

‘Where are we going?’

‘We’re just driving.’

‘Driving where, though?’

Rebus turned to look at his passenger. The man’s name was Peter Meikle. He had served almost half his adult life in various Scottish and English prisons and had the pallor and bearing common to ex-cons. His face needed a shave and his sunken eyes were black, wary pinholes. Rebus had picked him up from outside a betting shop on Clerk Street. A few sets of lights and they were heading past the Commonwealth Pool and into Holyrood Park.

‘It’s been a while,’ Rebus said. ‘What are you up to these days?’

‘Nothing you lot need worry about.’

‘Do I look worried?’

‘You look the same way you did when you laid me out in 1989.’

‘That far back?’ Rebus made show of shaking his head in surprise. ‘But be fair, Peter, you were resisting arrest – and you had a temper on you.’

‘You’re saying you didn’t?’ When Rebus made no answer, Meikle resumed staring through the windscreen. The Saab was on Queen’s Drive now, skirting the cliff-like Salisbury Crags on the approach to St Margaret’s Loch. A few tourists were trying to feed bread to the ducks and swans, though a troop of swooping gulls seemed to be winning more than its fair share. Rebus was signalling right, beginning the climb that would snake around Arthur’s Seat. They passed joggers and walkers, the city vanishing from view.

‘Could be in the middle of the Highlands,’ Rebus commented. ‘Hard to believe Edinburgh’s somewhere down below.’ He turned

again towards his passenger. 'Didn't you live around here at one time?'

'You know I did.'

'Northfield, I seem to think.' The car was slowing, Rebus pulling over and stopping. He nodded in the direction of a wall with an open gate. 'That's the short cut, isn't it? If you were coming into the park on foot? From Northfield?'

Meikle just shrugged. He was wearing a padded nylon jacket. It made noises when he twitched. He watched Rebus break open a new pack of cigarettes and light one with a match. Rebus exhaled a plume of smoke before offering the pack to Meikle.

'I stopped last year.'

'News to me, Peter.'

'Aye, I'll bet it is.'

'Well, if I can't tempt you, let's just get out for a minute.' Rebus turned off the ignition, undid his seat belt and pushed open his door.

'Why?' Meikle wasn't budging.

Rebus leaned back into the car. 'Something to show you.'

'What if I'm not interested?'

But Rebus just winked and closed the door, heading around the car and across the grass towards the gateway. The keys were still in the ignition, and Meikle studied them for a good twenty or thirty seconds before cursing under his breath, composing himself and opening the passenger-side door.

Rebus was the other side of the park's perimeter wall, the eastern suburbs of the city laid out below him.

'It's a steep climb,' he was saying, shading his eyes with his free hand. 'But you were younger then. Or maybe you weren't on foot – bound to be a mate's car you could borrow. All you had to tell them was you had something needed shifting.'

'This is about Dorothy,' Meikle stated.

'What else?' Rebus gave a thin smile. 'Almost two weeks before she was reported missing.'

'It was eleven years ago . . .'

'Two weeks,' Rebus repeated. 'Your story was you thought she'd gone to stay with her sister. Bit of a falling-out between the two of you. Well, there was no way you could deny that – neighbours couldn't help hearing the shouting matches. So you might as well turn it to your advantage.' Only now did Rebus turn towards the man. 'Two weeks, and even then it was her sister who had to contact us. Never a trace of Dorothy leaving the city – we asked at the train and bus stations. It was like you were a magician and you'd

put her in one of those boxes. Open it up and she's not there.' He paused and took half a step towards Meikle. 'But she *is* there, Peter. She's somewhere in this city.' He stamped his left foot against the ground. 'Dead and buried.'

'I was questioned at the time, remember?'

'Chief suspect,' Rebus added with a slow nod.

'She could have gone out drinking, met the wrong man . . .'

'Hundreds of pubs we visited, Peter, showing her picture, asking the regulars.'

'Tried thumbing a lift then – you can lose yourself in London.'

'Where she had no friends? Never touching her bank account?'

Rebus was shaking his head now.

'I didn't kill her.'

Rebus made show of wincing. 'This is just the two of us, Peter. I'm not wearing a wire or anything; it's for my own peace of mind, that's all. Once you've told me you brought her up here and buried her, that'll be the end of it.'

'I thought you weren't working cold cases any more.'

'Where did you hear that?'

'Edinburgh's being shut down, transferred.'

'True enough. But not everyone would be as informed as you seem to be.'

Meikle gave a shrug. 'I read the papers.'

'Paying particular attention to police stories?'

'I know there's a reorganisation.'

'Why so interested, though?'

'You forgetting that I've a history with you lot? Come to that, why aren't you retired – you must be on full pension by now?'

