

FEBRUARY'S SON

He sits down, looks at what he's done. Down to his trousers and vest now, hard work this thing he's doing. Still an occasional moan from it, gurgle and cough as the blood runs back down its throat. He's tired but he's close to the end now. He stands back up, calls it a fucker again, spits at it. Tells it why he's here even though it must know. Tells it again and again. No response. He takes a swinging kick at the side of its head. The moon emerges from the clouds, illuminates the scene in cold, heartless light.

He takes the Polaroid camera he's bought himself out the holdall. Sticks a flashcube on the top and aims the camera at it. Familiar click as he squeezes the button, bulb fizzes, camera makes a grinding noise then the cardboard-backed photo slides out the back. He sticks it under his arm. Moves in, takes another one, closer this time, shoves that under his other arm and waits the two minutes just like it says on the packet. He peels the backs off, ghostly reverse image on the paper. He lets the wind take the paper out his hands, watches it fly up into the air then slowly descend over the side of the building. Nice little present for someone to find. The pictures are still sticky. He holds them by the corners, lays them on the ground, tries not to look at them too much, keep that for later.

Gurgling has stopped now, no more misty breath leaking out its

mouth. Dead. He takes the ivory-handled razor out his pocket and moves in. He's being a Good Boy not doing it while it's alive. He smiles, not like he hasn't done it before, maybe he's getting soft in his old age. He says her name, tells her it's all for her own good. Wishes she was here watching, knowing what he'd done. He lifts his arm and the razor comes down. An arc of dark red blood flies past his shoulder and splatters into the puddles on the ground.

10th February 1973

ONE

McCoy stopped for a minute, had to. He put his hands on his knees, bent over, tried to catch his breath. Could feel the sweat running down his back, shirt sticking to him under his jumper and coat. He looked up at the uniform. Another one of Murray's rugby boys. Size of a house and no doubt thick as shit. Same as all the rest.

‘What floor is this now?’ he asked.

The big bastard wasn't even breathing heavily, just standing there looking at him, raindrops shining on his woollen uniform.

‘Tenth, sir. Four more to go.’

‘Christ. You're joking, aren't you? I'm half dead already.’

They were making their way up a temporary stairway. Just rope handrails strung between scaffolding poles, stairway itself a series of rough concrete slabs leading up and up to the top of the half-built office block.

‘Ready, sir?’

McCoy nodded reluctantly and they started off again. Maybe he'd be doing better if he hadn't just finished two cans of Pale Ale and half a joint when the big bastard had come to get him. Him and Susan were laughing, dancing about like loonies, Rolling Stones on the radio, when the knock on the

door came. Big shadow of the uniform behind the frosted glass. Panic stations. Susan trying to open the windows and fan the dope smell away with a dishtowel while he kept the uniform talking at the door for as long as he could. Just as well they'd decided against splitting the tab he'd found in his wallet.

They climbed a few more storeys, turned a corner, and at last McCoy could see the night sky above them. It was grey and heavy, moon appearing every so often through the clouds and the falling rain. He stood for a minute, taking in the view, getting his breath back. Glasgow was laid out beneath him, dirty black buildings, wet streets. He walked to the side and looked out, didn't want to get too close, no walls up here, just more rope handrails. Worked out he must be facing west, the dome of the Mitchell Library was right in front of him, university tower behind it in the distance. Below them the new motorway they were building cut through what was left of Charing Cross, a wide river of brown mud and concrete pilings. He heard footsteps behind him and turned.

Chief Inspector Murray held out his hand. 'Sorry it's a day early but Thomson's away until Monday. Need someone working this soon as.'

For some reason Murray was wearing a dinner suit under his usual sheepskin car coat. Full shebang: dickie bow, cummerbund, silk stripe on the trousers. Only thing spoiling the dapper effect was the pair of black wellies he'd tucked the trousers into.

'Lord Provost's Dinner,' Murray said, noticing him looking. 'North British Hotel. Food was bloody swill. Never been happier to be called away to a murder in my life.'

'Still trying to get you to take that Central job?' asked McCoy.

'Still trying, still not getting anywhere. No matter how many fancy dinners they invite me to.' He took the unlit pipe

out his mouth, pointed into the darkness. 'Follow me, good pilgrim, for I am not lost.'

A path of damp stamped-down cardboard boxes led towards the far corner of the roof. There must have been ten or so people up here already, uniforms milling about, two technicians carrying the tent, even Wee Andy the photographer, almost lost in his duffle coat and a big woolly scarf. He could hear distant sirens; saw two ambulances crossing the river over to their side, blue lights spinning. Meant it wouldn't be long until the press boys were here. Was hard enough to keep a murder quiet, never mind this one. A body found at the top of an unfinished office tower only a couple of minutes' walk from the *Record* office? No chance.

'Quite a view from up here,' said Murray pointing. 'Can see the cathedral. If it wasn't pissing with rain you'd even be able to see the People's Palace.'

'Great,' said McCoy. 'Well worth climbing up fourteen bloody storeys for.'

Murray shook his head. 'And here was me thinking leave might have changed you, but no, still the usual moaning-faced bastard that you are. How'd it go anyway? You go and see him?'

He had. Three two-hour sessions in a draughty back room in Pitt Street. Question after question.

How did you feel when you pushed him off the roof?

How did you feel when you saw the dead body?

How did you feel, really feel, inside at that point? Did you feel guilty?

What he'd really felt was an overwhelming desire to lean over the desk and punch the bastard in the face but he knew if he did he'd never get signed off so he sat there saying as little as possible, watching the clock. It was only when he got home he'd started thinking about the last thing the bloke had said to him.

