



Ellen Dunne

Black Soul

A Case for Patsy Logan

Crime Novel

(Original German title: Schwarze Seele.

Ein Fall für Patsy Logan

Kriminalroman)

379 pages, Paperback

Expected publication: 14 January 2019

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Domestic Rights Sales: German Audiobook (Audible)

Ellen Dunne's *Hard Landing*: Nominated for the Friedrich-Glauser-Prize

2018

ABOUT THE BOOK

A drowned Irish man is fished out of the Schwabinger Bach – a stream in the English Garden in Munich. There is no evidential material, but motives galore. Not the ideal starting position for Patsy Logan, the German-Irish detective chief inspector with the Munich homicide squad. She has to call on her instincts more than ever – but those instincts are wavering just when she needs them.

Patsy Logan is at an emotional low: her desire for a child remains unfulfilled, and the hormone treatment is taking its toll. The case of the dead Irishman turns up at just the right moment: Donald McFadden, a man of some charm and many enemies, had been in Munich to win back his ex-wife, Fiona, by force if necessary. But whether he had fallen into the water by accident, or had been given a helping hand, is impossible to say. Plenty of people had reasons for doing him in – and the opportunity, too. Patsy's theories lead to a series of dead-ends. Until another death provides a seemingly vital clue. It is just unfortunate that Patsy's own crisis comes to the fore at that very moment...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellen Dunne, born in 1977, worked as a text editor in an advertising agency and then held various positions with Google in its European headquarters in Dublin. She has published two crime novels. Her 2017 crime novel *Hard Landing* was the first of a new crime series published by Insel Taschenbuch. *Black Soul* (2019) is the second installment featuring heroine Patsy Logan.

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PRAISE FOR *HARD LANDING*

»An immensely exciting thriller with interesting protagonists and a very cunningly written cliffhanger at the end – I would have liked to go on reading right away. On the upside: *Hard Landing* is the beginning of a new series.«

Radio Bremen

»Great entertainment, but also yet another proof for the ability of crime novels to reflect upon current societal problems in a fictional setting.«

culturmag.de

»Ellen Dunne knows how to create characters.«

sabine-ibing.ch

»Excellent crime entertainment with a likeable, original heroine and enticing settings.«

BÜCHERmagazin 2/2018

SAMPLE TRANSLATION

by Laura Wagner

pp. 7—27

Prologue: Donal, on Halloween

Just before the end, the cold water brings him back to the edge of consciousness. Close enough to hear the voices above him. Close enough to realise: The people up there in the darkness are his last chance.

They are laughing. Roaring unintelligible things. Germans, of course. Still. They have to hear him.

Help!

Nothing comes out of his mouth. But something comes in. Water. He swallows icy cold, earthy water, coughs and splutters, swallows again, but there's more still. Water, everywhere. It pulls and sucks at him. Gets into his ears and nose.

The trees, they're reaching out their bony arms towards him. Their tired leaves rustling in the wind as though they wanted to calm him down. Shut him up.

He tries to grasp them, but the water surrounds him, restrains him, unyielding and gentle. Numbs his body, turns his mind into mush. Where there should be adrenaline is nothing but sluggish blood.

Help! I can't swim!

More water. More coughing. Water instead of air.

Then no more voices.

The Germans have gone, moved on to somewhere.

Only the water is left.

And the trees.

Shhhh, they say.

Tuesday, November 7

*Pull me close look into my eyes
Smile at me when you stick in the knife*

Tom McRae, »Karaoke Soul«

For She's a Jolly Good Fellow

1

A dream washed me ashore from the blackness and back into my bedroom. A dark world of silhouettes and shadows. And still better than the one I was coming from.

I waited for a while. Nothing but silence. The light of the street lamps, softened by the cream-coloured curtains. The dream left behind nothing but a vague dread and the certainty that tonight wasn't the first time I had encountered it. A revenant that had been haunting me regularly for almost a whole year.

The fifth of December.

My pulse was vibrating against the duvet I shared with Stefan. My husband was sleeping, sound- and motionless as always, a human anchor that filled his side of the bed entirely and still never crossed the border into mine.

