

# **Gabriel Aidan Faulkner**

## **THE TWO**

**The Faith that Kills**



*Explode and tear this whole town apart, take a knife and cut the pain from my heart*

Bruce Springsteen, The Promised Land

*There is no perfection only life*

Milan Kundera

*Freedom is what we do with what is done to us*

Jean-Paul Sartre

**Part One**

## Chapter One

The incandescent sky, the glistening sun heady in its baptismal essence, darkens brutally as the rampaging clouds renew their timeless quest, and then the sunlight fractures the nebulous breath once more, piercing its side in the resurrective essence.

Saoirse holds his hand as they walk along the beach with the waves slowly coming in to reclaim their abandoned sands. She smiles, starts to run with Daniel sprinting next to her, stooping down so as not to let go of her hand.

He laughs, watching her stumble and fall over into the sand. A collapsing elegance. He picks her up, dusts her off and puts her onto his shoulders. She grabs his long, dishevelled hair, wraps both her arms around his streaming, ragged beard. And then he begins running towards the incoming waves suddenly tripping and falling onto his knees as Saoirse tightens her grip on his beard. He succeeds in not becoming fractured and fragmented whilst Saoirse roars with laughter imagining that her father has stage-managed the fall.

“That was funny Daddy,” she laughs, dismounting from her father’s crestfallen shoulders. She walks towards the approaching waves, bending down, gathering up some water in her slender hands and attempting to shower her father. He takes cover, runs towards her, picks her up and feigns throwing her into the sea. She laughs, urging him to put her down. He does so but then advances an incoming wave, taking up some water into his hands and holding it above Saoirse’s head. She closes her eyes as he allows a few drops to fall out and christen her head. She laughs, scooping up some water herself and launching it in his direction. As he runs away, she starts after him but loses the water from her cupped hands. By the time he slows down, her hands are empty, her face tinged in disappointment.

“That’s OK Saoirse, you’ll do better next time,” he reassures, smiling consolingly.

“You always say that,” protests Saoirse, frowning, her eyes glaring.

“Believe me, you will do better next time. It’s always like that.”

He picks her up, lifting her onto his shoulders and heads back towards the promenade. As he walks slowly, he looks over to his left and the large cliff shadowed in the emerging daylight.

Daniel returns to the car, sitting Saoirse on the front seat, taking care to fit the seat belt. He then gets in behind the wheel, starts the engine and slowly pulls away from the beach. Driving through the town, he looks up at the beautiful blue sky with the shimmering sunlight beaming down upon the road.

Upon arriving home, he undoes Saoirse's safety belt and gives her the key to the house. She runs towards the front door that she gleefully opens. Daniel watches her dart inside, following her in. Just as he closes the door, his mobile phone starts ringing. He looks at the number on the screen and understands.

"I can't talk to you for long..." begins a hesitant voice, its frailty barely masking the underlying, resonant fear. The voice resurrects that distant overpowering indescribable fear, entombed within Daniel's subconscious, unleashed brutally into the breathing present.

"What is it?" questions Daniel, his voice echoing the trepidation.

"They're on to you."

The caller hangs up. Daniel puts the phone back inside his pocket. Momentarily ensnared in the emerging images of his past, he endeavours to shut them out, closing his eyes and inhaling deeply. Opening his eyes, his mind clears in the awakening horror.

He runs up the stairs. There he takes the two suitcases that he keeps packed for every such occurrence. He races down the stairs with both cases as Saoirse comes out of the kitchen, holding a glass of milk. She looks at the two suitcases and understands immediately. Letting go of the glass and oblivious to the sound of shattering, she follows her father out as he places both suitcases inside the boot of the car. She instinctively gets into the front of the car, buckling her seat belt as her father starts the engine and pulls away from the house.

"Where are we going this time Daddy?" she enquires, her voice tinged in confusion and apprehension.

"I don't know yet. I have a friend down in the mountains. You've never seen the mountains have you Saoirse?"

"No."

