1

Running was a strange thing. The sound was your feet slapping the pavement. The lights of passing cars batted your eyeballs. Your arms came up unevenly in front of you, reaching from nowhere, separate from you and from each other. It was like the hands of a lot of people drowning. And it was useless to notice these things. It was as if a car had crashed, the driver was dead, and this was the radio still playing to him.

A voice with a cap on said, 'Where's the fire, son?'

Running was a dangerous thing. It was a billboard advertising panic, a neon sign spelling guilt. Walking was safe. You could wear strolling like a mask. Stroll. Strollers are normal.

The strangest thing was no warning. You wore the same suit, you chose your tie carefully, there was a mistake about your change on the bus. Half-an-hour before it, you had laughed. Then your hands were an ambush. They betrayed you. It happened so quickly. Your hands, that lifted cups and held coins and waved, were suddenly a riot, a brief raging. The consequence was forever.

And the meaning of everything was changed. It had no meaning or too many meanings, all of them mysterious. Your

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body was a strange place. Hands were ugly. Inside, you were all hiding-places, dark corners. Out of what burrows in you had the creatures come that used you? They came from nowhere that you knew about.

But there *was* nowhere that you knew about, not even this place where you came and stood among people, as if you were a person. You could see who people thought was you in the mottled glass. His hair was black, his eyes were brown, his mouth wasn't screaming. You hated his ugliness. There was a green bottle with what looked like a fern inside it. There was a nose with enormous nostrils. On the black surface there were cloudy streaks where the wipings of a cloth had dried. A man was talking.

'See ma wife, son.' He was speaking towards where you should be standing. 'See when Ah go in here the night? Be like *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. Ah've been away since yesterday mornin'. Met an old mate yesterday after ma work. Christ, we had a night at his place. One half borrowed another, ye know? Ah wis helpin' him to get over his wife. Died ten year ago.' He was drinking. 'Ah think Ah'll go out an' get knocked down. Give me an excuse.'

You used to think things like that could be a problem, too. You cried when you broke a vase your mother liked. You hid the pieces in a cupboard. You worried about being late, offending somebody, things you shouldn't have said. That time wouldn't come again.

Everything had changed. You could walk for as long as you liked in this city. It wouldn't know you. You could call every part of it by name. But it wouldn't answer. St George's Cross was only cars, inventing destinations for the people in them.

The cars controlled the people. Sauchiehall Street was a graveyard of illuminated tombstones. Buchanan Street was an escalator bearing strangers.

George Square. You should have known it. How many times had you waited for one of the buses that ran all through the night? The Square rejected you. Your past meant nothing. Even the black man on the black horse was from another country, a different time. Sir John Moore. 'They buried him darkly at dead of night.' Who told you his name? An English teacher who was always tired. Yawner Johnson. He told you interesting things between yawns. But he hadn't told you the truth. Nobody had. This was the truth.

You were a monster. How had you managed to hide from yourself for so long? Some conjuring trick – to juggle smiles and nods and knives and forks and walks for the bus and turning the pages of a paper, for twenty years to make your life a blur behind which what was really you could hide. Until it came to introduce itself. I am you.

George Square was nothing to do with you. It belonged to the three boys walking tightrope on the back of a bench, to the people waiting in the bus-queues to go home. You could never go home again.

You could only walk and be rejected by the places where you walked, except the derelict tenements. They were big darknesses housing old griefs, terrible angers. They were prisons for the past. They welcomed ghosts.

The entry was dank. The darkness was soothing. You groped through smells. The soft hurryings must be rats. There was a stairway that would have been dangerous for someone who had anything to lose. At the top a door was broken. It could

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be pushed closed. Some light came in very dimly from the street. The room was very empty, some plaster from the ceiling on the floor.

It was strange how little blood there was, just some dark flecks on the trousers, so that you could imagine it had never happened. But it had happened. You were here. The body had been like leprosy. You were the leper, a contamination crouched and rocking on its haunches.

The loneliness was what you had made of yourself. The coldness was right. You would be alone from now on. It was what you deserved. Outside, the city hated you. Perhaps it had always excluded you. It had always been so sure of itself, so full of people who didn't open doors tentatively, who had a cocky walk. It was a hard city. Now all its hardness was against you. It was a mob of bitter faces turned towards you, it was a crowd of angers all directed against you. You had no chance.

