



A SAM WYLDE THRILLER

**HOW TO
MAKE A
MONSTER**

RJ BAILEY

HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER

A prequel to Nobody Gets Hurt

R J BAILEY

PART ONE

Venus With Bomb

ONE

It took a long time for me to piece this together. It went way back, long before I faced a man threatening to kill me in an old cherry processing plant in the Basque country. Back to the early 1970s. What's that? Forty-odd years. And a lot of people died in between. I was almost one of them. Look, what happened over those years, what those bastards did to him, it doesn't forgive what he did. But it might explain it.

For a heart-freezing moment she thinks she is a dead woman. Walking along the road, back to her cottage after a pint at Grogan's, she doesn't think much of it when a car's headlamps pick her out against the hedgerow and slows as it passes her.

She steps to one side to let it go and notices the rear window rolling down. That is when she thinks she is about to "have her tea" as they said. But there is no black snout of a gun poking out of aperture. Just a mop of dark hair and a familiar voice as the car pulls over onto the verge.

'Caitlin, where the fuck have youse been?'

'Cal?'

'Aye. Get in.' The door swings open.

Again, the stab of fear. They often send a friendly face, to lull you into a false sense of security.

'Come on, girl. We don't have all night.'

Whatever is about to happen will happen no matter what her response, she decides. She slides in the back of the big old Ford Granada as Cal shuffles across to give her some room. A man she doesn't recognise is behind the wheel and Ronnie Corrigan in the passenger seat. The flutters come for a third time. Granite-faced

Ronnie Corrigan is a scion of the Dark Angels. The IRA's punishment brigade.

He must have caught her expression in the brief flare of yellowy door lamp.

'Don't worry, Caitlin,' Corrigan says, glancing over his shoulder. 'We haven't come for you.'

Cal squeezes Caitlin's thigh in reassurance. 'Something's come up. You can't go home.'

'What? You have a job for me?'

'Not exactly,' says Corrigan. 'A bit of bother. Drive, Mikey.'

'Monkton?' the driver asks.

'Aye. For now.'

Mikey executes a nippy three-point turn and they are soon heading back along the road towards the pub. Caitlin wants to ask questions, but her throat is dry. Her voice will crack, betray her. In Corrigan's world "a bit of bother" means something fucking serious had gone down.

She waits. Puts her hand on top of Cal's. Is reassured by the warmth.

'You know Bobby McGuire,' says Cal. It isn't a question, but she nods anyway.

'He's given you up,' says Corrigan. His voice is hard, full of certainty. 'He's touted you.'

'What?'

'Not by name. Just that the best bomb maker in the IRA is a woman. Code name Venus.' That was, indeed, her code name.

'So what do we do?'

Corrigan swivels to face her fully. 'We've got to get you out.'

'Over the border?'

Cal shakes his head. 'Not far enough.'

'Where then?'

Corrigan answers. 'Spain.'

'The Basques?'

'Aye.'

Cal reaches out and lets her red hair fall through his fingers.

'They'll appreciate you. And what you can do.'

'How long?'

'Till it's safe,' says Corrigan.

She almost laughs at that. Once the Brits have her real name, it'll never be safe.

'I'll keep an eye on things,' says Cal. 'Look after the cottage. Jesus, these past few years..'

He meant since her brother died at the hands of the Brits.

'You're special to all of us, Caitlin,' he says softly. 'We'll look after you.'

They passed the pub and turned onto a better road. Mikey picked up the pace. The Granada's engine let out a low growl. Bungalow's flashed by on the outskirts of the village. She felt like her life was doing the same.

'Your not the first this has happened to, Caitlin,' said Ronnie. 'Won't be the last. As Cal says, you're special. We'll find a way to bring you home soon enough.'

TWO

Santander, Northern Spain, 1974

When she emerges onto the gangplank and smells the distinctive aroma of a city wafting across from the chimneys and out of car exhausts, Caitlin McManus feels like running to the dockside, flinging herself down and kissing the oil-stained concrete. It was a rough old passage over the Bay of Biscay for Brittany Ferries' *Amorique* and, although the seasickness pills had mostly worked, she is keen to get on to terra firma. However, she forces herself to hold back, shuffling down with the crowds, Delsey suitcase in hand, like any other visitor.

It had been a long three weeks since the events at the cottage. Cal had taken her over the border to Dublin, but something had spooked him during their time in the city. Instead of heading for Rosslare, they had doubled back at short notice and she had taken the *Ulster Queen* overnight to Liverpool. Alone. That was the last she had seen of Cal, a quick kiss in her cabin, and a promise she could come back one day. But from the look in his eye, she knew he didn't expect that to be any time soon.

In Liverpool she had been met by Mick O'Malley, who had placed her in a dingy flat on Lark Lane, before training her down to London. There, in Willesden, she was given her new British identity by a be-spectacled, school-teacher type, and tutored in softening the more extreme aspects of her brogue by his wife. Caitlin McManus is now Mary Miller, a primary school teacher, who likes walking holidays and has come to trace part of the Santiago del Compostela pilgrimage route in the Pyrenees. She is dressed mostly from C&A, in a cheap, sensible A-line skirt and white blouse, an M&S camel-coloured three-quarter overcoat and comfortable flatties. In her bags are waterproof trousers, an anorak and clumpy

hiking boots, all purchased second-hand in London. Not a single item of Irish origin is on her or in her luggage.

As she descends to the chorus of seabirds, she can see the Guardia Civil dotted about the quay and suppresses a giggle. Those silly shiny hats are familiar from dozens of films and cartoons about humourless Spanish cops trying to prevent topless sunbathing or the wearing of bikinis in urban public places. But here they are, folded on their heads like patent leather handbags. Mind you, she has to admit, the stubby sub-machine guns slung over their shoulders is no laughing matter.

A brace of the guards have bracketed the bottom of the gangway, and are examining the arrivals with that up-and-down eye movement beloved of border sentinels everywhere. She can see a few knees go wobbly under the piercing gaze, designed to make the most innocent feel as if they are harbouring a guilty secret. Although she is immune to such intimidation – she'd had plenty of practice with the Brits – she allows herself a nervous half-smile, just like a primary school teacher might.

The trail of passengers is ushered into a shed, where they are formed into five slow-moving lines for passport inspection. This involves more rapid-eye movements as photos and faces are compared, as well as much enthusiastic rubber-stamping. When it is her turn she offers her bogus passport and a genuine return ticket, stating she is on a sailing back from Santander in two weeks' time. She would not, of course, turn up to use that, but she was assured this would cause no hue and cry. Spanish bureaucracy simply isn't efficient enough to flag up every no-show, even if Brittany Ferries bothered to inform them, which was unlikely.

The final part of the shed, which smells vaguely of livestock and latrines, is the customs hall, controlled by more conventionally uniformed customs officers, although half-a-dozen Guardia Civil hover in the background while suitcases are opened and given

surprisingly thorough searches. She can see several large bins of confiscated goods, the largest of which holds books and magazines. Most of those being subject to detention, however, appeared to be Spanish nationals. She is waved through with barely a glance.

In the 1930s ticket hall, with its echoing cathedral-like steel-braced dome, elderly porters approach with their barrows, along with a number of young men hissing the word 'taxi'. One or two try to grab her case and she hisses back, alarmed by the alien smell of their bodies and their breath. A Guardia Civil watches impassively as the men form a semi-circle around her. A similar scene was being repeated in throughout the dank space.

'Miss Miller! Mary!'

The voice booms from behind her. The hustlers stand their ground until her saviour steps forward. He says nothing to her tormentors, simply making a flicking motion with his right hand, as if shooing flies away. They take several paces back, reluctant to let their catch go.

'Welcome to Spain.' He relieves her of the case and then beckons the nearest of the porters over, negotiates a price for him to transport the Delsey and they set off, with him threading his arm through hers, the barrow squeaking behind them.

'Sorry I was late,' he says in remarkably decent English. 'The town is locked down tight. Roadblocks everywhere.'

'Why?'

He senses the nervousness in her voice. 'Don't worry, it's nothing to do with you. Just the usual crackdown, a few random arrests after someone blew up a statue of the Generalissimo on the Plaza de Toros. The old bastard is dying.' She assumes he means Franco. 'And he is trying to keep a lid on any premature celebrations. This way.'

They swerve left. She tries to get some distance from him so she can examine him properly, but he keeps his hand on her elbow,

as if frightened she might run. He is tall, over six feet, with big, expansive features and a heavy moustache. His body feels reassuringly solid next to her, encased as it is in an old-fashioned double-breasted pinstriped suit, the kind a movie gangster might wear. It has a slightly comical air. She had been warned that Spain was not at the forefront of contemporary fashion. But then, neither was Ireland. 'I suppose I should have asked you who you are? Or for some identification.'

His large frame shakes as he laughs. 'I'm afraid we don't issue identification. I have a car over here. But if I were with any official organisation, you would be joining the poor souls who are being taken to the Palacio in the round-up.' He crosses himself with his free hand. 'And I know your name. Both of them. Including your real one, Mrs McManus.'

That meant nothing. Someone in London could have touted her. He could even be a British spook, sent to intercept her, although his colouring is most un-English. 'But I don't know yours.'

They emerge from the hall into a sunshine, filtered through thin, wispy clouds, and she suddenly feels warm in her thick woollen coat. He stops suddenly, his face serious, and he gives a formal little bow. 'My apologies. My name is Paskal Alesander Garzia. Welcome to Euskal Herria.'

THREE

Basque Country, 1974

The strain of the weeks since the night she was picked up by Ronnie Corrigan finally break over Caitlin, and she dozes off as they drive from the ferry, sliding down in the seat, her head lolling awkwardly to one side. By the time she wakes they are driving down a narrow road between two rows of verdant hillocks, some topped with ruined towers. Ahead of her she can see the glistening of sun on beautifully blue sea. For a second she thinks she is dreaming, but when she moves her head a spasm quivers up her neck.

'Ow!'

'Are you all right?' Paskal asks, alarmed.

'Jesus.' She levers herself upright in the passenger seat. 'It's just a crick.' But her neck remains crooked.

He reaches over towards her with his right hand, but she instinctively pulls away.

'It's OK, come here.'

His fingers move up and down her neck, fluttering gently, a fleet-footed spider. As he seeks the areas to massage he continues to steer with his free hand, as a series of brightly coloured houses appears and a town sign, defaced so many times it is illegible.

'Where are we?' she asks, wincing as the pressure builds beneath his fingertips.

'Home,' he says.

'You live here?'

'No. I'm saying that we are safe here. Among friends. You must have places like that back in Northern Ireland.'

'Bandit country,' she laughs. 'That's safe.' The thought of life in her little cottage, the detonators and the timers laid out on the table, makes her shiver a little. It suddenly seemed a long time ago, and far away. It was followed by a stab of homesickness.

'How's that feel now?'

Caitlin realises he had stopped stroking and probing her neck. She lays a hand over the back of her head and twists and turns. 'Grand.' She looks up and down, the muscles, joints and tendons gliding freely as she does so. 'No it is, absolutely grand. Thank you.'

He beams at her. 'My pleasure.'

The claustrophobic streets that have closed in around them open out into a small square, with an ornate church at one end. A small market has set up opposite, just five stalls, mostly selling household goods, although there is one exuberant-looking flower stall, full of gaudy wreaths, doing brisk business. Despite the sunshine, for the most part the people are sombrely dressed, the men in dark suits – a few with berets – the women in either black or fussy floral patterns. There are few youngsters in evidence, apart from two little girls playing a hopping and skipping game.

