

It became one of the cases cops mark their career by. Peter Manuel, Bible John and Bloody January. Nobody really knew where the name came from, probably some passing remark in Pitt Street or in a pub next to Central. The papers got a hold of it pretty quick. Banner headlines straight away. Most famous one still framed and hung up in stations across in the city.

BLOODY JANUARY: HOW MANY MORE TO DIE?

Years later the cops that worked Bloody January would tell the younger guys that they had no idea what it was really like back then. Six bodies in one week. They'd sit in pubs and reminisce, retired now, run to fat and drinking too much because they had nothing else to do. They'd tell their war stories, about how close they came to an arrest or finding one of the bodies. The younger ones would smile and nod, listen with one ear on the football results coming out the TV, thinking, 'It can't have been that bad.'

But it was.

1st January 1973

ONE

McCoy headed along the corridor towards the stairs, heels clicking on the metal walkway, breath clouding out in front of him. Never changed, Barlinnie. Freezing in the winter, boiling in the summer. The old Victorian building was on its last legs. Wasn't built for the number of prisoners they had stuffed into it now. Three, sometimes four of them locked up in a cell made for two. No wonder the whole prison stank. The smell of overflowing slop buckets and stale sweat was so thick it caught in the back of your throat soon as the big doors opened; stuck to your clothes when you left.

He'd been coming up here since his first weeks on the beat. Only good thing about Barlinnie was that it saved you going anywhere else. The whole spectrum of Glasgow's wrongdoers ended up in here. From rapists and murderers, nonces and kiddie fiddlers to bewildered old men caught coming out the Co-op with two tins of salmon stuffed up their jumpers and their wives not long in the ground. Barlinnie wasn't fussy, it took them all in.

He leant over the balcony rail, peered through the netting and the fug of tobacco smoke at the rec hall below. Usual crowd milling about in their denims and white plimsolls.

Couple of boys whose names he couldn't remember playing ping-pong. Low-level troops from the gangs in the Milton gathered round the pool table, all long hair, moustaches and borstal tattoos. One of them pointed with his cue as Jack Thomson was wheeled in front of the TV, started sniggering. A year ago he would have been too scared to even look at someone like Thomson. Now the poor bastard had a dent in his head so deep it was visible from up here. That's what happens when someone takes a sledgehammer to each knee and then gives you a few whacks on the head for luck. Can't walk and your brain's so scrambled you don't even know where you are.

He buttoned up his trench coat, blew in his hands. Really was fucking freezing in here. A wee fat guy stood up from the card school, looked up, nodded. Steph Andrews. Still kidding himself that no one in here knew he was a tout. McCoy dug in his pocket, took out one of the packets of Regal he'd brought with him and dropped it over the side. Steph had caught it, pocketed it and was off before anyone even noticed. First rule of a visit to Barlinnie: bring fags. McCoy leant over a bit further, still couldn't see the reason he'd come up here.

'Feeding time at the zoo, eh?'

He turned and Tommy Mullen was leaning on the rail next to him. He took his cap off, scratched at his head. When McCoy had first started coming up to Barlinnie, Mullen's hair had been black. It was mostly grey now.

'How much longer you got now, Tommy?' he asked.

'Three more cuntin' weeks. Countin' the days.'

'Not sad you're going then?'

'Jokin', aren't you? Cannot fuckin' wait. Wife's brother's bought a wee caravan down in Girvan. Fresh air. Get the stink of this place out my nose.'

'What is it he wants anyway?' McCoy asked. 'All I got was a call at the station to get up here.'

Mullen shrugged. 'Think he's going to tell me?' He took a roll-up out his baccy tin and lit up. McCoy looked over the balcony again, tried to see him in the crowd.

'You'll no see him down there,' said Mullen. 'He's been moved. He's in the Special Unit now.'

McCoy let out a low whistle. The mysterious Special Unit. Nobody knew much about it or how it was supposed to work. Had been set up last year. Prison Services embracing the sixties far too late. McCoy remembered a news conference on the telly. A grim-faced warden sitting behind a desk flanked by two hippy professor types. The hippies blabbering on about Art Therapy, Positive Custody and Breaking Barriers.

Even though it was early days, any mention of the Special Unit was enough to start the papers frothing at the mouth, most of the polis too. According to them the Special Unit was going to be Sodom and Gomorrah rebuilt on the banks of the Clyde. According to the hippies it was just a small section of the prison where top security prisoners would be treated like human beings. McCoy wasn't too bothered either way, wasn't like the usual stuff was working anyway. Bully squads beating the fuck out of troublesome prisoners, sticking them in cages in freezing wet basements. Far as he could see it just made those nutters worse; all the more determined to stab or batter any screw that looked at them the wrong way.

Mullen and McCoy left the main building and ran across the prison yard, coats over their heads, heading for a red door in the far wall. Weather was getting worse again, icy sleet, wind whipping leaves and rubbish across the yard. Mullen pulled the red door open and they were in.