Nothing to do. Sit becoming what you are. Admit yourself, the just hatred of every other person. Nowhere in all the city could there be anyone to understand what you had done, to share it with you. No one, no one.

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2

Laidlaw sat at his desk, feeling a bleakness that wasn't unfamiliar to him. Intermittently, he found himself doing penance for being him. When the mood seeped into him, nothing mattered. He could think of no imaginable success, no way of life, no dream of wishes fulfilled that would satisfy.

Last night and this morning hadn't helped. He had finally left Bob Lilley and the rest still on the surveillance in Dumfries. On the strength of solid information, they had followed the car from Glasgow. By a very devious route it had taken them to Dumfries. As far as he knew, that was where it was still parked – in the waste lot beside the pub. Nothing had happened. Instead of catching them in the act of breaking in, three hours of picking your nose. He had left them to it and come back to the office, gloom sweet gloom.

It was strange how this recurring feeling had always been a part of him. Even when he was a child, it had been present in its own childish form. He remembered nights when the terror of darkness had driven him through to his parents' room. He must have run for miles on that bed. It wouldn't have surprised him if his mother had had to get the sheets re-soled.

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Then it had been bats and bears, wolves running round the wallpaper. The spiders were the worst, big, hairy swines, with more legs than a chorus-line.

Now the monsters were simultaneously less exotic and less avoidable. He was drinking too much – not for pleasure, just sipping it systematically, like low proof hemlock. His marriage was a maze nobody had ever mapped, an infinity of habit and hurt and betrayal down which Ena and he wandered separately, meeting occasionally in the children. He was a policeman, a Detective Inspector, and more and more he wondered how that had happened. And he was nearly forty.

He looked at the clutter on his desk. It was as if on the desert island of his feeling this was all that chance had left him to work with: the two black-bound books of *Scottish Criminal Law* and *Road Traffic Law*, the red MacDonald's, establishing precedents, and the blue book on stated cases, the telex-file on British crime, the folder of case-reports. He wondered how you were supposed to improvise fulfilment out of that lot.

He was aware of the neatness of Bob Lilley's desk across from him. Did neatness mean contentment? He glanced over to the pin-board on the wall facing the door: shifts, departmental memoranda, a photograph of 'The Undertaker' – a con-man Laidlaw liked – overtime payments, a list of names for a Crime-Squad Dinner Dance. 'These fragments I have shored against my ruin.'

Guilt was the heart of this kind of mood, he reflected, and it surprised him again to realise it. The need to be constantly sifting the ashes of his past certainly hadn't been inculcated in him by his parents. They had done what they could to give him himself as a present. Perhaps it was just that, born in Scotland, you were

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hanselled with remorse, set up with shares in Calvin against your coming of age, so that much of the energy you expended came back guilt. His surely did.

He felt his nature anew as a wrack of paradox. He was potentially a violent man who hated violence, a believer in fidelity who was unfaithful, an active man who longed for understanding. He was tempted to unlock the drawer in his desk where he kept Kierkegaard, Camus and Unamuno, like caches of alcohol. Instead, he breathed out loudly and tidied the papers on his desk. He knew nothing to do but inhabit the paradoxes.

He was looking through the Collator's Report when the phone rang. He looked at it for a moment as if he could stare it down. Then his hand picked it up before he wanted it to.

'Yes. Laidlaw.' The hardness and firmness of the voice was a wonder to the person crouched behind it – a talking foetus!

'Jack. Bert Malleson. You did say anything of interest that came up, you wanted to know. Well, I've got Bud Lawson here.'

'Bud Lawson?'

'Remember a case of severe assault? It's a while ago now. But it was in the city-centre. It was a Central Division case. But the Squad was in on it. In the lane between Buchanan Street and Queen Street Station. The victim almost died. Bud Lawson was suspected. But nothing was proved. There was a connection. Some kind of grudge.'

'Yes.'

'Well, he's here now. Seems a bit strange to me. He's reporting his daughter missing. Because she didn't come back from the dancing last night. But it's only a few hours. I'm

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wondering about that. I thought you might want to speak to him.'

Laidlaw waited. He was tired, would soon be home. This was Sunday. He just wanted to lie in it like a sauna-bath, scratch his ego where it itched. But he understood what Sergeant Malleson was wondering. Policemen tended not to see what was there in their anxiety to see what was behind it. Zowie, my X-ray vision. But perhaps there was something in it.

'Yes. I'll see him.'

'I'll have him brought up.'

