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Sanctum

Written by Denise Mina

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SANCTUM

Denise Mina



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Prologue

Following the recent House of Lords judgement in Harriot v Welsh it is finally possible to publish, for the first time in the UK, the notorious Lachlan Harriot diaries.

These pages came to be in my possession through a series of happy accidents. In the winter of 1998 I was approached through mutual friends concerning some materials relating to Dr Susie Harriot. A local doctor, Dr Morris Welsh, had come to be in possession of a set of diaries written by Lachlan Harriot, the husband of Dr Susie, and was deeply troubled by their contents. Dr Welsh, a good man who is much maligned in this text, was keen to do the right thing but unsure how to go about it.

A week earlier, Dr Welsh had taken Lachlan Harriot's old computer away as a favour. Knowing that Harriot's computing skills were minimal, Morris Welsh did a quick search of the recycle bin, checking for important files that might have been accidentally deleted. It was there that he stumbled across the diary files that were to make him famous and add yet another twist to the Dr Susie murder case. Having alerted the police to the facts outlined in the files, Morris Welsh sold them on to me, as a collector of true crime stories and the highest bidder.

A little over a month before this discovery Dr Susie had been convicted, in a worldwide blaze of publicity, of the gruesome murder of Andrew Gow. The public were still

intrigued by the case: how could a mother and professional woman, previously of good character, suddenly turn into a vicious animal who would cut the tongue from a man lying restrained on a cottage floor and leave him to bleed to death? As his psychiatrist, did Dr Susie know more about Gow than the rest of the world? Was it an act of revenge by a jilted lover? Had she indeed fallen in love with him? The answers to these and many other questions were afforded by these diaries.

This is the first time that the law has encountered a set of computer diaries being sold by accident on old hardware. Even before the final judgement was delivered, the case of Harriot v Welsh represented a significant development in the intellectual property and copyright law of this country. It was in response to this that the ExLibris™ Author Assignation software was developed, a system now used worldwide and subject to a series of copyright challenges itself.

The right to publish the diaries was challenged but upheld on two grounds: had Harriot reserved copyright he would have been able to claim authorship and stop publication. However, because the files were written on his wife's computer, Susie Harriot was cited as the user and by default the author, and the copyright defence was not available to him. Susie Harriot herself neglected to bring a copyright action. The second course of action was Lachlan Harriot's privacy case, brought under the Human Rights Act, but the House of Lords found that Dr Harriot had vitiated his right to privacy, having courted publicity and given a series of interviews to the *Mirror* newspaper. He had, therefore, left himself with no defences.

What follows is the transcript of those diaries, complete and unabridged. The sole alterations to the text are the addition of a start date to orientate the reader and then

numbered headings at the beginning of new entries, put there for the sake of clarity.

Denise Mina
Glasgow, 2002

For legal reasons, Denise Mina herein reserves the moral right to be identified as the author of the text.

1

Tuesday 3rd November 1998

I'm shocked. I woke up after four hours' sleep this morning still trembling. It feels as if there's a bubble of bile at the back of my throat, ready to splatter out through my mouth if I try to speak. I was exuberantly sick in the taxi on the way home, all hot browns and greens, which is odd because I have no memory of eating for the last three days. I tipped the driver twenty and apologized over and over. He said, don't worry, pal, no bother at all, just get out for fucksake, quick, before it happens again.

How could they find her guilty? She's a doctor, for Chrissake, she's a mother. We're both professional people. Things like this don't happen to people like us. Now I understand why mothers stand over dead children and shout NO as if their soul is exploding. It's a primordial urge; fate has made a terrible mistake and needs to be informed; in a just world this could never happen.

The courtroom was packed for the verdict. Even the policemen from the other courts snuck in to stand at the back in the dark. The public galleries seemed to include the same faces each day but they must have changed. The queue was one hundred, two hundred yards long every morning. A ragged, untidy snake of people having one last cigarette, nodding and chatting to the people before and aft, sometimes hunched against a hard rain, sometimes upright as meerkats in the morning sun, ready to come and

sit in the warm, watching our lives being ripped apart as they nibbled their sweeties and nudged one another. They were almost all quite old. I wondered if that's the optimum age for shamelessly indulging in ghoulish interests but they're probably retired or unemployed and have more time for such activities than young people.

