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Hide Her Name

Written by Nadine Dorries

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NADINE DORRIES

*Hide
Her Name*



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Chapter One

‘STOP LYING ON his pyjamas now, Peggy, and let yer man
‘Sout to earn an honest crust!’

Paddy’s next-door neighbour, Tommy, impatiently yelled over the backyard gate as he and the Nelson Street dockers knocked on for Paddy. They stood, huddled together in an attempt to hold back the worst of the rain, as they waited for Paddy to join them.

Much to her annoyance, Peggy, Paddy’s wife, could hear their sniggering laughter.

‘Merciful God!’ she said crossly. ‘Paddy, would ye tell that horny fecker, Tommy, it’s not us at it every five minutes.’ She snatched the enamel mug of tea out of Paddy’s hand and away from his lips before he had supped his last drop. There was not a second of silence available for him in which to protest.

‘The only reason he and Maura have two sets of twins is because he’s a dirty bugger and does it twice a night. I’ll not have him shouting such filth down the entry, now tell him, will ye, Paddy?’

Peggy and Paddy had spawned enough of their own children, but Peggy had never in her life done it twice on the same night. Every woman who lived on the four streets knew: that sinful behaviour got you caught with twins.

‘I wonder sometimes how Maura holds her head up

without the shame, so I do. Once caught doing it twice, ye would know what the feck had happened and not do it again. He must be mighty powerful with his persuasion, that Tommy. Answer me, Paddy, tell him, will ye?’

‘Aye, I will that, Peggy,’ said Paddy as he picked up his army-issue canvas bag containing his dinner: a bottle of cold tea and Shipman’s beef paste sandwiches. Rushing to the door, he placed a kiss on Peggy’s cheek, his shouted goodbye cut midway as the back gate snapped closed behind him.

Each man who lived on the four streets worked on the docks. Their day began as it ended, together.

It took exactly four minutes from the last backyard on Nelson Street, down the dock steps, to the perimeter gate. The same amount of time it took to smoke the second roll-up as ribald jokes and football banter rose high on the air. When the sun shone, their spirits lifted and they would often sing whilst walking.

The same melancholy songs heard in the Grafton rooms or the Irish centre on a Saturday night sunk into a pint of Guinness. Melodies of a love they left behind. Of green fields the colour of emeralds, or a raven-haired girl, with eyes that shone like diamonds.

The Nelson Street gang was often delayed by Paddy at number seventeen and would pause at his back gate and stand a while.

Each morning, wearing a string vest that carried the menu of every meal eaten at home that week, Paddy sat up in bed, picked up his cigarettes and matches that lay next to an ever-overflowing ashtray on the bedside table, and lit up his first ciggie of the day.

Paddy smoked a great deal in bed.

He would often wake Peggy in the middle of the night with

the sound of his match striking through the dark, providing a split second of bright illumination.

‘Give us a puff,’ Peggy would croak, without any need of the teeth soaking in a glass on the table next to her. Not waiting for nor expecting a reply, she would warily uncoil her arm from under the old grey army blanket and, cheating the cold air of any opportunity to penetrate the dark, smelly warmth beneath, grasp the wet-ended cigarette between her finger and thumb, put it to her lips and draw deeply.

‘Ah, that’s better,’ she would say. ‘Me nerves are shot, Paddy,’ and within seconds she would drift back to sleep.

This morning, the squall blew across the Mersey and up the four streets, soaking the men waiting for Paddy. They stood huddled against the entry wall, trying in vain to protect their ciggies from the downpour.

Paddy appeared through the gate, Peggy’s words at his back pushing him out onto the cobbles.

‘Yer fecking bastards, ye’ll get me hung one day, so yer will,’ said Paddy only half seriously to Tommy and the rest of the gang.

‘I was only joking, Paddy, I’ve seen a better face on a clock than on yer missus,’ said Tommy. ‘I knew ye was just stuffing yer gob with another slice of toast.’

