



MARTINA COOLE

THE LIFE

THE MOST AUTHENTIC NOVEL OF GANGSTER FAMILY LIFE
EVER WRITTEN, FROM THE NO. 1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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[Lyrics Acknowledgements](#)

Martina Cole is the No.1 bestselling author of eighteen hugely successful novels. Her most recent novel, *The Faithless*, was a No. 1 bestseller. *The Family* went straight to No. 1 on the *Sunday Times* hardback bestseller list and was the bestselling hardback adult fiction title of 2010 as well as being No. 1 bestseller in paperback. It is currently being adapted for television following the huge success of *The Take* and *The Runaway* on Sky One. *Two Women* and *The Graft* have been adapted for the stage, both were highly acclaimed when performed at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, which will also stage *Dangerous Lady* later this year – celebrating twenty years since Martina's debut novel was published.

Martina Cole is a phenomenon. Her hard-hitting, uncompromising and haunting writing makes for an incredible read, and sales of her books now stand at over ten million copies. She is the person who dares to tell it like it really is.

By Martina Cole and available from Headline

Dangerous Lady
The Ladykiller
Goodnight Lady
The Jump
The Runaway
Two Women
Broken
Faceless
Maura's Game
The Know
The Graft
The Take
Close
Faces
The Business
Hard Girls
The Family
The Faithless
The Life

After books, my big love is music. As I'm writing of a night time, I listen to the sounds of the eras I am writing about. It's a perfect way to get into the characters' minds and, as everyone knows, a certain record can transport you back to a particular moment in time. If I hear 'Mama Weer All Crazee Now' by Slade, I can remember with stunning clarity one of my oldest friends, Graham Petherick, air-guitaring to it as a crowd of us watched his silhouette through his bathroom window! When I listen to 'Woke Up This Morning' by Alabama 3, I can see my daughter Freddie Mary and my grandson Lewis, both four years old at the time, singing along to it as we travelled down to my caravan in Eastbourne. Wonderful memories, captured in time by music. Music can do that to you, bring back a memory and make you smile even on your saddest of days. After I buried my mum, I played Bowie, and even in my grief I had to smile as I remembered her asking me to turn up 'Rock 'n' Roll Suicide' on my record player; she loved that song, she loved Bowie. She died in the early eighties, eight months after my father's death, and I still miss them both very much.

As I wrote *The Life*, I listened to a lot of Alabama 3 – one of my favourite bands of all time – and I have used their lyrics in this book. They are the band I listen to most these days. I have seen them live and they are a really visual band, whose music seems to encompass the thoughts of many different generations. I look forward to seeing them again soon. I was very lucky to be asked to be a part of their latest album, *Shoplifting For Jesus*, and I am now pretending to be a recording artist! Thank you to the guys, especially Ian Gough and Larry Love.

I can't believe it has been twenty years since the publication of my first book *Dangerous Lady*. To celebrate, *Dangerous Lady* is going to be performed as a play at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, East London. This theatre is very close to my heart; if we lose the local theatres *and* the libraries, the whole heart of local communities will be gone. It's a disgrace, and something that needs to be addressed because we will never get these things back. Without my local library when I was a child, I don't know what I would have done, and our local theatre also played a big part in my quest for knowledge.

Dangerous Lady was a big milestone in my life, and I'm very proud of it. I would never have been published had it not been for my agent, Darley Anderson, who is not only my agent but a wonderful friend to boot. I can't thank him enough for everything, especially his friendship and support. Darley is that rare breed – a man who genuinely understands women! He is also my daughter's godfather, and a close member of my family, loved by us all. His wisdom is unique, and his friendship means the world to me.

Susan Fletcher, my first editor and a terrific person, who believed in me from her first glance at *Dangerous Lady*; a big thank you once more. Sadly, Sue is retiring from publishing this year, and she will be greatly missed by everyone.

Tim Hely Hutchinson, always so good to me, and who, along with Sue Fletcher and Sian Thomas, built Headline up into the wonderful publishing house it is today. I have been with Headline for over twenty years now, and everyone I have ever dealt with has always been wonderful. Thank you, Tim, for everything.

Clare Foss – my editor for many years – another person I can never thank enough for her support and her kindness. Go, Clare!

