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# SHOT THE DEVIL

Five went into the woods.  
Two never came back.

**RUTH McIVER**



Ruth McIver is a Dublin-born Western Australian and NYC writer currently based in Melbourne. She is represented by the Story Factory. In 2019, she completed her PhD in the field of true-crime inspired fiction with Curtin University. Her first novel, *Nothing Gold*, was runner-up in the inaugural Banjo Prize (2018) and was one of seven novels selected to be pitched at Bloody Scotland Crime Writing Festival (2014). Ruth's self-published novel-in-verse, *The Sunset Club* (2014), was highly commended in the Anne Elder category by the FAW (Fellowship of Australian Writers). *I Shot the Devil* won the 2018 Richell Prize for Emerging Writers.

I  
SHOT  
THE  
DEVIL

RUTH McIVER

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AUSTRALIA

This book is based on a collage of true crime events and is in no way meant to depict one true crime or real person. This is a work of fiction.



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For my brother, who taught me all about cars before I was even born; introduced me to AC/DC, horror movies, MTV, Jackie Collins and punk rock, all while I was still in primary school

'I really don't know why it is that all of us are so committed to the sea, except I think it's because in addition to the fact that the sea changes, and the light changes, and ships change, it's because we all came from the sea. And it is an interesting biological fact that all of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea – whether it is to sail or to watch it – we are going back from whence we came.'

**John F Kennedy**

# PROLOGUE

## RESIDENT ALIEN

By Cormac O'Malley

*Why me? Why him?* I asked the darkness.

*Well, hell, because it's fun,* the darkness answered.

At that moment, 31 October 1994, 11.11 pm, the darkness had six heads, twelve arms and twelve legs. The woods were all around, already knowing everything and swollen with our secrets.

You know that record *Rumours*, the one with the gaylord in tights on the cover that everyone's parents have? Well, that's how it all started. Someone said something to someone and someone's mother heard it and then it's all over the school, the PTA and later, the news: Satan worship, group sex, animal sacrifice.

West Cypress Road Woods have a soundtrack. In the daytime, it's all Disney: hummingbirds and red-headed woodpeckers, the light footfall of deer. At night, the deep-bellied hoot of barn owls and nightjars and more sinister rustling deeper in the dark. There was an occasional homeless guy wandering through, kids parking, getting high, fooling around. Wildcats, you think; wolves, you imagine. Another layer of the soundtrack: the noises he made in the dark: gurgles, snorts, moans. Feet shuffling in dirt, the crunching of sticks under boots and canvas sneakers.

Steve said that he'd killed a bear not far from there. He claimed to be a hunter, but all he had for evidence was a bearskin rug that none of us wanted to go near, let alone sit on.

We told Andre we had something for him. It was the only way to get him there that night without arousing his suspicion. Andre knew something was up – he was sweating, his eyes were unfocused and he kept licking his lips and pumping his fist. Still, he came without a fight, slapping a mosquito and drinking a beer too fast, humming what sounded like 'You Gotta Fight for Your Right'.

Death's a lottery, Ricky Hell once said. Now Andre's number was up, everyone agreed. That's why he was smiling, Danny said. He compared Andre to a white cat: blond as a mouse and blind as a bat. It explained his resting aggression – natural disadvantages that made him both overly willing to please, but also extremely aggressive. He wheezed from asthma and wore contacts most days, but sometimes tinted glasses. He had a pear-shaped, near womanly body, and he almost always smelled like beer and plant matter; something botanical, earthy, rank.

I see it in a movie montage: faces, feet and hands; kicking,

breaking. The crack in his expression where he knows what's going to happen and he seems less afraid and even a little sad.

I rewind the tape, the bit where the reel is warped and baggy with wear, the break in Andre's voice. Why me?

You heard it all and you saw and you saw.

The worst bit is remembering before, the bits you can remember.

At Wendy's near the highway, all sharing the same Frosty and French fries in the back booth, before getting kicked out by some junior manager. Danny making devil horns and singing along in that deep growl of his, 'blood will rain down'. Carole, still in her Dairy Queen uniform, smelling like Windex and sugar. Carole, grabbing you by your denim jacket, running her fingers down all the badges, like she was ticking boxes – yes, correct. Megadeth. Slayer. Metallica. The Crue. Tick, tick, tick. Getting high in the parking lot in the tray of the short-bed Chevy, with the tarp covering us, Hellhammer turned up so loud it was shaking the truck, and the smell of dope and menthols and Carole's lip balm. Smiling at each other. This little moment of belonging before everything breaks.

You didn't do it, did you? You just saw and you saw and you saw.

