

# Amadans Alert



MALACHY DOYLE

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

‘Malachy Doyle, you great amadan!’ my teacher, Miss Sharp, used to say, whenever I did something silly, like spilling ink into the goldfish bowl, or getting a halfpenny stuck up my nose.

That’s because in Ireland, where I come from, if someone calls you an amadan, it means they think you’re a fool. But the amadans I’m talking about here are clever little fellows who use computer screens to come through into our world to tackle crime, ably assisted by the Stroke, which is their ability to paralyse people. My first book about them, called Amadans, was great fun to write, so here they are again, getting into even more trouble.

Malachy lives in a big old house in Aberdyfi, a pretty little seaside village in North Wales, with his wife Liz and his two cats, Bracken and Milo. Every morning, he goes down to the beach, fishing for stories, and then he comes home and writes them. You can find out more about him and his books on his website: [www.malachydoyle.co.uk](http://www.malachydoyle.co.uk)



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*For Seana Lee*

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# Amadans Alert



**MALACHY DOYLE**

ORCHARD BOOKS



# 1

## DIRTY DOINGS IN THE DARK

It's night. A large shape appears out of an alleyway. Dark glasses on and a hood pulled up tight so you can't make out his face. A quick check that there's no one about, and then he runs, on cushioned feet, towards the door to Nita's yard.

A tug on the handle, but it's locked. A muttered curse, then a flash of a torch, up and down the alley until he sees what he needs. A couple of wheelie bins, further up the lane.

Padding over, he tests them for weightiness, smelliness, squeakiness. Then he grabs hold of the lighter, fresher, less squeaky one and trundles it off, as quietly as possible. Into position next to Nita's door and up he hoicks himself, onto the lid and up again, onto the wall.

Another quick flash of the torch, to spot a safe place to land, and his cushioned trainers break his fall as he drops gently down onto the other side, as silently as a cat. (Which is why they call them cat burglars, in case you were wondering. Not because they steal cats, or sit on your lap purring, or eat Jellymeat Whiskas.)

A third flash of light around the yard – careful not to shine it at any windows – and then he sees what he’s come for. It’s up against the wall, gleaming proudly in the torchlight.

‘Aha!’ he whispers, under his breath. ‘We’re in business!’

And what is it that our nasty teenage sneakthief has gone to all this trouble for? I hear you asking. What’s he scuttling around in the middle of the night for? What’s he balancing on bins and risking breaking his neck for?

It’s Nita’s younger brother, Partho’s, brand new top-of-the-range mountain bike, that’s what. The one he got for his seventh birthday, that very day. The one the little fellow’s been dreaming about for weeks. The one that’s been sitting in the window of the bike shop that he’s walked past on his way to and from school every day for the past three months, crying out, ‘Buy me, Partho! You

know we're made for each other!' The one that had made him screech with delight when his mum wheeled it into his bedroom that very morning, all tied up with balloons and streamers, and that he was just about to bounce down the stairs on till Nita grabbed hold of him.

'But it goes up mountains,' Partho pleaded. 'Surely it can go down stairs!'

The one he'd been racing up and down the street on, in his pyjamas, before breakfast, howling with happiness. Then haring round the neighbourhood all day, doing wheelies, zoomers and all sorts of tricks, drawing admiring glances from the warm-hearted, covetous scowls from the cold...

And the dirtiest of smirks from one person in particular. The anonymous teenage bike thief, who lurks all alone in the flat above the video shop, twitching the curtain and watching for any opportunity to take advantage of someone else's good fortune. Watching and waiting, looking and listening, noticing who lives where and what they've got and where they keep it, and what they wouldn't miss – and how much it's worth to the sort of people he knows who'll give you hard cash for anything and no questions asked. (Handy

people to know, they are, if you're that way inclined. Which I very much hope you're not.)

'Nice one,' the hooded burglar mutters to himself, running his thieving eyes over the shiny aluminium, the twenty-four-speed fire-trigger gears, the state-of-the-art fully active suspension, the stop-dead shimano brakes. And not a cover, not a chain, not a bike lock in sight. 'What a fool,' he smirks. 'What a silly, trusting, innocent fool.' And his thoughts turn to its re-sale value. 'Mmmm,' he says, stroking it lovingly. 'This'll fetch me a hundred, no bother.'

With as little noise as possible he picks up the featherweight bike, carries it over to the door of the yard, slides back the bolt and then he's off, down the alley and away. He's much too big for it, of course, but it's the middle of the night, there's no one about (so he doesn't mind looking stupid) and all he's got to do when he gets home is to haul it up the steps to his flat round the side of the video shop, and tuck it away in his front room until his nasty flash-cash friends come calling.

But suddenly, before he's even out of the alleyway, a shape appears in the darkness ahead of him. It's small, a lot smaller than the bike thief. It, too, has a hood, pulled up tight. It's running

towards him, on silent feet, and the rider, pedalling at full speed down the lane, doesn't even notice until they've nearly collided.

'Stop!' hisses the shape in the darkness, and a long thin hand, with seven bony fingers, reaches out from inside the coat and briefly touches the thief's arm. With the Touch. The Stroke. The amadan's secret weapon in the battle against crime.