'It is the saint's day tomorrow,' he says as he parks up. 'Flowers and offerings will be thrown to the sea for those lost in the last year. There will be pelota – the back of the church is the wall for the game. There will be strength contests, music and dancing in the evening. Food and wine.'

'Sounds great,' Caitlin says.

'Alas, we can't stay.'

'Oh,' she says, feeling like a child at Christmas who has just discovered the lovely present is meant for another.

'Are you hungry now?'

She turns her attention to the emptiness in her stomach. 'I am that. I could eat a horse between two mattresses.'

Paskal chortles and shakes his head at the image. 'I imagine we can do better than that.'

They walk across the gently sloping cobbles of the square – she can hear the thunk of balls from beyond the church as the pelota team practise – and onto a promenade that opened up a

vista of the Atlantic, empty save for a few ships in the distance. To her right stand the jetties where the village's fishing fleet of a dozen boats is tied up, and a few of the fishermen are at work on essential repairs. To her left is a restaurant, little more than an open front with a grill and tanks of fish. A scattering of scruffy plastic tables that run down to the edge of the concrete.

'Take a seat. We're a little late for lunch, but they'll do something for me.'

She walks down and peers over into the water, coloured by an oil slick and clotted with seaweed. She can smell drains, too.

Behind her there are voices raised in greeting and a babble of that strange unintelligible - and illegal - tongue that Paskal told her about on the journey.

She sits, squinting against the harsh light as she looks out over the harbour to the horizon, feeling more alien than ever. When Paskal returns he has a wide-brimmed straw hat with him, which he offers to her.

'What's that?'

'Madame back there is worried about your skin. She says you are very pale.'

She looks down at her freckled arms and the milk-bottle white beneath and wrinkles her nose. 'She might have a point.'

'She meant it as a compliment.' He proffers the hat.

She places it on her head and glances over to the front of the restaurant. A bulky woman with a stained apron is standing in front of the bubbling fish tanks. Caitlin waves her thanks and the woman nods vigorously.

'How do I look?' Caitlin asks from the corner of her mouth.

'You look....' Paskal pauses and then laughs.

'What?'

'There is no way to answer that without falling into one trap or other. You look fine.'

'Fine is it?' she teases. 'Only fine?'

'You see?' He holds her wrist as she moves to take the hat off. 'You look lovely. There. Now you think I am being, a creep. Is that the right word? How about this: *neska polita*, Caitlin. *Neska polita.*'

'What does that mean?'

He wags a finger. 'You'll have to learn the language.'

'Is it rude?'

'There are no really rude words in *Euskara*. Trust me, it's..'

'Fine.'

'It is. It's fine.'

The woman brings an opened bottle of white wine and two tall tumblers and pours them both a healthy measure without being asked. As she does so she raises the bottle a good three feet up in the air, but never loses a drop.

'They say you can tell where you are in the Basquelands by the height from which they pour the *txakoli*. The further from the big cities, the greater the height. You do drink wine?'

'More a Guinness girl, myself, but..' She holds the glass up, examining the yellow-green hue and the slow rise of the bubbles. 'There are good ships, and there are wood ships, the ships that sail the sea, but the best ships, are friendships, And may they always be. Sláinte.'

He raises his own glass. '*On egin dizuela janak eta kalterik ez edanak.* It means "May the food do you good and the drink do you no harm".'

The table quickly fills up with plates and bowls, and the waitress begins to colonise the one next to them with the overflow. He points to the dishes as they come, served by a young girl who is clearly the owner's daughter. 'I asked for a taster of everything they had, just in case. You do eat fish?'

'On Fridays,' she admits. 'Fish and chips.'

'Well, this here is *marmatiko*, tuna, cooked with potatoes, garlic and red pepper. Actually it's bonito, very similar to tuna, but I don't think you have that.'

They didn't have much tuna of any kind, except in cans, she thinks.

'This is eel, with parsley and garlic. No?' She keeps her face in neutral but he isn't fooled. Paskal gives a smirk. 'I'll have the eels, then. *Txipirones*, stuffed baby squid, hake in green sauce. I wanted you to try the spider crab, but they had sold out. I have a plate of *piments d'Espelette* here, but be careful. Spicy. You like spicy food?'

'The odd curry on a Saturday night. My God, Paskal, how much food did you order?'

'Oh, about the equivalent of a Basque horse between two mattresses. And Basque horses are very big. You'd best get eating. Have some bread. Ah, look, scallops. The local ones are..' He kisses his fingertips theatrically.

'You'll have no room for dessert if you eat all that, Fat Man.'

The newcomer pulls out a chair at the adjoining table and sits down, tearing himself off a hunk of bread. 'And thanks for the lunch invitation.' His English accent, like his manners, is as rough as a bear's arse.

He has lank dark hair, cut longer than seemed the norm in the country, high, almost Slavic cheekbones and a wide mouth that is set in either a sneer or a smirk. The eyes are bright and wild, full of challenge and fire. She has seen that fire before. He reminded her of Corrigan, the Dark Angel enforcer.

He turns and looks her up and down. She feels her skin prickle under the gaze. There is a sentence in *Euskara*, before he adds: 'Although I can understand why.' He stands, taking the last of the loaf, and looms over Paskal who, despite his bulk, now appears diminished. The interloper says something else in the local

language, clearly a demand that they leave soon. He points to the square, where the car is parked, and turns on his heel.

She waits until he is out of earshot before she asks. 'Who was that?'

'Teo Barron. They call him The Serpent. He needs a ride. He's coming with us.' Paskal's voice is full of disappointment.

'What a prick.' Paskal doesn't reply, so she adds. 'And you're not fat. Just big boned.'

He laughs at that and Caitlin feels a warmth spread across her belly. Careful now, girl. You're getting a fancy for him. And whoever heard of a Basque and an Irishwoman getting together? The political activist-cum-terrorist and the bomb maker? What good could possibly come of that?

FOUR

Basque Country, 1974

Caitlin's car journey takes her east, towards the mountains and the border. Now they have Teobaldo "Teo" Barron, The Serpent, on board. He is sprawled across the back seat, smoking. Paskal has asked him to keep the window open, which he has, although Caitlin notices tiny flakes in the air from the blowback of his half-hearted attempts to dispose of the ash outside.

Paskal is wary of Teo, if not downright frightened. She recognises that. She felt the same about Ronnie Corrigan, back home. Teo is cut from the same cloth.

She doesn't have a baldy as to where they are, but they're still running parallel to the coast, and Caitlin can glimpse the darkening sea, the clusters of houses marking a fishing hamlet clinging to a break in the rough cliffs. The hills between them and the sea are dotted with vines planted, as Paskal explains, to face away from the capricious Atlantic weather.

Barron says something in *Euskara*. She thinks she picks out the name of a village or destination.

Paskal turns to her. 'Teo here is too well known to get through the border posts. We'll take some of the old shepherd roads.'

There is another exchange in the impenetrable language. Twice Teo looks at Caitlin as he speaks. She is obviously the subject of discussion.

Caitlin doesn't understand any of it, but Paskal speaks through clenched teeth, angry at Teo. She knows his type of gobshite, this so-called Serpent. Arrogant, cocky, always up for the craic, always ready to eat the head off someone until they snapped, and then affect an air of wounded innocence. 'I was only coddin'

you, f'God's sake.' The other is left looking like a useless can of piss.

It is also clear that Teo Barron has serious form of some description. He is blooded, she can tell. And she is savvy enough not to enquire further.

They are travelling around a long, gentle bend when Paskal speaks again, this time in English. 'I'm turning off just here, into the countryside again. We need to avoid-' The rest of the sentence becomes incomprehensible, but not its tone.

Barron swears.

Ahead is a queue of four cars and a lorry. Two boxy police cars are across the road forming a V, forcing the vehicles to come through single file, alternating one in each direction. An armed Guardia Civil officer is stationed on either side of the roadblock, a little way up the embankment, so they can survey the scene. At the pinch-point, two further men in their stupid triangular hats are checking papers.

Barron and Paskal begin to argue, snapping at each other, the language uglier and more opaque than ever.

A gap has opened up between the Rover and the Beetle in front. The lorry has passed the checks and everyone is creeping forward.

'We are still some way from the usual checks,' says Paskal. 'They don't normally block here.'

'Don't hesitate, close up,' Caitlin says. 'You mustn't look unwilling or scared.'

She has run enough Brit blocks in her time to know the drill.

She looks up as they draw level with one of the cops with the sub-machine guns who is standing some way up the hillside, peering down at them. 'And for Chrissake, don't even think about a U-turn.'

Teo Barron laughs and says something to Paskal.

'What?'

'He thinks it's funny you are giving orders.'

'Just relax,' she says, feeling anything but calm inside.

'That's easy for you to say,' mutters Barron in English, as he opens the car door. 'When it's not your face on the posters.'

'Teo-' Paskal begins.

He lets out a yelp of pain as a heavy revolver drops into his lap.

'I'll take two of them. You shoot the third.'

The cop up the hill is unslinging the submachine gun. 'Teo, get back in, don't be stupid,' Paskal says.

Barron's feet are on the ground now, but he leans back in. He hisses a phrase she has heard before. '*Eusko gudariak gera.*' We are the Basque fighters.

'I'm a Basque lawyer,' Paskal says.

The cop has taken a step closer. 'It's too late now, we're rumbled,' Caitlin says.

Teo looks at Caitlin. 'You do it, then.'

Teo Barron swivels away and fires. Before the cop can bring his machine pistol to bear, he is dead, one of Teo's bullets having punched through the bridge of his nose. He falls, leaving what looks like a swarm of tiny flies where his head had been. Droplets of his blood. Caitlin feels her lunch rising and a bitter taste filled her mouth.

The window behind her shatters and the car rocks under the impact of machine-gun rounds. The glass next to Paskal turns opaque and blows inwards, showering them with nasty razor-sharp shards. She feels her cheek sting, but knows better than to touch it until she has a mirror.

'You know, this isn't my war,' she shouts to Teo, reaching forward and grabbing the revolver. She pulls back the hammer, raises the gun and sights one of the cops crouched behind a car.

She squeezes off two shots. Sparks fly off the car's bonnet. The policeman has disappeared.

Teo loses off three more rounds, ducks down and looks at her, a wild grin on his face. His words are almost muffled by the ringing in her ears.

'It is now.'

FIVE

MANY HURT IN SPANISH AIRPORT BOMB BLASTS

By STAFF REPORTERS/REUTERS

MADRID, August 3, 1974 Three powerful and synchronised explosions tore through the domestic arrivals terminal of Madrid's airport at 12.05pm yesterday, wounding at least 85. Thirty of the wounded were reported to be in serious condition. Police and ambulance services say it was a miracle nobody was killed. Many of the wounded were hit by glass from the roof, which blew into the taxi waiting area. The three bombs had apparently been planted by Basque separatists. A woman claiming to be from the guerilla organisation E.T.A. telephoned a warning to a news agency an hour before the first explosion. The airport was only partially cleared when the initial blast ripped through the terminal. There was a sharp explosion, and then the glass started to fall," said Ramon Parilla, who had been on his way to the baggage area. "I saw a man with his face very bloody. What do these people think they will achieve with their bombs?' About 45 people have been killed in political violence in Spain this year. Terror-

ist violence continues in the Basque region, where two policemen were killed and three paramilitary Civil Guards were wounded yesterday; one of the guards died today. Outside Pamplona, gunmen raced past a police station, spraying it with bullets and wounding three Civil Guards. Last year three policemen died at a roadblock in a gun battle with two men and a woman; the trio escaped when the woman, described as “a young red-head” hi-jacked a car at gunpoint. There are rumours that weapons and knowledge are now being shared between ultra-nationalist groups, including Italy's Brigade Rosso and the IRA in Ireland. It appears that faster official action could have saved the airport victims, claimed a journalist at Euskadi Press, a Basque country news agency. “Once we received the call, we telephoned the police in San Sebastian and they passed the message on to Madrid, which for some reason delayed their response for 30 minutes.”