McCoy just stood there looking, taking it in. Alice through the looking glass.

There were two greenhouses in front of them, full of flowers and tomato plants. Beds had been dug out the concrete, planted with neat rows of vegetables. A fenced-off area at the

side was full of huge lumps of stone with half-finished faces or bodies carved into them, granite glistening in the wet. The door of a wee shed beside them opened and a thin bloke stepped out, long blond hair, chisel in his hand, dusty leather apron. He lifted up his safety goggles.

‘All right, Tommy?’ he asked. ‘No seen you for a while.’

Took a couple of seconds for McCoy to realise who he was. Bobby Munro. Couldn’t help but smile. Bobby ‘Razor’ Munro standing in Barlinnie with a chisel in his hand? No wonder the papers were going mental. Must be the first time he’d used one for its real purpose; normally he’d have had it at someone’s throat.

‘Aye, all good,’ said Mullen. ‘Looking for Howie.’

‘He’ll be stuck in front of the TV as per.’ He pointed to a door. ‘Through there.’

‘So you’re Tommy now, are you?’ asked McCoy, as they went in. ‘All best pals. That how it works?’

‘Don’t fucking start me,’ said Mullen, as they walked through the door. ‘That took a lot of getting used to, I’ll tell you. “The use of surnames is demeaning and depersonalising and must be phased out,”’ he recited in a posh voice. ‘Load of fucking pish.’

Last time McCoy had been in the washing block it was full of big industrial machines churning away, men standing behind big electric presses, half hidden in the clammy steam. Not now. Now it was almost empty, painted white, framed pictures and posters on the walls, huge iron sculpture in the middle of the floor. As far as McCoy could make out it seemed to be two dogs with human faces fighting each other, or maybe fucking each other, couldn’t quite tell. Mullen pointed at a door in the corner.

‘Lounge is over there.’

McCoy stepped through. He didn’t know what he was expecting, but whatever it was it wasn’t this. It was like step-

ping into your auntie's cosy front room. Geometric wallpaper, two-bar fire going full blast and a three-piece suite with wooden arms positioned round a colour TV. Didn't even smell of slop buckets. Only one thing was spoiling the cheery atmosphere: Howie Nairn. He was sitting slumped on the couch. No denims and white sandshoes for the prisoners in the Special Unit. They got to wear their own clothes. In Nairn's case that wasn't much of an improvement. A dirty Che Guevara T-shirt, a tartan scarf round his neck, flared denims and long, wavy auburn hair tied back in a ponytail. Even had his slippers on. He was a bit thinner but looked much the same as last time McCoy had seen him. Was one thing hadn't changed: still had the raised criss-cross of scars running across his neck, disappearing down into the collar of his T-shirt.

'Get that screw to fuck,' Nairn said, eyes not leaving the TV. 'He's no allowed to be in here.'

'Suit yourself,' said Mullen. 'McCoy?'

He nodded an okay and Mullen backed out the door. 'I'll leave you boys to it, give us a shout when you're done.'

McCoy sat down on the arm of the couch, put a packet of Regal on the wee tile-covered coffee table. Waited. Was sure he could smell dope from somewhere. Wouldn't surprise him. Nothing about here could any more. Nairn didn't say anything, eyes stayed firmly fixed on the TV. Up to him then.

'I got the message. Supposed to be honoured, am I?'

Nairn grunted. 'Don't flatter yourself, McCoy. You were the only fucking polis whose name I could remember.'

McCoy looked at the posters taped up on the wall. Not the usual girls with their legs apart, not in here. A map of Middle Earth, picture of Chairman Mao. Books on the shelf were as bad. The autobiography of Malcolm X. *Stranger in a Strange Land*. *The Bhagavad Gita*.

'All this hippie stuff working, is it?' he asked. 'No feeling

the need to open the warden's face any more?' No response. He sighed, tried again. 'So is this about Garvie, then?'

Nairn finally looked away from Zebedee and Dougal. 'Who?'

'Stan Garvie. Stuffed in a tea chest and chucked in the Clyde with some iron weights for company. Believe it was your doing. Staying in this holiday home made you want to confess all, that it?'

Nairn smiled, looked very pleased with himself. 'So that was the cunt's name, was it?' He shook his head. 'Naw, don't know nothing about that, *Detective McCoy*.'

McCoy raised his eyebrows. 'News travels fast.'

Nairn sat up, stuffed his hand down his jeans, scratched at his balls then sniffed his hand. 'Aye well, I've got some more news for you. Someone's gonnae get killed tomorrow.'

'What, you going to knife someone in the showers? Giving me a heads-up?'

Nairn smiled again, revealing a row of small yellow teeth. 'Always think you're the funny cunt, McCoy. About as funny as fucking cancer. Up the town, girl called Lorna.'

McCoy waited but nothing else was forthcoming. He realised he was going to have to play along. 'Who's going to kill this Lorna, then?'

Nairn looked disgusted. 'Fuck off. I'm no a grass.'

