

## PROLOGUE

*August 1992*

**T**his year was going to be different.

Every day was still a test; every day was a challenge.

It was a fresh summer morning, very early, not yet seven. She was not confident that her knee was ready for the hike to the top of the Whangie, with its unforgiving rock formation and steep paths. But she walked on, knowing the car park at the bottom of the Queen's View was empty. She was on her own, walking slowly but sure footedly, skirting her way round the far side of Auchineden Hill, then through the gash in the rock, the walls fifty-feet high on either side of her. This early there were no rock climbers, no abseilers, only the thud of her boots on the grass underfoot.

The injury had destroyed her pleasure in walking, in the open air, her lust for life. It had almost taken her degree and her career. She was reclaiming them now.

She zigzagged her way uphill on the rocky path until she reached the jagged crags at the top where she bent over and let her lungs take their fill of the cool fresh air. She drank, standing too long, deluding herself that she was taking in the view. It was not the majestic beauty that detained her, not this time. Today her horizon was filled with challenges. Loch Lomond, the southern highlands, the Campsies. She was determined that she would walk them all again.

She breathed deep, glad she had brought her wrap-around glasses, the thinness of the air emphasized the glare of the sun. Noises carried easily up here, the drone of a distant tractor, the bellow of a cow down in the green patchwork of fields.

And something else.

A slap? A clap? A sound that was familiar but discordant here on the hill.

She capped her bottle and pulled her sunglasses up to rest

on her forehead, listening and looking around for the source of that quiet, familiar noise, resenting it. She wanted, she needed, to be up here on her own. And she begrudged her companion their peace on the hill.

She pulled her glasses back over her eyes and started down the quickest way. It was steeper and more unstable but she wanted the challenge, her irritation pushing her on. She kept going, faster and faster, placing her feet carefully, twisting to the right to negotiate two huge boulders, then to the left to jump a deep crevice.

She glanced back. Glad to see and hear no one, she slowed down. They had taken a different path.

She walked along, looking up at the last minute as she heard something above her. That noise? Something that reminded her of her dad?

*Clap clap.*

*Clap clap.*

She ducked a minute too late as the coil of rope settled around her neck.

# ONE

*Tuesday 10th October*

**B**y four o'clock DI Costello was walking along Byres Road, her hands buried deep in her pockets, collar up to get out of the rain. She was heading for Superdrug to buy some shampoo and deodorant. She had been using soap on her hair for the last fortnight and spraying a cheap perfume called Kabana over herself in any breaks in court proceedings. It made her smell as though she had just cleaned out the toilets, but it was worth it to be there.

To hear the word.

Guilty.

The look on Bernadette Kissel's face was *worth it*.

Now DI Costello wanted to celebrate, but only after spending an hour in a hot shower, washing the stink of the Kissel case off her skin, scrubbing those images from her eyes. She wondered if DCI Anderson had been following the case; it would have been difficult for him to avoid it. One day last week, she couldn't remember which day – the trial seemed to go on for ever – her face had been on the front page, sharp focus, her frown making the scar on her forehead pucker. Beside her there was a picture of Professor Jack O'Hare, or 'John' as they had called him. Unfortunate black and white pictures of them looking tired and ineffectual, taken as they left the court, one word underlining the images: MISTAKES.

She had been furious but the professor hadn't minded at all. Of course, mistakes had been made. But not by them. The pathologist had taken it all with the finality of one who spends most of his time with the dead.

Costello, hurrying to get out of the rain, paused under the emerald green and gold awning of La Vita Spuntini, her eye attracted by a familiar jacket with a small herringbone pattern. She recognized the square head, the salt and pepper hair, the

white shirt with ironed blade creases down the sleeves. She recognized the back of his neck.

Archie Walker, Chief Procurator Fiscal and her . . . well, whatever he was. They were too old to be ‘friends with benefits’. He sat with his back to the window, studying a few pages of A4 paper. She waited for him to remove the staple, flatten the papers out to line them up correctly. Finger and thumb pinched the corners, like an entomologist selecting some rare species.