My hands underneath the duvet felt my womb. Another reflex that had developed over the past few months. The search for a second heart in my belly. The flicker of a new life. I had seen it with my own eyes. Last December in Dr. Wahlheimer's clinic. A miracle, a cliché until it actually pulsated in front of your own eyes; a miracle that had left me speechless and brought involuntary tears to Stefan's eyes. Only Dr. Wahlheimer had stayed calm, his otherwise so radiant smile dimmed.

»It's a little small for eight weeks,« he had said. »But that doesn't have to mean anything. We're going to check if everything is alright at the next appointment.«

That appointment never happened.

After two days filled with a fear so intense that I had never felt before and that surged inside me like toxic bubbles, the cramps had set in. Then the bleeding. Hospital. The end.

The fifth of December. Almost a year.

It was only the first try, Stefan had comforted me in a muffled voice. *The next one is going to stay with us, you'll see.*

By now we were on the fourth try.

I got up, watched the snowflakes outside tumbling down onto Breisacher Street. On bare feet and dressed in a t-shirt I padded along the hallway to the fridge in the open floor plan kitchen. Opened it tentatively. Last December the smell of the fridge had routinely made me throw up. This time: nothing. Just packets of medicine, disposable syringes and applicators. A

menu of substitute hormones, essential for the survival of my lab-made pregnancy. If there was one.

Think positive. Negative thoughts are bad for the child, Stefan had drilled into me at the first try. Typical psychologist.

I closed the fridge. 5:16 a.m.

Should I go back to sleep? Pointless. I'd rather go to the office earlier. I could have positive thoughts there as well.

Ludwig the Labrador was nougat-coloured, happy to wag his tail and quite agile despite his advanced age – a ray of sunshine to everyone who met him.

The same thing could not be said for his owner. Ever since he knew humans, he preferred animals, Martin Geiselmayr liked to say, referencing Schopenhauer to legitimize the grumpiness that was normally reserved for old age but that had been brought forward into his early forties.

He ran his parents' antiquarian bookshop on Sieges Street, was a staunch bachelor after early disappointments when it came to love and wasn't, as he liked to point out, particularly attached to his »shitty life« – an attitude that was going to change this morning, because that's when he met death.

On their usual round at five a.m. he and Ludwig were the first ones at Kleinhesseloher Lake. Hardly surprising: The foehn of All Hallows' Day that had brought temperatures of almost twenty degrees was followed by the onset of winter immediately. During the night, last evening's showers had first turned into steady rain then into obstinate snow that had spread over the English Garden like a lace doily. By dawn a few more centimetres had arrived.

Not a good day. In this weather, a lot of pedestrians would be seeking shelter in the bookshop and fumble the collection of historical magazines with their clammy hands without buying anything. Only Ludwig would be happy about all the additional attention. But he was always happy, like everyone who doesn't know better.

»Time-wasters, the lot of them. Making life easy for themselves,« Geiselmayr mumbled. But at least he could let the dog off the leash for once without someone having a go at him right away.

Ludwig, as soon as he was freed from his leash, had run off towards the Schwabinger Bach. He loved fishing flotsam out of the stream and carrying it to the bank no matter the water temperature.

»Ludwig!«

The animal was a panting shadow that – always following its instinct, towards the water –crossed through the beam of light of Geiselmayr's headlamp every now and again and kept moving further and further away while its owner commanded it in vain to come back.

It was a rare occurrence that Ludwig forgot himself and his obedience. Maybe it was the snow. It regularly drove people out of their minds as well.

Huffing and puffing, Geiselmayer ran after the dog. Snowflakes flew into his eyes, clung to his anorak. The footpath towards Schwabing was slippery with snow and the many leaves torn off the trees by the storm during the night. On the two hundred metres to the bridge across to Liebergesell Street he almost slipped many times.

»Ludwig, goddammit!«

But the dog had already disappeared down the embankment. A determined bark, a splash and he was gone. Geiselmayer went after him without hesitation. Ludwig wouldn't be the first dog to be carried away by the current because of high water – and that would be the end of him.

More slush, damp leaves, rain-soaked soil. Geiselmayer slipped and fell. He couldn't catch his fall until he reached the edge of the almost overflowing stream. It was slightly brighter here than it was in the park. Street lamps and the first lights in the windows of the bed and breakfast on the other side of the stream were shimmering faintly through the barren trees on the riverbank and the increasing snowfall. After the blackness in the park there were now soft grey silhouettes everywhere. Slush was dripping from the trees ...

