



FIELD
OF
BLOOD

A NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF DECEPTION

denise mina

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The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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[ALSO BY DENISE MINA](#)

GARNETHILL

EXILE

RESOLUTION

DECEPTION

For Fergus.
Fight on, baby.

Judas . . . purchased a field with the reward of iniquity. . . .
And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem . . .
that [the] field is called . . . the field of blood.

ACTS 1: 16-19 (*King James Version*)

ONE

SMALL WONDERS

1981

I

They were still traveling, into the dark. They had been traveling for a long time, and in Brian's mind every inch of every step took him away from his mother, and She was all he wanted in the world.

He couldn't cry. They hurt him when he cried. He thought of Her, the softness of her breast, her fingers with the rings, how the world was warmer when she was there, and he struggled for breath, his bottom lip bumping noisily against his teeth. James, the boy sitting by his side, slapped him hard on the ear.

Surprised at the sharpness of the pain, Brian squealed and his mouth fell open. Callum, the boy on his other side, laughed at him.

"Don't be a crybaby," said James.

"Yeah," said Callum. "Don't fucking cry."

They laughed together, leaving him out. Brian didn't cry. Brian thought about his tummy insides hurting and his sore foot, but he didn't cry. It was only when he thought about her that he cried; just when he remembered not being here, then he cried. Tears raced down his cheeks, but he breathed in, managing to keep quiet.

"You're a big baby," said James loudly.

"Aye," said Callum, showing his teeth, his eyes shiny. "You're a fucking big cunt baby."

The boys got excited, saying "cunt baby" over and over. Brian didn't like that word. He didn't know what it meant, but the sounds were jaggy. Certain he was going to sob and be hit, he covered his face with his spread-out hands and held his breath until his ears popped.

He couldn't hear the boys now. With them out of his thoughts he could remember her hands washing him, scooping soothing warm water that smelled of softness over him, picking him up to carry him, even though he was bigger, feeding him with bread dipped in hot mince gravy, with chips,

with sweets from the ice-cream van. She tucked him into bed and left the hall light on and the door open and came to look at him throughout the night so he wouldn't ever be alone. She was with him, always around a corner, in another room.

They were leaving the light. There were no houses outside, just dark and mud. The door opened and James pushed Brian into the black void, toppling him over so he tumbled out and down, landing on his side. He tried to stand up but his ankle wouldn't work. Inside his Welly boot his foot was big, the rough cloth lining pressing against his skin. He fell over onto his shoulder and into the dark, outside the yellow fan of light at the door.

It was darker than he had ever seen, black like gravy, like smoke from toast, like bitter medicine for a cold. The ground was frozen into hard lumps. He heard wind and moving things, running things coming towards him, creeping things. A surge of panic gripped his chest as he used his good foot and both hands to drag himself back into the smudge of light from the van.

He saw the boys' shoes and felt sudden relief that he was not alone. They put their arms through his on either side and lifted him, trying to balance him on his feet, but he toppled to one side, grabbing at the frozen earth, struggling to keep his face near the light at least. The boys lifted him again, and again he fell.

Brian couldn't walk, his big foot wouldn't work, so the boys, huffing and puffing, dragged him backwards, over the edge of the world and down a steep hill. It was windy and dark, so dark at the bottom that Brian clung to James, holding tight onto the sleeve of his anorak, afraid that they would leave him. He couldn't stop himself and he began to cry, sounding loud because there was no telly and no wireless, nothing to cover his noise like there had been in the stranger's house. James moved around in front of him, standing with his feet apart and raising his hands. Callum pulled at James and said, No, no, over here, by the track.

They dragged him farther down the hill until there wasn't a hill anymore, and then they left him to stand alone. He fell forwards, banging his front teeth on metal; one of them broke and hot water came all over his chin. His crying seemed very loud now, and he sputtered through the warm liquid, breathing it in and coughing through his sobs. James stood in front of him again, planting his feet and reaching down, putting his hands on Brian's neck. Brian felt himself lifted up until he was looking into James's wild animal eyes.

Brian heard his own noise stop, heard small animals scamper for cover on the far bank, heard the brittle wind ruffle his hair. And then he saw black.



James strangled him and then Callum hit his head with rocks. The baby's head was all mess. They looked at it, afraid and not wanting to, but drawn to the sight. They hadn't expected the baby just to stop moving or to do a smelly diarrhea, he hadn't told them that would happen. They hadn't expected him to stop being annoying so suddenly, hadn't expected him to completely stop being anything. The baby's foot was facing all wrong. His eyes were open, popping out as if he couldn't stop looking. Callum wanted to cry, but James punched his arm.

"We . . .," said Callum, staring at the messy baby, looking sick. "We . . ." He forgot the rest of it. He ran up the steep hill and disappeared over the bank.

James was left alone. It had blood all over its chin and down its front like a bib. The blood was warm when he had his hands in it, when he had his hands around the baby's neck. He imagined the

baby standing up with its messy head and black chin, swelling up to the Incredible Hulk and beating him up in slow motion.

