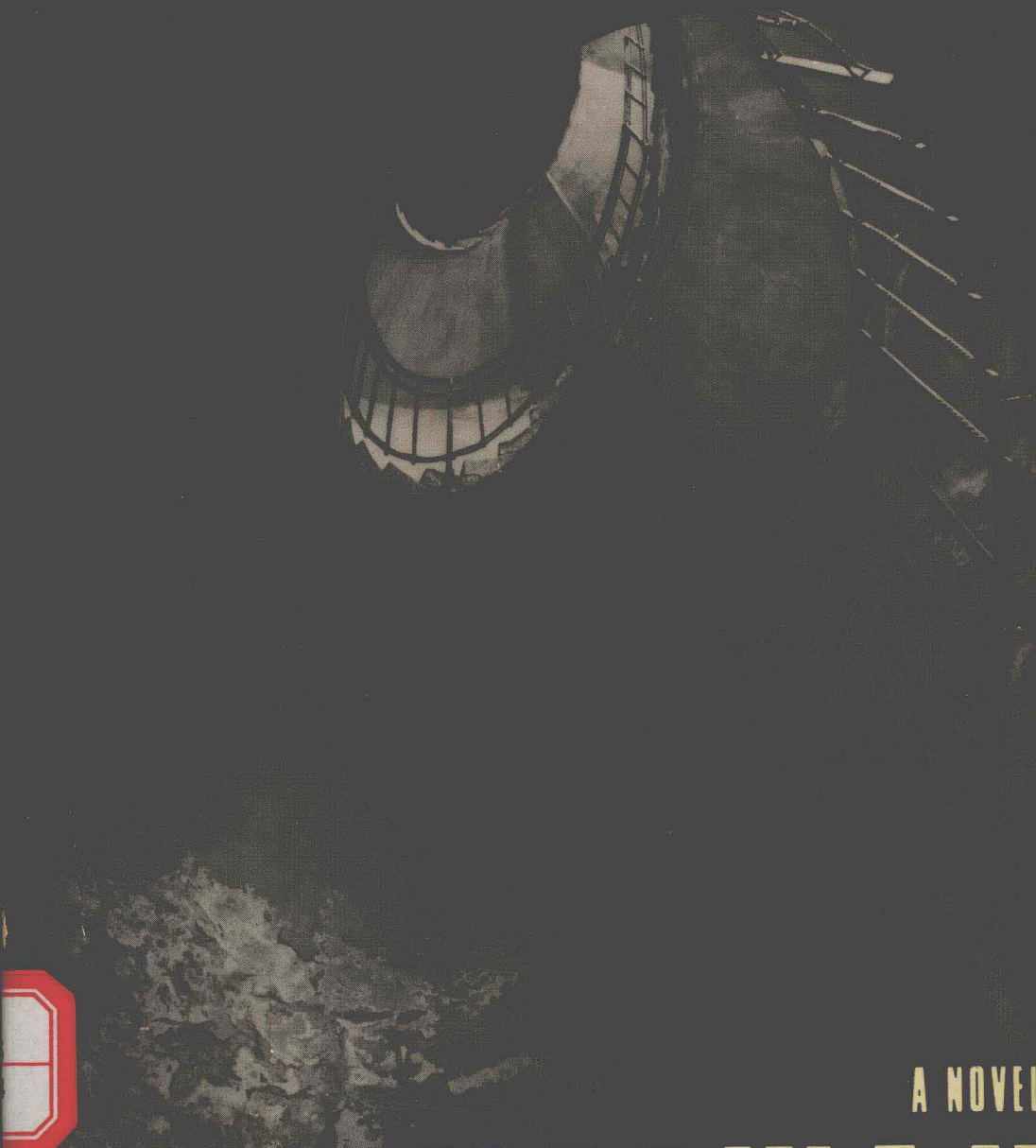


# THE INNOCENT



A NOVEL

IAN McEWAN

# THE INNOCENT

I a n M c E w a n



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HEARTBREAK HOTEL

By: Mae Boren Axton, Tommy Durden. Elvis  
Presley

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My labours on the Castle Keep were also made harder, and unnecessarily so (unnecessarily in that the burrow derived no real benefit from those labours) by the fact that just at the place where, according to my calculations, the Castle Keep should be, the soil was very loose and sandy and had literally to be hammered and pounded into a firm state to serve as a wall for the beautifully vaulted chamber. But for such tasks, the only tool I possess is my forehead. So I had to run with my forehead thousands and thousands of times, for whole days and nights, against the ground, and I was glad when the blood came, for that was a proof that the walls were beginning to harden; and in that way, as everybody must admit, I richly paid for my Castle Keep.

