

Irish Eyes

Crime tales from the Emerald Isle

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

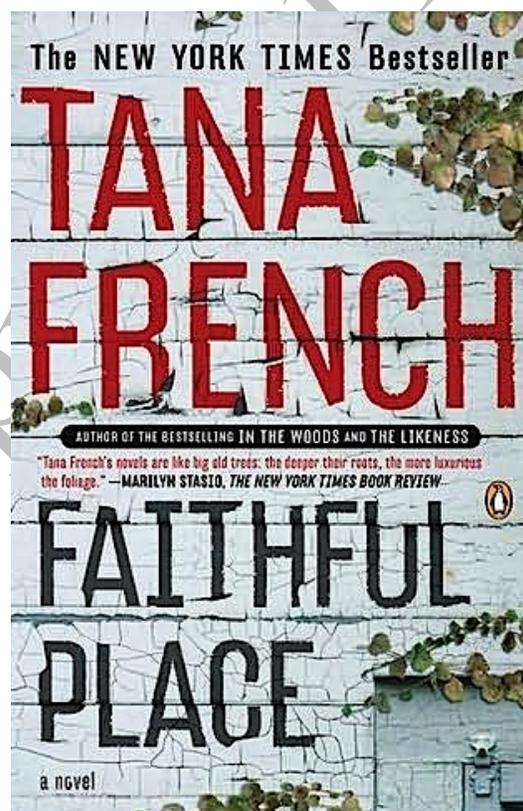
Just in case you haven't had your fill of things Irish, this week's review celebrates some of the best in contemporary crime fiction from the Emerald Isle. There are indeed, Irish Eyes—of the private eye variety—and police detectives as well. But be warned: this isn't your granny's Ireland. There are no mischievous leprechauns here, and precious few verdant hills. The streets are mean, the stories dark, and St. Patrick notwithstanding, it seems that not all of the snakes have been driven out of Ireland.

Tana French, *Faithful Place*
(Hodder & Stoughton, 2010)

One of the strongest crime writers to emerge in a very long time, Tana French is quickly making a name for herself worldwide. The Dublin-based author has published just three novels to date, and each has been a ground-breaker, earning both critical and popular acclaim. Her debut novel, *In the Woods*, won her Edgar, Anthony, Barry and Macavity Awards, and her most recent, *Faithful Place*, has just been shortlisted for another Edgar, for best crime novel of 2010. She is scary good.

Faithful Place centers on Frank Mackey, an undercover cop, and his more-than-dysfunctional family. Divorced and estranged from his parents and siblings, he returns to the neighbourhood of his childhood when a suitcase is found belonging to a girl he'd planned to run

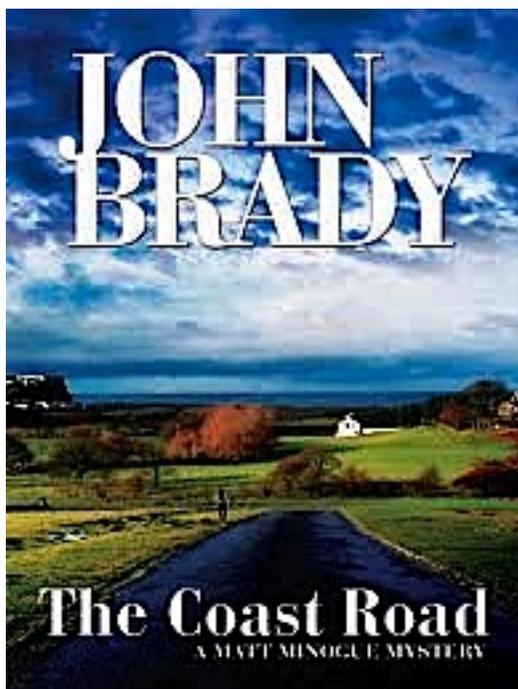
away with two decades earlier. She hadn't met with him as planned that fateful night, simply vanishing from the



face of the earth. All these years later, after Frank Mackey had married, had a child, and divorced, he continues to wonder why she never showed. The suitcase contains Rosie's birth certificate and ferry tickets to England, things she would not have willingly left behind. Prevented from taking a direct role in the investigation, Mackey nonetheless finds himself immersed in the simmering cauldron that defines his old neighbourhood,

and he cannot help but reopen old wounds, heighten sibling rivalries, and expose a terrible, corrosive secret that will forever change his life.

A superb stylist, French is Ireland's answer to Ian Rankin, and an author to savour. Told in the first person, *Faithful Place* is a fine, taut tale that will send you to the bookshop in search of her earlier works.



