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Opening extract from

The Great War
An Anthology of Stories Inspired by Objects from the First World War

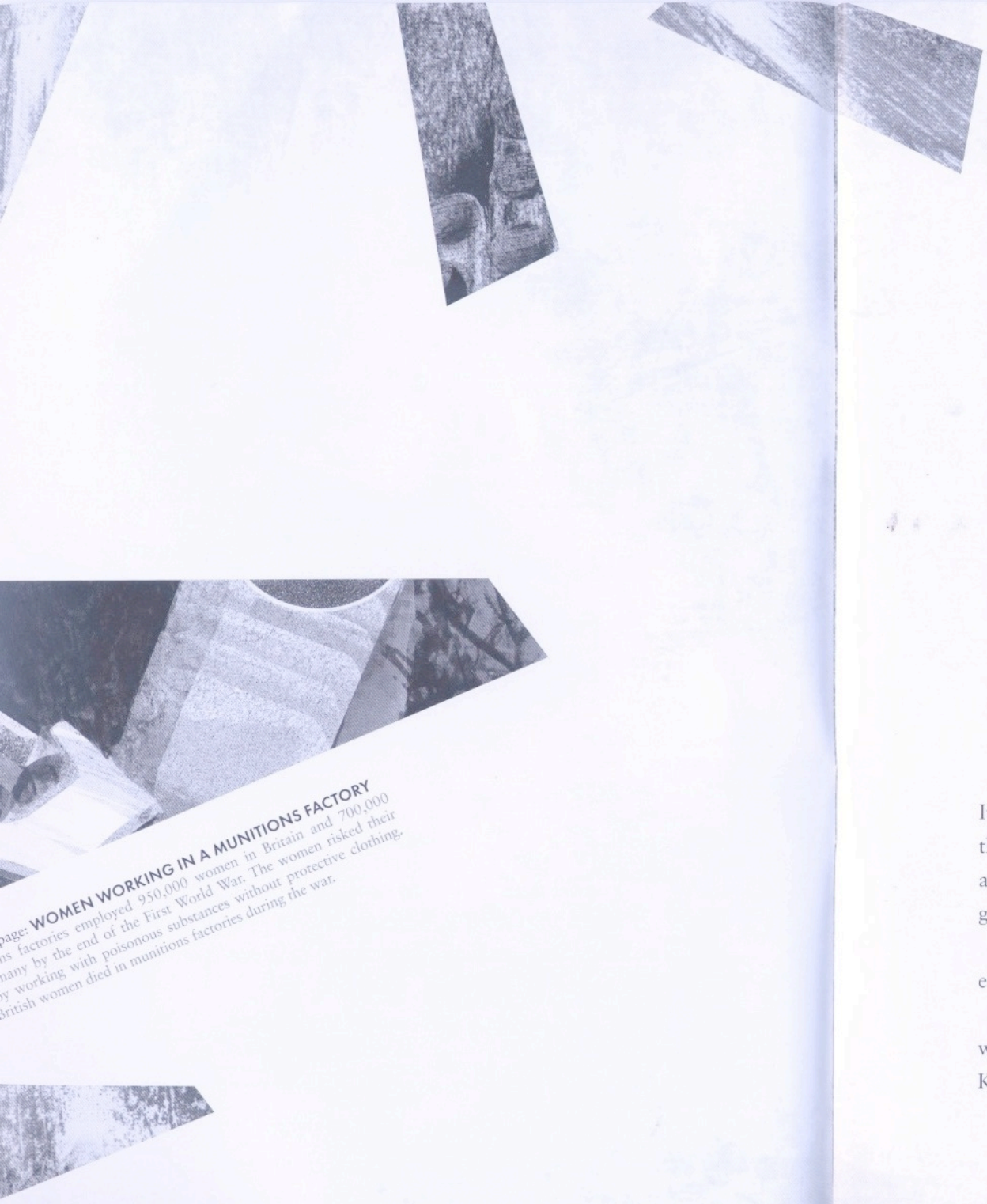
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page: WOMEN WORKING IN A MUNITIONS FACTORY
ns factories employed 950,000 women in Britain and 700,000
nany by the end of the First World War. The women risked their
y working with poisonous substances without protective clothing.
British women died in munitions factories during the war.

