

Chapter 1

Winter 2013 Spain

As places for dying go, Malta seemed as good a place as any. Matt Healy looked through the haze of his life at the tiny dot on the map. It had been ringed by a beer stain from one of the many bottles of Estrella he had consumed the night before with Jim Frame, his once-upon-a-time work colleague from the now-defunct Strathclyde Police.

Healy was slumped at the kitchen table in the small pension in Lloret de Mar that he now called home. He had smiled to himself when he first heard his flat referred to as a pension. *True, that's what I am. A pensioner. Someone who lives on, and now in, a pension. God bless Strathclyde Police.* He and Frame weren't really friends, more a case of two guys with an unbreakable bond of depression. Healy vaguely recalled their conversation from the previous night before Frame collapsed on the couch.

'There's only one thing you need to know about Lloret de Mar, Jim.'

'What's that?'

'It's a shit hole.'

'Why do you live here then?'

'I'm shit.'

Healy had known for a while that if he didn't change his life, he was a dead man. He also knew he had to leave Spain. He couldn't stay where he was and stay alive at the same time. He stared again at the map. 'Malta it is, then.'

Even for Matt Healy and Jim Frame, the copious amounts of alcohol consumed over the previous few days were beginning to take their toll, and with Frame due to fly back the next day, they had agreed to moderate their intake for the day and even to cheat: they would go for a proper meal as well.

'What do you know about Malta, Jim?'

'Not a lot, why?'

'I'm moving there.'

'What, when?'

'Soon as.'

'Why?'

'I'll die if I stay here, that's why.'

'What, and you'll live forever if you move to Malta?'

'No, but I might live for a day, really live, and that's got to be better than this.'

The relatively little Healy had to drink that day made no difference to his nightly torment. Healy didn't think of them as dreams. Dreams were jumbled, incoherent, unreal. These were memories: real, painful and unceasing. *Mother, never satisfied, often critical. No father to speak of, but a presence nevertheless. Years of dealing with the dregs of Glasgow. But, most of all, Dornan, Susan Dornan. Friend, colleague, boss, lover, bitch, corpse. Why Susan, why? Always, why?*

The following morning, Healy poured Jim Frame into a taxi bound for Barcelona airport, as he didn't trust Frame's ability to get on the right bus from Lloret's busy bus terminal. He then walked to the little local bodega he had discovered on first moving into his pension, and which he had adopted as his local. No words were exchanged initially as Healy sat on his stool, positioned near the entrance so he could get some breeze, as Pedro's charms did not stretch to air conditioning. Pedro himself placed a black coffee and a Cutty Sark whisky on the bar and went back to reading the sports pages of *El Periodico*. Healy concentrated hard on the offerings. After a few minutes, his shaking hand reached for the coffee. He drank it slowly, smarting slightly at its bitterness.

'Pedro.'

'Si, Senor Matt.'

'*Un café con leche, por favour.*'

'*Que?*'

'A white coffee, Pedro. A white coffee. My Spanish is shit I know, but not that shit.'

'No, no Senior Matt, it's just... another Cutty Sark though... yes?'

'No Pedro, no Cutty Sark, not ever. I don't drink anymore.'

'*Que?*'

'Will you stop saying "*Que*" all the time, Pedro? You sound like the guy from Fawlty Towers, look a bit like him too, now I come to think of it. You heard me okay. From now on, I do not drink alcohol. Comprende?'

'*Que?*'

'Oh very funny, Pedro.'

'But why, Senor Matt?'

'Because, Pedro, up until today, I have been an asshole, but no more. I'm going to sell the pension and move to a new life.'

'In Scotland?'

Healy pondered the question although he already knew the answer. He loved Scotland in a way but knew he couldn't go back. He kept up to date with the football scores—gloating always good for the soul—and listened to Lori McTear on his iPad for pleasure, but that was it.

'No Pedro, in Malta. Being in Spain has shown me I like the sun, the Mediterranean lifestyle, the whole bit.'

'Why not just stay here then?'

'I can't. Too many demons. I need to start again.'

'How much do you want for the pension? Don't forget, the Spanish property market is terrible, Senor Matt. It might take you a very long time to sell it.'

'Would you be interested in it?'

'Depends, Senor Matt. I am not a rich man.'

'My heart bleeds for you, Pedro. How much?'

'Maybe.... thirty-thousand euro?'

'Scottish *que*.'

