The Merley Brothers

Blood & Legacy

Richard Merley grew up in a broken home, determined to escape the life his alcoholic and crime-ridden father had created for him. Alongside his younger brother, Richmond, he builds a small newspaper company from nothing, naming it **Merley Brothers**.

But Richard's ambitions soon take him beyond journalism. As the brothers grow older, their newspaper becomes a gateway into London's criminal underworld, and Merley Brothers slowly develops into something far more dangerous than either brother could have imagined.

Years later, Richard's life is struck by tragedy. His partner, Catherine Hayes, takes her own life, leaving their fourteen-year-old son, **Vincent Merley**, without a mother. Not long after, Richmond is murdered by an unknown knifeman, leaving Richard with almost nobody he can call family.

With London becoming increasingly dangerous, Vincent is taken to **Washington, D.C.** by his uncle, **Michael Hayes**, in the hope of giving him a life away from the world his father created.

Richard stays behind.

Merley Brothers is all he has left.

As Vincent begins a new life across the Atlantic, Richard continues building the organisation that has consumed his life. Father and son are separated by thousands of miles, but the Merley name follows them both.

Their meeting will change the Merley family forever.

Chapter One | Before The Name

It's March 1955. The television mumbled quietly in the corner of the room, its black-and-white picture flickered across the walls. Winston Churchill's government was still going through a difficult year, although Walter didn't seem to care. He sat in the corner of the room on his rundown-looking armchair, a burning cigarette between his fingers. Walter glanced over towards the corridor and noticed his wife, Margaret, glaring over at him. Behind her was the blurred sight of their newborn baby, Richard, sleeping peacefully.
As Margaret glanced over at the bedroom, Walter exclaimed, “So, that's him then.” Margaret nodded while mumbling, “He's beautiful.” In a stubborn tone, Walter said, “Don't be so ridiculous, woman, he's a baby.” Margaret was not shocked; this attitude was addressed to her on a daily basis. Walter did not even attend the birth of his child. “He's your son!” said Margaret in a loud tone. “Well, what have you named the bloody thing?” said Walter. “Richard Edward Merley, Edward after my father,” Margaret exclaimed proudly. “Sounds like a bloody politician,” exclaimed Walter as he lit another cigarette and took a swig of the two-day-old whiskey rotting on the decaying table beside him. Margaret glanced at him in disgust and walked towards the bedroom. From there, you could hear the floorboards, almost as if they were screaming as Walter got up. He stumbled towards the bedroom and took one good look at Richard before turning away to grab his hat. Margaret asked, “Where are you going?” Walter glanced over and said, “Nothing in this world is free. Nobody in this world will give you anything for free.” Margaret looked at him in confusion and asked him to elaborate. Walter exclaimed, “This child will not drain my earnings. I don't want any part of it.” Walter then stormed out, leaving Margaret standing silently in the doorway as she watched him disappear down the street.
Margaret remained standing in the doorway for several moments, staring down the street through the small window beside the front door. She could just make out Walter's figure disappearing around the corner, his hat pulled low over his head as the rain continued to fall. She sighed and slowly closed the curtains before returning to the bedroom. Richard was still asleep, completely unaware of what had just happened. Margaret sat beside his cot and gently placed her hand against his small chest, watching it rise and fall. For a moment, everything felt peaceful. She knew Walter would return eventually; he always did. Whether it was because he cared about his family or simply because he had nowhere else to go, Margaret could never be sure. She looked down at Richard and quietly whispered, “You'll be alright, darling.” Outside, the sound of Walter's footsteps had long disappeared, but Margaret knew this wasn't the last time she would see him.

The following morning, Margaret woke to the sound of knocking at the front door. She slowly climbed out of bed, careful not to wake Richard, who was still sleeping peacefully beside her. For a brief moment, she wondered whether Walter had finally returned. She walked quietly down the stairs and opened the door, only to find Walter standing on the doorstep, his coat damp from the rain and his usual cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. He didn't say anything at first. He simply walked past her and into the house as if he had never left. Margaret closed the door behind him and watched as he placed his hat on the table. “Where have you been?” she asked.

Walter ignored the question and glanced towards the bedroom. “He's still asleep?” he asked. Margaret nodded. Walter gave a quiet grunt before walking towards the kitchen. Margaret followed him, still unsure whether to be angry or relieved that he had returned. “I thought you said you wanted nothing to do with him,” she said. Walter stopped for a moment before turning around. “I said I didn't want him draining my earnings,” he replied. “I never said I was leaving for good.” Margaret stared at him, realising that, whether she liked it or not, Walter was back.