‘Leave Peggy alone or I’ll set her on yer,’ joked Paddy. ‘She was kept in a cage till she was five. Ye’ll be sorry if I do.’

They all laughed, even Paddy.

Tall Sean, a docker by day and a boxer by night, joined in as he struggled to light up.

‘Never fear, Paddy,’ he laughed. ‘Yer a lucky man with your Peggy, her titties are so feckin’ big, ye could hang me wet donkey jacket off them with a bottle of Guinness in each pocket and it still wouldn’t fall off.’

They roared with laughter and with lots of matey reassuring pats on the back for Paddy, they continued on their way down the steps to face another day of hard graft on the river's edge.

Boots on cobbles. Minds on the match.

From an upstairs window in the Priory, Daisy Quinn, Father James's housekeeper, studied the dockers marching down the steps towards the gate, just as she had done every single morning since she herself had arrived from Dublin during the war.

In an hour, once she had cleared away the breakfast things, she would take her damp duster and move to another room, across the landing and look down on the mothers and children from Nelson Street as they walked in the opposite direction to that of the dockers, towards the school gates.

The Victorian Priory, large, square and detached, stood next to the graveyard and from each of the upstairs windows Daisy could alter her view: of the docks, the graveyard, the school and the convent, or the four streets. Daisy had her own panoramic view of life as it happened. There wasn't very much about anyone or anything Daisy didn't know. They all turned up on the Priory steps at some time, for one reason or another.

'Daisy, have ye any coal to spare? We have none and the babby is freezing.'

'Do ye have any potatoes or bread? A coat for the child to go to school?'

They were always wanting something and, sure enough, Father James could often solve the problem. They had cupboards in the Priory stuffed full of the clothes people donated for him to hand out to the poor.

But the father never gave. Mothers had to ask.

'I am here to do God's work, not the corporation's,' he would often boom in a bad-tempered way when Daisy asked

should he take a coat or a pair of shoes to a family, after she had noticed the welfare officer knocking on their door.

But pride never stood in the way of a mother needing to warm a child, so beg they often did.

Occasionally people came for happy reasons – to ask for the father to perform a christening or a wedding – and when that happened, the father would take them into his study and Daisy would carry in a tray of tea and a plate of her home-made biscuits, just as Mrs Malone had taught her.

She almost always took back an empty plate. Hardly ever had Daisy returned a biscuit to the kitchen.

If ever a mother was too polite or too scared to allow her children to take one, Daisy would press a few into her hand at the front door, wrapped in greaseproof paper and tied up with string.

‘Go on now, take it,’ she would say. ‘Have them for later.’

Daisy would have loved to have had children of her own.

She had arrived in Liverpool from Dublin to take her position at the Priory whilst still a child. She became an assistant to the fathers’ cook, Mrs Malone, and like most young girls she had a head full of dreams and plans.

Father James had disposed of those faster than a speeding bullet.

‘You will have one day and one night off per month,’ he told her, within moments of her being summoned to his study.

Daisy was a little disappointed by that news. She had been told by the sisters at the orphanage in Dublin that she would have one day a week to herself and a week’s holiday each year, during which she could travel back to Ireland and visit the only place she knew to be home, the orphanage where she had been raised since she was a baby.

Now, all these years later, Daisy could count the days off she had taken on one hand.

‘You must work hard and help Mrs Malone in the kitchen,’ the sisters at the orphanage had told her. And, sure enough, working hard was what she had done every day since.

Without a moment’s pain or illness and certainly without any warning at all, Mrs Malone had dropped dead, almost ten years to the day following Daisy’s arrival.

Mrs Malone had often told Daisy what a good worker she was.

‘I don’t know how I would manage without you, Daisy,’ she said, at least once a day. ‘The sisters may have said you were simple in the head, but I didn’t want you for brains, brawn was what I was looking for and you have plenty of that.’

