

Gallows Field

Eamon Foley, #1

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Chapter 1

Tralee September 1941

The noise coming from the Friday night crowd in Delaney's pub was brutal. Customers were crammed so tight around the bar people had to squeeze sideways to get by them. Big Mike Hurley was perched on a stool in the far corner with a fiddle stuck under his huge chin and the tune that came from it had everyone clapping their hands and shuffling their feet.

Somehow Kath Flaherty had created a space around her and her generous bosom heaved and fell as she jigged to the music. The crowd was impressed. They raised their drinks and yelled their appreciation.

Eamon Foley swallowed the last of his pint, studied the empty glass and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Through the haze of cigarette smoke, he could see John-Joe Delaney and his wife Patsy rushing around behind the bar pulling pints of porter and lining them up along the counter. He would have loved another pint but he didn't relish having to push his way through that crowd. Anyway, he was tired. He'd been on duty since eight o'clock and it had been a long day. There was already a pile of empties on the narrow shelf behind him and when he put his glass on it a cocktail of spilt drink splashed up his sleeve. He shook it off with a curse.

'Eamon, you're not going already?' Declan Griffin roared above the noise, blinking hard as he tried to focus. 'You'll have another pint!'

'No, I won't.' Foley patted him on the arm. 'I'm after having three already and that's enough for me. I have to cycle out to Edenburn in the morning.'

'What?' Declan cupped his hand behind his ear. He was in his early thirties and losing his hair, leaving just the tufts on either side of his head. The furrows on his forehead deepened even more when he frowned.

Foley leant closer. 'I'm spending the day with Mickey.'

'Who?'

'Mickey. My son,' Foley reminded him. 'You know he's out in Edenburn recovering from the TB?'

'Ah yes,' Declan nodded. His words were slurred and his eyes still looked vague. 'And how is he, God help us?'

'He's not too bad. He's making progress all right.'

Declan attempted to cross himself. 'Sure I'm awful glad to hear that, Eamon. I'll get a Mass said for him, that's what I'll do. I'll have a word with the Dean himself. Would next Sunday be any good?'

'It would, of course.' Foley chuckled at the serious look on Declan's face. 'Thank you very much.'

Declan nodded gravely. 'In the meantime, you'll have one for the road!'

'No!'

'Ah, go on!' He slurped the dregs from his glass then barged his way to the bar. 'A pint it is, so!'

Foley gave an exasperated groan. There was a solid wall of people between him and the front door. The only other way out was through the toilet, a tin shed in the back yard that opened onto Bridge Street. The door was over in the far corner between the fireplace and the back wall. As he edged towards it Foley sensed a change in the mood on that side of the room. People seemed agitated by a voice that was shrill enough to be heard above the singing. He stood up on his toes but he couldn't see anything.

'Eamon?'

Foley turned. A young woman was studying him closely.

'Breda.' He put his hand on her shoulder. 'Hello. How are you?'

'I'm grand.' Breda squeezed the hand. 'I didn't know you were home.'

'Yeah. I've been home since the beginning of the year.'

'Really?' Breda stepped back and looked at him again. 'How come I never saw you? Mind you, I'm living out in Ardfert now so I don't get into town as much as ...'

The rest was lost in a new wave of noise. The screeching voice rose with it.

'What is that?' Foley stood on his toes again.

Breda pulled a face. 'It's that stupid clown Joe McCarthy. The eejit's drunk again. If he can't take his drink he shouldn't be allowed in here in the first place.'

When someone moved out of the way Foley could see Joe singing at the top of his voice and waving his glass in all directions. People were glaring at him and mouthing obscenities.

Breda tugged Foley's sleeve. 'God, I'm sorry, Eamon. I just remembered. He's your brother-in-law, isn't he? Vicky's husband, yeah?'

'Unfortunately, yes,' Foley grimaced.

'Oh, dear. And he's sloshed tonight again. And more than usual, I'd say. Maybe you should go and tell him to shut up roaring. He sounds like a pig with his bits caught in a door.'

Foley laughed and waved the suggestion away. 'I'm sorry Breda, but I'm not getting involved. I'm too tired. I'm going home to my bed.'

'Coward.' Breda gave him a soft thump on the chest. Then she looked him up and down again. 'That uniform, isn't that Local Security? You could go and arrest him for being a noisy eejit.'

Foley snorted and Breda laughed out loud. 'Sorry,' she chuckled. 'I don't blame you. Goodnight, Eamon. I'll see you around.'

Foley had to lean closer to hear what she said and Breda kissed him on the cheek. 'Good night, Breda,' he laughed. 'It was great seeing you again.'

If he wanted to go out the back door now Foley would have to pass right by Joe so he moved as quickly as the crowd would let him, keeping his head down. Maybe Joe was too drunk to notice.

He wasn't. He grabbed Foley's jacket. 'Eamon, have a drink.'

'No thank you, Joe.'

'Ah, go on. I'll buy you a pint.'

'Joe, let go of me!' Foley gave a violent shrug and Joe lost his grip.

'Well, feck you. Who do...?'

The rest was lost in another deafening cheer as Kath Flaherty reached the climax of her dance. The music screeched and the noise exploded around them. Something hit Foley on the shoulder and spun him around. And Joe flew past and

slammed his head into the face of a young woman who was coming in the door from the toilet.

At the same time the light bulb above the fireplace popped and showered everyone with a spray of broken glass. The music stopped. But only for a moment. Kath Flaherty looked up at the broken bulb swinging on a piece of flex. 'Now how's *that* for a high note?'

She gave an extravagant bow and was engulfed by another wave of roaring and cheering and prolonged wolf-whistles. Mike Hurley bowed too and wiped his face with a grubby handkerchief.

The noise was fading now as the crowd turned back to the bar, so engrossed in themselves they didn't even notice what was happening in that corner of the room. Joe McCarthy lay still on the floor, blood flowing from above his hairline and pouring down into his eyes. The young girl had shuffled onto a stool and the handkerchief she was holding to her nose was saturated with blood.

Foley was almost pushed over as he dropped to his knees beside Joe. Paddy Quinn stooped down too, using his broad back as a shield against the push. 'What the hell happened, Eamon?'

'I don't know, Paddy. I think Joe was trying to throw a punch at me or something. Anyway, he missed. He must have lost his balance and banged into that young girl.'

'She's one of the Sullivans.' Paddy glanced over at her. 'I saw them collide. There was a hell of a wallop. I think her nose is broken.'

'Joe!' Foley patted his face. 'Wake up, you big eejit. C'mon, I'll take you home before someone tears you to pieces.'

Joe didn't move.

As the space cleared around them John Joe Delaney noticed the young girl and he shot out from behind the bar. Assessing the damage to her nose he immediately began fussing around her. 'Who has a car?' he shouted. 'We have to take her to the hospital. We need a car to take her to the hospital.'

'Joe McCarthy.' Delaney's wife Patsy was also out from behind the bar and she stooped down beside Joe. 'I warned you about this,' she shouted in his ear. 'I'm telling you now, I don't want you coming in here again until you learn how to behave yourself.'

She put her hand behind his head and tried to lift him. When she took her hand away again it was covered in blood.

'Oh my God. I think he's dead.'

Chapter 2

A huge yellow moon sat low in a clear sky and the light it threw down skimmed the edge of the Slieve Mish Mountains and turned them into a still, black shadow.

Garda Sergeant Liam Edge stepped into the middle of the street and sucked in a huge gulp of air. 'Wow, Lucy.' He took off his cap and ran his fingers through his thick curly hair. 'Will you look at that? Isn't it beautiful?'

The young woman's shoes clicked on the cobbles as she walked into the road behind him. Instinctively he put his arm out to draw her closer but he hesitated when he realized there were other people strolling by and enjoying the warm evening air. He waved at the moon instead.

'Alex,' she said. When Edge glanced down at her she gave a self-conscious shrug. 'You called me Lucy again. I'm Alex. I'm not Lucy.'

'No, you're not Lucy,' the sergeant wanted to say. '*I wish to God you were. But you're not.*'

He looked back at the moon and acted as if he hadn't heard her. 'I wonder if this is what William Mulchinock was looking at when he sang to Mary O'Connor all those years ago,'

'Who?' Alex looked up at what the six-foot-four Garda Sergeant was pointing to.

Edge glared down at her in mock horror. 'Don't tell me you never heard of William Mulchinock. The *famous* William Mulchinock who wrote about *The Rose of Tralee*.'

'I might have.' She gave a nervous chuckle. 'What was it, this Rose of Tralee?'

'*It?* The Rose of Tralee was not an *it!*' This time he let his hand land on her shoulder and he manoeuvred her back onto the pavement. 'The Rose of Tralee was a *she!*'

'A *she?* Oh. I thought it was a flower or something.'

Alex Cassidy seemed so small and fragile Liam Edge was afraid his hand might be too heavy on her narrow shoulder and he let it drop to his side. At just a little over five feet tall and with her hair in a ponytail, she looked more like a schoolgirl than a patrolling auxiliary police officer. They couldn't even find a uniform to fit her so she wore her own black jumper and skirt.

And in this light she was the image of Lucy Valance. Similar height, similar build, similar hair as black as a raven's wing, similar dark eyes. At first glance, they could have been sisters. Twins, even.

But that was where the similarity ended. Lucy Valance had a personality that fizzed with contagious energy.

Alex Cassidy had energy too, but it was unfocused. And there was a strangeness about her that Liam Edge couldn't quite grasp. He couldn't decide if she was very clever or a bit simple.

But Lucy Valance was gone now and there was a huge hole in Liam Edge's life. He was hoping Alex Cassidy might fill it. She wasn't perfect, but she helped to ease the pain.

'No, the Rose of Tralee was not a flower,' Edge told her as they walked back down Godfrey Place. 'She was a young servant girl who fell in love with the master of the big house. William Mulchinock was from a wealthy family and poor auld Mary O'Connor was just one of the girls who worked for him.'

Cassidy chuckled. 'They wouldn't have liked that.'

'I don't suppose they did.' Edge chuckled too as they headed towards the Garda barracks. 'Some say she was a nanny but others think she was just a maid. Anyway, according to the story, they used to do their courting near the pure crystal fountain.'

'That sounds romantic. Where is this pure crystal fountain?'

‘Well, there’s a lot of speculation about that. Some say it was just outside the town on the...’

A cluster of people came bouncing down the steps of the Theatre Royal Cinema and dashed off in different directions. Edge took his fob watch from his breast pocket and flicked it open. Damn! Eleven O’clock already. His shift was officially finished. Technically he should go straight back to the barracks and hand over to the duty sergeant. But he’d rather spend a little more time with Alex Cassidy.

An elderly gentleman with a walking stick stopped to light a pipe, taking long puffs and making a loud sucking noise. Behind him, a full-size poster had Errol Flynn in a black cowboy outfit pointing a gun at Miriam Hopkins. **Virginia City** was splashed across it in dramatic letters, claiming it to be the most popular movie of 1940 and still doing the rounds a year later by popular demand.

Cassidy skipped up the steps and touched Miriam Hopkins’ dress. ‘Will you look at that? It’s worth going to see it just for the outfits.’

‘It’s a repeat,’ Edge insisted. ‘It was already here back in February.’

Cassidy stepped back, her eyes still glued to the dress. ‘Was it good?’

‘How would I know?’ Edge gave a dismissive snort. ‘It would have to be something really special to get me to go to the pictures. I wouldn’t spend good money to sit in a dark room with a crowd of strangers smoking and coughing and munching sweets.’

Cassidy chuckled again and skipped back down the steps. ‘What kind of something special?’ She leant into him.

‘Mind your own business.’ Edge stepped away from her and strolled on ahead. He would take the long way back to the barracks, he decided. The pubs were supposed to be closing now. He’d say he noticed some unusual activity in Bridge Street and felt he had to investigate.

Cassidy caught up with him and fell in step.

Chapter 3

Paddy Quinn was staring down at Joe McCarthy’s limp body with a mixture of fear and bewilderment. ‘All he did was bang heads with that young girl over there.’ His lip quivered and spittle glistened on his chin. ‘I was standing right next to him. He just sort of... fell! That’s all. He just fell. How can he be dead?’

‘Let me have a look.’ A little round man pushed his way through the knot of people that had gathered, wanting to help but not knowing what to do, and he knelt beside Joe. ‘I’m Doctor Quilly.’

He checked Joe’s wrist for a pulse, then looked at his eyes. He lifted Joe’s hair and looked at the wound on his forehead. ‘What happened here, exactly?’

‘We don’t know,’ Patsy Delaney answered as she stood back against the wall. ‘He just sort of fell. He must have hit the back of his head on the floor because there’s a lot of blood coming from there too.’

The doctor turned Joe onto his side and leant right over to get a better look. Then he stood up with a groan and rubbed his knees. ‘D’you know this fella?’ he asked Foley.

'Yes. He's my brother-in-law.'

'That uniform you've got on - you're Local Security, right?'

'I am.' Foley straightened his jacket. 'Why?'

The doctor drew him aside and glanced over his shoulder to make sure no one could overhear him. The music had stopped so the crowd was beginning to thin out. The fiddle was lying on the stool but there was no sign of Mike Hurley. Someone had carried the young girl out and John Joe Delaney was back behind the bar covering the taps with a towel. 'Patsy,' he called to his wife who was still paralyzed with shock. 'We have to clear the bar before the guards get here. C'mon, get everyone out.'

She took a moment to react then started herding people towards the door. Most were already leaving anyway but those who had noticed the drama were eager to stay and be part of it.

'The lady is right.' The doctor said to Foley from behind his hand. 'Your man is dead.'

'Oh Sweet Jesus!' Foley sagged against a stool.

'Look, I don't know if I should be telling you this.' The doctor still held his hand over his mouth. 'But that injury didn't come from a fall.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, it looks like a bullet wound to me. I believe your friend was shot.'

'Shot?' Foley spluttered. 'How the...?'

The doctor squeezed Foley's arm to calm him down. 'Sush. Not so loud. I'm saying this because the hair around the wound is singed. That tells me that whoever did this was standing very close to him when they fired.'

'No, that's not right! It's a mistake.'

'I wish to God it *was*.' The doctor let go of Foley's arm. 'But I seriously doubt it. I've seen this kind of thing more times than I care to remember during the troubles. I know a bullet wound when I see one.'

'But who would want to shoot Joe?' Foley was trying to squeeze answers out of his words. 'He was a drunk and he was annoying but would someone shoot him just for that?'

The doctor shrugged but he didn't comment. Foley had to hug his hands to stop them from shaking. 'If you're right we should call the guards.' He turned back to Paddy Quinn. 'Paddy, will you go over to the barracks? Tell the guards someone's after being...'

As Foley glanced up he noticed a big man with a mop of silver hair looking back at him from the front door. And a nightmare from his past exploded in his head. 'Holy shit!' He straightened up with the shock but the big man had already disappeared amongst the crowd that was squeezing through the door.

'What?' Paddy Quinn looked from Foley to the door and back again.

Foley was paralyzed. *Leo Maranus*? What in God's name...?

'Eamon?' Paddy Quinn came closer. 'What are you looking at?'

Foley grabbed a glass that still had some whiskey in it off the counter and swallowed it down. He was hoping it would snap him back to reality but it nearly choked him instead and he gasped. How was it possible? How could Maranus be in this pub tonight and Foley not notice him? OK, the place was crammed tighter than a duck's eyelid. But a six-foot-four thug with a mop of silver hair? Surely not

God Foley would have spotted him. He'd have heard his brash Dublin voice even with all the noise.

'Eamon.' Paddy Quinn tugged Foley's sleeve.

'Sorry, Paddy.' Foley pulled away. 'I thought I saw someone. I'm sure I... never mind. Just go and get the guards, please.'

As Paddy headed for the door Foley raked his fingers through his hair but it didn't stop the image replaying in his head. A big man with silver hair moving through the door with the rest of the crowd.

'Eamon, what's going on?'

Foley spun around. And he groaned with relief. 'Liam. Thank God you're here.'

Garda Sergeant Liam Edge looked down at the body and his face crumpled when he realized who it was. He took a step back and removed his cap. 'Jesus. What happened, Eamon?'

'Doctor Quilly says he was shot.'

The sergeant paused for a moment then knelt beside the body. Alex Cassidy pushed in and went to bend down too but Foley grabbed her arm. 'What are *you* doing here?'

'I'm on duty.' She pulled away from him.

'You are not. You're on the same roster as me.'

'Eamon.' Edge glared up at him. 'She *is* on duty. All right?'

'She can't be. She's...'

but Edge had already turned back to the body. Foley grabbed Cassidy's arm again and pulled her over to the bar. 'What do you know about this?'

'What do I know about *what*?' Her lips curled and she slapped his hand away.

'*This*.' He pointed at Joe's body.

She glanced over at Edge then back at Foley. 'Are you drunk? Why would I...'

'I just saw Leo Maranus.'

'Who the hell is Leo Maranus?'

'Don't get smart with me, lady. You know perfectly well who he is.'

'I do not! I never heard of him before in my life.'

'What? You little feckin' liar.' Their heads almost touched as Foley studied her face for some reaction. But there wasn't any. Not a flicker. *How did she do that?* Most people would show *something*, a twitch at the corner of their mouth, little nuances that humans had no control over. Everyone showed *something*. But not Alex Cassidy. Her face could have been cast from wax. Her eyes were like two shiny black stones and her expression was impossible to read.

'Eamon, you're on duty now too.' Edge pointed at Foley with a pen. 'So make yourself useful. Someone must have seen something. Go and ask them. Alex, get over to the barracks. Tell them there's been a shooting, one man dead. We need everyone they can spare.'

'Right.' Cassidy flicked her head at Foley as she barged past him, and as the door shut behind her it threw up the image of Maranus again.

Foley stooped down beside Edge. 'Liam, I have to talk to you.'

'Eamon, I need you to start questioning people before they're all gone home. But make sure they know it's about what happened to Joe and nothing to do with drinking after hours, all right? Now go!'

'Liam, listen to me. There's something I need to tell you. It's urgent!'

‘Eamon! Please! People are already leaving.’

‘No! This is urgent. It can’t wait.’

‘Yes, it can.’ Edge sat back on his heels. ‘You’re Security Force first! That means you’re on duty. So go. Now!’

‘You can *not* be serious!’ Foley stood up to his full height and bunched his fists. ‘Joe’s dead and I have something urgent to tell you and you want me to pretend I’m a feekin’ policeman?’

‘Go!’ Edge jabbed a finger at him. ‘If you want to help Joe just do what I’m asking.’

‘Paddy Quinn was outside.’ Cassidy was back between them again. ‘He was already heading down to the barracks with the message.’

‘Good girl.’ Even on his knees, Edge was as tall as Cassidy and his eyes smiled as he looked into hers. Then he noticed Foley watching and his face clouded.

Foley stepped back until he was up against the bar and he slammed his hand on the counter. ‘*Why won’t you listen to me?*’ he wanted to scream. ‘*There could be a man with a gun waiting for me out there!*’

But Edge’s unblinking stare made him swallow it back down. He spun away and stormed across to the front door.

Chapter 4

Foley caught a glimpse of himself in the pub window and he tugged at his uniform jacket. Local Bloody Security Force. He’d only joined out of desperation. When he’d arrived home to Tralee back in January the place was choking with refugees from the war in Europe. Jobs were scarce, food was rationed, resentment was growing and tensions were high.

A year before that, in 1940, the Government had created the Local Security Force, an auxiliary police unit, to take the strain off the Gardaí. Volunteers were paid two shillings a day. By May 1940 over 45,000 volunteers had signed up, and by August it had risen to 148,000. Eventually, they were split into two sections. The Local Defence Force was assigned to the Army, and the Local Security Force continued as auxiliary police.

Foley was unable to get a proper job so he volunteered for the Local Security Force. And he discovered he actually enjoyed it. They were unarmed but that never bothered him. People respected the uniform and gave him very little trouble. But right now he wished he was armed. If Maranus was waiting for him at least he’d have something to defend himself with.

‘Will you look at that, lads?’ Four Gardaí were coming down Bridge Street, led by Mick Galvin. ‘The Local Security Force got here before us. We’d better watch out or they’ll be taking our jobs off us.’ Galvin paused for effect then flicked his thumb at his colleagues. ‘Never mind, Eamon. The real guards are here now.’

‘What’s going on, Eamon?’ Michael Lynch, an older guard, pushed to the front.

‘Sergeant Edge wants us to...’

‘Sergeant Edge?’ Lynch gave a lopsided grin. ‘How’s he still here? His shift is over already. Would little Miss Cassidy be with him by any chance?’

Foley cringed. 'What's that supposed to mean?'

But he already knew what it meant. Everyone in the barracks knew what it meant. The fifty-something Sergeant and the pretty young volunteer he fussed around. Human nature being what it was, people questioned the attention he was giving her. Of all the women in the LSF, why was she the only one he took out on patrol with him? Who drew up the rota? Surely there had to be more to it than just a casual friendship? The rumours grew legs and took off in all directions.

'C'mon,' Lynch mocked. 'Everyone knows when they're out on patrol together they make a detour around the Green. And it's not to admire the roses, is it? That's why he never finishes his shifts on time.' The eruption of laughter caused several people to look around.

'That's enough!' Foley pushed Lynch in the chest. 'We have a dead man in there and you come out with that load of shite! Cop on, for God's sake.'

'Hey! Take it easy!' John Guerin got between them. 'Just because Sergeant Edge is your stepfather, Eamon, there's no need to get so defensive about it. Michael was just playing with you. So relax and tell us what's happening? Tell us who's dead?'

Foley straightened his jacket and stepped back. 'Joe McCarthy.'

'Joe McCarthy?' Guerin recognised the name. 'Isn't he your sister's...?'

'Yeah. He's my sister's husband. Anyway, Sgt Edge wants us to question everyone before they leave. But only about the shooting. We need their help so we mustn't annoy them.'

'What do you mean the shooting?' Lynch took a step back into the road.

'That's what Doctor Quilly believes. He's convinced Joe was shot.'

'Jasus. Who shot him?' A fresh-faced young guard tried to look in the window.

'That's just it.' Foley lowered his voice. 'We don't know. There was so much noise going on in there nobody noticed.'

'You are joking! Someone fired a gun in a crowded pub and no one noticed?'

'Well, it was probably a small handgun,' Foley insisted. 'You know, quiet enough to be missed in a noisy pub. It could be back in a pocket before Joe even hit the floor.'

'Or in a purse.' Lynch's eyes widened when they all looked at him. 'Well, who said a man shot him? Joe has a fierce reputation with the women. Everyone knows that! So it could be some jilted lover. Or a jealous ex-lover.'

'No, no. It wasn't...' Foley stopped himself before he said too much. Maranus was stuck in his head, colouring his imagination. 'Anyway, we need witnesses.' He avoided eye contact with the guards. 'And I need to talk to Liam Edge so I'm going back inside.'

Edge was leaning on the bar scribbling in his notebook. Cassidy sat on a stool beside him reading what he was writing.

'Eamon.' Edge straightened up and shut the notebook. 'How're the interviews going?'

'Liam, I need to talk to you.' Foley beckoned with his head and moved over by the fireplace. A flash of annoyance danced in Edge's eyes. He put the notebook back in his pocket and strolled after him. Cassidy jumped off the stool and went to follow.

'Alone,' Foley insisted.

Edge raised his eyebrows. 'What's going on that Alex shouldn't know about?'

Foley could feel Cassidy glaring at him and he lost the thread of what he wanted to say. 'What's happening about Joe?' was how it came out.

'They're coming to take him to the morgue in about ten minutes.'

'So who's going to tell Vicky?'

Edge groaned and bowed his head. 'God, you're right. I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking straight. Why don't you go and tell her? Alex and me will go and see your mother after we've finished here.'

'You're taking her with you?'

'Why not?'

Foley shook his head. 'Anyway, I have to tell you something first.'

'Go on.'

'In private.'

Edge shrugged and smiled at Cassidy. 'All right with you?'

'Yeah.' She smiled back. 'I'll be right here if you need me.'

'John,' Edge called to the Delaneys who were both behind the bar with their heads together. 'Can we use your back room?'

They both nodded. Edge led the way into the small kitchen. A sink in the corner was piled high with dishes. He took two cups and rinsed them under the tap. Then he drew a chair out with his foot and sat at the table. He took a small bottle of whiskey from his pocket and poured some into each cup. 'What's this all about, Eamon?'

Foley sat on the other side of the table and took a sip of the whiskey. 'I know who shot Joe.' It came out flat and sounded ridiculous. Edge gulped down his drink and nodded for him to go on.

'It was a fella called Leo Maranus.'

'Leo Maranus? Never heard of him.'

'Well, you wouldn't, would you? He isn't from around here.'

Edge's head gave the slightest of shakes as he put his cup down. 'So how's he involved with Joe?'

'He wasn't involved with Joe. He was after me.'

'You? Why would he be after you?'

'Because he thinks I have something that belongs to him.'

Edge straightened up in his chair. 'Are you telling me this fella thinks you have something that belongs to him and he shoots Joe to... what? Make you give it back?'

'Yes. It was a message. He was telling me he knows where I am.'

Edge studied his empty cup for a moment then poured another whiskey and swallowed it straight down again. 'But if he knew where you were why didn't he just ask you to give it back? Why go to the trouble of shooting Joe?'

'Well...'

'And why would he risk shooting Joe in a crowded pub?'

'That's just it.' Foley rapped the table in emphasis. 'The place was packed and how many people saw what happened? So it worked, didn't it? He executed Joe to show me how easy it is. Can't you see? It's a message.'

'No, actually. I can't see it's a message. What I can see is you shaking like a leaf because you've had a terrible shock. We're all in shock, Eamon. It isn't every day

you see someone shot, especially someone so close to you. So you need to calm down and think about what you're telling me. First of all, why does Maranus think you have something that belongs to him?'

'Because he mistook me for someone else. He thinks I'm Raymond Price.'

Chapter 5

Dublin. New Year's Day. January 1941

Foley's heart was already heavy that morning back in January as he picked at his breakfast in the dining room of the Black Bird Hotel. He was leaving the job he loved. And it wasn't by choice. Now he was killing time until the bus came to take him and his son into the city to catch the train to Tralee. He checked his watch, dropped his napkin on the plate and shuffled his chair back. 'Are you ready, son?'

The young boy nodded and pushed his chair back too.

A sharp laugh made Foley glance around at a group of East European men sitting at their usual table in the far corner of the dining room. Menace radiated off them, as dark and moody as the weather outside.

The same two men sat on the inside of the table with their backs to the wall. That way they could watch everything that went on around them. The two sitting on the outside of the table and the one on the end had a selection of newspapers in front of them and they read out snippets for the benefit of the man at the head of the table. He sat up straight and picked at his food with superior grace. It was hard to tell his age. The silver hair and pencil moustache made him look older than he probably was. But he was certainly in his sixties. He was one of the main investors in the hotel. A silent partner, by all accounts. Whatever that meant. Foley never asked. All Foley knew was a whole mob of them had come to Dublin to escape the war in Europe. And they brought a pile of money with them.

A gust of wind threw rain against the windows like a shower of small stones. 'Better put your coat on, Mickey,' Foley said to the boy. He took his own coat off the back of his chair and slipped it on before helping the boy with his. As he picked up his suitcase a tall white-haired waiter came over and put out his hand.

'Eamon, are you going?'

'We are, Billy.' Foley took the hand and squeezed it.

'It's not much of a New Year present for you, and that's for sure.' Billy's grip was strong and his pale face was genuinely sad. 'And after all the years you've been here. 'Tis dreadful. Are you sure you can't stay? We'd all love you to stay.'

'I wish it was that easy, Billy.' Foley let go of the hand and put his arm around the boy. 'But you know how it is. Since Katie died I've got no one to look after young Mickey here so I'm struggling to do my shifts. It would mean leaving him on his own and he's way too young to look after himself.'

'But I'm sure we could find someone to babysit him for you, Eamon.' Billy ruffled the boy's hair. 'There's loads of people who would love to look after him.'

'We tried all that,' Foley sighed. 'But people kept letting me down. And you know what Raymond is like these days. Anyway, his patience has run out now and he

thinks it's probably best I moved on, find something more suitable to my circumstances.'

'The miserable shit.' Billy stepped back and pulled a face when he realised what he'd said. 'Sorry, I shouldn't be saying things like that in front of the child. But I don't know what's got into that man lately.'

'Well, he's under fierce pressure right now, as you know,' Foley said.

'I do,' Billy agreed. 'But it doesn't excuse his behaviour. Still, I wish you weren't leaving us like this. The place won't be the same without you.'

'It's not the same *now*,' Foley wanted to say. The Black Bird Hotel had changed so much recently it bore no resemblance to how it was when Foley arrived almost ten years ago. 'Thank you, Billy,' was what he said. 'But that's just the way it is. So you look after yourself.'

Billy tussled the boy's hair again. 'And you, young fella. We'll miss you most of all.'

Mickey gave a shy smile and moved closer to his father.

'Waiter, more tea.' One of the men in the corner clicked his fingers. 'And more butter. We need more butter.'

Billy's mouth turned into an angry thin line and his eyes squinted. But he checked himself quickly, turned around and produced his best smile. 'Certainly, sir. Coming right up.'

'You will keep in touch, Eamon,' he said as Foley steered Mickey towards the door.

'I will, of course, Billy. You can expect a card at Christmas. Maybe.'

'That would be grand, sure.' Billy gave a salute. 'Anyway, good luck. And may God bless you both.'

Out in the foyer, Foley put the suitcase on the floor beside the reception desk and nodded to the young woman scribbling in a ledger. 'Good morning, Annie. Have you seen Raymond?'

Annie hadn't been working there very long and she had none of the sharp edges that come from dealing with the public every day. 'Mr Price?' she gushed. 'No. He hasn't been down for breakfast yet.'

'Oh, right.' Foley felt a mixture of relief and regret. Part of him wanted to say farewell to the man he'd worked with for such a long time. But part of him wanted to just walk away too. Because, like the hotel, Raymond Junior had also changed. He was no longer the scatty young fella who greeted Foley on his first day as the new barman all those years ago.

The Black Bird was a small family hotel on the outskirts of the big city back then. Old and creaking, but comfortable and friendly. The owner Raymond Price was one of the old school, a proper landlord. There was no pressure from him, no urgency. Things got done without any fuss. And the business rattled along comfortably. Foley and Raymond Junior were about the same age so they had more or less the same interests too. And for a while, they were best friends.

Then when Raymond was twenty-one, his old man handed the hotel over to him. The old man had been in the trenches during The Great War. He could smell this new one coming and he didn't want to be anywhere near it. So he took off to live with his daughter in Australia.

The big problem with that was Raymond Junior. He was too nice. And very quickly both the customers and the suppliers began to take advantage of him. It wasn't long before the debts started mounting up and Raymond had to go grovelling to the bank. The bank wasn't interested. But others were. They had money to invest. And very soon Raymond was spending most of this time running around after them and hardly any time on the daily running of things.

Foley was seriously concerned about the dodgy investors and the way they were turning the hotel into a sort of seedy private club, but when he commented on it one evening Raymond went pale with fury. He would have nothing said against his new best friends. Especially by the hired help. And in the blink of an eye, his friendship with Foley splintered. A huge gap opened up between them and they could hardly acknowledge each other anymore. Foley regretted that, but he didn't know how to fix it.

Then Foley married Katie and the gap widened even more. Raymond thought Foley was a fool. Katie being pregnant was not a reason to marry her. In her profession, any one of her clients could be the father. Still, Foley stood by her and did what he thought was right.

Then one night a guest did some terrible things to an escort girl and Raymond's bubble burst. He was horrified. The incident was quickly covered up but the shock of waking up to the reality of what his quaint old hotel had become almost drove him over the edge. He physically shrivelled up and all colour left his face. Foley desperately wanted to help his friend but the barrier Raymond had built between himself and Foley was too high now. There was no getting over it.

Even Katie dying so suddenly didn't bring them any closer. If anything it gave Raymond the excuse to terminate their relationship and he put pressure on Foley to move on.

Still, Foley was leaving with a heavy heart. He loved his job. He would miss this place. As he was about to pick up his suitcase again Annie gave him a beaming smile and pointed to the stairs with her pen. 'But I think he might be in his office, though. A man was looking for him a few minutes ago. He went straight up there and I'm sure I heard voices.'

'Right,' Foley straightened up and glanced at where Annie was pointing. 'Thank you, Annie. So maybe I *will* just pop my head around the door and let him know we're leaving.' Foley guided Micky to a chair and sat him down. 'You sit here, son. Look after the suitcase. I won't be long.'

Foley bounced up the stairs. The office was at the back of the building and as Foley turned the corner into the corridor he could hear what sounded like angry voices muffled behind a closed door. He slowed down and approached as quietly as the creaking old floorboards would let him.

Through the glass partition he could see Raymond sitting bolt upright with his hands flat on the desk in front of him. He looked distressed. Foley could only see the back of the other man. He was stocky and wearing a long overcoat. He had a trilby pulled down over his face. And he was pointing a .45 Webley handgun at Raymond's face.

Raymond was trembling. 'I don't know what you mean,' Foley could hear him saying. 'Honest to God. I didn't do anything. You have to believe me.'

‘Stop it,’ the man told him. ‘Stop embarrassing yourself. We know what you did. Lying about it is just wasting your time and my time. And the result will be the same. You are only delaying the inevitable.’

As Foley moved closer to get a better look at the man his foot clipped a small table and knocked it against the partition. The man spun around waving the gun. Raymond saw his chance, jumped up and with a mad scream threw himself over the desk. His long arms wrapped around the man and they danced across the room like two angry spiders, pulling and grabbing at each other.

Foley crashed through the door and tried to grab the man’s arm but it was like a piston and it threw him back against the desk. He fell awkwardly and had to grab the desk to get back up. And as he struggled to his feet there was an almighty bang and a fierce blow caught him in the side like a slap from a wrecking ball. He slammed back against the desk again. Then everything went black.

But it wasn’t for long. Through the buzzing in his head, he could hear footsteps approaching. They stopped close by and a second later a woman screamed. Then the footsteps went back down the corridor, only this time a lot quicker.

Foley almost screamed too when he tried to stand up. The pain was excruciating. It felt as if his ribs were crushed and he was struggling to catch his breath. He grabbed his side and when he saw the blood spurting through his fingers the shock made his head swim. He squeezed a fistful of his coat against the wound as he looked around the room.

Raymond was slumped on the floor with his legs spread out and his hands in his lap. And his face was gone. The .45 bullet had entered under his chin and sliced it right off.

The man with the gun was gone too.

Foley tried to pull himself back up but the strength was pouring out of him along with the blood. He staggered around to Raymond’s big office chair and dropped into it. Then the blackness came down on him again.

When Foley woke up again that he found himself in a tiny room. Just a bed and a wardrobe. And a bowl with a jug of water on a chair. The room smelt old and musty, like his room in *The Black Bird*. But this certainly was not a hospital.

His first thought was for his son. Where was Mickey? He needed to find Mickey. He tried to sit up but pain shot through him like a zap from a light socket. It made him wrap his arms around himself and he was surprised to find his chest enveloped in a thick bandage. And all he was wearing was a pyjama bottom.

He waited for the pain to settle before attempting to sit up again. Then he slid his legs onto the floor and wobbled when the blood rushed to his head. And as he got to his feet the door flew open and a nun waltzed in carrying a tray. Without a word she manoeuvred Foley back into the bed, put the tray on his lap and scooted out again, locking the door behind her.

It happened so fast Foley was too stunned to react. Then he shoved the tray aside and jumped back up, wincing as the pain gripped him again. ‘Wait,’ he called after her. ‘Where’s my son? Where’s Mickey?’

He grabbed the door handle and pulled, but the door was locked. He gave it a kick and shuffled across to the window. The room was on the second floor at the back of a huge building. It was obviously out in the country because all he could see in every direction was fields.

And the wardrobe was empty. All he had was what he was wearing, a pyjama bottom that was too big and nothing on his feet. So why did they need to lock the door? Where did they think he could go dressed like that?

He rattled the door handle again and called out. But all he got back was an echo from an empty corridor. He cursed and wobbled back across the room, moved the tray out of the way and dropped onto the bed. His whole body ached.

The smell of the fried bacon on the tray was tantalising but he was too distressed to eat. The coffee was still hot though, and he took a sip. It was strong and very sweet and he drank it all. Then he lay back and closed his eyes. And he went out like a flame in a sudden breeze.

A sharp voice snapped him awake again. 'Sit up. You have a visitor.'

He slammed his hand over his eyes when the light came on. The nun glided around the bed and fluffed up his pillow. His tongue felt like a tinker's sock and when he turned to look at the nun his head floated away. A burp brought the taste of sour coffee. And he noticed it was already dark outside. Whatever they'd put in the coffee had knocked him out for the whole day.

'Mr Price!' The voice was loud and brash. 'I'm Leo Maranus.'

Mr Price? Foley tried to pull himself up onto his elbow. *My God! They think I'm Raymond Price.*

Maranus towered over the bed. He was well over six feet tall with a mop of white hair and grey unblinking eyes. Foley flinched. He'd never seen human eyes like that before. Dead eyes, like a shark.

'You're a feckin' eejit, Mr Price.' The big man gave a sinister click of his tongue.

'No, no. You're after making a mistake.' Foley was surprised by how weak he sounded. 'I'm not...'

'Don't take me for a fool, young man. We knew what you were up to since the day you started whining about that incident with the hooker. We've been keeping a beady eye on you, Mr Price.'

Foley's head throbbed with the tension. 'No. You got it wrong. He's dead. You killed him. I saw you shoot...'

Maranus held his finger like a weapon and pointed it at Foley's head. He oozed menace. 'No, Mr Price. *You* killed him. If you'd behaved yourself none of that would have happened. We only wanted to talk to you but you had to go acting the fool. Unfortunately, your pal was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But you can rest assured that's all sorted now. Which just leaves *our* little problem. What did you do with our...?'

Sweat dripped off Foley's chin and he swiped it away. 'Where's Mickey?'

Maranus growled deep in his throat. 'Who the hell is Mickey?'

'The boy,' the nun said. 'You don't have to worry about him, sure. He's fine. We have him safe. We'll look after him till we locate his relatives.'

Before Foley could say anything more Maranus lowered his voice to an even deeper growl. 'But that is no concern of yours, is it? Your only concern is the stuff you took from us.' He glanced at the nun as he pulled an envelope from his pocket and waved it at Foley. 'Dipping into the till is part of the course in our business, right? We accept that. As long as you don't get too greedy. But right now we're more interested in what you did with the ledger.'

'Ledger? What ledger?'

‘Oh for God’s sake.’ Maranus went to pace the small room, realized he couldn’t and gave himself a furious hug. ‘If you want to get out of here with all your limbs still attached I suggest you stop feckin’ around and think very carefully before you answered the next question. Where is the ledger?’

‘I swear to God I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

Maranus flapped his hands as he struggled to control his fury. ‘You’re wasting my time. You know what I’m talking about. I *know* you know what I’m talking about. Paddy Oliver kept meticulous accounts of everything that went on in your hotel. One for the Inland Revenue. And one for our investors, which you stole. But why? It’s no use to anyone other than the taxman. Or the Fraud Squad. So what were you going to do with it? Hold it for ransom in case we found out about the money you stole? Make some sort of deal with us? Clever thinking, but not clever enough. So stop arsing about and tell me where it is?’

‘I don’t know. I swear to God.’

‘Bullshit.’ Maranus slapped him across the head with the envelope then threw it on the bed. ‘You know, I can’t decide if you’re very clever or as thick as a lump of concrete. I mean, what eejit goes to his local bank and changes a suitcase full of money into US dollars and thinks no one will notice? And then buys a ticket to New York from the local travel agent and again thinks no one will notice?’

Foley licked the sweat off his lip as he picked up the envelope and turned it over. Aer Lingus was printed on the front. He dropped it back on the bed.

‘And yet you can hide both the money *and* the ledger where even our most efficient bloodhounds can’t find them,’ Maranus continued. ‘Amazing. We took your room apart. We took your office apart. We took the whole feckin’ hotel apart. But not a sniff of our stuff. Truly amazing.’

Then something popped into Foley’s head. *Of course*. That’s what Raymond was doing down in the cellar last night. He looked shifty. When he noticed Foley he pretended he was looking for some special wine for a customer. But he was on the wrong side of the cellar. He was over by their secret chimney.

Foley had forgotten about the secret chimney. They discovered it years ago when Raymond dropped his pen behind the racking. They cleared the stock off the shelves and pulled the racking away from the wall to retrieve it. And they discovered a fireplace that was probably there from when the hotel was built a hundred years ago.

When they put the racking back they lined it up so the chimney was accessible by removing the bottom row of stock. They had great fun hiding stuff there. For a while. Then they grew out of it.

Foley’s heart gave a thump when he saw how intensely Maranus was watching him. Maranus could *smell* deception.

‘I’m sorry.’ Foley forced a sob into his voice. ‘My head is all over the place. I feel sick.’

‘What? Do I look like I *care*?’ Maranus snapped. ‘Mr Price, I need to know where our stuff is, and I need to know right...’

‘Sush.’ The nun held up her hand. ‘Is that the phone?’

Maranus practically ran to the door and whipped it open, checking his watch as he went. The ringing was coming from somewhere downstairs. ‘Damn, is it that

time already?’ He spun back into the room and glared at Foley. ‘So what have you got to tell me, Mr Price?’

The big man’s eyes bulged with rage and his fists were clenched against his chest. Foley buckled under the glare. He knew he had no choice. He had to tell them everything. He pulled himself up in the bed.

‘Look, I... the thing is, I...’

‘Leo.’ The nun gave Maranus an agitated poke on the arm. ‘This will be your call from Dublin. You have to take it. You can’t keep them waiting.’

‘Thank you, Sister Michael.’ Maranus growled again as he opened and closed his huge fists. Then he spun around and stomped across to the door, held it open and nodded the nun out.

‘Don’t think this conversation is over, Mr Price,’ he called over his shoulder. ‘We will continue it shortly, I can assure you.’ Then he pulled the door shut with a crash that rattled the window.

Chapter 6

Tralee. Sept 1941

Sergeant Liam Edge sat forward with his elbows on the table and he pointed an angry finger at Foley. ‘So why didn’t you tell us all this before now?’ he growled. ‘When you arrived home back in January you led us to believe you got your injury in an accident involving a fire at the hotel you were working in.’

‘Yeah. Well,’ Foley held up his hands. ‘I didn’t want to involve anyone else in all this stuff.’

‘For God’s sake.’ Edge sat back in his chair and rested his head against the wall. He fixed a hard stare on Foley. ‘Anyway, getting back to your story, how could they possibly have got you mixed up with that Raymond fella?’

‘People were *always* mixing us up. We were the same age. Even Old Man Price was always getting the both of us mixed up. So I suppose when they found me sitting in his seat spattered with blood they just assumed I was Raymond.’

Edge didn’t look convinced. ‘But surely to God, it wouldn’t have taken them long to realise they made a mistake. Who did they think the body on the floor was? Are you telling me none of the staff recognised you, the barman, when they came running in to see what was going on?’

‘They didn’t, though,’ Foley groaned. ‘I don’t know why. It was all a blur to me. I vaguely remember someone hauling me out of Raymond’s chair and dragging me downstairs. But the pain was too much and I must have passed out again.’

‘But when they got you to the hospital didn’t they ask you your name? Didn’t they want to know who you were and what happened to you?’

‘That’s just it,’ Foley picked up his cup and took another quick swig of the whisky. ‘They didn’t take me to hospital.’

Edge growled again and rolled his eyes. ‘Where then?’

‘I don’t know. It was a big house out in the country somewhere. And that fella Maranus was waiting for me. It was the place where Alex Cassidy worked. I expect

she told you all about it. That's how we met. When she helped us get away from there and back to Tralee.'

The sergeant's eyebrows rose a fraction. 'No.'

'What? She didn't tell you about ...'

'No, she did not.' This time the sergeant's mouth was a thin line as he glared back at Foley. 'She's like you. She didn't tell me anything about that. Like you didn't tell me anything about that.'

'Well, I'm...'

'So tell me *now*.' It wasn't a request, and Foley swallowed the last of his whiskey as he sank back in his chair and thought about where to pick up the story. But a loud rap on the Delaney's kitchen door stopped him in mid-flow and he sat up straight in his chair.

Cassidy's head appeared and she glanced from Edge to Foley and back to Edge again. Her eyes crinkled when he smiled up at her. 'I'm sorry to interrupt, Sarge, but the detectives are here.'

'Oh, right,' Edge jumped up. 'I'll be right there.'

Foley jumped up too. 'Liam, we haven't finished ...'

'We have, I'm afraid. I have a murder out there that needs my attention.'

'But I told you who was responsible for that. It was Maranus. I know it was.'

'No, you do *not* know it was.' Edge put his cup in the sink. 'Anyway, what I don't get is why Maranus didn't realise you weren't Raymond the moment he saw you. If he was one of the people involved with the hotel, surely he would have known you straight away?'

'No, he wouldn't. He never came to the hotel. At least I never saw him there. I never even heard his name until that night. Whoever took me to the house must have told him I was Raymond and he had no reason to doubt them. And he was determined to know what Raymond did with whatever he stole from them. And that is why he's still after me now.'

'Look Eamon,' Edge rinsed his hands under the tap and wiped them with the frayed towel hanging on a hook by the sink. 'I believe you *did* see someone tonight who looked like Maranus, but in the heat of the moment it was blurred out of all proportion. You'd just seen Joe shot dead. It confused you, but that's nothing to be ashamed of.'

'That's not what I...'

'Think about it, will you?' Edge insisted. 'Maranus might have thought you were someone else at the time, but that was nine months ago. He'll have realized his mistake by now and he'll have stopped worrying about you. And even if he *still* thinks you have what he's looking for, what would he gain by killing Joe? It wouldn't make any sense. If you have something he wants, wouldn't he just come up to you and ask you to give it back?'

He waited for an answer but Foley couldn't think fast enough.

'Anyway, right now I think we should take a closer look at Joe's private life first. Who knows what skeletons will fall out when we open his cupboard door? So can I suggest you get over to Vicky's house and let her know what's happened before the jungle drums beat you to it?'

A group of people came rolling out of a pub in Rock Street and staggered into the middle of the road, shouting at each other to be quiet. 'Tis the middle of the

night you know. People are trying to sleep!' one of them roared. The streetlights were already switched off but the sky was clear and the full moon painted the town in a nice silver glow.

One of the women rummaged in her handbag and took out a packet of cigarettes, picked one out with her teeth then passed the packet around. The others took one each and followed the match as she tried to light them. When she flicked the burning stump away it landed near the petrol pump outside Rice's garage. They all shrieked and chased after it to stamp it out.

Foley watched their antics as he passed by on the other side of the street. He had stomped out of Delaney's, furious that Edge wouldn't take him seriously. His step-father had dismissed him. Foley was so angry he hadn't even considered that Maranus might be lurking in the shadows. When the thought hit him he stopped dead and looked around. His nerves were so frayed he didn't know which way to turn. Part of him wanted to run. Go out to Edenburn, get Mickey and just run.

But another part of him knew he was safer here with his family. In the morning, in the cold light of day, he could lay it all on the table and pick the bones out of it. Right now, though, he needed to think about how to break the news to Vicky. What do you say to someone whose husband has just been murdered? Her whole life was about to change out of all proportion. Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, she's a widow with five children, no house, and no job. Foley's mother had gone through all that years ago when his father died and it still haunted him.

He jumped when one of the women gave another loud shriek. She was small and slim, and she reminded him of Alex Cassidy. He wished he could put his finger on what was troubling him about Alex Cassidy. OK, she took a big risk helping him escape from Leo Maranus. But why did she insist on following him to Tralee? Why didn't she just go home? And he couldn't believe she hadn't told Liam Edge about any of it. What did they talk about when they were alone? They seemed to spend so much time together Foley thought Edge would know every little detail about her life. So why was she so secretive? Was it all part of some elaborate plan?

But if it was, she was playing her part brilliantly.

Chapter 7

Dublin. January 1941

Foley certainly didn't notice anything suspicious the first time he met Cassidy back in January. All he could remember was feeling a huge surge of relief when she walked into his room.

Maranus and the nun had been gone less than half an hour when Foley heard someone shuffling around outside the door. He didn't expect them back so soon. He wasn't ready. He needed more time to work out what to say, how to tell them he wasn't Raymond Price. Part of him was screaming to just tell them about the secret chimney, let them have their stuff back. Get it over with.

But a darker voice was telling him something else. Without this information, Foley meant nothing to these people. So when they got what they wanted were they likely to just let him go? Now that he knew about the ledger? Now that he'd seen Raymond Price murdered for it? Whatever choice he made, it was not going to end well.

His stomach lurched as the door clicked open. And a young woman in a maid's uniform backed into the room. The cutlery on the tray rattled as she tried to balance it and shut the door behind her at the same time.

Relief poured out of Foley. His mouth was so dry his tongue stuck to the back of his teeth. The maid's eyes were everywhere except on Foley as she plonked the tray on his lap. Boiled bacon, flowery potatoes bursting out of their skins surrounded by boiled cabbage. She unfolded a napkin and spread it across his chest. He felt queasy. His guts were so disturbed he didn't think he could eat ever again. But he couldn't stop gibbering. 'I was expecting... I thought you were... so where's the nun? I thought you were the nun. And that other fella, you know? The big fella...'

The maid busied herself straightening the jug on the chair and checking the water. She ignored him completely. It was hard to tell how old she was but if Foley had to guess he'd say late teens. He poked at the dinner with his fork. 'So where am I? What is this place?'

The maid still didn't respond. She tugged at the curtains with the awkwardness of a nervous little bird trying not to catch his eye. He cut off a piece of the bacon and inspected it. 'Is this someone's house?' he asked.

This time she did look up but she quickly turned away again,

'Answer me!' Foley dropped his fork with a loud crash and the maid jumped.

'I can't.' Her hand went to her throat and her eyes darted anxiously from Foley to the door and back again.

'What do you mean *you can't*?'

'That's what they told me. Don't talk to the guests.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.' She picked up the water jug then put it back down with a thump. 'Take in the food, tidy the room, don't talk to the guests. That's my orders.'

'Well at least tell me your name.'

She gave a sharp gasp and practically ran to the door. 'I have to go now. I'll come back later for the tray.'

'No. Wait.' Foley shoved the tray to the side, swung his legs out of the bed, and groaned at the pain in his side. The maid looked startled.

'I can't.' She pulled the door open. 'I'm new here. I only started this week. I have to do what they tell me and not be talking to you.'

Foley put his hands up. 'Please. Look, I don't mean you any harm. I promise you. I just want to ask you something.'

Her head gave an involuntary shake. 'What?'

'They brought a boy here, a little fella called Mickey. Do you know where he is?'

She blinked rapidly as she considered her answer. 'I do.'

'Did you see him? Is he all right?'

'Sure he's in the room next door. I took him in his tea a few minutes ago?'

'What? He's right next door? In there?'

The maid glanced out at the corridor and nodded. 'He is.'

'I have to see him.' Foley shuffled across the floor. 'Is his door open? Show me. Take me to...'

'Are you mad?' She gasped so loudly she started to cough and tears glistened in her eyes. 'I can't...if they catch me...'

'He's only a child, for God's sake. He's not even four years old yet and they have him locked up in a strange room. He'll be terrified. I just want to see him.'

'No. I'm not supposed to even talk to you, never mind let you out of your room.'

'What do you think I'm going to do? I'm wearing pyjamas. They took all my clothes. I haven't even got any socks.'

Foley could see hesitation and he held his hand out. 'Please. He's only a child. Just let me see him for a minute. I just want to let him know I'm here. That I'm only next door.'

The maid bit her lip. 'I can't. If they find out they'll skin me alive.'

'Please. Look, I'll even pay you. How much do you want?'

She looked him up and down, suspicion turning up the corner of her mouth. 'How will you pay me? You just said you have nothing but what you're standing up in.'

'I have money. Not on me right now. But when I get my stuff back I'll have money. I'll give you a pound.'

Her face was blank as she analysed the proposition. 'No. I can't...'

'Two, then. I'll give you two pounds.'

'I don't know.' She looked at him under her eyes and there was an odd coldness in the half-smile she gave. 'I'll be taking a big risk.'

'Three pounds.' Foley clapped his hands and she flinched. 'And that's my final offer.'

This time she nodded and put her head out the door to check the corridor. 'All right so. Three pounds. But you better only be a minute.'

'That's all I want.' Foley stood behind her as she took a bunch of keys from her pocket and checked the corridor again. 'So what's your name? What do I call you?'

She glanced back at him and dropped her voice even more. 'Cassidy.'

'Cassidy? Is that what your mammy calls you?'

She gave him a strange look and motioned for him to follow her. The corridor had the musty smell of an old country mansion. The ceiling was high and the walls were panelled in dark wood. And the frayed carpet didn't do much to deaden the creaking floorboards as they crept along to Mickey's room.

Because the light was so dim Cassidy had to bend down to see the lock. And as she fumbled with the key a door on the other side of the corridor flew open. 'What the hell do you think you're doing?' Sister Michael leapt into the corridor.

Cassidy jumped and dropped the keys, and before she could protect herself the nun grabbed her hair and punched her in the face. 'You were warned about this, you stupid little cow.' Sister Michael swung Cassidy around in a circle and sent her crashing into a small table. 'I've had enough of you. I always knew you couldn't be trusted.'

'Sister Michael!' Maranus jumped between them. Cassidy whimpered as she scrambled to her feet and staggered away, blood from her nose spattering down the front of her blouse.

It all happened so fast Foley didn't have time to react and now Maranus was pushing him back into his room. 'Like I said, Mr Price, you're a feckin' eejit. How far did you think you'd get? Still, not to worry. You're not going to be here for much longer anyway. Some friends are dropping by tomorrow to have a little chat with you. Then you'll be gone. One way or the other.'

Chapter 8

Later that night something snapped Foley awake again. He was amazed he'd fallen asleep in the first place, considering his situation. But he had. And now something had disturbed him.

The room was pitch black. Any light from outside was quenched by the thick curtains. Nothing came through the crack under the door either. He held his breath. A house as old as this made strange noises anyway, and the wind was blowing rain against the window and groaning in the trees. But whatever woke Foley felt near, in this room, by his bed. There was a soft brush of air on his face, like a draught from someone moving close by. He braced himself, ready to roll away from it.

Then a flashlight came on and the glare stunned him. He clamped his hands over his eyes and groaned at the pain in his side.

'Sush!' The intruder turned the flashlight on her face. 'Tis only me, Cassidy.'

'Cassidy? What are you doing here?'

She wagged the flashlight back at him. 'I came for my five pounds.'

'What five pounds?'

'You promised me five pounds.'

Foley struggled up onto his elbow, grasping the bandage to soften the pain. 'I did not. I said three pounds. And that was if I got to see my son. I didn't see my son so I don't owe you anything.'

'All right then, give me my three pounds.' The flashlight wobbled even more. 'C'mon, I'm in a hurry.'

'What are you talking about? What's going on?'

'I'm running away. When you hand over my money I'm leaving this dump.'

'In the middle of the night? Where are you going to go at this time of... what time is it anyway? It must be nearly midnight.'

'I don't care. I just want my money. Just give me my money so I can go.'

'I can't, even if I wanted to. I told you already. They took my clothes off me. My money was with my clothes.'

'But you promised me three pounds.' A sob dripped from her voice. 'I want it now. I need it now.'

'Why? What's so bloody urgent it can't wait till morning?'

It was a few seconds before she answered. 'Because they're going to kill me.'

'Who is?'

'Sister Michael and Mr Maranus.'

'For God's sake! Why would they want to kill you?'

'Because I was helping you.'

Foley snorted. 'Stop it. I don't believe that for a second.'

'You don't know them.' Cassidy whimpered with frustration. 'They're not nice people. They warned us about talking to you. They threatened us with all sorts if we did. They're obsessed about it. Don't ever speak with the guests, they told us.'

Foley shifted to ease the pain in his ribs. 'Yeah. But kill you? Aren't you exaggerating a little bit?'

'Am I?' Her voice had turned into a frightened whisper now. 'What if I told you that nun killed two of the girls recently right there in the kitchen? She caught them speaking to a foreign fella—I think he was a Jew from Poland—and she killed them herself. They're buried in that field out there?'

Foley sank back on the pillow. His side was thumping and he squeezed it tighter. There was something flaky about all this. Yes, Maranus was a thug, but surely Cassidy was wandering into the realms of fantasy with this story. 'Naw,' he grunted. 'Anyway, what about the nun? How do you know she's not out there in the hall waiting to ambush you again?'

'Because she's with Mr Maranus. They usually spend the night together. I saw her go into his room with a bottle of something half an hour ago. She won't be back out till the morning.'

'What about the others?'

'What others?'

'The other staff. People like you?'

'Oh.' A hint of irritation skipped through her voice. 'They're all gone home. There's only a couple of us that live in. And they'll be asleep in their rooms.'

'What about Mickey? Have you looked in his room? Is he all right?'

'Why would I be looking in his room? I haven't the time to be looking in his room. I just want to get out of here.'

'So what's keeping you?' Foley felt his patience drain away.

'I haven't got any money.' She gave another pitiful whimper. She sounded so distraught Foley almost felt sorry for her. But he quickly shrugged it away.

'Well, I can't help you with that,' he snapped. 'So you might as well just piss off right now.'

She moved closer to the bed. 'Where did they put your clothes?' She said it quickly as if she'd only just thought about it.

Foley dragged himself back up on his elbow. 'Why?'

'Well, if we find your clothes you can give me my three pounds. So do you know where they are?'

'I've no idea.' Coming here had been a total blur to Foley. 'But if they brought Mickey here at the same time they might have dumped them in his room.'

Cassidy screwed her face up. 'You might be right, you know. I think there's stuff in that wardrobe. The door was open all right, so... yes, I'm sure there is.'

'And have you still got the key to the room?'

'I have.' Cassidy was already easing the door open.

Mickey didn't move when the flashlight picked him out. His arms were flung out across the bed, his chest rising and falling quietly. Foley made sure the curtains were drawn and the door was closed before he turned on the light. The boy's breathing didn't alter and Foley gave him a gentle kiss on the forehead.

‘Are these yours?’ Cassidy was rummaging through the wardrobe and throwing stuff onto the bed.

Foley picked through it. ‘Where’s my coat? Is there a coat?’

Cassidy threw that on the bed too. Foley grabbed it and felt through the pockets. They were empty. ‘Shit, shit, shit.’ He threw the coat across the room and buried his face in his hands.

‘What’s wrong with you?’ Cassidy was still waving the flashlight around. ‘Have you got my money?’

‘There is no money, you stupid little...’ Foley grabbed the flashlight from her and she threw herself back away from him. ‘All my money is gone. They took every penny I had.’

Cassidy let out a sob. ‘But what about my three pounds? I can’t wait any longer. I need my three pounds now.’

‘Are you not listening to me, woman?’ Foley almost hit her with the flashlight. ‘I just told you, all my money is gone. Did you take it? Did you steal my money?’

‘What? I did not! Don’t you accuse me! Do you think I’d be here asking for my three pounds if I had? Cop yourself on, for feck sake. I came to you because I’m desperate. If I took your money I wouldn’t be here now, would I?’

‘All right!’ Foley sat on the bed and Mickey opened his eyes for a brief moment then sighed and went back to sleep.

‘You’ll have money at home, though.’ Cassidy was using a little girl voice that threw him.

‘What?’

‘When you get home. You’ll have money at home.’

‘So what?’

‘Well, if I take you with me, how much will you give me?’

‘Are you feckin mad?’ Foley held the flashlight like a weapon. ‘Why in God’s name would I go anywhere with you? I can find my own way out. We can manage very well without you, thank you very much. So get lost.’

Then in a heartbeat he realised he didn’t even know where he was. And he certainly didn’t know how to get out of the house without being seen. Maranus would be back in a few hours and it was not going to be a nice day. So if Foley was hoping to put some distance between them he would need all the help he could get.

‘All right. We’ll go with you.’ He grabbed his shirt and started pulling it on, struggling to get his arms through the sleeves without crying out in pain.

‘How much will you give me?’

‘What?’ Foley had to stop to breathe. ‘You want to talk about money now?’

‘Yes. I want to know now. I’m not risking my life for you until I know what tis worth.’

‘For God’s sake. So how much do you think our lives are worth?’

‘A hundred pounds.’

‘A hundred pounds? You are mad.’

‘A hundred pounds. I want your word you’ll pay me one hundred pounds if I get you away from here.’

A train whistle sounded in the distance, just audible above the blustering wind. Cassidy ran to the window and whipped the curtains open. 'Shit. C'mon, hurry. We haven't much time.'

'What do you mean?' Foley winced as he pulled his trousers over his pyjamas. His stitches pulled and his ribs ached.

'That's my train. That's how I'm getting away from here.' Cassidy bubbled with excitement.

'How... what are you talking about? Are you telling me there's a station nearby?'

'No. There's not a station.'

'I don't understand. How're you going to catch a train if there's not a station?'

