

unforgivable

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Mike has previously had two novels published, was longlisted for the Wales Book of the Year and was on the list of Waterstones 'New Voices'. His second novel, *Ugly Bus*, is currently in development for a six-part series with the BBC.

He lives in the wilds of Portugal with his wife, children and a senile dog who enjoys eating furniture.

Also by Mike Thomas

Pocket Notebook

Ugly Bus

In the DC Will MacReady series

Ash and Bones

Mike
Thomas
unforgivable

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For Toria, my Somebody

I should have gone to college
and gone into real estate
and got myself an aquarium.
That's what I should have done.

– *Jeffrey Dahmer, presented during his trial,
Milwaukee County Circuit Court,
January 30th to February 15th 1992*

The hunter lifts his head to hear,
Now far and faint, now full and near . . .

– *John Greenleaf Whittier
'Mogg Megone, Part II'*

Wednesday

One

It was a beautiful day in a summer of beautiful days.

Late August, and everyone was accustomed to the temperature now: weeks of cloying heat making sweat-sheened brows and shirt-backs slick with perspiration the norm. Kaftans and loose-fitting dresses and sandals treading arid ground. Shorts and T-shirts and seared skin itching beneath knock-off football shirts, cheap sunglasses sitting above bright and genuine smiles. The world was a happier place. Upbeat. Lighter.

The sun does that to people, he thinks. For a little while, at least. Gives them just enough good times to bank the memories, ready to draw on during the harsh winter which lies ahead. Ready for the darkness.

He smells citrus and mint and smoked animal flesh as he slides from the beat-up car, reaches back in to grab his belongings from the dusty passenger seat. Breathes in the aroma as he shrugs on his rucksack, adjusts his baseball cap and shades, listens to the shouts from the vendors, to the various sound systems battling for attention: Berber flutes, the bouncing bass-twang of reggae, the percussive beats of drums iced with the *tsss* of finger cymbals, the music louder and more intoxicating as he wanders through the open entrance gates. Face downcast, he pushes through the sticky bodies of the crowd, through still air which seems to thicken and catch in his throat.



This market, this *souk*, is full. A noisy mess of colour and energy, of spices, preserved lemons and handbags, of shawls and carpets and a thousand pairs of shoes for sale. Clutches of people catching up and talking of family, of loved ones, of all the things which make life tick tick in that mundane yet wonderful way when you're a part of it. Tick tick. *Tick tick*. And the sun beats down and they swig at water bottles, sip at spiced tea and freshly squeezed orange juice, hands swinging plastic sacks filled with yams and figs, with third-hand clothing, with decade-old video games, with just-couldn't-resist bargains to be used once and instantly forgotten.

He finds the food stall immediately, drawn by the delicious smell drifting on smoke over the crowds: a makeshift grill beneath a sun-bleached canopy, trestle tables lined with earthenware dishes of tabbouleh, hummus, just-charred spiced sausages and myriad sweet pastries. Great shanks of meat hang from the creaking timbers, unbothered by the buzzing flies and casting long shadows onto the faces of the two Somali men – *brothers, they must be*, he thinks, eyeing them – who laugh and joke with glossy customers, with the mishmash of nationalities who have flocked here from surrounding towns and villages to cluck in their mother tongues over dried fruits and bowls of couscous.

Off to one side he waits a while. Just *is*, as unmoving as the air which warms his lungs. The people at the stall are so happy, emitting satisfied moans as they chew. The brothers moving this way and that, rolling wraps, slathering them with harissa, handing them over to grabbing hands. He finds one of his feet



tapping to the music, glances around and sees garishly clad women dancing through streams of grinning people, an oily chancer hassling families for a paid photograph with the snake he has draped over one forearm.

Tap, tap. Tick tock. He begins to drift, such is the atmosphere. Momentarily forgets where he is. Starts to lose himself. A small part of him enjoying what is going on here. He looks down again, thinks of walking away. Leaving the market. Getting into the car and driving into the morning haze.

He is a moment from going home when he hears the unmistakable sound of someone hawking mucus from the depths of their chest. Hears them spit the resultant phlegm, sees it land in the dirt just inches from his right foot. It sends a minute mushroom cloud of dust rippling outwards, one edge of it settling on the bulled toecap of his army surplus boot.

He glances up from under the brim of his 'ball cap. Notices the three figures. Three teenagers, all faded branded sports gear and leers. Staring at him. Motionless, like him.

