

THE DYING REBEL
By Dennis Corcoran

SCENE

Aine, “Annie”, is outside a book shop in city center, Derry, Ireland, looking in the window. She paces slowly by the windows scanning the titles and book jackets. She has a definite limp, pain evident in her body movement. She’s thin. Average height, long hair, now graying but obviously once dark and beautiful. With her is a young girl, a teen. They hug, put their heads together every so often as they look in the window. They enjoy each other’s company – like best friends or sisters or a mother and daughter. Little laughs. Smiles, at times. At times, frowns, but mutual, as though they share each other’s thoughts.

It’s a cold. The stone of the building, the streets, of the recent rain in puddles on the walkway and road, the grey of the sky, all paint a somber picture which gives focus to, frames, if you will, the gentle laughter and warmth which the woman and girl share as they window shop.

Across the street, a man in his 50s walks along not heeding the woman and girl. His head is down, arms tight to his body to protect him from the cold. He, too, is walking slowly, seemingly lost in thought.

He stops at a bus stop and turns to wait, now glancing across the street, then up the street in search of the bus, then across again. His curiosity is aroused by the woman and girl. He catches a glimpse of the woman’s face and seems to recognize her. He catches another glimpse is sure he knows her. He pauses, pulling something from memory. At that moment, she notices the man too. At first she glares – who is this rude lout. Then she realizes she may know him. Slowly, they each come to confirm in their own minds that this person across from them is someone from their past, someone special, someone long gone from their lives but never far from their thoughts.

He begins to cross the street. She turns to the girl, whispers something to her. The girl glances at the man then turns and walks away down the street. The woman then begins to approach the man who has stopped at the curb.

As they come within speaking distance, they each pause, study each others’ faces for a moment. Words seem impossible to utter. Then she speaks, hesitantly at first, then more assured.

CAST

Aine “Annie” McGinley
Andrew O’Doherty

Woman, in her 50s.
Man, in his 50s.

AINE

Andrew ...? [beat] Andrew ... ?

ANDREW

Annie ... it's you ... it's really you?

AINE

Oh, my god. *[They approach and embrace. She then exclaims.]* You've no hair! Bald as a stone! You'd frighten off cats with the looks of ya.

ANDREW

[Andrew laughs and says with bravado] Well, and the same to ya, love ...

AINE

Didn't granny Doherty teach you any manners? Commentin' on a woman's hair, especially after it's gone a bit gray and all?

ANDREW

If that was me worst breach of wisdom come from me mammy's knee, I'd be a bloody professor ...

AINE

Oh, right! And we both know the likelihood of that situation!

ANDREW

Geez, Aine ... what is it? 35 years or so ...? God ... *[steps back, looks at her]* Lord, me heart's pounding in me chest like a bloody school boy.

AINE

Mine, too ... we best act our age. We were just kids back then. Got a few years on ourselves now.

ANDREW

Yeah, we do. *[long beat]* I remember the first time we talked like it was this morning. God, I'd had my eye on you for months but never could muster a word.

AINE

Yeah, big, brave rebel - couldn't even talk to a wee lass.

ANDREW

Wee lass, me arse! I remember you hurling them pavers - geez, like a pro! You had a hell of an arm on you, Annie McGinley. Remember taking down those two paras at the barricade near Lecky Road? [*They laugh*]

And you had a beautiful arse on you, too, if you don't mind me saying.

AINE

I'll slap you backwards, Mr. O'Doherty, if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head.

ANDREW

I don't know if it was the way you hurled 'em pavers or the way you swung them hips of yours but I know when I'd see you, I'd damn near swallow me own tongue.

AINE

Is that why you never said a word? I damn near crippled me self trying to get your attention and you some god damned mute staring like a deer in the headlights.

ANDREW

Now look who's being uncivil? Half the boys joined up back then just to get a shot at ya. As soon as word got out Annie McGinley was IRA, we had to beat recruits away with hurlies - especially the Gallagher brothers. Christ, do you remember the Gallagher brothers?

AINE

Remember 'em? How could I forget 'em? They made me life hell. Me on the barricades, gas cylinders flying like hail stones, and those two grabbin' at me arse! I walloped Jimmie a good one, one night. Christ, us trying to throw the Brits out and all he's got on his mind is getting in me pants.

ANDREW

I took care of them for you. I'll bet you never knew that?