Surprisingly few of the audience were journalists. From the extent of the coverage you'd think every hack in the country was there. The journalists stood out because they were there for a purpose, bored and bent over notepads, scribbling in shorthand, glancing up every so often when a new player appeared. A larger portion of the crowd watched in shiny-faced amazement. A bald man, who smelled like mustard, always managed to inveigle his way to the front row. He seemed to know everyone. A recurrent group of three septuagenarian women saved places for each other in the queue. They all had the same tight white perm. One afternoon one of the ladies brought fruit scones for them to eat with their cups of tea from the machine in the lobby. She had buttered them and wrapped them individually in cellophane. They tittered and giggled as they ate. I was sitting on the bench across the corridor from them, thinking to myself: they'll remember this trial because of the scones. My life's being fucked ragged and all they'll remember are the fruit scones and their chum's winsome wit in bringing them each a funny little snack.

I sat through the two weeks alone, the sole representative of Susie's family. She waved to me, made faces and occasionally turned for a reaction. I pretended to be a journalist with exclusive access and wrote everything down in a poor man's impression of shorthand (jst shrt wds, rlly). The newsmen had worked out that I was her husband at the start of the case. They realized during the first day, because they saw me talking to Fitzgerald during the breaks.

Fitzgerald has become a bit of a celeb during the trial. He was lampooned in the press last Sunday: a cartoon showed his headmasterish scowl and his big grey eyebrows, dressed in lawyers' robes, driving an expensive sports car with 'appeal' written on it and money flying out of the back. They're never, ever funny, those cartoons.

The journalists approached me at the start of the trial, some even slipped notes into my hand like love-sick schoolgirls. The answer machine is choked with messages every day. They want to buy my story or get some sort of comment about each new development. They offer money, fame, a chance to have my say. They approach and approach, ignoring my snubs, rebuffing my rudeness.

The public didn't realize who I was until we went back in for the verdict, when the journalists shouted questions at me outside the court. When we were sitting down the man who smelled of mustard turned around and smiled, pointing at the back of Susie's head.

'Is that your missus?' he asked, surprised and pleased.

I was so nervous I didn't trust myself to speak and I just nodded.

'Oh,' he said. 'Very good. You look queasy.'

I muttered something about the possibility of being sick and he gave me a mint to suck.

The court official with the ceremonial stick came in and we all stood up, sat down, genuflected at the Crown, whatever. The jury clattered back in along the little wooden benches and sat down. The room was so quiet it felt as if everyone had inhaled and frozen, sitting perfectly still for the seven minutes it took the clerk to declare the result.

Guilty of murder. A murderer. Murderess. My own precious Susie, my sweetheart, my funny valentine, my dear Christ Almighty. Every pore on my body swelled open, as if trying to absorb the news osmotically. A hair fell from

my head. A man dropped a pen along the row from me and I kept thinking: he's dropped it, he's dropped it.

Susie turned slowly in her chair, her black hair sliding off her shoulder like a lazy oil slick, the flannel of her pale grey suit jacket folding perfectly into tiny consecutive waves below her shoulder blade. She looked back at me, horrified and helpless. Instinctively, I reached out to touch her and smashed my knuckles loudly on the safety glass. In the tense hush of the courtroom it sounded as if I was rapping jauntily on the glass to get her attention. Everyone – the journalists, the old women, even the old man – stared at me disapprovingly. It was the most private, despairing, appalling moment of our lives and yet they sat there, watching us, disapproving of me reaching over to give a last free embrace to my darling wife. It was like watching a loved one die on the pitch at Wembley and then being criticized for your technique.

Finding me a disappointment, as ever, Susie seemed to shrink to half-size, to look more alone than before in her big wood and glass playpen. Sad and defeated, she dropped her eyes to her lap and turned away from me. My hand was throbbing. Everyone stood up. I felt as if I was sinking into a grave.

