

JACK HIGGINS



CONFESSIO

CONFESSIONAL

JACK
HIGGINS



STEIN AND DAY / *Publishers* / New York

Copyright © 1985 by Jack Higgins
All rights reserved, Stein and Day, Incorporated

Printed in the United States of America
STEIN AND DAY/*Publishers*
Scarborough House
Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. 10510

For my children
Sarah, Ruth, Sean, and Hannah

CONFESSIOAL

P R O L O G U E

1 9 5 9

WHEN the Land Rover turned the corner at the end of the street, Kelly was passing the Church of the Holy Name. He moved into the porch quickly, opened the heavy door, and stepped inside, keeping it partially open so that he could see what was happening.

The Land Rover had been stripped down to the bare essentials so that the driver and the two policemen who crouched in the rear were completely exposed. They wore the distinctive dark green uniforms of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Sterling submachine guns held ready for instant action. They disappeared down the narrow street toward the center of Drumore, and Kelly stayed in the church for a moment in the safety of the half-darkness, conscious of the familiar odor.

"Incense, candles, and the holy water," he said softly, and his finger reacted, dipping into the granite bowl beside the door.

"Is there anything I can do for you, my son?"

The voice was little more than a whisper, and, as Kelly turned, a priest moved out of the darkness, an old man in shabby cassock, his hair very white, gleaming in the candlelight. He carried an umbrella in one hand.

"Just sheltering from the rain is all, Father," Kelly told him.

He stood there, shoulders hunched easily, hands thrust

deep into the pockets of the old, tan raincoat. He was small, five foot-five at the most, not much more than a boy, yet the white devil's face on him beneath the brim of the old felt hat and the dark, brooding eyes that seemed to stare through and beyond, hinted at something more.

All this the old priest saw and understood. He smiled gently. "You don't live in Drumore, I think?"

"No, Father, just passing through. I arranged to meet a friend of mine here at a pub called Murphy's."

His voice lacked the distinctive hard accent of the Ulsterman. The priest said, "You're from the Republic?"

"Dublin, Father. Would you know this Murphy's place? It's important. My friend's promised me a lift into Belfast. I've the chance of work there."

The priest nodded. "I'll show you. It's on my way."

Kelly opened the door, the old man went outside. It was raining heavily now, and he put up his umbrella. Kelly fell in beside him, and they walked along the pavement. There was the sound of a brass band playing an old hymn, "Abide with Me," and voices lifted, melancholy in the rain. The old priest and Kelly paused, looking down onto the town square. There was a granite war memorial, wreaths placed at its foot. A small crowd ranged around it, the band on one side. A Church of Ireland minister was conducting the service. Four old men held flags proudly in the rain, although the Union Jack was the only one with which Kelly was familiar.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"Armistice Day, to commemorate the dead of two world wars. That's the local branch of the British Legion down there. Our Protestant friends like to hang on tight to what they call their heritage."

"Is that so?" Kelly said.

They carried on down the street. On the corner, a small girl stood, no more than seven or eight. She wore an old beret a couple of sizes too large, like her coat. There were holes in her socks, and her shoes were in poor condition. Her face was pale, skin stretched tightly over prominent cheekbones, yet the brown eyes were alert, intelligent, and she managed a

smile in spite of the fact that her hands, holding the cardboard tray in front of her, were blue with cold.

"Hello, Father," she said. "Will you buy a poppy?"

"My poor child, you should be indoors on a day like this." He found a coin in his pocket and slipped it into her collecting tin, helping himself to a scarlet poppy. "To the memory of our glorious dead," he told Kelly.

"Is that a fact?" Kelly turned to find the little girl timidly holding a poppy out to him. "Buy a poppy, sir."

"And why not?"

She pinned the poppy to his raincoat. Kelly gazed down into the strained little face for a moment, eyes dark, then swore softly under his breath. He took a leather wallet from his inside pocket, opened it, extracted two pound notes. She gazed at them, astonished, and he rolled them up and poked them into her collecting tin. Then he gently took the tray of poppies from her hands.

"Go home," he said softly. "Stay warm. You'll find the world cold enough soon enough, little one."

There was puzzlement in her eyes. She didn't understand and, turning, ran away.