McCoy laughed. 'You're no a grass? Fuck am I doing sitting here, then?'

'You're sitting here because I'm stuck in this shitehole. I cannae do anything about it so you're gonnae have to.'

'How am I going to do that, then? Get on the radio and tell every girl called Lorna to stay in her bed all day? Away and shite, Nairn, you're wasting my time.'

He stood up. He'd been on since five this morning, was tired, wasn't in the mood. All he wanted was a pint and to be as far away from this prison and from Howie Nairn and his shite as possible. He leant forward to pick the cigarettes up

off the table and Nairn's hand shot out, grabbed his arm. He pulled him close, face leaning into his.

'You start paying attention to what I'm telling you, McCoy, or you're going to make me awful fucking angry. Right?'

McCoy looked down at Nairn's tattooed fingers wrapped round his arm, knuckles white already. He was a prisoner and McCoy was a polis. There were lines and he'd just crossed them. Game was off.

'Get your fucking hand off me, Nairn,' he said quietly. 'Now. And don't you ever fucking touch me again. Got it?'

Nairn held on for another few seconds, then let McCoy's arm go, pushed it back towards him. McCoy sat back down. 'Either you start talking sense or I'm off. Last chance.' He waited. Nairn stared back at him, watery blue eyes fixed on his. If he was trying to intimidate him, it wasn't working. He'd been stared at by far worse than him. He shrugged and stood up. 'Time over.'

He walked over to the door, shouted on Mullen. He heard his boots coming down the corridor, segs clicking against the lino floor. Voice came from behind him.

'She's called Lorna, don't know her second name. Works in town. One of they posh restaurants. Malmaison or Whitehall's. Don't know who, but someone's gonnae do her tomorrow.'

McCoy turned. 'That it?'

Nairn was staring at the TV again. 'That's enough.'

'Just say I believe you and just say I stop it. You'll tell me what the fuck you're playing at?'

Nairn nodded. 'Now get to fuck. You're stinking up my living room.'

★

'What was all that about, then?' asked Mullen when they were back in the main building. Lock-up was starting. McCoy had

to raise his voice to be heard over the catcalls and clanging cell doors.

‘Fuck knows. Telling me someone’s going to get murdered tomorrow.’

‘No in here?’

McCoy shook his head. ‘The town.’

Mullen looked relieved. ‘Thank fuck for that. I’m on tomorrow. How come laughing boy knows about it anyway?’

‘Christ knows. Think he’s just pulling my string.’

They waited as a prisoner with a black eye and a bleeding lip was walked past them; hands cuffed behind his back, officer either side, still shouting the odds.

‘That’s the funny thing,’ continued McCoy. ‘I was there when he got done, but it was Brody’s deal, no mine. Don’t know why he wanted to speak to me.’

‘Brody. Christ, nae cunt would want to speak to him. He fit him up?’

He shook his head. ‘Nope, whole thing was straight for once. Nairn was as guilty as they come. Caught with a hold-all with three sawn-off shotguns in it.’

Mullen left him at reception, told him he’d let him know where his leaving do was. McCoy liked Mullen well enough but no way was he spending a night in the pub with a load of moaning-faced prison officers telling war stories.

A girl called Lorna. Maybe he would call the restaurants just in case. Couldn’t be that many Lornas working there. Still couldn’t think why Nairn had told him, he’d barely looked at him when he was arrested, too busy trying to kick out at Brody, calling him every filthy name in the book. His eyes drifted up to the calendar on the back wall of the turnkey’s wee office, topless girl draped over a car trying to look like she was fulfilling her life’s desire to hold a big spanner. Didn’t realise it was Thursday. Maybe he wouldn’t bother with Nairn’s shite; maybe he’d go and see Janey instead. He was owed after

all. The buzzer went and the lock shifted back with a loud clang. The turnkey opened the door, held on to it as the wind rattled it in its runners. McCoy peered out at the trees surrounding the car park whipping back and forth.

Turnkey grimaced. 'Rather you than me, pal. Rather you than me.'

He made a run for it, got in the unmarked Viva and slammed the door. He started the engine up and the radio came on. 'Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep' suddenly filling the steamed-up car. He swore, turned the dial, Rod Stewart, 'Maggie May'. Much better. He jammed the heater to full and pulled out onto Cumbernauld Road, heading for town. If he was going to see Janey, he needed to go and see Robbie first.

TWO

‘How long have we got?’ he asked.

She grinned. ‘All night. Stevie cleared it with Iris. She wasnae happy about it.’

He went to take a couple of the Tennent’s screw tops off the set of drawers and she wagged a finger at him. ‘Still have to pay for drink. You know that.’

He shook his head, took out a fifty pence, left it in the porcelain dish by the bottles.

The shebeen was big, one of those huge Victorian flats you got in Glasgow, every room converted to a bedroom apart from the kitchen. That was Iris’s domain. She sat on an old kitchen chair in the doorway, crates of bottles and big Chas the bouncer looming behind her. She’d told him once that the shebeen made twice as much money out the drink as it did out the girls, whatever that said about Glasgow. She didn’t mess about, Iris. Only sold whisky and beer. Take it or leave it. Tennent’s and Red Hackle.