—FRANZ KAFKA, *The Burrow*,  
translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

After dinner we saw an amusing film: Bob Hope in *The Princess and the Pirate*. Then we sat in the Great Hall and listened to *The Mikado* played, much too slowly, on the gramophone. The PM said it brought back “the Victorian era, eighty years which will rank in our island history with the Antonine age.” Now, however, “the shadows of victory” were upon us. . . . After this war, continued the PM, we should be weak, we should have no money and no strength and we should lie between the two great powers of the USA and the USSR.

—JOHN COLVILLE, describing dinner with  
Churchill at Chequers ten days after the  
end of the Yalta Conference.  
*The Fringes of Power: Ten Downing  
Street Diaries, 1939–1955*

# O n e

**I**t was Lieutenant Lofting who dominated the meeting. “Look here, Marnham. You’ve only just arrived, so there’s no reason why you should know the situation. It’s not the Germans or the Russians who are the problem here. It isn’t even the French. It’s the Americans. They don’t know a thing. What’s worse, they won’t learn, they won’t be told. It’s just how they are.”

Leonard Marnham, an employee of the Post Office, had never actually met an American to talk to, but he had studied them in depth at his local Odeon. He smiled without parting

his lips and nodded. He reached into his inside coat pocket for his silver case. Lofting held up his palm, Indian greeting style, to forestall the offer. Leonard crossed his legs, took out a cigarette and tapped its end several times against the case.

Lofting's arm shot out across the desk and offered his lighter at full stretch. He resumed as the young civilian lowered his head to the flame. "As you can imagine, there are a number of joint projects, pooled resources, know-how, that sort of thing. But do you think the Americans have the first notion of teamwork? They agree on one thing, and then they go their own way. They go behind our backs, they withhold information, they talk down to us like idiots." Lieutenant Lofting straightened the blotter, which was the only object on his tin desk. "You know, sooner or later HMG will be forced to get tough." Leonard went to speak, but Lofting waved him down. "Let me give you an example. I'm British liaison for the intersector swimming match next month. Now, no one can argue with the fact that we've got the best pool here at the stadium. It's the obvious place for the venue. The Americans agreed weeks ago. But where do you think it's going to be held now? Way down in the south, in their sector, in some greasy little puddle. And do you know why?"

Lofting talked on for another ten minutes.

When all the treacheries of the swimming match seemed to have been set out, Leonard said, "Major Sheldrake had some equipment for me, and some sealed instructions. Do you know anything about that?"

"I was coming to that," the lieutenant said sharply. He paused, and seemed to gather his strength. When he spoke again he could barely suppress a yodel of irritation. "You know, the only reason I was sent up here was to wait for you. When Major Sheldrake's posting came through, I was meant to get everything from him and pass it on. As it happened, and this had nothing to do with me, there was a forty-eight-hour gap between the major's departure and my arrival."

He paused again. It sounded like he had prepared this explanation with care. "Apparently the Yanks kicked up an almighty

fuss, even though the rail shipment was locked in a guarded room, and your sealed envelope was in the safe in the CO's office. They insisted that someone had to be directly responsible for the stuff at all times. There were phone calls to the CO's office from the brigadier, which originated with General Staff. There was nothing anyone could do. They came over in a lorry and took the lot—envelope, shipment, the lot. Then I arrived. My new instructions were to wait for you, which I've been doing for five days, make sure you are who you say you are and explain the situation, and give you this contact address."

Lofting took a manila envelope from his pocket and passed it across the table. At the same time Leonard handed over his bona fides. Lofting hesitated. He had one remaining piece of bad news.

"The thing is this. Now that your stuff, whatever it is, has been signed over to them, you have to be too. You've been handed over. For the time being, you're their responsibility. You take your instructions from them."

"That's all right," Leonard said.

"I'd say it was jolly hard luck."

His duty done, Lofting stood and shook his hand.

The Army driver who had brought Leonard from Tempelhof airport earlier that afternoon was waiting in the Olympic Stadium car park. Leonard's quarters were a few minutes' drive away. The corporal opened the trunk of the tiny khaki car, but he did not seem to think it was his business to lift the cases out.