Do you still feel happy being a policeman? Is it what you really want?

McCoy nodded. 'Statutory three appointments all attended. Signed off. Psychologically fit for duty.'

Murray grunted. 'How much did you have to bribe him?'

'So what have I missed?' McCoy asked. 'What's the big news from—'

'There's the boy!'

They turned and Wattie was walking towards them, anorak, bobble hat and a pair of Arran wool mittens. He looked more like an enthusiastic toddler than a trainee detective.

He took a mitten off and pumped McCoy's hand up and down. 'Thought you weren't due back until tomorrow?'

'I'm not. Couldn't keep away. Well, not when there's some big bastard at your door telling you Murray needs you now.'

Wattie grinned. 'Did you miss me? Because fuck me, I didn't miss—'

'Watson!' Murray had had enough. 'Get this crime scene secured now! Stop acting like a bloody schoolboy!'

Wattie saluted and walked back through the rain towards the lights being set up on the far corner of the roof.

'How's he getting on?' asked McCoy, trying to fasten the top button of his coat, not easy with numb fingers.

Murray shook his head. 'Bright enough, but he treats everything like a bloody game. Need you to knock some sense into him.'

'What's the story then?' McCoy asked, looking round. 'How come we're freezing our balls off on the top of this building?'

'You'll see soon enough. C'mon,' said Murray.

McCoy followed him along the cardboard path leading towards the other side of the roof. Three steps behind Murray again, just like always. Was like he'd never been away. Cardboard beneath his feet already starting to dissolve with the rain and the amount of people walking on it. Two uniforms were

huddled over in the corner, big umbrellas being held over them not doing much to keep the water off. Both of them were fiddling with the battery packs, trying to connect them.

‘Fucking bastard thing,’ said one, then noticed Murray. ‘Sorry, sir, just give us a minute.’ He grunted and finally managed to push a plug into the socket in the side. ‘Should be all right now,’ he said, putting his fingers into his mouth, trying to suck some feeling back into them.

‘Well then,’ said Murray. ‘What are you waiting for?’

The uniform nodded and clicked the switches down. Bright white light bounced back up off the wet roof. McCoy held his arm over his face, peered out through half-closed eyes. He’d never been good with the sight of blood, any blood, never mind this much. He took an involuntary step back. Edge of his vision was starting to blur, he felt dizzy. He shut his eyes, took deep breaths, tried to count to ten. He opened them again, saw the red everywhere, and turned his head away as fast as he could.

‘Christ! You could have warned me, Murray.’

‘Could have but I didn’t,’ said Murray. ‘Need to get over it. Told you a million bloody times.’ He looked over at the illuminated corner of the roof and grimaced. ‘Mind you, this is bloody hellish.’

It was. The blood was everywhere. Splattered up the half-finished walls, dripping from a flapping tarpaulin. Some of it had started to freeze already, red ice crystals glinting in the light from the big lamps. But most of it was still sticky and wet, giving off the familiar smell of copper pennies and butcher shops.

McCoy pulled his scarf across his mouth, told himself he was going to be okay and tried to concentrate. There wasn’t any way round it. To get any closer to the body he was going to have to step into the big puddle of blood. There was more cardboard laid down in it but it had half soaked up the blood,

wasn't going to make much of a difference. He put his foot down gingerly, felt the congealing blood tacky against the sole of his shoe. A tarpaulin snapped in the wind and he jumped, heartbeat going back to normal as he watched it break free and float off over the side of the building into the darkness.

He took a few deep breaths and stepped in, folded the edges of his coat over his knees and squatted. Tried to block out the cold and the rain, the sheer amount of blood, and tried to think about what he was looking at. It was a young man, late teens, early twenties. He'd been sat up against a pile of metal scaffolding poles, legs pointing out in front of him, arms hanging down by his sides. His left leg ending in a mess of tangled blood and bone, foot just attached.

Whatever he had been wearing had gone. All he was left with was a pair of underpants, pale skin of his legs and torso bluish in the bright lights. The words 'BYE BYE' had been cut into his chest, blood running down his torso.

McCoy counted down another ten like the doctor had told him and looked up into the man's face. Despite everything, his hair was still combed into a neat side shed, raindrops on it glistening in the big lights. Below it, one of his eyes was completely gone, socket empty, some sort of vein emerging out of it, dried blood sticking it onto his cheek. His jaw was hanging slack, broken it looked like. There was something stuffed into his mouth. McCoy knew what it was going to be before he looked. He looked. Wasn't wrong.

He stood up, ran for the side, feet sliding as he went, just made it to the edge before he was sick. When he'd finished he spat a few times, trying to clear his mouth of the taste of stomach acid and flat lager, watched it spiral down.

A tap on his shoulder and Murray handed him a hip flask. He took a deep pull, swirled the burning whisky round his mouth and swallowed it. Murray was shaking his head at him, looking at him like he was a uniform on his first day. He

handed the flask back and Murray looked at him disapprovingly.

‘Give us a break, Murray. That your idea of fun, eh? Switch the big fucking lights on when I turn up? Christ, they’ve even stuck his cock in his mouth.’

‘Aye, that’s right, McCoy. This whole murder scene’s been arranged just to give you a fright.’

McCoy nodded over at the body. ‘How did we know he was here?’

‘Anonymous phone call into Central,’ said Murray.

‘From whoever did it?’

Murray nodded. ‘Who else? No other bugger would know he was up here.’