The real money was made after hours and on a Sunday. By midnight on a Friday or three o’clock on a Sunday afternoon, when the real drinkers started to get the shakes, she could pretty much charge what she wanted for it. He’d passed

enough shame-faced women and rheumy-eyed men on the stairs to know how well she did. Drinkers always found the money from somewhere. Even if it meant their weans didn't eat the next day.

Janey'd built a joint with the grass he'd brought, good stuff, according to Robbie, taken off some American band playing at Greene's Playhouse the night before. Half of it deposited into the lock-up at Central and half straight into Robbie's pocket. He'd only charged him a quid. By the expression on Janey's face should have been a lot more than that.

She put the thin joint in his mouth, closed her own over the burning end, lips forming a seal, and blew the smoke deep into his lungs. He held his breath as long as he could then let out a cloud of the sweet-smelling smoke. Didn't take long to kick in. He felt a bit woozy, good. Robbie was right. He took it back off her, had a couple more deep puffs and handed it back.

Janey'd put a scarf over the wee lamp on the bedside table, lit a few joss sticks, stuck some pictures from magazines of beaches and expensive cars onto the peeling wallpaper. Anything to make the place a bit less like the back bedroom of a cold-water flat in Possilpark. 'Atmosphere' she called it. 'Punters like it, younger ones anyway.'

He sat down on the end of the bed, tried to untie the laces of his shoes. He giggled, was more difficult than he thought. He managed to get his tie and shirt off, tried and failed to unbuckle his belt, started giggling again. Janey'd put an album on the wee record player in the corner. *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. Had to keep it low, though. Iris didn't like her playing music, couldn't hear what was going on. Wasn't his favourite, but tonight it sounded good. Grass, drink and the music were starting to work together, perfect equilibrium.

Janey started dancing. Watching herself in the cracked mirror in the wardrobe. She was swaying to the music, singing along.

She was a good-looking girl: long black hair, curvy body, funny wee button nose and a big smile. Too good-looking to be working here. Iris's shebeen wasn't exactly what you'd call high class. Punters were mostly labourers off the sites or men from the Iron Box factory with Friday night's wages burning a hole in their pocket. Every time he tried to ask her about it, tell her to find somewhere else, she laughed it off. Told him she liked it here, had worked in a lot worse places.

She caught sight of him in the mirror watching her, smiled and stuck her tongue out at him. He leant over and pulled her down onto the bed beside him. She laughed, pretended to struggle. He kissed her as she kicked off her platform sandals, wiggled out her hot pants. He kissed her neck, moved his hands down to her breasts, cock already hard against her thigh. Dope was really kicking in now; he felt heavy, slow, relaxed. He moved down her. She ran her fingers through his hair and he looked up at her, grinned.

'You and me, Janey. You and me,' he said.

The record stopped, arm lifted, went back and then the music started again. 'She's a Rainbow.' He was in her now, getting quicker, breathing heavy against her neck, getting there. She wrapped her legs around his back, moved in closer, whispered in his ear. 'Come on, my wee darling. Come on . . .'

He moved another few times, tried to hold back but couldn't. He moaned, collapsed on top of her, breathing heavily into her neck. He lay there for a minute, then raised himself up on his elbows, looked into her eyes.

'That was magic. How about you? You okay?'

She nodded, slapped him on the back. 'Let's do another, eh?'

He rolled off, sat up against the headboard and watched her. She was sitting cross-legged, bag of grass and fold of papers

on the album cover nestling in her lap, long dark hair hanging down like a curtain over her face. She was a pro, could roll a joint in seconds flat, could even do it with one hand if she had to.

He looked at his watch. Ten past twelve. He wasn't going to any restaurants tonight, didn't care, too stoned to go anywhere. Nairn could fuck off. He wasn't his fucking errand boy. He wanted to be here, with her. She lit up another joint and took a deep drag.

'As of ten minutes ago it's my birthday,' he said. 'January second.'

'That right?' she asked. 'What age are you, then?'

'Thirty. Past it.'

She smiled hazily, eyes glassy. Leant over and kissed him, put the joint in his mouth. He took a drag, felt a rush to his head. He couldn't think of a better way to celebrate. He exhaled, lay back on the bed. Could hear Janey singing to herself as she built another joint. Could hear a closing door and the clatter of some punter's boots walking down the corridor, Iris answering the door and the clink of bottles as she handed them over.

Janey leant over him and gently blew a cloud of the grass smoke into his face. He breathed in, watched the headlights of the cars driving past making giant shadows that came and went. He listened to the rain battering against the window, remembered being in a caravan with his mum and dad when he was a wee boy. Janey switched the lamp off, snuggled up beside him. He watched the orange end of the joint glow and fade as she inhaled. He put his arm round her shoulders, pulled her in, let his eyes close and he drifted away.