She was about to tap on the window when she noticed there were two glasses on the table, both poured. White wine. Archie looked up and smiled in the direction of the small, tanned brunette pulling down on the cuffs of the cream blouse that hung loose over her black skirt. She appeared to have been to the loo and had rolled up her sleeves to give her hands a thorough wash. Somebody who routinely touched something unpleasant and had learned to wash their hands scrupulously?

Pathologist? A lab technician?

But Costello didn’t recognize her.

Archie slid his papers from the table back into his briefcase. He locked the case, spinning the digits. The brunette moved an empty glass from another table and set it in front of her, placing both full wine glasses in front of him. Had he ordered wine? It was lunchtime and Archie never drank this early. Now the brunette was moving all three glasses, so she could get closer to him across the narrow table.

These two knew each other well. They were very cosy.

And Costello had no idea who the woman was.

She was talking now, this brunette. Friendly, laughing slightly. It didn’t look like two lawyers discussing a case, ready to take corners and argue the burden of proof.

The brunette was younger than Archie, in her thirties? Minimal make-up, a very good suit and a blouse that looked rather loose as if she had lost weight and classic high-heeled black shoes. Her long dark brown hair was perfectly curled into a French roll, a few loose strands falling over her face to soften the look.

Probably another fiscal, somebody from his office. Costello

raised her hand to tap the rain-spattered glass, as the woman threw her head back to laugh.

When had Archie ever said anything that funny?

The brunette glanced out the window and caught Costello's eye, her gaze passing over her as if she was invisible. No recognition. Nothing.

Costello lowered her hand and tilted her head to look at her own reflection, red-rimmed, baggy eyes and spikey, wet scarecrow hair. She noticed her own fingernails, rough and bitten, as the brunette reached her manicured hand out to lay it gently on Archie's wrist. He leaned forward, looking as though he was whispering to her across the table. Then she laughed again. She had a long feminine throat, a finely crafted silver butterfly hung round it, the delicate chain attached to each upper wing.

Had Archie just kissed the back of her hand?

Bastard. Costello walked away, across the road, stepping into the puddles. As she splashed along Byres Road towards Superdrug, an Asian woman with a long, purple-patterned dirndl skirt and a washed out baggy, blue woolly jacket approached her, hood up against the rain. Under her arm was a huge Lidl bag bulging like a balloon. Costello noticed the rainwater running out the side of the woman's clogs. She had her arm up, palm out as if to catch hold of her as she passed.

'I've no spare change,' snapped Costello, automatically and sidestepped. She was not in a mood to be generous.

At five p.m. Roberta closed the door of the Duster and eased out the drive, phone on hands-free in case James had news about the new job.

She pulled out of Acacia Crescent heading down towards the Avenue. They could take a wee drive along the twisting farm roads around Waterside. The smooth rocking of the car had put Sholto to sleep at half two this morning and again at half five. God, she was tired, the back of her eyelids felt like sandpaper. The cold outside chilled her tired, weary bones in a way that no long soak in a hot bath could ease. She was in the permanent winter of a land somewhere beyond exhaustion.

Nobody told her it would be like this. She had spent hours

at the hairdressers when she was pregnant, reading the celebrity magazines and she'd imagined she would be like Angelina Jolie. Have a baby, go back to work, get a good night's sleep, the house would stay clean, her figure would snap straight back into shape and bits of her anatomy would stop leaking. Nobody had told her that babies stay awake twenty-four-seven, and that for the first six weeks she would have difficulty remembering her own name. And there were a lot more hours in the day, long, long hours where the crying never stopped. And yet she never had enough time to do anything.

'Why don't you just sleep, you wee pig,' she asked. Her baby son looked comfortable enough in his new blanket, still clean enough to see the fluffy cream lambs round the bottom.

Sholto looked at her with big blue, tearful eyes, and for one short moment he fell silent, as if he was chewing the idea over, considering the concept in his tiny mind. He rejected it and started wailing like a siren sounding a red alert.

