Troubled Times

Dark clouds scudded overhead though the rain had stopped. Jack shivered as he walked through the cemetery gates which creaked and rattled in the wind. It had been sunny when he'd left Belfast that morning. He sunk his hands in his pockets and pulled up his coat collar.

The cemetery was larger than he had expected. There was a clear pathway through it with smaller side paths leading off alongside rows of headstones. The first set of memorials were blackened and weatherbeaten, some of them crumbling. Too old. He followed the path past the Jewish cemetery and into another distinct area where he read the names on the graves - Rossi, di Marco, Esposito. Would all the Irish people be together too? He felt a spot of rain on his forehead and sighed pulling up his coat collar a bit further. The next row of graves were all dated from the 1930s. He didn't even know the exact year Great Uncle Michael had died, just that it was the mid 1960s and that Mum said she'd heard he was somewhere in this cemetery. Who would have thought tracing your family tree could be so difficult?

He took shelter under a Yew, pushing his back against the trunk as the sky darkened and the rain came down in sheets. According to Mum, Uncle Mick had fled from Northern Ireland to Manchester as a young man after the border campaign against the British in the early 60s. Jack assumed that he was a member of the IRA though this was never spoken of. Nothing more was heard of him until two or three years after his disappearance when they received news that he had died in a work accident. Jack had never heard the family talk about him.

The clouds thinned and the rain lightened so Jack set off again. He passed several long rows of graves covering the 1940s and 1950s then slowed his pace as he reached the 1960s. Arriving at a row of headstones engraved with dates in 1964 and 1965 he made his way along the path checking the inscriptions on each stone. The rain had soaked though his coat and he shivered again.

He checked his watch. The light would be fading soon and the cemetery was due to close in half an hour. He quickened his pace. Everyone else had forgotten Uncle Mick but he wanted to remember him, at least to know when he died. At the end of the second row of 1966 headstones he was about to turn back then re-read the final headstone. 'Paul Michael O'Connor. September 3rd 1939 to January 16th 1966.' His heart leapt. It had to be him, the date of birth was right, he must have used his middle name. He read on 'Beloved Husband and Father.' Husband and Father! Jack read the words out loud. So part of Uncle Mick lived on. He stood back and took a photo of the grave before strolling to the cemetery exit just as the sun appeared from behind the receding clouds.