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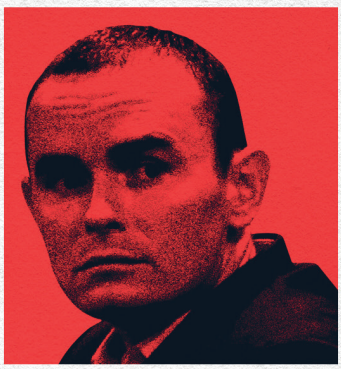
THE HITMEN

The Shocking True Story of a Family of Killers for Hire

STEPHEN BREEN &
OWEN CONLON



The Hitmen

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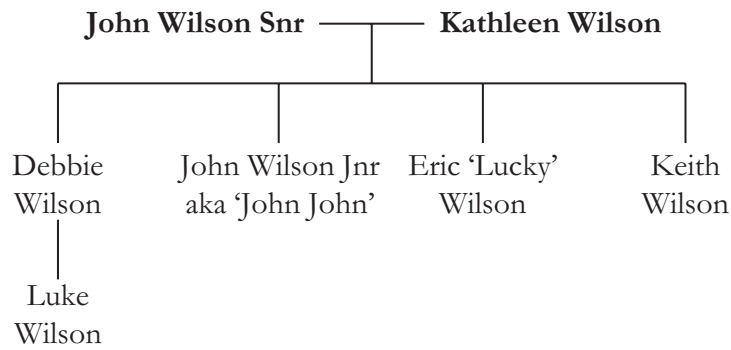

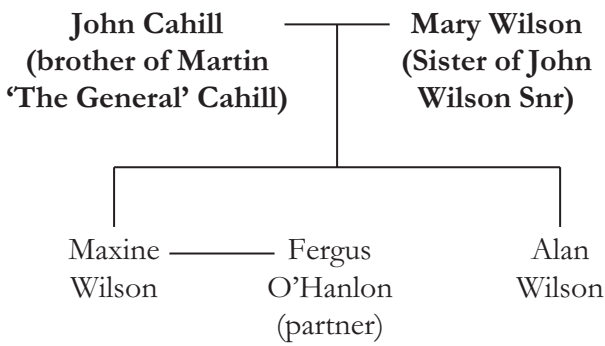

Prologue

There's gonna be his missus there, there's gonna be a child there. If they get in the way, they're gonna be killed . . .

The phrase overheard by the garda surveillance team on 2 November 2017 added yet another chilling dimension to a carefully planned murder that was on the verge of being carried out.

By itself, it might be dismissed as the boastfulness of a young, coked-up hitman desperate to impress his getaway driver. But when the threat was repeated by Luke Wilson's cousin Alan and then by another fellow gang member, investigators realized they were racing to avoid the contract killing of not just a criminal rival, but also potentially that of his toddler son.

Gardaí had been watching the assassination team for two months. They knew the identity of the target and where the attempt on his life was most likely to be made. They knew who was putting forward more than €100,000 to have him eliminated. They also knew that Luke Wilson was only acting in accordance with how he had been tutored by his cousin and uncles.

Between them, the five Wilsons had been responsible for more than a dozen deaths stretching right across Europe. Some victims were gunned down before they knew what was happening, others coldly dispatched even as they begged for their lives.

There was no room for sentiment in the business of paid murder. Paradoxically, John, Eric, Keith, Alan and now Luke had always combined cautious and careful planning with a reckless regard for the lives of innocent bystanders. They had access to military-grade sub-machine guns and explosives and had trained themselves in their use.

And if someone 'got in the way', it was their own bad luck. One target's sister had been shot and wounded along with her sibling; a man had been murdered in full view of his young children; and innocent customers and a bouncer had been gunned down outside a pub. Former criminal acquaintances had been ambushed and tortured or set up to be riddled with bullets by those they considered friends. Someone who had come looking for protection was executed in case he turned state's witness. And an innocent young girl had been abducted from the street, held captive and slaughtered, her body hidden in a cold mountain grave, though the man accused of the crime was exonerated by a jury.