2nd January 1973

THREE

McCoy woke up freezing cold, all of the blankets wrapped round Janey, only a sheet between him and the ice starting to form on the inside of the windows. He tried to burrow under the sheets and fall back asleep, but it didn't work. Combination of a hangover and the cold meant he'd no chance. He tried to shake Janey awake, but she was having none of it, just grunted and turned away, burrowed back down under the blankets. He got dressed quickly, picking up his clothes from where he'd dropped them, pulled the front door of the shebeen closed behind him and walked down the stairs. Half five. Too late to go home, too early to go into work. Maybe he'd check the restaurants after all. He'd nothing else to do.

The city was starting to wake up, first buses rolling past, passengers leaning on the windows half asleep, bundled up against the cold. Despite the holiday New Year was over, back to normal, no matter how bad the hangovers were. Christmas lights hanging across the streets were still on, bells and holly weakly flashing on and off through the freezing mist and the snow that was starting to fall. A dog appeared round the corner of Sauchiehall Street, ran at the seagulls

feeding on an overturned bin and they wheeled up and away, squawking into the sky.

McCoy was freezing, been standing in under the canopy of the Malmaison since half six, stamping his feet and blowing in his hands to try and keep warm. So far he'd watched a road sweeper trying to gather up all the soggy chip packets and empty beer bottles strewn round the street, bought a paper off a boy selling them from a pram, and stood out the way as two blokes pushed a cart full of old carpet and underlay up Hope Street. He conducted a thorough search of every one of his pockets, still couldn't find his other glove. He took the one he had off his left hand and stuck it on his right just as the restaurant manager turned up. Mr Agnotti, as he introduced himself. A right snotty wee bastard, as it turned out. Suppose you had to be to work in a place like that. McCoy'd only been in the restaurant once. Murray's fiftieth birthday dinner. Didn't think he'd be back, not unless he won the pools. It was a big room, wood panelled, hushed waiters going back and forwards with silver service trays and bottles of wine. Other clientele were all businessmen, stuffed with well-done steaks and prawn cocktails, after-dinner cigars plugging their fat faces.

Agnotti took McCoy into his office, asked to see his badge before he would answer any questions. Wasn't happy about being interviewed. Turned out they did have one girl called Lorna working there, an under-waitress, whatever that was. He wrote out an address on a wee card and handed it over.

'May I enquire what this is about?' he asked.

McCoy smiled at him, couldn't help himself. 'No,' he said.

A kitchen porter was coming in as he was leaving, chaining up his bike outside. He pointed at a picture on the staff notice-board in the corridor when he asked him if he knew Lorna Skirving. It had been taken at some staff night out. Four women sat round a table in a pub all dressed up, glasses held high, big

smiles. Lorna Skirving was the one at the end. Nineteen, low-cut dress, dyed blonde hair, good-looking. He took it off the wall and pocketed it. Had to be who Nairn meant. He'd already been to Whitehall's and they didn't have anyone called Lorna working there: two Laura's but no Lorna.

According to the kitchen porter she'd no phone, so he called the shop, got them to send a panda up to her address to bring her in. He waited in the kitchen, was the warmest place, and watched them setting up the lunch service. Big pans of potatoes and carrots coming to the boil, trays of meat coming out the cold store. An Italian guy with no English appeared from the back and handed him a tiny wee cup of strong coffee. He said 'Gracias' thinking he was clever, was only when the guy walked away looking a bit puzzled he realised he wasn't. The shop called back fifteen minutes later. Uniforms had been on the radio, no answer at her door. Must have left for work already. He sighed, nothing else for it, and called Wattie from the payphone. This was going to be more than a one-man job.

The Golden Egg cafe was a right dump, like a Wimpy without the Wimpy name. Even had a menu with pictures on it – pictures that must have been taken somewhere else, if his bacon and eggs were anything to go by. But it had one virtue: it was right opposite the bus station. So close he could even hear the announcements from the station tannoy over the chat of the other customers and the orders being shouted through to the back kitchen. He rubbed at the condensation on the window and peered out. Eight o'clock and it wasn't even properly light yet, streetlights still on, snow getting worse, lying now. Cars and buses nose to tail as they queued at the big junction to Buchanan Street. Lorna Skirving's address was in Royston; all the buses from there came into the city via the bus station. She had to come in this way. Now all he had to do was spot her in the crowd before she got to work and

some bloke who didn't like last night's lobster thermidor stabbed her to death.

'What time does she start?'

McCoy turned, had almost forgotten he was there. Wattie. Old mucker of Murray's at the Greenock shop had called him, said he had a bright boy, too bright for Greenock, should be up in Glasgow playing with the big boys. The bright boy was sitting in his chair ramrod straight, surveying the crowd outside like some sentry on guard duty. McCoy'd argued with Murray, tried to get out of it, tried to pass him on to Richards, Wilson, anyone but him, but Murray was adamant. He'd done three months in the shop answering the phones, making the tea. Was time for him to shadow someone for a few months. Murray got round him the usual way. Flattery. Bright boy needs watching, can't give him to some plodder like Richards. Didn't know why Murray was so keen, you'd think he'd have learnt his lesson by now. He'd had the complaints before, was sure he was going to get them again. Last secondment had gone back crying to Murray. 'He doesn't tell me what's going on, doesn't speak to me, blah blah blah.' But here the new one was, blond hair wetted down and neatly combed, big open face, dark suit and shined shoes. Twenty-six and he looked about fifteen. About as green as they come.