He tilted his head and looked at it. He smiled at it. He poked it with his foot, and it couldn't even try to get away from him. He didn't feel scared being here with the broken baby. He felt other things, but he didn't know what they were called. He crouched down.

He could do anything to it. Anything he wanted.

THE REAL PADDY MEEHAN

I

If there was any other angle to the Brian Wilcox story, none of the staff of the *Scottish Daily News* could find it. They had interviewed the missing child's family and neighbors, retraced all possible routes, commissioned aerial photographs of the area. They had written features about children who had run away in the past, printed countless column inches on the future of missing children, and the little bastard still hadn't turned up.

Paddy Meehan was standing at the Press Bar when she overheard Dr. Pete telling a crowd of drunks that he'd strangle the three-year-old himself if it would bring an end to the story. The men around him laughed and slowed and laughed again in a ragged wave. Dr. Pete sat still among them, looking even more desiccated than usual, his features organized into a smile around his heartbroken eyes. She watched his reflection in the mirror behind the bar. His bushy eyebrows billowed out from a face scarred by a decade-long hangover. He lifted his glass to his mouth, eyes shut, feeling for the rim with the gray tip of his tongue. Rumor had it that he was a bigamist.

Paddy didn't like the men or want to keep their company, but she did want to have a place among them, to be a journalist instead of a gofer. She would have felt like an interloper in the bar if she hadn't been on *News* business, here to get the picture editor's tankard filled. In front of her, McGrade the bar manager, was flushing the leads to the taps, taking an age to draw the beer through spluttering pipes. Pints of syrupy white froth were lined up along the bar.

The Press Bar was painted a pragmatic tobacco / spilled beer yellow, furnished with small chairs and mean little tables covered with ashtrays and beer mats. Screwed tight to the walls were archive pictures of news sellers and pressmen holding up significant copies of the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times*: VE-day, Pearl Harbor, Kennedy's death. The photos were from another time, another place, and largely irrelevant to Glasgow, but they represented a plea for loyalty to the bar's principal clientele and the justification for its special license. It was one of the few pubs in Glasgow that didn't shut at two thirty in the afternoon, but the bar was too far from the city center to attract passing

customers, too close to the city to be anyone's local, and relied on the *News* for all its trade. An adjoining wall divided the two establishments, and the absence of an internal entrance was often bemoaned, especially in the winter.

It was the only occupied table in the bar. The men sipped their elevenses under a slick of blue smoke. They were the early shift, men of indiscriminate age, all drunks and renegades who couldn't be sacked because of their length of service. They did the bare minimum of work and did it quickly before hurrying off to the pub or the house or the desk where the next party was being held.

Today the head of the union, Father Richards, was penned protectively in at the center of the crowd, looking tired, being cheered along by them. Richards was rarely among the drunks. He was a good father to the chapel and had negotiated longer breaks and the right to smoke anywhere in the building, even in the print room. Beer fat around the middle, he had the prison pallor of a man who worked indoors all day every day. Usually he wore aviator glasses with a thick steel frame, but they were missing today, replaced by a long diagonal cut under his eye, perfectly tracing the line of the absent lens. Someone had punched him in the specs.

The laughter died down and the boys sat back. Paddy could feel them casting their attention around the room, looking for something, anything, to ridicule. She was usually immune because of her age and miserable position, but when drink was thrown into the mix they could turn on anyone. She braced herself, twisting her cheap diamond-chip engagement ring around her finger, willing the barman to finish with the beer pipes and serve her. Three seconds shrieked by. She could feel a preemptive blush starting on her neck. Her ring finger was getting sore.

One of the drinkers at the table broke the silence. "Fuck the Pope."

The men laughed, watching a fragile Richards reach unsmiling for his drink. As his pint glass docked at his mouth a broad grin burst on his face and he poured the golden beer in, letting little rivulets tumble down his jowls. The men whooped.

Out of a reflexive sense of loyalty, Paddy disapproved of Richards's saying nothing. Only ten years ago job adverts routinely carried codicils saying Catholics need not apply. Housing and schools were segregated, and Catholics wouldn't feel safe to walk along certain streets in Glasgow. But here was Richards, sitting at a table of Protestants, siding with them against his own.

"I don't care about the Pope," shouted Richards. "I don't care. He's no friend of the workingman."

Dr. Pete waited until the audience had calmed down. "We have nothing to lose but our rosaries."

They laughed again.

Richards shrugged, showing he didn't mind. Not one bit. Meant nothing to him. He took another drink and, sensing her disapproval, glanced at Paddy's feet, drawing the gaze of the men to her, giving them her scent.

"You," he said. "You a Pape or a Marxist?"

"Leave her alone," said Dr. Pete.

But Richards pressed the point. "Pape or Marxist?"

They knew from her name that she was Catholic. She even looked bog Irish, with black hair and skin the color of a paper moon. She didn't want to talk about it, but Richards pressed her.