‘Sir?’

They turned. Wattie was standing there with a clear evidence bag. ‘One of the uniform boys found these.’ He handed the bag to Murray.

Murray took out his torch, switched it on and pointed it into the bag. Three used flashcubes, bulbs fizzled and spent, and two Polaroid backs, the cardboard left when you peel the picture off. He turned the bag and they could see the ghost photo on them. Reverse images of the man’s destroyed face.

‘Christ,’ said McCoy. ‘Pictures for later. Lovely. Might be fingerprints on them?’

Murray nodded.

‘What do you mean for later?’ asked Wattie.

McCoy made a wanking gesture. Wattie groaned.

‘Mr McCoy, nice to see you back.’

He turned and Phyllis Gilroy the police pathologist was standing there. Seemed to have some sort of tiara thing on under her Rainmate, pearls round her neck, bottom of a pink chiffon dress poking out beneath her black rain slicker.

‘North British?’ asked McCoy.

She nodded. ‘Mrs Murray was indisposed so Hector kindly invited me along as his partner. Unfortunately we didn’t get

to stay very long. Had to leave before the turn. Moira Anderson. Pity, she has an excellent voice, I think.'

'You look very . . .' McCoy searched for the word. 'Dressed up.'

'I'll take that as a compliment,' she said, 'of sorts.'

'Did you have a look?' asked Murray.

'Indeed I did.'

'And?'

'Provisionally?' she asked. As always.

Murray sighed. As always. 'Provisionally.'

'Gunshot to the front of the head, specifically the left eye. As you will have noticed, that had the effect of pretty much removing the back of the head. There is another gunshot wound to the left ankle which seems to be post-mortem. Other than that he's been knocked around a bit, scratches and scrapes and cuts. And of course, the amputation of the . . .'

She hesitated for a second.

'The penis.' Carried on. 'The words on his chest look post-mortem too but I'll have to double-check . . .'

'Why no clothes?' asked McCoy.

'That, Mr McCoy, is a question for you rather than me, I fear. However, were I to conjecture I'd say he wanted the **BYE BYE** on the chest to be on display, first thing one would see, but as I said it's only conjecture. Now, if Hector will give us the go ahead I'll get the ambulance boys to start packing him up?'

Murray nodded, and she walked off across the roof, gesturing to the ambulance men that they were good to go.

McCoy watched her go, looked at Murray and grinned. 'Hector is it now? Didn't know you and the esteemed Madame Gilroy were so pally.'

'Secret weapon. She's perfect for fending off the top brass. She's cleverer, richer and posher than the lot of them put together. I just hide behind her and smile. Stops them pressuring me about Central.'

McCoy blew into his hands. He was freezing, driving rain had pretty much soaked him through. Icy wind blowing round the top of the building wasn't helping much either. 'Do we know who he is? Nightwatchman, something like that, maybe?'

Murray held up a clear plastic bag with a bloody wallet in it. 'Don't know, but this was sitting next to the body. Whoever did it wanted him identified quickly.'

McCoy took the bag off him, fished out the wallet, trying not to get too much blood on his fingers. He flipped it open, managed to read the name on the driving licence.

'No,' he said. 'No way.'

He dug further in the wallet, found a folded-up bit of newspaper. He unfolded it. Read it. Couldn't believe it.

'Christ, it is. It's him.'

He held up the newspaper. Murray peered at it, too dark for him to read. Got his torch out, pointed it at the clipping. Illuminated the headline.

DREAM DEBUT FOR NEW CELTIC SIGNING

TWO

‘Seriously? You don’t know who he is?’ asked McCoy.

‘Why would I? Never been to a football match in my life,’ said Murray.

‘Not even seen him in the paper? On the TV? Charlie Jackson?’

‘Two teas. One wi’ sugar?’

The woman was leaning out the caravan hatch, two chipped mugs held out in front of her. McCoy took the one with sugar, handed the other one to Murray. The tea van was parked outside Tiffany’s in Sauchiehall Street, prime position to catch people coming out the dancing. Van had been there for years, selling teas, coffees, rolls and sausage. McCoy remembered stopping at it on his first night on the beat. He took a sip of the tea. As rotten as it was then. Still, at least the mug was warm.

‘So who does he play for then, this boy?’ asked Murray.

McCoy shook his head, didn’t believe what he was hearing. Half suspected Murray was just doing it to annoy him. ‘Celtic. He probably played today. Draw with Partick Thistle.’

‘Today?’ asked Murray.

‘Aye, at Parkhead. He made the first team a year or so ago, never been out it since. Very talented boy. When he’s on he’s

fucking magic, reads the ball better than anyone I've seen. Probably be off soon, or he would have been I should say. Liverpool would have got him, Clough, someone like that.' He looked at Murray again, still not quite believing him. 'C'mon, you must have heard of him.'

Murray shook his head, patted his jacket looking for his tobacco. 'No. Bloody game should be banned. Just another excuse we don't need for the idiots in this town to knock lumps out each other.' He looked at his watch. 'It's quarter past nine now. Was called in at seven. So when did this game finish?'

'Usual. Quarter to five,' said McCoy.

'Not much time to do that,' said Murray, nodding up at the office building. 'Must have got hold of him just after the match.'

'Poor bugger,' said McCoy. He thought for a minute. 'You know something? I just don't get it. Why would anyone want to shoot Charlie Jackson, carve some shite into his chest? What's he ever done to anyone? He's what, twenty-two? All he's ever done is kick a ball.'

