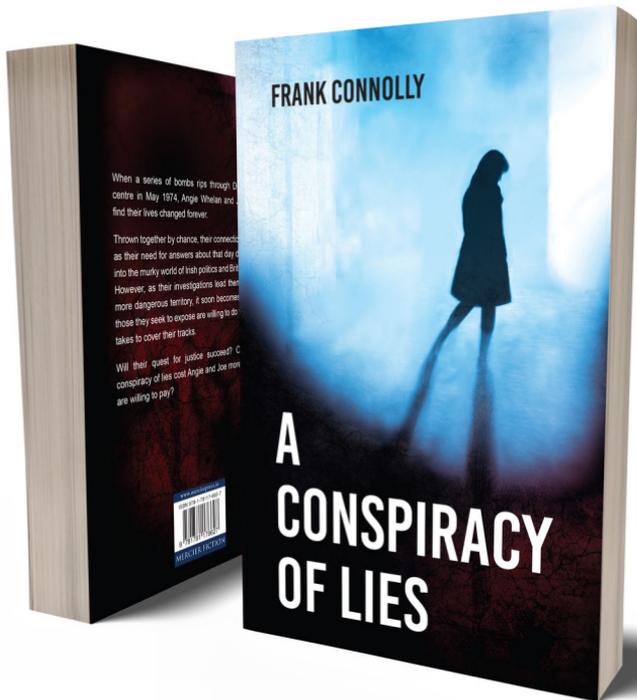


FRANK CONNOLLY



**A
CONSPIRACY
OF LIES**



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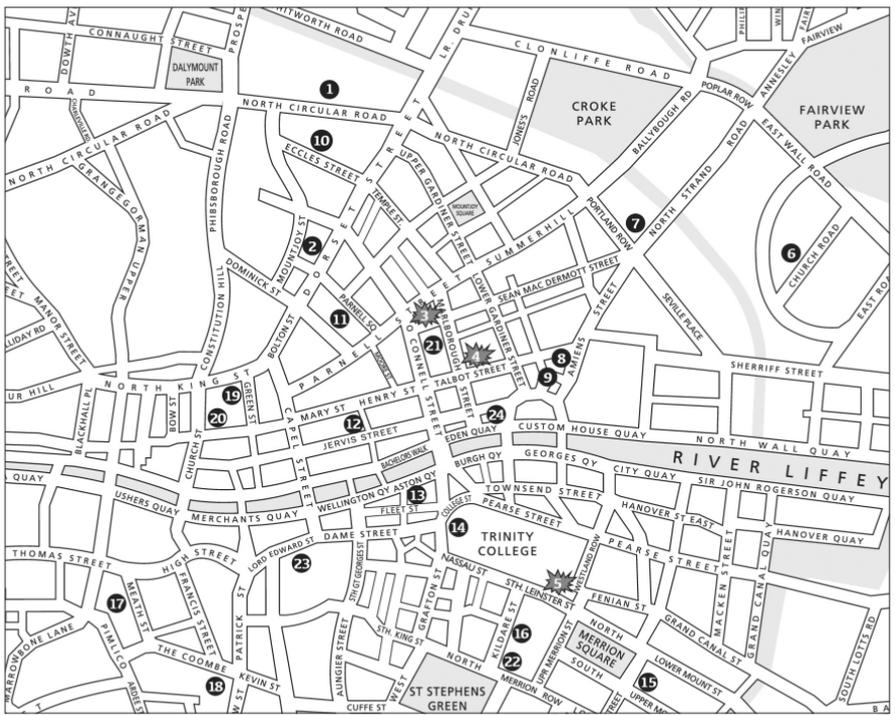
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**A
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OF LIES**

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MERCIER PRESS



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Mountjoy Jail | 13. Palace Bar |
| 2. Dorset Street | 14. Trinity College |
| 3. Parnell Street car bomb | 15. Holles Street Hospital |
| 4. Talbot Street car bomb | 16. Leinster House |
| 5. South Leinster Street car bomb | 17. The Liberties |
| 6. East Wall | 18. Fallon's Pub |
| 7. Humphrey's Pub | 19. Special Criminal Court |
| 8. City Morgue | 20. The Bridewell Garda Station |
| 9. Store Street Garda Station | 21. Gresham Hotel |
| 10. Mater Hospital | 22. Shelbourne Hotel |
| 11. Granby Row | 23. Dublin Castle |
| 12. Jervis Street Hospital | 24. Liberty Hall |

**EVERYONE REMEMBERS WHERE THEY WERE AT THE
TIME OF THE BOMBINGS, EXCEPT THOSE TOO YOUNG,
TOO OLD OR TOO DEAD.**

PROLOGUE

It is a warm, early summer's afternoon as three cars move slowly through the streets of Dublin. Each driver knows what to do. Find a good parking spot and disappear. On Parnell Street, a green car pulls up outside a garage just yards from the city's main thoroughfare. Its Northern Irish registration plates stand out. A tall, blond man emerges from the car and walks quickly away. He doesn't lock the door. Pulling a dark cap over his head he mingles with the bustling hordes heading for the train station in the evening rush hour. 'Soon they'll get a taste of what's been coming to them for a long time,' he says to himself. 'I hope the boys get away okay.'

