

Chapter 1

A shaft of light penetrated the inky blackness as he gripped the pencil torch between his teeth. One last heave should do it. He grunted as he struggled to manoeuvre what appeared to be a dead weight into position.

"How you doing Pat?" A whisper with a sense of urgency filtered through the surrounding darkness from his small transceiver.

"Be done in a couple of minutes and you?" He called back in a low voice.

"Yeah I'm through." Then silence. There was a dull clang of metal on metal, a half-whispered oath then silence once more. A few seconds elapsed and the disembodied voice floated through the darkness once again.

"What's holding you up? Come on man let's go." There was silence. "Pat are you ok?"

"Yeah I'm ok." He muttered in the cold night air as his hands deftly twisted a pair of wires together in the small beam of light from his torch. "There that should do it." He said to himself, he then depressed the send button on his transceiver and in a hoarse whisper said; "Right I'm through. Come on we're out of here." He scrambled back up the bank to the wall and gave a low whistle, which was answered by another barely fifty yards away and a small circle of light momentarily flashed in his direction then it was gone. Within seconds his partner joined him.

"Ok Pat I've taken my trip wire across the road at a height of six inches and tied it off. I've concealed it as best I can under the soft earth. What do you reckon, will it work?"

"It should do, I see no reason why it shouldn't. Right lets get back to the van and wait." It took the pair of them five minutes to reach their British registered van concealed down a farm track well away from the main road and prying eyes.

"How long before we detonate it?"

Pat looked at his watch it was three o'clock. "Well I reckon they should be able to see the flash about now." With that he pulled up the antenna of a small transmitter and pressed a tiny red button. The effect was instantaneous. There was an almighty roar as a wall of flame shot about twenty feet upwards and culminated in a loud explosion which ripped the sub-station apart. He calmly pushed the antenna back down and started the engine. "Well that should keep them busy for a few minutes looking for candles. I don't see them getting the power back on today."

In the distance could be heard the plaintive wail of a two-tone horn as the patrol headed with speed to where the wall of flame had occurred. In a matter of minutes they would be dead or dying but they were not to know.

As the Land Rover rounded the bend the driver spotted what appeared to be a wire at about six inches above the ground stretching across the road in front of him. Too late he realised what it was. He slammed on his brakes locking all four wheels as he did so then everything went into slow motion. With all wheels locked up the vehicle slithered forward over the surface of the road. The driver saw the wire disappear from view. As the front wheels made contact and he sensed the wire go taught there was a blinding flash of light and an almighty BOOOM, then blackness. The force of the explosion picked up the Land Rover and tossed it in the air as if it were a toy. It landed a broken twisted wreck upside down some forty feet along the road. The blanket of silence that followed was almost deafening as the pitch black of the night closed in once again.

Fifty miles away to the south a small group of men worked in the glare of arc lights loading bulk bins of apples onto an articulated truck. The time was just before three in the morning. It was always the same routine; the truck would arrive in the early hours and be loaded in the dead of night. The driver could never understand the reasoning behind this, but the pay was good and he, like many people in this area, needed money so it didn't pay to ask too many questions. Word had it that the man in charge was exceedingly wealthy and was a very powerful man, with friends in high places. Rumour was that he was the hidden force behind certain union personalities and that he indirectly controlled their actions, but of course it was only rumoured. Still he was only a truck driver so far be it for him to question even the rumours. When he had first been told about the job he was somewhat sceptical and being a good Protestant he was even more dubious at the prospect of working for a Catholic family. Especially in the present unpredictable environment and in particular the geographical local he found himself in. I wonder why they want me here just for apples at this hour, the driver thought to himself.

"Right that's the last of them," someone shouted. There was a swish and rattling noise as the Tautliner curtain was pulled along its runners then a series of clumps as the clips were locked into place. Someone banged on his door.

