

IM01

IMMORAL DAWN

L SHEA

BAD DOG PUBLISHING

IMMORAL DAWN
Copyright © L Shea 2002 & 2024
Cover concept by L Shea
Cover digital design by BDP
Edited by BDP

All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by photocopying or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage or retrieval systems without permission in writing from both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

First Edition Published 2017 Bad Dog Publishing
Second Edition Published 2024 Bad Dog Publishing

IMMORAL DAWN

All characters and events in this book are fictional and any resemblance to actual places, events or persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Dedicated to:
My Mother, Helen,
For believing in my ability to tell a story...

CONTENTS

Chapter One: Life Has to Begin Somewhere.....	9
Chapter Two: Never Look Back.....	29
Chapter Three: Prelude to the Past.....	40
Chapter Four: Puzzle Pieces	60
Chapter Five: The House that Jack built.....	73
Chapter Six: Bricks and Mortar.....	85
Chapter Seven: When the Fairytale Ends	103
Chapter Eight: Never Bluff the Joker	121
Chapter Nine: Wrong and White	142
Chapter Ten: Counterstrike.....	155
Chapter Eleven: An Emotional Mistake	167
Chapter Twelve: Revelation of a Future.....	183
Chapter Thirteen: The Colour of Love.....	196
Chapter Fourteen: Breaking Ground	208
Chapter Fifteen: Playing the Fool	222
Chapter Sixteen: The Winding Road	236
Chapter Seventeen: Closing Doors	254
Chapter Eighteen: Broken Glass	266
Chapter Nineteen: Matters of the Heart.....	278
Chapter Twenty: The Last Call.....	291

Circa 2002...

Chapter One

Life Has to Begin Somewhere

Earliest memories? Who the hell gives a damn about my earliest memories? For that matter, I am not sure anyone would want to know about my life or would believe the impossible consequences that have led me to become the man I am. To me, life has been amazing, with its own highs and lows. To me! However, to you who read this, well, you will have to judge the merit of my story yourself. Life has to begin somewhere. Where did my life begin? I am not sure.

I remember friends who came and went in my earlier life. I lived in Wales. I don't really remember that time. I was too young. I remember coming home to Ireland. That is to say, I have a vague recollection of returning home without the details of the transition. I remember going to school. I was terrified. My life went by in a blur, and I could never find a sense of balance. I was ignored and put aside and had to face the reality of growing up alone. No one really expected me to do well, or to amount to anything. No one really cared if I succeeded in this playground of life. *Deep?* I realised when I was very young that what separated me from the throng was my ability to see beyond the moment. I just didn't care enough about the consequences.

Everything frightened me back then, even my imagination. The damage inflicted on my spirit and self-esteem would prove to have a lasting effect. My family loved me. Of that, I have little doubt now, but encouragement was never really forthcoming. I am sure my parents wanted the best for me. They just didn't know how to express such things. They were too busy trying to stay alive in a world that had grown cold and distant. Everyone had their own problems. I remember my father hitting my mother. I never really understood why. Now, as I look back, I guess things are a little clearer. Circumstances were different back then. No work. Drink. Any number of things. Not much changes, and for many, the bleakness of reality in a

9

modern world remains the same. We just hear more and see more than we ever did before, and ultimately, we ignore more in the face of futile acts of desperation. I guess feeling lost in a hopeless situation can make even the best of people do the most unsavoury things. Children never really understood at the time. When you get older there is a kind of clarity that creeps into the mind that allows vague recollection to at least identify with similar experiences. Hate and anger can be powerful emotions but they only serve to diminish when contained. I closed my eyes and waited in the darkness for the quiet and regret.

My grandmother exerted a lot of control over the family at a time when no one could keep up with how fast the world was changing. People tried to cling to the old ideals of family but the past conception of the idea was doomed. Change is inevitable. Maybe this doesn't make it right and God knows I'm no expert. I don't think anyone really is. We blunder through life and hope that we make the right choices. Sometimes we get lucky. If I had to analyse my life back then, I don't think I would have been able to change a thing. I was too insecure and too inconsequential. I was too afraid. In the light of a growing, changing world, many things from back then seem alien and misguided. The word of law was to respect one's elders in a Catholic society. I remember visiting my grandmother until I was a teenager. There are large gaps in my life I have either suppressed or they were just not that memorable. I have no time now to force a recollection of the mundane though I guess it is only natural to wallow in such frivolity from time to time. My grandfather died. There was a man who had a sense of presence. A simple gesture or word could silence anyone in the family. The great, gruff voice and piercing frown were enough to silence the masses. In retrospect, this may have been out of fear of the man. He had been more than but was diminished in stature over time. He had been formidable in his past. The stories of the fearlessness of the man seemed adequate to sway even the most belligerent men in his corner of the world. The fist, a slap of the hand, and even a raised voice were enough

