

# THE TRINITY

*Siobhan Cooney* fiction

His voice had never sounded so cold. I could feel the icy chill of Granddad's muffled words through the kitchen wall as I pressed up my ear to eavesdrop.

We had been eating breakfast when the phone rang. Granddad was reading the paper while munching on toast, Dad was scarfing down a scrambled egg so he wouldn't miss his train into the city, and I was cleaning my Sony Alpha a6000 camera that I got as an early graduation present. The shriek from the landline startled me so much I almost dropped the lens into my Frosted Flakes.

Granddad nonchalantly strode to the opposite wall to answer the call with a friendly, "Hallo." Suddenly, his voice lowered to a grave grumble, and his brow furrowed deep into his wrinkly face. Dad looked up from his eggs for the first time that morning, and sensing a growing tension, quietly urged me out of the room.

The pocket door leading to the kitchen creaked as I tried to sneak a peek inside. All the color and spirit had drained from Granddad's face. He just stood leaning against the wall that held the landline, no more than a flat black and white shadow.

"I knew they'd find me one day, Danny. I was just hoping I'd be dead when they did." He disdainfully shuffled out of the kitchen and out onto the porch, probably to take a puff from his pipe as he often did when he was troubled.

After I finished picking my jaw up off the floor, Dad opened the sliding door and lightly placed a warm hand on my shoulder, sighing.

"Rosie, I think we need to talk."

He boiled the water while I grabbed the Twining's from the cupboard. We sat there at the table for a while, silently sipping the tea until Dad was ready to talk.

"Now, your Granddad had done some things in his past that he was not proud of, but little things. Nevertheless, the police had his name. Some tout<sup>1</sup> had put it out there that Granddad was a sniper for the IRA and was there in Derry on a rooftop when all Hell broke loose on Bloody Sunday. But Rose, he wasn't. He was home in Belfast at a jewelry store buying a necklace for your grandmother. Old Sean Finnegan said he would open up the shop especially for him on that Sunday, when he otherwise would have been closed, so that my

dad could give it to my mom on her birthday.”

My hand flew protectively to my neck and I grasped my grandmother’s delicate trinity knot Celtic cross tightly in my palm. I never take it off.

Dad took a deep breath, and then continued.

“Granddad had heard from some friends that they were after him. He always told me that he wasn’t in Derry that day. But of course, it was his word against theirs, and based on the RUC’s<sup>2</sup> track record with internment, where they could lock you up for as long as they wanted until you ‘confessed,’ his word wasn’t going to mean much.”

“After hiding among friends and living on the run, he knew that he and your grandmother had to get out of Northern Ireland. So he called in a few favors from certain people who helped forge some new documents. They changed their names and fled.”

I stopped him right there. “What do you mean, ‘changed their names’?” Out of nowhere, Mr. Martin’s lecture on *Romeo & Juliet* came to mind. *What’s in a name, huh?... Apparently my entire livelihood!*

“Well Rosie, they couldn’t very well start a new life with an old name that had a heavy bounty on it. So Mr. and Mrs. Martin O’Mara became Mr. and Mrs. John Duggan. Granddad took your very pregnant grandmother first to Canada, and they eventually worked their way down to New York where I was born. And then of course, you know that my mom died shortly after—”

“Yeah,” I interrupted, “just like

mine.”

We both nodded in a quiet acceptance of our common bond. I was starting to understand Granddad’s predicament.

“So that’s who was on the phone tonight? They’re after him again, aren’t they? 45 years later, and he has to answer to a crime he didn’t even commit?”

Dad shook his head in utter dejection.

“I hate to say it Rosie, but that’s the way the fiddle plays.”

As I sat at my desk later that afternoon staring blankly at my homework, I couldn’t help but think that there was something more that I could be doing to help the only other man besides my father that has always been by my side. For my whole life it has been us three, and I couldn’t imagine a world without either one of them.

I closed my macroeconomics textbook and logged into my Mac to begin researching, to see if I could find any kind of exculpatory information that might help clear Granddad’s name. All of my searches kept drawing me to this one website in particular: “aliveinhistory.org.” The hypnotic reviews drew me in. “*What a fantastic journey to the past.*” “*I found out so much about my ancestors through this site.*” “*Results you have to see to believe.*”

Just reading those first three testimonies was enough to send me entering all the information I had to give into the “aliveinhistory” database. No sooner had my finger left the enter key, that the lights in my bedroom

flickered; on, off, on, off.

