

Chapter 1 *Thick dark blood – and lots of it*

George Keegan opened his eyes. His head hurt. His mouth was dry and tasted strange. At first he had no idea where he was. He turned his head. It was 7 am. There was a clock on the small table beside the bed. His clock. His bed. His bedroom. He was at home. His head continued to hurt. He closed his eyes. Then suddenly he opened them again. OK, he was in his flat, in his own bed, but he felt terrible. Why? What had happened last night?

George lay on his back, looking up. He tried to remember where he had been, or who he had been with. He thought hard – but he had no idea. A party maybe? A night out with friends? He remembered going to work the day before, but that was all. Slowly he began to realise that his hand felt wet. In fact, the bed felt wet. Not wet with water, but something thicker. He took his hand out from under the sheet and looked at it. ‘My God!’ he shouted. It was blood, thick dark blood – and lots of it!

George sat straight up and threw back the sheet. What had happened? He was still fully dressed – dark blue trousers, pink shirt, socks and shoes – but there was blood everywhere! George jumped out of bed and immediately started pulling his clothes off. As he did so, he checked his body. Where had the blood come from? Had he fallen? Or cut himself? He seemed OK – except for the headache.

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Thirty seconds later George stood, with no clothes on, in front of the bedroom mirror, looking at himself. He was tall and well built, with wild red hair. There were no cuts on his body, so it wasn't his own blood. But whose blood was it? There was so much of it. It wasn't just on his clothes and his sheets. There was some on the carpet, too. Was it only in the bedroom?

Quickly George made a tour of his flat. It wasn't big – a bedroom, a sitting room, a bathroom and a kitchen. The bathroom was clean, but there was blood in all the other rooms. In the kitchen there was blood on the floor, on the table and down the front of the cupboards. In the sitting room it was on the carpet and there was a little on the sofa. The bedroom was the worst.

'My God!' George said again, his hands shaking, as he stood in his bedroom looking round. 'Whose blood is this? What's happened?' He looked down at the blood on his hands.

'First things first,' he thought to himself. 'I've got to get clean. I've just got to get clean.' He went back to the bathroom and got in the shower. Ten minutes later he felt a bit better. Eight minutes of hot shower, soap and shampoo, then two minutes of ice-cold water. His body began to feel more normal, but his hands wouldn't stop shaking. He dried himself and put on clean clothes – black jeans, a green Ireland rugby shirt and trainers.

What should he do next? 'You should always wash blood off quickly and always use cold water,' George's mother used to say. 'Always wash blood off quickly.' He knew he wasn't thinking straight, but he couldn't help it. He didn't know what to think. He couldn't think! He put his bloody clothes and sheets in the washing machine together.

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‘Blood,’ he said to himself. ‘Cold wash. Cold water to wash off blood. Thanks Mum.’

He started the machine.

George’s mouth was dry. His head still hurt. It hurt badly. He needed aspirin. And a drink. He made some tea, then found some aspirin and took two. He sat at the kitchen table and looked at his hands. He looked at them hard until they slowly stopped shaking. Then he began to think. What should he do? Call the police? Probably – but not just yet. Not right now. He needed to know more first, more about what had happened.

George started searching for his diary. It was on the table in the sitting room. Quickly he opened it at yesterday’s date. There it was. *Thursday 17th March – 7.30 pm, CSI drinks, O’Gara’s*. That was where he had been! O’Gara’s was a bar near Grafton Street, Dublin’s main shopping street. ‘CSI drinks’ meant he had had drinks with the ‘Church Street Irregulars’. George was a lawyer. He shared offices in a building with several other lawyers. As a joke, they called themselves the Church Street Irregulars. Their offices were in Church Street and, like all lawyers, they worked very irregular hours – sometimes starting very early in the morning, sometimes finishing very late at night.