Jane Morpeth – who is now my editor – a really lovely lady, and someone I truly admire and respect. Thank you, Jane; I look forward to the next twenty years! You've been a great friend, and a fantastic editor. Thank you again.

Martin Neild, the loveliest man on earth, thank you so much. You have been a great influence, and

I appreciate your friendship very much. (Pink Floyd in a Bentley is a memory I will have for ever)
Good luck for the future.

I'd also like to thank Amanda Ridout. She was very good to me when she was at Headline, and will always be grateful for all that she did for me. Great girl; and I'll never drink five bottles Montrachet with anyone else – she knows what I am talking about! (PS, Amanda, we are still welcome at the OXO Tower!)

I want to say a big thank you to Kerr MacRae; he was always so very nice to me when he was at Headline and, even though he has moved on to pastures new, we have stayed good friends. He is possibly one of the nicest people in publishing, and he played a big part in my success. Now I wish *him* every success for the future.

Louise Page – what can I say? She is fantastic – not only a good person and a wonderful friend, but the best PR in the land! Thanks, Lou, you have been a star over the years. Me, you and Peter – otherwise known as The Waberthwaite Three – have travelled the length and breadth of this country and had some good laughs along the way. Thank you, once more; you always find the best venues, and you can throw one hell of a party!

Now on to Peter Bates. You have driven me for many years now, Pete, and we have both seen our share of ups and downs. One thing never changes though: your friendship and your humour. I love you, Pete, and I can't thank you enough for being there beside me since time began! We have had some screams along the way, and without you those journeys would not have been half as much fun. I wish you everything that is good for the future. I still don't know how Rita puts up with you; she is a lovely lady, and a saint!

I would like to thank everyone at Headline, old and new. It's been a second family to me, and I know how lucky I have been to be a part of it. It's been a privilege, and it's been a lot of fun – and hard work! So, thank you all again, especially a certain Irishman! Darragh – driving through Spain listening to good music is a memory I will never forget. Thank you.

I'd also like to thank Peter Newsom, who was another good friend to me. I remember meeting him at a Morrissey concert a few years ago and I don't know who was more surprised! But thanks, Peter – I had some great times in Oz, New Zealand and South Africa. I wish you well for the future.

A big thank you to Martin Booth, a really good man who was responsible for my first ever payment cheque for writing! He was at the BBC in the early nineties and he took up a script I had sent in. We became good friends and he gave me the confidence I needed to look towards writing as a career. So thank you, Martin, very much.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Lavinia Warner. She made *Dangerous Lady* into a TV series many years ago. Since then we have become close friends and business partners, going on to make three more series together, along with other projects we have in the pipeline. Thanks, Vicky, you have been a real star, and you're a big part of my family, we all love you dearly. In New York earlier this year, we watched her cousin on Broadway in *Venus in Fur*. It was one of the highlights of my life; thank you for making me a part of it. I love you, girl.

Now, to my readers – you know who you are! I've met so many of you over the years, especially at Pat Fletcher's stall on Romford Market. Pat gave me my first book signing, and I will always be very grateful to her for that. We have become good friends, and even have houses near each other in Northern Cyprus! So thank you to Pat and Harry Fletcher, and I will see you soon, mate, at Kyber restaurant in Bellapais.

So thank you, once more, to you all, my loyal readers, who have been there since *Dangerous Lady* all those years ago. I hope you enjoy *The Life*. I have been living with the Bailey family for a year now, and I plan to finish Tania's story off in a few years' time! So I hope you enjoy her ups and downs – and, believe me, there are a lot of those! I hope to meet many of you at my signings, and I look

forward to saying hello to you all.

Take care and God bless,

Martina

x

Prologue

1997

I'd grown up in the Life, but I'd never really been a part of it – my mum had made sure of that. It all changed the day she died.

On the day we buried her, I looked around the church. My whole family was there, and we were a big family, the Baileys, and a well-known family to boot. My nana, Theresa Bailey, the matriarch, was sitting beside me, holding my hand. She was good to me, always. I could depend on her – she would never repeat my secrets. She knew more than any of them, and she kept it to herself. But then, if she had opened her mouth, there would have been another murder – we needed to keep the secret no matter what, and that is exactly what we did. I knew that I could never have coped without her, especially not that day.