Police in Madrid deny they were tardy in their reactions to the warning. “It is our duty to ensure such threats are credible before we close down the county's infrastructure,” said a spokesperson. But Paskal Garzia of the newly formed Herri Batasuna, the non-violent political wing of the Basque separatist movement, commented: “If the police

had done their job, there would have been almost no casualties."

PART TWO

ANJEL ON BOARD

SIX

Basque Country, 1983

Caitlin and Paskal Garzia sit at a table and watch their young son throw stones from the edge of the stone pier, out into a benign Atlantic. There is a light sea breeze, crisp and salty. The undercurrent of sewage she recalls from years ago has disappeared. There are new streetlights dotted along the promenade, lovely opaque globes on elaborate art deco stems. The little fishing village is changing.

'Anjel!' Paskal shouts.

'Yes?'

'The crabs!'

The boy nods solemnly and picks up the line, which is baited with a chunk of ham. He gives it a whirl over his head and flings it out to sea, then sits and waits, his little legs kicking the air.

Paskal is bigger now, his bulk running to fat, but he has the frame to carry his new belly. His hair is greying, his eyebrows growing wild like some untrimmed hedgerow. Caitlin, too, is changing, but only in a softening of the jawline, a slight thickening of the waist. She still has good legs, though, she is proud to say, and gravity has been kind to most of her. So far.

'Remember when we first came here?' Paskal asks, nodding at the restaurant, now re-named and spruced up, where they had that first lunch. Since Franco's death, the coast had become much more popular as a tourist destination. The influx has brought money, although it has also diluted the area's feeling of isolation. Still, it means the cafés now have far sturdier tables and more comfortable chairs.

'I do. Seems like a lifetime ago. But then everything before Anjel feels like a lifetime ago. Is this is an anniversary drink?'

Paskal says nothing.

'I just hope you haven't invited Teo, so it'll be just like old times.'

Teo is godfather to their child, but is a somewhat distant figure as befits a man who must keep one step ahead of the law. He is still Muju, The Serpent, still fighting the war that, with increased prosperity in the region, seems less and less vital to her.

Paskal sits back as a basket of deep-fried elvers in breadcrumbs is delivered. Breeding is used to disguise an inferior catch. It is happening more and more frequently. The past few years have seen a lot of over-fishing. He squeezes a spray of lemon over them and pops one in his mouth. The crisp morsels of bread give way to a soft, yielding flesh. He mentally apologises to the chef.

'I feel safe here,' he says. 'Away from men like Teo and their political infighting. It reminds me of what the struggle was for.'

'Was?'

'Is,' he corrects, with a smile.

'You know, Paskal, I think I am ready to go where I feel safe.'

'Where's that?'

'I'd like to take the boy to Ireland for a while. There are family and friends who would like to see him.'

'Who?'

'My folks. Cal Brennan. Ronnie Corrigan.' All had been over to visit at some point. Her leaving Ireland would have broken her mother's heart, had it not been shattered by the murder of her son by the British army.

Paskal helps himself to some more elvers. 'And as your husband-'

'You will be very supportive. As my husband.' My mostly absent husband, she wants to add.

He gives a wry smile. 'Of course.'

'I do love you, you know.'

Paskal stays silent for a few moments; when he speaks, it is in English. 'Do you remember? *Neska polita*? I called you that.'

'*Neska polita*. Beautiful girl. I wondered if I understood what that phrase meant back then, things might have been different.'

'Yes. You'd have thought I was a creep.'

'No, I knew creeps back home. By the bucketload. You weren't a creep. Aren't a creep.' It makes her think of Ireland again. Caitlin indicates Anjel, now re-casting the line. 'He's never seen the place. And I think I've forgotten what the old country looks like, smells like, tastes like. I know, I didn't have to stay, didn't intend to, but I didn't intend to fall in love or for Anjel or to marry you. It all just happened. And, let's face it, much of the work here is done.'

He knows she is referring to the progress made with the Basque Autonomous Community that has given the *Euskara* speakers some degree of self-government and self-esteem and helped blunt some of the nationalist fervour. 'Teo doesn't think so.'

Teo believes the referendum that voted for the BAC is bogus. He is for the Ibbarexte plan, which gave the Basquelands full autonomy from Spain. 'Leave Teo to me,' she says.

Paskal raises his glass of rosé in an ironic toast. 'Good luck with that.'

'Mummy, I've got one.' Anjel trots over with his bucket. His parents peer inside at the crustacean skittering around the bottom, claws snapping in irritation at its captivity. It is smaller than the lad's fist.

'A velvet swimming crab,' says Paskal. 'Bad tempered. Be careful.'

Anjel points up at the bright yellow awning of the restaurant. 'Can I sell it to the chef?'

Paskal laughed. They are an edible species, but not at that size. 'You can try.' They watch their son run through into the

kitchen, an excited smile on his face. Paskal drinks again and a shadow crosses his face.

'What is it?'

'The Zuba has agreed a fresh campaign.' The Zuba is the ETA equivalent of the IRA's Army Council.

'Why?' she asks. 'To what end?'

Paskal looks as if he didn't understand the question. She knew what his answer would be anyway: the Zuba want a fresh referendum, the release of political prisoners and an amnesty for 'crimes' committed, which should be re-classified as 'acts of war'. The usual. 'They have settled on the targets.'

'Paskal-'

'And we need that old Eneca magic,' He grips her hand. 'Teo insists.'

'I told him once, this isn't my war. And even if it was once, when I fell in love with you, it isn't now.'

He winces as if she has slapped him. 'You mean you have fallen out of love?'

'I have fallen out of love with all the killing. Eneca no longer exists.' It had been her nickname when she made them the bombs, in the days before Anjel. Eneca. The fiery one. A play on her red hair and the flames of her bombs.

'But Anjel does. Our son. He changed everything. Did I want to be making bombs with the boy running around my feet? I did not. But you know this. You are meant to be the man of peace.'

'I am the face of peace. A façade for the media. In reality, I do what the Zuba tell me.'

'Meaning?'

His voice is low, with almost a tremor in it, as if the thought of what he is to say frightens him. 'That I think they won't take no for an answer. That Eneca might have to be resurrected. One last time.'

Caitlin bristles. She speaks in English, her Irish accent as strong as it ever was. 'And if she can't be? What if she is dead and buried and never coming back?'

He looks pained.

'When does a man like Teo ever take no for an answer?'

Caitlin can sense the trip to Ireland slipping away. And she can taste blood in her mouth. She realises she has chewed a hole in the lining of her cheek. 'When someone stands up to him.'

Paskal looks down at the table and pokes at a lemon exhausted of its juice.

'But that's not you, is it?' She can't keep the contempt from her voice. 'So we are to go backwards?'

'No. We go back so we can move forward.'

A hollow laugh escapes from her. 'No wonder they need you Paskal, when you can think up shite like that. George Orwell has nothing on you.'

'I am being pragmatic. We have no choice, not really.'

We always have choices, she almost says. But she isn't ready to share her options, not yet. 'Who are the targets this time? Politicians? Policemen?'

'Not who. Where. It is time to hit Madrid where it hurts. In the pocket. Which means tourism. We start with Palma, Mallorca.'

'Tell me more.' She grips his hand, her mind made up. 'Tell me everything.'

*

At ten minutes to midday there is only one person in the café with death on their mind: the young woman dressed in a simple black linen shift dress. Her face is pretty but drawn, the skin pallid, scrubbed and devoid of make-up. She is sitting at the front of the

terrace, close to where the bow-tied waiter stands, surveying his fiefdom of tables in the shadow of Palma's over-bearing cathedral.

She is just entering her mid-twenties, but already widowed, and is now sipping coffee and eating *churros* the way she and her husband had most Saturday mornings at this very spot. On several occasions during the fifty minutes she has been sitting there, she feels as if he has merely slipped inside to the lavatory and will be back at any moment; but mostly she feels like an amputee, a victim of phantom-limb syndrome, wanting to stroke and itch an appendage that is no longer there.

It has been six weeks since the accident on a road outside Magaluf, when he had swerved to avoid a group of young, exuberant Germans riding their hired mopeds three-abreast. Five weeks since the funeral. Three days since her mother has gone back to the mainland to look after her father. Two hours since she had stopped crying.

A young man brushes by her table and works his way into the centre of the terrace, where he puts down his purchases from El Corte Inglés and orders a hot chocolate. He is dressed in light-coloured chinos, deck shoes with no socks, and a grey t-shirt. His hair, thick, dark and luxuriant, almost reaches down to his shoulders.

There are now twenty-one people on the terrace, including six female students, two housewives, four middle-aged Dutch tourists, about to start a cycling holiday, a group of hung-over Liverpudlians in town for a stag weekend, a lone teenager, looking around anxiously to see where her friends have got to and wondering whether this apparent shunning has anything to do with her new boyfriend, and three local businessmen discussing plans for expansion of their shops and the difficulty of obtaining loans in the current financial crisis. A member of a local crime syndicate sits with them, listening carefully, working out what percentage of

interest they could tolerate, and how easy it will be to use these men to launder some of the *coca* money his group has squirrelled away around the city, waiting for a legitimate home to wash it clean.

Plus, lost in her thoughts and still-fresh memories, the grieving widow.

The number swells further when another young man, in a Led Zeppelin t-shirt and Lois jeans wanders over and asks the waiter for a beer. He then selects a seat, making sure he is in the sun, and turns an already bronzed face towards the sky. Several of the female students look over and appraise him, noting the way he sprawls confidently on the metal chair, legs apart, and how the t-shirt sleeves are rolled up to display his gym-worked biceps. *Narcissio*, they conclude, and return to their conversations.

Ten minutes pass. One of the businessmen leaves to make a surprise audit on one of his pearl and jewellery shops; he suspects the manager is stealing from him. More coffees, hot chocolates and beers are ordered, keeping the waiter busy but not overworked. It is still spring, before the real invasion of foreigners and the twelve- and fourteen-hour shifts six days a week in scorching temperatures that will see the waiter curse the vest, shirt, bow tie and waistcoat the owner obliges him to wear.

The waiter watches another woman arrive, examining her flowing, hippie-ish floral dress, made diaphanous by the sun, and the wide-brimmed straw hat she wears. A few strands of reddish hair tendril down from beneath it. He can tell from the paleness of her face and its dusting of faint freckles that she rarely courts direct sunlight. The woman isn't young – in her thirties, maybe even older – but she is by far the most striking female on that terrace. She smiles warmly at him and sits down with Mr Muscles, the *narcissio*. The lad barely shifts in his seat and remains slumped. The waiter feels momentarily disappointed by her taste in men. He is about to

cross to take her order but the Liverpoolians begin arguing and he moves over to distract them by suggesting they replenish their beverages. Instead, they decide to move on from black coffee and tea to the first Cruzcampos of the day.