to instil immediate panic in me even when the outburst was not aimed in my direction. Maybe during an era that approved of corporal punishment, where the concept of talking to a sibling had not yet even occurred to the masses, imposed respect. After that time, my life became my own. In a way, my own respect diminished. I took less and less notice of everyone and had no desire to become one of the family – just to gain the merits of inclusion. Sure, people tried to mould me into accepting my lot in life. The only way to succeed was to become one of the numerous people who live life for the sake of peace. I am still not sure I understood everything that was going on and could care less what transpired when I could just as easily distance myself from any of the imposing possibilities of conformity. My mind was in turmoil. Somewhere beyond school and the development of my character, I found clarity. I found myself. I began to understand the game. In the meantime, my grandfather while alive was exacting in his protection of his family. I was quiet enough to make my presence in a room of drunken bravado acceptable.

I only have to open the paper these days or turn on the television and I am bombarded with the moral indignations of society. The implications of sex, drugs, drink and the wonderful delight of a good smoke are all abstracts of moral decay no longer accepted by a culture that perceives such indulgence as crawling in the gutter. At the very least, embracing the habits of decadence has invited a return to sanction and moral outrage. Ban smoking. Cut down on the drink. Return to the Catholic disposition of moral sobriety. I drink, I smoke and I enjoy the indulgence of all life has to offer. However, the use of drugs has never appealed to me. When I was thirteen or fourteen, I met a girl. To be more accurate, I met a woman in the body of a girl who had grown up too much to do the things we did together but was still too young to find her way in other respects. Kay was a wonder to me. An indulgence that very nearly made me accept of my fate, but she was also a startling revelation. In truth, she was every bit a woman, with a physical

awareness and a body that just looked too good to belong to one almost as young as I had been. She had become my lover, even if I was unable to understand what sex was for a while. I learned quickly, and the fascination became almost like an obsession. We knew nothing of condoms and I am fairly certain that Kay's family would not have had the sense to put a girl so young on the pill. She was fifteen. She was beautiful, with a clean innocence that had not yet discovered makeup, or the polish that so often and inevitably dulls the charm. She had more experience than I, or certainly more knowledge. When I met her, I had no aspirations towards getting into her panties. However, in time, this was all I could think about. We kissed. I had kissed girls before but it had never felt quite like this. The naïve giggle of the playground kiss was never like this. I responded to her excitement. I responded to her in every way that pulled me into the maturity of a physical need, but I was still too young to even begin to comprehend the change or the consequences of continuing to engage in such a dangerous game. I cannot say I felt love. I didn't understand love in that sense of the word. For a while, this intimacy was akin to unparalleled infatuation, but it was not love. I'm not sure I felt much of anything back then, except the occasional thrill, fear and exhilaration in some of the daring exploits I was to become involved in. I can remember Kay visiting me on many occasions. The games of *cops and robbers* would never be the same again. The first time we moved beyond the moment of heavy petting to coupling, the act left me confused but elated. We made love in the back of an abandoned wreck of a car, dragged far enough off the road into the darkness to make the streetlights inadequate to reveal our presence. It was over in about three seconds. I barely got my pants down in time to call it sex, considering what passed for foreplay took most of the night, and searching for a place to do it, almost as long, felt kind of anticlimactic. Kay guided my touch to achieve her own climax. Something must have worked right. This was only the beginning. She came back again and again, and I got better. The

need became as much mine as it was hers. However, on reflection, the way she gave herself to me for a moment of intimacy became as powerful as any drug. I remember sex in a dirty boiler room, lying on my back and not knowing what to expect, as she found the right pitch of her back and guided yet another moment of intimacy. I remember her inventiveness. She was too young to know so much. I was too young to experience so much. I will never forget Kay, even if I never meet her again. She was a stepping stone in my maturity as a man. I am sure the *die-hards* in a moral society would have a problem with my casual portrayal of this event. The generation gap still exists even if we try to deny that people cling to such an appalling perception. I really don't care. Still, I do not mean to imply this in a bad way. If there is a God and we were supposed to have been given free will then I will accept the consequences of my own actions when I am forced to atone for the sins of my past. If God gave us free will, then no man or woman has a right to take it away. I made a choice. My choice for better or worse was mine to make. Kay was another turning point in my life. You could say she is the reason I never married. I was drifting around, unsure of where I was going. Again, rather deep for someone so young, but then life can get complicated very fast. I enjoyed Kay's company and she enjoyed mine. I enjoyed Kay. The moral implications never entered my mind. This was where the gap between physical maturity and the development of a sense of perspective that comes with age widened. Unfortunately, we were doomed to fail. Kay and I never really talked, never really got to know each other. We were too busy avoiding those who would stop us from making love that we never had time to fall in love. All we really had was sex, where the concentration of escape and avoidance consumed every other possible moment when we could have grown together. Sad really, when you stop to think about it. I will never really know how I would have turned out, or what I would have become if I stayed with Kay. The sex on the other hand would have been great. I don't know if I broke her heart or if she just