When the mobile rang, Roberta pulled over, put the handbrake on and stepped out the car to stand in the road, in the rain, so she could hear her husband properly.

James's voice came through loud and clear. 'How do you fancy a glass of bubbly tonight?'

'You got the job?'

'I did and the pay rise means you don't need to rush back to work.'

She pulled up her hood. 'And how do we celebrate with the noise of the jumbo jet on a test flight in the room with us?'

'A drink might help you sleep.'

'I don't need any bloody help sleeping. It's him that doesn't sleep. I need help to stay awake.'

'OK, maybe if you calm down, he might relax better and stop screaming.'

Roberta felt like screaming. It was OK for him, driving to work in a nice silent car, staying late at the office then going to the pub, engaging with grown-ups who talk rather than gurgle and who smell of aftershave rather than Nappy San.

'Calm down.' James repeated. 'Go to Barry's and buy a nice bottle of bubbly, push the boat out, thirty or forty quid. Go home and stick it in the fridge and I'll pick up a nice

takeaway.’

‘OK. Congratulations,’ she muttered and climbed back into the ear-splitting interior. She shoved a Kleenex in each of her ears and drove on.

Ten minutes later, she pulled up in the inshot outside Barry’s. The sky was darkening, the temperature had dropped. As she removed her makeshift earplugs, she looked at Sholto, and his mouth was closed.

In the car there was only the quiet rattle of the rain on the roof, the gentle rumble of the engine, and the easy rasp of Sholto’s breathing. Then the engine cut off.

He had stopped crying.

Actually stopped crying.

His blue eyes widened and looked up at hers, beguiling in their threat to start again.

She waited.

He remained quiet.

She reached to undo the seat belt and stopped as he opened his mouth. Moving him now might not be a good idea.

She looked into the shop window. Barry was visible through the row of hams hanging across the window, chatting animat-edly as he wrapped something small in paper and placed it in a plastic bag. The queue was short. She caught his eye and waved at him. He waved back, recognizing the car, if not the driver. She watched him as he turned and said something to a customer at the back of the shop, pointing out to the street.

Slowly and gently, she slid out the driver’s seat and eased the car door over, without closing it properly to avoid any harsh clicks. She dashed into the shop, scanning the shelves of sparkly, then making her way to the fridge at the back. This was going to be her first drink for a year. She could feel her taste buds tingling already.

Barry asked her how she was doing as she handed over the bottle of chilled Tattinger. He wrapped it slowly in tissue paper and tucked the ends in neatly. Roberta looked out at the car, checking that it was OK and that the monster was not awake and screaming.

‘James got the job?’ Barry asked.

‘How did you guess?’

'You look happy. You had any sleep yet?' Barry took her credit card and wandered to the machine at the counter.

'Nope but he's stopped crying now so I live in hope.' She followed him, giving the car a glance over her shoulder. 'Last night he slept for a whole hour and a half. Imagine!' She listened to Barry telling her that his middle boy had been like that, but had grown out of it eventually.

'How long was eventually?' Roberta asked, hopefully.

Barry handed her the machine for her pin number. 'Well, he started sleeping then sleep walking, then not sleeping again, then coming into our bed every two minutes, then teething and screaming the house down. In fact, he has been a right pain in the arse from the moment he was born.'

Roberta played along, enjoying this adult exchange, being witty, using her brain. Something beyond 'The Wheels On The Bus'. 'And how old is he now?'

'Twenty-six. He still lies in bed all day, playing his Xbox. Still talks crap. But you've got to love them.'

Roberta smiled, took the bottle and the credit card in its little blanket of receipt.

She walked out the shop, busy holding the bottle, slipping the credit card safely in her purse, closing the clasp, watching her step on the wet floor, before she looked up.

The Duster was gone.