Platanenallee 26 was a modern building with a lift in the lobby. The apartment was on the third floor and had two bedrooms, a large living room, a kitchen-dining room and a bathroom. Leonard still lived at home with his parents in Tottenham, and commuted each day to Dollis Hill. He strode from room to room, turning on all the lights. There were various novelties. There was a big wireless with creamy pushbuttons, and a telephone standing on a nest of coffee tables. By it was a street plan of Berlin. There was Army issue furniture—a three-piece suite of smudgy floral design, a pouf with leather tassels,

a standard lamp that was not quite perpendicular, and, against the far wall of the living room, a writing bureau with fat bow-legs. He luxuriated in the choice of bedroom, and unpacked with care. His own place. He had not thought it would give him so much pleasure. He hung his best, second best and everyday gray suits in a wardrobe built into the wall whose door slid at the touch of the hand. On the bureau he placed the teak-lined, silver-plated cigarette box engraved with his initials, a going-away present from his parents. By its side he stood his heavy indoor lighter, shaped like a neoclassical urn. Would he ever have guests?

Only when everything had been arranged to his satisfaction did he allow himself to sit in the armchair under the standard lamp and open the envelope. He was disappointed. It was a scrap of paper torn from a memo pad. There was no address, only a name—Bob Glass—and a Berlin telephone number. He had wanted to spread out the street plan on the dining table, pinpoint the address, plan his route. Now he would have to take directions from a stranger, an American stranger, and he would have to use the phone, an instrument he was not easy with, despite his work. His parents did not have one, nor did any of his friends, and he rarely had to make calls at work. Balancing the square of paper on his knee, he dialed painstakingly. He knew how he wanted to sound. Relaxed, purposeful. *Leonard Marnham here. I think you've been expecting me.*

Straightaway a voice rapped out, "Glass!"

Leonard's manner collapsed into the English dither he had wanted to avoid in conversation with an American. "Oh yes, look, I'm terribly sorry I . . ."

"Is that Marnham?"

"Actually, yes. Leonard Marnham here. I think you've been—"

"Write down this address. Ten Nollendorfstrasse, off the Nollendorf Platz. Get here tomorrow morning at eight."

The line went dead while Leonard was repeating the address in his friendliest voice. He felt foolish. In solitude he blushed. He caught sight of himself in a wall mirror and ap-



proached helplessly. His glasses, stained yellowish by evaporated body fat—this, at least, was his theory—perched absurdly above his nose. When he removed them his face appeared insufficient. Along the sides of his nose were red pressure streaks, dents in the very bone structure. He should do without his glasses. The things he really wanted to see were up close. A circuit diagram, a valve filament, another face. A girl's face.

His domestic calm had vanished. He paced his new domain again, pursued by unmanageable longings. At last he disciplined himself by settling at the dining table to a letter to his parents. Composition of this kind cost him effort. He held his breath at the beginning of each sentence and let it go with a gasp at the end. *Dear Mum and Dad, The journey here was boring but at least nothing went wrong! I arrived today at four o'clock. I have a nice flat with two bedrooms and a telephone. I haven't met the people I am working with yet but I think Berlin will be all right. It's raining here and it's awfully windy. It looks pretty damaged, even in the dark. I haven't had a chance to try out my German yet . . .*

Soon hunger and curiosity drove him outdoors. He had memorized a route from the map and set off eastward toward Reichskanzlerplatz. Leonard had been fourteen on V-E Day, old enough to have a head full of the names and capabilities of combat planes, ships, tanks and guns. He had followed the Normandy landings and the advances eastward across Europe and, earlier, northward through Italy. Only now was he beginning to forget the names of every major battle. It was impossible for a young Englishman to be in Germany for the first time and not think of it above all as a defeated nation, or feel pride in the victory. He had spent the war with his granny in a Welsh village over which no enemy aircraft had ever flown. He had never touched a gun, or heard one go off outside a rifle range; despite this, and the fact that it had been the Russians who had liberated the city, he made his way through this pleasant residential district of Berlin that evening—the wind had dropped and it was warmer—with a certain proprietorial swagger, as

though his feet beat out the rhythms of a speech by Mr. Churchill.

As far as he could see, the restoration work had been intense. The pavement had been newly laid, and spindly young plane trees had been planted out. Many of the sites had been cleared. The ground had been leveled off, and there were tidy stacks of old bricks chipped clear of their mortar. The new buildings, like his own, had a nineteenth-century solidity about them. At the end of the street he heard the voices of English children. An RAF officer and his family were arriving home—satisfying evidence of a conquered city.

