

Cut Scenes

PRISON NOTEBOOKS

- i. Lead up to my arrest
- ii. Arrest
- iii. Deterioration
- iv. 6th December
- v. Annie Mac Swiney

1. Scene: Lead up to my Arrest

DOROTHY Lead up to my Arrest!

She glances again towards the door, and begins again to write.

Sounds gather again; horse's hooves, trams, car engines, distant shooting and shouting... She hears her own voice echoing in the distance. Shadowy uplighting.

VOICEOVER (DOROTHY ORATING) Citizens of the Republic- This is a difficult and bitter time. What does it mean, that the free state is violating all democratic and constitutional norms behaving like a military junta of the dark ages? It means that they know their power is not founded on the people's will. They know there is an opposition against them that is unconquerable.

She looks up and speaks along with the final V/O line

DOROTHY/ECHO They know that in spite of all their effort to crush it- The Republic Lives!

Applause. She rises now, stands on a box and continues (without V/O) to speak in impassioned tones

DOROTHY And so, fellow citizens. As we gather in the dark of evening, amid the ruins of O'Connell Street. I urge you to heed the words of Madame McBride, here beside me! Stand with us! And stand up for the Republican women and men now languishing in our gaols. Sign our petition in support of Mary McSwiney who six days ago, in Mountjoy Prison, embarked, like her heroic brother Terence before her, on a hunger strike to the death. Long live the Irish Republic! Thank you!

Applause and the odd catcall. A volley of distant shots. Fades out. She speaks reflectively.

DOROTHY Oh, I thought the tide was turning in Ireland, those few swift days- that mood of intense hope and pride! Our work at No. 73 knew neither meal or sleeping time, we painted posters and gathered processions. I spoke with Madame McBride – Maeve, as we call her – addressing the white faced crowds on O Connell Street. They were threatened by soldiers who fired shots over their heads, and yet the crowd would not disperse! I rushed out Issue [16] of Freedom in haste- the little paper that has become the sea into which tumbles every

torrent of my thoughts. I wrote to the council of Alexandra College, my employers, telling them I felt constrained to take part in a campaign for the proper treatment of republican prisoners and that this might involve public work. I knew this would almost certainly mean dismissal and had no notion of what I should do after that. But Miss MacSwiney's danger and suffering had already become an intolerable thing to me, and to be doing anything else, even for ten minutes, seemed shameful! On Thursday afternoon a cable came from Ms. Sheehy Skeffington.... "What is it?" Maeve, I asked:

MAEVE (impatiently) It reads: Muriel ill. Anxious about Mary and Baby Maire. Wire news at once!

DOROTHY Muriel?

MAEVE Yes! Muriel MacSwiney, You know... Poor Terence's widow. In the United States. Well, I cannot go! I cannot risk arrest running around the streets searching for a child.

DOROTHY I'll go! But where should I look? I met Lili O'Brennan, on her way into Suffolk Street. Oh Dorothy, she said, you need to get to Mrs.Cathal Brugha in Rathgar, Muriel's mother – she will have news of the child! Go at once.

She writes.

VOICE OVER (DOROTHY) But I did not do what I ought to have done – I was in a fatalistic drifting mood. Saturday would be Donald's birthday- I was not satisfied with the shade of the brown tie I had bought for him, he wanted the colour of dead leaf. (it was not the colour of any leaf I had ever met) it was in my bag – it would not mean 10 minutes delay- I went to the shop and changed it and walked toward Nassau Street then to get the tram to Rathgar.

More dramatic street sounds. She rises again.

DOROTHY As I passed Suffolk Street I found a crowd gathered and saw military motor cars and lorries drawn up outside No 23 – The big raid at last- I saw B standing silent- in the crowd. Could one do anything to help. I asked her. There are secret Republican documents they don't want taken, answered B. I'll go up! The Soldiers let me pass in and upstairs into Lili O Brennan's room. She and Miss Bermingham were sitting by the wall. The raiders were turning out drawers reading everything. There were still important dispatches in one

drawer on the table not far from the fire. (She sits – nervously) I sat down by that table and began writing. Lili sat between me and the fire but a sentry stood watching me all the time.

She looks up nervously at the sentry. But then, her reverie is interrupted by a banging on her cell door. A voice calls.

VOICE Dorothy! Dorothy!

She returns to her cell.

DOROTHY Where was I? 23 Suffolk Street. The day of my arrest....

2. Scene: Arrest

She resumes watching the sentry – occasionally reaching a little but withdrawing again.

VOICEOVER (DOROTHY) The sentry stood watching us. I put in the time writing a long birthday letter to my brother. Donald. I realised I had no chance of reaching into the drawer.

DOROTHY (rising) I might step out for a moment....

