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**Opening Extract from...**

# A Death in Summer

Written by Benjamin Black

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# A DEATH IN SUMMER

# 1

When word got about that Richard Jewell had been found with the greater part of his head blown off and clutching a shotgun in his bloodless hands, few outside the family circle and few inside it, either, considered his demise a cause for sorrow. Jewell, known to the jauntier among his detractors as Diamond Dick, had been a wealthy man. The bulk of his money he had inherited from his father, the notorious Francis T.—Francie—Jewell, sometime lord mayor and proprietor of a highly successful newspaper chain that included the scurrilous and much-feared *Daily Clarion*, the city's top-selling paper. The older Jewell had been something of an uncut stone, given to violent vendettas and a loathing of trade unions, but his son, though no less unscrupulous and vengeful, had sought to polish the family name to a high lustre by means of well-publicised acts of philanthropy. Richard Jewell was known for his sponsorship of orphanages and schools for the handicapped, while the recently opened Jewell Wing of the Hospital of the Holy Family was in the vanguard of the fight against tuberculosis. These and other initiatives should have made Dick Jewell a hero in a city beset by poverty and chronic ill-health, but now that he was dead

there were many among the citizenry who declared themselves ready to dance on his grave.

His corpse was discovered that Sunday afternoon in his office above the stables at Brooklands, the place in County Kildare jointly owned by him and his wife. Maguire, the yard manager, had come up by the outside stairs to give him a report of a stallion that was lame and unlikely to run the following Thursday in an evening fixture at Leopardstown. The door to the office was ajar but Maguire had known better than to walk in without knocking. Right away, though, he had the feeling that something was seriously amiss. When asked later to describe this feeling about it he could not; only the hair, he said, had stood up on the back of his neck, and he distinctly remembered hearing Blue Lightning sending up a whinny in the quiet below in the yard; Blue Lightning was Dick Jewell's darling, a three-year-old with the highest potential.

The shotgun blast had lifted Jewell out of his chair and flung him backwards at a crooked angle across the desk, where he lay with a bit of jawbone and a few teeth and a bloodied stump of spine, all that was left of what had been his head, dangling down on the far side. On the big picture window in front of the desk there was a great splatter of blood and brains, like a giant peony blossom, with a gaping hole in the middle of it giving a view of rolling grasslands stretching off to the horizon. Maguire at first could hardly take in what had happened. It looked as if the man had shot himself, but Diamond Dick Jewell was the last person Maguire or anyone else would have expected to blow his own head off.

Rumours and speculation started up at once. It added to the shock of the event that it had taken place on a drowsy Sunday afternoon in summer, while the beeches along the drive at Brooklands sweltered in the sun and the mingled smell of hay and horses lay heavy on the summer air. Not that many were privy to the details of what had happened. Who knew better than the Jewells how to hush up a scandal? And a suicide, in those days, in this place, was a very grave scandal indeed.

In the *Clarion* offices on Eden Quay the atmosphere was a combination of pandemonium and wondering disbelief. The staff, from copy-boys to editorial, felt as if they were moving under water, or through a medium heavier and more hindering than water, and yet at the same time everything seemed to be racing along like a river in spate and carrying all before it. The editor, Harry Clancy, had come in from Portmarnock, where a caddy had been sent on a bicycle to intercept him at the twelfth hole, and he was still in golfing gear, the studs in his shoes rattling out a tattoo on the lino as he marched back and forth in front of his desk dictating a eulogy, which his secretary, the no longer young, and faintly moustached, Miss Somers, was taking down in longhand on a pad of copy-paper.

'. . . should have been struck down in the prime of life,' Clancy was intoning, 'by a cerebral haemorrhage—' He broke off and looked at Miss Somers, who had stopped writing and sat motionless with her pencil suspended over the sheaf of paper on her knee. 'What's the matter?'

Miss Somers seemed not to have heard him, and began writing again. '. . . *in the prime of life* . . .' she murmured, scoring the words laboriously into the cheap grey paper.

'What am I supposed to say?' Clancy demanded. 'That the boss blew his brains out?'

'. . . *by a cer-e-bral haem-orrh-age* . . .'

'All right, all right, cut that.' Clancy had been pleased with himself for having hit on such an acceptable-sounding cause of death. It *had* been a kind of haemorrhage, had it not? There was bound to have been plenty of blood, anyway, seeing it was a shotgun Jewell had used on himself. The *Clarion* would not say it was suicide, nor would any of its rivals: suicides never got reported in the press; it was an unspoken convention, to spare the feelings of the relatives and make sure the insurance companies would not seize on it as an excuse to renege on paying out to the family. All the same, Clancy thought, better not to print an outright lie. It would get around soon enough that the boss had topped himself—Jesus, there was an apt phrase!—no matter what convenient lies were told. 'Just say *at the tragically early age of forty-five and at the pinnacle of his professional career* and leave it at that.'

