

●●●●●Chapter One

Danielle, a long legged redhead, lay beneath my none-to-clean sheets. 26. Thin hips. Smooth skin. Neatly trimmed bush. A degree in English and History, a masters in something ridiculous and two brain cells that'd long since stopped communicating. This was not an uncommon occurrence, particularly for teachers. Give them a year outside the university gates, a job crisis and suddenly they've forgotten what a bookshop looks like. I'd seen it a thousand times and wondered how I could have spent six years drinking two bottles of wine a day and still manage to have ten times the brains they had. Danielle was just another idiot with a few letters after her name. It was sad but that was all she was.

Of course not everyone is like this, I had just given up looking for those that were different.

But that bush. Fuck. That bush was a sight to behold. Nothing more beautiful to look at than a redhead with a bush. Obviously I'm in the minority with this sort of thinking but I've always been a living anachronism and I'm too old to change now.

We both knew we'd never see each other again and I was feeling impatient. I'd let her rest for the minute though.

It was the least I could do considering the view she was giving me.

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I got my smokes.

Now I had to figure out what to do with the day.

I ran my fingers through my hair, trying to untangle a stubborn curl, and beneath an apathetic sun I began the walk from Ranelagh to Grafton Street. There was nothing else to do.

I decided I'd drop into the second-hand bookshop where I did a bit of part time work for spending money. Under the table, obviously. The shop was one of those "blink and you'll miss it" places off Georges Street. As soon as I entered I was greeted by Frank's Northside growl.

"Well if it isn't Mr. Sean Aloysius Ignatius Augustus Connolly! How's the world been treating you?"

My voice immediately modulated to his;

"Not so bad, same as usual. Yourself?"

"Same as, my boy. Same as. Can't complain and who'd listen to me if I did."

I smiled.

"Know the way buddy."

"Any women on the scene lately?"

"You know me, Frank, I'm practically a priest these days."

"A nun you mean? You're full of shite anyway you little bollocks," Frank said. "I've seen you about, you'd charm the knickers off anyone who wore a pair, though doubt you go for that sort you dirty cunt."

"Nah, not my type."

"The ones with the knickers or the ones without?"

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I looked at him with a crooked smile and gave him the answer he wanted.

“They all end up the same in the end, buddy.”

Frank laughed and said: “Fair point.”

We went on talking shite for another fifteen minutes before I asked him what times he wanted me in next week. Frank with his red Luke Kelly beard and me with the vertical mass of curls that invariable made me look like I’d stumbled out of the Eraserhead cast party.

“Could do with you locking up Thursday evening, got a bit of business to do, you know yourself.”

“Yeah, that’s no hassle Frank.”

“One more thing, my boy.”

“Yeah Frank?”

“Go home and hit the scratcher, you look like the worst form of scuttery shite I’ve seen since I had to plunge the jacks after the wife got over that last bout of constipation of hers.”

“Thanks Frank.”

“I mean it brother. Don’t want to see you again ‘til Thursday and no skirt chasing in the meanwhile, right?”

“No need to do any chasing. Since your wife had that shite she’s been knocking over for her biweekly shag again.”

“You’re some bollocks Sean lad,” came the growl.

“Fuck, you can have her anyway, I could do with the break.”

After another half hour or so more slagging, I left Frank and started home. When I got in Danielle was still there. She’d just

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gotten out of the shower, her hair still wet. She asked what I was up to for the rest of the day.

“Meeting Kate later on, haven’t seen her in ages.”

“Who?”

“Girl I know from way back when. Been meaning to catch up with her.”

“Ah ok, thought she might be another one of your girlfriends,”

I lit a cigarette. Looked at her. Looked straight through her. What did she care who I was meeting another girlfriend or not? She continued nonetheless.

“I know your type.”

She didn’t.

“Really?”

I was beyond incredulous now.

“Fancy a pint sometime later in the week?”

“Why not?”

We exchanged numbers and I told her I’d be in touch. It was a lie. But she knew it.

“Cool. I look forward to it.”



“Coffee, Sean?”

Kate was in her late 30’s but could have passed for 20. Blonde, intelligent with a set of legs like a lothario’s Camino. She

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was wearing a wool dress that stopped just before the knee with no tights or shoes. I wondered what else she'd neglected to put on.

"Yeah, love one."

