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*To Scottie and Winston Jr,
and their owners*

This is based on a true story ...
... but most of it is yet to happen ...

‘Art is the lie that enables us to realise the truth.’

Pablo Picasso

THE GARDNER MUSEUM HEIST

From start to finish, the biggest art heist in modern history lasted just 81 minutes.

At 1.24 am on 18 March 1990, two men dressed as police officers walked into Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. They overpowered two unsuspecting night security guards, then duct-taped their victims to a pipe and a workbench in the museum basement.

'Gentlemen, this is a robbery,' the criminals announced.

The pair proceeded to remove 13 treasured artworks on display in the lavishly decorated gallery, smashing the protective glass of two Rembrandt paintings and cutting the canvases from their gilded frames. Just over an hour later, the thieves made off with a staggering collection of art that's valued today at \$500 million.

Despite a flurry of press attention – and the \$10 million reward offered by the museum for the items' safe return – the stolen works have never been recovered.

Smithsonian Magazine, 9 April 2021

1

The Farrellys
Belfast, Northern Ireland
2015

Conor Farrelly hoisted both hands to hush the crowd, ignoring the wash of black Guinness he was sloshing over the top of his glass. Standing on top of the long bar, the nuggety entrepreneur surveyed the jam-packed pub, which overflowed with guests and an endless supply of beer. It was a perfect brew for the double celebration – his birthday and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CCNN Group.

At sixty-six years old – one crucial six short of the devil’s number – Conor had made himself into one of the wealthiest men in Northern Ireland. He started CCNN as a small freight operation, but his hard-scrabble drive

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had grown it into a massive conglomerate that spanned international shipping, pharmaceutical production in India, and clothing manufacturing in Bangladesh. Despite this, Conor remained a man of the people, which was why the festivities were in a pub and not the ballroom of a five-star hotel.

‘Niall!’ he shouted over the heads of his guests. ‘Git your arse up here, boyo.’

As the bald, muscled Goliath pushed his way through the crowd, Conor took a swig of Guinness to hoots and cheers. Niall got up on the bar and, towering over his father, was greeted with a hug, and another cheer. He had a shaved, oiled head and, like his father, his face had what the charitable would call *character*. This was mostly due to his large and flattened nose – a trophy from his teenage years, a brawl with the paramilitaries where a loyalist crushed it with a rifle butt.

‘Nessa. You too!’ roared Conor. For Nessa, the shouts and applause were deafening. As Niall sneered, the barkeep gave her some unnecessary help onto the countertop. She stood on the other side of her proud father, who downed the rest of his Guinness, put the glass on the countertop, and wrapped his arms around his children.

Nessa was the same height as her Terminator of a brother, but the similarity ended there. Apart from his pug nose and moustache, Niall’s dark, round face was the spitting image of their late mother Ciara’s, with the same brown eyes and pointy ears, and a cleft chin that on her was charming but which he was notorious for jabbing at people with ‘Go on ... Hit me, ya shite, and see what happens to ya.’ Niall had his father’s brawn but lacked his parents’ and his sister’s brains. He was a ticking time bomb with an explosive temper, no

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matter how much money Conor threw at anger management and every other kind of counselling.

Nessa was a taller, more willowy version of her stocky father, with fair skin and penetrating blue eyes. Her disarming heart-shaped face – capped with a mop of black hair so wild it made her seem easygoing – meant that most people severely underestimated her the first time they met.

Only Conor could read Nessa. It infuriated Niall that his father was more like his twin than he was, not only in looks but in temperament and intellect. He fumed when they finished each other's sentences or supported each other's ideas, but rarely his. Unlike Niall, who would blurt the first thought that popped into his head, Nessa took her time answering questions, often causing him to slam a fist on a table, or stamp his foot and charge out of a room. But Nessa could be as volatile as her brother when it suited her. It made for torrid family gatherings as well as board meetings since the three, after Ciara's death, were CCNN's only directors.

