

THE BOOK OF CONDOLENCES

BY KIERON CONNOLLY

EXCERPT

Margo: A point of order if I may?

Paul: You may.

Margo: Well, how can it be that this he ... whoever this he happens to be, would be interested in someone like ... me?

Tom: Yeah, especially if she's already dead ... nothing personal, Margo. Just sayin', that's all.

Margo: It is what it is, Tom. Don't go fretin' yourself.

Paul: But she might not have died yet.

Margo: Would ya make up your feekin' mind! I'm either dead or I'm not ... maths me arse!

Paul: It could well be that you're betwixt and between.

Margo: But I'm here now, amn't I?

Tom: (*Looking at Margo's costume*) And you're looking very well.

Margo: (*With great pride*) Ah sure, it's just a little something I threw on me for the audition – be prepared, that's my motto.

Paul: (*Paul runs over to the coffin, stops, and looks in*) Maths and timing; maths and timing; maths and timing.

Tom: He's off again.

Margo: I could always wave my magic wand at him.

Tom: Would ya stop; those things can be lethal.

Margo: But we have to do something.

Tom: Nothing to be done.

Paul: (*Runs to Tom and Margo*) It may not be too late. (*points at Margo*) One ... (*points at Tom*) Two ... (*points at himself*) Three. (*runs over to the coffin and points at it*) And if this

yoke is made for one ... (*runs over to the book*) and if myself and Tom truly do exist because we signed ourselves in ... (*gives the book a couple of taps - pauses, clearly lost in thought*) But one person didn't sign Margo, get your arse over here!

Margo: Paul ... cop the feck on.

Tom: Wishful thinking, I'm thinking.

Paul: (*Walks over to Margo*) But if you also sign the book that would mean ... What would it mean? ... It has to mean something ... I mean, it meant something just a second ago ... Shite. Yes! ... I think. Margo – timing! It's all about timing! If you sign the book we can prove to him that you're still one of us, and because you're still one of us, chances are, in all probability, that you're still ... you're still ... What are you still? ... Yes! It would mean that you're still - alive! Feck, I knew it made sense.

Margo: Paul, have a nice little sit down.

Tom: I'd make you a cup of tea ... if there was any tea.

Margo: But tea or no tea, the three of us can still have the chat.

Paul: We haven't got time to ...

A distant church bell rings three times.

Tom: Paul?

Paul: Yes, Tom?

Tom: Something is telling me that this isn't good.

Margo: I'd love a cup of tea.

Three loud, singular thuds can be heard coming from the far side of the doorway.

Tom: Paul?

Paul: Yes, Tom?

Tom: Seriously, this really isn't good.

Margo: Paul?

Paul: Yes, Margo?

Margo: Is this it?

Paul: It's starting to look that way, Margo.

Margo: Ah, sure, I've had my fill of living, time for moving on I suppose.

Tom: You can't leave us, Margo.

Margo: Some things just are what they are.

Tom: But I love you.

Margo: And you never extracted a price.

Tom: It's be a strange class of love if I did.

Again, the same three thuds.

Margo: Be polite and invite him in, Paul.

Paul: I'm scared, Margo.

Margo: No need for fear, not now.

Paul: But he's coming to take you away.

Margo: I was a good girl, I was. I'll be grand.

Again, the same three thuds, although this time they're noticeably louder.

Tom: Impatient little shite, isn't he?

Margo: Paul, do what you have to do.

Paul moves towards the doorway, stopping about five feet away. Slowly, he raises his hand, gesturing to the visitor that they should come in, and after a few seconds the Grim Reaper, carrying a large scythe and dressed in a dark cloak and hood, enters.

Paul: Howya (goes to shake the Grim Reapers hand before stopping himself) ... No, probably not ... Anyways, ya see the thing is ... well, as luck would have it, I think you've come to the right place ... yeah, couldn't be a finer place come to think of it.

Tom: Paul, what are you doing?

Paul: (Still looking at Grim Reaper) Plan B, Tom ... plan B.

Tom: This isn't going to end well.

Paul: It's the cigarettes you see (makes a pathetic attempt at coughing) ...they're killing me. So, if you were to take me now – smoking bad, I die, end of. You came for one, and it's a clear as fuck ... excuse the French, that it's my wretched bones you came for. So let's not delay and be on our way; no time like the present.

With Paul and the Grim Reaper looking at each other, Margo stands and walks over to Paul, grabbing him by the arm.

Margo: You can't do this, Paul.

Paul: Ignore her, she's doesn't know what she's saying; it's the innocence of youth, I'm thinking.

Margo: Paul, please don't.

Paul: So, what do you say? Time for us to be leaving?

A Momentary pause, and then the Grim Reaper turns and walks over to Tom, with Paul and Margo following closely behind. And as Tom looks up at the Grim Reaper ...

Tom: I knew this wasn't going to end well.