"Ok mate all yours." Colm, that was the drivers name, wound down the cab window took the clipboard that was being proffered, signed the paperwork keeping his copies then passed it back. All this time the big man stood with his Irish Wolfhound by his side, watching just watching. Colm had been told he was the boss but he'd never spoken to him.

"Ok Colm see you in a couple of weeks." The man with the clipboard said. Already the arc lamps were being extinguished one by one. Colm hit the ignition and there was a deep muffled roar as the powerful engine kicked into life. In a matter of minutes he was pulling out of the leafy lane and turning right heading northwards. Colm whistled along with the radio as it played 'Danny Boy' quite happy at being on the move at last. But I wonder had he known the real reason behind those early morning pickups would he have been just as happy?

In 1972, not long after 'Bloody Sunday', my good friend Paul Jones and I started work on my fathers fruit farm in Kent. This was a far cry from the excitement I had yearned for when we had both joined the Parachute Regiment some years previously. During our stint in the Para's we had served our time for Queen and country to the best of our ability but I somehow still found something missing. In a way it was nothing like I had expected, don't misunderstand me I really enjoyed my time, but it was not as exciting or as glamorous as I had expected or had been portrayed. Maybe it was me. Perhaps I had read too many war books or possibly I was just plain naive. Anyway, upon our discharge Paul went back to Kent to start his life as a civilian once more, whereas I still thirsted for excitement. The thought of fruit farming held as much appeal to me as watching paint dry, so I set off in search of a more stimulating life elsewhere. I didn't have far to go. In fact Dorking was the place that beckoned to me. I had heard on the grapevine that a Major Paul Leonard was looking to recruit ex-military personnel with a view to building up a mercenary force to send out to Angola. This sounded like the life to me, a bit of action, good money, and foreign lands. Yes excitement, the very thing I craved for and the very thing I had expected to find in the Para's but didn't, so no sooner had I heard about it than I was there. Unfortunately I was not the only one to learn of Major Paul Leonard and his band of merry men. The British Government had also heard about his mercenary force and learned of his intentions to ship out to Angola with them. This, the Prime Minister felt, was not in the best interest of the country therefore some gentlemen paid our Major a visit one-day and that was that. Once again I, Richard James, found myself back in civilian life with any prospect of foreign countries, good money and excitement fast disappearing over the horizon. Left with no income, no excitement I had no alternative but, like Paul, to return to my native county of Kent and join him working for my father.

It was whilst working for my father we devised, or should I say stumbled on, a better and much quicker way of grafting fruit trees. Our method showed great promise and it wasn't long before our reputation started to spread throughout the local fruit growers and farmers. Very soon the trade magazines started to take more than just a passing interest in Richard James and James Fruit Farms. A number of articles started to appear in various trade magazines and journals tracking our progress and praising our new innovative approach to fruit growing and management but most of all they showed a particular interest in our method of tree grafting. Then, completely out of the blue and apparently in response to one such article, I received a telephone call from a man called Breandán O'Shea.

"Hello, would that be Mr James?" a man with an Irish accent enquired, "Mr Richard James of James Fruit Farms?"

"Yes, I'm Richard James. Who am I speaking to?" I asked.

"My name's Breandán O'Shea and I'm..."

"Sorry Mr O'Shea should I know you?" I asked cutting across his conversation.

"I wouldn't have thought so Mr James, but if you'll just allow me to finish I'll explain why I'm calling you this evening."

"Sorry Mr O'Shea. Please continue."

"Well it's like this now. I've just been reading this latest article about your grafting technique...." He then went on at great length about the different articles he had read about Paul and I. How he had followed our progress with interest and watched how we had become celebrities in our own field, so on and so forth. In fact I would say he was full of the Irish blarney, I was only half paying attention to what he was saying, trying to work out how to get rid of him without appearing rude, when he dropped the proverbial bombshell. "...So you see, if you were prepared to come over here, and of course you can guarantee your work, then I'm prepared to offer you two hundred punt plus all expenses paid. Oh and that would also include hotel accommodation. What do you think now?"