Conor could sense the tension mounting in Niall, so he pulled him closer, in a warning to behave, and pushed on with a shout, 'If you're enough lucky to be Irish ... you're lucky enough.' The crowd erupted in roars of 'Dead on' and 'Too right'. Then Conor called out, 'Who ever thought the Farrellys would come this far?' Applause, shouts and stomping filled the pub.

Conor had come a long way indeed, but most of those present knew only a small part of it. The legal part.

Until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 ended the Northern Ireland conflict, Conor was the Provisional Irish Republican Army's secret head of 'Transport', effectively in charge of its arms smuggling operations. Fundraising

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was also part of his job, although he wasn't collecting cheques at parties in tony New York City brownstones or Chicago town houses. Conor was an ambitious, small-time, down and dirty *gombeen*, who branched out into running drugs in London. That line of business, a sure-fire money-spinner, came with a handy sweetener ... the corruption of British youth.

Only a few of those present were aware of the fraught circumstances of the twins' birth in Lisburn, a little southwest of Belfast. How Ciara's waters broke while she was driving getaway in a stolen Ford Escort van, just after Conor shot a British soldier in the face. She pulled over into a bombed factory and hopped into the back of the van, where Conor pushed aside the guns, Molotov cocktails and cans of petrol, and delivered their babies himself.

Scuttlebutt had raged for years that CCNN was involved in more than was publicly disclosed. Nothing was ever proved and it wasn't likely to be. Every time an allegation was printed in a media outlet, Conor would instantly swing out with a fierce right-hook libel suit that sent the proprietor and the offending journalist reeling. If it didn't, some of his 'boys' would pay a visit. As time wore on, the stories stopped. No one inclined to follow any leads was left standing. For good measure, Conor also maintained a close and cordial relationship with the local constabulary. Bygones, it seemed, were easily bought.

'Friends,' said Conor, holding up his glass again. 'A smart man goes before he loses it, so tonight I'm announcin' my retirement.'

The crowd, including Nessa and Niall, took in a sudden deep breath, like a single organism.

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‘My successor to take the reins as chief executive of CCNN is ...’ and he turned briefly to Niall, who pasted an enormous smile on his enormous face, ‘... my daughter Nessa, and Niall here will be her deputy.’

Nessa flushed a deep red, and if Niall was a keg, he would have exploded. If it wasn’t at first obvious to the audience that Conor hadn’t discussed the plan with his family, it became crystal clear when the son threw off his father’s arm, leapt off the bar, and shouldered his way through the crowd and out into the night.

2

JJ Jego
Sydney, Australia
2015

My parents – Lauren and Hugh Jego – only had one clash in their twenty-seven years together, one that lasted their entire marriage.

After putting up with Hugh’s ... well, Hugh’s everything ... Lauren finally walked out on him. It was on 1 January 2014. *A new year and a new life*, I heard through her sobs when she phoned to tell me.

Yet, so soon after her ‘liberation’, as she called it, here we are in a hospital though, in her case, she’s barely here.

Hugh, her husband – they never got divorced – isn’t here.

Of course he’s not.

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Tears cascade down my cheeks, filling the dimple in my chin and dripping onto her pillow, grey splotches spreading across the white cotton. It's less than two years after they separated, and four months after she got the diagnosis ... stage four pancreatic cancer.

Did Hugh come running, like any decent human being would? No. He didn't even contact her. Not even a measly text.

For twenty-seven years she'd been devoted to the prickly narcissist, giving up her career in fashion to pander to his every want. She cooked for him, cleaned up for him, cleaned up after him, and apologised for him when he offended people – which was most of the time. Yet, because *she* had the audacity to leave *him*, he snapped his fingers and magicked her into a nothing, a footnote in his history.