Sentencing has been deferred until psychiatric and social reports can be drawn up; exactly the same sorts of reports that she used to draw up herself for a living. We have to go back for the sentencing diet in a few weeks but murder has a statutory penalty of life imprisonment, so that's what she'll get. Whose lives are they taking in payment? Susie's or mine? Or Margie's? The forces of justice are orphaning our daughter at nineteen months old.

Margie'll never know her mother. She'll never walk past a make-up counter, catch a smell and remember a thousand days at her mother's knee. She'll never roll indignant

teenage eyes and join the other girls bitching about their bloody mums during school lunchtime. Susie will never surprise her in her thirties with a story about little Margie saying something rude to a pompous visitor, about falls and friends forgotten, about the literal confusion of early childhood. I wanted to stand up and scream at them; they're taking the wrong life.

As I made my way out of the courtroom I tried hard to blend into the milling public but I'm too tall to be inconspicuous, especially in a crowd of the midgetized elderly. A cross-eyed woman ran up to me and asked for my autograph. The crowd turned on me, wanting papers of their own signed, poking at my hand with chewed pens. I kept my eyes on the door and ploughed through them. What does my autograph mean? Do they want a bit of me? It can't be saleable, surely.

The lobby was quieter than usual. Most of the journalists had been corralled into a side room but some members of the public took flash photos of me and got told off by the policeman on the door. Fitzgerald took me aside to brief me but I couldn't hear the words he was saying, just a vague rumbling mumble from a mile away about an appeal and statements for the press.

To my surprise I found I was nodding and then shook my head violently. What the fuck was I agreeing to? It felt like one of those no-trousers-at-assembly dreams I used to have. I managed to rub my ten-ton lips together. 'I can't speak.'

Fitzgerald nodded. 'Aye, well, all right then,' he said matter-of-factly. 'That's not a problem. We can proceed without your active, verbal participation. Leave it to me. Just stand next to me and keep quiet, no matter what they ask. They may try to provoke you.'

A woman passed us and slipped, late, into the journalists'

room. Through the swing door I could see a gang of grown men, half of whom had never been in the public galleries, I'm sure. Pointing at the two seats set out for Fitzgerald and me were fifty beady eyes, fluffy microphones and cameras, boxy TV cameras on stands and flashes on tripods. Their voices were high and excited. Sitting on chairs and swivelling around to talk, writhing, grinning at each other. The Dr Susie Harriot Murder Trial was going to run and run for them. It was just an entertainment. I've seen it happen to other people and never considered the casual brutality of it. Distant participants in the story, who neither knew nor loved Susie, would sell their stories. They'd be paid little more than pocket money to attach their faces to a string of misquotes that would make Susie sound sexier than she is, more evil, more interesting.

'Can't go in there,' I said to Fitzgerald, knowing this more surely than any other thing in the universe. 'Just – I'm going to be sick.'

Fitzgerald looked at my face and, judging from the way his head darted away from my mouth, he knew I was telling the truth. He put his hand on my forearm and patted it once. 'Perhaps the best course of action in this instance would be for you to go home,' he said. 'Just go home.'

'Can't I see her? Before she's gone?'

Fitzgerald shook his head and apologized. I fled.

A couple of photographers followed me and took pictures as I hailed a cab. I left the car there. I've driven drunk; I've driven at sixty through blinding rain; I've driven my dying mother-in-law to hospital, but I couldn't have fitted the key into the ignition yesterday. The car's probably got a stack of tickets on it already.

The answerphone was full when I got in, men and women offering gazillions for my story. We pay more, I care, so

sorry, remember me from the court? I was sitting behind you, over your left shoulder.

