



**SHIVER  
THE  
WHOLE  
NIGHT  
THROUGH**

**DARRAGH McMANUS**

For our little buachaillín and cailín beag

My girl, my girl, where will you go?  
I'm going where the cold wind blows  
    In the pines, in the pines  
    Where the sun don't ever shine  
I would shiver the whole night through

*Where Did You Sleep Last Night?*

Traditional folk-song

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## On the bridge

I stood by the bridge and tried to get up the courage to jump. I stood there and thought, If it's good enough for Kurt Cobain, it's good enough for me.

I looked down at the freezing, choppy water far below. This Sunday night in November was darker than it should have been with a full moon. But I could see the river, out here on the edge of town, churning like something half-crazy, and knew it'd do for me. I'd die if I leaped in there, and right then, I wanted to die.

I think I did. I think I wanted to die.

I gripped the stone bridge, an ancient thing without a name built long before the town itself. Dated to medieval times, historians said. It was colder than the grave. I kind of smiled at that. The grave. *My* grave. Was I really about to do this?

I got a better grip for leverage and lifted one leg onto the top of the bridge and thought, Hell yes I'm going to do it. If it's good enough for that movie director in Los Angeles, it's good enough for me. Even stupid, pathetic, butt-of-every-joke me.

The water really did look freezing, very rough. I imagined myself hitting it at speed, maybe being dragged down by a current, the river sloshing over my head, snaking down my throat. The image made me shiver. I didn't want that, but I didn't want to be here any longer either. I wanted out.

Maybe if I got lucky I'd crack my head off the rocks, lights out, no need to drown, no more coldness and pain. No more memories. No more anything. But I was never very lucky.

I pulled myself fully onto the bridge and stood there, wobbling a bit, caught unawares by a strong wind. Whoa. Wouldn't want to get blown off, I might get hurt, ha ha.

I thought about *her* and what had happened last summer. Thought about the bullying and harassment, the blows and whispers, and steeled myself. Just do it. Do it and be done. If it's good enough for all those celebrities and poets and geniuses and rebels who killed themselves, it's good enough for me.

Me. Loser. Clown. Designated town asshole.

I raised my right leg half an inch and leaned into the wind and closed my eyes and... I still don't know if I would have jumped, because then I heard a voice. My movement stalled. I heard it again, definitely, hard to distinguish over the wind and torrents of water but it was real, not my imagination.

*'Hey. Watch yourself there, boy.'*

I opened my eyes and turned around. An oldish man, fifty-five or sixty, stood ten feet away, holding a terrier on a leash. The dog was snuffling around his feet, trying to root something out from under them. I knew this guy. He did work for my parents the odd time, a handyman.

*'Mind yourself up there,'* he said. *'That wind'd knock a house. Ah, you might come down out of there altogether will you, I'm too old to be lepping into the river to rescue someone.'*

I nodded dumbly and had jumped back onto the pavement before I realised it. Foiled. I smiled bitterly and thought, Not to worry – I have all the time in the world.

I mumbled some vague excuse as to why I was up there in the first place. It was hard to tell if the man believed me. I walked home, not sure whether I felt relieved or disappointed. Thinking, I've got the rest of my life to end my life.

Then I woke the next morning to hear that Sláine McAuley actually had.

My mother gently shook me at eight and said, *'Something awful has happened, Aidan. I'm so sorry, pet.'*

I blinked the sleep from my eyes and head, staring at her. What the hell? Was this about me? Had I actually done it? The man with the dog just a dream after all, some part of my brain still working after death. Or maybe that was heaven and he was an angel, my guide. But if I was dead, how could my mother be talking to me?

I tried to focus. You're going crazy, man. You're still half-asleep and fully alive. Oh, whoopee.

I smiled at my mother, pretending to be okay. ‘Sorry. Say that again.’

She squeezed my hand and blurted out the details. ‘That girl from your school, Sláine McAuley. She died last night. Her body was found early this morning. Her family doesn’t know what time she left the house, they say she went to bed early and next thing was they heard... This must be upsetting for you. Something like that happening your friend.’

Sláine McAuley wasn’t my friend, exactly. She wasn’t at my school anymore, either. I knew her to say hello to, we’d had maybe five conversations and none stretched beyond a brief greeting. She was older than me, eighteen at least while I’d turned seventeen in July (what happy memories I had of *that* time). She’d also been a year ahead in school. A month ago Sláine had started first year in university; meanwhile I was in my last year at secondary school, without a clue what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go.

