

IN THE
MORNING
I'LL BE GONE

ALSO BY ADRIAN MCKINTY

The Cold Cold Ground

I Hear the Sirens in the Street

A DETECTIVE SEAN DUFFY NOVEL

IN THE
MORNING
I'LL BE GONE

BOOK THREE
THE TROUBLES TRILOGY

ADRIAN MCKINTY



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My friend you must understand that time forks perpetually into countless futures. And in at least one of them I have become your enemy.

Jorge Luis Borges,
The Garden of Forking Paths (1941)

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1: THE GREAT ESCAPE

The beeper began to whine at 4:27 p.m. on Wednesday, September 25, 1983. It was repeating a shrill C sharp at four-second intervals, which meant—for those of us who had bothered to read the manual—that it was a Class 1 emergency. This was a general alert being sent to every off-duty policeman, police reservist, and soldier in Northern Ireland. There were only five Class 1 emergencies and three of them were a Soviet nuclear strike, a Soviet invasion, and what the civil servants who'd written the manual had nonchalantly called “an extra-terrestrial trespass.”

So you'd think that I would have dashed across the room, grabbed the beeper, and run with a mounting sense of panic to the nearest telephone. You'd have thought wrong. For a start I was as high as Skylab, baked on Turkish black cannabis resin that I'd cooked myself and rolled into sweet Virginia tobacco. And then there was the fact that I was playing Galaxian on my Atari 5200 with the sound on the TV maxed and the curtains pulled for a full dramatic and immersive experience. I didn't notice the beeper because its insistent whine sounded a lot like the red ships peeling off from the main Galaxian fleet as they swooped in for their oh-so-predictable attack.

They didn't present any difficulty at all despite the sick genius of their teenage programmers back in Osaka because I had the moves and the skill and all they had were ones and zeros. I slid the joystick to the left, hugged the corners of the screen, and easily dodged their layered cluster bomb assault. That survived, I eased into the middle of the screen and killed the entire squadron as the ships attempted to get back into formation. It was only when the screen was blank and I saw that I was nudging close to my previous high score that I noticed the grey

plastic rectangle sitting on the coffee table, beeping and vibrating with what in retrospect seemed to be more than its usual vehemence. I threw a pillow over the device, sat back down on the rug, and continued with the level. The phone began to ring and it went on and on and finally, more out of boredom than curiosity, I paused the game and answered it. It was Sergeant Pollock, the duty man at Bellaughray Station.

“Duffy, you didn’t answer your beeper!” he said.

“Maybe the Soviet army blocked the signal.”

“What?”

“What’s going on, Pollock?” I asked him.

“You’re in Carrickfergus, right?”

“Aye.”

“Report to your local police station. This is a Class 1 emergency.”

“What’s the story?”

“It’s big. There’s been a mass breakout of IRA prisoners from the Maze prison.”

“Jesus! What a cock-up.”

“It’s panic stations, mate. We need every man.”

“OK. But remember this is my off day so I’ll be on double time.”

“How can you think of money at a time like this, Duffy?”

“Surprisingly easily, Pollock. Remember double time. Put it in the log.”

“All right.”

“Another fine job from Her Majesty’s Prison Service, eh?”

“You can say that again. Let’s just hope we can clean up their mess . . . Listen are you OK with going to Carrick? I know you haven’t been back there since you were, uh, demoted. I could always send ya to Newtownabbey RUC.”

“Never fret, Pollock. I shall thrive on my native heath.”

“I hope so.”

I hung up and addressed the Galaxian fleet hovering silently on the TV screen: “Return to your alien masters and tell them that we Earthmen are not so easily crushed!” And with that I pulled the Atari out of the back of the TV and flipped on the news. HM Prison Maze

(previously known as Long Kesh) was a maximum-security prison considered to be one of the most escape-proof penitentiaries in Europe. Of course, whenever you heard words like “escape proof” you immediately thought of that other great Belfast innovation, the “unsinkable” *Titanic*. The facts came drifting in as I put on my uniform and body armor. Thirty-eight IRA prisoners had escaped from H Block 7 of the facility. They had used smuggled-in guns to take hostages, then they’d grabbed a laundry van and stormed the gates. One prison officer was dead and twenty others had been injured. “Among the escapees are convicted murderers and some of the IRA’s leading bomb makers,” said an attractive, breathless young newsreader in the BBC studio.

