INTRODUCING

KATIE MAGUIRE

KATIE MAGUIRE was one of seven sisters born to a police Inspector in Cork, but the only sister who decided to follow her father into An Garda Síochána.

With her bright green eyes and short red hair, she looks like an Irish pixie, but she is no soft touch. To the dismay of some of her male subordinates, she rose quickly through the ranks, gaining a reputation for catching Cork's killers, often at great personal cost.

Katie spent seven years in a turbulent marriage in which she bore, and lost, a son – an event that continues to haunt her. Despite facing turmoil at home and prejudice at work, she is one of the most fearless detectives in Ireland.



Also by Graham Masterton

Horror Standalones

Black Angel
Death Mask
Death Trance
Edgewise
Heirloom
Prey
Ritual
Spirit
Tengu
The Chosen Child
The Sphinx
Unspeakable
Walkers
Manitou Blood
Revenge of the Manitou
Famine
Ikon
Sacrifice
The House of a Hundred Whispers
Plague
The Soul Stealer
Blind Panic
The House at Phantom Park

The Scarlet Widow Series

Scarlet Widow
The Coven

The Katie Maguire Series

White Bones
Broken Angels
Red Light
Taken for Dead
Blood Sisters
Buried
Living Death
Dead Girls Dancing
Dead Men Whistling
Begging to Die
The Last Drop of Blood

The Patel & Pardoe Series

Ghost Virus
The Children God Forgot
The Shadow People
What Hides in the Cellar

The Night Warriors

Night Warriors
Death Dream
Night Plague
Night Wars
The Ninth Nightmare

Short Story Collections

Days of Utter Dread

PAY BACK THE DEVIL

GRAHAM MASTERTON



An Aries Book

First published in the UK in 2024 by Head of Zeus,
part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Copyright © Graham Masterton, 2024

The moral right of Graham Masterton to be identified
as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of both the copyright owner
and the above publisher of this book.

This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events
portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's
imagination or are used fictitiously.

9 7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (HB): 9781837931064
ISBN (XTPB): 9781837931071
ISBN (E): 9781837931040

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



Head of Zeus
First Floor East
5–8 Hardwick Street
London EC1R 4RG

WWW.HEADOFZEUS.COM

Nil cara ag cumha ach cuimhne
'No friend for sorrow but memory'

Irish saying

1

'Fidelma!' called Brendan up the stairs to the bathroom, where he could hear her still splashing. 'Would you fancy a mug of scáiltín, and maybe a slice of that brack your mam fetched over?'

Before his wife could answer, the house blew up. Brendan's head was blasted off his neck and hit the front door, which slammed backwards on to the porch, while his left arm was torn away and disappeared into the living room. The staircase shot straight upwards like a fireman's ladder and then broke apart and collapsed on top of him, burying his decapitated body under a clattering cascade of wooden treads and rippling folds of carpet.

The side walls of the house burst out into the garden and bricks went bouncing across the road and on to the grass of Merrion Court. Then, with a hideous groan and a deafening crash, the upstairs floor collapsed at a steep angle to ground level. The bathtub slid down on to the front patio as fast as a toboggan, awash with bloodied water, with Fidelma still sitting in it, or what was left of Fidelma, with her head blown off like her husband's and her intestines dangling over the sides.

The explosion was so loud that the McCarthys' immediate neighbours could hardly hear it. They felt only as if their ears had been compressed, like descending in an airliner. But

further away, all across the heights of Montenotte and all over Cork city centre, the boom echoed and re-echoed, and passers-by stopped and looked around in shock.

A boiling grey ball of smoke rolled up into the air and was then swallowed up by the darkness. Immediately afterwards, lurid orange flames flickered up over the treetops.

Less than five minutes later, the wailing of sirens could be heard from the fire station on Anglesea Street, across the River Lee and up Summerhill.

When the McCarthys' house blew up, Katie was chatting to her old school friend Saoirse O'Connor in the Glasshouse bar in the grounds of the Montenotte Hotel.

The Glasshouse was less than five hundred metres away from Merrion Court, although it was further down the hill, and it was shielded from the main force of the explosion by the hotel building itself. All the same, they clearly heard the boom, and all the windows rattled. Everybody in the bar put down their cocktails and every conversation came to a stop.