He thrust his hands into his pockets and crossed clatteringly to the window and stood looking down at the river. Did no one ever clean this glass?—he was hardly able to see out. Everything was shimmering in the heat out there and he could almost taste the cindery dust in the air, and the river had a bilious stink that no thickness of grimed glass could shut out. 'Read it over to me so far,' he growled. He had been on fine form on the course today, with three bogeys and a birdie at the ninth.

His secretary risked a sideways glance at him. That pink pullover might be all right on the golf course, she thought, but here in the office it made him look like a superannuated nancy-boy. He was a stout man with a head of auburn curls, greying now, and a cross-hatching of livid veins over his cheekbones that was the legacy of a lifetime's hard drinking. He should beware a brain haemorrhage himself, Miss Somers considered. He was the fourth editor she had worked for in the forty years of her employment at the *Clarion*, not counting Eddie Randall who had broken down after a fortnight in the job and been sacked. She remembered old man Jewell, the well-named Francie; over a hot port in Mooney's one Christmas he had made an indecent proposal to her that she had pretended not to understand. All the same, he was a real man, not like the fellows going about now, calling themselves journalists—whatever happened to *reporters*?—and spending half the working week playing golf and the other half in the pub.

Clancy was off again, pacing and prating. '. . . scion of a great Dublin family and a—' He stopped again, checked as Miss Somers delicately but unignorably cleared her throat. 'What is it now?'

'Pardon me, Mr Clancy—but what was that word?'

'What?' He was baffled.

'Do you mean *scion*?' Miss Somers asked. 'I believe that's how it's pronounced, not *skion*.'

She would not raise her eyes to his, and he stood in the middle of the floor breathing hard and gazing at the white parting down the centre of her silver hair with an expression of angry helplessness. Bloody impossible dried-up old maid! 'Oh, do forgive my ignorance, please,' he said with weary

sarcasm. '—*scion* of a great Dublin family . . .' And a ruthless bastard, he was thinking, who would tear out your heart as quick as look at you. He waved a hand impatiently and went and sat down behind his desk. 'We'll finish it later,' he said. 'There's plenty of time. Ask the switch to get me Hackett over at Pearse Street, will you?'

But Inspector Hackett, of course, was out at Brooklands. Like Clancy, he was not in a good mood. He had just finished his Sunday dinner—a nice leg of lamb—and was getting ready to go down to Wicklow for a bit of fishing when the phone rang. A phone call on a Sunday afternoon had to be either from his sister-in-law, threatening a visit with her brood, or from the station. Today, somehow, just by listening to the bell shrilling, he had known which one it was, and that the matter was going to be a weighty one. The new fellow, Jenkins, had picked him up in a squad car; he had heard the yowling of the siren from three streets away. His wife had made him a sandwich from the leftover lamb—May's main task in life nowadays seemed to be to keep him fed—and the warmish wad of bread and meat wrapped in greaseproof paper and making his jacket pocket sag was an annoyance to him. He would have thrown it out of the window of the squad car when they got into the country except that he would have felt disloyal.

Jenkins was in a state of high excitement. This was the first serious job he had taken part in since he had been assigned to work with Detective Inspector Hackett, and serious it certainly promised to be. Although initial reports from Brooklands had suggested that Richard Jewell had

killed himself, Hackett was sceptical, and suspected foul play. Jenkins did not understand how the inspector was managing to be so calm—even with all his years of service he could not have dealt with more than a handful of murder cases, and certainly not with one as sensational as this, if murder it was. All he seemed concerned about, however, was the fact that his fishing trip had had to be cancelled. When he had come out of the house, his missus had been hovering behind him in the shadow of the doorway, he had been scowling, and the first thing he had done when he got in the car was demand why the hell the siren had been going, since it was Sunday and there was hardly a vehicle on the streets, and after that he had not spoken a dozen words until they got to Kildare town. There they had to ask the way to Brooklands, which made him all the more annoyed—'Would you not have thought of looking at the bloody map before you set out?' And then, when they reached Brooklands at last, there was the worst humiliation of all. A corpse was one thing, but a corpse with nothing where its head should be except part of the jaw and that gristly bit of spine sticking out at the back was altogether another. 'Get out!' the inspector had shouted at him when he saw him turn green. 'Get out before you puke on the evidence!' And poor Jenkins had stumbled down the wooden stairway outside and coughed up the remains of his dinner in a corner of the cobbled yard.