I can almost hear his thoughts. *How could she walk out on me, a genius who knows better than everybody else, God's gift to the police force?*

The truth is that Lauren was an angel to have stayed with Hugh so long. Some people would blame her for not leaving him earlier, but they hadn't spent decades as a victim of his vainglory and Machiavellian flair for manipulation. We both kidded ourselves that we went along with Hugh's wishes – a euphemism for 'demands' – out of love. There was some love, for sure, but mostly there was fear ... a Mount Everest of fear, and we had no Sherpas to help us navigate it. There was no physical abuse. But if we'd known today's language for what Hugh put us through – coercive control, psychological trauma – both our lives might have been different. Better.

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In my eighteen years under their roof, I struggled with what Hugh did to us. When mean kids at school found out he was a cop, they'd say, 'My dad can still beat up your dad,' and I'd clasp my hands and politely say, 'Please.'

To people who lived outside our suffocating four walls, Hugh was sweet and charming, kind of like Prince Harry before he met Meghan Markle. Eventually, though, if they committed the crime of laughing at the wrong time or daring to disagree with him over something – no matter how trivial – they'd watch his Mr Nice Guy mask drip away to reveal the trademark sneer my mother and I wished we'd never seen.

One time, a fellow detective came over for high tea, a speciality of Lauren's. She presented it on the faux Limoges china she'd bought at the op shop, and Hugh had made her pipe her famous cupcakes with icing that spelled our surname, *Jego*. When Hugh went to the bathroom and Lauren was in the kitchen, the detective, with a cheeky look, held up one of the cakes and told me my father's nickname at work, 'Huge Ego'. I laughed so much I got a stitch, though I made sure it wasn't loud enough for Hugh to hear me through the door.

In my last year at high school, Hugh went undercover and we didn't see him for months. Frankly, it was bliss at home, and probably the reason I blitzed the HSC and won a scholarship to art school. But when the operation was over, we found out he'd almost single-handedly broken up a notorious drug ring, which included senior police. The trials of Mr Big and Detective Inspector Bigger made front-page news for weeks. Hugh, referred to only as Witness G6, gave the crucial evidence that sent them all down but he had to do it from behind a screen, and Lauren

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and I were forbidden from telling a soul it was him. It was the first and only time I was actually proud of my father, and I had to bottle it up.

During the sting, he'd got hooked on crystal meth, and after the criminals were sent down, the force put him on extended leave and sent him to rehab. Hugh came home 'cured', but was even more insufferable than before, not least because he was denied the celebrity he so obviously craved.

The sad thing is that all that drama gave Lauren yet another reason to stay, even when I told her I was going. 'You go,' she said, meaning it. 'But how can I leave him after what the poor man's put himself through?'

Me, though, I slammed the door on Hugh as soon as I finished my final exams and, apart from a chance run-in – at the National Gallery in Canberra in 2010 – I haven't seen him since.

*

'We've just landed in Sydney,' I whispered to the nurse an hour ago, surreptitiously, under my sweater. It was before the cabin crew announced we were free to use our phones.

Being sneaky while crammed in economy – or coach or tourist, or whatever the back of the plane is called these days – isn't easy. Especially when you're in the centre seat of three, with a hulk of a man on one side, so well upholstered I couldn't see the window past him even if I leaned forward. On my other side, a tall, gawky teenager who was so sprawly that 'shared armrest' clearly meant 'his'.

Because of my mother's decline, I'd actually said no to this work trip, a four-day Van Gogh conference in

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Amsterdam – all expenses paid by my employer, the Art Gallery of New South Wales – but she'd insisted. 'It's good for your career and, besides, you'll only be gone a week.' The hospital staff had told me she was stable, that it was safe to go, and promised to call me if anything changed.

That happened yesterday, on day two of the conference, right in the middle of an eye-opening talk by an Italian expert, Francesca Rossi, on 'The Degradation Process of Chrome Yellow in Paintings by Vincent van Gogh Studied by Means of Synchrotron X-ray Spectromicroscopy'. After quietly apologising to everyone around me, I ran out of the conference room, grabbed my bag from the hotel, leapt into a cab and changed my return flight as we sped to Schiphol Airport.