My four brothers – all big, handsome, honourable men – sat on her other side and my father, broken by his wife's death, and completely unaware of his only daughter's shame, sat by me. It was *how* my mum died that was affecting him even more than just the loss of her. She had been taken in a heartbeat – those were his words, not mine.

I stood beside him, his youngest child and his only daughter, small-boned like my mother and with my parental grandmother's thick auburn hair. But I had his eyes – the deep blue Irish eyes that showed every emotion and told the whole world what I was thinking, especially him and my brothers. I learned quickly to never let anyone know my true feelings and that is a sad testament to the life I live now. Knowledge is power and even the smallest slip can be enough to bring you down.

We were the Baileys – the most talked about and revered family in the East End – the foremost family in England, actually, for many a long year. We led charmed lives, we had everything – and we meant *everything*. My father, Daniel Bailey, saw to that.

As I held his hand on that cold bleak day, he slipped it into his coat pocket as he had when I was a small child. Even at nearly eighteen, I still appreciated the warmth and kindness behind the act. I knew my father was dangerous from the time I was a child, but I had not known just how dangerous he really was until recently. He had only ever done what he felt was needed; I understood that and, on that day, unhappy and devastated at the loss of my mother, I depended on him more than ever to bring me comfort.

My world had changed overnight. With my mum gone there was no one to shield me from my family's real way of life. My mum, God love her, had done her best to make sure I never knew the real deal, but however hard she tried, I overheard more than was good for me. My family were murderers, liars, people for whom violence and intimidation were literally their daily bread.

My brothers were years older than me – I was my mum's last hurrah, as she would say with a big grin on her face. God had sent me to her as a gift – I was all hers. She talked about God a lot, she saw a great store by Him and His son, the Christ who had died on the cross to take away the sins of the world. When she died, they just didn't know what to do with me, this female left in the predominantly male world, but they loved me all the same and would do anything to protect me, I knew that. And I'll never stop loving any of them, as bad as they are. They love me, and they care for me. And, at this time in my young life, that is enough.

I suspect my mum knew more than she let on about her husband's and sons' activities and it must have been very hard for her to hear so much that was bad about them, and still believe in them. She

was a decent woman in her own way – God fearing, and with a strong belief in the afterlife. She put up with the men in her life because she had to. She was a mother after all, and these were her little boys. But deep inside she had to have condoned what they were.

I remember smiling at my eldest brother Danny that day, knowing he would always be there for me. Danny, despite his blond hair, was my dad's double, like the spit out of his mouth, as the old fucking shawlies – as my nana called them – would say. He and my other brothers Davey, Noel and Jamsie had each received Confession, made a good act of contrition, so they could take Communion at their mother's funeral without fear or favour – my father had made sure of that. Hypocritical, I know, but it was for her more than for him, and I loved that he had done that for her. He had loved my mother with a vengeance.

Years later, when I remembered seeing him cutting a man's fingers off, I would also see him as he was on this day. The two sides of Daniel Bailey.

I watched his face contort with emotion as his brother Peter Bailey and his wife Ria entered the church with their remaining children. He gritted his teeth, and I saw in his eyes that it was hard for him to forget his brother's part in this terrible day.

My Auntie Ria, Peter's wife, had always been good friends with my mother – they were very close and she looked unbearably sad.

I smiled at her, and at my cousins as they followed their parents to the front of the church. My cousin Imelda, a beautiful woman with long, dark relaxed hair, who exhibited more Jamaican heritage than her brothers, walked over to me and my father. Smiling sadly, she hugged him first, then me, her eyes wet with unshed tears. I was pleased and so relieved when my father had hugged her back; she had always been a favourite of his. No one really knew then how much the Life had affected her.

I looked at my Uncle Peter, a big, handsome black man, and at my father, so like him in many ways, even though he was what would be called white. They had the same mother, but different fathers, and were so close they were like pages in the same book, united now in their grief. It was a grief that transcended feuds.

The church full of people were wondering who the bastard was that had set the car bomb that had blown my poor mother all over Soho. But, unlike them, we knew who was responsible for planting the bomb which had caused this carnage. And we also knew that the bomb hadn't been meant for my mother. If the intended recipient had died maybe, just maybe, things would never have turned out like they did. Hindsight really is a fucking wonderful thing.