moved on to some other guy. We had been together on and off for six years before I really got into the nightclub scene and started meeting other women. I had met girls. I had dated some of those girls for a while. One particular girl, Margaret, I dated for a number of weeks. When she broke up with me, I felt nothing. After all, I still had Kay. She was the comfortable cushion to avoid the implications of rejection. If I had any thought of how my social graces, or lack thereof, would have affected Kay if she found out, it just never occurred to me. The moral compass that should have guided me in such things was missing, or perhaps I just ignored it.

Then I met Tara. I was tired that night and in no real mood for dancing. The fatigue was less the result of any prolonged activity and more associated with the endless humdrum and boredom of trying to find my way. Jack Breen introduced us. In fact, dear old Jack went out of his way for weeks to find me the ideal woman. Jack was a man who had aspirations to own the world but he would never truly succeed in completing the leap from the concept of a vision to reality. For all the suave and *bullshit*, he just didn't have the neck to go far enough. We had met towards the latter end of school, before the advent of college. In fact, we kind of knew each other in passing for longer but we never really connected until life brought us along the parallel path to business studies and the endless mire of taking the first step to the future. The difference between us was the difference between knowing what you want and wondering what you can do to get all that you want. In all the time we hung around together, I never spoke about Kay, and of course, I had never bridged the gap to actually taking her out. She was my secret, my reserved hold on the comfort of having something I didn't want to share, not even in conversation. Jack most likely knew Kay. We lived in the same neighbourhood. If he ever made the association, he never said. At the time, I was a man going with the flow but Tara intrigued me. She had been talkative from the outset. I guess she was nervous. My own stolid manner probably didn't ingratiate me

any and most likely came off as disinterest. However, I was not indifferent to her charm. She was refreshing and had a pure, almost shy, composure that drew me in. Tara's skin had a dark tone. I never really found out why. The question just never came up. She could have been of Indian descent but had been so far removed from that heritage as to hold none of the manner. She was a Cork girl with all of the colourful Cork twang and mannerisms. She had the most fascinating eyes. They were green, piercing, and full of intelligence. The smoothness of her skin was striking and the way she pursed her lips when pouting inevitably reminded me of Kay. Tara was inquisitive. When she got over the initial shyness, she began to take comfort in talking so much that I was in no real danger of her getting to know the real me. However, I found that I liked her company. She talked and I listened, most of the time. I contemplated more in my own quiet sanctuary of what I perceived as a world driven by motives that were not necessarily in line with my own. She was also the reason I later told Kay that I could never see her again, at least not as a lover. You really can't tell a woman whom you have been intimate with for so long that you would like to just be friends, especially after sleeping with her for one last time, tangled in the sheets after a heated exchange that was akin to raw lust. Kay left dejected. She never said a word. She just left. I could tell from the way her shoulders sagged that I might as well have slapped her. I never saw her face as she turned away from me, pulling on her clothes with that awful silence between us. Something inside of me said that I shouldn't let her go. Something told me that I had made a mistake telling her the truth. I guess that would have been my conscience but I had already grown cold enough to exert control over my own life and self-interest. Kay was starting to become a risk, not in the concern of making love but my will to make the leap. Kay left me alone and I never saw her again. I still do not know to this day what became of her. I could have gone back and found out. I just didn't want the complication. As I got older, I became aware of the dangerous game we

when we had unprotected sex. I mean I certainly wasn't worried about aids or anything like that. I didn't even know about the possibility of such things back then and I am unclear as to whether anyone really did. Kay definitely wasn't playing around. I assumed she had taken the pill at some time during our years in this casual liaison. How she never got pregnant in all the time we were together amazes me. Most people would condemn me in an instant for my reckless nature, but I must have still had some semblance of conscience at that time to have broken off my non-relationship with Kay to be with Tara. I could have just as easily held on to everything and kept her in my bed in case Tara hadn't worked out. I also wondered what would have happened if I had got Kay pregnant. Would I have stayed?