SUMMER 1974

JOE

The bells of the church tower ring as I walk through the gates. It's warm out here, bright, noisy, full of people. The cars are lashing up and down the North Circular, heading for all the places people can go when they're not banged up. When it's safe, I cross to Berkeley Road and walk towards the cream-coloured box. I have to call the ma. Two pence in the slot. The house phone rings.

'Hello? Who's that? I can't hear you,' she answers.

I've forgotten how to use the thing. Press button A, for fuck's sake. The phone in the 'Joy's been broken for months.

'It's me, Ma. I'm out. On the street. Early release.'

'Joe, merciful hour. Are you alright? Are you coming home for tea? When did they let you go? And your sister about to drop.'

'I'm fine, Ma. Where is she?'

'Holles Street and due any minute.'

'I'll surprise her before I come home.'

'She'll like that and I'll have some steak for you, love.'

Crossing Dorset Street, I look up at the huge Guinness ad with the couple lying in flowers. I'm tempted to drop in somewhere for a pint, but it's too early. Besides, I can't go into the hospital smelling of gargle. Tricia wouldn't like that with her first baby on its way into the world. I pass the Garden of Remembrance on Parnell Square. Pity she's not in the Rotunda just around the corner. Where all the northsiders are born. I could see her there and still grab a pint or two before heading home.

There's no fucking buses. A few are parked up, empty, but none are moving. The busmen are on strike. Bus stops with no queues, on a Friday! Jesus, I'll just have to leg it to Holles Street.

Crossing into O'Connell Street, I pass Tom Clarke's old tobacco shop under the shadow of Parnell. A kid is pumping petrol into a grey Morris Minor at the garage in Parnell Street. Brown hair, early teens. Cars, double-parked, all shades and sizes, a guard directing traffic, a woman pushing a pram, fucking gorgeous. I spot my da's car pulling up at the garage, his olive-green Hillman. Then a tall, fair-haired man gets out. Mid-forties. Not my da. Northern reg: DIA. Didn't cop that. Anyway, Da's likely on the high stool in Nolans by now. First pint, browning black, and a chaser. Old bollox never came to visit me once. No mercy for the sinner.

I pick up speed down O'Connell Street. *Blazing Saddles* is on in the Savoy, Forte's is packed with people eating ice cream, there's a smell of cooking oil. I'd mill a bag of chips. No, Ma's steak is what I need. The Clery's clock says ten past five. Crowds are heading down Talbot Street for the trains, the paper boy says there's no end to the bus strike.

'Hurdle and Pressed – No buses for Dubs this weekend,' he shouts. Over the bridge. I wonder who's in the Palace Bar as I get the whiff of coffee from Bewley's.

I pass the imposing gates of Trinity College and follow its wall around to Nassau Street. There's a smell of freshly mown grass. Across the street, I notice a bunch of flowers outside a shop. Tricia will like them. I head over. A girl with blonde hair wearing a light yellow coat over a short skirt walks out as I enter the newsagent. She drops her pack of ten Carrolls into a small

red handbag. Beautiful. About my age. She returns my gaping look with a shy smile and heads up the street, towards Merrion Square. I pay for the lilacs and tulips wrapped in coloured paper. Outside, I see her up the street, crossing towards the college wall.

Two big cracks erupt like thunder from the city centre.

Another almighty bang, much closer, and a ball of smoke. The ground shakes. I tumble onto the street, dropping the flowers and my kitbag on the footpath as I fall. Then, silence. People are shouting, pointing. Flames and smoke are rising from a car not far down the road. I pick myself up and run. I approach the burning blue car. Beside it is the girl in yellow, her leg almost torn away, her blonde hair covered in blood as she lies on the footpath, still gripping her red handbag. Pure terror in her pleading eyes. I take off my jacket, cover her near-severed leg. I kneel down, taking her hand. She looks at me and screams.

‘My leg, please help me, please save me, please call my mammy.’

I gently raise her bloodied head.