Nearly three years had passed since Richard was born, and life in the Merley household had changed very little. Richard was now a lively young boy, constantly running around the house and getting himself into trouble, while Walter continued with his drinking and unpredictable behaviour. One cold evening in December 1957, Margaret stood quietly in the kitchen, staring down at the small piece of paper in her trembling hands. She had been feeling unusually tired for weeks, and after visiting the doctor earlier that day, she had finally received the answer. She was pregnant again. Margaret placed a hand against her stomach, staring into the distance as she thought about what another child would mean for the family. Richard was almost three years old, and Walter had never exactly embraced fatherhood the first time around. Still, part of Margaret felt hopeful. Perhaps another child could bring something good into their lives. When Walter eventually returned home that evening, Margaret waited until he had taken off his coat before quietly saying, “Walter, I need to tell you something.” He glanced at her suspiciously. “What now?” Margaret took a breath. “I'm pregnant.” Walter froze for a moment before his expression hardened. “You're bloody joking.” Margaret shook her head. “No, Walter. I'm not.” Walter slammed his hand against the kitchen table, causing Margaret to jump. “Do you have any idea what I've been doing to keep this family going?” he shouted. Margaret stared at him, frightened by his sudden anger. “What are you talking about?” Walter paced across the kitchen before turning back towards her. “I've been involved in armed robberies, Margaret. Do you understand that? I've been risking my bloody life just to bring money through that door!” Margaret's face dropped. She had suspected Walter was involved in crime, but hearing him admit it so openly was different. “You told me it was nothing serious,” she whispered. Walter laughed bitterly. “Nothing serious? People have died doing what I do.” Margaret's eyes began to fill with tears. “And you're telling me this now? With Richard upstairs and another baby on the way?” Walter shrugged. “What do you want me to do about it?” Margaret stared at him, her fear quickly turning into anger. “Get out.” Walter looked at her. “What?” “I said get out, Walter. Get out of my house.” He stood silently for a moment, clearly surprised that she had finally stood up to him. Margaret pointed towards the front door. “I'm not raising my children around this. I'm not having Richard grow up thinking this is normal.” Walter grabbed his coat from the back of the chair and stared at her coldly. “You'll regret this.” Margaret didn't answer. Walter stormed out of the house and slammed the door behind him. Margaret stood alone in the kitchen, tears running down her face, before slowly looking towards the stairs. Richard was still asleep upstairs, unaware of what had happened. Margaret placed a hand against her stomach and took a deep breath. Walter had left again, but deep down, she knew this wasn't the last time he would walk through that door.

Nearly nine months had passed since Walter had stormed out, and Margaret had done everything she could to keep the household together. Richard was now three years old, and although he still asked about his father from time to time, Margaret tried not to let him see how much Walter's absence affected her. It was a cold September morning in 1958 when Margaret suddenly woke to a sharp pain in her stomach. She sat up slowly, breathing heavily as another contraction followed. “Not now,” she whispered, gripping the bedsheets. Richard was asleep in the room beside hers, but before Margaret could reach him, another wave of pain forced her to sit back down. She knew immediately what was happening. She was going into labour. Margaret struggled downstairs and reached for the telephone, but before she could pick it up, there was a knock at the front door. She froze. For a moment, she wondered who could possibly be there so early in the morning. When she opened the door, Walter was standing on the doorstep. He looked tired, his coat was damp from the rain and a familiar cigarette rested between his fingers. “Margaret,” he said quietly. She stared at him, almost unable to speak. “What are you doing here?” Before Walter could answer, Margaret suddenly doubled over as another contraction hit. Walter's expression changed immediately. “What's wrong?” Margaret looked up at him, struggling to breathe. “The baby... it's coming.” Walter dropped his cigarette onto the doorstep and quickly stepped inside. For once, he didn't argue, complain or ask questions. He simply looked at Margaret and realised that, whether he was ready or not, his second child was about to be born. Upstairs, Richard began to wake from the noise below. Margaret gripped Walter's arm as another contraction came, and for the first time in months, the two of them stood together as a family again. Neither of them knew what the future would bring, but within the next few hours, the Merley family would have another name to remember.