John Brady, *The Coast Road*
(MacArthur & Co., 2010)

An old hand at crime writing, Irish-born (now Canadian) author John Brady has penned nearly a dozen novels featuring Inspector Matt Minogue. His debut novel, *A Stone of the Heart*, won Canada's 1989 Arthur Ellis Award for Best First Novel, and *Islandbridge*, released in 2005, was shortlisted for the Dashiell Hammett Award. In *The Coast Road* Ireland's economy is on the skids. While investigating a cold case Minogue and his short-tempered partner Tommy Malone are told to turn their torch on the murder of Pdraig Larkin, a well-known

mentally-impaired homeless man who has been found beaten to death in a suburban park. There is public resentment that the case is being ignored, whipped up by a well-connected and overbearing nun, used to the Church having its way. What are her motives, and what really happened that fateful night? Larkin may have witnessed a drug deal going down, or have simply been in the wrong place, the victim of out-of-control youths who roam the city. Or was it something else entirely?

The past, it seems, is never far away in Ireland. Insightful and atmospheric, and as much a reflection on a nation in transition as a tale about a specific event, John Brady nails the soul of his birthplace. There are no weak point in his narrative: fully-developed characters, crackling dialogue, evocative settings and in-your-face action come together in a compelling mix that will leave you wondering why you haven't heard of Brady before.

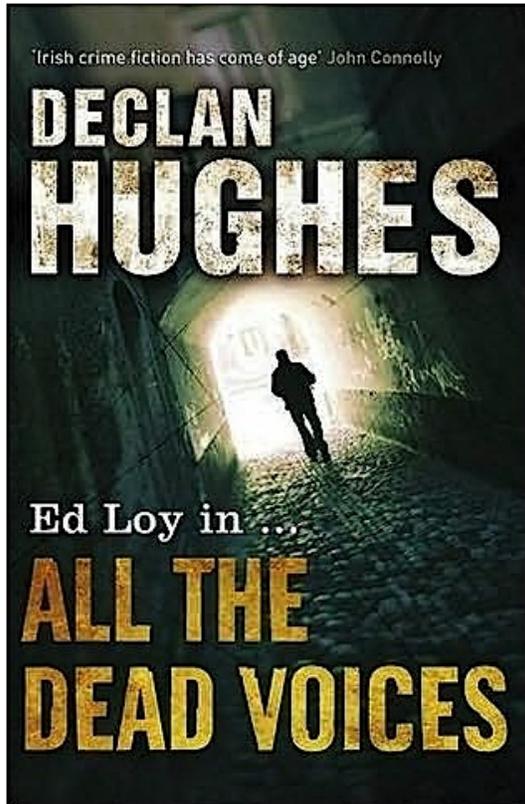
Declan Hughes,
All the Dead Voices

(John Murray/Hachette UK, 2010)

After working in Los Angeles for several years, PI Ed Loy returned to Dublin to bury his mother and, despite other plans, has remained there. It is a decision that continues to trouble him:

There's a reckoning you can make with history, a reasonable settlement that makes demands but leaves you with your dignity. And then there's a kind of morbid fascination that borders on obsession, a grave-robbing disorder that fills your every waking moment with memories and echoes and dust. Something like that had gotten a hold of me...

Now, however, business is thriving and the present promises to replace the past. Loy's been hired to watch over Paul Delany, a rising young soccer star. When there is a very public attempt on Delany's life Loy tries to sort out why someone would want the likeable young athlete dead. When the next attempt is successful, Loy resolves to get his killer.



Adding to Loy's workload is a cold case involving the fifteen-year-old murder of a government tax inspector. The victim's daughter is not satisfied with the original inquiry, and she asks Loy to conduct his own investigation. His efforts soon centre on three suspects: Bobby Doyle, a wealthy property developer with links to Sinn Fein, George Hallighan, a Dublin-based underworld czar, and Jack Cullen, an ex-IRA terrorist. Loy must navigate his way carefully between the Garda, who are protecting their own handling of the case, and some very dangerous movers

and shakers of the Dublin underworld dating back to the time of the Troubles. The two cases will come together in a way that makes for riveting reading.

Hughes was nominated for a CWA New Blood dagger and won a Shamus Award for his debut novel, *The Wrong Kind of Blood*. He followed that with both Edgar and Macavity Awards for 2008's *The Dying Breed*. The fourth in a very strong series of noir stories featuring loner Ed Loy, *All the Dead Voices* skillfully combines the past with the present in a gritty, layered tale where things are never quite what they seem and the past simply refuses to remain buried. Hughes' novels are a tantalising mix of fresh characters, graphic dialogue, and page-turning suspense that places him in the top tier of Irish crime writers.

So there you have it: a trio of tales, all deftly written, that do the Irish literary tradition proud. Enjoy!

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