Daisy smiled with pleasure. Being told that she was simple was not news to her, sure, she had heard it so often before. But the sisters had also said, ‘You can hold your head up with no shame, you were born to a very good family, Daisy Quinn.’

Daisy never thought to question why she was in an orphanage and not with her family. She had no real understanding of what a family was.

Being a good girl and coming from a good family must have been why she was sent to take up such an important job in England and for one of the fathers too.

‘You have simple ways, but they can be put to good use if you can be protected from the sin that preys upon girls like yourself,’ the sisters had told her. Daisy had no idea which sin would prey upon her or what it would do, but she was grateful for the protection.

Neither the sisters nor Mrs Malone had ever mentioned to Daisy the other reason that she had been sent to the Priory.

Daisy presumed that they could not have known, because

Father James forbade Daisy to speak to anyone about it.

‘To speak of anything that occurs in this Priory would be the greatest sin for which no forgiveness would ever be forthcoming. Ye will be left to burn alone in the eternal flames of hell and damnation. Do ye understand, girl?’

She was asked this question on a regular basis and her answer was always the dutiful same: ‘Yes, Father.’

Daisy took over the housekeeper’s role in full. She coped well and never took nor was offered a day off.

However, there had also been a number of welcome changes following Mrs Malone’s death.

Neither Father James nor any of his friends had bothered her again, and the nuns began to invite her over to the convent for tea.

She had only the bishop to tolerate now.

She sometimes wondered if Father James would have preferred someone other than herself as housekeeper, but on the night of Mrs Malone’s funeral, on her way to her modest room, she had overheard raised voices coming from the study.

‘The money for the Priory would stop if she left. It must follow her wherever she is and, anyway, the sisters in Dublin would have too many questions to ask should she be moved.’

That was the bishop speaking. A fat man, distinguishable by his thin, weedy whine, which as it whistled into the air struggled past the blubbery folds of lard gathered under his chin.

‘I suppose we are safer if she is here,’ said Father James in a tone loaded with disappointment.

‘Aye, we are that, but anyway, she is simple. No one would ever believe a word she said. I will write now that she is happy and improved. That she is running the show and, sure, isn’t that the truth? Wasn’t that just the grandest bit of rabbit pie we ever ate for supper?’

Daisy grinned from ear to ear with pleasure. They had loved her rabbit pie.

On this wet morning, Daisy padded across to the south side of the empty house. Sister Evangelista had popped a note through the door late last night to let her know she would be visiting the Priory this morning to help Daisy pack up the father's room, ready to send his belongings to his sister in America.

The murder of Father James in the graveyard had taken place only feet away from the Priory and everyone was still in a state of profound shock.

Everyone except Daisy, that was.

Daisy wasn't sad and didn't miss the father at all. Not in the way she had missed Mrs Malone when she died.

In fact, Daisy missed Mrs Malone a great deal. She had always told Daisy what she could and could not do, and with no one to guide her, Daisy was lost.

Father James had told her what she could and could not say.

What should she say now and who to?

Her mind was in torment.

Daisy pressed her forehead against the cold window and, looking down, watched the children walking to school. She saw Sister Evangelista close the convent door, make her way down the path and turn right along the pavement towards the Priory. The Reverend Mother waved to Kitty Doherty from number nineteen, who was making her way towards the school steps on the opposite side of the road to the convent. Kitty was herding along the two sets of twin boys and that lovely girl, Nellie Deane, from number forty-two was helping her. The girls waved back to Sister Evangelista, all smiles.

The Kitty girl. Daisy had often seen Father James visit her house, very often at night, but he never visited Nellie's.

Nellie, whose mother, Bernadette, had died so tragically young and whom Daisy still saw sometimes in the dead of the night, running up and down the four streets.

It was Nellie's Nana Kathleen who had woken Daisy late on the night the father was murdered. She had been talking to Bernadette as she left the Keating girl's wedding and followed the river, down towards Nelson Street.