They moved into the side of the caravan to let a group of girls clattering through the puddles in platform boots pass by. They had skimpy wee dresses on, halter tops, coats held over their heads to keep the rain off their hair. Even if it was pissing down and freezing it was still Saturday night. Bit of weather wasn't going to stop a Glasgow Saturday night.

'That photographer boy Andy seemed to know a bit about him,' said Murray, watching the girls joining the end of the queue already forming outside Tiffany's.

McCoy looked surprised. 'Andy? What'd that wee prick have to say about it?'

'Said he'd taken pictures of Jackson for the sports pages, chatty young lad apparently. Told him all about his fiancée, plans for the big day.'

McCoy dimly remembered a picture of Charlie Jackson

and a girl in the paper, some big charity do. 'A dark-haired lassie? Good-looking? That her?'

Murray put his mug up on the counter. 'That's her, and, according to young Andy, she's Jake Scobie's daughter.'

McCoy had brought his cigarette up to his mouth, was about to take a drag. Stopped. 'You're having me on.'

Murray shook his head. 'Need to get it checked out but he seems certain.'

'Charlie Jackson is Jake Scobie's future son-in-law?' McCoy shook his head. 'How the fuck did I not know that?'

Murray shrugged. 'What? Harry McCoy's not as clever as he likes to think? Wonders will never cease.'

'Very funny,' said McCoy.

'Maybe the boy didn't know what he was letting himself in for.'

'How could he not? Can't be anyone in Glasgow who doesn't know who Jake Scobie is.' Something dawned. 'That's got to be why he's been killed. Maybe Charlie Jackson was playing away, if you'll pardon the expression, and Scobie found out. Maybe he—'

'Maybe's the bloody word! I don't know what happened and you certainly don't know what happened. That's what we need to find out. It's called being a polis.'

McCoy was on a roll.

'Makes you wonder what Jackson did to his daughter. Must have been something bad. Maybe he got another lassie pregnant, that might explain the cock-in-mouth scenario.'

Murray looked exasperated. 'I'm talking to my fucking self here. We don't know who did it. Got that?'

McCoy nodded. 'Yes, sir.'

'First principles, not bloody fantasies. Okay?'

McCoy nodded again.

Murray seemed temporarily satisfied. Had managed to locate his pipe, now came the process of getting it lit. He

knocked the barrel on the heel of his shoe. 'How d'you think he got him up there?'

'Arrange to meet him nearby? Put a gun in his back and march him up the stairs? But why go all the way up there? Doesn't make any sense, too much chance of him getting away, even with a gun. Why go to all that trouble? Why not just kill him in his flat?'

They looked up at the half-built building. 'No one to see you up there,' said Murray. 'Or hear the gun. All the time you want to do what you want. That's why.'

The crime scene lights at the top of the building were still on, shining out in the rain like some kind of lighthouse. McCoy didn't want to think about what had gone on up there, how many of Jackson's screams went unheard, how much pleading there had been, how much pain. Still, didn't see how the office building made sense. Why not some waste ground or an empty house? Plenty of those around here. Be a lot easier.

'Maybe the office block is one of Scobie's jobs? He runs a security firm, doesn't he?'

Murray nodded. 'Amongst other things.'

'He could have cancelled the guards, made sure there was no one around to see what was going on.'

'Get Wattie to check, give him something to bloody do,' said Murray.

'Will do. Shooting someone in the head, that's like an execution.'

'Something a hit man would do,' said Murray.

'Okay, and don't go nuts again but Scobie's got one of those,' said McCoy.

Murray unclipped his bow tie, opened the top button of his dress shirt. 'That's better. I can bloody breathe now.'

He looked at McCoy. 'Kevin Connolly.'

McCoy nodded. 'Don't know that much about him apart from he does Scobie's dirty work.'

‘Well, I do,’ said Murray, finally getting his pipe lit. ‘He’s a right nasty piece of work is our Connolly.’

‘Nasty enough to do that to Charlie Jackson?’

‘Oh aye. Something like that’s not a problem for Connolly. Was at one of his trials, prosecution lawyer described him as “a truly evil man”. Way he grinned when he said it, Connolly seemed to take it as some sort of compliment.’

‘Did he get done?’ asked McCoy.

Murray shook his head. ‘Too many witnesses who suddenly forgot their testimonies and Archie Lomax in his corner. Archie Lomax is many things, but he’s also a bloody good lawyer. Don’t think Connolly’s done jail time for anything serious for years. Scobie needs him around, happy to pay Lomax to make sure he is.’

He looked back up at the building. ‘What we really need to find out is how he got to the top of that bloody building.’

‘Hang on,’ said McCoy.

He left Murray standing there and hurried across the road. The paper seller outside the Variety Bar was packing up for the night, pulling the headline paper from under the crossed wires on the wooden board in front of him – *TRAGEDY IN CHURCH* – and crunching it into a ball. Luckily he had one *Sports Times* left. McCoy gave him the four pence, flicked through it on the way back. Found what he was looking for by the time he got back to Murray.

‘Jackson was on the bench. Didn’t play. Need to find out what happened between the end of the match and . . . you know. You going into the shop now?’

Murray shook his head. ‘Pitt Street. Need to do a report for the Super getting in.’

McCoy nodded. ‘Okay. I’ll go back to the shop, see if I can get hold of Scobie or his daughter. Quite looking forward to disturbing Archie Lomax’s peaceful Saturday night. You know Jackson was a left-footer?’

‘A Catholic?’ asked Murray.

