whole heap of new inventions, it is the same as any other morning.

Cold austere and miserable and not a good place to live.

The fresh disparaging graffiti on the walls of Catholic homes found new victims. Traversing the charred remains of another burnt out shell, drivers awoke to the realization that intended victims were not always the R.U.C. Fearing that the Provo's might use Catholics living in our neighborhoods in their aims to mount civil war, many were now being systematically forced out of their homes by the protestant paramilitaries.

Those neighbors who lived amongst us and perhaps who never supported the cause of the paramilitaries became victims also.

In addition, they were not always Catholics either. Neighbors who were sometimes perceived as non-combatants, where often mistakenly seen unsupportive to the struggle. Catholic neighbors for example, were particularly vulnerable at this time. Sometimes keeping themselves to themselves, out of fear and caution, although loyal to the protestant cause was not a guarantee of immunity. Sometimes inaction or neutrality was seen mistakenly as anti loyalist. Angel told me often off former members of the Tartan who had become junior Paramilitary members were perpetrating such activities against our taig friends as well. Some had been burnt out of their homes. For the R.U.C to assist Catholics sometimes had been unable to given circumstances such as the current one. Often perceived as reluctance by one faction as the other faction similarly saw favoritism or suspicious collusion. Making it particularly difficult for them to regain trust from either side but none more than the fact they were largely a protestant force at the time. Even within their circles, some found intimidation by the boys could reach them. It soon became

one big vicious cycle of mistrust and suspicion from the poison of discrimination. Poison that came with the housing projects some of the villagers would say.

Victims were now checking if their automobiles were still there that morning. Each day men off uniform checked undercarriages, as the Provo threat extended more and more into the east off loyalist strongholds.

The barricades, normally torn down by this stage, were untouched by the early police and army patrols. It had not escaped the notice of the local Paramilitary, who at first thought they just got lucky. Eventually they grew suspicious. Drivers heading to work out of the rear exits onto the comber road, an alternate route to Belfast, triggered ridicule of the army and RUC for their inconvenience. The upper Newtownard's road was blocked, wriggled down into the heartland of the disturbances, coupled with security checkpoints, preventing the movement of Paramilitary activity. That morning most people were rising to a reality check. With the level of destruction, these were still early days. Things were about to get a lot worse. The walls of resident's homes now adorned with a new tapestry of paint, remained untouched. Of a political tone being testament not only sentiment, of the protestant struggle.

**'BRITS GO HOME' 'NO POPE HERE' 'R.U.C. TRAITORS'  
'NO SURRENDER' 'QUEEN AND COUNTRY FIRST'  
'THE POPE, NOT EVEN ON THE LIST!' 'NEVER THE SIX COUNTIES OF  
ULSTER WILL WE SURRENDER TO THE THIRTY-TWO OF THE FREE  
STATE,' 'WHO'S SIDE ARE YOU BRITS ON ANYWAY,'  
'VENIANS OUT TODAY' NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET. ETC**

The roads in some places still had the blackened tar burning from the gasoline that leaked from spent Molotovs.

And after the rush to work, the estate drifted back to a state of inanimate motion. The litter fluttered and flittered along the streets, avenues, Cull De Sacs and roads by the downwinds, normally shielded from heavy traffic on the Newtownard's road. Living with the unrest, residents could not afford to stop and allow the abnormality outside to creep inside. That day and thrice more, children who used the once green soccer field for playing, were too play no further than their own front garden patch.

Even the ubiquitous blackbird avoided the area as though the stench and taste of rotting materials, with its hidden evils offended.

That morning I could hear my parents in the kitchen grabbing a bit off how's your father, before one would green-light us for breakfast. They still thought that we were too young to recognize the sound of passion as we ensured our door was shut. Early morning news, was the signal that everything returned to normal, as it crept up to our bedroom from the UTV. It would once again announce the usual doom and gloom news in that usual melancholy tone. The usual morning revelations would confirm the deaths off the usual victims off intolerance. Least ways, that is how I heard it from our local reverend once, when the notion took me too church. Strange words used then, made me kinda think, still do, kinda.



*‘Two soldiers from the king’s royals were killed at Crossmaglen in a gun attack yesterday. It is thought they were the victims of a sole sniper operating from over the border. A Roman Catholic forced from his home in Belfast at gunpoint and told to leave the neighborhood or pay the consequences, said ‘he is not moving.’ Meanwhile the UVF have asserted their readiness for civil war. In addition, for the first night of disturbances in east Belfast, the Newtownards, Woodstock and the Cregagh roads have seen more intensive rioting.*

Little did they know, that is just the start of it, I’ll tell ya. Strange that they didn’t include our neck of the woods, after all we are one of the largest loyalist areas in the east. However, nothing could have prepared me more for the last piece, as I sprang from my bed to the ill of a broken floorboard, and almost broke a leg in doing so.

*‘And lastly, the army and police in a combined effort give chase to what is believed the first ever arms running group linked too possible east Belfast paramilitaries; in the pursuit there was an explosion from what army sources fear were grenades in the craigantlet region at Dundonald. Army sources would not elaborate on the incident.’*

## **CHAPTER [15] A Snare to Trap The Bold Tartan Men of Ulster**

### **6.30 p.m at the Drumadoon Barracade**

The rough assemble of uncertain lighting from overhead kicked in intermittingly, after the generator finished cranking up.

The man standing forward on the wooden platform in the black hood, amongst the other men with black hoods bellowed a few expletives and then,

“Our forefathers came over from Scotland many centuries ago.

The occupying protestant forces invited them. You all should remember your history eh Sam?” he said jokingly. “They who needed Scotsmen loyal to an English realm to occupy and extract the usual land taxes. They fought and died to maintain powerful English monarchs too reign over their Celtic cousins, and we never stalled then!”

“NO! WE CAME TO THE RESCUE.”

Make no mistake!

“Then they were mostly lowlanders, otherwise they wouldn’t have come. We all know from our history lessons, eh McDuffie?” Again the crowd laughed, “Highlanders

were the big boys back then. However, we never forgot that we were men of the Tartan too. It is to these Ulster Scots who bravely held and still holding the last bastion of an empire that served them albeit indifferently across a body of water. Now they want to sell us down the filthy Liffy.”

The Liffy, is a slur we used as it pertains to the Free State’s main Dublin River.

“They who were loyal, were clans of the Stewarts the Cunningham’s, Curries, Cleland’s, Johnston’s and Johnsons the Grahams and Grays, Then came the Reynolds’s Keenan’s McIntyre’s MacDonald’s McClelland’s McWhyarts McDuggan’s, Mac Taggard’s, MacGregor’s, McDowell’s McKee’s, yes and even the McGowan’s and all other Mc’s and Mac’s.

Then let’s not forget the other lesser clans of the kirks, Kennedys, then the Thompsons and Thomson’s, Robinsons, Robertson’s, and so forth and so on.”

A crescendo of bawdy laughter and hilarity erupts and as soon as it had, his hands quickly pat the area in front to silence the gathering clan of Tartans and all again went silent. A newborn here and another there, cried from the distance until they too fell silent. Even the barks off nervous dogs whimpered to a silence, as the house walls around seemed too listen. We could hear the wind blow up craigantlet hills to the secret Glens that hid him there. Only the occasional breeze brought other sounds from the village that carried on through the Avenues and Cull De Sacs around us.

“That is exactly what we are struggling for boys, those sounds are the future of our six counties.”

Now they want to treat us as second-class citizens in our own land, like we no longer matter. We, who have been keeping the faith for all these centuries,”

*“WHATTA DO WE SAY TO THAT?”*

*“NO SURRENDER!”*

*“AND WHAT DO WE SAY TO THAT?”*

*“NO SURRENDER!”*

*“AND WE HAVE BEEN SAYING THAT FOR HOW MANY CENTURIES ALFIE?”*

*“Last count, AROUND FIVE CENTURIES,”* shouted the hooded man in the crowd.

*“REMEMBER THEM and HONOR THEM,*

*TONIGHT!”*

The man in the black balaclava then laid down the loudspeaker onto the wooden makeshift rafters. Very quietly, I stood petrified next to Angel and Georgy, dumping into my wranglers. Trying to conceal my predicament with the hardman stance, I wasn't sure if it was working, I just knew I had to bluff. Other newbies steamed from behind and from the front, so I didn't feel too bad, I'll tell ya.

Then the man nearby on the stand and another lifted his Kalashnikov and fired off a burst into the air. That was enough, and the steam came upwards from my front as well.

Three cheers followed and all quiet again, as a slither of excrement spliced the warm piss running down both my thighs.

They then both uniformly stepped down from the small platform amid cheering from jubilant members of at least three seasoned Tartan groups. Representatives of the Carnet and Newton Tartans were also present, occupying positions at the front forming the front guard. The two men then disappeared into a waiting dark ford Granada when it sped off, in a cloud of airborne debris, toward the stronghold of east Belfast.

That night they sealed the fate of many newbies, including Angel and myself.

Then another anonymous man stepped up onto the platform,. One from the many who belonged to the large Paramilitary presence. Ranting on about God and Ulster, he then candidly reminded us what would happen to those who would betray the cause. Now I was really dumping it. I'll tell ya, To hear such words in that manner, I'll tell ya, enough to keep me dumping for a whole month. Truth is, most of the newbies were now totally dumping it and wanting out. Some lost their nerve, one splashed piss on the boots of a tartan and received a swift kick to the shin and a slap on the head. That's how Tartan were. Words were not really for effective communicating, not like actions, I'll tell ya.

Darkness came suddenly. I still hadn't heard from Georgy or Angel on the explosion incident. I decided to hold my tongue until I was sure. Sure, that no one else knew about it or heard about our piece of action. Sure that they both hadn't heard also. It occurred me that perhaps they were also holding out. Worse, what if 'The Boys' knew too and needed them both too time out on the subject, until it suited them after the operation. I needed to wait. Too be sure if anyone else had heard the same. So I decided to give it a chance to come out into the open. If no one else knew, then I would say nothing. Why poke a sleeping dog anyway. Angel himself presented a problem though, his Da being in the UDA and all that. But if he did know? They will want to know answers. I can just hear them now? Why did we not come and tell sooner? Then my fears worsened, when I heard about the disappearance off a delivery off some arms

The men walked at the front, whilst the boys behind. Word had spread around the estate regarding impromptu visits bolstering moral amongst the loyalists. Others came out to join the vanguard.