'Thank heavens you've made it home,' said the nurse. 'Come straight to the hospital. No detours. Do you understand what I'm telling you, JJ?'

*

Everyone calls me JJ. It's short for Justine Jégo, pronounced Jaygo. This is because, four generations ago, it was Jégo when our people lived in Arles, in the south of France. Hugh bestowed my full name on me, in all its toe-curling glory. Needless to say, he put it on my birth certificate without asking Mum.

The only times I'd be willing to give my full name to anyone is if I was being waterboarded or if I've got to comply with some government requirement, which can be much the same thing. I got more than a lifetime's ribbing in Year 3 after my teacher, Miss Fox, asked about it in

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front of the whole class. ‘Justine Vincent van Gogh Jego. That’s a fascinating name, JJ. Can you tell us about it?’

I shrank into my seat, making myself even smaller than I was.

It’s why I’ve gone with JJ my whole life. Even – or especially – in my career as an art conservator, I’ve concealed my full name better than Caravaggio’s miniature self-portrait in his painting *Bacchus*. That’s the one he camouflaged in a carafe that virtually every art teacher makes a big song and dance about revealing to newbies in Art History 101.

I raced off the plane, and charged through the airport to the taxi rank as fast as my short legs, cabin-sized wheelee bag, ever-present camera flying on its strap behind me, and border control protocols allowed.

Carrying an almost empty Australian passport helped. No stamps from Syria, Somalia or any hotspots and just the two for Amsterdam, three years apart. From my passport photo, or even in real life, people would probably say I’m pretty average looking. That’s if you ignore my flaming red hair and my lack of height. I come in at five foot, child inches. Kind of like Lady Gaga in a red wig, but without her heels, looks or talent.

Hugh used to tell me I was so small that if I’d been born in winter I wouldn’t have made it through. He frequently saddled me with reminders like ‘Tiny silhouette, tiny brain,’ even before I knew what a silhouette was. Poring through a dictionary to find out was no easy feat for a dyslexic, making it even easier for Hugh to enjoy ‘proving’ his put-downs.

Dyslexia did have a good side. While reading is tough for me, even today – thank heavens for audiobooks and

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text-to-speech buttons – images have always come easily. Hence, art became my refuge. Initially, my passion was for photography. Ultimately, it led to my job as a conservator.

Unsurprisingly, given our family's Van Gogh connection, my love of art was the one thing about me that Hugh was happy about. His full name is similar to mine – Hugh Vincent van Gogh Jégo – but, unlike me, he boasts about it. Yes, I can still hear him intoning on automatic pilot, *I am indeed related to the great artist. I'm his great-grandson, actually.*

Sometimes he'd add, *And see my red hair, and my daughter's? Just like Vincent's.*

As if our hair colour proves a thing, especially when a cousin on my mother's side has red hair too.

Hugh's greatest frustration is that his – our – lineage is unacknowledged. There's not a single mention of any Jégo, or Jégo, in the official Van Gogh family history, and the recognised relatives, all descendants of Vincent's brother Theo, won't engage on it.

Hugh used to write to them, initially via the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam which houses the works the family transferred to the state-sponsored Vincent van Gogh Foundation. It's where I did a secondment four years ago, and where I went for the conference and, no, I didn't reveal my full name on either occasion.

Hugh wrote to them every year on the anniversary of Vincent's death. Always the same letter. *If you really want to honour Vincent, you'll arrange for one of his brother Theo's descendants to join me in a DNA test. That will prove we're related.*

They did respond once, years ago, offering to take the test but on the strict condition that Hugh first sign away any claims we had on the Van Gogh estate. He was

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incensed and, when I got old enough to understand, it was one of the few times I was on his side. Given our Jégo family folklore, why should we give up our rights?

Over the years, there's been all sorts of speculation as to why, on 23 December 1888, Vincent went nuts and sliced off the lower part of his left ear with a razor. There's a book about it called *Van Gogh's Ear: The True Story*, except it isn't the true story.