'Half eight, supposed to be,' said McCoy, yawning widely.

'Can I see the photo again?' asked Wattie.

He handed it over. Looking at Wattie was like looking at himself five years ago. Been a long time since he'd been as bright-eyed and enthusiastic. Been a long time since he'd come to work with his shoes shined and his shirt ironed too. He took a look at his reflection in the window, didn't look good. He needed a haircut and a suit that didn't look like he'd slept in it.

He stood up, looked outside. A layer of white settling on the tarmac. 'We'll head over there, see if we can catch her coming in.'

The bus station sat at the top of the town, hemmed in by the high flats at Dobbies Loan at one side and the new motorway that had destroyed the old Garscube Road on the other. It was a huge asphalt rectangle, must have been half an acre, lined with slanted bays for the buses to park. Shelters and benches ran round the outside, a cafe that made the Golden Egg look like Malmaison near the entrance. Buses came in from everywhere – housing estates on the edge of town, rich suburbs, even from the coast, Ardrossan and Largs. And the bus to London went from here, one every morning, always a big queue waiting for that one. The chance of a new life for a five-bob bus ticket.

A fat bloke with a hat and a whistle told them the Royston buses came in at bays 21 to 24 and pointed them up to the far corner. An old woman sitting on the bench by bay 22 gave McCoy a dirty look as he sat down, sniffed and moved herself and her plastic bags up a couple of feet. He watched Wattie pace up and down, stamping his feet to keep warm, flicking the top of his lighter open and shut, humming something under his breath. At least he was quiet; the last one had never bloody shut up. Some twat from Edinburgh with a science degree, in the accelerated promotion fast track, as he told you every five minutes. Went back to Edinburgh with his tail between his legs after he tried to arrest two women fighting outside the Barrowlands and got a broken nose and a black eye for his trouble.

A double-decker spun round the asphalt and pulled into the bay in front of them. McCoy stood up. The bus door hissed and folded back. A couple of old men muttering about the snow stepped down, followed by a bloke in a boiler suit with his piece in a loaf wrapper tucked under his arm, then a group of school kids all shouting and pushing each other. No Lorna Skirving.

She wasn't on the next one either. Wattie eventually got tired of pacing, sat down on the bench and pushed his heels

out in front of him, stretched his legs, yawned loudly. McCoy sat, watched an old man throwing crumbs onto the wet ground, sparrows flying in from nowhere.

Another bus came and went, still no Lorna. He was beginning to think Nairn had been taking the piss after all when he saw the crowd across the other side of the station scattering. Shouts, a man falling backwards as he tried to run. A woman screamed.

McCoy started running. He was halfway across the forecourt when a reversing bus almost hit him. He jumped out the way, stumbled, looked up and saw what the crowd was backing away from. He was young, couldn't have been more than a teenager, anorak, jeans. His left arm was out in front of him, gun gripped tightly in his hand.

'Police!' shouted McCoy. 'Drop it!'

Clatter of heavy shoes and Wattie was beside him, breath coming out in clouds, eyes darting everywhere. McCoy grabbed his shoulder, pointed over at the crowd. 'Get them down and back. Now!'

Wattie nodded, ran off looking terrified. He didn't have time to worry about him, though. Had to get to the gun before the boy decided to fire it. He took a deep breath and started walking towards him. He tried to sound calm, wasn't easy, he could feel his heart going like a hammer in his chest.

'Just put it down, pal. No harm done, eh?'

His voice made him sound like he was trying too hard, being too nice, nothing he could do about that. The boy didn't even look at him, just kept moving his head from right to left, scanning the crowd, looking for someone. He could hear Wattie shouting behind him, trying to get the crowd out the firing line. A woman was crying, some wee kid screaming, more shouts. He tried to block the noise out. Just him and the boy with the gun, that's all that mattered. He kept walking towards him, going slow, hands held up, getting closer, keeping in between him and the crowd.

‘C’mon, pal, gonnae have to stop this now. Just put it down, eh? It’s not like—’

The boy’s eyes suddenly focused, like he’d just seen McCoy for the first time. He spun his arm round towards him and lined up a shot, pistol aimed square at his head. McCoy froze as the boy adjusted his aim and squeezed the trigger. There was a sharp crack. A cloud of sparrows took off from the roof and the screaming started in earnest.