Despite its appearance, they had not the success that they thought they had from the previous night. The men in the middle had been told to step it up from "The bigger Boys" the senior arm of the UDA.

The Boys, it is now well known, formed the Paramilitary Tartan or the junior UDA, which became the subordinate end of the UDA or 'The Wee Boys'.

Membership was subject to rigorous picking order. Angel told me its secrets, privy to members only. Needles to say, his dad ensured his membership with a kick in the arse for

resisting. A kick in the arse, well it's an expression we used to mean a hard-line approach to getting things done ASAP. It usually did around here, I'll tell ya.

'Innocence is the reward off being young and ignorant, be prepared one day, to face your guilt,' said old McGovern to me once. His words began to mean something more and more.

At the Davarr avenue entrance manning the barricade, stood the hard men in balaclavas trying to keep warm. These men remained anonymous. They were not from the projects, and they were hard core. We were not to engage with them in chit chat. Usually older and experienced with homemade arms at this stage in the game. However, that was to change as the cause progressed. They were also to be obeyed at all costs we were told. That rendered all Tartan men and others subordinate too them. Generally, it was believed their anonymity had to be a big secret. That is "we believed" they would make most of the sacrifices and take risks in the name of the struggle. Least that's what we were told. As we approached, it is clear they are armed with what looked like some type of homemade weaponry. One looked like a Sten-gun, another a crossbow, and one that seemed a familiar hand gun. From appearances, they were expecting to use them, soon.

After the briefing from each of the Tartan leaders, we were ordered to stay close to the operations zone. We were to stay clear from the barricades this time, and too use the nearby buildings for cover when needed. Tougher rules usually meant stepping it up, cause they needed better results tonight. Well, they are just about to find that out, I'll tell ya. We were making our way forward, when all of a sudden, the call went up from the front line of Tartan men who were already approaching the conflict zone.

**"HERE THEY COME!"**

**"Good, just in time." said McGurran**

Rolling the cigarette between my fingers I quickly joined the edges and lit it, fumbling with it as I did so. I sucked on it for the quick fix effect, as everyone jockeyed for positioning in the zone. My nervous system engaged that same rapid fire sensation matching the increased heartbeats that pounded my chest. I am thin, and gangly. Hardly a muscle to speak off, on my sixteen year old frame. Hardly any comparison to the fine shapes of McGurran, Madman, McCann, or even Georgy come to that. I am nothing compared to these fellas in the moment of ice cold reality. I'll tell ya. All skin and bones, trying to look like the likes of Madman or McMann, but never McGurran, never him, no one could look as well muscled as him. I wasn't that dumb. He is in supreme shape. And tonight sober, and better and ready for what he is good at. Tonight McGurran was in charge and led us forward. He Was ready for what is known for. A hardman to pick a scrap with.

The distant sirens rang out like the wail of banshees, gathering pace from the rolling hills at craigantlet. It is like they were coming from the woods, a whole army of them, en-route to us. Can ya imagine, we are the focus off her majesty's armed services, I'll tell ya.

**Warrrrrr.....Warrrrrrrrrrrr.....Warrrrrrrrrrrrrr.**

**“Here they come tartan”, someone nervously said.**

**“Now do you have the balls Glasgo?” whispered Angel in my ear from behind, “let’s see what you’re fawkin’ made off?”**

**I turned to face him. We slapped our right cheeks, embraced in the Tartan manner, then sharpened our wit and focus for readiness.**

**Georgy emerged from some corner of the dark zone, again alone, always alone. He preferred alone sometimes, Angel said. We then gripped each other's lower arm for the Tartan shake.**

**Then I felt that creepy sensation of that little demon again. I’ll tell ya.**

**Remember the one that got me into this mess. He comes when he has me in a bind, just when he knows when I am at my weakest.**

**“There’s something that is so different from last night?” Angel said.**

**That dread, that climbed inside to my entrails came again, bringing out obsolete emotions that I never thought would, displaying them to me saying,,**

**‘Here, you see Glasgo; you’re all full of nothin’ness! Not a man in ya, You’re all yella, go home to your wacko da!’**

**This time I was ready for him.**

**Mockers paranoia, now fast becomes mine too. I shrugged it off, like it had landed on me. Outside of my mind, closer and closer they wailed from the glens, threatening my courage that could abandon me.**

**In these moments, I thought of Zulu, and those fellas standing their ground. I thought of their courage. I thought and realized, this was the moment of being that man of today, they talked off. My fears briefly subsided when such thoughts made me feel brave. Then the presence of the seasoned Paramilitary men came running to flank us, encouraging us to move forward, chanting, like the Zulu in my ear. Then fire. Everywhere fires lit up all over the zone, and the men now holding firelight, where everywhere. Here and then nearer, over there and behind, caught in the orange light of their own deeds.**

**Then McGurran sang out, coaching, spurring us on,,**

**“Remember,**

**We are’ we are’ we are the Tartan men!**

**We are, we are, we were the B.R.S,**

**Of all the Tartan men, we’re simply the best,**

**Aside, and let US Tartan men in.**

**Cause, we’re the best of the B.R.S.”**

**We are, we are...**

Moral quickly restored, we soldiered forward, onward driving the force. Funny thing, that fear started to ebb away, and euphoria, Angel called it that, now kicked in kinda. It took a while before we noticed the absence of the manned barricade. Mockers appeared from the front theater of operation and somehow knew the reason my distance from him.

“No offence, Glasgo, you would have done the same, believe me.” He then ran on to The Boys assembling in the middle ground.

“I would square up to him some other time,” Georgy swore.

I wondered what he meant, and told Georgy to forget it!

“There’s reasons for his actions that are not all his doing,” according to Angel. Georgy threw him a look, and almost said something, but something tied his tongue.

“Is it true Angel? I asked, “that someone said he has a gun put to his head?” Angel knew all the secrets, I’ll tell ya. That one he avoided. I was glad we were best mates. I wanted to push him on that, but given the moment, I let it slide until some other time.

“There’s just too much coming our way,” he said.

The boldest of the Tartan men, now at the front line included. McDuggan, McGurran, McMann, McCann, Jacko, Georgy, Madman, Den wooden, Angel. Then McGurran and McMann through down the pickaxe handles supplied by ‘The Boys’. Others had been supplied with heavy-duty chains and an assortment of other low-level weaponry. More Tartan clans came to join us. Some from Ardcarn, and some from the Carnet.

“Start throwin’ the teeth when the Bastards arrive,” McGurran barked, spitting hard from his tight mouth. This time determined, resolute, focused, we were overly confident.

‘An attitude can maketh man.’ I once heard old weasel Sarg McGovern say. I saw some newbies already retreat from fear, scurrying away behind the tenements too make their escape. Scared of McGurran I suppose. Seemed he is less when drunk. Can’t blame them myself, mind, they were too young for this anyway.

**WARRRR, warrrrr... A Single Flash.**

Then silhouetting against the row off scarred -gray blocks are figures betraying movements of the foe.

Then again that flashing, alien flashing, deep inkish blue flash.

You’d think we’re used to it by now; didn’t work that way somehow.

Relentless flash, flash flash flash, that made some of us queasy if we stared too long at it.

Dogs nearby, gunfire in the distance, probably from Belfast, then a chopper hovering somewhere in the dark void, its eyes all seeing, but not visible. The sound came closer and then somewhere above, hovering like a dark mechanical bee darting between the scented colonies of possibilities for easy pickings.

Ro, ro, ro, ro, ro ,ro, ro,

Lights blinked, then flashed red and sometimes green, sometimes yellow, depending which way they were beaming.

Always coming back, and then circling, and then flash again. What part of me did they steal, that I had no say in.

Finally, the beams of bright lights coupled with shots that downed men writhing the nocturnal grass.

The lights quickly cut out, and the sound of rotor surge upwards out of sight. Relative silence, made eerily more so, when no one did anything, and staring at the vessel above looking down at us. "It could do damage alright, make no mistake," said a hooded figure.

We knew now, that we were going places tonight and we were serious.

The drums of the Ballybeen and Brookland lodges beat too the cry off the cause and the memory of 1690.

The drumsticks tapped on them by two men and out came a sound of the past, present and their future.

DRUMmmm, drummm, drummm,

Then came almost a tinny effect, but most never noticed its source, just its effect on the battlefield.

Indiscriminate cursing off men from behind screamed retribution, but got lost in the confusion.

Warrrrrrriin,,,,,and , Ro ro ro ro ro ro.

The adrenalin pumped as before, only with more intensity.

My chest rose, and then dropping breathed an abnormal labor, as though my heart might burst

Sobbing, a young newbie nearby is subdued with an order to hit the trail, receiving a kick to his rump as he fled

Then we heard the voices of the middle men reassure that all of the east had now erupted into full scale operations.

"The east has erupted everyone, there is no turning around now," said a voice from the middle ground.

The grid-lighting cut again, but with a more executed domino effect, creating a surreal event as it did so. Groups of men stopped to fathom its effect.

The sirens drew ever nearer, Warr, Warr, warr, war, war.

The middlemen, now suspicious with the absence at the Davarr barricade, turned more serious. Unbeknown to them, hiding in the dark were men of the 14<sup>th</sup> Para. The barricade, dark and seemingly vacant, soldiers crouched patiently. Others, nearby in the grass, camouflaged. The light shut down would soon reach there, and so the corralling would begin. It is then that the mist from craigantlet would descend at the same time, like they said it would back at logistics.

All around the zone the jubilation had ceased. Then tapped the drum, and goose bumps rushed all over me like a sensation, I'll tell ya. Again my ebbing courage, soon restored itself. The alarms of the R.U.C. vehicles wailed in too close to change anything strategic, Angel assured us.

A shout from the middle men behind us, soon brought up the rear with more hooded robust seasoned men.

“What’s the time?” the voice again demanded.