I still had a lot to learn about my family. On that day I knew nothing about guns, and the murder of a baby, an innocent child tragically drawn into this world of violence as easily as my mother had been. I would find out about these things eventually. You name it, my family had done it. But they couldn't have foreseen how deep they would get into the quagmire of revenge, and how they would lose a semblance of reality, forgetting about the real world outside of *their* world.

The loss of my mum had opened my eyes to the truth of the Life. In the last month I had seen and done things which would change me for ever. And, despite everything my mum did to protect me, she didn't prepare me for how seductive the Life could be.

There was an old Irish saying of my nana's – she always said you get the life you deserve. I hoped against hope that there was no truth in that. But only time will tell.

Book One

She shakes the blues off then she tries her luck
Makes a little bet, hopes her horse comes up
Pickin' pockets for some easy money
'Cause she blew the goddamn lot on the National Lottery

Alabama 3, 'Mansion On The Hill'
Album: *La Peste*, 2000

Flip, baby flip my switch
Blow my head off
If you're gonna cry, keep your shades on

Alabama 3, 'Keep Your Shades On'
Album: *Outlaw*, 2000

Chapter One

1979

'You and whose fucking army? Listen to yourself! You're threatening *us* with your cunt of an uncle. You're talking utter shite.'

Daniel Bailey was fuming, and everyone in the factory knew that this was not going to end well. Michael Lanson, or Micky L as he liked to be known, was trussed up like a chicken, and he was seriously regretting opening his big trap. He had heard the Baileys were a law unto themselves but he had not really understood the seriousness of their outfit until he had been abducted off the street two hours previously.

He worked for his uncle, a man called Jed Lanson, and he had believed he was invincible because of that. Jed was an old-time Face; he had his creds, and no one, until now, had ever had the nerve to take him on. It seemed that Daniel and Peter Bailey were the exceptions to the rule.

Peter Bailey sat quietly, sipping on a glass of white rum, watching his brother with interest. Peter understood the logic of his brother's methods even if he didn't follow them himself. It was why they were such a good team – they each had different strengths. Peter liked to do things quietly, with the minimum of fuss. He liked privacy. But he was also known to be a man who would seriously harm anyone who crossed him. Long and slow was Peter Bailey's retribution. It was rumoured he enjoyed the whole gamut of emotions his victims were put through, from fear, pain and agony, to begging for their lives to be finally ended. But there was never any evidence; the person would disappear, and all that would be left of their ordeal would be rumours.

Daniel, on the other hand, was happy to take out anybody who crossed him with as much melodrama as possible. He believed that if you were going to take someone out you should do it in such a way as to make it a lesson of sorts. Make sure that people understood what would happen to them if *they* pushed it too far. Daniel knew the value of a decent reputation. It kept mouths shut, and he kept the 'hoi polloi', as he called them, in their place. He believed that reputation was everything; there was time enough for the down low when you were properly established – until then you had to build your rep and you had to make it a good one. The brothers were in their thirties now, and this was the time to take what they wanted. No more fucking about, working for other people, being taken for cunts left, right and centre. It was time to take what was rightfully theirs.

Daniel and Peter were starting with the Lansons. Micky's uncle was a seriously big fish, in a very very small pond. So small, in fact, that it was easy for the Baileys to walk in and take it away from him. Jed Lanson didn't have an eye to the future: he still thought he was hard enough to keep a hold on what he had created. But the fact that this boy – his own nephew – was confident enough to mug him off, spoke volumes to the Baileys. It was time for Jed to disappear. First, though, the kind of disrespect Micky L had shown his uncle had to be dealt with. It was a diabolical fucking liberty and, for the Bailey brothers, it was tantamount to fucking mutiny.

Daniel picked up a ball-peen hammer and, motioning to his men with his chin, he said angrily 'Hold his fucking hand out. I'm going to teach him a lesson about loyalty he won't forget in a hurry. You should have known that family is worth more than strangers, boy. You mugged off your uncle, your mother's brother, your own flesh and blood. You're a fucking Judas, in every sense of the word.'

