

Left Hook Head On

Book Three in the Left Hook Saga

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To all those that have loved, lost and loved again.

Chapter 1

Houston Texas, October 1977

Scorching heat baked the Texas freeway as a black crow danced on the bitumen edge and picked at the carcass of a rabbit. The crow squawked towards the cloudless sky, a distant cry came back. In a flutter its mate joined the macabre feast by the side of the road.

The two birds argued, oblivious to the chaos of a machine hurtling towards them. The sound of a roaring engine echoed from miles away. One bird looked up, its mate stopped pecking and did the same. In a flutter of feathers they were both gone.

A white Cadillac rocketed past. The bull's horns attached to the bonnet whistled in the 140mph wind.

'C'mon you piece of shit!' Evie yelled. *I've gotta get there. I've gotta know what the hell's goin' on.* Her eyes were drained from crying. *No more tears. I want answers.*

Her thoughts of the trial from an hour ago played with her thinking. Her broken arm throbbed in its cast.

How could this be true? She blinked away a tear. Pieces of blonde hair lapped against her face and neck. *How can any of this be true? Mick's alive...* She shook her head and began to replay the last three hours of her life.

'Order! Order!' Judge Nelson smacked his gavel. 'Order I said!'

'God damn it!' Red struggled forward and pushed the bailiff out of the way. 'She's my kin god damn it.' He grabbed Evie under the arms just as

she slumped forward. 'Evie darlin'... don't give the bastards the satisfaction. Stand tall... stand tall my girl.'

Is that Red? Her mind wandered. *I can see... I can see a shadow. What's happening?* Her eyes rolled backwards then forwards. *Adam? Mick? I'm so confused what...*

'Come on sweetheart...' Red smiled. 'That's it... that's it... come back.'

'Red?' Her eyes cleared. Her thoughts came back into shattering focus.

'Your honour!' Jack Clark, Evie's lawyer called above the chaos. 'Under the circumstances I would like to delay —'

'I object!' blasted state attorney Winston Astor.

'You would you son of a bitch!' Jack glared at Astor. *I wanna punch the smug smile straight off that peckerhead's face.*

Astor glared back as if he could read Jack's thoughts.

'Order! Order!' The judge smacked his gavel like a sledgehammer.

The full gallery of people struggled to hear Judge Nelson over arguments breaking out everywhere.

'No,' came a whisper. 'No,' Evie said louder. 'NO!' She yelled and gripped the railing of the witness box. 'Fuck... you!' Her eyes were laced with hate towards the public prosecutor.

The bailiff moved closer towards Evie's trembling body.

The gallery's conversations trickled to a stop.

'Mrs O'Connor,' asked the judge, 'are you able to continue —'

'Yes!' Evie fired.

Judge Nelson stared at a woman transformed, then back at Astor. 'Get on with it prosecutor.'

'Mrs O'Connor,' Astor smiled and glanced at the jurors, 'as I was saying, pregnant teenager, a liar to everyone that loved you —'

‘Objection!’ called Jack.

‘Over ruled.’

‘You’ve lied about your past,’ Astor smiled again, ‘so why would we believe you now?’

A hush washed over the room.

‘I said, why would we believe —’

‘I heard ya...’ Evie looked up. Vengeance boiled just beneath her tears. ‘The only thing I’m guilty of... of, is falling in love more than once.’ Two tears cascaded down over her heart-broken cheeks. ‘Yes I loved Mick. I loved him more than anything.’ She glanced at all the faces judging her life. ‘When I heard — thought he died I was... was...’ She sobbed then stopped and shook her head. ‘I was crushed... I was hurt more than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing, thing...’ She shook her head. ‘Meg was what kept me going... and... then I met Adam.’ Two fresh tears trickled free and outlined her smile. ‘He was beautiful in every way, more than I knew a man could be.’

Evie wiped her eyes and looked at Red. ‘Ya gotta believe me Red. I loved him more than anything.’ She swallowed, waiting for any sign she still had the big man’s support.

Red nodded back. She breathed out her fear and smiled through her tears.

‘All this shit from the past has nothing to do with Adam.’