“Eleven forty-five, Sandy.”

“Who cut the Fawkn’ lightin up here’?  
I’ll kick their fawk’n’ balls up to their swinkters when I find out.”

“I have a feeling that wasn’t us, Sandy,” shouted a voice I knew.

The grim look of a man who removed his balaclava came toward us.

“*IT WAS’NT US*,” I repeated. Then I saw Georgy.

“Where are the men guarding the barricade?” he asked lowly.

Then a sudden quiet and tongues quit, everyone seeming to sense something about to go down.

The cheering behind Georgy short lived on seeing him freeze

If there is one thing I learn from this: talk is just not as important as body language. You just got to be able to read others in conflict, or you’re toast, I’ll tell ya..

“Too quiet, he murmured, much too quiet for a housin’ estate with hundreds of kids who can’t sleep.

We’re not alone,” said Georgy, “there are others in the zone.  
Not from here, not owning it like us,” he said.

“How do you faucin’ know Georgy?”

“ Let’s just say I practice smellin’ the bastards.”



Georgy, suspicious, faced something that became more than we wanted. A look on his features, looking back, is another look I had never seen before. One day I'll know the word for it.

Then he backed off slowly. Slowly backing to where he was with the others, his arms outwards, flailing like huge eagle wings straddling their length as though gathering all with them.

Back to the men in the middle. Others tried to follow.

However, he told them not to, saying to carry on like everything is normal.

He backed himself right into the confidence of the men he needed to get with.

The opportunity perfect, moreover, any doubts about his cause from them now faded faster. Georgy was now hard-core with 'The Boys'.

Now all he had to do is to survive the night.

Two hours earlier the Army and some RUC officers were assembling in the side courtyard off the barracks. Each one started their engine and each one exited through the side archway; the sentry closed the large steel gates after the third vehicle with a tip off his cap. Outside the barracks on the main road that led up to the conflict zone, the waiting line of army personnel. The grunt of engines idling, for the final word that would release their Saracen wrath.

Men in green camo fatigues with red berries milled between the din of their machines, making last minute adjustments to plans.

The heavy duty turning over of torque and horsepower, apparent from the fumes they spat out at either ends, would not be good for the eyes or health of the villagers.

Meanwhile back at the palace, Major Braithwaite climbed into the Westi chopper, which left the ground with purpose at 9.00 p.m.

Next, he got on the personnel communicator with his sergeant. From the top of a Saracen, the broad shape hanging out of the turret is Mitch, his sergeant.

Reminded not to make any arrests of the Tartan thugs, he rolled his eyes upwards.

**“NO ARRESTS OF ANYONE WITH A TARTAN SCARF, DO YOU UNDERSTAND MITCH?”**

Inside the barracks, McGovern held down the blade of a Venetian puffing his pipe, when his eyes found Graham who would be receiving his last minute instructions.

Delivered a few minutes earlier, Braithwaite conceded even though he knew the impact of McGovern's demands, would have a diminished effect on his men.

Officer Graham glanced at him as he passed from the RUC Defender, acknowledging Sergeant McGovern at his porthole.

When asked by Mitch if they be permitted to give them a hiding, Braithwaite conceded.

When also asked those without tartan scarves could be nicked, Braithwaite looked at McGovern peering out of the window, and conceded too that as well.

*“Must maintain our traditions Sergeant, What!”*

The men from the black Tartan uneasy at not being properly prepared with grenades or more men, now needed more seasoned men to make up for the shortfall.

The word went out around the estate, with the usual dire consequences for not supporting the struggle.

The sirens of the R.U.C came screaming, coming from the village.

The Tartan raced forward to meet with the fury that came hurdling down the upper Newtownards road towards them.

Confident with renewed experience and vigor, the Tartan were first to break from the main group, spearheading the way forward. First, they lobbed the jagged teeth onto the parking lot area where the RUC Defenders and Army Saracens would attempt a base.

The feedback from Georgy, got overlooked by the middlemen.

The missing men at the barricade got overlooked too.

The threat to the Tartan in the middle operations, also overlooked

They were now all walking into McGovern's snare.

The grim grey reinforced vessels contained only RUC drivers. Officer Graham, just released from hospital, is at the steering wheel off one of them. The others behind him? mean lean killers of 14<sup>th</sup> Para hungry for action.

They rounded into the estate and met with a barrage of jagged rock and petrol bombs.

Their trap was now set. As they did so, others from 14th Para Regiment entered two unmanned paths at north of Drumadoon, and from a leafy artery to the south.

The southern group cut out, making for the southern and furthest barricade in stealth.

There they took up positions in the neighboring soccer field and waited.

Swooping too take up positions behind the tenements, which is strictly out of bounds to the young men of the Tartan, is the northern group of the 14th Para. No children cried, not even the dogs barked, on the second night of conflict. Nevertheless, the men in green fatigues had their methods too. Two army vehicles parked in the nondescript Robbs road adjacent to Drumadoon entrance. There tenements and hedges, a secluded area and perfect for army coverts concealed them. Any canine around were knocked out, before the arrival off the tartan groups.

Three hours before, there were two important phone calls.

Major Braithwaite made one to Sergeant McGovern.

Confirmation.

He said he had good info that the Paramilitary were definitely embarking on a full scale disturbance tonight in his jurisdiction.

In addition, that it would be too much for the R.U.C. to handle. Would he object if they superseded their plans and got right on with the job. McGovern relieved with this particular guess, sat back puffing on his pipe after reassuring the Major to go right ahead.

He was not surprised with the call. In fact, he was sure Braithwaite would have some basis for the commencement of operation crackdown this night.

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"You'd be doing me a great service, Major."

The veteran sensed a feeling of being freed-up for once. The Major extended the idea, that for both, it may be prudent to meet just after the commencement of trouble.

Braithwaite at first disturbed, when the Vet suggested it would be prudent that he took time out on this one.

McGovern explained to the Major that in such circumstances prudence found better results with the good guy bad guy policy, which helps causes confusion in the enemy.

Besides, he still had to live with them, and better they did not associate their failure with him. After all, they were secured in their army forts, and he needed all the help he could get. Additionally, that in the Ulster theatre better that the army took the flack when possible, as they did not have the obvious direct threat to their lives. Anonymity being chief to both men, Braithwaite again conceded. By doing so, the RUC with their local leverage, could slow any unnecessary feedback to the Paramilitary, on which regiment toasted them. The bullshit worked again and McGovern sat back smoking his last puffs of tobacco, before he would put his head down for the night.

The sly of foxes varies with the turf, and Braithwaite had the craftiest fox within pondered McGovern. He is not agreeing to all his demands for nothing, not Braithwaite, not a man like he.

However, he needed to ensure that the rest of his plan came together like that of an elementary jigsaw.

He had told the Major better that RUC vehicles lead his men into the conflict zone. The more confusion they created the more complicated it would be for a later determination of recording events.

Braithwaite, a wry smile etching across his chiseled features, agreed, then hung up.

Something about Braithwaite told McGovern more and more with each confrontation, that a smooth transition to demobilization might be at risk.

The other phone call was too UDA headquarters on the Newtownards road east Belfast. The anonymous voice postponed their supply on the premise off a recent climate off risk. It was finished with an assurance of a reschedule at sometime in the initial New Year. Livid, their suspicions grew as they attempted to press for specific reasons. The other end hung-up with the assurance of follow up reschedule off the delivery.

6.45 p.m. The conflict zone.

*"Come on ya Razzers bastards!"* shouted some of the hard men in the front line.

From behind, *"Curse the pigs!"*

Carried now in greater numbers to the barricades, are wooden boxes containing broken rocks. Then came the petrol bombs.

Broken pavement slabs, deadly in the hands of the Tartan front men distributed quickly amongst the dwindling die herds.

However, one who felt the surge of panic's empty promise

*"Where are the grenades?"* shouted one of the men.

Informed that there is none, and commanded to make do! offering the pretext that somehow there was a present risk to them being delivered, and therefore reissued to another zone of operation.

There the protests ended.

But for me, the realization that Angel, Georgy and me may have blocked a Paramilitary operation of paramount importance, is almost too hard to swallow, I'll tell ya

Had we been involved in that development, be it all innocently, perish the thought, I'll tell ya.

I thought of Angel, and his sources that would be privy to information that would throw more light on the missing grenades.

But, what if they hadn't any? What if, the best thing is to go to 'The Boys?' That might expose us anyway as a liability even if we are innocent.

Truth, often found lacking in such circumstances, could be relied only with the source.

Something in the north zone of the soccer field moved conspicuously.

Against the impending darkness, they were soon everywhere, only not in black fatigues this time.

As soon as I seen that it isn't the RUC, I hollered,,

**"GEORGY? ANGEL? RETREAT! RETREAT!  
THE LIMEYS."**

**"Come on then, Pigs!"** shouted Tartan men.

The sound of a petrol bottle traced over our heads.

Flames from its neck flickered leading the way for others to follow.

It didn't take long, and more did.

The Westi's engines were now racing up the north side of the Craigtlet hills, with full booster rockets firing from its rear.

As it did so, it came into view of the night vision's cross hairs of the latest German Mauser. The infra red tailed it for a quarter of a mile and dropped off in the dark

The Provos, advanced to cooking the books, flourished much better in the present conditions than their adversaries, the loyalists .

They recruited professional types with dubious business savvy, easily arranging purchase of such weapons from the international markets.

But then they did have a lot more resources than their nemesis.

It was a no brainer that they would exploit them to maximum effect.

This evening would test the reward of their labors with that of the latest shipment from Germany.

On the other end of the Mauser, was one of the most renowned marks-men produced by a war off eliminating foe with a single shot.

However, this time the rifle was on a test run to test the night vision. The next time would be to test run the magnum, loaded in its chamber.

The Westi's occupants would enjoy the rest of their trip up over the tip of the hill to swoop down the other side to the conflict zone, which they could now see in the distance.

Dark glens lined the under passage, which concealed many sins below amid the pristine rivers and hiding places. Some sins stashed there until the big day.

In contrast to tranquility, back in the riot zone, quarrelling echoed off the walls of surrounding houses. Panic kicked in, and tonight the Paramilitary along with the black Tartan would luck out.