SENTRY (swinging his rifle around. Dundalk accent.) Nobody's goin' anywhere. Youse are all under arrest!

DOROTHY I'm sorry, but I must be allowed to leave. I just dropped in...

SENTRY Name?

DOROTHY I beg your pardon?

SENTRY What's your name?

DOROTHY Dorothy Macardle.

SENTRY Address?

DOROTHY Sorry?

SENTRY You heard me. Address.

DOROTHY Cambrickville, Dundalk, County Louth

SENTRY The brewery. (Dorothy declines to answer) Your father sold beer to the British Army in the world war. Right few quid he made at that game! Fond of a bottle of Macardles, I am meself. Your mother's a Unionist. (He softens – just a little) Look, I'm from Dundalk meself. I'll see if we can let you go.

DOROTHY But just then an officer came in and said we should all be taken to Portobello. We were put into comfortable motor cars and driven away through the familiar lamp lit streets. I had known of course that editing "Freedom" would lead to my arrest. We were captives now, powerless to escape, being taken to imprisonment that must last at least, until the Republic is won.... Months or years, maybe. I thought I would open the door and try to slip out- impossible- the second car was behind. So, we came to Portobello and sat in a circle in the guard room, the light of a curious lamp, like a lighthouse, on our faces, while sullen, rough looking soldiers came in and out. The authorities were looking up our records, we supposed. Strange searchlight illumination. Male voices are heard, hurling insults.

DOROTHY Is this how you treat women?

SENTRY Youse! Will yiz get away and keep yer mout's shut!

DOROTHY Not a word of explanation was given to any of us, then or afterwards. We were packed into the motor cars again and driven down Stephens Green and Grafton Street and off towards Mountjoy. I longed intensely to see one face of a friend- to let them know what was being done to me. I had the letter hand written to Donald, addressed, in my hand and would have thrown it to be posted to any friend I might see. I was sure, quite sure, that Maeve and her brave throng of Republican women would be either in O Connell St. or outside Mountjoy. I felt sure there would be a hundred hands to take the letter- maybe even a rescue, I said! We might slip out into the crowd and be hidden and get away. But she was not in O Connell Street; there was no sign of any Republican women outside Mountjoy. Those familiar gates outside which I had stood so often in suspense and anguish for those within opened before us and closed behind. We were Republican Prisoners of War.

Sound of prison gates shutting. Silence now. Lights dim gradually. Doors shutting. Then, from upstairs a bit of a ruction – banging on metal doors etc.. The voice of Brighid echoes: "I

will in my Paudeen go to bed at five o'clock in the day."...Laughter. "Yes, yes, yes. We will protest". Then Lily: "I... I'm not so sure..." This rises to a mild crescendo of argument.

DOROTHY (looking up) You see, down here, we are all propagandists. Thought and words are our natural medium. Whereas on the landing above, Mrs Humphreys, Sighle, Brighid, Rita Farrelly... they are women of deeds, champions of Cumann na mBan. A difference of attitudes is inevitable...and a little... scorn.... (She goes to her peephole and looks out) But the challenging, reckless spirit and boyish beauty of those girls is very... lovable, however they frown upon us.

Lighting grows more ominous. The sounds of the prison and outside world become nightmarish. Gunfire, meowling cats, banging doors, the laughter of maddened women. Dorothy climbs up and looks out the window. Shots are fired and she ducks and retreats. A voice whispers. "His eye, Miss Macardel! His eye was gone. Like that! Gone!"

DOROTHY The night was hideous ... soldiers shouting and shooting in the yard. They shot a cat and it was in agonies on the grass. Agnes came in at breakfast time and whispered to one me that one of the men convicts had been shot. His eye was gone. He had looked out of the window of his cell. And all through the night, from the cells below a horrible banging and beating on the iron door. In the morning we do not hear it any more. A prisoner has gone out of her mind: she has been taken to the asylum. She is 19 years old.

3. Scene: Deterioration of Miss MacSwiney

Dorothy rises, goes to her hiding places and selects a specific set of pages. She arranges them on her desk. There are several of them.

DOROTHY All the time that I have been here no one has yet sent me pen and paper or ink. The hunger to be writing is on me these long slow days and nights, and I have to write my thoughts in pencil on little miserable borrowed scraps. I have written to Iseult begging for my writing case and supplies of manuscript- paper. A dispatch box-came today full of luxurious toilet things chosen by Iseult: cream and expensive powder, eau de cologne, and perfumed soap. It made one feel a woman and not a mere prisoner - and was a great delight. But what I am starving for now is paper and ink...

She reads or summarises her loose pages as she lays them out in order.

DOROTHY Miss Mc Swiney: Sunday the 12th. On my first visit, Miss MacSwiney did not recognize me. But today when I went in, she said she remembered sitting by my fire in No. 73. She is troubled, full of concern about us - our rights, our food. It makes her pain harder to see.