Anything or anywhere but here, I suppose. Anything, nothing, who cared?

Now my mother was telling me Sláine was dead. Could that really be true? I put a hand to my face and winced – still tender around my mouth, after the punch Rattigan had given me. I couldn’t believe it, he’d done that last Friday and it was still sore. At least he hadn’t loosened any teeth. I’d told my mother I walked into a road-sign when she asked about it. I have some pride. A tiny amount.

Rattigan. The Rat. One of the main reasons I wanted to check out.

I hadn’t, not yet. But I was about to discover that Sláine had.

‘What happened?’ I said.

My mother replied, ‘She...she killed herself, pet. They found her body in the forest, a good way in. Robert Marsden who works for the forestry, clearing some old growth or something. He found her, lying under a tree. Almost curled around it, the sergeant told your father.’

‘How come she was lying under the tree? If... Oh right. She didn’t hang herself, then.’

‘No. They don’t know exactly yet. Might have taken poison, swallowed something. Or pills, something to knock her out. The cold would finish...’

My mother broke off; her head wobbled. She looked close to shedding the tears I somehow knew I should have been shedding myself. But I was pretty sure I wouldn’t.

Not that I had anything against Sláine. She seemed fine, a nice person despite being by far the best-looking girl in school – wavy brown hair, dark-grey eyes, a classical beauty, like something out of an old painting. She hadn’t let that lovely head go to her head, so to speak.

As far as I knew her, which wasn’t far, I liked her. She was intelligent and softly spoken. Honours all the way, studying Law in Galway. Popular, well-read, played tennis, helped out at a home for mentally handicapped people. That’s about all I know of Sláine.

Except, of course, the fact that she had now killed herself and I hadn’t.

I felt sorry for her, of course. You’d feel it for anyone, if you’ve any bit of heart in you; especially someone so young, who you vaguely knew. But I wasn’t going to cry. I was fairly sure there weren’t any tears left in me. They’d all been wrung out, and everything else besides. I was empty inside. Hollowed-out. Used-up.

So me not crying or really *feeling*, even – it had nothing to do with her. Ha. It’s not you, Sláine, it’s me.

I heard myself mutter ‘Jesus’ without meaning to. Maybe I was in shock, after all. That’d do things to anyone, wouldn’t it, news like that? And the state I was in, close to the edge, all sorts of edges... I didn’t know what I felt or what was what.

I patted my mother’s hand. ‘Alright, Mam. I’m grand. I’ll get up now or I’ll be late for school.’

*School.* I shuddered inside. My mother smiled warmly and left the room. I opened my window and rolled a cigarette, wondering again if I was in shock. Hard to know. I looked out at cold November and thought, for the millionth time, of that day last summer when I really had been in

shock. Such an almighty shock I still hadn't recovered from it. I sometimes wondered if I ever would.

Late to school as usual, but for once it didn't matter because everyone else remained gathered around outside. They'd all heard about Sláine McAuley. Ridiculous rumours and wide-eyed speculation running like a virus through the student body. I overheard someone say she'd climbed to the top of the tallest tree in Shook Woods and jumped to her death. Someone else said she ate poisonous toadstools, and they knew this for a fact because Sláine always got A1s in Biology so she'd know what to pick. A third someone reckoned she'd encountered something ungodly, otherworldly – literally scared to death.

None of these kids would have known her well, probably, and they were all talking complete shit.

At the main entrance I met Podsy, my friend – my only friend now, really. He was wiry-haired and short-sighted, small, not like me; I was tall and skinny, not bad-looking I guess, awfully pale with permanent five o'clock shadow. My father's hairy genes, thanks very much. I had to shave every day if I wanted to look respectable. I'd given up on shaving every day a while ago.

Podsy looked dumbfounded. 'Aidan, did you hear?'

'I heard.'

'Holy crap. Sláine McAuley, I mean of all the people you wouldn't expect to top themselves.'

'Podsy, d'you mind not saying that? "Topped herself." It's a bit...I dunno. Don't like the thought of it.'

'Aw yeah, 'course. Sorry, man.'

Podsy was a sweet-natured kid, he honestly wouldn't hurt a fly if he could help it; he'd even turned vegetarian after seeing a documentary on abattoirs. Maybe that's why he was decent enough to not mind being seen with a dickhead like me.

At ten the principal herded us into the sports hall for what he called ‘special assembly.’ He stood on-stage and told us he was worried. The principal was decent, he would have been sincere about that.

