

Prologue

2016

‘Mum, there’s a funny old lady at the door who says she’s married to Dad?’ Delilah wore an expression that sat somewhere between amused and unsettled. Grace supposed anything was better than bored and indifferent. It seemed that had been the permanent expression since she turned fifteen a few months earlier.

‘She’s at the wrong house,’ Grace said absently. They were going for a picnic. The sun was shining and Grace hoped a day at the seaside might recapture some of the closeness she’d shared with her daughter before it was just the two of them here.

‘No, she’s sure. She says her name is Evie...’ Her usually ambivalent voice held a note of perplexity. ‘Evie Considine Starr – but Mum, I think, she’s a generation out.’ She stuck a finger to the side of her head and wound it around. It was her shorthand language for mental health issues. Grace tried to discourage it, but still never mentioned the antidepressants deep in her own handbag.

‘Oh. Evie?’ The name registered deep in her brain; still, it sounded strange on her daughter’s lips. ‘Evie is here?’ Grace’s hand shot up to smooth her hair back, an involuntary movement, hated herself for it. Why did she care what Evie Considine thought of her? ‘At the front door, now?’

‘Well, yes.’ Delilah stumbled over her words, for once thrown by her mother’s reaction. ‘You know her? She’s actually...’ The words petered out, same as Paul’s – Evie Considine it seemed was still an unfinished chapter in Paul’s life.

Grace stood straight, imagined herself being pulled by an invisible central rope, lengthening her out, just as the nuns had taught her. She threw her shoulders back with more confidence than she really felt, and made her way to the front door.

‘Hello Evie.’ She stuck out a hand. ‘It’s nice to meet you at last...’ It was a lie, but only a white one.

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Grace Kennedy

Paul Starr was tall – well, anyone was tall to Grace – he might have been gangly, but his thick dark flop of hair and chestnut eyes distracted her from noticing. His smile was easy, his voice low so it made her lean closer; she was charmed instantly. He was the most successful surgeon in Ireland. He was confident, sophisticated and, rumour had it, married. Grace knew who he was. Everyone in Ireland knew who he was. It was said that he was responsible for keeping a former U.S. President alive, as well as half the royal family over sixty.

‘You don’t want to believe everything you read,’ he said, and she realized that she’d never felt so equal to anyone who towered over her so much. She was used to being the short one; five foot just, before she put on her heels. She fingered the amulet that hung always at her neck. It was her father’s; a token to enhance the artist within. Its green gemstone brought out the emerald of her eyes and it made her feel safe, as though her father was still near.

‘Who said I’d be reading about you?’ She couldn’t help fidgeting with her long dark hair any more than he could stop his eyes drinking in every moment of her.

‘This is impressive.’ He waved a hand about the exhibition. It was her second in a year. She felt she’d rushed it, but maybe some things were meant to be. They stood for a few minutes, making small talk. He wasn’t a collector – she could spot them a mile off – not of art anyway. She was about to move away, but he reached out, touched her lightly on the arm. The silver stacking bracelets that she wore jangled, the only sound between them that mattered in the crowded room. The effect was electrifying. ‘I’m just looking at this one...’ He walked towards a watercolour she’d painted two winters earlier, a stark white lighthouse against the rocks and grey waves of the western coastline. ‘It’s breathtaking.’ He caught her eye as he murmured the words. The look sent ripples of what she supposed was desire through her; she’d never felt anything like it before in her life. ‘I’m making changes,’ he said, moving closer to her so his voice was little over a whisper. ‘Making changes and it might suit; do you think anyone has their eye on it, yet?’

‘I wouldn’t know,’ she smiled at him, flirting in some strange subconscious way, couldn’t stop herself, even though she’d spotted his wedding ring immediately. ‘You’d

need to talk to Patrick.' Her eyes skimmed the room for Patrick Marshall. Usually she could find him easily – he was never far away. His languid easy pose tended to dominate whatever space he was in, and she spotted him now surrounded by a coterie of enchanted hangers-on, regaling them with one of the funny stories he always had to hand. He was all she had here; Patrick knew this without ever having to mention it. 'Oh, he looks busy. Anyway, you can always leave your name with the gallery.'