Bits and pieces of the evening came back to him. Although it was only a Thursday night, O’Gara’s had been full. He remembered arriving at the bar with Frank Brady, whose office was next door to his. Michael Sullivan was already at the bar when they arrived. He was also a lawyer and George’s friend. Had Orla been there? Or had she come later? He couldn’t remember. His phone was next to his diary. He picked it up and called Orla’s number. There was

no reply. The call went straight through to the answerphone. He spoke into it.

‘Hi, Orla. It’s George. I really need to talk to you about last night, about what happened. Call me quickly – as soon as you get this. Love you.’

George looked at the phone in his hand and then called another number.

‘Michael Sullivan speaking.’

‘Hi, Michael. It’s George here. I’m sorry it’s so early.’

‘Hello there, George.’ replied Michael. ‘That’s OK. I’ve been up for some time. How are you doing?’

‘Not so bad,’ answered George. ‘Listen. I need to get a couple of things straight about last night.’

There was a laugh at the other end of the phone.

‘Too much Guinness, George?’ asked Michael, laughing again.

‘Come on, Michael. You know I never drink much. But seriously, I was at O’Gara’s last night, wasn’t I?’

‘Yes,’ answered Michael, surprise in his voice. ‘Don’t you remember?’

‘Well, not very clearly, actually.’

‘Yes, you were there,’ repeated Michael. He sounded more serious now. ‘And Frank and Paul and quite a few others were there too. And Orla came along later. And then you left with Orla at about 11 o’clock.’

‘Right,’ said George.

He said nothing for a moment, asking himself where Orla was and why she wasn’t answering her phone. Asking himself where the blood came from and whose blood it was. Not Orla’s. It couldn’t be Orla’s. He couldn’t even begin to think that! He heard Michael ask a question, but he wasn’t really listening.

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‘I’m sorry, Michael, what did you say?’

‘I asked, “Are you going out with Orla?”’ replied Michael.

George was going out with her, but they hadn’t told anyone yet. It was only a couple of months since Orla had moved into the same building as George and joined the Church Street Irregulars. She didn’t want everyone in the offices talking about her. But Michael had clearly put two and two together and got the right answer.

‘Well, yes, I am going out with her actually,’ said George. ‘And even though it’s still early days, it seems quite serious. But we don’t want everyone talking about it. OK? It’s a secret for the moment.’

‘OK,’ said Michael. ‘No problem.’

Neither of them spoke for a few seconds.

Then Michael said, ‘You sound a bit strange this morning, George. Is everything OK?’

‘Fine, fine,’ said George. ‘Look I’ve got to go. I’ve got some cleaning to do. Don’t worry about me. Everything’s fine.’

But, as he turned off his phone and put it back on the table, George knew that everything was far from fine.

Chapter 2 *A crime of hate or madness*

Inspector Sean Murphy of the Dublin police was at his desk in the Pearse Street police station when the phone rang. It was 7.30 in the morning. He put down his first coffee of the day and picked up the phone.

‘Murphy,’ he said.

It was Fiona Whelan, his boss.

‘Sean,’ said Whelan. ‘Get over to Grattan Bridge. Northside. They’re pulling a body out of the water.’

‘I’m on my way,’ said Murphy. He quickly finished his coffee, took his jacket off the back of his chair and left the office. Outside it was cloudy. There was the smell of Irish rain in the air. It wasn’t actually raining now, so Murphy decided to walk to the bridge. It wasn’t far, but even at that time in the morning the Dublin traffic was bad.

Within a few minutes, he was walking beside the River Liffey. The dirty brown waters cut the city in two. On Murphy’s right, across the water, was the north of the city – the ‘Northside’. This was once an area where the poor and working class lived. Today, many people think of it as the ‘real’ Dublin. On his left was the ‘Southside’, where Dublin’s rich and important people had made their homes. Here there were pretty squares, wide shopping streets and the beautiful 18th-century buildings of Trinity College.

Soon Murphy passed The Clarence hotel, owned by the rock band U2. Then he turned right across Grattan Bridge towards the Northside. There was a group of people

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standing near two police cars and a white police van. Behind the police van were some TV cameras and a few journalists. As he reached the group near the cars, a face he knew well turned towards him but did not smile.