‘Jesus! No, well, I don’t know, maybe he was, probably was if he played for Celtic, but he was actually left-footed is what I mean. Always scored with his left.’

‘Ah. That why he shot his left ankle, you think?’ asked Murray.

McCoy shrugged. ‘Could be. Mind you, not easy to play football with the back of your head blown off. Not sure a broken ankle’s gonnae make much of a difference.’

Murray sighed. ‘Someone’ll have to tell the boy’s family and quick. Every one of those uniforms up there’ll be racing to a phone box as soon as they get down, straight on to the *Record* for their tenner. If word of that thing on his chest gets out I’ll bloody hang for someone. Need that kept back to weed out the fucking nutters. He a local boy, this Jackson?’

McCoy nodded. ‘Maryhill, I think.’

Murray took off his hat, scratched at what was left of his ginger hair. ‘So that’ll be me then. What a fucking mess.’

McCoy watched Murray get into the waiting squad car, drained the rest of his rotten tea, put the mug back on the counter. The queue outside Tiffany’s was starting to shuffle in. Groups of giggling women passing half-bottles of vodka. Boys in their leather and denim jackets getting soaking but trying to show they were too hard to worry about something like rain.

Jackson must have been about the same age as them. Nice-looking fiancée, great football player, good-looking boy. Had it all in front of him. McCoy lit up, took a deep drag, started walking into town. Not any more he didn’t.



Turned out Lomax beat him to it. By the time McCoy got back to the shop there was a note on his desk telling him to

phone Mr Lomax at home as soon as he could. He cursed, crumpled it and threw it in the bin. Then he phoned the number. Posh Edinburgh voice answered, wasted no time.

‘Ten o’clock tomorrow morning at my office. Mr Scobie wants to have a chat.’

McCoy put the receiver down, sat back in his chair and had a look around. Didn’t seem like much had changed in the three weeks he’d been off. Desks covered in papers, full ashtrays, files and dirty mugs. Wee plug-in radiator in the corner doing its best and failing to heat up the room. Apart from the desk sergeant he was the only one in. Saturday night was always their busiest night. Everyone out dealing with the usual shite. Fights and drunks, knives and crashed cars. Battered wives and slashed boys.

He took the two bacon rolls he’d bought on the way out their damp paper bag and started eating, realised he was starving.

He was so engrossed in the rolls and the copy of *Titbits* he’d found on Wattie’s desk he jumped when the phone on his desk rang. He picked it up.

‘Central. McCoy speaking.’

‘Harry, my wee darling! The very man. What you got to tell me about a certain young football—’

He hung up before she could get any further. Mary at the *Record* hot on the trail. Hadn’t taken her long. The phone rang again so he leant over and unplugged it at the wall, sat back up and that’s when he noticed it. Thomson’s corkboard. Been up there so long he’d stopped seeing it. Pictures of big-titted girls he’d cut out from the *Sun* or *Men Only*, a poster telling you to look out for Colorado Beetle in your potato plants, and a front page from a few weeks ago.

HERO COP FOILS KILLER ON ROOFTOP

He walked over and pulled it free of the drawing pins, took a closer look. God knows where the paper'd got the picture of him. He looked about ten years younger. Wouldn't have looked bad at all if someone hadn't drawn a moustache and a pair of wee glasses on his face and a speech bubble coming out his mouth – *I'm shiteing it up here!*

He shook his head, pinned it back up, and that's when he noticed it, pinned in between a picture of George Best and a picture of Jinky Johnson. Charlie Jackson was running away from the goalmouth, green-and-white strip, hands held up, expression of utter joy on his face, teammates trying to catch up with him to celebrate. He looked ecstatic, not a care in the world. He unpinned the picture, put it in his wallet, walked back to his chair, plugged in the phone, called Susan, told her he'd be late.

11th February 1973

THREE

Most of the lawyers McCoy dealt with had offices down on the Saltmarket right beside the courts, all the better for picking up stray clients. Not Lomax, though, he was up in Blythswood Square, smack in the middle of the most expensive area of town, in amongst all the bankers and the corporate offices. Wasn't that far from the shop and the rain had gone off so they decided to walk.

Sunday morning in this part of town was dead. All the offices and shops shut up. Just the distant clang of St Aloysius' bells as they walked up West George Street, past the RAC Club with its Union Jack flying, and into the square. Nothing grand, just a rectangle of grass with benches round it surrounded by wrought iron fencing.

Was a funny place, Blythswood Square. Schizophrenic. During the day it was full of men in pinstripes and secretaries in wee business suits going in and out the offices, making deals, looking important. Soon as the offices shut and night fell everything changed. Became a different kind of square entirely. The girls started appearing. Old, young, didn't matter, all of them dressed in mini skirts, high heels and jackets that were too flimsy for the weather. They stood on the corners,

chatting, smoking, keeping one eye on the cars circling round and round. If one stopped it didn't take long, they leant in the window, decided a price, then got in. Two different worlds separated by a couple of hours.

Number 42 Blythswood Square was a three-storey building of grey stone, marble steps leading up to a smart black door. Murray rang the brass doorbell above the nameplate LOMAX & LOMAX and they waited. No reply. Murray pressed it again, muttering under his breath. Still nothing. He turned to McCoy.

'Where is the prick? Sure it was ten he said?'

McCoy looked at his watch, tried to stifle a yawn. 'Only ten past, maybe he's a wee bit late.'

It was almost half past when he turned up. Murray'd just declared that he'd had enough and was going back to the shop when McCoy saw the car.

'Sir,' he said, nodding over.