“Well, that’s fantastic,” I muttered, and wondered whether it was anybody I’d personally put away. I made a cup of instant coffee and had a bowl of Frosties to get the Turkish black out of my system and then I went outside to my waiting BMW.

“Oh, Mr. Duffy, you won’t have heard the news!” Mrs. Campbell said to me over the fence. I was wearing a flak jacket, a riot helmet, and carrying a Heckler and Koch MP5 submachine gun so it wasn’t a particularly brilliant deduction from Mrs. C, but I gave her a grim little smile and said, “About the escape, you mean?”

She tucked a vivid line of burgundy hair behind an ear. “Yes, it’s shocking, they’ll murder us all in our beds! What will I do with my Stephen upstairs on disability?” Stephen’s “disability” was a steady diet of cheap gin and vodka, which meant that by lunchtime he was as pickled as Oliver Reed during the making of *The Three Musketeers*. She was a handsome woman, was Mrs. Campbell, even with her troubles and her 1950s nightdress and a fag-end hanging out of her mouth.

“Don’t concern yourself, Mrs. C, I’ll be back soon,” I said, trying to sound like Christopher Reeve in *Superman II* when he reassures Lois that General Zod will be no match for him. I’m not sure she quite got the element of self-parody in my Reeve impersonation but she did lean over the fence, give me an ashy kiss on the cheek, and whisper “thank you.”

I responded with a little nod of the head, walked down the path, and got into my BMW. Before I put the key in the ignition I got out

again and looked underneath the vehicle for mercury tilt bombs. There were none, and I re-entered and stuck in a cassette of Robert Plant's *Principle of Moments*. This was my fourth listen to Plant's solo album and I still couldn't bring myself to like it. It was all synthesizers, drum machines, and high-pitched vocals. It was a sign of the times, and with the autumn upon us it was safe to say that 1983 was turning out to be the worst year in popular music for about two decades.

I drove along the Scotch Quarter and turned right into Carrickfergus RUC station for the first time in a long time. It was a very strange experience, and the young guard at the gate didn't know me. He checked my warrant card, nodded, looked at me, frowned, raised the barrier, and finally let me through. I parked in the crappy visitor's car park far from the station and walked to the duty sergeant's desk. There had been a few changes. They'd painted the walls mental hospital pink and there were potted plants everywhere. I knew that Chief Inspector Brennan had retired and in his place they had brought in an officer from Derry called Superintendent Carter. I didn't know much about him except that he was young and energetic and full of ideas—which, admittedly, sounded just ghastly. But this wasn't my manor anymore so what did I care what they did to the old place?

Running Carrickfergus CID branch on a temporary basis was my former adjutant, the freshly promoted Detective Sergeant John McCrabban, and that was a good thing. I went upstairs, slipped into the back of the briefing room, and tried not to draw attention to myself.

"... might be of some use. We're instituting Operation Cauldron. Blocking every road to and from the Maze. Our patch is the access roads to the north and east, the A2, and of course the roads to Antrim. We are coordinating with Ballyclare RUC ..."

Carter was tall with a prominent Adam's apple and brown curly hair. He was rangy and he leaned over the podium in a menacing way as if he was going to clip you round the ear. I listened to his talk, which spoke of dangers and challenges and finished with an echo of Winston Churchill's "Fight Them on the Beaches" speech. As rhetoric it was wildly over the top but some of the younger reserve constables clapped

when it was done. As we were filing out of the briefing room I said hello to a few old friends. Inspector Douggie McCallister shook my hand. "It's great to see you, Sean. Jeez, if you'd been here five minutes earlier you would have caught up with McCrabban and Matty but they're away with the riot police. How ya been?"

"I've been fair to middling, Douglas. How's your new boss?"

Douggie rolled his eyes and lowered his voice: "If he wasn't a six-footer I'd have said that he was a short man in need of a balcony."

"Oh dear. You could always do the old Thorazine-in-the-whisky trick."

"Total abstainer, Sean. Tea drinker. Wants to ban booze from the station, from the whole island too if his pamphlets are to be believed."

"I think they tried that approach in America with decidedly mixed results."

"Aye well, one crisis at a time. Let me sort you out with a duty roster. Can you still drive a Land Rover?"

"Does the Pope shit in the woods?"

I got my armored police Land Rover and headed out with a group of nervous constables to a place called Derryclone on the shores of Lough Neagh. It took us over two and a half hours to get through all the police roadblocks so that we could reach our destination and set up our own roadblock. This was the much-vaunted Operation Cauldron in action.