The investigators listening in were aware of all this, but still had to bide their time. Move in too soon and charges could not be made to stick. Too late and the country might see its first-ever gangland murder of a baby.

There was another factor to consider: without the right intervention, those looking to intercept a shooting might end up dead themselves. Informants had previously warned gardaí that Eric Wilson would not be taken alive. Now, his nephew Luke Wilson could be heard vowing to 'start fuckin' shootin' the police as well' if any member of the force turned up to interfere. It was a life-or-death judgement call and the consequences of making it incorrectly were enormous.

For more than twelve years the Wilsons had relied on blood connections to enforce their own particular form of *omertà* – the gangland code of silence. Threats of extreme

violence against potential witnesses and members of An Garda Síochána were common, and active efforts were made to carry them out. The clan's homicidal reputation had been enough to see off powerful enemies in the past, including the might of the Kinahan cartel.

But the Wilsons' reign of terror across Europe was coming to a close. Eric, Keith and John had already been taken out of the picture. One was the architect of his own spectacular downfall, another nailed by patient and clever police work. A third had fallen victim to his own kind. Now there remained just two.

Like the others, Alan and Luke had no intention of ever stopping.

Just like the others, they would have to be stopped instead.

1. Beginnings

That fella's off the smokes

– Eric Wilson

The assassin's unusual choice of ammunition meant Martin Kenny had never stood a chance. The first shotgun blast that hit him in the neck was a Brenneke round, a solid steel slug known as a 'rad buster' by police in the US, who use them to disable the engines of speeding cars. They are also routinely carried by cops in Alaska, who say they are the only ammo capable of stopping a grizzly bear if necessary.

On 14 May 2005 Martin Kenny had been staying at the Ballyfermot home of his girlfriend, who had been disturbed at around 5 a.m. by the sound of glass breaking downstairs at the front door. There had been a similar attack on the front of the house the previous week and she woke Kenny to investigate. He was getting out of bed when the killer, wearing a balaclava and a bomber jacket, burst into their upstairs room.

The first shot disabled the victim, who fell to the floor. The killer then walked over and fired the second round into his head, before he turned and fled. Garda intelligence would later indicate that Kenny had been allocated the blame when a stash of drugs went missing. The murder was a relatively run-of-the-mill gangland murder except for one thing: it marked Eric Wilson's debut as a contract killer. Up until that point, Wilson, still three months shy of his twenty-second

birthday, had been just another up-and-coming young drug dealer in west Dublin.

Eric Wilson was born on 25 August 1983 to John and Kathleen Wilson. The third of four children, his older sister, Debbie, had been born on 12 December 1975, followed by a brother, John, on 27 March 1977. After Eric youngest brother Keith completed the family on 6 June 1988. The children's father died while they were young and his eldest son John – known within the family as 'John John', to distinguish him from his dad – became something of a replacement father figure to his brothers. Unfortunately, he did not set much of an example. Despite being a talented boxer who was viewed as a real prospect if he applied himself, 'John John' instead became sucked into the petty crime scene which plagued Ballyfermot during much of the 1990s. A few days after his seventeenth birthday in April 1994, he was sentenced to twelve months for car theft. Gardaí who know the family say both Eric and Keith looked up to John and sought to emulate him: but both would soon come under a much more malign family influence.

Alan Wilson was a cousin of the boys on their father's side. He was born on 24 February 1979 in Ballyfermot to John Cahill and Mary Wilson, a sister of John Wilson Snr. Alan Wilson's father was an older brother of the infamous Dublin criminal Martin 'The General' Cahill. But after he was sentenced to sixteen years for robbing a labour exchange, John Cahill and Mary became estranged and she reverted to using her maiden name. Though he had no convictions and was not on the garda radar, Alan Wilson was involved in varying degrees of criminality. At that point a clean-living teetotaller who did not touch drugs, he was nevertheless dealing himself. And as he spent more and more time hanging around his

cousins' family home in Ballyfermot, Eric in particular began to notice that Alan was never short of cash.

'Eric was a fairly normal lad,' one underworld source told the authors. 'He was a nice enough young fella, there was no badness in him. But when Alan started whispering in his ear about the money to be made, he wanted a slice of the action himself for the drug business.'