Some nights it knocks you out and you're on the ground, tasting blood, hands over your ears; yours, his, you don't even know. You don't know what you saw.

You don't even know if you made this all up. The same way you didn't feel real while you were in America. Whatever happened there feels like an MTV video clip, but one you keep editing and editing and then, in the final cut, Andre gets up and walks away.

# 1

10 SEPTEMBER 2010

WHEN MY FATHER WAS WORKING A CASE, HE USED TO SAY HE was going underwater – a case had him by the leg, and sometimes, both legs at once. When he wasn't underwater, Raymond Paul Sloane, or RP to those unlucky enough to know him, taught me facts: the etymology of place names on the island; the lifecycle of lakes and canals, the meaning of the word archipelago, that my name, Erin, means 'from the island to the west'. I learned that deep water is dangerous. Not only could a person drown, but it's a well-known phenomenon that rescuers drown alongside them. So, I tried to stay away from drowning men, but it was a lesson that never stuck.

Although RP had quit undercover work when I was in grade school, he was a phantom parent; an unclaimed seat at the dinner table, an empty chair beside my mom at school recitals. The only proof of his corporeality were the empty cans of Rolling Rock lined up on the coffee table, a TV set left on, a toilet seat in the up position.

Try as I might to resist turning into someone like him, I was spending most of my recent days in a liquid fugue, only I wasn't an investigator – I wasn't even much of a journalist anymore, except when I was writing for a glossy monthly magazine supplement called *Inside Island*. Long-form crime features that you could sort of sink your teeth into. Mostly I was at coffee shops, the kitchen counter or bars until happy hour, churning out numbing copy for real estate agents, insurance companies, even school newsletters. I rotated bars in and around Suffolk county, largely sports bars around Massapequa with names like Paddy Power, careful to avoid being a regular anywhere. Life had become an ellipsis between the decade-long mistake of my twenties and the life I wanted.

It was duty that brought me back to the island. Months ago, I'd given up my apartment and my life in Brooklyn to care for RP, moving into his split-level bungalow on Oceanside Avenue. There were only three suburbs between Massapequa and Southport, a thirty-minute drive dependent on traffic, but they acted as a kind of geographical and psychic buffer between my past, which after all these years was almost like a lucid dream, an intense hallucination I could put down to youthful excess, if it hadn't left so many physical scars.

Denise, my editor from *Inside Island*, must have smelled my desperation, the animal ambition, underneath my all-day antiperspirant and the Dior Poison that I had been wearing since the nineties, because she was promising me a big story – something substantial. It was something close to hunger that resurrected me that morning and drove me, still half-drunk, to the Lyrebird Café in Rockville Centre to meet her. I wanted to become a 'lifer' – a guaranteed full-time gig with *Inside Island*.

Even though the fastest route from Massapequa was the Southern State Parkway, my GPS told me there was an accident on Exit 37N, which meant I had to drive down Southport Avenue, past the train station that was just blocks away from Roosevelt High, my old high school.

At the lights, I looked out at the now fenced-off Old Res, as locals called it, a dried-up catchment filled with old soda and beer cans, scrap metal and, according to the adults, hepatitis. Aside from some new fencing and a different billboard (the old one had featured the obese man who got skinny on Subway holding his old fat pants, grinning), it looked the same. The Res backed onto Southport Station. I was surprised the place was still there. In freshman year, a classmate of mine, Linda Bauer, was dismembered from below the armpit to the groin, while clambering up an embankment onto the track, wasted on wine coolers. All the local papers, the floral tributes, acrostic poems that enshrined her picture – L is for lovely, I is for inspired and so on – forgot that she was N for nasty, D for diabolical and A for autocratic. Her death became an urban legend, just one of many in a community that felt like a sociocultural cul-de-sac.

I used to think that I'd escaped Southport, but as I got older I realised that I'd simply absorbed the town into my system, like when I ate a nickel as a kid and never saw it re-emerge. Southport had become a part of my intimate geography, ingrained and shadowy. Near my heart: the library, where I hid and read *Les Misérables* until the German librarian kicked me out. Near my spleen: the Waldbaum's where I was busted for shoplifting. Take a right and you'll hit my liver, the nightclub Escapades, where I took my first drink, seriously underage. Over there by the gloomy underpass to Southport train station, my stomach, where I threw

up the drinks, somehow glittery and foamy like I'd ingested a snow globe.

And yet all these parts that I'm showing you, all these were not the worst parts, not by a long shot.

I took out half an Ativan from my purse and swallowed it dry. I popped an Adderall and an orange Tic Tac and then spritzed a Frankincense-heavy space-clearing spray all over me that I'd got as a stocking stuffer at *Inside Island's* Christmas party. I suspected it was from Denise.