And there he was, his Ludwig, halfway between the riverbank and a small island overgrown by shrubs and trees that divided the Schwabinger Bach. He was paddling against the current, his jaws locked into a thick branch that he was trying to take ashore. He was puffing with the effort of his endeavour but still he was making hardly any progress. The branch was caught on something underneath the water surface.

»Leave it be, Luggi. Come on out.«

Ludwig did not leave it be. Grunting through his lips he kept tugging at his haul. Puffs of his breath rose up, visible in the cold air. With a jerk, he advanced half a metre but then got stuck again.

Stubborn dog.

At least now he was close enough to the riverbank for Geiselmayer to pull him out, if needs be with the branch in tow. He knelt down on the muddily smacking ground. After two missed attempts he got hold of Ludwig's collar. Still the dog refused to let go.

»Drop it now or you'll drown.«

Geiselmayer tried to rip the branch from his dog's jaws. The bark was soft and slimy. The branch almost slipped from his fingers, but he held it tighter, jerked on it once more. At that, whatever it was that had held it under water before released it.

While Ludwig, who had finally let go now, was panting and thoroughly shaking himself on dry land, Geiselmayer, panting with exhaustion, pulled the heavy flotsam closer and studied the thing Ludwig had sunk his jaws into in the blue LED light of his headlamp.

His stomach was faster than his perception and sent bile up his oesophagus even before the golden glimmer in what he had thought were branches turned out to be a ring and the branches themselves bloated greenish fingers.

No, this was definitely not a branch.

8 a.m., our daily case review. Of course, I should have suspected it as soon as I entered the conference room. The way Konstantin lowered his gaze. The ironic »Good morning, Patsy,« from Reitsamer. The honeyed smile from Lisa, our secretary who had recently been promoted to office manager.

I registered everything but understood nothing. Probably due to the lack of sleep or because I had spent the three days before today in either a quiet room, a swimming pool or in the hands of a massage therapist. But even more likely it was because my head was filled with a whole arsenal of useless thoughts. Thoughts about tomorrow. About the pregnancy test that would show either the success or failure of our fourth artificial insemination. For the first time I was truly nervous. Even though I already knew the result.

When I finally realised what was going on Kris Meyerhofer had already struck up a dissonant rendition of »Happy Birthday«. Most of the other colleagues joined in, some less awkward than others.

Cake, homemade. Table fireworks. Even a card: »40« it read among a lot of balloons and confetti. Underneath the 40 someone had written »minus 1« and painted a wonky smiley with a black felt tip pen. Classic Konstantin.

»So you can get used to the four,« he said with a grin. Of course the others thought it was hilarious.

My boss and I had been patrol cops together for years and later become colleagues in the homicide division. Sometimes he still treated me like that. His timing wasn't always the best.

Still, I laughed along, had a sip of my champagne in a plastic cup someone had handed me. Everyone in the office knew – unofficially – about my miscarriage. Lisa, at the very least, would notice if I didn't drink and put me back under the spotlight of her curiosity. Better not risk it.

I opened two presents wrapped in superhero paper.

Crime novels. No policeman other than myself reads these. So much more exciting than my own life. Also, they make me laugh. Another thing everybody knew already, apparently.

I blinked away my tears of emotion quickly – something that had been entirely unfamiliar to me until now, but since I started drugging myself up to the eyeballs with hormones every day, I was barely able to control them. I hoped no one noticed.

Konstantin stopped my thanks with a wave of his hand. »Our fun committee organised that.«

He was referring to Kris Meyerhofer. Ever since we had worked together on a homicide in an online start-up last year, she had come down with a longing for a harmonious work environment which she tried to put into action with all sorts of suggestions for group activities and general niceness. She was tilting at windmills, I would have thought. But by now Kris' perseverance bordering on insanity had started to corrode even the toughest resistance. Birthdays had never been officially celebrated here before.

Could have stayed that way, if you asked me.

»How was it at Lake Tegernsee?« she asked while Lisa got stuck with clearing the table. Sounded more polite than interested. Kris looked worn out. Her usually freshly dyed pixie cut, which had been magenta for a few months, was sporting dark-blonde roots. Probably as overworked as the rest of us.

»Nice.« I stuck to the abridged version. It wasn't a lie. Stefan had pulled all the stops: 5-star hotel, 5-star menu, views of the lake, the autumn leaves all around us like flames, the blue sky interspersed with fluffy foehn clouds.