Laidlaw put down the phone and waited. Hearing the noise of the lift, he brought Bob Lilley's chair across in front of his own desk and sat back down. He heard the voices approaching, one frantic, the other calm, like ravaged penitent and weary priest. He couldn't hear what they were saying. He wasn't impatient to find out. There was a knocking. He waited for the inevitable pause to pass. What was he supposed to be doing, hiding the dirty pictures? The door opened and Roberts showed the man in.

Laidlaw stood up. He remembered Bud Lawson. His wasn't a face for forgetting. Angry, it belonged on a medieval church. Laidlaw had seen him angry in outrage, demanding that they bring out their proof, as if he was going to have a fist-fight with it. But he wasn't angry now, or at least he was as near to not being angry as was possible for him – which meant his anger was displaced. It was in transit, like a lorry-load of iron, and he was looking for someone to dump it on. His jacket had been thrown on over an open-necked shirt. A Rangers football-scarf was spilling out from the lapels.

Looking at him, Laidlaw saw one of life's vigilantes, a

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retribution-monger. For everything that happened there was somebody else to blame, and he was the very man to deal with them. Laidlaw was sure his anger didn't stop at people. He could imagine him shredding ties that wouldn't knot properly, stamping burst tubes of toothpaste into the floor. His face looked like an argument you couldn't win.

'Sit down, Mr Lawson,' Laidlaw said.

He didn't sit, he subsided. His hands were clenched on his knees, a couple of smaller megaliths. But the eyes were jumpy. They were trying, Laidlaw decided, to keep track of all the possibilities that were swarming through his head. In that moment Laidlaw was sure Bud Lawson's concern was genuine. For the first time, he admitted Sergeant Malleson's suspicion explicitly to his mind, in order to reject it.

With that realisation, Laidlaw felt a twinge of compassion for Bud Lawson. He remembered the pressure they had put on him before, and he regretted it. So Bud Lawson was a mobile quarrel with the world. Who knew the grounds he had? And doubtless there were worse things to be. Whatever else was true, he seemed to care about his daughter.

Laidlaw sat down at his desk. He brought the scribbling-pad nearer to him.

'Tell me about it, Mr Lawson,' Laidlaw said.

'It might be nothin', like.'

Laidlaw watched him.

'Ah mean Ah jist don't know. Ye know? But Sadie the wife's goin' off her head wi' worry. It's never happened before. Never as late as this.'

Laidlaw checked his watch. It was half-past five in the morning.

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‘Your daughter hasn’t come home?’

‘That’s right.’ The man looked as if he was realising it for the first time. ‘At least when Ah left home she hadn’t.’

Laidlaw saw a new fear jostle the others in the man’s eyes – the fear that he was making a fool of himself here while his daughter was home in bed.

‘How long ago was that?’

‘Maybe a couple of hours.’

‘It took you a while to get here.’

‘Ah’ve been lookin’. Ah’ve got the auld motor, ye see. Ah cruised around a bit.’

‘Where?’

‘Places. Jist anywhere. Around the city. Ah’ve been demented. Then when I was in the centre anyway Ah remembered this place.’ He said it like a challenge. ‘An’ Ah came in.’

Laidlaw reflected that something like a stolen bicycle would have been more concrete. Bud Lawson had got away ahead of the probabilities. What he needed wasn’t a policeman, it was a sedative. The main purpose of what Laidlaw was going to say next would be lay therapy.

‘You’d better tell me it from the beginning.’

The man’s confusion funnelled through a filter onto Laidlaw’s pad.

Jennifer Lawson (age 18). 24 Ardmore Crescent, Drumchapel. Left the house 7.00 p.m., Saturday 19th. Wearing denim trouser-suit, yellow platform shoes, red tee-shirt with a yellow sun on the chest, carrying brown shoulder-bag. Height five feet eight inches, slim build, shoulder-length black hair. Mole on left temple. (‘Ah mind that because when she wis wee, she worried aboot it.

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Thocht it wid spoil her chances with the boys. Ye know whit lassies are like.') Occupation: shop-girl (Treron's). Stated destination: Poppies Disco.

It looked neat on paper. On Bud Lawson's face it was a mess. But Laidlaw had done all he could. He had been a pair of professional ears.

'Well, Mr Lawson. There's nothing we can do at present. I've got a description. We'll see if anything turns up.'

'Ye mean that's it?'

'It's a bit early to declare a national emergency, Mr Lawson.'

