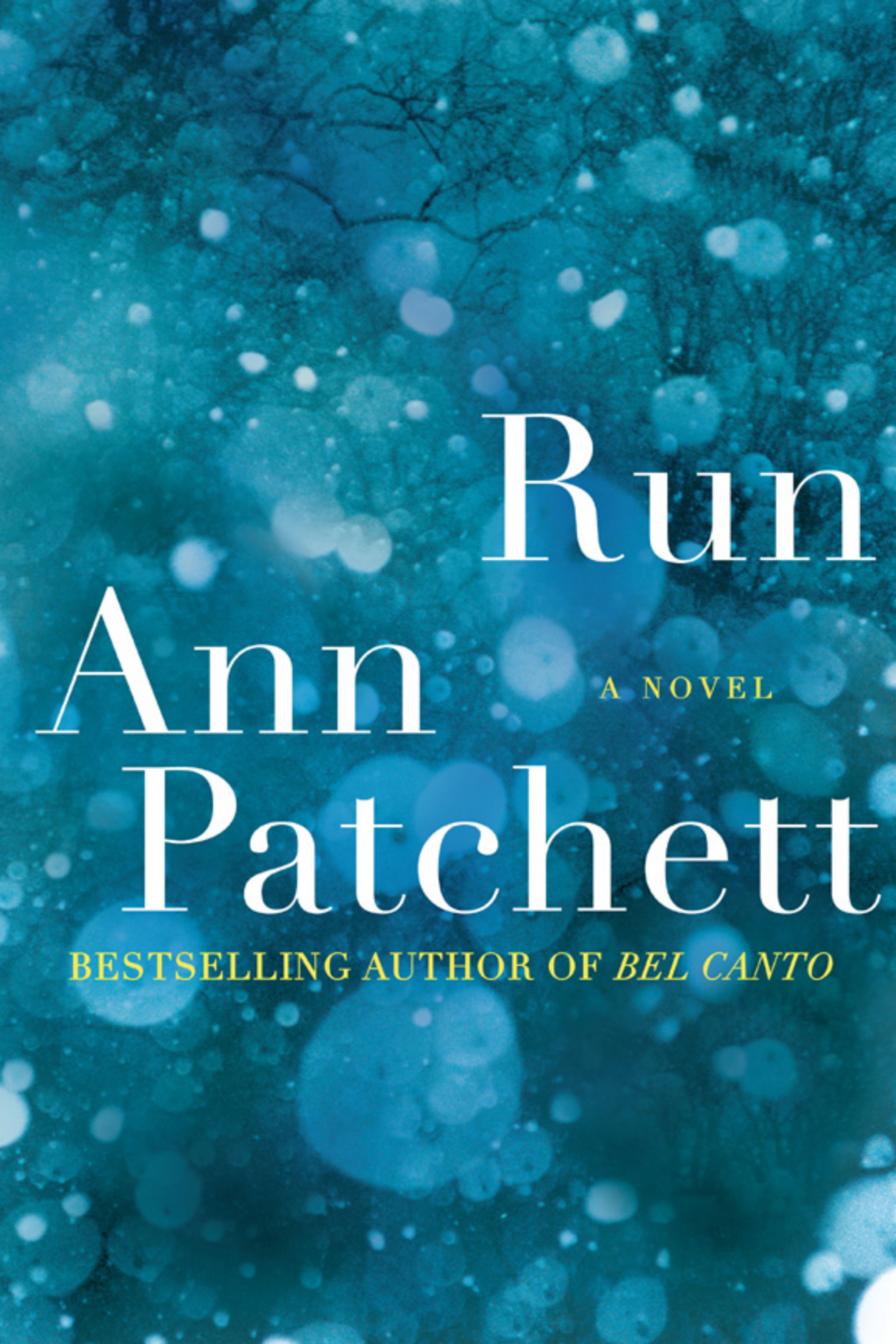
Run
Ann Patchett
A NOVEL
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *BEL CANTO*

run

ann patchett

HarperCollins e-books

To my sister, Heather Patchett
and my stepmother, Jerri Patchett

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chapter 1

Bernadette had been dead two weeks when her sisters showed up in Doyle's living room asking for the statue back. They had no legal claim to it, of course, she never would have thought of leaving it to them, but the statue had been in their family for four generations, passing down a maternal line from mother to daughter, and it was their intention to hold with tradition. Bernadette had no daughters. In every generation there had been an uncomfortable moment when the mother had to choose between her children as there was only one statue and these Irish Catholic families were large. The rule in the past had always been to give it to the girl who most resembled the statue, and among Bernadette and her siblings, not that the boys ever had a chance, Bernadette was the clear winner: iron rust hair, dark blue eyes, a long, narrow nose. It was frankly unnerving at times how much the carving looked like Bernadette, as if she had at some point modeled in a blue robe with a halo stuck to the back of her head.