'Because,' she tried to give a light laugh but it came out as a semi-hysterical cackle. 'I've been watching that train for ages. I can see it from my room. It goes past here twice a day, at midday and midnight. There's a water tower just along the track and it stops there for about twenty minutes. So if you're coming with me you'll have to hurry.'

'So that's your plan? Go down to the water tower and climb on a train. What if... are you even sure it's going to stop?'

'Yes, I'm sure. Haven't I been watching it for weeks? It stops at the water tower every time.'

Foley pointed the flashlight at her again. 'I thought you've only been here a week?'

'I have.'

'Then how can you have been watching the train for weeks?'

'Days, I said.' There wasn't the slightest hesitation. 'Anyway, I need your word. One hundred pounds.'

'Look...'

'We haven't got much time. One hundred pounds.'

'All right, for feck sake. I give you my word.'

'One hundred pounds?'

'Yes. One hundred pounds.'

'Then c'mon.' Cassidy ran to the window again then across to the door. 'Stop wasting time.'

Foley grabbed his son's clothes and as the boy came around he gave a beaming smile. 'Dada?'

'Hi ya, son. Sorry to wake you, but we're going for a little walk.' Foley helped the boy to sit up and started dressing him. 'And we have to be very quiet because people are sleeping and we mustn't wake them. All right?'

As soon as Mickey was dressed they followed Cassidy along the corridor to a wide staircase that swept down to a large entrance hall. Huge paintings of old soldiers filled every bit of wall space and a battered chandelier sparkled as it fluttered in the draught. The wind was louder in this part of the house and it hid the sound of them picking their way down the ancient stairs.

The pain from his wound made Foley take shorter steps and when he rubbed his side his hand was sticky from the blood that was seeping through his bandage.

'The front door will be locked so I'll have to take you through the kitchen,' Cassidy said from behind her hand. She crouched low and led the way, walking on

her toes as if she was crossing thin ice. Foley guided Mickey with an arm around his shoulder.

One of the doors off the hall was open just wide enough for Foley to see candles around a fireplace. He also saw Maranus lying naked in front of a log fire. Sister Michael—also naked—was sitting astride him, her long blond hair swirling around her head.

Cassidy turned back to see what Foley was looking at and she gave a sharp gasp. ‘She’s not a real nun,’ she almost choked trying to stop herself from saying it out loud. ‘I always said she wasn’t a real nun.’

Foley steered her back to the hall. ‘Which way?’

Cassidy gave several angry turns before heading down a narrow passageway under the stairs and into the kitchen. A long table took up most of the floor and as they squeezed past it Cassidy pulled a cloth bag out of a drawer. ‘As we haven’t got any money I think we should take some food with us.’ She grabbed two loaves of bread and dropped them in the bag. ‘The good stuff is locked in the pantry so take what you can see.’

Foley grabbed some tins from a shelf and apples from the fruit bowl. Two jars of pickled eggs and two jars of gooseberry jam followed them into the bag. Cassidy went to lift the bag then put it back on the table. ‘You’ll have to carry this. It’s too heavy for a girl.’

She smirked at Foley as she turned the handle on the back door. And the wind whipped it from her grasp and threw it back against the wall. A mini-tornado ripped through the kitchen, rattling pots and pans and flapping the curtains.

‘Shit.’ Foley grabbed Mickey and pushed him out the door. Cassidy was transfixed by the sudden chaos and it was a few seconds before she followed them.

The wind that roared around the corner of the house was ferocious and it threw the rain at them in cold sharp waves. ‘Which way?’ Foley shouted.

‘Straight down there.’ Cassidy pointed the flashlight across the field. Foley guided Mickey across the uneven ground and the beam from the flashlight bounced all over the place as Cassidy followed them.

Mickey stumbled and Foley tried to stop him from falling, and his shoes slid from under him. He hit the ground with a thud and it felt like he’d broken his ribs all over again. He must have cried out because Cassidy was pulling at his coat. ‘Be quiet. They’ll hear us.’

Foley bit back a curse as he scrambled to his feet. He knocked Cassidy out of the way but he didn’t stop. He dragged Mickey down the field, through a gap in the hedge and onto the tracks. The lights around the water tower were flickering in the distance as the wind tore through the trees and made the branches dance violently. And as the three figures crept towards the train they keep a lookout for the driver and his mate.

When they reached the end wagon they crouched down and checked behind them to make sure Maranus and the nun weren’t coming after them. Then Foley studied the shape above him. He couldn’t see any windows, only flat dark walls. ‘For shit sake. This is a bloody goods train.’

‘Yeah,’ Cassidy answered. ‘So?’

‘So how the hell am I going to climb up there? I can barely lift my arm high enough to scratch my nose.’

Cassidy tutted and pointed to the rear of the end wagon. 'Sure aren't those steps?' she said in a condescending tone. Foley flinched, stood up and moved closer to where she was indicating.

'Yeah. You're right,' he said grudgingly. 'It's a guard's van.' He gripped the rail and tested it. 'Wait here. I'll check it out.'

Ignoring the pull of his stitches, he dragged himself up onto the platform and looked through the tiny window in the door. It was pitch black inside. He tried the door handle. It wasn't locked. He climbed back down and crouched beside his son again. 'The guard is probably up front helping the driver with the water. We'll wait and see if he comes back or not.'

'What happens if he comes back?' Cassidy's hand brushed against his face.

'I don't know.' Foley moved away from her. 'We'll just have to find another way to get on board.'

Cassidy gave an irritated tut. 'What do you suggest, if you can't climb up into the wagon?'

'I don't know,' Foley repeated sharply. 'It's your plan. What do you suggest?'

'I suggest I'm climbing into a wagon,' Cassidy snapped back. 'What you do is up to you.'

'All right,' Foley sighed. 'Look, I'm sorry. Let's just wait and see what the guard does. All right?'

They didn't have to wait long. A chain rattled as the hose was hauled back up the side of the water tower. Voices floated back to them but then faded, and suddenly the train gave a lurch and started to shunt forward.

'It's moving!' Cassidy grabbed the rail and leapt onto the bottom step. 'C'mon!'

Foley almost slipped on the wet sleepers as he lifted Mickey and swung him up to Cassidy. She grabbed him by the coat and pulled him onto the step beside her. 'Will you c'mon,' she screamed at Foley. Her voice was shrill with panic. Foley leapt as the train gathered speed and got his knee onto the step. Cassidy wrapped her arm around his shoulders and steadied him. Together they shoved Mickey up onto the platform and Foley followed him. When he reached down to Cassidy she grabbed him around the neck and pressed her face against his. He hauled her up quickly, unwrapped her and pushed her towards the open door. 'Better get inside.'

Cassidy flicked on the flashlight. There was a narrow bench along the wall and Foley manoeuvred Mickey towards it.

'Be careful with that light. Someone will see it.'

'I am careful,' she snapped. Then she switched it off.

Chapter 9

Tralee. September 1941

The sudden shriek of a cat made Foley jump and brought him back to the present. Rock Street was quiet again, ghostly in the silver sheen of the moon. The group of revellers had disappeared down a side street. Foley was just around the corner from Vicky's house. It was time to face her.

Vicky McCarthy dropped another sod of turf into the range and caused a shower of sparks to fly up around her hand. She sagged back into the battered old armchair and shoved the poker through the grill, gave a quick shuffle and disturbed a cloud of grey ash. And the heaviness in her heart almost made her weep. Is this what her life had become, a dull grey depressing ash?

She rubbed her eyes to distract herself from the misery that was hanging over her tonight. She needed to push it down into her secret place - the place a priest once told her about. He said the centre of your being is your solar plexus. That's where your consciousness exists. That's where your very soul lives. Vicky imagined it as a huge cave flooded in a beautiful white light and divided into little compartments. And over the years she had developed a way of filtering out all the sad things in her life and filing them away in those little compartments.

But lately she was finding it hard to keep them from wriggling back up again. Maybe she was just too tired. Maybe she no longer had the willpower to fight another disappointment. She thought she'd be immune to the sting of disappointment by now. But the latest one hurt just as much. She tried to file it away like all the others but for some reason, this one wouldn't stay down. And now it seemed as if all the others were about to come pouring back out to torment her all over again.

She couldn't remember a time in her life when she wasn't wallowing in disappointment. Even when she was just a little girl. Her father said goodbye one morning and she never saw him again. He promised he'd buy her a box of coloured pencils when he got paid. So on payday she hurried home expecting to see her present on the kitchen table. But there was no present that day. Her father had gone to America, they told her. He was going to build a new life there and then send for them.

It never happened.

What did happen was they had to leave their home and move in with relatives, lodging with one family or another over the next few years. For a while everything would be fine, but then their mother would come home from work exhausted from holding down a dozen jobs. Someone would make an innocent comment, she'd misunderstand it, sparks would fly and the next day they'd be living with someone else. The children were never sure whose house they were going back to after school.

Then one day they got a package from America with all their father's possessions in it—a broken fob watch, some tools and \$20.00. The building he was working in had collapsed. Four men died.

Vicky's brother Eamon left school soon afterwards but he hopped from job to job, unable to settle down to any of them. The longest he stayed anywhere was in Lovell's Sweet Factory and that was only because of Jane Kennedy. Vicky had never known anyone fall in love so fast and so hard. Eamon was besotted.

Then one day Eamon was gone as well. The rumour was he found Jane and her boss taking advantage of the mistletoe at the Christmas party.

Vicky's accident with the bicycle was the disappointment that caused the deepest hurt. She was just a child yet she was held responsible. The man who rode into her even insisted she paid for his torn trousers. Luckily she didn't lose

the sight in her left eye, but the scar from her forehead to her cheek prevented her eye from opening properly. It gave her face a lopsided focus.

The only one who showed any interest in her was Joe McCarthy, a local lad with a wild streak. Short and wiry, he had a reputation for being a bit slippery. And vicious too, when the drink took him. Better hang onto that one, her mother said. You'll be lucky to find anyone else with your looks. Marry him before he changes his mind. He's got a good job in that new factory. He'll look after you.

It wasn't long before Vicky saw the real Joe McCarthy. The day they got married and moved into their tiny rented cottage he went for a drink and didn't come home for three days. And only then because he ran out of money. When he discovered there was no food in the house, no supper on the table, he beat her so badly she couldn't go outside for a week.

She never told her mother, or anyone else. She felt too ashamed. Anyway, her mother wasn't a strong woman. She wouldn't have supported her. She shied away from confrontation. Vicky stayed away from her if there was any visible bruising. And that was when she learnt to fold the disappointments into little squares and stow them away in her secret place.

She picked up another sod of turf and went to put it in the range but she dropped it back into the bucket instead. Joe shouldn't be long now. She glanced up at the clock on the mantelpiece. Ten minutes past two. He was later than normal, but somehow that didn't surprise her. Not tonight. And the reason sat like a lump in her stomach. She tried to cut away from it but the children's clothes hanging on the washing line was a bitter reminder. It was already September. They were due back at school and they desperately needed new shoes. New clothes would have been nice, but right now she'd settle for the shoes.

Yet the day had started so well. Mel Cahill called in with some wonderful news. Joe's factory knitted jumpers for the Army, and because they'd reached their quota everyone was getting a bonus in this week's pay packet. Vicky said a prayer of thanks to the Sacred Heart.

But that was as far as it went. When she mentioned it to Joe he nearly took her head off. He threw her housekeeping money across the floor and it was only the terrified faces of the children looking up at him that stopped him giving Vicky another beating. He grabbed his coat and stormed out.

Vicky's weary bones groaned as she stood up now, moved the teapot onto the back plate and spooned some tea into it. She needed to focus on something different, something good. But that was hard. Here she was, twenty-six years old and looking sixty, trapped in a tiny terrace house with five children. The windows were cracked and the roof leaked into pots on the floor. The paint peeled off the mouldy walls. No, it wasn't easy to find something good to focus on.

For a short time at the beginning of the year, things did look a little brighter. Eamon came home after all those years working in Dublin. He turned up with a son and a strange girl called Cassidy. No one was quite sure what their relationship was. All they knew was Eamon's wife had died and he was injured in an accident. There was such a mix of emotions, relief that he was safe, the excitement that he was home again, and sadness that they'd never met his wife Katie.

But Eamon only ever came to Vicky's house once, and that was a disappointment too. She saw the look in his eyes when he stepped through the door. He tried to disguise it but it was too late. She knew what he was thinking. She was dressed in rags, the house was stinking. The children just stood there like zombies, dirty faces and running noses, staring up at him as if...

Tears smarted her eyes as a wave of hopelessness swept over her again. Yes, this was what her life had become, one long, bleak, dreary struggle.

The crunch of gravel outside in the lane made her jump. That would be Joe. Her heart fluttered. What kind of mood was he in? If he'd had a good night he would be on her immediately like a frustrated rabbit. She hated that, but it was the better of two evils. The drink made him think he was the world's greatest lover but it also meant he couldn't rise to the occasion. He'd grunt and groan then fall asleep. More often than not Vicky would crawl out from under him, slip off to bed and leave him snoring on the sofa.

But if he'd had a bad night, if his money had run out or if someone said the wrong thing to him, he'd be spitting venom. Like all bullies, he wasn't going to challenge the person who upset him. No, he was going to take it out on someone who couldn't fight back.

The knock on the door startled her. Her heart went from a flutter to a thump. Joe had never knocked on that door in his life. She checked the clock again. It was two fifteen.

Another knock, louder, more urgent. She picked up the poker and crossed to the window but she couldn't see anyone through the cracked glass. The person must be in the shadows. 'Who's there?' Her voice was a high croak.

'Vicky, tis me. Eamon.'

'Eamon?' she said to herself. She checked the clock again.

'Vicky, will you open the door!'

Her heart was pounding as she flicked the latch and pulled the door inwards. A shaft of light from the solitary bulb fell across Eamon's face. He didn't have to say a word. His expression told her that whatever disappointments she had before, this was going to be the biggest one of all.

Chapter 10

'There's tea in the pot, Liam,' Foley's mother pointed to the range with her cigarette. 'Will I pour you some?'

'No. I'm grand, Kathleen.' Liam Edge sat on the arm of the chair his wife was slumped in. 'I already had some in the canteen after I spoke to the Super.'

Vicky was sitting in the other armchair, staring absently at the floor. Foley had offered his bed to the children last night but they didn't want to leave their mother. Eamon Junior, the youngest, sat on her lap and the oldest, Joe Junior, perched on the arm of her chair. Joe Junior had the same pinched features and small grey eyes as his father. Foley felt dreadfully sorry for him, but there was no way he could warm to the lad. He couldn't get past the way he looked.

The other three children were at the table with Cassidy. She'd come back to the house with Edge this morning, moving as quietly as his shadow. Now she'd flattened out a paper bag and was drawing on it with a pencil. She seemed genuinely at ease with the children.

'Eamon, will I pour you another cup?' Foley's mother waggled the cigarette at him.

'Yes.' Foley stretched to tease the kinks out of his weary bones. 'I'll have a slice of toast too if there's any bread.'

'I'll get it for you.' Cassidy shoved her chair back and jumped up.

For God's sake, Foley groaned to himself. What the hell was Edge thinking, bringing her here at a time like this?

'You will not.' Foley's mother jumped up too, dashed to the dresser and grabbed the loaf of bread. 'I'll do it.'

Cassidy shrugged and sat back down, giving Foley a cursory nod. Foley had to look away. His head was throbbing from lack of sleep. Every time he closed his eyes the same images filled his head—Joe being shot, Maranus bearing down on him, Vicky and her children traumatised as he gathered them up and took them to his mother's house.

Liam Edge passed the mug of tea to Foley. 'Are you all right there, Eamon?'

'Wonderful.' Foley took the mug. 'You know I'm supposed to be cycling out to Edenburn to see Mickey today?'

'I do.' Edge looked at the clock on the wall. 'And I'm sorry. I wouldn't ask you to come in to work today, but we're desperately short of people. As you know most of the guards have been called away to the riots in Limerick. But I'm sure Mickey won't mind if you go tomorrow instead.'

'He'll be expecting me today. If I don't turn up he'll get confused.' Foley sipped the tea and pulled a face. 'There's no sugar in this.'

'There's no sugar in the house,' his mother said. She had a slice of bread stuck on a fork and was holding it against the open grate of the range. 'So what are they rioting about in Limerick?'

'Ah, the same auld thing.' Edge sat back down on the arm of the chair. 'Rationing, too many refugees, the lack of food, the lack of jobs. People want someone to blame so they're blaming the refugees and the tinkers. And the Jews, of course. The Church is saying the Jews shouldn't be allowed in a Catholic country and wants them sent home even if it means they'll be killed. So the Jews are keeping their heads down while the tinkers and the refugees are fighting back. So there's only a handful of guards left here in town. And that's why the Super wanted to see me this morning. He's put me in charge of the case. Me and whoever I can get to help me. Like Eamon and Alex.'

When his mother held out the fork Foley took the slice of toast and dropped it onto a plate. Cassidy jumped up and grabbed it. 'I'll butter it for you.'

'Go easy with that butter,' Kathleen yelled. 'Tis all we have.'

Cassidy ignored her. She spread the butter thickly and beamed as she handed it to Foley.

'The thing is, Eamon,' Edge uncoiled himself from the chair and stretched to his full height. 'The longer we take to investigate Joe's shooting the more time the killer will have to concoct an alibi. Then we'll lose control of the situation.'

'I know, I know.' Foley bit into the toast. 'So we'll look for Maranus first?'

'Maranus?' Edge shook his head. 'No. We'll start with the people who were in Delaney's last night and take it from there.'

'But what about Maranus?'

'Eamon, there are procedures for investigating a murder and for the moment we'll stick to them. So, when you've finished your breakfast, we'll get started.'

Edge swallowed the last of his tea and Cassidy sprang off the chair and took the mug from him. He watched her put it in the sink as he walked to the front door.

Cassidy. What was *her* role in all of this? Foley wondered if he'd missed something during their scramble to get away from Maranus that night back in January, and he couldn't get it out of his head.

Chapter 11

Dublin. January 1941

Foley struggled to keep still. Sitting on the hard bench with his arm around Mickey as the guard's van rocked and rolled through the black windy night was fiercely uncomfortable. Cassidy had dropped down next to him before she switched off the flashlight, and in the darkness of the wagon, her voice was high and excited like a little girl on a school trip. 'How long will it take for us to get to Dublin, do you think?'

'I don't know.' The train rocked even more as it gathered speed and Foley winced when Mickey knocked against his wound. 'But if I knew where we were in the first place I might take a guess.'

'Well don't ask me.'

'But you worked there. How could you not know?'

'I didn't, though.' Her tone was edgy, defensive. 'They sent me from the orphanage. A car took me there so I had no idea where I was going.'

'Oh? I'm sorry. I didn't know you were an orphan.'

'How would you? It isn't stamped on my feckin' head.'

Foley cringed at the image. 'So they didn't tell you where they were sending you?'

'No.' Again the defensive tone. 'You have to go where you're sent. I was sent there. I'm supposed to be there until I'm eighteen. Then I'll be out on my own.'

The whistle gave a sharp burst and they both jumped. Everything was black inside the wagon, nothing coming in through the little windows.

'So they sent you to work for the lovely Sister Michael?' Foley said.

'That cow.' Venom clung to her words. 'Sister of Mercy, my eye. She's pure evil, that one. They all are. They do terrible things to us and nobody cares because we're just orphans. I told you she went raving mad last month and battered two girls to death. Killed them stone dead because she caught them talking to a guest. She beat one girl with a poker, kept hitting her even when she fell on the floor. The other girl tried to stop her so she belted her with a frying pan. We just stood there

terrified. Then the gardener came with a wheelbarrow and took them away. He buried them in the field.'

Foley scratched his head. 'Who told you all that?'

'Nobody told me all that.' Cassidy rustled as she moved about on the seat. 'I was right there. I saw it with my own eyes.'

'How could you, though? You told me you've only been working there for a week?'

'I did not.'

'You did. The first time I spoke to you. You said it was your first week and you didn't want to lose your job. So make up your mind, woman. How long have you been working there?'

'I'm not telling you,' she moaned. 'If you're not going to believe what I say I'm not talking to you anymore.'

Foley grunted and closed his eyes. The adrenalin was still coursing through him and he knew he wasn't going to get any sleep. Mickey sighed and Foley stroked his hair.

'Where's his mother?' Cassidy decided she was talking after all.

'Sush.'

Cassidy clicked her tongue and Foley could feel the annoyance radiating off her. This uneasy feeling he had about her was disturbing him even more now. Why couldn't she even remember things she'd told him a short time ago? She was like a bad actor who hadn't learnt her lines.

Is that what she was doing, playing a part in a hastily written plot? Had Maranus arranged the escape hoping Raymond would go straight to where he'd hidden the ledger? God, it was so simple. Except there were bits that didn't make any sense. Surely Cassidy would have been briefed about Raymond. He was a single man. He had no children. Yet she didn't question Foley about Mickey.

Yes, there was something very odd about Cassidy. But was she really on a mission for Maranus? Or was she just a flaky young woman who wrapped herself in fantasies as a shield against life? Maybe she was just plain devious, as sly as a fox with an agenda all of her own.

Foley wondered what he was going to do when they reached Dublin. He had no money. And if Maranus had arranged the escape then someone would be waiting when they got there. Perhaps they should jump off earlier if the train stopped for water again. And they could get rid of Cassidy at the same time. Sneak off without telling her?

'I was only asking because my brother was his age when our Ma died.' Cassidy's voice was soft now, like a child's.

Foley groaned again. 'I thought you were an orphan?'

'I am an orphan. I'm an orphan because my parents are dead. Because I have a brother doesn't mean I'm not an orphan. Do you even know what an orphan is?'

'All right.' Foley snapped. 'I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking straight. So where's your brother now?'

'I don't know.' Again the little girl voice. 'When my Da was killed by a bull my Ma went insane. She heard all the screaming and when she saw the cut of him she ran off across the fields. No one ever saw her again. The guards think she fell

down a bog-hole. So me and Gabriel were taken in by different relatives and I haven't seen him since.'

The exasperated sigh Foley gave sounded like a snigger and he sensed her sit up. 'What?' It was a shrill sound.

'Nothing,' Foley mumbled. 'Just go to sleep.'

'I don't want to go to sleep. Tell me what's so funny.'

'Nothing's funny. I'm just tired, all right?' The rhythm of the wheels on the tracks got more hypnotic as the train reached top speed but it didn't help the frantic turmoil in Foley's mind. He rested his head back against the wall and stared into the darkness.

'Maybe they just didn't want me.' Cassidy's voice rose above the noise, whining and abrasive. 'Maybe it wasn't that they didn't like me. Maybe they just wanted the boy because he could work on the farm. Maybe they sent me away because they thought a girl wouldn't be any good working with the animals and things. Maybe...'

'Go to sleep!'

'God! All right.' There was a lot of shuffling and she sounded like she was lying down. 'So are you some sort of robber?'

'For feck sake.' Foley squeezed his eyes shut. 'What do you mean am I some sort of robber?'

'They said you stole a lot of money.'

'Who said that?'

'I don't know. Mr Maranus, I think. I couldn't see them. I could hear them because the door was open but I don't know who was in the room. Anyway, they were annoyed because someone got shot. And you didn't have the stuff on you.'

'What stuff?'

'I don't know. Whatever you were supposed to have robbed.'

'That is such a load of crap.'

'Are you, though?' She seemed excited by the idea. 'Is that why we were warned not to speak to you?'

Pins and needles forced Foley to change position. He needed to stand up. Mickey moaned when Foley lifted his head, slid sideways from under him then lay his head back down on the bench. Through the little window, Foley could see a string of lights in the distance. Another set of tracks was running parallel to theirs now and more appeared to be coming in at different angles. It looked like a railway junction. The wheels clattered loudly as they went over the joins and suddenly they were approaching a long platform with some huge sheds scattered all over it. Farm machinery and assorted boxes were spread out along it. And the train was slowing down.

'We're stopping.' Foley slapped Cassidy on the leg and lifted Mickey by the arm. 'Get ready. We might have to get off here.'

He eased the door open and stepped out onto the small platform, pulling his collar up against the rain. There was a lot of clattering as the train shuddered to a halt. Then silence. After a few minutes, the driver and the guard got off and strolled across to the office.

The station was small, not like Foley was expecting. Surely a city station would be a lot bigger than this. With more activity too. Then he saw the sign. 'Thurles? Isn't that in Tipperary?' he said to Cassidy. 'Is Thurles in Tipperary?'

Cassidy pulled a face. 'I don't know. I never heard of it.'

'Well, it's either Tipperary or Limerick.' Foley picked up the bag of food and took Mickey's arm. 'Either way, it's better than I could have hoped. We were going in the opposite direction to Dublin. Can you believe it? But this looks like the end of the line. We'll be spotted if we stay here so we have to get off now.'

A sharp breeze blew the drizzle in sheets across the platform as they scurried over to the cover of the big sheds. They stopped for a few minutes to make sure no one was coming after them. Then they followed a dirt track at the side of the sheds leading to a narrow lane that seemed to be heading towards the town. They came out at the back of a pub near the main street.

Cassidy shone the flashlight up at a signpost. 'Limerick that way, Kilkenny that way, and Cashel that way.' They stood looking at it for a moment then Cassidy shivered. 'So which way do we go?'

'I was good at geography in school,' Foley answered. 'But that was a long time ago. I can't remember much about it now. But I do know where Limerick is so we'll go that way.'

'Why do you want to go to Limerick?' Cassidy skipped to get in step with him. She seemed relaxed about where they were. He was expecting her to be annoyed they weren't in Dublin. 'Is that where you're from? Do you know people in Limerick?'

'No, no. It's just that...' Foley paused. Something still nagged him.

Cassidy looked up. 'It's just what?'

'It's where me and Mickey are going. But you can go where you like.'

'Oh, no.' Cassidy grabbed his sleeve. 'Not so fast. You owe me a hundred pounds. I'm going where you're going till I get my hundred pounds.'

Chapter 12

Tralee September 1941

As they picked their way through the line of donkeys and carts delivering milk to the Lee Strand Dairy at the end of Creamery Lane, Cassidy walked close to the sergeant, mimicking his every move. Foley was increasingly irritated by her, the way she walked, the way she wouldn't move from Edge's side, the way she continually glanced up at him to assure herself he was paying attention to her. Foley had so many questions he wanted to ask Edge and he felt restricted by her being there. He wanted to know how they were going to find Maranus. Where would they even start looking? Foley had no experience of this kind of stuff, but he thought Edge would start with the obvious suspect. Yet Edge seemed unconcerned about Maranus - as if he didn't believe Foley's story.

'Liam.' Foley decided to skip around it. 'You know I'll have to find a job now?'

Edge glanced back at him. 'You have a job.'

'Yeah, two nights a week in The Grand Hotel. And I'm lucky to get the full ten hours some weeks. Monday nights are so quiet they often send me home early.'

'Well, there are loads of people who'd be glad of even that. You've seen them yourself, Eamon. Queuing outside the factories. You've been there when a ship comes into the basin, hundreds of men after a hand full of jobs.'

'It isn't just for me, though. With Vicky and the children in the house things are going to be a lot tighter now.'

'She has her own house, hasn't she?' Cassidy leant into the sergeant.

'No, she hasn't!' Foley wanted to say shut your stupid mouth but he stopped himself and turned back to Edge. 'Anyway, I need to find a full-time job.'

Cassidy pointed at his uniform. 'Don't you get two shillings a day for wearing that?'

'And how many days do I get to wear it?' Foley's voice dripped agitation. 'A couple of days a week, maybe. It isn't enough.'

'Well now all the guards have been called away you'll be wearing it a lot more. So look on the bright side.'

'For God's sake. What feckin' bright side? Vicky's husband is after being murdered. What bright side are you talking about?'

'Cut it out.' Edge took his notebook from his top pocket as he pushed between them, flipped it open then stopped as he scrolled through it. 'Right, c'mon.' He flicked the notebook shut and slid it back in his pocket.

'Where are we going?' Foley glared at Cassidy but she was no longer paying attention to him.

'To the factory where Joe worked. We'll have a look around, talk to a few people.' Edge strode off without waiting for a response.

'So what are you thinking?' Foley caught up with him. 'Joe might have upset someone at work?'

'You never know. Like I told you before, if you ask the right questions you'd be surprised how many skeletons fall out of cupboards. Sometimes there are bones all over the floor.'

'Jasus, they'd have to be really upset to shoot him, though.'

'They certainly would.' Edge coughed into his hand. 'Anyway, you probably won't know this but last year a young woman who worked at that factory was also murdered.'

'What?' Cassidy gasped. 'My God, what happened?'

'Well, it was rather messy.' Edge looked up at the sky as he recalled the details. 'Rebecca Quille and her husband went out for the evening and when they got home there was an intruder in the house. They were both beaten unconscious. The husband was tied up and Rebecca was raped and strangled.'

'God, that's awful.' Cassidy groaned in disbelief. 'Who did it? Did they get him?'

Edge gave an unusually big sigh as he wrestled with the answer. 'Well, officially they did, yes.'

'Officially? What does that mean?'

'Well, around that time there was a spate of attacks on young women all over the town. A masked man walked into their house in broad daylight and raped them. But in all those cases the attacker never used any violence towards them.'

‘What? He never used violence?’ Cassidy’s voice was shrill. ‘What exactly would you call rape if it isn’t violence? I can’t believe you think rape isn’t violence. Rape is...’

‘I’m sorry,’ Edge held his hand up. ‘You’re right. Of course rape is violent. What I meant was, they were never hit or beaten up. Some victims said he was very gentle with them. Anyway, the pressure on the Gardaí to catch him was fierce. The newspapers were squawking. The Super was squawking even louder.’ Edge gave his eye a rub with his finger. ‘Then Rebecca Quille was murdered and all hell broke loose. They even sent some lads down from Dublin to help us out.’

‘So how did they catch him?’

‘Well, one morning a young man called Patsy Quilter was seen sneaking into a house up in Ballard. It had all the hallmarks of our rapist so he was dragged out by the neighbours and hustled down towards the barracks. Needless to say, word spread faster than a fart in a storm and by the time they reached the Dominican Church a fair crowd had gathered and they wanted to lynch him from the nearest lamp post. Well, the poor lad was so frightened he admitted to all the rapes. But he categorically denied having anything to do with Rebecca Quille. He swore on his mother’s life. He said he had witnesses to prove he was somewhere else on the night she was killed. Anyway, by the time we got there, things were out of control and we had to force our way through the mob to get to him.’ He made the motion of swinging a baton. ‘Unfortunately, we were so engrossed in controlling the crowd we lost sight of Patsy and he bolted. He was off like a rabbit with a greyhound on his arse. He tore down Bridge Street and ran slap bang into a Guinness lorry.’

‘Ouch. Was he killed?’ Cassidy pulled a face.

‘Well, the crowd got to him before the guards did. But yes, officially the lorry killed him. Officially he died of his injuries. So you can imagine the jubilation. The papers were full of it. Poetic justice. The Super was walking on air, taking all the credit. And the case was closed.’

‘But?’ Foley could see the doubt in his eyes.

‘There were just too many discrepancies. As I said, all the other rapes weren’t...’ He glanced at Cassidy. ‘Well, the attack on Rebecca Quille was completely different from the others. Patsy Quilter stalked his victims, followed them home and made sure he wasn’t disturbed. And they were all in daylight. But Rebecca’s case was—well, it was so cold and brutal. Someone broke into their home and when he was disturbed he launched a sickening and prolonged attack. Then he raped and strangled his victim. I just feel it wasn’t...’

A short, heavysset woman wearing a nurse’s uniform stepped out of a doorway in front of them. ‘There you are.’ Her arms wrapped around her chest. ‘And about time too. I reported this to the barracks over an hour ago!’

‘You reported *what* to the barracks over an hour ago?’ Edge smiled politely.

The woman puffed. ‘Are you telling me you don’t know? I went all the way down there to tell them...’

‘Tell them *what*?’ the sergeant repeated. The woman puffed again and looked at the stripes on Edge’s uniform.

Edge anticipated the next question. ‘I’m Sergeant Edge. This is Eamon Foley. He’s Local Security. Alex Cassidy is Local Security too. So now, what can we do for you?’

‘I’m Mary Carmady. Sister Mary Carmady. I’m a nurse over at St Catherine’s. I live upstairs here in flat number six. I called you because there’s a baby crying in flat number five.’

Edge blinked at her a couple of times. ‘You called us because there’s a baby crying?’

‘The landlord has a very strict policy—no children or pets. Which is why I was surprised to hear one crying like that. I said all this to the fella down at the barracks.’

She groaned at the blank looks she was still getting. ‘Look, I was away all week visiting my sister in Carlow and I got back late last night. And the first thing I heard when I was climbing up the stairs was this baby crying.’ Sister Carmady waddled back into the house and beckoned for Edge to follow. ‘Now I don’t have any problem with crying babies.’ She began to climb the stairs. ‘I specialise in childcare over in the hospital. I’m in charge of the paediatric ward. But this baby sounded like it was in distress.’

The long narrow hallway had several doors down one side and a solitary light bulb on a frayed bit of flex. The shiny brown walls were pockmarked and the dark olive lino had lumps out of it. Someone was cooking cabbage. Foley winced. It reminded him of when his own family lived in a place like this. He followed the others up the stairs.

‘As I said, it was late when I came home. But I thought I should see if I could be of any help.’ Sister Carmady was a short lady and very much overweight. She panted loudly as she took the steps one at a time, looking back to make sure they were following her. ‘I knocked on the door but I didn’t get an answer. So I tried the flat on the other side of mine. I got no answer there either, but they usually go out on Friday and don’t come back till the small hours. The old fella in the flat on the end is as deaf as a post so he probably wasn’t even aware of the noise so I didn’t bother knocking there.’

As they turned the corner Nurse Carmady put up her hand. ‘There, you can hear for yourselves how distressed the poor thing sounds.’

Edge took his cap off and scratched his head. ‘Are you saying it’s been crying like this all night?’

Nurse Carmady turned and glared at him. ‘Are you listening to me at all? Isn’t that why I went down to the barracks to report it? Why do you think I went down to the barracks to report it? If the poor thing had shut up no one would have said anything. So, yes! It has been crying all night. And all the morning, too.’

‘Forgive me, but are you saying the baby was crying all night and nobody did anything about it?’

‘Jasus!’ Nurse Carmady went purple and she looked like she was going to choke. She wanted to shout at Edge but she couldn’t do that and breathe at the same time. ‘Am I the only one living here? I told you, I knocked on the other doors but no one was home. Anyway, I was exhausted so I went to bed and fell asleep. When I woke up the baby was still crying so I banged on the door again. And I still got no answer. And that is why, Sergeant Edge, I walked down to the barracks to report it. So that someone in authority would come and deal with it!’ Her eyes were like two angry grey pebbles about to pop out of her head.

‘Right you are.’ Edge squeezed past her and took the rest of the stairs two at a time. As Foley went to follow him Cassidy took his hand. He glanced back at her and she dropped it immediately.

‘Number five.’ Nurse Carmady reminded them. Edge put his ear against the door. The crying was pitiful. He gave the handle a shake, scattering dust from the frame above. ‘Open up, please. Tis the Gardaí.’

The crying didn’t waiver. No other sound came from the room. Edge hit the door again. ‘Gardaí. Open up now or I’ll have to force it open.’

Again no response. The baby still howled. Edge motioned for everyone to stand back then threw himself against the door. The cheap lock shattered and the door slammed open. And the crying stopped.

The force of the charge carried Edge into the middle of the room. Foley followed and Cassidy was close behind. They all stopped dead. The only sound was Nurse Carmady panting for breath as she lumbered in behind them. ‘What’s going on?’ she gasped.

The room was empty. The single bed under the window had an old threadbare mattress on it. A rickety chair stood next to it. The door on the small wardrobe hung open on one hinge. It was bare except for a solitary coat hanger. An opening led to a smaller room with a cracked porcelain sink in one corner and a grubby electric hotplate on a small table. There were no pots or pans. No cups. No one lived here.

‘Are you sure we’re in the right room?’ Cassidy asked in a loud whisper.

‘For God’s sake,’ Nurse Carmady snapped. ‘Didn’t you hear it yourself as you came up the stairs? Weren’t you outside the door yourself, listening to it?’

Edge tried to open the window but it was stuck down with old paint and dirt. He went back into the small room and tapped on the wall. ‘What’s on the other side of this?’

‘Nothing,’ Nurse Carmady told him. ‘That’s the gable end. This is the last room on this floor.’

‘Alex, go down to the floor below and ask if they know anything.’

Cassidy nodded and skipped down the stairs. Foley went out to the landing and looked up at a small hatch in the ceiling. ‘Is that an attic?’

Edge followed him out. ‘See if you can reach it by standing on this,’ He patted the bannister rail. ‘I’ll hold your legs.’

Foley looked at Edge, up at the trap door and back at Edge again. ‘Really? You want me to climb up there?’

The nurse went back into the room and brought out a chair. ‘Here, this might help.’

‘Thank you!’ Foley glared at her. Edge held onto his arm and helped him get his foot on the bannister. With the nurse and Edge holding onto a leg each, he straightened up slowly before grabbing the hatch. It opened easily and a shower of dust cascaded down on him. He shook it off and poked his head through the opening. ‘It’s pitch black in here,’ he shouted. ‘I can’t see a thing.’

‘Hold on,’ Nurse Carmady yelled. ‘I have a flashlight in my room.’ She let go of his leg. Foley wobbled and clung to the frame of the hatch. She scurried off and came back just as Cassidy bounced back up the stairs.

‘The auld fella in the flat below says thank you for stopping that infernal crying. He says he hasn’t had a decent night’s sleep since it started squawking.’ She hesitated and looked up at Foley balancing on the bannister rail. ‘Anyway, the woman next door says she’s already written to the landlord about it. She posted it this morning.’

Nurse Carmady passed the flashlight up to Foley and he flicked it on, put both his arms through the opening and squeezed his head in. As he swept the beam of light across the curtain of cobwebs it was obvious nothing had been disturbed there for a long time. Probably since the place was built. He extracted his head, then his arms, and he passed the flashlight down before sliding the hatch back into place. As he jumped off the rail Cassidy’s hand clasped his and he was surprised how firm her grip was. He let go and she gave a small sigh as she moved out of his way.

They all stood looking at the empty room. Then Edge walked over and pulled the door closed.

‘So what are you going to do now?’ Nurse Carmady’s chest was fluffed up in a challenge. Edge walked past her and started back down the stairs.

‘Excuse me!’ the nurse barked after him.

Edge hesitated then turned around, and the nurse crossed her arms defensively. ‘I asked you what you’re going to do now.’

‘What about?’ Edge’s face had turned a pasty grey and his eyes looked unnaturally red.

‘What about?’ The nurse rolled her eyes. ‘About the baby. About that baby that’s been crying all day and all night for the last few days, that’s what about. Isn’t that why you came here, to investigate the crying baby?’

‘What crying baby?’

‘You know very well what I’m talking about!’ Nurse Carmady blustered. ‘Don’t pretend you don’t know what I’m talking about. You heard it. All of you heard it.’

Edge rubbed his eyes with his fingers as he turned away. ‘Did we?’

Chapter 13

The Kingdom Knitting Factory was tucked away behind a high fence. The only way in was through a gate at the end of an approach road. The muffled thud of machinery filtered out through the large opaque windows and smoke puffed from a tall chimney at the back.

Foley and Cassidy only managed to catch up with Sergeant Edge when he stopped at the gate. He’d walked away with long urgent strides as if he couldn’t get away from Sister Carmady and the crying baby fast enough. Several times Foley wanted to ask what exactly happened back at that flat but he couldn’t find the right words. And Cassidy looked so disturbed he was afraid she’d burst into tears if he spoke about it.

But they all heard a crying baby. There was no denying that. The whole house heard it. So where was it? And why did it suddenly stop crying?

An elderly watchman stepped out of a small hut and his face lit up when he saw Edge. 'Good morning, Sergeant,' he beamed. 'And how're you this fine day?'

'I'm grand, Sean. And yourself?'

'I'm grand too.' As he pulled the gate open he glanced at Foley and then at Cassidy. 'So what can I do for you today?'

Edge gave him a warm smile. 'I was wondering if we could have a word with Mr Griffin. If he's not too busy.'

'Right you are. I'll ring his office.' He shuffled into the cabin and picked up the phone. A few moments later he came back out. 'He'll see you straight away. You know where to go. Straight across the yard, through the front door and up the stairs.'

Michael Griffin stood up as they entered the surprisingly small office which looked down over the factory floor.

'Good morning, Mr Griffin.' Edge took off his cap. 'Thank you for seeing us.'

'Not at all, Sergeant. Good to see you again. I just hope I can be of assistance.'

'This is Alex Cassidy. And this Eamon Foley.'

'Eamon,' Griffin beamed as he held out his hand. 'And how're you after all these years?'

Foley frowned and Griffin chuckled. 'You don't remember me, do you? I suppose that's understandable.' He turned to Edge. 'Back in those days Eamon only had eyes for the beautiful Jane Kennedy. Everything else happened outside his field of vision. So he wouldn't have noticed a poor barman behind the counter of Crabtree's pub.'

'Mickey Griffin.' Foley grasped the hand as it all came back to him. 'Of course. Good God. That was a long time ago.'

'It certainly was.' Griffin nodded to the chairs. 'But won't you sit down? Can I get you a drink? Tea?'

'No, no,' Edge said quickly. 'We won't keep you from your work. We only came by to make sure you knew about Joe McCarthy.'

'Oh, right,' Griffin sat on the edge of his desk. 'Yes, I heard about it when I came in this morning. I can't believe it's happening to us again.' He looked up at Foley. 'I don't know if you heard about it, Eamon, but last year one of our staff was murdered. A girl called...'

'I know. Liam told us on the way over. What a dreadful business. One murder is bad enough, but two?'

'It certainly is.' Griffin turned back to Edge. 'But what happened to Joe? Only there are so many versions going around.'

'Is there?' Edge scratched his chin.

'Chinese whispers, Sergeant. Something like this spreads faster than smoke in a storm. And it takes on a life of its own along the way. But you'll know all about stuff like that, I'm sure.'

'So what version did you hear?' Foley asked.

'That he was stabbed in Delaney's pub, that he was hit with a bottle on his way home. Someone who was there said he'd been shot. The only thing we know for sure is he's dead.'

'He is indeed,' Edge agreed. 'Which is why we're hoping you might be of help.'

'Me? Of course—if I can.'

‘Well, the obvious question is—did he have any enemies here? Anyone with a grudge?’

‘God, it would have to be a serious grudge to kill him over.’ Griffin sucked on his teeth. ‘But to answer your question, no. I can’t think of anyone who’d want to kill him. Not that I’d know anyway, you understand. The fact is I have over four hundred people working here so it would be hard to keep tabs on them all.’

‘So how long have you worked here, Michael?’ Foley asked.

‘Since the very beginning.’ Griffin nodded at a picture on the wall. ‘I was recruited by Kieran Prenderman. You remember Kieran Prenderman? He used to come into Crabtree’s flashing his money around. Anyway, he started this company and he needed people to man the machines. I was the first person he took on.’

‘And now you’re the boss?’ Foley was impressed. ‘You did well for yourself.’

‘Well, to tell you the truth, Eamon, I surprised myself.’ Griffin gave a big grin. ‘I never thought I’d find machines so easy to understand. Before I knew it I was the supervisor, then foreman. Then one day the old boss crumbled under the pressure and Kieran persuaded me to have a go. He gave me tremendous support.’

He picked up a photo from the desk. ‘See that? The front page of The Kerryman the day we got the Army contract five years ago. There’s me.’ He tapped at a figure in the crowd. ‘And there’s Joe.’

He picked up another photo of three men standing by a shiny new car. ‘This is me with Kieran and Joe. We were trying to get Kieran’s car to start when a reporter came around the corner. Joe knew a bit about cars but he was reluctant to lift the hood. He was worried he’d get oil on his best suit.’

Cassidy took a closer look at it. ‘You all look very smart.’

‘And this one was taken just last week.’ He picked up a larger photo and rubbed it with his sleeve. ‘We’d renewed our contract with the Army. The same reporter turned up and thought it would be great to have us re-enact the original scene. So there we are, standing in front of a car again. The two photos were in last Friday’s Kerryman, a sort of now and then thing. And look at how we’ve all changed.’

He touched Joe’s face. ‘The thing is, Joe was not an easy man to get along with. Don’t get me wrong, he was a tremendous worker. He was never late, he never took a day off. He knew his job inside out, which is why he survived for so long.’

They waited for him to elaborate and he shrugged. ‘Look, Joe had an eye for the girls. And sometimes he could be a bit obnoxious, crude even, when he tried to force his attention on them. Especially if they were new and vulnerable.’

He looked at Edge for acknowledgement. Edge nodded. ‘A few complaints did filter down to us. But Joe always maintained it was just horseplay. A misunderstanding. And that was as far as it ever went.’

‘No one followed them up?’ Foley could picture Joe’s smarmy grin as he preened himself and leered at the young girls.

Griffin put the photo back. ‘To be honest, Eamon, I think he had more conquests than complaints.’

‘What?’ Cassidy’s head snapped up.

‘It’s a sad fact, Miss Cassidy. But we live in strange times. Most of the women here are struggling to make ends meet. They’re hungry, and not just for food. Their men are away for days, sometimes weeks, working at whatever jobs they can get. Women need comfort too. Physical as well as emotional.’

'That's disgusting,' Cassidy puffed.

'Probably,' Griffin agreed. 'But it's for the Church to moralize. I'm afraid I'm only concerned with their behaviour while they're at work.'

Cassidy turned away and studied the pictures on the wall. 'Is Rebecca in any of these?'

'Yes, that's her,' Griffin pointed to a smiling girl with short blond hair.

'She's very pretty,' Cassidy took a closer look. 'What did she do here?'

'She managed the office,' Griffin took the picture down and turned it to the light. 'We all loved her. We were devastated when... Her poor husband never really got over it, you know.' He put the photo back and turned to Edge. 'Do you remember the day he had the fight with Joe?'

'I do indeed,' Edge nodded.

'Rebecca's husband had a fight with Joe?' Foley looked from Griffin to Edge. 'What was that about?'

'Oh, the usual,' Griffin rolled his eyes. 'Joe took a shine to Rebecca. He started annoying her, asking her out, that sort of thing. Anyway, she told her husband and he came to pick her up after work the next day. Joe made some sordid comment and got a smack on the nose for his trouble.'

'How long ago was that?'

'About eighteen months, I'd say. Maybe more.'

'Anything more recent?'

'Strangely, no,' Griffin reflected. 'Come to think of it, Joe seemed to quieten down after that. We've not had a complaint in ages. Who knows, maybe he just grew out of it. Still, it doesn't matter now, does it?'

'No, it certainly doesn't,' Edge put his cap back on and straightened it. 'Anyway, thank you for your time, Mr Griffin.'

Griffin shook his hand. 'Remember, if there's anything I can do, please don't hesitate to call me.'

'Well, actually, there might be,' Foley said quickly, 'I was wondering if you have any vacancies at the moment. Since Vicky and the children moved in with us I'm in desperate need of a full-time job.'

'Vicky?'

'Joe's wife. She's my sister, remember?'

'What?' Griffin looked amazed. 'Good God, Eamon, I had no idea. I knew you had sisters, but I could fall over them in the street and I wouldn't know them. I'm so sorry.'

'Don't be,' Foley waved it away. 'But you can understand why I desperately need a job.'

'I do. And I wish I could help you. But right now I have about fifty people waiting. Joe held a key position here so naturally, his deputy fills his shoes. Then everyone moves up a step and their spot is filled by the person coming up behind. I've got people waiting for years just to get in the door.'

'I understand,' Foley held out his hand. 'Thanks, anyway.'

'Not at all,' Griffin shook it. 'But what about Jane? Have you seen her since you've been back?'

'Jane?' Foley glanced at Edge and he knew his face went red. 'No. No, I haven't.'

'The reason I ask is that I see her at Mass most Sundays.' Griffin sat back on the edge of the desk. 'She was telling me how they're struggling where she works. I'd try there. You never know.'

'Where does she work?'

'Oh, I thought you'd ... she works for Jerome Quille. Rebecca's husband. You know, the girl who was... who we were just talking about? He has a small business over in Courthouse Lane. They make cardboard boxes.'

Chapter 14

The Quille Box Company was a small shabby unit down an alleyway off Castle Street, tucked between a motorcycle repair shop and a tailor. A brick held the battered green door open and a faded arrow pointed to reception.

Liam Edge removed his cap as they went in. The reception was behind a small glass panel at the end of a narrow corridor. A young woman popped her head up and slid the panel open when she saw Edge striding towards her. 'Good morning. How can I help you?'

She glanced past Edge at Foley and then at Cassidy before she looked back at the sergeant. And in a fraction of a second, she looked at Foley again. 'Eamon?' She frowned even more as she gave Cassidy another quick look up and down. 'What's going on?'

'How are you, Jane?' It came out as a croak. Foley's mouth had dried up. Jane went to open the door but turned back to the window instead and put her hand out. Foley's palm was sweating and he rubbed it against his jacket. Then he took her hand and it was amazingly soft, just as he remembered it.

'What are you doing here, Eamon? What's happened?'

'Nothing. We were just passing.' Foley let go of her hand and stepped back. 'Well, actually, that's not strictly true. I was told there might be a job going here.'

'Where did you hear that?'

'Someone mentioned it this morning so I thought I'd come over and see about it.'

'What about your job in The Grand? I heard you work there in the bar.'

'I do. But it's only part-time. I need more hours. So if you are looking for someone, I'd be interested.'

'Look, Eamon, I'm not...'

'The reason I'm asking is that my sister Vicky has moved in with us and ...well, you know how expensive that can be.' Foley couldn't believe he was so nervous he was rambling. 'I don't know if you've heard about Vicky's husband.'

'What about him?'

'He was killed last night. Down in Delaney's.'

'Oh, my God.' Jane dropped back down on her chair. 'That's awful. Is that what all the guards were doing in Bridge Street?'

'Were you there?' Cassidy stepped closer.

'I was not!' Jane threw her a nasty look. 'We weren't there. We were at a social at the CYMS. We came home through Bridge Street. We saw the guards so we assumed it was just some drunks. God, I can't believe it. Poor Vicky.'

‘And that’s why I’m desperate for a full-time job.’ Foley got in front of Cassidy. Jane picked up a mug and took a sip from it. Her face was pale. ‘I’m sorry, Eamon. I can’t...’

‘Look, I appreciate it might be awkward if we were working together again but...’

‘What do you mean by that?’ She put the mug down and her mouth tightened. ‘Eamon, I can’t offer you a job because I haven’t got the authority. I’d have to ask my boss. And he’s not back in until Monday.’

‘Oh, right.’ Foley backed away and forced a smile. ‘I’m sorry. I understand. But thank you anyway.’

Jane didn’t smile back. She squinted at Cassidy. ‘I will ask him, though. When I see him, I will ask him for you.’

As they turned out of Courthouse Lane into Castle Street a young Garda on a bike wobbled across the road and collided with the kerb as he braked noisily.

‘Sarge! There you are. Everyone’s looking for you.’ His eyes flickered between Edge and Foley as he straightened himself out, and when he noticed Cassidy he went bright red.

‘What’s wrong, O’Gara?’ Edge was trying to keep a straight face.

‘The Super sent me to find you, Sarge. They’re after finding a body down the Green. The Super wants you to go down and take charge of it.’

‘Who is it, do we know?’

‘No. Only that’s it’s a young woman.’ His eyes were still darting between Edge and Foley, trying desperately not to look at Cassidy.

‘So how did she die?’

‘I don’t know, Sergeant. I heard there was a bottle of pills beside her, and a whiskey bottle.’

‘Suicide?’

‘That’s the impression I got.’

Edge gave a sharp nod. ‘All right, O’Gara. Tell them I’m on my way.’

The Local Security officers standing by the back gate to St John’s Church straightened up when they saw Edge approaching. An older officer stepped out in front of Foley and put his hand on his chest. ‘Eamon...’

‘Donal?’ Foley frowned.

‘What’s wrong, Donal?’ Edge moved between them.

‘Sarge, you’d better take a look first.’ Donal nodded at the bench on the other side of a tree. Edge glanced at the other men but they avoided his eyes and he visibly tensed up. He stepped around the tree and froze. The young woman sitting up straight on the bench had her hands in her lap and rosary beads draped through her fingers. Her head rested back against the tree and the light breeze fluttered her hair. Her eyes were closed as if she was asleep, but the froth around her mouth coloured her lips a deep shade of purple.

‘Oh, my God.’ Cassidy came up behind Edge and grabbed his sleeve. Edge took off his cap and walked back round to Foley. ‘Jasus, Eamon. I... I’m so sorry.’

‘What?’

Foley tried to push past him but Edge took his arm. ‘Eamon, brace yourself. I’m afraid tis young Mary.’

‘Young Mary who?’

Edge's face crumbled and his eyes filled up. But it still didn't register with Foley. 'What are you talking about, Liam? Young Mary who?'

'Eamon!' Cassidy took his hand but he pulled away. And suddenly he was standing in front of the bench.

'Oh Sweet Jesus.' The rush of bile in his throat made him gag. Edge put his arm around his shoulder and forced him back to the other side of the tree.

'The Doc thinks she took these, Sarge.' One of the officers held up a small pill bottle and an empty whiskey bottle.

Edge took them and studied the pill bottle, rolling it in his fingers. 'There's no name on this. Is it her own?'

'No. The Doc says he didn't prescribe them for her. But he did prescribe some for her mother.'

'My sister would never take those.' Foley felt strangely detached as if he was looking through someone else's eyes. 'That's whiskey. She couldn't stand whiskey. She couldn't stand any alcohol. There's no way on God's earth she took this stuff—not by herself.'

'Eamon, please.' Edge took his arm again. 'I think you'd be better off if you just went home now. Leave this to us.'

'No!' Foley shrugged the arm away. 'This isn't right. There's no way Mary killed herself. No way! Someone did this to her. I'm telling you, Liam. Mary was killed by someone else.'

'Have you called the detectives yet?' Edge asked the nearest officer.

'No,' the man glanced at the body as if he was frightened he might disturb her. 'The Super wants you to deal with it. He said he can't afford to tie detectives up with a suicide.'

Edge cursed under his breath as he took out a handkerchief and wiped his eyes and hands before stuffing it away again. 'Where's the doctor now?'

'He's gone to arrange the removal.'

'Is there any marks on her?' Foley went to touch his sister but Edge pulled him back.

'Eamon! For God's sake. Leave this to us. We'll take care of her.'

'No.' Foley tried to touch her again but the sergeant's grip on his sleeve was too strong. 'Just have a look, will you?' Foley pleaded. 'See if someone forced her to swallow those pills. Check if there are any bruises, any sign that she was struggling.'

'Eamon, leave it,' Edge repeated in a softer voice.

'No, Liam. She was only twenty-one years old. She had no reason to kill herself. Anyway, she'd be too afraid to take her own life. It's a mortal sin. She'd never go to heaven if she killed herself.'

'Why is she turned around that way?' Cassidy was standing in front of Mary and studying the bench.

Foley and Edge looked at her. 'What do you mean?'

'Well,' Cassidy pointed out at the park, 'all the other benches are facing the other way. When you sit on them you're looking across at the mountains. But this way around you'd just be looking at a wall.'

She bent down and touched the grass. 'I think she dragged the bench around to here. You can see the marks where she pulled it. And the grass is worn down on that side where people usually sit.'

Edge studied the marks from every angle. 'But why would she do that if she intended to kill herself?'

'Maybe she wanted to be facing the church. Maybe she wanted to say a final prayer before she died.' Cassidy was as giddy as a schoolgirl answering the teacher's questions. 'Or maybe she was just looking at the flowers.'

A flowerbed with wallflowers and roses stretched along the base of the wall. Directly in front of the bench, a small patch had been newly turned over. 'Maybe she planted some seeds herself,' Cassidy added. 'Maybe her flowers will grow there someday.'

Foley felt more bile rise in his throat. 'Surely that proves it. When they killed her they turned her around that way so no one would see her. They killed her then turned her around...'

'Eamon.' Edge gave a weary sigh. 'Just think about it, will you? If someone wanted to hide her, why would they bring her down the Green in the first place? They'd take her over to the basin and just dump her in the sea. You're upset and that's understandable. But please, just go home now.' He looked around at the other officers. 'Has the family been notified yet?'

'Kieran Green was sent over to the mother's house,' Donal answered.

A haunting scream came from behind them and they all turned towards it. The first person through the narrow church gate was Foley's mother. Vicky followed with two of her neighbours.

'Kathleen.' Edge ran over and put his arms around his wife.

Her body rocked with sobs. 'Liam, please tell me it's not my Mary.'

Vicky looked at Foley with big terrified eyes and he had to turn away.

Chapter 15

Heavy grey clouds hung low over the Slieve Mish Mountains and the breeze had a damp feel to it. But the rain held off and Foley was grateful he didn't have to wear his overcoat. It was rolled up and tied to the crossbar of his bicycle. A small suitcase was strapped to the carrier behind him.

He felt light-headed. None of them had slept the night before. The doctor gave Foley's mother an injection but she was too distressed and it didn't work. She closed her eyes for no more than a few minutes at a time. So they all sat in the kitchen, too stunned to even speak. Neighbours wandered in offering support and even Cassidy stayed until well past midnight. She was surprisingly helpful. She got the children ready for bed and settled them down in Foley's room.

The kettle was kept on the boil and the teapot topped up, and people drank tea because they didn't know what else to do. Holding a hot cup of something was a distraction, a tiny respite in a dreadful day. Kathleen went from bouts of hysterical crying to deeply sad meandering. She talked about everything, from her childhood to the time her husband went to America and shattered her world.

But they skipped around the crucial question—what happened to Mary? Foley got the impression they believed she did take her own life. The evidence was there, the pills, the whiskey. But why would she do something she knew was a mortal sin? She was a devout Catholic. She would be too frightened of eternal damnation.

No, Foley felt it in his bones. Mary wasn't capable of taking her own life. Someone killed her. It had to be Leo Maranus. It had to be another message. He tried to recall Cassidy's reaction. Was she surprised? Or did she already know something had happened? He couldn't remember. The shock of seeing his sister lifeless on a park bench brought a curtain down on everything around him.

He was still in a daze now as he cycled out to Edenburn to see Mickey. As he passed the handball alley at the crossroads the thwack of a ball made him glance up. A game was in full swing. A group of men sat on the grass watching it. They turned to look at the lone cyclist. Foley gave a quick wave and they nodded back. Somewhere in the distance a church bell called the faithful to Mass. Foley couldn't tell which direction it came from but Castleisland was the nearest town.

A small cloud of dust followed him up the drive to Edenburn Hospital. The middle part of the big old mansion was used for administration. The wings on either side were the medical wards. One for women and one for men. Foley leant his bike against the wall by the front door and detached the suitcase from the carrier. The place was unusually quiet as he walked through the hall and up the stairs. All the outside doors to the wards were kept open for most of the day. Those on the ground floor led to a paved area, and those on the first floor had a balcony. Patients were encouraged to sit out in the fresh air for as long as the weather permitted.

Mickey's ward was on the first floor. It was empty. Foley was surprised to see Mickey's pyjamas under his pillow. His dressing gown was on the back of his chair. Foley checked the locker. Mickey's trousers, shirt and jacket were gone. Through the glass partitions he could see the other patients out on the balcony still in their dressing gowns. He put the case on the bed and went out. 'Lads, where's Mickey?'

Desmond Cahill gave a toothless smile. 'Eamon. Hello. How're you doing?' Then he gave a prolonged hacking cough.

Foley waited until Desmond caught his breath again. 'I'm grand, Desmond,' he said. 'Only I can't see Mickey. Do you know where he is?'

'I do not. I haven't seen him since breakfast. What about you, lads?'

'No. He hasn't been out here,' they said in unison.

Foley looked at the group of women sitting on the balcony opposite. 'I hope you haven't sent him over there with dirty messages. He's too young to be mixed up in your shenanigans.'

'Ah no.' Desmond chuckled. 'Sure we wouldn't do that to the poor lad. Now would we, lads? Anyway, Breda's around somewhere. She might know where he is.'

Breda was a nervous ward assistant who went bright red at every opportunity. Her hair was thick and uncombed and dandruff lay like a shroud around her shoulder. 'Breda.' She jumped when Foley called her. 'Have you seen Mickey?'

Her hand went to her throat and she blinked several times. 'I... no... I'm not... I'm only just after starting my shift.'

‘Well, he can’t have gone far. Are you sure you didn’t pass him on the way in?’

‘I don’t know. Which one is he?’

‘Mickey.’ Foley pointed at his bed. ‘The young fella. Blond hair. He’s just a boy, four years old.’

Breda followed his finger. ‘Right. I think I saw him go out the front door with a nun.’

Foley’s stomach lurched as a vision of Sister Michael filled his head. ‘What nun?’

‘How do I know? I’m just...’

‘Who else was with them?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Was there a man with them?’