'I *was* retired – that's what the Cold Case Unit was, a bunch of old hands still itching for answers. And you're right that our case-load has gone elsewhere.' Rebus's face was by now only a couple of inches from Meikle's. 'But *I've* not gone, Peter. I'm right here, and I was just getting started on reopening your case when it was taken away from me. Well, you know me, I like to finish what I start.'

'I've got nothing to say.'

'Sure about that?'

'You going to slam me into a wall, knock me out cold again? That's the way you and your lot always liked to operate . . .'

But Rebus wasn't listening. His attention had shifted to the mobile phone gripped in Meikle's right hand. He snatched at it and saw that its recording function was on. With a grim smile, he tossed it into a thicket of gorse. Meikle gave a little yelp of complaint.

‘This the way you want it to go, Peter?’ Rebus asked, stubbing the remains of his cigarette against the wall. ‘Always watching over your shoulder for someone like me? Waiting for the day a dog goes sniffing where it shouldn’t and starts to dig?’

‘You’ve got nothing and you *are* nothing,’ Meikle spat.

‘You couldn’t be more wrong. See, I’ve got *you*.’ A finger was stabbed into Meikle’s chest. ‘And as long as you’re unfinished business, that makes me something you need to worry about.’

He turned and headed back through the gateway. Meikle watched him climb into the Saab and start the engine. The car sped off with a burst of smoke from its exhaust. Swearing under his breath, Meikle began trampling down the gorse in search of his phone.

The Chief Constable’s leaving party took place at the canteen of Lothian and Borders Police HQ on Fettes Avenue. He was heading to a new post south of the border and no one seemed to know whether anyone would take over his role. The eight regional Scottish forces were soon to be amalgamated into something called Police Scotland. The Chief Constable of Strathclyde had been given the top job, leaving seven of his colleagues scratching around for fresh opportunities.

A perfunctory attempt had been made to turn the canteen into a festive location – meaning a couple of banners, some streamers and even a dozen or so party balloons. Tables had been covered with paper tablecloths. There were bowls of crisps and nuts, and bottles of wine and beer.

‘Cake’s arriving in half an hour,’ Siobhan Clarke told Rebus.

‘Then I’m out of here in twenty.’

‘You don’t like cake?’

‘It’s the speeches that’ll no doubt accompany it.’

Clarke smiled and sipped her orange juice. Rebus held an open bottle of lager, but had no intention of finishing it – too gassy, not cold enough.

‘So, DS Rebus,’ she said, ‘what did you get up to this afternoon?’

He stared at her. ‘How long are we going to keep this up?’ Meaning her use of his rank – detective sergeant to her inspector. A decade back, the roles had been reversed. But when Rebus had applied to rejoin, he’d been warned of a surfeit of DIs, meaning he would have to drop to DS.

‘Take it or leave it,’ he’d been told.

So he’d taken it.

‘I think I can string it out a little longer,’ Clarke was saying now, her smile widening. ‘And you haven’t answered my question.’

‘I was looking up an old friend.’

‘You don’t have any.’

‘I could point to a dozen in this very room.’

Clarke scanned the faces. ‘And probably as many enemies.’

Rebus seemed to ponder this. ‘Aye, maybe,’ he conceded. And he was lying anyway. A dozen friends? Not even close. Siobhan was a friend, perhaps the closest he’d ever had – despite the age gap and the fact she didn’t like most of the music he played. He saw people he’d worked alongside, but almost no one he would have invited back to his flat for whisky and conversation. Then there were the few he would gladly give a kicking to – like the three officers from Professional Standards. They stood apart from the rest of the room, pariah status confirmed. Yet they had a haunted look – as with the Cold Case Unit, so too with their particular jobs: packed off elsewhere come reorganisation. But then a face from the past was squeezing through the throng and heading in Rebus’s direction. He stuck out a hand, which Rebus took.

‘Bloody hell, I almost didn’t recognise you there,’ Rebus admitted.

Eamonn Paterson patted what was left of his stomach. ‘Diet and exercise,’ he explained.

‘Thank God for that – I thought you were going to tell me you had some sort of wasting disease.’ Rebus turned towards Clarke. ‘Siobhan, this is Eamonn Paterson. He was a DS when I was a DC.’ While the two shook hands, Rebus continued the introduction.

‘Siobhan’s a detective inspector, which has her under the cruel delusion she’s my boss.’

‘Good luck with that,’ Paterson said. ‘When he was wet behind the ears I couldn’t get him to take a telling, no matter how hard I kicked his backside.’

‘Some things never change,’ Clarke conceded.

