

**Israel Madigan**

by

**Robert Eady**

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....mine eyes I rais'd,  
And saw her, where aloof she sat, her brow  
A wreath reflecting of eternal beams.  
Not from the centre of the sea so far  
Unto the region of the highest thunder,  
As was my ken from hers; and yet the form  
Came through that medium down, unmix'd and pure.  
– Paradiso Canto XXXI, Dante Alighieri

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# ONE

Salome, in the form of a reporter, showed up at my aunt's door yesterday morning demanding not my head, but the thoughts contained within it, on a platter. As I have done on several occasions since being released from the gleaming bins of Gehenna, I explained that I would need a good deal of time to collect myself from wherever I have been obliterated to. Of course this lady who was sent from the *Glendevon Daily Advance* wasn't prepared to listen to that so I just imparted what I believed to be as accurate a statement as possible: I told her that all the images in my brain are presently like grains of silt flowing in turbid waters to the sea. With wisps of flaxen hair sticking to her sweaty forehead, she said she was there to discuss only the facts of the case which I "surely had a duty to set right once and for all." I put the following plain question to her then in reply: "Does the delta at the mouth of a river consist of the individual facts of what comes waterborne from the land, or is it a new wholly independent fact onto itself?" She just glared, perhaps thinking I was trying to mock her, so I asked if she remembered the fate of the house built on sand as compared to the one built on rock. When she continued to stare as stupidly as a frog or goat, I told her it was pointless for me to throw a lot of words into the air knowing they would disperse as soon as the weight of the truth was laid upon them. Barely controlling a sudden fury that I saw kindle in her eyes, she asserted that "even after all this time there are unanswered questions and my editor is intent on providing answers for our readers." Before turning away and locking the door, I told her that her time would be better spent reporting on the latest hurricane pinwheeling into the Gulf of Mexico.

When I saw you get out of your small car late yesterday afternoon I thought that you were just another malevolent visitor sent from yet another media equivalent of Herod Antipas. I won't apologize for that because there is nothing to forgive. Too many apologies have been made for no good reason and that is what is used

against the survivors. (In legal circles, I think they call it assumed or declared liability.)

Please note that the silver cross (with corpus) you wore played no role in convincing me that you could be trusted. Even a fool knows that a body can be fitted with the veil of a Saint Clare as easily as the armour of a village-torching Mongol invader. When you stepped up onto the porch, I thought of the previous visitor, and scribbled a little note to my half-deaf aunt to maintain a dead silence until you left. Fortunately, after you had at last given up your wood-peckering, you shouted your brother's name into the door and then almost as loudly revealed who you were.

Of course, hearing your name made all the difference. Although your face has aged (if you will pardon me) from the old photograph your brother once showed me, it immediately began to change shape and features from the harpy I had unconsciously concocted. In an instant you had taken your place among the grinning heads frozen some forty years ago under the seminary pines. Once again the sweet young sister of Father Michael Liam Collins was standing with other relatives beside her dear brother. I didn't need the distraught tone of your voice to further convince me of your obvious innocence of any indictable or even summary offence.

Forgive me, but I have to think hard to remember anything much these days. Not that it was easy before I had my so-called freedom restored to me. To gain blessed relief from the terrors that melt into fitful sleep and bad dreams most nights, and begin sparkling new with a spine tingling thrill on awakening, I try to let my mind wander just about anywhere pleasant, (although it takes no more than an hour or two before it drifts back to the smouldering heap of beams and lumber which is its natural home). This past week I have been lingering mentally on the rock pile mound behind the old homestead in Barford Township where I used to play soldier with my cousin Ted under the maples and oaks splayed there against the sky. Because I was younger, I never got to play the British commando, although I was more than happy to be the German saboteur. (Ted even allowed me once to wear the treasured leather Nazi

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belt Uncle Patrick had taken off “a squarehead” he had shot in Holland.) Although he tried to fake an English accent, Ted was never convincing as an officer of His Majesty’s Armed Forces. He would have been a lot more British-looking if he’d worn his Sunday rain coat, instead of his older brother’s hand-me-down red and white leather jacket with the hockey crests sewn onto the back and front by the Italian shoemaker down in the village. I did a good job impersonating a goosestepper, however. Even as a child, I always liked to be on the enemy side. I named my personal Nazi after Günter Rogner, the fat, jovial and completely innocuous German who picked up my grandfather’s dairy cans. (If only I could have remained forever that little enemy soldier fiercely defending the glacier leavings heaped in the flaming-yellow autumn hayfields belonging to my father’s only brother.)