‘No.’ Brenda backed away. ‘I didn’t see any man. I only saw the nun.’

Foley groaned out loud. ‘Did you see which way they went?’

‘No, I did not. I didn’t see anything. It’s not my fault.’

‘For God’s sake. No one said it was your fault. I just want to know what they did with my son.’ He turned sharply and marched back down the stairs. But there was no sign of anyone in the yard. Breda appeared beside him. ‘I think there was a man,’ she panted. ‘He was in the car.’

‘What car?’

‘There was a car over there in the corner. I noticed it because the engine was running. I’m sure there was a man in it.’

‘Did you get a look at him?’

‘No. I was over there.’ She pointed at the other side of the yard. ‘How could I see him from over there?’

‘So how do you know it was a man?’

‘Well, I don’t... I... Well of course it was a man. Who else would be driving a car? Have you ever seen a woman driving a car?’

Foley wasn’t listening. He ran back into the building. He needed to raise the alarm. His son was kidnapped from right under their noses. They should have been looking after him. Someone should call the Gardaí. Get a search going. Set up roadblocks.

But he couldn’t find anyone in the wards. He ran across to the Admin building. The door was locked. Breda was still following him. ‘Where is everyone?’ he shouted.

‘Well it is Sunday,’ Breda shouted back. ‘There’s ever only a few of us here at this time on a Sunday. Everyone else will be at Mass over in Castleisland.’

‘Shit, shit, shit.’ Foley knew if he called the Castleisland guards he’d waste precious time trying to explain things. He had to find Liam Edge. He grabbed his bicycle.

Joe Junior was sitting at the kitchen table making a model out of a lump of putty when Foley charged in through the front door. ‘Where’s everyone? Where’s Liam?’

‘They’re not here.’ Joe Junior gave Foley an indifferent glance then picked at the putty with a dinner knife.

‘I can see that,’ Foley barked. ‘It’s bloody obvious they’re not here. I asked you where’s Liam?’

Joe Junior flicked a bit of the putty on the floor then leant closer to the model, but he didn't answer. Foley's heart was thumping in his ears. He needed to calm down. He took slow, deep breaths and leant on the table with both hands. Joe Junior flattened some putty into a ribbon and carefully placed it along the side of what looked like a medieval castle. He didn't acknowledge Foley at all.

Joe Junior was just a child, but all Foley could see right then was a miniature Joe McCarthy—the same arrogant set of the jaw, the same thin lips curled in a sneer. Foley's impulse was to grab him by the neck and shake him senseless. But that would only make him the bigger child. No, he just needed to put himself at the boy's level. 'What's that you're making?' he asked.

Joe Junior gave a snort and rolled his eyes, and the clock on the mantelpiece gave a single chime. It had taken Foley almost an hour to cycle back from Edenburn. Mickey could be miles away by now. A red mist blinded him. He lashed out and sent the knife flying out of Joe Jnr's hand. 'I haven't got time to play games with a snotty little shit like you. Where is Liam Edge?'

Joe Junior jumped up and send his chair flying. And for a second he stood there with his mouth open wide. But he recovered in a heartbeat and looked at Foley under his eyes. 'Where d'you think he is?' His flint-hard eyes held Foley's stare.

And Foley felt ashamed. With Joe McCarthy for a father, the boy probably experienced this kind of treatment every day of his life. 'Look, I'm sorry, all right?' he sighed. 'But something's happened to Mickey and I need to talk to Liam about it.'

For a moment the only sound in the room was the ticking of the clock. 'It is Sunday, you know.' Joe Junior stood rock still as he answered. The only thing moving was his lips. 'They go to half twelve Mass on Sunday. You should know that yourself.'

Sweat still stung Foley's eyes and his shirt was cold from the sweat on his back. 'Is he coming straight back here?'

'No. He told Nana he had to see the Super first.'

Foley nodded and ran to the door. When he glanced back Joe Junior was still standing there, watching him with unblinking eyes. Foley wondered if he could ever bridge this gap between them.

'Thank you,' was all he could say.

Chapter 16

Tony Brick was on duty at the front desk and he looked Foley up and down when he rushed in through the door. 'Not in uniform today, Foley? I thought you fellas lived in your uniform in case you had to assist the real guards when we get into trouble.'

'Is Sgt Edge in?' Foley couldn't keep the impatience out of his voice.

Brick shook his head. 'I don't think so. But I did hear the Super is looking for him. Have a look in the canteen. He might have slipped in when I was—you know—otherwise engaged.'

‘What about Alex Cassidy?’

‘Definitely not.’

‘You’re very sure about that.’

‘Believe me, I would have noticed if Alex Cassidy came in.’ Brick gave a smarmy, lopsided grin.

‘Would you indeed?’

‘Come off it, Foley. Any man with a pulse would notice if Alex Cassidy was in the building. But you’d know all about that yourself, wouldn’t you?’

‘Meaning what?’

‘Meaning what?’ Brick sniggered. ‘Meaning everyone knows she was your—how do you say it, your floozy?—before Sergeant Edge pulled rank and took her off you.’

‘For God’s sake! Where did you get that shite from?’

‘Well, that’s what I heard.’ Brick pointed at him with a pencil. ‘I heard you weren’t big enough—sorry, you couldn’t hold on to her. But no one’s complaining, mind you. It’s the best thing that’s ever happened. While the Sarge is sniffing around young Cassidy he’s leaving us alone. So good luck to the man.’

Foley stepped away sharply. He didn’t have time for this. Mass would be over soon. It made sense to just wait here for Liam Edge.

‘I’m wondering how long it’ll be before she gets tired of old man Edge and starts looking for a younger model.’ Brick put the pencil in his mouth, chewed the end of it then took it out again. ‘What d’you think, Foley? Will you put in a good word for me?’

‘Just... just sit on that pencil, will you, Prick? Sorry, Brick.’ Foley pushed through the swing doors and headed for the canteen.

‘Ha, bloody ha!’ Brick called after him.

Foley got a cup of tea and made his way to a seat by the window, squeezing past a table where a cluster of women was chatting. Their voices rose and fell like the swell of the sea. And they were talking about Foley’s sister Mary. ‘No one seems to know what happened to her,’ one of them was saying.

‘I heard there wasn’t a mark on her,’ another voice added. ‘She was just sitting there on a bench in the middle of the Green, stone dead. Someone said she was pointing up at the church steeple. And she’d been sitting there all night.’

‘God, that’s awful.’

‘Did you know her?’

‘I did. I went to school with her. Sure isn’t her mother married to Sgt Edge?’

‘God, poor old Liam! Wasn’t it Liam’s son-in-law who was shot in Delaney’s pub on Friday night?’

‘Yeah. Joe McCarthy. He was married to Liam’s step-daughter. And it was her sister they found down the Green.’

‘Isn’t that unbelievable? Two people from the same family killed within a day of each other? What’s going on in Tralee? It’s horrible.’

Foley took a swig of tea and gave his chin an angry wipe. He didn’t want to hear this right now. His mind was already in chaos. The breeze threw rain against the window and the drops made streaks through the dirt as they trickled down the glass. People were starting to filter out of the Dominican Church. Mass must have finished. He scanned the faces for Liam Edge.

The women behind him had suddenly gone quiet. Someone was asking them if they'd seen Sgt Edge. Foley glanced around. It was Cassidy. She had her back to him and as she spoke her ponytail swished around her face. And Foley was amazed at how harsh she sounded. Why hadn't he noticed that before? He would never have associated such a cold, hard voice with such a pretty face. He turned away. The last thing he wanted right now was a conversation with Alex Cassidy. He watched her reflection in the window as she walked away, her ponytail still bobbing around her shoulders.

'God, I can't stand that one!' The older of the women put her hand over her face in mock anguish.

'Why? Who is she?' The girl on the far side of the table looked young, probably late teens, and she had a small thin face with a button nose that crinkled up as she spoke.

'Who is she?' mocked one of the others. 'Sure tis obvious you're new around here, Margaret.'

'She's Liam's fancy piece,' the first woman got in before anyone else had the chance.

'Liam?'

'Liam! You know... God Almighty, how long have you been here? Liam Edge! You know Sgt Edge?'

'But he's an old... he's... he's a married man!'

'What's that got to do with it?'

'Well, that's disgusting. He's old enough to be her father. What would she see in an old man like him?'

'What d'you mean? Liam is lovely. And he's not old. He's gorgeous. Anyway, tis not his age we'd be concerned about, tis the size of his truncheon.' That brought a shriek of laughter.

'And we know what he sees in her, with her neat little arse and big baby eyes,' one of them added loudly. 'Just watch her when there's men around. She only has to flutter them eyes and wiggle her butt and they all turn into gibbering eejits.'

'Until she opens her gob!'

'I know! That dopey voice, it's like scratching your fingernails along a blackboard. I wonder how Liam puts up with it.'

'Do you think they actually talk when they...?'

'Well, maybe they don't. Maybe they do it in total silence.'

More laughter.

'Oh, stop! You'll get us all shot.'

'Is she from Tralee?' the embarrassed young girl asked. 'Her accent doesn't sound Kerry.'

'No. I heard she's from Donegal.'

'What's she doing in Tralee, so?'

'Well,' the older woman bent forward and the rest of them leant in to form a huddle, 'when Eamon Foley—he's Liam's step-son—came home earlier this year, she came with him. Eamon has a son and the rumour is she's the mother. But if that's the case she... how old would you say she is? No more than twenty? Which would mean she was about fifteen when she had the baby. Anyway, Sgt Edge took a shine to her and he's been flopping around her like a lovesick puppy ever since.'

'I still think it's disgusting,' the young girl protested. 'What about his poor wife? Her daughter is dead and her husband is acting the fool with someone young enough to be his daughter.'

The older woman snorted. 'That's life.'

'What about Eamon? Was he upset having his girlfriend stolen off him like that?'

'He's probably relieved to see the back of her.'

More laughter.

'Don't be so mean.'

'Well, she probably drove him mad with all her lies. God, she tells some wonderful stories. No one believes a word of them, of course. I'm telling you, if she told me today was Sunday I'd still check with a calendar.'

'Well, I just hope Liam doesn't find out about Doctor Adams, that's all.'

They all looked at the woman with red hair.

'What about Dr Adams?'

'Well, you know she cleans for him over there in the surgery? So last week my friend Patty was sitting in the waiting room and the door to his private quarters was open. And who does she see in there only her, wearing a nurse's uniform? Well, Patty nearly died on the spot, given that everyone knows the good Doctor has a fondness for young girls in nurse's uniforms.'

They waited for more.

'Well, don't you see? She's only the cleaner. What would the cleaner be doing wearing a nurse's uniform? She isn't a nurse, is she?'

Foley jumped when a hand landed on his shoulder. 'Eamon.' Tony Brick dropped onto the seat next to him, 'I'm just after hearing about your sister. Jasus, Eamon, I'm so sorry. Me and my big mouth. Honest to God, I would never have... I don't know what to say. I'm so, so sorry. If I can do anything...'

Foley felt tears smart his eyes and he wiped them quickly. 'Don't worry about it, Tony.'

Brick coughed into his fist and stood up. 'You were looking for Sergeant Edge. Well, he's just after coming in. I saw him with the Super at the top of the stairs.'

When Foley stood up and turned around all the women were staring at him with their mouths open. And as he squeezed past they studied their fingernails with a sudden fascination.

'That's Eamon Foley,' he heard someone whisper.

Chapter 17

The Super's voice could be heard all over the second floor. 'I'm very sorry for your loss, Sergeant,' he was saying as Foley approached the open door. Edge stood in front of the big desk, his cap in his hand. 'My deepest sympathy to both yourself and your wife. Tis an awful shock, especially for the poor mother.'

'Thank you, sir.' Edge sounded subdued.

‘And I’m sorry to drag you down here today of all days. But the fact is we’re mighty short of officers, as you know. Every available guard is in Limerick so that leaves just you and three others to hold the fort here.’

Superintendent Lynch was a big thick-set Corkman with tight curly hair and a bull of a head that came straight out of his shoulders. He gave the impression he was just passing through, biding his time in Tralee until there was a vacancy higher up the ladder. He didn’t work on Sunday so he was dressed in a tweed jacket and grey trousers. He raised himself onto the balls of his feet. ‘Now I know you should be at home supporting your family but somehow I think you’d rather be out looking for answers about this. And that’s what I want you to do. But you’ll have to use the Local Security Force. Take as many of them as you need.’

He glanced over the top of his glasses and spotted Foley. ‘You’ll help Sgt Edge, won’t you...am...’ He clicked his fingers.

‘Foley, Sir.’

‘Yes, of course. Good man yourself.’ The Super turned back to Edge. ‘So if there’s anything else you need, just ask. But remember all eyes will be on you. Just thank your lucky stars the press is too busy in Limerick to bother coming down here annoying us.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ Edge spun around on his heels, pushed past Foley and marched down the stairs.

‘Liam!’ Foley clattered after him. ‘I have to talk to you.’

Thomas Sweeny was on the front desk now and as Edge approached he waved a piece of paper at him. ‘Sergeant, I have a message for you.’

But Edge walked past and out the door. Out in the street he took a packet of cigarettes from his breast pocket, pulled one out with his teeth and shoved the packet back. He only slowed long enough to flick the lighter and take a long drag of the cigarette. Then he flipped the lighter shut, blew the smoke down his nose and strode on past the church and into the Green.

‘Liam.’ Foley was struggling to keep pace with him. ‘Will you stop and listen to me! They’re after taking Mickey.’

It was only when they reached the bench where Mary was found that Edge stopped and spat what was left of the cigarette on the ground. The smell of rain wafted up from the wet grass and droplets hung like necklaces from the leaves above them. Edge bowed his head and closed his eyes. And he stood in silence for what seemed like ages before he opened them again. He took off his cap and looked up at the imposing steeple of St John’s Church, now shrouded in a wet, grey mist.

‘Liam, I need your help.’ Foley chose his moment to speak.

‘I heard you back there. Who’re you talking about?’

‘What do you mean who... Mickey, of course?’

‘No. You said someone took him. Who took him?’

‘Them... those people who shot Joe. Maranus and the nun. They’ve kidnapped Mickey.’

‘Eamon...’

‘Listen to me, Liam,’ Foley insisted. ‘When I got to Edenburn this morning one of the girls told me she saw a nun put Mickey in the car and drive away.’

‘A nun?’

‘Yes! That’s what the girl said. A nun took him away in a car.’

Edge looked down at the bench. After a moment he reached out and touched it. ‘Liam?’

Edge gave a deep bitter sigh. ‘Have you any idea what’s going on around you, Eamon?’ His voice was almost a growl. ‘Right now your mother is in bits. She’s sitting at home trying to understand why one of her daughters is dead and another is left with five kids and nowhere to live. And that’s where I should be, at home with them. But I can’t just go home because it’s been left to me to sort it all out.’

A pigeon fluttered down in front of them and started pecking at something on the ground.

‘How can that be right?’ Edge waved his cap in a circle. ‘I’m only a sergeant, for shit sake. How can a uniformed sergeant be put in charge of a murder case? Especially when it involves members of his own family? Tis not right. Tis not bloody right.’

The church bell boomed and the pigeon shot off with a clump of grass in its beak.

‘Use the Local Security, he said. Feckin’ eejit! How many of them know anything about murder? They’re not detectives. They’d faint if they saw a dead body. Apart from yourself, there’s very few of them I would rely on.’

Edge took out the packet of cigarettes again, picked one out and handed the packet to Foley. ‘You know what’s even worse?’ he sighed. ‘If Mary has committed suicide she won’t have a proper funeral. You know that, don’t you? They’ll bury her in the un-consecrated ground without a blessing or anything. That will really push your mother over the edge.’

Foley shuddered. ‘Can’t we do anything? Ask the priest?’

‘I saw the Dean himself this morning. He said Church law is perfectly clear and he hasn’t got the authority to contradict it. He probably has but he’s just a little maggot, too afraid of his own shadow to do anything that might cause ripples. So I went to the Dominicans and the answer was the same. Suicide is a mortal sin and condemns the soul to eternal damnation, so praying for them at a funeral is a waste of time.’

Edge gave a sob and turned away. ‘It’s all so feckin’ wrong. They’ll give that bastard Joe McCarthy a blessing and they’ll say nice things about him even though he’s worse than what a cow squirts over the grass. But Mary who never hurt a fly in her whole life is denied that last little bit of dignity.’ He spat out a bit of loose tobacco and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand before passing the lighter to Foley. He took a big gulp of air and started walking away.

‘So what are we going to do about Mickey?’ Foley trotted after him.

‘Look, I know you’re sick with worry about your son, Eamon,’ the sergeant said without looking back. ‘But we need to look at it logically. Ask yourself why someone would want to take him in the first place.’

‘They kidnapped him.’

‘All right, they kidnapped him.’ Edge flicked ash from his cigarette. ‘But the question is why? You kidnap someone because you want something. So what would these people want from you? You haven’t got their money, you told me. So what have you got that they’d kidnap your son for?’

'I told you already. They mistook me for Raymond Price. He stole some stuff from them and they want it back. It's as simple as that.'

'So they shoot Joe to...what?' Edge stopped and faced Foley. 'Then they kill Mary and kidnap your son. Why?'

'I don't know. They're trying to frighten me. To make me tell them where their stuff is.'

'But,' Edge blew out a cloud of smoke, 'don't you think that if they're clever enough to find out where you live, that you have a brother-in-law who drinks at Delaney's and a sister called Mary, that they'd be clever enough to know you are not the person who robbed them?'

'Well, I don't...'

'Eamon, you're not being reasonable with me, and I can't work like that.'

Chapter 18

When Jane Kennedy turned into Courthouse Lane, Eamon Foley was amazed that after all this time he could still recognise her by the way she walked.

As he watched her approach he took a cigarette from his pocket and put it in his mouth before searching for a match. When he found one he cracked it against the wall and took a big drag, and he rubbed his eyes with his fingers. He was so weary it was making him feel detached, as if he was living someone else's life and looking at this one from a distance.

No one had slept again last night. And this time it was because of what happened to Micky. Foley knew in his bones he'd said too much to Edge last night. But he was tired and Edge kept picking away, wearing him down with his questions. And once Foley started talking he couldn't stop. Now Edge and Vicky and Foley's mother knew all about the ledger and the secret chimney in the Black Bird Hotel basement. And the kind of people who shot Raymond Price. And Foley felt terrible because he believed it was all his fault, coming back to Tralee and bringing all this trouble with him.

But still Liam Edge wasn't convinced. Whatever happened to Micky, it wasn't connected with what happened to Joe McCarthy. Edge was positive about that. Joe was killed because of his fractured lifestyle. Edge was certain Joe had upset the wrong people, probably a jealous husband or a bitter rejected lover. What happened to Micky was a different mystery, and Edge assured everyone he would be contacting the Castleisland Gardaí first thing this morning and get a search going.

In the meantime Edge believed Foley needed a distraction to stop him from going mad with worry while he waited for news about his son. So he insisted Foley got to work interviewing the witnesses who were in Delaney's pub when Joe McCarthy was shot.

Sgt Edge left the house early, sneaking out without a word. And Foley was left struggling to keep his emotions from fraying any more. He thought he'd find a distraction in Jane Kennedy, and he could have a word with Jerome Quille at the same time.

The dark cloud coming in from the Atlantic looked angry enough to spit out rain and Jane's coat was buttoned up to her neck just in case. She looked Foley up and down. 'Eamon, what are you doing here?' She sounded annoyed.

Foley blew out a long stream of smoke. 'I'm on my way to work. I thought I'd drop by and say hello.'

Jane took a bunch of keys from her pocket, selected one and stuck it in the keyhole. Then she pulled the door open and let it slam back against the wall, flicked on the lights and pushed past him into the corridor. 'You were on your way to work? Over in the guard's barracks, which is on the opposite side of town?'

'Well, yes.'

Jane was already taking her coat off as Foley followed her down the narrow passageway and into the office. She hung it on the back of the reception door and dropped her handbag on the floor beside the desk. 'If you've come about the job, I haven't spoken to my boss yet. I'm not even sure he'll be coming in today. But I'll get the fire going and put the kettle on.'

She went across to a small stove, wrapped some sticks in newspaper and put them in the grate. Then she sat lumps of coal on top of them. Foley took a match from his pocket and knelt beside her, struck it on the floor and held it to the edge of the paper. As he closed the door their hands touched. Jane pulled away and stood up.

'It won't take long to boil.' She avoided his eyes. 'Then you can have a cup of tea and get back to work. I hope you won't be late and get yourself into trouble.'

'Well, actually, I've already started work. I have a list of people Sgt Edge wants me to interview today.'

'What do you mean you have a list of people to interview?' Jane snapped up straight. 'Don't tell me I'm on that list. Jasus, Eamon, did you come here because I said I was in Bridge Street on Friday night?'

'No,' Foley groaned. 'Of course not. Look, to tell you the truth I only came here because I was hoping to see a friendly face, that's all.'

Jane made a noise that could have been a snigger. 'What about your little friend? Isn't she a friendly face?'

'Who's my little friend?'

'The one who was with you on Saturday.'

Foley grinned. Was that a flash of jealousy? 'Do you mean Alex Cassidy?'

'Is she the one you brought with you when you came home?'

'No! Well, she did come home with me, but it wasn't... it's not what you're thinking.'

'Eamon,' There was a sharpness in her voice. 'I'm not interested. All I asked you—as a friend—isn't she a friendly face?'

'I don't know. The only time I see her is when we're on duty together.'

Jane went to the stove and gave the kettle a shake. Satisfied there was enough water in it she put it back. 'So, what do you want? Are you going to question me or not?'

'I'm not.' Foley was beginning to regret coming here now. He didn't know what he was expecting but it wasn't this sourness. Perhaps he should have left it for another day. 'Anyway, it's your boss who's on the list, not you.'

'My boss? Why would Jerome be on your list?'

'Because he had a fight with Joe McCarthy over there at the factory where Joe worked.'

'For God's sake.' Jane's eyes flashed. 'You're going to question him about something as trivial as that? Are you implying he had something to do with Joe's murder because of a schoolyard scrap from years ago?'

'Whoa!' Foley said. 'No one is implying anything.'

'Well, don't!' Jane kicked out a chair, pulled it closer to the stove and sat down. 'Don't you know his poor wife was murdered last year? You have no idea how it affected him. It almost destroyed him, I can tell you.'

'All right. I'm sorry. I know how hard it must be for him. But all we're trying to do is find out why someone would shoot Joe McCarthy. Jerome is just one of the people Joe had a run-in with.'

'I understand that, Eamon. But when Rebecca was murdered the spirit went out of Jerome.' When Jane looked up her eyes were wet. Foley handed her a handkerchief but she brushed it away and took her own from up her sleeve. 'It's heart-breaking to see him like that. He makes an effort but then something sets him off again and he can't even get out of bed. Which leaves me and the two lads in the workshop to keep things running. And they're only staying because they're his friends.'

'Jane, I said I'm sorry.'

'Do you know we supplied cardboard boxes to all the top businesses in Kerry?' Jane wiped her eyes again. 'And in Cork, too. Any size you wanted. Any shape. Whatever you wanted to put into a box, we could make the box for you. We had twelve people working here, you know. Look at us now.'

'Well, as I said, I'm sorry.' Foley put his hand on her shoulder but she pulled away. 'Look, I didn't mean to upset anyone, Jane. But the sooner we find out who killed Joe the sooner we'll find out what happened to Mary.'

'What do you mean? What happened to Mary?'

'They found her down the Green on Saturday, sitting on a bench.'

'What's wrong with that?'

'She was dead.'

'Oh my God, you're not talking about your Mary.' Jane jumped to her feet. 'Your sister Mary?'

Foley nodded.

'Oh sweet Jesus, that was Mary?' Jane dropped back in the chair. 'I heard they found a body all right, but I didn't know... oh my God. That's awful. That's just... what happened to her?'

'We don't know yet. The doctor thinks it might be suicide. He thinks she took an overdose of pills and swallowed them down with a bottle of whiskey.'

Jane covered her face with her hands. 'That's terrible. And you think it has something to do with what happened to Joe McCarthy?'

'To tell you the truth, I don't know what to think.'

'Your poor mother. She must be going out of her mind.'

'I think we all are. And on top of all that, my boy Mickey is missing too.' It came out as a croaking sob and Jane stared at him for a moment before shaking her head.

'For God's sake, Eamon, what's going on?'

The door behind them opened and a tall man in a long dark coat poked his head around it. 'Jane, did I hear you talking to someone?'

'Jerome!' Jane beamed. 'I wasn't expecting you till later.'

It was a second before Jerome noticed Foley and his face drained of colour. He spun around to go back out but he hit the door with his shoulder and flicked it shut. He turned back into the room and his eyes were wild.

'Jerome,' Jane jumped up and put her hand on his chest. 'It's all right. There's nothing wrong. Eamon is just here looking for a job, that's all.'

Jane guided Jerome to the desk and he sat on the edge of it, and it was almost a minute before he composed himself. 'I'm very sorry.' He licked his lips. 'I'm afraid the uniform threw me. I thought you were the guards.'

'I... well. No,' Foley lied. 'I'm Local Security. But I'm not here on business. As Jane said, someone told me you might have a job going.'

'Well, we do not.' Jerome took a handkerchief from his top pocket and wiped his mouth. 'We can't afford the people we have already.' His hands were shaking as he took off his coat, hung it on the back of the door by Jane's and walked briskly across to his office. He was well over six feet tall with thick blond hair that reached down to his collar. He was probably athletic once but now his shoulders were rounded and his face was thin and haggard.

'I've put the kettle on.' Jane followed him. 'I'll make you a nice cup of tea.'

Jerome flopped behind his desk and Jane fussed around him. Foley watched them for a minute, his hand on the notebook in his pocket and his mind struggling with whether to start the conversation with Jerome or not. Jane had filled his head with doubt now, painting the incident as a trivial spat worthy of the schoolyard. Foley felt embarrassed even thinking about it. He tapped on the door. 'I'll be going now.' He nodded at Jerome.

'Oh, right,' Jerome nodded back. Then he looked at Foley again. 'Don't I know you from somewhere?'

Foley shrugged. 'Well, I'm from the town. You probably saw me around.'

'Probably.'

'You should know Eamon's mother,' Jane interrupted. 'She's married to Liam Edge, the Garda sergeant.'

'Eamon Foley?' Jerome clicked his fingers. 'The Christian Brother's. We were in Brother Healey's class together.'

'Were we?'

'Yes. You sat next to me. I remember you all right. You lent me your pencil. Then we all went home and you never came back. So I kept the pencil.'

Foley laughed. 'Really?'

Jerome gave Jane a soft smile. 'You didn't say he was your Eamon Foley.'

Jane went bright red. 'What do you mean my Eamon Foley?'

'Anyway, if I had a job going I'd certainly offer it to you. But we're under fierce pressure right now. The orders have all but dried up. Our auld van conked out and we can't afford to get it fixed.' He smiled up at Jane. 'In fact, if it wasn't for Jane and the lads out there we'd have closed down a long time ago.'

'I'm sorry to hear that.' Foley straightened his jacket. 'Anyway, I'd better shoot off and leave you to it.'

'Bye.' Jane forced a smile. 'I'll see you around.'

'Yeah.' Foley backed across to the door. 'In the meantime, if I can do anything to help just let me know.'

'I can't see how. Unless you have a van you can lend us.' Jerome pulled a glum face.

Foley paused then scratched his head. 'Actually, I might have, as it happens.'

They both looked at him and he gave a nervous grin. 'Well, it's a small van. An Austin Seven. A bit battered and bruised, and it hasn't been driven for a while. But I'm sure I can get hold of it.'

Jerome's face lit up. 'Are you serious? If you have a van then you're our man.'

'There's not much petrol in it, though. And I'm not the owner so I don't get a petrol ration either.'

'So who owns the van?'

'That's a long story.' Foley shrugged. 'But if you can get the petrol, I can get the van.'

'I have some business coupons here somewhere.' Jerome pulled a drawer open and rummaged in it.

'How soon can you get hold of this van, Eamon?' Jane asked. 'Only we have a few orders already made up. If we could get them out today they would pay us, and that might give us some breathing space.'

'Well...' Foley hesitated. He was reluctant to put a time on anything in case Liam Edge had news about Micky.

Jerome jumped up and waved a strip of paper at them. 'Can the van take ten gallons?'

'It should.' Foley took the coupons. 'Thank you. I'll go and sort it out straight away.'

Jane flicked her eyebrows at him. 'I thought you were supposed to be on duty, out there looking for your boy? And for whoever...'

'I am. But with Vicky and the kids at home, we're struggling. So if there's a chance of me getting a proper job I'm going to grab it. Liam Edge is already out looking for Micky. And I'll let him worry about catching whoever killed Joe McCarthy as well.'

The brass letter opener dropped on the floor with a loud crash and they both jumped. Jerome looked startled again. He cursed out loud and scraped his chair back as he bent down to pick it up. Beads of sweat dotted his forehead. 'Any chance of that cup of tea?' he snapped.

Jane glanced at the stove. 'The kettle's almost boiled. It won't be long now.'

Chapter 19

Thurles. January 1941

They'd hardly gone a mile out of Thurles on that wet January morning when Mickey started whining. 'Dada, I'm hungry.' He pulled on Foley's sleeve.

'And I am.' Cassidy's voice was weary too. 'We should stop and eat something. What do you think?'

They spotted a tree with branches like a huge umbrella so they squeezed through a gap in the hedge and sat under it. Foley broke the bread into lumps and spread the gooseberry jam on it. Mickey took the first piece and swallowed it down as if he hadn't eaten for a week. Foley handed the next lump to Cassidy.

'It's not like bacon and eggs.' Cassidy turned it around as she studied it. 'What else have you got?'

'Well, we've got eggs all right but they're pickled.' Foley waggled the jars at her before easing the lid off. He picked one out and passed it to Mickey who looked at it suspiciously before taking a bite. Foley picked out another one and handed the jar to Cassidy.

Cassidy was the first to notice the buzzing of an engine in the distance and she rolled onto her knees. 'Would that be a bus by any chance?'

'You could be right, you know.' Foley scrambled to his feet and patted his pockets. 'How much money have you got?'

'Me?' Cassidy rummaged through her pockets and held out a fistful of coins. 'Not much. It won't be enough. Two halfpennies and a farthing.'

'Well, all we can do is ask.' Foley screwed the lid back on the jar and stuffed everything back in the bag. And as they came out through the gap in the hedge a small black van came around the bend and Foley stopped dead. He grabbed Mickey and tried to pull him back through the hedge but the middle-aged driver had already spotted them and was slowing down. Cassidy ran into the road holding her thumb up.

'Good morning to you all.' The driver wound the window down as the van crunched to a halt. 'Tis not a nice day to be out walking and that's for sure. Would you be wanting a lift somewhere?'

He looked like a plumber with dirty overalls and a jumper frayed at the elbows. His passenger was younger, maybe late teens and also wearing overalls. Foley could see through to the back of the van. It was full of bits of metal and other parts. Would Maranus be that inventive, disguising his crew as workmen?

'That's very decent of you.' Foley relaxed a little and bent towards the window. 'But will you have room for the three of us?'

'We will, sure. Where are ye going?'

Cassidy gave him a bright smile. 'Would you be going to Limerick at all?'

'Ah, no.' He smiled back as he looked her up and down. The passenger leant over and looked her up and down as well, and he gave a lopsided grin. 'We're only going as far as Cashel today. We have a bit of business there. But you're welcome to climb into the back and come with us. T'll take a few miles off your journey at least.'

Cassidy glanced at Foley as they went around to the back door and pulled it open. It was even worse than it looked from the front. Twisted lengths of pipe and electrical cable wrapped themselves around half-empty bags of cement. Foley shifted an old tyre and pushed a piece of engine out of the way.

'That's the way,' the driver called back to them. 'Move that auld stuff and make yourselves comfortable.'

As Foley helped Mickey climb on board, the young man watched Cassidy with the same lecherous sneer on his face. Cassidy noticed it too and when Foley

squeezed into a space behind the driver's seat she squashed up close to him, forcing Mickey to sit on the opposite side.

'So what part of Limerick are ye from?' The driver turned around in his seat as he waited for them to pull the door shut.

'We're not from Limerick. We're from... ' Foley almost said Tralee but he hesitated. 'We're just going to see our uncle. He's not well so we're going to stay with him for a while.'

'What's his name? We know loads of people in Limerick. We might know him.'

Foley ignored him and made a fuss of Mickey. 'Are you alright there, son?'

The driver waited a moment longer and when Foley still ignored him his tone turned noticeably cooler. 'If you pull that string you can shut the door. Then we can be on our way.'

Foley tugged at the piece of string and when the door clanked shut the driver made the engine roar before pulling away.

'What's her name?' The young man was still leering at Cassidy. She shifted closer to Foley.

'This is Cassidy.' Foley tried to sound calm even though he was starting to regret being here. 'And this is Mickey. I'm Eamon. What's yours?'

'This is Seamus.' The driver pointed at the young man with his thumb. 'Well, Seamus Junior, to be exact. I'm Seamus Senior. I'm his Da. So to avoid any confusion we just call him Junior.'

'Hello.' Foley gave a little wave.

'How old is she?' Junior drooled. 'How old is your daughter?'

'My daughter? She's not my...'

'I'm his wife, if you must know!' Cassidy grabbed Foley's arm.

Seamus watched them in the mirror as Junior snorted. 'She's not his wife. She's too young to be his wife. Isn't she too young to be his wife, Da?'

Foley could see Seamus grinning. 'Well I don't think she's old enough to be the boy's mother, that's for sure.'

'I *am* his mother,' Cassidy insisted. 'Sure I'm twenty-one, so I *am* his mother.'

Junior was agitated by this and he spun around and faced the front, muttering loudly as he glared out of the window. The noise in the back of the van drowned out what he was saying but it was annoying his father. Seamus snapped at him and Junior curled into the corner and sulked.

'That's a grand coat you have there.' Seamus studied Foley in the mirror again. 'Have you been out hunting in it?'

Foley looked down and tugged the coat tighter around him.

'Only that's a really bad tear in it.' Seamus gave a mock laugh. 'Now if I didn't know better I'd say it looks like you were hit by a stray shot. What happened? Did you stand too close to a miss-fired when you were out shooting rabbits?'

He waited for a response but Foley looked away. 'Or maybe it was a keen gamekeeper out to make a name for himself. Did he pop up unexpectedly?' Again the mock laugh. 'Anyway, this could be your lucky day because I know someone who can put a stitch in that for you. She's a miracle worker, so she is. She'll have it looking like new again. I... '

'No.' Foley knew he said it too quickly and he forced a smile. 'But thank you all the same. Tis fine the way it is.'

Seamus shrugged. 'You're not a local man yourself, I take it. You have an odd sort of an accent. I can't place it exactly.'

'I... we've been living in Dublin for a while. Maybe the accent rubbed off on me.'

Seamus gave a cold smile, holding Foley's gaze for a moment. 'Well she's definitely from Dublin, I'd say.'

Cassidy's leg was pressed against Foley's and he could feel her trembling. He put his arm around her shoulder.

'So how long have you been married?' Seamus grinned again.

Junior spun around and sneered. 'Well if she is your wife it'll explain the cut of you.'

'What?'

'Will you look at yourself?' He showed a mouthful of bad teeth. 'You look like death warmed up. I'd say the young mare is sapping all the life out of you.'

They both chuckled and Junior turned back in his seat, and what they said after that was lost in the engine noise again. They drove on for a while without speaking but a strange menace was seeping through their silence. When Foley looked at Cassidy she seemed to be all eyes, like a doe in a headlight. 'Why did we turn off the main road?' she whispered.

Junior turned around and put his hand behind his ear. 'What did you say?'

Cassidy swallowed nervously. 'I was just saying you turned off the main road. That sign back there said Cashel was straight on.'

'Ah no, sure.' Seamus gave a loud laugh. 'That's the long way. This is a shortcut. It takes at least half an hour off the journey.'

The trees were getting thicker as they got farther away from the main road and Junior was twitching and fidgeting. When he looked back at Cassidy he was licking his lips. Foley felt a cold sweat on his neck. He looked at the pile of junk around him but he couldn't see anything that would be useful as a weapon. When the van weaved off the road and bounced into the trees Cassidy's whole body stiffened. 'Why are we stopping?'

'I need a leak.' Seamus glanced back at them. 'And I thought you might want to stretch your legs too, seeing as you're so cramped in there.'

The van wobbled to a halt and Junior jumped out and scurried around to the back door. Foley scrambled over Cassidy and grabbed the first thing he could—a piece of pipe about six inches long. He shoved it into his pocket as the doors flew open and when he leapt out it took Junior by surprise and he staggered back. Foley seized him by the throat and ran him up against a tree, and a vicious pain made Foley grab at his wound. When he took his hand away it was red with blood. He rubbed it on Junior's face.

Seamus was coming up on the inside carrying a starting handle and when he saw the blood he stopped dead. Foley put his hand back in his pocket and pushed the piece of pipe through the hole. 'Stay where you are,' he screamed. 'Stand still or I'll blow his feckin' guts out.'

Junior gave a whimper and his knees buckled. 'Da...'

Seamus had gone pale but his grey eyes were still alert. He could see the blood seeping through Foley's coat and he was calculating the damage.

'You are right.' Foley swung Junior around so he was between them. 'I was shot. But did Maranus tell you what happened before he sent you after us?'

'Who's Maranus, for feck sake?'

'Did he tell you the fella who shot me only got one chance? I managed two shots and they were from this close. The first one shattered his spine and the second blew the shit out of his intestines.'

Junior was shaking so much he sagged to his knees and started being sick. Foley held him tighter by the throat.

'Da!'

'Easy now, for God's sake.' Seamus dropped the starting handle. 'I have no idea what you're talking about. Honest to God. I don't know anyone called Maranus. I don't know what you're talking about.'

'So what's this all about? Why did you bring us here?'

Seamus pointed at Foley's torn coat. 'I thought you were on the run from the guards. I thought you might be carrying something valuable on you. You know, in that bag. Stolen property and stuff? Proceeds from a robbery maybe? And seeing as you were injured I thought I might be able to relieve you of some of it.'

Foley glanced down at his wound. Blood was still seeping through the tear.

'But we weren't going to hurt you. Honest to God. We were just going to take your stuff and drive away. As I said, you didn't look like you could put up much of a fight. So we thought we'd...'

'Start the van.'

'All right, all right.' Seamus glanced down at the starting handle before picking it up very carefully and he held it out as he stepped backwards around the van. It took five spins before the engine started then he threw the starting handle on the driver's seat.

'Now empty your pockets.'

'What? Sure I haven't got anything worth stealing.'

'Do it!'

Seamus was flushed with anger as he rummaged through his pockets and threw some loose change, a door key, bits of paper and a bolt onto the seat.

Cassidy had her legs out of the back door but stayed sitting on the rim. Mickey looked over her shoulder.

'Cassidy, get back inside. Pull the door behind you.' She did as she was told. Foley manoeuvred Junior towards the driver's door. 'Get over to that tree and kneel down,' he told Seamus. 'Put your hands behind your head and press your forehead against the tree.'

'Ah Jasus, now you can't do that.' Seamus staggered back towards the tree, holding his hands out in front of him. 'You can't just murder us in cold blood.'

Junior was sick again and it spurted out on the grass, and a patch of wet appeared down the front of his trousers. 'Da, what's he going to do? Da?'

'I want you to turn around and stand perfectly still until I tell you what to do, all right?'

'All right.' Junior struggled to stand up straight. 'Da, tell him all right.'

Foley wound the window down on the driver's door and slid into the seat, pulling it shut behind him. 'Now get over there beside your Da and kneel down.'

'Ah no. Please, mister...'

'Move.'

Junior stumbled over beside his father as Cassidy climbed over the back and dropped into the passenger seat.

‘Are you going to shoot them?’ Her eyes were wide and excited. ‘What are you going to do? Someone might hear the shots. Are you really going to shoot them?’

Foley took the piece of pipe from his pocket and handed it to her.

‘You shoot them if you want.’ He put the van into gear and the engine screamed and shuddered as he pulled away. ‘But I’m going home.’

Chapter 20

Tralee. September 1941

The old Morris van was still parked at the end of Creamery Lane and the ability of nature to vandalize anything that didn’t move was evident by the mould around the windscreen. Cobwebs had captured some fallen leaves and wrapped them around the wiper blade.

Foley bought a can of petrol on the way home and poured it in the tank, and he offered up a silent prayer as he turned the starting handle. And he cursed when all he got back was a dull clunk. The next turn was no better, and by the time he’d done eleven turns, he was close to losing patience and wrapping the starting handle around the engine. But his reluctance to let Jane down made him carry on and suddenly there was a cough and a shudder, and the engine rumbled into life before settling down to a steady purr.

He left it idling and went back into the house to make some tea. He was disappointed when he’d got home to find here was no word from Liam Edge. He’d promised to phone Castleisland first thing this morning, and Foley thought he would have some idea about what was going on by now. Foley decided he’d bring the van to Jane first, load the deliveries then go down to the barracks and find the sergeant.

He took his tea outside and began to tidy up the van. He wanted it to look presentable for Jane. And he was surprisingly anxious about that. It reminded him of how he used to feel all those years ago when he waited for her by the railway gates and watched her coming down Edward Street. He thought those feelings would have faded by now. People alter. Memories become hazy. But his hadn’t. He was still fascinated by Jane Kennedy.

The first time he ever saw Jane was the day he started working in Lovell’s Sweet Factory. They were grading the chocolates that came down the conveyor belt and he couldn’t believe it when she popped a chocolate into her mouth. It meant instant dismissal if she was caught. When she noticed him looking she winked and gave him a huge mischievous smile. She rolled her eyes in the direction of the supervisor Fat Belly Kelly, and with impeccable timing popped another sweet in her mouth the moment he turned away.

Kelly turned back in less than a heartbeat but Jane was already segregating the good sweets from the bad with an air of total innocence. Foley was besotted. He fell in love with everything about her. But he was seventeen now. And restless. He

could hear the call of the big city. The bright lights shimmering on the other side of the hill turned the grass there a more exciting shade of green. He desperately wanted to see it for himself, smell the air and walk amongst the crowds.

But Jane didn't share his dream. She loved Tralee. The farthest she ever wanted to go was a day trip to Killarney. Still, that didn't stop Foley from applying for several jobs in Dublin. And on Christmas Eve he got a letter offering him a position as a barman in a small family hotel called The Black Bird just outside Dublin City. Jane was working overtime. Foley was so anxious to tell her the news he went straight over to the factory. He wished he hadn't.

Of all the people in the world, he couldn't believe she'd be up close and personal with Fat Belly Kelly. The man had a serious hygiene problem. He was a buffoon. Yet there they were under a sprig of mistletoe.

So Foley went to Dublin. And he never came back. If he'd stayed around he'd have discovered that Jane wasn't that fond of Fat Belly Kelly anyway. She married Colin Regan.

Foley took a swig of his tea and put the mug on the ground. He wasn't sure how Liam Edge would feel about him lending the van to Jane. He didn't own the van. Foley only acquired it after they escaped from Maranus all those months ago. It probably saved their lives. It certainly saved them a long walk to Tralee.

'What's all this rubbish in here?' Jane Kennedy pulled a face as she opened the back door of the van and saw the pile of scrap, old tyres and bits of engines.

'It came with the van.'

'Well, couldn't you dump it somewhere?'

'Why? If that's all the deliveries you have there's plenty of room.'

'But they'll get all dirty. Put that rug over it. At least it'll keep them a bit clean.'

The rug was as old and dirty as the scrap but Foley shook it out anyway, scattering the flaky bits all over the street. Then he spread it over the mess as best he could, tucking it down in the corners.

As Jane loaded the bundles in order of delivery Foley gave the engine a few turns with the starting handle. When it started he climbed into the driver's seat and pulled the door shut.

'You'll have to drop me home first.' Jane scooped the paperwork off the passenger seat and climbed in. 'I need to change my shoes.'

'Are you coming with me?'

She rolled her eyes. 'Of course, I'm coming with you. I know these customers. We've let them down so many times I'll have to do a bit of grovelling.'

'Oh.'

'Oh *what?*'

'Well, I was going to see Liam Edge first. I need to find out what's happening about Mickey. Liam was going to ring Castleisland this morning.'

Jane gave him one of her soft smiles. 'Can you do it when we get back? I phoned the customers and told them to expect us this morning.'

Foley felt a wave of *déjà vu*. He loved that smile. He put the van into gear and drove out of the lane.

When they turned into Edward Street Jane shoved the paperwork at him and pointed to the entrance to Railway Terrace. 'You can stop here.'

Foley glanced at her but she didn't look back. She was too busy picking up her handbag. He pulled up outside the Station Master's house, at the very spot where he used to wait for her all those years ago.

'I won't be a minute.' She pushed the door open and scrambled out.

'Is his where you live? Railway Terrace?'

'Yes. The third house in. Why?'

'Nothing. I didn't know, that's all.'

'Well, it comes with the job. You know Colin works for CIE? And tis perfect for us, close to work and close to town.'

'For some reason I thought you'd be living up in Oakpark, in the posh end of...'

His words were wiped out by the slam of the van door. Jane straightened her skirt before striding around the corner, and Foley sat back and smiled.

A tractor roared out from Railway Terrace and swung across the road, moving so fast the cargo on the trailer wobbled dangerously. And it passed so close to Foley it shook him back to the moment. Being with Jane had made him forget about everything for a while.

Now Mickey was filling his head again. A ripple of panic made him grip the steering wheel. He should be out there looking for his son, not acting like a besotted delivery boy. He wished he knew what Liam Edge was doing about it. He'd telephoned the barracks from Jane's office just before they left but all they could tell him was that Edge had gone out and they didn't know where.

Still, the deliveries shouldn't take that long. As soon as he got back he'd find Liam Edge.

Jane reappeared and climbed into the car. 'All right?'

'Fine,' he answered.

Jane was hunched down in the passenger seat staring out of the window as they drove back down Oakpark towards Edward Street.

'Well, look on the bright side.' Foley tried to sound cheerful. 'Eight out of fourteen. That's eight more than you had this morning.'

'I know.' Jane gave a weary sigh. 'But the six we lost were the most important ones. Dudley's alone was bigger than all the rest put together. And he made it clear he won't be coming back to us. Still, you can't blame him. We let him down, so he let his customers down. Even with this stupid war on, if they can't take their fancy cakes home in a fancy cake box then they just won't buy the cakes.'

As they passed Fairy's Cross filling station Foley could see the clock through the shop window. 'God, it's one o'clock already. Will I drop you at your house or do you want to go back to work?'

'I'd better go back and let Jerome know how it went. And if they've got any more orders ready maybe we can deliver them this afternoon.'

Foley sucked at his teeth. 'I have to find Liam first, though. I need to know what's happening about Mickey.'

'Oh, of course.' Jane sat up and brushed down her skirt. 'I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. You better just drop me off at work then. It's on your way.'

'Look, why don't you come over to our house for a sandwich. Liam might be there too. You never know.' Foley was enjoying being with her and he wanted to hang onto the moment for just a little bit longer. 'I'm sure my mother would be pleased to see you.'

‘God, no.’ Jane gave a shiver. ‘I wouldn’t dream of it. Your poor mother has enough to put up with right now without all that.’

As they approached Railway Terrace Jane picked up her handbag and flicked Foley on the arm. ‘Maybe I should change my shoes again, I suppose. You don’t mind, do you? I’ll only be a minute.’

‘No, of course not.’ Foley slowed down and indicated to turn into the Terrace but Jane put her hand out.

‘No, stop out here like last time.’

Foley braked and clipped the kerb. Jane jumped out and slammed the door behind her as spatters of rain blew against the car window. She put her hand on her head and hurried around the corner. Foley leant back and his hand brushed against something on the back of Jane’s seat. It was her coat. The rain was getting heavy now and it didn’t look like a quick shower. He grabbed the coat and followed her.

The front door of the third house was open. Foley tapped on it before stepping into the long hallway. He called her name but got no answer. Two doors opened off the hallway, one on either side. The one on the left led to the kitchen. Jane wasn’t in there so Foley tried the other one. It led into a small sitting room and it was exactly how he’d imagined Jane’s home would be, neat and cosy. An armchair on either side of the fireplace, a bookshelf in one recess and a tall cabinet with glass doors in the other. The mantelpiece was cluttered with the usual assortment of photographs and ornaments.

When he heard footsteps upstairs he turned to go but something in the tall cabinet caught his eye. He stooped down to take a closer look. Pinned to a red display board were seven handguns, three down each side and one in the middle—a silver Derringer. A bronze plaque read: Colin Regan, Irish Olympic Squad 1939.

‘Eamon! For God’s sake. What are you doing in here?’

Foley turned so fast he almost fell over the armchair. He was so engrossed in the guns he hadn’t heard her come downstairs. The angry look on her face stunned him and he held out the coat. ‘You left this in the car. It’s raining so I thought you might need it.’

‘You can’t just come into my house like this.’ Jane snatched the coat off him. ‘You should have stayed in the car like I told you.’

‘Well, I’m bloody sorry. I thought I was doing you a favour.’

Jane held the door open and nodded for him to go out. ‘You don’t understand. These are railway houses. Everyone knows your business. And what they don’t know they make up. So something like this can easily be misunderstood.’

‘What on earth are you talking about?’

‘I’m talking about this. You! Just walking into my house.’

‘What’s wrong with that?’ Foley gave a sharp laugh. ‘Our neighbours just walk into our house all the time. If people knocked on our door we’d think something was wrong.’

‘Eamon, you’re not listening to me. What if someone saw you? It would get straight back to Colin.’

‘What are you saying? That me calling to your house would bother him?’

‘Yes. But it wouldn’t bother him if it didn’t happen in the first place.’ She steered him down the hall towards the front door. A wave of disappointment hit

Foley. When they were out in the van he'd felt some of the closeness they once had. The way they sparked off each other opened little windows to the past and gave him a glimpse of how they used to be. Now she made him feel like a stranger who'd just wandered in off the street.

He brushed past her in an angry huff and she put her hand on his arm. 'Look, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have snapped at you like that.'

'No, you shouldn't.' He pulled away and stepped out onto the path.

'It's just... look, let's say I'd rather not give the neighbours anything to gossip about.' Her voice was softer now. 'It's not your fault, so I'm sorry.'

'Well, if it upsets Colin then...'

'It's not like that.' She followed him out and pulled the door behind her. 'It's just that Colin is fiercely private. He hates gossip, especially if it's about him. He's always been like that, even when he was in the army.'

'Colin was in the army? Is that where he got those guns?'

'Oh, he loves his guns.' Jane's eyes scanned the houses opposite. 'I blame all those John Wayne films he watches. Shooting is his hobby. He was an Army marksman, part of the team that went to the Olympics. They didn't win any medals but they were up against the best in the world. When they got home they were presented with a solid silver Derringer each. That's the one in the middle of the display. He's so proud of it he polishes it every chance he gets.'

'Where does he practice with it? The Army shooting range, I suppose?' Foley had calmed down enough to walk closer to her.

'Good God, no! He doesn't fire the Derringer. That's strictly for show. They gave him two silver bullets for it but he's not going to waste those. But he does practice with the others. His favourite is the Beretta. He takes it up Foley's Glen and shoots rabbits and things.'

'Doesn't it bother you? All those guns in the house?'

Jane threw him a funny look. 'Why would that bother me?'

'Well, suppose someone broke in and—you know—they could use them on you.'

'Did you look at that cabinet?' Her tone was defensive. 'It's a solid metal frame bolted to the wall. The glass is bulletproof. By the time anyone got into it the guards and the neighbours would have arrived to see what all the racket was about. No, I'm glad he has guns in the house, considering the state the country is in.'

Chapter 21

Cassidy was waiting to cross the road when Foley turned into Bridge Street. She still looked like a schoolgirl in her black skirt and jumper and her hair in a ponytail. She tutted when Foley slowed down and sounded the horn. He wound the window down. 'Where's Sergeant Edge?'

Cassidy looked at the van for a moment then patted the bonnet. 'Is that our van? That's our van, isn't it? What are you doing with it?'

'Sergeant Edge.' Foley said again. 'Where is he?'

'I don't know.'

‘What do you mean you don’t know?’

‘I don’t know. I’m just coming on duty.’

Foley checked his watch. ‘But it’s two o’clock.’

‘Yeah! I finished with Dr Adams at one o’clock.’ Cassidy rubbed the van mirror with her sleeve. ‘Then I went home and got changed. Now I’m going down to the barracks. At two o’clock. Because my shift starts at two o’clock!’

‘And?’

‘And what?’

‘Did you see Sergeant Edge?’

Cassidy groaned and pointed back down the street with her thumb. ‘Actually, I did see him. He was getting on the bus to Fenit.’

‘What?’ Foley studied her face. He couldn’t tell if she was winding him up or not. ‘Why would he be getting on a bus? Are you sure it was him?’

‘Yeah. I’m not blind. It was him.’

‘But why was he going to Fenit?’

‘How would I know?’

‘So you didn’t speak to him?’

Cassidy slapped her hands on her hips. ‘How could I speak to him? He was down the road getting on a bus.’

‘So he said nothing to you about Mickey.’

‘For God’s sake! What part of I didn’t speak to him is confusing you?’ She started walking towards Castle Street but turned back and patted the bonnet of the van again. ‘How much petrol is in this?’

Foley glanced down at the gauge. ‘Why? What’s that...?’

‘Look, if you’re so anxious to see Sgt Edge why don’t we drive out to Fenit and find him? And I bet he’ll be glad of a lift home too.’

‘Don’t be so feckin’ stupid.’ Foley looked at the gauge again. ‘Anyway, this isn’t my petrol. It belongs to my boss. I need it for work.’

Cassidy dived into the passenger seat and slammed the door behind her. ‘Liam can get you lots of petrol. So c’mon.’

Foley groaned. This was not a good idea. Edge would not be pleased if they rumbled up in the middle of some Garda business. It would be even worse if he thought they were checking up on him. But Foley desperately needed to know what was happening about Mickey. He wound the window up and pulled away.

Cassidy gave an excited chuckle as she looked around the inside of the van. ‘I never thought I’d be sitting in this again.’

As they drove through the Spa and out towards Oyster Hall the sun broke through and sparkled off the blue-grey waters of Tralee Bay. The huge Brandon Mountains on the other side of the bay had a mass of thick fluffy clouds stuck on top of it. But that wasn’t unusual. Even on the hottest days of summer when the sky was clear those mountains would catch anything that blew in off the Atlantic Ocean and hold it there like a huge canopy. Stripes of golden sand tapered along the shoreline for miles before disappearing in a haze. And where the mountains dipped near Camp village there were so many shades of green it was hard to count them all.

‘Will you look at that scenery?’ Cassidy put her hand out of the window as if she was trying to touch it. ‘I’ve never seen such a beautiful place in all my life.’

‘Really? I thought you were from Donegal. Isn’t Donegal supposed to be beautiful?’

It was a second before Cassidy replied. ‘Not as nice as this.’

The road rose steeply as they came out the other side of Oyster Hall. Foley hadn’t been out this way for so long he’d forgotten about the severe bend at the top of the hill that turned a sharp left and then a sharp right a little farther on. He was so busy admiring the scenery he didn’t realize the road had disappeared until he noticed the wall and the farmer’s gate right in front of him. He jumped on the brake and slid sideways onto the grass verge, cleared the wall by inches and bounced back onto the road.

His head hit the roof and he let go of the steering wheel to rub it. And it was Cassidy screaming that made him look up again. A donkey and cart were sauntering along in the middle of the road. Foley couldn’t possibly stop in time. His only hope was to aim for the gap between the cart and the grass verge, and the donkey reared up in surprise as the van shot by it.

This time when they hit the grass the engine cut out. And they sat in silence as the donkey and cart ambled past. The old farmer gave his cap a tug and nodded at them. Then he smiled broadly and gave the donkey a gentle slap with the reins to move it along.

When Foley got out to check the damage his legs were shaking so much he bent down to hide them from Cassidy. She got out too and looked over the small stone wall. ‘Hey, look at this. The sea comes right up to here.’

‘I know. We used to swim there when we were kids.’

‘You swam in there?’

‘Loads of times. It’s a lovely spot for a swim.’

Cassidy climbed on the wall, gave a shrill laugh and jumped down the other side. With her arms flapping she looked like a penguin picking her way over the rocks. By the time Foley caught up with her she’d already taken off her shoes and was testing the water with her foot. ‘It’s lovely and warm.’ She squealed and looked up at him. ‘I’d love to swim in that.’

‘We haven’t got time.’ Foley had forgotten how clear the water was in this part of the world. And how peaceful it was too, just a soft breeze and the lap of the tide. And the odd bark of a dog in the distance. ‘We’re not on a day out to the seaside, you know?’

How many times had he cycled out here for a swim, he wondered? He certainly didn’t remember it being as rough as this, though, huge rocks and wild bushes, and streams of seaweed clogging up the gaps. He probably didn’t come here that often, actually. There were much nicer places close by - Banna, Derrimore - with miles of sand and crashing waves.

Yet the day he brought Jane Kennedy here it was perfect, all warm sun and crystal clear water. He couldn’t remember if they went swimming or not. Perhaps they just took off their shoes and went paddling. But he still remembered the magic of having her all to himself for a whole day, excited and giggly and talking about nothing in particular.

He spun around when he heard a splash. He couldn’t believe it. Cassidy had dived in the water. Her clothes were thrown in a heap on the rocks. ‘Are you mad?’ Foley scrambled back towards her.

‘Come on in. It’s beautiful.’

‘No! Get out of there now!’

She swam out about twenty yards before diving under the water.

‘You stupid... how’re you going to get yourself dry now?’ Foley cursed as he climbed back up to the van and rummaged through the back to see what he could find. All he came up with was the old rug. It would have to do. If she caught pneumonia it would be her own stupid fault.

He couldn’t see her when he came back down and for a second his stomach tightened. Then a wet hand landed on his shoulder. And he blinked in embarrassment when he turned around. Cassidy’s naked body was covered in goose bumps. Her wet hair looked blacker against the whiteness of her skin, and her eyes seemed darker too as they sparkled with mischief. ‘You should get out of those wet clothes,’ she purred as she rubbed her hand down the front of his shirt.

Foley’s mouth opened and closed but no words came out. It was all happening too fast—he couldn’t think straight. He’d never really looked at her properly before. He never noticed that when she smiled her eyes crinkled up and tiny lines appeared around her mouth. And there was a cluster of fine freckles around her nose. ‘I think you better put yours back on.’ Foley handed her the rug but she tossed it away.

‘God, the look on your face.’ She gave a husky laugh and before Foley could stop her she snaked her arm around his neck and pulled him down towards her.

‘Now stop that, you silly...’ Foley put his hands on her shoulders but she slipped between them and pulled him closer. And her mouth covered his. He could feel her heartbeat as she pushed against him, her lips tasting of seawater. And when his hands touched the small of her back she gave a shiver that caused more goose-bumps on her arms. She took his hand and cupped it over her breast, and she wriggled against him even harder.

A cow bellowed in the field behind them and Foley’s jumped. This time he did push her away.

‘What’s the matter now?’ Cassidy was using her little girl voice.

‘I’m sorry. We shouldn’t be doing this. You know it’s wrong.’

‘What do you mean I know it’s wrong? We’re two grown-up people doing what grown-up people have been doing since the beginning of time.’ She turned away with an angry grunt and strutted up and down the shingle waving her arms in annoyance. ‘What’s the matter with that? What’s the matter with you?’

Suddenly she was back in front of him and pointing at his face. ‘Oh, I get it now. You’re worried she’ll find out?’

‘What? Who’ll find out?’

‘That... that one who works in the cardboard place. You know?’

‘Jane Kennedy? What the hell has she got to do with this?’

‘Oh don’t act the innocent little boy with me, you big ape.’ She grabbed her skirt and danced awkwardly as she pulled it on. ‘Liam told me all about her - and you!’ She clutched her blouse off the rock and slipped it on as she shook her feet into her shoes, picked up her jumper and climbed back up over the rocks.

‘Liam told you what about her?’ Foley picked up her bra and followed her.

‘That you two were engaged to be married.’

‘We were not!’

‘Well, he said you were. And when she married someone else you went off to Dublin in a huff.’

‘That’s bullshit.’

‘You still love her, though.’ She turned around and looked straight into his eyes.

‘What do... where did you get that from?’

‘I saw the look on your face when you saw her sitting at that desk.’ She poked him in the chest. ‘And when she spoke to you, you went to pieces.’

‘I did not. That’s total rubbish.’

‘Is it? Your face was red and your hands were shaking.’

Foley looked at his hands. Cassidy pulled herself up onto the little wall and swung her legs over it. ‘You’re wasting your time, you know. There’s no way you’re going to get back with her.’

‘Who said I wanted to get back with her?’ Foley sat on the wall beside her. ‘Anyway, she’s a happily married woman.’

Cassidy gave a snort, took a rubber band from her pocket and pulled her hair back into a ponytail. ‘She’s a happily married woman,’ she mocked. ‘How could she be happily married to a pig like that?’