Searchlights flashed once again from the Peelers to their source.

Running up to inform McGurran, he brushed me aside with his hand that held a petrol bomb. He is preoccupied with evil.

“Wise up! You're not even one of us,” he growled.

If it had not been for body mass, I felt like deckin' him, I'll tell ya.

Probing the men at the front, who would be ducking their rubber bullets, the searchlights came under catapult fire.

Attempting retreating through the houses that flanked the right side of the soccer field is confusion.

Unable to see the foe, any moment now would soon be upon our numbers.

I heard the breathing as I dared to listen where I dared to stop, and then knew soon, I would be in meltdown.

Some of us were simply not going to make it home tonight, I thought.

Others skulked behind in more sheltered zones at large tenement blocks.

From that fatal error, they got a kicking army style. Out of the eyeshot of others and severely beaten, some got it in the tenements where they were left bleeding. Others dragged back into the dark garages, screaming for their brothers or their comrades. They went unheard.

In addition, for the Paramilitary Brass in the middle more confusion and the likelihood to abandoned them, now a reality.

Silhouetting dark shapes appeared swooping from one block to another. The searchlights again probed their source. Shadows that became more like foreign forms seemed like a show for entertainment. However, the shapes were movers stealthily jutting, springing,

**pouncing, grabbing between the tenements. Suddenly, ominously, the lights from the homes on the other side shut down.**

**It didn't make sense, I'll tell ya.**

**Directed to the partisans arriving from the rear, we were to take the fight sideways immediately.**

**Failure would not be an option.**

**The situation grew darker for us that would make things harder for escape.**

**Lights on supposedly meant, that the homes were willing to assist us and we were to make our escape if things got out of hand.**

**Hooded Tartan men began kicking the doors of traitors homes I to make escape.**

***"WHAT THE FAWK IS GOING ON DAVY?"***

**"Who told them to cut their lights," demanded Sandy,**

**"Who the fawk told them bastards they could turn off their lights?"**

**"It's not only the home lights that we have a problem with, it's the gridlock," someone replied.**

**"Seems like someone has tampered with the grid lighting."**

**"And the house power sources," another shouted.**

**The Paramilitary tactic was to ensure the owners would eventually open their doors, for us to pass-through or so hoped. But that tactic too, has now failed.**

**All of us were ordered back into the middle off the riot zone.**

**Back into the searchlight view, back into the fray, back to more risk and danger.**

**Back to where only we boys were not accustomed to.**

**The men from the black Tartan began boosting moral, and then told us we had nothing to worry about, and to stay calm and resolute.**

**Injuries, not what we wanted, but at least safe from arrest and a kicking from the squaddies hiding around the zone, for the time being.**

**"They never reacted," I heard a seasoned figure report to his senior.**

**McDuggan's voice carried surprisingly clear in the night air,**

**"We threw a tonna devils brew at one of their Jeeps, lit up like a firecracker, and they drove it away which put the fire out.**

**Soon another came and took its place."**

**"And then what?" demanded Sandy.**

**As McDuggan recounted his report, a rubber bullet ripped pass and plunged into a Tartan member's groin. It sent him down hard, kissing the dirt like only a man in terrible pain could. A direct hit too his balls, he swore the devils curse upon the RUC, only this time it isn't the RUC.**

**"It isn't the RUC out there, tell ya." Demanded McDuggan**

I began to sense a patent difference with this night's operation.

"That's more like it ya black bastards," cursed McDuggan, his eyes furiously flashing about him.

Sandy, the head poncho, hadn't noticed that the balance of yesterdays dynamics, now different, now alien, and now a lot more aggressive. But denial refused him seeing what his eyes won't allow, convinced that it is the RUC of yesterday.

Then another shower of revengeful brew flickered over the expectant Pig line, followed by other salvos.

Whistles dinned loudly through the dark, and the blowers were now organizing their groups to repel any potential RUC breaches.

"Over here Glasgo, and you Jacko, get that case of Molotovs over here just in case we need it," instructed Georgy.

"Use the teeth and catapults for the up close and personal shit," shouted Angel.

Whistles now used to create fervor, drive and authority to gain ground, failed. Georgy and Angel pushed through and led from the front.

"OK. You you and you, petrol bomb the tenement front, where they are hiding," yelled Georgy, "Burn the bastards out."

"Let's burn the bastards out everyone," Angel spat, wishing he had the use of his S and W.

Pumping as never before, my heart's blood raced through every vein and vessel in the only skinny frame I thought I'd even own. I thought soon dread, I'll tell ya, not surprising, as others who were fleeing had now lost the spirit of the cause, which now threatened to desert myself. But not so. Not yet! Not while Georgy and Angel still believed in the struggle.

Despite our gallant effort, from the green off the field and the black off the dark, the wrath of brutality pounced swiftly. Just before it had, the air held a scent in that miniscule second of a different odor: an odor not of our neighborhood. For most of us, we knew then, the very air had betrayed them at the last minute, as the north wind blew down a Craigtantlet hill. Only someone from the hood would know that, however futile our resistance. We had been breached, and that went deep into our pride, I'll tell ya.

Then came the crunching of thick wooden batons on skull and bones, and the moment for many, the reality check we knew would come.

Soon, hot on the heels off another retreat, I ran thinking that Angel and Georgy were probably done for.

"I called out, 'ANGEL, GEORGY, Angel, FALL BACK! FALL BACK!'"

It occurred to me that they might hide in our secret nearby hiding place, where we sometimes smoke drank and shagged scrubbers. After all I never imagined we were the bravest trio.

I heard the news on Angel's radio and relief. It is then I found both listening to it quietly, hiding in our disused garage, as I sneaked in by the side window.

"The Bastards found the Smith and Wesson." Angel cursed.

"That's not all they found," I said.

"Oh fawk, what else?"

"C'mon, let's get outta here, the limey's are all over the fawkin' place," I said.

"We know we heard their coordinates on Pinky," replied Georgy.

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English voices neared the door, as we stole out of the side window. Descending on us in a moment's panic, the limey came from nowhere. They even used the upwind at first, to throw us off their limey smell, but we fought him off and escaped.

Houselights in the immediate battle zone along with the grid lighting had completely shut down. It occurred to us it had been prearranged to make our escape more difficult.

Hoping that the house lighting would be to our advantage, is no more. Betrayal once more stroked over our neighborhood.

"I hope that's our side's idea," Mockers snapped, as he ran pass.

An odd little sod, in which I only had known him twenty-four hours.

But for reasons I was not quite sure off, I failed to hate him like McGurran.

We came upon organized Tartan groups, ready for something substantial to happen. Their clash came with the cracking of wood and bone, followed by the screams of a brother, cousin or a mate.

"*WHO CUT THE LIGHTING?*" demanded one of the hooded leaders.

"*NOT US,, ..THAT'S FOR SURE,*" I replied.

Tartan men stood their ground all around us, swearing retribution at the RUC.

However, there were no RUC, only make believe. It became clear after a while we had been bluffed, and royally.

"It's the limey's ya stupid wankers" Georgy asserted.

"How'd you know for sure?"

"Cause I can smell the bastards, and we saw them before the bastards cut the lighting."

"So it was them bastards all the time," concluded the hooded figure resignedly.



Another impatient petrol bomb jettied through the black crow night buoyed at what they just heard.

Then another, and another, until tracing flames began filling the air, landing and exposing the enemy, who were by now in full charge at us.

‘Whoosh, more whooshes,

“That will seem like we’re shooting at them, the scum bastards.” Angel laughed derisively firing his catapult.

Angel’s desire to use guns began to make me nervous, and seemed too me he would have one sooner or later.

Suddenly overhead, the Westi chopper hovered like a huge bird of prey.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh,

From its cockpit peering down, Braithwaite belted out the commands on his loudspeaker to his snatch squads.

“Go get em, it is clean up time, Mitch!”

Meanwhile out of sight from the others, I heard a voice from the nearby Tenement.

“Who’s that pipsqueak Mick?” demanded a Limey, “yes that’s daddy, our daddy. Now what do we have here, Mick?”

“What the fawk does it look like?” The youth Seethed.

“It looks like a bloody cah’apelt, you’re usin’ there, ya bad tempered pipsqueak,” said the paratrooper.

I hid behind a hedge listening.

“Let’s ave a go!” another soldier said, grabbing the youth by his neck waving a truncheon.

The front Tartan group did not see the charge on their flanks until it was too late.

I was grateful that I got further back with The Boys at this time, I’ll tell ya’.

Then the figures, emerged as though from the very air before us, forward in a cohesive manner by the strategy known as ‘The Para run’. We knew the front tartan group were already toast. They were on top off them before some realized or even saw them pounce.

Then droplets off flame fell to the street as brew picked up momentum upwards at the Westi, almost making contact with it.

” CRASH” followed by red umbrella of fire, the brew of Satan fell in vain, as the Westi’s engine roared upwards.

Below, the rubbers once again exploded with might, and it now came from the tenements. A second later, stealthily limey moved in bludgeoning the boldest fighters who went to meet them.

Good old McGurran got what he wanted, and where he wanted swiftly

A hard kick from his boot and a head butt, caused the squaddie to overestimate his capability. McGurran's sacrifices came easy first time around. One now and then another, only this time dispatching him with a hard whack off the pickaxe across his neck, rendering the limey null and void

When he picked out three more, then he proceeded to throw himself at their advancement. He swigged once, and buried the bottle in forehead off another. The soldier never tasted Irish dirt before his face met with muck. Something we all already had a taste off, I'll tell ya.

McGurran buoyed up, began kicking and lunging forward with a pickaxe handle, stopping one, then two then more off their numbers

The butt off his head, which what he is good at, met the head off another limey who fell back. McGurran stamped his red beret with contempt and kicked it to the side.

He butted one more and then for a moment paused to pick another victim, his eyes rightly with alcohol now failed him. Out of the black, now the object off one other Para group, who succeeded grabbing him by his harvest of dark red hair?

Overcome with the expert blow from a truncheon, then another, he is soon inoperable. Then extra blows for certainty he received a further kicking for his obstinacy and being Irish, according to that of the limey swear.