I met Tara again a few days later and subsequently entered into the first and only monogamous relationship in my life. I dated Tara. We had been going out for over six months before we made love. Tara was a virgin. This was something I came to understand and wondered if Kay had been when we first had sex. I dismissed the idea. When I made love to Tara, she had been inexperienced. I patiently spent the time teaching her, as Kay had taught me. I definitely wanted to be in love with Tara; madly, deeply, and passionately in love. I just didn't want to need her that much. Something kept me from that last plunge into giving up my freedom and self-determination to be me. She tried too hard to change me. She was disturbed by my non-religion, though this only came out in time. She was Catholic. I was Catholic only in some far-distant fashion where I remembered the teachings of the church and decided to believe in something else. Tara was the first woman I murdered. I didn't kill her in the way that murder normally means, but I took her spirit and I stole her innocence. To most, that is pretty much the same thing. She was in love. She was willing to change her whole world to be with me. The first two years together went fine. In fact, you could say we were happy, or she was happy and I was comfortable again. We moved in together and took

an apartment close to my parents on the north side of the city. We were the perfect couple. In the eyes of my parents, her parents, and indeed any friends we still had at the time, we were the personification of the most likely couple to get married, have kids and grow old together. However, love for me would never have been enough. I had ambition. The revelation that I had begun to slide into a stagnant acceptance hit me with all the force of the same panic I felt when my father or grandfather responded in anger to some non-event that scarcely mattered beyond their own pathetic little world. I wanted more. I needed more. Tara soon became an obstacle to my purpose, forming a resistance to every urge I had to look farther. When my parents died within months of each other, another tie to home had been irrevocably lost. Instead of making me mourn such a traumatic event, the coldness consumed me. My father left me with a legacy of anger and my mother had never been what a mother should be to a child. I became distant again. I had been gambling, both in the common garden-variety card games and in the stock market. I guess it was my way of compensating for any degree of acceptance I was forced to endure. Every time I got money, and I mean real money, I would go on a bender and Tara would suffer for my indulgence. More times than nought, Jack Breen had been right there with me. I had big plans and Tara became aware she was an inconvenience. She had plunged too far into her narrow Catholic mind by accepting me, in sleeping with me, and in living with me outside of marriage. We began to fight all the time and inevitably I fell out of love or that comfort zone with Tara as casually as I had fallen into this relationship. Tara became convinced that all I ever really wanted her for was to keep the place tidy and warm my bed. The sex was still good when we were inclined to make up but it just wasn't enough. After a year of being left alone night after night and a drunken moment when she spurned my advances, Tara left. She left after the night I had sex with her when she didn't want to and I told her how dull she had become. She was, as I stated, an intelligent girl. I'm surprised she

stayed so long. Somewhere deep down I didn't like what I was becoming with Tara. The destructive urge was brought on by a need to go farther and an inability to find the right avenue to the success I knew I would be capable of without her. Tara, like Kay, became a distant memory. I satisfied any creeping pang of remorse with a stream of one-night stands, Jack Daniels, and ashtrays full of cigarettes that would have pleased the most ardent chain smoker.

Today I have no respect for anyone other than me, Killian Greye. The only question in my life that matters is: '*Who is Killian Greye?*'

I am an immoral man. I like to think I am a fair-looking man and have been described as handsome in a suave sort of way but I would be the first to admit that my charm probably does more to ingratiate me than my looks. I doubt that anyone who has ever done business with me would agree. The reflections of my past serve only as a case study to present the history of a boy who decided he would no longer be ignored, and dispensed with the consequences of trying to adapt to a society that had already failed to turn me from this path. I have found my sense of direction. I have no family, no friends, and nothing to tie me down. I no longer crave peace or expect honesty. I understand my flaws. In fact, I relish life with a vengeance.