“No problem,” I thought as I dried my sweaty palms on my denim capris, “just a little power surge.” Yeah right, a power surge at 3:15 on a cloudless day. *What more are you going to throw at me God?*

Apparently, He had a plan.

A dense, green fog suddenly poured out of the air conditioning vents on the ceiling and from under my bedroom door until the fog completely enveloped my entire room. I bolted to my door, but the handle would not budge. The same was true with my window. I was stranded in the middle of my bedroom, having nowhere else to go. The mist snaked up my body and coiled around my neck, tugging on my pendant. It plunged into my nose and mouth and sucked the air right out of my lungs. I cannot remember if it was the room or my head that was spinning, all I know is that I collapsed, and hit the floor hard. I just lay there choking, my chest heaving with each difficult breath.

Then. All. Went. Black.

Bitter winds burned my cheeks and tugged maliciously at my fiery curls. I regained consciousness to the cacophony of a constant clanging. My eyelids fluttered open, revealing the scene of older women on their hands and knees banging metal garbage can lids on the pavement, shouting, “They’re coming! They’re coming!”

Startled, I pushed myself up, only to trip over a curb that seemed to have come out of nowhere. Dazed and confused, I rubbed my now sore rear end. My eyes wandered around until they landed on a battered and bruised

brick building, weathered by time and tension. Brick by brick my gaze climbed the wall, stopping abruptly at a large street sign reading “Falls Road” with its Irish translation below. *Huh, didn’t Granddad and Grandma used to live off a street in West Belfast called Falls Road?*

The winds picked up again, greedily stealing leaves from their neatly formed piles and throwing them back on the ground haphazardly. A worn out piece of newspaper tumbled down the sidewalk and landed next to my waist. Hoping it would yield some valuable information, I scoured the page, but I almost dropped it when I read the headline, “DERRY MARCH TO PROCEED,” dated January 30th, 1972. It was written over the by-line Jerome Reilly.

*1972?* Only then did I notice that my emerald blouse, capris, and fuzzy penguin socks had been exchanged for a brown woolen trench coat and an itchy sweater to match, along with baggy bellbottom jeans and a pair of what looked like hand-me-down platform boots.

All of a sudden two large rough hands grabbed my shoulders and pulled me down a dark alleyway.

“You’re gonna get yourself killed, girl. Didn’t ya hear the warnings?” Standing over me was one of those women I saw slamming a garbage can lid. She looked me up and down with narrow brown eyes and said, “Oh you must be one of the O’Mara girls.”

After 17 years of being a Duggan, and considering that I had only learned my true surname

only hours ago, O'Mara still didn't sound quite right yet. Nevertheless, I attempted to mask my initial puzzled expression with a round of vigorous nodding.

The burly woman continued. "I just saw your brother Marty two minutes ago. He was in a hurry and said he was off buying something for that pretty lass of his."

*Granddad.*

She quickly ducked her head out of the alley, her voice suddenly lowering to an urgent whisper. "He went 'round the corner, I'm guessing he's going to Finnegan's. If you catch up to him, you better tell him to get the hell outta here. They're picking up everyone, taking 'em to Castlereagh<sup>3</sup>. Feckin' Brits and their internment." The woman then spat on an unsuspecting cobblestone.

At that moment the big picture came into focus, and I realized why I was there. *I have to find him, and fast.*

Using the best brogue I could muster, I responded with the only piece of stock conversation that would always get a chuckle out of family and friends. "Tanks very mooch."

I took off from the alleyway, not daring to look back. On the other side of the street I could see that distinctive shock of red hair underneath a worn woolen cap, the color and style of which I had seen on countless occasions growing up. He was a short distance away, so I broke into a light jog to keep pace. As I was running, an incessant thud nagged at my hip. I reached inside the overcoat, and was never so happy to feel the familiar rectangular edges of

my iPhone. In one fluid motion I pulled my phone out of the pocket, and with a single swipe, captured the moment that he entered "Finnegan's Fine Flatware & Jewelry."