‘What’s your name?’ I ask.

‘Carol ... My leg, I can’t feel it.’

The handbag falls from her hand.

‘Carol, you’re badly injured. Try to stay awake. The ambulance is near. Can you hear the sirens?’ She looks at me, her mouth opens, but no words come out. Her eyes close.

It seems like an age before the men with stretchers carefully lift her into the back of the white van.

‘Do you know her?’ a white coat asks.

‘No. Her name is Carol though.’

‘She’s still breathing, just about,’ he says.

I pick up her red bag and place it beside her on the stretcher. The mutilated body of another woman is lifted carefully from the footpath and put on board. I grab my jacket from the ground and follow the ambulance as it weaves its way slowly through the injured, shocked and helpless. On Lincoln Place it picks up speed and disappears into Westland Row.

As I turn back, a few guards are pushing people away from the bomb site, from the burning wreck, towards the modern office building on Clare Street. I hear the sound of cracking glass from above.

'Get them away from the fucking building before the windows come down,' I shout at one rookie as he and other guards herd the stunned onlookers into danger. He looks up and shouts at people to move away from the building. It's a miracle no one else is killed when the sheets of heavy glass crash to the footpath from four and five storeys above. It's fucking hell. The air is full of smoke and sirens blare across the city. My jacket and shirt are stained with Carol's blood. I don't go to Holles Street, just a few hundred yards down Merrion Square. I can hardly walk straight. I wander back towards town. I wait in line at a phone box to call my ma and tell her I'm all right. I don't tell her I've blood all over my shirt and I won't be going to see Tricia in this state. I hope she's all right, baby and all.

'Get out of there, Son, before the whole place is blown apart. The world's gone mad,' she says.

'I'll be home soon, Ma.'

I put the phone on the hook and break down. I've seen the aftermath of car bombs on the telly before, but I've never seen a dead body on the street. Not to mind holding the hand of a

beautiful young woman in terrible pain. My head is reeling and my hands are shaking. I don't know what to do, where to go, or how to get there.

When I woke this morning I was in the safest place in Dublin. Safe if you discount the assortment of thieves, strokers, abusers, dealers and general no-good gangsters that share the corridors and cells of Mountjoy Jail. Not to mention the screws – peculiar and often dangerous specimens with almost as few scruples as the men under their care and control. My home for one year, three months and six days. For hash dealing. Nothing to see but the chimneys of the Mater, the odd pigeon and a soundtrack provided by freight trains, traffic and the odd ice-cream van on a summer evening.

I was stirred from my slumber by the loud hammering on the cell door.

'Heney. Get yourself up and ready. You're out of here today, you lucky bastard,' the Seagull shouted.

'We have to make room for some other scumbags,' was the explanation for my early release. It took a while for the paperwork to be sorted, so it was the afternoon before my cell door opened.