He swallows. Moves through the crowd, moves away from them. No aggro here. Not today. He doesn't want it. Doesn't need it, not now of all times. And yet they follow him, move parallel with him, pushing through the throng, their belligerent faces bobbing over the heads of the people, seeking him out, their nasty, toothy grins visible over mops of hair and ponytails and braids and sunglasses. And he is trying to work out why, why him, why now, what do they want, what has he done to them, and then they are in front of him, one of them poking a finger into his chest, hard, and he remembers they don't need



a why, and he needn't have done anything to them, and that is why he is here.

They circle him, step closer, uncomfortably close, invading his personal space, and one of them, a thickset teen with a shaven eyebrow, reaches out, grips his coat by the collar and yanks at him.

And this is a little inconvenient, but it was time to start anyway.

Deep breath. Deep, deep breath.

He pulls aside one flap of his jacket, shows them what hangs beneath.

Three pairs of eyes widen. The one with the eyebrow, his hand falls away. Lifts upwards, as if to ward him off. Head shaking. The three of them, backing away and into the scrum of oblivious market-goers. Their shouted warnings drowned by the music.

He smiles. Calmer than he thought he would be. Shrugs off his rucksack and places it on the ground. Reaches inside and pulls them out. One, two, three. Enough for now. Digs out his lighter, sparks it. Watches the dancing women, the happy families. Taps his foot and nods his head in time to the beat from a nearby sound system.

Lights one of the fuses and tosses the IED into the crowd.

Hoists his ruck to one shoulder, walks away, quickly, twenty feet or so, lights another fuse, tosses another IED, swivels on his heel, lights and lobs the third. Walks over to the stall with the Somali brothers, customers still gathered for the street food, joins the jam in front.





Waits, eyes unblinking behind his shades.

They're louder than he thought they would be, and he flinches a little as the bombs go off. The people in front of him at the stall, they hunch down, confused, the market suddenly quiet, just for a few seconds, and then the screams begin, and the wails can be heard over the music, and the people no longer wish to purchase food and scatter like rats, and the Somali brothers have stopped, mouths agape, looking past him, behind him at some unspeakable horror, one of them with a half-rolled flatbread hanging limply from frozen fingers.

Then they notice him. Standing there. Alone. A grin beneath his shades.

Head bobbing to the music. Foot still tapping away.

Tap, tap.

'Don't,' he warns, because he still has to finish this, but the brothers, they *know*, they're coming around the stall, advancing on him, grabbing hands raised and lips drawn back as they snarl and holler and he can't understand a word they're saying and he has no time for this so swipes back the flap of his jacket, raises the sawn-off he's tied to his shoulder and levels it at them. Neither man sees it. Two quick taps on the trigger and they both lurch backwards and out of sight. He notices blood in the tabbouleh, on top of the trestle table. Breaks open the shotgun, drops the spent cartridges into his jacket pocket. Reloads the barrels, racks them closed.

The building is at the back of the market, a thrown-together effort of breezeblock and chipboard and indifference. He heads for it, ignoring the screams and the rivulets of red, and





when he reaches the door he kicks it open, quickly scans the interior: concrete floor, solitary desk and chair, titty calendars, television, all wrapped in the smell of chicken fat and cheap cigarettes.

A pair of wide, white eyes peeking over the rim of the desk.

He swings the shotgun around, aims at them.

The market owner. He bolts upright from behind the desk. One hand skywards in half-surrender, the other clamping a mobile phone to his ear. The dark skin of his face drenched with sweat, his underarms shadowy blooms of perspiration on the fabric of his lime polo shirt.

‘Don’t shoot,’ the market owner pleads.

He drops the rucksack. Cocks his head. Listens. Can hear a voice on the other end of the line from where he stands: urgent, shrill.

Sir, where are you? We’re tracing the call, but where are you?

‘I won’t,’ he says, and sparks the lighter. Touches it to the fuse inside the rucksack. Tosses the whole thing to the desk and leaves.

He hears the door slam, the market owner yelling after him, quickens his pace, time against him. *Tick tock*. Breaks into a sprint, the rucksack going up in the office behind him, a colossal *whump* of an explosion, the earth quivering beneath his boots, almost throwing him forwards and off his feet, but he regains his balance and runs through the dead and the dying, looks around at what he has done as he goes, sees sprayed spices and torn baskets and punctured tinned goods, bodies and body parts, the music still playing, so incongruous, so surreal, and



then he is out through the gates, running with the panicked crowd – mingling, disappearing – and he hears no sirens so yanks open the car door and dumps himself inside and starts the engine and drives away.