AINE

Oh, Jesus, no. What did you do to them? Andrew - what'd you do?

ANDREW

Nothing much. Just told 'em you were my girl, so if they knew what was good for them, they'd best back off and leave you alone.

AINE

So, you're running around Derry telling everyone **but me** we're an item?

ANDREW

Just defending your honor.

AINE

Honor, me arsel!

ANDREW

I'd say more admired than honored.

AINE

[They laugh] Look at the two of us - you bald as a stone and me gimpy and old. We should act our age.

ANDREW

Speak for yourself, Ms. McGinley. I'll act any way I'm able, as long as I'm able, if you don't mind.

AINE

And I'd expect no less of ya, Andrew O'Doherty. *[Long beat]*

ANDREW

[pointing to a bench] Let's us old folks take a wee breather here, eh?
[they sit, long beat] So, how have you've been, Annie? God, I've thought about you so many times over the years.

AINE

I heard you went to America when you got out? I see your brother Paul now and again. He says you never were one for the writing.

ANDREW

Aye, never was. Didn't call much neither. Couldn't, really. For a while there I wasn't legal - figured a call from me was a kiss of death.

AINE

Heard you married an American girl, couple of kids. Made a good life for yourself over there, have ya?

ANDREW

I suppose.

AINE

You don't sound convinced.

ANDREW

It's just that I miss this place.

AINE

You've got to be out of your mind. You've missed nothing here, be sure of that. *[beat]* You know Martin's a big shot these days – for all the difference that makes.

ANDREW

Yeah, I talked to him yesterday. Good seeing him again *[long beat]* America's fine. People are spoiled, though, you know. Wouldn't know hard times from a howitzer - bitching about everything all the time. And religious bigots – Jesus, Annie – the ones there make this crowd look like pikers. But I got a good job and a decent-enough place. People treat me OK. *[looks at her with a big grin and slaps her on the thigh]* Some of 'em even say I'm some kind of fucking hero – now, how about that?

AINE

Always said there was something wrong with them Yanks. *[long beat]*

AINE (cont.)

I had a real thing for you back then, you know. But a hero - that's a laugh. I did everything but strip naked to get your attention. What a waste - just another shit-for-brains Fenian bastard, as best as I could tell.

ANDREW

I miss this place, Annie. Sometimes it gets real bad. I don't let on, but I've cried many a time, missing me Ma and Da, lifting a few with me mates. It isn't the same there. This is home, always was, always will be.

AINE

I know. As hard as it's been at times, I've never wanted to leave. I hate this shit hole but I can't imagine living anywhere else. *[laugh, a pause]* Dominic still keeps a horse in his house - can you believe that? He's well into his 60s and not a jot more sane today than he ever was.

ANDREW

[laughing, then somber] Yeah. No one back there understands that - how I could be missing people like Dominic, places like O'Donnell's and all. Honest to god, Annie, it tears at me innards sometimes.

AINE

But you got a wife and kids, no stench of peat hanging in the air, sunshine - yeah, tell me about that, huh? Remember how we used to talk about going on vacation to Spain when all this was over?

ANDREW

Aye, I sure do. When we were victorious. Free. Off to sunny Spain to bask in the sun and glory. God, we were fucking nuts then.

AINE

Nuts, maybe, yeah, but that kept me going a long while in there ...

ANDREW

Seriously?

AINE

Yeah. I dreamed of you all the time. I'd picture us in some quaint mountaintop village, sun pouring down on us like honey, air sweet with the smell of olive and cedar, us drinking some rich red wine, making love right there, bare-ass naked, in the open air, in the town square - sometimes just us, sometimes others around, not paying us any attention, just enjoying themselves, maybe a bit envious. I'd imagine at times we were so much in love – such passion, oh my god the passion. Damn near takes me breath away just thinking about it - sharing everything – everything. *[long beat]*

ANDREW

Jesus ... your mates ever get tired of you moaning? *[feigning passion]*
Oh, Andrew ... Andrew.

AINE

[Angrily] Fuck you, Andrew O'Doherty ...

ANDREW

I didn't mean nothing, sorry. I'm just saying, in the Kesh you'd best not come off too amorous - made some of the lads a bit nervous and all.

AINE

[long beat] Did you ever think of me in there?

ANDREW

Christ, Annie, I thought of you all the time. Non-stop. But it got so bad - I couldn't. Made me weak and there was no room for that. If they even smelled weakness on you, they poured it on. *[long beat]* Let's don't talk about that, ok? I don't want to talk about that.

