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A note on the author

Denzil Meyrick was born in Glasgow and brought up in Campbeltown. After studying politics, he pursued a varied career including time spent as a police officer, freelance journalist, and director of several companies in the engineering, leisure and marketing sectors. He lives on Loch Lomond side with his wife Fiona.

WHISKY FROM SMALL GLASSES

A D.C.I. Daley Thriller

Denzil Meyrick

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For Fiona, Rachel and Sian

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Prologue

Lights sparked and flashed before her eyes. The movement of her limbs slowed as though of its own accord. The pain she had felt was dull now; the panic subsiding. She was aware that her bowels had opened; she no longer cared. Her last emotions were a fading mixture of anger, injustice and overwhelming sadness, the cause of which she could barely recall.

All she was, all she had ever been, was seeping away: her loves, desires, likes and dislikes, the things that made her angry, the things that made her sad, made her laugh, made her cry; now all diminished. Her final moments were descending into a fading abyss – the surreal detachment of the brain soothing its own way to oblivion.

Suddenly, as the light began to dim, the face of a small, blond, blue-eyed child filled her thoughts. Only for an instant did the terrible choking pain, the struggle for breath, the fight to stay alive, return.

Part One

1

The body ebbed and flowed rhythmically in concert with the seaweed and flotsam and jetsam trapped in the bay of the low, rocky cove. A Styrofoam cup, a fisherman's glove with three fingers missing, a drinks bottle, the label so bleached by sun and sea that only a hint of its former contents were now discernible, and orange plastic netting which had ensnared a small crab, reluctant to quit the purpose for which it was intended: all of these floated and bobbed in unison with the corpse.

The naked body of a woman lay face down in the water, limbs spread in a lazy 'X' shape. Her skin looked waxy – a horrible cross between yellow and grey, turning black at her feet, hands and the back of her neck. The remains were bloated, consistent with time spent in water. Small areas of her lower back and thighs were gnawed, most likely by prawns, indicating the corpse had spent at least some time further out to sea.

Surprisingly though, and most repellent, were the two bright red ribbons that held her hair in bunches, hairstyle redolent of childhood and happiness, horribly incongruous with the rotting corpse now souring the tang of the mild spring day.

With almost six years' service in uniform, Detective Constable Archie Fraser was new to the CID. So new in fact that he hoped he was surveying the scene on the beach with what could be considered the appropriate degree of professional detachment. A young female PC and the pale dog-walker who had alerted the police looked on with the mixture of abject horror and fascination so common in humanity faced with death, especially of the gruesome variety. A large black Labrador snuffled and pawed at the sand, undisturbed by the corpse.

'Could you put your dog back on the lead, please, Mrs MacPherson?' Fraser bellowed with a confidence he did not feel. It would not be beyond possibility for the dog to catch an unusual scent on the air and wade into the water to investigate its source.

His short time in Kinloch had already been difficult. Only last month his ultimate superior – one Inspector MacLeod, Sub-Divisional Commander – had cause to reprimand him on discovering a young female shoplifter handcuffed to a very hot radiator while her captor answered an urgent call of nature.

'Focus, boy, focus!' MacLeod had shouted in his high-pitched Highland accent. 'The last thing I need is the Discipline Branch descending on me because you've seen fit to roast some daft bint. You're bloody lucky she was too stupid to make the complaint.'

Fraser had noticed how his boss referred to *the* something, in the way a foreigner would; tourists regularly took him for a German or Scandinavian, and not from the Isle of Harris that was his home. A long period of admonishment ensued, after which Fraser resolved to improve in every way and pay many less visits to the Tas of India restaurant.

'Karen, could you come over, please?' Fraser summoned the PC.

She walked slowly towards him, never taking her eyes from the body, in the way a child would, having been asked to pat a snake.

'What's up?' he enquired. 'Surely this isn't your first stiff?' Her doe-eyed nod was barely perceptible. Having worked his probationary period in Glasgow, Fraser was no stranger to dead bodies: murders, drownings, suicides, accidents – occasionally even some natural deaths. All were part of the daily diet of Glasgow's finest. The difference now was that for the time being at least the crime scene was his responsibility. No van full of

colleagues likely to appear; the Serious Crime Squad over a hundred miles away; even his DS off sick, laid low with a persistent 'early retirement' back. Right here, right now, he was the senior CID officer on duty in the Sub-Division, in fact the only CID officer on duty in the Sub-Division.

'It's no' jeest that, Archie.' The PC had a strong local accent. 'I mean, this is Kinloch – I probably know her. How could he forget? The crime locus was three miles away from one of the most unique places he had ever been to, let alone lived and worked in. Kinloch. The town was situated on a peninsula one hundred and fifty miles away from Glasgow, on Scotland's rugged west coast; alternatively, miles away from anywhere, as Fraser had come to think of it. Around ten thousand people lived in what could best be described as a moderate alternative to the 1950s. Everyone knew everyone else, down to the tiniest detail of family, even personal, life. Sometimes, when working on a case, the young policeman had the distinct impression that everybody knew what he was trying to find out, but of course were never going to tell.

Another symptom of such a close-knit community was an inherent distrust of strangers, including policemen. Fraser's uncle, himself a retired police officer, had advised him always to have friends outside 'The Job', as the force was habitually known to initiates. He believed that because many cops both worked and socialised together, it left them isolated, introverted and out of touch. 'You keep your ear to the ground, son, especially in a wee place like Kinloch,' Uncle Davie had declared sagely. 'I mean, you're never goin' tae find anything out about these people unless you get out an' talk tae them. Socialise, spend a few bob, buy a couple o' drinks, and you'll see they'll soon open up.'

Archie had mixed feelings about this strategic advice: for a start, Davie had had his ear to the ground, and bought so many drinks, and so regularly, that he was now awaiting a liver transplant. Also, this was Kinloch, a place most definitely apart. However, he thought that some of what Davie had said could be useful. As the town was his first posting as a DC, he resolved to immerse himself in the community. He tried to join the local golf club, though sadly they were full. Unabashed, he tried the local tennis and cricket clubs, both with the same result. He was briefly elated when the town's Gaelic choir had contacted him in the hope he could swell their dwindling numbers; sadly Fraser was about as tone deaf as it was possible to be.

He had tried visiting the local pubs when off duty. Kinloch had a goodly number of such establishments – far too many according to some of the town's more temperate residents. They conformed to small communities within the community. For instance, regulars at the Shore Bar wouldn't consider crossing the threshold of the Royal Borough across the road. Subtly, each establishment catered for a slightly different clientele: rowdy youths attended Pulse, a noisy club bar in the Main Street, while their more cerebral peers became habitués of the Old Bothy, in the square. Roman Catholics preferred the Douglas Arms, while so-called 'blue noses' headed for the Royal. There was a pub that catered for lawyers, doctors and businessmen; another favoured by tradesmen and factory workers; and one hostelry, situated conveniently next to the bookmakers on the High Street, was dedicated solely to horse racing, the 'sport of kings' playing 24/7 on large screens. Jenny's, tucked away in a small back street, was the end of the line. Those who behaved badly enough to be banned from all the other premises – and many had – gravitated there. The 'tick book' was legendary, as were the fights. Locals referred to it as the '*Star Wars* Bar', for reasons that were obvious.