I have not led a perfect life. I am not a saint. I am not famous, rich, or prominent, except maybe in my own corner of the world. I must point out that my definition of rich far exceeds the common man's hopes of winning the lottery. What is the point of this self-analysis? Let me just say when you go to kill a man, you need to be certain of who you are. Again, I am speaking metaphorically. I like Cork as a city. Not too big, not too small and really easy to disappear in a crowd. I sat in the café on Patrick Street staring out at the passing traffic. I had only recently returned from New York after spending six years with a man named Mike Warren from North Carolina. Mike and I had been working on this deal for most of the last six months. Then we heard about a company in Cork, Ireland who

were in the process of upsetting a major development. The bigger the world gets in business, the smaller it becomes. Mike is not the type of man you want to cross in business. So here I am, sitting in a café waiting for Jack Breen. *Small world.* I haven't seen Jack in so long and certainly not since college. I am sure Jack will presume my intentions are nothing more trivial than two friends getting together. In fact, I'm counting on it. Mr Jack Breen is about to get a taste of the real world. There is a light drizzle falling outside that seems to have persisted since I got here. When I got off the plane in Shannon and took a connection to Cork the inclement weather was enough to bring a smile to my face. Good old, reliable, Irish weather. I continued to stare out the window of the café feigning disinterest when the waitress came over to ask me if I would like a refill. I can see Jack crossing the road, a slight haste in his walk. I would like to think he is anxious to see me. However, he probably is trying to avoid the rain. I shrug the waitress away, darting a look at her as she moves from table to table. I lick my lips and smile. She was probably a looker once, but long hours and the labour of marriage haven't been kind. I saw the ring on her finger as she brushed back the tresses of her blond hair where the slide had sagged and opened. Maybe if she had turned left instead of right on the path of life and the universe, she might have found a richer more rewarding existence. Maybe she was happy. Somehow, I doubted that. Wrong turns can consume a person's whole being before they really know that anything went wrong.

'Jack,' I called across the café as he entered looking through the breakfast crowd to find me.

'How's it goin, Killian? My God, how long has it been?'

I noticed Jack had put on some weight, though his black hair was still as prominent as I remembered. The slick, stylish cut betrayed a man who was still trying to hold on to a little of his past *pre-thirty-something* existence in a vain attempt to convince himself that he had survived the concept of getting old. I offered him my hand and smiled, though he insisted on

hugging me. We were just two friends who hadn't seen each other in so long. The embrace made me cringe.

'About six years,' I offered in answer to his question shaking off the discomfort of his careless affection. I really hoped he didn't feel inclined to do that too often.

'What's with the Yankee accent? Don't they speak good Cork boy out there in the States?'

I smiled again unable to stifle the curious grin. The more people changed, the more they stayed the same and Jack was exactly the same – looking for the rainbow in a storm.

'I was never a good Cork boy.'

Jack sat down. I could see he had no idea why I had come back or why I had asked to see him. He waved to the waitress and asked for coffee. I drew out my third cigarette since I had arrived and proceeded to indulge the one habit I knew I would never give up.

'So, what have you been up to?'

The waitress made a point of refilling my cup without asking. I guess she was just trying to look busy, or helpful, or something.

'I live in New York now. I don't really get back much these days. I am here on business.'

Jack grinned that incessant smile – the one that always seemed a little too smug for my liking.

'There's more to life than business, Killian. What about a woman? I don't see any wedding ring, or are you just playing the field while you're away?'

I'd forgotten how colourful the Cork accent was. Hearing the Corkonian brogue again brought back memories. However, no amount of sentimentality was going to keep me from disappointing Mike Warren.

'If I wanted a woman, Jack, I am sure you would do your best to find me one.'

Jack wasn't quite sure how to take that, but he forced a smile and shrugged off the comment. I glanced down and saw the thick wedding band on his own finger but I had not come

here to be drawn into a conversation about life and the universe according to Jack Breen.

‘I heard a rumour you were in trouble, Jack.’

Jack coughed and a little dribble of coffee ran down onto his bland, dark blue, silk tie. With the white shirt, charcoal suit and black slip-on shoes, he was dressed to appear important. Knowing Jack, I could have surmised that he had dressed up purely for the purpose of impressing an old friend with the trappings of success. I dismissed the idea. Jack may have been a shallow soul in the past but he was just like any other businessman in an era where his dress had become the norm for so many, even in the most mundane pursuit. There is nothing like a suit and tie to garner importance or a modest degree of perceptual respect.

‘You heard a rumour, all the way in New York,’ he stated with some degree of agitation. This was not going to be pleasant for Jack Breen.

‘What the *fuck* is going on here, Killian?’

I lit up another cigarette and leaned closer. Jack had attracted some attention with his abrupt outburst and I certainly didn’t want to become embroiled in some public outcry.

‘Calm down, Jack. I’m here to help.’

Jack Breen was never the smartest man when it came to dealing but from what I had managed to learn, his business was now on the verge of bankruptcy.