It was 11.11 am when I found the Lyrebird Café; I was either four minutes early or eleven minutes late, I honestly couldn't remember. Denise was a friend and she wouldn't sweat it – she was already in a booth drinking a cappuccino. I noted her little bottle of Sweet'N Low on the Formica table. Denise wasn't too much older than me, but she was literally twice my size. She styled herself in vintage dresses and wore her weight like an expertly tailored power suit – it wasn't just armour, it made her difficult to ignore; allowed her to break down doors.

If I'd learned anything about life, it was that you need padding; Denise had figured this out.

'Erin. It is so good to see you,' Denise enthused. 'Sit. You look svelte.' She meant drawn, but was being polite. I shrugged in response and we smiled at each other.

A waitress with swallow and star tattoos on her neck took my order. The Lyrebird was what Denise might call 'hyperlocal' – a concept she'd applied to the magazine to make it into a lifestyle magazine: the artisan ice-cream, loft conversions and suburb profiles and, of course, tasteful gore were selling. In the aftermath of the GFC, *Inside Island* was not only still in print, it was glossier than ever.

I took my coat off; my face felt flushed. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and winced. While at thirty-two my face was still unlined, I had lost some of that apple-cheeked youthfulness and my skin had taken on a slightly sallow tone. My lips were desiccated. I was a ghost in an old coat; in this case, one that had belonged to my mother, which still had the dry-cleaning receipt pinned to it from 1993.

‘How’s everything? How’s RP?’

‘He’s dying and he’s really pissed. The house goes on the market in October.’

There was no way to sugar-coat it. If you’d met my father when he was younger, you’d know that it wasn’t the Alzheimer’s that had damaged the part of his brain that controlled empathy and basic human kindness, but he was especially miserable in care and verbally abused me when I visited.

My main goal was to keep him out of the state facilities. I toured one and the infernal moaning and occasional scream in various dialects, the smell of piss and shit mingling with disinfectant, was enough to make me write a living will.

‘Sounds hard.’ Denise drove her hands across the table to touch mine. It was like they were warm liquid and my hands were a pile of autumn leaves.

‘Thanks.’

We’d worked together for a few years and she’d persisted in inviting me out for weekend brunch, evening drinks, afternoon coffee; I knew she liked me, and it was mutual, but I continued to hold her at a gracious distance. Denise was too canny, too intuitive – too warm. She would melt me.

My cappuccino and cake arrived. I couldn’t really attempt the cake, so I sipped the lukewarm milky coffee, wishing I’d ordered

an Americano. The Ativan had softened the edges of the morning, the lights in the café taking on a romantic glow, but the Adderall was making me drum my fingers on the counter.

‘Erin, I’ll get straight to the point. I’ve got a story for you. It’s short notice for a feature like this, we were going to cover the Bethpage baby beauty pageant scandal, but we’ve had to scrap it.’ Denise leaned forward in her seat. I leaned in automatically, mirroring her – she’d lowered her volume, but her excitement couldn’t be muted.

‘This story – it got emailed to me by some true-crime nut, who actually put your name forward, and even though a few supps writers have tried to claim it, I want you to have it. You’ve heard of the Southport Three, right?’ She said it like you would a punch line. ‘In 1994, a high school senior called Andre Villiers was murdered by his group of friends in Southport, Nassau County ...’

1994. I was sixteen. Words whispered to me by a boy, that I cannot forget, even if I tried to forget the rest: ‘*While in the wild wood I did lie, A child – with the most knowing eye.*’

‘Maybe? Was it something occult and like, very stabby and violent?’ Instead of sounding vague, I’m sure I sounded high, which I was. I could wear my buzz with the best of them, but the truth of the matter was, deception was not my forte. It was my father’s. It was one of the reasons I chose not to be a cop like him. That and I was never going to pass a physical.

‘No to stabby, yes to occult, and hell yes to very violent. It was sixteen years ago, on Halloween, and a satanic murder. You’re from Southport, right, Erin? Were you, like, upstate or under a rock or something at the time?’

‘Under a rock,’ I managed.

‘You must have at least been permanently stoned at the time because it was a *huge* story.’ Denise ran with the pun.

‘I was in Maine. Aunt Marnie didn’t believe in TV.’ I didn’t mention that I was tucked up in a white guest room with excellent linen, like an overmedicated and temporarily compliant injured bird. By the time I returned to New York, post breakdown, it was 1997 and the buzz had died out.