Fraser had visited them all. Typically, as he walked into the room the conversation would stop, resuming in a more modulated fashion moments later. People would gradually drift away, leaving the young detective with one of Kinloch's small army of drunks who barely knew nor cared where they drank, as well as a glaring publican, counting the cost of lost customers.

'Can I say something?' Mrs MacPherson said timidly. 'The tide's on the turn . . . well, could it . . . could she . . . not drift back out?'

The young officer had not considered this. 'Right, Karen, time to get your feet wet. We'll need to get her above the water line. Even if we corrupt forensics it's better than her ending up on Islay.'

'Can ye no' dae it yersel', Archie? This gies me the dry boak.' Fraser gently reminded her why she was being paid, and after removing shoes, tights and socks where appropriate, the pair waded into the few inches of water.

'OK, grab her other arm, Karen, and mind and pull gently – we want to disturb this as little as possible.' The police-woman looked doubtfully at the body, but did as she was told, looking away as she grabbed the left wrist. Lips pursed in distaste. 'One, two, three . . .' They started to pull. To the collective horror of all three on the beach, the corpse, with a great issue of dark fluid and some more solid matter, broke neatly apart, with the dec-

sucking noise of a plunger working on a blocked sink. Both police officers, having put more effort into the task than required, fell backwards onto the shingle, the top half of the deceased now some two feet away from the rest of the remains.

In a split second, the fetid stench emanating from the newly cleft body induced the dog to stand tall on all fours and emit a mournful howl, as Karen retched copiously over her uniform, still sitting on the shingle where her assistance to the CID had left her. Body fluids seeped darkly into the sand; even the local seagull population had registered the events and were now swirling in a squawking frenzy over the bay.

'Fuck!' Fraser momentarily forgot the presence of Mrs MacPherson, who was herself looking on in disbelief as though she was waiting for someone to come bounding from behind a rock to confirm the whole ghastly episode was an elaborate joke, of the type played out on late-night TV.

Just then, movement to his right caught Fraser's eye. Three figures were walking purposefully down the beach towards him.

The slight, taut figure of Inspector MacLeod was unmistakable at their head. It took the Inspector a few moments to grasp exactly what was in front of him. One of his DCs was getting up from the sand, leaving the torso of a dead woman, and a PC, who was spewing at his feet. A woman he did not know was sobbing convulsively, while a large black dog happily wagged its tail at the new arrivals. Only a few feet away, the rest of the body could barely be made out in the badly discoloured water. A sickening stench was all pervasive.

'What the fuck are you doing, boy?' MacLeod's temples displayed throbbing veins. 'In all my years in the police I have never seen the like.'

'I was merely trying to . . .'

'You were merely trying to fuck things up, as usual.' The Inspector was incandescent. 'Aye, and all our careers along with it. I dread to think what they taught you at the training college. In my day you were shown how to preserve the crime scene, not tear the bloody thing in half!' As though suddenly remembering others were there, MacLeod visibly took hold of himself and addressed the PC next to him. 'Sergeant Shaw, please do your best to ensure that the remains are contained at this locus.' Turning to a stocky man in a well-worn sports jacket with patched sleeves, he said, 'Sandy, are you able to make any kind of examination under these circumstances?' At that he looked towards Fraser with a thunderous glare.

Sandy, whom Fraser recognised as one of the local doctors, ran his hand through greying locks as he surveyed the scene. 'Well, Charles, I can only concur with your accurate assessment.' His accent was straight out of the Scottish public-school system. 'I, too, have never attended such an incident in thirty years of medicine.' He looked at the young DC with a pursed mouth that spoke of nothing but contempt, then leaned over the landward portion of body, rubbing his chin.

MacLeod walked away from the group, gesturing to Fraser to come with him. Once out of earshot, he grabbed the younger man's arm and on tiptoe addressed the DC's right ear with spitting vitriol. 'You listen to me, constable. Since you arrived at my station you've lurched from one crisis to the next.' Fraser could feel his face redden. 'As soon as this sorry mess is over I'll be recommending to HQ that you are not only unsuited for the CID, but to police work in general. Be absolutely sure that the cack will land on your head, not mine. We don't want to be the laughing stock of the force by tea time at this rate.'

Fraser resisted an urge to grab his superior and fling him bodily to the ground. He was considering what to say in his defence when a shout from the doctor turned both of their heads.

'One for the big boys, I'm afraid, Charles.' The doctor was brushing sand from his trousers as the policemen walked back over to the scene. 'It's murder, nasty business.'

'How can you be so sure, Sandy?' The inspector looked doubtfully at the medic.

'Oh, quite easily, Inspector MacLeod. She has a ligature around her neck.'

2

Detective Inspector Jim Daley reflected on the dispiriting nature of shopping for trousers as he handed his credit card over to the assistant in the fashionable clothes store. In his twenties – even in his thirties – he had been able to maintain a respectable waistline without the deployment of starvation diets or drastic fitness regimes. Now in his early forties – as he liked to think of forty-three – and especially after giving up cigarettes, he felt his stomach now capable of gaining inches overnight. It was not without a little trepidation that he eyed the suit or a pair of jeans he had not worn for a few weeks. Often, trying to get them on, there would follow desperate tugging at a straining zip, a grunting wrestle with a recalcitrant waistband, a holding in of both breath and stomach, as he fought to get the garment into a position whereby he could move, sit or stand without a trouser button shooting into the air like a misdirected bullet; worse still, without hearing the sickening rip of stitching tearing apart over a more than ample backside.

He had resolved therefore to make a new start as far as trousers were concerned: go out and buy a pair that more suited his thickening frame, regardless of how unpalatable the thought was of having a matching age and waist size. After all, he would get older, diet and join a gym, thus ensuring that these numbers would diverge in an acceptable manner in the near future.

He caught a glimpse of himself in a full-length mirror as he left the shop. Was that overweight, middle-aged man really him? He consoled himself with the fact that he was six feet three and still had his own hair and teeth. Sure, women found him attractive, just not the woman he wanted to, or so it seemed. Tall, dark, getting fatter and older but still handsome – that summed up Jim Daley.

The theme tune from *The Sopranos* jolted him from thoughts of sartorial insecurity to an equally perplexing subject: his wife Liz. She called infrequently when he was at work and he had become used to these calls containing at least a modicum of bad or unwelcome news.

‘Hi, Liz. Everything OK?’ He always sounded so lame when he had to speak to her unexpectedly. He felt an involuntary frisson of excitement at the sound of the well-spoken, smoky tones.

‘Oh, hi, darling. That was quick. Is it OK to talk?’

‘Yeah, no bother. I’m actually . . .’

She gave him no time to finish. ‘Great. Just to let you know, Jill wants me to go up to the caravan at Granton for a few days. Anyway, I thought, the weather’s nice, and it’s not as though we’ll be doing anything, so I’m leaving in a couple of hours.’

Daley was used to being presented with a *fait accompli*. He marvelled at the effortless way Liz, again, managed to impart her intention to do as she pleased, while at the same time make him feel as though he was in some way responsible. He attempted a rear-guard action. ‘I’ll be home about five. We could go to the wee pub for a couple of drinks, or get a curry or something – make a night of it. You could go up to Jill’s in the morning.’

Liz’s reply was as predictable as it was swift. ‘Oh, what a pity you didn’t mention it before. She’s invited me to dinner tonight as well. Mark has some boring guest to entertain. I’ve already said I would go. Sorry, darling.’