‘Doesn’t it?’ Astor held out his hands. ‘By your own admission you’re a liar on multiple levels.’

Evie struggled to listen to Astor’s words as her own thoughts wreaked havoc. *How am I gunna handle all this? I could go to jail and Meg won’t have anyone but Aunty... and Mick? What the hell am —*

‘Mrs O’Connor, are you even listening to me?’

‘I heard everything you said... and you’re wrong. I’d... I’d do anything for the people I love.’

‘Anything?’

Oh shit! Jack thought and gripped the edge of his desk.

‘Anything, and that includes...’ She stared at the jury. ‘And that includes handing Adam the gun that killed him.’

Jack smiled. A shiver ran over his skin. *She’s like nothing I’ve ever seen.*

Damn this woman. Astor fought not to frown. *I’ll do my damage in my closing.*

‘Councillor Astor?’ said Judge Nelson.

‘No further questions.’ Astor took one more glimpse at Evie then the jury before sitting at his desk.

‘Defence?’ called the judge.

‘No, your honour.’

‘Very good. We will have a short recess then I’ll hear your final arguments.’ He smacked his gavel. ‘Court is adjourned.’

‘Red,’ Evie rushed back. ‘I’m... I’m sorry —’

He gripped her by the arms. ‘Look me in the eye and tell me you loved my boy. Tell me you didn’t chase after Adam for his money?’

‘I didn’t. I loved him with everything I had. Mick was a guy I fell in love with. I thought he was dead. Adam was...’ She squeezed her eyes closed, ‘Adam was forever.’

Red sighed. ‘Girl... I... I believe you. We’re gonna get through today.’ He turned to Jack. ‘Can you get her off this buddy? Or do I give her my Cadillac and send her to Mexico?’

Jack smiled then realised Red was serious.

‘I think Astor’s reaching, I think —’

‘Think?’

Evie watched the two men stare at each other. *Shit.*

*

‘Your Honour,’ Jack began his closing statement, ‘Members of the jury. Today and every day since this trial began you have heard witness after witness speak positively for the accused.’ His voice slowly increased in volume. ‘You have heard how she risked her own life and that of her unborn child to rescue her husband, not once, but twice.’ Jack held up two fingers to press his point. ‘This woman, this mother and much loved wife acted in a way that I have personally witnessed before... and that is like a hero.’ The jurors watched and listened as the defence lawyer appeared to get taller and prouder. ‘Is this the actions of a murderer? No! An opportunist? No!’

This guy’s good. Evie watched as Jack Clark edged his way in to the jurors’ minds

‘Is she intelligent? *Yes!* Did she love her husband more than life itself? Undoubtedly YES!’ Jack took a deep breath and stared up at the ornate stained glass window of the biblical scene, the jury followed his stare. ‘God is the ultimate judge of this young woman, and she and her husband’s love will be judged by him alone. You are not here to judge Adam O’Connor’s actions but those of his loving wife... Mrs O’Connor, and those actions are those of an innocent woman on all counts.’ Jack concluded with a nod, a nod to himself of a case he had to win.

‘Mr Astor.’ Judge Nelson curled his thin finger for Astor to come forward. ‘It’s your turn.’

‘Thank you your Honour, members of the jury.’ Astor scanned the courtroom ending his stare at a nervous looking Evie. ‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ Astor walked to the middle of the room, ‘the American legal system is in my opinion the pinnacle of justice. You as Americans are the caretakers of our moral fabric, the compass that leads us through the daily

rights and wrongs.’ Astor nodded aware of his silky words weaving their way into the jurors’ egos. ‘It is your responsibility as God’s creatures to do your duty. “I shall not lie!” is the fifth commandment. *Lie!* Evelyn O’Connor has done nothing but lie to you since this trial began. Proven lies by her own confession.’

‘Shit he’s good,’ Evie whispered to Jack. She waited for an answer but his silence confirmed her thoughts.

‘Lie after lie after lie.’ Astor smacked his fist into his open hand. ‘Unmarried teenage mother, a runaway... members of the jury it is as clear as the outside day. She disarmed a state trooper. She pushed the gun into her husband’s head. She alone pulled the trigger that ended the life of Adam O’Connor.’