Please do not be overly concerned about the waterworks as per my old Aunt Rita. She often starts to cloud up and rain when someone she loves or instinctively trusts is in close proximity. She calls this “blessed unburdening,” which, as you witnessed at her kitchen table, can easily become an unblessed torrent descending from the storm swept mountain pushing houses, boulders, and tangles of stumps before it as it goes. Little wonder the poor dear is so upset considering the trouble she’s seen since I returned from what, with blameless ignorance, she calls “the healing place.” The phone calls in the middle of the night were only the beginning. The stream of media people not only from across Ontario but across Canada and even the United States never seemed to stop coming, at least initially, when I still lived in Glendevon. As the latest intrusion into my privacy has shown, it doesn’t matter at all that I wired a makeshift cardboard sign reading “no interviews” on the cedar rail fence by Aunt Rita’s driveway. I feel for my aunt, of course, but I can hardly run away somewhere considering my financial situation and the nonexistent prospects of regular employment.

No need to fret. I agree without reservation that every sister has a right to know how her brother passed to eternity, especially if there was criminal activity involved, and there certainly was plenty of

that. I thought I must at least try, however, to dissuade you from hearing what I might have to say on the matter. When one dredges up a sea bed, not all that is spilled out onto the slippery steel deck of the harbour scow may be tolerable to look at. I am talking here of more than rusted forty-five gallon drums that slid overboard in a bygone storm, or treadless tires tossed from the docks or the bows of bobbing tugboats.

*“In the beginning...the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep...”*

Now where exactly should I commence my narrative? Initially the best place I would think is with the chief instigator, the Prima Donna of Mayhem herself, one Caitlan Madigan (nee Bedlam.) The newspapers were quite generous in printing the libels about her that they had predetermined to disseminate, so I won't attempt to embellish their “reporting.” All you have to know at this point is that your brother's meeting with Caitlan was undoubtedly what led to his passing to eternity. There can be no question at all about that.

“Katie,” as your brother would refer to her, was someone few people had likely heard of outside Glendevon, and now for perhaps decades to come she will have a public name that thousands of strangers everywhere will recognize. She will never return to the anonymity of being just another of those feral cats that people are too lazy or too cheap to euthanize. (I'm sure you have heard of landlords finding starving felines in vacated apartments or mewling kitties tossed from cars into parking lots and rural ditches.)

The soon-to-be-infamous lady's shocking first arrival on the shoulder of the highway near Saint Michael the Archangel Church rectory on a sunny September afternoon was not witnessed by your brother, but by a Mrs. Stan Tyrell who had just driven out of the church parking lot after laying gladiolas before the headstone of her husband in the adjoining cemetery. Suddenly a big, black half ton truck swerved past Mrs. Tyrell's car and the driver slammed on the brakes. The passenger door swung open, and to Mrs. Tyrell's dismay,

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she saw a young woman being violently kicked out of the truck by a man wearing tan-coloured work boots. Mrs. Tyrell said that the brute had actually slid over, swung his legs around on the seat, and was using both of his feet at once. In vain, the young woman tried for a moment to hold onto the door's arm rest for support. After yet another vicious kick, she fell beside the truck, half on the gravel shoulder and half on the paved road. Mrs. Tyrell said that through the rolled-down window of her car she heard the man in the truck spit out a string of obscenities. The truck then sped off with tires squealing. If the woman hadn't rolled away from the vehicle as quickly as she did when she landed on her back, her left arm and perhaps leg would have been driven over. The truck had only gone about a quarter the length of a football field when it screeched to a halt and a muscular-looking man with blond hair tied in a ponytail reached into the box at the back and lifted out a large cardboard box. He walked around the front of the truck and heaved the box into the ditch, spilling out part of its contents, which were women's shoes and clothes. He then sped off again down the highway.

Mrs. Tyrell backed her car into the church parking lot and as fast as her heavy bulk would allow, jiggled over to the rectory. Fortunately, your brother and I had just returned after picking up groceries and dropping off some letters at the post office in the Rexall drugstore on this side of Glendevon. After blurting out a description of what she had just seen, Mrs. Tyrell apologized profusely and breathlessly for not getting the licence plate number of the truck. Your brother and I immediately rushed out of the rectory and ran up the road to where the young woman had risen unsteadily onto her feet.

Caitlan's nose appeared broken at the bridge, but was later determined to be only badly bruised by a back-handed blow to her face. Blood was running over her lips and chin and dripping onto a white long-sleeved jogging sweater with some garish pink and...

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