There are now, in total, four people with death on their mind.

By the time the waiter emerges with the beers, the scene has altered. Mr Muscles with his Led Zep t-shirt has gone. So has the young man with the thick black hair. In his place is the creamy-skinned woman in the floaty dress, bending down to pick up the El Corte Inglés bag that the young man has clearly forgotten. A good deed.

A magnesium-bright star flares from the spot where she is crouched, and with it, even before the sound reaches him, comes a shock wave that drives the waiter back through the café's window. The blast has fatally damaged his internal organs anyway, but a triangular shard of glass opens up a vein in his neck and the compressed air sprays the bar's interior with droplets of blood. One of the tiny spheres punches its way into the eye of the barman inside, who is also hurtled backwards, landing spread-eagled in the centre of the shelves of bottles.

The blast wave, filled with particles travelling at supersonic speed, kills the Liverpoolians instantly. The blast wind follows, negative pressure that crashes heads together and fuses skull to skull as well as tearing off two arms, depositing them hundred of metres away. This hyper-compressed air, as solid as a moving brick wall, slams into the Dutch tourists, leaving little external damage but emulsifying their insides into a pink sludge.

The lone teenage girl is picked up and flung across the street towards the other bar, her clothes burnt off her back, her bones snapped, her broken body flailing as if she had been filleted.

Outside the central blast zone, eardrums burst as the air pressure stretches them beyond breaking point and lungs fill with

blood. When the first phase of the detonation has passed, twenty-six people in all lay dead, with many more injured in some way. Gobbets of flesh begin to rain down onto the immediate area, making a wet plopping noise that the shocked and dazed onlookers – at least those whose hearing is still functioning – will never forget. Shoes, handbags, pagers, glass, crockery, coins, twisted sections of furniture that had been swept up in the blast also fall to earth, often striking the living and causing a second wave of injuries.

The motion systems inside the alarms of nearby cars shake violently as the concussion of over-pressurised air reaches them, triggering an uncoordinated display of flashing sidelights and adding a Greek chorus of honks, whines and whoops to the scene. Soon that racket will be joined by the more authoritative sirens of police, ambulance and fire.

A rope of black smoke rises from the shattered café, blessedly, albeit temporarily, obscuring the most sickening scenes of carnage. From the gritty miasma of debris at ground level one woman emerges, half-staggering, her dress ruined, her hair standing up as if she has received an electric shock, her skin blackened, a trickle of blood snaking from her nose, but otherwise unharmed. The young widow will never understand why, in the midst of such horror and sorrow, she, already dead inside, has been spared.

PART THREE

FLIGHT OF ANJEL

SEVEN

Basque Country, 1998

It isn't a visit Anjel Garzia wants to make. He is a young man now, living in Vitoria-Gasteiz, and has little to do with any kind of politics, let alone ETA's, not now his parents Caitlin and Paskal are long dead. But he does pay homage to his inheritance. He owns the only Irish bar in the city: Guinness, Jamieson, Harp lager, Tayto crisps, hurling on TV. Twice a year he travels to Ireland, to see what is happening in the catering business there and re-connect with the spirit of his mother. The woman they had once called Eneca. To re-connect with her country, that is, not her deeds. They sicken him.

He pulls into the courtyard and his uncle is waiting for him. The Serpent isn't as imposing as he once was – his features have sagged, and he walks with crook-backed stoop - but Teo Barron is still a man to be reckoned with.

They take coffee outside under a pergola, where two heavy wooden trestle tables have been laid out on the gravel. It is a balmy morning, with the temperature in the late teens, and the house is bathed in bright sunshine.

Paulin, Teo's aide-de-camp, emerges with a tray holding a coffee pot, two cups and some almond biscuits. He has a genuinely warm smile on his face.

'Anjel. It's been a long time.'

'Hello, Paulin. Too long. I am sorry. When you own a bar, you are tied to it. The moment you leave some bastard starts robbing you or watering the whiskey.' He points at the biscuits. 'Those homemade?'

'My wife's. Try one.'

He does. It crumbles in his mouth and he has to catch the crumbs in a cupped hand. 'You must get me the recipe.'

Barron laughs but Garzia remains impassive. He is serious. 'Really, very good.'

'I'll tell her. You might have known her from the summer camps. Nerea?

He probes his memory of those days. 'No, sorry.'

'Been a long time, Anjel,' he repeats.

'I know. Another world.'

'For you. Some of us stayed.' Paulin winks. There is no bitterness in his words. 'I'll leave you two to talk. Maybe we can catch up later?'

'I'd like that.' He would, too. Paulin's reasonableness is not a mask; even as a boy he had treated the whole business of killing, bombing and kidnapping as if it were a regrettable evil, forced on him by circumstances. An affable fanatic, if such a thing is possible.

Paulin carefully decants everything off the tray onto the table, sets up the cups and retreats back inside.

'Paulin and I had Zuba business over the border last night. It ran late.'

'I thought you had retired, uncle.'

'*Quemados?*'

It means burnt out; it refers to those who had tired of the struggle or their imprisonment. There is no shame in it. 'No. Just gone back to your cherry trees.'

Barron begins to stroke his forehead, with thumb and forefinger, as if to demonstrate the burden he is under. 'If only they would let me.'

Pure melodrama, Garzia thinks. 'What am I doing here, Teo?'

The old man purses his shrivelled lips. 'You are *Eneca's* son. You are always welcome.'

'But you asked me to come.'

'Everyone who knew your mother, they loved her. She is still revered.'

'But..'

'The Zuba would like you to step up and grasp your heritage.'

'My heritage? My heritage is a mother who blew herself up while killing innocent tourists and a father who was driven crazy with grief and was shot by the police in a gunfight a week later.'

Barron sips his coffee. 'That much is true. But now there is a new Zuba.' There is a lengthy pause. 'Now there is an opportunity.'

'Tell me, uncle, is this an opportunity for me or for you?'

It was a risky business talking to the old warrior like this. But after his father had died, Teo Barron did become a kind of uncle. There were the mountain hikes, organised camping trips, long talks about the Basques, basketball, and games of pelota. Lots of games of pelota. And then rifle practice. And explosives training. It was after the latter that Anjel had broken free of his "heritage".

'You broke my heart when you ran away.'

'I didn't run away. I left. And the only reason I am still alive is that to kill me would kill the legend of my mother, the fiery angel, and the tall tales of the gunfight on the road to Hermani, with my father cowering in the car while you two gunned down eight policeman. Or was it ten?'

'At least,' Barron smiles. 'A whole squad.' He raises his left arm, straightening and stretching it. 'Never leaves, does it? A bullet wound. Your body never lets you forget. Of course, I have picked up a couple of others since that day.' His other hand lashes out and he grabs Garzia's wrist and squeezes. 'Your mother saved my life on that road, you little turncoat shit.' Garzia yelps with pain as the fingers dig in, but he is pulled closer to the twisted face. 'And in honour of that, I let you live when you went to the city and spoke against us. When really, you should have been found with your throat cut and thirty pieces of silver pushed into the wound.'

'I love the old traditions.' As Anjel says this, Barron shoves him away. Anjel massages his throbbing wrist.

'But times change, Anjel.' A calmness comes over Barron, as if a switch had been thrown. 'There is a chance for a man to step forward and stop this for good. Not with a half-hearted ceasefire that satisfies nobody. To end the war. To be our Gerry Adams. Just now, just while the Zuba is weakened and the other organisations are busy jostling for position.'

It was as if the assault had never happened. The pains shooting up to his elbow told him otherwise. Teo was like a snake with no conscience. Strike and forget about it. 'There have been such chances before. My father saw one once.'

'Not like this. Maybe we weren't ready then. Perhaps I wasn't ready.'

The enormity of what he is suggesting finally came home with the force of a slap. 'You? You see yourself as ETA's Gerry Adams?'

'And why not? Someone has to make the next move – destroy the weapons caches, disable those still committed to violence. Those women,' – he spat the word – 'cannot be relied upon to grasp the nettle.'

His words confirm that the influx of female freedom-fighters into the Zuba was not universally popular. It is all he can do not to laugh at the thought of Uncle Teo, aka Muju, The Serpent, as a peacemaker. 'Adams was never actually caught with blood on his hands. Yours are dripping.'

'Proudly dripping,' he corrects.

Garzia drains his coffee. He wonders if the old man is going insane. Or demented. Or, perhaps, like many facing their final stretch, he was thinking about his legacy. He had a choice. To go out in a blaze of violence, like Garzia's mother had, securing her place in ETA history, or to do something really radical. Such as bring a real peace, rather than a worthless ceasefire.

But is Teo the Serpent the right man to do this? He doubts it.

'And what about Miguel Blanco?' The Basque Councillor had been kidnapped and then murdered when Madrid refused to relocate all Basque prisoners closer to their homeland. 'How is that going to help with peace?'

A firm shake of the head, brooking no argument. 'No. It wasn't us. Not official.'

'Then who?'

'I know who. But for there to be any chance of peace, a truth and reconciliation, the violence has to end completely.'

Anjel can't believe his ears. This was like Himmler suggesting the Jews weren't so bad after all. 'Are you serious?'

'Of course.' He takes one of the biscuits and bites into it. He looks pensive. 'You know, I never forced your mother to do what she did. I asked her to help us. As a favour. Which she did. Help us, that is.'

'She helped you make bombs. She helped you to kill innocent people.'

He takes that with a studied equanimity and a slight shake of the head. A pitying shake, Garzia decides. 'That is the simplistic view, yes. Ah. Here we are.' Barron rises stiffly to his feet, grimacing as his back twinges.

Garzia turns. Three men have rounded the corner and are crunching over the gravel. Bernardo, Ochoa and a fresh-faced man he doesn't recognise. Garzia stiffens. Bernardo and Ochoa are men of violence. Like Teo, they were no longer young, but their dark visages seem to bear witness to the years of killing.

'Relax,' hisses Barron. 'What did you say? Truth and reconciliation.'

The old man strides over and holds out his hand to the stranger, who takes it and allows Barron to slide an arm round his shoulder. 'This is Jorge. He is family now, just like you once were,

Anjel. I have even invited him to the next *txarriboda*.' To join in a family *txarriboda* when a fattened pig was ritually killed and every single part of the pig was used, down to the blood, was something of an honour. 'You remember that, Anjel?'

Garzia indicates he does.

'So you remember how it starts?'

He doesn't need reminding. It isn't for the squeamish.

'It starts with a pig squealing.'

A short stubby blade has appeared in Teo's hand and he draws it hard across Jorge's throat. An arc of blood, livid in the sunlight, squirts from the gaping wound. A terrible noise comes from the young man's mouth.

Now Bernardo and Ochoa have hold of Jorge, each gripping an arm and they force him face down onto the empty trestle. He is struggling and kicking and the roaring grows more desperate.

'Of course, normally we catch the blood in a bucket. But not here.'

Anjel is on his feet, shouting, but it only makes the cacophony worse. Bernardo, his face dotted with crimson, smiles at him. Barron steps in closer and works the knife into the wound, twisting this way and that.

Anjel Garzia closes his eyes. Sparks erupts behind the lids.

'You have been stupid beyond belief,' Barron yelled at the dying man. 'The death of the councillor brought the people on the streets against us. Because you killed him. Now I have to make peace with them. They had no argument with us..'