'*Que*?'

'Scottish *que*; it means fuck off.'

Winter 2013 Malta

The now-Inspector Thea Spiteri of the Maltese *Pulizija*, CID branch, had just finished playing a vital part in the investigation, the politically sensitive and serious crime investigation into the bribery case against the former chief justice of Malta, Noel Borg. Spiteri didn't attend court every day of the trial but she had made an effort to be there on this day, as she knew that Borg had decided to take the stand in a last-ditch attempt to save his skin. Spiteri was also uneasy about an issue related to the case concerning her own ultimate boss, the police commissioner Chris Debono.

Daphne Arrigo was approximately the same age as Thea Spiteri and, like Spiteri, she was single, good looking, no kids, and loved her job as an investigator. But unlike Spiteri, Daphne Arrigo was an investigative journalist with the *Malta Times* and not a *Pulizija* officer.

Arrigo and Spiteri had never actually met, but they both knew who each other were, and both knew exactly why they were sitting in a Valetta court listening to the trial.

Arrigo was there because her investigations had helped put Borg in prison and because she felt there was still more to come out surrounding this story. Spiteri was there because she felt the same.

Borg had taken the stand a few moments earlier; Anthony Demajo, the Prosecutor, had just asked Borg how he actually came into possession of the money used as the bribe.

'Patrick Rizzo came into my office and just left it on my table,' replied Borg.

'And what was your reaction to this happening?' asked Demajo.

'I told Rizzo I didn't want it.'

'And what did he say?'

'He just said, "Too late, my job is to give it to you. I've done that. I wish I'd never gotten involved with these people but it's your problem now."'

'What did you do then?'

'I tried calling some trusted colleagues, but I couldn't get a hold of any of them.'

'Was one of the people you called Police Commissioner Debono?'

'Yes.'

'Why did you call him?'

'I told you, I wanted advice about what to do with the money from someone I trusted.'

'What did you do with the money?'

'I took it home and put it in a drawer.'

'Why didn't you go straight to the police? Tell them, hand the money over.'

'I thought about it, but I couldn't.'

'Why not?'

'Because I'd already told some people what a judgement in a drugs case was going to be before the judgement was official. I hadn't acted as a Chief Justice should have. I was scared.'

'Why had you done that?'

'Friendship had led me to divulge information that, as I said, I shouldn't have divulged.'

'What was the information that you divulged?'

'The length of sentence an accused was going to be given.'

'And?'

'And... that I thought the sentence was harsh and that if he appealed on certain grounds, his appeal would come to me, and I would be inclined to reduce it.'

'Who did you divulge this information to?'

'I can't remember.'

'Was one of the people Nicola Tizian?'

'As I said, I can't remember.'

'But Mr Tizian is a friend of yours, is he not?'

'I wouldn't say friend necessarily. More an acquaintance.'

'Was one of the people you gave the information to Commissioner Debono?'

'Look, how many times do I need to tell you? I can't remember.'

'So Dr Borg, you get up the next day. What do you do?'

'I went to my office.'

'Was anyone there?'

'Rizzo was waiting for me outside.'

'What did he want?'

'He just said, "You'll get the rest of the money over the next couple of months.'

'What did you think he meant by that?'

'I didn't know.'

'You didn't know! Shall I tell you then? Obviously, at some point you had agreed an amount for doing what you could regarding this drugs trial you mentioned. You weren't given all the money the previous day, so you were just being informed that everything was okay, you would get the rest. Is that not so, Dr?'

'No amount of money was ever mentioned.'

'So you admit that you did have discussions about what you could do to help?'

'Conversations, yes. There is nothing wrong with that. I did not interfere in the judgement. My mistake was telling friends the verdict, but the verdict had already been decided.'

'What did you do with the money?'

'I phoned a priest I know and asked his advice.'

'And what did he say?'

'He suggested I give it to charity.'

'And did you?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I was too scared to leave the house; these were not nice people that I had mistakenly become involved with.'

'I repeat, what did you do with the money?'

'I gave it to a priest and asked him to give it to Commissioner Debono.'

'And the priest's name?'

'Father Francesco Marandon.'

'And did he?'

'I assume so.'

'Do you? Well, you assume wrongly, Dr Borg. Both Father Marandon and Commissioner Debono deny having any knowledge of what you are talking about.'

The following week, both women were happy to hear that the former chief justice had been sentenced to two years in prison.