Daisy wasn't scared to see the ghostly Bernadette with Kathleen. She often saw her in the graveyard and up and down Nelson Street, as she flew straight through the wall into what had once been her home, number forty-two.

Daisy, uneasy, had been unable to return to sleep on that particular night. She had wandered out of her bedroom, the static from her peach, brushed-nylon nightdress crackling and snapping at her feet as she walked. She had leant over the dark, swan-necked banister that swept away steeply, and gazed down the long stairwell. The hall light was still on. The father had yet to return home from the wedding. He would switch the light off when he returned to the Priory.

From the window, Daisy had watched Nana Kathleen and Bernadette, and waited. And then she had seen the father in his large hat and cloak, turning the corner into the back entry just ahead of them both. He hadn't come back to the Priory as usual that night.

Daisy knew she should tell someone what she had seen. But Daisy wasn't allowed to tell anyone anything.

'I might be simple,' she had said to herself as she got back into bed on that fateful evening, 'but I'm not an eejit. There's no way I am spending eternity stood in the fires of hell.'

When the bell pull rang, Daisy almost fell down the stairs as she ran to open the Priory door for Sister Evangelista. She had been unhappy sleeping in the huge house on her own since the murder. Today she would beg Sister Evangelista to take her to the convent right away. She would be safe there, just as she had been at the orphanage.

‘Morning, Daisy.’ Sister Evangelista sounded brighter than she felt.

She was dreading this job but the bishop had been very strong indeed on the telephone.

‘Make sure you clear up every single thing that belonged to Father James, Sister, and I shall be with you later in the morning in my car to cart it all away to send on to his sister in America, everything, do ye understand?’

Of course Sister Evangelista understood. Did the man think she was witless?

‘Yes, Father, there will be no problem. The housekeeper Daisy will help me and it shouldn’t take long.’

‘Ah, yes, Daisy, the girl is a bit simple, is she not, Sister?’

‘She is, Bishop, but she is a good housekeeper, Mrs Malone trained her well.’

‘I am sure she did, but she is bound to be very upset indeed and may be prone to rambling. We must be careful to protect her, as she has no family of her own, except for us. I wonder if a spell in the peace and quiet of the convent might be a good idea?’

This had never crossed Sister Evangelista’s mind and she was far from happy. Disruption in the convent always upset the nuns’ routine and, sure, didn’t she have enough to do with a school to run as well?

However, even she dared not argue with the bishop.

‘Aye, well, I’ll see how she is, Father, when I get there,

shall I? She will need to prepare the Priory for the father's replacement.'

No sooner had the words left her mouth than her throat began to thicken with emotion and tears swam across her eyes.

'I mean, what are the arrangements, Bishop? Where is Father James to be buried? We need someone in authority here. Everyone is dreadfully upset. Will you definitely be coming soon?'

The bishop had promised to visit days ago. But something both mysterious and urgent had occurred daily to prevent him. Sister Evangelista had carried the entire burden alone and now she felt exhausted.

She had almost broken down earlier in the morning when speaking to her friend, Miss Devlin, a teacher at the school.

'Our own Father James, found murdered in the graveyard, and the bishop still hasn't arrived to help deal with the police or bring some authority to the church, and now, here I am, about to pack up all his personal possessions in the Priory with only simple Daisy to help.'

Into one of her hands Miss Devlin had quietly placed a hankie, and into the other a cup of tea with a couple of Anadin on the saucer.

Tea and Anadin, hailed as a miracle cure by all of Liverpool's women. A headache? Take a cuppa tea and two Anadin. A toothache? A cuppa tea and two Anadin. A priest found murdered in the graveyard? A cuppa tea and two Anadin. Anadin sat on the wooden shelf next to the Woodbines in the local tobacconist's and they sold almost as many of one as the other. Acknowledged as an effective alternative to gin to help with the pains of afterbirth, mastitis, monthlies and the constant headaches brought on by looking after a dozen unruly children.