‘Oh, OK,’ was all he could muster. He guessed it was true what people said: once a partner had been unfaithful, it was really difficult to regain the trust that was so important in any relationship. And Liz had been spectacularly unfaithful. The first incident – that he knew of – had been with her gym instructor. Sent home early by the force’s medical officer after taking a baseball bat across the head during a drug raid, he thought he had heard noises as he gained the stairs of their new detached home in the village of Howwood. The vision of Liz c

hands and knees on their bed while her paramour worked energetically behind her was seared onto his memory. Suffering from a hair-trigger temper as well as an acute headache, Daley proceeded to render the third party insensible with a swift uppercut, dragged him by the hair onto the small balcony, and despatched him neat over the railing and into the garden below.

The sight of a naked man struggling to stand up, with what looked alarmingly like a broken leg, accompanied by the shrieks of an obviously frantic woman, constituted more than enough reason for the good people of Howwood to call the police. Eventually, after much pulling of strings and dire warnings regarding the diminishment of his prospects, a deal was done behind the scenes, and Daley – forced to attend anger management classes – was left to resurrect, as best he could, the remnants of his career. Having reached Detective Inspector in his mid thirties, Jim Daley could reasonably have hoped for Superintendent or beyond before retirement. This was now most unlikely. As for Liz, she had vowed undying love for him and tearful cited boredom and loneliness as an excuse for her behaviour. Although Daley realised he was wrong, his almost cloying love for her saw him take the only action that seemed palatable: forgiveness. Since then, even when close friends and colleagues alerted him to likely dalliances, he chose to ignore them, having neither the strength nor will to do the sensible thing and leave her. Though he would never let her know, he was head over heels in love with her, and, even though he barely believed it himself, was prepared to accede to almost anything in order to keep their relationship afloat.

She said and did all the right things: she showed great interest in him, they made passionate love, declared satisfied happiness, promised unerring loyalty, but all to no avail. Now that trust was absent, only the slavery obsession remained. Daley was forced to endure the nods and winks of colleagues; the police of course being a small community where gossip was rife. Had Liz been less attractive her indiscretions would probably have gone unnoticed, however, such were the rumours of her wanton nature, every male colleague now reckoned that they had a chance with her.

‘Anyway, you know what the traffic’s like in the morning.’ Liz pronounced ‘morning’ with that annoying intonation that had crept into everyday usage from Australian sitcoms, as though the knowledge or concept of the morning was something entirely alien to the listener.

The habit annoyed Daley, who hardened his reply. ‘Yeah, whatever you think, Liz. When will you be back?’ ‘Oh, you know me, darling – go with the flow.’ He did. ‘Anyway, better dash. I’ve left one of those microwaved curries out for you. Ring you later. Love you.’ The term of affection was an obvious afterthought.

Daley stood with the handset to his ear for a few moments. So little said, so much left unsaid: it summed up their marriage. He walked back to the car park, made a mental note to get his car washed, then drove to the station.

Jim returned to his office by way of the coffee machine. On reaching the second floor and his shared office he could hear his DS swearing volubly at his computer. ‘You know, I’m buggered how they think that getting us tae dae all this typing ourselves is cost effective.’ DS Brian Scott was more agitated than normal, which was, indeed, saying something. ‘When I joined up you just had tae scribble something doon and wait for some daft wee lass in the typing pool tae dae the business. Noo, well, I’ll tell ye, Paisley’s goin’ like a fair, while I’m up here learnin’ tae be a fuckin’ secretary.’

‘Ah, DS Scott.’ Daley aped the clipped Kelvinside tones of their boss. ‘It’s incumbent upon us all to integrate with new policing methods.’ He grinned at Scott’s exasperation.

‘Aye, and fuck him tae. It’s getting tae be ye need a degree in this shit jist tae dae yer ain job.’ Scott was smiling in spite of himself. An IT specialist he most certainly was not; a highly effective, sometimes inspired police officer he most certainly was. His brusque manner and tendency to ignore the rulebook had hampered his progress through the ranks, and he would no doubt end his career as a DS. Daley felt that it was a role tailor-made for his gritty determination, and he valued his assistance more than he would ever admit. Simply, they made a good team.

Daley walked to his large paper-strewn desk. A yellow Post-it note placed on top of a mountain of files announced *Numpty wants to see you!* in Scott’s bold, untidy hand.

‘When did his magnificence call?’ Daley enquired, looking up just in time to see Scott’s computer screen turn a brilliant blue.

‘Oh, just after you left. He’s in a right stooshie about somethin’. He didna even pull me up about whit a coupla this place is.’ He swung his chair around to face Daley, left hand outstretched in a gesture of disbelief at his computer screen. ‘I mean, whit the fuck is this a’ about?’

Draining his coffee, Daley went over to Scott’s desk, where he deftly pressed a few keys on the computer restoring it to the report on which the DS was working. ‘Just how many computer courses have you been on? Must be dozens now.’

Scott’s face took on a look of rueful resignation, ‘Aye, a few, but you’ve got tae remember, Jim, every time ye get a chance tae go up tae the college it’s mair like a break from my dear lady wife. That’s a great wee bar they’ve got there, an’, well, by the time ye’ve sobered up in the morning, ye’ve well an’ truly lost the thread about whit the fuck they’re on about.’

Daley chuckled to himself as he took the lift to the top floor of the building. As the elevator doors swished open he marvelled, not for the first time, at the steep upward curve in the standard of opulence in this portion of the station. Gone was the bare functionality of the other three floors, to be replaced by dark wood panelling, tasteful paintings, picked out by soft lighting and thick carpeting punctuated by tall verdant pot plants. Even the civilian staff were of a more aesthetically pleasing variety; a woman in a tight-fitting skirt wiggled past him in a cloud of expensive perfume that reminded him of Liz.

Behind the closed door the sound of a giggling female was plain. The nameplate read simply SUPERINTENDENT JOHN DONALD. COMMANDER DIV. CID. Daley knocked loudly three times. After a few moments of mumbled voices, the familiar ‘Come’ served as an invitation for Daley to enter. He opened the door and stepped inside, straight-backed and confident.

Donald was sitting behind an unfeasibly large desk that made the rest of the office seem shrunken. A very attractive woman stood over him clutching a file, looking intently on as the superintendent busily appended his signature to a document.

‘Ah, Jim.’ Donald’s eyes flitted towards him then back to his papers. He gestured airily with his left hand. ‘Make yourself comfortable while I satisfy the rapacious appetite for my time this young lady seems to harbour.’

Same old, same old. Jim was used to his boss’s eccentricities; at times it felt as though he had worked for the man for his entire career. As a young probationary cop Donald had been Daley’s shift sergeant. On his first posting to Paisley CID, as a raw DC, Donald was his DS. Not long after Daley’s promotion to DS in A-Division in Glasgow, Donald arrived as the all-powerful DCI. They were once described as star-crossed. He wished they weren’t.

The man who sat in front of him now bore hardly any resemblance to the foul-mouthed, overweight philistine of what seemed like a very long time ago. Steadily Donald had ironed out all his imperfections. He stopped drinking, took up running, golf and squash, and consequently lost piles of weight. He spent a great deal of time abroad or under a sunbed, ensuring that his permanent tan was just that. Even his hair had undergone transformation: gone were the thick black curls cut close to the scalp; now thinning, his gelled coiffure made him look like a hackneyed version of an East End gangster.