[long beat]

And yourself? Is that your daughter over there who's been so kind as to pretend she's not dying of curiosity all this time?

AINE

No, that's me niece, Nuala. *[long beat]* I never married. You didn't know that, eh?

ANDREW

No. I asked about you when I got out - wanted to come see you but the Brits wouldn't have let me in. Besides, if I'd come, it'd be worse for you.

AINE

Yeah, I know. I heard you were out. I hoped, prayed, I'd see you come through those doors. But I knew you couldn't.

ANDREW

When I left for America, I thought I'd be gone just a year or two. Pretty naïve, huh? I'm not legal here now - got a fake passport.

AINE

Shit, Andrew. You can't be caught. You gotta be careful, even now.

ANDREW

[long beat] Have you waited all these years?

AINE

For you? Don't flatter yourself, Mr. O'Doherty. I've had plenty of suitors, thank you kindly. And some very substantial offers, if I do say so me self.

ANDREW

[boyish grin] None quite as engaging as me own self here, though, eh?

AINE

Please - let's don't tease about this. Fact is, yeah, I've never gotten over you. Sure, I've had lots of loves - tried, anyway. I don't know how to describe it, exactly, but I left something in there. Something died or withered away. I don't know - but I've not felt love or passion since.

ANDREW

I understand.

AINE

Do you? Do you really?

ANDREW

Yeah. It's more than missing Ireland and Derry and me family and you ...

AINE

Me? You've missed me?

ANDREW

Oh, god, Annie, have I missed you? Jesus, you've never been out of me thoughts. It's not that I don't love me family - it's just - 10 years in the Kesh. I've not felt at home, at peace, the kind-of feelings we had back then. I remember as vivid as this moment the taste of your lips, the smell of your hair, so sweet, the feel of your skin, so soft. Oh, god, Annie, all I ever wanted was to live with you, our kids - yeah **our** kids - in a nice house, a job.

I haven't felt anything real since the cages. Something died there, over the mirrors, hunger strikes. Not me body – but something inside.

AINE

Can I hold you?

ANDREW

I'm scared.

AINE

Me, too, every day. [*they embrace, long beat*] I was on hunger strike.

ANDREW

I know. I remember the army council holding a meeting - called it off. I was so happy. I was so scared for you. It's no way to die, Annie.

AINE

They did the same to us as you only, maybe worse. There wasn't a part of us they didn't violate.

ANDREW

Did they rape you?

AINE

Not like that, not in a sexual way. *[long beat]* I still feel 'em shoving their batons into ... into every ... place ... *[long beat]* They crippled me.

ANDREW

I noticed the limp.

AINE

Worse. Any thought of being touched in a loving ... *[tears]* ... there are no loving ways. God *[wipes eyes, stiffens, long beat]* by the time I got out, I couldn't have kids, that was all ruined, tore up. I couldn't love a man. I wanted to – tried, but ...

I heard you'd gone to America. Figured you'd never come back. Not much else to say between that day and this. *[long beat]*

ANDREW

Why did you do it? Join up?

AINE

You know why. *[long beat]* But that's ancient history. Times have changed. People say things are better now – bullshit. The war's over, and it's not likely to start up again - but you and me, people like us, we're part of a old story no one wants to hear. There's plenty of fight in me, but it's meanness I feel now, coldness, not love and that scares me. I don't want to become the person I see in the mirror.

ANDREW

I have to go, Annie - the fake passport. And I want to visit me Ma and Da's graves before I leave.

AINE

I'll remember this day - and cherish it, Andrew O'Doherty. I've not had a sweet memory since the day that iron door closed - not til this. Now I have a fresh one - I'll carry it here *[she touches her heart, her breast]* to me grave.

ANDREW

Annie, please, stop.

AINE

[They stand, hug, kiss ... a short, timid kiss. They hug again, a long, warm, tight embrace. They look into each other's eyes.]

ANDREW

I've got to go ...

AINE

I know ... *[He turns, takes steps, turns again, gazes at Aine]*

ANDREW

Do you have any regrets?

AINE

[long beat] Will you visit my grave?

ANDREW

God willing.

AINE

Then, God speed.

[Andrew exits the stage, lights begin to fade, a spot on Annie, who follows Andrew with her eyes. The spot slowly fades to black.]

END OF PLAY