It really hadn't been his fault that I had been yearning for my desk the entire long weekend.

What felt like hours later: Konstantin was moving from one case to the next. Torrents of words. Pens scratching over paper. Comments for comments' sake from Holger and Philip, the »young bucks«, as they liked to call themselves. Reitsamer's suppressed yawns. And me? I was alternating between staring at my to-do list and out into the November sky. All I could see were dead ends.

»You've capacities to take that on, don't you?« Konstantin asked.

Silence all around. When I raised my head, my colleagues were already staring at me and Konstantin was pursing his lips impatiently.

Take on what?

»Sure, no problem,« I said.

I didn't like his smile. Much too relieved.

»Colleague Hauser will be in touch. Knowing him, it'll be immediately.«

Everyone was grinning, even Kris, who always aimed to please. What had I gotten myself into just then?

»You mean Burkhardt Hauser?«

»That's the one,« Konstantin said merrily.

Burkhardt *fucking* Hauser from Missing Persons.

Congratulations, Patsy Logan.

I don't dislike Hauser. A reliable guy and fastidious methodologist who has a smile for everyone. But, unfortunately, he was as agile as a sloth. Time pressure and unclear circumstances overwhelmed him, he was constantly seeking refuge in regulations and risk avoidance strategies. In the past, he had driven the entire department crazy with his hesitancy. But it was rumoured that he had been in our former boss' good books for some unknown reason. Then came Konstantin and his pragmatism and Burkhardt was »promoted« to K14, to people who had gone missing and the unidentified dead.

But even from there he kept putting out his feelers in our direction. Playing on Konstantin's guilty conscience. Brief queries and small favours often turned out to be bait for something much bigger.

Just like the case of the missing Irishman.

Siobhan McFadden had long, salon-dyed silver-grey hair, big doe eyes and vocal cords made from barbed wire; she was carrying a rage so profound it must have been nurtured for years.

Together with her brother Donal, who was thirteen years younger, and her parents she ran a small hotel in the coastal town of Bray, twenty kilometres south of Dublin. McFadden's Inn had made a name for itself as a gastropub with a couple of guest rooms.

Last Sunday the siblings had travelled to Munich on an evening flight and visited the wine and specialities fair on Prater Island on Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, All Hallows' Day, Siobhan had flown back to Dublin by herself in the morning while Donal wanted to stay in Munich until Thursday night. When he hadn't shown up in the Inn on Friday morning as promised and his mobile stayed turned off, Siobhan had contacted the police in Dublin.

»Useless bunch, the lot of them.« She was clutching her disposable lighter. *Tock, tock, tock* – edge to table. Perfect shiny blue fingernails. The remnants of a Halloween party, maybe. »I should calm down, they said. Donal was a grown man, ›impromptu prolonged holiday‹ and bullshit like that.« *Tock, tock, tock.* »It wasn't 'till Saturday that they took me seriously. And even then nothing happened, only a daft missing person appeal. Even though I told them that Donal probably never even made it to Ireland. Monday morning they still hadn't done anything useful. So I packed my bags and fly over. You have to do everything yourself, no one else's gonna take care of it.«

That's how Siobhan McFadden had turned up at the police precinct on Monday evening, hysterical with sweat and fear, and caused a scene until someone from K14 took her case: Burkhardt Hauser.

Siobhan's rude tone and her Dublin accent had completely overwhelmed Burkhardt and the English he remembered from school. Even so, he had somehow managed to convince the woman to come back on Tuesday – until then, they would contact the Irish colleagues to clarify the situation.

The interpreter was otherwise engaged until Thursday and the backup interpreter was bedridden with gastroenteritis. What to do? Enter Patsy Logan, half Irish on her father's side and often the next port of call in times when her colleagues had problems with the English language.

And now I was sitting here, in an overheated conference room with no windows, pierced by Siobhan McFadden's looks, smelling too much of her flowery perfume while Burkhardt studied his files next to me, coughing.

Tock, tock, tock.

»Your contact person, Detective Mahony,« he drew out the O excessively, »received confirmation today from Aer Lingus that Donal never checked in for his flight to Dublin, so he probably never even got to the airport.«

Siobhan McFadden rolled her eyes.

Tock, tock, tock.