"Would you like to see the mountains?"

"I want to stop moving all the time," exclaims Saoirse in protest, crossing her arms maniacally. Daniel observes her tenderly, smiling and offering her one hand that she grasps tightly as he keeps his other hand on the steering wheel.

"I know you do and so do I. But we have to keep moving for the moment," he asserts calmly, holding her hand firmly.

"But how long for?" pleads Saoirse.

"I don't know," responds Daniel almost disconsolately. He looks back at her fleetingly before once more averting her torrid gaze.

Saoirse suddenly starts crying. The awakening self-hatred consumes Daniel once more. He turns to look at her just as he has done every other time before turning back to face the road.

“It’s going to be OK Saoirse,” he declares as he pulls her hand closer, clasping it securely.

“You say that every time and it’s never OK,” remonstrates Saoirse

“This time it will be better. I promise.”

“But you always promise.”

Her voice unleashes a stream of images, swirling within the vortex of his subconscious, Grace surging forwards, sensuously, sensually, whispering to him but he cannot understand what she is saying.

He closes his eyes.

The darkness purges once more. “I know, I know. But we don’t have the choice for the moment, we have to leave.”

“You never tell me why!” she objects.

“When you’re old enough I will. I promise.” Daniel does not turn to face his daughter.

“And when will that be?”

Daniel turns to look at Saoirse. “Probably very soon,” he whispers reassuringly.

“It’s because of Mummy isn’t it?” questions Saoirse.

The silence overwhelms once more, mournful yet cathartic.

Daniel is instantly hauled back into his labyrinthine past. He glimpses Saoirse’s reddened eyes, their distinctive green momentarily indistinct.

“It’s not because of Mummy,” he whispers, seeking desperately to reassure her. He watches the tears stream down her cheeks, turns to offer her a comforting look before spinning back to concentrate on the road.

He wipes away his own tears. The rain elegiacally spattering the windscreen and the darkness labyrinthine.

## Chapter Two

On a cold Christmas winter day, they lowered her into the ground as he contemplated vacuously the emptiness of where the coffin had stood, holding Saoirse firmly in his arms, fighting back the tears.

That is something he promised he would not do. Not in public. Not in front of them.

As he watched the coffin engulfed by the ground, the congregation strode past him and Saoirse and presented their condolences. He looked into the eyes of every one of them, trusting none and asking himself if they had been involved. Yet in their eyes, he could see nothing but the renewal of that overwhelming sadness steeped in the continuity of the past. And there also stirred that festering anger that he now himself incarnated.

He observed Saoirse lovingly. She looked up at him, beaming laughingly. Her angelic baby face white with the cold of the mourning day. He smiled back then looked down to where the coffin now rested elegiacally. He moved forwards, positioning a rose, touched the coffin with his hands before turning away. Claspng Saoirse closer to him, he marched out of the cemetery. Not once did he turn around to address the mourners, abandoning the cemetery in the silence of his lament.

“Where are you going?” The impetuous man asked, the voice irascible as he reached out to grab Daniel’s arm. He glared at him irreverently, suddenly realising that he had never perceived him at the graveside.

“We’re leaving,” vociferated Daniel, brushing aside the outstretched hand as he clutched Saoirse firmly to his chest, feeling her warm innocence breathing fiercely.

“Where?” retorted the man, brazenly seizing Daniel’s arm before the latter wrenched it away.

“I’m going home,” he proclaimed. Staring coldly at the man, he hoisted Saoirse higher upon his chest.

“What does that mean? This is your home.” His voice insistent. Vehement.

He glowered at him as he looked away before levelling his eyes. Impenetrable, the seething blue.

“Not anymore.” The voice perfunctory, yet defiant as he turned away to leave.

“You know you can’t leave.”

Daniel whirled around to face the man. Anchoring Saoirse to his heart, he moved towards the man, stared him down, waiting for the eyes to lower. He stormed, “What more can this place take from me?”

“You can’t leave.” The man’s voice vituperative.