It felt strange to Hackett to be standing here, on a fine country estate, with the birds singing all about and a slab of sunlight falling at his heels from the open doorway of Jewell's office, and at the same time to have the old familiar smell of violent death in his nostrils. Not that he had smelt

it so very often, but once caught it was never to be forgotten, that mingled faint stink of blood and excrement and something else, something thin and sharp and insidious, the smell of terror itself, perhaps, or of despair—or was he being fanciful? Could despair and terror really leave a trace? He heard Jenkins down in the yard, dry-retching now. He could not find it in his heart to blame the poor chap for his weakness: Jewell was a frightful sight, sprawled across the desk as crooked as a corkscrew with his brains spattered all over the window behind him. The shotgun was a beauty, he noticed, a Purdey, if he was not mistaken.

Jenkins came clumping up the wooden stairs and stopped just inside the door. 'Sorry, Inspector.'

Hackett did not turn. He was standing at the desk with his hands in his trouser pockets and his hat pushed to the back of his head. There was a shine, Jenkins noted, on the elbows and the backside of his blue suit. He peered past his boss's shoulder at the thing that had been thrown over the desk like a side of beef. He was disappointed: he had been hoping for a murder, but the corpse was holding the gun in its own hands.

They heard a car drawing up in the yard. Jenkins glanced back down the stairs. 'Forensics,' he said.

The inspector made a chopping gesture with the side of his hand, still not turning. 'Tell them to wait a minute. Tell them'—he laughed shortly—'tell them I'm cogitating.'

Jenkins went down the wooden steps, and there was the sound of voices in the yard, and then he came back. Hackett would have liked to be alone. He always had a peculiar sense of peace in the presence of the dead; it was the same feeling, he realised with a start, that he had now

when May went up to bed early and left him in his armchair by the hearth, with a glass of something in his hand, studying the faces in the fire. This was not a good sign, this hankering after solitude. It was the other, sweeter, smells, of horses and hay and the like, that were making him think in this way—of the past, of his childhood, of death and of the ones of his who had died down the years.

'Who was it found him?' he asked. 'The groom, was it?'

'Yard manager,' Jenkins behind him said. 'Name of Maguire.'

'Maguire. Aye.' Scenes such as this of bloody mischief were a stopped moment of time, a slice taken out of the ordinary flow of things and held suspended, like a specimen pressed between the glass slides under a microscope. 'Did he hear the gunshot?'

'He says not.'

'Where is he now?'

'In the house. Mrs Jewell brought him in, he was that shocked.'

'She's here, the missus?—the widow?' Jewell's wife was foreign, he recalled. Spanish, was it? No, French. 'Did she hear the gun?'

'I haven't talked to her.'

Hackett took a step forward and touched the dead man's wrist. Cold. Could have been lying here for hours, no one the wiser. 'Tell those forensics lads to come up.' Jenkins went to the door. 'And where's Harrison, is he on the way?' Harrison was the state pathologist.

'Sick, apparently.'

'Or out on that boat of his, more likely.'

'He had a heart attack, it seems.'

'Did he?'
'Last week.'
'Christ.'
'They're sending Doctor Quirke.'
'Are they, now.'

Maguire was a big man with a big square head and square rope-veined hands that even yet were noticeably trembling. He sat at the kitchen table in a patch of yellow sunlight with a mug of tea before him, staring at nothing. He was ashen, and his lower lip, too, was unsteady. Hackett stood and gazed at him, frowning. The ones that look the toughest, he was thinking, are always the hardest hit. There was a vase of pink tulips on the table. Off in the fields somewhere a tractor was buzzing; hay-making, on a Sunday afternoon, to get the best of the weather. Rain was forecast for later in the week. A big wireless set standing on a shelf beside the sink was muttering to itself in an undertone.

Hackett had met Richard Jewell only once, at a fund-raiser for Garda widows. Jewell had had a bland sheen to him, like all rich men, and only the eyes were real, set like rivets into a smiling mask. Good-looking, though, in a wolfish way, with too many big white teeth and a nose like the head of a stone axe. As he moved among the crowd, glad-handing the commissioner and the mayor and making the women weak at the knees, he seemed to be holding himself aloft, turning himself this way and that, as if he were indeed a precious gem to be admired and envied. Diamond Dick. It was hard not to be impressed. Why would such a man think of shooting himself?