'Perhaps I could commission a piece for my rooms,' he smiled, catching her by surprise, '...at the clinic.' His voice was light, she guessed they were a similar age, but she had a feeling he knew much more of life than she. He reached into his pocket; he wore an elegant off-the-peg navy jacket that moved fluidly. 'Take my card. Maybe you could drop by, if you're passing. We could...' his eyes held an unmistakeable promise, '...have coffee.'

Grace wasn't sure how she managed to walk away from him, but she made it to the other side of the room, her legs like jelly, her stomach a wasp's nest of restless commotion. She silently cursed herself. The last thing she needed was to fall for a married man. She'd stay well clear of him, or so she told herself. She sipped sparkling wine gently – there were still speeches to be made, people to talk to, sales to close. Even if there weren't, she'd had enough of being attached to people. She'd spent a lifetime taking care of her sisters and her mother. Her father had taken the easy way out – a double barrel, kept for foxes, in the end. She'd been the one who found him in his studio. He'd probably wanted it to be her. 'You're the strong one, Grace.' He'd said it so many times.

In the end, it was all she could remember of him. She'd spent almost ten years being the one who had to hold it together. All the time, her mother descended further into a bleak haze, clouded by prescription drugs for a series of spurious health problems, one of which would surely stick, someday. Grace got out at twenty-three. It took almost two years to make the break completely, for them to understand that they were on their own. She did what she could. It was either get away or die slowly, as her mother seemed intent on doing.

Painting saved her. It made no demands, beyond those she was prepared to sacrifice and it gave her solace when she had nowhere else to turn. It kept her world together, and now it was her life.

This was her biggest exhibition yet and she'd been nervous when Patrick suggested it. It made good sense, he said last time round, the paintings were picking

up a minimum of ten thousand a canvas; of course it made sense. Once she had said yes, Patrick came up with the venue. She had a feeling he'd had it up his sleeve for a while, what she couldn't understand was why he'd decided to let her have it rather than some of the bigger names he represented. The Dublin City Library and Archive had only reopened months earlier after a total revamp. She had to concede as she had stood beneath its imposing façade – it was overwhelming. The exhibition room seemed vast when she'd come here first. A daunting space filled with echoes of great Dubliners lingering within the repointed stone and polished timbers. How would she fill it? Could she really be good enough to sit with collections like Yeats and Stoker and Swift? Somehow, the building made her nervy and calm all at once. A strange mix of expectation and complete confidence ran through her and propelled her from the moment she set foot in the great hall. She'd pulled out some of the work that she'd started years ago. It added poignancy to the exhibition, she thought. True, it was darker than her more recent work, but it held the loneliness of her past, something that seemed to draw people. The first exhibition had been an unexpected success; it was the reason Patrick suggested a second.

'What do you expect when all you do is work?' Patrick had said when they'd met a few months earlier. 'Note to yourself, Grace Kennedy: *get a life*.' He flapped his arms about in that theatrical way he had, so she only half took him seriously and never took his advice, unless it was professional. This was as close as Grace got to friendship. 'What about family?' Patrick asked her one bleary night after they'd been drinking wine in her little studio; she, feeling creatively stuck, he, depressed because he'd lost the love of his life. To be fair, every man he dated seemed to be the love of his life for the first six weeks, and then...

'What do *you* expect,' she fired back at him, 'when all you do is work?'

'Touché,' and they clinked glasses. By virtue of common ground and both loners at heart, unwilling to let anyone else in, their friendship suited them both. It was lucrative too, and there were no real strings or obligations.

'So, tell me, has he bought anything?' she nodded in the direction of the heart surgeon. He was standing among a group of other men but seemed to dominate the crowd. Even then, she could see it was his way of listening that really marked him out. He had deep set brown eyes, clear skin and hair that buckled insolently across his forehead.

‘Not yet. I got the distinct impression when I saw you talking to him that he was more interested in the artist than the art.’ Patrick smiled at a heavily bejewelled woman who may have had her face frozen somewhere in her fifties, but her body and posture had traitorously kept on marching towards their eighth decade. ‘Don’t stare. If she starts collecting your stuff, the prices will rocket.’

‘Then tell me about Paul Starr,’ she said. She smiled at the strange-looking woman who was holding court among a group of youngsters who might have had artistic leanings or not, but they certainly had a bent towards free champagne.

‘I think they’re trying to lure him away from the public sector completely.’ Patrick gestured towards a group of middle-aged men in suits.

