

# Finn's Journey CHP 1

By CurtisCLennon

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## Preliminary note

Translated from the original Gaelic, this text, by assumed author **â€˜Finâ€™™**, comprises six entries over six successive days, written inside a small carefully concealed notebook. Despite its title **â€˜Jail Journalâ€™™**, Finn dwells little on his time as prisoner, preferring instead to delve deep and often into what he calls his **â€˜long-gone past'**, his aim it seems, to better understand the forces and impulses leading to his imprisonment. In many ways too then, it might be read as the last words of the knowingly condemned: a man who nonetheless tries here to find some meaning, sense and purpose, at least, to see him through whatever hours or days (he is unsure throughout) of his life remain. This then is Finnâ€™™s journey. **Dr. Curtis C. Lennon.**

January 5 1948.

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Friday March 31 1918

Day 1Â

â€œSomebody next to you may have a gun.â€•

Words that began the first meeting, calmly spoken in the vestry, as evening's shadow lengthened across the backroom of our small town church. Hands raised and counted, loyalties pledged, so began the drift

into war.Â

â€œYour brother...Terryâ€™s words,â€• says a sternly-voiced Jeb.Â

This Jeb, I mean, whose ghosted image replays before me now, freckle-duster face afloat, pall bearing eyes large and lambeg-white, and who even, inhales hard the dim grey air exactly as I remember!Â

"We fight this hellish warâ€• says he, behatted and tall now, my memory zealously assembling his noble brow and chin atop his lofty frame â€œin his honour and in his blessed name."

The first time I heard Jeb say this, I fell down on two main counts. Chiefly, I lacked good reason to doubt neither his sincerity nor the means by which I might check the validity of his words. He spoke like a true believer, not even the subtlest near-imperceptible waver â€œseemed to pierce that solemn iced walled throat. Yet just as surely, to convince others even while you knowingly propagate falsehoods and deceits is in itself an arch form of self-deception. Some of what you say must strike home with some part of you, even if this is merely to repeat a mantra until conviction sets in? If some truth exists therein, who say might feel need or otherwise that a lie is merely a still maturing truth. But then, who on God's green earth would have second-guessed that our own kindly Jeb might soon after grind bones to make his bitter unleavened bread?

Jebâ€™s words then, no less truthful than the evermore sombre-toned Father Michael, he as you will discover soon enough could busy himself with committing to earth what could not be commended to Heaven, even as Jeb, was busy resurrecting martyred blood to earthly life.Â

But too unkindly I feel do I begin with Jeb. No! There are far worse than Jeb! Some yet alive while others lie more safely dead, and after all, I cannot deny how dearly patient Jeb acted as my guide, it was he who taught me to lie flat, and so, so still; fair, kindly Jeb, the first to press the rifleâ€™s weight into my chaste hands.Â

How vividly now the memories of the last few days come to mind. Back to when on that cold early morning, startled awake by my hammered-upon door, my near-silent, earnest prayer before hurriedly setting out, bearing eastwards, navigating familiar, short rises, with my fast-revolving toes pinched-hot into stirrups. How vainly now all this seems. Speeding faster still, spinning selfish thoughts already running on worn thin tyres. Desperate thoughts steeped in self doubt, filled with anxieties and Oh Godâ€™s! I did warn him, didnâ€™t I? Racing gasconaded greens, darting down past the white hawthorn of Christ's Crown, through and under the ash boughs of our Saviour's True Cross, alone with my endless sally of futile reasoning; could he not see for himself how sin skulks all around us? Slicing across darkly yellowing fields, feeling the rough scratch of barley anns on the heel of my outstretched hand; no need to sacrifice your heart for this! Did I not plead with him...to resist the gun! â€œPlease Terry! Think of your duties. The farm, as a son...as my brother! ...Think upon all God has graced us...has blessed all our lives with!â€•Â

Such entreaties made, and yet, resistance won! All my fears falling light upon unreceptive ears. Then, and indeed, until not too long ago, I supposed it would bechance fall to me to nourish his and a dozen other

spiritually hungry souls. But I too, would abandon my calling, coming to know too well how lonely faith can feel. Discovered too, how thickly blood lies upon a now never-now-to-be-worn uniform of black and white, the collar turned crimson with revolution. For in the end, who can say where the line between the damned and the saved should be drawn. Yet, without weakness there would be no-one left to save. Indeed, it was Terry then, who, that evening in the church, saw fit to speak of the gun! He, who that night, gathered the faithful about him.Â

"We all knew..." (from out the ether, Jeb's voice returns), "...no lesser a man than he, could have done so ... so ably roused and readied us all for the coming of the storm!"Â