The *real* true story – so says our family – is that he only did it after my great-great-grandmother, Madame Marie Claire Jégo, a married and generally respectable woman in Arles, popped by the Yellow House, where Vincent lived, and revealed that she was pregnant.

To him.

A child was the last thing the penniless artist with a precarious mental condition wanted. Hence the ear, and the stint in the asylum that came soon afterwards.

Eighteen months later, in July 1890, when Vincent got a letter from Marie Claire telling him about their little boy, he shot himself. He died two days later.

Vincent is renowned not only as a brilliant artist but also a prolific letter writer. So, when Hugh told people our story, they'd often ask how it was possible that not a single one of the hundreds of letters Vincent wrote to Theo made even a fleeting reference to Marie Claire Jégo or their baby. And it's true ... they don't. I'm so sure of it because when I did my Amsterdam secondment, I had access to the digitised files – before the letters were posted on the website – and I did a Google search trawling for even the barest mention.

According to Hugh, and his father before him, there were indeed letters between the Van Gogh brothers that

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referred to the pregnancy and the baby, and also letters between Vincent and Marie Claire. But after Vincent's death, and Theo's own death six months later, from syphilis, Theo's widow began to champion Vincent's work. The idea that Vincent had an heir, let alone one who might make a claim on his estate, did not suit the narrative she spent the rest of her life spinning. She got Marie Claire to sign, in today's parlance, a blatant gag agreement. She paid her off, buying both her silence *and* her letters. She then burned every letter, Marie Claire's, Vincent's and Theo's, that referred to the affair or to the baby.

Hugh gets enraged every time he tells the story. Me, while I understand how he feels, I'm relaxed about it. History is messy.

*

What I'm not okay with – and never will be – is how Hugh treated my mother.

Lauren's hand stirs inside mine, and I squeeze it gingerly. 'JJ,' she croaks, 'Promise me one thing.'

I move in closer, my forehead lightly kissing hers.

'Anything,' I tell her.

'Promise me you won't let your father come to my funeral.'

3

Claude Fontaine
Monte Carlo, Monaco
2020

The penthouse-floor boardroom at the law offices of Fontaine & Fontaine was big enough to house two squash courts and, once, it did. That was before the firm's founder, Jacques Fontaine, bought the whole building, gutted it and, on this floor, tore down the exterior wall to install a metres-long floor-to-ceiling window.

Jacques had a good eye for value. He knew back then that opening up his main conference room to this postcard-perfect view over the famous Port Hercules marina and the Monaco Grand Prix finish line meant he would more easily get away with whacking big premiums on top of his firm's already stratospheric fees. The squash courts'

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hardwood floor became plush beige carpet, and he made the new boardroom grand enough to house a huge single-slab table of pink Italian marble and thirty capacious black-leather-backed armchairs spread around it.

Despite the steep outlay, the office had barely been used in the past few months. Even today only a skeleton staff were in, the majority teleworking from wherever. One partner, for example, picked up sticks as soon as Covid-19 struck and moved his family to their holiday house in Malta. He hadn't left the island since. Whenever Claude Fontaine, Jacques' only child and his successor as senior partner, asked the émigré how he was doing, he'd say, 'Time simply Zooms by.' Claude was growing to despise him.

The good news was that Monaco's lockdowns and curfews had ended, at least for now, though the principality was still cautious, mandating masks in public and social distancing in private.

Claude, the newly minted senior partner, the '& Fontaine' in the logo screwed into the wall, was one of the handful who still came into the office every day. This practice felt crucial now that Jacques, until recently a towering presence, could no longer manage it.

It was the tail end of Claude's first week as senior partner. Jacques' incipient dementia and his increasingly frequent episodes of forgetfulness and awkward, random spouting of client business had reached the point where the other partners gave Claude an ultimatum ... either step into Jacques' shoes, and sit at his desk, take over his clients and send him where he could do no harm, or they'd quit. Claude had no choice, so Jacques was now at home, cared for by the same round-the-clock team who had looked after his late wife Gisèle during her own decline.