'Ma lassie's missin'.'

'We don't know that, Mr Lawson. Are you on the phone?'

'Naw.'

'She could've missed a bus. She wouldn't be able to inform you. She could be staying with a friend.'

'Whit freen'? Ah'd like tae see her try it?'

'She *is* an adult person, Mr Lawson.'

'Is she hell! She's eighteen. Ah'll tell her when she's an adult. That's the trouble nooadays. Auld men before their feythers. Ah stand for nothin' like that in ma hoose. Noo whit the hell are yese goin' to do aboot this?'

Laidlaw said nothing.

'Oh aye. Ah might've known. It's because it's me, isn't it? Ye wid jump soon enough if it wis somebody else.'

Laidlaw was shaking his head. His compassion was getting exhausted.

'Ah refuse tae be victimised. Ah want some action. D'ye hear me? Ah want something done.' His voice was rising. 'That's the trouble wi' the whole bloody world. Naebody bothers.'

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'Here!' Laidlaw said. His hand was up. The traffic stopped. Laidlaw was leaning across the desk towards him. 'I'm a policeman, Mr Lawson. Not a greaseproof poke. You put your philosophy of life on a postcard and post it anywhere you like. But don't give it to me.'

Laidlaw's silence was a confrontation.

'Look,' Laidlaw said. 'I can understand your worry. But you'll have to live with it for the moment. She may well be back home this morning. I think you should go home and wait.'

Bud Lawson stood up. He turned the wrong way in his attempt to find the door. For a second he looked oddly vulnerable and Laidlaw thought he saw through the cleft of his indecision another person flicker behind his toughness. He remembered his own foetal fragility of some minutes ago. A tortoise needs its shell because its flesh is so soft. And he felt sorry for him.

'Come on,' he said. 'I'll show you out of this place.' He had torn the page off his pad, still had it in his hand. 'It's like doing a crossword just getting out of here.'

At the door Laidlaw remembered that Bob had a Production on his desk – a labelled cassette to be produced soon as evidence in a case. He locked the office and put the key above the door.

Bud Lawson let himself be led. They went down the three flights of stairs. As they passed the desk, Laidlaw was aware of the sergeant looking at him, but he didn't look back. In the street, the morning was fresh. It should be a nice day.

'Look, Mr Lawson.' Laidlaw touched his arm. 'Don't rush to any conclusions. Let's wait and see. Maybe you should concentrate on helping your wife just now. She must be out of her mind with worry.'

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‘Huh!’ Bud Lawson said and walked across to his 70 Triumph, a mastodon in a football-scarf.

Laidlaw was tempted to shout him back and put it another way, say with his hands on his lapels. But he let it pass. He thought of what he had seen inside Bud Lawson’s armour-plating. It was as if he had met him for the first time. He shouldn’t spoil the acquaintance. He breathed the absence of exhausts and factory-smoke, and went back in.

At the desk the sergeant said, ‘Nothing, Jack? Well, you asked for it. I could have dealt with it. I hope you don’t mind me asking. But why do you sometimes want to deal with whatever comes up?’

‘When you lose touch with the front line, Bert, you’re dead,’ Laidlaw said.

‘You think you have?’

Laidlaw said nothing. He was leaning on the desk writing on his slip of paper when Milligan came in, a barn door on legs. He was affecting a hairy look these days, to show he was liberal. It made his greying head look larger than life, like a public monument. Laidlaw remembered not to like him. Lately, he had been a focus for much of Laidlaw’s doubt about what he was doing. Being forcibly associated with Milligan, Laidlaw had been wondering if it was possible to be a policeman and not be a fascist. He contracted carefully, putting a railing round himself and hoping Milligan would just pass. But Milligan was not to be avoided. His mood was a crowd.

‘What A Morning!’ Milligan was saying. ‘What! A! Morning! Makes me feel like Saint George. I could give that dragon a terrible laying-on. Lead me to the neds, God. I’ll do the rest. Did I see Bud Lawson on the road there? What’s he been up to?’

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'His daughter didn't come home last night.'

'With him for a father, who can blame her? If she's anything like him, she's probably been beating up her boyfriend. And how are things in the North, former colleague? I just popped in from Central in case you need advice.'

Laidlaw went on writing. Milligan put his hand on his shoulder.

'What's the matter, Jack? You look as if you're suffering.'

'I've just had an acute attack of you.'