DCI Colin Anderson listened to Brenda's voicemail but didn't leave another message. It was after five, she was normally home with Peter by now, giving their son his tea. Reluctantly, he joined the queue at the water cooler outside the main investigation suite. His meeting at West End Central was running late, so he may as well stay on and work the rest of the evening. He had nothing much to go home to. He eavesdropped on one of his new colleagues, Steve, talking about his vengeful ex-wife, his money-grabbing present wife and the wondrous tottie he had his sights on for wife number three. Anderson and Brenda – he couldn't even refer to her as an 'estranged wife' – had a very good relationship. In Steve's opinion that was due to the little matter of Anderson inheriting a million-pound house, despite him arguing, truth-



fully, that it was the twenty-year marriage and two kids that kept them close.

And Steve had laughed.

Was it him or were all cops complete dicks these days?

Bruce, Stevie's partner in crime, took out his mobile and began scrolling. 'The jury in the Kissel case are back. Guilty on all counts.'

'Was there ever a doubt? That kid was dead in the flat for six months before anybody noticed. I'm surprised they are not asking for the death penalty to be reinstated.'

'And your old pal was front page news, did you see that? The old woman?'

Anderson tried to make the connection in his mind. He had seen the headlines. It was a long time before the penny dropped. 'Costello, you mean, my old DI?' he said, well aware that he hadn't spoken to her about it, even though the case had been all over the media. Not so long ago, she would have been his first call. He looked at his watch, she'd be off duty by now. Maybe better to leave it.

'Word from Govan is that she made mistakes, her and that old pathologist. He should be retired by now anyway.' Stevie offered his valued opinion. 'There's a nice new pathologist over at the QE, little blonde, Welsh. Got an arse that could make a vicar kick a stained-glass window.'

Bruce chipped in. 'Costello's been drifting for a while. She must have been a dead weight in your career, Colin. I mean you were really going places. At one point. Is she retiring now?'

Retiring? Costello was only a few years younger than him. It was a chilling thought. Anderson looked at his phone, scrolling, pretending that he was reading the news updates on the Kissel case. God, in the old days they had shared everything, sat on surveillance in frozen cars for bum-achingly tedious hours, sipping tea from a flask and eating cold chips. He knew her so well he could choose her as his specialist subject on Mastermind. She was one of the few women he knew who was happy to sit in silence. Why had he not phoned her? Was he jealous that she was still out there doing the job while he was stuck in here with the Versace twins?

And did they see him as they saw her, old with his career

well and truly behind him?

Cold case units had so many different names to mask the reality of the bureaucratic game of pass the parcel. They opened files, a quick check to see if any advancement in forensics might help or if there was any nicely preserved, uncontaminated material to test. There rarely was. So the file was closed again and left for the next review.

He was going to be the sixth unwanted cop to review the Gillian Witherspoon case. What was he supposed to do? Go out and interview Gillian, so she knew she wasn't forgotten? 'Under constant review' sounded like good policing to some but to others making contact with the victim every three years only dragged up painful memories that prevented them from moving on.

He looked at the picture inside the front page of the file, a pleasant, totally unremarkable woman except that on the 15th of March 1996, Gillian, a young, busy mum of two, had nipped out to her local shop for a pint of milk at night after watching the ten o'clock news, full of the horror of the Dunblane massacre. She had pulled her coat over her PJs, slipped on her trainers and picked up her purse to walk down to the main road and the garage shop. It was well covered by CCTV, it was an unseasonably warm night, the area was well lit. Everybody knew everybody. Nobody saw anything.

But somebody had been watching.

She was found behind the bins, bleeding badly. She couldn't remember what she saw, or heard, or smelled, or tasted, only that she had been aware of somebody.

End of.

As the rage of Thomas Hamilton unfolded, Gillian got lost in the later pages of the press. She had been divorced in 1998. Anti-depressants followed. Not an unfamiliar story.

'Looks like we are reconvening.' Stevie crushed his plastic cup in his fist and tossed it into the non-recyclable. 'Yeeees,' he said, 'got it in one.'

'You've still got the moves,' agreed Bruce, and they high fived each other. Anderson walked quickly away before they started French kissing.

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Roberta stopped dead, the world stopped with her. For a

stupid moment, she turned to glance behind her, thinking she had come out a different door of the shop. She looked up and down the street, but the Duster was gone.

