

Dear You,

Let me get to the point. I am penning this to you, via the gardener, from the Asylum in Northampton, where I have been forcibly lodged now for the last thirty years. It's the early 1950s and I've been here since 1927. They call me the Irish woman who shot Mussolini, because that is what I am. They, still, say that I am insane to have done such a thing, even though they sent thousands upon thousands upon thousands to their deaths to do that very deed. It is a burden to carry, to have done the right thing early.

I will begin near the beginning, although it is hard to know what bits of our beginning make us take action, or not, as is the case with most people, what bits make us be part of the wider world looking out, often the same things that make a sibling gather into themselves and step back into the comfort of their own pettiness.

When I was nine years old my father was made Lord Chancellor of Ireland. I remember all the talk about it. I remember the flurrying of carriages, the endless sounds of horses pulling up outside, even at night. I think the boys in the house got more important then and the girls were expected to do even less than we had done before, but with a lot of dressing up. I didn't attach undeserved seriousness to that but I went along with it, not knowing what else to do. We had school at home. I particularly liked languages, which were really being taught to my brothers so they could fight wars, if necessary even where English was not spoken. My French is still good, all our time at Boulogne-sur-Mer polished it nicely, and my Italian is a particular love. The Italians still have the best poems. We read what we were told to read until I discovered that you could find other books too, some of which I got from Willie. I should tell you that of the seven of my siblings, Willie, Harry, Elsie, Edward, Victor, Frances, Constance, only three really matter to me now, which is not too bad really. Two of the three who matter to me are now dead.

But to get back to my growing up, I did my best to mostly fit in, despite my reading. I occasionally brought up a conversation about women voting – I read mention of it sometimes – and my father congratulated himself that he approved – but I

knew that he would want to tell us how to do if it ever did happen. He had a way of looking at me, rather startled, when I mentioned it. The same look he used when he said, 'Enough is Enough'. I could hear the capitals on the words. And when that day did come, years after he died, I remember that I asked my sister not to put on a corset just for once. I said to her, 'for heaven's sake we're going to vote', and she looked at me like our father used to do.

Despite the beauty of Rome, despite its paintings, its pencil thin trees rising inexplicably towards the blue skies, its lavish avenues and its bright sunsets there was a rotting thing growing through that man Mussolini and his followers. He was destroying Italy, leading it into the fold of his own ego. We could see it, those of us who spread out the map to its full size. As the deeds of this emerging tyrant and his followers grew in darkness and violence I decided upon action. I was old enough by then to know that sometimes there is nothing else, that action is the only sane choice. I got myself ready and set forth to put my destiny and Mussolini's within a breath of each others.

I was fifty when I shot Mussolini, a good age I think to do it, don't you? I would really have liked not to have upset my family but I couldn't not have done it just to keep my family happy.

Signed, Violet Gibson.

Dear You,
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to you, vi
Northampton,
now for the
and I've b

This is a work of fiction. The story is based on the life of Violet Gibson, the Irish woman who attempted to assassinate Mussolini, and who could have changed the history of Europe if she had succeeded. The story is based strictly on the facts of what happened, although of course the writer has taken licence by imagining what Violet might have said to us if she had got a chance. The attempt to keep her life secret seems to have finally failed through the work of Frances Stonor Saunders.

Evelyn Conlon is an Irish novelist and short story writer, living in Dublin. She has published three collections of short stories, and contributed to the recent Tramp Press anthology, *Dubliners 100*, in which contemporary Irish writers wrote cover versions of the stories from James Joyce's *Dubliners*. She was recently nominated for Laureate of Irish Fiction.