There is a pause in the tirade, replaced by Barron's laboured breathing. And another, more awful, sucking sound.

A minute passes. Almost against his will, Garzia's eyelids rise.

Barron is standing back from the table, admiring his handiwork, his clothes covered in gore. Bernardo and Ochoa let Jorge's arms go free and they drop with the heaviness of death.

Garzia fights back tears, unable to believe the horror he has seen and heard.

Barron throws the knife down. Blood is still slopping off the table. 'Take pictures,' he says to Bernardo. 'To send to the others in his unit. To show that we will not tolerate any more killing.'

Losing his mind? The man is totally insane, thinks Anjel.

Teo is snorting like a wounded bull and when he turns to Anjel, his eyes are ablaze and his words reek of his madness. 'You see, Anjel, for true peace to have a chance, the violence has to end.'

EIGHT

England, 1998

I am not like them.

The phrase is on a constant loop in his skull. *Not like them.*

Not a murderer like “Uncle” Teo, not like Eneca or Paskal. Not like his other “Uncle”, Ronnie Corrigan.

Anjel Garzia bent down and scoops up another pebble, which he sends spinning through the air to land in the wavelets that are climbing up the beach towards the log he was sitting on.

He is on the eastern coast of England. He hadn't intended to be. He should have been in Ireland, on the border between the North and the South. Uncle Ronnie's 80th. An invite had come over. No, not an invite, a summons.

After his parents died, his years had been split between time in San Sebastian, living with the Albarozes, his father's uncle and aunt, both now dead, and summers in Ireland, where he lodged with Harry and Anne McManus, his grandparents. But Uncle Ronnie had been a frequent visitor and he knew whenever the Ford Granada pulled up in the driveway, he was about to have a day out.

When he ran away from the ETA training camp, Teo Barron had come to the Albarozes, had sat him down and told him about his bloodline. An apposite choice of words. He spelled out what his mother had been doing in Majorca that day and the legend of Eneca. Of how his father had died in a blaze of police bullets. Surely their son wouldn't turn into an *Espanolista*, a Spain lover?

No. But neither do I want to carry on my mother's work.

Teo had told him that perhaps he had no choice. Perhaps it was in his blood. He also told him the truth about Uncle Ronnie back in Ireland, the man who plied him with ice creams and took him into the city for a movie and hamburgers. Ronnie Corrigan. A Dark Angel. Another man with a long history of violence.

I am not like them.

He could understand his mother's grief, how losing her brother to a Para bullet on Bloody Sunday had devastated her. But Caitlin's response, how was that in any way measured? To become a bomb maker, a bringer of indiscriminate death? She must have been unhinged by the sorrow. Surely there would come a point when revenge was complete, that an eye for an eye had been satisfied. Yet there she was till the day she died, snatching innocent lives in a square in Palma, for a cause that wasn't really hers.

In the end the Albarozes had sent Teo away, saying the lad would make up his own mind when he was ready. From that day on Anjel had distanced himself from Teo, although the man still sent gifts, money for birthdays, Christmas, October 25th, the anniversary of the first Basque parliament set up in Guernika in 1935 (such things were taught at the training camps and were difficult to un-learn).

"Uncle" Teo had turned up at the bar shortly after it opened to wish him well, to say there were no hard feelings, and that was the last time he had seen him until...

The images of that throat-cutting still bubbled just below the surface, reading to spring into view at the slightest provocation. *You see, Anjel, for true peace to have a chance, the violence has to end.*

After Teo's butchery of the young man, Anjel had gone back to Vitoria and handed over the bar to Mateo, his partner, for an indefinite period. *Where was he off to?* He didn't know. *Oh, this came for you.*

The summons. From Ireland. From the Corrigans.

Was there no escape from monsters? Apparently not. And so he had booked a plane ticket, via London. On the way over from Spain, he had read in the in-flight magazine about a composer – Benjamin Britten – and the town on the east coast that celebrated him. He has never heard a note, as far as he knew, of Benjamin

Britten. The bar plays Thin Lizzy, The Corrs, U2, Van Morrison – anything with an Irish connection, apart from rebel songs that glorify the struggle. But something about the shingle beach and the grey North Sea in the photographs matched his mood. It didn't look like the candy floss and rides on the pier image of the English seaside he had in his mind. It looked more sombre and serious.

He decided during the flight, on simple, irrational, liberating impulse, to go Aldeburgh.

He had left the airport at Gatwick, and made his way, by train and taxi, to Aldeburgh. He will lay low until the 80th passed, in two days' time. They would be angry with him for disrespecting Uncle Ronnie, but the truth was he had been trying to avoid contact with the man all his adult life. Ever since Teo Barron's revelations. But there is a pull of family, a pull that cannot be denied. Anne McManus is still alive, his maternal grandmother, and he has always liked her. It was she, when he was 21, who gave him the money to open the bar. A legacy from his mother, she had said. 'Do something Irish,' she had said, 'That doesn't involve pain.' And so he opened the Glad Tidings bar. An Irish bar in Basque country that had nothing to do with The Troubles.

I'm not like them.

He tosses another stone. He'll have to move back soon, the foam of the sea is hissing closer and closer. So far he has done little other than walk the shoreline, head down. He has eaten fish and chips from the High Street. Had a drink in the Mill Inn. Has talked to a pretty young barmaid – Irish as it happened – called Andrea. From Cork. A city he has never seen. But would like to. He will probably wonder over to the Mill again this evening. She has a rare light in her eyes, that one, and a cheeky smile. She might be an antidote to his melancholia, if only from afar.

The water finally rolls over one of his shoes. He stands and crunches up the beach. He is aware of the man watching him. He is

dressed in a corduroy jacket and mustard-coloured trousers, with a red jumper over a shirt and tweedy tie. He keeps his eyes on Anjel as he approaches the path. How long has he been there, staring with such intensity?

He has a dirty-blond floppy fringe which the wind keeps blowing into his eyes and he keeps tugging back. There is no sign of grey in the thatch of hair, but he judges the man to be around fifty. He has a ruddy face and prominent, nobbly cheekbones. It is hard to tell whether the redness is from a love of the outdoors or drink. Possibly both.

'Mr Garzia?' he asks when Anjel is a few metres away.

Anjel stops, taken aback.

'Yes?'

His voice is cultured, posh, dripping with privilege. 'My name is Jonathan Carstairs. I wondered if I might have a word.'

'About?'

'About your mother, actually.'

'My mother?'

'About what actually happened in Palma that day. About how your mother really died. If you'll allow me, I'm going to tell you a story.'

NINE

Palma Mallorca, 1983

Caitlin McManus Garzia spots the loping form of the man known as Ochoa from across the street. Palma is small enough that she had been confident of finding him. He is dressed in a grey sweatshirt, chinos, and deck shoes with no socks. He is carrying bags from El Cortes Ingles. She scans the immediate area and spots his shadow, Bernardo. Led Zeppelin t-shirt, Lois jeans and a swagger she had warned him about. 'People will remember you,' she had advised him, back when she thought such things mattered. The boy had grinned. 'I want them to remember me.' To which she replied: 'Yes, but not in a police line-up.'

 Bernardo and Ochoa. The *comando* active service unit. The bombers.

 They are drifting south, and she slots in behind at a safe distance. There was no point in hiding from them. If they saw her, they saw her. Eneca is too distinctive and she hasn't had the time – or inclination – to dye her distinctive hair just to fool Ochoa and Bernardo. It is stuffed under a hat as a compromise, although wisps keep escaping.

 Ochoa hesitates as he passed a café close to the cathedral, swerves and sits down. What makes this one so special, Caitlin wondered? What has caught his eye? The sad looking woman at the side? The bored waiter hovering by the door, eyes sweeping over his customers, alert to the need for a refill? The young, anxious teenage girl, looking about for her friends or perhaps boyfriend? Or maybe it is the gaggle of Dutch or the hung-over English or the pretty students or the sombre-dressed businessmen that attracts him. Or possibly it is that this group as an entity represents a cross-section of Palma's café society.

Whatever the reason, Ochoa has selected these people for death.

Caitlin checks her watch. Five minutes before noon. Soon, then, she thought.

Where is Bernardo? She has lost sight of him. No, there he is, talking to the waiter, making an order. Bernardo moves to a table, some distance from Ochoa, and flexes his muscles as he sits down, stretching like a panther, aware that the girls would be checking him out.

Narcissio, she thinks.

The waiter watches as she strides among the tables, one hand on her head to keep her hat in place as a gust of wind snakes between the tables, fluttering her dress. She smiles warmly at the waiter and sits herself down opposite Bernardo. The arrogant young man barely shifts in his seat and remains slumped, his face turned to the sun.

The waiter is heading for her when the English began to sing. He swerves towards them, hoping to quieten them down by giving them more coffee.

'Cerveza!' one of them demands in an atrocious accent.

'Mucho cerveza!' another adds and they all whoop in delight at his linguistic skill.

As he goes to fetch their drinks, the put-upon waiter raises his eyebrows to Caitlin, simultaneously signalling his disdain for the foreigners and that he would be with her soon. She raises a placating hand to show him there is no hurry.

'Bernardo,' she says. 'Look at me.'

'I didn't think you were coming on this one,' he says, turning his head slowly, the eyes still closed.

'Change of plan.'

One eye opens. 'What kind of change?'

She is aware of Ochoa, his piston-like knee pumping with nerves, glancing in their direction. Calm down boy, she thinks. Too jittery. Any pro in the vicinity will tag them as an active service unit. She has to move quickly.

'It's an abort.'

The other eye flicks open and he sits up. 'What?'

'Abandon the plan. There has been developments.'

'What kind of developments?' Bernardo does not sound convinced.

'A ceasefire is on the way.'

'Who said this?'

'The Zuba.' He wasn't going to argue with ETA's high command.

He indicates Ochoa. 'It's all set.'

'How long?'

'Fifteen minutes.'

'It's one of mine?'

'Of course.' He grins. 'Yours are always the best. Always on time. Never late or early.'

'Then I can defuse it.'

He shakes his head. 'I don't know. We have our orders-'

'The Zuba insists.'

Bernardo seems agitated.

'I insist. If you proceed I will be obliged to make a call and clear the café.' She points to the public phone booths nearby. 'One minute is all it will take.'

'You're the boss.'

'Yes I am.'

Bernardo swivels in his seat and draws a finger across his throat followed by an inclination of his head, indicating Ochoa should follow him. He threw some coins on the table as he stood.

'This better be right, Caitlin Garzia.'

Oh, it's right. It's very right. 'Of course it is.'

'We'll see you back in Euskal Herria, Eneca?'

'Yes.' It was a lie. It was all decided. She, Paskal and Anjel are heading straight for Ireland from Palma. The boy is at a nearby hotel with a nanny. Paskal is on his way over. That night they would board a charter flight for Dublin. This life, this war, is over for them.

The two young men walk briskly away, Bernardo glancing over his shoulder as Caitlin moves across to the table vacated by Ochoa. He spits between clenched teeth, an impossibly thin stream of saliva pinging off the pavement. 'They said she'd say that.'

'Even so..' The boy was nervous. This was Eneca, after all.

'She's betrayed us. Ceasefire my left bollock.'

At a safe distance, they turn and look back at the café. The scene is much as they had left it. The waiter has emerged from the gloom of the bar into the bright light of day with a tray of drinks for the English. He stands, blinking for a second, while his eyes adjust.