Chapter Two | Trouble at Twelve

The afternoon rain had finally stopped as Richard and Richmond walked home from school, their schoolbags hanging loosely from their shoulders as they made their way down the familiar streets of Bethnal Green, East London. Richard, now twelve, kicked a small stone along the pavement while Richmond, only eight, struggled to keep up beside him. “Did you see Dad the other night?” Richmond asked, trying not to laugh. Richard smirked. “When he started shouting at everyone in the pub?” Richmond burst into laughter, covering his mouth as they both remembered Walter knocking his glass over and arguing with a man at the bar. “He looked like he was going to kill him!” Richmond said between laughs. Richard laughed too, but his smile quickly faded as they reached the corner of their street. “Yeah,” he muttered, “but he probably would've.” Richmond went quiet. Neither of them wanted to admit it, but they were both afraid of their father. They had grown used to Walter's temper, the shouting and the smell of alcohol on his breath, but neither brother ever knew exactly what would set him off. Richard looked towards their house in the distance and slowed his pace slightly. “Just don't say anything about it when we get home,” he warned. Richmond nodded, and the two brothers continued walking, their laughter fading as the Merley house came into view.

Both boys walked through the front door as the cold winter breeze sent shivers down their spines, and their mother greeted them. “How was school, Richmond?” asked Margaret. Richmond looked down and mumbled, “Fine, Mummy,” before going upstairs towards his bedroom. Richard, on the other hand, went straight into the garden to read. Richard loved to read. When his foot first touched the wet and muddy ground below him, he stopped instantly in fear as he glanced over towards the fence and saw Walter lying there, with a damp cigarette on the grass below his mouth and a half-empty bottle of wine beside him as he slept heavily. Richard moved around him and positioned himself in his usual reading corner. After twenty to twenty-five minutes, Walter awoke from his rest and stumbled towards Richard while lighting another cigarette. “How was school, boy?” Walter asked in an unfiltered tone. “Fine, Walter,” said Richard. “CRASH!” Glass scattered across the ground as Walter took a swig from his wine bottle and launched it directly towards Richard. As the bottle made contact with the garden fence, glass shards scattered all over Richard and the grass below him. Richard screamed in fear and tried to run back inside before Walter grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. “I am your father. That is what you will address me as. If you have a problem with that, you can go read on the streets with the rats and tramps.” Richard was crying as his feet lifted from the ground, and all that was holding him was his father's unwashed hands around his collar. Richard nodded while attempting not to make eye contact as Margaret swung open the back door and shouted, “Put that boy down this instant, Walter!” Walter did. He then walked inside the house and slammed the door behind him. Margaret wrapped her arms around her crying son and comforted him. This was the day Richard realised he had a drunken loser for a father, and he made it his life's mission to become better than he ever was.

Richard soon found himself surrounded by a group of friends who thought it was cool to smoke cigars on street corners and steal from local businesses. At first, Richard saw it as nothing more than a way to fit in, but he soon realised that it gave him something else: a way to relate to his father. He began getting himself involved, hiding his misbehaviour from his mother whenever he could. Walter knew exactly what Richard was doing, but instead of stopping him, he simply warned him, “I am not to blame if you get in any bother, Richy.” For the first time, Richard felt heard and, more importantly, respected by his father. That feeling only encouraged him to escalate. At the age of thirteen, Richard joined a secretive local gang while simultaneously developing an early interest in journalism. His behaviour at school gradually became worse, eventually resulting in him being expelled. Richard never returned to formal education. Instead, at thirteen years old, he decided to start his own newspaper company, spending hours upon hours writing each edition by hand inside a small hut in an abandoned field. It was there that Richard began building what would eventually become Merley Brothers.

