

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Stolen Souls

Stuart Neville

Contents

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Stuart Neville

Dedication

Title Page

Part One: Galya

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Part Two: Herkus

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

Chapter 40

Chapter 41

Chapter 42

Chapter 43

Chapter 44

Chapter 45

Chapter 46

Chapter 47

Chapter 48

Chapter 49

Chapter 50

Chapter 51

Part Three: Edwin

Chapter 52

Chapter 53

Chapter 54

Chapter 55

Chapter 56

Chapter 57

Chapter 58

Chapter 59

Chapter 60

Chapter 61

Chapter 62

Chapter 63

Chapter 64

Chapter 65

Chapter 66

Chapter 67

Chapter 68

Chapter 69

Chapter 70

Chapter 71

Chapter 72

Chapter 73

Chapter 74

Chapter 75

Chapter 76

Chapter 77

Chapter 78

Chapter 79

Part Four: Jack

Chapter 80

Chapter 81

Chapter 82

Chapter 83

Chapter 84

Chapter 85

Chapter 86

Chapter 87

Chapter 88

Chapter 89

Chapter 90

Chapter 91

Chapter 92

Epilogue

Acknowledgements

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About the Book

It is snowing, she's barefoot, but Galya runs. Her captors are close behind her, and she won't go back there, no matter what. Tricked into coming to Belfast with the offer of a good job, all she wants now is to get back home. Her only hope is a man who gave her a cross and a phone number, telling her to call if she escaped. She puts herself at his mercy, knowing she has nowhere else to turn.

Detective Inspector Jack Lennon wants a quiet Christmas with his daughter. When an apparent turf war between rival gangs leaves a string of bodies across the city, he knows he won't get it. As Lennon digs deeper he discovers the truth is far more threatening. Soon he is locked in a deadly race with two very different killers.

About the Author

Stuart Neville's first novel, *The Twelve*, was one of the most critically acclaimed crime debuts of recent years. It was selected as one of the top crime novels of the year by the *New York Times* and it won the *Los Angeles Times Book Prize* for best thriller. His second novel, *Collusion*, garnered widespread praise and confirmed his position as one of the most exciting new crime authors writing today.

www.stuartneville.com

Also by Stuart Neville

The Twelve
Collusion

For Jo, and everything to come

Stolen Souls

Stuart Neville



Harvill *Secker*
LONDON

PART ONE: GALYA

1

BLOOD HOT ON her hands. Red. The brightest red Galya had ever seen. Her mind tilted, her vision disappearing down a black tunnel.

No, don't faint.

She gasped, pulled air in, and with it a copper smell that went to her stomach and grabbed it like a fist. Bile rose to her throat. She swallowed.

The man's legs shook as she tried to withdraw the shard of glass, a strip of bed sheet wrapped around one end to form a grip for the improvised knife. She jerked. His eyes gaped. She twisted, feeling the glass grind against a hardness deep inside his neck until something snapped. The blade slipped free of the new mouth it had opened beneath his chin. Red bubbled from it and spread across his Lithuania football shirt, swamping the bright yellow.

Galya stepped back as the blood advanced across the linoleum towards her bare feet. It licked at her toes, warm kisses from the dying man who slid down the wall as his eyes dimmed.

A scream rushed up from her belly, but she clamped her free hand over her mouth, trapped it behind her teeth. The hand was slick on her lips, and then she tasted it.

Galya's gut flexed, and vomit streamed between her fingers. Her legs dissolved. The floor came at her like a train. She sprawled in the wetness and the heat, tried to scramble away from it, but it was too slippery against her bare skin.

The scream came again and this time she could not hold it back. Even though she knew it would kill her, Galya let it

burst free, a terrified bird escaping from the cage of her chest.

The howl dragged every last swallow of air from her lungs. She inhaled, coughed, breathed in again, brought her mind back under control.

Galya listened through the rushing in her ears.

Silence, save for the choked bubbling from the man's throat. Then a knock on the bedroom door. Tears came to her eyes, frightened little-girl tears, but she blinked them away. She was not a little girl, hadn't been since Papa died almost a decade ago.

Think, think, think.

The glass blade still rested in her bloodied fingers, the tip missing, the rag grip soaked through. Maybe she could keep them back. They would see their dead friend and know she could do the same to them.