His manner had changed accordingly: the harsh accent of Glasgow’s East End was now modulated to the clipped tones of middle-class Bearsden, taking him much further socially than it had in geographic reality. His notorious temper was kept in check by sycophancy to superiors or aloof arrogance to those of a lesser rank. Yet Daley had never been in any doubt as to how thin this façade was; Donald was as notorious for his self-seeking ruthlessness as he was respected for being a mediocre police officer who had transformed himself into a truly talented administrator and political mover. The letters BA, LLB after his name bore testament to the hard work and determination it had taken to climb from the mire of a piss-poor childhood to his current middle-class comfort.

Donald signed the document with a flourish, then flamboyantly waved the paper in the air to dry the fountain-pen ink he had used. ‘Now, Di, don’t be frightened to bring in as many papers for me to sign as you want. My door is always open, you know.’ He leered at the young woman who nodded dutifully then left the room. ‘Now, Jim, sorry about that. Breaking in a new girl, so to speak. One long round of paperwork in he. Now where did I put that . . . Ah, here it is.’ He lifted a black file from the desk and removed what looked like a number of printed emails. ‘Bit of bother in our new dominions. Kinloch, to be exact. There’s no point in blustering on, scan these and we’ll get on wi’ it.’

Daley noticed how the polished edge of his accent tarnished slightly once the secretary had gone. For many this would have appeared to be an acknowledgement of their shared past; to Daley it was more an indication of how far down he was in the pecking order. Donald obviously felt there was little point in turning on the charm for his senior DI. He opened the file and began to browse its contents. After a few minutes he looked up from the papers and cleared his throat to divert Donald's attention from the copy of *Perfect Home* his superior was avidly consuming.

'Oh, right, Jim. So, there you have it. Bit of a crisis down there in terms of manpower, and experience too. The subdivision is run by a teuchter called Charles MacLeod, a right little shit and the very worst kind of social climber. They have a DS who's no more use than an ornament, and a few eager young DCs. Do you remember Davie Fraser from A-Division? His nephew Archie's there.'

'If he's anything like his uncle, the pubs will be doing a fine trade.' Daley had a sinking feeling in his stomach. Strathclyde Police had undergone yet another phase of reorganisation in an attempt to save money. His division had been amalgamated with what had been the old Argyll Constabulary, meaning that Paisley HQ was now responsible for parts of the west coast of Scotland that few could pronounce, never mind find on a map.

'Quite so, Jim, quite so. Poor man. I think his liver is on the way out. Never met a man who loved a drink more.' Donald looked rueful. 'Anyway, I'm reliably informed his nephew is cut from entirely different cloth.'

Daley hoped so. His experience of Davie Fraser was having to follow him from bar to bar when he was a young cop, watching the man who was supposed to be showing him the ropes steadily becoming more and more inebriated and objectionable by turns.

'Do you mind me asking what this has to do with me?' He knew what the answer was going to be, but being direct would mean Donald would be unable to dollop his usual helping of sugar onto an unpalatable request.

'Straight to the point, Inspector Daley. That's what I like to hear.'

Daley had the impression that Donald was a bit disappointed, and would rather have had the chance to dish out his usual jargon on 'duty' and 'chances for advancement', the normal precursor to a shit job. 'I need someone there with a bit of experience, to get this solved quickly and prove to those yokels that our way is the best way. Fuck knows, we'll have to get them to toe the line somehow, and this affords us the perfect opportunity.'

'So you want me down there, sir?' Daley moved the conversation away from a lecture on the difference between policing methods between city and county divisions.

'Yes, Jim. In fact, I'd like you down there first thing tomorrow morning. The body is on the way to the mortuary in Glasgow. That prick Crichton will do the necessary this evening at about seven, and I'd like you to be there.'

Daley paused momentarily to take this in. He was being sent to a far outpost of the empire to investigate a murder that could take forever, while the wayward Liz was at the other end of the country doing, well, what he dreaded to think. 'I see, sir. What about personnel?' was all he could think of to say.

'I have you booked on the first flight in the morning. You will of course be much better informed after the PM. Take a look on the ground yourself, then we'll decide who we can spare to send down there with you. Take that file, and I'll send anything else we've got downstairs. No doubt we can spare Tweedledum and a few other bodies should the situation require it.' Donald had what could best be described as a strained relationship with DS Scott.

Daley's mind returned to what he had read in the emails: a young woman, ligature, body dumped at sea, and a locus distant from usual amenities. This was not going to be an easy inquiry. 'Have the Support Unit been informed yet, sir?' He was referring to the group of elite Strathclyde officers who specialised in various disciplines now required of a modern police force: firearms, dog branch, crowd control, underwater unit and so on. Daley reckoned the underwater unit would be handy bearing in mind the circumstances of the death.

'Not as yet, Jim. I think it wise to wait until we have some kind of result from the PM, no matter how preliminary. Of course, you realise, in terms of expenditure this is going to be a killer. We've already had a full SOCO team down there. The burden of expense falls to us, the investigating department. I hope you'll bear that in mind when you're on the ground?'

'As you know, sir, cost is always at the forefront of my mind during every inquiry.' Daley smiled, knowing his boss was well aware of his attitude to the bean counters many senior officers had been forced to become.

'Luckily,' said Donald, choosing to ignore the irony of the last statement, 'because this is new territory, so I can speak, we are able to introduce a degree of flexibility into our spend. However, Jim, the pot is by no means bottomless. Please take that on board.'

Daley was about to make some sarcastic reply, when Donald continued on an entirely different subject without the need for an intake of breath. He, it seemed, had developed all the skills of the politician. 'And how is Liz? Everything back to normal in that department?'

Daley bridled as a leer crossed Donald's face. Only a few weeks had passed since Liz had flirted outrageously with the superintendent at a retirement party. The couple had rowed late into the night when they returned home, with Liz claiming that she was only trying to advance his career with a little 'networking' – yet another modern term he couldn't stand. Anyway, Donald's body language had made it abundantly clear that 'networking' was the last thing on his mind. The ever loyal DS Scott had administered a left hook to a colleague who had insinuated that something illicit was afoot.

'Mrs Donald and I really must have you for dinner.'

Mrs Daley's more likely to have you for breakfast, Daley thought, somewhat uncharitably.

'Anyway, better get on, we both have plenty to do.' The superintendent stood, hand outstretched. Daley shook it in acceptance of the dismissal. 'Pick up your tickets from Kirsty next door – and don't forget to keep me informed. Don't take any shit off that little bastard MacLeod. Any trouble there and I've got a few tricks up my sleeve. Good hunting, Jim.'

3

It didn't matter how long it had been since Daley's last visit to Glasgow's mortuary: it hadn't been long enough. Part of the training of young police constables in years gone by had included at least one trip to this place to witness a post mortem. Around a dozen pale police officers would huddle around a bluff pathologist, as he hacked, cut, tore and drained, and generally showcased his talents in a way only the most strong of stomachs could withstand. Daley had managed not to faint or to be sick, however, he had been in the minority. These incidents were so common that each muppet (as trainee cops were then affectionately known) would be given a paper bag and told to be ready to grab whoever was next to them, in the not unlikely event they passed out. The young PC who had stood next to Daley the first time was so traumatised that she left college that day, never to return.

Things had changed: brushed aluminium sheets replaced the badly grouted Victorian tiles that had served as wall covering; industrial carpet silenced the ominous tread of the cracked linoleum flooring; soft mood lighting illuminated, where once the harsh glow of humming striplights had served to augment a visceral scene of blood, shit and gore.

