

# Dead and Buried

‘Colder than an ex-wife’s kiss,’ Detective Inspector Stefan Gilmour muttered, shuffling his feet and rubbing his hands.

‘I wouldn’t know,’ Rebus replied. His own hands were pushed deep into the pockets of his coat. It was 3 p.m. on a winter afternoon, and the lights in the prison yard had already been switched on. Faces sometimes appeared at the barred windows, accompanied by curious looks and gestures. The mechanical digger was making slow progress, workmen with pickaxes standing ready.

‘I keep forgetting you’re still married,’ Gilmour commented. ‘That’ll be for the sake of your daughter, eh?’

Rebus glowered at him, but Gilmour was focusing his attention on the unmarked grave. They were in an unused corner of the grounds of HMP Saughton, close by its high sheer walls. The guards who had brought them to the spot had vanished indoors again sharpish. In place of a hearse, the undertaker had provided a pale blue van pockmarked with rust. It carried a cheap, plain coffin, since nobody reckoned much would remain of the original. Twenty years back Joseph Blay had been hanged not fifty yards away, one of the last men to be executed in Scotland. Rebus had been shown the hanging shed on a previous visit to the prison. It was still, he’d been informed, in full working order should capital punishment make a comeback.

The digger scraped at the ground again, and this time threw up some long splinters of wood. One of the workmen gestured for the driver to lift the arm away, before climbing into the hole, accompanied – with some apparent reluctance – by his younger colleague. As they worked with their pickaxes, more of the coffin was revealed, some sections intact. There was no smell at all, not that Rebus could pick up. The first he saw of Joseph Blay was a shank of hair with the skull below. The fresh coffin had been produced from the back of the van. Nobody was here to loiter. Blay wore a dark suit. Rebus didn’t know what he’d expected from the exhumation: worms

emerging from eye sockets maybe, or the stench of putrefaction. He had been steeling himself all morning, forgoing breakfast and lunch so there'd be nothing for him to bring up. But all he was looking at was a skeleton in a cheap suit, resembling the prop from some medical students' prank.

'Afternoon, Joe,' Gilmour said, giving a little salute.

After a few more minutes, the workmen were ready to lift the body. Blay's trousers and suit jacket seemed stuck to the ground beneath, but eventually came free. The remains were treated with neither great reverence nor any disrespect. The deceased was a job, and that job would be carried out with brisk efficiency before any of the living participants froze to death.

'What's that?' Rebus asked, nodding towards the hole. Gilmour narrowed his eyes, then clambered into the trench, crouching to pick up a pocket watch on a chain.

'Probably in his jacket,' he said, offering his free hand to Rebus so he could be helped back up. The lid had already been placed on the new coffin and it was being loaded into the van.

'Where will he end up?' Rebus asked.

Gilmour shrugged. 'Nowhere worse than this,' he offered, returning the sombre stare of one of the old lags at a second-storey window.

'Hard to disagree,' Rebus said. The digger's engine had started up again. There was a hole to be refilled.

At a pub near Haymarket Station, Gilmour ordered Irish coffees. The coffee was instant and the cream UHT, but with an extra slug of Grouse in each mug it might just do the job. There was no fire as such, but radiator pipes hissed away under the row of bench seats, so they sat side by side and slurped. Rebus had lit a cigarette and could feel his whole face tingling as he began to thaw.

'Remind me,' he said eventually. 'What the hell just happened?'

'It's how they did it back then,' Gilmour obliged. 'When you were hanged, you went to a grave inside the prison grounds. Joseph Blay killed a man who owed him money. Went to his house and stabbed him. Found guilty and sentenced to the scaffold.'

'And this was in '63?'

Gilmour nodded. 'Twenty years back. Charlie Cruikshank was in charge of the case. He's dead now, too – heart attack a couple of years ago.'

'I've heard of him.'

'Taught me everything I know. Man was a legend in the Edinburgh Police.'

‘Did he attend the execution?’

Gilmour nodded again. ‘He always did. When he used to talk about them, you could tell he thought we’d made a big mistake doing away with them. Not that he thought it was a deterrent. I’ve not met many killers who paused beforehand to consider the consequences.’

‘So for him it was what? A vengeance sort of thing.’

‘Well, it stopped them getting into any more bother, didn’t it? And saved all of us the cost of their upkeep in the nick.’

‘I suppose.’

Gilmour drained his glass and told Rebus it was his round.

‘Same again?’

‘Aye, but without the coffee and the cream,’ Gilmour responded with a wink.