Mockers swore a million curses as he emerged from the smokescreen with a ribbon of crimson, streaming down his bewildered face.

No more the cocky smirk, or the fag drooping from neither a sneering mouth, nor the desire to recruit others, but just stunned realization that he was mortal after all.

He too is beaten to the ground and becomes a recipient off a limey kicking for being Irish, according to their wrath.

Just before the limey dagger touched his tongue for removal, McDuggan somehow came too his rescue with his heavy chain. Before another limey could swing the truncheon one more time, a vengeful Jacko appeared from nowhere and thrust into him from behind, his long stiletto silver blade. The blood, he hoped, would christen the taste between his lips.

Only this time in vain, as the blade met only with the hard surface of a bulletproof jacket. The gloating limey was short-lived.

A kick to the groin from McDuggan splayed the Paratrooper out before he delivered the Coup de Graf with the swing of his chain.

Not to be short-changed on the action, Jacko tried again with another two-Paratroopers moving in on him, one from the front, one behind. After being overcome, he then is manhandled too the tenements for a kicking, swearing in a most vengeful curse.

Madman did not escape the attention of one Para who left the imprint of his truncheon from behind, with the leverage off the smokescreen.

Both engage in a brief struggle, then making a punch bag out of his victim, 'which he is known for,' he is also rendered inoperative and bludgeoned for being Irish.

The summons to retreat to the Drumadoon barricade needed the loudspeaker for delivery amid the din. McMann and McCann heralded the retreat.

However, it was too late for most of the young Tartan men, who eager for early action and their fate, fled homeward to lick their wounds.

The moment McGovern waited for finally had arrived. Would the Major honor their agreement? This time officer Graham sat peacefully in the grey RUC defender, observing at a safe distance. He is not alone. In fact, he is with McGovern's plant.

The red phone now sat fixed in the periphery of McGovern's vision beside the black phone. Both now set aside of each other on the old table strategically.

Braithwaite's call sounded in what is now the nerve center off the operation. Castlereagh allowed their sergeant slack to accomplish the task and get the result they knew he would. They did not want to inconvenience him because of his gammy leg, and he had not played that card for some years. So he conducted his part off the operation from the village barracks.

The red sprang into action.

"Sergeant McGovern?"

"Braithwaite!

We are now done and dusted with the Davarr Barricade and the Tartan there. We are now moving onto the other barricade at Drumadoon/Craigleith!"

McGovern held the phone tight, tensed, suspicious.

"And what were their injuries, Major?" McGovern asked, his tone direct, all knowing.

A line of perspiration lined the forehead of Braithwaite. The fires blazed below his Westi in a pattern of breaking crimson and orange.

"They were allowed liberty, Sergeant," he said, wiping the sweat from his brow.

McGovern knew the army and that this sort of thing was as old as the army itself. This time he allowed it to slide without further enquiry.

"As far as I know there were no real injuries except amongst some of my own men," Braithwaite said nervously, voluntarily, carefully.

"Major Braithwaite, do not tell me you are a man with a softly softly approach?"

"Very well Sergeant."

"Very well major, keep me posted?"

"Yes Sir, you'll hear off any further developments."

**Buzz.**

**Galvanizing a long-term relationship with General Custer was not at the top off the list for McGovern, especially at this late stage in the game.**

**After all, why would he want too? In about one week, he was due for retirement.**

**The only galvanizing is too be with Mary Mauv McNamara. The woman who lived on a hill and who in turn loved Sergeant Vincent McGovern.**

**Love again on the cards, McGovern is now ready to embrace a remaining life with it. Homemade baking with proper hot meals, and cuddles from a woman he would dearly miss at night in a big comfortable bed, would be too lonely to forgo.**

**He knew the likes of Braithwaite were the new breed of war busters, with their problem solving strategies. The McGovern types were already obsolete, truth be told, and obsolete a very long time ago.**

**The measure of such a man, already a historical chapter in heads of others, began to slow down as they accepted his final days. More and more of the brass did not quite see it that way, the way things were heading.**

**The end of a very long career was ending quickly for them. Maybe too quickly.**

**As far as he was concerned, veteran McGovern really did not care to hear from General Custer from this point on. Nor from the R.U.C. brass, nor the Army rank and file, nor the people he did not care for.**

**The Tartan clan has been routed, along shortly with the junior Paramilitary and the middlemen, and all will soon be history.**

**The Patriarch will slip out the back door, and no one will notice.**

**Mission accomplished, or so it is hoped.**

**“Pull back boys, pull back, ya stupid wankers,” the Lancashire dialect pleaded.**

**“ I never heard so many English accents close quarters like this before I’ll tell ya, Angel!”**

**“Fawkin’ accents from all over the fawkin’ place,” he said.**

**“Place sounds like a Fauc’n menagerie, I’ll tell ya.”**

**McDuggan swiftly came from behind a limey, with a swing from his heavy chain downed him cursing the retreating tartan.**

**He too fell back with the middle and then further to the second barricade.**

**By now, most of the injured Tartan was allowed to make their escape through some of the paths and back alleys.**

**Including Mockers, McGurran, and Jacko.**

**CHAPTER [16] The Drumadoon Barricade.  
The Bau’ld Tartan Men of Ulster**

**10.37 p.m.**

A thousand feet above the operations zone, Major Braithwaite watched the developments on the Westi's digital monitor. He is pleased and found an opportunity to keep McGovern informed of developments. During his induction, he received training on some of the Westi's aeronautical controls.

He is certainly delighted with its camera and the GPS system that came with a satellite map. He would press on the green button, in one spontaneous flare the flash from the chopper's exterior would light up the sphere around it.

Then below, in one exploding flash, a thunderous purple flare bellowed upward and swirled like it would produce something at any moment.

Braithwaite again shot the scene, while his chuff turned to a smug smile, everything seemed to be panning out. What in fact the Major had just photographed, were the automobiles set alight, as the Paramilitary retreated down Drumadoon drive towards their doom.

The Tartan brimming with anger and revenge for their disloyalty, turned their attention on the automobiles of traitors and ignited them.

Due to the darkness that made things difficult for the Paramilitary leadership, this was in accordance with their policy.

It had the effect to provide enough light to see the enemy and deprive them of the element of surprise.

Secondary flames licked up the sides of preselected automobiles en-route to the second barricade, whose owners were usually non-supporters.

The jeers from the horde of Para loyalist men sang out briefly, when the army snatch squads had been exposed by the new lighting.

“Come on now ya limey bastards” hollered Georgy from behind having made it back with a lump on his forehead.

Then! From the side streets rumbled an ominous sound.

The unmistakable din of heavy-duty vehicles thundered down a small enclave called Bute Park.

Concealed by the row of three tenement blocks, the same development was taking shape on the other side.

“What now? Would someone please get us our grenades so we can finish the job,” Mockers cursed furious with revenge.

Sandwiched by encircling army paratroopers, the loyalist Paramilitary would be also circled unless they moved quickly.

Swooping down to a level of a hundred feet above is the Major and his Angel of death.

“Seems you lucked-in Mitch, drive the escapees down to the last barricade at Craigleith drive, we'll let Lewis mop the trash.”

“Copy Sir!”

Fear never seeming to leave me, I could hear my heart pumping and the first thoughts of capture, and the shame I would bring upon family and myself.

Exciting, being with a Tartan gang once I thought. Even fun! Now my worst nightmare, I'll tell ya. I was beginning to prove myself, I'll tell ya, but frankly, I didn't now need it. Not that type of reputation!

The petrol bombs stashed at the second barricade were 100 fold.

The 14th Para using snatch tactics succeeded at reducing loblers from the side alleys, in Drumadoon drive as they retreated

The army began pushing us down the drive toward the last barricade at Craigleith.

Some of the seasoned men now considered abandoning 'operation defence' knowing the enemy would inevitably trap us there.

The Paras were now using the darker side-alleys to much effect, swiftly appearing and retreating with quarry.

One moment they appeared from Inchmarnick drive, then Dornock walk, the next from Durness Park. Then they came out of the dark at Craigleith Avenue and disappeared.

That was another scary time I'll tell ya.

Our ideas men were out of ideas, and now appearing to be panicking us to retreat further to the last barricade, at the junction with Craigleith Drive.

[a] We could see the puffs of flash from exploding rubber bullets aimed at our front forcing us more, like corralled cattle.

[b] At the same time, the snatch groups kept coming at us from both sides all the way down Drumadoon. We managed to hold them off sometimes with the combat skills from some older vets amongst us were equipped with.

They engaged us in hand to hand and we fended them off using pickaxe handles.

[c] Meanwhile, the drone of heavy duty Saracens followed from behind the tenements.

Flash, flash, and then puffs of white smoke sailed upwards.

The rubber bullet launchers we could now see were again in action only fewer.

They resembled the old Sten guns of the old official pictures back in the day.

But they were the tools of pitch and run, whistling missiles that kept coming at us.

Many of our fellas went down wounded, not a pretty sight, I'll tell ya. Nevertheless, my luck seemed to be holding out, sticking with the seasoned big boys.

Having reached the last barricade all seemed quiet, almost too quiet.

11.10 p.m.

However, among the front line off men who were now mostly the Paramilitary contingent, the tension grew unbearable even for them.

Others were waiting for the limeys too arrive at the last barricade.

Some of the big boys at the front began asking questions and now were very suspicious with some of the limey tactics.

"Why is it taking so long to catch up with us?" one asked.

The initial army group was now appearing to be lying low.

Back at the Davarr barricade, the mist was burning away with so many fires around.

The RUC personnel were helping the injured into their military vehicles. It became clear the vehicles were now retracting. Their rays struck the walls off tenements like alien eyes, creating an intensity that exposure would not allow to pass those, that watched from beyond a thousand eyeing windows. Reversing, eventually, all disappearing into the night in one swift united move, and then gone, as if a better world had been found elsewhere for their kind.

## **Chapter 17 | Slight of hand down at the village**

### **The Bold Tartan Men of of Ulster**

“Aren’t you awake yet, damn it?” asked the constable his hand pushing down the heavy blanket.

