‘Right,’ said Sly, taking a pint of lager from his older brother, who had returned from the bar with refills. ‘So anyway, this Irishman … What the fuck? Get down!’

‘Eh?’

Irish Phil thought it was part of the joke until he felt Sly’s full weight on his back and tumbled to the floor, glasses shattering and people diving out of the way. The girls, having registered the look of stunned disbelief on Sly’s face, instinctively threw themselves across the couch. Immediately, they were showered with glass as the window shattered.

‘Christ!’ said Chuck. ‘Move!’

Sly saw his brother turn and grab a table, the old couple sitting at it looking up with surprise and consternation. Holding it in front of him like a knight with a shield, the oldest Dolan boy batted away the first Molotov Cocktail that flew through the open space but could do nothing about the one that fell next to Becca, flames leaping up the heavy, auburn drapes. Black, acrid smoke began filling the room, a dark cloud forming and spreading across the high ceiling.

Acting on instinct, Sly reached over and grabbed Becca’s wrist, pulling her away from danger.

‘Go back there, now, and take your friends with you,’ he ordered, pointing further inside the pub. She was petrified, and he feared she might freeze, but when she put her arms around Fenella and Sharon and stumbled off in the direction of the bar, he felt relief course through him. A screaming Millie arrived, burying herself into his shoulder, but he shrugged her off and pointed her in the same direction as the others.

Billy Ray’s best efforts were being drowned out by screams and shouts as the banks of black smoke multiplied, stealing the oxygen from the room. Coughing and spluttering, his eyes stinging, Sly turned to see Chuck holding a wet beer towel out to him, another pressed against his own face.

‘I’ll get some lads to barricade the doors so the bastards can’t get in!’ Chuck mumbled through his customised mask. ‘You create a route to the back door and take people out that way.’

Turning, Sly saw Pete Vickers holding the arm of a grey-haired woman who was stumbling around in a daze, blood pouring from a nasty cut above her eyebrow; one of Janie’s mum’s best friends, Doreen something? They had to take control before there were more casualties.

Looking in the direction of the front door, he could see a couple of bodies prone on the floor and wondered whether they were injured, dead or just intent on self-preservation.