'Will you take some tea, Inspector?' Mrs Jewell enquired. Tall, slender, with intense dark eyes, she stood by the sink with a cigarette in her fingers, cool and preternaturally calm, in a dress of dove-grey silk and narrow patent-leather shoes with stiletto heels. Her very black hair was tied back, and she wore no jewellery. Some tall, stately bird, a heron, say, would have looked less incongruous than she did in the midst of these homely surroundings.

'No, thank you, ma'am,' Hackett said. Jenkins made a sound and Hackett half turned in his direction, lifting a hand. 'This, by the way, is Detective Sergeant Jenkins.' Whenever he said the young man's name he had to bite his lip in order not to grin. Jenkins: for some reason it made him think of a picture he had seen somewhere when he was a child, of a donkey wearing a hat with holes in it for the big furry ears to stick up through. And indeed Jenkins's own ears were remarkably large, and were even pointed a little at the tops. He had a long, very pale face and an Adam's apple that seemed to be attached to the end of an elastic string. Though eager and always obliging, he was a hapless specimen. Many are the things, Hackett told himself, that are sent to try us.

'Tell me, ma'am,' he said carefully, 'were you here when—when it happened?'

Mrs Jewell arched an eyebrow. 'When *did* it happen?'

'We won't know for sure till the pathologist arrives, but my fellows think maybe four or five hours ago.'

'Then no. I got here at'—she glanced at a clock on the wall above the stove—'three, half past three, something like that.'

Hackett nodded. He liked her accent. She did not sound

French, more like that Swedish woman in the pictures, what was she called? 'Can you think of a reason why your husband . . . ?'

She almost laughed. 'No, of course not.'

He nodded again, frowning at his hat, the brim of which he was holding lightly between the tips of the fingers and thumbs of both hands; it irked him that in front of this woman he felt like an applicant for something or other, all meekness and humble deference. It struck him suddenly as odd that everyone was standing, except Maguire, sunk there in shock at the table. What was the matter with the fellow, had he lost his nerve altogether?

He turned his attention to the woman again. 'Forgive me for saying so, Mrs Jewell, but you don't seem very surprised.'

She widened her eyes—how extraordinary they were, black and glittering, the lids tapered at the corners like a cat's. 'But certainly I am,' she said. 'I am'—she groped for the word—'I am baffled.'

This seemed to allow of no further advance, and he turned to the yard manager again. 'You say you didn't hear the gun?'

At first Maguire did not realise it was him who was being addressed, and Hackett had to put the question again, more loudly. The big man stirred as if he had been prodded from behind. 'No,' he said, frowning at the floor. 'I was probably out on the gallops.'

Hackett looked to Mrs Jewell. 'The gallops, where the horses are exercised,' she said.

She had finished her cigarette and was casting about for somewhere to deposit the butt, with an air of slightly

amused vague helplessness; it was as if she had never been in a kitchen before, not even this one, and was both taken with and puzzled by the quaintness of all these strange implements and appliances. Jenkins spotted an ashtray on the table and came forward quickly and brought it to her, and was rewarded by an unexpectedly warm, even radiant, smile, and for the first time Hackett saw what a beautiful woman she was—too thin, and too chilly in her manner, but lovely all the same. He was surprised at himself: he had never been much of a connoisseur of women's looks.

'Did you go up to the office?' he asked her.

'Yes, of course,' she said. He was silent, turning the hat brim slowly in his fingers. She smiled with one side of her mouth. 'I was in France for all of the war, Inspector,' she said. 'It is not the first dead body I have seen.'

Ingrid Bergman—that was it, that was who she sounded like. She was watching him, and under her scrutiny he lowered his eyes. Was that what her husband was to her now, a dead body? What a queer person she is, he thought, even for a Frenchwoman.

Suddenly Maguire spoke, surprising himself as much as them, it appeared. 'He got me to clean the gun,' he said. The three of them looked at him. 'He gave it to me yesterday and asked me to clean it.' He returned their looks, each one's in turn. 'I never thought,' he said in a tone of wonderment. 'I never thought.'

There was nothing to be said to this and the others went back to being as they had been, as if he had not spoken.

'Who else was in the house?' Hackett asked of Mrs Jewell.

'No one, I think,' she said. 'Sarah—Mr Maguire's wife and our housekeeper here—was at Mass and then to visit her mother. Mr Maguire himself, as he says, was out on the gallops. And I was still on my way here, in the Land Rover.'

'There's no other staff? Yard hands, stable girls'—he did not know the technical titles—'anyone like that?'

'Of course,' Mrs Jewell said. 'But it is Sunday.'