Foley watched her as she fiddled with her hair. Her face oozed so much innocence he understood how people would believe whatever she told them. ‘What do you mean?’ he asked.

Cassidy glanced sideways at him. ‘Sure everyone knows he’s got a wicked temper on him. They say he gives her a good slap now and again. Especially if he thinks she’s been talking to another man.’

‘Did Liam tell you that?’

‘Well, I heard he was kicked out of the army because of his temper.’ Cassidy’s face had brightened again. She was enjoying her moment. ‘They say he went mad during some exercise. He got into a fight and a man was beaten to a pulp. Regan said it was self-defence and the other fella said he couldn’t remember anything about it. There wasn’t enough evidence to put him on a charge so they advised him to resign instead.’

She jumped off the wall and strode over to the van. ‘Did you know he was arrested for throwing an iron bar at some fella at work because he said something about your girlfriend?’

‘She’s not my...’

Liam was called to their house once because of all the roaring and screaming coming from the two of them. He said she had bruises all over her arms but she said she was after falling down the stairs.’

She caught the look on Foley’s face and a smug grin danced on the corners of her mouth. ‘Well, tis only fair you should know. She’ll be too frightened to be seen talking to you. A stranger would be bad enough, but a former lover...’

As Foley went to follow her he spotted a movement out of the corner of his eye. Liam Edge was crouched behind the van.

Chapter 22

When Sergeant Edge popped up from behind the van Cassidy staggered back into Foley. The black mask of fury on the sergeant's face made her gasp.

'Liam. How did you get here?' Foley realised he was holding Cassidy's bra and he stuffed it into his pocket. 'Don't tell me you walked from Fenit.'

Cassidy gave a nervous laugh and let go of Foley's arm.

'I thought I recognised this.' Edge gestured at the van. 'What are you doing with it? With everything that's going on in town you still found time to come out here for... for whatever it is you're doing out here? Did you think no one would miss you?'

'We were looking for you.' Foley spoke as lightly as he could. 'We were coming out to Fenit to find you.'

Edge stared at him in brooding silence, and the air hummed before he spoke again. 'Why?'

'We thought you'd want a lift home.' Cassidy reverted to her little girl voice and gave him a sweet smile. Edge seemed unable to look at her. The glare he was giving Foley still had darkness in it.

'Look, it was all my idea.' A line of sweat trickled down Foley's cheek. 'I wanted to know what's happening about Mickey. Is anyone even out looking for him?'

Edge took a deep breath through his nose. 'That doesn't explain why you're parked up here.'

'You'll have to ask that old fool with the donkey and cart. He ran us off the road.'

Edge glanced back down the road. His eyes still crackled with suspicion. 'Is the van damaged?'

'Not that you'd notice. My nerves are a bit frayed, though.'

'Then get it started.' Edge walked across the road, picked up a bicycle and carried it back to the van. 'I borrowed it from the lads in Fenit. They'll be wanting it back.'

'So what's happening about Mickey?' Foley took the starting handle and gave the engine a quick turn.

'I don't know. I was up to my neck at work all day. I didn't get a chance to look into it. As soon as we get home I'll give the lads in Castleisland a ring, all right?'

Cassidy headed towards the passenger door but Edge stood in her way. 'Get in the back.'

He pulled the string that held the doors and let them swing open, lifted the bicycle over the rubbish and dropped it. Cassidy scrambled in and shifted around until she found a space. Edge slammed the doors and tied the string back up. Once the engine started Foley threw the starting handle into the back and Cassidy gave an angry yelp. Edge was already in the passenger seat. He waved at Foley as if he was swatting something on the dashboard. 'Drive.'

'Where?'

'Go back to town.' Edge glanced at his watch. 'If we're quick we might get to the hospital before the pathologist leaves for the day. He might tell us how Mary died.'

The hospital was strangely quiet. The long bare corridor echoed to the clatter of three pairs of shoes. As they approached the reception a middle-aged nurse came out of a side door and dropped a bundle of files on the desk. When she saw Liam Edge her face clouded. 'Well, you certainly took your time.'

Edge gave her a dark look and tried to walk around her.

'I put this call in at nine o'clock this morning, you know?' The nurse was in full flow as she blocked his way. 'But I should have expected this after the response I got the last time. You didn't take it seriously then either. And I told them so when I called in the barracks. So I certainly didn't expect them to send you again.'

Edge's mouth tightened when he looked at her name badge. 'Nurse Carmady.'

'Oh, so you remember me. Anyway, why are you here and not down in Godfrey Place?'

'Godfrey Place?'

'For the love of God.' Nurse Carmady rolled her eyes. 'Surely they gave you the right message this time, you being the sergeant and all. Or did you...'

'That's enough.' Edge put his hand up as if he was going to push her away. 'I haven't a clue what you're talking about. We're not here to see you. We came to see Dr Ryan.'

The nurse's mouth flopped open. 'So you didn't come about the baby?'

'What baby?'

'The baby!' Her voice rose to a shout. 'The baby that's crying all the time in the flat next door to mine. You heard it yourself. You were there! You heard the wretched creature. Well, it's still crying and it's driving me mad. It's upsetting me so much I had to ask matron if I can sleep here in one of the empty wards until someone sorts it out. I just can't put up with it anymore.' Her eyes filled up and she pulled a handkerchief from her sleeve and dabbed at them.

'But there was no baby,' Edge answered in a surprisingly soft voice. 'We looked in that room. There was nothing there. We even looked up in the attic. Anyway, it stopped before we left.'

Nurse Carmady blew her nose and stuffed the handkerchief back up her sleeve. 'It didn't stop for long. You'd hardly gone out the front door when it started again. I ran down after you but you'd vanished. Anyway, I tried to ignore it as best I could. But by the morning I was so distressed I called into the barracks on my way to work.'

Edge took off his cap and wiped his brow with his sleeve. 'I'm very sorry, Nurse. But I'm afraid my business with the doctor is very...'

The double doors behind them flew open with a crash and two men in white coats breezed through followed by an older man in a smart suit. He put some papers on the desk and scribbled in a ledger with a flourish before slipping the pen back into his top pocket. Edge put his cap back on. 'Dr Ryan, I'm glad we caught you. Have you any news for me?'

The doctor gave an exasperated sigh and looked at the clock. 'I'm finished for the day, Sergeant. It's been a very long day. I'm tired and I'm going home.'

'It's been a very long day for all of us.' Edge pulled himself up to his full height. 'All I want to know is if you've established how Mary Foley died yet.'

The doctor took off his glasses and shoved them in his top pocket. 'Sergeant, I suggest you contact my office in the...'

'It's a simple feckin' question, Doctor. I need to know how my daughter died. Do you know or don't you?'

The doctor stepped back and jutted out his chin. He looked at the nurse behind the desk but she turned away. He looked at the clock again. 'Come into my office. I can give you two minutes.'

In the dark panelled office, the doctor sat behind a large desk and shuffled some papers with his fingers. 'I'm afraid your daughter...'

'Actually, she'd my step-daughter—not that it makes any difference.'

Dr Ryan looked at him for a moment then back at the papers. 'Yes. Well, her death was caused by the tablets she swallowed. I won't confuse you with the technical details. And there was also a copious amount of alcohol in her system.'

He glanced up at Foley. 'There was no bruising on the face, which is what you suggested we look for, and no sign of any kind of struggle. In my opinion, she took the medication and alcohol of her own accord.'

Edge swayed slightly and gripped the back of a chair. 'So it was suicide. She took her own life.'

'Yes.'

'But why?' Foley's words came out as a sob. 'I don't understand it. She was so—you know—full of life. She had no reason to do that.'

'Well, it's not uncommon for a woman to become depressed under those circumstances. Especially if she's—well I don't wish to be presumptuous but I didn't see a wedding ring. Or signs that there had ever been one.'

There was an awkward silence before Edge cleared his throat. 'I'm sorry, Doctor. I don't follow you. Why are you talking about a wedding ring?'

The doctor checked his notes again. 'Well, as I said, it's not uncommon for a woman to suffer from depression after giving birth. And if the baby is born outside of wedlock the pressure on the mother can appear insurmountable.'

'What baby?' Edge's voice was like snapping twigs. 'We don't know anything about a baby. What are you saying?'

The doctor stood up and straightened his jacket. 'I'm saying that your daughter Mary Foley gave birth recently.'

Chapter 23

Apart from an odd vehicle rattling past the window, the only noise in the bar of The Grand Hotel was the grumbling of the pipes and the hiss from the water heater. And that suited Eamon Foley. He didn't mind the lack of customers right now. It meant he didn't have to engage in small talk or listen to mundane comments about the weather and the price of spuds. He hoped to use the time to sort out his thoughts, but so far it wasn't working out that way. There were just too many of them filling his head like snowflakes in a storm.

He couldn't believe Mary killed herself. It was impossible. And what baby was the doctor talking about? How did no one know about a baby? But worst of all, where was his own child? The thought of Mickey all alone and frightened made Foley's heart squeeze. If he'd been taken by Maranus surely someone would have made contact by now.

He jumped when the bar door crashed open. Liam Edge looked around the empty room.

‘Whiskey?’ Foley waved the glass at him.

Edge didn’t answer. He shook off his coat and threw it on the counter. Foley poured a measure of Jameson and Edge swigged it down, but it did nothing to ease the burning rage that was still lodged in his chest. It had been festering there ever since he saw Cassidy climbing over that sea wall with Eamon Foley that afternoon. And no matter how hard he tried he couldn’t let it go, because the ache in his heart was like a tumour the size of a cannonball.

It was the way she flicked her wet hair at Foley and chuckled, her whole face animated and—what—happy? He couldn’t remember her ever looking that happy when she was with him.

But it was the expression on her face when she saw him that really hurt. The only way he could describe it was shock. Or fear. How could she possibly be afraid of him? He couldn’t understand any of it. And even if it wasn’t fear, it certainly was guilt.

And Eamon had her bra in his hand. God, he couldn’t even think about that without wanting to be sick. But if he was honest with himself, he knew this was bound to happen one day. She was sure to meet someone her own age who would take her away from him. Just as life had taken Lucy Valance from him. But he hoped he could live the dream for just a little bit longer. While Cassidy was close, so was Lucy.

Then today, there he was - the man who would do the dirty deed. Only Edge never expected it to be Eamon Foley, of all people. Not after the way they spoke to each other. He honestly thought they didn’t even like each other. Now he realized it was all an act. Cassidy was playing him like a banjo—and after everything he’d done for her!

The pain was so confusing, so irritating—like a cough he needed to bring up and spit out. He wanted to grab Foley by the throat, let him know his betrayal was like a dagger to his heart. Instead, he banged the empty glass on the counter and pushed it at Foley. ‘I can’t believe you came to work, Eamon. Tonight, of all nights. What were you thinking? What... Do you realise your mother is in a terrible state right now, sitting at home bawling her eyes out?’

Foley picked up the bottle of whiskey and this time he poured it straight into the glass. ‘Sorry. I couldn’t stay in that house a moment longer. I had to get out.’

‘We’d all like to run away from this.’ Edge took a sip and wiped his mouth. ‘But that’s not the answer, is it? Your mother needs all the support you can give her. And your sister, too. You’re the man of the family now. They’re looking to you for direction.’

‘I can’t... what sort of direction can I give them? I was depending on you for that. You’re the policeman.’

Edge grunted and swished the whiskey around the glass before taking another sip. ‘Seeing as you’re here, have you spoken to her friends yet?’

‘Whose friends?’

‘Mary’s friends. We need to speak to them, see if they can shed any light on what was going on with her.’

‘How would I know Mary’s friends?’

‘She worked here, didn’t she? With you! Surely you know who she hung out with.’

‘No, I don’t.’ Foley popped the cork back in the bottle. ‘I never saw her at work. She was finished for the day whenever I came on duty.’

‘But she lived here in the staff quarters,’ Edge waved his glass at the door. ‘Didn’t she ever come down for a drink in the evenings?’

‘Not on the nights I’m working. Maybe on Friday when she got paid. But never on a Monday. Anyway, she couldn’t afford these prices.’

‘Well, you need to talk to them, Eamon. Surely someone knew she was having a baby. She couldn’t hide that for long. And who’s the father? If he has the baby, does he need our help? He might even know what drove her to take her own life.’

The door opened again and a tall lady in a long black dress hurried over to the bar and held out her hand. ‘Eamon, I’m so sorry for your loss. I only just heard about it.’

‘Thank you, Mrs O’Riley.’ Foley shook her hand.

‘And I can’t believe you came into work this evening. There was no need.’

‘No, no. I’m fine. Honestly, I need to be doing something. I’m better off here. It helps to take my mind off it.’

Mrs O’Riley nodded at Edge. ‘Good evening, Sergeant.’

‘Good evening, Mrs O’Riley. We were just talking about Mary’s friends.’

‘Oh? What about them?’

‘Well,’ Edge turned around on his stool. ‘We saw very little of Mary since she started living here. So we don’t know who her friends are anymore. We were wondering if there’s anyone—you know—close?’

Mrs O’Riley thought a moment. ‘Well, she shared a room with three other girls. I suppose she’d be friends with them.’

‘Would they be here now?’ Edge swallowed the last of his whiskey.

Mrs O’Riley glanced at the clock behind the bar. ‘I don’t know. But tis Monday so I expect they’d be staying in. There’s nothing much that happens in Tralee on a Monday night. Do you want me to go and see?’

‘Would you mind?’ Edge smiled at her.

‘Not at all.’ Mrs O’Riley looked over the top of her glasses, smiled too and patted her hair in the mirror before rushing back out.

Foley waited until the door shut before he leaned on the counter. ‘So did you ring Castleisland, Liam? What did they say?’

Edge pulled out a cigarette, cracked a match and disappeared behind a cloud of smoke. ‘No,’ he said, picking a bit of tobacco off his tongue.

Foley groaned and poured another whiskey, clipping the glass with the bottle. ‘Liam, I have to know.’

‘Look, I’ve been up to my eyeballs all day.’ Edge tapped his cigarette in the ashtray. ‘I have a murder and a suicide, and a wife—your mother—who’s lost her daughter. And another daughter—your sister—who’s just lost her husband and is now homeless with five children. So right now...’

‘And my son has disappeared off the face of the earth so forgive me for being so feckin’ worried about that.’ Foley went to put his glass on the counter but missed and it crashed into the sink.

Edge put up his hand. 'Sorry, sorry. You're right. I'm sorry. But I'm under fierce pressure at the moment. The Super wants this sorted as quickly as possible. Your mother and Vicky want it sorted as quickly as possible. I have people coming at me from every direction demanding answers and I have nothing to give them.' He took a long suck on his cigarette and let the smoke out in streams through his teeth.

'And in the meantime, Maranus has my son.' Foley grabbed the bottle, splashed a large whiskey into a new glass and swallowed it down in one gulp. And he gagged as it burnt right down to his navel. 'My son has been kidnapped and you can't even be bothered to ring Castleisland to see if they know anything about it.'

Edge gave an annoyed sweep of his hand. 'Well, contrary to what you might think, I had officers visit every hotel, boarding house and hostel in the town today. But no one saw a man answering the description of Maranus. Or Maranus with a nun and a little boy. Or Maranus with just a nun. Or Maranus with just a little boy. I'm sorry, Eamon. But Maranus is not in Tralee.'

'Oh,' was all Foley could say. 'I didn't... so why didn't you let me know? I could have helped.'

'Because I don't want anyone to know why we're looking for Maranus. All they need to know is we're looking for a man who was in Bridge Street on the night of Joe's murder.'

'So why couldn't I help?'

'Because you have a gob on you like a faulty tap. Once you open it you can't shut it again. Everything just pours out all over the floor. As I said, I don't want anyone to know why we're looking for Maranus.'

'So you do believe he has something to do with this?'

Edge tapped his glass on the counter and blew out another cloud of smoke. 'Not necessarily. But like I told you already, we have procedures. We consider every lead, no matter how vague or hysterical it might be. Then we decide if it's worth following up or if it's just imagination.'

'Just imagination? Is that what you're thinking? That I'm some hysterical eejit who makes up stories?'

'Oh stop it. That's not what I meant and you know it.'

'Well, it sounded like that to me. Anyway, what are we going to do about Mickey now? What can I do to help?'

'Well you can help by... sorry, you don't know yet, do you? Well, if you'd been at home you'd have known. The hospital is releasing Mary's body tomorrow. And Joe's too.'

Foley poured another drink. Up till now, the nightmare was hovering behind a fog of disbelief. Suddenly it was all too real.

'So if you don't mind, Eamon, would you stay home tomorrow and take charge of the proceedings? Your mother will need you there.'

Chapter 24

The door clacked open and Mrs O'Riley came back in. 'I'm afraid the girls are too upset to come down, Sergeant. They're very sorry for your loss, though.'

Edge raised his glass. 'Not a problem, Mrs O'Riley. Thank you anyway.'

'You're welcome, Sergeant.' She pushed her glasses up on her nose. 'But there is one thing puzzling me, though. We thought—well, we assumed Mary was living at home for the past few weeks.'

'What do you mean?' Edge flattened his cigarette butt in the ashtray.

'You said you hadn't seen her for a while. But Mary hasn't been at work for a couple of weeks now. She sent in a letter from her doctor. And some of her stuff is gone. We assumed she'd gone back to her mother's house.'

Edge looked at Foley. 'Well, we certainly haven't seen her. Did you know anything about that, Eamon?'

'I did not. I thought she was here. We haven't seen... maybe she's staying with a friend.'

Edge grunted but didn't look convinced. 'Did the sick note say what was wrong with her?'

'Stomach pains. The doctor advised her to rest. She's been a bit under the weather recently. We were concerned about her a couple of times. But she always bounced back. She's a good worker and usually very reliable. Which is why we overlooked the recent incidents.'

Edge stood up and pushed his stool back with his foot. 'What incidents?'

Mrs O'Riley brushed the front of her dress in a nervous movement. 'As I said, Mary is a lovely girl and very hard working. But recently her work fell short of her usual high standard. Her friends tried to cover for her but it usually got back to me. She overslept a few times, and once she fell asleep on a guest's bed. The guest left after lodging a complaint and we had to deduct the loss from her wages.' Mrs O'Riley wiped her eyes. 'The poor girl. If only we'd known she was so sick. Is that what killed her?'

'What?'

'Her bad stomach. Is that how she died?'

Foley picked up the bottle and poured some whiskey into the glass in Edge's hand. Edge looked up at the clock, thought a moment and nodded slowly. 'Yes, it was something like that. And I'm sorry but I have to go. I have to see... I have a few things to do.' He glanced at Foley as he swallowed the whiskey. 'I'll see you back at the house.'

'And I'd better get back to the front desk.' Mrs O'Riley pushed her glasses up on her nose again, nodded at Foley and disappeared out the door. Edge followed her and the door clattered shut behind them. Foley looked at the clock as he put the glasses into the sink. His shift ended in half an hour.

When the whiskey hit his senses the weariness crept into every nerve of his body. He knew he'd never make a detective. His son was missing, his brother-in-law was murdered, his sister killed herself, and it paralysed him into total inaction. He didn't have a clue what to do. Or even where to start looking. He felt so useless.

He picked one of the glasses out of the water and started drying it, and he jumped when he noticed the young woman standing by the door. Her hair was pulled back in a bun and her face was matted with teenage acne. She pulled her

cardigan tighter around her as her green eyes darted around the bar. 'Is Sergeant Edge not here?'

'He just left.' Foley nodded towards the street. 'If you hurry you might catch him.'

She looked at the door, back at Foley then back at the door again, and she turned to go. 'I'll see him tomorrow so.'

'I'll be seeing him later myself. Do you want me to give him a message?'

Again her eyes darted between Foley and the door, and she pulled her cardigan even tighter. 'Aren't you Mary's brother?'

'I am. I'm Eamon.'

'Hello.' She gave a nervous nod. 'I'm Rene Maher. I work with Mary. We share a room.'

'Oh, hello.' Foley held out his hand. 'I'm very pleased to meet you.'

Rene hesitated then walked over and shook the hand. Her grip was soft and quick. 'Do you know why he wants to see us?'

'Yes. It's just that we haven't seen much of Mary for a while and we were wondering if anything was going on at work that was bothering her.'

Rene blinked again. Foley picked up a bottle of red lemonade. 'Can I buy you a drink?'

She shook her head.

'Look, there's nothing to be worried about.' Foley put the bottle back down. 'You're not in any trouble. We're just asking because we're confused. Did you hear what happened to Mary?'

Rene tugged at her cardigan again. 'We heard she collapsed down the Green.'

Foley nodded. 'The thing is, Rene, we didn't even know she was sick. We feel terrible because we could have helped her. We didn't see her for over a month so we presumed she was alright. Then tonight we're told she wasn't at work for a couple of weeks, and she wasn't living here either. So you can see why we're asking if she was in any kind of trouble.'

Rene looked as if she was about to cry. 'I don't know. What trouble do you mean?'

Foley sensed she knew more than she was letting on and he gave an impatient sigh which made her blink nervously. Then before he could say anything else she turned back to the door. 'I'm sorry, I have to go.'

'Rene.' Foley didn't mean to snap. It made her jump and she spun around like a startled rabbit. 'Look,' he shifted his tone, 'this isn't about getting anyone into trouble. We just want the truth. Nothing else. Mary's gone now so whatever you say won't harm her. And your name won't be mentioned either. Except as a friend.'

A tear crept out and trickled down her cheek. 'I can't... I love Mary. I don't want to be the one to break a promise.'

'Do you mean about her being... you knew about the baby, didn't you?'

Rene's hand went to her mouth. 'I didn't say that.'

'Look, you can tell me. No one's going to think badly of you.'

'I can't.' Her hands flew out as if to push him away. 'You'll have to ask Michael.'

'Michael? Who's Michael?'

'I don't know his last name. He's a porter here. He'll know what to tell you.'

‘Do you mean Michael Rowe, that tall fella who works in the kitchen? How would he know about it? Are you saying...?’ But Rene was gone, leaving the door to swing shut with a dull plop.

Foley cringed at the thought of Michael Rowe and Mary up close and personal. Rowe was a bit of a lad with a sneer on his face that said he knew it all. Tall, thin, moody, he moved with a typical teenage lethargy. Had Mary ever mentioned him? But then she hadn’t been home. So where had she been? Was she living with Rowe? Was he with her when she had the baby? Or was she alone, terrified and in agony? It was too horrible to imagine. Foley poured another whiskey and swallowed it straight down.

But was Michael Rowe the father? And where was the baby now?

‘Why didn’t she just come home?’ Foley asked the empty glass. Yes, they would have been shocked. But they would never have turned her away. How could she think they’d turn her away?

This time Foley took a swig straight from the bottle.

Chapter 25

‘I don’t know what to do anymore, Lucy.’ Liam Edge rubbed his fingers along the top of the marble gravestone leaving a fine line through the dust. He wished he’d brought some flowers but this visit wasn’t planned. He usually came after Mass on Sunday. But tonight he had a desperate need to pour his heart out to someone who would listen without reproach.

The sun creeping down behind the Slieve Mish Mountains drew dark shadows from the oak trees on the inside of the cemetery wall. A cloud of rooks squawked madly as they gathered there for the night.

‘You know I never wanted to be a feckin’ sergeant in the first place.’ Edge looked over at another grave tucked away in the far corner by the main gates. ‘I only did it to impress her.’

That other grave belonged to his first wife Eileen Burke. She had enough ambition for both of them. He knew Eileen was a fierce Irish Republican when they met, and that she had an opinion on everything under the sun. And as a police officer Edge was technically on the opposite side of the fence. But he married her anyway.

His superiors in the Royal Irish Constabulary didn’t think it was a problem because they still awarded him a medal for exceptional service. On the strength of that, Eileen persuaded him to apply for promotion to Sergeant. But all Edge ever wanted to be was just an ordinary cop - to serve and protect. That was his nature. Serve and protect. Wearing the sergeant’s stripes didn’t sit well with him. And it wasn’t long before the pressure from the extra responsibility began to agitate the little cracks that were already appearing in their marriage.

The 1916 Easter Rising opened the cracks beyond repair. When the Republican leaders were hanged by the British the outpouring of resentment had every police officer carrying a weapon at all times. They were the public face of the establishment—an obvious target. So they were walking on eggshells, braced for

the unexpected. But when the attacks did come they were so sudden the officers had no chance to defend themselves.

Two officers in Farranfore were walking by O'Sullivan's pub when they were shot at close range. Two more were shot in The Mall, Tralee, and another as he got off a train.

Edge believed his involvement with Eileen Burke gave him some sort of protection. But he couldn't guarantee it and he didn't want Eileen caught in the crossfire. So he moved out of his house in Rock Street and into the police barracks. And he never went back.

When the Irish Free State was created the Royal Irish Constabulary was disbanded and replaced with the Gardaí. At the same time, the country split in two and collapsed into a vicious civil war. Liam Edge was stunned when Eileen's family went from being just supporters of the IRA to active volunteers. He tried to warn them about the consequences but they just stonewalled him. He was advised to step back and not to interfere.

Because of the IRA activity in County Kerry, the Free State Army was despatched to Fenit and marched on Tralee. There was fierce resistance—the Army barracks at Ballymullen and the Garda barracks in Bridge Street were set alight. But the town was eventually secured by the Free State troopers at four o'clock in the afternoon. Eight troopers had been killed and another eight were wounded. The IRA casualties were not known.

And around eight o'clock that evening Liam Edge was given the dreadful news. Both Eileen Burke and her brother Michael were dead. The troops were fired on from a cluster of haystacks near the Spa. Spotting several flashes from one haystack in particular the troopers concentrated their fire on it. Eileen, Michael and another man died instantly under the volley of lead. Three rifles were recovered at the scene.

The following days were a blur for Liam Edge. The Army Special Branch and the Dublin Metropolitan Police questioned him relentlessly about Eileen's involvement with the IRA. But Edge refused to be intimidated. He was a decorated Garda Sergeant. He had nothing to answer for.

The rest of Eileen's family were arrested and imprisoned, and after Eileen's funeral, Edge never saw them again.

Lucy Valance was at the funeral. She was a distant cousin of Eileen's mother and she came up to shake his hand. 'So sorry for your loss,' she said in a low husky voice, and her dark eyes were so intense Edge was instantly mesmerised.

The gathering after the funeral was in Benner's Hotel but Edge was reluctant to go because he didn't want to face Eileen's family. They had nothing in common now. Her father and the others were on day release from prison and Edge knew they would only tolerate him out of respect. But Lucy Valance was going to be there and he felt a desperate need to get to know a little bit more about her. It was obscene, he knew that. And he did feel guilty about it. But the attraction was too strong. Or was he deluding himself, a sad widower grasping at a friendly shadow?

Lucy was standing at the back of the room when he walked in and she gave him an amazing smile. And he spent the rest of the evening in her company, drinking and swapping stories, and when they left together later there was a lot of muttering about the indecency of it. A lot of people didn't like it, and when it got

back to the Superintendent he called Edge in and insisted he couldn't have one of his sergeants involved in another scandal so soon after the much-publicized death of his wife. So to calm things down Lucy and Edge waited a year before getting married in Listowel.

Two happy years was all they had together. Then Lucy was gone.

Chapter 26

A stocky man in LSF uniform poked his head around the bar door and he beamed when he saw Foley. 'Eamon.' He waved his hand around the empty room. 'I'm not jumping the queue, am I?'

Foley chuckled. 'Dean, what's a fella like you doing in a nice place like this?'

'I thought Delaney's would be shut because of what happened,' he said, then he groaned and slapped his forehead. 'Jasus, I forgot. It was Joe McCarthy, your brother. I'm so sorry, Eamon.'

'Brother-in-law,' Foley corrected.

'What? Oh, right. But...' he lowered his voice, 'what are you doing here? Surely they'd give you the night off?'

'Naw. I needed to get out of the house for a few hours. You know how it is. Anyway, what can I get you?'

'A pint please, Eamon. Something to wet my whiskers before I go on duty.' He perched himself on a stool. 'Have any of the lads been in?'

'No. Just the usual Monday crowd—me and the manager.'

'So your brother-in-law, what happened to him? There's a rumour he was shot, but there are so many different versions it's hard to know what's true.'

Foley considered his answer. He wasn't sure what the official story was. 'There's a lot of confusion all right, Dean. But the...'

'Ah, there you are!' The woman's voice was like cracking ice as she swept in the door and headed straight for Dean. 'You're an awful hard man to catch. I was heading home when I saw you coming out of your shop but by the time I managed to cross the road you'd gone haring off down the street. I assumed you'd be going down to us but then I saw you turning in here so I came in after you.'

'Mrs Delaney.' Dean gave her his best smile. 'I thought you'd still be shut.'

'We're not.' She slapped her handbag on the counter. 'The guards have finished with us, thank God. So tis business as usual.'

'When did that happen?' Foley sounded sharper than he intended and she gave him a hard glare.

'Today.' She puffed out her chest. 'If it's any of your business. That stropky little cow that's always hanging around Sergeant Edge called in and gave us permission to open up again, would you believe. As if we were supposed to be eternally grateful to her, the little madam.' Mrs Delaney squinted at Foley and sniffed. 'Oh, tis you. I didn't recognize you there for a minute. I'm very sorry for your loss. Of course, I am. But things are hard enough these days without having to close the pub out of sympathy for... well, you know what I mean.'

Dean took a long drink from his pint and wiped some froth from his lip. 'So what can I do for you, Mrs Delaney?'

She rummaged in her purse and took out something wrapped in tissue paper, unfolded it carefully and handed it to him. 'I was wondering if you would have a look at this for me. I think it might be silver.'

Dean held it up to the light. 'Where did you get it?'

'Ah well, tis been knocking around the house for ages. I think it's the foot off an old snuff box my grandmother left to me. I could be wrong, of course. It could be a bit off an old candlestick. We have two in the living room upstairs, you know.'

'Well, it looks like silver all right.' He took it to the window and made some grumbling noises before rolling it back in the tissue. 'If you bring it over to the shop in the morning I'll be able to give you a value.'

'But it is silver?' Mrs Delaney snatched it from him. 'You can tell tis silver, can't you?'

'As I said, bring it over in the morning and...'

'But it is silver, isn't it? You can tell tis silver,' she repeated.

Dean took a long swig of beer and put the glass down heavily. 'In the morning, Mrs Maguire. I'll be able to tell you more in the morning.'

'And you call yourself a jeweller! A proper jeweller would be able to tell by just looking at it. Why can't...'

Dean rubbed his mouth and gave a cheery wave. 'Anyway, duty calls. I'm off to protect you good citizens while you sleep soundly in your beds. I'll be seeing you.'

'What are you going to do about my bit of silver? Don't tell me you're just going to...'

'Look, do you want to leave it with me?'

'What?' She clutched the handbag to her chest. 'You want to keep it? How do I know...?'

'Please yourself.' Dean nodded to Foley. 'See you later, Eamon.'

'All right.' Mrs Maguire ran after him. 'Take it. Only don't bring it down to the pub, will you? I don't want the auld man knowing about it. He has enough on his plate to be worrying about me selling off the family silver.' She pressed the tissue into his hand. 'And don't be thinking of cheating me. I know what you people are like, robbing poor people like me out of our inheritance. I want a fair price for it.'

Dean stuffed the tissue into his shirt pocket, flashed a wide smile and shot out of the door. Mrs Delaney gave Foley another sour look and ran after Dean.

Foley began to tidy up, not that there was much to do. He dreaded going home. There was so much he didn't want to face. Perhaps he'd take a walk first to clear his head. Dean's head appeared around the door again. 'Is she gone?'

'I thought you were gone yourself.'

'I hid in the toilet. I still have an hour before I'm on duty so I'll have another pint if you don't mind. And one for yourself.'

Foley took two glasses from the shelf behind him and started to fill them.

'I could swing for that feekin' woman,' Dean groaned as he sat back on the stool. 'She's always the same. She doesn't trust a single person on God's earth. I never understand why she runs a pub if she can't stand people.'

He took the tissue from his pocket and unfolded it, picked up the small lump of silver and rubbed it between his fingers again. 'Tis an odd little thing, isn't it? I

wonder where she found it. It's certainly not the leg of a snuff box. It looks more like a... what do you think this looks like, Eamon?

Foley took it and held it up to the light. 'It looks nothing like a foot, that's for sure. I'd say it looks more like... '

'A bullet? It could be, couldn't it? A bullet would be flattened like that, wouldn't it - depending on what it hit.'

'Where did she say she got it?'

'A family heirloom, she said.'

'Oh my God.' Foley dropped it back on the tissue. 'What if she found it in the bar where Joe was shot? That could be the bullet that killed him.'

'Holy shit, Eamon!' Dean stood up then sat down again. 'You can't be serious. So who do you think... who would be using a bullet made of silver? That's the kind of stuff you see in comics. You don't see stuff like that in real life.'

'Can I keep this?' Foley picked up the tissue. Something was tugging at the edge of his mind but he cut away from it, afraid of what it was saying. 'I think Liam Edge should look at it, see what he thinks it is. But first I should go down to Delaney's and talk to Patsy.'

'All right.' Dean didn't look too sure. 'Just don't lose it. I couldn't face her if she comes looking for it in the morning and I haven't got it.'

Chapter 27

The sole customer leaning on the bar in Delaney's had the air of a weary old farmer about him. He nodded at Foley as he came through the door. John Joe was behind the counter hammering a tap into a barrel of stout with a rubber mallet. He grunted with the effort and barely glanced up when Foley rapped on the counter.

There was a splurge from the tap as John Joe opened it. He filled a glass with frothy stout before screwing the tap shut again. Holding the glass up to the light, he nodded and poured the contents into a jug under the counter. 'Well, I'm surprised to see you in here tonight, Eamon.' He looked sideways at Foley. 'Especially after Joe... anyway, I'm sorry for your loss. Will you have a pint?'

'No. I only called in to see Patsy. Is she in?'

John Joe scratched his head. 'Look, Eamon, what happened on Friday was a tragedy and I'm very sorry. But none of it was anything to do with us. We weren't...'

'John Joe, I just want a quick word with your wife.'

'Ah sure, I know that.' John Joe rubbed his finger around the inside of his shirt collar. 'But if you're wondering why we're open already, well times are hard and we can't afford not to open. I'm sorry, but as I said, none of it's our fault.'

'I didn't say it was.' Foley gave a forced smile. 'All I want is a quick word with your wife.'

'What do you want now?' A shrill wail came from the living room door.

'Ah, Patsy.' Foley took the tissue from his pocket. 'I'm sorry to bother you. I just wanted to know where you got this.'

‘What is that?’ She walked over to see what Foley was holding and a shadow flickered across her forehead. She went to take it but Foley closed his fist.

‘It’s the bit of silver you were asking Dean about.’

She tried to grab it again. ‘What are you doing with that? It’s mine. How dare you. Give it back to me this minute.’

‘Mrs Delaney, I need to know where you found it.’

‘I didn’t find it, you ignorant sod. It’s off a snuff box my mother left me. What right have you got to steal it? Give it back to me right now or I’ll have you arrested. John Joe, call the guards.’

‘The thing is, both Dean Callaghan and I think this bit of silver looks more like a bullet than the foot off a snuff box. Now if it is, it could be the bullet that killed Joe McCarthy. So I’m asking you for the last time, where did you get it?’

‘How dare you come into my pub and start accusing me of—of—of whatever it is you’re accusing me of, you little shit.’ A trickle of spit glistened on the corner of her mouth. ‘Are you saying I stole it? Why on God’s name would I... anyway, whoever heard of a bullet made of silver? It is silver, isn’t it? I can’t believe you’re saying I stole it. I can prove it came from a snuff box my mother gave me, God rest her poor soul.’ She made another snatch at Foley’s hand. ‘So give it back to me, you thieving bastard or I’ll have you sent to jail yourself. Just give it back and feck off out of my pub—now!’

Foley held the flat of his hand in front of her face. ‘Mrs Delaney, I’m here on official Garda business. I’m investigating the murder of Joe McCarthy and I believe this bit of silver is crucial to that investigation. I believe you found it and you decided to keep it for yourself. Now I don’t know if you realized what it was but that’s no excuse. So if you don’t give me a straight answer right now I’m going down to the barracks for Sgt Edge. He’ll come here with the guards and he’ll shut the place indefinitely while he goes through every square inch looking for more evidence. Do I make myself clear?’

The farmer banged his glass on the counter. ‘Can I have another pint before you do? John Joe, another pint there, so.’

Mrs Delaney glared over at her husband for support. ‘Well, I know nothing about any silver bullet.’ John Joe hitched up his trousers. ‘And I’ll stand up in court and swear on the Bible that I didn’t see him in this bar on Friday night.’

The three of them looked at him. ‘Who?’

‘The Lone feckin’ Ranger! Who else uses silver bullets?’

‘You stupid...’ Foley tried to grab him but Mrs Delaney rushed between them. ‘All right. I found it on the floor over by the fireplace. But I had no idea it was a bullet. I mean, how could I? I wouldn’t know what a bullet looks like. But I knew it was silver. I thought it fell off someone’s jewellery or something. Serves them right, I say, if they have so much money they can wear jewellery to show off. Anyway, finders keepers. Isn’t it?’

Foley put the tissue in his pocket and headed for the door.

‘So what are you going to do now?’ Mrs Delaney ran after him. ‘You can’t blame me for wanting to keep it. Things are hard, you know. It’s every man for himself!’

As he walked up Bridge Street Foley’s mind was spinning. It was like trying to read a deck of cards that was being flicked in your face. All you see is a blurred mess of red and black dots. A silver bullet? What did it mean? Colin Regan had

silver bullets. But surely to God, it wasn't him. Living in a small town he'd have known Joe McCarthy. But what could Joe have done to upset him enough to make him do that?

Then a dreadful thought drew a cold circle around Foley's heart. What if it wasn't Joe he meant to hit? What if Colin Regan was under some illusion that Jane still had feelings for Foley? What if Regan was as unbalanced as Cassidy said he was and suspicion was festering in his mind? People killed for less. It was time to go and talk this over with Liam Edge.

Chapter 28

Liam Edge touched the gravestone again and choked back a weary sob. 'Oh Lucy, Lucy. Why did you leave me?'

Ballybunion beach was packed that beautiful Sunday afternoon. The whole of Kerry was taking advantage of the rare period of unbroken sunshine. Liam Edge and Lucy had been splashing around in the sea for over an hour when Edge told her he was getting out, going back to their spot to lie in the sun. Lucy blew him a kiss. 'OK, you get a pot of tea and I'll join you in about fifteen minutes.'

Because of the crowd, it took Edge over twenty minutes to get the tray of tea and scones from the little shop by the seaweed baths. And he was surprised that Lucy wasn't waiting for him when he got back. Perhaps she'd gone up the hill to the toilet. But after another twenty minutes he began to get worried and he went back down to the water. When he couldn't find her amongst the throng of swimmers the lump in his stomach turned into a knot of panic. Eventually, it got too much for him and he called for help.

The lifeguards took him out beyond the waves in a whaler but there was still no sign of her. By now word got around and people were leaving the water to make the search easier. Someone suggested she might have swum around to the Nun's Strand on the other side of the cliff. She was a strong swimmer but there was a possibility she didn't have the energy to swim back just yet.

Edge had never been around this headland before and he was stunned by the size of the caves dotted along the cliff face. The lifeguards suggested they take a look inside them. What they found in the first cave haunted Edge every day of his life since. While he was standing in line to get a tray of tea Lucy was struggling for her life against a tide that had sucked her into a cave and held her there in appalling blackness.

She was unrecognizable when they recovered her, battered to a pulp by the thunderous roll of the tide. She was identified by her wedding ring and the blue band on her ponytail. In the blink of an eye, everything had changed. And yet nothing had changed. Edge struggled to understand how normal life could carry on around him. Couldn't they see his world had just been shredded? How could people be laughing when he had the heart ripped out of him?

It was only the support of his colleagues that kept him from throwing himself in front of the Cork Express. They forced him back to work, kept him busy, and didn't give him time to brood.

The house in Creamery Lane was all he had left of Lucy now. It wrapped itself around him like her arms used to do. He felt her in the very fabric of the place, heard her voice in every creak and whisper, smelt her presence in every room. He hurried home every evening just to sit in his big old armchair by the range and talk to her, telling her everything about his day.

Some years later Kathleen Foley and her daughter Mary rented a room in his house in Rock Street. She was a striking looking woman and it was obvious she was as lonely as he was. He enjoyed her company, her easy companionship, but it still took another two years before he finally asked her out. And only after he'd discussed it with Lucy first. He believed Lucy approved because the house itself felt comfortable about it. It seemed to re-shape itself to accommodate them all.

But lately, the pressure of the job was taking its toll on Sergeant Liam Edge. He was weary. His confidence was fraying. He used to love the challenges that each day brought. He loved the buzz of squaring up to a criminal, the thrill of the chase, the rush of adrenalin that gave him a wonderful high.

Not anymore. These days his stomach tightened if there was a confrontation. He'd struggle to stop his hands from shaking. He couldn't even stand up to the Super anymore. Is this how it is when you get older? Your perception changes? Your vulnerability becomes obvious? Was it because of the war in Europe? The rioting, civil unrest, food shortages, people being vilified because they had a job and their neighbour didn't? All around him there was a tangible fear.

An animal howled behind him and Edge buried his face in his hands. For God's sake! Why couldn't he just face the truth? The way he was feeling right now had nothing to do with any of those things. If he had the guts to admit it, they boiled down just one thing—his obsession with Alex Cassidy.

How did it ever come to this? His life was floating along nicely before she appeared. He'd settled into a comfortable routine with Kathleen and her daughter Mary. His step-daughter Vicky was married with five kids. His stepson Eamon was in Dublin. All was well with his world.

Then Eamon turned up out of the blue with a son and a girl called Alex Cassidy. Edge would never forget the shock he got when he saw her. The way she held herself, her black hair in a ponytail flicking around her as she moved. Dark eyes taking everything in. Edge was stunned. It was as if Lucy had come back to him.

That was where the similarity ended. Lucy Valance had a tangible aura around her. If she was in a room you were aware of her, even if she never spoke. Alex Cassidy was different. A duller light. And a face that rarely changed expression. Yes, she was beautiful when she laughed and her face lit up. Otherwise, it was as if she was wearing a mask.

But Edge couldn't see beyond the physical. She reminded him so much of Lucy. Of what he'd lost. Being close to Cassidy was all he needed to keep Lucy alive in his heart. He grabbed every opportunity to be with her.

Recently, though, the edges were starting to blur. Cassidy was morphing into a full-blown replacement for Lucy instead of just a reminder. The odd thing was, Edge could never get as close to Cassidy as he did to Lucy. Cassidy followed him around like a shadow. She walked close to him. She stood so near he could feel the heat from her body. She held eye contact, unblinking, enticing. She would

laugh at his jokes, make an odd suggestive comment. She gave everyone the impression they were conspiring in something intimate.

But if Edge stepped an inch inside her personal space she stepped the same distance away from him. And it played havoc with his head. He struggled to understand why. It tormented him so much he couldn't concentrate on anything else. But how could he get behind that barrier? He was desperate to break down her resistance and show her how he felt?

Then suddenly the answer was there. Foley told him where Raymond Price has hidden the money and the ledger—in a secret chimney in the Blue Bird Hotel. All Edge had to do was go and get it. He would contact his pals in Special Branch and find out all he could about Leo Maranus. That would determine what he did with the ledger—offer it back to Maranus for a price, or pass it on to Special Branch.

Either way, he was keeping the money. He would use it to impress Cassidy, buy her affection by smothering her in gifts. He even fantasised about eloping to America with her. He wasn't too old to follow his dream, find a small town in Oklahoma and become their sheriff.

But first, he had to get the money. And he couldn't do it on his own. However, he knew a man who could. Pincher Sweeney, the Fenit Ferret, was the most efficient burglar Edge had ever known. He was so good some people didn't even know they'd been robbed.

Pincher wasn't the brightest candle in the box, though. The first time he did a job he tried to sell the antique silver to his local jeweller, who was the brother of the victim. But Pincher didn't learn anything from that and he made the same silly mistakes time after time. Now, after his latest spell in prison, he was determined to behave himself. He got a job delivering fish all over the country. Including Dublin.

So Edge met Pincher in Fenit and convinced him that the Gardaí needed his help. It was a delicate operation for which he'd be handsomely rewarded. But he had to sign an agreement to not tell a living soul for as long as he lived. Pincher was delighted. He agreed to pick Edge up on his way to Dublin on Thursday. But that was as far as it went. Because today Liam Edge's dream had turned to dust.

The look on Cassidy's face when she saw him standing by the van caused something inside Edge to twist out of all proportion. It made him feel so stupid, so embarrassed. He wanted to crawl away and hide under a stone. What in God's name was he doing, acting the fool with her in front of the whole town? His face burned at the thought of it. Suddenly he despised her.

From now on he was going to keep out of her way. And he'd make sure they never worked together again. She'd have to get out of the room she rented from him in his house in Rock Street too—he'd tell her he needed her room for Vicky and her children. The other tenants would have to leave too, of course. Vicky would need the whole house.

Seeing Cassidy's smug face as he gave her the bad news would give him enormous satisfaction.

Chapter 29

Jane Kennedy was coming around the corner into Creamery Lane as Foley opened his front door, and for a second he didn't know what to do. He still had the piece of silver in his pocket and he felt so awkward about it he almost turned back into the house. How could he look her in the eye and pretend he wasn't thinking what he was thinking? Was this a bullet from her husband's gun?

The way her shoulders were hunched she was already in a foul mood anyway. Perhaps he should just shut the door and pretend he hadn't seen her. But she was already glaring at him so he held the door open and nodded for her to come in.

'No.' He could hear her panting as she drew closer. 'I just want to borrow your van?'

'Oh? I don't know. I'm not sure if Liam wants me to...'

'We just had a phone call from a customer in Killarney.' Jane stopped inches from his face and her cheeks were flushed. 'They said if we deliver their order this morning they'll pay us in cash. Tis a huge order for us, Eamon. And with the money, we can get our van fixed. We can't let him down.'

'Look, come in and have a cup of tea while I think about it.'

'No. I need to know now! They want their stuff this morning. I need the van right now. I can't wait while you fart around drinking tea.'

Foley could feel the heat from her face and he had a sudden impulse to lean down and kiss her beautiful lips. She stepped back from him.

'Jane, I'm sorry but I have to find Liam first. He was supposed to be checking with Castleisland about Mickey. But he didn't come home last night so I don't know what's going on. I can bring the van over to you later, though. After I've seen Liam.'

'That'll be too late.' Jane slapped her hands together. 'I need the van now, Eamon!'

'And I need to know what's happening with Mickey. If I go with you to Killarney, Liam might be trying to find me and...'

'Why do you have to come with me?' Jane gave her nose an angry wipe. 'I can drive myself. Just give me the key.'

'You can drive?'

'Of course I can drive, you big eejit. Who do you think drives our van? And before you say it, that's not the reason it conked out. I'm a good driver. I've never had a single accident in my life.'

Foley got the key off the nail behind the door and dropped it into her hand. 'In that case, you can drive me down to the barracks.'

'All right. But you can help me load the stuff into the van first.' Now her eyes were bright again and she gave him a big smile.

The packages filled the van and spilt over onto the front seat. 'So I'm walking down to the barracks, am I?' Foley muttered.

'Well, it's your fault.' Jane waved a fistful of paperwork at him. 'I can't believe you've still got all that junk in the back. I thought you would have dumped it already.'

'Dumped it where?'

'Throw it in the river like everyone else.' She shut the van door and disappeared back into the office. Foley followed her and stood by the reception window as she

scribbled a note for Jerome. 'Why can't your boss drive you if the order is so important?'

'Jerome? No. I told you already, he doesn't usually come in before mid-day.'

'Nice job if you can get it.'

Something flashed in Jane's eyes. 'He's not a well man, Eamon. I told you. Ever since his wife... well, he doesn't sleep too well so he has—assistance, shall we say? So he usually sleeps late. Anyway, stop asking if someone else can drive me. I can drive me! I'm a good driver.'

'Sorry. I worry about you, that's all.' It came out before Foley could stop himself. Jane looked at him for a second as she flicked open the bottom drawer of the desk and dropped her handbag into it. Then she locked it by sliding a ruler between the drawer and the edge of the desk and forcing it back into place.

She caught Foley's eye and pulled a face. 'We lost the key ages ago. C'mon, I haven't got all day to stand here chatting.'

They went back out to the van and Jane slid into the driver's seat. She left the factory door wide open. 'Aren't you going to lock that?' Foley pointed at it with his thumb.

'Why?' Jane gave him a look that questioned his sanity. 'What's in there that's worth robbing?' She wound down the van window. 'In fact, if someone did rob us they'd be doing us a favour. We'd get more from the insurance than the business is worth. Especially if they burnt the place down. Anyway, Old Ted is in the workshop.'

Foley turned the handle and started the engine, and Jane gave a flick of a wave and shot off up the street. It was almost ten o'clock now. Liam Edge would surely have reported for duty by now. As Foley headed for the Garda barracks he took the tissue out of his pocket and studied the piece of silver again.

It had tormented him all night, making his mind flip-flop between taking it to Sergeant Edge and just giving it back to Patsy Delaney and forgetting all about it. He could imagine Edge's face getting all out of shape as he threw questions at Foley like leaves in a storm. Where did Foley get it? What made him think it was a bullet, or that it was the one that killed Joe? How did he even know Colin Regan had silver bullets? Why would Regan shoot Joe? Was Foley suggesting the shot was meant for him? Did Foley believe Regan was so insecure he'd shoot his wife's former lover? And of course, if Regan did shoot Joe, Maranus would be out of the picture. So was Foley saying Regan kidnapped Mickey?

And what did Foley want Edge to do about it—apply for a warrant over a legally held weapon? Seriously? On what evidence—a blob of silver that might or might not be a bullet? And if Edge did get a warrant, what can of maggots would that open up? Especially if Foley was wrong and the two bullets were still in Colin's gun. How Jane would react to that didn't bear thinking about.

But Foley knew in his bones the bit of silver was linked to Joe's murder. If only he could look at Colin's gun he would prove it one way or the other. But obviously, he couldn't just call around and ask Jane.

He wondered what kind of lock she had on her front door. Could he pick it without the neighbours seeing him? Probably not. Jane said there were eyes everywhere. But she had a back door. Could he get in that way? Then he remembered, Jane left her handbag in the desk drawer in the office. What were the

chances of her house keys being in it? If they were, maybe Foley could make an imprint of them, take it down to Benner's and get copies cut. How long would that take? It would be at least two hours before Jane got back from Killarney. Would that be enough time to get the key cut, get up to Railway Terrace and check out the gun?

He turned around a dozen times as he tried to make up his mind and eventually he built up enough courage to head back to Jane's factory. He crept along the passage to the reception. He could see Old Ted through a small window above a filing cabinet. He was bent over a newspaper and sipping tea from a big enamel mug. Foley flipped Jane's drawer open with the ruler. A bunch of keys was lying right at the top of Jane's bag and he snatched them up. All he needed now was a pencil and some blank paper to make an imprint. He jumped when the phone rang.

The initial panic blocked his mind, but the next ring snapped him back into action. He shoved the drawer back into place and ran down the corridor with the keys in his hand and he reached the street as the workshop door popped open.

Chapter 30

Railway Terrace was tucked away behind a high wall on the Listowel Road, easily missed if you weren't looking for it. Two rows of terraced houses faced each other across a small green. A church blocked off one end of the green and the railway stores at the other end turned the place into the nearest thing to a private enclave. The only way in was by an access road at the side of the Station Master's house.

The green was flat and bare. Anyone approaching Jane's front door would be seen from the houses opposite. But there was a lane between the high wall and the back of Jane's house. Foley checked the bunch of keys again—one long one, one very small delicate one and one short one. He assumed the long one was for the back door.

The wall around Jane's backyard was about four feet high. Foley's eyes were everywhere as he leant over the gate and slide the bolt across. Then he paused before easing it open. There was an outhouse with two doors. Foley took a quick look in each of them. The first one was a shed with turf stacked against the back wall and folded cardboard piled against the side. Old coal sacks hung on the back of the door. Behind the second door was a toilet.

He listened at the back door for a few seconds before trying the key, then he eased the door open and poked his head into the tiny scullery. The shelves above the porcelain sink had everything on them from a can of oil to a frying pan.

The silence made the rustle of his clothes sound like a tidal wave as he went through to the sitting room. The little key opened the gun cabinet and when he picked up the Derringer he was surprised how solid it felt. He sniffed the barrel. He wasn't sure why but it's what they did in the movies. He took it across to the window as he worked out how to open it, and there was a flash of disappointment when he did. There was a bullet in both barrels.

He turned it in his hand as if challenging it to be wrong. From the moment he first saw that piece of silver Mrs Delaney gave to Dean Callaghan, his instinct was pulling him in this direction. He was so sure. Just as well he hadn't taken it to Liam Edge. He twisted the gun in his hand again, wondering why he felt so disappointed. Surely he should be relieved. Now Jane had nothing to worry about. What was wrong with him?

Anyway, he'd done what he'd come to do. It was time to leave. As he went to shut the gun the light from the window caught a small mark in the bullet in the top chamber. Foley picked it out. It was just an empty casing. The weapon had been fired.

So he was right after all. He skipped back across the hall and into the kitchen. Then reality hit him and he sat on the arm of a chair. What was he supposed to do now? Take it to Liam Edge? Jane would notice it was gone the minute she came home. What would she do? Call the guards?

Footsteps crunched on the gravel outside and a shadow went past the window. Foley froze as the front door gave a clatter and a pile of letters fell onto the mat. The footsteps went off up the path.

Foley looked at the gun again as if it was going to tell him what to do next. Of course there might be a reasonable explanation for this. Redigan was presented with a beautiful weapon. It would be human nature to want to test it, to feel its power, to experience the kick and the accuracy. Who could resist it?

Foley picked out the second bullet, took the lump of silver from his pocket and held them both up to the light. There was only one way to check if the piece of silver was fired from this gun—fire it again and compare the results. But he couldn't do that in here. What was he going to fire it at? A cushion on the armchair? As if no one would notice a big burnt hole in the furniture.

He was suddenly conscious of the time. He was farting around too much. Then he remembered the shed. He checked the lane was clear before he went back out.

It was important both bullets were fired from the same barrel so he put the spent shell in his pocket and popped the good one in its place. Then he squeezed into the shed and wrapped one of the sacks around both his hand and the gun. He put the barrel against the stack of cardboard and fired downwards, and it gave a surprisingly soft pop.

Whipping the sacking off of his hand he scattered the cardboard until he found the bullet. Then he wrapped it in his handkerchief with the original bit of silver and the two spent shells. He tidied up the cardboard and hung the sack back on the nail before quietly shutting the door behind him.

After wiping the gun with the tail of his shirt he locked it back in the cabinet and wiped that too. And in his haste, he brushed against some pictures on the windowsill. They collapsed like dominoes and he fumbled to stop them from hitting the floor.

One small silver frame had a photo of Jane looking at the camera with just a hint of a smile. And it reminded him of a time when they were so close, when he could reach out and hold her, kiss her beautiful mouth, run his hands through her soft hair.

He couldn't help himself. He put the picture in his pocket.

Chapter 31

A spatter of rain hit Foley in the face as he shut Jane's back door and put the key in the lock. And when the toilet door flew open he jumped back about six feet.

The little boy with the chubby face and mop of curly hair couldn't have been more than ten years old, but his eyes watched Foley like a cat. Foley jerked up to his full height. 'Who the hell are you?'

'Who the hell are you, more like?'

'You cheeky little...'

'You're not the usual fella.'

'What usual fella?' Foley didn't want the neighbours coming out to see what the shouting was all about so he lowered his voice. 'And why are you hiding in Mrs Regan's toilet?'

'I was waiting for you.'

'You were waiting for me?'

'Well, not you.' The boy's eyes didn't blink as they held Foley's. 'I mean the fella with the long coat. He gives me sixpence every time I see him.'

'Why?' It came out as an angry yelp. 'Look, you can see I'm with the guards so you'd better start explaining yourself or I'll take you down to the barracks and...'

The boy snorted and rolled his eyes. 'Why? I haven't done anything.'

'You're hiding in Mrs Regan's toilet, for a start.'

'I needed a pee.' He gave an arrogant shrug. 'Mrs Regan said I could use her toilet anytime I wanted to.'

Foley wanted to slap the smug grin off the boy's face. 'So who are you? What's your name?'

'Joseph O'Connor. I live next door.' He pointed up at a window that looked down into Jane's yard. 'That's my bedroom up there.'

'So why aren't you at school?'

'My Ma is sick and I have to stay home to mind her.'

'So why aren't you at home minding her now? Why are you down here lurking in the toilet?'

'I heard you creeping around. I thought you were the other fella so I came down for my sixpence.'

'So why does this fella give you sixpence?'

'Because he wants me to keep quiet and not tell anyone I saw him.'

'I still don't understand. Explain to me.'

'Well, I do small jobs for Mr Regan. I cut up the sleepers for firewood and tidy up the yard. So when I hear him coming home I go down and he pays me.' He paused for Foley to say something. Foley just flicked his head. 'Anyway, one day I heard the gate so I went down, only this other fella was there. He grabbed me by the shirt and started yelling in my face about snooping around.'

Again the pause.

'Go on.' Foley growled.

'Well, he gave me sixpence and made me swear I wouldn't tell anyone about him.'

‘So what was he up to? What did he want you to keep quiet about?’

‘And you’re supposed to be the cop?’ The boy gave a knowing wink. ‘It was when Mr Regan was away in Dublin.’

Foley’s mouth opened but nothing came out. The boy grinned again. ‘So I kept an eye out for him.’ He said it as if it was the most natural thing in the world for a boy his age to be doing. ‘And sure enough, he was back the next day. I waited in the toilet until he came back out and he got really mad this time. He threatened to smash my skull with a dog iron. I told him I was only looking out for him. If anyone came I’d be able to warn him. He liked that.’

Foley cringed as he recognized the feeling that was gripping his chest. It was the same feeling he got all those years ago when he thought Jane was seeing another man. He swallowed it down quickly. ‘Describe him to me.’

‘He’s very tall. And he wears a long black coat.’

‘What colour hair?’

‘Ah... I’m not sure. Maybe t’was white. Yes, I think tis white.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘I am. Tis very light, anyway. I’m sure tis white. Maybe.’

‘Right.’ Foley poked him in the chest. ‘So don’t tell anyone you saw me either.’

‘That’ll be sixpence, so.’

‘What?’ Foley raised his hand but dropped it immediately. ‘No, it bloody won’t. I’m with the guards. I’ll take you down to the barracks and say I caught you coming out of the house.’

‘I live here... you’ll not get away with telling a pack of lies like that.’

‘I saw you coming out of that house with something in your hand.’

‘How could I? The door is locked.’

‘Tis open now, isn’t it?’ Foley took the small picture frame from his pocket and shoved it at the boy. ‘Do you know what this is?’

The boy took it instinctively, studied it and nodded. ‘That’s a photograph of Mrs Regan.’

Foley snatched it back. ‘And that is what you stole from the house’

‘I did not ...’

‘Well, it has your fingerprints all over it.’ Foley put it back in his pocket. ‘So one word out of you and you’ll be off to Borstal faster than you can say a Hail Mary. And who’ll mind your mammy then?’

‘You’re a feckin’ liar,’ the boy shrieked and he tried to grab the frame from Foley’s pocket. His eyes filled up and for the first time, they blinked rapidly. ‘Liar, liar,’ he sobbed.

‘Look, just do as I ask, will you?’ Foley’s voice was softer now. ‘Say nothing to no one. I’ll lock the door and walk away, and you’ll go home and forget you ever saw me. Otherwise...’

He patted his pocket and turned the key in the lock.

Chapter 32

As Foley rushed back down Edward Street it felt as if the whole town was out to slow him down. Cars jostled with ponies and traps around the Railway Station. People wandered all over the pavements smoking pipes and swapping gossip. A train rattled across the road between the railway stores and Latchford's yard, stopping the traffic and spattering the crowd with puffs of steam.

Foley glanced at the station clock. He needed to hurry if he was to return Jane's keys before she got back from Killarney. Then he needed to take the bullets down to Liam Edge and have them forensically checked. But he was dreading facing Sgt Edge. If the sergeant was still in his dark mood it could be Foley who got arrested. Everything he did was illegal—stealing Jane's keys, entering her house without a warrant, carrying out an unauthorised check on a firearm.

But having the bullets analysed would answer a crucial question. It had to be done. There was no other option.

Then as he passed Dean Callaghan's jeweller shop he had an idea. Maybe there was another option. He went straight through to the back room. Dean was bent over his bench studying something under a bright light. He glanced up when the shadow fell across him. 'Eamon. You're still in one piece. How did you get on with the delightful Mrs Delaney last night?'

'That woman has claws like a Tasmanian Devil,' Foley chuckled. 'I could have bled to death from the lumps she tore out of me.'

'Have you brought the knob of silver back to me?'

'I have.' Foley put the handkerchief on the counter. 'But only for a bit of technical advice.'