"Are you religious, Meehan?"

The men were looking at their drinks, uncomfortable but not prepared to stand between them. It was between two Papes, it wasn't their business. Paddy felt she'd better speak or they'd smell the fear.

"How does my conscience come to be your business?" Her voice was higher than she meant it to be.

"Will you attend mass tomorrow? Do you go to communion, confession? Do you drop your mite

the collection every Sunday and develop crushes on the parish priest?" Richards's voice grew as he spoke. ~~He was a little drunk and mistook speaking a lot for speaking well.~~ "Are you saving yourself for your husband? Do you pray each night to bear children who'll uphold the faith of our fathers?" He took a breath and opened his mouth to speak again, but Paddy interrupted.

"And what about you, Father Richards? D'you attend weekly meetings and demos? D'you contribute a portion of your wage to the revolutionary fund and develop crushes on all the young Marxist girls?" She couldn't quite remember the shape of what he had said next, so she just got straight to the point. "Your job is basically interceding between the management on behalf of the shop floor. You go about enforcing rules and distributing money to the needy. You're just a priest in a polo neck."

Without really taking on board the content of what she had said, the men laughed at Richards for being slagged off by a woman, and a young woman at that, thumping him on the arm, egging him to retort. Richards smiled into his drink while Dr. Pete sat very still, looking at Paddy as if he had just noticed she existed. Behind the bar McGrade snorted affably, taking the picture editor's tankard out of Paddy's hand and filling it three-quarters full with 80 Shilling, topping it up with two shots of whisky.

"The shape of your beliefs is exactly the same as it was when you were practicing," Paddy continued. "The only difference is that you've replaced the basic text. Classic failed-Catholic mistake. You're probably more religious than I am."

The door behind her opened suddenly, banging off the wall, and a gust of cold air blasted into the room, curling the gray smoke. Terry Hewitt's black hair was shaved tight like an American soldier's, cut right into the wood so that pale pink scars on his scalp showed through. It made him seem a little bit dangerous. He was plump with disproportionately short legs, but there was an air about him, an aura of dirty-bad man, that made Paddy's mouth water when she dared to look at him. She imagined him going home every night to a comfortable house with parents who read novels and encouraged his ambition. He'd never have to worry about losing his monthly Transcard or wear cheap shoes that let in the rain.

"Hoi, Hewitt!" shouted Dr. Pete, waving his hand in front of his face. "Shut that door. This good woman's trying to coax Richards back to the chapel."

The men laughed as Paddy carried the pint to the door, calling after her to stay, Woman, save us all.

She turned back to them. "You know, one day all your livers are going to explode simultaneously and it'll look like Jonestown in here."

The men screamed with delight as Paddy backed out of the door. She was pleased. Being a lowly copyboy was a precarious position: a bad choice here or a vulnerable moment there could mark her out for a lifetime of bullying.

It was just as the door was swinging shut behind her that she heard Terry Hewitt ask, "Who is that fat lassie?"



She sat on the top deck, chewing through her third consecutive boiled egg as she looked down on the bustle in the street. It was a disgusting diet, and she wasn't even sure it was working.

Outside, pedestrians were wrapped up warm, closing their faces against a needle-sharp wind that found its way through scarves and tights and buttonholes. The wind buffeted the high side of the

double-decker bus on open stretches of road, making passengers grab at the back of the seat in front, smiling sheepishly around when their alarm passed.

Richards had annoyed her. She kept rerunning the conversation in her head, thinking of better, faster retorts, reshaping her speech so that it better reflected his. She had made the point well, she thought, even though Terry Hewitt's remark had ruined the effect entirely.

Classic failed-Pape mistake.

The phrase rolled around her mind, catching its tail, rolling and repeating in the lug-bugga-lug rhythm of the bus. She knew all about replacing the central text. At least Richards's substitution had made him more useful to the world. She couldn't tell any one of the people she loved about the black hole at the heart of her faith. She couldn't tell Sean, her fiancé, or her favorite sister, Mary Ann, and her parents must never know, it would break their hearts.

Downstairs the bus swung on the sharp turn into Rutherglen Main Street, hurrying to catch the green light. Paddy was on her way to the rosary at Sean's dead grandmother's house, ready to perjure herself once more.

Granny Annie had died aged eighty-four. She wasn't a warm woman, or even an especially pleasant one. When Sean cried for her Paddy knew he was really grieving for his father, who had died of a heart attack four years before. Despite his broad shoulders and deep voice, he was a boy at eighteen, still eating lunchtime sandwiches made by his mum and wearing the underpants she left out for him at night.

The old woman's death was a big event in Rutherglen. Some nights the rosary was so busy that a portion of the mourners had to keep their coats on and stand in the street, praying towards the house. As they chanted the prayers for the repose of Annie's soul, the young kept their voices low while the older ones sent up their sighs in Irish accents, copying the priests who had taught them.