‘Ah,’ Grace said. ‘So...he could be interested in picking something up for new offices?’ Had she been imagining that fusion of electricity that had passed between them? ‘And he’s not gay?’ She knew intuitively from the way Paul Starr had looked at her that he was not gay.

‘Fair to say he’s not gay – he’s married.’ Patrick glanced at her over his low-slung reading glasses.

‘He could still be gay. This is Dublin after all – he could be gay and quiet about it.’

‘Well, he’s not, but if you have a shred of decency, you’ll leave the poor man alone. I’m all for you finding a man, preferably not one I find attractive, but you need to get one of your own, not one who’s already married to someone else.’

‘He’s quite safe. I’m not looking for anyone, just happy to paint and have you keep selling for me.’ She held her hands up, ‘Honest.’ It was true. She wanted to crack the American market. Patrick called her ambitious, and yes, she supposed, she was driven, and she didn’t want to be slowed down by kids or a husband – especially if he was someone else’s.

She lost sight of him then, for a while. Assumed he’d left like anyone who wasn’t there just for the champagne. It was in the foyer that she spotted him again. He was waiting, probably for a taxi.

‘You’re working late?’ His body skimmed hers too close; his expression was mischievous.

‘Work hard, play hard,’ she whispered, matching the challenge in his eyes. It must have been the champagne. In that moment, she left her normal sensible self behind, leant across and brushed her lips on his, for too long so it was not just friendly. The kiss, if you could call it that, a fleeting-lingering-caress, boiled a wanton question

between them. His look of surprise matched the hysteria erupting in her heart, but she had a feeling that alcohol helped her hide it better. She turned on her high heels. She heard them clicking on the stone floor beneath her and slinked, tiger-like, away from him. She could feel him watch her, take in her every fibre as she moved, and she revelled in it. She'd never felt more in control; in that moment she had become all she'd wanted to be. Then the familiar fear threatened to rise within her. Kissing someone she didn't even know, and like that? Someone else's husband? She never felt more... she couldn't articulate it, and she was far too happy to try.

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The following morning, nursing a thumping hangover, she walked across the city towards her studio to the drumbeat of her headache. Alongside her, cars snaked through the worn-out city streets. The Liffey twisted tediously beneath the grey of the Ha'penny Bridge and anonymous footsteps rattled its surface like unrelenting raindrops. Dublin has its own way of reminding you that you were only passing through. Still, deep in her heart throbbed an excitement she'd never known before and even her hangover couldn't dampen the glimmer of hope that had ignited within her.

She had bought the studio with the proceeds of her first exhibition – it was technically a lock-up garage in the Liberties. It snuggled between the Iveagh market and a raft of antique shops that she had a feeling started out as pawnbrokers long before vintage was fashionable. This was old Dublin, the valley of the Vikings, the birthplace of Walt Disney, a red-bricked ravine – the heart of the fair city. Grace loved it here. It was an odd mix of old buildings and new blood and, above it all, Christchurch pealed its three-hundred-year-old bells over her rooftop. In the beginning, the studio had been little more than a draughty shell with a rotting double garage door. That didn't matter; it was hers, and once the builders left her to it, with a row of Velux windows and a small kitchenette and bathroom, it felt more like home than the dingy flat she rented on the far side of the river.

Patrick was an angel. A hair-gelled, smoking-jacketed, cravat-wearing angel. Even today, when Grace just about managed to crawl into a pair of paint-spattered leggings, Patrick looked immaculate.

'So what's she like?'

'Who?'

‘His wife, of course, Paul Starr’s wife.’ She couldn’t get him out of her mind.

‘I don’t know, do I?’ Patrick was considering something on his fingernails as he held them up against the natural light. Getting information out of him was harder than winning the Eurovision. ‘Plain, I think, older, lives in a serious pile of real estate in Howth.’

‘Oh? Kids?’

‘What is this? Inquisition? Torture? Do you have any idea how much my head hurts?’ He took the phone from its cradle beside him. ‘Why don’t you ring him up and ask him?’ Patrick put his hand to his forehead, pressing his palm hard to dispel the pounding headache. His breath was deep and slow – a sure sign of the hangover from hell.

‘I can’t do that, can I?’ Grace rolled her eyes at him. He replaced the phone on the cradle.

‘No, you definitely can’t.’ He grinned wryly.

‘He might actually want to buy something though? He mentioned a commission.’ She knew she was clutching at straws, but she wanted to see him again.