Caitlin is still rooting in the bags, looking to make the bomb harmless. They see her stiffen slightly. This is the moment she has realised it wasn't one of hers after all, thinks Bernardo.

Life, so slippery, so ephemeral, he says to himself.

Ochoa has the radio remote in his hand, which is shaking slightly. He looks behind him. There, at another café, smoking, is the scary Irishman. Ronnie Corrigan, the Dark Angel, here to approve the punitive action. He ruffles the hair of his toddler son, then nods to the young man. Permission is given.

'Just do it,' hisses Bernardo.

Ochoa mutters to himself. '*Eusko gudariak gera.*'

He shuts his eyes and presses the button. A magnesium-bright light penetrates his closed eyelids, turning the world a painful, searing white.

*

'And that,' says the Englishman to Anjel, 'Is the truth about the day your mother became an ETA legend'.

They are eating fish and chips from the paper, their voices almost drowned out by the screech of circling gulls. Anjel suspects the Englishman likes it that way.

He lets what he has been told sink in. The truth of it chills his inside like iced water. But the reason for the telling of the tale eludes him. 'What's your point?'

'That when TA decided to kill your mother for her attempts to undermine the bombing campaign, they needed permission of the IRA Army Council. A man called Ronnie Corrigan gave it.'

Anjel nodded. Uncle Ronnie. His stomach churned at the thought, but he kept his face impassive.

'He even took his little lad Ronnie along to witness what political action looked like. Almost like he knew his boy would follow him down the path of violence.'

Path of violence? It sounds so pompous coming from this arch-manipulator of men. But Anjel lets it pass.

Carstairs screws up the remainder of fish and chip and dumps them in the bin. A cheeky gull lands on the rim and begins pecking at the paper. 'Your father suspected what had happened. He began shooting his mouth off. He had to be.. dealt with. Poor orphan Anjel, said the people who had made him such.'

'What exactly has this got to do with me? That was all years ago.'

'Nothing. And everything. You are Eneca's son. Both ETA and the IRA would be glad to have you on board. But there is an alternative. You could help finish what your mother started, or tried to start, that day in Palma.'

Anjel laughed. 'By spying on them?'

Carstairs gave a slight tilt of the head, as if he was looking at the subject from a slightly different angle. 'By working for peace.'

'How exactly?'

'For a start, I want you to go to that party you have been invited to.'

'Ronnie Corrigan's?'

'Uncle Ronnie's, yes. The man who allowed ETA to murder your mother.'

PART FOUR

THE TOUT

TEN

Ireland, 1998

The little town's social club has been given a lick of paint. It is more crowded than it has been for a while. Old hatchets have been buried alongside caches of weapons. Even the family of Danny Leary, a famous tout whose body has never been found, are there, although as skittish as jackrabbits, albeit jackrabbits with pints of Guinness superglued to their hands. A showband in gold jackets is setting up on the stage. Meanwhile, My Old Rebel Heart is playing over the speakers. A long trestle table has been set up for food at the opposite end from the stage. Above it, in pride of place, is a large photo of a young Ronnie Corrigan in paramilitary uniform and beret, a Browning pistol held across his chest. Around the picture, circling like static satellites, are images of other IRA heroes – Charles Corrigan, Andy Cooney, Pete Ryan, right up to the Loughgall Martyrs, the blood barely dry on that one. But, Jesus, thinks Anjel, who thought it was a good idea to have a picture of Bobby Sands above the buffet?

As he moves through the crowd towards the banner that proclaims "Happy 70th Ronnie", a few in the mob recognise him. Chins or glasses are raised in greeting. The first to speak to him is Cal Brennan, who throws an arm round his shoulders.

'Anjel. Ronnie'll be happy you made it.'

'How are you, Cal?'

'Old.'

He is, too. The handsome devil who had romanced his mother is now a careworn fifty-odd, his thick hair reduced to a few strands across a bald pate and he has a prominent, shirt-popping paunch. But his features remain firm enough to echo those of his youth, when he was a carousing young IRA man with the flattest of

stomachs.

'But look at the puss on you. God, but you look like her,' Cal says, as if taken aback by his resemblance to his mother. 'I might have to fuck you later for old times' sake.'

Anjel manages a smile. 'You do and I find out, there'll be hell to pay.'

Cal roars at that. 'Come on, I'll take you to him. You'll be wanting a drink?'

'That'd be grand.'

'A proper drink, mind. None of that Spanish muck.'

'Cop on, Cal. You think I'd be ordering fizzy white wine in here? The boys'd give me a good baytin'.'

Play up the Irish in you, the posh Englishman had said. Make them think you are one of them. It's in your blood, after all.

'You know Ron?' Cal asks, pointing to a younger man. 'Ronnie Corrigan Junior?'

'No. I don't think so,' Anjel says, although he has been briefed about the man.

'He's one of Old Ronnie's sons. But don't call him that. Old Ronnie, I mean. Here.'

Cal does the introductions and they shake hands. Young Ron's are thick and gnarled. Farmer's hands. Killer's hands, too, by all accounts. 'My dad used to tell stories about your mother,' Ron said. 'I think he was soft on her.'

'He'd have had to get past me first,' says Cal.

After some empty small talk, Cal takes Anjel through to where Old Ronnie is sitting, greeting people like he is The Godfather. But then, he is Anjel's godfather, and no doubt one to lots of children over the years. It was always good to have a man like Ronnie linked to the family, if not by blood, then duty.

Ronnie raises a hand when he sees Anjel and the supplicants take a step back. 'Anjel. You came!'

'Happy birthday, Uncle Ronnie.' From his pocket he extracts the gift and places it on the table with the others. It is a gold ETA martyr pin, awarded to the families of the fallen. He received it because of Eneca, the Venus with a bomb. He can no longer bear to have it near him. But Ronnie won't know that. He will see it as a great sentimental gesture.

'You didn't have to get me anything. I've not long left to enjoy any presents!'

Where has he heard that before? These old, battle-scarred veterans of the independence struggles will need stakes driven through their hearts before they will die. But Ronnie, in truth, does look diminished. The hard man of the Dark Angels has had a palsy, so that one side of his face droops, and the once frighteningly merciless eyes are soft and rheumy. The tattoos along his forearms have faded to blue-black ciphers.

'Ah, don't go acting the maggot,' Anjel says. 'Years left in you, uncle.' But he hears the phlegm moving in the old man's tubes each time he takes a breath, up and down, up and down, a million fags turned to sludge. Anjel take a glass of the black stuff from Cal and sits next to Ronnie, who puts a hand on his knee. He takes a sip. It is a good pint.

Ronnie nods towards the wall of photographs. 'D'you think all those fine men died so that Sinn Fein could help the British rule the Six Counties? I tell you, we'll have to watch that shite Tony Blair. He's like a fuckin' door-to-door salesman, peddling shoddy goods.'

'You're not for peace then?'

'Gerry fuckin' Adams,' is all he offers. Then his face brightens. 'Ah, my lovely, come here. Here, now.'

Anjel looks up at the young woman who steps in close, a pretty blonde in a short dress who reminds him of one of that All Saints pop group. A feek, was that the word for such a looker? He can't be sure. Best not to use it.

'Anjel Garzia, I'd like you to meet Marie. Marie Ronan. A goddaughter of mine. She runs FIL, here and in America.' Anjel thinks back to the long list of IRA-affiliated organisations the Englishman had shown him. He is certain FIL was on there, but its full name escapes him. So he nods as if he approves. 'And she shares some talents with your mother, if you get my drift.' A wink. So Marie makes bombs, Anjel thinks. 'She's a good girl. You two young 'uns go off and have a good natter and leave an ancient eejit to re-fight his old wars.'

*

Later they walk down to the river, their ears still buzzing from the showband. There is little or no light from most of the dwellings, the whole population of the village having decamped to the celebrations and its free bar. So the stars shine down with a fierce luminosity as they head for the stone bridge. And as they look up at the sparkling heavens, Anjel finds his hand is holding Marie's. She gives him a smile and a squeeze to show it is OK.

'There's no big son of the turf going to follow us down and put a boot up me arse?'

She chuckles. 'No big son of the turf anywhere. You're safe enough, Anjel Garzia. God, I love that name. The way it trips off the tongue. Anjel Garzia. You've quite a story.'

'I haven't told it yet.'

She laughs at that. 'We all know about Caitlin McManus Garzia and her little boy and the way she died for a cause she believed in.'

They reach the bridge and lean on the wall, watching the water split into silver ribbons over the rocks. Eventually their hands find each other again. 'What does FIL do? What does it even stand for?'

'Ach. Freedom for Ireland League. The usual. Raises money for the lads, mostly from America. Although it's not as easy as it

once was, not since London and Manchester. Not since Enniskillen, to be truthful, although that was before my time. One more big bomb and we'll have lost all sympathy.' She let out a sigh. 'Look, I don't want to talk about it. It's too nice a night.'

'You think there'll be peace?'

She blows out her cheeks and pulls the hair away from her face. 'Ronnie says not. Not completely. There are those who have known nothing but the struggle. Take that away.. you take away their certainties. I think Ronnie is one of them.'

'He is a legend,' Anjel says.

'He is that. And it's hard for him to let go of that. Me, I think there will be peace. The appetite has gone. But I think there'll be a more blood spilled before it's all played out. Anyway, enough of that. Are you going to talk shite all night or are you going to kiss me?'

He doesn't say or do anything, just smiles a little.

'What?' she asks.

'I'm trying to decide..'

'Oh, you.' She punches his shoulder, then pulls him in close and plants her lips on his. When they break away she says once more, with wonderment. 'Anjel Garzia.'

ELEVEN

IRELAND, 1998

The text comes through just as he is about to climb on top of her. Marie senses him hesitate at the irritating ping from the Nokia. She has tensed. He rolls back a little. But his cock is still hard against her thigh. He can wait a minute, she is sure.

'I have to take this.'

'What is it?' he asks.

She looks at the phone and presses several buttons. 'Fuck. How does this work?'

'Don't ask me. I don't own one.'

'Hold on.'

'I'm holdin' on, darlin'. Holdin' on for dear life..'

She slaps his arm and shuffles up on the pillows, pulling the sheets over her breasts as she does so. 'Ah, there we are.'

He slides out of bed and pours himself a fresh glass of wine. It is a few weeks since the party for Ronnie Corrigan and the old man's health is fading fast, as if he had only been holding on for the celebrations. Anjel is finding it hard to show the appropriate concern for the murdering bastard.

They are in the bridal suite of a country estate, a pile built by one of the rich Anglo-Irish families in the late 1800s, but which has been used for weddings, conferences and golf events for the past forty years. Tony Blair stayed there two weeks ago, which she finds funny for some reason. She wonders if they had the bridal suite? Or maybe Cherie doesn't get involved in the Irish peace process.

The hotel is costing them a fortune, but Marie doesn't mind. She deserves a bit of luxury in her life now and then. The old ways are going, the world turning. She is going to change with it. The alternative is to decay and die, pickled in bitterness. A life other

than bombs, blood and bullets beckons.

She reads the message and clicks the screen off. 'Excellent.'

'What is it?' he asks.

'I can't take you seriously standing here like that. You'll do someone an injury with that thing. Come back to bed.'

He does so, bringing the wine with him, whistling something only he can hear the tune in. She takes a sip from the glass and puts it down on the bedside cabinet. 'Where were we?'