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It was a sad ending for Jacques. Under his leadership and with Claude's support, Fontaine & Fontaine had grown into a full-service firm that quietly boasted a client list of some of the world's super-rich ... tech magnates, private equity tycoons, and two famously competitive global media moguls, who, to Claude's surprise, were as chummy as a pair of Speedos when they'd once sat together in this boardroom. While the firm's clients were a veritable *Who's Who* of the rich and famous, Jacques had drawn the line at Russian oligarchs. Not one had ever darkened the firm's doors.

Jacques had started the firm in a shoebox of an office, doing 'international tax planning and corporate administration' for his very first client, Conor Farrelly. In the more freewheeling 1990s, tax planning and administration were code for plain and simple tax avoidance or, without the sugar-coating, tax fraud. Today, Fontaines still did tax law – what firm in Monaco didn't? – but the work also spanned contracts, construction, finance, corporate law, intellectual property and more.

The Fontaine and Farrelly families had risen together, though Jacques always kept CCNN's work close to his chest, and the Farrellys themselves even closer. Jacques had never introduced Claude – or any other partner – to Conor before he died. He also hadn't introduced anyone from Fontaines to Conor's successors, not that Claude minded. There were plenty of other clients to look after and, besides, with the Farrellys regularly delivering twenty per cent of the firm's billings via Jacques, Claude and the other partners felt he could do what he liked.

Now, though, Nessa and Niall, the thirty-five-year-old Farrelly heirs, had flown in from Belfast with no

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warning. Given the Jacques situation, Claude was intent on giving full attention to the twins whether they had an appointment or not.

Nessa's suit, the lawyer observed, didn't scream money like the clothes of some of their other clients, who wanted everyone to see how rich they were, even from a distance. It was a no-nonsense elegant trouser suit, grey compared to Claude's black though with no collared shirt, instead with a white silk blouse. Nessa's outfit plus her hair, black and shiny but unkempt, suggested a woman who was practical and direct.

The receptionist indicated for the Farrellys to take their seats on the 'good' side of the boardroom table, where clients always sat opposite their lawyers. Ostensibly, it was so they'd enjoy the panoramic view, but it was also to bring the light streaming into their eyes so the lawyers would have the advantage. As Nessa brushed past, a head taller than the lawyer and literally looking down her nose, Claude could almost smell the woman's disdain.

Niall came across as a rough, nasty piece of work, equally tall but a muscled skinhead. A pumper of steroids as much as iron, Claude thought and, without knowing much Irish, the word *gobshite* came to mind. Niall swaggered to his seat in his *I don't give a crap* clothing, a pair of ripped-knee blue jeans, and a loose-fitting, distressed black leather jacket over a too-tight white T-shirt, with loud fluoro-green Nikes on his feet.

Claude intuited that while Niall was trouble, it was super-cool Nessa who was the one to watch out for. Niall might throw the punches but she'd be the one to land them.

As soon as Niall sat down, he put his Ray-Bans on and, before Claude could utter a word, said, 'You could start off

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by thankin' us Farrellys for payin' for a fair whack of your feckin' view.'

Claude knew not to respond. Niall looked down at his hands, picked dirt from under his fingernails and flicked it onto the table. Nessa reached over to push her brother's hands into his lap, where Claude couldn't see them.

'Claude,' Niall said, looking up again. 'What kind of name is that?'

'Huh?' the lawyer blurted.

'Enough, Niall,' said Nessa. To Claude, she said, 'Your father knows everythin' about our business affairs ... feckin' everythin'. What we conduct through CCNN and the stuff we do, you know, outside of it.'

'And?' said Claude, ambiguously but with a smile the lawyer hoped covered up a total ignorance of what they were talking about. Over the years, there had been rumours of underworld connections, but Jacques swore he knew nothing about them and only did legit work for legit clients.