I'm in the papers this morning, hailing the taxi, looking shifty and portly and weird. I had no idea I look like that. I've always thought having longer hair made me seem rakish and bohemian. Instead I look as if I'm inexplicably ashamed of the tops of my ears. I'm plump in parts as well, which is a surprise. A sagging roll of fat is perched on my belt and my jaw's indistinct. I look tearful and my back's rounded as if I'm waiting to be slapped across the back of the head. This may well be the only time in my life when I'm in the papers and I look fat and ill-groomed and frightened.

I went out and bought all the other papers this morning to see if my strange appearance was the fault of a crooked lens but it wasn't. It's bizarre being in the papers. I feel a thrill of something, a mixture of fear and pleasure. The pleasure is like the delight of seeing an unexpected photograph of myself at a party I don't remember being at, its confirmation that I exist and am up to stuff. The fear is more real. People will know me from those photographs; people I've never met before; odd people. They'll look at my photograph for too long; they'll laugh at me for having a fast, faithless wife and for not working; make jokes about my hair and fatness to each other on the train on their way home from work; use me as a nickname for a misguided sidekick whose wife is fucking a serial killer.

The arrant stupidity of the coverage is astonishing. They're selling it as a sexy story, making out Susie was a frustrated suburban type. One of the tabloids is telling people not to trust their doctors any more.

I've brought all the papers up here to the study, to hide them from Margie. It's irrational, I know, but I don't want these stories near her. I don't want her perfect, tiny hands

with their rosy fingernails to touch the paper they're printed on. It feels like an unforgivable act of brutality, to bring these terrible accusations into such a precious, innocent life. She'll see them one day. She'll be curious and look them up, and I can't protect her indefinitely from articles like this one from yesterday:

> Sex Doctor Verdict on Psycho Lover's Murder
> A verdict is expected today in the trial of Dr Susie Harriot, 30, former psychiatrist at Sunnyfields State Mental Hospital. Dr Susie is accused of the brutal murder of Andrew Gow, 33. Gow, previously found guilty of the 'Riverside Ripper' series of murders but recently released on appeal, was discovered in an abandoned cottage in the Highlands, having bled to death. The prosecution claims that Dr Harriot was in love with Gow and, enraged at his marrying another woman, killed him.
>
> The body of his new wife, Donna McGovern, still has not been found, although her blood was identified from a sample in the couple's white Golf Polo car. Strathclyde Police say that they would be willing to prosecute for Miss McGovern's death if Dr Harriot is acquitted on the present charges. A spokesman stated yesterday:
>
> 'During the summer months the hills of Sutherland are busy with walkers and we would ask people to keep alert and watch out for anything unusual.'

We've got this to look forward to all next summer. And every following summer if they don't find Donna this time around. Every time they find the decomposed body of some poor depressed soul who has staggered off to the Highlands to die, Margie will have the whole story thrown back in her face. It's not an uncommon occurrence either. Last year, before I was interested in such things, I remember they

found the remains of a young French guy who had walked off into the hills with no ID and the labels cut out of his clothing. It was a suicide. He'd left a note in a hostel. He just wanted to melt back into the land, he said. In the same month they also found a woman from London who'd died of starvation while camping next to a loch. Apparently she was vegan and was giving airianism a go.

The coverage in the broadsheets isn't much better. An intellectual phoney has written three pages in a review section about the significance of Gow dying in Cape Wrath. Just because it has the potential to be a metaphor doesn't give it meaning. He can't have listened to a word of the trial because Susie didn't choose the venue; Gow went to Cape Wrath and she followed him He talks about Gow's head injuries, saying maybe all psychiatrists want to bash their patients' brains in, smash the organ that offends.

I can't answer the phone. Mum called from Spain and left a message asking how we got on and saying she was worried. I heard Dad clearing his throat over and over in the background, like a phlegm-powered car revving at the lights. He coughs like that to signal distress. I can't stand it when he's upset; it makes me feel so mortal.

The English papers will have arrived there by now, so they'll know anyway. It might even be on the news.

I can't bring myself to speak to anyone. Instead I remind myself of the need to focus on the positive things. I must:

1. Keep Margie away from the television so she doesn't see pictures of myself or her mother flashed up every two minutes. I don't want her to remember this. I want it to pass her by for as long as possible because it's going to be part of her life for ever.
2. Remember to pay bills and keep going.