Meanwhile down at the village barracks Sergeant McGovern carefully contemplated his next move. He had to live with the rabble at the new Belfast housing projects.

Thinning out the troublemakers would be just dandy with everyone at the village. How much anonymity did he actually have with the boys, must be balanced with anonymity he had with Paramilitary acquaintance. How much time had he, as the village sergeant would remain with the RUC Brass? Outside of that, he was still on course to hang up his boots in about a week from today. In addition, the village folk? Well he knew they had his back, as they did not talk with the rabble that moved in at the projects. Otherwise, he probably had enough leverage to make his exit without any notice or threat to his life. That the Paramilitary had taken possession of his comfortable jurisdiction, he had long gotten his head round it. That is life, shit happens. Soon, that’s someone else’s problem.

That did not mean that the Brass would allow him to bury his head in the sand if things got worse with the Provo threat. It would continue to preoccupy his mind with one thought. Mary Mauv McNamara, was his big investment, and his only salvation, toying with the idea of finding her alone, made it ever more crucial.

He is now one-step closer to taking the ultimate gamble. A gamble he was hiding from the Brass. Staying around until she came back might be the way to go. The village had attached itself to him too. He knew their gossip would go no further than the village if they knew something about the find or her: which he supposed they already did. In fact, he knew they would be the first to support his wants and wishes, as they were now more than grateful and wanted to demonstrate their respect for him, as best they could.

He could change his mind and stay on, and that would be ok with the brass. It was not as if, as far as they were concerned, he was going anywhere, or that he had someone in his life to take care of him. At least not anyone that they had heard off recently, when her name would once bounce down those shiny plastic tiles like a new virus had hit the farming community’s livestock. Unfortunately, for them, the corridors of Castlereagh Headquarters had not heard from Mary Mauv Mc Namara for quite a while. It would be no surprise exactly; no surprise she has occupied a place in their filing system for quite a while, since she had gone professional. Then she was known as someone else.

The villagers were in one accord that he had done his big part and then some for Queen and country. They would have found it difficult to stop him doing anything he wanted at this point. Especially when a woman had entered the world of one of their most decorated. In the village, he was accustomed to walking around on his evening beat. Villagers would eventually invite him into their homes providing tea and cake with quiet conversation, with the sole purpose to extract as many morsels for gossip, as they could. Mostly about the woman on the hill and which church she is attached too, that way they could deduce whether she is catholic or protestant, and he knew how that went.

“When is an auld fella like yourself Sergeant, ready?” Mrs Spence asked nosily hiding behind her Titanic mug.

“Ready for what, Mrs. Spence?”

“Auch, you know, takin’ yer woman on the hill as your wife?”

Then the nature of the city rabble would be next, and how that had overtaken their quiet surroundings, and other similar bullshit. However, this time it would be different. There was a new gossip in the village air, and someone said something about a woman on a hill not there anymore. Something else would come from that, and something even McGovern did not know. Remaining in uniform, well, what was the point then? Everything would have to change back to that, he thought. Then the thought occurred to him, that he was a person who wanted his own life to himself. And with that, he is satisfied that he is on the right path too retirement.

City folk brought their hang-ups with them, and the usual shape of things to come.

Division, sectarianism, bigotry, much did he hate them for bringing that too his secure innocent village? Now he would have to live among them, until his love returned. One thing he knew, they would get to know who he was, if he remained in uniform, eventually.

He thought it more prudent not to visit their part of the village, nor drink in their paramilitary pubs, or worse, indulge in passing chitchat. He could never be sure he had all the anonymity he needed. Nevertheless, it now all seemed to be in vain anyway, unless the woman on the hill returned. After all, it is partly for her and what remaining life he had, assured him the time to take retirement is now and get out of uniform.

Ballynamara Castle, deep in the Antrim Glens. Co.Antim. Ulster

Mary was half way through her decision to escape the family entanglements, through marriage designs. Her brother had second-guessed it already. It is one element of his master plan that he hoped would finally bring her closure and happiness. He could quite easily allow Vet McGovern to marry Mary and while away his remaining years with her in happiness. It would not have any conflict of interest. In fact, it would be a positive move that benefited him and in his plan A. Besides, he had no animosity toward his old friend, only what he stood for. But that would not stop him making him a rich also. After all, it his sister he will be married too, and she could be high financial maintenance.

For Mary’s compliance, he would allow him to take her around the world on cruises. Despite Herr Steiner’s attempts, he could even make it possible for him to make physical love again. Everything was possible with Mary and wealth, and that is what made her



special. However, it also had other implications that helped her Brother's cause while he possessed her.

The atmosphere in the village had recently changed to a sense of relief, then again fear relief, then a stay of execution relief. Word got out that the Provos were in town. Trust and allegiance still had a part to play in village life, though for McGovern to succeed in rescuing the village, needed more than that.

The gamble that, he might play the wrong card which would favor the devil's success, was at risk from the get go.

Time was running out, if he did not play it soon, all the villagers will know, come hither or nether. He waited for the final phone call that needed conclusion to the arms find.

He had to make sure that he bargained for everyone, not just himself.

Nov 23<sup>rd</sup> 11.30 p.m.

"I believe we made a bollocks of that one big style?" said Georgy.

"Bollocks would be the right fauc'n'word," I said.

I remember the last images of the Davarr Avenue barricade. I remembered a hooded figure, at the front who took action after realizing that something was wrong. But he is overlooked.

Then the realization we had bitten off more than we could chew. I remembered someone shouting,

"Everyone head for the next barricade on Drumadoon!"

"Finally" cursed Georgy.

"Yeh you bet," concurred Angel.

"The night was not over yet." I said.

Then the command "*RUN.*"

Instantly, the groups scattered as though Old Nick himself was on their heels.

We were too all gather at the last barricade, but the pigs robustly followed us.

At this point, we were to all regroup on the other side of the new part of the housing estate, by the region known as Craigleith hills.

"Like faucin' Custer's last stand," said Georgy.

"There the hills offered some chance Georgy." Said someone hooded.

A savvy Paramilitary member had established a vantage point.

We could see almost that the small enclave front of us, until the lighting cut out there too.

We knew now, that the limey would be soon with us. Little did we know at the time, they were already with us? Only they were mostly greened into the grass and we were too green too see them. Except for some of the former vets, we had with us. They kept shouting 'keep yer eyes on the flat ground!' but no one really knew what the flat ground was, or if they were taking the piss.

To our flank, our front our hind, we had a panoramic view; though that damn darkness followed us everywhere.

Tense, focused, we waited nervously. Then came the hard men.

Shadowy figures of hooded men, some with the Tartan scarves, covering their faces.

They scared me at first, with their army fatigues and hard voices.

**"EVERYMAN ST, ST, STAND YOUR GROUND, IT IS OUR DUTY FOR GOD AND ULSTER,"** commanded McDuggan. I knew McDuggan, because he stuttered at times.

McDuggan had finally come full circle and he was now where he wanted. Last time I heard, he was now on the payroll of 'The Boys'. Was I surprised? Whatta you think?

In addition, although I did not understand it at the time, it scares me now what foolhardy I was prepared to do.

Sergeant McGovern was once a man in supreme condition.

But, it is time to hang up his proverbial boots. Beside the pain from his thigh playing up lately, he did not think his hearing was up to the job these days either.

He knew when he lifted the old black official phone on his desk that it was a struggle to hear detail.

He looked at the wall were the Queen hung with her official garb casting final looks over her loyal servant.

She too knew that these days were ending, and she told him so, along with his mother.

Soon the stampede of men in uniform in and out of his office would be a distant memory.

The year was 1973 soon to be 1974, and he was reaching the age of 76.

A man well passed retirement age. But he did have attributes not easy to find amongst ordinary rank and file. He hoped this time they would let him slide away, to find his queen like a viking warrior amid his own possessions but missing something. However, men of his experience were platinum plated especially with the threat of looming civil war.

A cursory knock and entered a man in a dark uniform.

The low-lit wall lamps inside the office allowed entry of his shadow, as it accompanied an unfamiliar subordinate.

**"Sir, we are now at the stage where we need limey reinforcements at Ardcarne Estate?"**

**"Ok Corporal Nesbitt warm up at the fire."** McGovern said smirking to himself.

**"Major Braithwaite's Westi is on the ground and things are not exactly kosher, Sir."**

Sergeant McGovern pulled out the pipe his brother give him.

Packing it with tobacco, he puffed hard caught the sinders and blew smoke. Then he waited for the call from the brass. He listened to the subordinate, calmly smoking, and detached.

“Remember everyone keep your eyes on the darkest areas, that’s where they’ll fawkin’ come from boys.” Hollered the hooded man.

We all fell silenced. You could even hear the breeze catch your collar, and fag smoke inhaled to be impatiently exhaled by some of the ready combatants.

I remembered the last stages off the operation ending, and my body felt like I was wearing a coat of iron, I’ll tell ya.

The sensation of weight on me is a feeling I’ll never forget.

Nevertheless, I suffered silently, as others around me suffered worse.

Then a blond hair fella had ambled towards us, his upbeat smile short-lived, when he had lost his footing in the grassy slopes. Falling, hitting the grass like a sack of spuds, his eyes folded. A rubber bullet struck him center chin, taking the full force of its impetus, rendering him helpless, then blank.

“Follow me Glasgow” came a voice from the darkness of a garden somewhere behind. It was Georgy and Angel.

But it was too late. No one saw them coming. Camouflage works that good, even that close where men can hide so effectively in front of you, I’ll tell ya.

What we did not see, were the hundred Limey Paras that were crawling across the dark soccer field to our front. Right before us, right fauk n’ there, and who would have thought that possible.

From our front line of men, a hooded figure, sensing danger turned to us, too late, his face wretched with fauc’n’ terror.

“Get a man over here and take him over there to that house with the light on!”

Then some of the men being downed, not by rubber bullets this time, but more succumbing with ugly up close and personal baton charges. Some Men taken with shock, hadn’t the time to take it all in, such was the enemy stealth. Someone attempted organizing the lobbbers into a line of defense, frantically waving his arms in one desperate last stand.

“Tucker over here quick, bring him with ya.”