"I can't give it to you," Doyle said. "It's in the little boys' room, on the dresser. Tip and Teddy say a prayer to it at night." He kept his eyes on them steadily. He waited for an apology, some indication of backing down, but instead they just kept staring right at him. He tried again. "They believe it's actually a statue *of her*."

"But since we have daughters," Serena said, she was the older of the two, "and the statue always passes on to a daughter—" She didn't finish her thought because she felt the point had been made. She meant to handle things gracefully.

Doyle was tired. His grief was so fresh he hadn't begun to see the worst of it yet. He was still expecting his wife to come down the stairs and ask him if he felt like splitting an orange. "It has in the past but it isn't a law. It can go to a son for one generation and everyone will survive."

They looked at each other. These two women, these aunts, had supported their now dead sister in her limitless quest for children but they knew that Doyle didn't mean for the family's one heirloom to pass to Sullivan, his oldest son. He meant for the statue to go to the other ones, the "little boys" as everyone called them. And why should two adopted sons, two *black* adopted sons, own the statue that was meant to be passed down from redheaded mother to redheaded daughter?

"Because," Doyle said, "I own it now and so I'm the one who gets to decide. Bernadette's children are as entitled to their family legacy as any other Sullivan cousin." Bernadette had always predicted that without a daughter there was going to be trouble. Two of the boys would have to be hurt someday when it was given to the third. Still, Bernadette had never imagined this.

The aunts did their best to exercise decorum. They loved their sister, they grieved for her, but they weren't about to walk away from that to which they were entitled. Their next stop was to seek

the intervention of their uncle. As both a priest and a Sullivan they thought he would see the need to keep the statue in their line, but much to their surprise, Father John Sullivan came down firmly on Doyle's side, chastising his nieces for even suggesting that Teddy and Tip should be forced to give up this likeness of their mother, having just given up Bernadette herself. If he hadn't closed the argument down then, chances are that none of the Sullivans would have ever spoken to any of the Doyles again.

It was a very pretty statue as those things go, maybe a foot and a half high, carved from rosewood and painted with such a delicate hand that many generations later her cheeks still bore the high, translucent flush of a girl startled by a compliment. Likenesses of the Mother of God abounded in the world and in Boston they were doubled, but everyone who saw this statue agreed that it possessed a certain inestimable loveliness that set it far apart. It was more than just the attention to detail—the tiny stars carved around the base that earth sat on, the gentle drape of her sapphire cloak—it was Mary's youth, how she hovered on the line between mother and child. It was the fact that this particular Mother of God was herself an Irish girl who wore nothing on her head but a thin wooden disc the size of a silver dollar and leafed in gold.

Bernadette's mother had given her the statue for a wedding present, and it wasn't until they were home from their wedding trip to Maine and were putting things away in their overlarge house on Union Park that Doyle really stopped to look at what was now theirs. He got very close to it then and peered at the face for a long time. He reached a conclusion that he thought was original to him. "This thing really looks like you," he said.

"I know," Bernadette said. "That's why I got it."

Doyle had certainly seen the statue in her parents' house, but he had never gone right up to it before. His did not have the kind

of faith that believed religious statuary was appropriate for living rooms, and now here it was in his own living room, staring down at them from the mantel. He mentioned this to Bernadette. In that bright empty room there was no place else to rest your eyes. The Virgin looked so much larger, holier, than she had in the clutter of her parents' house.

"You don't think it's a bit overtly Catholic?" her young husband asked.

Bernadette cocked her head and tried to divorce herself from her history. She tried to see it as something new. "It's art," she said. "It's me. Pretend that she's naked."

He looped his arms around this beautiful girl who was his wife. The very word, *naked*, made him kiss her ear. "So where did it come from?"

Bernadette looked at him now. "My mother never told you this story?"

Doyle shook his head.

Bernadette rolled her dark red hair around one hand and then stuck a pencil from her back pocket through the knot to secure it to her head. "That's because my mother's afraid of you. She's afraid of boring you. She tells this story to everyone."

"I don't know if I should be flattered or offended."

Back then there was only one sofa, one dinged up chair, one round leather ottoman that looked like a button. They left the boxes and sat together on the couch, her legs draped over his. "It's a sad story," she said.

"I'll remember it," he said. "That way you'll only have to tell me once."

The story she knew began in Ireland, where her great-grandfather was a boy full of stories and high expectations. When he was still young he settled those expectations on the lovely shoulders of Do-