A gold Jag was turning into the square, exhaust billowing out behind it in the damp air. It circled round, then pulled in to the pavement in front of them. Door opened and out stepped Archie Lomax, looking immaculate as always. Chalk-stripe suit, polished black brogues, navy Crombie. No tie the only concession to the weekend. You didn't get to be the highest paid criminal lawyer in Glasgow by turning up looking a mess.

Murray got in first. 'About bloody time, we've been standing here for half an hour.'

Lomax held his hands up in apology. 'Sorry, gents, roads blocked outside Bearsden. Some burn has burst its banks, had to go round the long way, couldn't be avoided.'

'Half a bloody hour,' said Murray again.

Hadn't got his money's worth from Lomax, he wasn't contrite enough for his liking. Wasn't going to get it, though. Lomax just ignored him, unlocked the big black door, pushed it open, held it wide for them. They followed him up the

stairs, furnishings and fittings getting steadily more luxurious as they climbed. On the third floor Lomax unlocked a heavy glass door and they went in.

‘Welcome to the inner sanctum. Don’t usually have men of the constabulary in here but the boardroom is being redecorated so needs must.’

Lomax’s office covered most of the top floor of the building. Carpets were dark green, dotted with faded oriental rugs, pale blue walls hung with gold-framed paintings of old sailing ships. His desk sat in front of the double windows looking out over the square, not so much a desk as a long slab of glass held up by spindly steel legs, leather swivel chair behind it. Only things sitting on it were a metal frame with a row of silver balls hanging from it by black threads, a notepad and a thick file. If the office was meant to be impressive, it was. He clicked a switch and warm air started blowing.

‘Drink?’ he asked, walking over to a large antique globe with legs. He flipped up the top half to reveal gleaming crystal glasses and expensive bottles. McCoy spied a bottle of Chivas, was about to say yes, but Murray got in before him.

‘As I’m sure you are aware, Mr Lomax, we’re on duty. Where’s Scobie?’

‘Please yourself,’ said Lomax, pouring a good measure of Johnnie Walker Black Label into a tumbler. He settled himself down behind the desk, pointed at two leather armchairs in front of it. ‘Make yourselves comfortable.’

They struggled out of their coats and scarves – room was heating up already – and sat down. Lomax took a heavy fountain pen from his inside pocket and unscrewed the top, wrote the date on the notepad in front of him.

‘Couple of things before we start, gents. My client has volunteered to come in here and speak to you. He only heard about the dreadful incident a few hours ago. Obviously he’s

extremely upset so I'm sure you'll appreciate how helpful he's being coming here today. Secondly,' he looked at each of them in turn, 'this conversation is very much off the record, in the spirit of cooperation and the hope of bringing a swift conclusion to things. Understood?'

Murray took his time, brushed a bit of lint off his trousers, moulded the crease on his trilby sitting on his lap before he spoke. 'Your client is a piece of scum, Mr Lomax.' He looked round at the paintings on the wall, the deep pile carpet, the Bang & Olufsen stereo system in the corner. 'All these trappings that he's no doubt paying through the nose for don't change a thing. Jake Scobie is still scum. Always has been, always will be. The fact that he pays you means you may have to act like he's a respectable businessman, but thankfully I don't. Now where is he?'

McCoy had to hand it to him; Murray was not one to be intimidated by anyone. Not even a big lawyer like Lomax.

Lomax looked indignant, had just opened his mouth to reply, when the buzzer went. 'Looks like my client is here,' he said, getting up. He leant into Murray as he passed him on the way to open the door. 'Keep your grandstanding under your hat if you please, Mr Murray. It's not only tiresome, it's pointless and, believe me, I've heard it all before.'

'What's he doing this for?' asked McCoy after he'd gone. 'Normally Scobie wouldn't talk to us for love nor money, and now he's volunteering for a little chat? After he's got his pet hatchet man to kill his future son-in-law? I don't get it.'

'Me neither,' said Murray. 'Normally takes a week of going back and forward with Lomax until he'll even admit Scobie is his client, never mind set up a meeting.'

'Must be your way with words,' said McCoy.

Murray was about to answer when Scobie and Lomax appeared. Lomax pulled another chair round behind his side of the desk and they sat down.

Scobie was dressed just like Lomax. Suit and a Crombie, shiny shoes, white shirt. On Lomax they looked like the clothes he was born to wear, on Scobie they looked more like a costume, dressing-up clothes. There was one other big difference between the two of them. Lomax, unlike Scobie, didn't have a dirty big scar running from his ear down across his left cheek and into the side of his mouth. Looked like someone had tried to hack half his face off, which, knowing the people Scobie ran with, they probably had. He was a small man, Scobie, and like all the best hard men, slight too, built like a welterweight.

'Morning, Jake,' said Murray.

'That's Mr Scobie to you,' he said, leaning forward.

Lomax held his hand across him, a restraint. 'As I said, gents, Mr Scobie has volunteered to come here. Some respect is in order.'

Murray grunted.

McCoy knew Scobie and Murray had too much water under the bridge for a civilised chat, so he thought he'd better step in. 'What was it you wanted to see us about, Mr Scobie?'

Murray didn't look happy at him saying 'Mr'. Grunted again.

'It's a delicate matter,' said Lomax, shifting round in his seat towards McCoy, grateful for a more receptive audience. 'Might be easier if I speak on Jake's behalf.'

Jake was looking at them with contempt, barely nodded. 'Fire away,' said McCoy. 'We're all ears.'