Another knock, louder. The door handle rattled.

'Tomas?'

Fear cut through her. No, she could not keep them back with this piece of glass. Again, the urge to weep. She pushed it away once more.

'Tomas?' The voice slurred out some more words. She knew a little Lithuanian but not enough to understand the drunken questions coming from the other side of the door.

'You all right in there?' Another voice, the English spoken with the hard twang of this strange, cold place. 'Don't be leaving any marks on that girl.'

How many were there? Galya had listened to the voices as they arrived. Two spoke Lithuanian. One of whom now lay beside her on the floor. The other spoke English with an accent strong enough for her to hear that he was Irish. One of the two brothers, she thought. After a week of listening to their conversations through the locked door, she had learned one was named Mark, the other Sam. Only one of them was here tonight.

‘Tomas?’ A fist hammered the wood. ‘Listen, stop fucking about in there. I’m going to kick this door in if you don’t come and open it.’

Galya got to her knees, then up on her feet, the air chilling the wetness on her stomach and thighs. The plain grey sweatshirt and pair of jogging bottoms they’d given her lay on the dressing table. She grabbed them, juggled the glass from hand to hand as she pulled them on, feeling the fabric stick to the blood. Foolish, perhaps, but she felt safer clothed.

The door rattled with each thump. Beyond it, the other Lithuanian cursed.

‘Fuck’s sake,’ the Irishman said.

Galya blinked as the door jerked in its frame, the noise booming in the bedroom. She backed towards the corner, gripping the glass knife in front of her. Another boom, and the light bulb swayed on its cord above her head. She wedged herself into the angle where the two walls met. The glass quivered in front of her eyes.

She prayed to her grandmother, the woman who had always protected her and her brother ever since they had been orphaned. The old woman had been Mama to them as long as Galya could remember. Now Mama lay in the ground hundreds of miles away where she could no longer give protection. Galya prayed to Mama’s departed soul, even though she did not believe in such things. She prayed that Mama would look down on her granddaughter and take pity, oh please Mama, come down and take me away please Mama oh pl—

The door burst inward, slammed against the wall and bounced back. The Lithuanian blocked it with his shoulder as he entered. The Irishman followed. They stopped when they saw the dead man.

The Lithuanian made the sign of the cross.

The Irishman said, ‘Fuck me.’

Galya shrank into the corner, made herself as small as she could, as if they wouldn't see her cowering there.

The Lithuanian cursed and shook his head, his eyes watering. He rubbed his big hand across his lips.

'Jesus, Darius,' the Irishman asked, 'Is he dead?'

'Look like yes,' Darius said.

'What do we do?'

Darius shook his head. 'Don't know.'

Sam - Galya was sure this was Sam - said, 'Fuck me'.

'We all dead,' Darius said.

'What?'

'Arturas,' the Lithuanian said. 'He kill us both. You brother also.'

Sam said, 'But we didn't—'

'No matter. We all dead.' Darius pointed a thick finger at the corner. 'Cause of her.'

Sam turned to look at Galya. She raised the glass blade, cut the air in front of her.

'Why you do this thing?' Darius asked, his face slack with despair.

She hissed, the glass sweeping in an arc at his eye level.

'Don't waste your breath,' Sam said. 'She doesn't speak English.'

Galya understood every word. She choked back a giggle at the deception, felt her mind flutter like a flag in the wind, ready to tear itself free. For a moment she thought she might let it go, let insanity carry her away, but Mama had not raised her to give in so easily. She bared her teeth and showed them the blade again.

'What are we going to do?' Sam asked.

'Get rid him,' the Lithuanian said.

Sam's eyes brightened. 'What, dump him?'

'We say Arturas, you brother come here, take her out of this place, no come back. Arturas ask where go, we say we know nothing.'

'Will he believe us?' Sam asked.

The Lithuanian shrugged. 'We say real thing, we dead. Arturas don't believe, we dead also. What different?'

Sam nodded to the corner. 'What about her?'

'What you think?' the Lithuanian said.

Sam blinked and stared at him.

'Go.' The Lithuanian stepped aside. 'Take *stiklas* from her.'

'Take what off her?' Sam asked.

'*Stiklas, stiklas.*' The Lithuanian searched for the word. 'Glass. Take from her.'

Sam approached, hands up. 'Easy, love. Take it easy.'