‘Let me put the facts to you as I see them and you can jump in at any time to correct me if I’m wrong. Your company is seven hundred thousand Euro in debt. You have no assets except for two software packages that are on the verge of being confiscated by your developers due to non-payment of nearly half that debt. You own nothing. You have leased everything, and the house you are living in is rented. You have borrowed from everyone and somehow you still managed to continue trading. You haven’t paid any of your employees in months and you have a considerable tax liability. However, you do have one saving grace. You managed to cut yourself in on a

deal with long-time friend Anthony Blaine as part of a consortium operating out of Dublin. The consortium is about to go public on a very lucrative project and if you can last long enough, you can finally turn things around. So far you have spent eight months waiting with promise after promise from Blaine and the deal has still not been closed. The big players who control the money are in no hurry to expedite funding on the basis that you have financial difficulties. In fact, they are unaware of your tenuous situation. Have I left anything out?’

Jack was seething with rage. The burning expression in his eyes and the way his lip quivered made him seem on the verge of a seizure. I was glad to have chosen such a public forum. There was no telling what old Jack boy was capable of in a moment of spiralling apprehension. If I had to equate him to a cornered animal, the only distinction I could make was to a rat. He just didn’t have the teeth to rise above the level of the floor.

‘How the *fuck* do you know all this?’ whispered Jack under his breath but I could still hear the clenching of his teeth.

‘Wake up, Jack. If you were a normal company with a good trading record, Blaine’s deal would be wonderful. You’re not. HourGlass is guilty of reckless trading. The consortium may be able to draw down one hundred million from the Trading Bank but Anthony Blaine won’t get a sniff of the money in time to stop you going down the toilet. You need to liquidate now before someone decides to do it for you.’

Jack leaned back in his chair dejected. He had probably come here to give me the impression of how well he was doing; Chief Executive Officer of his own company and all that rubbish. Ego can be a terrible thing. Everyone plays a little polish in the public eye, among friends and especially among casual acquaintances. The common charade of importance was all very well as long as it had some basis in fact and you could keep your mouth shut. Jack was a victim of his own success, or at least the success he once had. A few drinks, interesting company and a need to express himself as the single most important entity in the universe only served to make any due

diligence on Jack Breen easier.

‘You came all the way back from New York because you heard I was in trouble. No *fucking* way, Killian. If I liquidate now, I lose everything.’

The cookie was out there. All I had to do now was make him eat it.

‘You need serious investment, Jack. You need to take a radical look at the company and make a decision. You need to do it soon or the next time I see you, HourGlass will be a distant memory.’

Jack straightened his tie and stood up to leave.

‘I am working on the problem, Killian. I don’t know what you want here, but you are not going to swallow my company just for your own satisfaction. Anthony and I go way back. He won’t let me down. He’s promised me the contract and the money. He’s a very good friend.’

The implication of Anthony Blaine being a good friend was not lost on me. Jack was implying that I was no longer a friend, good or otherwise.

‘Jack, there are no friends in business. Business is just business. If you want to talk again, I am staying in the Ambassador Hotel, up on Military Hill for the next three nights. Here’s my card. My cell phone’s on there. Give me a call, Jack, even if you just want to go for a drink’

Jack Breen was a man on the edge. His casual nonchalance was gone.

‘I will, Killian, but just for a drink. Stay out of my business.’

Jack Breen left. The confident swagger in his walk was replaced with a crestfallen stroll. His shoulders sagged and I could guess that his mind was reeling with more questions than answers. He didn’t dash out or run to avoid the rain. He just walked away, oblivious to any harm other than that he had just swallowed with a whole lot of pride. If I had managed to learn so much from New York, who else knew he was hurting? The drizzle had become a downpour. I stayed in the café a little

while longer, drinking the last of my coffee and smoking a cigarette with some satisfaction. My chain-smoking wasn't due to any need to calm my nerves. I just had the habit and there were times when I could empty a pack of twenty and there were times when I didn't. It really was a perception of how busy I was at the time. Need fuelled the inactivity. The inactivity fuelled the need. Either way, it all amounted to the same thing. Jack had disappeared from view though I hadn't really been that attentive to his plight. I had to phone Mike Warren and let him know I was staying in Cork a little longer than I had expected, but I think I knew this would not be a short visit.