3. Get back into a routine. Routine is comfort and as close to normal as we can hope for over the next short while.
4. Have a purpose. Before, when we discussed the possibility of a guilty verdict (Me: 'Oh, by Jingo, that'll never happen,' followed by hearty laugh. Susie grinning heavenward: 'No, darling, of course not. Nothing bad ever happens to young professionals like us,' followed by brittle, tinkling laugh and little sip of sherry), Fitzgerald asked me to look through all of Susie's papers and see if I can find anything that might give us grounds for an appeal. We can't appeal against the sentence because life's mandatory for murder. We can only appeal against the conviction. We have to show that the evidence was flawed and claim a miscarriage of justice. It's the only grounds of appeal.

I've already spent forty minutes this evening in Susie's study sorting through piles of newspaper cuttings and tapes and professional files. I'm going to come up here night after night, and go through every note and paper with microscopic care.

2

I forgot. I woke up this morning with tired eyes and lingered in my bed. I pulled the crackling duvet up to my chin, warming my neck against the crisp November air seeping through the window. I heard Yeni and Margie downstairs, la-la-singing the Happy Happy Hippo song together and the high tink of cutlery against crockery as Yeni emptied the dishwasher. I smelled bitter-sweet coffee brewing on the hob.

The house yawned and stretched as the heating warmed the wooden floors; beyond the garden wall neighbours backed their cars out of garages, wheels rolling over damp leaves. Then I became conscious of the cold, dead space next to me in the bed.

For a fleeting, cosy moment I wondered why Susie was up already. I saw her in the kitchen, sipping a mug of coffee and eating an orange. I thought, she's been up long enough for the sheets to cool down, and then I remembered.

I couldn't face breakfast or a shave. I got a mug of coffee, hugged Margie for a bit and then came straight up here.

I've found a box file with Gow's prison files in it, the ones the hospital sacked Susie for stealing from the office. Sinky Sinclair's suspicions were right all along. I bet he still wonders about that. Despite being a senior member of staff she still wasn't authorized to take them out of the grounds.

She was adamant that she hadn't taken them. She lied to me. She was so insistent that she said 'fuck' in front of Margie. Now I've found them here, five paper files and a computer disc sitting in a box file, on the right of the computer where she could reach them easily.

There are a number of matters I want to raise when I go to visit Susie:

1. Why has she never denied having an affair with Gow to me?
2. Where are the insurance papers for the house?
3. What in the name of the almighty fucking bollocks was she doing stealing these files and then lying to me about it? Does she think I'm an idiot or something? Does she think I'm going to take an infinite amount of shit from her and still stand by and save face for her? Has she no regard for my dignity? Am I some sort of pointless prick she thinks she can push around?

I think those two months of us both knocking around the house after Susie had been sacked, before the phone call and her taking off to Cape Wrath, I think they were the happiest of my life. I knew she wasn't happy, she was forgetful and ratty. She'd lost her wedding ring and was sure she'd left it at Sunnyfields. I bought her another one, a smaller one which she never wore, and fooled myself into believing that she was adjusting to a new pace of life. I thought she'd get into it, slow the rhythm down. I thought, it's okay, we're fine for money, we can spend more time together, just the three of us. I even dared to wonder whether we might have another kid.

It was during that time that the mist came into the front room. It was July and I'd left the front-room window open when I went to bed. When I came down in the morning

the garden mist was all through the room, a swirling fog at chest level. I walked slowly through it and the damp cloud closed in around me. As my bare feet came down on the red kilim carpet they smashed the settled dust of water droplets and left perfect photographic prints. I told Susie when she came down for breakfast but the mist was gone by then and she listened but didn't understand. It felt like a dream sequence and now I think maybe it was. No one around me was living in the same reality. What sort of self-centred buffoon would mistake a cataclysmic event in his wife's life for a splendid opportunity to spend quality time together? I'm a fool, a selfish fool. I hadn't a clue what was going on. Rome was burning and I played Dixie on the spoons.