Lomax looked relieved, sat back in his chair, settled down to tell the tale. 'Mr Scobie has some information that may be pertinent to the unfortunate fate of Charlie Jackson. As you may know, Jackson was only months away from becoming Mr Scobie's son-in-law. Consequently he's very upset about what's happened, as, naturally, is his daughter.' Murray made a noise somewhere between a snort and a laugh. Lomax ignored him, kept going. 'Mr Scobie has an occasional employee, a Mr Connolly—'

‘Occasional employee?’ said Murray. ‘Now you really are taking the piss.’

Lomax, not looking happy at the interruption, sat forward, laced his fingers together. ‘As Mr Scobie’s accountancy records will show, Connolly is indeed an occasional employee.’

‘Employed as what exactly?’ asked McCoy as innocently as he could manage.

‘Ah . . .’ Lomax looked at the notepad in front of him, couldn’t find any inspiration, turned to Scobie. ‘What was his official title again?’

‘Gardener,’ said Scobie, deadpan.

This time Murray laughed out loud; even Lomax had half a smile on his face. ‘We are off the record, gentlemen?’ McCoy nodded, Murray almost did.

‘In a situation this grave I feel the best option is to be as open as possible. I think we all know who Mr Connolly is and what kind of work he does for Mr Scobie, no need to elaborate. Unfortunately Connolly has become a problem. Connolly has always been – how shall we say? – somewhat unstable. Regretfully that instability has become more pronounced of late. It seems he has formed an unnatural interest in Mr Scobie’s daughter, Elaine.’

McCoy raised his eyebrows; things were getting interesting.

Lomax went on. ‘About a year ago he started sending her letters, following her, turning up wherever she was. She became an obsession, an unreciprocated obsession to say the least. Miss Scobie tried to laugh it off at first, but then she became alarmed and then she became seriously frightened. This courtship, for want of a better word, culminated in her coming home one night to find him sitting in the living room of her flat holding a bunch of flowers.’

Lomax glanced at Scobie. Another nod. Carry on.

‘At that point she felt she had to tell her father. After she and her father made it perfectly plain there were no reciprocal

feelings, Connolly became convinced that this was simply due to her fiancé, Mr Jackson. That he had somehow turned her against him. In his twisted mind he started to believe that without Charlie Jackson in the picture Miss Scobie would come to her senses and fall for him.'

'Hence the BYE BYE on his chest,' said McCoy.

Lomax nodded.

'Nasty,' said McCoy. 'Imagine that. A nutter like Connolly taking a fancy to your daughter.'

Lomax carried on. 'You may have read recently that Charlie was injured – hamstring trouble. Couldn't play for a couple of weeks. In reality he'd been attacked by an associate of Connolly. He tried to break his shin with a hammer. Luckily his aim wasn't too good and he only inflicted a rather nasty flesh wound. The club and ourselves thought it better it didn't become common knowledge. Shortly after that incident Connolly disappeared, cut off all communication with the Scobie family.'

'Did you look for him?' asked McCoy.

Scobie answered before Lomax could stop him. 'Oh, I looked for the cunt all right, looked everywhere. Nobody hurts my family and gets away with it. When I find him I'm going to splatter the cunt from here to—'

Lomax's hand went up again. 'Jake,' he hissed. 'Please.'

Scobie didn't look happy but he sat back, hands gripping the arms of the chair. He reached into his pocket, took out a packet of Regal and lit up.

'Okay?' asked Lomax.

Scobie nodded.

Order restored, he went on. 'It seems that Mr Connolly is a very hard man to find. He has a habit of staying in short-rent flats, hotels, boarding houses, moving around a lot.' He smiled. 'Perhaps a wise move for a man like that. The Scobies eventually gave up, hoped he had moved on, gone to London, somewhere like that.'

‘Until this morning,’ said McCoy.

‘Until this morning,’ said Lomax.

McCoy sat back on his chair. Time to throw the grenade. ‘That’s a lovely wee story, Mr Lomax. But I’ll tell you what I’m thinking, eh? Maybe Mr Scobie there just wasn’t too keen on his future son-in-law and got Connolly to take care of it. That’s what he usually does for you, isn’t it, Mr Scobie? Takes care of nasty wee problems, makes them go away, weeds in your roses, that sort of thing.’

Lomax’s hand came up again, but Scobie was having none of it this time and pushed it away, stood up before Lomax could stop him.

‘Who the fuck are you, you prick? You calling me a fucking liar?’

McCoy was the picture of innocence. ‘I didn’t say that.’ He turned to Murray. ‘Did I say that?’

Scobie was red-faced, spat through clenched teeth, ‘That boy was like a son to me. Understand that? That going in your fucking head, is it? If I get—’

‘Jake! Please!’

Scobie looked at Lomax, took a second, then nodded and sat down. Suddenly he seemed deflated, confused, almost as if he was going to cry. All of this seemed like it was new to him. Not used to not being the one calling the shots, running the show. Was new for McCoy too. The only emotion he’d ever seen on Scobie’s face before was anger. Never seen him look like he did now, like a man who was hurting.

‘Well, Mr Scobie, I’m sorry to hear of your loss,’ said Murray, standing up. ‘From the look of it, Connolly may well be responsible. However, what the motive was and who was involved remains to be seen.’

Lomax screwed the lid of his pen back on. ‘Be assured, Mr Murray, my client is telling the truth.’

Murray smiled, put his hat back on. ‘Who knows, Mr

Lomax? Maybe he is. Always a first time for everything. Isn't that what they say? We'll be in touch.'