Other hooded men with whistles attempted rearranging others into their groups.

But futile.

Then each time, futile, futile, and again futile.

“*CHARGE!*”, and the second body off the Para beast beat a path toward us.

A large group of tall camouflaged soldiers loomed up from the playing field.

**They were on top of us from the front and soon from behind.  
No one saw them coming with truncheons and a war cry enough to make me dump myself again and again.  
So much for the idea of neighbors allowing access to escape through their homes when the time came, I'll tell ya.**

**Down at the village barracks Sergeant McGovern carefully contemplated his next move.  
Then the din of the red phone sprang at him around 11.45 p.m.  
The sound of Mary's voice was almost too much.**

**"Mary, mother of our dear lord, where are ya?"**

**At that point McGovern heard a very familiar sound.**

***'Click'.***

**It was the unmistakable metallic effect off the first chamber cocked from a German ruger, nudging at her head..**

**"Vincent darlin' listen to what I have to tell you!"**

**Tone was enough for McGovern, listening nervously, like something parasitical had invaded body. Something that made him tremble like that, needed attention.**

**Before the call and like many times before, play-back in his head played from the first time she had entered his life.**

**Also on play back, the chat if they could live with the Paramilitary as neighbors and then she would turn a shade of white.**

**Thinning them out is worth the pay-off, he would argue, and so what if a few heads got broken. He could live with that. But she held most of her thoughts, and somehow he knew she wouldn't be happy living in the village married to him.**

**How much anonymity did he actually have with the paramilitaries, was to be balanced with how much acquaintance he had with its members. But that was a risk and one she didn't like, he remembered.**

**'Listen Mary, I am done with the village,' he wanted to say, but the ruger cocked again.**

**"What I am saying, are his words Vincent!"**

**"What are you saying Mary?"**

**'There is a big gun pointed at my head Darlin',"**

**"The man with the free state accent is intent on one thing, Vincent!"**

**"I see,"**

**“Don’t ask any questions; just give him whatever you have of his.”**

**“I see”**

**“You know what it is, he says”**

**“I believe so!”**

**“Unless, he gets it back whatever you have, you won’t see me again, he says,”**

**“I see.”**

**“And then, if you don’t Vincent,  
“He says you’re next,”**

**Mahler symphony no five played softly in the background. In one of the far off distant rooms. The family castle somewhere in the Antrim glens, is a tall man with three holsters containing three pistols.**

**A Glock, a Ruger, and the last is a Smith and Wesson.**

**“He said you have one hour.”**

**“I see.”**

**McGovern was not about to let her go yet. She seemed slick and he knew that from experience. She seem that she might be reading from a rehearsed script, under coercion perhaps. She knew what to say as she had other times. Nevertheless, this time just before she put the phone down, a sudden pang of doubt threatened the outcome.**

**“My Love will be your reward, he promised.”**

**“One Hour.”**

**McGovern caught the sound of the gun’s hammer release.**

**Without any further interaction, she hung up.**

**Mary despite herself, is quite steady for a woman in such circumstances, which at first endeared her more to McGovern.**

**The 14<sup>th</sup> Paratroop Regiment will eventually take possession of his comfortable jurisdiction and he had to accept that. Soon Braithwaite would finagle patrols from the Army Brass around the estate on some proviso. The Para boys would look to the village sergeant too make their complaints and trust will be on their agenda..**

It soon occurred to Sergeant McGovern that Major Braithwaite was playing into their hands, be it all indirectly, and acceptance of his intentions needed thought. With such a big individual with big individual goals like those that he had, might take the heat off himself, thought McGovern. He knew one thing; he needed to get out of uniform, as soon as possible. What better way than something that went along with the army brass. After all, he had done his part for King, Queen and country, and they would probably prefer their General Custer to take over the village security anyway.

In the village, he would be saying goodbye to many aspects of his life. One in particular, as accustomed to walking around too maintain good relations with the gossipers and troublemakers that would often yield surprising intelligence.

People would often invite him into their homes and provide tea and cake, with quiet chitchat, and a modest amount of typical backstabbing.

Usually about the nature of the city rabble that had overtaken their quiet surroundings.

City transients that brought their hate and hang-ups with them were the usual topics, and how he must despise them for bringing that to the village.

Nevertheless, he had to live among them too, and so to remain quietly impartial, until the return of his betrothal.

Eventually, he knew the Paramilitaries would get to know who he was. Sooner if he remained in uniform.

He had considered it prudent not to visit their part off the village, nor drink their brew, or seen in their presence, or even indulge their chitchat.

The atmosphere in the village pub had recently changed to a sense of fear that civil war would begin soon.

Drinking men talked loosely, as drinkin men do and tongues wagged on about civil war as if it was happening already.

The acute stench off petrol, fire, and scorched earth reached the village in the early hours.

However, this time not from Ballybeen, but from the northern end of the village at a place called Ardcarne.

Moreover, there the Tartan groups where in full frontal attack.

Time was running out if he had not let Braithwaite act sooner. Soon the Major would take over in stature with enough ego to make a name for himself.

Back in the riot zone, Braithwaite's men would soon be busy on the ground mopping up. A gun battle was unlikely on loyalist turf especially at this early stage. He knew that would be not as difficult as he may have feared, but then that is also why there are inductions for the army personnel.

Radio silence had been imposed and he got busy with rounding up the hardest men.

Night vision glasses fed back some of their hiding places, and soon they would be able to disarm them. The Loyalist at this time were reluctant to take British lives, or engage in a arm struggle with the realm. Which is why they mostly retained their legal status throughout the troubles, unlike the republican provisional movement?

Camouflaged, the Paras waited until the right moment in the soccer field.

The putrid taste of burning petrol, debris, and an assortment of cruel acidity, threatened to give them away, performing their task. One they had been prepared, the Ulster Theatre is unlike the others that went before them.

We were corralled to Drumadoon Barricade like men more on the run, and a quite few were, not just from the army but the hard men of the paramilitary. Down the narrow tree lined Drumadoon drive, festooned with burning vehicles along the way, we would reach the road to the last barricade at Craigleith Drive. The snatch squads harrowing us all the way like a mechanical assembly line, darting from both sides and behind.

Drumadoon barricade would soon serve its purpose.

The loud command ‘*RUN*’ again was heard above the voices. Instantly, the masses of scattering groups ran as though Old Nick himself was on your heels. We finally all gathered at the last barricade, but the limey robustly followed and the same scenario repeated.

Then someone hastily separated us into two groups at this point. A diversionary tactic that would seem the way to go, at the time. In fact, it appeared to have worked better than we expected.

There were hills there, and it occurred to the leaders that we could establish a vantage point. Then the lighting swiftly cut out there too. Those hopes got dashed right before our eyes. Now we knew that the limey would be soon with us. We were clean out of options and the only one left was to make for the hills anyway.

Out there to our flank and our front we would have had a panoramic view. The difference was that we were now up against professional men who now knew the topography out here as well us. Tense, focused, scared, we all waited once we had reached the hills, exhausted. A Paramilitary member with balaclava moved in amongst us and then he turned to face everyone.

*‘EVERYMAN STAND YOUR GROUND, IT IS OUR DUTY FOR GOD AND ULSTER ‘*

I was ready for nothing!  
I just wanted to go home and take my chance with me da!  
I called out for Angel and Georgy, but nothing. They were probably already home.  
I heard from someone, they somehow tricked us to these dead ends on craigleith drive.

They had prearranged the residents to remain inside their homes, to keep us out, I heard some days later.

They were at no time, too offer any escape too us or they would be arrested for aiding and abetting. I heard a lot of things.

I remembered making for the entrance of a house that was near. In fact all three of us had. I had been pushed back by the bigger of two hooded men, I remember, as they frantically attempted to jump the wire fence to someone's garden, and instead fell into it. They didn't get far. Neither had I.

Shoved aside, I'm back into the metal waste bins that announced my presence, I'll tell ya.

"Here I am!" I shouted. "right fauc'n' here! ya see me, limey eh! And the clutches of her Majesty's dominion, reached over and nabbed me, like an apple for the eatin'.

Damn those old fawkin' metal bins."

I remember attempting to throw them, trying desperately to fight off the imminent assault on my person.

The crack of a baton on my skull had rendered me unconscious.  
I didn't expect that. Then, I was only sixteen.

"Are you awake yet?"

The next day I found myself here, back in the same old cell at McGovern's barracks.

Only this time, alone with memories. Some battles were just not to be won, I guess.

As soon as my eyes allowed sight to enter, Chizz is still there along with McGurran, Jacko, Georgy, and Mo forever engraved on my wall.

So this is how it all ended up for me. It turns out some new army dude, needed to make name for himself, and decided to give the wrong side a lesson for posterity. To demonstrate to the republicans his impartial intentions, according to the loyalist Paramilitaries. And that's it, pure and simple.

Or is it. With the sort of thing, I'll tell ya, it's what comes after that changes things, and how it gets told in history books.

There I would leave my proof, that I was once a Tartan man.

Tartanman,

Hath no guilt upon your name

Lest those hath life more violated.

Born neither high nor life the same.

Innocence taken without shame.

Just isn't the same.

Long live the Tartan men of Ulster. *Glasgo*

.



Three thousand feet above and one-step closer, Major Braithwaite saw his promotion to Brigadership loom. He had moved to make a name for himself swiftly and competently, be it all general Custer style.

Now he was about to bring another chapter in his career to a satisfactory conclusion.

Consumed by his self-glorification and heightened by the fact that he would soon be in control, he had his mind on other things already.

McGovern was probably the last of the real soldiers who had kudles to speak of these days. Moreover, he was about to take his leave.

Braithwaite was not entirely happy about that after all.

Sergeant McGovern for a veteran of two wars, is a man in surprising condition, and is at the stage to hang up his boots.

Beside the pain from his thigh playing up lately, he knew when he lifted the phone on his desk, that he must now bluff his way out with the brass as well. Just in case they had any ideas.

Since especially the last few calls, they would ask for him by name which would bring his hand upon the red phone again, in anticipation. Timing was everything, and his time is nigh.