Never much of a scholar, as he grew up Eric followed his older brother John into petty crime. By the time he reached his late teens, he and his neighbour Martin Kenny had become targets for the local garda drug unit.

The pair had been pals since childhood and lived just two minutes' walk from each other. 'They would have been close buddies, they would have been involved in boxing and football all the way along,' one investigator familiar with the pair said. 'They were tight not only with each other but with each other's families as well.'

But once money entered the equation, things soon went sour. A few months before the murder, Eric Wilson had moved to Naas, where he was continuing to sell to local addicts, and it was not long before he came to the attention of the local drugs squad down there too. That April 2005 gardaí had come across him and an associate parked under the motorway bridge at Oberstown near Naas. A search of the vehicle revealed a night scope and weighing scales, but though both items were obviously suspicious, neither was illegal. They were handed back and both men were free to go.

Wilson returned to drug dealing and gardaí continued trying to catch him in the act. However, in his absence, trouble was brewing. A stash of drugs went missing – and Eric Wilson felt Kenny was responsible.

Gardaí learned that a number of threats had been issued and a week before the murder there had been the failed

attempt to kick in the door of Kenny's girlfriend's house. But then things appeared to simmer down a little. Wilson had called round to the Kenny family home on O'Hogan Road a few days later for a chat with his pal and all seemed well. According to gardaí, Martin Kenny would have had no reason to suspect he was in serious danger.

Within hours of the killing though, Eric Wilson had been nominated as the chief suspect. The murder probe soon began to back that up. There was no CCTV at the murder house on Ballyfermot Parade, but one property nearby did have a security camera. That showed a Volvo estate car cruise up the road towards the crime scene shortly before the murder took place and then speed back the same way soon afterwards. Inquiries revealed that Eric Wilson had access to such a vehicle.

Further inquiries were made and it emerged that in the hours after the killing, Wilson had phoned an associate and told him, 'That fella's off the smokes' – considered by gardaí to be a reference to the shooting. He was pulled in and questioned, but gave nothing away.

With no reason to hold him, gardaí were forced to release him. However, that was not the only grilling Eric Wilson would face. Gardaí later learned that a delegation of criminals, led by the violent Ballyfermot drug dealer Derek 'Dee Dee' O'Driscoll, called up to Wilson's home to have a word. As well as having a number of other heavy-duty friends, Martin Kenny was related to another serious criminal, Mark 'The Guinea Pig' Desmond. (Desmond had gained his ludicrous nickname after taking part in paid clinical drug tests as a younger man.)

But there was nothing funny about his behaviour. He had shot two junior gang members dead in 2000 and had a reputation for sexually assaulting addicts who owed him money.

The same year, Desmond had been questioned by gardaí over the rape of a fifteen-year-old boy.

Gardaí never discovered how Eric Wilson had talked his way out of the bind, but he returned to the midlands. Herbert Kilcline, a solicitor Alan Wilson knew, was asked to provide a reference so Eric could rent a house there.

'I was told that he wanted a house down the country, he wanted to get out of Dublin so that he wouldn't get involved in drugs and stay out of trouble,' Kilcline told the authors. 'So I was asked for a reference to say I knew the family and they were okay. I had no reason to believe he wasn't.'

Duly vouched for, Wilson secured a house for himself in Portarlington, Co. Laois, where he continued to deal and also began to branch out into armed robberies. Together with his crony from Naas and another individual, Wilson was the chief suspect for a series of hold-ups across Laois and the surrounding counties, including one raid on a Hackett's Bookmakers with a knife in August 2005.

Though Eric Wilson had moved down the country to escape garda attention after the murder, he kept popping back up on their radar. On Saturday 27 August 2005, a local man named David Thompson and one of his friends were out socializing in Portarlington. At the end of the evening, they got into a row with 'a couple of Dubs' outside a takeaway in the town centre. The scuffle was broken up and those involved went their separate ways. But as Thompson was walking home with a neighbour, a silver Golf pulled up and two men jumped out. One was wearing a balaclava and both of them set about Thompson with hurleys and beat him unconscious. The victim spent five days in hospital with a fractured skull.