'Ah-ha!' Milligan laughed loftily, astride a bulldozer of wit. 'I hear an ulcer talking. Look. I'm happy. Any objections?'

'No. But would you mind taking your maypole somewhere else?'

Milligan was laughing again.

'Jack! My middle-aged teenager. Sometimes I get a very strong urge to rearrange your face.'

'You should fight that,' Laidlaw said, not looking up. 'It's called a death-wish.'

He put the piece of paper folded in his inside pocket.

'Listen. Anything you get on a young girl, let me know.'

'Personal service, Jack? You feel involved?'

The sergeant was smiling. Laidlaw wasn't.

'Yes,' he said. 'I know her father.'

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3

His hands, illumined in the lights he passed, rose and fell helplessly on the steering. They were enormous hands that had driven rivets on Clydeside for thirty years. They weren't used to being helpless. Just now they signalled an anger that, lacking a focus, took in everything. Bud Lawson was angry with Laidlaw, the police, his daughter, his wife, the city itself.

He resented the route by which he was having to go home: along the motorway to the Clyde Tunnel Junction, right into Anniesland, left out Great Western Road. The first part of it reminded him too strongly of what they had done to the city he used to know. Great loops of motorway displaced his past. It was like a man having his guts replaced with plastic tubing. He thought again of the Gorbals, the crowded tenements, the noise, the feeling that if you stretched too far in bed you could scratch your neighbour's head. To him it felt like a lost happiness. He wished himself back there as if that would put right Jennifer's absence.

He knew it was serious simply because she wouldn't have dared to do this to him if she could help it. She knew the rules. Only once before had she tried to break them: the time she

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was going out with the Catholic. But he had put a stop to that. He hadn't forgotten and he never forgave. His nature ran on tramlines. It only had one route. If you weren't on it, you were no part of his life.

It was that inflexibility which trapped him now. In a sense, Jennifer was already lost to him. Even if she came back later today, she had done enough in his terms to destroy her relationship with him. With a kind of brutal sentimentality, he was thinking over past moments when she had still been what he wanted her to be. He remembered her first time at the shore when she was three. She hadn't liked the sand. She curled her feet away from it and cried. He remembered the Christmas he had bought her a bike. She fell over it getting to a rag-doll Sadie had made for her. He remembered her starting work. He thought of the times he had waited for her to come in at nights.

He had passed the Goodyear Tyre Factory and was among the three-storey grey-stone tenements of Drumchapel. They didn't feel like home. He stopped, got out and locked the car.

He came in to Sadie at the fire. She was wearing the housecoat out of his sister Maggie's club catalogue. On her its flowers looked withered. She looked up at him the way she always did, slightly askance, as if he were so big he only left her the edges of any room to sidle in. Her very presence was an apology that irritated him.

'Is there ony word, Bud?' she said.

He stared at the tray-cloth he had pinned above the mantelpiece, where King Billy sat on his prancing charger.

'Ah went tae the polis.'

'Oh, ye didny, Bud.'

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'Whit the hell wid Ah dae? Ma lassie's missin'.'

'What did they say?'

He sat down and stared at the fire.

'By Christ, there better be somethin' wrang wi' 'er efter this.' He looked at the clock. It was a quarter to seven. 'If there's no somethin' wrang wi' her the noo, there'll be somethin' wrang wi' her when Ah get ma haunds oan 'er.'

'Don't say that, Bud.'

'Shut yer mooth, wumman.'

His silence filled the shabby room. He took off his scarf and dropped it on the chair behind him. Sadie sat rocking very gently, making a cradle of her worry. He looked across at her. She looked so gormless that a suspicion formed in him slowly.

'Ye widny know anythin' that Ah don't, wid ye?'

'Whit d'ye mean?'

'Ye know whit Ah mean. She's never done anythin' like this in her life afore. She's no up tae something that Ah don't know aboot, is she?'

'Bud. Hoo can ye think that? Ah widny hide anythin' from you.'

'Ye tried it before. The time she wis goin' aboot with the Catholic. Till Ah put a stoap tae it.'

'Ah never knew aboot that till you found oot.'

'Aye, that's your story. An' ye're stickin' tae it. It'll no be tellin' any the two o' ye if ye're in cahoots aboot somethin'. Ah'm warnin' ye.'

He stared at her and her skinny obsequiousness offended him. One child. That was all she had been able to produce. And four miscarriages, small parcels of blood and bones that hadn't got enough from her to make a human being. There wasn't enough room in her to hold another child.