Crap. Jack swallowed realising Astor wasn’t to be taken lightly. He squeezed Evie’s hand and forced a smile.

Evie smiled back. *Shit... I know fear when I see it.*

‘You the jury must do your duty and find the defendant...’ Astor pointed at Evie. ‘Guilty as charged.’

Evie’s heart pounded inside her chest. *I know I did it. Maybe I should be found —*

‘All rise.’

Evie snapped from her day dream. She stood with everyone else as the judge and jury left the courtroom.

‘Now we wait,’ Jack said, allowing Evie to walk ahead of him towards the waiting room. ‘Whatever happens stay strong. If it goes bad I’ll lodge an appeal on at least ten reasons.’

‘Goes bad?’

Well wishes came from everywhere. Frank and Grace hugged her, Frank telling her, ‘I had a dream you were on a beach, smiling, and everyone was cheering.’

‘She doesn’t want to hear your crazy dreams,’ Grace snapped.
‘Everything’ll be fine.’

Bobby and the whole race team descended and declared their support.

‘It’s time.’ Jack motioned for Evie to re-enter the courtroom.

‘It’s only been ten minutes. Is that good?’ Evie asked.

‘It can be —’

‘*Shit.*’

‘Shh,’ Jack said and held her by the elbow.

Evie walked back to her seat. The three days of court appearances had taken its toll.

‘Has the jury reached a verdict?’

‘Yes we have your Honour,’ answered a mature man in a tweed suit.

The bailiff took the verdict from the elected foreperson and handed it to the judge. The man glanced sideways at Evie. She couldn’t read his tired expression.

This is it. Evie swallowed nervously as a bead of sweat trickled down the back of her neck. *I feel like I’m gunna spew. I knew my life would go to shit like this. Poor Meg, poor Aunty... I’ve let them all down. And now Mick?... Will I ever see —*

‘How does the jury find the defendant on the grounds of second degree murder?’

The man glanced sideways at Evie then at Astor. ‘Not guilty your honour.’

The silent courtroom sat motionless. Evie glanced around the room, every set of eyes were on her.

‘How does the jury find the defendant on the grounds of manslaughter?’

Jack gripped Evie’s hand. *This is the charge I fear the most.*

The foreperson wet his lips ready to deliver the jury’s verdict.

Evie stared, trying to read the man's mind. *It can't be anything but innocent. Please Adam give me the —*

'Not guilty your Honour.'

Evie blinked. *What did he say?*

'Case dismissed.' Judge Nelson hit his gavel as the courtroom erupted in a cheer.

Evie sat stunned. 'What?'

'You're free!' Red said and kissed her on the forehead.

'Red,' Evie's eyes changed to all business, 'can I have ya keys?'

'Keys?'

'I've got questions, and there's only one person that knows the answers.'

'I'll drive.'

'No... I'm doin' this one alone.'

Chapter 2

The white Cadillac screeched to a stop outside Houston's General Hospital. Steam billowed from under the bonnet.

'Y'all can't park there Ma'am,' said the security guard.

'Tow it!' Evie barked.

The guard watched a four month pregnant Evie dressed in black rush past, clutching at her small matching handbag.

'Miss,' Evie tapped on the front desk, 'Nurse, please.'

'Emergency is just down the —'

'No. I have to see a patient. He came in last night with a gunshot wound. His name is Harris —' *Shit, what was the fake name in his wallet* — 'Clancy! His name is Mr Clancy from Australia.'

The nurse turned to her paperwork and flipped a page back and forth. 'Are you family? We only allow family —'

'Course I am. I'm his niece — listen to my accent.'

The nurse pulled a face and ran her fingers down the page. 'Mr Clancy is in level one, west wing, room eight.' She looked up. 'He has...' *Where did she go?*

Evie half walked half ran. *Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.* She looked around the deserted corridor then ran towards room eight. She sneaked one final glance up and down the hallway and pushed inside the room.

'You prick!' Evie reached into her handbag and marched towards Angel.