When he was able to be interviewed, David Thompson reported the assault to the gardaí, who soon tracked down

Wilson and his associate to their Portarlington hideout. A car similar to the one used in the attack was found and balaclavas were also recovered inside the property, which had been set up with an extensive security system.

Eric was arrested and charged, but skipped town. In keeping with his established behaviour, he rented another low-level rural hideout, this time in the tiny village of Killerig, halfway between Carlow town and Tullow.

The house was in the Killerig Golf Lodges, some of which were rented out to those visiting the nearby Des Smyth-designed golf and country club. Eric was not there to work on his putting game, however. By now, he and Alan were heavily involved in drug dealing, hold-ups and other assorted criminality and had access to a wide range of arms. The house in Killerig was being used as a location to store the weaponry.

In late November 2005 Alan and two Dublin criminals named David 'Babyface' Lindsay and Alan Napper paid Eric a visit. He had recently received a delivery and the visitors were there to check it out. Included in the haul were Heckler & Koch MP5 sub-machine guns and Sig Sauer P226 handguns, both equipped with silencers. There was also a variety of sawn-off and automatic shotguns in the house, plus a replica AK-47. This was some serious firepower.

The MP5s are used by military and police units in more than a hundred different countries, including the Irish Defence Forces' elite Army Ranger Wing, the London Metropolitan Police's Specialist Firearms Command and the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team. The Sigs, meanwhile, have been the favoured handgun of the US Navy SEALs since the late 1980s and are also used by the SAS and ECTLO, the French navy's counter-terrorism and hostage rescue squad. Satisfied that all was in order, Alan Wilson, Lindsay and Napper returned to Dublin.

But gardaí were continuing to look for Eric and a few days

later, they received a tip-off about where he was staying. Detectives travelled from Dublin to carry out surveillance on the property and confirmed he was there. They obtained a warrant to search the property on 2 December and burst in. Garda intelligence had already indicated that Eric Wilson was extremely volatile and had access to several weapons. Those taking part in the raid had been warned that he was liable to shoot at them in order to escape, so they entered with weapons drawn, shouting, 'Armed gardaí!'

True to form, Eric Wilson did not go quietly. He kicked the first garda through the door and punched him in the chest, knocking him to the ground, but was quickly overpowered by the officer's colleagues and positively identified. He was then cuffed and held at the scene while a search was carried out.

Fortunately for Eric, most of the haul that had been at the house had been removed. All that remained were two sawn-off shotguns and the AK-47. The latter was quickly discovered to be a replica but the shotguns were very real and, more importantly, had been stolen during a burglary in Cork the previous month.

Unfortunately for Eric, gardaí found several pictures of him posing with the weapons on his mobile phone – they believed he was offering them out for hire to other criminals. As well as being a favourite of armed robbers, sawn-offs leave little ballistic signature. The only real way to identify them is via the firing pin, so unless a criminal is dumb enough to eject the shells at the scene, the same weapon can be used over and over without being traced.

Eric Wilson was charged with assaulting gardaí and was remanded in custody to Cloverhill prison. But even though he had been caught red-handed in a house with hidden guns, sources close to the investigation say the DPP was slow to

issue directions on how to proceed. After two weeks, he appeared again before Cloverhill District Court and was granted bail on the assault charge. It was not until much later that a decision to charge him over the guns would be made. Eric's good fortune aroused the suspicions of his cousin Alan.

Herbert Kilcline had originally been introduced to Alan via Kilcline's neighbour Fergus O'Hanlon, who was in a relationship with Alan's sister Maxine. An armed robber with a record stretching back to the age of fourteen, O'Hanlon was at that point Alan Wilson's right-hand man.

'Fergus and Alan were in a car together when Alan got a call to say he [Eric] had been released from custody,' Kilcline said. 'Alan went ballistic. He said, "You must have done a deal, there's no other way they'd let you out with all those guns." And Eric was saying, "No, there was no deal. I just got out."