Information is everything in business. Mike Warren had been busy. Jack had been trying to do the smart thing and find his way out of a bad situation. However, one conversation with Mike in New York was enough to put me on edge. Jack relied on his friendship with Anthony Blaine to see his Company through a difficult time. There was no doubt the deal would go through. The only problem for Jack was time. Blaine had no control over the release of funding. He was counting on Jack's friendship almost as much as Breen counted on him. What brought HourGlass to the table was hardly original. I had to hand it to Jack. He could still talk a good deal. He managed to shake some of the major players at the table with guile, or more to the point, he had managed to impress with the use of those who actually knew what they were talking about. Jack was about to find out that guile wasn't enough.

I stayed in my room for most of the day, fielding calls. Occasionally, I walked to the window and marvelled at the view of Cork City from the Ambassador Hotel. *Cork city?* Cork was not what anyone in the States would call a city. It was a town at best. However, New York may have been breathtaking a while back, but six years of living in the city made me appreciate the closeness and uncomplicated look of Cork. I dismissed any stirring feelings. I never really had to

remind myself why I was here. There wasn't much else I could do. I went to the bar. As I walked through the hotel, I had to take in how well they had transformed this place. I remembered when this building had once been an old folk's home. The red brick structure of the hotel was all that remained to remind anyone of what this place had been like in the past. As I sat in the bar, drinking too much and, of course, smoking too much I wondered how the rest of the city had changed. For a hotel bar, it seemed small. However, it was comfortable and had none of the pretensions of some of the supposed Irish bars I had frequented in the States. Mike wouldn't have liked this place. He preferred something more grandiose; somewhere he could disappear in a crowd of his own associates and, for want of a better term, pawns. This place was more personal. I had forgotten just how personal Cork people could get, and how friendly. I had spent so long in an impersonal arena, where discussion with a stranger outside my own collective in the world of business was almost frowned upon if someone forced inclusion. The casual conversation with the barman and some guy named John from Killmallock was a refreshing change for me. Every moment in the last few years almost seemed rushed by comparison. I guess I had really missed the relaxed atmosphere of Ireland, and especially of Cork. My moment was short-lived. The curse of the cell phone prevailed. I paused to look at the number and knew instantly that the caller had to be Jack. Not a lot of people knew I was in Cork, and certainly, I could think of no one else who would be ringing me from a number in this locale.

'Hello, Jack, what can I do for you?'

I could almost sense the hesitancy in his voice.

'I was going to call up to the Ambassador, Killian. If you don't have any plans.'

I couldn't resist a smile. He certainly seemed eager, but then again, he might have just wanted to rekindle a non-business friendship. I had no qualms in allowing him to believe that this was possible. Of course, I had no desire to proffer a lasting

friendship. This was still business. When the deal was done, I would be gone, and Jack would again become a memory.

‘Sure, Jack. I’m in the bar. I’ll save you a seat.’

I would have loved to believe that Jack was coming up to talk over old times, but with the obvious pressure he was under, I knew he wouldn’t be able to resist turning the conversation towards business.

‘I’ll be there about nine.’

I glanced at my watch and noticed the time had just passed six. Nearly three hours. I would have to slow down or Jack would certainly have the advantage in coherent conversation.

‘See you then.’

I ordered something to eat, not realising how famished I was until the food arrived. I hadn’t eaten since breakfast and smoking never really compensated for my appetite. Before Jack arrived, I would have to go to my room and freshen up. I found I was eager for company. In some ways, it was great to be back.

At this time, I was certainly unaware of how my life was about to be turned upside down. Initially, there were moments when I would feel lost, but ultimately, a careless feeling would creep into the good sense of the past few years, and force emotion into my business decisiveness.

I washed and changed and was about to return to the bar when the phone rang. *Reception*. I immediately thought Jack had got here early. Eight Fifteen.

‘Hello, Mr Greye. There is a lady here to see you.’

A lady? Who the hell knew I was here?

‘Em, I’ll be right down,’ I stated realising there had been a long pause while I deliberated. ‘Tell the lady I’ll see her in the bar,’ I added. If I was in for some surprise, I certainly wanted to be within distance of a stiff drink.

I have to say, I felt a growing sense of apprehension as I descended to the lobby and walked the plush corridor to the bar. I had changed into jeans, a casual grey button-topped sweatshirt and soft-soled black slip-on shoes. My intention had

been to relax. I had spent enough time in a suit in the preceding hours to almost embrace the comfort of more casual attire. The Armani suit, stiff collar shirt and silk tie seemed somewhat pretentious since returning to Cork. I had no desire to perform the role of the rich American businessman. I was painfully aware that my American colloquialisms only served to distance me more. I am after all, Irish. I never approved of pretensions to be anything else; though I would have to say I strongly disapproved of any attempt to make me adopt the persona of the Cork boy. Can you imagine sitting in the boardroom in New York and proclaiming a greeting in true Cork fashion? *'How's it goin, boy?'* never really seemed the proper expression of greeting in a world of business and everyone adopts some charade or mask to proffer acceptance in the business world.