One thing that had not changed – not in the slightest – was the smell. The olfactory sense being as it is, Daley was instantly transported to his first visit every time he came here. A cloying, sickening mix of death, decay, disinfectant and refrigeration, it was a smell that, no matter how you tried, would be your unwelcome companion, an uninvited house guest, for days on end after departing this Faustian repository of hell on earth.

Not everyone was affected in the same way. Scott slouched along the corridors, untroubled by anxiety or the clammy odour. 'Aye, an' see if he doesna get another centre half – he can forget it.' The DS was expostulating on his favourite subject: Rangers Football Club. 'That fuckin' keeper's fuck a' use an' a.' From different sides of the west of Scotland sectarian divide, inspector and sergeant usually kept up a healthy banter on the subject of football. At the moment though, Scott found his interlocutor uncharacteristically silent. 'Are ye followin' me, Jim?'

The clatter of a large fire door being slammed shut startled both men and negated the need for an answer.

'Well, well, if it's not the dream team.' The sarcasm was palpable. Another thing was unchanged from the first time Jim Daley had been to the mortuary, and the man was now trying to secure the fire door with one hand as he pocketed a black pipe into a short white coat pocket with the other: Chief Forensic Pathologist Andrew Crichton.

'Still at the pipe, Andy? I dread to think what shape your lungs are in.' Daley walked towards Crichton and slapped him on the back. 'How are you keeping? Surely you must be past retirement age.' He smiled affectionately at the older man.

'One of the advantages of a professional career, Inspector Daley, is that one doesn't have to retire in one's forties and get a job delivering newspapers or doing odd jobs in order to make ends meet.' Crichton was referring to the fact that most junior uniformed police officers retired after thirty years of service. Many would find themselves in rather menial employment, either from boredom or the pressing need to supplement an inadequate pension. In the CID, and from the rank of inspector and above, the situation was different: the higher grades regularly stayed well beyond thirty years in 'The Job'. However, the forces were slow to encourage ordinary cops to stay on as well, realising that there was truly no substitute for experience.

'Aye, listen tae it.' Scott adopted an expression of mock outrage. 'It'll be nae bother fir you tae get a wee part

time job. That butcher in Kilmacolm's always needin' help, an' think, no reports tae write or fuck a'.'

~~'I'm so glad those elocution lessons have finally paid off, Brian. Your ready turn of phrase never ceases to~~ amaze me.' Crichton surveyed the DS with a critical eye. 'All that drink is having a devastating effect on you looks too. Good grief, man, you look like you've aged ten years in the last two.'

'Cheeky bastard.' Scott chuckled. 'Anyhow, me an' the boss haven't a' day for this. He's gettin' sent tae the wilds tomorrow.'

'Well, gents, as you can no doubt discern with the use of your legendary detection skills and from the fragrant aroma of tobacco, I have been having a smoke. Really, nothing is sacred these days. My old professor never had a cigar out of his mouth when he performed a post mortem. Now, if you light up within ten feet of the building you're liable to go down for ten years.'

'Aye, an' you've aye been a stickler for the rulebook, Andy.'

Laughter filled the corridor as they headed for the pathology theatre. Two technicians were working on a body lying on a metal autopsy table. The room itself was dimly lit, however a large bank of lights suspended in a metal frame above the table illuminated the scene with ice-white precision.

'Be so good as to put these on.' An assistant had arrived bearing green aprons, masks and rubber overshoes. Crichton removed his white coat, then headed over to a large metal sink where he rolled up his shirt sleeves and soaped his hands and forearms, operating the taps with his elbows when he was finished. This done, he shrugged on his green rubber overall with a great deal more ease than the two police officers, both of whom had required the help of an assistant.

Now fully kitted out, the trio proceeded to the autopsy table where Daley recognised the blackened, bloated features of the deceased he had first seen on the emails in Donald's office. The body cavity had been exposed on both sides of her ribcage and flesh were pinned back with large stainless-steel clamps. As usual Daley had to suppress an automatic gag reflex. Scott, meanwhile, took in the scene intently, eyes visible over his mask, which was moving in a less than flattering manner as he continued to chew an ever-present piece of gum.

'Aye, you've made a good start, Andy.' Scott's eyes flicked from the eviscerated corpse to the pathologist.

'When I heard who was in charge of this investigation, I thought I'd get the sawing over with before you got here.' Daley could only imagine the broad grin hidden by the older man's mask. 'Right, progress so far . . . As you can see, we've managed a pretty comprehensive examination of the subject.' Crichton was talking in a more businesslike manner now, rather like a dentist announcing to his nurse which teeth were to be filled. A large microphone hung down above the scene, ensuring no utterances from anyone around the table would be missed. 'At first glance – despite one or two anomalies, which I will come to later – a straightforward strangulation. However, if I may draw your attention to this.' Crichton moved down the corpse to the exposed right leg. 'This mark around the ankle indicates restraint.' He pointed to a band about two inches wide that encompassed the ankle. The skin here was a lighter hue than the rest of the body, which was turning black as the process of putrefaction began. 'However, this mark was left on the body post mortem, so someone felt the need to tie her up even though she was dead.' Without giving the officers time to take this in, or ask any questions, he pulled away the green sheet which had been covering the waist of the dead woman, to reveal a deep black gash that bisected the remains.

Daley could taste bile in the back of his throat.

'Again, after death, the body suffered a major trauma, completed I am told by your colleagues in Kinloch who saw fit to pull the subject apart like a Christmas cracker.' Crichton looked towards Daley, laughter lines visible above his mask. 'If you need a chair, please just ask, Jim.'

'Very good, Andy.' The inspector changed the subject quickly. 'How – when – could that have happened?'

'If you're asking me to make a wild guess, I would say she was nearly cleft in two by a large, sharp metallic object – a ship's propeller, for example. The wound is precise and clean, which suggests to me a swift slice rather than the kind of sawing or cutting that would have been required had manpower, or even a tool, been used. I'll have to do more tests on the flesh surrounding the wound. That'll take a couple of days though.'

'Fuckin' hell, this is some mess, Jim. You'd be better takin' Sherlock Holmes doon wi' ye, never mind me.' As was his habit, Scott had displayed his uncanny knack of distilling the most complex of situations down to the lowest common denominator.

'I must admit, in my many years as a forensic pathologist I've never encountered such circumstances

However, as I say, we have a number of lab tests yet to perform: stomach contents, other bodily fluids and so on. She definitely had sex within the last forty-eight hours, but I'll be in a position to tell you more about that after the lab work.'

'What do you mean, Andy?' Daley was curious. He had known Crichton for so many years that he had become used to the nuances of his voice and presentation. He suspected the pathologist had discovered something significant.

'Oh, merely a theory, nothing more. By the time you've had lunch down in Kinloch tomorrow I should be able to give you some answers.' Suddenly Crichton raised his head from the body and looked at the police officers. 'Wonderful place, Kinloch. An old friend of mine lives down there: great fishing, golf, fantastic scenery.' He had a far-away look. 'People are as mad as fuck, though.'

'What are you, a shite tourist board?' DS Scott, straight to the point. 'Once you're done with the rough guide, maybe you can tell us how long she's been dead for.'