McCoy couldn’t believe he hadn’t been hit, would have sworn he felt a push of cold air just above his head. People behind him were running, falling, shoving each other out the road to get away. Wattie shouting at everyone to keep down. They started to drop and that’s when McCoy saw her. She was lying half on, half off the pavement, body stretched across the kerb. Blonde hair, white coat, one shiny black shoe lying a few feet away from her. She tried to sit up, looked round bewildered. Blood was flowing down her legs, starting to turn the snow red. She looked down at it, her mouth opened to scream but no sound came. McCoy turned back towards the boy with the gun.

‘Put it down, pal, come on, it’s done now. Just put it down.’

The boy smiled at him, didn’t look like he was all there. His eyes were blank, faraway. He held the gun up in front of him, looked at it. Snowflakes had settled in his hair, were melting, dripping down his face. He wiped his eyes and smiled again, and that’s when McCoy realised what he was going to do.

He started running towards him, shoes trying to find purchase on the greasy ground. He was still a couple of yards away when the boy stuck the barrel up to his temple. He was screaming at him to stop, was almost at him when the boy closed his eyes and pulled the trigger.

The sound was muffled this time, no crack. A reddish mist appeared on the other side of the boy’s head, bits of bone,

then a thick jet of blood flew yards up into the sky. He wobbled, eyes rolled back in his head and he collapsed forward onto his knees, stayed like that for a second or so, then fell forward onto the ground.

McCoy ran over and kicked the gun out his hand, trying to avoid the blood still pouring out the side of his head. Up close he was even younger than he thought. A pair of dirty white plimsolls, quilted anorak with a tear at the pocket, sparse moustache barely covering his top lip. A froth of blood was bubbling out from the side of his mouth, big chunk of the back of his skull gone, bone and brain fragments all over the tarmac.

Wattie was kneeling down by the girl, fingers on her neck. He held them there for a minute then looked up and shook his head. McCoy wasn't surprised; amount of blood pouring out of her, she didn't have much of a chance. Tannoy was still going. The 14 bus from Auchinairn was going to be late. He looked up at the sky and let the snow fall on his face. He could hear sirens in the distance getting louder. He turned as a bus wheeled round into the bay in front of them, driver in the cab staring at the bodies open-mouthed. He stood on the brakes too late and his bus slid across the asphalt and into the station wall. There was a crunch and the driver fell forward and landed on the horn. It blared out, echoing round the walls of the station. McCoy looked back down at the boy, his left hand was spasming, fingers opening and closing, eyes going everywhere. He coughed up a huge goblet of dark blood. Chest was only just going up and down, breathing shallow. McCoy squatted, took hold of his hand.

'You're going to be okay, just hang on, no long now.'

The boy coughed again, more blood came up and ran down the side of his face onto the fresh snow. McCoy sat there holding his hand, telling him it was all going to be okay, knowing it wasn't, wishing he was anywhere but there.

FOUR

He was sitting back on the bench by the Royston bay, smoking, when Murray turned up. Needed some time away from the blood and the uniforms bustling about and Wattie asking him questions every two seconds.

The ambulances had arrived first. The ambulance man had put his hand on his shoulder, told him they would take over. McCoy had tried to stand up but the boy's fingers kept squeezing his. He knew it was a spasm but couldn't let go, needed to feel he was some comfort for the boy. Ambulance man had eased his hand free. He stood there looking down at the boy until another one ushered him away.

Police cars had come next, then the vans with the uniforms in them, then the unmarked cars, then the lorries with the crash barriers. Now the place was bedlam, shouts, sirens, people crying and the tannoy still blaring out.

The line of uniforms that was blocking the entrance parted and a black Rover drove through the cordon and weaved its way through the maze of abandoned buses crowding the forecourt. Soon as it stopped a uniform scuttled over, opened the back door and Murray stepped out. Senior officers were around him in seconds, pointing over at the bodies, explaining what had

happened. Murray listened for a while then held his hand up, silencing them. He pointed at the crowd gathered behind the rope cordon and sent one of them over there, barked orders at the others and they rushed off double-time towards the entrance.

McCoy watched as he strode over to where the bodies were, lifted the rope and went through. Uniforms and ambulance men stepped back, getting out his way. Wattie was standing there trying to look like he knew what he was doing. Even had his wee notebook out. Murray nodded a greeting at him, knelt down and carefully lifted the green sheet off the girl's body. Although the boy's body was surrounded by doctors and ambulance men, it didn't stop him pushing them aside to have a look at him too. He asked Wattie something and he looked around, eyes finding McCoy, and he pointed over. Murray gave out some more instructions, sent Wattie scurrying off, and made his way across the forecourt. Snow was still falling but Murray had no coat, just the usual tweed jacket stretched tight over his shoulders, trilby stuck on his head. He was a big man, Murray, six-foot odds, ginger hair fading to grey, moustache on a ruddy face. Looked like a prop forward gone to fat, which he was. McCoy wasn't sure why they got on; they had nothing in common as far as he could see. Maybe everyone else was just too scared of him to have a normal conversation.

'You all right?' he asked, coming in under the shelter, taking his trilby off and shaking it.