I paused at the door to the bar and I would be the first to admit that I took a look through the glass panel to see if I could achieve any advance glimpse of the lady I was about to meet.

My expression must have betrayed a multitude for it greatly amused the lady who was waiting for me. There was no delay in recognising her, but I was singularly more taken aback than I would have ever thought possible. The confusion at how she could have possibly known about my return to Cork soon followed.

'Kay?' I mouthed her name in question but I was absolutely sure. She was stunning, like an apparition with all the grace and countenance of a woman of purpose and charm. Somewhere in the intervening years she had discovered the application of makeup and all the accoutrements that go with it. However, she applied all with exquisite reserve. Yet, despite her careful grooming, there was an unbelievable urgency in her manner.

'Hello, Killian.'

The sweetness of her voice was like a breath of fresh air that threatened to suck the life out of me but she continued to betray a tremor of uncertainty and kept her eyes low, almost in a

submissive reflection of a time that seemed too distant to adequately call up a comparison. Her dark hair was shorter and coloured with a highlight. She had cut it to just below the shoulder. Her warm brown eyes almost soaked up the brightness of the room. I couldn't believe how pale her milky white skin had become but this only served to accentuate her lips, fuller than I ever remembered. She was dressed in low-cut black top and black jeans. I was captivated for a moment, but I could not stay in the spell. I guess I may have been looking through eyes that remembered more and saw less. How in the name of hell did she know I was here? When I didn't offer an immediate response, she became more uncertain.

'You look good, Killian. It's been a long time.'

I smiled and knew at once the silly grin on my face was a little too obvious in expressing my confusion.

'What are you doing here, Kay? More to the point, how did you even know I was here?'

She seemed genuinely taken aback as if I should have already known the answer to those questions. The barman waited patiently, trying to remain inconspicuous as if he had no interest in the exchange between us.

'Jack told me you were here.'

Jack told her. Jack told Kay I was here. The revelation hit me with such an impact that I had to fight to recover my composure. I was definitely going to need that stiff drink.

Also, by William Anthony Shea

TALES FROM A DARKLING POOL (Author's Preferred Text)

RETURN TO A DARKLING POOL
A DARKLING POOL AGAIN
BEYOND A DARKLING POOL
RIPPLES FROM A DARKLING POOL
VERGE OF A DARKLING POOL

KNIGHTSHADE THE ROLE-PLAYING GAME

KST01: THE INITIATE'S TOME
KST02: THE GRANDMASTER'S TOME
KST03: THE LOREMASTER'S TOME
KST03: THE QUESTMASTER'S TOME – NYR*

FUMBLING VOLUME ONE
FUMBLING VOLUME TWO

SAGA OF THE SENTENIAL

BOOK ONE: CAULDRON OF TROUBLE
BOOK TWO: FOR THE LAND THAT FELL
BOOK THREE: THE HOUSE OF SILMARIN

BRETHREN

BR00: NIGHTMARE
BR01: BRETHREN
BR02: VAMPIRE
BR03: FALLEN

AFTERMATH

AM01: REMNANT
AM02: DAWN
AM03: RISEN –NYR*
AM04: HUNTED – NYR*

KILLING TIME

W/MICHAEL D. O'MAHONY
GNARL & OTHER STORIES

By L Shea

IMMORAL DAWN
DE CORK BOIs (a.k.a. The Cork Boys)
DEAD TO ME: De Many Deaths of Michaleen

*NYR – Not Yet Released

Killian Greye is an immoral man. In his past, he discarded any possibility of facing an emotional tie with Kay, the girl who taught him about love. He left her behind to embrace a future alone. Business is everything. Money is the means to making his life all that he ever wanted. When he returns to Cork in Ireland to take care of a problem that has consequences for a deal in his carefully tailored New York business world, he becomes embroiled with his past and Jack Breen.

Inevitably, Killian meets Kay again. She is Jack's wife now, a revelation that has deeper implications for Killian. They begin an affair, but this time he is led on a dance that makes him examine the reasons why he left Kay behind. Their passion erupts into an exchange that causes Killian to lose sight of the real reason he came back, but is Kay playing him in an effort to get revenge? Is Jack Breen the fool he appears? Did he manipulate Killian into leaving Kay behind all those years ago and is Jack using her as a ploy to distract him from a deeper problem with the business deal?