When Rebus returned from the bar with their whiskies, he saw that Gilmour was playing with the pocket watch, trying to prise it open.

‘I thought you handed it over,’ Rebus commented.

‘You think he’ll miss it?’

‘All the same ...’

‘Hell’s teeth, John, it’s not like it’s worth anything. Case looks like pewter. Here, you have a go.’ He handed the watch to Rebus and went to ask the barman for a knife. The timepiece had very little weight to it and no markings that Rebus could see. He worked at it with his thumbnail without success. Meantime, the barman had offered up a small screwdriver. Gilmour took back the watch and eventually got it open. The glass was opaque, the face discoloured and water damaged. The hands had stopped at quarter past six.

‘No inscription,’ Gilmour said.

‘Must have had sentimental value at least,’ Rebus offered. ‘For him to be buried with it. His dad’s maybe, or even his granddad’s?’

Gilmour rubbed his thumb across the glass, turning the watch in his hand. Then he got busy with the screwdriver again, until the mechanism came free from its casing. An inch-long cardboard rectangle was stuck there. It came apart in the process, adhering to both the workings of the watch and the inner case. If there had been any writing on it, the words had long faded.

‘What do you reckon?’ Gilmour asked.

‘Is there something I’m not seeing here, Stefan?’ Rebus asked in return.

‘You’re the detective, John.’ Gilmour placed the watch on the table between them. ‘You tell me.’

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The watch sat on Gilmour's desk at Summerhall police station for the rest of the week. The old building felt like it might not survive till spring. Two of the windows in the CID office wouldn't shut properly, and strips of newspaper had been stuffed into the gaps. An unlagged water pipe in the roof space had burst a fortnight back, bringing down part of the ceiling in a storeroom. Rebus had only been stationed there for a month and a half, but the mood of the place had managed to seep into his bones. He felt he was still being tested by his new colleagues, and that somehow the pocket watch was part of it. DS Dod Blantyre had offered to have it looked at by a watchmaker of his acquaintance, but Gilmour had shaken his head. There was a photo one day in the *Scotsman*, showing the construction work at HMP Saughton. New workshops were being built – the reason for Joseph Blay's exhumation. It still wasn't clear to Rebus why Gilmour had taken him there – or even why Gilmour himself had felt the need to be present. He hadn't joined the force until '65, two years after Blay's execution. When Rebus found himself alone in the office with Dod Blantyre, he asked if Blantyre had known Charlie Cruikshank.

'Oh aye,' Blantyre said with a chuckle. 'Some boy, Charlie.'

'He seems to have taken Stefan under his wing.'

Blantyre nodded. 'They were close,' he agreed. 'But then Charlie wasn't someone you wanted to get on the wrong side of.'

'Did he work at Summerhall?'

Blantyre shook his head. 'Leith – that was Stefan's first posting. Pair of them used to go to watch Hearts play. And here's the thing: Stefan grew up supporting *Hibs*. Could never admit as much to Charlie though. Had to keep gritting his teeth and joining in whenever a goal was scored.'

'Would it have meant a falling out between them if Cruikshank had found out?'

'You planning on writing Stefan's biography, John? What's with all the questions anyway?'

'Just curious.'

'I tend to find that's a dangerous trait in CID. You might want to get shot of it.' There was an edge to Blantyre's voice. For the rest of the afternoon, Rebus could feel the man's eyes on him, the mood lightening only when, at quarter past five, Stefan Gilmour announced that he could hear the siren call of the local bar. As the group left Summerhall, however, Rebus realised he had left his pools coupon in the office.

'I'll catch you up,' he said.

The coupon was in his desk drawer, filled out and ready to be

handed in at the pub. He'd often asked himself what he would do if he ever did get a big win. Retire to warmer climes? He doubted his wife would want to give up her job. Nor, for that matter, would he. Pausing by Gilmour's desk, he scooped up the watch and turned it in his hand, the chain dangling. It was easier to open now, the mechanism sliding onto his palm. But it still wasn't about to tell him anything.

'Sixty-three?' the clerk said. 'That counts as recent history.'

The man was bald and cadaverous, his glasses horn-rimmed and greasy. The warehouse in Granton was his fiefdom, and he obviously knew every inch of it.

'How far back do records go?' Rebus inquired.

'I've got some dating from the 1940s – they're not complete sets though.'

'You sound disappointed.'

The man peered at him, then gestured towards a desk. 'You can wait here while I fetch what you need.'