Daniel watched as his men did his bidding without hesitation. Micky fought them with all his might. A ball-peen hammer had that effect on people. It was a legal weapon you could put in your bo

without worrying about a tug from the Old Bill, unlike a shotgun or a machete, both of which could lead to a serious nicking. A hammer, on the other hand, was like a screwdriver or a chisel – a legal tool for legal business – even though it could inflict serious and personal damage in the right hands. *his* hands anyway.

Micky was sweating with fear, and Daniel grinned at him, before taunting him, ‘You thought you could take us for cunts, did you? Call my brother a fucking coon, and me a coon’s asswipe, and you really thought we would let that go?’

He brought the hammer down on the boy’s hand, as it was held on the concrete floor. Everyone heard the crunch as the bones were shattered, the blood splattering everywhere.

The pain was excruciating, and Micky, feeling the bile rising in his stomach, knew he was going black out. He finally understood the enormity of what was going on, just as Daniel Bailey had intended. He had been seriously harmed, and he could die in this stinking factory, on this stinking floor.

Daniel shook his head at what he perceived to be the sheer skulduggery of the man before him. ‘Fucking look at him, will you? Fainted, like a fucking little girl. Hold his head up, boys. When he finally decides to rejoin us, I’m gonna take the wanker’s teeth out. He won’t be fucking smiling at anyone for a few years.’

‘You’re letting him get out of here? Seriously?’ One of the crew voiced what they were all thinking, incredulous.

‘Course I’m letting him out! This ponce is the reason his uncle is going to come after us.’ He pointed to the man on the floor. ‘*This* is the reason his uncle is going to get his fucking ugly big head caved in, the treacherous bastard that he is too.’ Daniel walked back to where his brother was sitting. ‘Like fucking nuns these days – a bit of pain and they faint like virgins on a stag night.’

Peter Bailey laughed. ‘He’s not the first person to call me a coon, and you know it.’

Daniel shrugged. ‘It always bothered me more than it did you, Peter, even when we was kids. But if he insults *you* he insults *me* and, more to the point, he insults *our* mother. But you’re right – the time it’s just another excuse for having a go. Fucking wanker. Thinks he can short-change us? I don’t fucking think so.’

Peter nodded. ‘A fucking liberty all right.’

‘Well, bruv, we’ve worked long and hard for this, and tonight we’ll take it. Be like the fucking black and white minstrels just took over East London. After all, that’s what they are calling us according to that ponce anyway.’

Peter smiled, showing his expensive white teeth. ‘I always liked them myself. Remember when we were kids and we used to tap dance on the lino copying them? After tonight we will tap dance all over the Smoke.’

‘Fucking right we will, Peter, we’ve fucking earned it.’

‘Well, after this little lot, we’d better be prepared because this is not going to go down too well.’

Daniel laughed. ‘I should hope not, or this was all in vain! Fuck them! Me and you, bruv, are on the up.’

A groan from the floor interrupted their conversation, as Micky came round. Daniel knew he was in terrible pain and bewildered as to why this had happened to him, but he said delightedly and in an exaggerated pseudo-posh voice, ‘Oh, Peter, I do believe our guest is finally back with us. Where’s my fucking manners?’

He walked slowly back to where Micky was being held upright on his knees by his men and, looking into the young man’s eyes, he said jovially, ‘I hope you’ve got a good dentist, son, you’re going to fucking need one,’ before taking out the boy’s jaw, and the majority of his teeth, with one swipe of the hammer. Then, throwing the hammer on to a nearby bench, he said offhandedly, ‘Dro

him off at his uncle's pub, right outside the public bar. We don't want people thinking that we don't look after our guests, do we?'

Chapter Two

Lena Bailey was always worrying about something – it was part of her everyday life. But tonight was different. She knew in her heart that something was going to happen – what that was to be, she had no idea. Daniel was keeping very quiet, but then she never asked him about his business dealings.

Trying to put her worries out of her mind, Lena turned to her mother-in-law and smiled. ‘Theresa’s that smells fantastic. You’re too good to us.’

Theresa Bailey was still a good-looking woman, with traces of her youthful beauty in her eyes and her smile. She was in her early fifties, but with her make-up on, and in the right light, she could still pass for early forties. Peter and Daniel were so proud of her. Her boys both adored her, she was everything to them, and so she should be. She had borne them against the odds, and she had brought them up against even harder odds. Never having married, they had her maiden name; neither of the fathers had stayed around long after the births.