But I knew this was not going to be enough. I needed some kind of proof of purchase, any paper trail of the transaction having been long since lost to history and, as I learned later, the embers of a rogue loyalist paramilitary firebomb that destroyed Finnegan's shop and others on that street in the days following Bloody Sunday.

With the sounds of sirens and screams growing ever louder, it was clear that the police and military were beginning their siege of West Belfast. I had to act fast. Phone in hand and stepping off the curb, I was nearly struck by a speeding taxi, not remembering that traffic comes from the other direction in the UK. Catching my breath after that near miss, I raced across the street to get that final shot.

In the brief millisecond when the phone's screen goes black, and the camera shutter opens and closes to capture that moment in time, my eyes did the same, but everything stayed black for me.

When they finally opened, I was laying on the floor of my bedroom clutching my phone in a death grip. Instinctively, I looked up at my ceiling to search for my digital clock's projection of the time. In hazy blue figures, I could make out 3:17 PM, a mere two minutes since I first logged on to the aliveinhistory web site.

*It had to have been a dream, right?*

A tsunami of realization crashed over me. Not entirely sure of what to do next, I tentatively unlocked my iPhone and hesitated for a few long seconds before opening my camera roll. The last two photos grabbed my attention like one of those giant billboards in Times Square. There, as plain as day, were the two photos I took moments ago in West Belfast. Northern Ireland.

I selected the second picture to get a better look at what exactly I had captured before everything went dark. Sure enough, through the plate-glass window of Finnegan's Fine Flatware & Jewelry, there was my Granddad, John Duggan... strike that (I'm still coming to grips with this part)... Martin O'Mara leaning casually against the counter, completely unaware of the impending chaos outside. With his right hand, he shook the hand of the clerk, while in his left, the gold chain of the delicate trinity knot Celtic cross necklace dangled loosely from his fingertips. Using my own fingertips, I expanded the image and was astounded by what I saw. There on the counter, beneath their clasped hands lay a typical desk calendar, whose previous date had been torn to reveal Sunday, January 30th, 1972. Sunday, Bloody Sunday.

But I knew there was a problem. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a print made from a digital photograph would raise more questions than it would answer. I knew what needed to be done. I had to get to the film lab, where I often worked with the owner, Fred Lazzara, on the weekends. The shop specializes in

recreating vintage photography, posters, and prints.

Once there, I grabbed Mr. Lazzara's Canon F-1 35mm SLR camera off the shelf and fashioned two negatives from my digital prints. Going "old school," I went into the darkroom at the back of the store and developed the negatives, printing them using stock paper we had from the '70s. With every new detail that slowly but surely came to life on the paper, I grew more anxious to get back home before Granddad and Dad would have to leave for his lawyer's office.

I burst through the front door just as they were coming down the stairs.

Their eyes lit up, and Dad said, "Rosie! Where were you? We didn't know where you had gone."

"I'm sorry, I had to run down to the film shop for a moment to give the keys back to Mr. Lazzara." Clutching the brown manila envelope close to my heart, I marched right over to Granddad. Handing him the package, I said, "Granddad, please promise me that you will look at these on the way. It's important."

With a steady hand he took the envelope and secured it in his briefcase. "I promise." Wiping a stray tear off my cheek with his worn but warm thumb, he winked and using his pet name for me he cooed, "Ah sure, it'll be grand. Don't you worry Róisín<sup>4</sup>."

I walked them over to the car, and we gathered on the sidewalk for one final embrace. The three of us held tight to each other without saying another word. As I watched father

and son drive away, I held tight to the necklace. A gentle sigh floated off my lips, and I kissed the trinity cross.

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My grandfather went back to Northern Ireland to clear his good name and returned to us two weeks later. He lived out the rest of his life with the other two-thirds of his trinity knot. A framed photo of the purchase still hangs on the wall above the fireplace.

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<sup>1</sup>Slang term used by Northern Irish republicans to denote an informant who give the police and army information about suspected terrorists (from [Urbandictionary.com](http://Urbandictionary.com))

<sup>2</sup>Royal Ulster Constabulary: Northern Ireland police force at the time

<sup>3</sup>Pronounced "Castle-ray"

<sup>4</sup>Pronounced "Ro-Sheen" / Irish translation of "Little Rose"