

#1 – WATERLOO SUNSET

Marine Crescent, Liverpool, April 14th 1865

It is a chilly spring evening to be sitting out on the porch, but she does so every evening, come wind, rain or shine. The rickety wicker rocking chair creaks as she moves back and forth, aligning its motion with the brooding swell of the Irish Sea out there, beyond the sand hills of the Waterloo shore, to the North of town.

Nearby are Blucher Street, Wellington Street, East Street. All references to the place and moment old Bony succumbed nearly a lifetime ago, rubbing it into every Frenchman's face that will ever pass through here. The grand terrace of Georgian townhouses and mansions overlooking the bay stretches for half a mile, home to shipping magnates, merchants and captains, the famous and infamous. And then, at number 6, Marine Crescent, is the grand Georgian pile Harriet Farrell chose to make her home after she left 101 Canning Street to Pdraig and Sarah. This is the haven she made after the horror, but ghosts – angels and demons - have followed her. How she misses dear Conté, craves the moment that she wakes up from a bad dream.

Did Lee really surrender at Appomattox like the newspaper said? Then perhaps now Louisiana will become a safer place for her child, but she knows how bitter reality tastes after the sweet dream. There is nothing left there for them but ghosts too.

A yellow and orange sorbet sunset melts into the horizon and Harriet Farrell watches it, letting the marmalade sky remind her of the West and how there is very little to stop her upping sticks and returning to America now... but to what? Will it really be Louisiana, or should she prospect to California? The latter sounds like just the place to make a new start, to forget everything and look ahead to the Western sky and an ocean of possibilities, but here she remains in this odd corner of England, never one to sit upon her hands yet having to do so. If she endeavours to stay busy, then she may never move at all and at least then they will bury her with her beloved when that day comes. Harriet Farrell likes her ghosts and she just doesn't want to forget, but the problem is that neither does someone else.

The 'guests' have gone to bed early, perhaps because having a real bed in which to sleep is such a novelty. They are single girls, young women, and what society calls fallen women, though 'dropped' might be more apt. They are waifs and strays who otherwise might end up in brothels or the workhouse, who sought out the strange and kind American lady on the basis of a whisper, only to find that she is stranger and kinder than they would ever imagine.

But now her safe house is full to the rafters and even good-hearted people bring diseases and past traumas with them, no matter how much time Harriet spends on a clean regime of mind and body. She must look after her child. Perhaps it is time to sell and go, not least because these last few months, someone has been watching her and she senses a malign spirit descending upon this hermitage, upon a woman who only wanted to stay hidden, anonymous. It's a pity, because up until then she had found a peace that she had never known in her young life.

The evensong of wild and migratory birds, the fluttering of dragonflies past her nose, the rustling of hedgehogs and the fresh brine and sweet flora of the shore all points to this place as an idyll, but she knows that this means nothing if her violent past is still out there, waiting and watching, quite probably with malevolent intent.

She waits, as she does every evening, for the watcher to either make his move or reveal himself. Her Colt .45 remains a reflex away, as ever. She sniffs the air and gazes into the long shadows across the garden wall, beyond into the sandhills and silhouettes. He likes to stalk in the dark, but he arrives at dusk. Tonight, she has had enough of waiting for him.

The birds stop singing, the breeze drops to stillness, the aromas vanish into a void and Harriet knows he is there, yards away.

‘What in hell do you want from me?’ she whispers, out of any earshot but her own.

She gets up from her rocker and strides down the path, shale crunching under her boots. Through the gate at across the road where the gas lighters have already visited, the neat line of lamp posts denoting the frontier between the terrace and nature. Of course, a Mississippi girl would live so close to the wild and the water, transposing tropical for frigid. Now the long row of Georgian elegance is behind her and she is in the long grass, where a few cattle graze and moo. To her left there is a twitch of movement and she knows it is *his* turn to be nervous, as very well he should be when she gets hold of him.