'You're gunna kill me here?' Angel smirked and shook his head. 'I thought you were smart? You've got no idea who you're up against!'

'Don't I?' Evie pushed her .22 pistol under Angel's jaw. 'I want answers.'

‘I don’t answer to you.’ Angel winced and tried to move his shoulder. ‘And I don’t think you’re gunna put another bullet in my head in the hospital either... are ya?’

Evie’s lips snarled up at the edges. *He could’ve let that prick kill me last night but he didn’t... maybe* —

‘Are ya!’ Angel moved his chin away from Evie’s gun. ‘I thought you were smart. I must’ve got it wrong.’

‘Why’d you save me and my kid last night?’ Evie studied Angel’s face.

‘I...’ Angel shook his head. ‘I don’t know. I should’ve shot ya. But I — fuck it.’ He started to scratch the side of his chin, then the side of his head and then his forehead.

‘What’s wrong with ya? You’re all jumpy.’

‘So would you if you’d just been shot!’

‘It’s more than that.’ Evie studied Angel’s eyes. *I don’t believe it. Why didn’t I see it before* — ‘You’re a junkie. That’s how Ratcay has got ya by the balls.’

‘Fuck you! What would you know? I’m a detective. I’m ten times whatever you are.’

‘You’re filth. You’re dirtier than shit... that’s what you are.’

‘Get out!’ Angel reached for the help buzzer.

‘No you don’t.’ Evie moved it away.

‘Let me go. Get out!’

‘Like I said... I want answers.’

‘I’m tellin’ you nothing — shit!’

Evie pushed her fist into Angel’s bandages. ‘Tell me what you were gunna say before you passed out last night?’

‘What are you — arghh!’

‘Tell me about Mick. How can he be alive?’

‘I’ll tell ya then leave me alone.’

‘Tell me and I’ll decide if you make it to the airport alive.’

Angel stared into Evie’s intense eyes. *She’s bluffin’... she can’t control stuff here... that Red guy’s all she’s got... isn’t it?* Angel swallowed. *Fuck... I haven’t got a handle on things here —*

‘Tell me or you’ll end up like ya mate in the desert... I guarantee it.’

‘Alright!’ Angel held up his one good hand. ‘Michael Halias is a drifter. He got himself shot to pieces in Vietnam.’

Evie’s bottom lip trembled but she fought the tears.

‘He’s a real mess.’ Angel swallowed. ‘Your grandfather knew he was alive.’

‘What?’ Evie blinked and shook her head.

‘So that’s it... ya happy now?’

‘“Happy?”’ Evie studied Angel’s face as the truth took hold. ‘So you’re just gunna go back and pretend you didn’t kill...’ Evie went wide-eyed. ‘He said his name was Ratcaj. You shot one of the boss’ family... his son —’

‘He doesn’t have kids. Tino was his nephew.’

‘You’re fucked.’ Evie smiled when Angel started to sweat. ‘You think I’m stuffed. Wait til he finds out you killed one of his own.’

‘He won’t, will he?’

‘Won’t he?’ Evie’s smile became more sinister. ‘It’s just a phone call. We’ll even tell him where to dig for answers. If Ratcaj even suspects something’s wrong with ya story you’ll end up as shark food —’

‘Enough! I get it.’ Angel winced and tried to move his injured arm.

Evie studied his tired eyes. *He thought his number was up last night. I know what to do.* ‘I saw ya eyes last night.’

‘What?’

‘You thought ya number was up. You’re done with this life... aren’t ya?’

‘What would you know?’

‘I know people... especially people like you. You think wearing a badge makes you better than everyone else... well it doesn’t.’

Evie waited on Angel’s silence. *He’ll break... I can sense it.*

Angel closed his eyes. ‘What... what do you want?’ He didn’t look up.

‘What we both want. What you’ve just figured out.’ She pushed her pistol back into her handbag. ‘A life.’

‘The only way we can have that,’ Angel looked Evie in the eyes, ‘is to kill him.’

Evie didn’t budge. Her stare held her answer.

‘Shit.’ Angel closed his eyes and shook his head. *What do I do?*