'Ah, right, so it is.' That tractor, the needling sound of it, distant though it was, was giving him a pain in the head. 'Perhaps your husband was counting on that, on the place being deserted?'

She shrugged. 'Perhaps. Who can say, now?' She clasped her hands lightly together at her breast. 'You should understand, Inspector . . .' She faltered. 'Forgive me, I—?'

'Hackett.'

'Yes, yes, sorry, Inspector Hackett. You must understand, my husband and I, we live . . . separately.'

'You were separated?'

'No, no.' She smiled. 'Even still, sometimes, my English . . . I mean, we have our own lives. It is—it was—that kind of marriage.' She smiled again. 'I think perhaps I have shocked you, a little, yes?'

'No, ma'am, not at all. I'm just trying to understand the circumstances. Your husband was a very prominent person. There'll be a lot of stuff about this in the papers, a lot of speculation. It's all very . . . delicate, shall we say?'

'You mean, there will be a scandal.'

'I mean, people will want to know. People will want reasons.'

'*People?*' she said scathingly, showing for the first time a

spark of passion, a spark, and no more. '—What business is it of *people*? My husband is dead, my daughter's father. That is a scandal, yes, but for me and for my family and for no one else.'

'Yes,' Hackett said mildly, nodding. 'That's true. But curiosity is a great itch, Mrs Jewell. I'd recommend you keep the phone off the hook for a day or two. Have you friends you could stay with, that would put you up?'

She leaned her head far back and looked at him down the length of her narrow fine-boned nose. 'Do I seem to you, Inspector,' she asked icily, 'the kind of person who would go into hiding? I know about *people*, about their *itch*. I know about interrogations. I am not afraid.'

There was a brief silence.

'I'm sure you're not, Mrs Jewell,' Hackett said. 'I'm sure you're not.'

Jenkins in the background was gazing at the woman with admiring fascination. Maguire, still lost in himself, heaved a great sigh. Mrs Jewell's anger, if it was that, subsided, and she turned her face away. In profile she had the look of a figure on a pharaoh's tomb. Then they heard the sound of another car squeaking its way on to the cobbles of the yard.

'That'll be Quirke,' Inspector Hackett said.

The late afternoon had turned tawny and Hackett was pacing in a paddock behind the stables. The parched grass crackled under his feet and spurts of amber dust flew up. The country was in need of rain, all right, though it was only the start of June. He saw Doctor Quirke approaching

from the direction of the house and stopped and waited for him. Teetering along on those absurdly dainty feet of his, the big man seemed not so much to walk as to stumble forward heavily, limping slightly; it was as if he had tripped over something a long way back and were still trying to regain his balance. He wore as usual a dark double-breasted suit and a black slouch hat. Hackett believed that if they should chance upon each other in the middle of the Sahara desert Quirke would be in the same get-up, the jacket buttoned across and the hat pulled down over one eye and the narrow tie knotted askew.

'Doctor Quirke,' the detective said, by way of greeting, 'did it ever strike you we're in the wrong line of work? We only seem to meet up when someone is dead.'

'Like undertakers,' Quirke said. He lifted his hat and ran a hand over his damp and gleaming brow. 'This heat.'

'Are you complaining, after the winter we had?'

They turned together and looked back at the house and the straggle of stables. 'Handsome spot,' Hackett said. 'And to think it's only Diamond Dick's little place in the country.' The house was big enough to be a mansion, with fine Georgian windows and a sweep of granite steps leading up to a front door flanked by two stout pillars painted white. Ivy and Virginia creeper clung to the walls, and the four lofty chimneys of honey-coloured brick had at least a dozen pots apiece. 'Did you encounter the widow?'

Quirke was still squinting in the direction of the house. 'Yes,' he said. 'I met her before, can't remember where—some function or other.'

'Aye, the Jewells were a great couple for the functions.'

They were each aware of a constraint between them,

small but almost palpable. Death had that effect: it was embarrassing, like a bad odour. They spoke of Harrison and his heart attack. Quirke said he had not minded being called out on a Sunday, and Hackett thought, Yes, single men don't care about their Sundays. Though he had heard Quirke was going out with some woman now—an actress, was it? He considered it best not to enquire: Quirke's private life was a tangled business at the best of times. If there was such a thing as a private life, the detective thought, in this country.

They set off ambling across the dry grass towards the house. 'Did you have a look at His Nibs?' the inspector asked.

Quirke nodded. 'Some mess.'

'Indeed.' There was a pause. 'And what did you think?'