“Then stop me,” challenged Daniel, forcing his forehead upon the man’s, his fierce eyes consumed in a hastening depravity.

“I’ll do that if I have to.” The voice cold. Implacable. As the silence overwhelmed the instance, the man withdrew slightly to stare unforgivingly.

“Who and what are you for fuck’s sake to tell me what I have to do?”

“You know,” he paused, his eyes focussed on Daniel’s and then lowering to scrutinize Saoirse, “Everybody knows who and what I am,” he approached Daniel, a smile suddenly emerging, “And believe me, it’s better that way for you.”

“I don’t want to know you. I’m leaving. Now.” Daniel swivelled back around and started walking away.

“Is that what Grace would have wanted?”

Daniel stopped, looking down at Saoirse and her miniscule features, then turned back to face the man. “How would you know? You never even knew her,” he blazed, moving towards the man menacingly, stopping once more directly in front of him, never lowering his gaze and watching the man’s smile suddenly disappear. Daniel glimpsed some other people advancing and watched as the man fleetingly gazed around to analyse the situation. He refused to continue the conversation, disengaging his belligerency.

Yet he remained silent, rooted in some agonising meditation. Closing his eyes, a tear streaming down his cheek as the inhumed obscurity exhumed itself enthrallingly.

It was Saoirse’s sudden laugh that wrenched him out of the darkness. Opening his eyes, he contemplated her, recognising her mother’s captivating beauty.

Daniel began to walk away.

Mary closed in on him. “What was that about?” she asked, her voice visibly concerned as she walked beside Daniel. He spurned her questioning gaze as well as that of the gathered mourners. Stoically, he headed out of the cemetery.

“Nothing,” he muttered, not wanting to engage in any conversation. He observed Saoirse, replacing the tiny bonnet upon her head that had slipped slightly.

“Don’t fuck with me,” clamoured Mary, clutching Daniel’s left arm, bringing him to a halt. He turned to face her, his features gaunt, his colour pallid. She apprehended in that one instance how much he had changed in such a short period of time, failing to mask her unease.

“I don’t know what he wants,” began Daniel as he stared at her, noticing her perturbed yet equally infuriated eyes as they glared back at him. “And I don’t want to know,” he added, the relief tinged equally in despair.

“He only ever wants one thing,” reacted Mary instantly. “That must be why he came. Otherwise, you’d never see him here,” she pursued, still holding Daniel’s arm. “He came for you. Because of what happened.”

“He came for me?” Daniel barely disguised his exasperation as he forcibly extracted himself from Mary’s grasp. “He has no reason to be here.”

“If he came it’s because he’s offering you his help,” insisted Mary clinically. Daniel slowly resumes walking out of the cemetery.

“Which I never asked for,” clarified Daniel, Mary walking behind him, “And which I do not nor will ever want.”

“You’re still that arrogant man you were on that first day you arrived,” she broke off, rushing to his side, standing defiantly in front of him. He beheld Saoirse before looking down at Mary. “So sure of yourself. So convinced that nothing would ever get to you,” she added peremptorily. “And where has it got you?” The question accompanied by an overbearing silence. Daniel gazed up at the brilliant morning sun. “You came to this place Daniel. You came into it and you know how things work here.”

“I don’t want to be a part of it and I won’t be,” he asserted, staring at her cold features, the eyes eclipsed behind a sorrowful veil.

“It doesn’t work that way and you know it,” she reminded him chillingly. He shook his head, bit his lips as he meditated upon how to respond.

“I won’t be part of it,” he avowed adamantly.

“You already are,” she howled out, “Look back at the grave. Look at the fucking headstone,” she paused. He turned his head around and stared at the grave. And when he returned her gaze, she could see the tears rolling down his cheeks. “You know what you have to do Daniel. You knew the minute it happened.”

He wiped away the emerging tears and then remarked that one of them had dropped onto Saoirse’s forehead. He carefully swabbed the tear as she offered an evanescent smile, her face lit in the auroral glistening of the rising sun.