All that morning racing devilishly on! Mind's eye set to continuous motion, thoughts like revolving cogs, spinning memories wheelsâ€™, which finally come as though to a natural rest on a time long ago in distant youth, one till now long since forgotten, two brotherly souls chasing half-chased thoughts. Enjoying the sunshine of a day, unaware we had wandered into the wrong place at the wrong time. Surprised, we looked over to where weâ€™d heard the abrupt shout ordering us to a halt. A little excited and still more back then hugely naive; we did not look upon the two men rapidly making their way towards us in their smart drab uniforms as good reasons for fear and panic. So, we too with goodly-humoured began to walk towards them, halting a short distance away though more than close enough to think after a good stare at both their mugs, how great it must be that these here every day-Joe-blows, got to still be living even to their grand-old ages. And how I filled with pity on spying a better view of the â€™shorter' of the two. For dear old Mother Nature! Sheâ€™d only burthened the poor man with an unfortunate outrage of hugely-bucked, amber-tinted teeth. Not content with this her cruel handiwork extended further (the merciless old â€™Mother Hoary Goatâ€™ as our Daâ€™ would aâ€™ said). His recently removed hat revealed gramophone ears, running near the full length his head on either side. (Sure he couldn't be married now, could he? Not with those double burthens together with the amber horrors round the front of his gob!

"Think of the poor children!", this time, as our Ma would a' said).Â

As for the taller, his a large grey-blued eyed face, with decidedly more human-like portions of teathy-pegs and lugs. Some special business, I thought, that these two here chancerâ€™s must be on. It was the taller â€™Stretched Dublin' (I think I'd named him), who kicked, what became, the whole bloody mess off.Â

âœNow come right here, you Fenian bastards you!"Â

No doubt, about it, talking to us, so he was! A tooth-achingly wide smile, making obvious, he found us a source of amusement.Â

âœAnd how might we be of help to you'se two fellaâ€™s this fine day?âœ said Terry, through his sun-f-squinted-up-face.Â

“What the hell. Ye cheeky wee gets you ‘se hell. You ‘se calls us officers ‘ hell.”

It was a moment after ‘Stretched Dublin’s’™ response, that my breath suddenly shortened. Because surely, thought, we were stood too close and what indeed, were these two up to in paying us any mind at all! And so with my breath ever shortening, no longer it seemed, under my control, for the first and only time in my life, I began swallowing loudly, gulping and downing quarts of non-existent draughty air.

“Hey mister we aren’t no Fenians ‘ I could hear Terry saying, cool, as you like. And how ‘We was not la enough to sew a patch on any one of those heroes’ trousers.”

Triumphant-faced at his words, he turned towards me, with a wink and a smirk, one that said ‘You betcha, we ‘™se are guilty of something so we are.’ But the sly look, soon became a gasp, as he saw the state of me, and he paled white when he turned back and saw what I could not take my eyes away from; for ‘Tiny Dublin’™, it seemed, had taken my worsening condition, as confirming our guilt. As though he had somehow gotten wind of my thoughts some moments before, and taken offence at my unflattering comments.

“The pair of ye, stinking rogues”, he screamed, “traitors, the pair of you!”

Taken aback, Terry could only mumble. “Hey mister’s don’t you mind my friend there. He’s disturbed, special, if you like ‘.”

But ‘Tiny Dublin’s’ heated response was nothing however, compared to the sudden rage of ‘Stretched Dublin’. Without a word, he brought the butt of his rifle down, smashing it square and hard into Terry’s™ still-upturned squinting face. Clean and spiteful, it struck first left, then right, before we both managed to turn and take heeled flight. Running long after, our breath had left us, too-scared even, to turn and look to see whether we were being pursued, until we reached the front gate of the farm where we lived. There, my lungs burning, my arms through the gap taking my weight, I stole a glance at Terry. Though desperately trying to hide his gashed and blooded face from mine, I could see him rubbing at tear-stained eyes, noticed too, how after wiping his face, he stared hard at the blood on his hands, in that certain way he always did, whenever he had made up his mind about something.

“We were lucky there, ‘ he managed somehow to say; “talk is the guards have taken to kidnapping us young fella ‘™s. Good to have around so we are, for clearing mines and roadblocks.”

But then, I remember being suddenly shaken out from this memory, braking hard, my having arriving at the steep, final descent, I knew would lead me directly into the small - though, even from my lofty perch - near invisible town. Cloaked ashen, with thickly billowing clouds parading through its heart; I pedalled on into this near-blindness, managing to find my way to Baggett Street, house number 7 catching suddenly, from somewhere over fluted roofs, a rumbling motorised growl, the unmistakable noise of

rolling steel and mechanical wheels, a sound that when next I heard it, would send untold terrors down into the depths of my soul.

This time, with scarcely a pull on my wheel brakes, I leapt from my bike, my momentum bundling me through a mercifully unlocked back door. Hurrying inside, too swift to make out garbled words from the cluster of clamouring voices gathered in the front room. Left at the foot of the staircase, running clear of the stitched and stained, dishcloth carpet, strafing the narrowed passageway, descending further underground, down to where I know, the soft shushing I hear, is the sound of footsteps passing by on the pavement above.Â

At its end, a room spills its fill of mourners, among them, I hear clearly the sound of one voice alone.