Annie Ogilvy had been brought to Eastfield in a handcart in the dying years of the last century. Paddy's family, the Meehans, arrived from Donegal in the same year and had stayed close to the Ogilvys ever since: religious duties and odd immigrant habits bound the two families together, and the limited job opportunities for Catholics meant that most of the men were workmates in the mines or foundries.

Annie grew up in Glasgow but always affected an Irish accent, as was the fashion among immigrant girls in her day. Over the years her accent got thicker, shifting a few miles every year, from a Dublinesque soft brogue to a strangulated Ulster gargle. In her old age her children took her on an Irish coach tour and found that no one there could understand her either. All her tastes and songs and cooking, although distantly related to things in Ireland, were reproduced nowhere. Annie yearned her whole life for a fond remembered home that never was.

The presence of the corpse in the house gave Paddy the creeps, and she stayed well away from it. When they settled down for prayers she sat on the front room floor, facing the settee, each night staring at a different configuration of puffy legs in support stockings, mottled blue papery skin chopped into links by pop-sock rims.

The bus was approaching the end of the Main Street. Paddy finished her egg and stood up, making her way downstairs. It was an open-backed bus and the cold, windy night battled hard with the warmth from the heated cabin. Paddy put a foot on either side of the pole, resting her hip against it, letting her weight swing her out of the open back of the bus into the windy void. Crosswinds whipped her short hair, making it even messier. She could already see the crowd gathering in front of the small council house across the road.

She wasn't through the garden gate before someone caught her arm. Matt Sinclair was short and

fifty and wore glasses with dark lenses.

~~“There’s my wee girlfriend there,”~~ he said, eyes like dead televisions. He shifted his fag into the other hand and took Paddy’s hand, pumping it hard. “I was just talking about you.” He turned and addressed another small, smoking man behind him. “Desi, here’s wee Paddy Meehan that I was telling ye about.”

“Oh ho,” said Desi. “You’ll be interested to meet me, then: I know the real Paddy Meehan.”

“I am the real Paddy Meehan,” said Paddy quietly, moving towards the house, wanting to get inside and see Sean before the prayers started.

“That’s right. I used to live in the high flats at the Gorbals, and Paddy Meehan’s wife, Betty, she lived on my landing.” He nodded adamantly, as if she had forcefully expressed disbelief. “Aye, and I knew his pal, Griffiths.”

“Who’s that?” asked Matt.

“Griffiths was the mad guy with the gun, the shooter.”

“And was he a spy as well?”

Desi blushed around the eyes, suddenly angry. “For God’s sake. Meehan was never a spy. He was nothing but a bloody hood from the Gorbals.”

Matt kept his lips tight and his voice low, looking around the crowd. “Here, mind your language. We’re at a rosary.”

“Sorry.” Desi looked at Paddy. “Sorry, dear. But he wasn’t a Soviet spy. He’s from the Gorbals.”

“Spies don’t have to be toffs, do they?” asked Paddy, trying to be respectful even though she was correcting him.

“Aye, they need an education. They need to speak different languages.”

“Anyway,” Matt said, looking at her as he spoke, “the *Daily Record* said they framed him for the Ross murder to discredit him, because he was a spy.”

Desi blushed again and spluttered indignantly, “They were repeating what Meehan said, and no one believes him anyway.” He raised his voice angrily. “What would a common thief have to tell the Soviets?”

Paddy knew. “Well, he knew the layout of most British prisons, didn’t he? That’s how they helped their spies escape, because he told them how.”

Matt looked interested. “So he was a spy?”

Paddy shrugged again. “He might have sold secrets to the Soviets, but I think the Ross investigation was just incompetent. I don’t think one had anything to do with the other.”

Abandoning reasoned argument, Desi raised his voice. “The man’s a known liar.”

“Aye.” Matt looked at Paddy blankly, wishing, she sensed, that he had never introduced her to his volatile friend. “Well, he’s back living in Glasgow, I hear.”

She nodded.

“Living up in the Carlton. Drinks in the town.”

She nodded again.

Calmer, Desi tried to reclaim his place in the conversation. “How did ye end up named after him, well?” He looked at Matt to deliver the punch line. “Do your parents hate ye?”

Matt Sinclair tried to laugh, but the phlegm in his lungs gurgled and made him cough. “Desi, man,” he said solemnly when he had recovered, “you’re awful funny.”

“I was six years old when the other Paddy Meehan was arrested,” Paddy said. “And everyone call my mum Trisha.”

Now reconciled, Matt and Desi nodded in unison.

“So,” said Desi, “you got stuck with Paddy?”

“Aye.”

“How d’ye no call yourself Pat?”

“I don’t like that name,” she said quickly. Building on the success of a joke about the Irish homosexual Pat MaGroin, some of the older boys at school had nicknamed her Pat MaHind, a name she hated and feared for its unspecified sexual connotation and her uncontrollable blushing when they shouted it after her.

“What about Packy?”

“Hmm,” she said, hoping they weren’t going to say anything about black people. “I think that word means something else now.”