'Well,' Quirke said drily, 'there's hardly any doubt as to the cause of death.'

They left the paddock, and Hackett shut and barred the gate behind them. An unseen horse in one of the stables spluttered through its lips noisily and gave a kick to something wooden. Other animals stirred too, then settled down again. A sense of unease lay upon the Sunday quiet—or was it only imagined? But violent death is a definite presence; Hackett had felt the swish of its dark mantle before.

'There'll be some hullabaloo,' he said. He chuckled. 'What will the *Clarion* have to say, I wonder?'

'It will print the truth fearlessly, as always.'

This time they both laughed.

'And what will that be?' Hackett asked.

'Hmm?'

'The truth.'

'Ah, that's a question.'

They came to the house and stopped to admire its noble frontage. 'Is there an heir, I wonder?' Hackett mused.

'The widow will inherit, surely?'

'She hardly looks to me like one who'd be prepared to run a newspaper business.'

'Oh, I don't know. She's French, after all. They're different.'

'What age is the daughter?'

'I don't know—a child. Must be eight or nine, I suppose.'

Jenkins came round the corner of the stables, whey-faced and shaky-looking still. 'Are those fellows done yet?' Hackett asked him. Forensics teams always irritated him, he was not sure why.

'They're finishing up, Inspector.'

'They never finish, those boys.'

But when the three had climbed the outside stairs to the office the head chemist and his assistant were packing their things into their square black leather bags and preparing to leave. Morton was the older one's name, a heavy-set fellow with dewlaps and a mournful eye. 'Jesus Christ,' he said disgustedly, '—shotguns!'

'Well,' Hackett observed mildly, 'they're quick, that's for sure.'

Morton's assistant had a bad stammer and rarely spoke. Hackett had a moment's trouble remembering his name. Phelps, that was it. Morton and Phelps: sounded like a comedy duo on the wireless. Poor Jenkins was looking everywhere except at what was left of Diamond Dick Jewell.

'You'll have a report for me by the morning, yes?' Hack-

ett said to Morton, who rolled a moist eye and said nothing. The policeman was not to be put off. 'On my desk, by nine?'

'It'll be ready when it's ready,' Morton muttered, taking up his bag.

Phelps grinned and bit his lip. The two departed, tramping heavily down the stairs.

'What sort of an outfit is it we're running at all,' Hackett asked, of no one in particular, 'with the likes of those two clowns for experts?' He put a hand to his jacket pocket and felt the lumpy sandwich there, warmish still and soft.

Quirke was standing in the middle of the floor with his hands in his pockets and his head inclined to one side, gazing thoughtfully at the body on the desk. 'No note,' he said. Hackett turned to him. 'No suicide note, or did you find one?' Hackett made no answer, and they continued to regard each other for a long moment. 'Not what you'd expect,' Quirke said then, 'of the likes of Richard Jewell.'

Jenkins, his head cocked attentively, was watching them with lively attention.

Hackett sighed and shut his eyes and pressed bunched fingers and a thumb to the bridge of his nose, which was as shapeless as a potato and had something of the same greyish hue. 'Are you saying,' he said, looking at Quirke again, 'that what we have here may not be a suicide?'

Quirke met his gaze. 'Just what is it you're driving at, Inspector?' he asked, putting on a clipped accent. They grinned at each other, somewhat bleakly. As youngsters they had both been keen attenders of the picture-palaces of the day.

'Come on,' Hackett said, 'let's go and have another word with the grieving widow.'

In fact, Quirke remembered perfectly well where he had met Françoise d'Aubigny, which was how the independent-minded Mrs Richard Jewell had introduced herself to him, and he could not think why he had pretended otherwise to the inspector. It was at a Bastille Day cocktail party in the French Embassy the previous summer. There had been a diplomatic flurry early on when someone had declined to shake hands with the ambassador, an old Pétainist with exquisite manners, a majestic mane of silver hair and a sinister tic in his left cheek. Quirke came upon the woman standing alone at a window overlooking the garden. She was pale and tense, and he did not know what had drawn him to her other than her classical if slightly severe beauty. She was wearing a gown of diaphanous white stuff, high-waisted in what he believed was called the empire style, and her hair too was piled high and bound with a scarlet ribbon; bathed in the gold light from the garden, she might have been a portrait by Jacques Louis David. She was clutching a champagne flute in the intertwined fingers of both hands and almost upset it when he spoke, startling her. He was momentarily taken aback by the look she gave him, at once hunted and haunted, or so it seemed to him. She quickly recovered herself, however, and accepted a cigarette.