And it is such a beautiful day in Cardiff.

Two

All Inspector James Doolan could think was: *don't fuck this one up.*

Five years in, twenty-eight years old and a fast-tracker being groomed for better things – he'd already had the nod that he was looking at National Police Chiefs Council rank by the time he hit fifteen years in the job – he'd done all the courses, the classroom exercises covering hostage negotiation and crime scene containment, the practicals and hands-on riot training days where he'd suffered the sniggers and catcalls as the bottom-feeding PCs gleefully threw Molotovs and rubber bricks at his riot shield. He'd understood their enmity towards him: he was an accelerated promotion drone, the type hated by response cops and frontline departments who were at the coalface day in day out, who assumed he spent his hours hidden in an air-conditioned office formulating pie charts and massaging crime figures for the bean counters at HQ and the Home Office.

It made him want to be a better officer, to spend more time – any time that he could – on the street, to prove to any and all of them that he could cut it, that he wasn't just another clone, that they could rely on him. But his life, since joining, had been a whirlwind of examinations and self-reflective essays, of soft handshakes and knowing smiles from seniors with silver spaghetti on

their epaulettes, of complete and utter immersion in every aspect of police policy and procedure, from filling out the most mundane of property labels to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement strategy meetings about the latest shithouse rape merchant who'd decided to set up a squalid home in the division he now ran as its new bronze inspector.

Yet none of it had prepared him for this.

This was carnage.

Out of control.

They even had the army here, for Christ's sake.

The National Police Air Service chopper thundered overhead, whipping a rising funnel of dark smoke into a drab spiral which hung against the bright-blue summer sky. A fire still raged somewhere inside Bessemer Road Market and firefighters hovered outside the cordon tape, hoses poised and at the ready, unable to enter, frustration etched on their faces. Radios from ambulance crews, paramedics, fire and police officers crackled and bleeped, filling the air with metallic voices. TV crews jostled for space, interviewing members of the public who'd turned up to gawp or weep openly, questioning PCSOs who lined the police tape, even questioning each other when they ran out of people to collar, before turning to camera to opine and theorise for their ever-hungry twenty-four-hour-news junkies. So loud here, with everyone milling around helplessly, watching through the gaps in the metal perimeter fence as teams of firearms officers and army personnel worked the scene, moving quickly and quietly, Heckler & Koch submachine guns sweeping and clearing.

Over it all, audible and gut-scraping: the moans of the injured.

Still inside. Still untreated, twenty minutes after some lunatic had decided to attack the market. Nobody was allowed in, not until the Tac teams had declared the scene safe.

‘Gold is still ten minutes away. She’s asking for an update.’

Doolan looked at his companion: an unreconstructed dinosaur of a PC named Derek, who had been ‘gifted’ to him as his radio operator. Doolan knew it was because nobody else wanted to work with a slick career boy such as himself, and that management had nowhere else to place Derek, who was a lazy uniform-carrier from somewhere near Pontypridd who still described female officers as *split-arses* and *them lesbo types*.

Doolan shook his head. ‘Tell her I’d prefer to have some CID suits here to take ownership of this thing.’

The PC arched an eyebrow, reached up to one of his radios. ‘Really?’

‘No, Derek,’ Doolan sighed, more out of disappointment that Derek clearly felt somebody else would do a better job of running this incident. ‘Tell her there is no update. Firearms are still clearing.’

‘Bet you’d prefer to be in your cushy office, though,’ Derek smiled. Added as an afterthought: ‘Sir.’

Doolan turned to him. Thought about chewing him out. Decided against it. ‘Just tell her.’

Derek shrugged, began to transmit. Hesitated. Placed a finger up to his earpiece, screwed up his face in concentration.

Doolan watched, eyes narrowed, as Derek’s eyes did the opposite.

‘What the fuck?’ Derek blurted.



Doolan glanced upwards, saw the chopper suddenly peel away, nose down and heading west towards the coast at speed. Heard rapid footfalls and shouts and the roar of engines behind him, spun around to see paramedics sprinting back to their wagons, firefighters yanking open doors to their engines and clambering in, an ARV car printing tyre marks on tarmac as it powered out of the cordon. Mobile phones trilled and blasted ringtones, dozens of radios squawked in unison.