“That’s right,” explained Matt knowledgeably. “A Paki means a Indian now.”

Desi nodded, interested in this useful information.

“It’s rude to call someone that,” said Paddy.

“Big Mo that runs the laundry,” explained Matt, “he’s a Paki.”

“Not really,” said Paddy, feeling uncomfortable. “I asked him, and he’s from Bombay, so he’s Indian.”

“That’s right.” Matt nodded and looked at Desi to see if that had cleared things up any.

“But Indians and Pakistanis’re not really the same thing,” Paddy said, sounding unsure when she wasn’t. “Because didn’t the Indians and the Pakistanis have a big war? I think it’s like saying an Ulsterman is the same as a Republican.”

The men nodded, but she could tell that they had stopped listening.

Desi cleared his throat. “Oh aye,” he said, not grasping her angle at all. “Everything’s more complicated when darkies are involved, eh?”

Paddy cringed. “I don’t think that’s very nice,” she said.

The men looked blank as she let herself be washed into the house on a wave of mourners. She felt their eyes on her back, judging her, thinking her a snooty wee cow.

THREE

A TYRANNY OF EGGS

Paddy had spent her lunch hour wandering around the Sunday-shuttered town, nibbling boiled eggs wrapped in tinfoil, carefully avoiding newsagents with sweets counters. She hung her duffel coat on the hook by the door, carrying her yellow canvas bag over to the copyboy bench, setting it underneath. She'd had the bag for two years and liked it. She had inked the names of bands on it, not bands she necessarily liked to listen to but ones she wanted to be associated with: guy bands like Stiff Little Fingers, the Exploited, and Squeeze.

From their bench in the corner Paddy could see down the entire hundred-foot-long, open-plan newsroom and notice when anyone raised a hand or called them for an errand. She slid her bottom along the butternut oak, pulling up next to Dub.

“Right?”

“I hate weekend shifts.” Dub glanced up from the music paper he was reading. “Quiet.”

Paddy scanned the room for raised hands or open faces. No one wanted anything. She found her thumbnail running along a gouge she had made in the wood. She liked to run her nail along the soft grain, imagining herself in the future as a grown-up journalist in a fancy suit and real shoes, on her way out to a hard story or an evening at the Press Club, brushing past and seeing the little indentations, remembering where she came from.

Murray Farquarson, known as the Beast Master, shouted out from his office. “Meehan? Is she in?”

“She's in,” shouted Dub, nudging her to go.

Paddy stood up and sighed, affecting reluctance like they all did when called to do any work. She muttered under her breath, “For God's sake, I'm just bloody back,” dragging her feet over to Farquarson's door, secretly pleased that he had asked for her.

Farquarson called for Paddy by name whenever he needed a discreet job done. He trusted her because she had no allegiances; none of the journalists had groomed her for an acolyte because they assumed she wouldn't stay. They wouldn't have known what to talk to her about even if they had wanted to recruit her: she didn't like sport or know any of Hugh McDermid's poetry. The journalists had a lot of odd ideas about women; she was always having to stay late and lift heavy boxes to show

that she could. The only other women on the newsroom floor were Nancy Rilani and Kat Beesley, a genuine news reporter who had been to university and worked on a paper in England before coming home. Nancy was a heavy-breasted woman of Italian descent who wrote the agony column and most the weekly women's page. She never spoke to Paddy or Heather Allen, the part-time student, wouldn't even look at them, and gave the impression that she would trade any other woman to any man for peace and favors. Kat was proud. She always wore trousers, kept her hair very short, and sat with her legs open. She stared at Paddy's tits whenever she bothered to talk to her. Paddy didn't quite know what the story was with her.

She peered into the dark office and found Farquarson sitting at his desk, looking through cuttings about Brian Wilcox. He was a skinny, agitated man, all angles. He lived on a diet of sugar and tea and whisky. He didn't look up when he heard her at the door.

"JT's in this office somewhere. Get him in here pronto. Best guess is the canteen."

"Right ye are, Boss."

Something big had happened in the Wilcox case or he wouldn't be asking for the chief news reporter.

"And I want clippings about missing kids dying in accidents—railway lines, wells, quarries, that stuff. See what Helen's got." He pointed an accusing finger at her. "Say the clippings are for a freelancer, and don't tell anyone about this."

"Okay."

Paddy walked briskly through the newsroom, out into the stairwell, and up the two flights to the canteen.

Gina and David Wilcox's three-year-old son had been missing for almost four days. In the *Daily News* photo Baby Brian had a shock of white hair and a stiff, coaxed smile on his face. He had been sent out to play in the front garden at twelve o'clock and was alone for fourteen minutes while his mother spoke to the doctor on the phone about a personal matter. When Gina hung up and looked out the front door her child was gone. The child's parents were divorced, a rare occurrence in the west of Scotland. It was mentioned in most of the coverage, as if it wouldn't be hard to misplace a tiny child in the decadent chaos of two separate houses. The story was all over the papers—the child was pretty and it was a welcome break from tales of galloping unemployment, the Yorkshire Ripper, or Lady Diana Spencer's simper.