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Seeing him watching her, she talked a smokescreen.

'Wid ye like a cup o' tea while we're waitin', Bud? Will Ah make ye wan?'

Since he didn't say no, she went through to make it.

A baffled rage fermented in him. Normally, he went head-first through whatever threatened him. But this was different. This was squaring up to fog. The difference pumped up the pressure of his anger into something awesome.

Sadie had kept the fire going. It was dying down. He lifted the poker and halted with it in his hand. Jennifer had wanted them to have a gas-fire put in. But he liked coal. On that irrelevant thought he blacked out into a lonely fury.

When he came out of it, he stared at the poker twisted to a staple in his hands. It was an I.O.U. made out to someone.

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4

The boy had slept. That amazing fact alone put him back inside his own body. It was a terrifying place to be. He woke lying awkwardly against the wall where exhaustion had left him. Consciousness had burned out suddenly like a bulb. Now just as suddenly it had renewed itself. He was still himself.

The scabby wall against which his head was leaning seemed to be pressing against him, as if about to topple. He felt pinned against it by the impossibility of ever getting up and doing something. The enormity of what he had done had hardened into fact during the night. He knew it was there and inescapable.

Yet strangely it was still not a part of him. The feeling wasn't so much that of having done something as of having been part of an event outside himself, like an explosion. He saw her body, the odd splay of her legs, the head cocked in an absurdly human way, the position into which the blast had thrown her. He felt pity for her.

But he was left wondering what she was doing there. Something had happened of which he was only a part. What was it that had happened? He didn't know. He knew that he was in a strange room, that he was dirty, that he was very cold. To

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get from where he was to what had happened seemed impossible. But it was what he had to do.

It didn't help to close his eyes again and try to hide. The terrible fever was finished. The luxury of being overwhelmed by guilt was gone. He had thought he was drowning in it but instead it had beached him here. He was left to go on living, to find out how he could inhabit what had happened.

He tried to stand up and found that he could. The ache of his legs was things becoming possible again. He watched his hands automatically dusting his trousers. He started to walk. The stairs which were completely strange to him gave him the sensation of leaving a place without ever having been in it. He had to be careful of the broken bannister. Light showed through the corrugated iron sheeting across the outside door, where he had forced it to get in. The metal bent before his hand and he looked out.

The street was empty. He stepped outside. The sunlight dispelled his purpose for a moment. He stood baffled in the empty street, just a part of the dust and silence. It was very difficult to know whether to go right or left. He walked to the right. Within yards, he came out onto a road junction. It was then he recognised where he was.

Across from him was Glasgow Green. The Clyde was over a hundred yards away on his right. Being in a real place was being where people could find you. The knowledge frightened him and the fear gave him an arbitrary purpose. He crossed the road.

Outside the Green was a phone-box. He went into it. The door swung shut behind him, nudging him into the booth. He lifted the receiver and held it to his ear. The phone was working.

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He put it back down. The word ‘Cumbie’ was written with black paint on the metal fixture where you put in the money. Above it was written ‘Blackie’. Was ‘Blackie’ the name of another gang? Was it somebody’s nickname? He took change out of his pocket and laid it on the small black ledge. He lifted the receiver and put it to his ear again.

He dialled a number without having to remember it. When he heard it ringing, he was surprised that he had made something happen. He stood with patient dread, trapped inside the silence of the city while the phone drilled in the distance, trying to break his isolation.

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5

The room was a permanent hangover. Waking up in it, Harry Rayburn was always faced with coming to terms with himself all over again. It was the room in the house where he spent most time and it was furnished with the debris of past attitudes. Those attitudes were an unresolvable argument in which he was a very tired chairman. The two Beardsley prints looked uncomfortable beside the framed photographs of boxers. The largest one was Marcel Cerdan. The huge, elaborately patterned lampshade clashed with the ascetic whiteness of the walls, making the room look like a Calvinist brothel. The round bed appalled him, obliged him to sink nightly into his own embarrassment. His dressing-gown was a kimono.

More than once he had lain here and laughed at his pretentiousness. The room was such a wardrobe of psychological drag. But this morning he had no time to achieve that distance from his attempts to come to terms with his own nature. The phone pulled him out of bed and he put on the kimono without thinking. He bumped towards the phone in a confusion that was part hangover, part way of life. He felt momentarily bad about answering the phone in such a mess. As he lifted the receiver, he ran his hand through his hair.