Dean looked suspiciously at the handkerchief. 'You know I charge for advice?'

Foley sniggered. 'Of course, you do.'

'I'm serious.'

'Dean, if I had to pay for advice I'd be speaking to a real jeweller. However, as you're a friend I'll pretend you know what you're talking about and ask you first.'

Dean sniffed the air. 'What's that awful smell?'

Foley looked around and sniffed too. 'Your feet?'

'No! Bullshit. And tis pouring out of you. So shut up and tell me what you want to know so I can get back to work and earn a crust for my starving family.'

Foley leant closer. 'I read somewhere that Scotland Yard caught a murderer because they could prove the bullet that killed his wife came from his gun. Every bullet fired from a particular gun will have identical marks on them.'

Dean looked even more suspicious. 'I knew that. I read an article about it in the New York Times. But why are you so interested in that stuff?'

Foley heaved himself onto a stool and opened the handkerchief. 'Would you take a look at these and see if they came from the same gun?'

'Jasus, Eamon.' Dean picked up a bullet with tweezers and held it up to the light. 'What are you up to now?'

'Tis a bit complicated.'

Dean looked closer at the item. 'Is that Mrs Delaney's knob of silver? You've got two of them. Where did you get the second one?'

'I can't say right now, Dean. And I'm not even sure if it means anything. I just need to know, that's all.'

Dean shoved them away with the tip of his finger. 'Eamon, if this is what I think you think it is, shouldn't you be taking it to the Gardaí and not coming in here playing Sherlock feckin' Holmes. This could be vital evidence. The guards are the best people to decide what to do with it. So take it down to the barracks and give it to them.'

'I can't.' Foley shoved them back at Dean. 'Look, all I want you to do is see if they came from the same gun. Can you do that for me?'

Dean snapped his fingers. 'This means you have the gun. For God's sake, Eamon! This is serious. We shouldn't be...'

'Shush.' Foley flapped his arms. 'Will you be quiet? We don't want the whole feckin' town to know about this.' He went to the door and pushed it shut.

'So where did you find the gun?' Dean was looking incredulous now. 'Eamon, if you have the gun...'

Foley slammed his hand on the counter. 'I haven't got the gun! Will you just shut up?'

'But you know where it is. And you know who it belongs to.'

'Dean, for feck sake, will you do me a favour and just look at the stupid things for me? If you tell me I'm pissing up the wrong tree then you can give Mrs Delaney back her piece of silver and I'll take the rest back to where I found them. All right?'

'And if I tell you that you're right?'

'Then I'll have to think very carefully before I cross that bridge.'

'Is it someone I know?'

Foley groaned and pushed the handkerchief closer. 'Look, just...'

'Someone close, isn't it? That's why you're all wound up like a clock spring. 'Tis someone close—someone in the family! My God, someone in the family put the finger on Joe because of something he's done. My good God...'

'What are you talking about? Do you think this is some sort of American gangster film? Stop it! Look, I came to you because I thought you could be trusted to keep it to yourself. But right now I can feel some serious doubts creeping in.'

'All right.' Dean rolled his eyes. 'Just calm down, will you? I'm concerned about you. As a friend, right? I don't want to see you get into something you can't dig yourself out of. I'm just trying to help you.'

'Then help me by looking at this and giving me your honest opinion.'

Dean picked up the two bullets. As he pressed the magnifier to his eye he rolled them between his fingers, looking from one to the other. It didn't take him long to hand them back to Foley. 'Well, you could be right. It looks like they were fired from the same gun all right.'

'Are you sure?'

Dean fluttered his eyebrows in mock annoyance. 'Of course, I'm sure. The marks are as close as dammit. This one is a bit more damaged than the other one. But that deep mark on them is almost identical.'

He studied Foley's face for a reaction and smiled when Foley squinted. 'So, if you want my opinion—as you clearly do, because you've asked me enough times—I'd say both of those bullets were fired from the same gun.'

Foley shuffled the items back onto the handkerchief and stuffed it into his pocket.

‘Just remember, Eamon. I’m not an expert by any means. The Gardaí should be looking at this. Let them decide if it means anything.’

Foley wanted to reply but his throat had dried up. He gave a thumbs-up instead and headed for the door.

Chapter 33

Liam Edge was standing in the middle of the road talking to an elderly man on a bike when Eamon Foley rushed around the corner into Courthouse Lane. He skidded to a stop and went to turn back but Edge looked up too soon and saw him. Foley desperately wanted to know what was happening about Mickey. But he also needed to get Jane’s keys back. Now he was stuck. He couldn’t just walk into her factory without having to explain himself to the sergeant. And if he left it too late Jane would be back.

Edge waved the elderly man away and started walking towards Foley. Even at a distance his body language showed his mood and it wasn’t good. ‘Where the hell were you?’

‘I was looking for you.’

‘So what did you find out?’

‘What did I find out about what?’

‘Last night!’ Edge was on top of him now, his breath coming in angry gasps.

‘Liam, what are you talking about?’

‘For Christ’s sake.’ Edge had spittle on the corner of his mouth. ‘What did I ask you to do last night? You were supposed to find out about Mary’s friends. That was the last thing I asked you to do for me.’

‘You did not!’ Foley stepped forward until their faces almost touched.

‘You’re feckin’ useless, the both of you.’ When Edge glanced behind him Foley noticed Cassidy standing back against the wall with her head down. ‘Do I have to do everything myself? All I wanted you to do was find out if anyone knew what happened to Mary. But it was too much to ask. If I had my way I’d fire the two of you and get myself a pet rat. I’d get more sense out of it!’

‘Well, you could talk to Michael Rowe.’ Foley’s face was red, embarrassed by Edge’s behaviour.

‘Who’s Michael Rowe?’

‘He’s a kitchen porter in The Grand Hotel. One of the girls thinks he was close to Mary.’

Edge let the silence hang there for longer than was necessary before he responded. ‘So where will we find this Michael Rowe?’

‘Well, I think he’s a Monastery Boy so he’s probably living in the hotel.’

‘What’s a Monastery Boy?’ Cassidy felt it was safe to speak. Edge snorted and began walking towards the town centre.

‘The Monastery is the local orphanage,’ Foley told her. He wasn’t sure if he should follow Edge or not. ‘Michael Rowe is an orphan so he won’t have any family.’

'I know how that feels.' Cassidy gave a small shiver and Foley was surprised to feel a ripple of sympathy for her. He usually took what she said with a huge lump of salt. But there was something in her eyes this time that made him believe her.

'Liam!' he sprinted after the sergeant. 'What did Castleisland have to say?'

Edge didn't respond.

'Liam!'

Foley grabbed his sleeve but Edge snapped it away. 'Don't ever do that again!' he growled.

'For God's sake, what's the matter with you? All I want to know is what Castleisland had to say about Mickey. It's three days now. I have to know what's happening.'

Edge started walking away again.

'Liam, for heaven's sake...'

'They said they'd let me know, all right?' Edge called over his shoulder. 'They're sending someone over to Edenburn. As soon as they find out what's happening they'll phone the barracks.'

'That's *it*? They'll phone the barracks?'

'Listen to me!' Edge snapped. 'They're sending someone over to the hospital and they'll let me know what's going on the moment they know themselves.'

'But tis three days already. Anything could have happened to him. If Maranus took him...'

'If Maranus took him,' Edge mocked. 'If Maranus took him wouldn't he have contacted you by now, you stupid prick?'

'Unless something went wrong! What if something went wrong?'

'Stop it!' Edge put his hand on Foley's chest. 'You need to calm down and wait for Castleisland to get in touch. In the meantime, take her,' he pointed behind him with his thumb, 'and go down to The Grand. See if you can talk to that Michael Rowe. I'll call the barracks from the phone box over there and I'll catch you up in a few minutes.'

As Edge crossed the street Foley sensed Cassidy come up beside him. 'What in heaven's name did you do to him?' he growled down at her.

For a split second, he thought her eyes filled up but she turned away and walked on ahead of him.

'So?' He trotted to catch her up. 'What going on?'

'He's kicking me out of my room, that's what's going on. He wants the house for Vicky and the children so he's kicking us all out.'

'What?' Foley took a closer look at her to see if she was being serious. 'When did he tell you that?'

They'd reached The Grand Hotel now and Cassidy pushed ahead through the front doors. Foley was struggling to understand what was going on between her and Liam Edge. He'd sensed a bit of tension between them recently but he was too caught up in his own drama to take much notice of it. Had they fallen out for good now, or was it just a brief misunderstanding that would sort itself out in a day or two? After all, Edge had been besotted with Cassidy since the day they first arrived in Tralee. He got her a job with Dr Adams. He got her into the LSF. He let her rent her room for less than he charged everyone else. Kathleen didn't like it, of course,

but like any loyal wife, she closed her eyes and hoped it was just a temporary bout of midlife crisis. It would fizzle out soon enough.

Could this be what's happening now, Foley wondered. Had Edge's feelings for Cassidy fizzled out? Was that a good thing? When he caught up with her in the foyer of the Grand Hotel a small group of people were clustered around the desk, and when the receptionist saw Foley she gave him a big smile.

'Hello, Eva.' Foley smiled back as he eased a large woman out of the way. 'I'm sorry to interrupt, but do you know if Michael Rowe is at work today?'

'Actually, I think he might be off sick. Maybe you should ask in the kitchen. They'll know for sure.'

Chapter 34

Tralee. January 1941

The cloud was low and heavy that day back in January as Foley drove the van into Denny Street. You couldn't even see the enormous Slieve Mish Mountains behind the town. The van's wiper was losing the fight with the rain. As soon as it scooped away a slice of water the gap was filled again by a gust of spray.

Foley's feet were so cold he couldn't feel his toes anymore. And the pain from the wound in his side made him sit awkwardly as he held the steering wheel, and now his back and his arm were aching too. Cassidy had Mickey on her lap and they were wrapped in an old greasy blanket they'd found in the back of the van.

The front wheel of the van clipped the kerb as Foley pulled up outside a big house near the Green. And he groaned as he eased himself up in his seat.

'Is that it?' Cassidy squinted through the steamed-up window at the row of impressive buildings. Foley pushed the van door open.

'Wait here,' he ordered. The rain was bouncing off the pavement and Cassidy wasn't going to argue.

The big house didn't look very grand up close. The old front door creaked and swung back against the wall with a clatter. The narrow corridor reeked of cabbage and dampness. The chipped green paint on the walls, the broken bannister on the stairs, even the torn lino on the floor looked the same as when Foley lived here all those years ago. Nothing had changed. He tapped on the door of Flat 3 and it was pulled open instantly. An elderly face peered out of the two-inch gap. 'What you want?'

'Oh?' It wasn't the face Foley was hoping to see. 'I'm looking for Mrs Foley. Mrs Kathleen Foley. She used to live here.'

'Don't know her.' The door was slammed shut so hard dust from the frame dropped down on Foley. He tapped on the door again but this time he got no answer.

Footsteps sounded on the landing above him. Someone was coming down the stairs. He rushed over and the young woman in a long raincoat eyed him suspiciously and raised her umbrella.

'I'm sorry.' Foley stepped back. 'I'm looking for Kathleen Foley. She used to live in number three. Do you know her?'

'Kathleen? I do, sure. Who's asking?'

'I'm Eamon. I'm her... a relative. I'm in town and I thought I'd pay her a visit.'

The woman chuckled. 'She's not here anymore, I'm afraid. She moved out ages ago.'

'Oh? Do you know where she's living now?'

'I imagine she's living with her husband. But I'm not sure where.' She saw the shock on Foley's face and she clutched the umbrella tighter. 'Are you alright there?'

'I... yes. It's just that...'

'You didn't know she got married? How close a relative are you?'

'No. Sorry.' Foley rubbed his eyes. 'I moved away years ago and we lost touch. You know how it goes. She probably wrote to tell me but I moved around a lot.'

The woman nodded as if she believed him. 'Yes. She married a sergeant in the guards. A lovely man. Liam Edge. He has a house in Rock Street but don't ask me what number.'

'Rock Street,' Foley repeated. 'Thank you. I'll wander over there and ask around. Thank you again.'

The woman went to say something else but reached for the door instead. Foley pulled it open for her and she gave him a sideways glance as she walked out into the rain that beat on the umbrella like a drum when she opened it. 'You could always call into the guard's barracks and ask them,' she called back.

When Foley got back in the car he had to take a few moments to process the news. His mother had married again? It never entered his head that she would even want to.

'What's happening?' Cassidy shifted Mickey on her lap.

'Nothing,' Foley mumbled. He pulled away and headed across town.

The young guard behind the desk in the Garda barracks studied Foley for a moment and decided he was harmless. 'What can I do for you, sir?'

'I'm looking for Sergeant Edge. Is he here?'

'No. He's out at the moment. Can I help?'

'Yes. I'm hoping to call on him. I know he lives in Rock Street but I can't remember the house number.'

The officer looked closer at Foley and his forehead creased with suspicion. Then he clicked his fingers and snorted. 'Foley?' He jabbed his pen at him. 'It is, isn't it?'

Foley stepped back and shook his head as he tried to place the officer.

'Tony Brick,' the officer chortled and his eyebrows almost reached his hairline. 'Have you forgotten me already?'

Then it all came back. 'Tony Brick? Of course. What the hell are you doing here?'

Brick patted the front of his jacket. 'The clue might be in the uniform. But you always were a thick eejit, Foley.'

'As I said, what the hell are you doing here, Brick?' Foley laughed. 'You were so crooked back then we thought we'd have to screw you into the ground to bury you.'

'You weren't so snow-white yourself, Foley.' Brick jabbed the pen at him again. 'Fingers as light as feathers, I heard. Things fell into your pockets all by themselves.'

'Lies,' Foley insisted. 'All lies.'

'Anyway, is this a fleeting visit or are you back for good?'

'That depends, Tony.'

'On what?'

'My mother. If I can find her.'

'What do you mean? What happened to her?'

'She was kidnapped by a Garda sergeant, by all accounts.'

Brick straightened up and his eyes narrowed, then he caught the smirk on Foley's face. 'Ha, ha,' he waved the pen at him again. 'Of course. Sergeant Edge. Now I get it. His new wife's name was Foley. I knew that but I never made the connection. So now Sergeant Edge is your... what? ... He's your step-father? Holy Mother of God. You poor sod. That'll put a stop to your shady activities, that's for sure.'

'So what's he like, this Sgt Edge?'

'What do you mean? Haven't you even met the man? Weren't you at the wedding?'

Foley shrugged. 'I wasn't, I'm afraid. I couldn't get away at the time. You know how it is. The world is upside down with this war going on. But I heard he's a lovely fella.'

Brick snorted again. 'That depends on which eyes you're looking through. Me, I get on great with him. But others have scars that go right to the bone after crossing him. You should be all right, though. Your mammy will protect you from him.'

'Thank you for your concern, Guard Brick. Now tell me where he lives. He has a house in Rock Street, yeah?'

'He does. But he rents it out. He lives in Creamery Lane.'

Creamery Lane was tiny, four houses on either side of a narrow street. A high wall at the far end separated it from St John the Evangelist Church and a big gate on the left was the entrance to the Lee Strand Creamery. Local farmers brought their milk there every morning. A line of donkeys and carts often stretched around the block and halfway up Ashe Street. Usually, a young girl or an old woman was in charge of the milk cart. It was rare to see a man because only those who could be spared took the milk to the creamery. It was a long, slow process.

Foley pulled up outside Number 1 and knocked on the door. Cassidy helped Mickey out of the van and the three of them stood in the rain waiting for someone to answer. The lady who opened the door looked at each of them in turn and her eyes narrowed. Then she looked back at Foley and this time her face lit up, and her hand went to her mouth. 'Eamon?' she gasped.

'Hello, Ma.'

'Oh, merciful Jesus. Is it you? Oh my good God. What are you doing here? I can't believe it.' She flung her arms around Foley's neck and he had to grind his teeth as the pain from his wound pounded up through his head.

He hugged her back then eased her off him. 'Ma, can we take this inside? We're getting drowned out here.'

‘Oh yes, yes.’ Mrs Edge stepped back and held the door open. ‘Of course. I’m sorry... yes... come in. Come in.’

She scowled at Cassidy as she filed past, then she shut the door behind her. The heat from the big range was already causing steam to come off their wet clothes as they stood around the table in the small kitchen. Mrs Edge shuffled in behind them and Foley put his hands on Mickey’s shoulders. ‘Ma, I’d like you to meet my son. This is Mickey.’

‘What? You have a son? Oh my Good Lord.’ Mrs Edge swept the boy up in her arms and squeezed him. ‘Oh, you beautiful boy. You’re so handsome. You’re the image of your father at that age.’

Then she looked Cassidy up and down and the scowl was back in the folds of her brow. ‘And you’re the mother, are you?’

Cassidy spluttered. ‘No. I’m not the mother. I’m...’

‘Ma, his mother is dead. She had a heart attack last November.’

Mrs Edge sagged back and squeezed Mickey tighter. ‘Oh Blessed Lady. That’s dreadful. You poor boy. I’m so, so sorry.’ She turned back to Foley. ‘Were you and the mother...?’

‘Yes, Ma. Katie and me were married.’

Mrs Edge gave a long sigh and put Mickey down. Then she moved the kettle onto the hot plate on the range. ‘Sit down, sit down.’ She took a towel from the rack above the range and handed it to Foley. He rubbed his face with it as he dropped into the armchair. Mickey climbed onto his lap and Cassidy sat at the table.

‘You’ll have some tea?’ Mrs Edge picked up the teapot and shook it out in the sink. Then she dropped it back on the range and took a tea caddy from the shelf. ‘And something to eat? I have some cheese. Would you like some bread and cheese? I think I might have...’

Cassidy had brought the bag of food from the car with her and she tipped it out on the table. ‘We have stuff here,’ she said.

Mrs Edge scowled at her again then looked at Foley. ‘So how long were you married for, Eamon?’

Foley rubbed Mickey’s hair with the towel. ‘Mickey will be four in December. So just over four years.’

Mrs Edge gave a small nod. ‘And her name was Katie, did you say?’

‘Ma, I wrote to you. I told you all about her. And I told you about Mickey. I sent the letters to your old flat in Denny Street.’

‘God, I moved out of that place ages ago. Right after Vicky got married. Me and Mary got a room in Liam’s house in Rock Street. That’s how I met him. He owned the house.’ She straightened up and gave Foley a nervous look, and she joined her hands under her chin. ‘I don’t know if you heard, Eamon. But I got married again.’

‘Yes, Ma,’ Foley smiled at her. ‘I heard. We went to our old flat in Denny Street and a neighbour told me.’

‘His name is Liam Edge. He’s a sergeant in the guards.’

‘Yeah, she told me that too.’

‘He’ll be home soon,’ Mrs Edge beamed down at Mickey. ‘He’ll be so delighted to see you. And your daddy. He’s always saying how he’d love to meet your daddy.’

‘And I’m looking forward to meeting him,’ Foley said. ‘I’m sorry you didn’t get my letters, though. Obviously, the woman in your old flat didn’t bother to pass them on to you.’

Mrs Edge muttered something obscene and turned away. Cassidy was picking through the tins and jars on the table and the look Mrs Edge gave her was loaded with animosity. ‘So who are you, exactly?’

Cassidy looked up at her, then at Foley and back to Mrs Edge again. ‘I’m Alex Cassidy.’ She gave a huge smile. ‘I’m a maid in the...’

A shiver of alarm rippled through Foley, a warning that he shouldn’t mention Leo Maranus or anything else that happened at the Black Bird Hotel. It wasn’t over by any means. The less his family knew about it the safer they would be. ‘She worked with me, Ma,’ he said quickly. ‘We were working in the same hotel. She’s just a workmate, that’s all. Nothing else.’

Mrs Edge held the tea caddy as she waited for more. She wasn’t convinced. ‘There was a fire,’ Foley lied. ‘The hotel burnt down so we both lost our jobs. She had no place else to go so I told her she could stay with us for a while.’

‘Why?’

‘Because... well, she’s an orphan. She has no family.’ Foley threw the towel to Cassidy and she started to rub the wet out of her hair.

The front door flew open and a big man in garda uniform rushed in.

‘Liam.’ Mrs Edge spun around and took his arm. ‘Look who’s come home. Tis Eamon. Eamon’s come home.’

‘Well, well, well. Hello, Eamon.’ Edge beamed as he held out his hand to Foley. ‘I’m so glad to meet you at last. Your ma has told me so much about you.’

Foley lifted Mickey and went to stand up but Edge waved him back down. ‘No, no. Don’t get up.’

Foley took his hand and shook it.

‘And who’s this small man?’ Edge ruffled Mickey’s hair.

‘That’s Mickey,’ Mrs Edge gushed. ‘He’s Eamon’s son. Isn’t that wonderful, Liam. Eamon has a son.’

‘Eamon has a son? Well, that’s even more exciting. Hello Mickey.’ Edge held out his hand to the boy who glanced at his father before he took it. ‘I’m your ... what am I, Kathleen? I suppose I’m his step-grandad. Would that be right? Maybe you can call me Grandad, Mickey. I’d like that.’

When Edge let go of Mickey’s hand the boy turned into his father’s chest, and as Edge straightened up he noticed Cassidy and he staggered back as if he’d seen a ghost. ‘Jesus.’ All the colour drained from his face and he had to grab hold of the sideboard to steady himself.

‘Liam?’ Kathleen gave an anxious cry as she grabbed his arm. ‘What’s the matter?’ She looked from Edge to Cassidy and back to Edge again. Edge had to swallow several times before he could bring himself to speak.

‘I’m sorry.’ He squeezed his wife’s hand. ‘I don’t... I’m sorry. Who are you?’ he asked Cassidy.

Cassidy gave him a beaming smile and stood up. ‘I’m Alex. Alex Cassidy.’

‘She’s Eamon’s friend, Liam.’ Kathleen put her hand on his chest. ‘They worked together in Dublin. And she’s not the boy’s mother if that’s what you’re thinking. She’s just a friend. That’s all.’

'I'm sorry.' Edge wiped his mouth with his sleeve. 'For a moment I thought you were... you look just like someone I used to know. I hope I didn't startle you.'

'Not at all.' Cassidy held out her hand. 'It's very nice to meet you.'

Edge hesitated. He glanced at his wife then reached out and gave a little bow as he took the hand. 'Nice to meet you too, Alex Cassidy.' Then he turned around and ruffled Mickey's hair again. Mickey was all eyes as he stared up at the big man towering over him. 'Eamon's boy, eh? That's wonderful. Welcome to Tralee, Mickey. You're going to be very happy here.'

But all the time Edge was struggling to keep his eyes off Cassidy. His wife noticed it too and she positioned herself between them. 'Will you take your coat off, Eamon?' She sounded agitated and kept glaring at her husband. 'And you too, Mickey. You're soaked. Take them off and I'll hang them on the door to dry.'

Cassidy stood up again and started to unbutton her coat. Edge looked as if he was going to help her but Kathleen stood in his way. 'You can hang that on the back of the chair,' she snapped.

Foley lifted Mickey off his lap and shuffled to his feet, and he couldn't help moaning as he tried to get his arm out of the sleeve of his coat. His mother grabbed hold of it and she gasped when she saw the huge bloodstain on his shirt. 'Holy Mother of God, Eamon.' She started pulling at his shirt. 'What happened to you?'

'It's all right, Ma. I had a bit of an accident, that's all.'

Edge rushed over to look. 'Good God, Eamon. That looks bad. How did it happen?'

'I told Ma already. There was a fire in the hotel where we worked. I had a bit of a tumble on the way out.'

'What kind of tumble?' Edge pulled the shirt open and started undoing the bandage.

'Someone put an old ladder up to the window,' Foley lied again. 'I shoved Mickey out then followed him down. The ladder snapped as I was halfway down. But I was lucky. All I got was a cut.'

Kathleen put her arm around Mickey. 'And were you hurt?'

'No, Ma. He was on the ground already. He was fine.'

Kathleen went to a cupboard, took out a tin washbasin and plonked it on the range. Then she poured hot water from the kettle into it. 'Liam, there's a bottle of iodine in the scullery. Can you get it for me, please?'

'What about you?' Edge asked Cassidy.

She looked blank for a moment then shook her head. 'No. Sure I wasn't even...'

'She was outside already,' Foley threw her a warning glance and Cassidy rolled her eyes at him. 'That's right,' she agreed. 'I was outside already when the fire started.'

Kathleen made a grumbling noise in her throat. '*Liam!*'

'OK, I'm going.'

As Edge went to fetch the iodine Kathleen continued to unwrap the bandage. 'And see if there's another dressing, Liam. This one is rotten.'

The front door opened again and the young woman who came in mumbled something as she tried to digest what she was seeing. Kathleen was wiping Foley's

wound with a wet tea towel and she beamed at the young woman. 'Mary, look who's come home. Tis your brother Eamon.'

'Eamon?' Mary moved cautiously into the kitchen. Foley put out his hand to her but she didn't know whether to shake it or give him a hug. She shook the hand.

'Mary.' Foley squeezed her hand. 'Haven't you grown? You were just... well, you were only a little schoolgirl the last time I saw you. Now look at you. You're all grown up.'

'What happened to you?' Mary let go of the hand. 'That looks sore.'

'Don't be worrying about that, Mary.' Kathleen practically shoved her out of the way. 'Say hello to your new nephew. Say hello to Eamon's boy. Mickey, this is your Aunt Mary.'

'Oh hello there,' Mary beamed as she took the boy's hand. 'How are you?' She glanced up and noticed Cassidy and she did a double-take. 'Oh, you must be his...'

'I am not,' Cassidy told her. 'His mother is dead.'

'What?' Mary gasped in disbelief and put her arm around Mickey. Cassidy shrugged and Mary glared at her. 'So who are you?'

'I'm Alex.' She nodded at Foley. 'I'm his friend.'

Mary looked at Foley but he was in too much discomfort to notice. The wound smarted like the sting of a million wasps and he was gritting his teeth to stop himself from whimpering.

'Does Vicky know you're home, Eamon?' Mary asked. 'She'll be delighted.'

'Sure he's only after arriving a few minutes ago,' her mother said. 'He can call over to see her tomorrow if he's up to it.'

'Over where?' Foley forced his eyes open.

'Over in Friary's Row. That's where she's living now.'

'What? Vicky left home?'

'Of course, she did. She moved out when she got married. She's living with her husband and her five children.'

Foley jumped and he groaned as the wound stung even more. 'Vicky is married? Oh my good God.'

'She is. And if you had kept in touch with us you'd have known that too. But you chose to cut yourself off from us so that's that.' Kathleen gave a hard rub with the wet cloth and this time Foley did yelp.

'And she has five children?' he managed to croak.

'Five, indeed. And here will be a few more too if that husband of hers gets his way.'

'Really? And who is he? Do I know him?'

'Ah, you do. Joe McCarthy. You were in school together.'

'Joe McCarthy? From over there in Moyderwell? His mother had a sweet shop?'

'That's him.'

'Holy Mother of God. How did she get mixed up with him? He was a right obnoxious little shit...'

Kathleen tutted and Foley shut up. But her silence only confirmed Foley's impression of the pugnacious little horror from his schooldays. Joe was the smallest boy in the school but he was as vicious as a furious Highland terrier. 'Joe McCarthy,' Foley repeated. 'Well, well.'

‘How long are you home for, Eamon?’ Mary sensed the tension and decided to defuse it.

Foley looked at his mother and then at Edge. ‘I’m not sure, Mary. Right now I have no job. And no place else to go.’

‘I only asked because you can have my bed.’ Mary gave Mickey a hug and a big smile. ‘I have a bed in the staff quarters in the Grand Hotel. That’s where I’m working. So you and your Da can sleep in my bed right here in this house. Would you like that, Mickey?’

‘That’s very kind of you, Mary.’ Foley winced again as his mother pressed an iodine soaked cloth to the wound.

‘And what about her?’ Kathleen nodded in Cassidy’s direction without looking at her. ‘Where’s she going to stay?’

‘She can stay in Rock Street.’ Edge was rolling out a bandage and he pulled a face when Kathleen turned around and glared at him ‘What?’ he asked. ‘I have a spare room now. Kieran Riley has gone home to Belfast. So his room is empty. There’s no reason why she can’t have it until she sorts something else out.’

‘And can she afford it, Liam?’ Kathleen was flushed and her top lip glistened with angry sweat. ‘Is she able to pay for a room? We’re not a feekin’ charity. You can’t go around letting people have a room if they can’t pay for it.’

Edge’s mouth was a thin bitter line and he practically threw the bandage at her. ‘I’m talking about a couple of days here, Kathleen. What’s wrong with that?’

Chapter 35

Tralee. September 1941

‘Wake up!’ The clatter of pots and pans in the busy kitchen made normal speech impossible, but the Chef’s voice was abrasive enough to cut through the din. ‘Those desserts should be in the fridge already. What is the matter with you today?’

Michael Rowe stepped back from the angry figure bearing down on him, picked up the tray of soufflés and rushed over to the walk-in chiller. But he didn’t answer. He couldn’t. The heaviness in his heart was pressing down on him with such force it was crushing his very soul. He knew that if he spoke the tears would come spilling out. Because he was still in shock.

He couldn’t believe how his life had changed so fast—so brutally. They had so much going for them, him and Mary. There was a glorious future in front of them, full of dreams and hopes and half-formed plans. Yes, there were a few glitches. But who in this world doesn’t have a glitch or two in a relationship? It wasn’t anything they couldn’t resolve with a little patience. That was all they needed—a little patience. Babies cry. It’s what they do. But it’s not forever. Get over the first year or so and everything would settle down. Yes, that was all they needed—time and patience.

Then in one brief, stupid explosion of emotion—in the blink of an eye—it all turned to dust. His life collapsed like a loose house of cards. If only he hadn’t been

so tired. If only Mary hadn't been so tired. After all, he was only trying to help. If only he'd...

Tears smarted his eyes and he brushed them away.

Just a few more months. That was all he needed. After Christmas, he'd have enough money put aside to get married and find a better place to live. The run-up to Christmas was the busiest time of year in the Grand Hotel, with loads of overtime. And even more opportunities for his little scam. Then he'd have a few more pounds to add to his pot.

He felt a tug of shame about his little scam. But it was so simple, and the chance of getting caught was remote—as long as he didn't get greedy. That was the secret—take just enough so no one even knew it was happening. But he promised Mary he'd give it up as soon as they were married.

He only got involved in the scam by accident. Last Easter a delegation of Bishops arrived unexpectedly from Rome and took over The Grand Hotel. The management was thrown into a flap and all the staff were called in to help. Michael Rowe was asked to serve drinks in the lounge. Because of the war, the choice of beverages was limited to porter, Irish whiskey, and some local beer.

As the evening wore on one of the Bishops pressed a couple of pound notes into Michael Rowe's hand and ordered ten Irish Coffees for his table. But as Rowe set the tray of glasses down on the table another Bishop pressed more pound notes into his hand. 'I'm buying these,' he insisted in his heavy Italian accent.

Rowe tried to explain that they'd already been paid for but the Bishop didn't seem to understand. With all the shouting and singing and spontaneous laughter going on around them, the confused clergyman thought he hadn't paid enough. Others joined in and suddenly money was being thrust at Michael Rowe from all directions. He tried to protest but the Bishops dismissed him with good humour and a flurry of waves.

Rowe knew how many Irish Coffees he should get from a bottle of whiskey so he took the exact money to reception and paid it in. Later, alone in his room, when he counted what was left he nearly fainted. To be sure there was no cause for concern he asked the duty manager how he did on his first night. He didn't need to worry, the manager told him. He'd done a great job. So good he could help out with every function from then on.

Which he did. And he quickly got into a routine. He only took money when the bar was busy and he was given the exact payment for the drinks. That way no one would be looking for their change, and no one would notice if he didn't go to the till. Some nights he'd only get one or two chances, but other times it was obscene the way people threw their money around. And it all added up.

To nothing.

It was all over now. The two most precious things in his life were gone. Nothing mattered anymore.

Yet, when he shut the chiller door and saw two people in uniform looking in his direction, his instinct was to run.

Foley was sure he'd recognise Michael Rowe, but in the sea of white coats everyone looked the same. And it was hard to know who to ask. Everyone was too busy to care what the strangers in the kitchen wanted. They just barged around them muttering something rude.

Then Foley linked eyes with the man coming out of the chiller unit. Foley expected some reaction from Rowe. What he didn't expect was the look of sheer horror and the mad rush towards the back door, scattering everything in his path.

What amazed Foley even more was the way Cassidy took off after him. 'Go out the front,' she screamed as she flung herself out the back door. 'Head him off.'

Foley skidded out through the big front doors and across the pavement in Denny Street just as Rowe bolted out of an archway farther down the block and raced off down towards the Ashe Memorial Hall. Cassidy was just yards behind him and she scanned the street for Foley. She saw him immediately and shouted something that was lost in the noise. And she was off again, running like a Jack Russell with her head down and her shoulders braced.

As they disappeared around the side of the Ashe Memorial Hall, Foley speeded up. He needed to be there if Cassidy caught up with Michael Rowe. He was twice her size. A Jack Russell and a Doberman.

The area around the Ashe Memorial Hall was thick with people streaming back and forth across the road. Heads started turning as Foley rushed by them, curiosity in their eyes. He hoped no one would start following him. All too often the tiniest incident attracted a mob and the situation quickly escalated out of control.

He spotted Rowe cutting across the Green and heading towards the Dominican Church. But he didn't see Cassidy and for a moment he wasn't sure what to do. Look for her or follow Rowe. He followed Rowe. But by the time he reached the gate on the other side of the Green, there was no sign of him. If he'd gone left he'd be on open ground and easily spotted, so he'd obviously turned right and headed back into town. Foley went right too.

He glanced back across the park and when he still couldn't see Cassidy he started to feel anxious. How was he going to face Edge if anything happened to her? He was halfway down Princess Street when another thought hit him - why on earth was he chasing Michael Rowe in the first place? What had he done to warrant this reaction? No, finding Cassidy was far more important than chasing shadows. He decided to turn back. And he almost collided with Cassidy when she stepped out of a tall shabby house in front of him. She seemed as relieved to see him as he was to find her in one piece. She grabbed his arm. 'He ran in here.'

Foley looked up at the house. 'Isn't this where...?'

'...the baby was crying,' Cassidy stood close to him.

Foley had a very peculiar feeling about this. It took him a moment to respond. 'Which way did he go, upstairs or down?'

'I don't know.' Cassidy's hair had worked loose and it fell around her shoulders. She'd wrapped the hairband around her wrist and picked at it nervously. 'Will we wait for Liam?'

Foley stepped into the long hallway. The smell of stale urine and boiled cabbage made him flinch and his shoes squeaked on the sticky lino that covered the floor in patches. He listened for a moment, then he beckoned for Cassidy to follow him. He didn't have to tell her why—she heard it too. A baby crying somewhere upstairs. Cassidy's hand went to her throat. 'Surely to God that isn't the same baby.'

As they started up the stairs they heard a man crying and Cassidy grabbed the back of Foley's jacket as she followed him. Michael Rowe was crumpled up on the

floor as they rounded the corner of the landing. His hands were clamped over his ears and his whole body jerked with grief. And the baby's cries were louder.

'Michael, what's going on?' Cassidy put her hand on Rowe's shoulder and he started gibbering. His words were slurred and incoherent. Spit dribbled from his mouth and he wiped it away angrily.

'Michael?'

Rowe threw his head back and howled. 'How can this be happening? Holy Jesus, I don't understand. She's dead and I can still hear her. My baby's gone so how... Sweet Jesus, what's happening to me?'

Foley tried to take his hand but he snarled and pulled away, curled into the foetal position and hugged his legs.

'Michael, calm down.' Foley sat on the floor beside him. 'Just tell us what's happening. Has this baby got something to do with you?'

Rowe clawed at his face and howled again. 'It can't be happening. How can this be happening? Tis all wrong...'

Cassidy pointed up the stairs. 'Eamon, isn't that the room where...?' Her voice was trembling. 'What will we do? Will we call Liam?'

Foley put his hand on Rowe's shoulder. 'Michael, can you tell us what...'

'Feck off!'

'Look, just tell us what's going on. What do you know about that baby?'

Rowe howled louder.

'Michael, we need to go up there and see if it's all right.'

'How can it be all right, for God's sake?' Michael shrieked. 'My baby is dead. My feckin' baby is dead, do you hear me? So how can she be all right?'

Foley heard Cassidy mutter what sounded like a prayer. She was already backing away from them. 'Will I go and get Sergeant Edge? Will I go and... what will we do, Eamon? Tell me what to do!'

Foley looked through the bannister at the room. 'Well, I think we should go up and see if the baby is all right first.' He sprinted up the stairs. The lock was already broken where Edge had kicked it and the door swung open with the slightest push.

And the crying stopped.

The abruptness of the silence made Foley freeze and it took a few seconds before he could look inside the room. It was still the same, the battered single bed under the window, the same stained mattress on it, and the same rickety chair by the wall. The wardrobe with the broken door was empty too except for a solitary coat hanger. As he went over to the small kitchen with the cracked porcelain sink he could hear his racing heart pulsing in his ears.

He jumped when he turned around. Cassidy was standing behind him. She was about to speak when Rowe shuffled in the door, staggered over to the bed and dropped onto it. He clamped his head between his knees and rocked back and forth.

'Michael, what is this place?' Cassidy's voice was surprisingly gentle. 'Did you live here? Did Mary Foley live here too?'

Foley grabbed her arm. 'Why did you say that?'

Cassidy held up her hand for him to be quiet. Rowe's head gave the slightest of nods. 'So what happened here, Michael?' Cassidy sat on the bed beside him.

A tear dropped from Rowe's chin onto the back of his hand. 'It wasn't Mary's fault.' He looked at her with bloodshot eyes. 'We were just so tired. The baby wouldn't stop crying—it just went on and on. We were terrified the landlord would throw us out. I went out to work every day so I got away from it. But Mary was stuck here, too frightened to go out in case someone saw her and told her boss at the hotel. She was so worried she'd lose her job. I wanted her to go home. Her mother would help us. But Mary didn't want them to know about the baby. She thought the shame would destroy her family.'

The sobs came fast and it took a few minutes before he could carry on. 'I wrote to my cousin in Killarney and asked if Mary could stay with her until we sorted ourselves out, and she said yes. But Mary didn't want to go without me. We argued about it for days. Then last Friday she said she would go so I went and bought her a train ticket while she packed her case. But when I came back she'd changed her mind again.'

A shiver rippled through him and he shifted his position on the bed. 'She was so tired she could hardly stand up. But I was tired too. I'd been at work since seven and I suppose I just lost my patience. I tried to take the baby off her but she flew at me and tried to grab it back. Somehow we both lost our grip and the baby fell on the floor. It was the most sickening sound I've ever heard in my whole life.'

He gave another heart-breaking sob. Cassidy took his hand and this time he let her. 'Mary wrapped the baby in a blanket and sat holding it all night, sitting on the bed singing to it, rocking it.'

'Why didn't you call someone?' Cassidy squeezed his hand. 'You should have called for a doctor.'

'It was way too late for that. We both knew it was way too late for that.'

'So where's the baby now?'

Rowe shrugged. 'I don't know. I fell asleep sometime during the early hours and when I woke up they'd gone. I honestly thought she'd gone home to her mother. I thought her mother was taking care of her.'

'Why didn't you check up on her?' It came out sharper than Foley intended.

Rowe flinched. 'Her Da is a sergeant in the guards.'

'What difference does that make?'

'I don't know.' Rowe flapped his hands. 'He might have arrested me, said I killed the baby and charged me with murder or something. I didn't know what to do. I just thought Mary would let me know where she was when she was ready.'

Foley looked in the wardrobe. 'Michael, this place is empty. What happened to your stuff?'

'What stuff?' Rowe sniffed. 'Everything we had fitted into one suitcase. I took it back to my room at the hotel.'

Cassidy was staring into the middle distance and she blinked when she realized Foley was staring at her. 'What?'

'So what do we do now?' he asked.

Cassidy let go of Michael's hand and stood up. 'I don't know. Maybe we should tell Liam. Maybe you should tell him. He's not talking to me.'

'But what about the baby?'

'What about it?'

'Well, where is it? What did Mary do with the poor thing?'

'Well, it certainly wasn't with her when we found her down the...' suddenly her hand went to her mouth. 'Oh my God. So that's why she moved the bench around.'

Foley went to speak but she stopped him with a wave of her hand. 'Don't you see? She wasn't trying to face the Church. She wanted to face the flower bed.'

'The flower bed? Oh shit! You don't mean...?'

'Yeah. The patch in front of her was freshly dug over. Was that why she turned the bench around - so she could watch over her baby?' She put her hand over her mouth again and pushed past Foley.

'Where are you going?'

'I have to get out of here. I can't breathe.'

'All right.' Foley patted Rowe on the shoulder. 'C'mon, Michael, time to go.'

'What'll happen to me now?' Rowe asked in a feeble voice.

'I don't honestly know. All we wanted to know was why Mary did what she did.' Foley helped him stand up. 'I'm not sure if you did anything wrong. But I'll have to tell Sergeant Edge and he'll decide what happens next. So you go on back to the hotel. Look after yourself and we'll call to see you in a few days, see how you're doing.'

Rowe's eyes flickered around the room one last time then he rushed out and down the stairs. Foley followed him out. As he reached back to shut the door a baby gurgled and then all went quiet.

Chapter 36

Liam Edge was standing by his front door when Foley and Cassidy turned into Creamery Lane. His head was bowed as if he was distracted by something on the ground. Cassidy stopped so suddenly Foley nearly fell over her, and she made a strange noise that could have been a sob.

'What are you going to tell him?' she asked in an anxious flurry. 'Are you going to tell him about the baby?'

'Of course I'm going to tell him about the baby.' Foley grabbed her arm as she staggered against him. 'Isn't that why he wanted us to talk to Michael Rowe, to find out about...?'

'No.' Cassidy's whole body was trembling. 'I mean are you going to tell him about the baby crying in the room? Are you going to tell him we heard a baby crying again like we did before?'

Foley let go of her arm. 'I don't know. I'm not sure I understand what happened myself so how can I explain it to someone else? How would you explain it?'

Cassidy made the noise in her throat again. 'I think it was... you know? Do you believe in... was it Mary's baby trying to tell us what happened to her? Was it trying to let us know how she died?' She felt for Foley's hand and squeezed it against her chest. 'Do you believe in...?'

'Well, Catholics believe in life after death.' Foley squeezed her hand back. 'So maybe you're right. I only wish I could understand it, though.'

Edge must have sensed them because he jerked up straight, and immediately his face clouded. Cassidy let go of Foley's hand and stepped away from him as the sergeant squared his shoulders. 'Where the hell have you been? They told me at The Grand you were chasing one of their staff all over town.'

'Well, he ran away as soon as he saw us.' Cassidy looked out from behind Foley then darted back out of the way again.

'You were only supposed to talk to the man.' Edge ignored her and addressed Foley. 'What were you trying to do to him?'

'He panicked.' Foley braced himself for another one of the sergeant's rants. 'He thought we were coming to arrest him.'

Edge's eyes narrowed and he clapped his hands behind his back as he waited for Foley to continue.

'Does my mother know about the baby?' Foley lowered his voice and nodded at the house.

Edge pulled a face. 'I didn't tell her yet. I wanted to know what happened to it first.'

'Just as well,' Foley sighed. 'Because it's dead, I'm afraid.'

Edge's head gave a slight shake and he wiped his eyes with his sleeve. 'How?'

'Well, there was an accident...' Foley started to say but the darkness in Edge's face made him hesitate. The baby died because its mother was exhausted. And frightened. Its father was worried for them both and frustrated because he couldn't help them. But in the letter of the law, it would be seen as neglect, carelessness. Even abuse. The mood Edge was in right now it was hard to know if he would see it like that.

'It was stillborn,' Foley lied. Cassidy cleared her throat behind him. 'It was just one of those things,' he continued. 'But Mary blamed herself, and she—well, you know the rest.'

Edge looked up at the sky and his face was even darker. 'So what did that gobshite you were chasing have to do with this?'

'He's the baby's father.'

Edge groaned and paced across the street in long tormented strides. 'So how come we didn't know about him? You were working in the same hotel. If they were going out together how did you not know about it? She was your sister. You should have heard something.'

Foley gave an exasperated groan. 'I told you already. I never saw Mary at work. She was always finished work by the time I started. We never saw each other.'

'So when she lost the baby, where was she? In the hotel?'

'No. They had a room over in Godfrey Place.'

'I don't understand.' Edge strode across the street and back again. 'Why didn't she just come home? Why did she have to go and kill herself? We would have looked after her. And that feckin' maggot must have known what happened. Why didn't he come and tell us?'

'Actually, he didn't know what happened,' Foley said. 'He thought Mary had come home. He only found out she was dead when someone at the hotel told him.'

'So why didn't he come and see us then?'

'Because he was frightened.'

'Frightened of what?'

‘Of you.’ Foley waved his hand again. ‘He thought you’d find some excuse to arrest him. Accuse him of killing the baby or something.’

Edge looked as if he’d been slapped and he stared hard at Foley. ‘Jasus,’ he sighed. ‘Do you know what she... what Mary did with the...’

‘No. And Michael doesn’t either. As I said, he thought she’d come home so he lost contact with her.’

Edge looked up at the sky again. ‘So who else knows about this?’

Foley had to think about that. ‘No one at the hotel suspected anything. They thought it was just—you know—ladies trouble. Anyway, apart from Michael Rowe and the doctor who did the autopsy, just the three of us?’

‘Then I want to keep it that way.’ Edge stamped his foot in emphasis. ‘I don’t want your mother finding out from someone who can’t keep their big gob shut. So no one will mention it ever again.’ He pointed at Cassidy with a trembling finger. ‘And I mean no one.’

Cassidy whimpered as she slid back behind Foley.

Edge clasped his hands behind his back. ‘So where’s the van?’

Foley was thrown by the abrupt change of subject. ‘The van?’

‘The van. The rusty pile of junk that should be parked right here. Where is it?’

‘I leant it to someone,’ was how it came out.

‘You leant it to who?’

‘Jane.’ There was no point in lying. ‘I leant it to Jane Regan.’

‘Your... you leant it to your girlfriend?’ Edge rolled his eyes. ‘Tis not your van to lend to anyone. You have no right to even be driving it, let alone lending it out to... to a woman. Why on God’s earth did...’

‘Why? What do you want it for?’

‘I don’t want it.’ Edge moved closer with a dangerous swagger and prodded Foley in the chest. ‘You want it. Unless you want to cycle out to Edenburn and be there in the next hour.’

‘Edenburn? Oh sweet Jesus, what happened? Is it Mickey? What did they tell you?’

‘Nothing. Castleisland phoned the barracks and left a message. That’s all I know. They’re sending a guard over to Edenburn around three o’clock and they want you to meet them there. I don’t know why. All the message said was they wanted the boy’s father to be there by three o’clock. So if I was you I’d go and get the bloody van, then come back here for me.’

‘Do you want me to go with him?’ Cassidy gave him a nervous smile. Edge ignored her and went into the house, slamming the door behind him. Cassidy stood looking after him for a few moments before she ran after Foley.

Foley’s head was all over the place, hopping from dread to hope and hitting every block in between. Why in God’s name couldn’t Castleisland just give a simple message? Why did they have to wrap it up in such drama? He only realised he was running when he heard Cassidy gasping for breath behind him. ‘Where are you going?’ he said over his shoulder.

‘With you.’ She gave an extra spurt and caught up with him.

Foley still had Jane’s keys in his pocket. If Jane wasn’t back yet, waiting for the van would give him a reason for being in her office. Then he’d open the drawer and drop them back. But with Cassidy there, it might be awkward. ‘Look, there’s no

need,' he told her. 'Go back to the house and make yourself a cup of tea. Keep my mother company. I'm sure Liam will appreciate you being there.'

'What? After the way looked at me back there? I'd rather stick pins in my eyes than go near him when he's in a mood like that. Did you see the look on his face when he saw me?'

Foley stopped. 'What on earth is going on with you two?'

'I don't know.' She sounded genuine. 'He won't even look at me and I've no idea why.'

'Can't you go back and ask him? It might be something simple. Just a misunderstanding.'

'No. I can't face him. If I've upset him, why hasn't he told me? Until I know what I did wrong I can't put it right, can I?'

'Try.'

'No,' she stepped back against the wall and rubbed her hands together in nervous swipes. Foley walked on. It looked like he was stuck with her.

The van was parked outside the Cardboard Factory. Foley checked if it was open. It wasn't. The factory door was open though, so he went in. Cassidy shuffled close behind him. The office was empty but they could hear someone in the workshop. Foley poked his head in and nodded to the grey-haired man who looked up when he heard the door open. 'Is Jane here?'

'I've no idea,' was the grumpy answer. 'She comes and she goes. We don't always see her back here.'

Foley grunted and turned back to the office. Jane's coat wasn't on the usual hook. He checked the desktop, moving stuff around in case she left the van key there. He rattled the drawer where she kept her bag. It was locked. He picked up the ruler and looked around at Cassidy. She was wandering aimlessly around the place. Foley caught her eye and nodded towards Jerome's office. 'Have a look in there.'

She nodded back, crept towards the open door and disappeared inside. Foley shoved the ruler into the space between the drawer and the desk and gave a hard push. The ruler snapped. He jumped back as if he'd been shot and waited for Cassidy to reappear. She didn't.

'Will you look at the cut of this desk,' he could hear her muttering. 'How can he ever find anything? Tis like a rubbish dump. How can he run a business if he can't even keep his desk tidy?'

Foley tried to open the drawer with the broken piece of the ruler but it was too short to give enough leverage. He threw it away and searched for something else. He heard the scrape of Cassidy pulling a drawer open. 'There are loads of keys in here,' she called to him. 'What does the van key look like?'

Foley gave the desktop an angry slap. How the hell was he going to put Jane's keys back now? Maybe if he just dropped them on the floor she'd assume they'd fallen out of her bag.

'This one looks like a van key.' Cassidy called again. She was sitting in Jerome's chair with the drawer almost in her lap, and she jangled two bundles of keys at Foley as he came in. One bunch had six keys tied together with string. The other bunch had two keys but an assortment of other stuff caught up in it. 'Does that look like the one you want?' Cassidy picked out a gold coloured item.

Foley rolled his eyes. 'You won't start a van with that, you eejit. It's a feckin' tiepin.'

'Not that. I mean this other one.' She tried to detach something from the bunch when an almighty roar made her jump out of the chair.

'How dare you!' Jerome was filling the door frame, his long black coat adding menace to his already dark features. He shook with rage. 'How dare you come into my office and go rummaging in my desk! Who the hell do you think you are?' His eyes were bulging as he staggered forward like some possessed character from a horror movie. Cassidy ran behind Foley.

'Jerome.' Foley backed away too. 'I'm sorry. We're only trying to find the key for the van. We thought it might be...'

'Why the hell would it be in here?' Jerome sounded close to hysterics. He kicked the drawer shut as he threw himself into the chair. 'You have no right to be in here. How dare you? I've got a good mind to call the guards.'

'Jerome, please.' Foley manoeuvred Cassidy towards the door. 'We didn't mean to upset you. But I need the van and we couldn't find the key. Jane had them last, so we presumed they would be...'

'Get out!' Jerome thumped the desk. 'Just get out of my office. And don't let me catch either one of you in here again.'

Jane was standing in the outer office, frozen to the spot.

'The key for the van,' Foley shouted. Jane held it out and he snatched it from her.

'These were on the floor.' He handed her the keys to her house. She went to speak but Foley and Cassidy were already racing down the corridor.

Chapter 37

Liam Edge opened the van window and flicked a cigarette butt onto the road as they turned the corner by the handball alley and headed towards Edenburn. He'd sat in silence all the way from Tralee, his dark mood dripping off him. Foley wanted to scream at him to say something—anything—about the phone call. What exactly did they say? Is Mickey all right? Has he been harmed? Instead he slapped the steering wheel and ground his foot down on the accelerator. 'Why won't this feckin' thing go any faster?'

Edge wound the window back up, took his fob watch from his breast pocket and popped it open. 'We have loads of time.' He snapped the watch shut and put it back in his pocket.

'Well if they'd told us sooner we wouldn't be rushing like this now.' Foley rattled the steering wheel again. 'I mean, what time did they phone the barracks?'

'Yesterday.' Edge said casually.

'What?' Foley turned so violently to look at Edge he nearly careered off the road.

'Look out.' Edge grabbed the door handle 'Will you calm down and watch where you're going.'

'I don't believe this. You knew about this yesterday and you didn't think to tell me?'

'I didn't know about it yesterday.' Edge let go of the door handle and sat back in his seat. 'They told me when I phoned the barracks earlier. I went to The Grand to tell you but you were chasing Michael Rowe around town.'

They drove on in an even darker silence. Foley had been waiting for the right moment to tell Edge about Colin Regan's silver bullets. But Edge had the hard face on him again and Foley didn't know where to even start.

The gates to Edenburn hospital were open and they drove straight through and cruised up to the front door. 'Standard Garda issue.' Edge pointed to a bicycle leaning against the wall. 'I wonder who they sent over.'

His question was answered when a large white-haired officer appeared and motioned for them to wind the window down. 'Are you Foley?' He leant on the roof.

'I am.'

'You're to go straight to the main office. Dr Madler is waiting to see you there. Hurry up, now. He's been waiting for ages.'

Edge eased himself out of the van and when the officer noticed the uniform he straightened up. 'Sergeant.' He chopped off a salute but his tone was deadpan. 'We weren't expecting an escort for the gentleman.'

'What's going on?' Edge straightened his cap.

'Well now, Sergeant, I think the doctor would rather explain it to the gentleman himself, if that's all right with you.'

Edge nodded at the front door. 'Through there, I suppose.'

'That's right, Sergeant. On your left, as you go in.'

Before Foley could switch off the engine the officer snapped his fingers. 'You'll have to park it over there. So's not to be in the way, you understand?'

'In the way of what?'

The officer's flint grey eyes suggested it wasn't a request. Foley did as he was told. When he got to the office Liam Edge was standing by the window looking out at the lawn. Dr Madler was leaning against an enormous desk sucking on a pipe and squirting little streams of smoke out the corner of his mouth. He was an imposing figure, well over six feet tall with a mop of jet black hair and an expensive suit.

'Mr Foley.' He took Foley's hand in a solid grip. 'First, may I say how sorry I am about the loss of your brother and sister...?'

'Brother-in-law,' Foley corrected him.

'Oh?' Madler let go of the hand. 'Right you are. Brother-in-law. I'm afraid we only found out about it when the guards phoned us to enquire about your son.'

Foley ignored the request to take a seat. 'But that's not why you asked us here, is it? You called us here to tell us what happened to Mickey. So where is he?'

'He's upstairs in the day room.' The doctor waved his pipe at the ceiling. 'He's doing a jig-saw puzzle.'

Edge and Foley looked at each other and the silence danced around them. Edge was the first to speak. 'I'm sorry, doctor. I understood the boy was missing.'

'Well, I'm afraid there's been a bit of a misunderstanding about that.' Another puff of smoke shot from the corner of his mouth. 'And tis partly our fault. Mr Foley didn't come for his usual visit on Saturday so we weren't able to tell him what we were doing. We should have made more of an effort to contact him but it was a

decision we had to make very quickly.’ He turned to Foley. ‘Unfortunately, when you did turn up on Sunday there was no one here to explain it to you.’

‘Explain what? Are you saying my son was not driven off by a nun in a car?’

‘Well, yes, he was driven off all right. But it wasn’t a kidnapping as you seemed to think.’

‘Then what was it?’

‘Please,’ the doctor indicated to the armchairs. ‘You’ll be much more comfortable if you sit down. Can I get you something to drink? Tea?’

‘No,’ Foley waved the suggestion away. ‘Just tell us what’s going on.’

Edge dropped into the nearest chair with a loud sigh and crossed his legs. ‘Eamon,’ he nodded at the other chair. Foley reluctantly lowered himself into it and he too crossed his legs as he continued to scowl at the doctor.

‘Look,’ the doctor picked up some papers and studied them for a moment. ‘I apologise for the trouble we caused you. But please believe me when I say it was all done with the best of intentions. And the result is that your son is safe and well, and he will be able to go home soon.’

‘What do you mean?’ Foley sat up straight. ‘Are you saying he’s better? That he hasn’t got the TB anymore?’

Madler took another drag of his pipe and blew the smoke out like a cloud. ‘Well, it seems your boy didn’t have the TB in the first place. His doctor miss-diagnosed the symptom.’

Edge also sat up straight. ‘For God’s sake... are you trying to tell us that stupid Doctor Adams...?’

‘Please don’t get me wrong,’ the doctor insisted. ‘Your boy did have an infection. The symptoms can easily be confused with TB. Dr Adams made an honest mistake.’

‘I feckin’ knew it.’ Edge jumped up, almost knocking the chair over. ‘Didn’t I tell you, Eamon? Don’t go to that daft auld eejit, I said. Didn’t I tell you? For God’s sake, I said not to trust him’

‘Dr Adams is a well-respected doctor, I’ll have you know,’ Madler interrupted with a sharp wave of his pipe. ‘He’s a long-standing member of the medical profession.’

‘Too bloody long,’ Edge cut in. ‘He was my wife’s doctor for her whole life so he must be a hundred years old by now. He’s too senile. The old fool should be put out to grass.’

‘So are you telling me there was no need for Mickey to be here in the first place?’ Foley butted in. ‘He could have been at home with his family all this time? I don’t understand how that could have happened.’

‘Mr Foley,’ Madler tapped his pipe out in the ashtray and threw it on the desk behind him. Then he stood up and gave his jacked a sharp tug. ‘You have to understand that any diagnosis a doctor makes is based on what the patient tells him. How he’s feeling, what his symptoms are etc. Then he uses his expertise to draw a conclusion. We accepted the good doctor’s diagnosis and treated your son appropriately.’

He waited for a response and gave a satisfied smile when there wasn’t one. ‘Anyway, last Thursday we had a visit from Dr Charles Denison from Denver in America. He’s an authority on TB and he interviewed some of our patients here.’

He was particularly interested in your son and he did some tests. Then he phoned me on Saturday to say that, in his opinion, what Mickey had was a chest infection and not TB. But to be absolutely sure he asked to see Mickey again. So we arranged to take him to Limerick on Sunday. And the good doctor's instinct was correct. Mickey does not have TB. The even better news is that the infection he has got is almost cleared up, though he still needs proper medication. So with your permission, I would like to keep him here for a few more days, at least until Friday. Of course, it will be rather expensive, as you know.'

He caught the audible intake of breath from Edge and his hand went to his tie. He increased the wattage of his smile and stood up. 'But in the circumstances, there will be no charge to your good selves.'

Tom Carroll turned into Creamery Lane and stopped outside number one. He didn't know Sergeant Edge—he hadn't even heard of him until today—but he knew Dr Ryan didn't like him. Whenever Dr Ryan mentioned Sergeant Edge a wave of animosity came off him like a toxic cloud and impacted everyone within reach. Now Tom Carroll had a message to give to the sergeant and he was extremely nervous about it. He straightened his cap, gave a quick rap on the door and stepped back.

Nothing happened. He was about to knock again when there was a click, then a creak and the door was pulled open. He whipped off his cap. The lady looked dreadfully weary. The rims of her eyes were red as if she'd been crying. She raised her eyebrows in question but she didn't speak.

'Oh, good day, Madam,' Tom stuttered. 'Is Sergeant Edge—ah—could I possibly speak with Sergeant Edge? Is he...?'

'I'm Mrs Edge.' The lady watched him suspiciously. 'I'm his wife. What do you want?'

'I have a message for Sergeant Edge. Tis about—tis from Dr Ryan.'

'What's he want?'

'Well, he said—ah—he wants Sergeant Edge to know that—ah—the bodies—sorry, the deceased...'

Mrs Edge glanced up as a van came around the corner and crunched to a stop right in front of them. 'Well, here he is now. You can tell himself yourself.'

Tom jumped out of the way as the van door flew open and Foley climbed out. 'Hi, Ma.' Foley rushed over and hugged her. 'They've got Mickey. He's all right. He was over in Edenburn all the time. T'was all a mistake.'

Mrs Edge covered her mouth to stifle a cry. 'You found him? You found our little boy? Holy Mother of God, that's grand altogether. Come in, come in. The kettle's on. You can tell me all about it over a nice cup of tea.'

Foley pushed the van door shut and Edge drove it to its usual spot under the tree. And as he walked back to the house he glared at Tom Carroll. 'Who're you?'

'Am... I have a message for you. From Dr Ryan,'

'What does he want?'

'He said to tell you he's completed his report on the two bodies... ah... the deceased and you can take them...ah... they're ready... I mean they can be released into your custody as soon as you want... as soon as you can arrange the funeral.'

'That's grand, sure. That's... well, thank you. Tell him we'll make the arrangements right away.' He patted Tom on the arm and walked towards the door.

'Ah... Dr Ryan said he would like to see you first.' Tom took a step back.

'What? Why?'

'I don't know. He just said he'd like you to come over to his office.'