This study's a mess. Susie's left bits of paper everywhere, all over the floor, on the desk, Blu-Tacked to the wall; there are even some on the window. I haven't been in for a while because she'd taken to locking the door and I didn't want to pry (another clue I *completely* missed/rewrote/dressed up as a lady rabbit). There's a photograph stuck to the glass on the skylight, a picture of Gow and Donna's wedding, with Blu-Tack smeared angrily over Donna's face. The light shines through it so it's a translucent picture of Andrew Gow standing with a headless woman. It's creepy. I'll take it down.

These prison files trouble me intensely. I want to talk to Harvey Tucker, Susie's colleague from Sunnyfields, to ask him if what he said in court was right, if Susie had been seeing more of Gow than could be justified professionally. I got the feeling he didn't mean to insinuate that. During his evidence I looked up at him and he seemed uncomfortable, as if he'd been railroaded into saying things. I've got this in my notes:

Prosecution. How would Mr Gow come to be spending time in Dr Harriot's office?

Harvey Tucker. I'm sorry, I don't understand.

P. How would any prisoner come to be in the office of a psychiatrist? Can they just walk in and demand to be seen?

HT. No, of course not. They'd first of all have to approach an officer and ask to see someone. Then the officer would refer them on to the psychiatrist.

P. *[looking incredulously at the jury]* Is that the ONLY way? *[He raised a hand in a rainbow gesture as he said it. He really was the most awful ham.]*

HT. No, well, we could ask to see them as well.

P. A psychiatrist can call a prisoner to their office?

HT. Yes *[faltering]* within reasonable hours . . . some prisoners—

P. *[cutting him off]* We have submitted into evidence Dr Harriot's appointment book for the two months immediately prior to her dismissal. Is four hours in the space of three days a usual amount of time to spend with a prisoner?

HT. That's hard to say *[looking very shifty]*.

P. In this sort of case, where the initial paperwork is done, the Risk Assessment is done, no one has asked for a new report: would it be usual in such circumstances?

HT. I don't think it's poss—

P. JUST a yes or no will suffice, Dr Tucker.

HT. No.

P. Not a usual amount of time?

HT. *[quietly]* Not usual, no.

Tucker was very uncomfortable when the prosecution dismissed him, as if he had something else to say.

Anyway, I phoned him just now but got no answer. I left

a message asking him to call back, said it was important. I hope he doesn't think I blame him or anything. I know Sinky Sinclair was responsible for Susie getting sacked, not him, but I don't care about that either at the moment, I really don't. I can see how the lawyer got Tucker to say what he did. I'm not in a blaming frame of mind, I just want to ask him about it.

It's obvious in hindsight that Susie was going through some huge crisis before she took off for Cape Wrath. Looking back, it's so clear. At the time I thought she was just being huffy and withdrawn. She was insistent that she hadn't taken Gow's file, even after they sacked her. That was a massive, throbbing, neon-ringed clue. Sunnyfields only have one applicant per post. It's so hard for them to recruit for forensic psychiatry that they wouldn't have sacked her unless they had absolutely no other option.

Margie's gone down for her nap so I've come back up here to do a bit more tidying. This is a nice room. I never thought that before. It's more of a converted cupboard than a room. It's warm because it's at the top of the house and there's a wee stereo. The skylight Susie had put in last summer frames the top of next door's oak tree and stops the room from being suffocating. The plain white walls and the low bookcase keep it airy and fresh. And of course there's this computer, which I've never been allowed to use because I'm a Luddite and might break it. All I need is the word processing to write up the papers as I sift through them for the appeal. I know how to put the machine on and off and I can save the things I've written. That's all I need to do, really.

Once you're sitting at the desk the narrowness of the room and the high sloping ceiling make it feel cosy. It's only

when you're standing in the doorway, balancing on the shallow top step and looking in at someone else sitting here, asking them when they're going to come down and spend time with you, that it seems claustrophobic.