He looked back to Derek. 'What is it?'

'There's been another one.'

It didn't compute. Doolan shook his head, his stomach a knot. 'Another what?'

'The guy who did this . . .' Derek said robotically, finger still up to his ear. 'Same description . . . clothing . . . he just hit a mosque in Penarth. There are casualties . . .'

Doolan blanched. 'No. It can't be. He barely had time to get from here to there . . .'

Derek was glancing about. 'We don't need this now.'

'The city doesn't need this now,' Doolan replied. 'The Castle case. It's already enough. Too much.'

'Gold is diverting to Penarth,' Derek said, listening to a different radio.

'Good.' Doolan closed his eyes.

Wished, for the first time in his career, that he really was in a cushy office creating a pie chart.



Three

Bored.

Five of them sitting in the dock of Crown Court One. A row of apathy and barely concealed arrogance. Wrapped in oh-so-civilised black tie and white shirt combos which were only marginally less ill-fitting than the uniforms worn by the equally uninterested G4S prison officer civvies who bookended the accused.

DC Will MacReady saw their disgraceful sniggers and winks to their friends and *fam* in the public gallery. The sideways glances and wanker hand gestures and sullen stares at any police officer who happened to be in the courtroom. All of it in front of the deceased's parents, who had attended every day of every week since the trial began, shuffling in with backs bowed as if broken from the weight of it all, who had sat and listened, jaws tightening, as the prosecution barrister listed the injuries to their sixteen-year-old son, their kid who went out and never returned, their boy who suffered horrendous bruising and broken bones and multiple puncture wounds from a knife, one of which was delivered with such venom that it cleaved a rib clean in half before puncturing his heart.

Alexander Castle. Just sixteen, a high-achieving, sport-loving student, never in trouble in his life and on a night



out with friends to celebrate finishing his GCSE exams. The antithesis of the teenagers fidgeting in the dock – all of them known to police for years, with myriad pre-convictions and much time spent *over the wall* in prison. Theft. Dwelling burglaries. Public order. Dealing. Dozens of street robberies where they pulled knives on anyone who dared resist.

It was wrong place, wrong time for Alex Castle. He'd been leaving a pub in Cardiff city centre, his unfinished pint glass left on the beer garden table and still warm from his grasp, when his friends had argued with a group of Asian males. A group of males who were part of a notorious Cardiff crime gang. A group of males who you did not want to cross.

It was all so predictable: his friends had run, and Castle – his naivety getting the better of him, his belief that as he had not been involved in the argument the gang would leave him alone – had walked away slowly, not looking back, not thinking to put distance between him and the five teens and twenty-somethings who were now following him along a row of parked vehicles.

Then they had set upon him.

Between two vans. Five of them, punching and kicking him until he went down. Stamping on his torso, his head, while he lay on the ground, then one of them – none of them had admitted wielding it – plunged the knife into Castle's prone body. Thirteen times, until his lungs were punctured and his hands were shredded with defensive wounds and the blade entered his ribcage and sheared through bone and tore through the pulmonary artery and then the five were gone into the night.





Castle had pulled himself upright, staggered across the road to his returning friends, walked in circles for a few moments, shaking his head, not quite believing what had just happened.

Said to one of his friends, 'I don't feel right ...' and had given an incredulous laugh, his bloodied hands held out before him, the streetlights making his eyes glitter momentarily, a burst of adrenalin flashing in his pupils, and then they had dulled and he had sagged into their arms and was dead before he hit the ground.

The whole thing caught on the pub CCTV which faced out onto the main road. Only the attack itself was off-camera, hence the joint enterprise charges for the five, plus alternative murder and manslaughter charge sheets, and a court case which was now gripping the city and raising tensions as it dragged on.

The media were all over it, stirring the pot. A group of journos were clumped across the press bench, scribbling, typing onto tablets, live tweeting anything remotely interesting. Amongst them: Klaudia Solak, darling of BBC Wales. Occasional glances from her towards MacReady, who kept meeting her eyes, letting them linger before resuming glaring at the defendants.