'Thanks.' Rebus sat down and, seeing an ashtray, decided to get a cigarette lit. It was nine in the morning and he'd warned the office he had a dentist's appointment. Running his tongue around his mouth, he realised he really should make an appointment, having cancelled the last one. It was five minutes before the clerk returned. He placed a manila folder in front of Rebus, then produced a notebook from his pocket.

'Just need to sign you in,' he said. 'Warrant card, please.'

Rebus handed it over and watched as the man began to enter his details onto a page.

'You always do that?' Rebus asked.

'It's important to keep a record.'

'Anyone else requested this file recently?'

The clerk offered a thin smile. 'I wondered if you'd twig.'

'I'm guessing it was a DI called Gilmour.'

The clerk nodded. 'Just three weeks back. Our hanged man is suddenly a popular figure ...'

Frazer Spence was the only one in the office when Rebus returned to Summerhall.

'Must have been quite a procedure,' he said.

'What do you mean?'

Spence patted his cheek with a finger. 'The dentist. I'm usually in and out in half an hour.'

‘That’s because you brush your teeth.’

‘Twice a day,’ Spence confirmed.

‘How’s your bike, by the way?’ Spence had come off his motorcycle the previous weekend.

‘Garage says it’ll take a week or so.’

‘You need to be more careful on that thing.’

Spence just shrugged. ‘Hit a patch of oil. Could have happened to anyone.’

‘Still, sliding along a road on your backside at fifty miles an hour – maybe a lesson there, eh?’

‘My leathers bore the brunt.’

‘All the same.’ Rebus paused and looked around the office. ‘Where are the others?’

‘Meeting one of Stefan’s snitches. He might have something on the hold-up at that jeweller’s on George Street.’

‘Bit of progress would be welcome.’

‘Definitely.’

Rebus was standing next to Gilmour’s desk. The watch was no longer sitting there, so he opened the drawer. It lay on top of a stack of betting slips. Rebus lifted it out and slipped it into his pocket. ‘I’m off out again,’ he told Spence.

‘So what do I tell Stefan when he gets back?’

‘Tell him he’s not the only cop in town with informants to keep sweet.’

‘So which pub can he find you in if he needs you?’

Rebus pressed a finger to his lips and gave a wink.

‘What’s on your mind, John?’

It was mid-evening. A park bench next to Bruntsfield Links. Rebus had been waiting twenty minutes for Stefan Gilmour to arrive. Gilmour sat down, hands in coat pockets, legs splayed. Rebus had just stubbed a cigarette out under his heel and was resisting the urge to light another.

‘I’ve not been at Summerhall as long as the rest of you,’ Rebus began.

‘You’re still one of the Saints though.’

‘All the same, I keep wondering if I’m still on probation.’ Rebus held the watch out towards Gilmour.

‘I knew you’d taken it,’ his boss said with a smile. ‘So what did you do with it?’

‘The forensics lab. They’ve got some kind of camera there hooked up to a computer.’

Gilmour shook his head slowly. 'Isn't technology amazing?'

'Getting better all the time,' Rebus agreed. 'But sometimes the old ways work, too. Your name's on the list at the storage unit in Granton – three weeks ago, you pulled the file on Joseph Blay. This was after news broke that his remains would have to be moved.'

'True enough.'

'Your old mentor's doing?'

Gilmour was staring out across the links. The street-lamps were lit and a haar was encroaching from the coast. 'Charlie Cruikshank told me to keep an eye on Blay. At the time, I'd no idea what he meant – Blay was long dead.'

'But you kept to your word.'

'I usually do.'

'Did you expect something to turn up in the coffin?'

Gilmour offered a shrug. 'I'd really no idea. Poring over the case-notes didn't offer any clues.'

'Until after the body was dug up,' Rebus said.

Gilmour half-turned towards him. 'On you go then, hot-shot. The stage is all yours.'

'The evidence against Blay was flimsy. Yes, he was owed money by Jim Chivers, but he was by no means the only enemy Chivers had. You could have filled the courtroom with them. Blay's fingerprints were found in the victim's home, but then he'd been a regular visitor, so they couldn't be said to be conclusive. Added to which, the knife was never found and there didn't seem to be any traces of blood on Blay's clothes or shoes. His story was that he'd spent the evening of the stabbing at the flicks in Morningside, seeing *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Problem was, no one could verify it. Staff at the picture house knew him for a regular but weren't able to say which shows he'd been to. He hadn't gone with anyone or spoken to anyone – took the bus home straight after, and again, no driver would admit to seeing him. One thing I *did* glean was that there was history between Blay and your old boss. Cruikshank had tried a few times to put Blay away and had always fallen short.'