He shuffles back an inch or two. 'You aren't going to tell me? What message was worth interrupting us for?'

She kisses his chest. 'That message was worth about a million euros.' She laughs. 'You and me are going to be rich, Anjel Garzia. We've just got to bide our time. '

TWELVE

IRELAND, 1999

It is almost midnight when they bring the tout in. Marie Ronan hears the crunch of tyres on thick gravel and looks down at the scuffed pine table, with its collection of timers, from old British World War Two models to the latest Czech electronic number. There are also two revolvers, one of them a Smith & Wesson, the other a battered Webley of some vintage. There is no time to put them away. And no point, if that is the Brits out there. She throws a cloth over the pile of junk and fetches the shotgun from the cottage wall.

She sits, places the gun across her lap, pulls back the twin hammers and waits. The headlamps strobe briefly across the drawn curtains in the centre of the wall. She hears the car halt, the engine die, and a door slam. Silence. Then the whistling.

It is Anjel. He always was a cunt for the whistling. Probably some Basque shit. She eases the shotgun's hammers back down very gently.

Within moments, the room is full of bodies, and the oxygen sucked from it. She feels as substantial as a pipe cleaner next to the two burly men who come in first: Anjel, with his jet-black hair and swarthy, rough-hewn face; Sean Logan, her younger brother, is behind him, stooped by the low ceiling, his baby face with its incongruously full moustache devoid of its usual grin. He has a cut above his right eye. The third man is hooded with a black plastic bag, slashed across the nostrils. His hands are tied behind his back and his legs sag as he walks.

Bringing up the rear is Ron Corrigan. Recovered now from burying his father Old Ronnie, he has stepped into the old man's very large shoes. He is part of the Squad now, the latest version of the Army Council's punishment brigade.

Chairs are pulled out and the hooded man is pushed down into one, a belt strapped round him. His head lolls. She can only imagine what is beneath the shiny black plastic.

'Jesus, Anjel, you scared the living daylight out of me.'

'That was my doing,' says Corrigan, in a low voice that is meant to be soothing, although to her it is laced with something sinister. 'My apologies. We had no option.' He points over his shoulder towards County Armagh, a few miles to the east. 'Bit of trouble.'

'Can we get a cup of tea, Marie?' asks Sean.

'Are you all right?' she fires back.

He touches the cut on his forehead. 'Me? Aye. Just need a cuppa.'

Anjel puts the kettle on, and from beneath the cupboard fetches a half-bottle of whiskey. Marie scoops stubby glasses from the dresser without being asked.

The hooded man moans.

'What did you bring him here for?' she hisses at Anjel. 'I thought we agreed—'

'As Ron said. No option.'

Ron Corrigan remains standing and impassive. Marie knows he and his young wife – still in her twenties – have just had a baby daughter, not two weeks old. It doesn't seem the right time to be congratulating a man on bringing new life into this world, not with what is about to happen.

'We picked him up at a meet with his fucking handler,' Sean chips in. 'Some TRU piece of shit. We had to be sure, y'see.' The TRU is the Tasking Research Unit, the deliberately anodyne name given to one of several organisations that handle planted agents and cultivated informers – commonly known as touts – within the nationalist cause.

Marie knows without asking that this particular TRU handler is no more.

'What we didn't know,' says Anjel, sloshing out the drink, 'was he'd already given away the place in Monkton. We nearly walked right into it.'

They all take a glass and automatically raise it in silent toast and drink. Marie is glad of the burn, snapping her back to the reality of her situation. 'This is not good. Bringing him here. Not if Monkton is blown. What were you thinking? Have you finished yet?'

It is Corrigan who answers with a shake of his head. 'Barely started.'

He reaches over and yanks off the makeshift hood. Marie gasps at the state of the face, the split lips, the eyes closed by ugly swellings. There is blood matted in the hair on the left-hand side, as if an ear is missing. But that isn't what causes her stomach to heave. It is that she recognises him, despite all the damage to the face. Jamie Brogan.

'Jesus, Anjel.'

The prisoner opens one eye a few painful millimetres. It is garishly raw beneath the lid. 'Marie? Is that you? God love me, Marie—'

Corrigan backhands him round the head. His neck whiplashes back and forth. 'Let's hope so, because nobody here does.'

'Is this official?' Marie asks. She knows that there is a procedure to be followed, with final permission for any punishment resting with the Army Council. 'Are youse all on the level?'

'There's no time for any bollocksy red tape,' says Corrigan. 'This is urgent. He's one of us.'

He meant a member of the Freedom for Ireland. Which meant he might know- or have guessed - the truth about the guns that they have been sourcing from Libya, Lithuania or Liberia these past couple of years.

Jamie's voice is a tremulous whine, far removed from the soft baritone that had once whispered in her ear, hoping to distract her with sweet words while he slid a hand up her sweater. 'I'm innocent, Marie. Swear to God. And I haven't given them anything. You know me—'

'Anjel—' she begins.

'Hush now. Is there another room you can wait in?' Corrigan asks quietly but firmly.

'Marie, listen, Marie, there's been a mistake—'

Corrigan punches the tout so hard that the chair tips over and Jamie Brogan's skull rings like a bell on the stone floor. 'Get him up, clear that shite off the table, turn on those cooker rings and get me a kitchen knife.' When he turns to Marie all semblance of civility has fled from his face. 'You can watch if you want, it's all the fuckin' same to me. Right?'

She glares at him for a second, but he turns away, dismissing her from his mind.

'You be fuckin' careful with that shite,' she says, pointing at the pile of timers. 'Cause next week you'll be comin' around whinging to me for a wee proximity bomb or two. Won't ye?'

Anjel takes a step towards her, but Marie grabs her cigarettes and lighter from the table and strides from the oppressive room, out into the cool night air, slamming the door behind her. She walks past the parked Mondeo the men had arrived in, down to the fence. From the dark hills beyond comes the bleating of sheep. She looks up at the sky, sprayed with shimmering stars, innocent witnesses to all this. Marie shivers, wishing she had brought a coat, but there is no way she is going back in there, not yet.

A long, piercing wail fills the air as she hurries through the gate, down the rutted road, to where the hedgerows swallow her and blot out the sight and sounds of the cottage. There is a loud squelch underfoot and she swears. Cowpat. Should have fetched a

coat *and* a torch. She moves to the edge of the lane and wipes her shoe on the grass beneath the bushes.

Jamie Brogan. There had been two boys at the time, 'circling like sharks that smell blood in the water', her ma used to say. Jamie Brogan and Bobby Ronan. Jamie had been the handsomer, the silver-tongued charmer. Bobby was intense, serious, his great-grandfather one of Michael Collins's Twelve Apostles – the forerunner of the Squad – so he had family tradition to uphold. Her mother favoured Jamie, not tainted back then by any association with the lads of the IRA. Her ma knew Bobby Ronan was going to be an *óglaigh*, a volunteer, come what may. It was his destiny.

Marie moves further into the welcoming gloom and lights a cigarette, the tip unsteady as she holds it to her lips. In the far distance, among the stars, she can see the winking of aircraft lights. They appear to be stationary. Helicopters perhaps, searching for the men now a few hundred yards away in her cottage. Trying to prevent the inevitable.

It isn't just Jamie who will suffer. The blight on a tout's family, the stain, lasted for generations. His ma and da, his lovely old nan, his young sister Mavis, they would all be contaminated by this night.

How many times had she stepped out with Jamie? Four at the most, and he never did get much further than a bit of tit through a bra. Bobby, though, he didn't push it, he almost let her make the first move. And, in the end, it was Bobby Ronan she had chosen. And Bobby who had been shot by members of the British Army's out-of-control Military Reaction Unit six days before their wedding. Assassinated.

That's when she had said she would like to help. Wait a while, the men said. You are still grieving. It makes you reckless. Now, she said. I want to do it while it still burns in me. At first they had wanted her for the honeytrappers, young women who flirted with

the soldiers at the hotels and invited them back for a party. After beer, crisps and wine, the Lads would arrive, give them a good beating, then lie them face down and shoot them. But she couldn't do it, because when you got that close they changed from fuckin' pig-shit Brits into gormless, daft-as-a-brush boys just looking for a wee bit of company. The ones she wanted to hurt, the hard bastards, they weren't dumb enough to go off with some bit of skirt to an unknown address.

So they sent her to America, to Boston, as the young, pretty face of the Freedom for Ireland League.

It was when she came back, clear-headed, her grief now a cold, hard thing in her, that she had discovered that her dainty hands with their overlong fingers were wonderfully dextrous. That she could thread the smallest needle, twist the tiniest wire, create the most compact of detonators, build the deadliest of bombs.

She lets out a small scream when she feels something soft brush her neck.

'Steady, Marie. It's only me,' Anjel whispers, putting the coat over her shoulders. 'It's getting cold now.'

His breath is clouding the air. She shudders as she realises just how chilled she had become. She gets a whiff of the linseed oil on him from the windows. A glazier is a good job to have if you're an IRA man. Blow them out. Put them in. Repeat as advised.

'What time is it?'

'Past one.'

'Oh, Anjel.' She falls against him and he wraps his thick arms around her and pulls her in close. She can smell wool, sweat and whiskey. 'Is it done?'

'Aye. More or less.'

She untangles herself and they begin to walk slowly back up the track. She takes his arm. They hadn't seen much of each other since that night in the hotel when she promised him they would be

rich. *Bide your time*, she had said. He had done plenty of biding in the meantime. Months it, hanging out with Ron Corrigan and her brother Sean. Watching what The Squad do to those who cross the cause.

'Are you sure?' she asks. 'About him?' Marie knows what has to be done to touts. They are carrion, feeding on the carcasses of the dead. But the thought that they could get it wrong appalled her. 'Jamie—'

'We knew there was a tout, didn't we? Who else knew about the shipments that the bastards kept intercepting?' The last four shipments of explosives and weapons had never even made it to Ireland.

His voice is hard, full of certainty. 'Marie, he's given you up. It's you he's touted.'

She halts, her arm slipping from his as he took an extra pace. A terrible iciness spreads over her face. 'What?'

'Not by name. So he says. I don't think he's lying. He's past lying now. He's told them there is a woman bomb-maker who supplies the active service units. That she designed the Manchester bomb. He was stringing them out for the name.'

'That's desperate. The Manchester bomb wasn't mine,' she says crossly, as if it really mattered. But it would have put Jamie's standing up with the Brits. And the price he could charge them.

'Maybe not. But you know how hungry they'll be now, don't you? Like fuckin' wolves.'

'Aye.' They begin walking once more. Her brain is spinning, faster than the whirling teacups that Jamie Brogan had taken her on that time when she'd been sick down his best trousers. And, now, the wee bollix of a gobshite . . .

She manoeuvres them round the cowpat, her eyes better adjusted to the dark now, as they emerge from the sunken lane.

'So what do we do? What do I do, Anjel?'

'You cash in the money and get out of the country. Run.'

'What money?' she asks.

'Don't come the maggot with me, Marie Ronan. The FIL money you've got stashed.'

She didn't contradict him.

'I'm not stupid, Marie. Every time they pull those arms shipments, the weapons are pieces of shit. Not what we paid for. Something is going on. Someone is feathering their nest. That's what you was promising me that night in the hotel.'

'That was the champagne talking.'

'And sometimes the champagne tells the truth, Marie.'

There was fear laced through her voice when she spoke.

'Don't let Corrigan hear you. If he knows you know...'