Galya slashed at him, almost caught his forearm.

'Shite!' Sam retreated.

Darius pushed him back. 'Take from her.'

'Away and shite, *you* get it off her.'

The Lithuanian cursed and bulled his way past. Galya swiped the glass blade through the air in front of him, but he caught her wrist in one easy movement. He twisted once, hard, and the blade dropped to the floor. His thick arm snaked around her throat, and she smelled leather and cheap aftershave with her last breath before everything fell away into darkness.

She dreamed of Mama's coarse hands, and warm bread, and a time when she only knew Belfast as that wretched place they sometimes talked about on the radio.

2

SCREAMS WOKE DETECTIVE Inspector Jack Lennon. He shot upright on the couch. How long ago had he dozed off? Not that long. The film still played on the television.

Another scream and he was on his feet. It had been a week or more since Ellen had last erupted from her sleep, howling at the nightmares that dwelled there.

His daughter had witnessed more suffering than any human ever should. Lennon was constantly surprised that she could function at all, that she had the inner strength to go on. Maybe it was the stubborn streak she had inherited from the mother who had died beside her. He had left Marie McKenna's body to the flames when he'd carried Ellen unconscious out of that house near Drogheda. She never spoke of what happened there. Perhaps she didn't remember, or simply didn't want to recount the events. Either way, Lennon was relieved. He wasn't sure he could bear to hear it from her lips.

Alert now, Lennon went to her bedroom, opened the door, and flicked on the light. Ellen stared at him from under her twisted duvet, no hint of recognition on her face. She screamed again.

Lennon knelt beside the bed, placed a hand on her small cheek. He had learned not to take the child in his arms when she awoke pursued by night terrors, the shock of it too much for her.

'It's me,' he said. 'Daddy's here. You're all right.'

Ellen blinked at him, her face softening. He'd almost forgotten how old she looked when she emerged from her

nightmares, a girl of seven carrying centuries of pain behind her eyes.

'You were only dreaming,' Lennon said. 'You're safe.'

Her fingers went to her throat, brushed the skin as if it were tender.

'What did you dream about?' he asked.

Ellen frowned and burrowed into her pillow, pulling the duvet up so he could only see the crown of her head.

'You can tell me,' Lennon said. 'Might make you feel better.'

She peeked out. 'I was all cold and wet, then I couldn't breathe. I was choking.'

'Like drowning?'

'Uh-uh. Like something around my neck. Then there was this old lady. She wanted to talk to me, but I ran away.'

'Was she scary?'

'Uh-uh.'

'Then why did you run away?'

'Don't know,' Ellen said.

'You think you can get back to sleep?'

'Don't know.'

'Can you try?'

'Okay.'

Lennon stroked her hair. 'Good girl,' he said.

He watched her in silence as her eyelids drooped and her breathing steadied. The ring of the telephone in the living room caused her to stir for a moment. He held his breath until she settled, exhaled when it seemed the phone had not woken her, and went to answer it.

'It's Bernie McKenna here,' the caller said, her voice hard.

They had spoken on the phone and in person more times than he could count over the last few months, but still she introduced herself with that stiff formality.

'How are you?' Lennon asked. His only interest in her well-being was to gauge how the conversation might flow. Their discussions rarely went well.

'I'm fine,' she said. She did not enquire after Lennon's health. 'What about Ellen?' she asked instead.

'What about her?' Lennon regretted the hostility that edged into his voice as soon as he'd spoken.

'No need for that tone,' Bernie said, the words delivered in a staccato rhythm as if squeezed through tight lips. 'She's my grand-niece. I've every right to ask after her, more right than you—'

'You didn't want to know her for six years,' Lennon said. He winced.

'Neither did you,' she said.

Lennon swallowed his anger. 'Well, she's fine. She's in bed.'

'Any more dreams?'

'Some.'

Bernie clucked. 'Her eyes were hanging on her last time I saw the cratur.'

'Some nights are better than others,' Lennon said.

'Did you call Dr Moran for her?'

'My GP has her on the waiting list for the child psych—'

'But she'll be waiting for months. Dr Moran can see her straight away.'

Lennon saw the rest of the conversation spreading out in front of him. He closed his eyes. 'I can't afford to go private,' he said.

'I can,' Bernie said. 'Michael saw us right. I can spare whatever she needs.'