He cleared his throat and said uncertainly, ‘Kids, you’ve all heard about what happened poor Sláine in Shook Woods. An awful tragedy, for her family and of course her friends. Many of you knew her last year. Now, I know there’s this thing about copycats, I’ve read about it, and we’re concerned about what happens next. Okay? Kids, it’d break my heart if this terrible event was to start some kind of chain reaction, people imitating poor Sláine...’

I zoned out and looked around. Girls dabbing tears from their eyes, mascara running although technically students weren’t allowed wear make-up. Some kids sniggering, the callous little gits. A guy called Tommy Fox stared at the floor, ashen-faced, grief-stricken: I wondered if him and Sláine had a thing together. It was clear he was taking it badly.

I looked around, remembering how much I hated this place. This hall, the school and, except for Podsy, every kid in it. Hated the town, hated the world. Most of all, I hated myself.

Actually no. I probably hated John Rattigan even more, and now I could hear his voice in my ear, that guttural croak, a perfect match for his bulldog face and hulking body.

‘I hear there’s a carnival coming next weekend. You’ll be going along, will you, Flood? You like the carnival, I heard.’

I said, ‘Yeah, good one, John. You’ve used that joke already, but it’s still good.’

Rattigan snarled, ‘D’you want another thump, do you? Another nice bruise to go with that one.’

I looked down, face reddening, more ashamed than words can say. ‘No, John,’ I muttered.

“No John” is right, and don’t forget it.’

Rattigan was standing behind me with his usual gang. His little army of creeps and scobies and borderline psychos. I’d have bet a million that half of them would be locked up, in prison or the mental home, before they reached thirty. Unfortunately, that wasn’t much help right now.

Assembly was dismissed and everyone filed outside. Rattigan flicked Podsy on the ear. It looked like it hurt, but fair play to the small fella, he didn't give Rattigan the satisfaction of reacting. I snuck around the side of the school for a smoke – I figured classes wouldn't start for ten or fifteen minutes. Podsy followed, a firm set to his mouth. It had always been slightly wonky, his bite was off or something, and gave his face a comical sort of appearance.

'C'mon, Aidan, come inside. Freezing out here.'

'Leave if you're cold. Nobody's keeping you.'

He ignored me. Podsy was good like that, putting up with my crap; he knew it didn't mean anything, I was just taking it out on him because I hadn't the guts to take it out on anyone else.

He stamped his feet to warm them. 'Did you know, there hasn't been a suicide in the town in years? *Years*. Twenty or something. More, even.'

'Yeah? Right.' I wasn't interested in talking but he wouldn't leave me alone.

'Yeah, it's kind of unusual actually,' Podsy said, 'cause generally it's a kid does it, like Sláine? But our last one was that guy, Martin Hassett. The farmer? And he was middle-aged. Up to his eyes in debt, that's why he shot himself.'

He knew all this stuff through his Uncle Tim, the deputy Garda sergeant, who was forever telling Podsy about different cases, things he was working on; probably stuff he shouldn't have shared with a 17-year-old chatterbox.

'Your man did it in the nineties, '92 or something. We weren't even born. Took out the shotgun and...' Podsy made the sound of a weapon firing.

I grimaced and said, 'Stop it, will you? It's depressing.'

'Sorry, man. Come on to feck, I'm freezing. Finish up that thing.'

I flicked my rollie into a drain and slouched back towards school behind him. On the way we passed Caitlin, standing with a group of girls. I looked away, I didn't want her to see me, but somehow our eyes locked. She blinked and turned her head. She looked embarrassed. I'd like to think

she was; maybe she didn't give a damn. You can't know what's inside someone else's head.

One of her friends shrieked and hissed, deliberately loudly so I'd hear: 'Oh my *God!* It's your ex! Oh my God, I mean, is he *stalking* you now?' She laughed and the rest of their group did too and finally Caitlin joined in. I didn't blame her. I blamed her for other things, but not this. This was trivial.

I walked past. Caitlin: she pronounced it 'Kate-lin' in the American style, not 'Cat-leen', which is how the original Irish name sounded. That had always annoyed me about her; it seemed so dumb. A name travels across the Atlantic and gets misheard over there and comes back and we start using the new, wrong version for some reason.

It's stupid, getting worked up over something so small. I couldn't help it. Anyway, it was pretty much the only thing I'd disliked about Caitlin Downes, and you're allowed one thing, right?

Kate-lin, Cat-leen, however you pronounced it: the girl who broke my heart and kind of ruined my life.