'Well, immersion in water has made that more difficult, but I'd say no more than sixty, no less than twenty-eight hours. I'll be able to be more precise within the next day or so.'

'What about her age, Andy? Any distinguishing marks?' Despite the gruesome surroundings, attending the post mortem had whetted Daley's appetite for this investigation. He was intrigued now.

'I was just coming to that. I would say she was between twenty-five and thirty. She gave birth within the last three years or so. Oh, and look at this.' He moved the corpse's right leg. On her inner thigh the letters 'IS' had been tattooed. 'As you can see, not professional – ink and knife job if you ask me – and most unusual for a woman to let herself be disfigured in that way, don't you think, gents?'

For once, DS Scott had nothing to say.

4

Daley hated waiting. He was sure that on his deathbed he would bitterly regret the hours, days and weeks he had spent in the limbo of being unable to do anything while waiting. In this particular instance Scott was fifteen minutes late, and although he would still easily make his flight, he fretted that the time he had added in lieu of any possible delay was fast disappearing. He looked around his lounge, noting that the décor, ornamental furniture choices – even the photographs and paintings – were really all his wife's work. Not for the first time he felt like a stranger in his own home; it was an alien environment that bore witness to the tastes and comforts of another.

He remembered being a teenager: the posters on his wall, the black paint that had so infuriated his mother when she had discovered it adorning his bedroom, from floor to ceiling. He had painted his bedroom furniture white: black and white to match his taste in ska music. The music centre, that he had coveted for so long, sat on top of an old chest of drawers that his father had 'acquired', and a Roberts transistor radio dominated his bedside table. The rest of the small space was occupied by an ancient anglepoise lamp and whatever book he happened to be reading at the time. He had managed to cobble together a low cabinet, which contained his records and tapes, all stored in alphabetical order. He remembered making compilation tapes that he gave his father to play on the car stereo whenever they embarked upon one of the epic journeys that were the precursors to visiting some ancient relative. All this had been his pride and joy, an indication to anyone who cared to wonder that he was now an adult who had his own likes and dislikes – his personality encapsulated by a few sticks of rough furniture, poorly applied paint and low-end hi-fi equipment. Nothing special, but his. Even his eventual choice of career had reflected the black-and-white obsession.

Standing now in his expensive home, in one of the well-appointed 'reception' rooms graced with the cream of soft furnishings and contemporary art, a stark realisation that he had allowed his personality to be subsumed by the tastes and whims of Liz dawned. This room – in fact, the whole house – was someone else's stage, a stage on which he was merely one of an ensemble, an insignificant and unaccredited player. He shied away from the acceptance of the fact that this relationship was consuming his soul; that his reason for being was increasingly entwined and predicated on his dynamic with an individual he felt he was growing further from every day.

Unnecessarily, Scott was sounding his horn as he drove up the short gravel drive, and bawling, 'C'mon, yo! You'll miss that bloody flight if we don't get a fuckin' shift on.'

Daley pushed the front door twice, checking it was properly closed, walked down the three front steps and opened the door to Scott's car. The acrid smell of cigarette smoke hit him like a wave of unwelcome nausea and he eased himself into the passenger seat. 'You know, Brian, this car is a complete health hazard.'

'Fuck me, I'm good enough tae take ye tae the airport, an' a' ye can dae is gie me a hard time. Ye've been in the right pain in the arse since ye stopped smoking, d'ye know that?' Scott stubbed his cigarette out in the overflowing ashtray with exaggerated vigour and involuntarily coughed the deep, unhealthy rasp of the die-hard smoker.

'See? When you're in the oxygen tent you'll wish you'd done the same as me and given up. How do you think I managed to afford that big plasma TV you like so much?'

Scott coughed out a string of expletives as they drove towards the main road. Daley realised that he had become difficult since quitting fags. He definitely did not miss the hacking cough, the bad breath and the huge amount of money they relieved you of in the course of a year; he hadn't even suffered any noticeable signs of

withdrawal. No, his post-smoking self had developed a visceral hatred of cigarettes, something he supposed the body prompted in order to protect this new nicotine-free existence.

Scott broke the spell. 'Mind you met my brother, Willie, at the fitba?'" Daley grunted in the affirmative. 'Aye, well, I'd forgotten he wiz doon there workin' about three years ago. He's a sparky, mind?'

'I remember he swears more than you. I didn't think that was possible. Anyway, how did he like Kinloch?'

'Fuck me, we had tae wring his liver oot wi' a mangle when he came back. He says they're a' near daft doo there. The wife reminded me last night, you know, when I says I might be goin' doon for a while. A' mad wi' the drink, fightin' their ain shadows, an' close-knit tae. I'm thinking yer in fir a fuckin' hard time wi' that mob, for sure.'

Daley looked out at the leaden sky as he pondered Scott's theories on Kinloch society. Small communities were always difficult places in which to carry out an investigation. However, in a way, all investigations took place within one community or another, whether it be a housing estate, tower block, office or ethnic enclave. Glasgow's Asian and Chinese communities were notoriously difficult to infiltrate, and as for some of the schemes – well, he didn't expect Kinloch could be any worse.

As they neared the airport, large signs announced a change to parking procedures around the terminal buildings. In fact, it was more appropriate to say you couldn't drive anywhere near them. An attack on the airport by terrorists with a car full of gas canisters had put paid to that. As a young cop Daley had worked for nearly six months at Glasgow Airport. In those carefree days all the police had worried about was where they could get a free coffee, or where best to view young holidaymakers as they navigated their scantily dressed way through the terminal. Now, well, things were different. Even here, on Paisley's doorstep, he was aware of a change in attitude. People viewed anyone remotely Asian or Arabic in appearance as a potential threat. The landlord of his local in Howwood had implored him to look carefully at the soles of the shoes of any suspicious looking passengers. 'Think about it,' he said, 'when wiz the last time anybody looked at your shoes when you checked onto a flight? It's obvious, Jim.' Since then Daley had to make a conscious effort not to stare at fellow passengers' footwear. Maybe people were right to be suspicious; perhaps danger was ever present. It was undeniable that the world had changed for good.

Scott dropped him as near to the terminal building as was humanly possible, and Daley made his way along walkways crammed with pale-skinned travellers, chatting excitedly as they made their way into the airport, their tanned, more subdued counterparts, returning to the greyness of reality from holiday idylls. The scent of cool rain on warm tarmac mixed with the heady odour of aviation fuel and car fumes permeated the air. He never liked any kind of terminal building: whether it be train, bus or airport. It was not that they were large, often busy, usually impersonal places; no, it was the air of melancholy that inhabited them. To him, they spoke too loudly of parting, of sorrow: people saying goodbye. Not for him thoughts of a mother greeting a long-lost child, or lovers reuniting; these buildings were filled with a resonance of something coming to an end. Without meaning to, he thought of Liz.

He made his way to the check-in where his boarding pass was issued and his luggage processed. The check-in girl reminded him of the fragrant secretaries who populated Donald's floor of the station. He pondered how many women were passed over for work just because they were not in possession of the requisite looks; life was as unfair as it was ridiculous.

He ambled to the departure gate via a newsagent, where he bought a paper. A quick scan of the front page revealed that, inevitably, the press had got hold of the Kinloch murder story. No doubt he would have to appear at a press conference at some point – something he loathed. He wished he had chosen to wear a different tie and resolved to change it at the earliest opportunity.