‘Well, it was huge. A very photogenic Satanist by the name of Ricky Hell was the ringleader. He was shot dead on the scene, which was a major bummer, because he was like a star on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine – kind of a nineties Charlie Manson, but better looking. It’s a very sexy case: think Satanism, celebrity lawyers, Geraldo Rivera, an essay in the *New Yorker*, opinion pieces about youth violence, drugs, video games, apathy, blah blah blah.’

She slid her iPad across the table – it was cued to a true crime TV series called *Child’s Play: Kiddie killers*. Klassy. The episode was titled ‘The Devil came to Southport: Ricky Hell and the satanic teen thrill-kill murder of Andre Villiers’.

A beady-eyed man in a nylon suit and oversized spectacles, wearing a beige, old-school trench wandered around a wooded area. I recognised those woods – a mile from the Old Res. He reached a clearing, ‘the spot’, we called it – a ring of stumps that sat like makeshift bar stools; old beer cans and cigarettes, candy wrappers and empty baggies littering the forest floor.

Denise provided me with a voiceover:

‘Andre Villiers was eighteen when he was murdered, same age as Ricky Hell and nearly two years older than Carole Jenkins and Cormac O’Malley. Danny Quinlan-Walsh was seventeen, so he was placed in a secure facility in Westchester, a slap on the wrist,

really. This is the only interview he gave, right before he went nuts and his lawyer told him to stop talking to the press.'

Oh, I remembered. I didn't have the luxury of traumatic amnesia, and the pills I took only wiped out my short-term memory – receipts for impulse purchases I couldn't recall making, packages that appeared at my door, dinners left on the stove. But I remembered all right.

'I'll fast forward to the interview with him.' Denise moved the cursor to 13:13. She sat watching me expectantly.

Danny in a starched Gap shirt; the hot WASP next door, with his long blond hair pulled into a neat ponytail. He looked like he was going to junior prom and not a murder trial, except for the part where he held Satan's horns above his head for one of the reporters. This became an iconic image in 1994. There was a constellation of zits on Danny's usually unblemished face: prison food. Despite that, he was healthy and strapping, a milk-fed, well-nourished middle-class teenager. I heard Danny's unreconstructed Long Island accent for the first time in sixteen years:

I mean, I just don't know how it happened, man. Ricky had a plan and we just did it. He changed form once we got there. We all did. And then it, like, started, and we couldn't stop. There was no stopping. Ricky, he, like, flew up and at the cop like a freakin' crow, and the cop, like, shot him, like: bang, bang, bang and Ricky was shouting: 'Pray for us, Pray for Satan.' And then it was just, game over.

'Game over,' Denise repeated. 'Like Mario Brothers or something.' You could hear the silent 'tsk tsk' of reprimand that followed, but I knew she was thrilled. For someone with a little Zen garden on

her desk and an out-of-office email signature that read *Namaste*, Denise liked true crime and, what's more, she liked gore. Throw in a murdered kid or a killer kid – or better yet, killer kids – and Denise was one happy editor.

Listening to Danny now, I realised that it wasn't a voice numbed by fin de siècle apathy; in fact, his voice crackled with emotion. I wouldn't call it remorse, but disbelief.

The DA remained unconvinced. So was I.

'But for Danny Walsh, it was indeed, game over,' the narrator intoned. 'The church-going quarterback was sentenced to fifteen years in a maximum-security Westchester County facility for the criminally insane.'

Next, a collage of photos of Danny Quinlan-Walsh on the family boat, having lunch with his family. I was there that day; I remember Danny turning his unchristian Megadeth t-shirt inside out for the family photograph, so it was just plain black. Another photo: a sophomore dance photograph and I'm in it – even if my face is blacked out and all you can see of me is my clinging cherry-red velvet dress. His hands around my waist are the size of mallets.

Danny Quinlan-Walsh. The memory of him was like the skin of milk at the top of the bottle, the cream of youth: the smell of clean sweat, menthol cigarettes, double-mint gum. The taste of my own blood. The taste of Danny was in my mouth and I had to remove it. I swallowed my frothy coffee. I gulped down water. Denise watched me with naked curiosity, fluffing her hair up.

'It's cheesy, but you ought to watch it when you get home.' Denise pressed pause. 'After he'd served five years, his sentence was reduced to six years because of diminished capacity and good behaviour. He was twenty-two years old on release, has never

done an interview since. Carole Jenkins served three years in a juvenile facility. Same with her boyfriend, Cormac O'Malley. She wrote a book, *Dancing with the Devil: How I survived a satanic teen murder*. I've bought a copy from AbeBooks. Already on its way to you via FedEx. It was out of print; came out in '98, but by then the buzz around the case died down a bit. There were other crimes on the Island that took over.' They were mainly gun crimes: a sign of the times. A mass shooting on the train; a sniper at my old school, Roosevelt High, who only killed one person, but wounded many. They introduced metal detectors after that.