But nothing happens. The sneakthief isn't paralysed. He doesn't even slow down.

'Stop, you must stop!' hisses the frantic little creature from another world, turning full circle, running alongside, and trying to grab hold with his other arm as well.

'Push off!' cries the burglar, who's hardly even noticed him. 'Must be that kid who's been parading about on it all day, out to save his precious present,' he thinks. 'Serve him right, the spoilt little brat. Serve him right, for being such a show-off, riding it all around town like he's better than everyone else.'

And with a mighty shove, and the wickedest of laughs, the teenage sneakthief flings the caped defender aside. Then, with a quick change of gear, off he zooms, out of the alley, on to the main road,

through the lights and away.

And the poor defeated amadan, in a crumpled heap among the rubbish, moans quietly. 'Clear off, you,' he mutters, eyeing an arch-backed ginger cat, hissing down at him from the wall above. 'I might not have enough power to paralyse humans any more – not since that stupid big monster, Haranga, started mucking about with the Stroke – but I could freeze you to the wall for the rest of the night, no bother.'

The silent onlooker, unimpressed, of course, in the way that cats always are, turns his back and struts away, head held high. While the furious little amadan, embarrassed at having been seen to fail in his crimestopping duty yet again, picks himself up, dusts himself down, and stomps off into the night.

## 2

# OH, CRUMBS!

‘Finished on the computer already? That didn’t take long.’

It was earlier in the evening, and Jimmy’s father had just looked up from his newspaper, as Jimmy, Nextdoor Nita (Partho’s big sister) and Jimmy’s grandad entered the room.

‘Yeah, thanks Dad. We’ve done what we needed to.’

‘Great.’ Jimmy’s dad reached out to snaffle the tin of chocolate biscuits from the table in front of him. ‘I’m just going back in to work on my book, then.’

‘Oh yes, the Great Irish Novel?’ said Nita, smiling. ‘How’s it going, Mr MacIver?’

‘Mmm, all right,’ replied Dad. ‘I’m still on

Chapter Two, as it happens, but it's coming along.'

'What page?' asked Nita.

'Pardon?'

'What page are you on?'

'Well, eh, only page nineteen, since you asked.'

Jimmy's dad was a bit sheepish. 'But it's going rather well at the moment, though I say it myself.'

'Good. That's good. How long have you been working on it, by the way?'

'Oh, well, eh...' He was getting edgy under the weight of all Nita's questions. He really wanted to escape into his writing room, but for some odd reason couldn't seem to lift the biscuit tin from the table. He looked directly at it, for the first time, only to see someone else's hand holding it down from above. A smaller hand. A Jimmy hand.

'Leaving any for us, Dad?'

'Yes, eh, right. Of course. You can have the rest, Jimmy. Share them out between you.' Giving up, he wandered off into his study.

'That was a bit mean, stopping your dad having his biscuits,' said Nita to her friend, once Mr MacIver had gone. 'They probably give him inspiration.'

'Tooth rot, more like, the amount he gets through. Anyway, it's a bit much, him telling me to share

them,' answered Jimmy. 'There's never anything but crumbs, by the time I get near them. And what about you, Nita, if we're talking about meanness?'

'Me? What about me?'

'Well, if anybody's mean, it's you, having a go at him about his book like that.'

'I was only...' Nita thought about it. 'Well, maybe it did sound a bit hard. But he's been going on about his "Great Irish Novel" since the dinosaurs roamed the earth. Why doesn't he just give up on it and write another fantasy book, like that one he did before.'

She went over to the bookshelf that ran, tall and proud, all the way along the opposite wall and ran her fingers over the titles until she found the one she was looking for. 'It's great, this one,' said Nita. 'I really want to know what happens next.'

'Me too,' said Jimmy. 'But Dad's got it in his head that he's got to write something serious this time. Something he'll be remembered by when he's gone.'

'Why, where's he off to?' Nita looked up in surprise.

'No idea.' Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. 'Down to the shops to buy some more chocolate biscuits, probably.'

He opened the tin and stared deep into the darkness. Upending it, he tapped on the bottom and out dropped the last lonely biscuits – one, two and a handful of crumbs. He was just about to shove the first one in his mouth when he remembered that he'd agreed to share them, so, sighing deeply, he handed them round. One to Nita, one to Grandad, and the handful of crumbs for himself.

But Jimmy's old grandad was staring at the biscuit he'd been given like he'd never seen one before in his life. The chocolate coating slowly melted in his wrinkly paw as he looked up, at Jimmy, Nita and all the way round the room, before muttering something incoherent and stumbling off to bed.

'I think all that excitement we had with the amadans must have worn him out,' said Nita, thinking back to how Grandad had helped her and Jimmy confront the mighty monster, Haranga. 'I did tell you it'd all be too much for him,' she said, wiping the melted chocolate off the door handle (she always was a tidy, organised person, was Nita).

'No way, Nita. Grandad's not finished yet.' Jimmy was having none of it. Sure, hadn't his