Daley couldn't help smiling on discovering that the same girl who had checked him in was now collecting his boarding pass. She noticed his amusement. 'We're a small operation, sir. Everyone has to pitch in.' He detected an unusual lilt to her voice; not the singsong of a Highland accent, nor the upward intonation of the Central Belt – something different, with longer vowels and a more laconic pace.

A bus took them out to the runway. At first he thought they would drive past this mini-plane, until the bus pulled up and another uniformed flight attendant entered and ushered them from the vehicle towards the aircraft. Daley was normally a confident flier, but he was unprepared for the cramped cabin he now entered, hunched over, walking sideways like a crab. The flight attendant showed him to a window seat on the right

hand side of the aisle. As he adjusted his belt he heard a stream of expletives issuing from two youths who were seated in front of him. ~~The young men were not being intentionally offensive; in the west of Scotland~~ punctuation was gradually being replaced by curses. He and Liz had recently spent a weekend in York, and he remembered being surprised by the absence of swearing. Even the small pub in the Marygate, close to the hotel, offered a warm welcome in an oath-free zone. Along with good beer, it made a pleasant change from the raucous, febrile ambience prevalent in the boozers he frequented.

Momentarily the young men fell silent as a small, middle-aged Asian man was shown to a seat at the front of the aircraft. A snort of suppressed laughter indicated that they had registered his presence. 'Fuck me, Bobb, start saying your prayers. That cunt's probably got a bomb up his arse.' Daley contemplated intervening but was beaten to it by the flight attendant. 'Right you, Camel Johnstone, any mair o' that an' the only arse you'll need to worry about is yer ain as it bounces off the tarmac when I throw you off the plane. Understand?'

Daley smiled. This was not the type of approach he was used to from airline staff, however it proved more effective as both young men were now quiet and had adopted slightly embarrassed expressions. He had noticed the long vowels again, both from the boys and the attendant; this was, no doubt, the Kinloch accent.

He repressed feelings of claustrophobia as the engines burst into life and the plane began to taxi slowly along the runway. Without warning it rose sharply from the ground, engines straining to get them airborne. Daley's heart missed a beat as the engine noise dropped suddenly when they attained the required height. A grey curtain at the front of the aircraft was flung open, revealing the cockpit where one pilot was seated and another stood hunched with a radio mic in his hand, ready to address the passengers.

'Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, aye, an' you, Camel Johnstone . . . We'll be flying at a height of fifteen hundred feet for most of the journey, which will last around twenty-five minutes. The weather in Kinloch is much the same as in Glasgow, so we'll be taking the scenic route over Arran, then down the Kintyre peninsula. If you have any questions, please address them to our lovely flight attendant, Morag. I'm Lieutenant Moran, and your pilot today is Captain Witherspoon. Thank you for flying Scotia Airways. Morag will now take you through the safety procedures.'

As she stood up, the flight attendant obscured the young pilot as he retreated into the cockpit. After jumping involuntarily, she announced perfunctorily the usual list of safety instructions. Daley guessed that Lieutenant Moran had nipped her arse through the curtain, though her expression gave nothing away. He looked lazily out of the window: cotton-wool wisps of cloud floated above a patchwork of tiny fields and the grey snake of road beneath. Bright sunlight glanced from the silver wing of the plane, making Daley wish he had brought the fancy designer sunglasses Liz had so proudly presented him with at Christmas.

The fields were soon replaced by an iron-grey sea, flecked with the white tips of waves. Daley thought the sea looked out of place; too cold for what was a warm spring day. He shuddered at the thought of the corpse of the young woman floating in this forbidding expanse of water. He had always been wary of the sea; though he swam well, he restricted his aquatic pursuits to indoor swimming pools. The sea seemed too big, too unfathomable, filled with the unexpected and unknown. He had read that humans knew more about the surface of Mars than the hidden depths of the ocean, and it didn't surprise him at all.

His thoughts drifted back to Liz. He had managed to get her on the mobile late the previous evening. Despite ringing since six and leaving several messages, she seemed surprised by his call. The noise of a pub – clinking glasses, loud music, exaggerated laughter – was the backdrop to their conversation. She greeted his news about the Kinloch investigation with the platitudes he supposed she felt were her dutiful responsibility: *I'll miss you . . . hope you won't be away long . . . oh, the house will be so empty*. All the time he could hear muffled voices and suppressed laughter; it was like a teenager talking to a worried parent from a uni bar while being taunted by friends.

Amongst the conspiratorial mumbles there had been a familiar voice: Mark Henderson. Husband of Liz's sister, Jill. Mark and him had hated each other from the word go. In fact mutual friends would often comment on how mismatched both couples were. Mark was more like Liz: haughty, dismissive, immodest, sly, vengeful, superficial, good-looking, and extremely clever. It appeared to many that the sisters had married the wrong men. Jill, though almost identical to Liz in a long-limbed, languid way, had a much more reticent nature. The younger sibling by two years, she lacked Liz's supreme confidence, which, accidentally perhaps, had imbued her with greater empathy and sensitivity. She could almost mirror the role Daley played in his marriage. Mark was

notorious philanderer, having been a more than willing participant in a number of affairs. He worked as a corporate lawyer for an international firm of accountants: two of the slippiest professions under one roof. Who was less trustworthy? The accountant constantly seeking the loophole and the uncrossed 'T', or the lawyer who watched his back?

Daley was fond of Jill. He was able to gauge by the way she looked at Mark how devoted she was, and he sensed the pain and devastation caused by her husband's infidelity. Once, they had spoken about it on a Portuguese beach, sitting in a secluded bay watching Mark and Liz's horseplay in the sea. 'Do you think they slept together?' Her question was sudden and shocking. Daley realised that he had often wondered the same thing, but he'd done what he always did with unpalatable thoughts about his wife: he banished them. 'No, they're too alike to be attracted to each other,' he had lied. He remembered the quizzical smile that had crossed her face by way of a reply. After that, they had kept their own counsel on the matter, each aware of the bitter unspoken truth and unwilling to grant it the life of acknowledgement.

Jill and Mark did share something that it seemed he and Liz would never have: a child. Beth was their pride and joy. She shared her mother's long legs and easy grace, had her father's round, intelligent face, which framed deep, watchful blue eyes, slightly turned down at the corners. A nest of curly hair crowned her three-year-old head and hung in tangled ringlets when her mother let it grow. She had, as Daley's mother used to say, 'been here before'. Talking fluently before she was two, she combined tireless mischief with quick thought and a flawless parody. When Daley visited, she grabbed her favourite Noddy book, climbed on his knee, and demanded to be read to. She chuckled her way through a story with him, mimicking the voices he used for various characters. He didn't envy Mark Henderson his money, his board-level career, big house, fancy car, even the fact that he had probably had his wife: no, he coveted his daughter, dearly wishing that the beautiful little girl could be his own.

Liz, it seemed, had no intention of ever having a child. The five S's she called it: screams, shits, sickness, sleeplessness and stretch marks. 'Bugger that. Who in their right mind would want a baby?' Her attitude towards children was encapsulated in those few words.

'Ladies and gentlemen, we have just emerged from some cloud cover. Below, you can see the east coast of the Kintyre peninsula.' The uninviting grey sea had been replaced by a low rocky coastline, dotted at intervals with white sandy beaches. To Daley's untrained eye, the landscape looked more verdant than it had twenty minutes before, as though the fecundity of the season was somehow at a more advanced stage here.