Chapter Three | The Night Everything Changed

By 1968, the Merley brothers had grown closer than ever, despite the years of fear and instability that had surrounded their childhood. Richard was now sixteen, while Richmond had just turned thirteen. Richard had already spent several years writing his homemade newspapers in the little hut he had claimed as his office, while Richmond had watched from a distance, fascinated by what his older brother was building. One afternoon, Richmond finally gathered the courage to ask Richard if he could help with the newspaper articles. Richard immediately turned towards him and shouted, “NO! You must go down your own path. Finish school, like Mum said.” Richmond looked disappointed but said nothing. Richard believed he was protecting his younger brother from the mistakes he had made himself. Later that week, the two brothers found themselves sitting on the front steps of their house as the evening sun disappeared behind the rows of brick houses. Richard had a stack of newspapers beside him, each one covered in his handwriting, while Richmond sat beside him, quietly reading one of the finished copies. “You actually think people are going to buy these?” Richmond asked, looking over the pages. Richard smiled slightly. “They already do.” Richmond looked surprised. “How many?” Richard paused for a moment before replying, “Enough.” The two brothers laughed. Richard reached into his pocket and pulled out a small handful of coins, dropping them into Richmond's hand. “Go down the shop and get us something to eat.” Richmond looked at the money before grinning. “What do you want?” Richard shrugged. “Surprise me.” Richmond jumped to his feet and ran down the street, while Richard watched him disappear around the corner. For a brief moment, everything felt normal. There was no shouting, no arguments and no Walter stumbling down the street. Just two brothers sitting outside their home, trying to make something of the little they had. Richard looked back down at his newspaper and began writing again, unaware that before the week was over, the life they knew would be gone forever. Meanwhile, Walter had continued causing trouble at the local pub, drinking heavily and regularly getting himself into arguments. Every Friday evening at exactly ten o'clock, the boys would walk to the pub to collect their father and help him stumble home to bed. It had become an unpleasant routine, but one they had grown used to. This Friday, however, was different. As the boys approached the pub, distant screams and panicked shouting echoed from inside, while several people hurried out through the doors and ran down the street. Richard immediately told Richmond to stay outside while he went inside to find Walter. “Stay here. Don't move,” Richard ordered. Only sixteen years old, Richard pushed open the pub door and stepped inside, where he was met with chaos. Walter was in the middle of an aggressive argument with Margaret. Richard froze when he realised what was happening. Margaret had come to the pub earlier that evening after discovering that Walter had been having an affair. Years of arguments, drinking, betrayal and resentment had finally reached their breaking point. “I DIDN'T WANT THE BLOODY BOYS EITHER WAY!” Walter screamed in the middle of the argument. Richard stood in shock before slowly moving towards his parents, hoping he could somehow calm them down. Behind the bar, the bartender was already on the phone to the Metropolitan Police, desperately explaining what was happening. Margaret stared at Walter, her face filled with years of anger and hurt. “I won't regret this,” she said quietly before grabbing a pool cue. Richard barely had time to react before Margaret attacked Walter. The pub fell into silence as the police arrived moments later and rushed inside. Margaret was arrested, while Walter was taken to hospital in critical condition.

Despite the efforts of the medical staff, it was too late. The years of anger, abuse and resentment Margaret had kept inside had finally erupted, and Walter had died from his injuries. Richard had already left the pub by then, taking Richmond with him before either brother could fully understand what had happened. They walked home in silence, neither of them knowing what to say. That night changed the boys completely. Their childhood had been filled with arguments, fear and uncertainty, but now their family was broken beyond repair. Richard knew he couldn't stay. Richmond knew even less about what would happen next. By the end of the night, both brothers had lost their father, and their mother was in police custody. They would never see either of their parents again.

Richard sat Richmond down, and explained they need to fend for themselves from now on. Richard invited Richmond to help him with the newspapers. Richard turned 17, and by then both Merley Brothers were involved in petty crime. Richmond, sadly attaching himself to substances.

In the months after their parents disappeared from their lives, Richard began spending more and more time away from home. It was during this period that he met a girl named Catherine Hayes, a young woman who was already deeply involved in London's criminal underworld. Catherine was confident, reckless and unlike anyone Richard had ever known, and although he knew she was a bad influence, he found himself drawn towards her. She lived in a large, rundown house on the outskirts of East London, which soon became a place where Richard and Richmond spent much of their time. Catherine introduced Richard to people, places and parts of the city he had never experienced before, and Richard's involvement in crime gradually became more serious. Over the following years, their relationship grew closer, and after Richard became an adult, Catherine became pregnant with their first child. In 1976, she gave birth to a boy named Vincent Merley. Richard was only twenty-one, but for the first time, he had someone who carried his name and depended on him. He had no idea that Vincent would one day become the most important figure in the history of Merley Brothers.

Chapter Four | Across The Atlantic

By 1990, Vincent Merley was fourteen years old, and the Merley family had already endured more than most families could survive. Catherine Hayes, Vincent's mother, had struggled for years with the life she had built around crime, fear and instability, and when Vincent was eleven, she took her own life, leaving her son behind with more questions than answers. Her death changed Vincent in ways that Richard struggled to understand. He became quieter and more withdrawn, often keeping his thoughts to himself, while Richard tried to keep his son close despite being constantly pulled back into the growing world of Merley Brothers. Richard wanted Vincent to have a normal childhood, but the life he had created made that almost impossible. Men connected to the organisation were regularly around the family home, conversations stopped whenever Vincent entered a room, and Richard was frequently away for days at a time dealing with business. One evening, Vincent sat alone at the kitchen table while rain fell heavily against the windows, waiting for his father to return.