"Sorry Mr O'Shea I didn't quite catch all of that. Would you mind repeating the last bit?" I couldn't believe my ears.

"I'm sorry Mr James. What I said was, if I was to pay you two hundred punt would you be prepared to come over to my place and do some work for me?"

"How much?" I asked in amazement still not believing what I had heard.

"Two hundred punt, that is of course per week."

"You did say two hundred pounds?" I asked again incredulously.

"Yes, two hundred punt plus expenses and hotel accommodation." I still found what I was hearing incredible because what this man was offering was way above what we could earn here.

"I'm sorry Mr O'Shea, but you did say plus accommodation as well didn't you?"

"Yes that's right. Two hundred plus accommodation, that's hotel accommodation you realise, not some back street guesthouse you know, so what do you think?" I was so taken aback I didn't know what to say.

"Hello, Mr James are you still there?"

This was too good to be true. "Yes Mr O'Shea, I'm still here. I'm sorry can you hang on a minute?" My hands were shaking with excitement as I covered the mouthpiece and whispered to Anne. "This bloke's offered me two hundred pounds to do some work for him."

"What, two hundred!" She exclaimed. "But for how long?" She asked as common sense prevailed.

"I don't know." I replied.

"Well the money's good if it's only a week or two, but any longer than that then you could earn more here at home."

"No I couldn't. You must be joking. Where would I get two hundred a week?"

"What! A week did you say?" Anne like me just couldn't believe it. "Did I hear you right, two hundred a week?" She repeated the question.

"Yes that's what I said."

For a minute she stood there eyes wide and mouth open, then she shook her head in disbelief as she said, "Bah I don't believe you, you're having me on." I shook my head to let her know I wasn't and mouthed the amount again as I pointed at the telephone. She thought about it and laughed. "Richard James you are pulling my leg?" I shook my head.

"I'm not," I whispered. "He's offered two hundred a week plus expenses and hotel accommodation." I looked at her for an answer.

She stopped laughing and realised I was serious. "Richard you are serious aren't you?"

I nodded.

"Two hundred a week plus expenses, well what are you waiting for, take it, take it." She said with a sense of urgency.

"Are you sure?" I asked, but she did not have time to reply as the softly spoken Irishman was now pushing me for an answer.

"Mr James, hello are you still there?"

"Sorry Mr O'Shea I'm still here."

"Well Mr James are you interested?"

"Well yes, the question is how long will you want us over there for, and I presume you mean for both of us to come?"

"Two of you?"

"Well yes of course, is that a problem then?"

"Well hmm..."

"Well it takes two of us to do the work and I presumed you realised that." I caught sight of the look of disappointment in Anne's face as she sensed that things were starting to go slightly pear shape.

"Oh I'm sorry Mr James. No I hadn't realised that at all, but of course. If that's what it takes to do the job then that's a different matter. I thought you wanted to bring your wife or someone that's why I was a little hesitant." His voice held a note of relief in it. "Now can you come or not?"

"For two hundred..." I must have sounded slightly hesitant or something for he cut me short before I could say anything further.

"Three hundred and that's my top offer. Yes or No?"

The man had just upped the price by a further hundred a week. What I wasn't sure of was this for two men or was this pay per man. So trying to keep my voice on an even note and business like, which I now found increasingly difficult, I asked him.

"The three hundred and all expenses, including the hotel, is of course per man isn't it?"

"Of course." The line went quiet for a second before he started to speak again, "So is it a deal then?"

"Yes. It's a deal."

"Good I'm relieved to hear it. Now Mr James what's your partner's name?"

"Mr Jones, Paul Jones." I added, "I look forward to receiving your confirmation in writing Mr O'Shea."

"Oh I'm sorry Mr James, let's just say my word is my bond. I will of course be sending you the ferry tickets nearer the time so that in itself will be some form of confirmation." He paused as if waiting for me to speak.

"Ok Mr O'Shea, you leave me with no option but to accept what you say at face value. So will you be contacting us again, with the necessary information as to where we will be staying?"