A WORLD THAT HAS NO WAR IN IT

DAVID ALMOND

It had a war in it, the world when I was young. It was the war between the Killens and the Craigs. They lived among us, in the old terraces around the town square, in the Thirties semis, in the new estates growing across the hillside at the eastern edge of town.

The war was normal, just part of growing up round here. Aye, everybody was fed up with it, but hardly anybody dared to say a word.

"It's been going on forever, Son," said me dad. "They battled when I was a bairn and they'll battle till the day of doom. A bunch of nutters. Keep your head down, same as I did when I was a lad."

The kids were the worst. Aye, the blokes had fist fights outside the Wheatsheaf down beyond the railway line. There were brawls on Friday nights at the back of the Black Bull. There was always at least one of them in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and another one or two in Durham Jail. The women shouted and went at each other on the High Street, too. But the kids! They were the worst. Running through the streets in broad daylight, hoying rocks and half-bricks at each other. Wailing and howling like banshees. Ambushing each other in back lanes, setting traps and tripwires in Holly Hill Park. And the battles! Those great gang fights up on the high fields, bairns from five to fifteen screeching and howling at each other. Bin lids for shields and buckets for helmets and war paint on faces. Aye, it looked daft, but there was nothing daft about the wooden spears they carried, nor the half-bricks and the knuckledusters and the blood and the wounds. There was hardly one of them without marks on their faces where a rock had hit. And there was little Matt Craig with the limp, Dolly Killen with the twisted arm where a break had badly healed, Russell Craig with three whole fingers missing. What was it? Why did they keep on? What drew them to it and kept on drawing them to it?

Some said it had started way way back with their ancestors in Ireland. Some said they were all descendants of the ancient Reivers, and all this had been going on since the Border raids. Some said, What's the point of trying to explain it? They're not like other folk. It's their nature, just the way they are. They're the Killens and the Craigs. They go to war because they love to be at war.

Sometimes the police made a show, striding through the estates with their helmets on and their truncheons in their hands and Alsatians growling at their sides. They knocked on doors, wrote down names,

gave out cautions and dire warnings. No use. A Craig wouldn't snitch on a Killen, a Killen wouldn't snitch on a Craig. And who else was going to speak out? There were times when the coppers took a lad or two down a dark back lane and gave them a damn good thumping, but there were no complaints about that. A seeing-to by the law was just part of it all. The warriors bore the scars of that just like they bore their other wounds, with pride.

So war was everywhere, not just in the battles and the scars, but in all that graffiti. Curses painted on garage walls. Six-foot high obscenities. Dates and names of battles and heroes, some from ages back:

Stoneygate 1954; The Battle of High Lanes '62; REMEMBER THE HAYNING 1927; Nineteen twenty seven! R.I.P. TASH KILLEN TRUEST OF US ALL; IMLA CRAIG WILL RISE AGAIN.

Weird thing is, some of it was beautiful. There was that strange ancient-looking lovely lettering they sometimes used. There were those paintings of the Craig girls that appeared on the flagstones of the Sullivan Street pavements that time. Aye, they were brutal, but everybody could see how lovely the shapes were, how *artistic* it was. Like cave paintings or something, somebody said, or like those paintings of Saint Catherine and St Lucy in St Patrick's church. And there was that famous mural on the walls of the old railway tunnel underneath the bypass, the one that showed all the Craigs dangling from ropes, their necks snapped. Must have taken days to make. It was in many colours. It was accompanied by poems and prayers for the fallen and hymns in praise for the victors.



Objects from the First World War, such as a toy soldier, a butter dish and a compass, have inspired each writer to create a unique story.