'I'm not worried about what you or Corrigan or anyone else is doing. I'm worried about you. They'll be pulling the prick of every tout they have for this one. And we know they have men on the inside down there. In the Gardai, too. They might even think it's worth blowing a tout or two for youse.'

She had to agree. She would be a big enough catch that they'd risk losing a few tiddlers along the way.

They are at the gate, the cottage now in view once more, deceptively serene, the new synthetic slate roof gleaming silver in the moonlight. She hesitates, not wanting to go in, no desire to see what is beyond that door.

'When?'

'Well if it was up to me, I'd have you packing your bags right about now.'

She feels a stab of fear. Her heart twitches in her chest, as if it has received an extra jolt of electricity. That could be a euphemism. Would it be easier just to get rid of her? To let young Marie 'have her tea'? She's not worth the bother, the heat she'll bring down. Let her pack, give her tickets, then put her in a car and

when she's just thinking about being somewhere sunny for a change . . .

Anjel reads her mind. 'Hey, Marie, don't you go worrying. You're solid, you are.'

'Where then? Where will we go?'

'We?' he asked with a grin. 'There's two of us now, is there?'

'Don't joke, Anjel.'

'We could try Spain.'

She has never been, but she has an image of blue sea and sky, shades brighter than you ever saw in Ireland. A cold beer on a hot beach. But something tells her it isn't that part of Spain she'd be seeing.

'My mother went across when some cunt shopped her in.'

'And look how that ended,' she says, immediately regretting it. 'Sorry.'

'Don't be. You are right. It didn't end well. But it won't be like that this time.'

'But I'd still be with the ETA lads?'

'Aye. History repeating is what this is. Except for how it ended for her. There'd be no bomb planting for you. I still have relatives over there. You'll be safe.'

'And you'd visit?'

'I'll take you over myself. Settle you in.'

'They'll appreciate you. And what you can do.'

Anjel reaches out and lets her black hair fall through his fingers, looking into her alabaster face, letting his mood soften enough to allow a little of her pale radiance to touch him. He is standing there, the ugly smell of another man's blood and piss and singed skin in his nostrils, in front of a rare beauty, and for a few seconds, he almost forgets the horror of what has happened on the pine table. And the terrible thing he has done. Is still doing.

'Don't worry. You're special to all of us, Marie. *Neska polita.*'

'Don't you start talking dirty to me in your secret language, Anjel McManus Garzia.'

'It means "beautiful girl". You'd better get used to it. They'll love you over there.'

'I don't know. What do I know about Basques? Look, I still have friends in Boston, in FIL. They'd look after me. You'd visit me there? In America?'

'Of course.' A grin flashes in the night. 'I'm not going to let you go, Marie. You're the best fuckin' ride I ever had.'

She laughs despite herself and punches him on the arm and at that moment the cottage windows glow brighter momentarily, and, what seems like minutes later, there comes the flat bark of a handgun. The sequence is repeated two more times.

Anjel snakes an arm around her waist and pulls her close. 'There,' he whispers softly into her ear. 'It's over.'

But he knows in his heart that it isn't.

THIRTEEN

Northern Ireland, 1999

Anjel Garzia's footsteps echo on the worn metal treads of the spiral staircase as he descends to the lower level of the prison. They are shiny from the footfall of a million miserable souls. The thin winter light filtered through the grimy panes of the skylights struggle to reach the basement. The stench – of excrement, sweat and fear – is as strong as ever, though, and rises up to embrace him.

The cell doors have all been thrown open, to symbolise perhaps, that this is no longer a place of incarceration, and from within one of them he hears a low hum. Something jolly and Jack Tar-ish is struggling to be heard. He steps inside and there is Mr Carstairs of the Force Research Unit, the man who had recruited him on that Aldeburgh beach, humming his Gilbert & Sullivan.

He is dressed in an overcoat and a paisley scarf, his hair oiled in a way that must have already been old-fashioned when he was a child, his cheeks ruddy from the chill wind outside these walls. He is reading a long, scrawled verse on one of the walls. While he does so, Anjel examines the cement floor, wondering if those stains could talk, what horrors they would speak of.

'Quite poetic, really,' Carstairs says eventually. 'If there can be poetry in castrating Catholics.'

Anjel could tell from the graffiti that this wing had once been the preserve of loyalist paramilitaries. He wonders if there is a hidden subtext he can't quite discern. 'Why are we meeting here again?' he asks.

'Here? No reason apart from the fact it is well away from prying eyes. I am not meant to even be in the country. There is a spot to land a helicopter. Which means I don't have to venture out onto the mean streets of Belfast or Derry.' The FRU prefers to do

its work in the shadows. 'And for you.. well, we don't want a slip up in the final furlong, do we? So best that you, too, are not seen. You have done well, Anjel, to avoid detection so far.'

From the inside pocket of his parka, Anjel extracts a padded envelope that contains a dozen densely typed sheets of paper and a series of microcassettes. 'The last of it. Every shipment of arms from places like Lithuania and Liberia over the past five years. Now you have everything you need in there to bring the FIL down. Without the need for me to appear in court.'

'Excellent.' Carstairs takes the evidence in his gloved hand.

'I let an innocent man die for that,' says Anjel. 'Tortured by Corrigan and others.'

A quizzical eyebrow went up. 'Innocent?'

'Relatively innocent.'

'You could always have volunteered to take his place.'

'Thanks.'

Carstairs brandished the envelope. 'I am sure this is worth it. Whatever it is.'

'They are taking the thousands of dollars they have raised, buying low grade or obsolete weapons, then tipping off the Brits or the Gardai about the shipments. The arms get confiscated and FIL can pocket the money they didn't spend. Nobody is any the wiser. No copper is going to stand up and say – look, we just got a pile of crap. It's always a multi-million pound haul, isn't it?'

'It is,' says Carstairs. 'We were puzzled by the drop in quality. We thought they must be lining their own pockets.'

'Because it's nearly all over?'

'Let us hope so.' Then he fishes in his own pocket and produces a shiny new passport.

'As requested. Irish. And absolutely genuine. Apart from the name.'

Anjel pockets it.

'I am afraid Anjel Garzia will suffer a fatal car accident in the next few days. There will be mourning and gnashing of teeth. Do not be alarmed if you read that you are dead.'

'I doubt I'll get much of an obituary.'

'Oh, I suspect given your parentage, you'll warrant a few lines in *An Phoblacht*.'

'I won't be reading that crap any more.'

'And the Ronan woman? Will the separation from her cause you any.. pain?'

Anjel is aware that he could be sending Marie down for a good few years. Unless she did as threatened and jumped ship for America. Part of him hoped she would. 'It was only ever business,' he says.

'What now?' asked Carstairs, ushering him out of the cell. 'Spain?'

'No. I think-'

'Actually,' the MI5 man said quickly. 'It's best I don't know. But I suspect it involves the girl? The one from Aldeburgh?'

How did he know about Andrea? Well, he is a spy, he supposes. 'It does.'

They began to ascend the stairs up to the ground floor. 'Be careful.'

There is something in his tone that worries Anjel. 'Of who? FIL? I thought you were taking them out of circulation?'

Carstairs stops his climb and turns. 'The FIL has friends and they have long memories. I don't have to tell you that. I'd be happier if you were out of the country completely,' he said.

'I like it here. Andrea's family are all here. I can't ask her to leave.'

As he continues the climb, Carstairs speaks over his shoulder. 'By the way, your Uncle Teo passed. Prostate cancer. The other two you asked me to check on - Ochoa and...'

'Bernardo?'

'That's the chappie. Both in prison. And they'll probably die there. Just in case you were thinking of a vendetta after what I told you about their role in your mother's death.'

'I wasn't.' Barely crossed his mind. Yet.

'Good.'

As he steps off the final rung, Carstairs pauses to catch his breath. It steams in the cold air. A few hundred yards away stand two men, hands crossed in front of them, eyes constantly darting around the gloomy prison. Carstairs's heavies.

The spy hands Anjel a card. There is a Dublin phone number printed on it. 'If you are ever in trouble, either physical or mental..' he catches Anjel's expression. 'Do not underestimate the strain you have been under. A double life burns you up twice as fast in my experience. Any trouble, call that number. It is a carpet cleaning company. Ask if they have special rates for Axminsters. Understood?'

'Yes.'

Carstairs takes off his glove and holds out his hand. When Anjel takes it, the hand is surprisingly warm and soft, like a baby's. 'I am retiring at the end of the year. New millennium, new me.'

'Me too. I'm done with this shit.'

Carstairs gives a bleak smile. 'I'm pleased to hear it, Anjel Garzia. Long live Michael Shannon.'

EPILOGUE

ANJEL DOWN

FOURTEEN

CORK, 2000

Michael Shannon is shaving in the bathroom, looking through the tiny window over the rooftops, the slates freshly slicked with rain, a low, zinc sky keeping a lid on the city. But his eyes aren't seeing that gloomy roofscape. Even though he is far too young to be there in person, some time-travelling avatar of Michael Shannon is far to the south, feeling the prickle of a Mallorcan sun burning the skin on his pale neck. He can even smell the mix of coffee and bougainvillea, with grace notes of Spanish drains, that permeates the square, as if the scents were wafting up from the basin containing the black hairs from his beard. He sees his mother walking among the tables of the café, a few stray tendrils of red hair falling from beneath her sun hat. It is a long time ago, decades, but also just a heartbeat away.

'I promised I'd pick Siobhan up.'

Once again, frame by frame, person by person, he lives through the explosion that killed her. Killed his mother.

'I'll take yours, then.'

Like one of those cheap hypnotism shows Andrea loves, Michael is now back in the bathroom, staring at a half-shaved face in the mirror. What did she say? What did Andrea just say?

'You'll do what?' he shouts.

His mind replays the conversation with her over the past five minutes, an exchange muted to muffled exchanges by his being in the square, watching those people die again.

Michael, are you taking your car?

No. Joe's giving me a lift.

You don't need it?

No, why?

My battery is fuckety-fucked again. I'll take yours then. I've got the keys. See you later.

NO!

He shouts it out, but he has no sense of how much time has passed since they first spoke. A few seconds? A few minutes?

Andrea! Wait.

He is out of the bathroom and running – almost falling – down the stairs when the house rocks as if a giant tidal wave has crashed over the city and broken against the outside wall. The staircase becomes fluid beneath his feet. A roaring fills his ears. For the second time that morning, a bomb, a cowardly bomb, has shattered lives as well as bodies.

Plural.

Although it is only after the autopsy that he discovers that Andrea had been pregnant.

SIXTEEN

Local Woman
Killed By Bomb

By DENNIS RIORDAN
Exclusive to Evening Echo

September 8, 2000- A car bomb exploded this morning in Ban-
natyre Road in Blackrock, County
Cork, causing widespread damage and
disruption to rush hour traffic. The Gardai
report that there was one fatality, named locally as
Andrea Shannon, a married woman
who has lived the area for a short
time. Her husband Michael, who was
at home at the time, and believed
to be the owner of the bombed vehicle,
was unharmed. A Gardai spokesperson said
they have not ruled out a paramili-
tary connection, but that no organi-
sation has yet claimed responsibility.

*

So that's how you do it. That's how you take a guy trying to walk a line between two violent worlds and turn him into a monster. It's just too bad I had to cross paths with him. And swords. And bullets.

Anjel Garzia's story – and his meeting with Sam Wylde - continues in *Nobody Gets Hurt*.