"Sorry Mr James, an oversight on my behalf. You'll both be staying at the Tara hotel. I'm sure you'll find it more than adequate and I will of course need to speak to you again before you come over, just to go over some of the finer details. In the meantime take it as read that you have a contract at three hundred punt a week for each of you plus hotel and expenses. Is that ok Mr James?"

"Yes certainly Mr O'Shea, three hundred a week per man and staying at the Tara Hotel." I repeated the salient points more for the benefit of Anne than anything else. "I can't think of anything I've missed Mr O'Shea." I paused as if I was thinking then added, "No that's fine, more than fine."

"Good, then I'll not take up anymore of your time, and thank you Mr James good bye."

"Thank you Mr O'Shea and I hope to speak to you again soon, good bye for now."

A big grin spread across my face. Anne couldn't believe her ears. She rushed over grinning like a Cheshire Cat and gave me a hug.

"Wow, three hundred pounds a week. Umm just think of it. Oh I love you I love you. Hey wait 'till you tell Paul and your dad. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant, three hundred a week! Can you imagine it? Three hundred pounds a week! Where does this wealthy man live Richard, I want to meet him?"

"Ireland."

"Ireland did you say?" Her voice suddenly changed. It was now tinged with fear. She knew about Ireland all right from my time in the 'Mob'. Although she had never experienced the deep sadness and grief associated with the loss of a loved one, she had none the less, seen it with others when their loved ones had never returned, and it was this aspect that worried Anne. "It's not Belfast is it?"

"No, it's south of the border near Dublin."

"But it's still Ireland." She said looking concerned.

"It's not the same Anne; it's the Republic and quite safe." She still looked worried so I tried to reassure her. "Anyway it's different when you're a civilian. We'll be all right don't worry." I gave her a reassuring cuddle, and went on to explain to her that the trouble was in Ulster and not in Eire. Once she had grasped the difference between Ulster and Eire she cheered up.

"So when will you go?"

"Oh not until next Spring."

"But that's months away, oh Richard I thought it would be sooner than that." She looked disappointed. Suddenly she grinned, "Still it gives me time to work out what we can spend all that money on!"

"Slow down girl, I haven't earned it yet."

"Don't worry I have every faith in my man." She gave me another hug and a kiss then disappeared into the kitchen humming.

We arrived at our destination much later than anticipated on that fateful Saturday in March 1973. It was our first visit to the Republic. The town we found ourselves in, was a small town north of Dublin located deep in the heart of the 'Valley of Kings'. It is here where the River Boyne gently meanders its way between luxurious grassy fields and thickly wooded banks. In the distance the rolling hills and mountains form a backdrop to this beautiful area. It is here that one finds the very heart of Eire, where history, legend and folklore come together and are so entwined it is difficult to discern the ending of one and the beginning of the next. The valley is rich in Irish history and is home to such places as that of the Hill of Slane where it is reputed St Patrick lit his fire, a beacon to Christianity, and the ancient Hill of Tara the seat and burial ground of the 'High Kings of Ireland'. However, for all its natural beauty I, unfortunately, remember it more for the sinister secrets it holds and the events that took place during my period there.

Having reached the town, all we needed now was to find the hotel that was booked for us. Hopefully we were not too late to meet with Mr O'Shea as arranged. It was not long before we turned off the main road into a tree lined lane sign posted to the Tara hotel. We passed through a large gateway and into the hotel grounds. The drive swept round in an arc passing in front of a wide flight of stone steps leading up to a paved terrace area. The steps were flanked on either side by a solid looking stone wall behind which a steep grassy bank rose up to meet with a low wall that surrounded the paved terrace area. The entrance to this magnificent flight of stone stairs was guarded by two rampant lions each one holding an ornate outdoor lamppost between its paws. At the top, where the steps gave way to the terrace, there

were two further lions lying facing down the steps. The sweeping drive finally opened up into a large rectangular car park. The whole area was encompassed within a high stone wall.