He emerged onto Reichskanzlerplatz, which was huge and empty. By the ocher gleam of newly erected concrete lamp-posts he saw a grand public building that had been demolished down to a single wall of ground-floor windows. In its center, a short flight of steps led to a grand doorway with elaborate stonework and pediments. The door, which must have been massive, had been blasted clean away, allowing a view of the occasional car headlights in the next street. It was hard not to feel boyish pleasure in the thousand-pounders that had lifted roofs of buildings, blown their contents away to leave only facades with gaping windows. Twelve years before, he might have spread his arms, made his engine noise and become a bomber for a celebratory minute or two. He turned down a side street and found an *Eckkneipe*.

The place was loud with the sound of old men's voices. There was no one here under sixty, but he was ignored as he sat down. The yellowing parchment lampshades and a pea souper of cigar smoke guaranteed his privacy. He watched the barman prepare the beer he had ordered with his carefully rehearsed phrase. The glass was filled, the rising froth wiped clear with a spatula, then the glass was filled again and left to stand. Then the process was repeated. Almost ten minutes passed before his drink was considered fit to be served. From a short menu in Gothic script he recognized and ordered *Bratwurst mit Kartoffelsalat*. He tripped over the words. The

waiter nodded and walked away at once, as though he could not bear to hear his language punished in another attempt.

Leonard was not yet ready to return to the silence of his apartment. He ordered a second beer after his dinner, and then a third. As he drank he became aware of the conversation of three men at a table behind him. It had been rising in volume. He had no choice but to attend to the boom of voices colliding, not in contradiction but, it seemed, in the effort of making the same point more forcefully. At first he heard only the seamless, enfolded intricacies of vowels and syllables, the compelling broken rhythms, the delayed fruition of German sentences. But by the time he had downed his third beer his German had begun to improve and he was discerning single words whose meanings were apparent after a moment's thought. On his fourth he started to hear random phrases that yielded to instant interpretation. Anticipating the delay in preparation, he ordered another half-liter. It was during this fifth that his comprehension of German accelerated. There was no doubt about the word *Tod*, death, and a little later *Zug*, train, and the verb *bringen*. He heard, spoken wearily into a lull, *manchmal*, sometimes. *Sometimes these things were necessary*.

The conversation gathered pace again. It was clear that it was driven by competitive boasting. To falter was to be swept aside. Interruptions were brutal; each voice was more violently insistent, swaggering with finer instances, than its predecessor. Their consciences set free by a beer twice as strong as English ale and served in something not much smaller than pint pots, these men were reveling when they should have been cringing in horror. They were shouting their bloody deeds all over the bar. *Mit meinen blossen Händen!* With my own hands! Each man bludgeoned his way into anecdote, until his companions were ready to cut him down. There were bullying asides, growls of venomous assent. Other drinkers in the *Kneipe*, hunched over their own conversations were unimpressed. Only the barman glanced from time to time in the direction of the three, no doubt to check the state of their

glasses. *Eines Tages werden mir alle dafür dankbar sein.* One day everyone'll thank me for it. When Leonard stood and the barman came across to reckon up the pencil marks on his beermat, he could not resist turning to look at the three men. They were older, frailer than he had imagined. One of them saw him, and the other two turned in their seats. The first, with all the stagy twinkle of an old drunk, raised his glass. "*Na, junger Mann, bist wohl nicht aus dieser Gegend, wie? Komm her und trink einen mit uns. Ober!*" Come and join us. Here, barman! But Leonard was counting deutsche marks into the barman's hand and pretended not to hear.

The following morning he was up at six for a bath. He took time choosing his clothes, lingering over shades of gray and textures of white. He put on his second-best suit and then took it off. He did not want to look the way he had sounded on the phone. The young man who stood in his Y-front underpants and the extra-thick undershirt his mother had packed, staring into the wardrobe at three suits and a tweed jacket, had an intimation of the power of American style. He had an idea there was something risible about his stiffness of manner. His Englishness was not quite the comfort it had been to a preceding generation. It made him feel vulnerable. Americans, on the other hand, seemed utterly at ease being themselves. He chose the sports jacket and a bright red knitted tie, which was more or less concealed by his homemade high-necked jumper.

Ten Nollendorfstrasse was a tall thin building undergoing renovation. Workmen who were decorating the hallway had to move their ladders to allow Leonard up the narrow stairs. The top floor was already completed and had carpets. Three doors faced onto the landing; one of them stood ajar. Through it Leonard could hear a buzzing. Above it a voice shouted, "Is that you, Marnham? Come in, for Chrissakes."