'Everything OK?' Morag was making her way up the aisle, tending to her temporary charges, holding a small basket filled with brightly wrapped sweets. Daley had developed a sweet tooth since he'd stopped smoking, something he blamed for his recent weight gain. So, inevitably, as the confectionery was waved under his nose, he chose two sweets, being careful to avoid the gold-wrapped toffees that had been responsible for him losing weight filling last Christmas.

The chimneys and rooftops of a small town could be discerned now; Daley guessed this was the fabled Kinloch. As though to confirm this, the intercom burst into crackling life once more: 'Ladies and gentlemen, you can see we are approaching our destination: Kinloch. We will be landing in around five minutes or so. Please ensure that you remain seated and that your seatbelts remain secured.' The buildings below were becoming more distinct; unexpectedly grey, he thought. The street pattern of what looked like tenement buildings reminded him of Paisley. Unlike most seaside towns built around the front, it looked as though Kinloch's streets were at right angles to the loch around which the town sprawled.

The pitch of the engines changed again as the plane began its descent over an airfield that looked to be only a few fields away from the town. The hangars and other airfield buildings bore a distinctly military feel, though Daley could not see any matching aircraft. From some distance along the runway, a red fire appliance could just be made out speeding towards their likely landing point. 'Ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning our descent into Kinloch Airport. Please remain seated, with your seat belts fastened. May I take this opportunity to thank you again for travelling Scotia Airways and hope that you enjoy your time with the colourful residents of this area.' That had been said with tongue firmly placed in cheek. Daley wondered just how 'colourful' this place and these people could be. In any event he was about to find out.

The plane bumped down noisily onto the runway with a screech of skidding tyres and creaks and groans from the undercarriage, and taxied a short distance to a small terminal building. A green light flashed in time to

dinging alarm from the intercom, indicating that it was safe for the passengers to remove their seatbelts and begin the stooped crab-walk down the aisle and out of the plane.

Morag stood slightly hunched at the exit, handing passengers carefully onto the plane's steps, as an identical dressed colleague stood at the bottom of the stairs repeating this function. The two were carrying on a shouted dialogue in the long vowels he was now sure belonged to the natives of Kinloch. Daley ducked through the exit door and down the few steps onto the tarmac. The tang of the sea was strong. The temperature seemed high and there was a freshness to the air here. He inhaled deeply, already relishing being away from the stuffy air of the city.

A gaunt man in his late fifties stood in the doorway of the terminal building, examining passengers' identification documents. As Daley got to the front of the small queue, and before he could produce his warrant card, the man held up his hand, indicating that the policeman need not bother.

'You'll be fine, Inspector Daley,' he said in the musical lilt of the Hebrides. 'There's a boy out the front to pick you up.' Junior officers were often described by cops of old as boys. This, coupled with the man's demeanour, led Daley to comment, 'How's retirement treating you?' He smiled knowingly at the man.

'Aye, good, very good, Inspector. Lachie Bain, thirty years before the mast, and heartily glad not to be before it any more.' He held out a large hand for Daley to shake.

'Jim Daley, but you know that already.'

Now it was time for the older man to smile. He had a broad, infectious grin, though Daley suspected that was not something he did very often. 'Aye, well, as you'll find out yourself, old habits die hard. I saw your name on the passenger list, and anyhow this is Kinloch. The whole town will likely know you're on your way, aye, and why you're here.'

'Like that is it? Looks like a reasonably sized place. I didn't expect gossip to be so rife.'

Bain laughed again, this time tossing his head back in mirth. 'It's the biggest gossip hole this side of Benbecula, aye, and vicious with it. If you ever need a friendly ear, I'm in the bar of the County Hotel about half five most days – after the last flight. Only for an hour or so, you understand,' he said, with a serious look.

'Thanks, I'll certainly remember that, but I think I'll have my hands pretty full. I needn't tell you...'

Bain held his hand up again. 'Och, no doubt you'll not have troubles to seek, but you'll be billeted there anyway. Mind, all work and no play...'

Daley grinned as he headed into the terminal to collect his bags. It was already clear that there were few secrets in Kinloch.

5

A tall, well-built red-headed young man was sitting on the bonnet of what Daley recognised immediately as a CID car.

‘Inspector Daley, I’m DC Fraser.’ The man held out his hand to greet the senior officer. ‘Hope your trip was OK. It can get a bit hairy on that wee plane when the wind’s up. Not so bad today though.’

Daley noted the similarities between Fraser and his infamous uncle: while both men were tall, heavily built with red hair, the young officer in front of him bore no sign of the debauchery that had marked out his uncle. Indeed, he looked like the kind of cop you’d be glad to have at your side going in to sort out a pub brawl in Paisley, not one of the undersized graduates who seemed to be favoured by force recruitment these days. ‘Hello DC Fraser. I used to work with your Uncle Davie. How’s he doing by the way? I heard he hadn’t been too great.’

‘Eh, don’t hold that against me, sir. He’s on the waiting list for a liver transplant, and I don’t suppose I need to tell you why.’ Fraser looked ruefully at the inspector.

‘Ach, don’t worry, son. There’s a lot worse than Davie cloaking about,’ Daley lied. ‘You’re getting a bit of a reputation yourself, tearing murder victims in half.’ He smiled benevolently at the DC, quite sure that the younger man had heard plenty of that particular incident.

Fraser’s face turned a deep crimson as he stooped to pick up the inspector’s bags and put them into the open boot of the car. ‘Eh, would you like to drive, sir? Our boss always insists on driving if he’s in the motor.’

‘No, no, take the wheel, DC Fraser. This’ll be Inspector MacLeod you’re talking about?’

‘Yes, sir.’ Daley noted his colleague’s raised eyebrow. ‘He has his, eh, routines, so to speak.’

They both got into the car, and leaving the small airport car park, headed along a single-track road. ‘How far to the town?’ said Daley, remembering to switch his mobile back on after the flight, and noticing, with a twinge of dismay, that he had a missed call from Liz.

‘Oh, only about four miles, sir – we’ll soon be on the main drag. Have you been here before?’

Daley had only hazy memories of coming to Kinloch on one of the old steamers with his granny, what seemed like a lifetime ago. ‘Aye, once when I was a wee boy, so you’ll forgive me if I don’t remember too much about it.’ He put the phone back into his pocket, resolving to call Liz as soon as he got a bit of space. ‘How are we doing with this inquiry? Anything turned up?’

Fraser gave a resigned sigh. ‘We’ve done the rounds, sir. Y’know, local fishermen, missing persons, the usual. Nobody seems to know anything. She was a bit hard to recognise with the bloating an’ all. What did the P.D. show?’

Daley smiled. ‘If you’re worried about your little mishap, don’t be. The corpse was nearly severed already, so anyone trying to move it would’ve had the same problem. Oh, by the way, she had “IS” tattooed on her thigh. Ring any bells?’

Fraser shook his head. Daley could tell he was thinking about saying something but wasn’t sure what kind of reception he would get. ‘Spit it out, lad. I believe that everyone on an investigation should be allowed to give their opinion, so don’t ever be afraid to speak your mind if you think it’s relevant. In this job, the smallest push can topple the most robust wall of silence. Oh, and I get this fireside philosophy from my – our – boss, so take heed.’ He winked at the younger man.

‘Well, sir, it’s just that . . . well, when you get used to Kinloch, you realise that nothing really happens that th

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