The self-service canteen on the top floor was bright, the long, wide window overlooking a dirt-floor car park across the road. It was just midday, and the queue for hot food was already fifteen men long. They were printmen in blue overalls with inky fingers, hollering casual conversations at one another, shouting because the presses they worked on all day were so loud. Paddy didn't like going down there because they had pictures of naked women on the walls and the Linotype operators stared at her tits. JT wasn't in the queue. Through habit and affiliation the tidy rows of tables and chairs were segregated into blue-collar print workers' and journalists' areas. JT wasn't sitting in either.

She ran down three flights of stairs. Staff weren't allowed to use the lifts, nor were they usually allowed to enter or leave the building through the black marble reception area, but she was on urgent *News* business. The immaculately groomed Two Alisons who manned the front desk and switchboard stopped talking to watch her scuttle to the front door, pulling her cardigan around herself as she ducked out of the building. Outside, a queue of *Daily News* delivery vans were backed up, rear doors rolled up, showing bare metal floors strewn with sacking and tape. Paddy passed them, hurrying the four steps along the road to the door of the Press Bar.

The pub was lunchtime busy. Men were shouting to one another with an air of forced levity,

anxiously squeezing in as much drinking as they could. Paddy pushed past Terry Hewitt, blushing to think what he had called her, and found JT standing at the far end of the pub, wearing a blue shirt under a brown suede safari jacket. He was nursing a half of bitter. Paddy had watched him: she knew he didn't much like to drink, but he had to sometimes or the drunks on the paper would hate him even more. He was laughing joylessly at one of Dr. Pete's jokes, his eagerness to fit in setting him apart. He looked relieved when Paddy told him he had to come right away, and he put down his drink with indecent haste, not even attempting to finish it or to grab one last precious mouthful. Paddy saw Dr. Pete watching the fresh young drink thoughtlessly abandoned on the table. He narrowed his eyes and shifted his gaze back to JT, his face shriveling with disgust. Oblivious, JT followed Paddy outside.

"What's it about?"

"I don't know." Paddy didn't want to mention the accidental death clippings in case anyone overheard. "Might be the Wilcox boy."

"Right," said JT, lowering his voice. "Don't tell anyone."

He dodged past her, sprinting into the lobby and up the stairs. Paddy chased close behind and got to Farquarson's office just as JT shut the door. Through the slats on the venetian blinds she could see Farquarson explaining something, looking angry and irritated at JT, who was nodding excitedly, tapping the desk with his finger, suggesting a plan. The boy hadn't been found dead; if he had they wouldn't be excited, they'd be moving slower. Something else had happened.

Farquarson spotted Paddy standing outside the door and snapped his fingers at her, telling her to go and get the clippings. She watched for another moment, yearning for a taste of the glory, not knowing that JT and Farquarson were discussing a development in the Baby Brian case that would tear her cozy life apart forever.

FOUR

THE OFFICE FOR THE DEAD

It was four-thirty and the last slice of sun was perched on the horizon, the failing yellow light oozing through the dirty windows on the upper deck. In the back three rows teenage boys kicked at one another while diffident girls smoked and smirked and pretended not to watch.

Paddy sat alone, surreptitiously eating from a plastic tub. The three cold boiled eggs had been sitting in her bag in the hot office all day, and the texture was alternately rubbery and clay dry. All she had to chase away the aftertaste was a sour quartered grapefruit. She'd have the black coffee when they got back from the chapel. The diet had been scientifically worked out in America: three boiled eggs, grapefruit, and black coffee three times a day would build up into a chemical reaction that actually burned off fat at a rate of six pounds a week, guaranteed. She projected forwards to her goal weight. In just one month she could tell Terry Hewitt to go and take a flying fuck to himself. She imagined herself with an unspecified but better haircut, standing in the Press Bar, dressed in that size ten green pencil skirt she had optimistically bought from Chelsea Girl.

"Actually, Terry, I'm not fat anymore."

It wasn't very witty. It had the essence of what she wanted to say but didn't sound very real.

"D'you know, Terry, on balance, I'd say you're fatter than me now."

Better, but still not very good. If the journalists heard her say that, they'd know she cared about her weight and she'd never hear the end of it.

"Terry, you've got a face like two buckets banging together."

That worked. Paddy smirked to herself. She'd wear the green miniskirt, pointy-toed winklepickers and a tight black crewneck pullover. An unforgiving outfit. She'd need to be really slim to wear that. She only ever wore black pencil skirts with woolly tights and sweaters baggy enough to cover her lumps and bumps.

Paddy knew she was fat before Terry Hewitt commented on it—she wouldn't have attempted the disgusting Mayo Clinic Diet otherwise—but it hurt that her weight was the only thing he had noticed about her. The *Scottish Daily News* was a fresh audience, and without seventy-odd relatives preceding her she felt she could be anyone. She didn't want to be the clever fat girl again in this new incarnation.