He entered what was partly an office, partly a bedroom. On one wall was a large map of the city, and under it was an unmade bed. Glass sat at a chaotic desk, trimming his beard with an electric razor. With a free hand he was stirring instant

coffee into two mugs of hot water. An electric kettle was on the floor.

"Sit down," Glass said. "Throw that shirt on the bed. Sugar? Two?"

He spooned the sugar from a paper package and dried milk from a jar, and stirred the cups so vigorously that coffee slopped onto nearby papers. The moment the drinks were ready he turned off the razor and handed Leonard his cup. As Glass buttoned his shirt, Leonard had a glimpse of a stocky body beneath wiry black hair that grew right across the shoulders. Glass buttoned his collar tightly round a thick neck. From the desk he picked up a ready-knotted tie attached to a hoop of elastic that he snapped on as he stood. He wasted no movements. He took his jacket from the back of a chair and walked to the wall map as he put it on. The suit was dark blue, creased and worn in places to a shine. Leonard was watching. There were ways of wearing clothes that made them quite irrelevant. You could get away with anything.

Glass struck the map with the back of his hand. "You been around it yet?"

Leonard, still not trusting himself to avoid more of his "Well, actually, no," shook his head.

"I've just been reading this report. One of the things it says, and this is just anyone's guess, but what they say is that between five and ten thousand individuals in this city are working in intelligence. That's not counting backup. That's guys on the ground. Spies." He tilted his head and pointed his beard at Leonard until he was satisfied with the response. "Most of them are free-lancers, part-timers, kids, *Hundert Mark Jungen* who hang around the bars. They'll sell you a story for the price of a few beers. They also buy. You been over to the Café Prag?"

"No, not yet."

Glass was striding back to his desk. He had had no real need of the map after all. "It's the Chicago futures market down there. You should take a look."

He was about five foot six, seven inches shorter than Leonard. He seemed bottled up in his suit. He was smiling, but he

looked ready to wreck the room. As he sat down he slapped his knee hard and said, "So, Welcome!" His head hair was also wiry and dark. It started well up on his forehead and flew backward, giving him the high-domed appearance of a cartoon scientist facing into a strong wind. His beard, in contrast, was inert, trapping light into its solidity. It protruded as a wedge, like the beard of a carved wooden Noah.

From across the landing, through the open door, came the urinous scent of burned toast smelled at a distance. Glass bounced up, kicked the door shut and returned to his chair. He took a long pull of the coffee that Leonard was finding almost too hot to sip. It tasted of boiled cabbage. The trick was to concentrate on the sugar.

Glass leaned forward in his chair. "Tell me what you know."

Leonard gave an account of his meeting with Lofting. His voice sounded prissy in his ears. In deference to Glass, he was softening his *t*'s and flattening his *a*'s.

"But you don't know what the equipment is or what the tests are that you have to carry out?"

"No."

Glass stretched back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. "That dumb Sheldrake. Couldn't keep his ass still when his promotion came through. He left no one accountable for your stuff." Glass looked pityingly at Leonard. "The British. It's hard to make those guys at the stadium take anything seriously. They're so busy being gentlemen. They don't do their jobs."

Leonard said nothing. He thought he should be loyal.

Glass raised his coffee cup at him and smiled. "But you technical people are different, right?"

"Perhaps we are."

The phone rang while he was saying this. Glass snatched the receiver and listened for half minute and then said, "No. I'm on my way." He replaced the phone and stood. He guided Leonard toward the door. "So you know nothing about the warehouse? No one's mentioned Altglienicke to you?"

"I'm afraid not."

## T H E I N N O C E N T

“We’re going there now.”

They were on the landing. Glass was using three keys to lock his door. He was shaking his head and smiling to himself as he murmured, “Those Brits, that Sheldrake, that dumb fuck.”





# T w o

**T**he car was a disappointment. On his way to Nollendorfstrasse from the U-Bahn Leonard had seen a pastel American vehicle with tailfins and swags of chrome. This was a dun-colored Beetle, barely a year old, which seemed to have suffered an acid bath. The paintwork was rough to the touch. From the interior all comforts had been stripped away: the ashtrays, the carpets, the plastic moldings round the door handles, even the gearstick knob. The silencer was deficient, or had been tampered with to enhance the effect of a serious military machine.