

# Silent War

## 22nd June 1970

Blood rushes thick in the streets of Liverpool North. Life bleeds as worker's sweat lubricates gears, gears grinding gruesome symphonies with Belfast horns castrating ears upon which lays an abuse of power. British forces piercing hearts and guts of innocents with rifles yet not batting an eye. That's what it's like being a worker in Liverpool docks, a veteran of the Troubles. Royal Albert Dock screams for mercy whilst begging and being beaten by the coppers. What felt like May Day last month feels a loss of all motivation under a Tory government.

I look at my colleagues heaving a heap of luggage. Two Irish lads emerge who I recognise. Have I ought to tell them about my role in the Troubles? Liverpool hasn't been the same since the Troubles. St. Patrick's Day has been quiet in March since it began; we call it the Belfast of England for a reason and I can barely speak without fear for my safety. I get ostracised by my kind, the middle class and the protestant south for deserting that murderous hotspot and embarrassing my 'English roots'. You'd think my months in military prison would be enough for them to take me in, but apparently not. I'm fearful of what to reveal. I entered the army with nothing and I came back with guilt and trauma. I was lucky to find a job; in a way, I am always an anomaly amongst my tribes.

## 28th July 1972

The undergrowth of terraced housing submerged my soul in shallow submission. Bricks resembled an unconscionable hallucination upon subsequent repetition. Hopes crushed as you realise that puppet-masters force you to compete against other like-minded men in a battle ending in a weary stalemate. My mind snapped away as I recognised Stephen across the other side of the street. Stephen lived in Belfast and moved over to Liverpool by the time I deserted (a refugee in a way) but he would never picture it that way. He was older than us, in his sixties and yet somehow was not demoralised. He was feeble picking for the dole, a man with little wealth, little pension and a man with little life left to live. I knew I could tell him.

My chest pounding trying to put words to my mouth, the sound of the bullet spilling insides of the spleen, blood sticking onto my hands as its iron stench and leach consumed me. I could have killed his friend, his son, and maybe his son's sons. Sweat turned into bloody mush, turning into lives lost I couldn't bear to live with. Stephen smiled as I divulged.

"Well, who told you to do that?" he asked with his wise glare making contact.

"The state." I solemnly declared.

"So let's go kick the state in! We need you for the strike!"

***Excuse me? A strike?*** A strike upon Royal Albert Dock! Thunder cracking as my breath merged with the breath of others. I stood there, seemingly unaware. I knew that men were beginning to be laid off, but I always stood so feeble as so did others. The last time I had stood up for myself

was in that Belfast war-zone. I remembered the city centre distinctly empty after 7 PM, and contrasting to now when hundreds of like-minded workers took their stance. A headless horseman, no, maybe a couple, maybe ten strutting around with their batons in esoteric complexion. One would think this would be a simple endeavour, coppers simply herding sheep into a select area. However minds don't think so lightly, some cower so shell-shocked that their minds encircle and are left grave from ruin, dispatched from the Belfast machine fire. Others rush themselves towards martyrdom, a moment close to victory, a moment collapsed by the bloodshed.

I could hear the shouts of our men prompting us to move, men tripping over bodies like a tugging chain strapping onto whiplash. Petrol bombs of fury lashed out at my heart as my skull thrashed onto the burning concrete ground. Stephen was forcibly taken from the crowds. I locked eyes with those two Irish lads, blood gushing out as they were beaten to a pulp. I could only remember a specific date, 15th August 1969, the date five Catholic protestors were gunned down by the Ulster Police force and thus, at that moment, I broke down.

## **4th July 1981**

Two years, two years of tarnishing austerity from Thatcher. For starters, I am living upon dole money, as with most of the other dock workers. It was just one day a week ago and despite not having much of a life here, I felt oddly content. This city welcomed me home as if I had found my position in this unequal world. I waited by the gates, just like every other worker, minutes of waiting becoming hours, hours lasting longer until we found out that the dockyard had been sold to new private owners, who had outsourced a new set of workers outside the area. Where were the unions? All of us put on such a low ground to be kicked in the face from a pedestal of hierarchy. No wonder they collapsed so quickly.

I meandered through the city, lost with no purpose. You scrounge in the south end and they pity you and suggest you live like a bohemian. When someone with common decency does come up to you, they barely have any cash for themselves, let alone for a family of four or for those people out there dying on the streets. Streets roam flirtatiously around searching for their owners, only to weep when they are bought out by landlords to the point where you can't even consider it home anymore. A solicitor notified me of Stephen's death, giving me the remainder of what he had. Why did he give it to me? It wasn't much, but it was still something that should have been away from my blood-ridden hands.

A scream riddled behind me. A distinct light of fury and ember caught the corner of the eye, a fear I wished would never have come to haunt me again. A riot of which I must question if I should join? Do I risk my life? What value does my life have at this point? Wasn't I just entrusted with someone else's life? Do I uphold their legacy? Didn't that woman in the reins of power say that success came to those who worked hard? Was that a lie? Was it just a part of this silent war?