Paul: You can't (*panicked*) ... you can't be serious? (*gives Tom a firm slap on the shoulder*)
... Sure ... sure ... a finer specimen of a man you'd never meet ...

Tom: Why, thank you, Paul.

Paul: (*Ignores Tom*) Shut up, Tom ... I mean, if he was any fitter he'd be ... he'd be ... Margo, what would he be?

Margo: (*Pause*) He'd be ... he'd be half ... normal?

Paul: Exactly ... he'd be ... he'd be half ... half norm ... what? Feck sake, Margot, ya could have done better than that.

Margo: Hadn't much material to work with, sorry.

Tom: Even now, in my final hour, she still seeks to diminish me.

Paul: Tom, it's not your final hour.

Tom: There's nothing to say that it isn't.

Paul: What?

Tom: Leave this one to me.

Margo: Tom ... no!

Tom: I'll be grand, sure we'll only be having the chat.

Paul: Tom, settle yourself.

Tom stands, and placing both hands on the Grim Reapers shoulders, he gets it to turn.

Tom: (*Addressing the Grim Reaper*) So, ya see the thing is ...

Margo: Tom, I don't deserve this.

Tom: Margo, too late, I've made my decision.

Margo: (*Standing*) I don't think it's yours for the making.

Tom: Do you think I'm going to stand idly by and allow Mister Whatshisname here to take you? Sorry, chicken. You've too many summers still to be lived, too many breaths for breathing. (*putting his hand around the Grim Reapers waist, they slowly start walking towards the coffin*) ... So, anyways, ya see the thing is ... have we met, you seem somewhat familiar? A country road? A tree? Evening? ... No? ... It's strange, but as my consciousness drifted in and out, tomorrow now less certain, I could have sworn that you were sitting beside me ... No? No matter, and anyways, the two men with the bowler hats never gave you a mention so chances are you weren't there at all ... But feck it, I know you from somewhere.

Paul: Tom, a word?

Tom: Ignore him, he's too healthy for his own good; a picture of health if you ask me. All that shite about how the cigarettes we're killing him? Never smoked a day in his life.

Margo: Tom?

Tom: And as for that wan? Would ya look at her? ... (*The Grim Reaper tries to stop and have a look but Tom ensures that it keeps walking*) Healthy as a trout, she is. I mean, if she was any healthier she'd be ... she'd be ... Paul, what would she be?

Paul: (*Pause*) A big, healthy ... trout?

Margo: What?

Paul: I was paying you a compliment.

Margo: Compliment me arse ... (*mimics Paul*) A big healthy trout. (*normal*) Gobshite.

The four of them arrive at the coffin.

Tom: Do you know what I was thinking? (*Silence ensues*) Man of few words, I see. Anyways, I do know you. Once upon a time, yesterday or the day before, the darkness was telling me to pack my bags and leave - night, night, sleep tight, don't let the dreams bite. But you ... you told the darkness to leave me alone ... a whispered voice, nothing more, telling all who would listen that it wasn't my time ... strange the class of person you meet in a funeral parlour And so I stayed, and as a result of my staying I met this pair of gobshites. And now you want one of them to leave. But they can't leave. I love them, and I think, in their own way, that they love me. So, here's the deal (*puts a hand on the side of the coffin*). I'll call time on all time and leave with you now. And as for my friends? Not today. Tomorrow perhaps, but not today. Agreed?

The Grim Reaper turns away from Tom, its attention now focussed entirely on Margo, and the two of them will stay facing each other for several seconds. And as they stand there, a serene smile will gradually appear on Margo's face.

Margo: Thank you for choosing me. I'm ready.

Paul: Like fuck you are.

Tom. Paul, we have to do something.

Paul starts to rush frantically around the room. Tom follows soon after.

Paul: Think, Tom. Think!

Tom: Thinking, thinking, so much thinking; so much to think about.

Paul: How's that thinking going?

Tom: Still thinking.

Paul: Take all the time you need.

Tom: You had a plan.

Paul: I had a plan?

Tom: Yes, you had a plan.

Paul: Feck.

Tom: What?

Paul: I can't remember.

Tom: The plan, Paul – the plan!

Paul: Was it a good plan?

Tom: Two and two made ... something ... I think.

Paul: You think? It's more than thinking that's needed now!

Tom: The book.

Paul: The book?

Tom: Yeah, it had something to do with ... the ... the ... book.

Paul: The book? ... The book? The book? The book? ... Yes! The book! You're a genius! (*he gives Tom a peck on both cheeks*) What are ya, Tom?

Tom: A genius?

Paul: Still delusional, I see. Right, the book holds the key to ... the key to ...

A sudden pause, everyone's attention now drawn to a woman who has entered the room. Sarah, thirty-something, wearing a barristers wig and gown, carries a briefcase in one hand and a pair of black gloves in the other. Upon entering the room, she'll walk across to one of the chairs (SL), take a seat, and she will continue to sit there, motionless, oblivious to the events surrounding her.