»Additionally,« Burkhardt was trying to keep his composure, »the woman you were boarding with last week got in touch because she has found your brother's luggage. So there is some indication that Donal is still in Munich ...«

»That's what I've been saying since Friday. But how great that you've now come to the same conclusion.«

This woman had the charm of a blow to the head. Maybe it was compensation for all the romantic getaways she had to organise for her guests.

»Would you like to take a cigarette break?«

Her meticulously tweezed eyebrows shot upwards, she leant towards me. Pointing her lighter at me like a weapon. »What I bloody want is to know what happened to my brother.«

As difficult as she was making life for us – I felt sorry for Siobhan McFadden. I knew it too well, the desperation when a relative has disappeared. The unappeased hunger for information turned every minute into an hour, every hour into a day; the battle between hoping and knowing better leaving no energy for sleep, food, manners. This was written all over Siobhan's face: Her tough attitude was only the last stage before the breakdown.

»I know, for you as a family member, everything is moving too slowly,« I said. »By now, our Irish colleagues have officially requested our help. Detective Hauser is leaving no stone unturned, but we need to ask you for a little patience.«

There was a flicker in her eyes. She really wanted to tell me where I could shove my fake sympathy. She bit her tongue with obvious effort.

»If I may give you a little tip: Have a talk to that bitch Fee first of all. I bet she had a hand in it.«

Silently, I asked Burkhardt to clarify.

»Fiona McFadden is Donal McFadden's wife,« Burkhardt said and returned to staring at his files. »Since February this year, she and her husband have been estranged and she has been registered in Munich since March.«

»Donal was going to meet her last Tuesday to have a talk,« Siobhan chimed in. »And he did, I already found that out from her last Saturday. They were out until late in the evening. And since then nobody has seen him.«

I had heard more subtle accusations in my time. »That means he didn't return to your accommodation after the meeting?«

»No.«

»And that didn't worry you?«

»Would I have gone back to Dublin if it had?« Siobhan cocked her head and fixed her gaze on me, her features even more fascinating, her silver hair almost other-worldly, her thorns even more obvious. »Donal was crazy about Fee. He never thought that she would actually leave him and he had it in his head that he could get her back. He can be very charming if he wants to be. I thought he had convinced her somehow and spent the night with her. And if not with her then with some other chick he picked up and fucked instead until he felt better. That's how he is. He can have everything and anyone, always. But he absolutely had to be with that evil woman.« Her voice resonated with sisterly pride and contempt.

»When did you first suspect that something wasn't right?«

»Thursday evening. I wanted to ask him something about the breakfast on Friday and his phone was off. Not even the mailbox picked up, you know?« Her expression changed from worried to desperate to rock-solid conviction. »Fee and her lover boy, that good-for-nothing Steve, they killed Donal.«

Accusations as the last line of defence against the unbearable certainty. Unless she was involved in his death and wanted to disguise her guilty conscience.

Suspicious of a homicide detective. Better get rid of them.

»At this time, we should stay optimistic. I'm sure your brother is going to turn up safe and sound.«

Siobhan just snorted fiercely in my direction. Said the wrong thing, again.

Just as Burkhardt cleared his throat to give a deescalating answer, there was a knock on the door. A colleague stuck his head in, apologised curtly and asked Burkhardt to step outside in a whisper.

When Burkhardt Hauser entered the room again a few minutes later, his good-natured face had turned into a mask, his lips so thin that they disappeared in his beard. He kept stroking his left hand over it. In his right hand he was holding an evidence bag containing a smartphone.

Siobhan's alarmed gaze fell on the blue »Leinster Rugby« sticker immediately.

Nevertheless, Burkhardt asked: »Is this the handy of your brother?«

A whistle escaped from her throat like air from a balloon, her aggressiveness nothing but smoke and mirrors now.

»It looks exactly like his. Where did you get that? Did Donal turn up?«

Burkhardt coughed quietly and gave me look that said everything. Worst case scenario. Unhappy end. The situation every detective hates, and we were right in it.

»A man walking his dog found it this morning. It was in the trouser pocket of a drowned man whom we haven't been able to iden—«

The rest was drowned in Siobhan's sobbing. Rough, barking sounds that got under my skin immediately, burrowing into my insides.

Luckily, active sympathy is one of Burkhardt's strong points. He patted Siobhan McFadden's trembling hand and passed her some tissues while I got out of there to find someone from the psychologists' team.