The old priest said, "I was on the Somme myself, but this lot over here," he nodded to the crowd at the Cenotaph, "would rather forget about that." He shook his head as they carried on along the pavement. "So many dead. I never had the time to ask whether a man was Catholic or Protestant."

He paused and glanced across the road. A faded sign said *Murphy's Select Bar*. "Here we are, then. What are you going to do with those?"

Kelly glanced down at the tray of poppies. "God knows."

"I usually find that He does." The old man took a silver case from his pocket and selected a cigarette without offering one to Kelly. He puffed out smoke, coughing, "When I was a young priest I visited an old Catholic church in Norfolk at Study Constable. There was a remarkable medieval fresco there by some unknown genius or other. Death in a black hood and cloak, come to claim his harvest. I saw him again today in my own church. The only difference was that he was

wearing a felt hat and an old raincoat." He shivered suddenly.

"Go home, Father," Kelly said gently. "Too cold for you out here."

"Yes," the old man said. "Far too cold."

He hurried away as the band struck up another hymn, and Kelly turned, went up the steps of the pub, and pushed open the door. He found himself in a long, narrow room, a coal fire burning at one end. There were several cast-iron tables and chairs, a bench along the wall. The bar itself was dark mahogany and marble-topped, a brass rail at foot level. There was the usual array of bottles ranged against a large mirror, gold leaf flaking to reveal cheap plaster. There were no customers, only the barman leaning against the beer pumps, a heavily built man, almost bald, his face seamed with fat, his collarless shirt soiled at the neck.

He glanced up at Kelly, taking in the tray of poppies. "I've got one."

"Haven't we all?" Kelly put the tray on the table and leaned on the bar. "Where is everyone?"

"In the square at the ceremony. This is a Prod town, son."

"How do you know I'm not one?"

"And me a publican for twenty-five years? Come off it. What's your fancy?"

"Bushmills."

The fat man nodded approvingly and reached for a bottle. "A man of taste."

"Are you Murphy?"

"So they tell me." He lit a cigarette. "You're not from these parts."

"No, I was supposed to meet a friend here. Perhaps you know him?"

"What's his name?"

"Cuchulain."

The smile wiped clean from Murphy's face, "Cuchulain," he whispered.

"Last of the dark heroes."

Murphy said, "Christ, but you like your melodrama, you

boys. Like a bad play on television on a Saturday night. You were told not to carry a weapon."

"So?" Kelly said.

"There's been a lot of police activity. Body searches. They'd lift you for sure."

"I'm not carrying."

"Good." Murphy took a large brown carrier bag from under the bar. "Straight across the square is the police barracks. The local provision firm's truck is allowed through the gates at exactly twelve noon each day. Sling that in the back of it. Enough there to take out half the barracks." He reached inside the bag. There was an audible click. "There, you've got five minutes."

Kelly picked up the bag and started for the door. As he reached it, Murphy called, "Hey, Cuchulain, dark hero?" Kelly turned, and the fat man raised a glass, toasting him. "You know what they say. May you die in Ireland."

There was something in the eyes, a mockery that sharpened Kelly like a razor's edge as he went outside and started across the square. The band was on another hymn and the crowd sang, showing no disposition to move in spite of the rain. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that Murphy was standing at the top of the steps outside the pub. Strange, that, and then the publican waved several times, as if signaling someone, and with a sudden roar the stripped Land Rover came out of a side street into the square and skidded broadside on.

Kelly started to run, slipped on the damp cobbles, and went down on one knee. The butt of a Sterling drove painfully into his kidneys. As he cried out, the driver, who he now saw was a sergeant, put a foot hard on Kelly's outstretched hand, and picked up the carrier bag. The men turned it upside down and a cheap wooden kitchen clock fell out. He kicked it like a football across the square into the crowd, which scattered.

"No need for that!" the sergeant shouted. "It's a dud!" He leaned down, grabbing Kelly by the long hair at the back of the neck. "You never learn, do you, your bloody lot? You can't trust anybody, my son. They should have taught you that."

Kelly gazed beyond him at Murphy, standing on the steps outside the bar. So—an informer. Still Ireland's curse, not that he was angry. Only cold now—ice cold and the breath slow, in and out of his lungs.