The car parking space was empty.

The baby was gone.

Baby Sholto was gone.

She dropped the bottle. It exploded onto the concrete, feathering the streets with champagne.

She turned around to see if anybody was about. 'Did you see? Did anybody see? Where is my son, where is my baby?' She knew that the words were coming out her mouth but they didn't sound right. She was merely making noises.

Grabbing a pensioner in a grey raincoat, she screamed in her face, 'Sholto? Sholto? Sholto! Where is the blue Duster? There was a blue Duster parked right there.' She pointed, then grabbed the old lady again, this time by the shoulders, and began to shake her. 'Did you see them? Who drove my car away?'

Then strong hands were removing hers from the damp grey raincoat. Barry was out the shop, shouting at his assistants, sending one to run up the street, the other down. The Duster couldn't have gone far.

Roberta was aware she was screaming. 'Where did that car go?' she shouted in the woman's face, flecking her skin with saliva. She plunged her hands onto her pockets, grabbing only the silky lining and fresh air, frantically searching for her phone. It was on the dashboard of the car. James had called. She'd put it back in the cradle on the dashboard. After she had moaned about Sholto, about how horrible he was, how noisy.

Well, her world was quiet now.

She heard Barry on his mobile calling the police. The old woman was telling her to calm down.

'Where did it go?' She heard the screeching of a banshee. She knew it was her, but she couldn't stop herself.

Now Barry was stopping people, the woman at the auto bank, the teenager walking her pug, another customer. Roberta scanned them, her finger held horizontally, pointing at each one, thinking that one of them could have taken the baby; one of them must have seen something they were not telling

her. It was a conspiracy. They were all in it together. Cars do not disappear, not in that short period of time. How long had it been?

She heard the word 'Duster'.

'What? What?' She wiped the snot from her face.

The teenager with the pug pointed. 'Look, there's a blue Duster parked round there.'

Just as the man who worked the front till for Barry shouted something from the end of the road and waved up the side street.

Roberta ran to the corner, to the narrow road that led to the small car park behind the shops. Not somewhere to leave a car on a rainy, darkening night. Not somewhere she would have parked. She thought she had been careful.

The Duster was there. She looked at it and stopped dead, registering the number plate. Then began moving quickly again, almost laughing. Somebody had played a little joke and she had fallen for it. She could see the front seat, the outline of Sholto's car seat, still in its place. She ripped open the door. Wrapped up warm in his yellow blanket, the baby was there. He was fine.

He was quiet, he was gurgling and content.

She pulled down his fluffy blue coverlet trimmed with cream fluffy lambs.

And then she started screaming.

In the end, Costello decided to get into a worse mood. She had got soaked twice shopping. Having gone in for a two-pound bottle of shampoo, she came out having spent thirty quid. There was a special offer on a cream that would energize her skin, make her twenty years younger and a foot taller. It would make her wake up each morning at five a.m. and eat yoghurt. If she was lucky, it might make her look like the skinny Scandinavian twelve-year-old supermodel on the cover of the box, but she doubted it.

She was nibbling a blueberry muffin in the coffee shop, quietly drawing a blue Groucho moustache on the supermodel when they walked past on the opposite side of the road. Archie with the brunette on his arm, sharing his umbrella. She was

slightly smaller than him, despite her strutting along in very high heels. Costello thought she could see a flash of red soles. A young woman pushed a pram towards them. They didn't break stride as they sidestepped, both keeping under the shelter of his umbrella. As if they were used to walking together. The muffin went dry in her mouth. The brunette had stopped and turned her face to Archie. He leaned forward. Had he kissed her in the middle of Byres Road? He barely spoke to Costello in public, never mind show her any affection. She growled inwardly as the brunette turned towards the kerb, holding up her car keys.

'Holy Jesus,' muttered Costello as the lights flickered on a Porsche tucked into the kerb. A black Porsche Panamera? Who the hell was she?

What was she?