'Alan was shouting and roaring, "I'll fucking kill you." At that time, had Eric been in front of Alan, he might have killed him.' For gardaí though, Eric's release meant they were once more forced to play catch-up.

They discovered that he was staying in a house up in Lucan and a raid was organized again. This time, no chances were being taken and the elite Emergency Response Unit (ERU) was sent in. However, the target had abandoned the property just three days beforehand and, once again, they were out of luck.

By this stage Eric Wilson was taking large amounts of cocaine and decided that becoming a killer for hire was the best way to feed his habit. His favourite weapon was the .357 Magnum, made famous by Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* movies. Like the Brenneke round, the Magnum had no shortage of stopping power. It was initially used by US police to penetrate bank robbers' cars in the 1930s, a time when much more steel was used in the bodywork of automobiles.

One senior investigator told the authors, 'It became quite apparent that he had gone completely mad. There was intelligence that he had been involved in a number of serious incidents, including murders, and that he was offering himself for hits for hire.

'His fee was a kilo of cocaine at the time. He was taking a kilo as payment and it was for his own personal use, not to sell onwards. He was off his head, he wasn't thinking straight and he was paranoid. Everybody we spoke to told us that if and when you do catch up with him, he won't be taken alive.'

A year after his first murder, Eric would soon carry out his second and third – one because a man had been accused of informing to gardaí and the other because a witness to the first slaying was unable to keep his mouth shut.

In August 2006 gardaí, following a tip-off, raided a small shed outside Athboy, Co. Meath. Inside they found three men standing beside a bench holding weighing scales, money, a razor blade, a coffee blender and what turned out to be a red compressing machine modified to compact cocaine into blocks. Also uncovered was cocaine worth €170,000, which is a sizeable seizure for a rural area like Athboy.

The three men – Adrian Boyle, Sean Fennessy and Paul Reay – were all charged with unlawful possession of cocaine with intent to supply, along with a fourth, Seamus Halpin. Fennessy and Halpin pleaded guilty early on, but Boyle and Reay decided to fight the charges. Only one of the two would live to see trial.

The seized cocaine had belonged to one of the biggest drug barons in Dublin, Finglas-based Martin 'Marlo' Hyland, and the Athboy operation was typical of his modus operandi. Hyland, who was by then one of the top three narcotraffickers in the state, imported drugs from middlemen in Spain. He

would move them to isolated rural spots to have them bulked out with various cutting agents, before they were brought back into the towns and cities to be sold.

Hyland was also known for his paranoia. When gardaí raided one of his operations, they would always carry out follow-up searches of the various homes Hyland owned. Sometimes, Hyland would be there, sitting round a table with some of his associates trying to figure out if they had a mole in the camp or not. On this occasion, Hyland became convinced that Reay had tipped off gardaí about the location of the cocaine factory.

Gardaí will never reveal details of who acts as informant for them, though at the time senior officers were quoted by the *Irish Independent* as saying that Reay had not provided them with any information. Moreover, if Reay had been touting, it was unusual that he would be charged in relation to the seizure. But none of this seemed to cut any ice with Hyland. Detectives received intelligence about the threats on Reay's life and visited his home in the Tredagh estate in Drogheda where he lived with his partner Eleanor and his young family. Reay bought himself a bulletproof vest and regularly wore it when he left the house. However, there was one occasion when Hyland felt he would be unlikely to have it on.

Shortly after 9 a.m. on 23 November, Reay was being driven from his home by his sister Emmajean on his way to appear before Kells District Court in relation to the drugs charges against him. There is only one way in and out of the Tredagh estate and as they approached it, a man got out of the passenger side of a white Mazda 323 parked to the right of the exit onto Marley's Lane. Wearing a yellow hi-vis jacket and with a cap pulled down over his face, he walked towards the car with his hand in the air. Believing there were roadworks in operation, Emmajean slowed down.