‘Good morning, sir.’ It was Sergeant Tara Lynch. Murphy was pleased to see her. He and Lynch had worked on many cases together and liked each other.

‘Morning, Sergeant,’ he replied. ‘What do we know?’

They pushed their way through to the front of the group. Murphy looked down at the lifeless body of a young woman lying by the side of the road. Her long brown hair was wet. Some of it lay across her face. Her short red party dress had been cut in many places. Her face had clearly been pretty, but in death it was empty of life and light. A man and a woman in white clothes – the forensics team – were looking at the body and making notes.

‘It’s a young woman. In her twenties probably,’ began Lynch. ‘We pulled her out about forty minutes ago. A man walking his dog saw the body and called us.’

Murphy did not ask questions. He knew that Lynch would tell him everything of importance.

‘The doctor has had a look at her,’ continued Lynch, ‘and forensics will take the body away when you’ve seen it. The doctor put the time of death as late last night, or early this morning, between midnight and 2 am. She may be able to tell you more later. But it’s clearly murder. The killer used a knife. And not just once. The woman died when the knife went through her heart.’

Murphy got down to look at the body. Through the holes in the dress he could see some of the cuts to the woman’s chest and stomach. He counted nine or ten, but he could

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see that there must be more. 'A crime of hate or madness,' he thought to himself. He looked at the forensics team and nodded to them.

'OK,' he said. 'Take her away. Ring me when you have any more information.'

He stood up again and looked at Lynch.

'Do we know who she is?' he asked.

'This was on her wrist,' said Lynch, holding up a plastic bag. There was a circle of metal inside it. 'It's an "ICE" bracelet – In Case of Emergency. The name on it is Orla Quinn. It seems she had an unusual blood group. It's also got her doctor's name and number on it. I was just going to call the doctor when you arrived.'

'Do it now,' said Murphy. 'We need all the information we can get.'

Lynch moved along the road a little to find somewhere quieter and took out her phone. Murphy watched her. She was tall with short fair hair. When she walked into a room, heads turned to look at her. But she never made people think she was more important or better than them in any way. She was intelligent and thoughtful too. In fact, Murphy thought she was one of the best young police officers he had ever worked with. This might be one of the last cases they worked on together. It wouldn't be long before she was made an inspector.

After a couple of minutes Lynch closed her phone and came back.

'It's almost certainly Orla Quinn,' she said. 'The doctor knew her well and described her. She was 27. A lawyer. Her office is very close to here on Church Street.'

'She was clearly a clever young lady,' said Murphy.

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He looked across the river towards the Southside, shaking his head at the unfairness of life – and death. He'd been a policeman for twenty years, a detective for fifteen, but some parts of the job always got to him.

Turning back to Lynch he asked, 'Have you got a home address for her?'

'A flat on Charlotte Quay over by the Grand Canal Docks,' replied Lynch. 'Dublin 4.'

The information told Murphy more about Orla Quinn. On both the Northside and the Southside of Dublin there had once been large docks. These were areas where large numbers of ships came and went. However, by the end of the 20th century, there were fewer and fewer ships. Old buildings in the dock areas were knocked down. New offices and flats were built. Forward-looking young men and women moved in. People like Orla Quinn. The area known as Dublin 4 was on the Southside – and one of the best areas on the Southside. Clearly Ms Quinn had both brains and money.

Murphy thought about this as he looked at Lynch. Neither of them spoke.

'Right,' said Murphy, coming to a decision. 'You send some officers over to Charlotte Quay. I want them to ask questions door-to-door round Orla Quinn's neighbours. When did they last see her? What was she like? Did she have any visitors? Who were they? The usual thing. Then you and I can go over to Church Street and ask around at some of the offices there. Lawyers work long hours. I'm sure some of them will be at their desks already. Let's hope somebody knows where she was last night.'