Lennon had heard rumours of the substantial estate Michael McKenna's kin had inherited when he'd got his brains blown out last year. He didn't doubt Bernie could afford to pass on a few shekels, but the idea of it burned him.

'I don't want Michael McKenna's money,' Lennon said.

'And what's wrong with my brother's money?'

'I know where it came from.'

He listened to Bernie's hard breathing for a few seconds before she said, 'I don't have to take that from the likes of you.'

'Then don't,' Lennon said. 'I've things to do, so if—'

'Hold your horses,' Bernie said. 'I haven't even got asking what I called you for.'

He sighed loud enough for her to hear. 'All right. What?'

'Christmas.'

'We talked about this already. Ellen's spending the day with—'

'But her granny wants to see her. That poor woman's been through hell. Ellen's all she's got left of her own daughter. What's the sense in making the child spend the day all alone in that flat of yours?'

'She won't be alone. She'll be with me.'

'She should be with her family,' Bernie said. 'Her grandmother, her cousins, all of our ones will be here. Let her have a nice day. A happy day. Just because you're miserable, don't make her miserable too.'

'I'm taking her to see her grandmother - *my* mother - then she's spending the day with me. We're having dinner with Susan from upstairs, her and her wee girl Lucy. They're best friends. She'll be happy here.'

'You're taking her to your mother? Sure, what's the point of that? Your mother hasn't the wit to know her own children when they're in front of her, let alone—'

'That's enough,' Lennon said, his throat tightening. 'I have to go.'

'But what about Chr—'

He hung up and placed the handset back on the coffee table, fighting the urge to throw it against the wall. How many times would he have to argue this out with Bernie McKenna? Ever since Marie died, her family had been circling, waiting for him to slip up so they could claim his daughter for their own.

True, he hadn't been a father to the girl for the first six years of her life, but they had been no more a family to her. Marie's people had cut her off when she took up with him, a cop, long before Republicans changed the stance they'd held for decades and acknowledged the legitimacy of the police service. Until then, any young Catholic who joined the police immediately became a target for assassination, and anyone who associated with them risked being ostracised from their community. Marie had done just that, and he had repaid her sacrifice by abandoning her when she fell pregnant. These arguments only served to remind him that they had all failed Ellen, and they always left him wishing he had some moral high ground he could take. But there was none. His was the worst betrayal of all, and Bernie McKenna would always hold that over him. Anger bubbled in him after every call, and only force of will would quell it.

Before he could fully calm himself, the phone rang again. He snatched it from the coffee table, ranting before he'd hit the answer button. 'For Christ's sake, you're going to wake her up. I am not discussing this any more so, for the last time, you can—'

'Jack?'

'—shove Christmas up your—'

'Jack?'

Lennon paused. 'Who's that?'

'Chief Inspector Uprichard.'

Lennon sat down on the couch, covered his eyes with his free hand. 'No,' he said.

'I need you in, Jack,' Uprichard said.

'No,' Lennon said. 'Not again. I told you, didn't I? We agreed this. I'm not doing nights over Christmas. I can't.'

'DI Shilliday's taken ill,' Uprichard said. 'I've no one else to cover for him.'

'No,' Lennon said.

'It'll be an easy night. It's quiet out. You can sleep in your office. Just so I have someone on site, that's all.'

'No,' Lennon said, but there was no conviction behind it.

'I'm not really asking you, Jack,' Uprichard said, his voice hardening. 'Don't make me order you.'

'Fuck,' Lennon said.

'Now, there's no call for that.'

'Yes, there bloody is,' Lennon said as he stood. 'That's the fourth time this month.'

He almost said he knew where it was coming from, that DCI Dan Hewitt of C3 Intelligence Branch was pulling strings to make his life difficult, but he thought better of it.

'I'm sorry,' Uprichard said. 'That's just the way it is. I want you here in an hour.'

Susan opened the door wearing a dressing gown pulled tight around her. In the few minutes between Lennon phoning her and knocking on her door, she had tidied her hair and applied as much make-up as she could manage. Either that or she went to bed wearing lip gloss.

Ellen huffed and mewled in Lennon's arms, her bare feet kicking at his sides.

'You're a diamond,' he said to Susan. 'I can't thank you enough.'

Susan gave him a smile that was at once warm and weary. 'It's all right. I hadn't gotten to sleep yet.'