‘You don’t do commissions, not unless they have a hefty price tag – and we both know the only commission he’s thinking about is getting into your...’

‘Stop it.’ She pouted at him. ‘Those suits he was with last night, I bet they’d buy him the Mona Lisa if they thought it would entice him to work for them.’ What were the chances of a sale in it? ‘I won’t ring him. Maybe he’ll buy a whole load from one of the other auction houses and then you’ll be sorry that I didn’t.’

‘He knows where we are if he wants to get his hands on a painting.’ Patrick drained his coffee cup. ‘Must be off, sales to be made!’ He rubbed his fingers together playfully, ‘I can’t be discussing your non-love life all day.’ He flicked a paintbrush against her hand, splattering her arm with a dusting of bright blue powder.

‘Thanks,’ she said, staring into her coffee, still too busy remembering the flutter of her stomach when she kissed Paul Starr.

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It took her almost two days, but she knew that if she didn’t ring Paul Starr he could not ring her; not if he was married. He answered on the second ring and if he was

surprised to hear from her, he hid it well enough to make her question what she thought he felt.

At four o'clock, she walked into the modern white and steel foyer of Liffey Hospital. A young receptionist, efficient and friendly, led her into Paul's office, an insipidly cream space crying out for adornment. He had been waiting for her, and they sat for a while making small talk about art and business, but really, she could hardly concentrate. He was even more attractive than she remembered.

'You really do need a few paintings around here,' she said as they made their way to the café through a tunnel of endless naked walls and cream carpet designed to absorb bad news and good alike.

'Well, maybe that's something you can help me with.' He held the door open for her. She couldn't manage eye contact.

They sat at a small table on a mezzanine overlooking a courtyard decorated with colourful shrubs, wooden furniture and a privet maze. In the polished glass of the window, she could see their reflections. They made a striking couple. Her dark hair and clothes edgy compared to his clean cut good looks.

'I'm glad you called.' He ordered the coffees and leant across the table towards her. 'I was afraid you wouldn't. I thought I might crack and ring you first; then I realised, I didn't have a number for you. You kissed me and then you ran away.' He smiled through a lopsided generous mouth that was much more used to being set in serious mode in these surroundings. 'Of course, I couldn't.'

'No?' Was it her imagination or did his wedding ring constantly wink in the afternoon sunlight?

'I'm married. You must know that?' He broke their gaze, sadly looking down at the courtyard below. 'Well,' he scrutinized her with those astute eyes. 'Marriage? What does it mean anymore? Eh?'

'Probably means a lot to your wife.' Grace sighed, sitting back a little in her seat.

'It isn't straightforward.' He'd caught the fleeting look of resignation. 'Seriously, it isn't what you think. Evie is much older. We've never had... a...' He took the milk jug, concentrated for a moment on pouring it. 'We've never had a family, never had what you'd call a conventional marriage.'

'She doesn't understand you?' Grace had dipped her voice, though she knew she shouldn't make light of it. He caught her eye, and it felt as if she'd missed a heartbeat

and everything in the world had just toppled slightly. This was not funny, not funny at all.

‘She understands me perfectly, as it turns out. She recognizes what we have, and, well, she wants more for me. She has her life, I have mine. She understands how I feel about... things.’

‘So, she’d be happy with you, say, taking a mistress?’

‘I’m not sure that those are the words she’d use, but yes. Look, I don’t expect you to understand this, but when you love someone, really love them, well, you want what will make them happy.’

‘And that’s me?’ Grace whispered the words. This was insane; they hardly knew each other.

‘You’re looking at me as though I might be an escaped lunatic.’ They both laughed at that. He shook his head, lowered his voice still further so it was little more than a whisper. ‘I told her that I met you.’

‘Excuse me?’ Grace moved forward. This was not what she was expecting – what had she been expecting? That they might discuss the merits of charcoal over pencil? No, she should be honest with herself at least. She’d been expecting more than that. ‘You told your wife? That you met me?’

‘I had to, I couldn’t move on without being honest with her. You don’t just stop loving someone, not altogether. It may have changed, as the years have gone on, but I wouldn’t hurt her for the world.’

‘And, meeting me, here, having this conversation, that wouldn’t hurt her?’

‘No, she’s ready for me to move on. She wants me to find happiness. She is very content with her life as it is. She has, if you’ll excuse the old-fashioned way of putting it, given me her blessing.’ He smiled at Grace, a winning smile; it was game, set and match to Paul Starr. ‘If you feel the same as I do.’