Finishing the last piece of grapefruit, she put the soft plastic lid back on the tub, dropping it into her bag, and cautioned herself: there'd be a lot of food when they got back from the chapel, mounds of cheese sandwiches, hot salty sausage rolls, rough-cut gammon on soft plain bread spread with chips and hard butter. She'd better avoid physical proximity to them if she was to stick to her diet. Nor should she approach the iced rings or moist coconut snowballs or jammy biscuits or butterfly cakes or the arctic roll. She was salivating wildly as a talon hand clutched her shoulder.

"You're wee Paddy Meehan, eh?" The voice sounded like a man's but for a single strain in the timbre.

Paddy turned around to face a woman with a face like a dried chamois. "Oh, hello, Mrs. Breslin. Are ye going to Granny Annie's laying-in?"

"Aye."

Mrs. Breslin had worked with Paddy's mother in the Rutherglen Cooperative when they were both first out of school. She had seven children of her own, five boys and two girls, all of whom were considered a little bit scary by the other young people of the area. The Breslin kids were rumored to be responsible for the fire that burned down the Salvation Army Hall's shed.

Mrs. Breslin lit a cigarette from the stub of her last one. "God rest her soul, wee Granny Annie."

"Aye," said Paddy. "She was a lovely woman, right enough."

They avoided each other's eye. Granny Annie wasn't lovely, but she was dead and it would be wrong to say otherwise. Mrs. Breslin nodded and said Aye, right enough, so she was, God rest her.

"I hear you're a journalist now?"

"Not a journalist," said Paddy, pleased at the mistake. "I run messages at the *Daily News*. I'm hoping to become a journalist, though, one day."

"Well, lucky you. I've got four out of school now, and not one of them can get work. How did you get that? Did someone put in a word for ye?"

"No, I just phoned up and asked if they were taking on. I'd done articles for the school paper and that. I gave them some things I'd written."

Mrs. Breslin sat forward, her smoke-stinking breath smothering Paddy as effectively as a cushion. "Are they taking on now? Could you put in a word for my Donal?"

Donal carried a knife and had been giving himself tattoos since he was twelve.

"They're not taking on anymore."

Mrs. Breslin narrowed her eyes and turned her head away a fraction. "Fine," she said spitefully. "Help me up. We're there."

Mrs. Breslin was fatter than Paddy remembered. Her shoulders and face were deceptively slim, but her buttocks were fantastically large: the shoulders of her pale green raincoat were halfway down to the elbows to accommodate her shape. Paddy watched down the narrow stairwell as Mrs. Breslin slammed from side to side while the bus took a corner, and wondered if she herself would be that fat after seven children, or as oblivious to the truth of what her kids were like.

The bus stopped in the middle of the street, blocking the traffic. Paddy helped Mrs. Breslin down the steep step to the road, leading her across the still traffic, snaking through the smoking cars.

Every Catholic in the neighborhood was wearing black and converging outside Granny Annie's tiny council house. They climbed out of cars, walked around corners, came down the Main Street. Smoke and icy breath rose like steam from cattle as the frosty black tarmac glittered silver around them.

Fifty yards up the side street Mrs. Breslin saw someone she was more annoyed at than Paddy and went over to spoil their day.

Looking out for Sean's flattop, Paddy waved to cousins across the road and accidentally caught the distant eye of Mrs. McCarthy, an overemotional neighbor who cried with joy whenever she saw Paddy. Mrs. McCarthy had done an unrequested month-long novena before Paddy's interview at the *Daily News* and subsequently felt she had a claim on her, having effectively snagged her the job. Mrs. McCarthy mouthed "Thank God," and Paddy nodded stiffly, grateful for the hand reaching for hers. Sean Ogilvy, tall and dark with ninety-degree shoulders, dipped at the knee and gathered Paddy's hand into his.

"Bloody hell. I met stinky Mrs. Breslin on the bus, and then Mrs. McCarthy saw me. I got caught by bloody Matt the Rat last night and had to have the whole Paddy Meehan conversation again."

"You used to love talking about that Paddy Meehan case."

"Well, I'm bored of it now." She avoided his eye and looked around the crowd, seeing that a lot of her own extended family were there. "I'm sick of knowing everyone and everyone knowing me."

"Why aren't you interested in Paddy Meehan anymore? I thought you were going to try and interview him."

"Ye grow out of things, though, ye know?" she said uncomfortably. "I don't care about that anymore."

"Please yourself." He pulled off one of Paddy's woolly red gloves, tucking it into her duffel coat pocket, and slid his hot hand around her bare skin, making the peace. "I thought you'd be interested to meet him, after knowing so much about the whole story and following it for so long."

"He's just a fat old man now." She tutted and looked away. "He drinks in the town. All the wasters at work know him. I can't be annoyed with it."

"Well, well, well," Sean said, squeezing her hand playfully. "Don't get shirty with me about it."