At that point, the man pulled out a handgun and fired six bullets into the silver Renault Scenic. Four of them hit Paul Reay in the upper body, while a fifth struck his sister in the shoulder and a sixth lodged in the car chassis. The gunman then turned and walked back to the Mazda and its waiting driver and the car took off at speed. Reay was just twenty-five and left three children, then aged eight, two and one month old. One eyewitness told the *Drogheda Independent* that the gunshots sounded 'like firecrackers'. She said, 'When I went out I could see Paul's partner Eleanor at the car saying, "Please wake up Paul, please wake up."'

The murder was the second violent death to hit the family in the space of a few years. Reay's father Ned, a civil servant, had been beaten to death by a local thug named Peter McArdle in January 2000. McArdle had engaged in a street row with Paul Reay, followed him home and kicked in the family's patio door. When Ned Reay came out to investigate, McArdle attacked and killed him with a plank.

Following the shooting, the white Mazda 323, which had false registration plates and had been stolen two weeks beforehand in Clondalkin, was driven to Oldbridge in Co. Meath and set alight. The hit team then transferred to a van which had been left parked there for them and drove off. Further proof of Hyland's involvement in the murder would come from an alert witness out walking her dog, who took down the van's registration and later provided it to gardaí.

The van was registered to two Dublin criminals with links to Hyland who were also close associates of slain brothers Noel and John Roche. The Roche brothers had been murdered the previous year as part of the Crumlin–Drimnagh gang war in the capital. The van owners' Drogheda base was later raided and searched and a glove bearing Eric Wilson's DNA was found in the back of their van. But both criminals

refused to cooperate with detectives, while the DPP ruled that the glove, as a 'moveable object', was not sufficient by itself to bring a murder charge against Wilson to court.

Meanwhile, Paul Reay's distraught family issued a statement, declaring, 'Irrespective of the crimes to which Paul had been charged, no one deserves to die in the way Paul did. We would appeal to anyone who may have information regarding the identity or whereabouts of Paul's murderers to contact Drogheda gardaí.'

There was one person who had such information and had witnessed the murder himself, but he had no intention of going to the authorities. Instead, he believed he could turn what he had seen to his advantage. It was a fatal mistake.

Roy Coddington was thirty-six years old and lived on the same street in the Tredagh estate as Paul Reay. They knew each other but did not mix in the same circles. Coddington was much further up the criminal food chain and had, until recently, been one of the biggest drug dealers in Drogheda. However, shortly after Reay's murder, gardaí believe he had taken the decision to move out of the drugs trade. Unfortunately for him, this was not enough to stave off some unwanted attention.

'Taxing' dealers had long been a significant source of income for the Provisional IRA and, since it officially disbanded in 2005, had been continued by former members and other paramilitaries. Some members of the INLA across the border had noticed Coddington's activities and demanded a share of his profits. Coddington is believed to have handed over an initial contribution of €30,000, but this was not enough to satisfy the republican thugs. They wanted more, but, since he was now 'clean', Coddington was unable to provide it. When the cash was not forthcoming, Coddington was abducted, taken across the border and given a severe

beating. This was a warning, they said, and if it was not heeded, there would be further consequences. Terrified for his life, Coddington took the wrong decision.

By sheer chance, he had been out walking in the vicinity the morning Paul Reay was murdered and had seen the entire thing happen. Coddington had also recognized Eric Wilson and believed this was something he could use.

Sometime in March 2007 he made contact with the young hitman and told him what he had seen. Garda intelligence indicated that Coddington did not threaten Eric with exposure, but instead tried to point to the fact that he had kept his mouth shut. This, he felt, was proof he could be trusted. All he asked of him in return was that the Dubliner sell him a Glock so he could protect himself from the dissidents. Eric agreed and a meeting was set up for Mornington beach, downstream from Drogheda at the mouth of the Boyne estuary.

At around 4 p.m. on 22 March 2007, Coddington drove his van to Tower Road near the beach and parked. He got out of the van and into a blue Ford Focus in which Eric and his getaway driver from the Reay murder were sitting. The car drove down a track towards the beach before stopping near the sand dunes. There, Coddington was dragged from the vehicle into the dunes by Eric Wilson, who pulled out a gun and shot him in the chest. As his stunned victim lay bleeding on the sand, Eric leaned over him and fired two more bullets into his head. Both men then turned and ran for their car before speeding away.