What had they talked about? He could not remember. The weather, probably, and France, no doubt, given the day it was and where they were. She mentioned her

husband but did not say who he was, only confided, smiling, that he was here and was not pleased with her, for it was she who had refused to take the ambassador's expensively manicured hand. 'My brother was in the Resistance,' she said, and gave a small shrug. 'He died.' Other people had come to the window then and Quirke had drifted away.

Later, when Isabel Galloway, who was at the party, told him who the Frenchwoman was he was surprised and even somewhat disconcerted: he would not have picked Richard Jewell as the kind of man that the kind of woman he guessed Françoise d'Aubigny to be would marry. Isabel had been suspicious, of course, and had wanted to know what the two of them had been hugger-muggering about, as she said, there at the window, looking like Danielle Darrieux and Gérard Philipe, or somesuch. Isabel considered jealousy, quickly sparked and forcefully expressed, as love's necessary tribute. She and Quirke had been together only for—what?—half a year? In that time there had been bumpy passages: Isabel was an actress, and wore her theatricality offstage as well as on—

Hackett was speaking to him.

'Sorry?'

They were at the front door, waiting for their knock to be answered. Jenkins had been sent back to Jewell's office, to keep the corpse company, as Hackett had said, winking at Quirke.

'I said, what will we say to her? The wife, I mean.'

Quirke considered. 'It's not my place to say anything to her. You're the detective.'

'I tried already, and got nowhere.'

The door was opened by Sarah Maguire, the housekeeper. She was a wan creature with mousy hair, and had a flinching manner, as if she were constantly in expectation of being hit. Her pale eyes were red-rimmed from weeping. She stood back for them to enter and led them off wordlessly along the broad hall, over the gleaming parquet. The place smelt of flowers and furniture polish and money.

Mrs Jewell, Françoise d'Aubigny—what *would* he call her? Quirke wondered—was in the drawing room. At first when the two men entered they felt as if they had walked into a mass of hanging gauze, so dense was the light flowing in at four great windows, two each in adjacent walls. The windows were open wide at the top half, and the long trails of muslin curtain hanging before them were bellying languorously in the breeze. Mrs Jewell was standing to one side, holding something in her left hand, some kind of glass ball, and turning back to look at them over her shoulder. How slender she was, how narrow her face with its high cheekbones and high, pale forehead. She was far more beautiful than Quirke recalled. She gave him a quizzical look, half smiling. Did she remember him from that one brief encounter a year ago? Surely not.

'This is Doctor Quirke,' Hackett said. 'He's here instead of Doctor Harrison, the state pathologist, who's not well.'

She extended a cool hand for Quirke to shake. 'We meet again,' she said. Surprise made him miss a beat, and he could think of nothing to say and instead attempted an unaccustomed bow, bobbing his head awkwardly. 'You've been to see my husband?' she asked. She might have been speaking of a social visit. Her glossy black eyes took him

in calmly, with the hint of a smile, ironic, a little mocking, even.

'Yes,' Quirke said, 'I'm afraid so. I'm very sorry, Madame'—he faltered—'Mrs Jewell.'

'You are kind,' the woman said, withdrawing her hand.

Quirke now was startled to notice, from the corner of his eye, that there was another person present, a woman, in her mid-twenties, reclining on a sofa in front of one of the windows, with her head back and her long legs extended sideways and crossed at the ankles. She wore jodhpurs and gleaming black riding boots and a moss-green shirt; a kerchief, knotted loosely at her throat, was the same shade of old-gold as the upholstery of the sofa where she sat. She was regarding Quirke and the policeman with an expression of the scantest interest. A misted cut-glass tumbler of what must be gin and tonic, with ice cubes and a wedge of lime, was balanced beside her on the arm of the sofa. *Not a hundred yards from this room and these svelte, poised women*, Quirke was thinking, *Richard Jewell is sprawled across a desk with his head blown off.*

'This is my husband's sister, Denise,' Mrs Jewell said. 'We call her Dannie.'

Quirke went forward, offering his hand, with Hackett hard behind him. They were like a pair of clumsy courtiers, Quirke thought, stumbling on each other's heels in the presence of the queen and the crown princess. Dannie Jewell was as slim as her brother's wife, but fair where she was dark. She had short reddish-blonde hair and a face, broad at the brow and tapered at the chin, that showed a strong, even a jarring, resemblance, Quirke noted, to what

he remembered of the man lying dead in his office across the cobbled yard. She hardly lifted her head from the sofa-back as she took Quirke's hand and then the inspector's, unsmiling. She said something but so softly it was inaudible, which made both men lean forward intently. Dannie Jewell cleared her throat. 'I'm his half-sister,' she said, in a tone almost of defiance. 'We had different mothers.'