"Hey, would you take a look at that." I said as Paul pursed his lips and gave a low whistle in sheer disbelief at the size and grandeur of the building set before us. Even the main hotel door was imposing in itself, a huge solid oak door. "Isn't that something else. Look at that flight of steps, it's like, like... well I don't know what its like. It's brilliant just like..." I was lost for words but Paul came to the rescue.

"A Georgian manor house." He said in a matter of fact way.

"Yeah, that's right. You've got it, a Georgian manor house."

I was like a wide-eyed kid in a candy store. I was amazed at the opulence the building portrayed; after all I had never been fortunate enough to stay in a place like this before. Having parked the car we made our way up the stone steps, through the huge oak door and into reception where we checked in. I had never, in my wildest dreams, expected anything quite so big and grandiose as this.

Being dazzled by my surroundings and unaccustomed as I was to such luxury, I had completely forgotten about our host, that was until I started to unpack, then I remembered, we were supposed to meet Mr O'Shea for dinner. Rushing from the room I knocked on Paul's door.

"Paul" I called with a sense of urgency, but there was no reply. I waited, then knocked again. "Paul" even more urgently this time. I waited and waited but still no answer even though I could hear him moving about. "Paul" I shouted as I banged on the door in desperation.

"Yeah. Who's there?"

"It's me hurry up."

"Hang on, hang on. What's the problem, is there a fire or something?"

"Shit Paul come on hurry up."

"All right, all right I'm coming hold on. Anyway what's the big deal?"

"Nothing much only that I forgot to tell you that we're supposed to meet O'Shea for dinner."

"You what," he shouted back from the other side of the door. "Did you say we were to meet O'Shea?"

"Yeah. Sod it Paul come on leave what you're doing and let's get down there." There was a crash from inside the room.

"Shit!"

"What's up?" I called to him through the closed door.

"Nothing much it's only that my bloody case has slipped off the chair and tipped all my pissing clothes on the floor. Tell you what, why don't you go down to find him and I'll see you in the bar."

"Ok, but don't be too long then." I went back to my room grabbed my wallet and my keys then rushed off downstairs slamming my door behind me.

As I approached the desk, the receptionist, a pretty Irish girl with an oval face and beautiful long fair hair and the biggest brown eyes I had ever seen, looked up from what she was doing and smiled.

"Good evening sir, can I help you?" She asked. For a minute this beautiful girl transfixed me as she smiled and waited patiently.

"Sorry I was miles away, what did you say? Oh yes, I mean of course, I..." I stuttered and stammered like a schoolboy, "I just wondered if you could tell me where I can find Mr O'Shea?"

"Would that be Breandán O'Shea you'd be after?"

"Yes." I answered still spellbound by this pretty cailín.

"In that case he's away to the Dining Room with some guests. Was he expecting you?" I snapped back to reality.

"Yes. Unfortunately we arrived later than anticipated."

"Just a minute sir I'll check if there's any message." With that the young lady disappeared into the office, to reappear a moment later with another pretty Irish girl.

"Good evening sir, my colleague told me Mr O'Shea was expecting you."

"Yes we were supposed to meet him for dinner but we arrived later than we had hoped. I gather he already has gone into the Dining Room with some other friends."

"That's correct sir. Now tell me would you be one of the two Englishmen he was expecting?"

"Yes, I'm Mr James, Richard James. How did you know?"

"The accent, it's a dead give away. Now sir if you'll excuse me I'll let Mr O'Shea know of your arrival"

"Excuse me," I called after her, "Excuse me." She turned and smiled, "I'm sorry sir, did you want something else?"

"As Mr O'Shea's gone into dinner could I book a table for two?" She glanced at her watch and I did likewise. It was getting on for 9.30. She gave me an apologetic look, which summed it up. I was out of luck.