'*And?* you say,' Niall shot back. 'Nice one, Claude. We Farrellys have done a lot of business with your old man Jacko, and that "retirement" bullshit you wrote us about in your "Dear Sir/Madam" form letter – when you shoulda picked up the feckin' phone – that don't cut it with us.'

A word like feck – let alone fuck – was a rarity in the hallowed halls of Fontaine & Fontaine, yet in their first minute there Niall and Nessa were brandishing it like a fist. Claude wanted to give them a disgusted stare but was smart enough to blink it away.

'Way we hear it,' Niall continued, 'your Jacko's eejit mouth been spoutin' stuff it shouldna to people who shouldna be hearin' it.'

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Sadly, Claude knew what he was saying was true. Jacques' decay had accelerated rapidly. Only yesterday, when Jacques was speaking to his chief nurse at home, he called her by the first name of another significant client – a household-name tech multibillionaire – and started revealing details of how they'd shifted profits tax-free through Nevis in the Caribbean, back through Bermuda and, finally, through Lichtenstein to Ireland. It was all perfectly legal but if it got into the public domain or leaked like the Panama Papers did, the anti-corporate activists would have a field day.

'Old Jacko's loose lips worry the shite out of us, and the Farrellys don't like worryin'.'

Nessa cut in. 'You don't have a clue what Niall's talkin' about, do you? Jacques never tell you about our, em, shadow business?'

'For sure he didn't, Nessie,' said Niall. 'He weren't meant to tell no one.'

The 5000-euro ergonomic leather chair Claude was sitting on suddenly felt like it was embedded with razor blades. *This 'shadow' business? Is that a euphemism for shady or criminal?*

If, as Claude suspected, the Farrellys were embroiled in truly nefarious activities and Jacques knew about them, or worse, facilitated them, it could destroy the firm. Claude knew to remain in a state of ignorance, not a totally foreign situation for a lawyer. That way, a dose of plausible deniability mixed with a timely shot of shock might just save the day.

Claude's doomsday thoughts got interrupted when Niall, clearly sick of waiting for a response to Nessa's question, said, 'We got lawyer-client privilege here, don't

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we? You know ... like, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas?’

Claude nodded, even though the proposition was only partially correct. Client privilege did not protect communications when they facilitated the commission of a crime or, as the lawyer was starting to suspect, crimes. Claude knew Niall would not want to hear that, so stayed silent.

Nessa stood up and strutted around the table, almost pressing herself up to the glass and looking out at the panorama, forcing Claude to swing around in the chair. The Mediterranean’s languid late afternoon sun was spilling into the room low and long, yet strongly enough to light up the sparkles scattered through Nessa’s wild black hair. Claude hadn’t noticed them before. Ms Farrelly wasn’t as understated a woman as Fontaine had first thought.

‘Those yachts out there,’ said Nessa, looking out over the harbour. ‘One of them yours?’

No was the strictly correct but misleading answer. Claude didn’t own a yacht anywhere. But Jacques’ pride and joy – redefining ostentation as an understatement – was indeed berthed at the exclusive Yacht Club de Monaco nearby. It was a forty-five-metre super yacht that when Jacques wasn’t using her for client entertainment, was chartered out at 170,000 euros a week in the high season. Instead of answering, Claude stared at the back of Nessa’s head and said, ‘You didn’t travel all the way here to discuss boats.’

Nessa swivelled around on her heels and held Claude’s gaze, sizing up the firm’s senior partner for what seemed an hour but was less than a minute. ‘So the lawyer *can* speak. How about that, Niall?’ she said eventually. ‘And

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wow! Froggie's got a big plummy English accent. Daddy sent you to boarding school in Old Blighty, did he?' It was true. 'But who gives a shite about that,' Nessa continued, sitting back in her seat. 'You're right. We didn't come here to talk boats. We're here to talk about art.'