He looked at the wall where the queen hung with her official garb casting her final surveying looks at her loyal servant.

He had served her and her father well up to now, and to him, she seemed to know what he was thinking. As if in some consultation with her, he pardoned himself for putting another woman before her this time.

But, he felt it was the most his country to do for him. Mother kept her council, as his eye darted next door, as if too hope she would continue.

Then he apologized, for bowing out with a cloud of dereliction of duty hanging in the barracks air, in the village and amongst his men.

He then reached his green cap over and sat it on his head with the usual tip, and saluted.

Finally, next door, Mother spoke her mind. That, in his last days, all his ethics and code of conduct set as examples for others, that this woman on a hill, he would allow to cheat him of his pride at the last gate.

He knew that these days were coming to an end, with its shackles of obedience, allegiance and discipline.

Soon the stampede off uniformed men in and out of his office, would be a distant memory.

The smell of all things associated with men would also fade. Leather and wood, official paint, man sweat, the scent of canvass, the odor of cleaned uniform would vanish into dormancy. He would now have to get used to the scent of a woman.

The year was 1973, and he was reaching the age of 76, and she somewhere around her middle fifties, which she decline to divulge precisely.

Mary weighed mostly in his thoughts and the effort to shelve her proved to be almost emotionally too much. He had not heard from her for almost 1 hour and until now, it became almost too much to bear.

He looked at his chained pocket watch again and it read 5 minutes past midnight.

From the office, he thought he heard the phone ringing.

Shrugging, he thought his hearing was playing tricks again as it often did these days.

On the other hand, that he heard so many phones ringing recently, that somehow the jingle was still ringing in his ear.

However, this time it was not a trick of the brain.

It was ringing and it was not the black phone either.

He hobbled hastily without his walking stick toward the desk drawer.

Praying all that he could muster in his inner soul that this was just for once, free of the impending operations.

Pulling the drawer a sunder grabbing the phone set with his large right hand, he slammed it down, grabbed up the handset listening, without saying a word.

It was apparent too his eavesdroppers across the way, that he was losing it, and the stress was getting too him.

Nothing!

Nothing but his own breath, panting like a rapid dog.

Yet, something was there; his better ear told him so.

However, nothing came forth.

A clandestine attempt, maybe. He toyed hopefully with the idea, from a helpless desperate spirit, that it was her.

Then he checked the lighting again. It was definitely green.

Moreover, McGovern was hearing well than he ever heard before.

Nevertheless, there was a sound.

His distant memory misty, but it is a classical piece he knew from another time.

Then he heard the light hoarse breath down the phone, and instantly knew someone is there. Hearing every pause in that difficult laboring breath, he waited to see who would make the first move.

Again, he checked below for the light and it was still green. The most dreadful thing that could now happen was for it to turn to that cruel red glow.

Then happened again, and it was the sound of a man who had wounds. Deep awful wounds. Profound wounds acquired with terrible trauma from another period.

There is something else.

The presence, McGovern knew it had no bearing on the disturbances that currently dominated his recent preoccupations. This he was relieved to know, that his anonymity was still intact.

Mary McNamara had no knowledge of the red phone or its number.

McGovern prayed as if he never prayed before and new that this was deeply personal with whoever it was.

Just for once, he prayed, that something good would happen.

The breathing on the other end hissed, and fell silent.

McGovern dejected, almost replacing the phone when, his nerves not able to go on, roared,

“WHO ARE YOU?” The shout summoned his subordinates once more from their cosy mess.

He dismissed them, saying his old wounds were acting up! which always squared well with them, knowing they needed the face saving.

“Pull your men out of the Old church.” A southern brogue demanded.

From the microphone, a ruger found its loaded chamber again.

Mary’s voice emanated from the phone like a resurrected saint.

“Vincent Darlin’, he promised to keep this between you and him.”

The ruger remained at its loaded status,

*“Who Mary?”*

“He says you have three days to pull your men off the surveillance.” Then the phone once again separated them.

Braithwaite’s Westi landed hastily but smoothly on the grassy roundup zone.

Its L.E.D. main beams left on, too throw some celebrity light on the activity of kicking and rifle whipping.

Springing from it with a his usual smug smile, he reached for the two Havana cigars he had been saving, and planted one in his own big mouth.

He handed the other to his sergeant whom now had joined him for his pat on the back, as is the custom between the two men.

They lit their cigars, surveying the captive paramilitary men on the road whom put there and made to stretch out with their hands above their heads.

The corners of Braithwaite’s mouth curled up smugly, contemptuously, and no one notice.

Then he ordered them to be pistol whipped into the Saracens, on top off each other for processing back at the village barracks.

Glasgo reached the rifle-butt rout half-conscious. The street lighting turned orange before the bright normal lighting resumed around that spot where they had the spotlight.

He then saw the brutality of paratroop retribution and it was not pretty.

Back at the village barracks, McGovern was filling in two pieces of information into two separate files. Nevertheless, he enjoyed almost the feeling of relief and relaxation that wanted to surge over his tired body, but suppressed it.

The first one is Constable McDowell’s transfer to Omagh, as soon as he is to leave hospital in a couple of days. That was where he was from, and unlikely that he would object.

The other was the omissions from a previous log report regarding the arms find.

The log read,

Nov 21<sup>st</sup> 1973; 10.45 p.m. Arms Discovery, Dundonald, St. Mary's Church

Location; ARMY JURISDICTION [Palace Barracks] Holywood; R.U.C. Constable Officer No 33343; Name Robert McDowell.

Then he tore it out, folded it four times, and placed it in his large leather wallet and returned it inside his tweed dogtooth jacket.

Omitting the RUC Officer charged with the responsibility of the arms find, along with who made the entry would conceal its source. If not permanently, at least for a very long time, or so he hoped. Long enough for his departure from the RUC to make a difference and with sufficient protection for McDowell.

Then he deliberated over the finality of McDowell's honorable service as an upstanding constable, and got comfortable with that also. After all, it is clear that his replacement would take the flack if there were any.

All and all, he was comfortable with the only significant tarnished decision he made, and forgive himself.

He then took one of his men off surveillance one day later and waited for the third and last phone call on the red phone from Mary.

He had a feeling he or she would call back as soon as he noticed the well-intentioned signal, hopefully before the three-day threshold.

Nevertheless, the seed of irk had now grown and now bugging him to distraction.

Plan [B] would comply with the release of the weapons back to the provider.

The next call on the red phone came through from Major Braithwaite.

Squawking loudly from it amid an assortment of other English dialects in the background, caused McGovern to adjust to a change of environment.

In unmistakable Etonian overtones,

*'Paramilitary Trapped, Ambushed, Routed and allowed no liberty, sleep well tonight Sergeant,'* and then he hung up. It did not go unnoticed that Braithwaite averted heat from McGovern on the matter.

Sergeant McGovern did not pat himself on the back like his young subordinates when he had executed his responsibilities successfully; instead, he had developed a more philosophical attitude with maturity. It is all in a day's work to him, and it was his job to prevent death firstly to his men and others of the realm, and then to any moron who got himself in the way. The men back at the barracks picked up a few bottles from Tom's Cabin out sales, and had them placed above their hearth in the mess for a celebratory later drop.

There is to be something else. An apology. An apology for doubting his policing strategy.

Then there is to be another apology from Argyle in private, the one for stopping the arms getting through to the paramilitary big boys, who would probably have been using them on

his comrades. It was no secret to Argyle and the men how McGovern managed this. In addition, a subject that did not apply to most of them.

As far as the Veteran was concerned, he wanted to move on. On to a peaceful life A.S.A.P. but not before the little issue regarding the confiscated arms find. Now that plan A of his strategy is now a done deal, there was still Plan B from his strategy to be resolved.

Early next morning Thursday Nov 24 the kettle blew its top off in the barracks kitchen. McGovern had returned the handset in his usual slow fashion, hoping it would again produce the voice of Mary. Constable Graham poured over the large front pages of the Belfast Telegraph with him. It was a sense of relief that media coverage of the previous night's province-wide rioting had not extended to their village. Constable Argyle checked for anything on the arms find and that too is unmentioned.

He still had misgivings and eventually got round to burying them with the passage of time.

McGovern's remaining concern now is too accommodated the rest of his blackmail.

However, that might prove to be more interesting than he expects. The gamble was still to be resolved. The third day is tomorrow, and he had a plan.

At noon the next day, the expected phone call from the red handset did not take place. Instead, the black phone jingled jangled with a lesser din, and is apprehensively in McGovern's large left hand.

It is not Mary or him with the breathing problem either.

U.D.A. Headquarters, East Belfast, Nov 24th 1973, 9 a.m.

The answer machine's red light simultaneously flickered lit with the tape recorder's cassette run.

'You have reached the Headquarters for Ulster Defence Association out of hours.' It said with the usual monotone Belfast accent.

This time the voice said,

"Your Arms haul intercepted by RUC."

Dial Tone.

End of Part One.

## Glossary

Ards=Newtownards Town]

Bandied=Harked=Mentioned  
Da=Father

Fag=cigarette  
Fauc=Fuck

Fawk=Fuck  
Fenian=Catholic

Fruits=Homosexuals  
Geg=Laugh  
Give ma headpiece= leave me alone  
Gobbed=Punched in the face  
His Grand Exit= La Grande Debouche [French]  
Hole= sexual intercourse  
Ma= Mum

Trog= Ugly Girlfriend

UDA=Ulster Defense Association=  
Protestant Paramilitary  
UDR=Ulster Defence Regiment  
Ulster=Hospital

Waffle= B=S. = Jibberish  
What about ya/you=greeting=how are you?  
What's up?

Mustard=intensity of something  
Pace=peace= 'give me pace' leave me alone  
Parky=cigarette  
Projects =Housing estate  
Pulled=Set upon=bullied  
Razzers=RUC  
Zip=zero=squat=diddilly  
Rake=Mock= Tease  
Roger=[Vulgar term meaning. To fuck=screw  
Alt, would love to date her]  
Scrap=fist fight  
Sus=suspicious  
Slabbering=blabbering=mouthing off  
Taigs= Catholics  
The Boys= Loyalist Paramilitary organization