"I'm sorry Mr James, the restaurant takes last orders at 9.00 o'clock." My annoyance must have shown in my expression because she smiled and said, "I know it's not the same, but I could organise some sandwiches or maybe a salad or something. Or perhaps the night porter could recommend somewhere to you." I was hungry and that was all there was to it. To go somewhere else would mean more driving and I had done enough of that for the time being.

"No don't worry him, sandwiches will be fine. What can you offer?"

"Chicken, cold beef, prawn, ham or should I get the kitchen to prepare a small selection?"

"A selection please."

"Thank you Mr James I'll organise that now for you. Would you like them in the lounge, or maybe the bar?"

"The bar thank you, and could you make that two plates please."

"Certainly Mr James and I'll tell Mr O'Shea you're through in the bar then." She then rang the bell and the night porter appeared almost immediately.

"Ah Noel. Would you show Mr James the way to the bar and arrange for a selection of sandwiches for two."

"Certainly. Now if you would be so kind as to follow me sir."

"Thank you."

"Is this your first visit to Ireland then or have you been before?" He asked as he led me through the lounge to a comfortable looking bar.

Paul and I hadn't long finished our sandwiches when a smartly dressed well-built man approached our table.

"Hello, I'm Breandán. Breandán O'Shea." The stranger announced in a soft Irish accent. "I trust you had a good journey here and no problems. Let me get you a drink. Seamus," he called over to the barman, "Bring over an orange juice for me and whatever these two gentlemen are drinking."

"Yes Mr O'Shea."

He pulled out a stool and sat down at our table. "Now gentlemen, that's the priorities sorted out, so which one of you is Richard James?"

"Sorry Mr O'Shea." I extended my hand in greeting, "I'm Richard and this is my partner Paul Jones."

"Pleased to meet you Paul. Now lads this is the deal. You'll be here in the Tara Hotel as my guests whilst you're working on my farm. The pay, will be as agreed during our telephone conversation and is a contract price. If I am pleased with your work then there will be an additional bonus at the end."

"How much are we talking?"

"Let's just say you will not be disappointed."

"Yes, but what do you mean by we won't be disappointed. Exactly how much are you paying?" I asked.

"What exactly do we have to do to earn this bonus?" asked Paul.

"Just do a good job Mr Jones that's all."

This also puzzled me. We had agreed a price for the contract, three hundred pounds a week, a figure that was seven times above the national average and put us in millionaire's row figuratively speaking. So why should this man now offer us a bonus on top? It didn't make sense.

"Why would you want to pay us a bonus Mr O'Shea, what's the catch?"

"There's no catch Richard. However to earn your bonus I expect loyalty and a fair days work." He paused, "Is that understood?" He looked first at me then at Paul. We both nodded our agreement, but deep down I felt for all his apparent honesty there was something he was not telling us.

"That's that sorted then. Now what do you know about the area around here?" He asked.

"Nothing much" I replied.

"Well we are situated in the area known as the 'Valley of Kings' and it is the 'Tara Kings' that this hotel is called after. Did you know that the Tara Kings burial grounds were discovered not a million miles from here?" he asked as he took a look at his watch. "Gee is that the time I'll have to go otherwise my guests will wonder what's happened to me. Sorry lads I'll have to tell you about the area some other time, oh and I'm sorry I couldn't meet up with you tonight but there'll be other times." He got up to go, then as if with second thoughts he sat back down. "By the way, if you're interested there's a dance on in the nightclub tonight."

"The nightclub?"

"Yes Richard, we've got a nightclub here as well. Of course it's a separate business to the hotel, also a separate entrance."

"Do hotel guests get in free?"

"No, they pay the same as the locals." He smiled and gave a wink. "That way we get two bites at the cherry. After all we have to earn a crust! But don't worry lads you go in free, as my guests I can arrange

things, if you know what I mean." He gave another sly wink and continued, "After all it's no good being the boss if you can't have some perks is it?"

"Is this your hotel?" I asked.

"Technically no, but in practical terms yes. I hold the major interest and my wife is my sleeping partner, in more ways the one," he smiled at the pun, "so I suppose I do own it really, anyway enough of that. So what about this dance would you like to go or not?"