She had a nice little one bed place. Bedroom and living area where she kept her books piled in semi neat stacks beside the couch. I began rolling a cigarette as Kate walked into over to her little kichenette to make our coffees.

She came over and gave me my mug, sat down with hers and I lit my smoke.

"So, one night stand or are you actually going out with someone?"

"What are you talking about?"

Kate was smiling at me. That knowing smile of hers. What Daniel didn't know Kate did.

"You need to shower more often, Sean."

We both laughed and Kate sparked up a cigarette. We began talking about the old days back when we used to play in a noise band together. The usual sort of bullshit people talk when they haven't seen each other in a while with me looking at her legs throughout. She knew it too. And that was the fun. Nothing else needed to happen. Kate was probably the only person I actually liked. Frank was alright but only in small doses. It was different with Kate. We could talk for hours and rarely get bored. Even when that did happen it'd be forgotten about the next time we'd meet.

We kept on talking, I kept on looking and we both kept on smoking. Not a bad way to spend an afternoon really. Legs. Coffee. Cigarettes.

## ●●●●Chapter Two

Grace, my psychotherapist, suggested that it might be an idea for me to try out one of those community based suicide support groups to see if it would help elongate my periods away from the madhouse. In fairness I hadn't been doing too bad recently. It'd been six months since my last admission but she said it couldn't hurt. So I acquiesced and said I'd go.

I remember knocking on the door and a man, who could have been anywhere between his mid-forties to late-fifties, answered the door.

"Yes?"

"I'm Sean Connolly, I'm here for the group?"

"Oh, of course, come in."

He was as nondescript as you could get. Probably groomed himself that way. Couldn't be intimidating any of the sad little fucks inside. Despair obviously doesn't like a man with presence. He led me to a room with a handful of chairs roughly arranged in a circle. Two blondes and a brunette were there along with another three men. If you could call them men. I couldn't help but take an instant dislike to them. It's a common enough thing with me but these non-beings inspired something that was just about one step short of hatred. Fuck it, I might as well say I hated them and I'm just glad I don't have to sit in a room with them anymore.

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I took a seat leaving an empty chair to each side of me and the non-descript man sat down. He turned and spoke to one of the brunettes.

“So...”

He paused looking at her blithely.

“How are you this week, Justine?”

“It’s been hard this week Paul, I just keep thinking about it.”

“Really, well, if you want to talk about it, I know everyone here has been through a lot and most have felt the same as you are at the moment.”

I looked around the room at these pathetic souls and thought what an overarching statement this was. What a fucking ridiculously assumptive one too.

“If you do the group is here to support you and to try and get you through it.”

I wouldn’t.

“I know, Paul.”

Her voice was filled with naïve self-pity and belief. Did she really believe this guy?

“And the group really has been a lifeline to me.”

“Is it still everyday, Justine?”

“Most days....”

“Well, that’s something Justine.”

This cunt was the second best liar I had ever met though he hadn’t a patch on me. His condescension made me want to cut off his balls and shove them down his throat just so I could watch him suffocate on his bollocks.

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“You must be getting somewhere.”

“I don’t know where I want to get though, Paul, I really don’t.”

“One step at a time, Justine,” he smiled. “Baby steps all the way. We shouldn’t try for anything more than that.”

It didn’t seem to be going down well with Justine either. She was looking at the floor as she answered.

“I know.”

I noticed how this Paul twat seemed to have to, almost like a tic, use peoples first name in every sentence he spoke. To make things more personal probably, more family like.

Next came Stephen. A dipso whose wife had left him. He went on about this and all the pain misery in his life, with Paul’s guidance and affirmations, for about fifteen fucking minutes.

“I tell you no one else would stay off the gargle after what I’ve been through. But by God I do. You’d think after I ran into that car the kids’d come to see me in the hospital, I raised them for Jesus sake, just because I’d a few whiskeys on me they think that’s enough to disown me? No gratitude! And that woman she won’t even answer the phone. But I’m strong I tell you. They won’t beat me. None of them! Shower of bastards!”

If I wasn’t suicidal when I arrived, I certainly was now. How could someone have any sort of faith in humankind after listening to these fuckers?

I know if I was this fuck’s wife it would be nothing to do with the idiot’s alcohol consumption as to why I’d leave, the boredom would be enough. And what was this guy like in bed? I

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can't even imagine how bad it must have been for the poor woman. Anyone that arrogant is covering something up, most likely that he has a cock the size of safety pin. She's probably been in more of these groups than he has. And with just cause.