‘Eamonn here used to go by the name of Porkbelly,’ Rebus said. ‘Came back from a holiday in the States with the story he’d eaten so much of the stuff a restaurant had given him a T-shirt.’

‘I’ve still got it,’ Paterson said, raising his glass in a toast.

‘How long have you been out of the game?’ Clarke asked. Paterson was tall and slim, with a good head of hair; she wouldn’t have said he was a day older than Rebus.

‘Nearly fifteen years. Nice of them still to send me the invites.’ He waved his wine glass in the direction of the party.

‘Maybe you’re the poster boy for retirement.’

‘That could be part of it,’ he agreed with a laugh. ‘So this is the last rites for Lothian and Borders, eh?’

‘As far as anyone knows.’ Rebus turned towards Clarke. ‘What’s the new name again?’

‘There’ll be two divisions – Edinburgh, plus Lothians and Scottish Borders.’

‘Piece of nonsense,’ Paterson muttered. ‘Warrant cards will need changing, and so will the livery on the patrol cars – how the hell’s that supposed to save money?’ Then, to Rebus: ‘You going to manage along to Dod’s?’

Rebus shrugged. ‘How about you?’

‘Could be another case of last rites.’ Paterson turned towards Clarke. ‘We all worked together at Summerhall.’

‘Summerhall?’

‘A cop shop next door to the vet school on Summerhall Place,’ Rebus explained. ‘They knocked it down and replaced it with St Leonard’s.’

‘Before my time,’ she admitted.

‘Practically Stone Age,’ Paterson agreed. ‘Not many of us cave-men left, eh, John?’

‘I’ve learned how to make fire,’ Rebus countered, taking the box of matches from his pocket and shaking it.

‘You’re not still smoking?’

‘Someone has to.’

‘He likes the occasional drink, too,’ Clarke confided.

‘I’m shocked.’ Paterson made show of studying Rebus’s physique.

‘Didn’t realise I was auditioning for Mr Universe.’

‘No,’ Clarke said, ‘but you’ve sucked your stomach in anyway.’

‘Busted,’ Paterson said with another laugh, slapping Rebus’s shoulder. ‘So will you make it to Dod’s or not? Stefan’ll likely be there.’

‘Seems a bit ghoulish,’ Rebus said. He explained to Clarke that Dod Blantyre had suffered a recent stroke.

‘He wants one last gathering of the old guard,’ Paterson added. He wagged a finger in Rebus’s direction. ‘You don’t want to disappoint him – or Maggie . . .’

‘I’ll see how I’m fixed.’

Paterson tried staring Rebus out, then nodded slowly and patted his shoulder again. ‘Fine then,’ he said, moving off to greet another old face.

Five minutes later, as Rebus was readying his excuse that he needed to step out for a cigarette, a fresh group entered the canteen.

They looked like lawyers because that was what they were – invitees from the Procurator Fiscal’s office. Well dressed, with shiny, confident faces, and led by the Solicitor General for Scotland, Elinor Macari.

‘Do we need to bow or anything?’ Rebus murmured to Clarke, who was fixing her fringe. Macari was pecking the Chief Constable on both cheeks.

‘Just don’t say something you might regret.’

‘You’re the boss.’

Macari looked as though she’d made several stops on her way to the party: hairdresser, cosmetics counter and boutique. Her large black-framed glasses accentuated the sharpness of her gaze. Having swept the room in an instant, she knew who needed greeting and who could be dismissed. The councillor who headed the policing committee merited the same kiss as the Chief Constable. Other guests nearby had to make do with handshakes or a nod of the head. A glass of white wine had been fetched, but Rebus doubted it was anything other than a prop. He noticed too that his own bottle of lager was empty, though he’d vowed to save his thirst for something more deserving.

‘Got a few words stored up in case she drifts this way?’ he asked Clarke.

‘I’d say we’re well out of her orbit.’

‘Fair point. But now she’s arrived, the presentations can’t be far behind.’ Rebus held up the packet of cigarettes and gestured in the direction of the outside world.

‘Are you coming back?’ She saw his look and gave a twitch of the mouth, acknowledging the stupidity of the question. But as he made to leave the canteen, Macari spotted someone and made a beeline for them, so that Rebus had to swerve past her. She frowned, as if trying to place him, going so far as to glance at his retreating figure. But by then she had reached her prey. Siobhan Clarke watched as the most senior lawyer in Scotland took Malcolm Fox by the arm and led him away from his Professional Standards cohort. Whatever was about to be discussed, a modicum of privacy was required. One of the canteen staff had arrived in the doorway, holding the cake, but a gesture from the Chief Constable told her the ceremony would have to wait until the Solicitor General was ready . . .

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