'Holy Christ,' said Saoirse. 'What in the name of mercy was that?'

A few seconds later, a fine shower of brick and tile fragments rained down out of the evening sky on to the bar's glass roof, followed by a wooden banister post, which bounced off into the gardens.

'It's a bomb,' said Katie. She had heard one less than a year before, when the UCC's School of Pharmacy had been deliberately blown up, and there was no other sound like it.

She reached over to the chair beside her and took her phone out of her bag. Even though she was still on suspension, she

had stayed connected to the Garda communications centre at Anglesea Street.

'A *bomb*?' asked Saoirse. 'Who in the name of Jesus would be setting off a bomb in Montenotte, of all places?'

Katie lifted her hand to Saoirse to show that she would answer in a moment. After two or three minutes, she got through to Sergeant Murphy in the communications centre and he sounded harassed.

'Peter? It's Superintendent Maguire. I'm up at Montenotte and we've just heard what sounds like a bomb.'

'The calls are still coming in, ma'am. All we know so far is that it was a house on Merrion Court and that it's been totally flattened. We're not sure yet if it was some kind of explosive device or whether it was a gas leak, you know – same as that blast last week at the Meanys' house on the Lower Glanmire Road. The fire brigade and the ambulance are on their way like, because there's casualties reported, and we've contacted Gas Networks to send their emergency engineers.'

'How about the acting detective superintendent? Does he know about it?'

'DS ó Broin? I'm told that he's on his way up there already, ma'am, along with DI O'Sullivan.'

'Well, I'm thinking of going up there myself to take a look.'

'Be doggy wide, ma'am. You know – just in case it *was* a bomb, like, and there's a secondary device still waiting to be set off.'

Katie was tempted to tell Sergeant Murphy that she hadn't come down in the last shower, but instead she said, 'Thanks a million, Peter. I'm counting on returning to duty in a week or so, when the Discipline Section have finally made up their minds.'

'You and me both, ma'am,' said Sergeant Murphy quietly, and she could tell by his tone of voice that he meant it.

'Apparently it was a house on Merrion Court that blew up,' she told Saoirse. 'I'm off up there now to take a sconce at it.'

'Shall I come with you?'

'No, love. Just in case. Why don't you stay here and have another cocomintini? I shouldn't be too long and I'll probably need another one myself when I get back.'

She lifted her red duffel coat off the chair beside her, shrugged it on, and gave a wave to the barman before she walked out into the night, mouthing *I'll be back!* in case he thought she was leaving without paying. It was late November, and damp, but it was not too chilly, and at least it had stopped raining, although the pavements were still glistening wet as she walked up the steep slope of Leycester's Lane. An ambulance sped past her as she climbed, with its blue lights flashing, and up ahead of her she could see that smoke was still rising, with floodlights criss-crossing through it like lightsabers. She could smell burning, too, with a curious nutty aroma.

When she reached Merrion Court she saw that the roads that surrounded the grassy area in its centre were jammed with three fire engines, two ambulances, at least four Garda patrol cars and six or seven other unmarked cars. The roads had already been cordoned off with tapes, and they were crowded with firemen and paramedics and gardaí, although she could see that Bill Phinner and his technical team had not yet arrived.

The south side of the court was lined with eight detached houses, except that there was a gap where the seventh house should have been standing, and all that was left of it was a smoking jumble of bricks and tiles and broken doors and window frames. The windows in the two adjacent houses had all been shattered, too, and half the tiles had been blown off their roofs. The chimney of number 5 had crashed down

on to the new Volvo estate that was parked in their front garden.

Katie saw Detective Superintendent ó Broin standing beside the police tape, talking to Detective Inspector O'Sullivan. He was thin, Micheál ó Broin, with a hooked nose, and this evening he was wearing a grey woollen beanie and a long black raincoat, which Katie thought made him look even more like a witch than usual. He had a habit of repeatedly jabbing people with his finger when he was talking to them, and she could see that he was doing it now. It was just as well that DI O'Sullivan was plump and wearing a puffer jacket, so he probably couldn't feel it.