Lennon knew a lie when he heard one, but still he was glad of it. 'I'll be back before you get up in the morning.'

Susan reached for Ellen. 'C'mere, pet, I've got you.'

Ellen whimpered and rubbed her eyes.

Susan kissed her hair. 'You can sleep in with Lucy, all right?'

Ellen buried her head beneath Susan's chin. She had been ferried here while she slept many times before.

Lennon touched Susan's forearm. 'Thank you,' he said.

She smiled again. 'When you come back, why don't you come in for breakfast?'

'The neighbours might talk,' Lennon said.

'Let them,' she said.

3

THE PLASTIC-COVERED CORPSE rolled against Galya as the car jerked to a standstill, its bloody odours forcing her to gag against the cloth that had been shoved in her mouth. She wedged her shoulders against the rear wall of the boot and pushed the body back with her knees. They'd used some sort of thin electrical cord to bind her wrists but already it had worked loose on her blood-slicked skin. She could easily slip free from it, but instead chose to keep it there until her hands could do her some good.

Galya felt the car rock as the men alighted, heard the doors slam shut. The last few minutes of the journey had been slow – sharp turns and sudden stops – before a final lurch and judder as the car came to a halt on rough ground. She strained to listen to the sounds beyond the blackness that encased her. Traffic noise somewhere but, closer, the soft sigh of water.

As soon as she'd woken in the dark, her head throbbing with the car's engine, Galya knew they meant to kill her. There was no question. The sound of water only confirmed it. They would dump the dead man in it, then throw her in after. Maybe they'd kill her first, or maybe they'd drown her. Either way, she would be in the water soon.

Voices now, outside, the Irishman's high and panicky, the Lithuanian's low and angry. They exchanged accusations and curses as they came closer. A key scraped against metal, the lock turned, and cold air flooded in.

A cloud of mist formed between Darius and Sam as their breath mingled. The Lithuanian grabbed his countryman's

body and hauled it from the boot, grunted as he let it drop to the ground with a wet thump.

Galya did not resist when Sam reached for her. The icy ground seemed to bite at her soles as he held her upright. She bucked with the intensity of the shivers that shot through her, and he gripped her arms tighter.

The car, an old BMW, stood feet from a stretch of water, parked on a narrow band of waste ground separated from the empty road by a low kerb. All around were warehouses and cranes, quiet and still in the cold night. Lazy waves lapped at the embankment. Across the channel, more warehouses, and the lights of the city beyond them. Galya tried to turn her head to see more of the surroundings, but Sam squeezed and jerked her arm.

'Quit it,' he said, as much to himself as to her.

Darius stooped and grabbed his dead friend's ankles. He pulled, but managed no more than two feet, the plastic snagging and tearing on the rubble. He cursed and dropped the body's legs.

'Help,' he said.

'What?' Sam said.

'Help,' the Lithuanian said. 'Put Tomas in water.'

'I'm keeping hold of her,' Sam said, tightening his grip on Galya's arm.

'Where she go?' Darius asked, holding his hands out, indicating the expanse of water and low buildings. He pointed at the corpse on the ground. 'You help.'

A clammy heat lingered on Galya's arm when Sam released it. He pushed her back against the car.

'Don't move,' he said.

He crossed the few feet to the body, hunkered down, gripped the shoulders.

Darius said, '*Vienas, du, trys, hup!*'

Both men hissed as they raised the body a few inches from the ground. They shuffled towards the water's edge, huffing and grunting as they went. A bloodstained hand

flopped from the plastic and brushed its fingertips along the loose stones.

'Jesus,' Sam said.

A thin distorted disco beat erupted from nowhere, and he yelped in fright as he dropped the dead man's shoulders.

Galya took a step away from the car.

Darius lowered the feet and straightened. Something vibrated on the body. He reached down and tore a hole in the shiny plastic. His hand explored inside for a moment before emerging again, a mobile phone gripped in his thick fingers. His face went slack when he looked at the screen, its light making him look even paler than he already was. He glanced at Sam.

'Is Arturas,' he said.

Sam swallowed so hard Galya heard the click in his throat. 'Are you going to answer it?' he asked.

Darius gave him a hard stare. 'You a stupid man. I answer, say brother busy? Say he go in water, yes? I say to him this?'