'We all end up with at least one of those.'

'If we stay in the job long enough,' Rebus agreed.

'Having second thoughts, John? That would be a pity. Seems to me you're shaping up to be a good detective.'

'Meaning what?'

'Meaning someone who goes the extra mile. Someone who's conscientious.' Gilmour paused. 'And someone with a clear sense of good guys and bad.'

'You could have gone to Saughton alone. That would have been

the safe move. But instead you took me. You needed to see what I'd do, how I'd react.'

'I had no idea there'd be anything worth a reaction.'

'But there was.' Rebus nodded towards the pocket watch, still resting in Gilmour's hand.

'It's just a keepsake, John.'

'A keepsake with a little scrap of cardboard hidden inside. You know what they told me at the forensics lab? They told me it's a cinema ticket, one of those old-fashioned stubs they used to give you. They can't make out any of the details. My guess is, the date and time would have been legible at one time, maybe even the title of the film.'

'You're thinking *Liberty Valance*?'

'Seems to fit the bill. A tiny bit of evidence that would have helped Joseph Blay's case. Probably emptied out his pockets when he was arrested, and Charlie Cruikshank palmed it. Knew he couldn't have it being found. So Blay's found guilty and Cruikshank is there to watch him hanged. He still has the ticket stub so he hides it inside the watch, just because he can. That's why he needed you to keep an eye on Joseph Blay – because that stub could have proved a man's innocence. Your boss was content to see someone go to the scaffold, no matter whether they'd committed the crime or not.'

'We can't know that, John. Who's to say how that stub ended up where it did?'

'You know I'm right though.'

'Good luck proving it.'

Rebus shook his head. 'We both know I can't do that.'

'But do you *want* to do it? See, being a cop isn't just about getting to the truth – it's knowing what to do with it when you arrive. Making judgement calls, some of them at a moment's notice.'

'That's not what Cruikshank did though, is it?'

'Maybe it is. He knows Blay's guilty. That ticket could have come from anywhere – Blay could have picked it up off the pavement or from the floor of a bus. Charlie took it out of circulation so as not to confuse the jury.'

'He wanted a guilty verdict at all costs.'

'He didn't want a guilty man to get off, John. That's the story here.'

'And you'd do the exact same thing, Stefan? That's what your old mentor taught you?'

'He gave his whole life to the job, John, heart and soul.' Gilmour rose to his feet and stood in front of Rebus. He held out the pocket watch. 'Do you want this?' he asked.



‘What would I do with it?’

‘You’d take it to The Complaints, lay out your version of events.’

‘And what good would that do?’ Rebus stared at the watch, then averted his gaze and shook his head. Gilmour waited a few more beats, then stuffed the watch into his coat.

‘That’s us then,’ he said, reaching out his hand. ‘Welcome to the Saints of the Shadow Bible, John.’

After only a moment’s hesitation, Rebus stood up and returned the handshake.

# Playback

It was the perfect murder.

Perfect, that is, so far as the Lothian and Borders Police were concerned. The murderer had telephoned in to confess, had then panicked and attempted to flee, only to be caught leaving the scene of the crime. End of story.

Except that now he was pleading innocence. Pleading, yelling and screaming it. And this worried Detective Inspector John Rebus, worried him all the way from his office to the four-storey tenement in Leith's trendy dockside area. The tenements here were much as they were in any working-class area of Edinburgh, except that they boasted colour-splashed roller blinds or Chinese-style bamboo affairs at their windows, and their grimy stone façades had been power-cleaned, their doors now boasting intruder-proof intercoms. A far cry from the greasy Venetian blinds and kicked-in passageways of the tenements in Easter Road or Gorgie, or even in nearby parts of Leith itself, the parts the developers were ignoring as yet.

The victim had worked as a legal secretary, this much Rebus knew. She had been twenty-four years old. Her name was Moira Bitter. Rebus smiled at that. It was a guilty smile, but at this hour of the morning any smile he could raise was something of a miracle.

He parked in front of the tenement, guided by a uniformed officer who had recognised the badly dented front bumper of Rebus's car. It was rumoured that the dent had come from knocking down too many old ladies, and who was Rebus to deny it? It was the stuff of legend and it gave him prominence in the fearful eyes of the younger recruits.

A curtain twitched in one of the ground-floor windows and Rebus caught a glimpse of an elderly lady. Every tenement, it seemed, tarted up or not, boasted its elderly lady. Living alone, with one dog or four cats for company, she was her building's eyes and ears. As Rebus entered the hallway, a door opened and the old lady stuck out her head.