'Micheál,' she said, as she walked up to them. And then, to DI O'Sullivan, 'Terry, how's yourself?'

Micheál stared at her as if she were a mirage.

'Kathleen. You shouldn't be here.'

'I don't see why not. I'm nothing more than an innocent bystander, that's all.'

Micheál looked furtively around to see if any other senior Garda officers had arrived.

'You do realize that if it gets reported that I was discussing this situation with you, then it'll look like I was approving what you got suspended for.'

'Oh, don't be so sensitive. In any case, I'm almost sure that my suspension's going to be lifted soon, and then you can go back to Henry Street and forget about all the stresses and strains of solving crime in Cork.'

Micheál ó Broin had been brought in from Limerick to act as detective superintendent while Katie was relieved of duty. He had never concealed his contempt for women being promoted to senior positions in An Garda Síochána. Katie had heard from Detective Bedelia Murrish that he had expressed the hope

several times that the officers of the Garda's Discipline Section would find her guilty of serious misconduct and recommend that she be sacked, or even prosecuted.

'What do we think happened here, Terry?' she asked DI O'Sullivan.

'An explosive device of some sort, almost certain,' said Terry. 'The neighbours say that prior to the blast there was no smell of gas at all, like. But now you can smell that almondy smell and I'll bet that's C-4.'

'All right, O'Sullivan,' said Micheál testily. 'This isn't a briefing.'

'Some of the neighbours say they heard a noise like *whoosh!* too, right after the bang,' Terry went on, ignoring him. 'That makes me fairly sure that it was a bomb.'

'Bombs create a vacuum, don't they, when they go off?' Katie nodded, looking at Micheál as if it were likely that he didn't know this. 'And that *whoosh* – that's all the air rushing back in. Like thunder, after lightning.'

'Let's wait until forensics show up, shall we?' snapped Micheál.

'What about casualties?' Katie persisted. By now, she could almost imagine Micheál mounting a broomstick and flying around them in a frustrated rage.

'Two dead,' Terry told her. 'The owner of the property and his wife. A neighbour was struck by a shower of flying glass when he was out in his garden putting out the rubbish, but his injuries aren't too serious.'

'Do we have the names of the two deceased?'

'Hold on,' said Terry. He took out his phone and tapped the screen. 'Yes – here we are. Brendan and Fidelma McCarthy. According to the neighbours, Brendan worked at the Opel dealership in Silver Springs.'

Katie took hold of Terry's hand and angled his phone so that she could see the screen for herself.

'Mother of God,' she said. 'I *know* him. I know him and I know his family. I had a rake of trouble with those McCarthys two years back.'

'So why was that?' asked Micheál in a sharp voice, clearly annoyed at being left out of the conversation.

'They were members of what they called the Dripsey Dozen. We got wind that they were planning to sabotage a coachload of UK tourists on the centenary of the Dripsey Ambush. They denied it, of course, but they found out who had tipped us off and they beat the poor fellow within an inch of his life.'

'Some people can never fecking forgive and forget, can they?' said Terry.

'What are you suggesting, Kathleen?' Micheál demanded. 'This explosion today, it may be connected to the Dripsey Dozen?'

'It's possible.'

'Wouldn't you say that's jumping the gun a little? I'm not being critical, but I've been told by several of your colleagues that your methods have often been – how shall I put it? – less than methodical.'

'I'm suggesting nothing definite at all, Micheál,' said Katie. 'Let's wait until we receive a full report from Bill Phinner.'

'Don't you mean, let's wait until *I* receive a full report from Bill Phinner? Do I really have to remind you that you're on suspension?'

At that moment, a white van marked An Biúró Theicniúil came around the corner and parked right in front of them, followed by a white Garda car.

Three forensic technicians climbed out of the van, all wearing white protective Tyvek suits, like three snowmen who

had lost their carrot noses. Then the car door opened and Bill Phinner, the head of the technical bureau, emerged. He saw Katie talking to Micheál and Terry and came across, with a questioning smile on his face and his hand extended.

'Well, well, well! Detective Superintendent Maguire! Welcome back!'