'He wants me to go all the way over to the hospital?'

'Yes. If you would.'

'For God's sake. When?'

'He was hoping you'd come right away.'

Edge gave a long annoyed groan and marched over to the van. And he didn't look at anyone as he drove back out of the street.

Chapter 38

The knock on the door was short and sharp and Joe Junior jumped up to answer it. 'It's for you,' he said to Foley when he came back a few seconds later.

'Who is it?'

Joe Junior sat back at the table and picked up his cup of tea without answering. Foley muttered as he eased himself out of the armchair and went to see for himself. When he looked out the door his heart gave a flutter. Jane Kennedy was standing across the street. A beautiful image from years ago flicked through his memory—Jane Kennedy waiting for him by the railway gates on a Friday night.

'Jane.' He beamed a smile at her. 'Come in the house. We found Mickey so we're having a bit of a celebration. Just a drink, nothing too exciting.'

She didn't smile back. Her eyes were dark and angry and she beckoned him with a sharp nod of her head. 'I want to talk to you. Over here.'

When Foley got close enough she stabbed him in the chest with her finger. 'What the hell were you doing in my house?'

'What do...?'

'Don't you lie to me, Eamon Foley? You were in my house. Who the hell do you think you are, breaking into my house like that?'

'Breaking into your house? What are you talking about? Jane, listen...'

He reached out but she pushed his hand away. 'No. You have no right to go into someone's house without their permission, even if you are on duty as a—whatever you're supposed to be. So what were you doing?'

'What makes you think I was in your house?'

'You know very well what makes me think you were in my house. You were seen going in, and you were seen coming out again. So what were you doing there?'

'Who saw me? I didn't...'

'I've got a good mind to report this to the guards. I could have you arrested for this. I told you I don't want you coming anywhere near my house, didn't I? Didn't I?'

'Oh, I see.' Foley gave a sharp laugh. 'So it's only me you don't want coming to your house.'

Jane stepped back. 'And what's that supposed to mean?'

'It means you don't mind every other Tom, Dick and Harry going in and out of your house, but not me! Why is that, Jane?'

The curtain in the window behind them twitched and Mrs Flaherty was wide-eyed with curiosity. 'I'm not discussing this here.' Foley grabbed Jane's arm and tried to steer her away from Creamery Lane but she pulled away.

'We can discuss it with the guard if you like,' she spat. 'I'm sure they'd be interested in why someone is breaking into houses while he's pretending to be on duty.'

Foley felt a gulp of anger stick in his throat. 'Well, while you're at it you can tell them how your boss was seen creeping in and out of your house too. Usually when your old man is away.'

Jane stopped dead. 'What the hell are you talking about?'

'I'm talking about how Jerome visits you whenever Colin's away.'

'He does not.' It came out as a yelp.

'He does, Jane. I know! That young fella next door told me. So don't pretend otherwise.'

'You bastard!' Jane threw her head back and gave a cackle of a laugh. 'So that's what it's all about. Jesus, Mary and feekin' Joseph, Eamon. After all this time you're still acting like a jealous prat. My God! I can't believe it. I thought you'd be over it by now. How many years ago was it?'

'How many years ago was what?'

'How many years ago was it since you had that fit. Don't you remember? Christmas Eve, the sulks, the sniping, the ugly face, and all because you thought someone else was showing me attention. God Almighty, Eamon. And you're still not over it.'

'That's rubbish. It has nothing to do with what happened back then. I was passing your house and I saw a young fella in your back yard'

'You can't see my back yard from the road. You'd have to be in the lane to see my back yard. Do you think I'm some sort of eejit? I specifically asked you not to go near my house.'

Without realizing it they'd reached the Courthouse and Jane instinctively turned into the lane. And when they arrived at the box factory she whipped the door open, pushed Foley inside and herded him along the corridor. 'Why are we going in here?' he groaned.

'You wanted to talk.'

'In here? What if Jerome sees us?'

'Jerome isn't in today.' Jane whipped off her coat and hung it on the door.

'Jerome isn't in today,' Foley mimicked.

Jane rolled her eyes as she poured water from a jug into the kettle and slammed it on the stove. 'You're a sick man, Eamon Foley. You need help.'

Foley pulled out a chair and sat down. 'So how long has it been going on?'

'How long has what been going on?'

'You and Jerome.'

‘For God’s sake...’ Jane had picked up two mugs and she threw one at Foley’s head. He dived out of the way and it smashed against the wall behind him. ‘I’m sick of this. You break into my house and now you’re insinuating there’s something going on between me and my boss. Have you any idea how that sounds? Have you? It makes me sound like a loose woman. And that’s not a nice place to be in this town. People talk. They can ruin your life with one lash of their tongue.’

‘Oh dear, have I touched a nerve?’ Foley scrambled back to his feet and picked up the chair.

‘Stop it,’ Jane shouted. ‘Just shut up.’

‘No,’ Foley shouted back. ‘I don’t understand what’s going on with you. You’re worried in case your neighbours see me near your house. Yet your pal Jerome can wander in and out anytime he likes and that doesn’t bother...’ He stopped and clamped his hands over his face. ‘Oh, for feck sake. It all makes sense now.’

Jane stepped away from him, holding the mug in front of her. ‘What’s wrong with you now?’

‘I was right, wasn’t I? I knew that bullet wasn’t meant for Joe. It was meant for me. I was standing right next to him. I was this close.’

‘What the hell are you mumbling on about?’ Jane waved the mug at him. ‘What has Joe getting shot got to do with you?’

‘Everything. The gun was aimed at me. But I moved and Joe was hit instead. And in my panic, I thought I saw someone from my past. I joined up all the dots and made a picture. But it was all back to front.’

‘Eamon, what are you talking about? You look like an escaped lunatic with your big red face. You’re frightening me.’

‘Liam said most murders are committed by someone known to the victim. He didn’t believe it was Maranus from the start. He insisted we look closer to home.’

‘What? Are you saying someone in your family killed Joe? I know he was a hard man to like, but still!’

‘Jane, you’re not listening. The bullet wasn’t meant for Joe. It was meant for me.’

Jane moved even farther away. ‘Are you serious? Why? Who’d want to shoot you?’

‘Think about it, Jane.’ Foley spread his hands. ‘Who do you know with a violent temper and flies into a rage if his wife talks to another man? Who wouldn’t like it if his wife’s old boyfriend was back in town?’

Jane froze. The blood drained from her face. ‘What the hell are you saying? Are you implying Colin had something to do with this? My Colin? Are you stark raving mad?’

‘I’m sorry, Jane. But isn’t it obvious? That young fella next door—what’s his name?’

‘Joseph.’

‘He must have told Colin about Jerome. And Colin thought it was me. So he followed me and—you know the rest.’

‘You are raving mad.’ Jane was almost on top of him now. ‘Listen to yourself. Do you really think Colin would shoot you because he’s jealous? He might give you a good slap and tell you to leave me alone. But he would never shoot you.’

‘There’s no other explanation though, is there?’

Jane spun around in an angry circle. ‘You’re out of your tiny little mind, Eamon Foley. Everything that happened this week has unhinged you. You need some serious help.’

Foley scraped his chair back and stood up. ‘Do I?’

‘Yes. There are more holes in your argument than there is in one of your smelly socks.’

‘Like what, for instance?’

‘Like he’d risk shooting you in a crowded pub? Wouldn’t he just wait for you in a dark alley and beat you to death with a big stick?’

‘He was looking for the right opportunity.’

‘Really?’ Jane spluttered. ‘So he carried a gun around all day hoping to bump into you? You’re talking out of the wrong hole.’

‘No, I’m not.’ Foley stabbed the air with his finger. ‘Everyone knows I go to Delaney’s on Friday night. And everyone knows how packed it gets. All he had to do was take a gun to the hop, pretend to go to the toilet, run over to Delaney’s—tis close enough—shoot me and be back in time for the next dance.’

Jane spluttered again. ‘Colin wasn’t at the hop on Friday night. He’d rather stick a chopstick in his ear than go to a hop.’

Foley gave an angry snarl. ‘You told us yourself. You said you were coming back from the hop when you saw the commotion in Bridge Street.’

‘Yes, you big dope—me and my mother.’

‘No, no.’ Foley dismissed her quickly. ‘You’re making that up to cover for him. And I can prove it.’

He pulled the handkerchief with the bullets from his pocket and he was about to throw them down in front of her when she stuck her finger in his face. ‘Actually, I don’t have to make it up. You can check with CIE. Colin was in Cork last Friday night. He didn’t come home until Sunday afternoon.’ She gave him a long, hard stare that showed everything she was feeling right then—rage, anger, disappointment.

‘But I have the...’ He closed his fist over the handkerchief. Suddenly his whole case had evaporated like a fog in the breeze.

‘I can’t believe you even thought Colin was capable of that. How could you even consider it?’ Jane jumped when the kettle let out a shrill whistle. She went over to it and there was a lot of clattering and banging. Foley ignored it. He was struggling to extract himself from the hole he’d just dug. He was so sure a minute ago. He had the evidence. Two bullets from Colin’s gun. One of them killed Joe McCarthy. She needed to see them. He desperately wanted to explain it to her. But he couldn’t open his fist now.

‘Jane, I’m so, so sorry,’ he heard himself saying as he sagged down on the chair. ‘You’re right. What happened this week has sent me over the edge. I don’t know what I was thinking. I’m too puddled right now to make sense of anything. I mean, first Joe is shot dead. Then Mary kills herself. How did that happen? We didn’t even know she was in trouble. I can’t imagine what she must have gone through after losing the baby like that.’

‘What?’ There was a crash as Jane dropped the kettle. ‘Mary lost a baby?’

'No.' Foley almost knocked the chair over as he jumped up. 'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. Jane, you mustn't tell anyone about this.'

'Oh, Dear God. Mary lost a baby?'

'Promise me. We don't want anyone to know about it. Even my mother doesn't know.'

'All right. I promise you.' Jane sat down by her desk. 'My God, the world's gone mad. The poor girl. What happened?'

Foley sat back down and cupped his hands in his lap, and he repeated what Michael Rowe said. He left out the part about the crying baby.

'And you haven't told your mother?'

'No.'

'But surely she has a right to know?'

'She has. But she's too fragile right now. It could be the final straw. She could end up in Killarney wrapped in a straight-jacket.'

'But tis bound to come out,' Jane argued. 'How many people know about it? What about your dopey girlfriend?'

'Cassidy? She won't tell anyone. She's not like that.'

Jane sniffed and Foley cringed. 'What?'

'You!'

'Me what?'

'You're defending her. I can tell you're soft on her.'

'I am not!'

'You are.' Jane pulled a face. 'And I noticed the way she flutters those big brown eyes at you.'

This time it was Foley's turn to snort. 'Well, you certainly got that wrong. It isn't me she flutters her eyes at. I don't get a sergeant's wages. She knows what side her bread's buttered.'

Jane almost choked on her gasp. 'What do you mean, a sergeant's wages? You're not serious? Miss Dopey and your step-father?'

'Well, Liam fusses around her. And she sticks closer to him than a tinker's vest. Apart from that, I can't say.'

Jane shivered. 'Yuk. That's...'

Foley gave a dismissive shrug and Jane groaned. 'What? You think that's all right? What about your mother? On top of everything that's happened to her? Well, I think it's disgraceful.'

'Says the woman whose boss has the key to her back door.'

'You bastard.' Jane jumped up and charged at him, her hand raised like a weapon. 'Nothing is going on between me and Jerome.'

'Then why does he give that young fella sixpence to keep quiet about it?'

'What young fella?'

'Your neighbour, Joseph what's his name?'

'No, no, no. That's not true. You're making that up.'

'Jane, he told me. Jerome gives him sixpence every time he calls to see you. So what's he trying to hide? What's going on that...?'

'Don't you...' Jane bared her teeth. 'It is not what you're thinking. Just because you have a mind like a chamber pot. Anyway, Colin knows Jerome comes to the house. They're pals. Pals visit each other. There's nothing sinister in that.'

'Then what's the big secret? If Colin knows about it, why is he giving the young fella money to keep quiet about it?'

'My God, but you haven't changed, Eamon Foley. You're still a suspicious prat.'

'Yeah. Because all I'm hearing lately is lies. I'm all tangled up in a web of lies and I just don't know who to believe anymore.'

'And you're including me in that, are you?'

'Only because of this thing with Jerome.'

'Which had nothing to do with you. Why Jerome comes to my house is none of your business. And I don't care how jealous you are about it. I'm telling you for the last time, keep away from my house. Do not ever...' She stabbed at him with her finger. 'Hold on, I just thought of something. How did you even get into my house in the first place? Did you... you did, didn't you? You stole my keys. That's why you had them when you came back for the van. My good God. Of all the cheek. What in God's name were you doing, Eamon? What were you looking for?'

'I...' Foley was still squeezing the handkerchief in his fist. 'I don't know. I found your keys on the floor so I thought I'd return them to you.'

'At my house? But you knew I was in Killarney. I wasn't going to be home for ages.'

'I know.' Foley wriggled uncomfortably. 'I can't explain it. I just wanted...I wanted a reason to call to your house again. I know it sounds stupid but I... maybe I was wondering what it would have been like if I... if we were... you know?'

Jane spluttered. 'What? Still together?'

'Yes.'

'Bullshit. You want me to believe that after...how long? Ten years? You must think I'm senile to believe that crap.'

'It's true, though. I never stopped thinking about you. We had some good times, didn't we? I can't just forget all that. I missed you.'

'Well, you had a bloody odd way of showing it.' Jane's laugh was mocking. 'You disappeared without a word. You never contacted me. Not a letter, not a postcard. Nothing! You missed me so much you got married to someone else and had a child. And then you come home with another woman. You're home for months already and how many times have you tried to contact me?'

'Well, you didn't try to contact me either.'

'What?' Jane's voice rose to a cackle. 'Why in the name of God would I want to contact you after the way you treated me? You turned into Boris Karloff that night. You were all bent out of shape just because I gave my boss a Christmas kiss. He was just my boss, Eamon. Nothing else. You were not a nice person that night. I didn't like what you turned into, and I still don't. So put any notion about having feelings for me right out of your head this very minute.'

She grabbed her coat off the back of the door. 'Anyway, tis way too late for that. So just go home to your family where you belong, and please do not ever call to my house again'

Foley stood up. 'Well, as I said, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I was just...'

'...going home!' Jane held the door open for him. 'To your house.'

Foley cringed. 'All right. Anyway, I wouldn't want to bump into Jerome sneaking out of yours, would I?'

‘Will you stop,’ Jane screamed at him. ‘That’s enough from you now. I’m not talking about Jerome anymore, so grow up and go home.’

‘I’m going.’ Foley squeezed past her and she pulled the office door behind her. ‘No wonder he can’t come to work early, though.’

‘What?’

‘Just saying.’

‘He can’t come to work early because he’s sick, if you must know.’

‘Yeah. But he’s not too sick to visit you all the time.’

Jane turned and pushed him in the chest so suddenly he fell back and hit his head against the glass partition. ‘Jerome visits me because he has no one else to turn to. He visits me because...’

‘Because what?’ Foley snapped as he rubbed his head.

‘Because he’s dying.’ It came out so softly Foley wasn’t sure he heard right. When Jane looked up at him her eyes were wet. She tapped the side of her head. ‘He has a tumour behind his left eye.’

Foley rubbed his head again. ‘Are you serious?’

‘For God’s sake. Would I make that up?’

‘No. Of course not. I’m sorry.’ Foley put his hand out to her but she ignored it. ‘I had no idea. I feel like a right feckin’ eejit now.’

‘So you should.’ Jane wiped her eyes. ‘It was brought on by the beating he got the night Rebecca was murdered, according to the doctors. He almost died too, you know. And the trauma of his wife being killed didn’t help.’

‘Jesus, the poor man. Isn’t there anything they can do? Can’t they operate?’

‘No. It’s too close to his brain.’

Foley put out his hand again but dropped it when she turned away. ‘I’m sorry, Jane. I just assumed... you know?’

‘I do.’ Bitterness was heavy in her words. ‘You assumed the worst. You always do. You couldn’t imagine he was only looking for a bit of innocent comfort.’

‘I know. And I’m sorry. I can’t imagine what he’s going through. Does it give him much pain?’

‘Oh yes.’ Jane’s wiped her eyes again. ‘Sometimes it’s so bad he just lies on the sofa and sobs like a baby. The doctors gave him stuff to take but it doesn’t work. Colin gets him some of that other stuff... what’s it called? You know? That stuff you smoke. And it makes a huge difference. I swear if he didn’t have that he’d have jumped under a bus by now.’

‘God, that’s dreadful. I don’t know if I could cope,’ Foley admitted.

‘Nor me,’ Jane pushed the front door open and stepped outside. ‘The thing is people don’t know what he’s going through. They make sympathetic noises about Rebecca, but when he flies off the handle for no apparent reason all the sympathy turns to dust. They have no idea he’s in so much pain.’

Foley followed her out and she pushed the door shut. ‘Does that happen a lot?’ he asked.

‘Almost every day now. As the tumour gets bigger the pain gets worse. The drugs help but they cause confusion. He sees demons all around him.’

‘What about family? Has he got anyone?’

‘There’s a sister in America all right but they lost touch years ago. There are probably cousins scattered around the place too but apart from that he has no one you’d call close.’

‘Except you.’ Foley spoke softly but Jane’s eyes still flashed.

‘Eamon...’

‘No,’ Foley assured her. ‘I mean that in a good way. He’s a very lucky man to have someone to look out for him. You said it yourself, there’s not many people who’d go farther than making a noise. He is a very lucky man.’

Jane blushed and rubbed her nose. Then she pulled her coat tighter around her and walked off down Courthouse Lane.

Chapter 39

Liam Edge didn’t bother to wait. He gave a loud rap on the door and went straight in. To his surprise, Dr Ryan didn’t look up. He was writing something in a large diary, his expensive pen making busy scratching noises as it tapped across the paper.

Edge glanced around the tidy office, impressed by the size and neatness of it. He almost sat down in the huge armchair but his annoyance stopped him. Instead, he drew himself up to his full height and clapped his hands behind his back. He was determined to get Ryan’s attention by glaring at him. It didn’t work.

Eventually, Ryan sat back in his chair and picked up the cap of his fountain pen, screwed it back on and put it on the desk. ‘Ah, Sergeant Edge. Thank you for coming to see me. I have to be in the operating theatre in...’ he glanced at his watch, ‘...less than five minutes, so I’ll have to be brief.’

‘What do you want?’ Edge tried to match the doctor’s smile, feeling his lips tighten over his teeth.

Ryan slid two envelopes across the desk then sank back in his chair. ‘You’ll be needing these.’

Edge eyed them suspiciously but didn’t pick them up. ‘What are they?’

‘Death Certificates for your daughter and son-in-law.’

‘Your lad could have brought them when he called to my house. Why did you have to drag me all the way over here?’

A slight annoyance skirted the doctor’s words. ‘Because I have something to discuss with you.’

‘What’s so important it can’t wait till after the funeral?’

Ryan leant forward and rested his elbows on the desk. ‘I don’t like you, Sergeant Edge. I think you’re arrogant and I think you’re a bully.’

‘How dare...’

‘Someone with your intelligence will know that power corrupts. You’ve been wearing that uniform for so long you’ve become the uniform. You confuse your authority with your personal agenda and you forget the people you’re supposed to serve.’

'You don't know anything about me.' Edge stepped forward and banged his knuckles on the desk. 'What gives you the right to judge me when you don't know anything about who I am or what I do?'

'You're a bully,' Ryan repeated. 'You're doing it now. But I can assure you it will not work on me.'

'I've had enough of this.' Edge grabbed the envelopes and turned towards the door.

'I suggest you read them first, Sergeant.'

Edge hesitated and turned the envelopes over in his hand. 'Why? You made it clear how they died already.'

'Yes. How Joe McCarthy died is straightforward. A bullet wound to the head. But you should look at my report on Mary.'

Edge watched the doctor for a long moment before taking the letter out of the envelope and scanning it. Then he looked up again. 'I can hardly make out your writing. Does it say natural causes?'

Ryan spread his hands and sat back again. 'Whatever you may think of me, Sergeant, I do have some compassion. I know your wife and I'm aware of what she's going through. I'm also aware that if I say Mary committed suicide she can't be buried in consecrated ground. I believe that would be beyond cruel and it might even be the straw that destroys your wife completely.'

Edge felt his face flush. 'So you told a lie?'

'Not a lie, Sergeant.' Ryan tapped some papers on the desk. 'I won't confuse you with the technical details but Mary did have a very serious infection. She delivered the baby herself and she didn't have proper medical care afterwards. Without that care, Mary would have become very sick and she would certainly have died as a result.'

Edge closed his eyes. 'I don't know what to say. I'm...' He looked at the certificates again. 'You didn't mention the baby.'

'There was no reason to.'

Edge's lips had gone dry and when he tried to speak the words wouldn't come.

'Be assured, Sergeant,' Ryan stood up and gave his jacket a sharp tug. 'I'm doing this for your wife. Now you know you have to take custody of the bodies immediately. So if you call at Reception on the way out you can talk to someone about the details.'

Chapter 40

Alex Cassidy poured another jug of water over her head and rubbed vigorously to get the last of the soap out of her hair. Then she gathered it up and squeezed out as much water as she could before wrapping it in a towel. The mirror by the kitchen sink was mottled but the reflection Cassidy saw in it made her smile. She turned her head from side to side, pleased that the lines at the corner of her mouth and around her eyes were hardly visible. She raised her chin and checked the skin there, stroking it gently. 'You're still a handsome lass.' She gave a throaty laugh. Men had been telling her that for as long as she could remember.

She heard a key click in the front door. Ah, that would be Mick Collins. Collins had the room above Cassidy's. As soon as Edge told them they had to get out, Collins started looking for somewhere else to live. He found a small cottage in Strand Road and had arranged to look at it this evening. He told Cassidy he'd be home early to change out of his work clothes.

She knew his routine—he'd go up to his room then come back down about five minutes later. He'd wash his face in the kitchen sink then see what was cooking on the range. No matter what it was he'd help himself to some of it and take it to the table with a mug of tea.

The other two tenants stayed in their rooms. There was a time when they all used the kitchen but none of them was particular about how they left it. When Cassidy arrived she couldn't stand the mess. She spent a day cleaning it and left them in no doubt she expected it to stay like that. Two of them sulked and avoided the kitchen altogether. Mick Collins still used it, and he made an extra effort to clean up after himself.

Cassidy was usually first in from work so she lit the fire and put the kettle on. This evening she made a pot of porridge, nice and thick the way Mick liked it.

Mick Collins reminded her of Big Michael, from way back when she was a little girl on the farm. Big Michael just appeared one day. No one said who he was or why he was there. Cassidy assumed he was a relative come to stay for a while. She didn't know how old he was but he didn't go to school. And they didn't let him work on the farm either. Anyway, she liked him from the start, with his big red face and lumbering movements.

All she could remember about those days was that she was always cold and always hungry. And always lonely. Her father was a distant, severe man. He was brutal to his animals. The cows would sense him coming and shrink away from him. The horses got agitated whenever he was near. Her mother was oblivious to it all. They seemed to live in a parallel reality, never interacting with each other.

Now suddenly Cassidy had a friend. Every day after school Big Michael and Cassidy would skip down through the meadows to their secret den where they would fool around and play silly games. The first thing Big Michael did was sit her on his lap and wrap his arms around her, holding her tightly. She loved those moments, feeling his heartbeat and the warmth from his body. No one had ever held her like that before in her entire life. Not her mother, and certainly not her father.

But Big Michael only ever held her for a minute or two, during which time his breathing was laboured and he'd moan quietly to himself. Then he'd give a long shiver before letting her go.

She didn't want him to let her go. She was so starved of affection she would have stayed wrapped in his arms all day. She hated it when he put her down, scuttled to his feet and headed for the river. He'd kick off his shoes and wade out to the middle, standing with his back to her and his head bowed. Cassidy would sit on the bank and wait for him to come back out.

One wet Saturday afternoon Cassidy and Big Michael went to the barn instead of the den, and they sat in the hay. That was the last time she ever saw Big Michael.

She was wrapped in his arms with her eyes closed as Big Michael rocked back and forth, moaning softly in rhythm to the rain pattering on the tin roof. She was so happy, so contented. Then her world was shattered by an almighty bellow from the loft above them. Big Michael leapt to his feet and dropped Cassidy on the floor. As she scrambled to her feet she was surprised to see his trousers undone and falling down around his knees. Everything was a blur after that.

Big Michael was never mentioned again. But it didn't matter because Cassidy found another friend - Mr McMahon, the schoolteacher. He kept her back after class to ask how she was coping after the episode with her cousin. He muttered something about how the people who did bad things didn't always understand what they were doing. He asked if it upset her, this incident with her cousin.

When she said no, she liked it, his face took on a different shape. Before she knew what was happening he'd lifted her onto his lap and was asking her to show him what her cousin had done, how he'd held her, what he'd said to her. Then came the familiar moans. Just like Big Michael's. After a minute or two, he let her go and told her not to tell anyone.

He kept her back most evenings after that to fill the ink wells or to wipe the blackboard. It was because she lived closest to the school and didn't have as far to go as the other kids, he said. Sometimes he'd turn off the light and they'd sit in the glow of the coal fire, his breath warm on her neck and the smell of pipe tobacco on his clothes. Then he'd give her a sweet from the paper bag he kept in his desk. 'A handsome lass,' he'd say as he unlocked the door and ushered her out with a pat on the head.

After her parents died there was Mr Chute who told her if he was twenty years younger he'd be looking to marry her. Then Mr Hurley, the dentist, who insisted she come to see him once a week because her teeth needed work done. Cassidy inspected her teeth in the mirror. Yes, they were perfect, thanks to Mr Hurley.

The kettle was bubbling on the range and Cassidy pushed it onto the back plate, put some tea in the pot and filled it with boiling water. She scooped some porridge into a bowl and took it to the table. As she scattered a spoonful of sugar over it she fantasised about sharing this new cottage with Mike Collins. When he was telling her about it she knew what he was thinking - it would be so much cheaper if they shared and split the rent. But he was too shy to ask her. However, if he was lucky enough to get the cottage she'd put the suggestion to him. And men didn't usually turn her down.

Except for Eamon Foley. But that was different. He was infatuated by that woman in the cardboard factory.

No, it was unusual for men to turn her down. She had that effect on them. Look at old Dr Adams. He never actually touched her but his insistence that she wear a nurse's uniform while doing the housework amused her hugely. And he paid her handsomely, too. But sometimes she worried about other people finding out. She knew it was harmless fun, but how would it look to Liam Edge?

She gave a long sigh. Liam Edge was one man she just did not understand. When she first met him he treated her like a princess. He fussed over her, sorted out a place for her to stay, got her a job and even helped her join the LSF. For a while, she thought it would develop into something more.

But as time went on they seemed to morph into an altogether different relationship. It was as if Edge was turning into her father, looking out for her but never letting her get close. Then lately it all changed and she had no idea why. He was so angry all the time now. Perhaps the death of his stepdaughter and Joe McCarthy had put too much pressure on him. But none of that was her fault. There was no need to be so horrible to her, snapping at her like that, dismissing her like a naughty child.

Still, none of it mattered now. It was obvious he didn't want her around anymore. So it was time she moved on and closed this chapter altogether. If it all went well tonight she would move in with Mike Collins. She'd probably leave the LSF too. She'd miss the money, of course. But Dr Adams paid her well. Maybe she could persuade him to give her a few more hours.

The kitchen door clicked open and she chuckled as she turned around. When she saw who was standing there she jumped back with a startled cry.

Chapter 41

'Liam.' Cassidy tugged her bathrobe tighter around her. 'I wasn't expecting you.'

Liam Edge was perplexed. A wave of something swept over him that he couldn't understand. Anger? Because she was expecting someone who put a laugh in her voice? Bitterness? Because her smile disappeared when she saw him standing there? Disappointment? Because she instinctively wrapped her arms around herself in a protective huddle?

He wanted to rant at her, vent his confusion on her. But he couldn't. She looked so small and vulnerable. The pink cotton bathrobe almost buried her, and the colour of it made her face look all clear and shiny like a child's. With the towel on her head, her eyes seemed enormous, wide and startled like Bambi in the headlights.

Edge swept the room with his hand. 'Who were you expecting?'

'No one.' Something flashed across her eyes but her face didn't give it away. Edge glared at her but she held his stare, and the tension crackled between them.

'I need your room,' he growled. 'You have to move out right now.'

Cassidy gasped. The words hit her like a blow to the chest. It was too soon. What if Mike Collins didn't get the cottage? What if he doesn't want her to share with him? She was suddenly looking at a dark place and it terrified her. She tried to read Edge's face but it was as cold and hard as a lump of Curragheen rock.

'I don't understand.' The sob surprised her. 'You told me Friday. I haven't any place else to go. I haven't even started looking yet.'

'Well, I'm sorry about that. But I need the room right now.' Edge's voice was gruff, but deep inside he was in turmoil. It was as if someone else had taken over his mind and was giving orders he had no control over. 'They're after releasing the bodies of Joe and Mary. We have to take them somewhere so I'm putting them in your room until the funeral on Thursday.'

'But where will I go?'

'Ask Eamon Foley. I'm sure he'd find somewhere for you to stay.'

‘What?’ She looked genuinely confused. ‘Why would I ask Eamon Foley?’

‘Well, aren’t you two—you know—good friends?’

‘What do you mean?’

Edge sneered. ‘Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten about your little swim out there in Oyster Hall?’

‘What are you talking about? What swim?’

‘You know very well what I’m talking about.’ Edge’s hand shook as he pointed at her. ‘I’m talking about how friendly you two were when you thought no one could see you.’

‘You have got to be joking.’ Cassidy forced a laugh. ‘Me and Eamon Foley? What on earth gave you that idea? Me and... I can’t believe you even think that.’

Edge let his hand drop. Was she serious? It always annoyed him the way she wore such a blank expression. It was impossible to know what she was thinking. But what if he had jumped to the wrong conclusion? What if he’d miss-read the situation? For a moment he felt his mood lift a fraction.

But it didn’t lift any further. He had built himself up into such a mental frenzy he couldn’t snap out of. Everything was so dark and painful he was almost enjoying the drama of it. He didn’t want to let go of it just yet. ‘The two of you were laughing like a couple of love birds,’ he said.

‘We were not! I was laughing at him. I fell into the water and he was worried what you’d say if I got hurt.’

Again Edge faltered. ‘What makes him think I’d care if you were hurt?’

‘Because he knows you worry about me. It was the look on his face I was laughing at.’

Edge gripped the back of a chair. ‘So why did he have your...’ he nodded at her chest, ‘...your under things in his hand?’

‘He did not.’

‘I saw it. I’m not blind.’

‘Oh, that.’ Cassidy gave another chuckle and her eyes crinkled. ‘That wasn’t mine. Did you see the size of it? No, Eamon found it on one of the rocks. He was embarrassed but he couldn’t just leave it there. Not with the war on and all the shortages. He was taking it home to give to someone.’

‘Give it to who?’ Edge wasn’t sure if he believed a word of it.

Cassidy tapped the side of her nose. ‘Probably that woman who works in the cardboard place. You know, his old girlfriend.’

‘Jane Regan?’

‘Yeah.’ Cassidy could see a softening in Edge’s face. She unwrapped the towel from her head and let her hair fall over her shoulders. ‘Well, tis big enough for her. And tis certainly way too big for what I have to offer.’

As she turned she let the bathrobe slip open and in an instant she knew she’d timed it perfectly. Edge sucked in a huge gulp of air and his face went a strange shade of purple. He couldn’t drag his eyes away from her pale skin. She moved closer, her eyes bright and seductive. ‘I’m sorry.’ She gave a throaty purr. ‘I must buy a belt for this thing.’

Edge muttered something that Cassidy didn’t hear but she pretended it was funny and it made her laugh out loud. Edge laughed too but his eyes were glued to

her body. He was fascinated by what he was seeing. He always imagined Cassidy would have a similar figure to Lucy Valance. Small firm breasts and a tiny waist.

The blood was thumping in his brain and confusing everything around him. He couldn't think straight. All he could see was his beautiful Lucy. He imagined he could even smell the scent of her. 'What are you doing?' he thought he said, but he wasn't sure. 'You shouldn't be doing this, you naughty girl.'

In the haze of excitement he saw a beautiful face come up to his and a hand slip around his neck. He leant down and allowed her lips to brush his. The bathrobe had slipped off now and she was standing up on her toes. 'You shouldn't...'

Her tongue darting into his mouth stopped the rest of his words.

'Oh Lucy,' he whispered as he scooped her up and headed for her room.

A fly pattered against the windowpane before flying back into the room. It flew around the light shade then raced back to the window with an angry hum. Liam Edge desperately wanted to grab a shoe and spatter the stupid thing all over the glass. He was so angry, overwhelmed by the disappointment that rumbled around in the pit of his stomach.

For one beautiful moment he thought he was in bed with Lucy Valance again, and he anticipated the same amazing experience. Lucy had been so full of energy there was a physical glow around her. To kiss her was to experience the static from that glow for yourself. To make love to her was to feel the explosion of pure ecstasy.

Alex Cassidy was supposed to give him that too. How wrong he was. He'd been blinded by his imagination. After all this time, after all this waiting, after all the expectation, there was absolutely no comparison. Making love to Alex Cassidy was as exciting as being intimate with a sack of spuds.

Now as he lay beside her, the room buzzing with the noise of the fly, the only feeling Liam Edge had was of embarrassment. The only image in his head was the sneering faces of his colleagues down at the barracks. My God, how they would love to see him now, the disillusioned old fart trying to pick the bones out of his fantasy.

With the curtains drawn the room was reduced to a dull grey light and he could just see the sparkle of Cassidy's eyes. His stomach gave another twitch. He sat up and swung his legs onto the floor.

'Where are you going?' Cassidy spoke in her irritating baby voice.

'Get up.' Edge grabbed his trousers. 'You have to be out of here before they bring the coffins.'

'What?' Cassidy pulled the sheet around her as she jumped up. 'You're still making me go? After what you've just done to me? I don't think that's fair.'

Edge hopped on one leg as he pulled on his trousers. 'This changes nothing. I want you out of my house right now.'

'Oh, but this changes everything.' Her voice had lost the baby tone and became a sinister growl. 'If you think you can throw me out after what you just did to me, you have another feckin' think coming.'

Edge spun around, lost his balance and fell onto the bed. 'I hope you're not trying to threaten me.' He gave her the hardest look he could muster. It made her hesitate. But only for a second.

‘Of course not.’ She tried the baby voice again. ‘I’m just appealing to your good nature. You could say I had no place to go and you let me stay. Anyway, tis a grand big house. There’s more than enough room for everyone, me and Vicky and all the children. There’s loads of room here.’

‘No.’ Edge crashed his boot on the floor as he pulled it on. ‘Just get out of my house. Get your things together and clear off. Now!’

Cassidy pulled the sheet tighter around her. Her mouth was hard and determined, something Edge once found endearing. There was a time he desperately wanted to kiss that mouth. But right now he just wanted to slap it hard.

A loud knock on the front door made them freeze. Edge reacted first and looked through the crack in the curtains. ‘Holy shit. It’s Vicky and her mother. They’re early.’

‘Now this should be interesting.’ To his horror, Cassidy gave a shrill laugh, jumped off the bed and let the sheet fall to the floor. ‘You with no shirt and me with no knickers.’

‘Don’t you dare... ‘

‘Then swear on the Bible you’ll let me stay here for as long as I want to.’

The next knock on the door was as loud as a gunshot.

Chapter 42

The two coffins were propped up on chairs in the middle of the room so the mourners had enough space to walk around them as they came to pay their respect. The bed had been turned on its side and was leaning against the far wall. A blanket was draped over it to soften the effect. The only other furniture in the room was a wardrobe and a small dressing table.

They were told Cassidy had moved out. But she hadn’t taken all her stuff. The wardrobe door hung open a few inches and a black jumper and a white blouse were still hanging there. There was also some items of clothing in an untidy heap in the bottom as if they’d just been thrown in there. And there was a hairbrush, a small box of bits and pieces and a bottle of perfume on the dressing table. Foley wondered when she was coming back for them but he wasn’t going to ask Liam Edge, not the way he was behaving right now.

Foley, Vicky and their mother stood at the head of the coffins. Kathleen had shrunk deep inside herself and was supported by a walking stick. Liam Edge stayed out in the hallway and guided the visitors into the room. The strain was obvious in the folds of his face and he seemed unusually anxious.

When they opened the coffins earlier for the viewing Foley was shocked by how sad Mary looked. The people who got her ready had done a wonderful job, combed her hair, applied tasteful makeup, but they couldn’t disguise the awful pain that was etched in every furrow on her brow. The lines at the corner of her mouth, carved by her perpetual smile, now reflected only hopelessness and overwhelming distress. Foley was familiar with the coldness of death, but the way his lips stung when he leant over and kissed her cheek surprised him.

He couldn't bear to look at Joe McCarthy. Even in death, there was an aura of smugness and deceit about him. It was only for Vicky's sake and the sake of her children that he made no comment.

The first people to arrive were Mary's friends from the hotel. Mrs O'Riley shook Foley's hand with a gentleness that showed real compassion. Mary would be missed by everyone, she whispered. Her roommate Rene Maher's red hair was still in a bun and her face was still an unhealthy purple as she dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

As people appeared in front of him and said how sorry they were for his loss, Foley shook their hands. Some faces he knew but most he didn't and soon they all merged into one.

Then suddenly there was a gangly figure by Mary's coffin and a choke in his voice made Foley look up into the tormented eyes. The one person Foley didn't expect to see there - Michael Rowe.

'I'm so sorry.' Rowe reached out and touched her hair. For a second it looked like he was going to lean down and kiss her but he jerked up straight again and practically ran out of the room. Foley felt his eyes smart. He wanted to run after him, but instead he dabbed the tears away with the heel of his hand.

He couldn't help thinking about the baby. What was going to happen to it? Should they recover her from the flowerbed in the Green or should they just leave her there where her mother had put her?

Foley felt the baby should be with her mother, wrapped in her arms. She could be laid in the coffin discreetly and no one would ever know. But it would have to be done tonight at the latest, though, before the coffin was sealed. There could be legal implications if they were discovered, of course. If Edge found out it could result in all of this being brought out into the open. If there was an investigation the newspapers might get to hear of it and decide that it was in the public interest to make a huge and fabricated story out of it.

Then the Church would get involved. A baby born out of wedlock? An unmarried mother who took her own life? How on earth was she buried in consecrated ground? A sudden cloak of doom dropped over Foley's shoulders.

As the visitors left the room they were invited into the kitchen where tea and sandwiches were laid out on a crisp white tablecloth, but most people didn't stay for long. They said their piece and slipped away. When the last one had gone, Edge closed the front door and slammed the bolt into place.

'How're the lads going to get in?' Foley followed him into the kitchen.

'They should be in already. I told them about the coffins and I told them to decide if they wanted to stay in or stay out. But they had to decide before I locked the front door.' He glanced down at Foley with a sarcastic sneer. 'Is that all right with you?'

Foley pulled a face. 'What about all the stuff Alex left behind?'

Edge growled and swung around. 'What has that got to do with you?'

Foley stepped back a fraction. 'I was thinking of Vicky. She won't want them there if she's moving in. I thought we could put them in the van out of the way and give them to Cassidy when we see her down in the barracks.'

Edge's face darkened even more as he barged past Foley and walked down the hallway to the back door. Through the glass, Foley could see him heading for the toilet at the bottom of the yard.

Everyone else was sitting around the table in the kitchen nursing cups of tea and picking at conversations, but the tone was of sheer exhaustion. Vicky's youngest child, Eamon Junior, sat on his mother's lap and now and then Vicky kissed him on the top of the head. Joe Jnr had his chair pulled close to her too, and he leant right into her.

Vicky's eyes were almost closed with the puffiness from all the crying. She looked lost. In the blink of an eye, she had dropped down one more rung of the social ladder, a poor widow with five children. A social outcast now, shunned by the good citizens of the town. They would scurry across the street to avoid her, clicking their tongues at the cut of her as they rushed over to the Church to do their charity work. Without a husband, she was a nobody. Joe McCarthy might have been a nasty, vindictive little shit, but he was her nasty vindictive little shit.

'That shirt is awfully big on you.' As his grandmother straightened the cuffs Joe Jnr stuck out his jaw and his eyes had the glow of pride in them.

'Tis my Da's shirt. And the tie is his too, and I'm wearing his shoes as well. They're the ones he wears for work. They're not his best ones. He's wearing his best ones for the...' He glanced up at his mother then snuggled in closer to her and put his head down. She gave him a quick hug.

'I've got his watch too,' he added as he sat back up. His voice got a little brighter as he showed them the chain that linked from one pocket of his waistcoat to the fob in the other. 'He always said I could have it when...' He rubbed his nose. 'Tis the same one he was wearing when he had his photo in the newspaper. He always wore it for special occasions. He said I could have his tiepin too but we can't find it anywhere.' This time there was an edge in his voice as if it was someone's fault.

Vicky shifted the weight of the child on her lap and took a sip of her tea. 'Well, tis gone now and there's nothing more we can do about it.'

'But it must still be in the house somewhere. You couldn't have looked properly. It might be under the bed or something. You didn't look properly, did you?'

Vicky looked too defeated to argue but Joe Jnr still muttered to himself. 'I'm going back over there tomorrow to find it myself. After the funeral, I'm going to look properly...'

'No, you will not.'

'I will...'

'The place will be all locked up.' Vicky put her cup down harder than she intended and splashed tea all over the clean tablecloth. 'Anyway, other people will be living there by now. Those feckin' landlords won't waste any time replacing us.'

'But there's still some of our stuff in that house.' Joe Jnr sat back in his chair and glared at his mother. 'We have to go back to get it.'

'No, there is not. Everything that belonged to us was brought over to Nana's house. There's nothing belonging to us there anymore.'

Joe Jnr slouched down in the chair again. 'Then someone must have stolen it because tis not in Nana's house now.'

'Stole what?' Edge appeared behind them and took a cup, rinsed it under the tap then poured himself some tea from the big black teapot.

'My Da's tiepin.' Joe Jnr glanced at his mother, a hint of concern in his eyes. Edge leant back against the sink and sipped his tea. 'Why would anyone steal an auld tiepin?'

'Because tis made of gold. Tis solid gold.'

'No tis not.' Vicky was visibly annoyed now as she corrected him.

'Yes, it is. My Da said it was. My Da said tis solid gold.'

'The tiepin that belonged to your father?' Foley's mother looked up as if she only just realised what they were talking about. 'Sure I thought that was pure gold too. Don't say the eejit went and lost it.'

'He must have.' The weariness dripped off Vicky. 'If he still had it he would have been wearing it, so he must have lost it. Probably playing poker, knowing him.'

'No, he didn't lose it,' Joe Jnr insisted. 'He wasn't that stupid. Someone must have stolen it.'

'So it was a plain gold coloured tiepin?' Edge rubbed his eyes and sounded like he didn't care but thought he should say something. 'That'll be hard to find. There must be millions of them around.'

'It had his name on it.'

'Not his name.' Vicky glanced at Liam Edge as if she had to explain. 'There was a J on it. Dean Callaghan did it for me. I took it down to him to have Joe's name put on it. Dean found a little gold letter J that matched the tiepin and he stuck it on for me. And he only charged me for the cost of engraving the date on the back of it. He's such a lovely man. I've always liked Dean.'

'Well, that might make a difference.' Edge went over to his wife, put his hands on her shoulders and gently caressed them. 'Anyway, tis been a long day and tomorrow will be even longer, so why don't you all go home and get some sleep. I'll stay here and keep Mary and Joe company.'

'What about Alex?' Vicky's son slipped off his mother's lap and tugged his jumper tighter around him. 'Is she coming home to Nana's with us?'

There was a tense, awkward silence as they all waited for Edge to speak.

'I told you already.' He turned away and rinsed his cup under the tap again. 'Alex is gone.'

Chapter 43

The morning started with a light drizzle but as the coffins were carried out of St John's Church the sun broke through and bathed them in warmth. The funeral carriage was drawn by a single black horse. The coachman wore a long coat and top hat, and another man with a top hat waved a cane to start the procession. He took slow steps as he walked on in front of the horse.

Liam Edge and Vicky linked arms with Foley's mother as they walked behind the carriage. The children held hands and formed a line behind them. Foley was impressed by the crowd that attended Mass and were now falling into line behind the family. He wasn't sure who'd come to mourn Mary and who came to mourn Joe. But they were all welcome.

When they reached the church gates the man with the top hat stood in the middle of the road and stopped the traffic. And as the procession came out into Princess Street, Foley spotted Jane standing on the pavement with Jerome. She nodded her condolences. Jerome nodded too and as the breeze tossed his thick blond hair something flicked in Foley's mind. He looked back, but it was too late. The thought evaporated as quickly as it appeared.

Mary was laid to rest in the family plot beside her father. Then the carriage took Joe to the other side of the cemetery, right in the corner by a high drystone wall. Thick ivy covered the wall and an enormous tree cast a heavy shadow over the grave. Only a handful of the mourners followed them—Joe's boss Michael Griffin, some of the girls from the office. And a couple of his drinking buddies.

Vicky didn't seem to notice. But Joe Jnr did. His jaw was clamped tight in defiance and his eyes showed the hurt. He was still wearing his father's clothes. And the watch. He stood up straight with his legs apart as if to show the world he was now the man of the family.

Foley glanced across at Edge and saw the dark anger still there. Was it directed at Foley? It was understandable if it was. He's got them all chasing shadows because his imagination had run away with him. He miss-read the situation with Mickey. He'd convinced himself Maranus was behind everything, and now he was feeling foolish. The only real crime here was the shooting of Joe McCarthy.

The priest scattered earth on the coffin and said the blessing in a high sing-song voice. Everyone bowed their heads and said Amen.

The lounge of The Grand Hotel was crowded but when the funeral party arrived people cleared a space for them in the corner. Mrs O'Riley had arranged sandwiches and tea, which was very kind of her. But nobody felt much like eating and they only picked at the food.

Someone bought Edge and Kathleen a large brandy each and shook hands with them as they offered their condolences. Vicky sipped tea and Foley stood at the bar, quietly watching people in the mirror as they wandered in and out.

He secretly hoped Jane Kennedy might call in to pay her respects. He was disappointed she hadn't called to the house yesterday but perhaps she didn't want to be a distraction. Maybe she wasn't comfortable seeing his mother again under such dreadful circumstances. Perhaps she wouldn't feel comfortable coming here today either. But he could hope.

He became aware of a heavysset man with a large pink face paying him a lot of attention. When their eyes met the man turned away. He looked familiar, but right then Foley couldn't place him. Foley called for another pint and headed for the toilet while it was being poured. The man stood up too and followed him.

Out in the corridor, Foley turned sharply and the man stopped dead. He gave a hesitant smile. 'You're Eamon Foley, aren't you?'

'I am. Who're you?'

'I'm Mike. Mike Collins.'

'What can I do for you, Mike?'

He held out his hand and Foley shook it. 'Can I say how sorry I am for your loss?' Then he moved closer and his voice dropped to a whisper. 'I was wondering if you knew where Alex was.'

'Alex?'

'Alex Cassidy.'

'Oh, right. No, I'm afraid I haven't seen her today. The last time I saw her was on Tuesday.'

'That's when I last saw her.' Collins's face gave an involuntary twitch. 'I was hoping she would be here today.'

'Well, as I said I haven't seen her since Tuesday. You could try Dr Adams' surgery. Or the guard's barracks. She might be on duty today, you never know.'

'I did that already.' Collins gave an impatient flick of his hand.

'Sergeant Edge is in there.' Foley nodded towards the lounge. 'He might know. Why don't you ask him?'

Collins took a step back. 'Ah no. I won't be disturbing him at a time like this'

'What did you want her for anyway?' Foley asked as he turned towards the toilets. 'Will I give her a message for you? If I see her, that is.'

'No, no.' Collins waved the idea away, then changed his mind. 'Well yes, you could tell her I got the cottage I was telling her about so... well, just tell her if she wants to, the offer is there. But I need to know soon. Like today. If you don't mind.'

Foley felt himself grinning. 'Are you telling me Alex is going to share a cottage with you?'

'Actually, I haven't asked her yet,' Collins blustered. 'The thing is, Mr Edge wants us out of his house by Friday.'

'Oh, you live in Rock Street.' Foley clicked his fingers. 'I thought you looked familiar.'

'Yeah. Anyway, I was lucky enough to find somewhere else at such short notice. And I can move in straight away. But the rent is a bit steep so I thought if Alex moved in with me we could share it. Seeing as she has to get out too. But I can't find her. And I need to know today.'

'So she doesn't know about the cottage?' Foley frowned.

'Well, she knew I was going to look at it. And tis perfect. Alex would love it so I went straight back to tell her. You can imagine my surprise when I found two coffins in her room and no sign of Alex.'

Three men came out of the bar and squeezed between them, talking aggressively about some local politician who wasn't listening to the advice they were giving him. Collins crossed to Foley's side of the corridor. 'Anyway, I assumed Alex was staying somewhere else while the coffins were... you know? But last night she still wasn't back. There were people all over the house paying their respects to your sister so I went out to the pub.'

'I don't understand,' Foley butted in. 'Liam Edge told us Alex had already gone.'

'Gone where?'

'I assume he meant she found somewhere else to live. He just said she'd gone and she wasn't coming back.'

'No, no.' Collins looked as if he was going to cry. 'That's not right. She wouldn't just go without telling me. She isn't that kind of person. Alex wouldn't...'

'Perhaps she found somewhere else but she hasn't had the chance to tell you yet?'

'No.' Collins looked around to see who was nearby.

'How can you be so sure?'

‘Because after you all left for the funeral this morning I looked in her room. All her stuff is still there. Her jumper and skirt are still hanging in the wardrobe. And her shoes.’

‘That doesn’t mean anything.’ Foley had a flashback of what he saw in her room. ‘She could be coming back for them later.’

‘But that’s just it.’ Collins gave an impatient grunt. ‘She only has one tidy skirt and jumper. And a dress and cardigan she wore around the house, plus a couple of white blouses. And one pair of shoes. And all of them are still in her wardrobe. Apart from the bed up on its side, the room looks like it always did. If she’d gone, what was she wearing?’

‘Well, all I know is what Liam told us. She’s gone.’

‘But did he say where she went?’ Collins grabbed Foley’s arm. His whole face crumbled and he had to stop himself from blubbing. When Foley pulled back Collins let go of the arm. ‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m worried about her, that’s all.’

‘I can see that.’ Foley nodded. ‘So you and Alex are... what? Are you in a relationship?’

‘No. Not at all. Tis nothing like that. Tis just...’

‘So how come you’re so sure about what clothes she owned? Unless you’ve been peeping through her keyhole.’

‘I have not!’ Again the bluster. ‘How dare... that’s a terrible thing to say. I do not peep through keyholes!’

‘Anyway, she certainly kept that quiet. I knew nothing about you, and I certainly didn’t know about a new cottage either.’

‘Well, do you blame her?’

‘Why? She’s a single woman. I presume you’re single yourself. What would be the problem if you were going to move in together?’

Collins flushed and rubbed his cheeks. ‘I don’t know. There isn’t one, I suppose.’ His eyes flicked towards the bar just as Liam Edge came through the door. He gave a peculiar little gulp and scurried away towards the toilet.

‘Liam.’ Foley smiled as Edge approached with a slight sway. ‘How’s Ma bearing up? Is she all right?’

Edge took a moment to focus and he put his hand on the wall. ‘So far, Eamon. So far. But these are sad times. Wicked, sad times.’ He pointed back at the bar with his thumb. ‘But the medicine they gave her will deaden the pain for the while. If we can just get through the rest of the week we’ll have a good chance of getting back on even ground.’

‘What’s happening with Vicky?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I thought she’d want to start moving her stuff into your place now Alex has gone?’

‘No,’ Edge barked. His face turned a dark shade of plum and his eyes bulged. ‘No one is to go into that house unless I say so. No one. Tis not ready yet.’ His finger jabbed Foley in the chest.

‘Liam!’ Foley pushed the hand away. ‘For feck sake, what’s wrong with you? It was only an idea. I thought she might want to use the van, that’s all.’

Edge stepped back and shook his head. 'No, you are right. Sorry. But the house isn't ready yet. I have to get the other lads out first. Then I can make it into a proper home for Vicky.'

'That's fine. So why bite my head off? Anyway, do you want me to clear out the stuff Alex left behind?'

'What stuff?' Again the aggression.

'She left some stuff in her room. I told you already.'

'She did not.' It came out as a rasping shout and people looked around.

'Liam, I saw it.'

'Well, it's not there now, all right?'

'So where's it gone?'

'It doesn't feckin' matter.' A dribble stretched down his chin and he brushed it away with an angry swipe. 'Tis all gone. Everything belonging to her is gone. So forget it, all right?'

Chapter 44

Jane rolled her eyes when she saw Foley coming down the corridor and she slid open the hatch window. 'For God's sake, Eamon. What do you want now?'

'I was wondering if I was needed today.'

'What do you mean needed?'

'Didn't Jerome say if I had the van I was the man? I assumed he meant there was a job for me here.'

'What? I'm not sure Jerome would want to see you ever again after the way you upset him. I've never seen him so angry.'

'But that was just a misunderstanding.'

'A misunderstanding? Your dopey friend was sitting in his chair rummaging through his desk. I thought he was going to have a heart attack. What on earth was she doing?'

'She was looking for the van key. It wasn't as if she was robbing the place.'

'Anyway, he didn't say anything to me about a job.' Jane pulled a face and sat back in her chair.

Foley leant his elbows on the hatch. 'Well, that was the impression he gave me. You were there. You heard him say it.'

'Eamon, I don't remember what he said.' Jane insisted. Then she checked the diary in front of her. 'Look, he should be in around twelve. You can ask him yourself then.'

Foley clapped his hands in frustration. 'I need to know now, Jane.'

'Well, I'm sorry. I don't know what to say to you.' Foley's whining tone was starting to annoy her and she wanted to snap back, but she picked up a mug from her desk instead. 'Do you want to come in and have a cup of tea?'

Foley turned around in an angry circle. 'If I wanted tea I'd have stayed at home. What I want is a job.'

'Don't get shitty with me, Eamon Foley.' Jane slammed the mug down with a thump. 'You can wait to see Jerome or you can go back home.'

Foley groaned and rubbed his face with his hands. When Jane saw the strain in his eyes she softened her voice and opened the door. 'Look, if you're going to wait then come in and have a cup of tea.'

Foley slouched in. And he stood in the middle of the floor looking lost. Jane put tea in a mug, handed it to him then sat back at the desk. 'Why don't you sit down?'

'No, I'm grand.' Foley rubbed the back of his legs. 'My arse is still cramped after spending the night on a hard chair. I need to get the blood flowing in it again.'

'How're things at home?' Jane forced an interest. 'How's your mother coping with it all?'

'She's struggling. But Vicky and the children will be moving into Liam's house soon. That will take the pressure off her. I know it won't change what happened to Mary but at least we won't be falling over each other.'

'That's good news, I suppose. If it helps.'

'In the meantime, I was counting on this job.' Foley slurped a mouthful of tea. 'Even if it was just a couple of days a week. I thought you still had loads of orders to get out. I could deliver them for you. Then you'd get paid, and you'd pay me.'

'What'll Sgt Edge say about that? Won't he expect you to be out looking for whoever killed Joe?'

'I don't know what he'll say. Anyway, he didn't come home last night.'

'Oh no! He didn't spend the night with your little friend, did he?'

'I wouldn't think so. According to Liam, she's gone.'

'Gone where?'

'I've no idea. Liam told all his tenants to get out because he needs the house for Vicky. So she left and no one's seen her since.'

'What, she was Liam's tenant as well as... Oh my God, that's a bit... Oh dear, what did your poor mother think about that?'

'Stop it,' Foley snapped. 'There was nothing going on between them. Not like that. Not that I could see, anyway. Alright, Liam was fond of her but they weren't getting along too good lately. They could hardly say a civil word to each other.'

'There you are, then. They had a lover's tiff. He made her get out of his house and she stropped off dragging her pride behind her. But I bet she won't be too far away.'

A knock on the warehouse door made her look around at the elderly man who shuffled in. 'I've got some more orders ready to go.' He gave Foley an uninterested look. 'So I'll go for my break now and when I come back I'll do the ones for Latchfords. Is that all right, missus?'

'Thanks, Tom.' Jane smiled up at him.

'There you are,' Foley rubbed his hands together. 'I came just at the right time.'

'You did not. I can deliver them myself. They're all in the town.'

'Those things are heavy.'

'I'll take the bike. It has a basket big enough to take two or three orders at a time.'

Foley seemed to deflate. And the defeated look on his face irritated Jane all over again. 'Anyway, if you're not going to work, shouldn't you be at home with your mother?' she said. 'She'll need your support more than ever now.'

Foley winced. 'No. Tis just too crowded over there. There are people all over the place, asleep on chairs, asleep on the floor. I can't move for them. And there's nothing to eat either. I put the kettle on this morning to make a cup of tea only to find there's no tea left. And there's no milk. So I went to the bread bin and that's empty too. My stomach is grumbling for the want of a nice piece of toast but all I can find is fresh air. And that's not so fresh anymore.'

'Then wouldn't it be a nice gesture if you went to the shop yourself and bought some groceries?' Jane struggled to keep the sharpness out of her voice. 'Your mother would be delighted if you did something like that for her.'

'I would if I had the ration coupons. And the money. Right now I haven't got two brass pennies to rub together.'

Jane rubbed her eyes with her fingers. Embarrassment was seeping through the annoyance now. She never thought she'd be feeling sorry for Eamon Foley. She felt rage at him once, when he went away and left her. But that faded over the years. Now she wasn't sure what she felt, but it wasn't nice. She opened the drawer where she kept her handbag. 'Look, I can let you have half-a-crown.'

'No.' Foley shook his head. 'I don't want charity.'

Jane jumped up. 'Don't give me that I don't want charity shit. You're in no position to be friggin picky. And I'm not giving it to you, Eamon. Tis a loan. You'll have to pay it back.'

Foley was stunned by her sharpness and he stepped back away from her. 'I know that,' he muttered. Then he sighed again. 'But what about coupons? My mother used all of hers.'

'Well I can't help you with that, I'm afraid.' Jane threw her handbag back in the drawer and sat back down. Then she calmed down and clicked her fingers. 'Wait. I think I saw some in Jerome's desk?'

She shot into the office, sat in Jerome's chair and pulled the drawer open. Foley gasped. 'What are you doing? Look what happened last time someone did that.'

Jane ignored him and started rummaging in the drawer.

'Cassidy was right.' Foley decided it was safe to move closer. 'That desk is like a dump.' When the light glistened on something shiny he picked it up.

'What have you got there?' Jane glanced up briefly.

'A tiepin with a J on it.' Foley felt an odd shiver as he rubbed it between his fingers. 'Is it Jerome's?'

'Let me see.' Jane took it, studied it for a moment then threw it back in the drawer. 'I've never seen it before.'

'It looks expensive though. Is it gold?'

'That's not gold. Anyway, tis not the kind of thing Jerome would wear. He likes discreet stuff like small silver cufflinks or a silver stud on his tie. No, he'd never wear anything as big and crude as that.'

'So what's it doing in his desk?'

'Ah, got ya.' Jane picked up a ration book and pushed the drawer shut with her hip as she stood up. She flicked through the book and ripped some coupons out of it. 'Milk, bread, sugar. That should tide you over until you get your own.' She shoved them into Foley's hand and strode back out to the reception desk. 'Will two shillings be enough?' she called over her shoulder. 'I can make it two and six if you're desperate.'

Foley was still intrigued by the tiepin. He needed to get a better look at it. He tugged open the drawer, grabbed the tiepin and shoved it into his pocket.

‘Eamon?’

He slid the drawer shut. ‘Coming.’

As he came back into the room Jane held out a two-shilling coin to him. ‘I feel bad taking that.’ Foley made a contrite face. ‘Anyway, Liam will be home soon and I’ll pay you back then.’

Jane forced a smile as she sat back at the desk. She tried not to look at him but she couldn’t help it. And his face looked so sad she felt even sorrier for him. ‘Look, here’s the thing.’ She rubbed her nose with her sleeve. ‘Did you bring the van with you?’

‘No.’

‘Then go and get it. Deliver some orders for me and we’ll call it an advance of pay. How does that sound?’

‘Are you sure? What about Jerome?’

‘Let me worry about Jerome. Go on. Get the van and be quick about it before I fire you.’

Foley chuckled and looked down at the coupons in his hand. Then his face fell. ‘I can’t use these. They’ve got Jerome’s name on them.’

‘No, you’ll be grand. Just take them over to Minnie Ryan and tell her I sent you.’

‘That’s not a good idea, I’m afraid. Me and Minnie Ryan don’t see eye to eye since we challenged the accuracy of her scales. She was weighing butter and I swear she used her thumb to balance the outcome in her favour. Anyway, she suggested we take our business elsewhere. And she used colourful language doing it.’