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'Hello?'

'Harry? It's Tommy. Tommy Bryson.'

The name went through him like a spear.

'Tommy! Where are you? Do you want to come up?'

It struck him that the last word was strange, unless it meant upstairs, to the bedroom. He was fussing with his hair again.

'I can't. Harry.'

The way he said the name made a crossroads of feeling in Harry. It was a plea and that was what Harry had longed to hear but it was so fraught with pain that he dreaded what it was going to lead to. He waited to find out what he would have to feel.

'Something's happened. Something terrible.'

'What is it, Tommy?'

'I need your help. I've killed a girl.'

The statement spread between them like a steppe.

'Tommy,' Harry said.

They listened to each other's silence hopelessly.

'Tommy.'

The name died out between them. Harry was amazed to find that his voice knew what to say.

'What is it you want me to do?'

'You bring me paper and a pen. I need to write things down. I need to know what's happened.'

It was pathetic, as if somebody dying of throat-cancer should ask for pastilles.

'But first. Would you go and see my mother, please? Do you remember the address?'

'I remember.'

'Tell her something. Make up something. I don't want her to go to the police. I don't want that.'

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'You could come here, Tommy. They'll not look for you here.'

'No, I can't,' Tommy said, 'no, I can't.'

'Where are you, then?'

The pause was self-deception, a choosing whether to trust, but the choice had already been made.

'I'm in the Bridgegate. Off Jocelyn Square. It's condemned. Above "Alice's Restaurant". There's corrugated iron across the door of the entry. But I forced it. Don't come till later on. When things are quiet. But see my mother just now. See her right away.'

'Tommy,' Harry said.

'Will you do all that?'

'I'll do it.'

'All right.'

'I love you, Tommy. Don't forget that.'

But the phone was already down. It wasn't until he had said it that Harry realised how true it was. As he laid down the receiver, he knew he had just had a terminal conversation. This was a kind of arrival. The pretence that he wasn't really bothered by not having seen Tommy for the past couple of weeks was over. All the pretences with which he had furnished his house were over, or at least their compulsiveness was over. If he used any of those roles again, it would only be to help Tommy.

He remembered what he had said to Tommy the last time they spoke. 'You're terrified that you're gay. I *know* I'm a homosexual.' But although he had admitted his homosexuality to himself for a long time, he had admitted it only to contrive more effectively ways of protecting himself from other people.

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His life had been spent acquiring compensatory qualities that weren't natural to him but which enabled him to survive. The hardness of his own experience made him forgive Tommy at once, whatever he had done. As far as Rayburn was concerned, everybody else deserved to be Tommy's scapegoat.

The toughness he had learned would have an honest purpose now. He would use it to help Tommy to get away. It was his revenge on his own experience.

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Sunday in the park – it was a nice day. A Glasgow sun was out, dully luminous, an eye with cataract. Some people were in the park pretending it was warm, exercising that necessary Scottish thrift with weather which hoards every good day in the hope of some year amassing a summer.

The scene was a kind of Method School of Weather – a lot of people trying to achieve a subjective belief in the heat in the hope of convincing one another. So the father who lay on the grass, railing in his children with his eyes, wore an open-necked shirt, letting the sun get at his goose-pimples. Two girls who were being chatted up by three boys managed to look romantically breeze-blown rather than cold. An old man sitting on a bench had undone the top two buttons of his overcoat, heralding heatwave. A transistor played somewhere, evocative of beaches. People walking through the park moved unhurriedly, as if through an air muggy with warmth.

But it was the children who were most convincing. Running, exploring bushes, they had that preoccupation which is at any time a private climate. It was one of them who found the reality hidden in the park's charade of warmth.

A boy of about eleven, chrysanthemum-haired, he was on

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his own. For some time he had been stalking the park mysteriously, ignoring everybody else, with that cut-off look children achieve when following corridors of private fantasy. He parted bushes, he skirted trees. Exploring a dense clump of bushes, he suddenly stopped. His head came up, his mouth gagged open. He looked as if the day had stuck in his throat.

Then, 'Mister!' he was screaming. 'Hey, mister, mister. Mister!'

The man in the open-necked shirt came at a run. Others came. The voices clustered and scattered like gulls. The park became a vortex with those bushes as its centre, pulling some towards it, pushing others away as they shooed their children.

The hubbub rose and travelled beyond the park. The screams of panic and horror were translated into even, professional voices.

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