Theresa shrugged good-naturedly. ‘Ah, I was always the good cook. My mother, God rest her soul, she taught me feck-all about life, but she taught me good, basic Irish cookery.’

They both laughed at that.

‘Leave it to cool, it will be gorgeous tomorrow. And it will feed your whole fecking bunch for two days!’

She glanced at the clock on the kitchen wall; Lena could tell that her mother-in-law was as worried as she was, otherwise she would already be down the pub. She liked her nights there – she had good friends, played bingo, and enjoyed her life such as it was. She had given birth to her two sons in the forties, one by a Jamaican soldier, the other by an East-End wide boy. She had brought them up on her own, and she had made a life of sorts. She had never gone back to Ireland, her homeland, knowing that she would have had no welcome there considering the circumstances she was in. But she was still a devout Catholic, and she loved both her sons with a vengeance.

Theresa often said that life was for the people who were prepared to live it, and she had lived her life, and she didn’t regret a second. She had two handsome sons, and they had provided her with enough grandchildren to keep her busy into her old age. Lena often wondered who Theresa was trying to convince – herself or her sons. It had not been an easy life for her, and she respected her mother-in-law for the way she had brought the two of them up, and the wonderful way she had stood by them. Not an easy life in those days, or these days, if they were honest. Theresa had been sixteen and eighteen respectively when she had given birth to her sons. Her sister, who had begged for her to come over to England and help her out after marrying an English soldier, had thrown her out after the first one had arrived, and stopped talking to her altogether after the second. But she had never really let anyone know that she cared what they thought. Lena knew from things Theresa said that it had hurt deep down, but she had too much pride to let other people’s narrowmindedness ruin her day. Consequently, she had worked her fingers to the bone, and given her two sons the best she could afford. Now, they tried to repay her by making sure she wanted for nothing.

Both Lena and Peter’s wife Ria adored her. Ria, like Theresa herself, had faced prejudice to begin with her Peter, but she had won the battle and married him anyway, although her father had never accepted it. He had seen her marriage to a black man as a foolishness which could only bring trouble. Ria’s mother had come around eventually, and visited her on the sly as often as she could. Even so, she would still be loath to acknowledge her son-in-law in the street, or her grandchildren for that.

matter. Ria had understood her mother's prejudice in her own way. It was the way of the world. But for the Bailey family, colour meant nothing, and any prejudice they encountered just made them stronger and tighter.

Lena's husband Daniel had always looked up to his elder brother, had always been close to him; they were like twins in many respects. It hurt Daniel more when people were racially prejudiced than it ever hurt Peter. Peter felt that it was their problem not his; Daniel felt it was a slur on them all, the whole family. He took it as a personal insult to him and his mother, and Daniel Bailey did not like people insulting him or his. Theresa always said that Daniel would be his own worst enemy. Peter rose above people's pettiness, whereas Daniel let himself be dragged down to their level.

Lena could see Theresa's logic but, as Daniel's wife, she also knew how much he loved his brother, and how people's words could wound him. He idolised Peter, and Peter idolised him. True, they were as different as chalk and cheese personality-wise. But together they were a formidable team.

'You feel it too, don't you, Lena? It's like one of those humid and stormy summer days when you could cut the air with a knife. Something's going on with the boys and, as always, we will be the last to know what it is.'

Lena nodded. She wondered sometimes if her mother-in-law was fey; she often knew exactly what you were thinking. Unlike her mother-in-law, though, Lena preferred not to know too much about her husband's business dealings – as far as she was concerned, ignorance was bliss.

Chapter Three

Jed Lanson looked at his nephew, a boy he had never really found it in his heart to like. He was too much like his mother. Jed's sister Adelaide was a miserable fucking bitch and, like her son, she took the piss at every opportunity. All animosity aside, though, *this* was a fucking liberty, and it was something not to be taken lightly. Jed was an acknowledged Face; this was clearly the work of someone who wanted to challenge him. And he had a good idea who that might be.