"Well what do you think?" I asked Paul.

"Sounds all right to me."

"Good, that's settled then, I'll arrange it with the reception. Oh yes, I almost forgot." A slight edge crept into his voice as he continued, "There is one other thing you need to be aware of whilst working on my farm. You'll no doubt hear and see certain things, which have nothing to do with you. No matter what they are you will not say a word to a soul." He looked from one to the other of us. "Do I make myself clear? Not a word." His smiling Irish eyes had suddenly lost their charm and became cold and threatening. We both nodded showing we understood. "Because if you do repeat anything it could be very unhealthy for you and all concerned." He paused to emphasise what he had just said before speaking again. "Also whilst we are on the subject, there are certain pubs in the town that you should avoid, especially after the British Parachute Regiment murdered, yes and I mean murdered, many of our people." He paused staring into the distance as if he were somewhere else. His eyes cold and filled with hatred. I broke the spell.

"Mr O'Shea, I know what happened." I said in a quiet voice. He turned and looked straight at me.

"I think you are referring to what the press called Bloody Sunday. Now I really don't want to get involved in a discussion about that, especially as it has nothing to do with us, or why we are here." An uneasy silence descended on the three of us sitting there. Breandán shook his head as if to clear it and blinked.

"All right then," he said, his voice taking on a lighter note. "I understand what you're saying but both of you must also understand how feelings are running high here in the south. Some people see it as the blatant murder of innocent people living in the north." He heaved a sigh. "Anyway as I was saying, there are some pubs in the town you must avoid, especially after last year. They are somewhat on the rough side and in view of what has happened I would strongly advise you to stay well away. They do not take kindly to outsiders, especially Englishmen," he paused and his eyes said it all. 'Yes Mr O'Shea.' I thought to myself, 'I certainly know all about Bloody Sunday.' The fact of the matter was that had we both stayed on in the army we would almost certainly have been in the thick of it. I could see O'Shea's words had well and truly struck a chord with Paul. Seeing that look in O'Shea's eyes I just could not help thinking back to the bonus he said we would get paid, it just went to confirm my uneasy feeling that he was hiding something from us. Then, just as if someone had thrown a switch O'Shea's mood changed.

"Come on lads, drink up. No harm meant it's just my Irish humour, it's warped." He looked at both of us in turn, threw back his head and laughed aloud and his eyes danced with a look of friendly mischief about them. "Seamus," he called across to the barman, "fetch more drinks, these lads are thirsty and we need to welcome them to our beautiful land. Oh and Seamus let's liven up the place it's like a morgue. Put on some good Irish music."

"Yes Mr O'Shea, straight away."

"Now lads where were we, are yes I was telling you about the 'Valley of the Kings' and a little of our Irish heritage."

"What about your guests Mr O'Shea?"

"Oh they won't mind waiting a little while longer, they know me well enough. Anyway they're Irish and as long as I'm paying the bill it doesn't matter, they'll have a few Bushmill's whilst they patiently wait. That's one of the things we have a lot of here in the south, patience. Things always have a way of coming right in the end, so why worry."

The room was suddenly filled with the strains of a traditional Irish jig, and the atmosphere warmed, but no matter what happened from now on, deep down I knew that Breandán O'Shea meant what he had said and would be a force to contend with. My military training warned me that he was a very dangerous man and that we should always take care, treating him with the utmost of respect.

"I give you a toast," he raised his glass and looked first at Paul then at me and said. "May you both have a long and happy stay in the Republic and may we all do well."

"Cheers Mr O'Shea, I'm sorry we seemed to get off on the wrong foot, but here's to our future."

"Yes cheers Mr O'Shea," said Paul. With that O'Shea drank his orange juice down in one.

"Well now, if you'll excuse me," he said as he stood up and shook our hands. "I must return to my guests otherwise they will wonder what's happened to me even if I am paying the bill. I'll catch up with you both later."