With Archie's wife, Pippa, in a care home for nearly a year now, enough time had passed for him to bring along a lady companion to the Law Society events. Places he had never asked Costello to attend. Not that she would have gone.

Had she only been a stopgap in his life? An emotional Elastoplast until time healed the wound?

She had always appreciated his need for privacy out of respect for his profession. Maybe the secrecy was for quite a different reason.

Maybe he was a two-timing little shit.

Her thoughts ran riot. Was there a conspiracy? Did Anderson know about it? Was that why he had not been in touch? Bloody men sticking together as usual. If anybody was good at convincing themselves they were being benignly unfaithful, it was her ex-boss DCI Colin Anderson.

She studied Archie's face as the Porsche pulled away, his hand raised in the rain. He remained on the pavement under the shelter of his umbrella, watching the Porsche merge into the queue of traffic.

He had never stood at his window watching her leave.

Abigail Haggerty had been home from the surgery since half twelve and had been cleaning ever since. Now it was half five and she hadn't finished. She still had the downstairs

bathroom to do, and she needed to vacuum the hall again. George liked the pile on the carpet to lie the same way, like a cricket pitch. That kind of thing made George happy. And if he was happy with the house then he might be more agreeable about her going out with her sister tonight. But then it had been George himself who had suggested that Valerie stay over, as she was in Glasgow anyway. He had even given her some money to treat Valerie to dinner before the theatre and that was a first.

It would be nice, like old times for the two of them. Abigail felt a bit guilty about not getting the housework done but instead, with the light dying, she stood at the window and looked past the monkey puzzle tree that dominated the garden, down the avenue, scrutinizing the houses, watching the sky change colour from blue to grey to black, the dark clouds rolling in. She liked watching the goings on in the street but was always careful to retreat behind the curtain when anybody looked up. Abigail couldn't recall the last time she had spoken to somebody in a non-professional capacity, either 'That'll be four pounds twenty please,' or 'Can I have a line for another two weeks' but tonight she could talk to Valerie, sisters together.

She had texted Mary-Jane to see if she wanted to come along but there was no response. There never was. Her daughter hadn't visited them for months now; she didn't get on too well with her stepdad. There was no animosity. They just didn't gel like a family. Abigail wondered, sometimes, where she was, the older one. Always somewhere else. Like wee Malcolm after school or at the weekend always somewhere better than here. When Malcolm eventually returned, he'd refuse his tea as he had 'already eaten'. Then he'd go upstairs and not be seen until the next morning. So, she didn't cook for him anymore. George said she shouldn't waste her time and money cooking food that Malcolm wasn't going to eat. The boy kept his bedroom door closed and left his bedclothes on the kitchen floor on a Monday, his laundry basket outside his bedroom door on a Friday. Each morning he took a pint of milk from the fridge and wound his way down the avenue, waving at Mrs Sinclair from number nine. Sometimes he met up with

the man at number four. Abigail didn't know the tall, skinny man's name but thought he was the dad of the wee baby in the dark blue pram.

They had gone to the last parents' night. Abigail had sat clutching her handbag to her chest as George did all the talking, chatting away with relaxed eloquence as she had sat tongue-tied, wondering who this child was, this young man they talked about. He was bright, Malcolm, they said. He had a future. He could go to university.

Just like his mum with her medical degree. Just like Aunt Valerie with her law degree. The words had floated through Abigail's mind but she had remained quiet. Malcolm wanted to study engineering. Not law. Not medicine. What good had her degree done her, leaving her too scared to cross her own front door step.

Her husband had nodded in encouragement, taking some pride in his offspring. That might last until they got home. He certainly had no interest in Abigail's career, forcing her to cut her clinics until, like now, she was hardly working at all. And he had no interest in Mary-Jane and her dreams of being a singer. She would never make it, head up in the clouds, full of empty ambition. And maybe if Malcolm belonged to another family, a family that fed him, that saw to his haircut and his dinner money. Maybe if he had a father who would give him a laptop to type on, a printer to produce his essays, yes maybe he would make it to university.