The sergeant had him by the scruff of the neck, up on his knees, crouched like an animal. He leaned, running his hands under the armpits and over the body, searching for a weapon, then rammed Kelly, still on his knees, against the Land Rover.

"All right, hands behind you. You should have stayed back home in the bogs."

Kelly started to get up, his two hands on the butt of the Browning handgun he had taped so carefully to the inside of his leg, right above the left ankle. He tore it free, turned, and shot the sergeant through the heart. The force of the shot lifted the sergeant off his feet, and he slammed into the constable standing nearest to him. The man spun around, trying to keep his balance, and Kelly shot him in the back, the Browning already arcing toward the third policeman, turning in alarm on the other side of the Land Rover, raising his submachine gun too late as Kelly's third bullet caught him in the throat, driving him back against the wall.

The crowd was scattering, women screaming, some of the band dropping their instruments. Kelly stood perfectly still, very calm amidst the carnage, and looked across the square at Murphy, who remained, as if frozen, at the top of the steps outside the bar.

The Browning swept up as Kelly took aim, and a voice shouted over a megaphone in Russian, booming in the rain, "No more, Kelly! Enough!"

Kelly turned, lowering his gun. The man with the megaphone advancing down the street wore the uniform of a colonel in the KGB, a military greatcoat slung from his shoulders against the rain. The man at his side was in his early thirties, tall and thin, with stooped shoulders. He wore a leather trenchcoat and had fair hair and steel-rimmed spectacles. Behind them, several squads of Russian soldiers, rifles at the ready, emerged from the side streets and doubled down toward the square. They were in combat fatigues and

wore the flashes of the Iron Hammer Brigade of the elite special forces command.

"That's a good boy! Just put the gun down!" the colonel called. Kelly turned, his arm swung up, and he fired once, an amazing shot considering the distance, and most of Murphy's left ear disintegrated. The fat man screamed, his hand going to the side of his head, blood pumping through his fingers.

"No, Mikhail! Enough!" The man in the leather overcoat cried. Kelly turned toward him and smiled. He said in Russian, "Sure, Professor, anything you say," and placed the Browning carefully down on the hood of the Land Rover.

"I thought you said he was trained to do as he was told," the colonel demanded.

An army lieutenant moved forward and saluted. "One of them is still alive, two dead, Colonel Maslovsky. What are your orders?"

Maslovsky ignored him and said to Kelly, "You weren't supposed to carry a gun."

"I know," Kelly said. "On the other hand, according to the rules of the game, Murphy was not supposed to be an informer. I was told he was IRA."

"So, you always believe what you're told?"

"The Party tells me I should, Comrade Colonel. Maybe you've got a new rule book for me?"

Maslovsky was angry and it showed, for he was not used to such attitudes—not from anyone. He opened his mouth to retort angrily and there was a sudden scream. The little girl who had sold Kelly the poppies pushed her way through the crowd and dropped onto her knees beside the body of the police sergeant.

"Papa," she wailed in Russian. "Papa." She looked up at Kelly, her face pale. "You've killed him! You've murdered my father!"

She was on him like a young tiger, nails reaching for his face, crying hysterically. He held her wrists tight, and suddenly all strength went out of her and she slumped against him. His arms went around her, he held her, stroking her hair, whispering in her ear.

The old priest moved out of the crowd. "I'll take her," he said, his hands gentle on her shoulders.

They moved away, the crowd opening to let them through. Maslovsky called to the lieutenant, "Right, let's have the square cleared." He turned to the man in the leather coat. "I'm tired of this eternal Ukrainian rain. Let's get back inside, and bring your protégé with you. We need to talk."

THE KGB IS the largest and most complex intelligence service in the world, totally controlling the lives of millions in the Soviet Union itself, its tentacles reaching out to every country. The heart of it, its most secret area of all, concerns the work of Department-13, that section responsible for murder, assassination, and sabotage in foreign countries.

Colonel Ivan Maslovsky had commanded D-13 for five years. He was a thickset, rather brutal-looking man whose appearance was at odds with his background. Born in 1919 in Leningrad, the son of a doctor, he had gone to law school in that city, completing his studies only a few months before the German invasion of Russia. He had spent the early part of the war fighting with partisan groups behind the lines. His education and flair for languages had earned him a transfer to the wartime counterintelligence unit known as SMERSH. Such was his success that he had remained in intelligence work after the war and had never returned to the practice of law.

