

THE BELLE OF THE BELFAST CITY

Christina Reid

JANET:

Out of the frying pan into the fire. A devil and a saint are the same thing. Afraid of women. Afraid we'll tempt you. Afraid we won't. They say there are no women in Ireland. Only mothers and sisters and wives. I'm a sister and a wife. But I'll never be a mother. Will I, Peter? Why did you marry me? Why did I marry you?

(To Jack.)

Because he was everything you were not. Quiet. Gentle. Kind. After the ceremony we went to Dublin for a week. It was the one city I could be sure you wouldn't be in. But you were with me, all the way there on the train.

(To Peter.)

It was very late when we got to the hotel. I wanted you to take me ... to teach me ... I wanted to exorcize him ... to find out that it wasn't an act of sin and shame and pain and guilt. But as soon as you touched me I turned away. And then I turned back to you and you said, 'It's been a long day. Let's go to sleep.' The next day we hired a car and drove around Dublin. When we got back to the hotel we were both very tired. You told me that there was nothing to worry about. You said lots of newly married couples didn't ... for a while. You said there was no hurry. I felt grateful because you were so patient, so kind. It was years before I realized that you were relieved, that you didn't want ... had never wanted ... that you were content with things that way.

(To Jack.)

And I suppose I was content too. Knowing that I would never have to contend with you and Peter's mother fighting over the religion of the children of this unholy union. Peter's very fond of children. He's a community policeman. Does a lot of work with teenagers. One of them asked him once, 'Why does an Irish Catholic join a sectarian force like the Royal Ulster Constabulary?' And Peter said, 'It will always be a sectarian force if Catholics never join.' He was such a good little boy that his mother expected him to become a priest, but Peter sees his mission in life as doing something more positive towards peace and reconciliation

(To Peter.)

Was marrying me part of that mission?