When Richard finally arrived, Vincent asked him a question that Richard would remember for years: whether he was going to leave too, just as his mother had. Richard assured him that he would never abandon him, but Vincent could already see that his father's promises were becoming harder to believe. Despite this, Richard continued trying to protect his son in the only way he knew how, keeping him away from the most dangerous aspects of Merley Brothers while surrounding him with people he believed he could trust. As the years passed, however, the organisation continued to grow, and Richard became increasingly consumed by it. Then, in 1993, tragedy struck again. Richmond Merley, Richard's younger brother and one of the last remaining connections to Richard's childhood, was killed by an unknown knifeman. The identity of the attacker was never discovered, and rumours surrounding Richmond's death spread throughout London, but no clear answer was ever found. Richmond's murder sent shockwaves through the Merley family and had a profound effect on Richard. He had lost his brother, another piece of the family he had once known, and instead of stepping away from the criminal world, he buried himself deeper into Merley Brothers. Meetings became longer, his absences became more frequent, and Vincent increasingly found himself being raised by the people surrounding his father rather than by Richard himself. By then, Vincent was seventeen and old enough to understand that his father's world was dangerous, even if he still did not fully understand how deep it went. Catherine was gone, Richmond was dead, and Richard seemed more interested in maintaining the empire he had built than confronting the losses that had destroyed his family. Catherine's brother, Michael Hayes, began to believe that Vincent could no longer remain in London. He had watched his nephew grow up surrounded by violence, criminality and people whose loyalty could change at any moment, and he feared that if Vincent remained there much longer, he would eventually be drawn into the same world as his father. Michael decided that Vincent needed to leave Britain entirely and arranged for him to travel with him to Washington, D.C., where he believed Vincent could finally have a chance at a life away from the Merley name. When Michael first raised the idea with Richard, Richard resisted, arguing that Vincent was his son and that he could protect him, but deep down he knew that Michael was right. Richard had spent years building Merley Brothers in the belief that everything he did was ultimately for his family, yet the organisation had slowly become the very thing that was keeping him away from his son. Eventually, Richard agreed to let Vincent leave. On the morning Vincent departed, the house was unusually quiet. Vincent stood in the hallway with a small bag packed beside him while Richard watched from across the room. Neither knew what to say, and for several moments they simply stood there looking at one another. Richard finally walked over and placed a hand on Vincent's shoulder, telling him that he would find him. Vincent looked at his father, unsure whether to believe him, and for a brief moment Richard appeared to consider going with him. But the thought of leaving Merley Brothers behind was something he could not bring himself to accept. Michael called from outside, and Vincent picked up his bag before walking towards the door. He stopped for a moment and looked back at his father, hoping perhaps that Richard would change his mind, but Richard remained where he was. Vincent stepped outside and climbed into Michael's car, leaving London behind him. Richard stood in the hallway and watched through the window as the car disappeared down the street. He didn't follow.

He stayed in London, surrounded by the empire he had spent his life building, while Vincent crossed the Atlantic with Michael Hayes and began a new life in Washington, D.C. Neither father nor son knew it yet, but the distance between them would last for years, and Vincent's departure would mark the beginning of one of the longest and most complicated periods in the history of the Merley family.

Chapter Five | Far From London

Washington, D.C. felt like another world to Vincent Merley. When he stepped out of the airport with his uncle Michael, the noise and crowds of London already felt like a distant memory, replaced by unfamiliar streets, different accents and a city Vincent knew almost nothing about. Michael noticed how quietly he walked beside him and gave him a reassuring smile. “You’ll get used to it,” he said. Vincent looked around at the passing cars and tall buildings. “Do you really think I can start over here?” Michael nodded. “That’s exactly why I brought you.” Over the following days, Michael helped Vincent find a small apartment in a quiet neighbourhood, somewhere modest but comfortable enough for him to begin building a life of his own. As they carried the last of Vincent’s belongings through the front door, Michael placed the keys in his hand and told him, “This is yours. No Merley Brothers, no London, no people telling you what you’re supposed to become. You get to decide that now.” Vincent looked down at the keys, quietly taking in what his uncle had said. For the first time in years, he felt as though he had something that belonged entirely to him. But starting over did not mean forgetting where he came from. Vincent still carried the Merley name, and although he wanted nothing to do with his father's world, he had grown up watching how easily money, influence and connections could open doors. At first, it was harmless. Michael introduced him to a few people around the neighbourhood, including a local mechanic who occasionally paid Vincent to help move cars and deliver parts. The work seemed simple, and the money was better than anything Vincent had earned before. One evening, however, the mechanic quietly asked Vincent to deliver an envelope across town and told him not to open it or ask questions. Vincent hesitated, knowing immediately that it was different from the other jobs. “What's in it?” he asked. The mechanic looked at him for a moment before replying, “Nothing you need to worry about.” Vincent took the envelope anyway. He told himself it was only one delivery, nothing serious, and that he could walk away whenever he wanted. What Vincent didn't realise was that this small decision would become the first step towards a life he had spent years trying to escape.