The fucking Baileys. The trouble was, deep down, he liked them, respected them inasmuch as they were decent men. Peter, certainly, was a man of his word, and he was also a good earner. Daniel, on the other hand, was a hothead; it was Daniel who would have done this, he was the drama merchant Jed had used that very quality many times himself, and paid Daniel Bailey handsomely because of it. He was like the BBC. All drama, but no real substance. But he knew that Daniel and Peter wanted a bit more, and why wouldn't they?

If his idiot of a nephew had not felt the urge to berate them, humiliate them and, in short, fucking aggravate them, Jed would have offered them an in sooner rather than later. Now it would have to be a fucking lesson – he would have to make sure that everyone knew he would not countenance any kind of insubordination. He would have to go after two of his best earners over this useless boy, who couldn't find a golden fiver without a detailed map and a candle shoved up his arse! It was so unfair. But Micky was family, and if Jed swallowed this he would lose all face.

'Sling him in a motor and get him to hospital. He's had a battering, but he'll get over it. If the Baileys wanted him dead, I think we can safely assume that would be the case.'

He had said it now, said the name Bailey out loud. Everyone had guessed who the perpetrator was anyway, so it was pointless trying to pretend otherwise.

Jed Lanson looked around him, saw the faces of his workforce – good men, loyal to him – but they were getting on, were paunchy having lived the good life for far too long. Always a mistake, getting too complacent; after all, this was how he had got to where he was now. Taking out the old guard. He should have retired ten years before, quit while he was ahead. But it was hard, so hard to admit you were past it. That it was time to step back and enjoy the fruits of your labour. But, then again, unlike the Baileys, he had three daughters, no sons to bring up in the Life; that's why his sister's son had thought he was the dog's knob. For all the good it had done him – done any of them come to that.

He looked around him once more, at the men he had grown up with, worked with all these years, and he smiled wryly to himself. He had a feeling that they didn't stand a fucking chance. The Baileys would have thought this out down to the last second. This was going to be a well-planned and well-executed coup.

He sighed heavily. Twenty years ago they were the cream of the crop. Now they were more like *Dad's Army*, and he, it seemed, was Captain fucking Mainwaring. He knew instinctively that this night was not going to end well for any of them. And all over that useless ponce Micky. He would lose everything he had worked for, over a man he had never really liked, or indeed never even respected. It was life taking the piss all right.

Two hours later the last thing he ever saw was Daniel Bailey's face as he shot him through his right eye.

Chapter Four

‘Where have you been, Dan? I’ve been worried out of my mind.’

Daniel Bailey grinned that roguish smile that had attracted Lena so many years ago. It was strange, really, even after all this time and giving him four strapping sons, she still felt the same pull that she had felt the first time she saw him. He had looked like an even more handsome Rhett Butler to her, taller than most men, with thick dark hair, and deep blue eyes. She had been bowled over by him then and she still was.

He slipped into the bed beside her and, pulling her into his arms, he said quietly, ‘I was working. You know me, Lena, there’ll never be no one else for me.’

She did know that. If he had strayed she would have heard a whisper, their world was like that. Anyway, her husband was a stickler for fidelity. He saw it as his yardstick for decency and morality.

‘I know that! But I do worry about you sometimes, Dan. If anything happened to you . . .’ she trailed off.

Daniel Bailey smiled in the darkness, he had chosen well with his Lena. She was a good woman and still gorgeous too; with her rich chestnut hair and soft green eyes. She never asked for too much information about his lifestyle and his decisions either. He respected her enough to say in honesty, ‘I swear, Lena, on my mother’s life, you have *nothing* to worry about, darling. Everything is fine. In fact it’s hunky fucking dory.’

He felt her relax in his arms, knew he had allayed her fears, and he hugged her to him tightly. As she drifted back to sleep he sighed in contentment. Jed Lanson had died well, he had accepted the inevitable, realising that he should have given the Bailey boys their due before they took it.

He lay in the darkness, listening to the church clock as it chimed the hours away, planning the next few weeks. It was the aftermath of their coup that would be the hardest, and both he and his brother knew that. Taking out the Lansons was the easy bit; it was waiting to see who would crawl out of the woodwork for revenge that was going to cause them headaches. And Lanson had a boss. *He* was a shrewd man; who had let Lanson take the accolades and earn the poke. This would be the hardest part of their coup, and they would have to plan their next move carefully.

