

Sunday, Bloody Sunday

By Dennis Corcoran

I stood atop the city wall, and looked out ...
O'er the Bogside, the Creggan, the Brandywell below ...
the "sean talamh" of old ... once my home.

Behind me, the old stone church, site of Colmcille's monastery ... 546 AD ...
They said the IRA had bombed it – that was a lie ...
But in those days, truth was the first victim of state-sponsored hate.

[PAUSE]

Farther along the wall stood a tower ... chain link and barbed wire ...
cameras, listening devices - the eyes and ears of the British state ...
You needn't know more than what you saw, to know ...

[LONG PAUSE]

I was 16 that day ... trapped somewhere between being a boy and being a man ...
we marched - neighbors, friends, thousands strong ...
for an end to internment ... tho our litany of grievances was so very long ...

internment ... men, women, girls, boys, 'lifted' by the RUC ...
imprisoned without trial or charge ...
families, now, without income, driven to despair ...

A bit before 3, we started out – our spirits high ... excitement in the air ...
densely packed narrow streets. Our goal was Free Derry Wall ...
we were to hear speakers urge us on, urge us to stand strong ...
but, as we marched along, word was spread, 'All exits - blocked' ...
we didn't know what that meant ... but were soon to find out.

Trapped in a shooting gallery, soldiers formed a firing line ...
facing us ahead ...when, without warning, they fired ...
13 shot dead, 14 more wounded ... the beginning of the end.

[PAUSE]

Later, they lied, said it was all self-defense ...
We knew better, tho it took 30 years for them to admit ... and apologize ...
too little, too late to avoid the all out war created that day.

B'an dheireadh é sin ... the beginning of the end ... b'an dheireadh é sin ...

[PAUSE]

Me da, and me, together that day, made our way home, frightened to our core ...
Our neighbor, next door ... dead ... What's to be said ...
when those who did no more than seek justice under the law lay dead?

I was a kid that day at 3pm –
before the sun would set, I was a child no more:

If this is how it has to be to live in mortal dread of my so-called state,
And, if, like these, I must die, a violent death my fate, I vowed to fight ...

I joined the IRA ...

Of all that ensued, I'll say no more ...
By 18, a hardened man, tho still a teen ... with blood on my hands.
Jailed, tortured ... 10 years in a cage ...

Bloody Sunday, or so it was named ...
It was Yeats who said, "a terrible beauty was born"

[PAUSE – tears now]

Not long ago, a mate and me, sitting on a lawn under the shade of a tree ...
away from the crowd of fair goers ... when he asked ... Any regrets ... ?

He knew of the torture, the years in the Kesh ... Of others, far worse ...
women, girls, treated with invasive disrespect ...
even in their own labor's bed ...

Our hearts, hardened by inhumanity, we had vowed, never again ...
Vowed to be rid of them ... Yet ...

Did we do wrong? Did we cause harm? *[PAUSE]* Yes ...
but ... Did we have regrets? *[Pause]* Me? ... just this one ...
That this ... Any of this ... All of this ... had ever come ...

And a question, for which I have no answer, gnaws at me, to this day ...
Was it worth all this pain, theirs and my own?

[Another long pause]

I stand, on this wall, looking down ...
on all that once was, on all that I saw ...
And lower my head, and cry.