Jane gave a soft whistle. ‘In that case, we’ll walk over together. And while I’m getting the groceries you can go and get the van. You can pick me up on the way back.’

As they walked up Courthouse Lane Foley felt a flutter of pride at being out and about with Jane again. She strode with such confidence it caused little flurries from the old days to re-surface.

As they crossed the road by Minnie Ryan’s shop Jane held out her hand. ‘Actually, it makes more sense for me to get the groceries first.’ Jane pushed open the shop door. ‘Then you can take them home when you go for the van. I’ll head back to the office and get the orders ready.’

Chapter 45

Foley dropped the groceries on the kitchen table, took them out of the bag one at a time and showed them off. ‘Right, who wants a cup of tea?’ He went to the range and moved the kettle onto the hot plate. ‘And a cheese sandwich?’

Vicky stood up and straightened her clothes before shuffling over to the table. She picked up the loaf of bread and squeezed it. ‘Where did you get all this stuff, Eamon? Butter and cheese? How did you get butter and cheese without coupons? Don’t tell me you robbed some poor auld woman coming home from the shops?’

'Damn.' Foley snapped his fingers. 'You caught me out, Vicky. I give up. Only don't tell the guards. They'll only take it all for themselves and put us in jail.'

'Will Grandad put us in jail?' Eamon Junior's eyes were as big as saucers as he clung to his mother's skirt.

'No, no,' Foley laughed. 'We're only joking. But where is Liam? Did he not come home yet?'

'No.' His mother's voice was weary. She was sitting in the same chair by the range, smoking a Woodbine. A jar of water by her feet had cigarette butts floating in it. 'He probably went straight to work from Rock Street.'

'So he still has the van with him?'

Kathleen shrugged. 'I don't know what he wants that auld thing for. Tis easier to just walk down the town.'

Foley cursed under his breath. This meant he'd waste time trying to find the stupid van. That was going to annoy Jane. Suddenly he wasn't hungry anymore. 'I have to go out again.'

'What about your food?'

'Leave it on the plate. I'll have it when I get back.'

'If you see Liam, ask him if he's coming home tonight.' His mother had hope in her eyes. 'We can have his supper ready for him.'

Foley nodded and went out, and he slammed the door behind him. He dreaded having to ask Edge for the van key, especially if he was still in that dark mood. He would make a huge issue out of it. But the chance of a job with Jane was too good to throw away. He needed the van whatever the consequences.

Maybe he could use the tiepin as a distraction. It would give Edge something else to focus on. He took it out of his pocket and studied it again. Something about it was nagging at him, giving him annoying little pokes? But it was out of focus, as if he was looking at it through a fine mist. Would Edge even accept that it belonged to Joe McCarthy? He turned on his heels and headed back to Dean Callaghan's jewellery shop.

When Dean saw him he dropped his pen on the counter and tried to scurry back to his workshop. But he collided with one of the sales girls and had no choice but to turn and face his customer. 'Eamon. And how're you this fine day?'

'You could at least pretend you're interested.' Foley tried not to grin.

'Of course, I'm interested.' Dean put his hand on his heart. 'Well, I would be if you were a paying customer. But pigs would sprout wings and fly off over the rainbow before I ever saw the colour of your money. So what do you want? Sir?'

'Do you recognise this?'

Dean took the tiepin and studied it for a moment before handing it back. 'Yes, I sold it to your sister Vicky a few years back.'

'How're you so sure it's the same one?'

'Because that's my solder mark there, where I stuck the J on it. I always make a mark in case there's a query later. I remember she wanted it engraved with her husband's name. I had a small advertising plaque I was going to throw out and I thought it would be a nice gesture if I took the J off it and stuck it on the tie pin.' He gave a soft smile. 'You should have seen her face, bless her. She was so pleased. Tis only rolled gold, but she loved it.'

'Thanks, Dean.' Foley put it back in his pocket.

‘So what are you doing with it? Eamon, tell me you’re not up to something dodgy again?’

‘Don’t be so suspicious. Joe lost it ages ago. I found it but I wanted to be sure before I showed it to Vicky. I didn’t want to upset her if it wasn’t Joe’s.’

He had a sudden thought. ‘Dean, you play cards. Would this be worth enough to cover a stake?’

‘That depends how important it is to you. How determined you are to win it back. And how much the other players trust you.’

‘Does Jerome Quille ever play cards?’

‘Jerome Quille?’ Dean shrugged. ‘No, I don’t think so. At least not in the places I go to. But that’s not to say he doesn’t play in one of those exclusive clubs.’

‘What about Joe McCarthy? Would he play in those clubs?’

‘Joe McCarthy? No way. He couldn’t afford the stake in a place like that. You need at least £10 just to be in.’

Chapter 46

Jane looked through the workshop door when she heard Foley coming along the corridor. ‘Ah, there you are. If you load up straight away you can take those...’

‘I’m sorry.’ Foley pulled a sad face. ‘Liam has the van and I can’t find him.’

‘What?’ Jane flung her arms up. ‘For God’s sake, Eamon! I’m after phoning everyone to tell them we’d deliver their stuff today. I’m going to look a right eejit now if I have to tell them we can’t.’ She came in the door so fast she tripped and Foley rushed to catch her but she pushed him away and walked around him.

‘I thought for a moment you’d fallen for me again,’ Foley joked. Jane clicked her tongue, shook her head and sat back down at her desk.

‘Look, I said I’m sorry,’ Foley groaned. ‘But Liam has the van and nobody’s seen him today.’

Jane shuffled some papers on the desk and snatched up the phone. ‘I’d better tell Sweeney first. His is the biggest order.’

‘No, don’t.’ Foley took the phone off her. ‘Didn’t you say you have a bike? Why can’t I take Sweeney’s order out to him? Is that the Sweeney’s cake shop in Balloonagh?’

‘It is,’ Jane looked him up and down. ‘But when’s the last time you sat on a bike? You don’t look like you have the strength to walk let alone...’

‘Just show me the feckin’ bike.’

‘Are you sure? It would be a great help if you could.’

Foley put his hand on her shoulder. ‘For my most favourite girl in the whole world, it would be a pleasure.’

‘Stop that.’ A shadow swept across her face.

‘For God’s sake,’ Foley snapped as he pulled his hand away. ‘What’s the matter now?’

‘You know what’s the matter now.’ She turned away and picked some papers off the desk. Foley stood behind her for a moment then sat on a chair on the other side of the room. He folded his arms and crossed his legs.

Jane pretended to read the papers in her hand and the silence fell around them like a thick fog. Eventually, she put the papers down with a thump. 'So what do you want to do, Eamon?'

'What?'

'Are you going to deliver the orders for me or are you just going to sit there in one of your famous sulks?'

'I'm not in a sulk. Why are you saying I'm in a sulk? Just because I'm...'

'Eamon, I know the look. You're in a sulk because I...'

'Well I'm not sulking, all right. Anyway, I was just playing, you know?'

'Yeah, I know.' Her voice was softer now. 'So are you going to take the orders out for me?'

Foley shuffled to his feet. 'So where is this famous bike?'

Jane pointed with her pen. 'Just through the workshop there. Hold on, I'll come with you.'

She pushed her chair back and jumped up, and she reached the door at the same moment as Foley. He held it open for her and as she ducked under his arm she staggered into him. His arm instinctively wrapped itself around her neck. 'Eamon.' She shoved him away again. 'What is the matter with you today?'

'That wasn't my fault.' Foley stepped away from her.

'Yes, it was. You did it deliberately.'

'I bloody did not.' Foley turned back into the office and stomped over to the door. Jane tutted again and followed him. 'Eamon, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.'

'No, you shouldn't. It was an accident. It was no one's fault. But you don't want me hanging around you so I'll piss off and leave you alone. Good luck with the deliveries.'

'Look,' she put her hand on his chest. 'I'm sorry, all right? It's just... well, I don't want you thinking we can go back to the way we were. I thought you understood. We've both moved on. We're different people now.'

'I do understand. But it doesn't mean I'm not fond of you still. I can't just forget what we had.'

'Then you'll have to try harder. Just remember I'm a married woman.'

'Yeah, I remember. But are you happy?'

'Of course, I'm happy. What makes you think I'm not happy?'

'No reason. Tis just an impression I got from other people.'

'What are you talking about? What other people? What are they saying about me?'

Foley shrugged. 'Nothing. Just that living with Colin Regan can't be easy.'

'What the hell does that mean? You've got no idea what Colin is like. Colin is a good man. He has a good job. He works hard to give me a good home.'

'And that's what makes you happy? A good home?'

'Well, tis a lot more than you could ever give me. Anyway, Colin loves me. He takes care of me.'

'But he goes away all the time. How can he be taking care of you if he spends so much time away from home? And what about children? You always wanted children. You said you wanted a whole tribe of them. If he loves you that much how come he hasn't given you any children?'

The words were out before Foley could stop them and he regretted it immediately. Jane closed her eyes and shrunk down in the chair. 'Actually, he gave me four.' She said it so softly it was almost a sob.

'What?'

Her eyes were wet when she looked up at him again. 'He gave me four babies, if you must know.'

Foley's mouth opened like a beached cod.

'They all went the full term.' Jane wiped her eyes on her sleeve. 'But none of them was strong enough to survive the birth.'

'Oh my God, Jane. I didn't know.'

'How could you? You weren't here.'

'I don't know what to say. I... my God. That must have been awful for you.'

This time a huge tear fell onto her cheek. 'You have no idea. The pain of holding a tiny person in your arms knowing you will never see her grow up, never see her trotting around in her pretty little dress.' She took a handkerchief from her sleeve and dabbed her eyes. 'Our whole future was built around her. We decorated her room. We bought all the bits and pieces. Not that losing the second one wasn't just as bad. Or the times after that. It turned out I have some sort of defect that causes a lack of oxygen in the womb. It can't be fixed. And by the time it was discovered it was way too late anyway.'

She shoved the handkerchief up her sleeve. 'And whatever you might think of Colin, he could not have been more supportive. He stayed with me every minute I was in the hospital. He even slept on the floor. He took time off work to look after me when I came home. He wanted children as much as I did. He wanted to be a father too, but he stood by me regardless. He didn't abandon me in a fit of self-pity and go looking for someone else. He loves me and he stood by me and that makes me very happy indeed.'

Foley's head was spinning and he held it in his hands. 'Jane, I'm so, so sorry. I...'

Jane jumped up and headed for the workshop. 'Anyway, if you go through to the back of the workshop you'll see the bike in the toilet. I'll get the orders ready for you.'

Chapter 47

The rain hit the window like a handful of pebbles. Foley groaned and sat up. His buttocks were numb from sitting on the hard chair. His arms were numb from his head laying on them and his brain was numb from the lack of sleep. The grey light that filtered into the house made the kitchen appear even colder than it was.

He shuffled to his feet with the creaking energy of an old man. The house was remarkably quiet. Vicky and the children were in Foley's bed and his mother was in her room. Foley had to sleep in the chair by the range.

The fire had gone out ages ago. So between the cold and the hard chair he'd had a dreadful night. Every time he closed his eyes he was tormented by the images of babies. What Jane told him had haunted him. In another life, they could have

been his babies. How would he have coped with that? Would he have been as supportive as Colin, or would he have been as useless as he was with his own wife Katie?

Poor funny face Katie. Foley wondered how they ever got together in the first place. They were as different as two people could be. But somehow they got caught up in the same life current.

It wasn't long after Raymond Price got involved with his dodgy investors that the first batch of women arrived at the Black Bird Hotel in Dublin. They were all shapes and sizes, and some became instant favourites with the customers. The others were chosen as a last resort. Katie was usually the last one standing. She had the kind of looks that made her invisible. Limp mousy hair flopping over a face that was hard to describe, pale grey eyes that wouldn't look directly at you.

Yet night after night she'd be there, occupying the same stool at the bar and looking invitingly at the businessmen who were pretending they just popped in for a pint on their way home from work.

Foley and Katie spent many long evenings swopping small talk at the bar. In a certain light, Foley could see a softness in her, a vulnerability behind the hardness she liked to portray. Her armour didn't slip very often, but if it did she'd disappear to the ladies room. When she came back she'd be her normal self again. Foley often noticed a trace of white powder on her top lip.

One night, intoxicated by the long hours and the cosy log fire, Katie invited Foley to her room. Foley laughed. He couldn't possibly afford her, not on a barman's wages. She said the first one was free, a sort of introductory offer. And it all developed from there.

To save money Katie moved in with Foley. And it was working out nicely until the day she told him she was pregnant. And the baby was his.

Katie's family lived on a farm outside Dublin. Her two enormous brothers invited Foley to do the decent thing by her. He tried to explain about the business Katie was in but the brothers were in denial. Katie was a receptionist, they believed. And they would beat the life out of anyone who said otherwise.

The wedding was concluded in a heartbeat, despite Raymond's protests. 'How could you be so gullible?' he howled at Foley. 'The father could be any one of a hundred men. Are you mad?' He advised Foley to run away to England. But Foley had developed a fondness for Katie. He promised to stand by her.

Katie was back at work just weeks after the baby was born. Her mother was looking after the child and Foley hardly ever saw him. But the years hadn't been kind to Katie. The late nights, the childbirth, gin and tonic instead of food and the frequent visits to the ladies room had taken their toll on her health. She was tired and haggard and got even less attention from the customers.

And things between Katie and Foley were fractured long before the night the Gardaí came to investigate the death of a young female who fell off the roof in the middle of the night. The first person on the scene swore the young woman was naked with ropes around her wrists and feet. But by the time the emergency services arrived, she was fully dressed and reeking of alcohol. So the Gardaí dismissed it as a tragic suicide.

But for Raymond, the curtains had opened and let daylight into the cesspit his hotel had become. Most of the girls disappeared like mist in sunlight. Katie went

home too. And that was the last time Foley saw her alive. A heart attack, the doctor said.

After the funeral, Katie's brothers told Foley they could no longer look after Mickey, so Foley took him back to the hotel. Raymond wasn't impressed but he didn't object. He was too preoccupied with his own problems. Foley knew he should have taken the boy home to Tralee there and then. But he loved his job and he hoped things would still work out.

They didn't. Now here he was nine months later sitting in a cold kitchen with cramp in his arse.

He stood up and stretched. The rain was brutal, hitting the ground so hard it was bouncing up a foot into the air in places. He checked the clock. He promised Jane he'd be in today but he didn't want to take the bike out again. He'd hardly got to the end of Courthouse Lane yesterday when the rain came down. He couldn't believe how fast the wet went through his clothes. He should have turned back but for some reason he felt he couldn't let Jane down. So he plodded on, delivering the orders and collecting the money.

When he got back to the office Jane seemed unable to speak to him. She just looked straight through him. It made him sad, but he couldn't think of anything to say that would have made it better.

He wished he knew where Liam Edge was. He could do with the van today. Was it possible Edge had gone somewhere with Cassidy? He hoped not. Things were complicated enough already.

He decided to get the fire going. There was a bundle of sticks behind the door and as he stooped down to get them he saw something shiny under the table. It was Joe's tiepin. It must have fallen out of his pocket.

What was he supposed to do with it now? His enthusiasm for finding out why it was in Jerome's desk had waned. Perhaps he should just give it to Joe Jnr and say he found it. But the suspicious little git would probably say Foley stole it in the first place. So he slipped it back in his pocket.

Chapter 48

Foley took a swig of tea, put the mug on the desk and started rubbing the wet out of his hair with the towel Jane had given him.

'I can't believe you didn't bring an overcoat,' Jane nagged. 'You saw what the weather was like and yet you came out in that ridiculous uniform. Did you think it was waterproof?'

'Well, my suit is still wet from yesterday. This is all I have to wear.'

Jane rolled her eyes. 'You didn't have to come in today, you know?'

'I didn't want to let you down.'

'You didn't want to let me down? At this rate, you'll catch pneumonia and die and all your heroics will have been for nothing. It isn't as if what you did yesterday made a huge difference anyway.'

'Oh right,' Foley said. 'Thank you for that overwhelming vote of appreciation. I feel all choked up now.'

‘Don’t be.’ Jane gave a sharp chuckle. ‘We won’t be pinning a medal on you if that’s what you’re hoping for.’

‘Really? And here was me thinking I was indispensable.’

‘Indispensable? Take a walk over to the graveyard, Eamon. The place is full of indispensable people. We don’t need indispensable. We need a van. Now if you had a van it might be a different story. Well, maybe not indispensable exactly. Useful might be the word I’m looking for.’

Footsteps clattering up the corridor made Jane look out of the hatch. ‘Jerome. You’re early. I wasn’t expecting you yet.’

‘It’s this awful weather.’ Jerome flicked wet from his coat. ‘I was suffocating at home. I had to get out of the house.’ He noticed Foley and his colour changed. ‘What the hell are you doing here?’

His mop of blond hair swayed around him like a halo. And the image hit Foley like a sledgehammer. ‘Oh my God. It was you!’ Foley wasn’t sure if he said it out loud but it was what his mind was screaming. ‘How did I get it so bloody wrong?’

Delaney’s pub last Friday night, Joe McCarthy lying dead on the floor, smoke and noise and people moving in all directions. In the panic and confusion, Foley sees a big man with light hair pushing through the front door and glancing back at him. And Foley is blinded by what happened to Raymond Price back in January. All he can see is Leo Maranus because at that moment Leo Maranus is his only threat.

Jane moved between Jerome and Foley and began to help Jerome take off his coat. She was telling him what a great job Eamon had done yesterday. He delivered eleven orders and got paid for all of them. But Jerome was having none of it. ‘That man has more neck than a feckin’ giraffe coming in here. I want him out of here. Do you hear me? Get him out of here.’

But Foley was already out in the corridor and moving fast. He needed to put some distance between them. He needed time to think. Jane called after him but he was already back out in Courthouse Lane.

Chapter 49

‘For heaven’s sake, Eamon. What is the matter with you?’ Foley’s mother slammed the mug of tea down on the table. ‘You’re like a cat on a hot brick. Will you sit down and try to relax?’

Foley was pacing the floor, going from the door to the window, glancing out at the rain then striding back to the door again. From the moment he’d walked into the house he was like an unexploded bomb, hissing and groaning and ready to detonate. He did sit down. But only for a second. Then he jumped up as if the chair was red hot.

‘Are you sure you don’t know where Liam is?’ he asked for the hundredth time. ‘I have to see him. There’s stuff I have to tell him.’

His mother gave an irritated tut and shuffled the coals in the range before dropping the poker on the floor. Vicky glanced at Foley then at her mother, but

she didn't speak. She saw the tension in her brother and she shrunk down in her seat.

The children clung to her and watched Foley with huge frightened eyes. For their sake, he knew he should calm down, but there was so much turmoil inside his head it was about to split wide open.

Liam Edge was going to be furious when Foley told him that this time he did know who killed Joe McCarthy. This time he had evidence. Well, enough to arrest Jerome on suspicion anyway.

The question was why? What did Joe do to Jerome that warranted a bullet? How was it linked to the tiepin? The questions showered down on Foley so fast they merged into a thick soup of confusion.

The door crashed open and Joe Jnr skidded into the room. His wet hair was flat on his head and his clothes dripped on the floor. His mouth opened and closed but no words came out. A strange terror danced in his eyes.

'Jesus, Joe,' Vicky jumped up and took his hand. 'What's the matter with you? You look like you're after seeing a ghost.'

The boy was shaking and it wasn't from his wet clothes clinging to his skinny frame. He swallowed loudly and tried to speak again. Vicky grabbed her teacup and made him take a long drink from it. 'There,' she made soothing noises. 'Now tell me what's wrong.'

Joe Jnr looked at Foley then at his grandmother and back at his mother again. 'My Da's alive.'

Vicky's face creased. 'Oh, Joe, now you know that isn't true.'

'But it is,' the boy insisted. 'I'm after seeing him. I was over in the graveyard and I saw him.'

'Stop it!' Vicky cried. 'Now stop it this instant.'

'I'm after seeing him. I swear it,' Joe Jnr shrieked. 'Why won't you believe me?'

He spun around to Foley and his eyes were brimming. 'I did see him. You have to believe me.'

Foley held out his hand to him. 'Joe, I know your father dying was a terrible shock. But the pain of it is making you think you see him. I know it happens. When my wife died I still saw her everywhere, in the street, in the shops. We see someone who looks like them and for a moment we think it's the person we've lost.'

'No.' Joe Jnr gave a little dance. 'I didn't see someone who looked like him. I saw my Da. I saw his hand. His hand is sticking out of the grave. He's trying to dig himself out and he needs our help. We have to help him. Please, Uncle Eamon, we have to help him.'

Vicky grabbed Joe Jnr, spun him around and slapped his face. Everyone froze. Then Foley's mother got to her feet and put her arms around the boy.

'That's enough.' She pulled him closer. Joe Jnr hugged her and became a child again, sobbing openly. But as his grandmother tried to steer him towards the warmth of the range he pulled away and bolted for the door. 'Uncle Eamon, help us,' he cried and disappeared out into the rain.

Vicky knocked the chair over as she went to follow him but Foley jumped in front of her. 'No. I'll get him. You wait here. He'll be all right.'

By the time Foley got his jacket, Joe Jnr had vanished. Foley braced himself against the rain and took off after him.

The branches of the huge tree by Joe's grave were bent with the weight of the rain. It built up on the leaves and fell like tap water, heavy and hard, beating holes in the ground then filling them instantly.

'Help me,' Joe Jnr pleaded. Foley was frozen with shock. Joe Jnr was kneeling in the mud pulling on an arm. The arm was shredded as if it had been ravaged by wild beasts. The thick mud held onto it with fierce determination.

A gust of wind sent another wave of cold rain into Foley's face and snapped him into action. He ran over to the boy. 'Move over.' His stomach heaved as he scooped the mud from around the arm. Then he took a firm grip and pulled hard.

The mud sucked and popped before it released the body. Once free, the body was surprisingly light and Foley fell backwards with it. Within seconds the rain washed the mud off of it. It was female, and it was naked. And it had long black hair.

'Joe, I think you'd better call the guards.'

This time he couldn't stop the sick from coming up.

Chapter 50

Foley couldn't believe how much damage the animals had done to the girl's face. He had nothing to cover her with so he moved her near the wall where the long grass offered her some dignity. He put her on her side and covered her face with her hair. It was going to be difficult to identify her. But Foley had no doubt. Alex Cassidy had not gone home.

He stood back under the tree and tried to avoid looking at her. The rain was still brutal, dropping out of clouds that were so low you could reach up and touch them. It turned that corner of the graveyard into a muddy lake.

The only officers available were LSF men Patsy Fleming and Bill Gaynor. Both of them were young and inexperienced. And they trampled all over the place. Any clues about what happened here were now obliterated.

Patsy Fleming threw up when the doctor turned the body over and Bill Gaynor hid under the tree until the undertakers arrived and took the body away. Then they both disappeared and left Foley to walk the doctor back to his car.

The doctor dropped Foley off in Ashe Street and advised him to go home and change out of his wet clothes before he caught pneumonia. But Foley couldn't rest until he found Liam Edge. He felt sick at the thought of breaking the news to him. In Edge's current state of mind, there was no way of knowing how he was going to react. But it was best coming from Foley than from some blunt Garda officer who knew nothing about their history. Whatever went on between Cassidy and Edge over the past few days, Foley believed Edge was still very fond of her.

Sergeant Edge was in the canteen, sitting by the window looking out at the Dominican Church. 'Liam, where were you?' Foley pulled out a chair and sat to the side of him. 'We've been looking everywhere for you.'

Edge glanced at him then turned back to the window. 'I had things to do.'

‘What things? We were all worried about you. Where were you?’

‘That is none of your feckin’ business.’ Edge’s face was dark and angry as he glared at Foley’s reflection in the window.

‘Actually, I think it is my business. My mother—your wife—is going out of her mind with worry. You could at least pretend you care about what she’s going through.’

‘Don’t you dare talk to me like that,’ Edge growled and pushed his chair back. ‘I do not answer to you.’

Foley was startled by the ugliness of Edge’s face. He looked around at the other people in the canteen and they all suddenly found something more interesting at their own table.

Edge stood up and gave his jacket a sharp tug. ‘What do you want, Eamon?’

‘I have some bad news.’

‘Go on.’

‘Well,’ Foley glanced round the canteen again. ‘Joe Jnr is after finding a body over in the graveyard.’

A shadow flicked across Edge’s face and something touched his eyes for the briefest of moments. He seemed to sway but he quickly grabbed reality back. ‘Very feckin’ funny. Where else would you expect to find a body?’

‘Liam, I’m not joking.’ Foley waved him to sit back down. ‘I think it might be Alex Cassidy.’

The noise Edge made as he sagged down on the chair could have been a sob. Foley pulled his chair closer as the sergeant took a small bottle of whiskey from his inside pocket and popped the cork off with trembling fingers. After he took a long swig he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. ‘And you’re sure tis her?’

‘Well, I’m almost sure. She fits the description—you know, black hair, small, thin.’

‘How did... what happened to her?’

‘We don’t know yet. The doctor thinks she’s been dead for at least two days but he can’t say how she died. It looks like someone killed her and buried her in Joe’s grave.’

‘So how did... you said Joe Jnr found her. How? If she was buried in Joe’s grave?’

‘Well, they didn’t bury her very deep and the rain washed the soil away. Joe Jnr was visiting the grave and discovered her.’

Edge blew his nose into a handkerchief and stuffed it back in his pocket. ‘Did you see her yourself?’

‘Yes. Joe Jnr called me and I recovered the body.’

‘And it was definitely her?’

‘She fits the description.’

‘What do you mean she fits the description?’ Edge snapped. ‘You found her. Why can’t you say if it was her or not?’

‘Because,’ Foley had to look away as he tried to find the kindest words. ‘The animals got to her. They did a lot of damage.’

The sergeant sank deeper into his chair. His eyes were puffy as if he hadn’t slept for a week. With his shoulders drooped and his head bowed he seemed to have aged years.

‘Liam, I’m sorry,’ Foley picked up the whiskey and took a short swig. ‘I wanted to tell you myself because... well, you know.’

Edge snatched the bottle off him and swallowed what was left in one big gulp before slamming it down on the table. He squeezed his eyes shut as he wiped his mouth again. Foley waited for him to say something else but he just sat there as if he’d turned to stone.

‘So where were you?’ The silence was straining Foley’s nerves.

‘I was inquiring about your friend Leo Maranus if you must know.’ The sergeant sat up straight and his eyes snapped open.

‘And that took you two days?’

‘Yes. It was complicated. People had to speak to people who had to get clearance from other people. It took a huge amount of time and a lot of tenacity to get a straight answer.’

‘So you were here all the time while we...’

‘I was not. I had to meet a contact in Fenit. As I said it took a lot of time.’

‘And what did you find out?’

Edge studied the whiskey bottle, rolled it between his fingers then put it down again. ‘Leo Maranus is Special Branch. He was undercover, investigating that crowd you were involved with. He realised you weren’t Price when you took the boy with you when you ran away. They found the real Raymond Price in the hotel cellar. They also found the money and a ledger stuffed up a chimney like you said. Maranus was delighted. There’s even talk of him getting a medal.’

It took a minute for Foley to respond. ‘So that means I was...’

‘...wrong!’ Edge poked him in the chest. ‘You made a feckin’ pig’s ear out of the whole murder enquiry. We wasted precious time because you got it into your stupid fat head that someone was...’

‘Sarge.’ Guard Brick appeared and cleared his throat.

‘I suppose you’ve come to tell me about Cassidy?’ Edge had dribble on his chin and he swiped it away with his sleeve.

‘No.’ Brick blinked nervously. ‘Actually, we don’t know if it is Cassidy. We don’t know who the poor woman is. Eamon is the only one who thinks it’s Cassidy.’

‘So what do you want?’

‘The Super wants to see you.’

Edge picked up the whiskey bottle and held it up to the light. ‘Well, he can feck right off if he thinks he can dump this on me as well. I have too much other stuff to be getting on with. I’m not a detective. If he wants any detecting done he should bring back the detectives. I’m just a guard. A foot soldier. Nothing else.’

‘Sergeant.’ The Super’s voice cut through the canteen noise and everyone sat up. Edge spun around and jumped to his feet.

‘Can I see you in my office?’ It wasn’t a request.

Edge groaned and picked up his cap. ‘Right you are, Sir.’

‘Liam, listen.’ Foley grabbed his arm. ‘We have to talk to Jerome Quille. He’s responsible for shooting Joe. And he’s also responsible for what happened to Alex.’

‘For Christ’s sake, give it a rest.’ Edge pulled his arm away and barged past Foley. ‘I haven’t got time for any more of your fantasies.’

‘Look, it was Jerome I saw in Delaney’s, not Maranus. And Jerome had access to a gun and...’

Edge pulled his cap on with a grunt.

'...he had Joe's tiepin in his desk. Now, why would he have Joe's tiepin in his desk? The thing is, Cassidy found the tiepin when she was looking for the van keys. And now she's dead. Doesn't that make you think? She found the tiepin and then winds up dead. Jerome saw her with the tiepin. He...'

Edge was already walking out of the canteen and when he reached the stairs he ran up them two at a time.

'Liam, wait. Listen to me. We have to speak to Jerome Quille.'

Edge leant over the railing. 'Eamon, just go home. You caused enough trouble already. Just feck off home, will you?'

Chapter 51

'Jane, where are you?' Foley hammered on the reception window a third time but still no one appeared. He gave the door another shove and when it still didn't budge he kicked it. 'Jane, for heaven's sake. Anyone? Isn't there anyone in this stupid place?'

He was about to storm back out when the door between the office and the workshop flew open and Jane came through. 'Eamon, what the hell is this roaring all about? What is wrong with you?' Then she looked him up and down. 'For God's sake, look at the cut of you. You look like a drowned rat. A rat that's been drowned in a mud bath. What happened to you?'

'Is Jerome still here?'

'No. Why?'

'I need to talk to him. Where is he?'

'He went home. He was agitated. You upset him and he left when you did.'

'What's his address? Where does he live?'

'I'm not telling you that.' Jane folded her arms. 'What do you want to know that for?'

Foley slapped the glass panel. 'Because I have to talk to him. I have to talk to him, Jane. And I mean right now.'

'Well, I don't think he'll want to talk to you. He's taken a big dislike to you. You upset him every time he sees you. If I was you I'd keep well out of his way. You should go home and get out of those wet clothes. You need a good wash down.'

'Just tell me where he lives.' Foley tried to inject some menace into his voice. It didn't work. Jane sauntered over to the desk, opened the glass panel and sat down.

'What's this all about, Eamon? Are you hoping he'll let you work here after all? Well, I think you blew your chances there.'

'No. I want to know why he had this in his drawer.' Foley threw the tiepin on the desk.

Jane poked it cautiously then picked it up. 'That's the thing you showed me yesterday.'

'It belonged to Joe McCarthy.' Foley reached in and took it off her. 'Cassidy found it in Jerome's desk drawer. I want to know what it was doing there.'

Jane sniggered and sat back in her chair. 'So your dopey friend finds a tiepin in Jerome's drawer and you get your knickers in a twist. Why?'

Foley leant in through the hatch again and jabbed at her with his finger. 'Look, I just want to know why Jerome had that tiepin in his drawer, all right.'

'There could be a million reasons.' Jane pulled her chair out of reach of Foley's hand. 'Why do you think he had it? What kind of rubbish has your little friend been filling your head with? Is she implying Jerome stole it? Tis not even gold. How much is it supposed to be worth?'

'That's not what I'm concerned about, Jane.' Foley snapped. 'I have reason to believe this tiepin is connected to the killing of Joe McCarthy.'

Jane leant so far back in her chair she nearly toppled over. 'For God's sake, Eamon. What the hell has Jerome got to do with Joe McCarthy? Are you having some sort of breakdown? Your brain has turned to shit and it's dribbling out your mouth. If you keep this up they'll have you in Killarney wearing a straightjacket.'

'I'm going to end up there anyway if I can't get to the bottom of this. Nobody will listen to me. If they'd listen to what I have to say maybe they could make sense of what I'm thinking.'

'What are you thinking?'

'That's just it. I don't know. I'm standing too close to see the whole picture. I can see lots of little bits but I can't get them to fit together. I need someone to look at them with new eyes, then we might be able to put them in the right order. And that tiepin is one of those bits. Jerome knows where it fits. I just need to ask him the question. Why did he have Joe's tiepin in his desk?'

'Eamon, you're shaking like a leaf.' Jane jumped up and opened the office door. 'Come in. Sit down and I'll put the kettle on.'

'I know he lives up near Bullock Hill,' Foley muttered as he shuffled over to a chair. 'Someone said he has a big house with a monkey puzzle in the garden. I'll just have to walk over there and look for it.'

'All right, all right. But if I tell you where he lives you'll have to promise you won't take Minnie Mouse with you. Jerome might not want to see you, but he definitely will not want to see her. Where is she, anyway? Did you find her?'

Foley nodded but no words came.

'Well?'

'Yes. We did find her.'

'Oh, don't tell me. She was with Liam Edge all the time. Now you and Dopey had a row over it and you're not talking to each other again.'

When Foley still didn't answer Jane sat down again. 'So where was she really?'

'In Joe McCarthy's grave.'

'Eamon, for God's sake!' Jane gasped. 'That is sick. Why did you say that?'

'Cos it's true. Someone killed her, stripped her naked and buried her in Joe's grave.'

Chapter 52

The gate to Jerome's house was held open by clumps of wild grass wrapped around its base. The gate was probably green once but now it was discoloured and blemished with spots of rust. There was a brass plate on one of the huge pillars. Jane shivered and stayed behind Foley as they walked in. She was still reeling from the news about Cassidy.

The lawn on either side of the drive was sadly neglected. Long grass wandered over the border and choked the flowers. Buddleia and assorted weeds sprung up all over the place. The gravel was pockmarked with vegetation and the flowers in the pots by the front door were reduced to lifeless twigs. 'Will you look at the cut of this place?' Jane kicked at a clump of weeds. 'It was never like this when Rebecca was alive.'

'When was the last time you were here?' Foley gave the ornate doorbell a tug. They could hear it chime somewhere inside.

'Oh, ages. Not since... you know? Jerome doesn't want visitors. He comes over to us if he needed anything.'

They waited a few minutes before tugging the bell again. The windows were streaked with grime but they could see into all the downstairs rooms. There was no sign of movement in any of them.

'Maybe he went to your house instead of coming home,' Foley suggested.

'Maybe. We'll look around the back first, though,' Jane headed towards the gable on their right.

As they walked around the side of the house Foley was impressed by the amazing view out over Tralee Bay. He could see right across to the Brandon Mountains in the distance. The rain had stopped but the dark clouds rolling in from the Atlantic said it wouldn't be for long. But right now the sun spread a nice soft warmth all over the garden.

Foley turned back to the house and spotted a figure sitting inside the open French windows. The mop of blond hair said it was Jerome. He was wrapped in a blanket with his head down as if asleep. Foley turned to Jane. 'Maybe you should wait out here.'

'Are you mad?' Jane snapped. 'He hates the sight of you. If you come up on him out of the blue he'll rip you to shreds. No! That was not in the plan. I'm coming with you.'

'Jane, please. If I'm on my own he probably won't react like that.'

'What do you mean? Are you're saying I'd make him react like that?'

'Look, he respects you. If he has something bad to tell me he'll worry about upsetting you.'

'Something bad? Eamon, this is Jerome Quille we're talking about. He's one of the good guys. Jerome has never done anything bad in his life.'

'Jane, please. Do me this one favour. Wait here. With any luck, I'll only be a couple of minutes anyway.'

'For God's sake.' Jane tutted and gave a reluctant nod.

Foley had worked himself up into a rage. He needed to know why Jerome was in Delaney's on Friday night. And why he had Joe's tiepin in his desk. But the figure in the chair was a feeble shadow of the man who shouted at him in the office, and now Foley's anger was diluting fast.

Jerome reached out to pick up a glass from the coffee table and when he noticed Foley his eyes opened wide. 'What took you so long?' He pointed the glass at Foley.

'You were expecting me?'

'I've been expecting you since Friday.' Jerome put the glass back on the table. 'Come in, come in.'

Foley took a few cautious steps into the room. The place had a sour smell of neglect. There was rubbish everywhere. Newspapers, envelopes, open books covered every surface. Dirty plates and cups were scattered around Jerome's chair. Shoes, coats, even an umbrella were slung in corners.

'So it was you I saw in Delaney's last Friday night.' Foley was careful where he put his feet.

'Oh yes.' Jerome pointed a shaky finger at him. 'And when you looked at me I thought you'd be coming after me. But for some reason you didn't.' He gave a rasping cough, reached for the glass and took a big gulp from it.

Foley waited until he settled down again. 'So did you shoot Joe McCarthy?'

'I didn't expect to get away with it, you know.' Jerome's voice had a wobble in it that could have been a chuckle. 'I expected to be grabbed the moment I fired the gun. But no. The people around me were singing their heads off and they didn't even look my way. When the lamp exploded and everyone froze I still had the gun in my hand. But no one noticed me. It was so unreal. It was as if I was invisible. Then everyone was heading for the door, so I did too. Instinct, you see. Self-preservation.' He waved his glass at Foley again. 'Would you like a whisky? Tis all I have, I'm afraid.'

'No, I'm grand.'

'Sit down, sit down.' Jerome swept the room with his hand. 'That's if you can find a chair.' He picked up a cigarette paper and shook some stuff from an envelope onto it, rolled it with one hand and put it in his mouth. After he lit it with a silver lighter he took a deep drag then blew the smoke down his nose. And he gave a satisfied sigh. When he looked up at Foley again his eyes were unfocussed. 'Would you like one of these? I have loads here.'

Foley shook his head again. 'No thank you. Anyway, I'm not here on a social call. I came to...'

'Arrest me?'

'To find out why Joe was shot.' Foley looked for somewhere to sit and chose the edge of the coffee table. 'So what did he do to you? Was it anything to do with your wife's ... with how your wife died?'

Jerome clamped his eyes tight and nodded.

Raindrops pattered against the window and Jane threw herself into the room. 'That's your fault,' she shouted at Foley. 'You knew it was going to rain and you left me out in it.'

'Jane.' Jerome's eyes lit up and a huge smile brightened his face. 'What are you doing here?'

'Oh, Dear God.' Jane dropped her handbag on the floor and ran to Jerome. 'Look at the cut of you.' She picked up the glass and sniffed it. 'What is this?'

Jerome's head rolled awkwardly before he focused on her again. 'Sure tis lovely to see you, Jane.'

‘Have you been drinking whiskey?’ Jane sniffed the glass again. ‘For God’s sake, Jerome. You know whiskey can be lethal if you mix it with your medication. Are you trying to kill yourself?’

Jerome grunted and let his head fall back against the chair. ‘As I was just telling... ah...’

‘Eamon.’

‘Yeah, Eamon. I was just telling Eamon how stress can antagonize this ...’ he tapped the side of his face ‘...thing that’s growing inside my head. Every time something upsets me it gets bigger. Then the pain increases and it blots out another little bit of my world.’ He pointed at Foley with the cigarette. ‘So when I saw the photos in last Friday’s Kerryman the shock increased the stress a million per cent. Then when I came face to face with Joe McCarthy - well, that was so traumatic I could feel the tumour growing.’

Jane obviously didn’t pick up on what Jerome was talking about because her expression didn’t alter as she fussed around him. ‘You look so... well, you look dreadful.’ Jane waved at the glass and the envelope. ‘I thought you’d done something stupid.’

‘And would you be surprised?’ Jerome’s eyes glistened and he wiped them angrily. ‘Really, Jane? After everything, I’ve been through? When no one can see my pain, when no one understands my desperation? Do you know, after the attack—after Rebecca was killed—they sent me home from the hospital when I was still traumatized and disorientated? They let me come back here all on my own. I was so confused. Of course, they asked if I needed anything. I only had to ask, they said. They gave me a huge bag of pills and then they were gone.’ He pointed to the chest of drawers in the corner of the room. ‘As if pills would take the pain away. Yes, they help me sleep. But when I wake up again nothing has changed. What I want is my life back and my Rebecca here with me. I’m in such a dark place, a deep black hole that I can’t drag myself out of. So what is there to live for? There’s only pain and emptiness ahead of me. I can’t stand it anymore.’

His eyes drooped and Jane put her hand on his face. ‘Oh Jerome, I’m so sorry. We should have given you more support. But we will from now on. I promise you. You can come and live with us, me and Colin. We’ll take care of you from now on.’

‘No, no. You and Colin have done more than enough for me. You’ve been more than friends and I’m grateful for that.’ He gave a burp which turned into another hacking cough. His head fell back and his eyes closed. Jane ran into the kitchen and came back with a wet dishcloth, and she wiped his face with it.

‘I’m so sorry about McCarthy’s wife and children, though,’ Jerome said when Jane finished wiping his face. ‘But I can’t find it in me to feel sorry for him. My only consolation is he has to stand there in front of our Lord God and explain himself.’ His voice slurred and his eyes became even more unfocused. ‘As for me, I’ve made my peace with the Lord. Now I’m ready. Do your duty.’

He held out his wrists for the handcuffs. Jane snapped up as if a cog had fallen into place. ‘What’s going on? Eamon? What’s he saying?’

‘He’s saying he killed Joe McCarthy.’

Chapter 53

Jane's legs turned to jelly and she sagged down onto the coffee table. 'No! Jerome! Tell him it's not true.'

'Jane, Jane.' Jerome reached for her hand. 'I have to get this off my chest. I need to clear this up before I—you know?'

'No, I don't believe you. Why in God's name would you do a thing like that?'

'The thing is,' Jerome kissed the back of her hand. 'When they said they got someone for Rebecca's murder I just knew in my bones they had the wrong fella. I just knew it wasn't Patsy Quilter that attacked us that night. There was something so familiar about the man who did. But I couldn't put my finger on it. The pain had pushed it just out of reach and I couldn't get to it. But it was sitting there tormenting me, like a shadow that you can't catch hold of. And this feckin' thing didn't help.' He tapped the side of his head again. 'As it grows bigger it squashes what little brain I have left. So things get blurred—time gets blurred.'

His voice was getting softer and Foley had to strain to hear him. 'To be honest, I'm looking forward to the end,' he said. 'To the release from all this pain. Losing my Rebecca is more painful than all these stupid headaches put together. Anyway, I believe I've made my peace with God and he's forgiven me. I'm ready to face Him now with my head held high.'

Suddenly his face crumbled and he covered his eyes with his hand. 'I'm sorry. Please, just give me a moment.'

'Not a problem.' Foley said. 'Take your time.'

Jane poked Foley on the shoulder. 'Is this anything to with that tiepin your dopey friend found?'

'That feckin' tiepin,' Jerome groaned as he adjusted himself in his chair. 'Yes, it was the tiepin that kicked it all off again. When I saw the photos on the front page of Friday's Kerryman it felt like I'd stuck my finger in a light socket. One picture was of the factory bosses as they were five years ago, and the other was of them as they were last week. And there in the middle of both photos with a big grin on his ugly face was Joe McCarthy.'

Jerome took another drink from the glass. 'Something in those photos was disturbing me but I couldn't see what it was. Then I felt Rebecca at my shoulder telling me to look at them properly. There! she was saying. There! Right there in front of you. Why can't you see it? Look closer.' Jerome paused and rubbed his mouth with his sleeve. 'Then I saw it. And suddenly everything made sense. The day I came home from the hospital the guards asked if anything had been stolen. Or if there was anything I didn't recognize amongst the bits and pieces they'd picked up and put on the sideboard. Something did catch my eye—a gold tiepin with a J on it. But my whole life had just been ripped to shreds and I couldn't think straight. I presumed it was mine. Well, it had to be, didn't it? J for Jerome. So I put it out of my mind. Then when I saw those pictures in the Kerryman I knew where it came from. In the one photo, you could see the pin clearly on McCarthy's tie. In the later photo, it was missing.'

Foley went to speak but Jerome stopped him. 'I know, I know. On its own it means nothing. But the sight of that pin opened up a whole box of other stuff. I

said there was something familiar about the man who attacked us. Well, first of all, it was the smell of him. When I had my little skirmish with McCarthy outside the factory, the one thing I noticed was the peculiar smell coming off him. Rebecca said it was the oil they used on the machines—imported from India or someplace like that. His hands were always covered in it and he had a habit of brushing his hair back with his fingers. Between that and the Brylcreem he plastered on his head he'd created his own distinctive odour.'

Jerome finished his drink and took a long drag on the cigarette. 'Then there was his stupid laugh. It was the most peculiar noise, like a hyena choking on a whistle. He laughed like that outside the factory. And I heard it again on the night of the attack. I was knocked out but I came around briefly. And I heard that laugh.'

A shiver rippled through him. He sucked on the last bit of the cigarette, dropped it on the floor and ground it out with his shoe. 'Seeing that photo caused such a surge of hate I lost all contact with reality. All I wanted was revenge. I knew the guards wouldn't take me seriously. After all, the case was closed. Wasn't it?'

He looked at Jane and squeezed her hand. 'Then a wonderful calm came over me and I knew what I had to do. You were going to the hop so I went to your house, got the small gun and went looking for Joe McCarthy.'

'Oh my God.' Jane clamped her hand over her mouth. 'You used our gun? You took our gun and shot someone? What the hell were you thinking, Jerome? You involved me in a murder? How could you do that to me?'

'I'm truly, truly sorry, Jane. You know I am. But I wasn't thinking straight. All I could think about was what that piece of shite did to my Rebecca. My mind was a blur of fury. It was about to explode for the want of revenge.'

'But why didn't you tell us all this? We could have gone to the guards with you.'

'The guards,' Jerome sighed. 'By the time they gathered enough evidence and took it to court I'd be long gone and that little maggot would get away scot-free. No, I had to act quickly before it was too late. So the plan was—well, there was no plan. I was going to find him and pick my moment. But it took me so bloody long to find him the calmness I'd started with was fading and the doubts were creeping in. What if the guards were right after all? What if Patsy Quilter had done it and McCarthy was innocent?'

He shifted in his seat again and clicked his fingers. 'Then suddenly the smirking fool was right in front of me, staggering all over the place, bellowing like the pig he was. Of course, I wavered. What should I do? Get myself a pint and wait until he left? But I knew I didn't have much time. The hop would be over and Jane would be home before I could put the gun back. Then McCarthy turned around—so close I could smell him—and he looked straight into my eyes. He jumped as if he'd seen a ghost. And then he laughed. That ridiculous laugh. It was as if he was mocking us. I swear I heard Rebecca sob in my ear. Then the music got louder and the crowd cheered the woman who was dancing. McCarthy turned away and at that moment it all exploded in my head. All I wanted was to cause him pain. I wanted him to suffer, to hear him scream. But I didn't hear the shot. I sort of felt it. And McCarthy flew forward and collided with that young girl. And I just stood there. But like I said, no one even noticed.'

He pointed a shaky finger at Foley. 'Then as I was leaving I glanced back and you looked right at me.'

Foley cringed. 'I thought you were someone else.'

Jerome tried to pick up a paper to make himself another cigarette but his hands were unresponsive as if he couldn't coordinate his movements. He dropped the envelope in his lap several times before he managed to fill the paper, then it took four attempts to roll it. An awkward silence followed. Then Foley said; 'Tell me about Alex.'

Jane let out a yelp. 'For God's sake, Eamon. You can't be serious.'

'Jerome?'

Jerome didn't respond. Foley slapped him on the knee and he looked up sharply. 'What's wrong with you?' he slurred.

'I asked you about Alex Cassidy.'

'What's an Alex Cassidy?'

'Alex Cassidy is the girl you saw me with in your office. The one you yelled at because she was in your chair.'

Jerome shook his head. 'What about her?'

'Did you kill her?'

Jerome's eyes opened wide. 'I didn't even know the girl. Why in God's name would I want to kill her?'

'Because she found the tiepin in your drawer. That's what made you so mad, wasn't it? You knew that once the guards found out about the tiepin they'd connect you with Joe. You knew you had to shut her up and you panicked and killed her.'

Jerome had sagged back down in the chair and Foley tapped him on the knee again. 'So? Is that what happened, Jerome?'

'No.' Jane pushed between Jerome and Foley. 'That's nonsense. Will you look at the cut of him, for God's sake? All right, he might have shot Joe. But do you really think he has the strength to kill a fit young woman and then carry her body all the way over to the graveyard to bury her?'

'Well, yes. It would depend on where he killed her. Suppose he lured her to the graveside then hit her with a shovel. All he had to do was dig a hole. The earth was already soft.' Foley clicked his fingers. 'Which is why she was under just two feet of dirt—because that was all he had the strength to do. Yes, it makes sense now.'

'No, it bloody well does not.' Jane pushed Foley farther away from Jerome. 'That's all in your twisted mind. If Jerome arranged to meet her, why didn't she tell you? You two were almost stuck together. She'd have asked you to go with her.'

'No, she wouldn't.'

'And another thing. You said she was naked, right? So why would he kill her and then take her clothes off? Did the guards find her clothes? So where are her clothes?'

Foley groaned. All her clothes were still in her wardrobe. Foley saw them. So what did it mean? She'd been killed in her room?

Jerome's legs started to twitch and he made a funny choking sound. Jane ran to him and held his face. 'Oh my God. We need a doctor. Jerome, what have you taken? Tell me what you've done. Eamon, get a doctor. Quick.'

Jerome took her hands and kissed them. 'Jane, please don't fret. I'm all right. There's no more pain now. I just need to close my eyes and it'll be all over.'

‘No! Jerome, I can help you. Please let me help you. I’ll look after you. Tell me what you took.’

‘You always looked after me, Jane. God bless you. You and Colin. You’ve been such good friends.’

His head fell back and his hands dropped into his lap. And Jane cried out in anguish as he took his last breath. Foley put his arm around her and she buried her face in his shoulder, and they stood like that for what seemed like ages.

‘What do we do now?’ Jane whispered as she straightened up. Her voice was almost silenced by the handkerchief she was holding to her mouth.

‘I suppose we should call the guards.’

‘No. I mean about Jerome.’ Jane move away from Foley and stood staring down at the body. ‘We can’t just leave him sitting there.’

‘We have to. We shouldn’t move him until the guards have seen him. If you want to stay here I’ll go and get Sgt Edge.’

‘For God’s sake, Eamon. Why?’

‘What do you mean why? Because he needs to know who murdered Joe McCarthy.’

‘But why? Why does anyone need to know?’

‘Because... Jane!’ Foley flapped his arms in frustration. ‘Jerome murdered Joe! He just told you. He shot Joe in cold blood. Liam Edge needs to know so he can close the case. And he’ll also finally know who killed Rebecca Quille.’

‘And what about Vicky?’ Jane poked him in the chest. ‘Do you think she’ll want to know why Joe was shot? Would you want to know your husband was a rapist and a killer? And what about the children? Do you want them to go through the rest of their lives carrying the shame of it like a cross on their backs? How can you even think they’ll thank you for telling them that? Why can’t you just let them believe he was in the wrong place at the wrong time?’

‘So what are you saying? That we lie? Jerome killed Joe and we lie about it?’

‘No. We don’t lie about it. We just don’t tell anyone. Who else apart from us knows what happened? Jerome is dead and there’s nothing to connect him to Joe McCarthy. So we say nothing. They’re both dead and now their story can die with them.’

‘No. It isn’t right, Jane. What about the law? What about justice?’

‘Justice?’ Jane mocked. ‘Justices? Define justice, Eamon.’

Chapter 54

The front door to Liam Edge’s house in Rock Street swung open with the slightest push. Foley stepped into the hallway. ‘Liam?’

The van wasn’t parked in the street but that didn’t mean anything. Edge could still be in the house. The kitchen door was wide open. The fire wasn’t lit and the sink was filled with used dishes. Foley glanced up the stairs. ‘Liam? Are you home?’ He tried the back door. It was locked.

He heard a soft thud, like a drawer being shut. And it came from Cassidy’s room. Her door was open a few inches. Foley moved closer and looked through the

gap. He could make out a shape. Thickset, like a man, flat against the wall waiting for something to happen. It wasn't Liam Edge.

Foley looked around for a weapon. All he could find was a loose bannister slat. He pulled it off and tested it for weight. It would have to do. Holding the piece of wood in front of him he kicked the door and followed it in. Mick Collins was trying to melt into the wallpaper.

'For God's sake.' Foley lowered the piece of wood. 'What are you doing here?'

'I live here.'

'Not in this room, you don't. What are you doing in here?'

Collins turned away as his face folded in a mask of grief. 'They're after finding her.'

'Who?'

'Alex. They're after finding her.'

'Oh.' Foley put the weapon on the dressing table. 'How did you know about that?'

'I went down to the barracks looking for her. A reporter from the Kerryman told me they found the body of a young woman over in the graveyard. I knew immediately it was Alex. Don't ask me how. I just knew. So I ran over to the morgue, only they wouldn't let me see her because I'm not a relative.' His body shook with the sobs. 'So I came back here, just to be sure.'

'To be sure of what?'

Collins waved his hand around the room. 'I wanted to be sure about what happened here.'

Foley waited for him to continue but he seemed to lose concentration, standing still and staring at the floor. 'Michael, what happened here?'

'Alex was killed here.'

Foley watched him carefully. 'What makes you say that?'

'Because all her clothes are still in there.' He nodded at the wardrobe. 'I told you that already. The jumper and skirt, her shoes, everything is still there.'

'You told me you weren't in a relationship so how come you know so much about what clothes she had?'

Collins sniffed hard to stop himself from blubbering. 'Alright, we were close. But not like you think. I wish to God it was like that. But she was too scared to take it any further because... well, you know.'

'No, actually. I don't know,' Foley said it louder than he intended.

'Well, because of Sergeant Edge.'

'Sergeant Edge?'

'Oh, come on.' Collins wave his hand in annoyance. 'Don't pretend you didn't know he had feelings for her? The whole friggin' town knew he had feelings for her. He was infatuated with her. It terrified her but she didn't know what to do about it. And it got worse recently because he thought she was seeing someone else. It was driving him mad. So he wanted to punish her by throwing her out of her home.'

'Rubbish! He threw you all out. He needs the house for my sister.'

'Naw,' Collins insisted. 'There's plenty of room here. He did it because he was bitter and twisted when she wouldn't give in to his fantasy. He knew she had no family, no relatives to go to.' Again the strangled sob. 'She was looking for another

job, you know. Anywhere to be away from him. But it looks like he found out, and he couldn't let her go.'

Foley jumped up. 'Now hold on. Are you saying Liam Edge killed her? For God's sake, man. That's a ferocious thing to say. Just because he...'

'Then look at this.' The bed was back in its normal place. Collins ran to the gap between it and the wall. Foley could see a dark patch on the floor.

'That could be anything. Something was spilt there.'

Collins shook his head. 'Look there. That's vomit and blood. And I bet it was hers.'

'No, no, no. You're wrong. You're reading things into stuff that isn't there.'

'I'm not, though. And you know it. That's vomit and blood. I've seen that kind of thing before when my father died. I know what it is, Foley. And so do you. Someone died there and it can only have been one person.'

'No! I won't accept that. Maybe it is vomit but it could have come from anyone.' The bile suddenly caught Foley's throat and he clasped his hand over his mouth.

'You can smell it, can't you?' Collins covered his mouth too. 'The smell of death.'

Foley turned away. 'Anyway, even if she did die here it could have been for any number of reasons. Who's to say she was killed?'

'Then why did someone move her? Why did someone take her all the way over to the graveyard and try to hide her in someone else's grave?'

'I don't know. But it doesn't mean Liam Edge did it. If what you say is right, she could have been killed by anyone. Even you.'

'I feckin' knew you'd do that!' Collins held up a clenched fist as he ran at Foley. 'I knew you'd twist it all out of shape. That's why I couldn't go to the guards. You're all the bloody same, you shower of shite. I knew you'd close ranks and pull a sack over it. But whatever way you twist it, Foley, I know what happened here.'

'No one is trying to pull a sack over anything.' Foley shoved him away and he sat down on the bed with a thump. 'What I am saying is we need a bloody good reason to accuse someone of murder. We need evidence. Suspicion isn't evidence. The guards will want something more before they investigate this.'

Collins tapped the floor with his shoe. 'There was an old pink and blue rug there. That's what he carried her out in. If you find that, you'll know I didn't imagine what I saw.'

Foley looked from the floor to Collins and back to the floor again. 'What are you telling me?'

'I'm telling you Sergeant Edge wrapped Alex in that rug and carried her out to a van parked in the street.'

Foley almost choked as he swallowed down a gulp of air. 'You saw him?'

Collins shrugged. 'You know I did. But it'll come down to my word against his and I know who you'll believe.'

'So you saw Liam Edge kill Alex Cassidy?'

This time Collins didn't look so sure. 'Well, no. I didn't see him kill her. But I did see him carrying something wrapped in the rug and throw it in the back of the van.'

'Is that it? You saw him carry something wrapped in a rug and throw it in his van? What kind of crap is that? The guards will laugh you out of town if that's all

you have to go on. If they don't arrest you first for falsely accusing someone of murder.'

Collins shrugged again. 'Like I said, tis in your nature to cover up for one of your own. So I don't expect this to go any further anyway.'

Foley sat on the bed next to him. 'But why didn't you say anything about this before now?'

'I tried to tell you at the funeral in The Grand. But Mr Edge came along and the opportunity passed.'

'So what exactly did you see?'

'I told you. The house was full of mourners when I got home so I went to the pub. I came back around midnight. The lights were out so I thought everyone had gone home. Then as I was about to cross the road the door opened and Mr Edge came out carrying something in his arms. The street lights were off but a car went past. It was the rug from Alex's room. He put it in the back of the van and drove off. I thought it was something to do with the funerals. But then they found her body and I realised what I saw was... '

'So where did he go?'

'What? You think I ran after him?'

Foley felt paralyzed. He wondered if there was any alcohol in the house. He needed something to dull his mind.

Suddenly Collins jumped up. 'Would it be all right if I took something to remember her by? Something personal, maybe her hairbrush?'

'I... well, I think that would be... well, no actually. You shouldn't be touching anything till the guards have looked for evidence.'

Collins gave a sharp laugh. 'Looked for feckin' evidence? Are you joking? Do you think anyone is going to bother their arse investigating this? They'll have closed it already.'

'No, they won't!'

'Then why haven't they come here already? Alex has been missing for days. They know the body they found looks just like her so why haven't they come here to see if there's a connection? Because it's already swept under the carpet, that's why. I bet it won't be mentioned in The Kerryman either. And if it is it'll be written off as some sort of tragic accident. Or suicide. A naked madwoman kills herself in the graveyard. How weird. How sad. And I bet you won't find any reference to it in any guards' notes. No, it's case closed and that's the end of it.'

'Then come down the barracks with me now and tell them what you saw.' Foley took hold of Collins by the arm. 'If you make an official statement they'll have to look into it.'

'Are you mad?' Collins shrank into the mattress. 'I'm not going anywhere near that barracks. How long do you think I'd live if I gave evidence against a guard? No, I'm getting out of town and I'm never coming back.'

'But what about Cassidy? You owe it to her to find out what happened. Don't you want to find her killer?'

Collins shoved himself off the bed. 'Grow up, Foley. That's never going to happen and you know it. I know what he did to Alex. Getting myself killed trying to prove it is another matter. I loved Alex and hopefully we'll meet again in the

next life. But I don't want it to happen just yet. No, this is something you will have to sort out yourself—or not, as the case might be.'

Before Foley could do anything to stop him, Collins grabbed the hairbrush off the dressing table and darted into the hallway, crashed open the front door and ran off down the street.

Chapter 55

The van was hidden behind an old bus in the corner of the Garda Barracks car park. Foley stood looking at it for ages. What if the rug was still in it? What was he supposed to do then? Collins had painted a dark picture about getting involved, especially if he was accusing a fellow officer—his step-father—of murder. He didn't believe for one moment his life was in danger. But neither did he expect a pat on the back. Everyone would turn against him. They'd make his life unbearable.

And what about his mother? After everything she's been through, was he prepared to take her husband from her too? Before he realized what he was doing he'd pulled the string on the back doors and swung them open. The rug was shoved down between the seat and the rubbish.

'Eamon, what are you doing?'

Foley cracked his head when he jumped and John Guerin laughed. 'God, Eamon. I didn't know you were so jumpy. What's wrong with you?'

Foley rubbed his head. 'Do you know how long this van's been here?'

'I don't. Why, whose is it?'

'Sergeant Edge was using it. Do you know where he is?'

Before Guerin could answer, a commotion at the front door of the barracks caught their attention. 'John, Eamon, c'mon,' someone shouted to them.

'What's happening?'

'The Post Office is being robbed. Grab yourselves a firearm and get over there.'

By the time they got to the bottom of Edward Street, two cars were parked across it blocking it off. LSF men were crouched behind the cars and two Gardaí stood in the road to stop traffic from turning in. Through the window of Broderick's Chemist, Foley could see Liam Edge talking on a telephone. His arms were flapping and his face was dark and furious.

'Aren't we a bit far back?' Foley stooped behind a car with John Guerin. 'We can't even see the Post Office from here.'