So, Harriet has a good relationship with most of the neighbours, save those who look down their noses upon her guests. These sound, stout neighbours have an understanding with her about the land out front, how she likes to use it for shooting practice and the occasional bagging of ducks or geese for the Thanksgiving or Christmas table. She often brings game birds to those neighbours too, once her own household is catered for, rather like a friendly cat might bring a gift to a doting human.

Those ones like her, for all her strangeness. So when she mentions that they might want to avoid the undergrowth for a day or two, they understand. They don’t ask questions because they probably wouldn’t get a straight answer anyways. No skin off their noses and nothing much of interest out there anyway off the beaten track to the beach. A fine enough accord.

Snap.

‘Aaaargh, Jaysus bollocks! Me leg! Me fuckin’ leg!’

He doesn’t sound like someone who would live around here. Ever the Choctaw, Harriet could smell him at a distance, knowing that he would be determined to keep out of plain sight in his snooping detail. The further she walks into the sandhills, the further he is pushed back into the undergrowth towards the collection of iron mantraps she has laid in the undergrowth, among the pretty wild flowers. There is not much difference to snaring vermin, when it comes down to it.

‘Aaargh, please God, the pain! Aaaargh! Help! Someone! Anyone!’

If in doubt, follow the screaming. She strides through the swaying reeds and is aware of the natural sounds and smells again, augmented by the moaning lump of a man before her, characterised by any one of the gangs operating out of the town, travelled to this hinterland.

‘Howyer,’ says Harriet Farrell before the pathetic, twitching bastard before her, yelping and yapping. It’s her best Irish accent, just to put the wind further up him.

‘Miss, oh thank God. Jaysus, Mary and Joseph can ye get someone to release me from this trap, the gamekeeper or summat? Me leg’s in a dreadful mess, so.’

‘Gladly. Once you tell me who sent you to spy on me.’

‘Oh miss. What are ye sayin’, like? Please help me.’

‘Right ho. I’ll be off home then for supper. There are wild dogs out here. They’ll catch the smell of blood mighty quickly I would guess.’

That puts the fear of God into him. ‘Don’t go miss. I didn’t mean ye no harm so.’

By the looks of him, she very much doubts that. ‘I’ll need a bit more information, old chum. Your name, for starters.’

‘Seamus.’

‘Seamus what?’

‘Seamus Roscommon.’

‘Where are you from, Seamus?’

‘Scottie Road.’

‘No, originally.’

‘Ireland.’

‘County?’

‘Roscommon.’

‘Seamus Roscommon from Roscommon. Right.’

‘Aye. This smarts awful, Miss.’

‘You must think I was born with cotton for brains, Seamus Roscommon.’

‘No, Miss.’

‘So who sent you?’

‘I works for meself, like. I was slipped some guineas in an envelope with a note. Watch you, record everything I see,’ he taps his temple, gasping and sweating, ‘up there and await further instructions.’

‘Do you have the note?’

‘It said to burn it. Now please let me out of this thing. ‘Tis a cruel fate so you’re wishing on me.’

‘I could put you out of your misery.’

‘No miss, I beg you. I have seven nips so. Beautiful babies, aye.’

‘Why now? After all this time?’

‘What?’

Seamus Roscommon from Roscommon really does have no idea what she is talking about. Harriet has met good liars and terrible liars before, she would like to think that she falls into the former category herself. Seamus here is telling the truth, as any normal man under such duress would, save divulging his own name, which is immaterial. She could and probably should put him out of his misery, just to send a message to the scumbag who commissioned him, but that’s just cheap murder and she’s vowed away from that since the dirty business of ’63.

This little incident has made her mind up about something, though. She pulls her gun.

‘Oh dear God, no. I’ve told ye everything.’

‘Shut up.’

She jams the barrel into the spring mechanism and the trap snaps open. He pulls his lame leg free, wincing.

‘Oh, thank the lord.’

‘I’d use some of that cash they gave you to pay a physician, before infection sets in and you lose the leg. Or worse.’

A high-pitched whine and drawl emanate from him. ‘Worse? Wh-what?’