“You know what you have to do,” reiterated Mary.

“She was your best friend,” reminded Daniel, his eyes suddenly fierce, the features become sanguinary, “A Catholic,” he whispered, articulating each syllable.

“That was the past,” immediately countered Mary. “They took her away from you. You can’t stand by anymore.”

“I have to look after Saoirse now,” he dwelt upon his own words, staring at her menacingly before whispering, “Our baby.”

“You can’t look on anymore. You realised that the moment it occurred. Your parents knew it and that’s why they left and never came back. But you returned and you chose Grace.” Her voice cold, almost purgative.

“Are you saying I should never have done that?” His eyes tempestuous, a sudden ruthlessness consuming him as he held Saoirse firmly to his heart, his stance defiant as some mourners sauntered past them without once looking in their direction.

“You knew the risks,” she reminded, her voice clinical “She told you on that very first night.”

“You knew the risks too,” retorted Daniel.

“That I did and I accepted them,” she responded, almost nonchalantly.

“But you never gave up on her.”

“No. And you can’t give up on us now.”

Daniel averted his fierce, inquisitorial gaze before returning to the emptying cemetery and scrutinised Mary ferociously before elevating Saoirse and tenderly kissing her forehead.

“We’re leaving,” he proclaimed, heading for the exit.

“You know you can’t do that,” she called after him.

Sheltering Saoirse in his arms as though she were embedded, he abandoned Mary. As she watched him go, Billy placed his hand on her shoulder.

“What do you think Mary?”

“He’ll come around.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“He’ll come around, Billy, trust me.” They both looked up at the sky as it slowly began to darken, an inexorable obscurity accompanying every passing cloud. They glanced around at the sombre faces, some of them openly threatening as they turned to leave. The skies suddenly blackened, a fierce shrouding impenetrability that permeated the protean light, vast splintering shadows emerging from their mausoleum sanctuary.

He tentatively crossed the threshold of their home, momentarily breathless with Saoirse pressed upon his mournful chest, the rain slowly beginning to fall. As he walked beneath the doorway, he gazed down at the wooden floor, staring at the droplets of blood that still lie spattered.

Breakfast with Grace and Saoirse, the doorbell ringing, Grace answering. Playing with Saoirse, the distinctive explosive sound that forever changed his life.

Running down the corridor to the doorway, Grace slumped, bleeding out, holding her, her breathing fractured, the tears running down his cheeks.

The ultimate feeling of futility, her shattered breathing splintering, slowing in one defining instance.

### Chapter Three

On Sunday the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, 1972, Civil Rights marchers in Derry started out on a protest march at 2.50 pm. Thirty-five minutes later they passed Bogside Inn before heading up Westland Street and then William Street. There, a riot ensued and the British Army opened fire, wounding two men, one of whom died some six months later.

At 4.10pm, the British Army opened fire on people in the Rossville Flats area. When the shooting ended thirty minutes later, thirteen people lay dead with another fourteen injured.

In May 1972, Protestant Loyalist paramilitaries killed nine Catholics. One of them was a thirteen-year old girl who was shot whilst walking along the street. During the next month, another five Catholics were killed. The following month, nineteen.

In the first seven months of 1972, Protestant Loyalists killed thirty-six Catholic civilians whilst Catholic Republicans killed fifty-five Protestant civilians.

On Friday the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1972, Catholic Republicans planted and exploded twenty-two bombs throughout Belfast, killing nine people and injuring over one hundred and thirty others.

On Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 1988, three unarmed Irish Republican Army members were shot dead without any warning by members of the Special Air Service in Gibraltar.

Ten days later in Milltown Cemetery, during the funerals of the three killed, a Protestant Loyalist gunman opened fire on the mourners as well as launching a grenade attack. Three people were killed with fifty injured.

Three days later, during the funeral of one of those killed during the Milltown Cemetery attack, two British soldiers were hauled out of their vehicle, lynched and then shot dead by Catholic Republicans.

