

Homelessness in Northern Ireland during the Troubles was often caused by sectarian (religious) bias. Some Northern Irelanders who lived in mixed neighborhoods were warned to move or risk having their houses burned. Bernard MacLaverty's novel Cal describes the second warning Cal and his widowed father Shamie received advising them to leave. They did not, and later, their house was destroyed by a fire bomb. Fenians were Irish nationalists who believed in physical force to achieve an independent Ireland. In the current Troubles it was a derogatory phrase used for Catholic nationalists. The UVF is the acronym for Ulster Volunteer Force, an illegal Protestant paramilitary organization responsible for the random assassination of Catholics.

That night when he got the door open after pushing against the heavy curtain which shrouded it on the inside he found a note folded and caught by the sprung metal tongue of the letterbox. He switched on the light in the hallway.

GET OUT YOU FENIAN SCUM OR WE'LL BURN YOU OUT.
THIS IS YOUR 2ND WARNING, THERE WILL BE NO OTHER.

UVF

Cal switched out the light and tiptoed into the darkness of the front room. He peered between the slats of the blind. The street was empty. The only movement was the rain slanting across the yellow halo of the sodium streetlamp outside the door. At the back everything was dark except for some pinpoints of light around the base of Slieve Gallon. As quietly as he could, he opened the window and listened. Water clinked and spluttered from the drainpipe. A curlew called once in the distance, then twice, very close. There was the slow steady pulse of his father's snoring from upstairs. He kept expecting the window to burst into a shower of glass and flame but he knew it wouldn't. It would be some night when they were both asleep. The panic of jumping from his window. He saw the ungainliness of his father's bulk crashing through the asbestos material of the shed roof. Wouldn't they be waiting outside to pot-shots at the Fenians they had smoked out? This lot sounded a bit dramatic. 'THERE WILL BE NO OTHER.' He went to the bathroom, using only the light from the curtained landing. It was the idea of people whose faces he did not know hating him that made his skin crawl. To be hated not for yourself but for what you were. He went into his father's bedroom and shook him gently.

"Shamie," he whispered. "Shamie."

His father woke with a snorting noise.

"What?"

He switched on the bedside light and scratched his hair.

"What's up?"

"his." Cal handed him the note. His father angled it to the light and read with squinting eyes, holding it a few inches from his face.

"The bastards."

He got out of bed and knelt in the corner of the room. He had been sleeping in his pyjama trousers only and Cal saw the puckered white flab of his back as he pulled back the carpet. He lifted a short floorboard by two nails which were not quite flush with the wood and brought a black polythene bag to the bed. He emptied a gun and some bullets on to the eiderdown. It was an old .38 and Shamie loaded it, leaving the first chamber empty. The tiny click of the bullets as his father's fingers

groped for them on the eiderdown made Cal think his teeth were covered in sand. He asked,

"Sould we fill the bath?"

"Fill it but don't put in the blanket. It's a bugger to get dried."

Cal half filled the bath and took an old mushroom-colored blanket from the hot press and folded it over the side like a towel. When he came back to the bedroom Shamie was putting the gun beneath his pillow and climbing into bed. Cal said,

"Everything O.K.?"

"Are all the doors locked?" Cal nodded. "Goodnight then."

"Goodnight."

"Isn't it a terrible thing," said Shamie, "that those bastards have us whispering in our own house."(Michael MacLaverty, Cal. New York: George Braziller, 1983. pp. 29-30.)