The two men turned as one from the young woman and looked to Françoise d'Aubigny. 'My father-in-law,' she said, 'was married twice, but both wives died. So sad.'

This seemed to require a response that neither man could find the words to form, and in the awkward silence it was left to Françoise d'Aubigny to speak again. 'I seem,' she said, 'to have been offering tea to people for hours. Doctor Quirke, what will you take?' She lifted her glass from where it had been standing on a low table. 'Dannie and I, as you see, felt in need of something stronger than tea. Shall I ask Sarah to bring you something—a whiskey, perhaps?' She turned to Hackett, the corner of her lip twitching. 'Although I suppose you are "on duty", Inspector.'

'That's right, ma'am,' Hackett stolidly said.

Quirke too declined her offer, and she lifted a hand to her forehead in a gesture that even Isabel Galloway would have thought a trifle overdone. 'How strange all this is,' she said, 'and yet familiar, like something one might read in the newspaper.'

'Was it yourself that called the guards?' Hackett asked. 'They told me it was a woman but that she wouldn't give her name.'

For a moment Mrs Jewell seemed confused, then nod-

ded. 'Yes, yes, I placed the call,' she said. She glanced from the detective to Quirke and back again. 'It seems so long ago.'

There was silence in the room, save for the faint sibilant sounds the billowing curtains made. Then Dannie Jewell stood up from the sofa. 'I'll have to go,' she said. 'Françoise, will you be all right?'

Hackett turned to her. 'Maybe you'd hang on a minute, Miss Jewell,' he said, smiling his most avuncular smile.

The young woman frowned. 'Why?'

'Ah, it's just I'm trying to get an idea of the—of the sequence of events, you know, and I'm interested to talk to anyone that was here earlier today.'

'I wasn't here,' she said, almost indignantly. 'I mean, not when it—not when—'

'But you're in your riding gear, I see,' he said. He was still smiling.

Now it was her turn to look confused. 'Yes, I was riding. I keep a horse here. We went out early—'

'"We"?'

'I—I mean Toby and I. My horse.'

'So you didn't hear the gunshot?'

'How could I? I was out on the Curragh, miles away.'

Quirke saw that what Mrs Jewell was holding in her left hand was a snow-globe, with a tiny stylised French town in it, complete with houses and streets and a château flying a tricolour from its narrow turret. 'I feel,' she said, addressing Hackett, 'that we are being—how do you say?—cross-examined.' She gave an apologetic little laugh. 'But I'm sure I am mistaken.'

Dannie Jewell lifted her glass from the arm of the sofa

and took a long drink from it, thirstily, like a child. She held the glass in both hands, and Quirke thought again of Françoise d'Aubigny standing at the window in the embassy that day, with the champagne glass, and of the look she had given him, the odd desperateness of it. Who were these two women, really, he wondered, and what was going on here?

Hackett had lifted both his hands and showed the palms placatingly to Mrs Jewell. 'I'm only asking a few questions, ma'am,' he said easily, 'that's all I'm doing.'

'I should have thought,' Mrs Jewell said, with a sharper glint to her look now, 'there can be no doubt as to what has happened.'

'Well,' Hackett answered, all ease and smiling, 'that's the question, you see—what *did* happen?'

There was another silence. Mrs Jewell looked at Quirke, as if for enlightenment, then turned back to Hackett. 'I don't understand, Inspector.' She was holding her gin glass in one hand and the snow-globe in the other; she might have been an allegorical figure in a tableau, illustrating some principle of balance or justice.

Dannie Jewell sat down again abruptly on the sofa. With her head bowed she groped beside her blindly to set the tumbler down where it had been before and then covered her face with her hands and let fall a single muffled sob. The other three looked at her. Mrs Jewell frowned. 'This has been a terrible day,' she said, in a tone of mild amazement, as if only now registering the full weight of all that had happened.

Hackett took a step nearer to her, and stopped. 'I don't know, ma'am,' he said, 'whether it will make it better or

worse for you if I say that we think your husband did not kill himself.'

The young woman on the sofa lifted her face from her hands and threw herself back almost with violence against the cushions and turned up her eyes to the ceiling, in seeming anger, now, or exasperation.

Françoise d'Aubigny frowned, leaning forward and putting her head a little to one side as if she were hard of hearing. Again she turned to Quirke to help her, but he said nothing. 'But then,' Mrs Jewell began to ask in a baffled voice, '—but then *who* . . . ?'