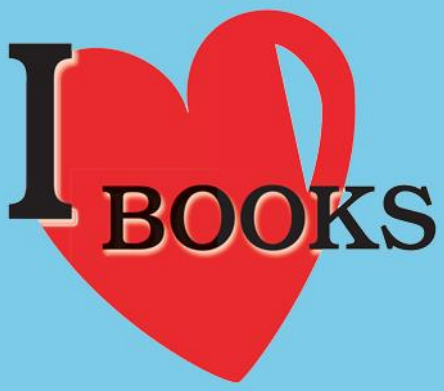


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SIOBHAN DOWD

the PAVEE and the BUFFER GIRL



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THE BUCKET LIST













"Don't go digging up troubles," his mam called as he set off. "You and your da, you're the one pair. Digging up troubles like bad old potatoes."

Jim turned back and waved, catching her in a smile. Her old yellow frock flapped in the June wind, matching the Calor gas bottles round the trailers.

"Aways with you," she said.



He went down the steep hill towards Dundray. As the morning haze thinned, he could make out the speckled dots of houses and a faint trace of the pier from the white shimmer of sea. Somewhere down there was the school. He'd have given anything not to go. But the education people had been around three times waving papers and mouthing the law, and his mam and da had given in.

"It'll only be a few weeks, Jimmy," his da said. "Then you can come scrapping again."

"The Buffers may be better down there," his mam said. "Try and get a few words of the reading off them."

In the last school, a year ago, he'd picked up a black eye and a bruised collarbone in two weeks, but no reading. The thought of all those books with the ugly black marks like secret codes was worse than all the fights put together. He paused, wondering if he should jump over the hedge and run for it, but his Uncle Mirt pulled up behind him in the van.











"Are yous off down that Buffer school too?" he said.

"S'pose."

"Hop in. I'll drop you at the gate with the others."

He climbed in the back where his cousins crouched, their faces dropping to the South Pole.

"I've never bin to secondary school before," said young Declan. He wheezed with the asthma and took out his spray.

"It's the pits," said May. Lil mimed a doom-laden spit.

"It's worse than the pits," said Jim. "Give me a mine to go down any day."

"What's it like so, Jimmy, if it's worse than the pits?" said Declan.

"It's like a laboratory run by robots. And we're the rats. The ones they give electric shocks to as an experiment." The van lurched over a hump in the road and came to a stop. "And it smells like a bit of cheese from the last century – any decent rat would turn up its nose."





"We're here," said Uncle Mirt. "Out yous all get and no malarkying."

But he beckoned Jim over and whispered, "Would you ever keep an eye out for young Declan? The wheezing's been wicked bad of late."

Jim nodded and followed the others through the school gates.