She places the page face down, finds the next one, reads it and places it face down on top of No. 1 – and so on.

Monday the 13th. Inaction is becoming unbearable ...that Miss McSwiney's suffering should go on..hour after hour and nothing be done. (She writes on the page, amending it slightly) Day and night we ask one another is there nothing that we can do? I know what the old phrase means now, to be eating one's heart-.

She picks up another scrap – undated and figures out it goes in here.

The newspapers are still reporting 'no change' in her condition. And no sign comes from the world that anyone cares.

Another page.

Monday the 13th: Evening: Lili said we must send out a report to our own Director of Publicity and she and I set to work, amid respectful silence to draw up appeals. All the anxiety and shame and pity that has been consuming me went into mine. When I had finished, they all wanted it until they heard Lil's which was stronger and simpler. Hers, they said, made one long to do something. Mine made them want to cry. ... I agreed but the people upstairs took both- They could not decide. To my dismay afterwards, they came and told me they had shown the letters to Miss MacSwiney. It appalled me to think she had read all that I had written, and I would not dare to go near her all day.

Another page.

Tuesday the 14th. Miss MacSwiney has indicated that she wants my letter sent with certain passages from Lili's inserted. With labor and irritation, I accomplished this distracting task and the letter was sent out, under-ground. We have little hope that our director of publicity

can manage to get it into the public press. I sent him too, a little poem, The Pilgrim, for the next issue of Freedom- Lili brought a copy to Miss MacSwiney and she wanted to keep it.

She allows herself a little smile, rummages among a separate sheaf of papers and finds "The Pilgrim"

The Pilgrim

Unhesitant, towards the dark unknown,

Her soul travels, alone,

Made swift by pity, omnipotent by faith;

And sure, the holy Dead,

Who gave theirs, would, for Ireland, lean above

That agony, and shed

Their splendour upon her spirit,

Because her love

Is like to (....._)

But time, in whose name

She dies, by whose sons she is

Flung to wrath,

Bows down her head,

Broken with bitter shame.

She puts the poem aside again and continues her ordering of the McSwiney pages.

Wednesday 16th November 1922. The evening paper has come, and our statement is in it at full length. To have succeeded even in this little thing has given us an elation of hope. It cannot but help we are sure!

Thursday 17th Miss McSwiney's vitality during these days has indeed seemed remarkable, but her voice and movements grow more faint each day and the periods which she can exert herself grow shorter*. She grows very weak.

Friday the 18th: Word has come back: the government has no intention of releasing Miss McSwiney.

On the soundtrack, we hear a female voice -that of Nóinín –singing a haunting Spanish folk/love song.

DOROTHY Nóinín sings at night for Mrs Mc Swiney. She is a woman quite different from any others I have ever known perhaps because of her French nationality, her French girlhood and her South American adventures.

Other voices from around the jail join in. After a while, faltering, Dorothy begins to sing along from the loneliness of her cell. Lights fade to grey as the singing trails off.

* This line is quoted from a statement smuggled out, rather than the diary

4. SCENE: Dec 8th Feast of the Immaculate Conception

On the soundscape, the Indian music becomes subsumed by the voices of Dublin newsboys: “Two TDs shot outside the Dáil. Hales dead. O’ Maille grievously wounded! Read all about it!” There is a distant volley of gunfire. The murmur of the rosary fades in. Dorothy rises – apparently sleepwalking. She walks around in a square, head bowed, hands joined, tossing her head, murmuring.

DOROTHY

Today is the Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception.

The other women have gone down to Mass.

The other women gone down to Mass.

O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

(The soundscape of whispering intensifies. Dorothy whispers now, articulating the women’s hushed conversation.)

Davy! Did you hear shots in the night?

I couldn't sleep!

Neither could I!

Mrs Humphreys heard something!

What did she hear?

Pick axes! The noise of pick-axes working!

Digging a grave?

Digging a grave.

Reprisals for the 2 TDs ? – but who? Who would they shoot?

Four! Four for every one of theirs, I heard them say!

(Aloud) O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

(Whispering again) Liam Mellows, maybe? Oh God, no!

Rory O'Connor?

Never!

Any four, chosen at random, I suppose.

Maybe young Cooney?

Maybe Seán McBride!!!

Maybe Seán McBride!!!

Maybe Seán McBride!!!

(Dorothy screams) Seán!

(White light saturates her face. She laughs like a person possessed. There is the sound of male laughter).

Seán in my cell, laughing! Laughing in the face of the executioner! O Seán!

Silence. Normal lighting returns. She has woken from her nightmare.