‘You should get going, but not before I give you a message for them, Seamus Roscommon from Roscommon. If I can’t shoot you in the head it will have to be something else.’

He struggles up on his good leg, tears of pain running down his ruddy cheeks. ‘Miss?’

‘You tell them that Harriet Farrell is retired. You tell them that she is going somewhere they’ll never find her and if they try to follow her, the next spy or his manager in the enterprise won’t get off so lightly. Can you do that?’

‘Surely. When I hear from them, Miss.’

She picks up a long piece of driftwood, ideal for a crutch. He gladly accepts it. ‘So you’d better beat it, Seamus Roscommon. Those wild dogs will start mooching soon. They’ll awful nasty fangs, so they have.’

‘Aye, Miss. Don’t need a second invitation. Aaargh, jaysus, me leg.’

‘Good man yourself.’

And he’s off, hobbling away back towards the long crescent to find his pony and trap. Just another idiot and how she tires of them in this world.

Something is going down and this is only the start of it. She can sniff it like she sniffed Seamus Roscommon from Roscommon. She’d be a liar to say she hadn’t been considering it for a while, in spite of her desire to stay for the sake of a dead beloved, a memory that can never be struck. Time to get their things in order, time to bail from this backwater like she should have done two years ago. A lonely grave meaning nothing to anyone but a handful of people kept her

here, but now Harriet must break the past before it comes back and breaks her. Why did she ever think that it wouldn't?

She begins springing the traps, her last task before home, bed and a sleepless night. There's a heap of arranging to do.

#2 – FORD’S THEATRE

Washington D.C., April 14th 1865

Bang.

Dang.

Got him. Actually. Got him. Almost as dammit square in the back of his head. The slug thudded into his brain and there ain’t a man alive who might survive that, twitch, groan and splutter as he may. What fools they were, letting JWB get so close, but that must be thanks to good old Maj. Gen. Butler and his string-pulling. Some officer in blue had tried to intervene, but the promising young buck of an actor was primed for some resistance. If the fella hadn’t made a move to defend himself, he would have seen his jugular ripped, too, but the shoulder slash was enough to get him out of the way. Too bad, as it would have been one less blue bastard. That was the sum total of the security retinue around Lincoln, so it was a turkey shoot. For that moment, time slowed. Not that dashing Young JWB is hanging around up here to admire his work, for there’s a bow to take below, where his adoring fans wait in stunned silence. Back to normal speed now. He leaps. Crack.

Now he is on the stage, at last gleaning the full attention of an audience who are not sure about whether or not they’ve just seen a very weird stunt or the actual assassination of their President. Well, lookee, a rapt crowd, about goddamn time too. That stunned silence is like a blanket over ’em, pregnant gasps and a few agonised tears are all he gets by way of a curtain call, but everyone knows that JWB has stolen the show this evening. His ankle is throbbing and he may well have bust it in the jump down from the box, but he is so pumped right now that it just don’t matter. He’s used to treading the boards in this city, with their po-faced take on just about everything and their fawning, false love of his sissy, pacifist brother, but this is *his* show now. At last, JWB has his moment, and *what* a moment – one that will resound through history.

There ya go, JWB. Showed them what yas are made of. All of ’em. Bang, dang. Glory, glory, hallelujah.

John Wilkes Booth will be a name remembered long after his brother or father, fellow thespians and Yankee stooges alike. He will die more of a hero than they’ll ever be, once the South rises again. All of his world is a stage and he just wishes that he could stay longer to milk it. This here is real theatre. Time to take his bow and his exit.

‘Sic semper tyrannos!’ he cries in his rehearsed exclamation, the battle cry of Virginia, then under his breath as he drinks the attention, ‘The South is avenged.’ The fulsome end.

Still, no one makes to stop him. He saunters off into the wings, past Miss Keene, an English ham in the lead role who shall now be known forever in a bit part to the greatest entrance ever made. She recoils in fright, her best performance all night, all goddamn season, all her career. What a curtain call.

‘Bravo,’ he mutters and vanishes into the backstage labyrinth. JWB, for one night only.