

The background of the cover is a photograph of a man and a woman walking away from the camera on a cobblestone street. They are surrounded by a large number of pigeons, some on the ground and some in flight. The scene is captured in a blue-tinted, high-angle shot, creating a somber and atmospheric mood. The couple's shadows are cast long and dark on the pavement.

WILLIAM
TREVOR

CHEATING AT
CANASTA

'HUMOROUS, THOUGHTFUL, RICH IN PATHOS,
AND ABOVE ALL, HUGEY ENJOYABLE' *DAILY MAIL*

Cheating at Canasta
by
William Trevor

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This is a limited extract from *The Dressmaker's Child*
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The Dressmaker's Child

Cahal sprayed WD-40 on to the only bolt his spanner wouldn't shift. All the others had come out easily enough but this one was rusted in, the exhaust unit trailing from it. He had tried to hammer it out, he had tried wrenching the exhaust unit this way and that in the hope that something would give way, but nothing had. Half five, he'd told Heslin, and the bloody car wouldn't be ready.

The lights of the garage were always on because shelves had been put up in front of the windows that stretched across the length of the wall at the back. Abandoned cars, kept for their parts, and cars and motor-cycles waiting for spares, and jacks that could be wheeled about, took up what space there was on either side of the small wooden office, which was at the back also. There were racks of tools, and workbenches with vices along the back wall, and rows of new and reconditioned tyres, and drums of grease and oil. In the middle of the garage there were two pits, in one of which Cahal's father was at the moment, putting in a clutch. There was a radio on which advice was being given about looking after fish in an aquarium. 'Will you turn that stuff off?' Cahal's father shouted from under the car he was working on, and Cahal searched the wavebands until he found music of his father's time.

He was an only son in a family of girls, all of them

older, all of them gone from the town – three to England, another in Dunne's in Galway, another married in Nebraska. The garage was what Cahal knew, having kept his father company there since childhood, given odd jobs to do as he grew up. His father had had help then, an old man who was related to the family, whose place Cahal eventually took.

He tried the bolt again but the WD-40 hadn't begun to work yet. He was a lean, almost scrawny youth, dark-haired, his long face usually unsmiling. His garage overalls, over a yellow T-shirt, were oil-stained, gone pale where their green dye had been washed out of them. He was nineteen years old.

'Hullo,' a voice said. A man and a woman, strangers, stood in the wide open doorway of the garage.

'Howya,' Cahal said.

'It's the possibility, sir,' the man enquired, 'you drive us to the sacred Virgin?'

'Sorry?' And Cahal's father shouted up from the pit, wanting to know who was there. 'Which Virgin's that?' Cahal asked.

The two looked at one another, not attempting to answer, and it occurred to Cahal that they were foreign people, who had not understood. A year ago a German had driven his Volkswagen into the garage, with a noise in the engine, so he'd said. 'I had hopes it'd be the big end,' Cahal's father admitted afterwards, but it was only the catch of the bonnet gone a bit loose. A couple from America had had a tyre put on their hired car a few weeks after that, but there'd been nothing since.

‘Of Pouldearg,’ the woman said. ‘Is it how to say it?’

‘The statue you’re after?’

They nodded uncertainly and then with more confidence, both of them at the same time.

‘Aren’t you driving, yourselves, though?’ Cahal asked them.

‘We have no car,’ the man said.

‘We are travelled from Ávila.’ The woman’s black hair was silky, drawn back and tied with a red and blue ribbon. Her eyes were brown, her teeth very white, her skin olive. She wore the untidy clothes of a traveller: denim trousers, a woollen jacket over a striped red blouse. The man’s trousers were the same, his shirt a nondescript shade of greyish blue, a white kerchief at his neck. A few years older than himself, Cahal estimated they’d be.

‘Ávila?’ he said.

‘Spain,’ the man said.

Again Cahal’s father called out, and Cahal said two Spanish people had come into the garage.

‘In the store,’ the man explained. ‘They say you drive us to the Virgin.’

‘Are they broken down?’ Cahal’s father shouted.

He could charge them fifty euros, Pouldearg there and back, Cahal considered. He’d miss Germany versus Holland on the television, maybe the best match of the Cup, but never mind that for fifty euros.

‘The only thing,’ he said, ‘I have an exhaust to put in.’

He pointed at the pipe and silencer hanging out of Heslin’s old Vauxhall, and they understood. He gestured with his hands that they should stay where they were for

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a minute, and with his palms held flat made a pushing motion in the air, indicating that they should ignore the agitation that was coming from the pit. Both of them were amused. When Cahal tried the bolt again it began to turn.

He made the thumbs-up sign when exhaust and silencer clattered to the ground. 'I could take you at around seven,' he said, going close to where the Spaniards stood, keeping his voice low so that his father would not hear. He led them to the forecourt and made the arrangement while he filled the tank of a Murphy's Stout lorry.