But his dad wouldn't. Not George.

Abigail glanced back at the clock. Malcolm would not be home for a while yet. She was surprised he had stayed in school the way he had been coughing and spluttering that morning. She hoped he was OK, feeling a little better. She missed him. Even when he was upstairs, locked in his room, she could hear him moving around, the odd floorboard squeak and when she was allowed upstairs she would go and lean her head against the door, not really listening, but hearing his movements all the same, sensing that there was somebody alive in this bloody house. Malcolm could still make her smile. Sometimes, on one of her bad days, he would make her a cup of tea and bring it to her in bed. On Mother's Day, he had

made her up a tray with a few colourful weeds out the garden, stuck in an old jam jar. There had been scrambled egg with lots of eggshell in it, and a napkin folded into a swan. She had kept that, for a while, under her pillow, unfolding it as far as she dared before she couldn't get it folded back up again. Then George had found it and threw it in the fire.

She looked at the clock again, rubbing her arm to ease her bruises. The anniversary clock on the mantelpiece was going on for six. George might be back soon, she had better get a move on and get the carpet vacuumed before Valerie arrived. She hated that clock and its perfect time keeping. Its message was always the same; that was another day of her life she wasn't going to get back.

It was getting dark, the rain shortening the day. It might have been her mood, but she felt daylight had somehow escaped her today. She wondered where Malcolm was. When was he coming home to confront her with those black empty eyes that so reminded her of George. He was so like his dad. Too like his dad.

Mary-Jane was lucky, she had grown up and slipped out of her stepdad's shadow before he had time to notice. But Malcolm was stuck. And at night, as she stared at the ceiling worrying about the man who shared her bed, she worried that her son might not be allowed to grow up at all.

The system had been updated with Gillian Witherspoon's number. Before driving out to the house, Colin Anderson had already read the notes of DCI Lennard, who Anderson did not know personally but he admired the man's style. The update was comprehensive and personal with paragraphs detailing the passing of Gillian's mother, her remarriage and the acquisition of a stepson to her own family of two boys. Anderson did a quick calculation. Her own boys would be in their early twenties now, her stepson about fourteen or so. Gillian had been his mother for most of his young life.

She now lived in a semi-detached in a quiet estate in Cardonald. He could have phoned first but a footnote on the file said that a cold call would be better, not giving her time to fret, which sounded to Anderson more like they were giving



her no chance to reject the meeting.

It looked like he was in luck and there was somebody at home. Anderson saw the Corsa in the driveway. He walked up the path, seeing the backs of greeting cards, a series of white rectangles standing to attention on the windowsill.

The door opened at his knock, a young woman answered, looking like she had a cold, eyes red and running, a handkerchief jammed to her nose.

‘Hello?’ she sniffed.

‘Hi.’ He was wrong-footed, no idea who this woman was. ‘Hi, I am looking for Gillian, if I could have a quick word?’

She stared at him, her little buck teeth opened, the hanky went up to her nose, and she slowly shut her eyes. And she closed the door on him.

He placed his finger against it. It had shut firm. So not simply away to get Gillian. He stepped back, casually looking in the window, trying to see if Gillian was going to appear, maybe curious about her unexpected visitor.

The door flew open again, an older man. Her husband? He was small and powerfully built, not somebody to be messed with.

‘And what do you want?’ His words were clipped by anger.

Anderson realized he had landed right in the middle of something. ‘I would like a quiet word with Gillian please. Witherspoon was her maiden name, I know she has remarried.’ He stood on the step with his sincere face on, hoping that his hint about the time that had lapsed might get his message across without him having to spell it out. He was not going to break Gillian’s confidence.

‘And who are you?’

‘My name is Colin Anderson, though that might mean nothing to her.’ He conceded.

‘What do you want to speak to her about?’ The brown eyes bored into his, searching.

‘It’s a personal call just to see how she was doing.’ He again hoped that was enough, without going into detail.

‘Not much of a personal call if she wouldn’t know your name.’