Radio 3 was playing Ligeti's *Requiem* and the somber mood wasn't helped by the black clouds and the light rain and solitary crows cawing at us from sagging telegraph wires. When I opened the back doors of the Rover two of the men were reading their Gideon New Testaments, one appeared to have been crying and the sole Catholic reservist was, embarrassingly, fingering a rosary.

"Bloody hell, lads! It's like a Juarez minibus on the *Dia de Los Muertos* in here. Come on! This is routine. We are not going to encounter any terrorist desperadoes, I promise you."

We set up our block along the sleepy B road by Lough Neagh and after an hour or two of nothingness it was evident to even the gloomiest young peeler that none of the Maze escapees were coming our way.

We saw helicopters with spotlights flying back and forth from RAF Aldergrove and on the radio we heard that, first, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had tendered his resignation, and later that Mrs. Thatcher herself had resigned.

No such luck. No one had resigned and I prophesied to the boys that when the inquiry into the break-out was published no one above the rank of inspector would even get a reprimand. (You can read the 1984 Hennessy Report for yourself if you want proof of my uncanny fortune-telling abilities.)

Another Land Rover arrived at our roadblock from Ballymena RUC and the coppers spoke in a dialect so thick we had trouble understanding them. Much of their conversation seemed to involve Jesus and tractors, an unlikely combination for anyone who doesn't know Ballymena. Yet another Land Rover came in the late evening: this one carrying lads from as far away as Coleraine. No one had thought to bring hot chocolate or hot cocoa or food or cigarettes, but the inspector from Coleraine RUC had brought along a travel chess set just to have the satisfaction of beating all of us. I told him my Boris Spassky story (Reporter: "Which do you prefer, Mr. Spassky, chess or sex?" Spassky: "It very much depends on the position"). But he was not impressed and mated me in eleven moves.

It began to rain harder around midnight and the night was long and cold. In the wee hours we finally stopped a car: an Austin Maxi with an elderly female driver who'd been trying to get home from church since lunchtime. In the boot, alas, there were no escaped prisoners. She did have a tin of shortbread and after some discussion, in the interests of good community relations, we let her keep it.

Bored senseless, we listened in on the confused and contradictory police radio traffic. There had been some rioting in West Belfast but this was an obvious ploy to distract the cops so central command hadn't diverted many troops or peelers to deal with it.

Just before dawn there *was* a bit of excitement on the southern part of the lough when an army helicopter pilot thought he had seen someone hiding in the reeds. The radio barked into life and we and

several other mobile patrols were scrambled and sent down to check it out. When we got there a small unit of Welsh Guardsmen were shooting into the water with machine guns. As the sun came up we saw that they had done a good job of massacring an exhausted flock of Greenland geese who had foolishly touched down here on their journey to the South of France.

The Ballymena boys grabbed a goose each and we drove back to our outpost. I sat up in the Land Rover cab and tuned in BBC Radio 4. The latest news was that eighteen of the escapees had been recaptured but the others had got clean away. At noon we got the list of their names. They were all unknown to me except for one . . . but that one was Dermot McCann. Dermot and I had gone to school together in Derry at St. Malachy's. A really smart guy, he had been Head Boy when I had been Deputy Head Boy. Handsome, good at games, and charming, Dermot had planned to go into the newspaper business and possibly into TV journalism. But the Troubles had changed all that and Dermot had volunteered for the IRA just as I had once thought of doing at around the time of Bloody Sunday.

Through various machinations I had joined the police and Dermot had served several years in the Provos before getting himself arrested. He was a highly gifted IRA explosives expert and bomb maker who'd only been betrayed in the end by an informer. The grass fingered Dermot as an important player but there was no forensic evidence so some clever peeler had fitted him up by putting a fingerprint on a block of gelignite. He'd been found guilty, and until his escape he'd been doing ten years for conspiracy to cause explosions.

I hadn't thought of Dermot in a long time but in the weeks that followed the break-out we learned that he had been one of the masterminds behind the escape plan. Dermot had figured out a way of smuggling guns into the prison and it was his idea to take prison officers hostage and dress in their uniforms so the guard towers wouldn't be alerted.

Dermot got to South Tyrone and over the border into the Irish Republic. I heard later from MI5 that he and an elite IRA team had

been spotted at a terrorist training camp in Libya. But even on that miserable Monday morning on the eastern shores of Lough Neagh with the mist rising off the water and the rain drizzling from the grey September sky I knew with the chilly logic of a fairy story that our paths would cross again.