I remembered that Cormac O'Malley, Carole's semi-permanent boyfriend, had been in my art class, but not much else. I thought about digging up my old yearbooks – except, of course, I'd burned them.

'There's a lot of innuendo surrounding the cop from Queens who shot Ricky Hell. A narco cop called Steve Shearer. Your dad was a cop, right? Did he know him?' Denise scanned me with scientific interest.

Hearing the name Steve Shearer was the mental equivalent of someone running a rusty knife down my spine. I remembered the name. I didn't want to.

'He knew of him.'

'He was Cormac O'Malley's stepfather. He said Ricky Hell was resisting arrest and he aimed for his shoulder but missed, hitting the heart. Despite this injury, Hell continued to resist and was shot in the face. An investigation revealed that it was a fair and lawful shooting – reasonable as opposed to deadly force. Ricky Hell obviously wasn't around to dispute his role as ringleader. He was on hallucinogenic drugs, he was a drug pusher, a Hispanic in an all-white area, and he'd brained a white

kid. There are rumours Shearer had a personal history with Hell but no one investigated the connection further.’ Denise rolled her eyes. ‘And Andre Villiers – I mean, he simply doesn’t feature in any of this. His parents were Jehovah’s Witnesses, I think, and he was in trouble with the law constantly. They condemned him, their own son. A meaningless death and then he sunk, like, without a trace.’

Andre, the victim, was as one-dimensional and unsympathetic in his death as he was in life. It was the only thing about the case that ever made any sense.

‘And Villiers had also been questioned by local police over a missing kid.’ The jangle of Denise’s charm bracelet seemed impossibly loud as she delivered this almost triumphantly. Denise loved missing kids.

I placed my palm on my solar plexus. Breathe. My heart was in my throat. I tried to swallow some of the cake, but it was gritty and a little stale. ‘Which missing kid?’

It turns out a town like Southport yielded a high volume of creeps per square mile – three kids from Southport went missing, two were found on Jones Beach in shallow graves.

‘Cathy Carver. Know about her? Young blonde girl, missing presumed dead since late 1993. The whole case had a touch of the JonBenét about it.’

I nodded. ‘My little sister Michelle was in her sixth-grade class. They were friends.’

Cathy disappeared in October 1993, just months before Mom and Shelly died. She had never been found. I adjusted my scarf and tried to appear cool as I looked up to meet Denise’s laser stare. She could see through a person; easily sniff out a lie from a text or an email, had a kind of instinct that bordered on precognition.

I could tell she wanted more, but she knew that I was stubborn and secretive enough not push the point.

‘Wow. That’s a crazy coincidence. Was Villiers really a suspect, I wonder? And if so, what about the other kids who went missing on the island? Weren’t there a few?’

There were. During the nineties, children weren’t allowed to walk or ride to school. Security systems became more sophisticated. The crimes changed the entire energy of the suburb. Wealthier families – and there were many, particularly on and around the water – hired extra help.

‘Jason Weis went missing before Cathy, in like ’92, but the other boy was later, like 2000, 2001. I think it’s a serial killer type thing, so ...’

‘No, not Andre,’ Denise agreed. ‘So back to Satan allegedly compelling kids to kill in the woods in Southport. I mean, I know you – it’s got your name all over it.’

If she only knew.

All the pieces I had written for *Inside Island* were conversational, informative true-crime stories that engaged with local cultural history and pop culture. I had two unspoken rules: I shied away from homicides, unless they were seriously historical, and I stayed the hell away from my old stamping ground. Now, Denise wanted me to break both rules.

While I had followed the developments in the abductions – leads mentioned in the newspapers always turned out to be dead ends – I had never researched, never even googled anything relating the ill-fated events of the past, the Southport Three and what happened that night in 1994. I never tried to locate old classmates or friends. I knew at the time that none of Andre’s family had spoken to the press (nor had Ricky’s) and that the

public largely believed Ricky murdered Andre as a sacrifice to Satan. Someone had told me years ago about Carole's book. I'd never read it. Denise moved in for the kill – flattering my writerly ego.

‘You grew up there, on the outside looking in. That’s why you write the island so brilliantly. You’re the only one who could write this story. I mean, you’re getting a following. This will cement your reputation as the Ann Rule of *Inside Island*.’

I long had an atavistic knowledge that the past was not going to stay contained forever, but it had managed to sit there, mostly undisturbed, for sixteen years. Now I realised, Southport had been coming for me all this time.