DOROTHY (At the table, absently drying tin mugs with a tea towel) We go about our morning's work- washing the supper things, waiting for sounds, making breakfast. There are differences of opinion.

A WOMAN I couldn't sleep. Two TDs shot in broad daylight? That shouldn't have been done!

ANOTHER Wasn't it good enough for them! Celebrating the anniversary of their shameful treaty. Executing our young men left, right and centre.

LILI It shouldn't have been done! To murder even a murderer is a terrible thing.

DOROTHY Some of the women say they saw a throng of officials in the prison yard as they were returning from Mass.

A WOMAN They were behind the iron gate, in the place of graves.

ANOTHER WOMAN The place where Kevin Barry is buried?

A YOUNG GIRL (Over-excited) Where Kevin Barry was shot!

Pause.

DOROTHY Lili spoke up... quietly.

LILi Shot? Kevin Barry? Kevin wasn't shot

The gentle rebuke has the effect of silencing everyone. Dorothy continues to dry the mugs in respectful silence. The silence drags out. There is a sudden loud report of 3 gunshots.

WOMEN (gasping?) Is that it? The firing squad? Lili???

DOROTHY Lili?... Lili who was in Kilmainham in 1916, when the leaders were shot outside her cell....

Silence. She looks to Lili.

LILI That is not the sound. (Pause.) What was in your parcel, Dorothy?

DOROTHY Why, cups and saucers- little tea knives and spoons- clean clothes- books.

LILI (Smiles) Civilization!

DOROTHY Yes. The cups just need a rins-

On the recorded soundtrack a male voice shouts 'Fire'! There is the massive rattle of sustained gunfire.

LILI That was an execution.

The women collapse onto their knees, cross themselves and begin to pray in almost silent whisper.

WOMEN

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,

Hail – our Life, our Sweetness and our Hope

To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve,

To thee do we send up our sighs...

Mourning and weeping in this Valley of Tears.

5. SCENE: ANNIE MAC SWINEY

A change of mood. The march tune plays again. Dorothy starts moving things around but this time in temper, banging a stack of books onto her table, kicking her ornate box.

DOROTHY I will not do it!

BETTY What is it Dorothy?

DOROTHY Annie McSwiney has just been brought in - She's been on hunger strike since her arrest. Walking around the floor, with Lily and Cecilia to support her.

BETTY And?

DOROTHY Well, the rumour has arisen, 'a sympathetic hunger strike at once'.

BETTY Hmmm... But what about you, Dorothy, will you hunger strike?

DOROTHY No! ... I know, I know! How unjust to be angry with any but the tyrants whose treachery drives brave women to such a terrible protest... but... (Fiercely) Annie McSwiney is not a great Republican! She is not a member of the Dáil, like her sister! Any work that was to

be done by a sister of Terence Mac Swiney, hunger striking in an Irish gaol, has been victoriously accomplished by Mary. Why must this dreadful agony be; bringing with it the death or broken health for years, of young girls?

BETTY But surely they will exempt the most delicate of the girls...

DOROTHY Exempt, exempt! I am probably the healthiest woman in this gaol. But I could not die for this - this inspiration would not be pure enough to carry beyond the twentieth day. And Mother? I picture her brooding in dread. I will not put my mother - or myself – into that pain and danger for one woman.

BETTY And yet ... when they threatened to withdraw political privileges, you –

DOROTHY Precisely! It would be different if it were for an article of faith. They can think me a coward. But there is no wisdom other than honesty, and I will not hunger-strike for this!

She places her head into her hands and appears to suffer a momentary convulsion. Alone now, she hears a faintly remembered song of lost love.

Poor Betty! ...She has been dreaming again. She was lost in a dark, tangled place among terrifying wild beasts and could escape only by crossing a dark turbid stream. Tom was waiting with his arms folded, calm and stern. The place where he was standing was a wide, green, sunlit field. Betty rushed to the water. But she had not succeeded in crossing when she awoke.

Later in the afternoon, I met Nora. She is perhaps the gentlest person here, and yet the women have now chosen her as our representative. They have discovered in her a deep - thinking and far-seeing mind; a large Republican sense of right, firmness and fearlessness towards the enemy.

NORA Have you heard the news, Dorothy! Annie MacSwiney was released this morning.

DOROTHY Oh! And the girls that were on hunger strike with her?

NORA All called off for now.

DOROTHY I am glad, Nora - glad this agony was not so long

NORA Yes. There is a great, restful thankfulness in the air. ... And Mary MacSwiney has sent us all a marvellous armful of flowers!

Dorothy smiles. Nora leaves.

DOROTHY But I have been thinking about my dream of Miss McSwiney and the Chief, afraid the dream might be coming true. This morning's paper had a great heading- 'Miss MacSwiney and De Valera – Republican split'