â€œHe has not yet stirred. Not come back to us. Not even, to say at whose sinful door lays this business...â€

Alone, he lay, a sunken soul, almost translucent in the cold candlelight. Legs curled up in the child's bed, silent, still. Sitting aside him, hardly able to look at him, so that when I finally turned my head, I did so with still heavily resistant to reality eyes, effecting for some moments a sham fascination with the rising bursting spontaneity with which endless fatted gleams of sweat purl and break about his temple, fevering his brow, until presently like a beautiful dream that without warning turns to terrible nightmare, I look and finally see â€“ the cut running so deeply familiar â€“ is the sight my dear brotherâ€™s. Tightly wound bandages embrace his chest, but though expertly bound, not even they could veil the deep red spills bruising beneath, the fateful wound busily devouring his life. Beside the bed the faded greying-white china bowl the still-hot water steaming up within I speak of such now, as a man well schooled in how easily, fast flung metal tears into fragile flesh.Â

Dipping fingers into the opened oil-jar on the bedside table, I remember my relief in those black blemishes upon his forehead. Up close, seeing the fingerprinted whorls within them, while in tandem able to withdraw my hand from my trouser pocket and release the rosary beads Iâ€™d been clutching so tight, now knowing, he had received The Last Rites. Gently I spoke his name.Â

â€œTerry.â€•Â

No word passed his lips. Not a movement's twitch upon his face. Then, despairingly, in that aching silence, I saw several photographs lying absently around the side of the bed, but not they, but the one he still clasped, palm-obscured, drew my curiosity, leading me to prize it from his slender fingers. (Indeed, it sits before me now, upon this, my makeshift writing desk). It pictures four of us, an ordinary young family, but of course, I see beyond the silvery slivers of smiles. Recall firsthand the fidgets and twitches before the camera flashed with light and, released from our enforced captivity we returned to the childish pursuits that no different from most others, then made up the better part of our day's. Both Ma and Da, stood behind us, only moments before knowing how they struggled so, to wrestle us into our Sunday best. Her hand on my left shoulder, stands my mother, just over from where so often she would kneel beside the rainwater barrels on the far right and cleanse the dayâ€™s toil from her dark hair. I could see beyond her smile too. See behind the mask she wore so long to keep at bay her suspicions. Betrayed, I remember it falling away, and too suddenly exposed, opened her to a world of creeping pain and loneliness. One that became all consuming. Driving everyone, all memories, all that was love and life, away. Through tears

spilled in the kitchen doorway and framed between those strangest of possessions, the wall-mounted ivory tusks, she made me promise to go now. "And be sure never to come back. No. Not to this. Promise me too, not to write ' just always be good to each other. Someday it will be only you two left." As I sat there beside him, I knew I had failed her in this. Heard then, what I™ failed to listen out for so long ago, the echo of my own careless footsteps, padding along behind his. Him the revolutionary! I the priest! For didn't he admire my sacred calling? Though thought it all beyond him "better leave it to those like you Fin, touched by God's grace", he would say.

"Terry. It's me Fin." I called out to him again.

Opening his eyes, he turned his face to mine, and we locked briefly in morbid scrutiny. Until sheen calmness came over him, and I realised, I was failing him even then, in his most dreaded hour, incapable it seemed of even offering up a prayer for him.  
His voice, when it came, was sapless, sallow and weak.

"I knew you would come despite our differences. You were right maybe it is lost, but done for the people and for our land. What happened to me...It was not your fault. You mustn't think that. I chose my path. I know how you will. Please promise me you won't think like that."

For a moment, no words came to me.

"Terry..."

I could say nothing more. Turning from him then (how could I, I ask myself now), I stared towards the blurred window, my eyes stung with silent tears. I prayed then. Oh God! I remember praying so hard that He would not take him from me. Not leave me here alone, that I simply would not know what to do. Then, I felt his hand upon my shoulder, drawing me in, with still-surprising strength. Whispering, he told me that most terrible of secrets, one that since has consumed my every thought. Then, I was at once grasping at him, trying to stop him spilling backwards onto the bed, as though in this, I might somehow keep him from his last breath.

Rising slowly, I was all fear, all panic, felt the darkest of all pains enter my being. How lost I felt! No one wants to be alone, not even those blessed with hosts of sweetened memories. How lost I am still! Somewhere deep inside blood-knotted veins, came a pounding throbbing, and from somewhere outside myself came a sound just like intruding heavy footsteps. Stood upright, but unsteady. Falling. Sensing not feeling the scrabbling fingers tightening, gripping, and pulling at me. In my sudden returning awareness there is only horror. I see the body on the bed. Scan then, the stranger holding me up, and realise only two lives draw breath in that dim, God abandoned room.

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