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It didn’t take long; he asked her to dinner a few nights later. The Trocadero, in the city centre, a public place. When she got back to the safety of her little flat, she danced about the cramped space to whatever mindless tune played on the radio. The next day, she headed for Switzers, blew a huge hole in her credit card and walked out the door with a sexy half-price Valentino blouse that left less to the imagination than it left in

her wallet. She was falling for him, regardless of marriage, blessings or any other stupid notions that might be playing in the back of her mind.

‘You look beautiful, even more so than the first time I noticed you.’ He all but fell inside her blouse as he was talking to her. It was a magical night. He was full of plans, dreams and ambitions. ‘And that,’ he told her was half the problem with his marriage to Evie. ‘We’re stuck, have been maybe since before we got married.’

‘My sisters are like that. They don’t understand why I’m...’ She inclined her head, knowing instinctively that he’d understand, ‘...the way I am.’

Four hours later, they walked around Stephen’s Green. The city smelled of promise. Across the railings of the green, viola, stock and jasmine coasted on the night air. It seemed the moon shone orange and low in the silken empty sky, just for them, and the horses stood a little taller to attention as they passed. Somewhere down Grafton Street, a busker played his heart out for a love he had lost, or maybe never knew. And Paul looked at her with desire Grace had only ever expressed in her paintings. He’d leaned in to kiss her, and then stopped. She thought that she’d turn herself inside out with hunger for him. She managed to play it cool.

‘I have to see you again,’ he whispered into her hair, his body skimming hers so she could feel the length of him against her.

‘I suppose, we might manage that.’ She laughed at him then, enjoying the game. It was the same the next time and the time after that. If he wasn’t being unfaithful exactly to Evie, he looked at Grace with more longing than any other man she’d ever known. Then, after five whirlwind months, when Grace had hardly eaten a bite apart from when she’d been with him, her whole body a knot of pent-up nerves and sexual tension, he’d rung her at the studio one afternoon.

‘I’m off to Paris at the weekend. Fancy it?’ He said the words lightly, but they both knew what they implied.

‘What about...’ first rule of affairs – don’t mention the wife’s name.

‘I thought it’d be something special, memorable for us.’ She could swear she felt his breath warm and spicy on her hair.

‘Work or pleasure?’

‘I don’t see why it can’t be both.’ He chuckled in a way that made him seem much older, worldly-wise. Patrick had told her that she was trying to replace her lost father. He was joking, she hoped.

‘Maybe I can get a little business done while I’m there too.’

As it turned out, she never took the sketchpad out of her bag. Paris had been wonderful. It truly was the city of love. It was as intoxicating as the connection between them and that ran far deeper than Grace had expected. Cemented by their shared sense of humour; they were anchored by voracious desire. Paul begged off the conference with food poisoning. A hackneyed excuse but, surprisingly, they bought it. They flew back on Sunday night, exhausted, but exuberant. Things had changed in Paris, and they both knew it.

Grace got home before midnight, oddly bereft at being without him. She did not want to leave him at the airport, and then it hit her that he was not hers; he still belonged to Evie. She climbed the four flights of stairs and cursed the Georgians for making people live in nests above the city. She lived alone. The only company she needed in the evenings were a remote control and a cat she called Moses that sometimes dropped by from the flat downstairs. She switched on the phone when she unpacked her weekend bag. One new message. She dialled the mailbox. It was her sister Anna – the middle one.

‘Grace, I’m sorry for leaving a message like this, but we’ve been looking for you since Friday night. It’s Sunday morning now and we’re getting really worried. Anyway, will you ring us the minute you get this message, it’s about Ma.’ Grace sat on the side of her cast-iron bed – a gift to herself. For once, its creaky welcome was lost on her. Hard to believe that only hours earlier she lay in his arms and all the world seemed right. She redialled the number on the call log.

‘Hi, everything all right?’ In her mind’s eye, she was back there. In that big cold farmhouse, the whitewash no longer white, ignored since long before her father died. She could smell the inescapable smell of damp, dust settled stubbornly in corners best avoided and the ceilings moved just a little closer to the floor with each passing year.