The other brunette wasn't much better, Sarah, "too much weed" according to her.

"Every morning I'd need to skin up. Never knew it could be so addictive. Just one joint after the other - twenty four hours a day - I felt like I was in a black hole."

Then a chick with cropped black hair, somewhere in her late 20's, expensively dressed and looking like she'd just had a make over to attend the group. Her entire get up looked like it cost more than my rent. She wasn't hard on the eyes so I ended up trying my best to just zone out and imagine the bitch's hips moving in crazed ecstatic undulations on top of my cock. She reminded me of someone though.

Paul introduced her as Julianne and with what had become his obvious his mind numbing monotony he asked her how she was.

She looked at the floor and began to speak.

"I just wake up and it's there, it's there every morning, you know like it's always there and I just want to get it over with. Everything's always so hard..."

Yeah. Like I was when I first saw you, bitch, before you started to speak.

"...it's just really difficult you know? The cutting isn't working anymore and when I go outside I don't even see faces

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anymore, I don't see people, just death. I don't know Paul, I don't know what to do anymore..."

Get it over with for fuck sake! Lock your door, take some pills, cut an artery and you're fucking set! Drink a bottle of bleach if you want to. Just shut up!

"I really don't."

And on and on and on she went.

ON.

AND.

ON.

AND.

ON.

"I can't feel anything other than this horrible numbness and that's all there is. I really don't know how much longer I can hang on."

Paul offered her a few of those platitudes that everyone seems to be filled these days and she continued.

"I know I should try to fight more but it's just so difficult. I promise I will. I mean I'll try and I'll keep coming here I swear."

After this slow death of a speech and a few more platitudes from Paul he announced how there was a new member (me) with us (them) today.

"Sean, would you like to share anything with the group? It's entirely up to you..."

His altruistic vestige became transparent. This was not the kind hearted suggestion he tried to make it sound. It was a demand.

"There's no pressure."

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I'd share alright but I wasn't going to share my story so I decided to share another one.

"Yeah, no problem Paul, everyone seems nice here, I think I can say something."

"Only if you want now, Sean."

Oh fuck off Paul. Just drop the charade. I'm beyond this.

"No, it's fine." I paused and looked at him "Well, I suppose it stems from my childhood really..."

The twat was nodding.

"...When I was about eight my father doused me and him in petrol and tried to set us both alight. I can still smell the fumes."

The faces on the people in the room were hilarious.

I went on, deadpan: "Thank God the matches were wet or I wouldn't be here today, he tried it on my mother too and eventually *did* manage to do it to himself. Fuck, Paul, I saw him as his flesh burned, he was running around screaming and I was just paralysed."

Paul tried, not particularly well, to remain unfazed. I stared at him.

"I was a child watching my Dad on fire. I hated the bastard but watching him flail about like that, just all I could do was cry."

I wished I could've taken a picture of the room.

Paul's eyes had widened: "That's obviously a lot to carry round with you for all these years Sean."

It was starting to get difficult to keep a straight face but they were all lapping it up I just couldn't stop there.

"It has been Paul, yeah, it wears me down at times. I dream of it, can't get it out of my head during the day and I tell you Paul,

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fuck have I tried. Drink, drugs, everything and nothing works. I don't know how I've gotten this far to be honest, I've been pretty close to the edge, well, most of my life really..."

I couldn't look him in the eye now. I would have erupted in laughter if I had.

"Sorry, you don't mind if I leave it at that today? I haven't actually spoken about this before."

The only true word I'd spoken.

"No, of course not Sean, that's fine..." He'd gone pale. It was fucking hilarious. He continued.

"...You only share what you feel comfortable sharing and I can see how hard it was for you to talk about that. It's a lot to say in one day and I admire you for saying it. If you want to say a bit more next week you can as I said we're all here to support each other and to help if we can."

Or to jerk each other off with tea and sympathy.

"Thanks Paul."

The group dispersed and I thanked God. An hour of unmitigated self-indulgence. Fucking disgusting. I don't think I'd ever witnessed anything like it before. And I knew the next one would be the same. That they'd just keep repeating the same stories over and over again. I could just tell.

It wasn't until later that night I realised who the Julianne reminded me of. It was Siobhan. I threw back a fistful of Ativan and tried to sleep.