Mornington is a popular spot in summer, though in chillier March it is primarily left to those out walking their dogs. When the shots were first heard, locals believed someone was out hunting rabbits on the nearby golf course. However, one German woman and her four children were just a few metres away on the other side of the dunes. The woman came upon

the scene and tried to comfort Coddington in his last moments, but his injuries were too great and he died on the spot.

A local woman told the *Irish Times*, 'A few people who spoke to the German girl said she was very traumatised. Other people in the area heard the shots. It's incredible to think that somebody could be taken out of a car and just shot like that.'

Gardaí were initially baffled by the murder and it was later assumed to be part of Coddington's drug-dealing past. A number of his former criminal associates thought likewise and immediately went into hiding, but it was only sometime later that the real reason emerged.

At the time of the murder, Eric Wilson was living in Omeath and had formed a relationship with a woman from Clogherhead. Unable to flush him out, gardaí decided to try and sweat his girlfriend instead. The woman was arrested and questioned on suspicion of withholding information about a crime. She did not provide anything of use, but Wilson's paranoia antennae were up and, after the woman was released, Eric Wilson never contacted her again.

The Coddington slaying also provoked another dispute between Alan and Eric. The younger cousin was supposed to have taken away the Ford Focus used to flee the scene and burnt it out to destroy any forensic traces inside. Instead, Eric hid the vehicle and changed its plates, planning to eventually use it in another hit. This broke every rule in the criminal handbook, but it would not be the last time Eric took serious risks for the sake of convenience.

Eric Wilson had now killed at least three people in little over a year, but these would not be the only murders linked to the Wilson clan in 2007. Two months after Roy Coddington was lured to his death, a drug dealer named David 'Boogie' Brett met a similar fate on a dark and lonely road outside a school in Cork.

Brett was an established dealer from Cork city who had several drug-related convictions. Following his release from a two-year term in jail, he had moved with his partner and their three young children to the village of Liscarroll in north Cork. Gardaí who were keeping an eye on him believed he was making an effort to keep his nose clean, but he was being pressured to pay back a debt of up to €100,000. The night he died, the thirty-four-year-old drove 40 kilometres from Liscarroll to tiny Ballydesmond, right beside the border with Kerry. Intelligence later indicated that though Brett had cleared some of his debt, those he owed were demanding more and more from him.

Finally, his debtors decided to make an example of him. At 10.20 p.m. on 21 May 2007, Brett's body was found beside his car outside Foilogohig national school, not far from Ballydesmond. He had been shot in the head and neck and had died instantly.

The investigation remains active, though the Wilsons have been ruled out as the hitmen in the murder. However, ballistics would later reveal that Brett had been shot with a .357 Magnum and the murder weapon would subsequently be definitively linked to the Dublin cousins. This time it was Alan, so fond of berating his cousin, who had taken a silly and unnecessary risk.

2. The Good Samaritan

There was nobody there when I came back
– Dumitru Rostas

'Help me' were the first words Marioara Rostas said to her older brother Alexandru in Romania as he picked up the phone on 7 January 2008. A cousin passed him the mobile device – to be used by the extended Rostas family only in the case of emergencies – at 2.42 p.m. that day, explaining that Alexandru's younger sister was on the line from Ireland.

Frantic with worry, struggling to breathe, eighteen-year-old Marioara told him she had been violated, was being held against her will some 200 kilometres outside of Dublin and was desperate for her father Dumitru to find her. Alexandru listened in horror, then pleaded with his sister to tell him where she was as she struggled – she had no English – to read a street sign identifying her location.

Then the line went dead. It was the last time anyone would ever speak to Marioara. The call was made just twenty-four hours after an attempt to report the teenager missing by her family, who had moved to Ireland four months previously.

Dumitru, his wife (also called Marioara) and their thirteen-year-old son Dumitru Jnr had flown into Dublin from Bucharest on 12 October 2007 in search of employment opportunities in the land of the Celtic Tiger. That night they made their way to Gardiner Street, where they spent the next two weeks in a hostel at a cost of €12 per night.