Chapter Five

Peter Bailey knocked on the door of Kevin O'Neill's house at four thirty in the morning. As he waited for the man to answer, he looked around him with genuine respect. O'Neill had left the East End, bought a large farm in Essex and had reinvented himself as a gentleman farmer.

Jed Lanson had just been a mouthpiece – O'Neill's. And now that Lanson was well out of the way, Peter Bailey was determined to make sure that Kevin O'Neill knew where *he* stood in the grand scheme of things. He felt in his pocket for the Stanley knife he had brought with him. He had come here without telling Daniel because he wanted this over as quickly as possible, and because he had a personal grudge against O'Neill.

Kevin opened the door with a genuine smile, and a cavalier attitude. O'Neill was a man who knew the importance of change and, as far as he was concerned, he didn't give a fuck who worked the Smoke for him, as long as he got his poke. He was glad it was Peter Bailey who had come to give him the hard word. At least Peter had a reputation for doing things quietly, unlike his brother Daniel. *He* was a drama queen of Olympian standards, which was why Kevin had more often used Daniel for jobs rather than this one. He began to realise now he'd overlooked the more dangerous Bailey brother.

'Well, I was expecting you at some point. Come on in.'

Peter went into the house, impressed despite himself at the sheer size and opulence around him. This was the good life all right and he wanted a bit of it for himself. In what was obviously an office he waited for O'Neill to pour them both a drink before he said quietly, 'We've taken them all out of Kevin, but you already know that, I'm sure.'

Kevin O'Neill looked at the huge black man before him. He had to admit he was a formidable opponent – both he and his brother were hard fuckers, the hardest he had ever come up against if he was honest about it.

'I heard.'

Peter smiled. 'I don't think you really get this, do you?'

Kevin O'Neill laughed, half impressed with the man's front, but aware that he also needed to be taken down a peg, sooner rather than later. 'What's to get, Peter? I couldn't give a fuck who works *me* on pavements, whether it's *you*, fucking Jed Lanson or King Street fucking Charlie. As long as my name is kept out of it, I couldn't give a toss. You had a swerve tonight because Lanson was getting too old. I've been wanting a younger, keener, hungrier crew, and if you and that moron of a brother had waited a few weeks I would have offered it to you on a plate.'

Peter raised an eyebrow sceptically. 'I have never heard anything remotely like that and, believe me, I hear fucking everything.' He downed his brandy and placed the glass carefully on the mantelpiece, watching O'Neill intently. He had admired him once, many moons ago, when they were much younger, but now he saw him for what he had become. 'Do you know what you are, Kevin? You're a fucking leech. You have lived off everyone around you since day one – you live off a rep that you got in the fucking dark ages. It's the seventies, mate, people don't doff their fucking caps no more because you shot someone once. All that's long gone. You're a mug, no more and no less. It's a new order now. You could have had another five years if you had used your fucking loaf. But you have no real intelligence. You're a fucking fool.'

Kevin O'Neill looked at the man who had the audacity to walk into his home and insult him and, shaking his head in disbelief, he said quietly, his anger now bubbling to the surface, 'You stupid black

cunt. I was willing to swallow your outrageous fucking behaviour, because I believed you and your brother were worth me taking an interest. But you walk in here like you are fucking important, and have the nerve to talk to me like *I'm* a cunt, and you think I'm going to swallow my knob like the fucker Lanson? Well, I fucking well won't.'

Peter said seriously, 'I should hope not.'

Then, taking out the Stanley knife, he sliced O'Neill across the face, opening the man's mouth from ear to ear. He disabled him in the worst way possible, making it impossible for him to say a word. It was an insult worse than anything he could have experienced and they both knew it.

'No one's coming to *your* aid, mate – we've already nobbled your little boys, I'm afraid. They deserted this sinking ship hours ago. And one last thing before I slice you up good and proper. Don't you *ever* call my brother a fucking moron. He's worth a hundred of you.'

Peter Bailey took his time, and he made sure Kevin O'Neill was still alive when he finally let him die. He wanted him to die slowly, knowing exactly who had killed him, and why. He looked around the room, noting everything. He would call his men to clean up later.

As he drove home he looked at the sun rising and smiled to himself. Today was the dawn of a new age and the Bailey boys were exactly where they deserved to be.

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