McCoy nodded. 'I'm fine. Unlike those two.'

'Right fucking mess,' he said and sat down beside him. 'Wattie said you came up here looking for the girl before anything happened. Didn't tell him why. That right, is it?'

McCoy nodded.

'How come?' said Murray quietly, just the last remnants of his Borders accent remaining. He only had two speeds, Murray. Shouting, which meant he was annoyed, and talking quietly, which meant he was about to get annoyed.

McCoy sighed, knew he was in for it. 'It was Nairn, Howie Nairn. That's what the phone call was about, got me up to Barlinnie last night. Told me a girl was going to get killed today, wanted me to stop it.'

Murray was padding his jacket, looking for his pipe. Suddenly noticed two plain clothes had followed him over, were standing off to the side waiting. 'What the fuck are you two doing? Standing there like spare pricks at a wedding. Fuck off and get this site properly secured, now!'

The two of them looked terrified, hurried off. Murray'd finally found his pipe, stuck it in his mouth, sat back on the bench and pointed over.

'See that over there, McCoy? Those crashed buses, the blood, the bodies, the weans crying and the crowds of fucking gawpers trying to get past the barriers. That's what's known as a right royal shiteshow. A right royal shiteshow that I'm going to have to sort out. So why don't you just start again and tell me what the fuck went on here and what the fuck it's got to do with you.'

McCoy dropped his cigarette onto the ground, watched it fizzle out, started his story. 'Howie Nairn got me up to Barlinnie last night, he'd got the warden to call the shop. So I get there and he tells me there is a girl called Lorna who works at Malmaison or Whitehall's. No second name. Said she was going to get killed today. I thought he was playing games but I checked it and there is – was – a girl who worked at Malmaison, Lorna Skirving.' He nodded over at the body. 'Wasn't at home this morning so we came here to meet her, except she didn't come in on the Royston bus, so we missed her. Can't have stayed at home last night. First thing we know that bloke's standing there with a gun, and then she's on the ground.'

'And what's she got to do with Nairn?'

McCoy shrugged. 'He wouldn't say.'

‘He wouldn’t say? Well, fancy that. Maybe you should have fucking asked then!’

‘I did . . .’ He started to protest, but Murray was having none of it.

‘Didn’t ask him hard enough, then, did you? Might have stopped this fucking disaster happening. And, by the way, how come that cunt Nairn is suddenly telling you all his secrets?’

‘Don’t ask me. Call came in to the station last night, so I went, thought it would be something about Garvie. I hardly even know him. He was Brody’s deal, no mine.’

Murray tapped the pipe stem off his top teeth, shook his head. ‘Nope. You’re not telling me something.’

‘Eh?’

‘Had to be a reason Nairn wanted to speak to you. What is it?’

McCoy looked at him, couldn’t believe what he was hearing. ‘What? You think I’m holding out on you, that it? That’s shite, Murray. Why would I do that?’

‘You tell me,’ he said evenly.

‘Fuck off, Murray, you’re way out of order.’

Murray’s face clouded over. ‘So are you, son. You remember who you’re talking to.’

‘Aye well, you too. You really think I’d fuck you about?’

Murray rubbed at the stubble coming through on his chin, shook his head. ‘No. But there’s a reason it was you he wanted to speak to. You might not know it, but he does.’

McCoy stood up and watched two uniforms push a row of photographers back behind a rope line. Ambulances were backing up to the bodies, doors open.

‘Where you going?’ asked Murray.

‘The boy still alive?’

‘Barely. If you can call it alive. Half his fucking head’s gone. Who is he? Nairn let you in on that one?’

McCoy ignored him. ‘He’s nobody. According to Wattie,

he's got nothing on him. No ID at all, no house keys, no wallet, no money, scars, tattoos. He's the invisible fucking man. Gold crucifix round his neck. That's it.'

Murray gave a half smile. 'Well, we know one thing then. He's one of your lot.'

McCoy ignored that too. 'So what happens now?'

'I walk back over there and try and get this mess sorted out. Try and get everything done and the place re-opened before the rush hour tonight. City centre's at a fucking standstill already. Buses backed up all the way from here to fucking Paisley.' He stood up. 'And you, away you go to Barlinnie and find out what the fuck Nairn's up to. And get some fucking answers this time. I mean it. He's an accessory at least. Lean on the cunt.'

'Here's done already. The bloke shot the girl then shot himself. What is there to find out?'

'What's to find out is what this has got to do with that cunt Nairn. This isn't bloody Chicago, we don't have shootings in the bloody bus station. Find out what Nairn knows and what it's got to do with him.'

McCoy sighed. Would have to try again later, no point when Murray was in this kind of mood.

'I'm sick of telling you. Get up to fucking Barlinnie now!'

McCoy held his hand up in surrender and walked up towards the row of unmarked Vivas parked near the entrance.

'And McCoy . . .' He turned and Murray nodded over at Wattie, standing on the other side of the forecourt watching them. 'You've forgotten something.'