The narrative: five Asian 'hoodlums' had knifed a 'fine young white boy' and everyone was going batshit. *Race murder. Hate crime.* Social media in meltdown. *Society broken beyond repair.* Far-right groups coming out in unwanted 'support' of the Castle family, rocking up each day outside Cardiff Crown in solidarity, then the left-wing Anti-Fascist opposition turning up en masse, the groups repeatedly bloodying each other as an increasingly thin line of police tried to separate them beneath a glorious summer sun.



MacReady had watched the pub CCTV recording on a loop for months, pausing and playing, forwarding and rewinding, hoping to catch something the others had missed, anything to push the investigation over the finish line, only stopping to answer the routine demands for teas and coffees and *don't forget the three bloody sugars, mun*, rattling around the office with mug-heavy tray in hand as Detective Inspector Fletcher and the Cardiff Bay CID team assembled their case.

He was sick of watching that tape. And after six weeks in a stifling Court One rammed with wigs and slick defence suits and air thick with dust motes, he was sick of watching the clowns performing in the dock. The investigating officers had given evidence, had stood in front of the jury and sworn on the good book and said what they had to say – which, in MacReady's case, had been very little, given that he'd bagged and tagged a few bits of evidence then sat in on two interviews – and were back to other crimes and outstanding actions and statements, arrests and file prep that probably should have been carried out two months ago.

Except him, of course. Still the new boy. No longer a trainee, but still a way to go as far as the higher-ups were concerned. And still being monitored. Nearly a year since 'it' had happened, yet nobody would ease up on him. Charlie Beck. MacReady could still picture it now: his detective sergeant slipping into unconsciousness in front of him on a cold concrete floor, dark red blooming beneath her hip and the thunderclap of a gunshot rattling around inside his skull . . .

And then the weeks and months of interviews and disciplinary notices and the lingering eyes on him whenever he entered



a parade room or custody suite or CID office in another nick. And the DI, just last week, in the Crown's marbled lobby after MacReady had stepped down from the witness box and left the courtroom: *Get back in there, Will. Sit in till the end. See how things pan out. Bell me if anything goes south. And don't fuck anything up this time, right?*

This time.

From his right, a hissed whisper: 'Christ's sake, look at you.'

MacReady kept his eyes staring forwards, studying the royal coat of arms at the back of the court, ignoring the man sitting next to him: Detective Sergeant Paul Echols. Weapons-grade bellend and temporary – everyone hoped – replacement DS for Beck while she continued her recuperation. Echols had been seconded to the team in January when it became clear Beck was not rejoining them any time soon. Just to compound MacReady's misery, the DI had seen fit to make Echols sit in on the remainder of the trial as well. For no other reason, MacReady knew, than to keep Echols away from the rest of the team and to punish MacReady for saddling them with the prize prick by getting Beck shot and hospitalised.

'Face on you, man,' Echols whispered. Everyone was *man* to him, a drawled, intensely annoying Americanism and a peculiar affectation, given he hailed from an unpronounceable hamlet in deepest West Wales and the closest he had ever come to the US was watching crappy cop dramas on Netflix.

MacReady gave in, turned to the DS. Found his face about three inches away, saw the sunglasses propped on his carefully coiffed dark hair, could smell the coffee he'd sunk half an hour



ago on his breath, stale and powerful. He recoiled and shushed Echols with a finger to his lips, a tip of the head to the judge who sat head on hand as he listened to one of the defence barristers waffle on about his client's concerns about disclosure.

Echols rolled his eyes. 'What?'

'I'm trying to listen,' MacReady muttered.

'You're putting the world to rights in your head, about this trial *and* your brother's. I can see it, and it's making you twitchy, and it's too early for me to deal with you being twitchy.'

MacReady shrugged. Said, not meaning it: 'Sorry 'bout that.'

'Don't be. You can't help it if wife-beating shithouses are par for the course in your family, right?'

'You're getting very personal here, Sarge,' MacReady said, but he hated to admit that Echols was pretty much on the money. Everybody on the force knew. MacReady pictured his brother, Stuart, the proverbial black sheep. An abiding problem, be it because of brawling while in drink, or begging MacReady to pay his rent, or assaulting his long-suffering girlfriend, Kirsty. Stuart was a man for whom *responsibility* meant ensuring he got enough beers in for his weekend, often spending what little cash Kirsty had saved for the children. His brother was here today, too. On trial, just down the corridor.

MacReady's thoughts quickly flashed to his father, the lifer. Everybody knew about him, too. It was hard to hide the fact your dad had murdered your mother and was currently serving a twenty-five-year sentence in prison.