He had been mainly responsible for the setting up of highly original training schools for spies at such places as Gaczyna, where agents were trained to work in English-speaking countries in a replica of an English or American town, living exactly as they would in the West. The extraordinarily successful penetration by the KGB of the French intelligence service at every level had been, in the main, the product of the school he had set up at Grosnia, where the emphasis was on everything French—environment, culture, cooking, and dress—being faithfully replicated.

His superiors had every faith in him and had given him *carte blanche* to extend the system, which explained the existence of a small Ulster market town called Drumore in the depths of the Ukraine.

THE ROOM MASLOVSKY used as an office when visiting from Moscow was conventional enough. It had a desk and filing cabinets and a large map of Drumore on the wall. A log fire burned brightly on an open hearth, and he stood in front of it enjoying the heat, nursing a mug of strong black coffee laced with vodka. The door opened behind him as the man in the leather coat entered and approached the fire, shivering.

"God, but it's cold out there."

He helped himself to coffee and vodka from the tray on the desk and moved to the fire. Paul Cherny was thirty-four years old, a handsome good-humored man who already had an international reputation in the field of experimental psychology. A considerable achievement for someone born the son of a blacksmith in a village in the Ukraine. As a boy of sixteen, he had fought with a partisan group in the war. His group leader had been a lecturer in English at the University of Moscow and recognized talent when he saw it.

Cherny was enrolled at the university in 1945. He majored in psychology, then spent two years at the University of Dresden in a unit concerned with experimental psychiatry, receiving a doctorate in 1951. His interest in behaviorist psychology took him next to the University of Peking to work with the famous Chinese psychologist Pin Chow, whose speciality was the use of behaviorist techniques in the interrogation and conditioning of British and American prisoners of war in Korea.

By the time Cherny was ready to return to Moscow, his work in the conditioning of human behavior by the use of Pavlovian techniques had brought him to the attention of the KGB and, in particular, of Maslovsky, who had been instrumental in getting him appointed professor of experimental psychology at Moscow University.

"HE'S A MAVERICK," Maslovsky said. "Has no respect for authority. Totally fails to obey orders. He was told not to carry a gun, wasn't he?"

"Yes, Comrade Colonel."

"So, he disobeys his orders and turns a routine exercise into a bloodbath. Not that I'm worried about these damned dissi-

dents we use here. It's one way of forcing them to serve their country. Who were the policemen, by the way?"

"I'm not sure. Give me a moment." Cherny picked up the telephone. "Levin, get in here."

"Who's Levin?" Maslovsky asked.

"He's been here about three months. A Jewish dissident, sentenced to five years for secretly corresponding with relatives in Israel. He runs the office with extreme efficiency."

"What was his profession?"

"Physicist . . . structural engineer. He was, I think, involved with aircraft design. I've every reason to believe he's already seen the error of his ways."

"That's what they all say," Maslovsky told him.

There was a knock on the door and the man in question entered. Viktor Levin was a small man who looked larger only because of the quilted jacket and pants he wore. He was forty-eight years old, with iron gray hair, and his steel spectacles had been repaired with tape. He had a rather hunted look about him, as if he expected the KGB to kick open the door at any moment, which, in his situation, was not an unreasonable assumption.

"Who were the three policemen?" Cherny asked.

"The sergeant was a man called Voronin, Comrade," Levin told him. "Formerly an actor with the Moscow Arts Theater. He tried to defect to the West last year, after the death of his wife. Sentence, ten years."

"And the child?"

"Tanya Voroninova, his daughter. I'd have to check on the other two."

"Never mind now. You may go."

Levin went out and Maslovsky said, "Back to Kelly. I can't get over the fact that he shot that man outside the bar. A direct contradiction of my express order. Mind you," he added grudgingly, "an amazing shot."

"Yes, he's good."

"Go over his background for me again."

Maslovsky poured more coffee and vodka and sat down by the fire, and Cherny took a file from the desk and opened it. "Mikhail Kelly, born in a village called Ballygar on Kerry.