'You buy all that?' McCoy asked. They were back on the pavement in Blythwood Square, stamping their feet, waiting for a squad car to turn up.

Murray shrugged, turned his collar up against the wind. 'Don't see why not. If Scobie had just wanted rid of that boy he'd have been a lot less obvious about it.'

'Unless he did something to his daughter, something he wasn't happy about.'

'Could be. We'll get her in, see what she's got to say for herself.'

'Can't see Lomax letting that happen without a fight. Or him being there,' said McCoy. 'But I'll give it a try.'

A patrol car turned into the square, started the one-way circuit.

'How were the parents?' asked McCoy.

'Them? They were great. Only son shot in the fucking face then chopped to fuck? They opened a bloody bottle of champagne. How do you think they were?'

'Sorry,' said McCoy, feeling like an idiot.

The car pulled up, uniform got out and came round to open the passenger door. 'At long bloody last,' Murray growled at him, turned to McCoy. 'You call Lomax when we get back, tell him we want Elaine Scobie in the station tomorrow morning. Rattle his cage.' He went to get in the car, realised McCoy wasn't following.

'You not coming back?'

'I'll walk. It's only ten minutes.'

'In this weather?'

'Clears the head,' said McCoy.

Murray shook his and got in the car.

No offence to Murray but McCoy needed a break. Couldn't face being stuck in the back of a stuffy squad car while Murray ranted and raved about what scum Scobie was and how Lomax should be struck off for defending scum like him. Besides, McCoy liked walking, gave him the chance to think without the noise and distractions of the shop. So he buttoned up his raincoat, started walking down the hill back towards town.

When Scobie had come into the office McCoy had thought he'd be intimidated, impressed maybe. The great Jake Scobie close up. But he wasn't, far from it. All the things that made up Scobie – the clothes, the scar, the temper – were beginning to feel wrong, dated. Was like Scobie was stranded back in the days when he'd come up through the ranks, still living in the time of the razor kings and honour amongst thieves. Would have been as well wearing spats and talking like George Raft. Scobie in the North, Ronnie Naismith in the Southside, McCready in Govan. Suddenly they seemed old, like kings who could be toppled.

McCoy handed the money over, pocketed the wee red notebook, stepped out of R. S. McColl's and back onto Sauchiehall Street. New case, new jotter. Force of habit. He peeled the price ticket off the front and put it in his pocket. Realised he didn't have a pencil, should have bought a new one of those as well. Was a mystery to him where everything he had disappeared to. They all went. Pens, fags, gloves, house keys more than a few times.

He was nearly at Treron's when he noticed him. Charlie the Pram. McCoy didn't know his real name but he'd seen him around town for years, wandering around, talking to himself. Just another lost soul amongst the many. Charlie'd found an old Silver Cross pram somewhere – hence the name – and, as always, it was full of wire, ginger bottles, anything he could try and make some money from. Charlie had good

days and bad days. Never knew if he'd talk to you or just stare through you.

'You all right, Charlie?' asked McCoy.

Charlie turned, nodded. A good day then. He tapped the window of Dunn & Co. 'I'd a coat like that once. Good tweed coat.'

'That right? What happened to it?'

'It's hanging on the back of the kitchen door,' he said, as if it was obvious.

McCoy dug in his coat pocket, found a pound note and handed it to him, told him to get a hot breakfast. Charlie took it and slipped it between the folds of the filthy tartan rug he had wrapped around him.

'Can I tell you something?' he said.

McCoy nodded, tried to look at his watch without Charlie seeing. Was already slightly regretting stopping.

'Sure. Fire away.'

'I had a house once, an old manse, lovely it was. Three boys at school, pretty wife.' He pinched the skin on his forehead, a habit; it was covered in small cuts and scabs. 'Was all mine. Until they found out.' He looked at McCoy, eyes panicked. 'They found out and they tried to drown me but I got away. That's what they do if they catch you. They boil you in tanks of dirty water and bleach until the skin peels off you.' And then he started to cry.

McCoy patted his shoulder. 'C'mon, Charlie. Not going to happen anytime soon. Get yourself a hot breakfast, eh? Make you feel better.'

Charlie nodded, wiped his nose with his sleeve, went back to staring at the tweed coat, pinching his forehead, blood starting to run into his eyes.

McCoy left him there, kept walking down the hill towards Stewart Street. He did what he could. Gave them some money, listened to their stories, tried to treat them like human beings.

Maybe it was a kind of bribe. Guys like Charlie wandered all over the city without anyone noticing them, they saw things. Guys like Charlie had given him information more than once. Information worth a lot more than a couple of bob for a cup of tea. At least that's what he told people he did it for anyway.

He stopped at the zebra crossing, waited. If Scobie was telling the truth, if he was out to get Connolly, which seemed more likely than not, Connolly was fucked. Either Scobie found him and killed him or the polis found him, put him in jail and Scobie got someone to do the same thing in there. If he was Connolly he'd be gone already, further than London – as far as he could go.

The rain was back on, turning into sleet, grey clouds scudding across the sky. McCoy stood in the doorway of Grandfare for a minute, lit up. The news about Charlie Jackson should be in the paper and on the radio this morning. Mary from the *Record* wasn't going to give up easy, not on a story like this. The shot in the eye, shot to the ankle, carving in the chest. Did that mean something, the places he'd aimed for? Or was it just Connolly getting his kicks? And the bloody pictures he'd taken for later? Proof of the job done, maybe, to send to Scobie. He finished his fag, flicked it out into the road, turned his coat collar up and ran through the sleet towards the doors of Central.