They smiled at the silly turn of phrase and stood pressing their shoulders together, looking at the crowd but thinking about each other. Paddy's breath felt warmer when Sean was with her. She felt thinner and taller and funny suddenly because he loved her and they were promised to each other.

The undertakers were bringing the coffin out of the house. A respectful hush descended on the mourners. Those having conversations too urgent to abandon lowered their voices. The chief undertaker took his place at the head of the procession and the hearse began its glide down the quiet street, gathering the crowd in its wake. They formed in the natural order of family, then friends, followed by neighbors and pals from chapel, until a hundred and fifty people were behind the car. Sean's mother and brothers were up front, but he held back, squeezing Paddy's hand tight. She saw him blinking hard, and the tip of his nose darkened as he struggled for breath. At eighteen, Sean was as tall as a man and his voice was deep, but sometimes under all the bluster she saw the sweet boy she met at school, before his growth spurt made him six foot one, before working for Shug gave him those shoulders.

The hearse took a right, turning into the Main Street, and the line of mourners braced themselves, standing taller, pulling the small children into the center. The chat got louder, as if they were trying to swell the numbers. It was a tense time for a Catholic procession: Pastor Jack Glass was giving speeches all over the city about the whore of Rome, and the troubles over in Ireland were ferocious. A Republican woman MP had been shot in her home in front of her child, and prisoners in the Maze were starting a second hunger strike to demand political status. A demonstration in support of the men had been organized, and everyone knew there was going to be trouble. Whenever feelings ran high in the six counties, Glasgow teetered on the edge of the violence. As the nearest foreign city to Belfast, just over a hundred miles away across the Irish Sea, Glasgow was the traditional place of exile for Unionists who had lost their position but were too contentious to kill off. They drank in Dennistoun

pubs and held raffles for the cause back home. Rogue Republicans got the better deal and were exiled to America.

The procession made its way down one side of the Main Street, and the cars on the other side slowed to show their respect. A couple of drivers sped up, crossing back and forth between the lanes. One man drove past hanging out of his window, shouting belligerent abuse about the Pope. Protestant pedestrians watched in silence from the pavement, some waving to friends who were walking, some uncomfortable or mocking because they didn't understand the custom.

The hearse stopped in front of St. Columbkil's modern yellow-brick chapel, and Annie's coffin was carried carefully across the low-walled courtyard, up the stairs, and through the huge yellow-timbered doors. They were committing her to the safety of the chapel for the night, to guard against the devil stealing her soul before the funeral mass and burial in the morning. Paddy spotted a crowd of four girls she had been at primary school with, standing on the steps, hands clasped piously in front, eyes cast down respectfully. Her two brothers, Marty and Gerald, were queuing behind them. Behind them again she saw an old neighbor who was in her Granny Meehan's knitting bee.

"For God's sake, this is like a bloody dream sequence," she said quietly. "Everyone I've ever known is here."

Sean nodded. "Yeah, it's nice." He took a breath and pulled himself up tall. "Wherever we go in this life, we'll always belong here." He squeezed her hand. "These are our people."

She knew he was right, that there was no escape. If she traveled a thousand miles and never came back, if she sold their gold, she would still belong to them. Sean tugged her hand gently, leading her up the stairs to the Office for the Dead.

FIVE

SALT FISH AND BLACK TEA

1963

I

It was afternoon and the date was December the fourth, that much Paddy Meehan did know. He couldn't be certain where he was in the world, hadn't been told where they were flying to, but he had seen the date on a German-language newspaper folded under the arm of a man climbing up the embarkation steps in front of them. Rolf had seen him looking at it and shifted to the side, blocking his view but doing it playfully, smiling back at him.

The plane was busy. Forty boys of all ages in red-and-beige uniforms played a call-and-answer game in Russian across the seats. Rolf stopped at a row of three seats, checking the numbers several times against their ticket before stepping back to let them in. Meehan shrugged out of his stiff gray overcoat, hurrying to get the window seat, but the young lieutenant shouldered him out of the way and ducked in, laughing as he took the seat for himself. Even the upholstery was luxurious. Meehan and the lieutenant put their hands on the back of the seat in front, working their fingernails into the thick blue-and-orange pile, giggling at the delicious depth of it. They were all excited to be on an airplane. Rolf smiled at their games as he carefully folded his coat and placed it on the rack above his head. He sat down in the aisle seat, straightening his hair, his jacket, his small moustache.

The deafening engines revved up to a whine and they taxied to the runway, finally taking off, prompting squeals and cheers of the children.

Once they were in the air and the plane had righted itself from an anxious upward angle, Rolf took a hip flask and three red plastic tumblers from his briefcase. The flask was much dented and loved, an oval curve of peeling silver plate with the brass showing underneath. He poured a stiff, stiff vodka into each tumbler and handed them down the line, first to the lieutenant, then to Meehan, and finally one for himself. Meehan handed around cigarettes as his contribution to the party and they all lit up, flicking open the little ashtrays in the arms, letting the sweet smell of a hundred smoky journeys waft

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