'And you're getting right on my nerves,' Echols replied. 'So just fuck off and see him, yeah?'

'I don't want to see him. I'm quite happy here, thanks'
'And I don't want to see you. So . . . bu-bye, William.'

Echols had raised one hand, was bending his fingers up and down in an exaggerated fashion, waving MacReady off. Thin smile on his lips, his tanned face glossy with perspiration: a thirtysomething wide boy who was definitely warm as toast, and who, if he hadn't joined the job to chase criminals, would probably be the one being chased, running some Cardiff sink-hole estate as its low-level crime kingpin.

MacReady closed his eyes for a moment, pictured the usher holding Echols down while the courtroom – defendants, the bookish clerk to the court, even the judge in a flurry of wig hair – rose en masse and beat the DS to a pulp.

He savoured it for a few seconds. Opened his eyes. Glanced at Klaudia Solak.

Quietly left the court.

*

'How's it going?'

Indifferent nods and grunts of *alrigh'* from the trio of uniforms outside Courtroom Number Eight in the bowels of the building. Around them the court went about its business: people drifting in and out of anterooms, fire doors swishing open and closed, heels clacking on polished floor, a dozen conversations loaded with legal jargon and discussions about what to have for lunch.

MacReady recognised one of the response officers from a training day he'd attended a few months earlier at divisional

headquarters, where the lucky few had sat through an interminable seminar on fingerprinting and bite-mark analysis on victims. No lunch to lighten the dour mood either, thanks to the austerity measures.

He felt their eyes on him; gossip and innuendo was the lifeblood of the service and MacReady's tale had been doing the rounds for a long time. Pretty much every officer in the city knew of him, or thought they knew him and what really happened to DS Charlie Beck in that basement garage last October. Thanks to the rumours and bullshit. And just to compound matters, here he was, drawn here because of somebody who managed to drag his family name through a river of mud whenever humanly possible, and annoying the officers who were hovering outside.

'Given evidence yet?' he asked them.

'Think we'd still be hanging around here if we had?' one of them replied, and followed it with an audible, irritated *tcch*.

'Y'know what it's like,' another offered. 'Airtight case, but the defence briefs'll try anything to get their scumbag client a not-guilty.' He looked away from MacReady. 'No offence, like.'

MacReady looked to the floor. Nodded. Mumbled a '*Scuse me* and pushed his way through the heavy double doors and into the court.

The room was brightly lit, modern. Cream carpets and polystyrene ceiling slotted with fluorescents, the benches and desks cheap, laminated. One of the newer courts, devoid of any of the atmosphere or sense of history you would find upstairs in what MacReady considered to be the proper Crown.

He stood at the back near the entrance door, watching the figure in the dock. Wiry and pale from weeks spent cooped up on remand, his eyes hooded and unreadable beneath the strip lights. MacReady knew he was staring right back, though. Staring right back and cursing him, just for the job he did, for being a copper, for being just like the men who had locked him up that night a few months ago, a rainy Tuesday when he'd been wetting the baby's head at the pub and downed those shots and necked those beers and rubbed that amphetamine on his swollen gums, before loping home to his girlfriend's house, where he woke everyone, woke the street, woke his girlfriend, who screamed and yelled, and he'd snapped – again – and grabbed her throat, and bang, there it was, before he knew what he was doing she was on the floor and out of it, nose crooked and pulsing blood, and he'd rubbed at his forehead, momentarily confused as to why it was throbbing until it dawned on him that he'd just smashed it into her face.

'You bastard,' MacReady said under his breath.

Stuart.

His brother.

On trial for assaulting Kirsty, his partner, in front of their children. After a night out celebrating the birth of his baby. *His* baby. Will's baby, now. A boy conceived last year as a business arrangement with MacReady's wife, Megan, so desperate was she for children, so money-hungry was his brother, and so incapable was MacReady of giving her what she so keenly wanted. Such was the mess it created – fracturing relationships, creating a chasm so wide between MacReady and his older sibling

that they had not spoken for the better part of twelve months – that it didn't bear thinking about, even this far down the line. MacReady breathed deeply on the musty air and turned away. Noticed a ripple of energy in the public gallery as one or two journalists gathered their belongings, staring at phone screens with wide eyes.

MacReady saw Echols in the doorway, face set, mobile in his hand.

'We are leaving,' Echols said, voice quiet but tense. 'Right fucking now, man.'