'The Sarge said to wait here,' a crusty old LSF man grunted. 'He sent some lads up McCowen's Lane to block off the other end of Edward Street, and he's posted another two in the lane itself in case they try to run through the school.'

'Can they get out that way?'

'They can. All they have to do is climb over the wall at the back of the schoolyard. Tis high, but if they're desperate enough they'll do it.'

Foley glanced around in time to see Liam Edge slam the phone down and rush back into the street. His face glowed with sweat and anger crackled from his eyes. He pushed his cap back on his head and spat on the pavement. He looked

dreadful. His tunic was unbuttoned, his tie was pulled down and he hadn't shaved for days.

'Feckin' eejits,' he muttered to no one in particular. He caught Foley's eye but looked away quickly before crossing to the other side of the street and lighting a cigarette.

Foley followed him. 'Liam, are you all right there?'

Edge took a long drag and blew the smoke out through his nose. 'They said they can't send the armoured car to help us.'

'What armoured car?'

Edge gave him a look that was a mixture of annoyance and pity. 'The Army has an armoured car over there in Ballymullen. I asked the commanding officer to send it down here so we can get this over with as quickly as possible. And do you know what he said? He said he couldn't authorize the use of Army equipment for the execution of civilian operations. Have you ever heard such bullshit in your whole life?' He stamped his foot and spat out a bit of tobacco.

'So what do you want us to do?' Foley asked.

Edge glanced up the street but he didn't respond.

'Liam. What do you want us to do? Surely we're not much use way back here. Wouldn't it be wiser to get closer to the Post Office so we can get a better idea of what's happening in there?'

Again Edge didn't answer. He seemed detached. His eyes had a distant look as if his mind was on other things.

'Liam, did you hear me? I said we should get closer to the Post Office so we can see what's going on. If we stay close to the wall on this side they won't even see us until we get to where the road bends. A couple of us could slip through the arch next to the shop and get into the Post Office through the back. But whatever we do, we're no use back here. We don't even know what's happening in there.'

'Four men with guns,' Edge announced, looking around at the others who were watching him closely. 'And they've got hostages.'

Foley waited for more but Edge just puffed on his cigarette.

A car tooted as it tried to turn into Edward Street, ignoring the officers trying to stop it. When the elderly driver saw Edge he wound the window down. 'Are you in charge here?' He sounded as if he had a mouthful of marbles. 'You're a sergeant, aren't you?'

'Well spotted, sir.' Edge watched him through amused eyes, but the sarcasm was lost in the haze of self-importance that seeped from the car.

'Well move that vehicle out of my way, will you? I have to get to my dentist.'

'Your dentist, sir?' Edge feigned surprise. 'Surely you mean your optician?'

'What?' The thin lips curled in a snarl. 'What are you talking about, you stupid man. I said dentist, or are you deaf too?'

'Oh, I'm not deaf, sir,' Edge smiled like a shark about to snap. 'No. Tis just that, as you obviously can't see a six-foot guard waving his hands like a huge windmill less than two inches from the front of your vehicle, maybe tis your eyes that need looking at and not your teeth.'

The man spluttered and anger flashed on his cheeks. 'How dare you speak to me like that, you ignorant buffoon. Do you know who I am?'

Edge took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair. 'Well, there's another thing. So tis not only your eyesight that's all gone to shit, but your poor auld memory as well. It must be frightening not knowing who you are.'

The man was purple now. 'How dare... what's your name? Who the hell do...?'

Edge slapped his hand so hard on the roof of the car the man threw himself onto the passenger seat. Edge leant in on top of him. 'What I suggest right now is you turn your car around and feck off out of here or I'll drag you by the scruff of your scrawny neck down to the barracks. I'll lock you up until you remember you're just another citizen who has to obey the rules like the rest of us. Do I make myself clear?'

The man threw the car into reverse and roared back into Castle Street. 'You haven't heard the last of this,' he bellowed as he straightened the car up.

'Now you have a nice day,' Edge shouted back at him. 'And give my regards to the rest of your Looney Tunes family.'

He caught Foley's eye but there wasn't a flicker of a smile on his face. He spat the cigarette butt into the road and took a Webley .45 from his pocket, checked the chamber and put it back. 'Eamon, have you got yourself a gun?'

Foley lifted his jacket to show a pistol in his belt. 'All that was left was this Walter. And there's only four bullets in it.'

Edge grunted and started walking up the middle of Edward Street.

'Liam,' Foley ran after him and grabbed his arm. 'What are you doing, you mad eejit? Get off the bloody road.'

'You wanted to get closer, so c'mon. We'll go over to the Post Office and ask them what they want.'

'Are you stark raving mad? You can't just walk over there like that. You don't know who these people are. They could be suicidal maniacs.'

'Are you afraid there, Eamon?'

'Of course I'm afraid. And I'm not suicidal. There's a huge difference between being brave and being stupid.'

As they rounded the bend, Edge pointed at the Christian Brother's School directly opposite the Post Office. 'Shouldn't that be closed?'

'It should be.' Foley didn't take his eyes off the Post Office. 'There's no school on Saturday.'

'Then why is the front door open?' Edge swung his arm around in a circle. 'Check if there's anyone in there. If there is, keep them away from the windows. Then cover me from that window up there.'

Three LSF men had managed to get up the street unseen and were crouched under the windows of the Post Office. Some more went through the arch near the shop. Farther down near McCowen's Lane three cars blocked the road and a line of rifles poked over the top of them. More men could be seen at the corner of the small Protestant church. Edge stood in the middle of the street, legs apart and his hands in his pockets.

'Liam, this is not a good idea.'

'Just check the feckin' school, will you.'

The school was a lot smaller than Foley remembered from his time there. It took less than two minutes to clear the ground floor. He skipped up the stairs to the

Headmaster's office and slammed the door open. Brother Jackson was kneeling behind his desk with a Rosary in his hands. He looked up at Foley. 'Who're you?'

'Local Security. What are you doing?'

'What do you mean what am I doing? I'm saying my Rosary. What are you doing?'

'Don't you know what's happening across the road? There's a robbery in the Post Office, people with guns and hostages.'

Jackson scrambled to his feet. 'Oh dear God. Has anyone been hurt?'

'We need to get you out of here, Brother. If you go out to the back yard we'll get you over the wall into...'

'No.' Brother Jackson looked bemused. 'I'm not going anywhere. If there are people hurt I want to help them.'

'No one's been hurt. Not yet anyway. So c'mon, Brother. Go out to the yard and...'

'Out of the question. I'm staying here. So you go back to your duties and leave me be. I'll be right here if you need me.'

Foley could see the determination in Jackson's eyes. 'Well, you're a grown man, Brother. Just don't come crying to us if you get shot. Who else is in the building?'

'No one. Tis Saturday. I'm here alone trying to catch up on some stuff for Monday.'

'Are you sure?'

Jackson's answer was an icy glare. Foley went across to the classroom at the front of the building from where Edge was expecting him to give cover. He pulled up the bottom half of the sash window and he was astonished to see Edge in the middle of the street talking to one of the gunmen.

Chapter 56

The man was standing just inside the Post Office door holding a gun to the head of one of the hostages. Foley had to strain to hear what was being said. 'I'm afraid you don't have any choice,' was what drifted up to him. 'If you come out now you will go to jail. But if you make us come in to get you, you will certainly die.'

'But we have prisoners.' The accent was East European. 'If you attack us they will all die too.'

Edge didn't answer. He stood perfectly still, forcing the gunman to fill the silence. 'They will all die,' the gunman repeated. Then the silence crackled between them again. Eventually, Edge spoke.

'What are you hoping to gain from this?'

'We want to go to America. We have no money. We want money to go to America.'

Edge reflected on that for a moment. 'Do you think you can go there now?'

Under his cap, the man's face looked thin and pale, but with his unshaven chin it was hard to put an age to him. His body language and the timber of his voice put him in his fifties. Already his gun hand was beginning to quiver and he

switched his grip on the hostage. The hostage was about the same size as the gunman but a lot older. He had a defiant cut to his jaw.

'We want money to go to America,' the gunman said again, his voice taking on a higher, more anxious pitch. 'You will give us money and get us onto a ship. Then we will go away and let you have the prisoners.'

'I'm afraid there will be no money for you today,' Edge told him. 'You have broken our laws. You have threatened people with guns. You have taken hostages. Now you have to face the consequences. So just put down your weapons and come out before anyone gets hurt.'

'No.' The voice was even higher now. 'We have prisoners. We will shoot them if you do not give us money.'

Edge shrugged. 'That's up to you, of course. But how long do you think you will last if you do?'

The man shifted his feet in an excited little dance. 'We have prisoners...'

'I'm told they're all farmers,' Edge said. 'Kerry farmers are hard men, you know. They've lived through worse days than this. The question is, what about you? Are you hard men? Are you hard enough to face the consequences? Are you ready for what will happen to you if you harm the hostages?'

'They will die. We want money to go to America. You give us ship to go to America.'

'No.'

'Then we shoot the prisoners.'

Edge waved his hand around the street. 'And then we shoot you. So tis up to you, my friend. But if I was you I would surrender right now and no one will get hurt.'

'You are not me,' the man shouted. 'You do not know me. I will shoot the prisoners if you do not give me money. I want money and I want a ship to take us to America.'

'But will America want you? After you robbed a bank? In America, they would have shot you already. Here in Ireland, we take a more measured approach. We negotiate. We ask you what you want. We don't give it to you, of course. But we don't shoot you either. So why would you want to go to America when you're much safer here.'

'We are not safe here. We are not wanted here. We have no jobs, no money. Our children are hungry. We are hungry. We want to be somewhere better, somewhere...'

'Just tell them to feck off.' The hostage jerked his head back and shouted. 'We're all hungry. We're all sick and tired of this god-forsaken country. We all want to go somewhere better. So just tell him to...'

The gunman clamped his hand over the man's mouth and tried to drag him back inside, but the farmer was too strong to hold. Suddenly he was free and running across the street. The gunman fired instinctively and the farmer flew forward, a spray of red and grey erupting from his head.

Edge had already dropped to his knees and the gun in his hand cracked. The gunman flew back through the Post Office door leaving one foot sticking out. The LFS men ran forward and pointed their rifles at him while two more grabbed the farmer and dragged him off the street.

Chapter 57

Foley ran down the stairs and reached Edge just as he staggered back onto his feet. 'For God's sake, you mad eejit,' Foley yelled. 'You could have been killed.'

Edge wobbled slightly as Foley took his arm and dragged him towards the school. As they reached the foyer Edge gave a gurgling cough and sank to the floor. Foley grabbed his jacket to haul him back to his feet, but he hit the ground and rolled onto his back. And a patch of sticky red glistened on the front of his uniform.

'Oh shit.' Foley fell to his knees beside him. 'You've been shot. For feck sake, Liam. I told you this would happen. Didn't I tell you this would happen?'

He lifted Edge's shoulder to see if the bullet had gone right through then laid him back down. 'Thank God. No exit wound. And the bleeding doesn't look too bad yet.' Foley pulled off his tunic, ripped the sleeve off his shirt and stuffed it inside Edge's jacket. 'Hold it there. It'll help stop the bleeding. But you'll have to lie perfectly still—you know that. Just lie still while I go and get help. I won't be long.'

He scrambled across the floor and looked out at the street. The LSF men had disappeared leaving a trail of blood where they'd dragged the farmer off the road. The only other people he could see were the men behind the cars. He yelled at them that the sergeant has been hit and needed help.

A puff of smoke came from the Post Office window and a chunk of concrete burst off the wall beside Foley's head. He ducked instinctively and yelled for help again. But no one answered him. He crawled back to Edge. The sergeant's face was a pasty grey and his eyes had turned a deep shade of pink. 'Liam, hold on there. Stay awake. Don't you go to sleep on me.'

The face Edge pulled could have been a smile. He tried to sit up.

'No!' Foley held him down. 'You have to lie still. You can't move or you'll start bleeding. Just lie still and I'll call the lads again.'

'Look, forget about me. Go out the back way into McCowen's Lane. Then come around and help the others sort this out. I'll still be here when you come back.'

Foley noticed some teachers' dust coats hanging by the door. He grabbed one, folded it and put it under Edge's head. Edge gave a sudden wheeze and gurgled loudly. 'Look, will you stop fussing around me like an old hen and just let me be. Just...' His eyes drooped and his head sagged back. 'God, I'm so tired.'

'I know, I know.' Foley patted his face. 'But you have to stay awake. Liam, I need you to stay awake. Look, I'm going to call the lads again so just lie still till I get back.'

'You don't understand,' Edge grabbed at Foley's sleeve and his eyes had a strange look in them. 'I've had enough. I just want to... look, just feck off and let me be. I'm tired of all this.'

Foley rocked back on his heels. 'I don't give a shit how tired you are. You have to stay alive. You owe it to my mother. After everything she went through this week, do you want to just give up and die on her too? I told you not to walk out there. But you wanted to play the bloody hero. You wanted to be...'

Edge turned away and Foley caught something in the look on his face. And he groaned out loud. 'My God, that's what you wanted to happen, isn't it? This is all about Cassidy! My good God. That's why you provoked that gunman, to make him shoot you. You wanted to die because of what you did to Cassidy.'

'What the hell are you squawking about?' Edge tried to sit up again but he couldn't muster the strength.

'You know what I'm talking about. I'm talking about what you did to Cassidy. My God, you wanted to die because you couldn't live with yourself.'

Edge closed his eyes and let his head fall back again, rolling it from side to side. 'Eamon boy, what are you talking about?'

'Stop it. You know what I'm talking about. You killed Cassidy and buried her in Joe's grave.'

Edge spluttered and opened his eyes wide. 'For heaven's sake. Is this another one of your fantasies? Aren't you getting tired of all this storytelling? Isn't it time you copped on and stopped this—this—nonsense?'

'It isn't nonsense, though, is it? You were seen, Liam.'

For a moment Edge looked startled but he covered it with a shiver and a groan. 'How could I have been seen? I haven't done anything. Stop it, Eamon. You're driving everyone mad.'

He coughed suddenly, making a gurgling sound in his throat.

'Oh shit.' Foley pressed hard on the wound. 'Liam, hold on. I'll get help. Just hold on there.'

He scrambled over to the door and screamed for help again, but again there was no reply. 'Where the feck are you all?' he howled. 'The Sarge is hit and he's dying in here. Help us, someone.'

He yelled more obscenities as he darted back inside. The sergeant's eyes were shut tight in pain. His breathing was laboured and he was shivering. Foley checked the bleeding and slapped his face. 'C'mon, Liam, stay awake. Just hang in there and we'll get you out of here soon.'

'It's too late for that, I think.'

'No, it is not. Don't be so feckin' selfish,' Foley slapped him again, harder this time. 'What about us? What about your wife? Do you think she wants a medal to remind her what a prick you were? Do you think she wants to be told how brave her husband was—but he's dead now? How do you think she'll feel when she finds out you got yourself shot rather than face up to what you did to Cassidy? The famous Liam Edge took the easy way out—the coward's way out.'

Edge's eyes snapped open and his cheeks flushed a dark crimson. 'Shut up, for God's sake. You haven't got a clue.'

'Then explain yourself. I know you had something to do with Cassidy being killed. So what happened? Tell me, Liam. If it was an accident then maybe we can help you. But you have to tell me what happened to her.'

Foley waited for an answer but Edge just closed his eyes. The colour had drained from his face again and now he was looking a sickly blue. He pointed to his pocket. 'Light me a fag, will you?'

Foley got the packet and as he lit two cigarettes he gave an unexpected laugh. 'You know these will kill you.'

When he put one in Edge's mouth, the sergeant took a long drag. 'Did you check if there's a telephone in this place?'

Foley looked up at the Principal's office and cringed. God, how stupid was that? He ran up the stairs and crashed through the door. Brother Jackson was still kneeling in prayer and he didn't even look up as Foley grabbed the phone.

Guard Brick answered on the first ring but before Foley could speak two shots rang out from the Post Office, followed by the ping of bullets on metal. Foley could hear the throb of a diesel engine coming up the street and he ran to the window. There was an eruption of heavy gunfire from the armoured car and one of the Post Office windows disintegrated. A face appeared at the other window but vanished immediately. Foley could hear a commotion down in the foyer, boots and shouting echoing up the stairs.

'Foley, are you alright? Where are you?'

'I'm grand. Tis Sergeant Edge. He's been shot.' As Foley clattered down the stairs the LSF men were kneeling around Edge, and through the door he could see the armoured car with some regular soldiers crouched behind it. 'You brought the Army,' he said to the nearest officer.

'They didn't want to come, the bastards,' the man said. 'It was only when The Kerryman phoned the barracks and said they were covering the robbery in the Post Office and why wouldn't the Army support the Gardaí in a national emergency. They wanted names and suddenly the Army decided they could help their fellow officers after all.'

By now they'd rolled Edge in a blanket, grabbed a handful each and carried him at a run down the steps, and they threw him into the vehicle. Then they stepped back, took up position on either side of the school door and raised their weapons.

As soon as the vehicle roared away in a cloud of diesel smoke a volley of gunfire blew out the rest of the windows in the Post Office. 'Remember to aim high,' an officer bellowed. 'Just let them know what they're up against.'

There was a thirty-second silence before the second volley peppered the building again.

This time the silence lasted longer. The officer handed a megaphone to a small bespectacled man who was shaking with nerves. He spoke to the robbers in a foreign language and his voice was pleading and punctuated with sobs. When he finished he handed the megaphone back to the officer and sat on the step with his head in his hand.

The officer counted down from twenty, and as he reached five there were repeated slaps as the soldiers pushed home the bolts on their Lee Enfield .303s.

When he got to two there was a frantic cry from inside the Post Office and a white shirt appeared attached to a broom handle. The little man jumped up and started relaying the instructions given to him by the officer. The hostages came out first, followed by the robbers with their hands on their heads.

Chapter 58

The huge front window of the abandoned newsagent shop was completely blacked out except for a thin strip along the top. The flickering light from a faulty street lamp came in that gap and threw dancing shadows around the pile of discarded rubbish. Lumps of plaster left ragged holes in the mouldy walls where it had fallen off. Collapsed shelves and battered chairs lay amongst the litter scattered all over the floor. A till drawer was open and sheets of paper lay scattered around it. Everything reeked of decay and neglect.

It was obviously somewhere in the town because people were passing by outside. And a steady flow of traffic threw more shadows across the walls.

Liam Edge thought he recognised the place, yet at the same time he knew he'd never been there before in his life. That was the problem with nightmares. Everything looks so familiar—and yet nothing does.

But what was he doing here, staggering around amongst the rubbish? Dread hung over him like a poisonous mist. He was struggling to breathe. Why? What was he so terrified of? And he was terrified.

Then he could see it. There on the floor—a dark shape. Small. And wrapped in a blanket. Sticky tape wrapped around it. The body of a woman. He couldn't see her face. But he didn't need to. Panic paralysed him. He had to get her away from here before they came. But he couldn't move.

Vomit filled his mouth and shocked him into action. He scooped her up in his arms and spun around looking for the door. There had to be a door. Glass crunched under his feet. He could see a small window at the back of the shop. But he couldn't see a door. Why couldn't he see a door?

Then there it was. But it was the front door. It meant he'd have to take her out through the busy street. It was madness. But he had no choice. He'd have to brazen it out. Take his chance. Because they were coming.

Suddenly he was out on the sidewalk and the body was no longer wrapped in the blanket. People were turning to look at the man with a naked woman in his arms. Voices were getting louder. Police whistles coming up behind him. Everything closing in. He tried to run but his legs had turned to jelly. He began to fall. Down, down...

Then Liam Edge snapped awake. And he gave a sob of relief. His stitches pinched as he tried to sit up. He pressed his hand against the bandage to stifle the pain. Sweat saturated his pyjamas, leaving him wet and uncomfortable. But it was nothing compared to the discomfort that was lodged in his chest. A lump of guilt as big as a cannonball.

He grabbed the glass of water from his bedside cabinet and swallowed it in one gulp. Through the open door of his hospital room, he could see the nurses' station at the end of the ward. The ward was quiet except for the odd grunt and snore. A nun was bent over the desk scribbling quietly in the cone of light from a lamp. Sister Clara.

Edge liked Sister Clara. She had soft, warm features and genuine compassion for the patients.

Not like Sister Aquinas. She was a bitter old wasp who lectured Edge about the importance of resting, especially after what he'd been through. The bullet had taken a lump out of his lung and it was a miracle he survived at all. The shock

would have killed a weaker man. So he was going to be in hospital for a couple of weeks at least and he'd better get used to it.

'It's not like in them cowboy films,' Sister Aquinas told him. 'A fella gets shot and falls off his horse, and he walks through the desert for help. The next thing you know he's back on his horse and riding off into the sunset with a girl on his lap. Absolute rubbish. In the real world, he'd be incapacitated for months. He'd struggle to get out of bed, never mind climb back on a horse. So behave yourself and don't be acting the eejit.'

Edge yanked his towel off the rail and wiped his eyes. He jumped when a hand touched his shoulder. 'Are you all right there, Mr Edge?' Sister Clara had crept in like a ghost. 'Can I be getting you anything?'

'Sorry, Sister. Did I disturb you?'

'Not at all, not at all. I think you were just having a bad dream.'

A bad dream? he wanted to say. You have no idea, Sister.

He wanted to say he didn't have a proper sleep in days because every time he closed his eyes he was sucked back into the nightmares. Tonight he was in that shop. Yesterday he was on a beach, staggering through dunes with a crowd following him. He couldn't see who was following him. But he knew why they were following him. And every step brought a deeper sense of doom. His thumping heart sounded like the waves crashing up the beach behind him. They knew his secret, you see. So his life was over as soon as they caught up with him.

It was like a scene from a film he once saw—a train steaming towards a collapsed bridge. The driver slams on the brakes. And the noise erupts. Frantic music cranks up the tension. The whistle shrieks and sparks fly from the wheels as they drag against the tracks. All the time the pulsating music attacks the senses. Terrified faces look out from the carriage windows as they roar towards certain death.

Then the noise stops. The train sails out over the cliff like a silent snake, wriggling and spinning in slow motion.

Sergeant Edge knew that any moment now someone would discover what he'd done. Then everything he'd achieved in his life, all the good he'd done over the years, would be flipped over the edge like that train. His reputation would be scattered amongst the wreckage of his sins.

'Maybe something for the pain, so?' The nun's soft voice caused the emotion of the moment to well up in his eyes.

'That would be nice, Sister.'

'And maybe something to help you sleep.'

'No.' He grabbed her hand and she jumped.

'Sorry, Sister. I'm sorry.' He kept hold of her hand. 'It's just that every time I fall asleep I see...' he squeezed the wet from his eyes. 'I have to tell someone, Sister. I can't... tis so hard to live like this. I killed someone, you see? I killed a...'

The choking sob stopped the rest from coming out. Edge had seen this kind of thing happen so many times before—people desperate to confess a crime, to throw off the guilt that was wrapped around them like a cloak of lead, pressing down on them day after day, squeezing the soul out of them. They can't sleep, they can't eat, they can't concentrate. They can't lead a normal life because the shadow of

what they've done reminds them, torments them constantly. They dread the knock on the door.

Yet when the knock comes they shrivel up with relief. Liam Edge saw hard men sob like babies as their confession poured out of them. And now he was one of them. The floodgate had been breached and everything was about to burst out into the open.

But what happened to Cassidy was an accident. They had to believe that. He never meant to hurt her. If she'd stayed where she was and said nothing everything would have been fine. His wife and Vicky would have been none the wiser. Instead, the silly cow laughed at him, threatened him. He tried to stop her from reaching the door but she danced around him. He kicked out. He was wearing his boots, big heavy things with steel studs.

He caught her in the side. She dropped like a sack of flour, hit the floor and doubled up in shock. Her face drained and her terrified eyes were wide open. Everything was a blur after that. He remembered picking her up and dropping her on the bed. Did he tell her to get dressed? Get out of his house? He wasn't sure. Maybe.

He ushered Vicky and Kathleen into the kitchen. The coffins were being brought over any minute now. He would have to get the room ready. But he had to get Cassidy out of the way first. His initial anger had turned into something else now. Was she going to cause a fuss? Or would she go quietly? Maybe if he apologised, offered to pay for a new room somewhere else. But she'd still have to get out of his house.

She was still on the bed when he went back in and he couldn't wake her. Her eyes were unfocused and her mouth was dribbling something dark and sticky. Panic gripped him, threw his mind into a mad spasm. It was as if he was standing apart from what happened next, watching the bed being tipped on its side, hearing the thud of something dead hitting the floor on the inside, seeing the blanket being pulled over it.

Three times he had to go outside to vomit when the coffins were being arranged in the room. It was unbelievably hard to act normal. He had to stay out in the hall when the mourners came because he dreaded being there when someone took a peek behind the bed and saw what was hidden there.

Common sense told him to report it. He could say he found her at the bottom of the stairs. A horrible accident. He was a Garda sergeant. They would take his word for it.

But there was a little pinch of doubt they might not. Everyone knew about their relationship, that there was a bit of acrimony recently. What if they decided to take a closer look? Could he take that chance?

Eamon Foley threw him into an even bigger panic by noticing her clothes in the wardrobe. What was wrong with that man? He was like a ferret, picking and poking, not accepting she'd just gone back home. He read more into it, oozing suspicion. He knew something happened, and sooner or later he was going to find out what it was.

Edge had no choice. He had to make the body disappear. So after everyone went home that night he wrapped her up in the rug and put her in the van. He was

going to take her out to Blennerville and drop her in the sea. But then he had another idea. What better place to hide a body than in a grave?

But he hadn't counted on a giggling couple looking for a quiet spot to do their courting. Who in God's name wants to copulate in a graveyard? He'd only dug down a couple of feet - it wasn't nearly deep enough. He almost picked her up and run back to the van, but again blind panic took over. He dumped her in the hole and covered her up with his hands, making as little noise as possible.

He intended to put the rug back in her room later. But he forgot and left it in the van.

'You must believe me, Sister,' he heard himself saying. 'I did a terrible thing. I killed someone.'

'I know all about it.' Sister Clara put her finger to his lips. 'Tis not something you'll get over in a hurry, the taking of another person's life. But what you did was extremely brave, Sergeant Edge. Putting yourself in the line of fire to save others. So you have nothing to reproach yourself about. You are a true hero. The people of Tralee can sleep safely knowing there are people like you looking out for them.'

Chapter 58

'Where's Guard Brick?'

Gerard Finucane, one of Tralee's first LSF volunteers, was manning the front desk when Foley came in the door. 'He's not here,' Finucane said without glancing up. The tiny eyes that peered out from his huge head were dancing all over the desk but settling on nothing. When he shifted his eighteen stone body the chair groaned.

'So where is he?'

'How would I know? Do I look like his mother?'

Foley slapped the desk. 'Tis a simple question, Finucane. Where's Guard Brick?'

This time Finucane did look up and his thin lips pulled back over his uneven teeth. 'I told you I don't know. So go away and stop annoying me. You can see I'm busy here.'

'Doing what?'

'That's none of your business. I have my work to do and I presume you have yours. So beat it before I do something you will regret.'

He suddenly looked past Foley and instantly sank back into his seat, and he busied himself shuffling papers on the desk. In the glass partition, Foley could see Acting Sergeant Redigan coming along the corridor and he turned back towards the front door. But it was too late.

'Mr Foley, what are you doing back here?' Liam Edge's temporary replacement was younger than Foley. He had bright suspicious eyes that flicked with impatience. He was on loan from Listowel and he was determined to grab this opportunity to shine. But he had no time for the LSF. He believed if you're not a real guard you shouldn't be anywhere near his Garda barracks.

'I wanted a quick word with Guard Brick, Sarge.'

'What about?'

‘Nothing. I’ll come back later.’

‘Foley, it was important enough for you to come back here when you have other stuff to do. So c’mon. Out with it. What do you want Guard Brick for?’

‘Well,’ Foley couldn’t think fast enough and the words came out uncensored. ‘I wanted to ask him about the body we found over in the graveyard.’

Redigan sneered. ‘You found a body in the graveyard?’

‘A young woman, Sarge. I was supposed to make out a report but with everything that happened to Sergeant Edge I never got around to it.’

‘Why did you have to make a report?’

‘Because it was me who found her. Well, my nephew found her and he called me. Then Patsy Fleming and Bill Gaynor came with the doctor.’

Redigan gave an impatient shrug. ‘So how did she die?’

‘We’re not sure. I was hoping Guard Brick might know what the autopsy showed.’

‘Did you suspect foul play?’

Foley was flustered by the question. ‘Well, yes! Someone buried her in a newly occupied grave. It was only because the rain washed away the earth that she was found.’

‘Right.’ Redigan had the arrogant I’m in charge look on his face and he flicked his hand at Foley. ‘Guard Brick isn’t here so it’ll have to wait. What I want you to do right now is round up as many of your lads that you can find and bring them back here. There will be a bus waiting to take you all to Fenit in one hour.’

‘What?’

Redigan gave a deep growl but then thought it was probably wise to explain. ‘There’s a tanker of diesel coming into Fenit Harbour today and they need assistance in guarding it. Local citizens are already on their way there hoping to grab some of it for themselves. We need to convince them that they can’t. Is that all right with you, Mr Foley?’

‘But what about Cassidy—the body in the graveyard?’

‘So you know who she is?’ Redigan was already ushering him out the door.

‘Well, we think she’s Alex Cassidy. She’s one of us.’

‘One of us? Who’s us?’

‘She’s with the LSF’

Redigan stepped back. ‘Foley, being in the LSF doesn’t make her one of us. She’s just a civilian playing at being a policewoman.’

‘It’s not Cassidy,’ Finucane squeaked from behind the desk. When Redigan turned to him he shrank back in his seat again causing it to groan louder. His Adam’s apple bounced up and down like a ping pong ball on a string. ‘Well, it can’t be her. Sergeant Edge told me she went back home and he made me cover her shifts.’

Redigan grunted again as he turned back to Foley. ‘You said you found the body. Didn’t you recognise her?’

‘I did recognise her. Well, I’m positive it was ... look, the animals had been at her. There was nothing left to identify her apart from her long black hair and her size. But I just know it’s her.’

Impatience creased Redigan’s face. ‘So what did Fleming and Gaynor have to say about it?’

Foley looked at Finucane. Finucane shrugged. 'Their reports are already with the Super to be signed off,' he mumbled.

'What do you mean signed off?' Foley stepped around Redigan and rushed back to the desk. Finucane gulped and his eyes flickered even more. 'I had a quick look at them before I took them up to the Super. Gaynor wrote it was him and Fleming who found the body near the old chapel ruins, and the doctor pronounced her dead from suspected alcohol abuse.'

Foley let out a choking groan. 'No. That's not right.'

'Well, they said there were whiskey bottles and beer bottles all around her.'

'No!'

'Go on, Finucane,' Redigan insisted. 'What else did they say?'

'They said there was a full moon and that's when those people have their—you know, rituals?'

'What people?'

'The Devil worshippers. The guards are always being called over to the graveyard because those lunatics are howling at the full moon. The doctor thinks the dead woman was part of them and probably died from whatever they were drinking.'

'That's just not true.' Foley looked pleadingly at Redigan.

'Well why else would a naked woman be dancing around in a graveyard?' Finucane sneered. 'They're not right in the head.'

'But that's not what happened.' Foley jabbed at the desk with his finger. 'It was me who found the body. It was me who pulled her out of Joe McCarthy's grave. Ask the doctor. Get Fleming and Gaynor back in here and they'll tell you what went on over in that graveyard.'

'Are you saying they lied?' Redigan asked. 'Both of them lied in an official report about a suspicious death?'

'No.' Foley spun around in a circle. 'Not at all. I'm just saying they made a mistake. It was raining hard and there was mud everywhere. It was an easy mistake to make.'

'Make up your mind, Foley.' Redigan was on top of him again. 'Did they lie and can you prove it? And if they did, why? The fact is two officers made a report which is being signed off by the Superintendent. You didn't make your report, and now it's too late. So, unless you have anything to add, shift your arse. Get out there and round up your mates. Now.'

Foley felt a shot of anger. Was no one interested in what happened? For God's sake. Even if it wasn't Cassidy, it was still someone's daughter, someone's sister, maybe even a wife and mother. 'Surely we have a responsibility to find out who she was, Sarge. Isn't that our job?'

Redigan had already turned back towards his office and he stopped dead. His shoulders hunched into an angry shape. He spun around and thundered back to where Foley was standing. 'Don't ever tell me what my job is.' His teeth were clamped so tightly they grated as he spoke. 'I am a Garda sergeant and I have more experience in the tip of my big toe than you have in your whole useless body. So get out of here now. Get back to work or go home.'

He collided shoulders with Foley as he turned around and stomped away towards the stairs. 'However, if you decide to go home, Mr Foley,' he shouted, 'don't even think about coming back.'

Chapter 60

The house in Creamery Lane was empty when Foley got back from Fenit. The fire had gone out and the walls seemed to ooze a grey depressing sadness. There was no food in the cupboard except for the end of a loaf of bread with spots of mould on it. Foley would have toasted it if the fire had been lit. The milk in the jug was sour and lumpy. It wouldn't go to waste, though. His mother would use it to make bread.

He checked the clock on the mantelpiece. It was time to visit Liam Edge. His mother would already be over there. After the fright she got when they told her Sgt Edge had been shot it was a wonder she wasn't in the bed next to him.

Foley caught sight of himself in the mirror by the front door. The bruise on his face was angry and he touched it lightly. He'd never hit a woman before. He had no choice, of course, but he still felt bad about it.

The oil tanker was already tied up at Fenit harbour when the LSF got there and the fuel was being transferred to a special train. A small crowd was being agitated by someone with a megaphone demanding the fuel be shared equally between the emergency services and the population.

There was only one local Garda officer trying to keep order, a grey-haired man in his fifties. He was useless at handling crowds and was close to losing control of the situation. Fenit harbour was built on Samphire Island, a huge rock in naturally deep water, and it was joined to the mainland by a half-mile long pier. The sensible thing to do was block off the pier and stop the crowd from getting to the tanker.

So the LSF men pulled their bus across the road as a barricade and initially the crowd respected that. But as the train came back along the pier the LSF had to move the bus out of its way. And the crowd became a mob in the blink of an eye. They hurled themselves forward and broke through the cordon. The woman Foley grabbed was well dressed and well-spoken but she fought like a wild cat, kicking and scratching until they both fell across the track. The train blew its whistle and belched steam as it bore down on them like an avenging angel.

As Foley tried to pull the woman out of its way her knee thudded into his face. For a moment he was disorientated and he reacted instinctively. He punched her so hard she went limp. He grabbed her around the neck and flipped her off the track, and the train brushed his shoulder as it rumbled past and almost drowned him in steam. He was so enraged he left the woman where she fell.

Once the train had disappeared the crowd dispersed and the LSF men followed the guard back to the barracks where he brewed some tea and produced a plate of bread and ham. They waited for an hour before deciding it was safe to go home.

On his way over to the hospital to visit Liam Edge, Foley cut down Courthouse Lane. He knew it was wishful thinking, but he hoped Jane Kennedy might be in her office. The note pinned to the door was brief—*due to bereavement we are closed until further notice*. He stood looking at it until a car came and he had to

move out of the way. He walked on down the lane to Castle Street and turned towards Boherbee.

As he approached St Catherine's Hospital the low sun was throwing mottled shadows over it as it filtered through the border of trees. The hospital was an imposing building in immaculate grounds but Foley always thought it had an air of despondency about it.

He could hear singing coming from the small church to the side of the main building. The Evening Benediction had just finished and when the doors opened the first person out was a young man in a brown dust coat. He stuck a cigarette in his mouth as he hurried across the grass, and as he patted himself down his head jerked with annoyance. His eyes met Foley's and he gave a sheepish grin. 'You wouldn't have a light on you, would you?'

Now it was Foley's turn to pat himself down. He found the box of matches, took one out and struck it against the box. The man cupped his hands around it and sucked greedily on the cigarette. As he blew out a cloud of smoke he looked Foley up and down. 'You're Eamon, Mary Foley's brother.' He put the cigarette in his mouth and held out his hand. 'I'm very sorry for your loss.'

'Thank you, ah... ' Foley took the hand.

'I'm Willie Diggin.' He took the cigarette out of his mouth again and brushed a bit of tobacco off his lip. 'I was at Mary's funeral but I expect you didn't notice me.'

'No. Sorry. There was a big crowd there, I'm afraid. The faces became a bit of a blur after a while. But I appreciate you coming. Did you know Mary well?'

'Oh, I did. I've known Mary all my life.' He steered Foley towards the hospital. 'Are you going this way?' Before Foley could answer Diggin took another long drag on the cigarette. 'We used to live in the room above you in that house in Denny Street but you probably won't remember me. You were older. I was the same age as Mary.'

He glanced at Foley and gave a whimsical smile. 'I loved Mary. I used to get up that little bit earlier just to catch a glimpse of her as she went to school. I'd wait till I heard her coming. Remember that big front door, how you had to give it a good hard tug to get it open? Well, I'd reach the door the same time as Mary and I'd do my gentleman thing and drag it open for her. She'd give me that coy smile and run off to join her school pals, and I'd stroll after her and catch up with my school pals.'

They walked in silence for a moment as Diggin puffed out another cloud of cigarette smoke. 'And did she ever know?' Foley asked.

'Well, if she did she never let on.'

Foley looked at him, expecting more. Diggin shrugged. 'We got one of the new houses in Marion Park so we sort of lost touch. But I did take her out once.'

'Did you? When was that?'

'Oh, ages ago. I never had the courage to ask her out before, then one day I surprised myself by asking her to come to the pictures with me. She said yes.'

He cleared his throat. 'But it was just the once, I'm sorry to say. It wasn't Mary's fault, though. No, she was great company and we had a lovely evening. But I tried to impress her by talking about my job and how much money I was earning. Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect on her. I could see the colour drain from her face and she looked like she was going to be sick. She sort of muttered

goodnight and staggered away. And that was that. I didn't have the nerve to ask her out again.'

When they reached the main door Foley stepped back to let Diggin go by but he shook his head. 'I use the back door.'

'Oh? You work here?'

Diggin spat the butt onto the gravel. 'Yep. Much to Mary's disgust.'

'Why? What's wrong with working in the hospital?'

'I'm the mortuary attendant.'

'Ah.'

'That's how I knew Mary was dead.' Diggin wiped his mouth with his sleeve. 'I'll never forget that day for as long as I live. I came back after lunch and saw her lying there. I was so upset they had to send me home.'

Foley closed his eyes to block out the image.

'Look,' Diggin said. 'I usually call into Lamb's for a pint on the way home. Around ten o'clock if you'd like to join me.'

'Right now I'd have to say no,' Foley shook his head. 'But maybe some other time.'

'That would be grand. Lamb's, usually after ten. It would be lovely to catch up.'

As Diggin turned away Foley remembered Alex Cassidy. 'Willie, before you go, can I ask you something? Do you know anything about a young woman whose body was found over in the graveyard a few days ago?'

A smile flickered on the corner of Diggin's mouth. 'They found a body in the graveyard?'

'Tis a long story. And because tis so odd I thought you might remember it.'

'Who was she?'

'We're not sure. She was young and she was naked. Do you remember?'

'No. But if you had a name I could check the ledger.'

'We think it was Alex Cassidy.'

'No. It still doesn't ring a bell.'

'But wouldn't it have caused a bit of a fuss? A naked woman found dead in the graveyard?'

'Not these days, I'm afraid. Do you know how many bodies pass through our department every day? There are so many the doc hasn't got time to do a proper assessment of them all. Unless there is a genuine concern he won't do an autopsy. He makes an educated guess and releases the body to the next of kin.'

'Oh, right. So what happens if there's no next of kin?'

'I don't know. I'm not involved with that bit.'

'Well, thanks anyway.' Foley turned towards the main doors. 'I'll probably see you around sometime.'

'Look,' Diggin rubbed his mouth again. 'We could go down to the office and take a look. Big Ned might be able to tell you more.'

The lift to the mortuary was a huge industrial metal cage that moved so slow it would have been quicker to walk down the stairs. The long corridor was painted a shiny green and the weak light gave the impression of being in a cave. The air was heavy with the smell of chemicals and Foley struggled to hold down the nausea as they entered a room with four steel tables. A bank of shiny steel doors covered one wall.

Diggin flicked through a thick ledger. 'Can't see anyone named Alex. Or Cassidy.'

Foley looked over his shoulder. 'What if no one could identify her when they brought her in?'

Diggin searched again. 'Unknown female.' He tapped the page. 'Yes. This could be her. Brought in by the guards.'

'What does it say about her?'

'Cause of death unconfirmed. Possibly alcohol-related.'

'No. That isn't right.'

Diggins tapped the page again. 'I remember now. The guards didn't know anything about her. They said someone visiting a grave found her behind a wall. She'd been there a few days. But they couldn't explain how she got there or why she wasn't found earlier.'

'She wasn't found earlier because she was buried in someone else's new grave.' Foley's voice cracked. 'And she wasn't found by some random visitors. I found her!'

'What? You found her? Then why didn't you bring her in? If you told us what happened we'd have logged it.'

'I know. But she worked with the guards and I thought they all knew who she was. I went to tell Sergeant Edge and I got distracted. And I didn't get to write my report.'

'But you told Sgt Edge, though?'

'I did. But there was so much else going on I lost track of things.'

They both studied the ledger for a moment. 'I can't believe they said she was a drunk,' Foley groaned. 'Why did they even think that?'

'Eamon, I'm just telling you what I overheard. The guards weren't talking to me. They were telling the doc. No one could identify her. And no one reported her missing.'

A shadow filled the doorway. 'Ah, Ned.' Diggin waved him in. 'This is Eamon Foley. He's with the LSF.'

'Hello.' Ned held out a hand the size of a small shovel.

'Eamon is enquiring about the female who was found over in the graveyard on Friday. Age between 20 and 30, mauled by natural forces.'

'Yeah.' Ned checked some papers. 'She was taken this morning.'

'Taken where?'

'Over to Gallows Field.'

'The pauper's graveyard?' Foley gave a throaty yelp. 'Are you saying she's already buried? How can that be possible? It was a suspicious death.'

'Well, we can only go by what the guards told us. No one identified her. No one reported her missing. She had no distinguishing marks, no skin on the fingers to get a fingerprint, no eyes to establish the colour, no wedding ring. No other jewellery. Cause of death not established. Possible mental illness since she was naked and sleeping in a graveyard.'

'But I was the one who found her and I'm saying it was Alex Cassidy.' Foley turned around in agitated little circles and ran his fingers through his hair. 'This isn't right. I can't believe there wasn't an autopsy. Tis all wrong. There should have been an autopsy. Or at least an inquiry. They can't just bury her without an inquiry, surely to God. She's not a piece of discarded meat. This was a living

person. No. I'm sorry but I can't just let this go. I'll have to get a magistrate to look at this again.'

Big Ned spluttered. 'That's not going to happen, is it? As far as the magistrate is concerned she'd be an unknown person in an unmarked grave. Do you think he's going to spend time and valuable resources investigating the death of someone no one even missed?'

'But what if this was a murder?'

'What if it was not?' Big Ned spoke in a slow drawl. 'The Coroner won't take that chance. His department is working every hour God gives them with the cases they already have.'

He slapped Foley on the shoulder and walked off.

Chapter 61

Voices drifted out from Liam Edge's hospital room as Foley approached and he recognised the deep Cork accent immediately. The Super had come to pay his respects. Foley didn't want to be part of the performance but before he could turn away Vicky came out of the room and her face beamed when she saw her brother. 'Eamon, why are you standing out here? You should be in there. The Super himself is here.'

She pushed past him and headed down the corridor. 'I have to go to the ladies' room. I'll be right back.'

The Super was in uniform, complete with medals. He held his cap in his hands as he sat awkwardly on a hard chair. He gave Foley a blank look as he came in.

Foley's mother jumped up and threw her arms around her son. 'Eamon, the Super has some news for us.' Her eyes had dark shadows and her skin was pale.

'I have indeed.' The Super gave an artificial smile as he turned to Edge. 'Sergeant, I'm here to inform you that in appreciation of your dedicated service to the Garda Siochana you're to be presented with a medal for bravery.'

Everyone looked at Edge. He gave a nod of thanks.

'And to inform you that you're to be promoted to Inspector with immediate effect.' This time everyone looked at the Superintendent who was waiting for a response with raised eyebrows.

'Oh my God!' Foley's mother clasped her hands under her chin. 'That's wonderful news. Liam, isn't that fantastic news? You're an inspector. Liam, say something.'

Edge looked startled. He grabbed a glass of water and swallowed it down.

'I wish I had a drop of the hard stuff to put in that,' the Super joked. 'We could celebrate in style.'

'We could.' Edge raised the glass to him. 'Thank you, Sir. I don't know what to say. I wasn't... this is so unexpected. I'm delighted, of course. I only hope I'm up to the job.'

'Indeed you are.' His wife poked him on the arm. 'You'll be a great inspector. Inspector Edge. It has a lovely ring to it, hasn't it?' She gave the Super a beaming smile.

‘There’s just one small drawback.’ The Super tapped his cap with his fingers. ‘You’ll be based in Limerick City. But you can live in the guard’s house there until you sort something out for yourselves. Unless you want to commute like they do in England, going back and forth to work every day. Which might be awkward if you get a call out in the middle of the night and you have to catch a train into work.’

He gave a grumble of a laugh, slapped his thigh and heaved himself off the chair. ‘Anyway, I’ll leave you good people to absorb the news. I know it isn’t much consolation for all the misfortune you’ve had recently. And once again please accept my sympathy for your loss.’

Vicky crept back into the room and stood beside her mother. ‘What’s going on?’

‘Liam’s moving to Limerick.’

‘Why?’

The Super put his cap on and made an issue of straightening it. ‘Look, Sergeant—sorry, Inspector—you don’t have to make a decision right this minute. The vacancy only came up this morning and we thought of you first. But you have a few weeks to consider your answer. So take your time, and don’t fret about it. Remember I’m always here if you have any concerns. And, if you want my honest opinion, you’re the perfect man for the job.’ He nodded to Foley’s mother and then to Edge. Then he was gone.

Vicky sat on the edge of the bed. ‘Why has he got to go to Limerick?’

‘Because he’s been promoted.’ Kathleen squeezed Edge’s hand and beamed at him. ‘Liam is an Inspector now. Isn’t that amazing? Liam, isn’t that amazing?’

Edge struggled to answer. ‘Limerick,’ was all he could say.

‘Yes, Limerick,’ his wife repeated. ‘But that’s all right. We’ll have the guard’s house until we can find a place of our own. It’ll be grand.’

‘But what about us?’ Vicky’s eyes filled up.

Her mother sat back in her chair and her face hardened. ‘You’ll be alright. I’m sure Liam will let you stay in Rock Street. Won’t you. Liam?’

‘That’s not what I meant.’ Vicky sucked in a cry. ‘If you go to Limerick I’ll have no one.’

‘But you will. You’ll still have Eamon. And Mickey.’

This time Vicky’s eyes overflowed and a tear crept down her cheek. ‘You know what I mean.’

Foley glanced at Edge. The sergeant had lost a lot of weight and his face was showing it in the folds of skin under his chin and around his eyes. He was studying his hands and his eyes had the vacant gaze of someone deeply troubled. Vicky dabbed at her eyes with her sleeve and her mother handed her a handkerchief.

‘Look, I know this is all a bit sudden, Vicky,’ Kathleen said. ‘God knows it was sudden for us too. If you want to know the truth, Liam and I will be glad to get away from this town. There are too many horrible memories for us here. I know it sounds selfish but I have to grab this chance to start over again in a new town, away from the bad memories.’

Vicky was too upset to answer. Her children watched her with increasing distress and she put her arms around them.

‘So where does that leave me and Mickey?’ Foley had to clear his throat before he could speak.

‘Well, me and Liam were thinking. If you move into Rock Street with Vicky, we’ll sell Creamery Lane. Then we can buy another house somewhere else.’

‘When did you decide that?’ Foley gasped. ‘I thought you didn’t know about this promotion.’

Edge glanced up but quickly averted his eyes again.

‘Actually, we thought Liam was going to lose his job.’ Kathleen squeezed Edge’s hand again. ‘We thought he was going to be pensioned off. And if that happened we were going to sell up and move on.’

‘But why? Everything you have is here in Tralee. Your whole life is here in Tralee.’

‘Our whole life?’ Edge gave a weary sigh. ‘That’s just it, isn’t it? All my working life I was a guard walking these streets. I know everyone and everyone knows me. So if they took that away from me I would not be able to walk down those streets again. I wanted to retire when I was good and ready, bow out with dignity. But if I was forced out I know I’d be too upset seeing someone else doing my job, having the lads pull sympathetic faces whenever they saw me. No, without my job I’d be just another face in the crowd. I’d have nothing. The only way I could keep my dignity would be to move away.’

He rubbed his mouth with his sleeve. ‘Anyway, if you and Mickey move into Rock Street, Vicky could mind Mickey while you went out to work. Then you’d be able to pay her rent for your room.’

Vicky scooped up the children. ‘I’m going home. I left Joe looking after the others so I have to go home.’

‘Vicky.’ Kathleen reached out to her but Vicky brushed past and shouldered the door open. Kathleen spun around to her husband. ‘Liam, tell her...’

But Edge was busy avoiding Foley’s eyes. Kathleen shuffled out of her chair and went after her daughter.

‘So that’s it?’ Foley stepped closer to the bed and towered over his stepfather.

‘So that’s what?’ There was a hint of the old defiance in the sergeant’s croaky voice.

‘You know what. You intend to walk away from all this as if nothing happened.’

Edge shifted up in the bed and fixed his hardest stare on Foley. There was a time when that stare would have intimidated Foley. But now it was diluted by the circumstances and become just an angry scowl from a sick old man.

‘You know they’ve already buried Alex over in Gallows Field?’ Foley said. ‘In a pauper’s grave?’

Edge’s mouth quivered. He tried to keep up the stare but his eyes had already filled up and a tear trickled down his cheek.

‘I should have listened to Mike Collins,’ Foley added. ‘He was right, wasn’t he? You made it all go away. And now you think it’s all over. Well, perhaps it is. But Mike Collins will still be there. And Alex will always be there in your head. One day, Liam. One day it’ll all come back to bite you on the arse.’

Edge wiped his eyes with the bedsheet. ‘You’re waffling again. Everyone knows she went home. And that’s the end of it. Just because there was something going on between the two of you doesn’t mean ...’

‘What? Stop it! You’re not turning this back on me. There was nothing going on between me and Alex and you bloody well know it. Whatever she was up to behind

your back had nothing to do with me. I only found out about Mike Collins the day you were shot.'

'And who the hell is Mike Collins?'

'Your tenant. You threw him out of his room so he found another place to live. He wanted Alex to share with him. Is that what made you do it? Jealousy? That's what happened, isn't it? You found out about Alex and Mick Collins and you couldn't stand it.'

Edge's face darkened and confusion coloured his skin. He genuinely didn't seem to know about any of it.

'Eamon,' Foley's mother came rushing back into the room waving an envelope. 'I forgot to give you this. It came this morning.' She looked from one of them to the other. 'What's wrong with the two of you?'

Edge grunted and turned away. Foley snatched the envelope and slit it open with his fingernail. As he pulled the letter out he edged towards the door.

'Eamon,' his mother followed him. 'What is it? Don't tell me tis bad news.'

'No, Ma. It's from Edenburn. I can go and collect Mickey.'

'Oh, thank God for that. When?'

'As soon as possible. They want me to phone first so they can get him ready.'

Foley waved goodbye with the envelope as he pushed the door open.

Chapter 62

A shadow passed the window a second before the letterbox clattered and Foley rushed out into the hallway. A thick brown envelope lay on the bare floor. He took it back to his room and he sat on the edge of the bed as he tore it open. The headed notepaper was folded in three and he smoothed it out on his thigh before scanning it. And he said a quick prayer of thanks. At last, he had a real job. Now he could afford to pay rent and support Vicky and the children.

The shock of his mother moving to Limerick with Liam Edge had unsettled him more than he expected. Vicky took it badly too. She felt betrayed and abandoned. It was weeks before she calmed down enough to speak to her mother again. While Edge was recovering from his injury Vicky and the children moved into the house in Rock Street and they took over the first floor. Foley and Mickey moved into Cassidy's old room. And suddenly Foley was under enormous pressure to get a full-time job. But jobs were scarce. Every vacancy was chased by a hundred desperate men with families to support.

However, there was one job where Foley had some experience. He also had the advantage of being related to the famous Sergeant Liam Edge. He was well placed to join the Gardaí.

But even as he was filling out the application the doubts were picking at him. Was this what he wanted? Or was he grabbing at it out of desperation? There was a huge difference between a Local Security Force volunteer and a full-time cop. Being a real cop involved honesty and integrity. And that was where his conscience bothered him. His integrity had been stretched wafer-thin.

He knew who murdered Joe McCarthy but he wasn't going to take it anywhere because he was dreading the consequences. And the guilt was eating away at him. He had sleepless nights over it. It was his duty to report it to the Superintendent but he couldn't because he knew how many people would be crushed by the fallout. Including Jane Kennedy. She was the only other witness to Jerome's confession and she made her position clear. It would become a bitter case of her word against his.

And to what end? As Jane pointed out, Vicky's life was horrendous enough already when Joe McCarthy was alive. If Foley pursued this and the truth about Joe came out, it would be infinitely worse. For her and the children. The bottom would fall out of their world too. And where would it all end?

But Foley was struggling with the weight of his secret. If he could just talk to Jane Kennedy about it—a burden shared was a burden halved, his mother used to say. Speaking about it might dilute it, make it more bearable.

But he hadn't seen Jane since Jerome's funeral. When he slipped into the church that morning she greeted him with a vague nod as if he was just another mourner coming to pay his respects. There was no conversation. And that upset him. He thought his feelings for her had died a natural death over the years, but the time they'd spent together recently stirred them all up again. He knew it couldn't go anywhere, of course. But he needed her to know he was still there for her if she ever needed a shoulder. So he took a walk down Courthouse Lane every day just to check if the factory was open again. But it wasn't. The bereavement note had curled up and crumbled away.

Several times when he was passing Railway Terrace he almost called in to see her. But he always lost his nerve. He couldn't believe how anxious he was just thinking about it. But now he had the offer of a job. He would use it as an excuse to call on her just to tell her he wouldn't be around for a while, just in case she needed him to do deliveries for her. It was feeble, he knew that, but it was all he had. He went into the hallway and took his jacket off the hook on the door.

Mickey came charging out of the kitchen followed by two other children and they screamed off down the hall. Vicky looked out after them and she frowned when she saw the letter in Foley's hand. 'Are you all right, Eamon?'

'Yes.' Foley tapped it against his fingers. 'Look, come into the kitchen. I have something to tell you.'

Vicky instinctively shoved the kettle onto the hot plate and checked there was enough tea in the pot. Then she wiped her hands on her apron before following Foley over to the table. The anxiety seeped out of her. 'What's wrong, Eamon?'

'Nothing.' Foley handed her the letter. 'It's good news. I applied to join the guards and I've been accepted.'

Vicky gave a gasp of relief. 'Oh my God.' Her eyes flickered from Foley to the letter and back to Foley again. 'That's wonderful news. Oh, Eamon, this is so... so... well, I don't know what to say. Does Mammy know? Have you told Mammy? Oh Eamon, I'm so pleased for you. When do you have to start?'

'Well, that's the thing. They want me to attend the induction course on Monday.'

Vicky was still trying to read the letter but getting nowhere fast. 'But that's good, isn't it?'

‘Well yes.’ Foley pointed to a paragraph at the bottom. ‘But it means I have to go to Cork for six weeks.’

‘For six weeks?’ Vicky gave a huge smile and handed him the letter. ‘Ah, that’ll pass in no time. But how’ll you get there? Have you enough money?’

‘They sent me a train pass. And an expenses form in case I have a meal on the way.’

‘So what are you looking so worried about?’

‘I’m worried about you. It means you’ll be looking after Mickey while I’m gone.’

‘And why are you worrying about that, you daft eejit? Sure I don’t mind that in the least. He’ll be grand here. He’s not a bother to anyone.’ She jumped up when the kettle whistled and poured the boiling water into the teapot. ‘Liam will be so proud of you. What did he say when you told him?’

‘Actually, he doesn’t know.’

‘What?’

‘No one knows, Vicky. I didn’t want to tell anyone until I knew I’d been selected. Just in case I wasn’t selected. You know what I mean.’

‘Wow.’ Vicky took two cups from the sideboard and put them on the table. ‘Won’t that be a lovely surprise for them when they get back home tomorrow?’

As soon as he’d been discharged from hospital Liam Edge took Kathleen to Limerick. He was anxious to meet his new colleagues and look at the guard’s house. They were coming back to sell the house in Creamery Lane.

‘Vicky, you know when I finish training I’m not guaranteed a position here in Tralee, don’t you?’

Vicky blinked nervously. ‘What does that mean?’

‘It means I could be posted anywhere in Kerry. The Super knows about my situation and he promised he’ll do his best to get me into Tralee. But a guard has to go where he’s posted.’

Vicky thought about it for a moment then gave a beaming smile. ‘Well, we’ll just have to keep our fingers crossed, won’t we?’

Chapter 63

Two small boys hung on the railway gates as the train to Limerick puffed across the road and buried them in a cloud of steam. Then the gates swung back across the road and the boys were off and running before they clattered shut. Foley waited for three cars and a donkey and cart to go by before he walked on. A fine mist was falling but the day was still clammy. He sensed thunder in the air.

When he reached Railway Terrace, part of him was hoping Jane would be in her back yard hanging out the washing. It would make it easier to engage her in the conversation he’d been rehearsing in his head.

But she wasn’t in the yard. And he was surprised at how untidy the yard was. The dustbin overflowed, newspaper and magazines were piled in a corner, milk bottles rocked on the concrete when the breeze annoyed them. A bad feeling came over Foley. It wasn’t like Jane to be so sloppy.

Then he noticed the windows. The curtains were gone. He opened the gate and crossed the yard. The shed door was ajar. Rubbish was piled in there too—an old chair, an enamel basin, loads of old clothes.

He knocked on the back door. No one answered. Through the scullery window, he could see the shelves had been cleared. All that was left was an old tea towel hanging on a hook.

A movement caught his eye and he looked up at the neighbour's house. Young Joseph was leaning out of the window staring down at him. 'They're not in.'

'Where are they?'

'You owe me sixpence.'

'What?'

'I said you owe me sixpence.' The boy's voice fluctuated between soprano and a crackling base. 'From the last time you came here pretending to be a guard.'

'I am a guard.' Foley argued.

'A pretend guard. And you owe me sixpence.'

Foley grunted as he went to the sitting room window and peeked in. That room had been cleared out as well. Even the gun cupboard was gone. What did it mean? Did Jerome leave his big house to Jane? Has she moved up there?

'Where's your key?' the boy mocked.

Foley ignored him.

'Throw up my sixpence and I'll tell you where they went.'

'I know already.' But Foley decided to humour him anyway. He dug in his pocket and took out a small cluster of coins. 'And I haven't got sixpence.'

There was a squawk and a curse then another squawk. 'How much have you got?'

Foley shuffled the coins. 'Two pennies and a farthing.'

The boy pulled a face and let the window drop. Foley looked into Jane's sitting room again. Even the light bulb was gone.

'Show me.'

Foley jumped and spun around. 'Don't do that,' he barked at the boy with the outstretched hand. 'I could have knocked you out, creeping up on me like that.'

'Show me.'

'Show you what?'

'My money.'

Foley felt his fist ball up. The boy had the kind of face that invited a good slap. Foley was tempted but he put his hand in his pocket instead. 'Two pence. That's all I'm giving you.'

'You owe me sixpence.'

This time Foley's fragile patience evaporated. 'That's all I have. So either tell me where the Regans went or get lost.'

The boy went to grab the coins but Foley closed his fist. 'All right,' the boy gave a pout. 'They moved to Dublin.'

'Dublin? What do you mean Dublin?'

'Dublin. That big city on the other side of the country? How can you be a guard when you don't even know what Dublin is?'

Foley grabbed him by the arm. 'What do you mean Dublin?'

'Dublin.' The boy slapped the hand away. 'They moved to Dublin. Are you deaf or stupid?'

'All right.' Foley took a step back. 'Just tell me. Why in God's name would they move to Dublin?'

'Because Mr Regan was promoted.' Joseph brushed something off his sleeve. 'He's a supervisor now. He'll be working in the CIE depot in Dublin. And a house goes with the job. A big house. Bigger than this one. With a proper garden.'

Foley felt his heart kick. 'When did all this happen?'

'Mrs Regan told my Ma all about it ages ago. She was delighted the day they got the letter saying he was promoted. But she didn't want to go to Dublin while her friend was sick. She was looking after him, you know? When he died she said there was nothing to keep them in Tralee anymore. So they packed up their stuff and left.'

'When?'

'I don't know. The day after the funeral, maybe?'