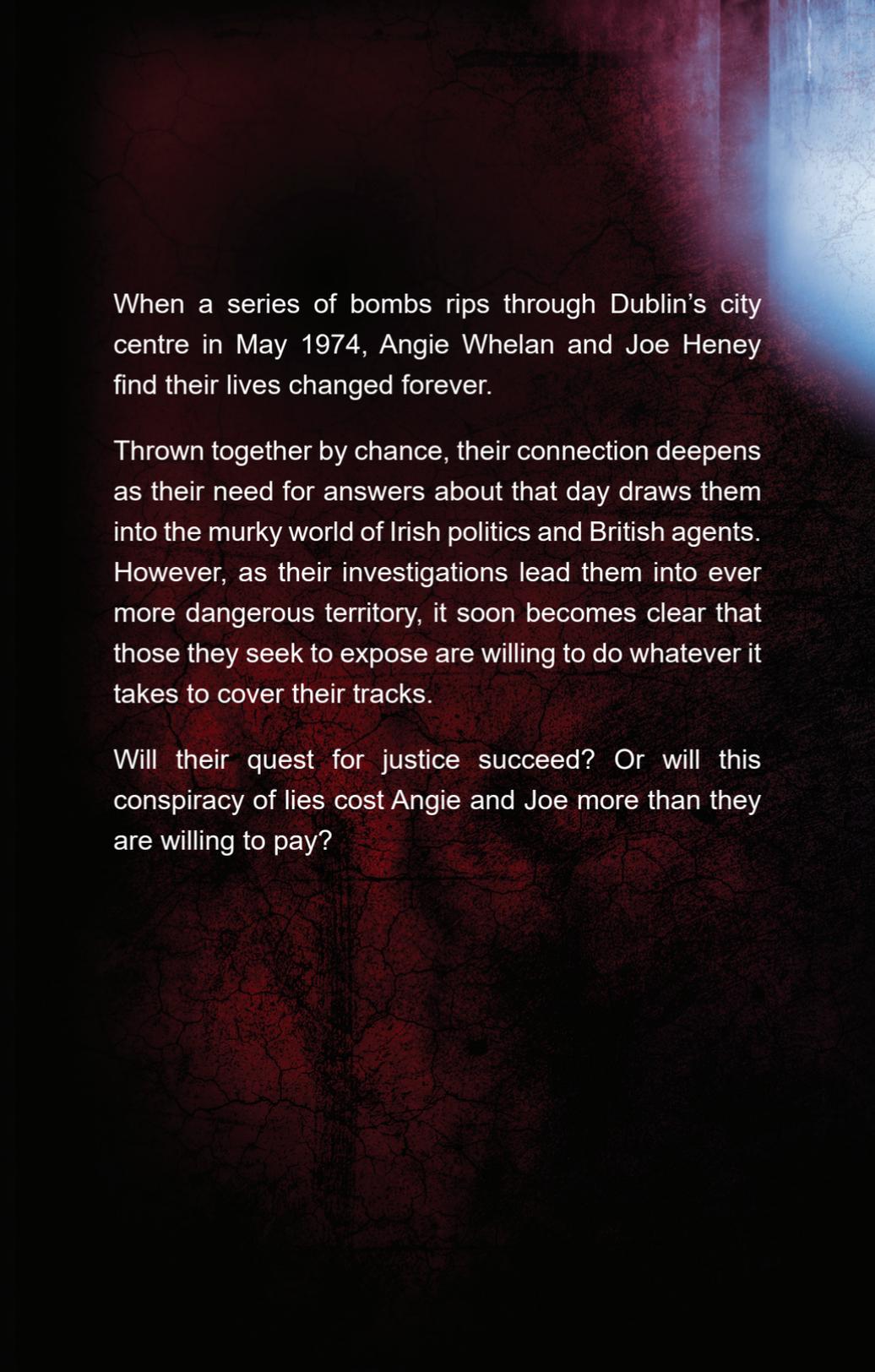
Seagull was at the gate with my release slip just after 4.30 p.m. I resisted the temptation to remind him of the nickname he had earned as a greedy bastard always on the look-out for money in exchange for the smokes, vodka, porn and hash he smuggles in for the unfortunates whose cash has helped fill the beer belly protruding from his size forty-fours. I just smiled as he sneered, 'Free at last, free at last.'

Into this fucking mess. I walk down Nassau Street to find a screen to tell me what the fuck's going on. Windows are cracked and smashed along the street and in the college library. As I

round College Green, retracing my earlier steps to freedom, hoards of people are coming in my direction, some bloodied and in tears, all scared. On Westmoreland Street two young guards are telling people not to cross O'Connell Bridge. Some ignore them. I don't. In the Palace punters are crowded around the TV and the evening news. Pictures are coming in of three bomb sites, the dead and injured scattered on the streets and the absolute chaos of a city rocked by the unexpected.

Three car bombs exploded within minutes of each other around half five on Parnell Street, Talbot Street and South Leinster Street, the newsreader tells us. Over twenty dead, more sure to follow, hundreds injured, thousands shocked and terrified. All the bombs were planted on roads leading to the train stations on the day the buses are on strike. The pub is full of people crying, shouting at the TV, skulling pints and looking for answers. I see my mate, Donal, a struggling photo-journalist, camera round his neck, tears in his eyes. Just back from Talbot Street, he says. Blood-stained like myself. In shock.

'I saw a woman's head and someone's arm. There's blood pouring down the gutter outside Guiney's,' he tells me. I describe holding the hand of the beautiful young woman. Her yellow coat and red bag. Her leg hanging off. We hug and hold on. We're both sobbing like babies. Who did this, and why? I'm not long in the place when the images come through from a border town where another car bomb has killed a lot of innocents in a pub. The tears come again. The late edition of the *Press* carries the headline 'No end in sight for bus dispute'. The date on the masthead reads 17 May 1974. The first pint tastes bitter.



When a series of bombs rips through Dublin's city centre in May 1974, Angie Whelan and Joe Heney find their lives changed forever.

Thrown together by chance, their connection deepens as their need for answers about that day draws them into the murky world of Irish politics and British agents. However, as their investigations lead them into ever more dangerous territory, it soon becomes clear that those they seek to expose are willing to do whatever it takes to cover their tracks.

Will their quest for justice succeed? Or will this conspiracy of lies cost Angie and Joe more than they are willing to pay?