

DA GLARED AT SIMON HUGHES.

'Tans in the street!' Jimmy said tensely from the kitchen.

'They didn't see me come in,' Simon said to Da.

'What was the shooting then?'

'They were getting close. A couple of the lads tried to distract them. I wouldn't let Tans see me come here – you know that. I just want to cut through the garden.'

Da sighed. 'You know the way?' he asked.

Simon nodded.

'Go then,' Da said.

Simon started to say something else, but Da cut him off.

'Take nothing,' he said. 'Just go.'

Simon nodded. He turned without another word and went down the hall. They heard the back door open and close. Da looked at Sarah. 'Into the kitchen,' he said.

They went in. Jimmy was by the window looking out. The curtains hid him from the street. Ella was standing by the sink with her hands covering her mouth.

‘Mind yourself, Jimmy,’ she whispered. ‘That’s how poor Mrs Carr got shot in the Rising, looking out the window upstairs!’

The Carrs had owned the house then. Old Mrs Carr had died of her wounds, and her husband hadn’t lived long without her. They’d been related to the Breens and left the house to them.

Jimmy ignored his aunt. ‘What are they at?’ Da asked him.

‘I think the shooting mixed them up,’ Jimmy said. ‘They’re looking every way. There’s people coming up from Mass now, and a lorryload of soldiers parked at the corner.’

Sarah couldn’t believe that Da had let Simon go out when he was hurt. ‘Da,’ she said, ‘we could have kept Simon here. Even if there was a search, we could have said he was Mick. They’d never know.’

Da snorted. ‘And how would we explain his accent?’ he said.

‘Aye,’ Jimmy said. ‘And what if Mick himself walked in? Who would we say he was?’

Sarah felt annoyed at her own foolishness. Da saw it on her face. Oddly, it seemed to relax him a bit.

‘Never mind, girl,’ he said. ‘I was never much good as a liar myself till I joined the army. It’s one thing that you learn there anyhow.’

'These times does make liars of us all,' Ma said very bitterly.

Jimmy turned from the window. 'Here's Josie now,' he said. 'And Mick is with her. And they've company.'

Ma crossed to the window. 'Who?' she said.

'Martin Ford,' Jimmy said.

Sarah felt suddenly cold. Mick and Josie would be safe enough if they were stopped, but Martin Ford would have a gun. She didn't doubt that it was he and Byrne who'd fired at the Tans.

Ma was standing beside Jimmy, looking out. 'They're stopping people!' she said in a hushed voice. 'Oh James! They're stopping Mick and Josie!'

'There's Mr Breen,' Ma added. 'He's stopping too.'

Da went to the window and looked out. The tension in the room was terrible. Sarah wanted to look out too, but she was too frightened of what she might see.

'What's going on now?' asked Ella in a little voice. Ella got frightened easily. She hated any hint of violence.

The three at the window were all holding their breath. None of them said anything for a little while.

'They're letting them go,' Ma said finally. She was nearly crying with relief. Sarah ran to the front door. By the time she had it open Da was standing behind her with a hand on her shoulder.

There was a little procession coming in the gate. Mick

was in front, smiling and talking to old Mr Breen. Behind him Martin Ford was chattering to Josie, who was laughing at something he'd just said.

'Will you come in and have a cup of tea, Mr Breen?' Mick said at the bottom of the steps.

Mr Breen rubbed his hands. 'Thank you, no, Michael,' he said. 'I'm sure my wife will be wondering about me.'

And with a cheery greeting to Da and Sarah he went down the steps that led to his basement flat. The others tramped up the house steps past Da and Sarah into the hall. Da closed the door behind them and turned angrily to Ford.

'What the hell are you playing at?' he said.

The gaiety was gone from Martin Ford's face immediately. 'I'm sorry, Mr Conway,' he said, 'I wanted to make sure Si was all right.'

'You've a funny way of doing it,' Da said. 'You might have brought half the British army in on top of us all. Have you a gun itself?'

Martin held his coat open to show his shirt, innocent of ironmongery. 'Ne'er a one, Mr Conway,' he said. 'Sure our guns are halfway to Ringsend by now.'

'And Simon? Did he come to my house with a gun?'

Martin's eyes flicked towards Sarah for a moment. She shook her head warningly at him.

'Si had no gun,' Martin said to Da. 'And they never

even saw him come into the street. Honest. They would have, though. They were just going to turn the corner. We had to shoot. You know what would have happened to any young man they saw running.'

Da glared at him, but the look softened. 'I know Simon wouldn't knock at this door if he thought he was bringing trouble,' he said. 'And I wouldn't leave a dog out with them animals after it. But I don't like you risking Mick and Josie's necks to prove what a brave fellow you are. The Tans might have arrested the lot of you. Then they'd have come here as well. We're still not out of it, you know.'

But they were. Jimmy came out from the window to say that the Tans had given up and were leaving. 'There's too many coming from Mass,' he said. 'They know they'll find nobody now. What happened, anyhow?'

'We were in Phelans' –' Martin started, but Da stopped him.

'No,' Da said. 'Don't even tell us about it.'

Sarah had never felt so annoyed at him. This was a real part of the war, and she'd been involved. Da was much too careful. She knew he was no coward, so why was he always like this?

'No offence, Martin,' Da said, 'but I want you out of here as soon as it's safe. Simon's gone out the back. He'll be well away by now.'

Josie, who'd been standing silent, touched his arm. 'In

the meantime, Da,' she said gently, 'we could at least offer Martin a cup of tea.'

Da made a scornful sound. He still looked cross. Sarah knew he worried about the family's safety, but sometimes she felt ashamed of the way he turned his back on the freedom struggle. At least now that the danger seemed past, he'd cool down soon enough. She knew him well.

'Were you going to nine Mass, Da?' she said. 'Only you'll be late if you don't go soon.'

Da went into the kitchen to get his jacket, leaving them all standing awkwardly in the hall. When he came back out he stood looking at them for a moment.

'Oh, go on, then,' he said to Josie. 'Give the boy some breakfast. But, Martin.'

'Mr Conway?'

'You be very careful, do you hear me? And don't risk the safety of this house again.'