‘She’d know Bobby Lennard.’ That got a reaction, a slight

withdrawal of the head. 'And who are you?' asked Anderson pleasantly, looking at the bright white shirt, thrown into contrast by the plain black tie.

*Oh shit.*

Anderson recognized the hint of resignation on the other's face, so he kept his own voice polite and engaging as he lifted his warrant card keeping it shielded by his palm, aware that there were people behind the door listening, peering out the window, watching.

The man closed his eyes and sighed, pulled his hand over his face then reached back closing the living-room door behind him so nobody else could overhear. Anderson noticed the three people staring out the window were all dressed in black.

'Could you come upstairs for a minute?' The man stood back, backhanding a lock of grey hair from a furrowed brow. He gestured to the steep internal set of stairs, resplendent in a plush dark-red carpet. The downstairs hall was covered in boxes, some open, some taped up, some with clothes piled up on top of them. Women's clothes.

Were they moving out?

As he went up the stairs, one foot in front of the other, thoughts darted into his head with every tread. The cars parked outside. The cards on the window ledge. The red-rimmed eyes. The gathering in the downstairs room. Why Gillian herself was still to come to the door.

The black tie.

Black.

Shit. Talk about bad timing.

He had come at a very bad time.

Gillian had a father, who would now be an elderly man and might now be lying in a wooden box in the room downstairs.

'I am so sorry. I now realize that this is a very difficult time to call. I apologize,' Anderson said when he stepped onto the tiny landing, noting the small nest of tables. The top was covered with a silver framed photograph of Gillian and a younger version of the man now following him up the stairs. She held a small posy of flowers in front of her light-

blue dress, a matching group of flowers nestled in her dark hair.

‘You have no idea how bad your timing is,’ said the man. ‘I’m Gerry. Gerry Stewart. Gillian’s husband.’

‘Glad to meet you.’

‘I’m afraid your journey has been in vain.’

Anderson stepped through into the bedroom, noticing another photograph of Gillian on the pillow, only one half of the bed had been slept in.

The two men looked at each other. Gerry’s eyes started to well up.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

‘I am so, so sorry.’ Anderson felt like a total bastard.

‘Not your fault. She told me that she was expecting a review of . . . the incident. She spent her life waiting for that knock on the door.’

‘I hope we were never intrusive.’

Gerry shook his head. ‘No. No. She never thought that. She wanted the bastard caught. Not got him yet though, have you?’

Gerry sat down on the bed, Anderson leaned against the windowsill. The hopper was open slightly, the cool draft making him realize how stifling the bedroom was. They remained in total silence for a few seconds making the sound of approaching footsteps immediately apparent. There was a quick knock at the door before it opened.

‘You OK, Gerry?’ The slightly older one asked.

Not his son then. Anderson could see the resemblance, these were Gillian’s boys.

‘Yeah. I was telling Mr Anderson here what a great woman your mum was.’

‘I am sorry, I had no idea . . .’ said Anderson, not bringing himself to say that he was sorry for their loss, it had always sounded so trite.

‘Looks like there was someone we forgot to tell. So, thank you for coming, Mr Anderson, I think you can update your records now. Gillian passed away last week. Monday it was.’ He glanced at his stepsons for confirmation. ‘Seems a lifetime ago.’

‘I’m so, so sorry. I have been there. I know what you are going through, time seems to slow down to the point of standing

still. She couldn't have been that old?'

'She was 45. We were about to go to Dublin for her birthday but she was having an operation and died while under the anaesthetic. Routine, they said, but she never woke up.' He shook his head. 'Never had a chance to say goodbye.' He dropped his head into his hands, Anderson placed his own hands on the man's shoulder.

'I'll leave you to your mourning. I never met her but she seemed a fine woman.'

Gerry's hand slipped over Anderson's, a rough hand, calloused with the hard skin of one who knew manual work. 'You have no idea how strong she was.'

Anderson thought of Helena, riddled with cancer, stepping in front of Claire on a dark rainy beach, sacrificing herself to save his daughter. He too had known strong women.