Sam shifted his weight as if the insult had hit him square in the chest. 'Well, fuck, I don't know. He's your boss, not mine.'

Galya moved to the far side of the car.

'Arturas everybody boss,' the Lithuanian said.

Sam took a step forward. 'He's not mine.'

Darius held out the phone, still blasting its tinny music, his podgy face swelling with anger. 'Okay, you say he not you boss, you say him now.'

'Fuck yourself,' Sam said.

Galya flexed her wrists, felt the electrical cord skim the backs of her legs as it slipped away.

Darius stepped over the body, came face to face with Sam.

'You think you big man?' he asked, the phone still alight and ringing in his hand.

Two metres separated Galya from the car now. She pushed the cord aside with her toes, kept her hands behind her back. She pressed her tongue against the rag between her teeth, pushed it out and let it fall to the ground. She steadied her breathing.

Sam moved to the other side of the body. 'Listen, this isn't the time for getting the arse with each other, right? We need to get this sorted before anyone comes along and asks us what we're doing here at this time of night.'

Darius would not be placated. 'You need take care your mouth, or you go in water also.'

Sam raised his hands.

Darius slapped them aside.

Galya ran.

4

ARTURAS STRAZDAS HUNG up without leaving a message. He thought for a moment as the car sped along the motorway towards the city, the driver's attention fixed to the road ahead. Tomas always answered his phone. It didn't matter if he was in bed or at a funeral, he never left a call unanswered if his mobile was in reach. Many times Arturas had phoned his brother only to hear hard panting and moaning on the other end as he rutted with one of the whores.

Once, Tomas had hospitalised a cinema-goer for complaining at the disturbance caused by his taking a call during a screening of some romantic comedy. It had taken several days, and some expense, to convince the victim they were mistaken in their identification of the attacker.

Tomas had always been trouble, but Strazdas had promised his mother he would care for his little brother, no matter what. He had repeated the promise just a few hours ago, before he left her in the Brussels apartment he'd bought for her and caught the flight to Belfast.

She had complained bitterly about being left alone at Christmas but it could not be helped. There was business to attend to and, as much as Arturas loved his little brother, Tomas could not be trusted with such a responsibility.

Strazdas had texted Tomas before he boarded the plane, reminding him to be ready for his arrival, that he needed him at the hotel that night. Now Tomas did not answer. Strazdas returned the mobile to his breast pocket and considered.

There were many reasons why Tomas might not have answered his phone, of course. But none were good enough for Strazdas. Clearly something was wrong.

'Herkus,' he called.

'Yes, boss?' The driver glanced back over his shoulder.

'When did you last see Tomas?'

'A few hours ago,' Herkus said. 'He and Darius were drinking in town. I had to pick them up in a hurry. They'd gone into the wrong bar, some place for queers. You know how Tomas is about queers.'

Yes, Strazdas knew how Tomas felt about homosexuals. That particular foible had cost him some money over the years. Between bail and pay-offs, caring for Tomas was like keeping an exotic animal. Its prey was expensive.

'How bad?' Strazdas asked.

'Not very bad.' Herkus shrugged. 'Not much blood on his hands. Darius got him out of there before he did any real damage. I lifted them a few streets away.'

'And then?'

'Tomas said he wanted to break in that new whore. The Ukrainian girl. Being around queers always makes him want a whore.'

Strazdas watched the city lights draw near, buildings solidifying in the dark.

'Which Ukrainian girl?' he asked.

'The one Rasa took from the mushroom farm last week,' Herkus said. 'The agency put her there, working under Steponas. She'd been there a month or six weeks, maybe, when Rasa spotted her. She was covered head to toe in horse shit, but Rasa can pick out a looker from a hundred metres. The Loyalists paid two thousand for her.'

'Good money,' Strazdas said.

'Like I said, she's a looker. Darius told me. Young, skinny, nice mouth. Good tits. They were putting her to work for the first time today. Tomas said he was going to get her off to a good start.'

'Where are they keeping her?'

'Bangor direction,' Herkus said. 'North-east of the city, past the other airport.'

Strazdas retrieved his phone from his pocket. He looked up Darius's number and dialled. It went straight to the answering service, didn't even ring.

'After you leave me at the hotel, you go looking for Tomas and Darius,' he said.

'Okay,' Herkus said.