‘Oh Grace.’ It was Clair who answered and she never got upset. She was much too flaky for that, a small angular girl with deep blue eyes and a leaning towards bad men. ‘We’ve been trying to track you down for days, its Ma... she’s...’ Clair didn’t have to say the word. Grace could picture her, standing against the dripping kitchen sink, her drawn face chalky pale, and her hand shaking. She was eight again, the news of their father hitting home.

‘How? When?’ It was all Grace could manage; the last thing she expected, and yet, not unexpected after all. Mona had been intent on dying for almost twenty years. She’d

taken to bed after their father was buried. Effectively, she'd abandoned them then, fallen into a ravine of mourning and left Grace to get on with running the house and raising the girls, although she was little more than a child herself.

'You have to come and help us get things sorted. Ma would want you to take care of the funeral.'

'Of course. I was away for... ' There was no point explaining. It would only be another thing for Anna to throw back at her. 'I'm on my way, sorry you couldn't get me. I'll leave straight away.'

'Well, get here as quickly as you can. There's so much to be done.' Clair put the phone down, in her usual absent-minded way.

Grace left a message for Paul, something insanely short about not being able to meet him because her mother had just died. She didn't expect him to come, didn't imagine that he would feel the need to get involved. Then, there he was, his car outside her flat, waiting to bring them both home and she wondered, for a minute if he'd even made it back to Evie.

'You really don't have to do this...' She dreaded the uncomfortableness of having an outsider among their dysfunctional family.

'I wouldn't let you go through this alone, Grace. It hasn't hit you yet.' He smiled at her. Soon they were leaving Dublin behind, heading towards the open road. The flattened midland bogs swept by her, a maelstrom of brown, purple and tawny green patches toiled large across the central plains. Then the land began to narrow, centuries of subdivision where farmers cut their hands on stones to mark out their hard-won sod of turf, heralded their arrival in the west. Here the rocky land prevailed long after Boycott and the Leaguers fought their wars and lost so much along the way. Grace had a feeling that all you could do was capture it in the briefest moment, commit it to a painting and hope to match the meanness with the majesty. She murmured the thought aloud. 'My father could have done justice to that; he could have painted it in his sleep.' She believed she'd never be as good as him, never have his touch.

'Your father was the artist? Everyone has heard of Louis Kennedy,' he said as the car purred along the uneven westbound roads. 'Tragic, is the word most people call to mind when they think of him, tragic and brilliant.'

'He was an odd mix of both. He was a quiet man, who spent more time painting than he ever did with us, but my mother adored him. He made her existence worthwhile. Does that sound strange?'

‘No, I can imagine how you could fall beneath the shadow of someone so talented.’ He stared ahead, thoughtful, his silence as loaded with more clever comprehension than any words could convey.

‘She married above herself – that’s what she felt, and I suppose it’s what people made her feel, and when he died, well, it was as if she became a shell.’ Her mother’s response to her father’s death was one of the reasons Grace had long since decided she would not live in someone else’s shadow. Husbands and children were definitely off the radar. She was making an exception for Paul – but, after all, he wasn’t *her* husband.

In the end, Grace read the eulogy – a three-stanza set of lines, with unequal rhyming, clunking language. Mona wrote it, before she lost all hope, verses of autumn and moving on. She was a poet once, but that was long ago. Grace stood at the top of the small church, the only dry-eyed one among them. She wasn’t one for weeping at weddings or funerals, she’d leave that to Anna. She hadn’t cried for her father, and knew she wouldn’t cry for her mother. It wasn’t natural, was it?

They buried her mother next to her father in a small plot on the mountainside, gazing across the vast undulating countryside. The county spread in a hazel bog before them, purple heather punctuating the tawny land. Overhead, grey skies conspired to cap any more emotion on the day; it was a Louis Kennedy landscape begging to be captured. She hadn’t visited the grave in over a decade. She pulled her dark cloak closer to her and was glad of Paul’s steadying hand on her back.

The funeral was all her mother would have wanted. The house filled with tea drinkers and near-professional mourners. Grace sat amongst them, listening to their stories, looking at the house, a faded apparition of a place she once knew well. The dresser seemed smaller, the paintwork scruffier and the chintz more faded. On the mantelpiece, there was a family photograph – the last one taken. Happier times, when they were all together. She got up to make more tea. It was the only way to cope here. Keep moving. Stay busy. Paul poured tea or whiskey, depending on the request, then turned his hand to dishwashing after charming first her sisters and then the neighbours with his winning bedside manner. They would probably remember him more than her for the day.