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## The Good Mother (Rae Cairns, HarperCollins)

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Some books come with their own stories, and *The Good Mother* certainly does: Rae Cairns self-published this book first and gained enough notoriety with reviews and a Ned Kelly Award shortlisting to be picked up by HarperCollins and showered with film and TV rights. The novel follows Australian Sarah Calhoun, who thinks she can help make change when she's posted to Belfast in the late 1990s to support the local youth and keep them from joining the forces at constant war. After Sarah sees something she shouldn't, she flees home and vows never to come back or talk about what happened. When, years later, her teenage son wants to travel to Ireland for a soccer camp, she lets him go with trepidation—something not unfounded, she discovers, when her ex-fiance's brother, now leader of the Real IRA, tracks her down and says she best go to Belfast too. Left with no other choice to keep her son safe, Sarah must return to Northern Ireland and confront her past. This is the kind of book the phrase 'nail-biting' was made for. Every mother Sarah is continually faced with life-or-death-or-someone-else's-death scenarios and the outcome seems genuinely terrifying, especially when the reader is never sure who the heroine should trust. Cairns's debut is for those who enjoyed suspenseful missing-child thrillers—think Petronella McGovern's *Six Minutes*—or readers keen on an Australian tilt on the likes of Adrian McKinty's Sean Duffy series.

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