

WHO IS TO BLAME WHEN  
NO ONE IS INNOCENT?



**ALAN PARKS**

A HARRY MCCOY THRILLER

**BOBBY MARCH  
WILL LIVE  
FOREVER**

'Think McIlvanney or *Get Carter*' IAN RANKIN

*It's Billy the desk sergeant that takes the call. A woman on the phone, breathless, scared, half crying. She says, 'I'd like to report a missing child.'*

*And suddenly everything changes.*

*When news of a call like that comes in, everyone sits up at their desks, stops filling in their pools coupon, puts down their half-eaten rolls. The ones with kids open their wallets under their desks, look at the pictures of Colin or Anne or wee Jane and thank God it's not theirs that have gone. The young ones look serious, try not to imagine pulling some weeping toddler from a cellar or from under a bed, being congratulated by the boss, thanked by a tearful mother.*

*Those that are religious cross themselves or say a silent prayer to keep the kid safe. And those that have lived through a case like this before say hello to the familiar dread and fear in their stomach, the knowledge that there is no end of bad things that men can do to children, that the missing child might be better off dead already.*

*And like a pebble dropped in the water, the ripples start to spread throughout the city. No matter the lockdown, news of a missing child always gets out. Cops come home, tell their wives and girlfriends not to tell anyone but they do. A shilling drops in a phone box across the road from the station, a reporter at the Daily Record answers and a beat cop earns a tenner for his trouble. Isn't long until the boys*

*selling the papers outside Central Station are shouting 'Final edition! Missing girl!'*

*And before you know it the missing girl is all the city is talking about. It's all the cops talk about when they assemble in church halls to get instructions for the search, all the reporters talk about – how they can get to the parents, taking bets on when she'll be found. It's all the kids in the back courts talk about, whispered rumours and stories about being dragged into a car.*

*And as the night falls and the chatter dies down there's still one person who doesn't know what Glasgow is talking about. Alice Kelly. She's the one person who doesn't know that all of Glasgow is talking about her. All she knows is that she's got a cloth bag over her head, that her hands are tied and that she's wet her pants. And there's one other thing Alice knows. It doesn't matter how hard she cries for her mum, her mum can't hear her. Nobody can.*

16th February 1964

Glasgow

*The train was freezing but he didn't care. The 6.15 to King's Cross. He was really going. Tom had brought a bag of cans with him, handed them out as they left Central. They were drinking them now. Him, Scott, Barry and Jamie. All of them feet up on the seats, full of chips, smoking away. Telling jokes. Pretending they weren't nervous.*

*Bobby sat forward and checked his pocket again. It was there, just like every other time he'd checked. The contract he'd had to beg his dad to sign. Couldn't sign it himself, too young, only seventeen. His dad said he should become an apprentice, steady money, but no way was he doing that. Two weeks of sulking and begging and eventually his dad gave in.*

*He couldn't believe it when he saw it. Parlophone written at the top of it. Just like The Beatles. Exclusive rights to the music of The Beatkickers. Wee Bobby March from Arden, him, in a train going to London to do a recording session for the same label as The Beatles. Tom said it would be fine, told him not to worry about it, that he was the only one of them that could actually bloody play.*

*He looked round the carriage. Tom wasn't wrong. Jamie was a half-decent drummer when he tried. Scott couldn't play the bass to save his life and Barry could hold a tune. Just. But that wasn't all that mattered, Tom said. What mattered was that Barry was good-looking, very good-looking. And he knew it. Steel comb was never out his hand, fixing his hair, wee backcomb to give it height, then a perfect blond fringe. Clothes always right, whitest teeth Bobby had ever seen.*

*The carriage door slid back and Tom was standing there. Polo neck and a pair of denims. Was a big guy, Tom, six foot odds, strong. Used to work on the furniture vans. Now he was the Beatkickers' manager, had bought them the suits and everything. And they were going places. He clapped his hands.*

*'All good, boys?'* he asked.

*They nodded, held up the cans in cheers.*

*Scott dropped his chin to his chest, burped loudly. They all started laughing.*

*'Dirty bugger,' said Tom, pretended to give him a clout over the ear. Scott swerved, almost fell off the seat.*

*'That'll teach you,' said Tom. Then he pointed at Barry. 'You, son, you come wi' me for a minute.'*

*Bobby took a swig of his warm beer, wondered why it was always Barry Tom needed to talk to. Maybe he was giving him tips about tomorrow, microphones, that sort of stuff. Barry stood up, followed Tom out the door. Scott burped again. They laughed again.*

13th July 1973

## ONE

McCoy looked at his watch. Quarter past eight. The call had come in just before six last night, so fifteen hours or so she had been missing. The time for her to have got lost or stayed at a pal's was long gone. A thirteen-year-old girl doesn't go missing for fifteen hours, overnight, without something being very, very wrong.

He turned into Napiershall Street and swore. Any hope he'd had of having a quiet look around was gone. The circus had already come to town. Concerned-looking mums with weans in their arms talking to each other in hushed voices, kids attracted by the police cars, a few press blokes he recognised from the dailies sitting on the wall smoking, waiting for any new developments. *Evening Times* photographer wiping the lens of his camera with his tie. Four or five panda cars parked outside the pub and an incident van set up across the road. Was even some nutter with a sandwich board with a biblical quote on it walking up and down, handing out tracts. He swore under his breath, crossed the road and headed for the entrance.

The doors of the Woodside Inn had been wedged open to try and let some air in. He stepped in and realised it wasn't doing much good, was even hotter inside. A few shafts of light

from the closed-over shutters pierced the fog of dust and cigarette smoke, making the place feel more like a church than a Maryhill pub. Took his eyes a few seconds to adjust to the gloom, to see how much the Woodside had changed.

Wasn't really a pub any more, was now a temporary Police HQ. Twenty or so uniforms, hats off, sleeves rolled, were sitting on the benches at the back being handed door-to-door assignments by Thomson. A big map of the surrounding area – Maryhill, North Woodside, Firhill – was laid out on one of the tables, corners held down by Johnnie Walker water jugs. Map was marked into sections, some of them scored off already. A young policewoman was wandering round with a tray of pint glasses full of water, handing them out to everyone. Two blokes in boiler suits were trying to connect three navy-blue telephones sitting on the bar, while the landlord sat on a stool at the side looking like he didn't know what had hit him, fag in one hand, pint in the other.

The door to the Gents opened and the one person McCoy didn't want to see came out, wiping his hands on a paper towel. Bernie Raeburn in all his portly glory. Raeburn was one of those men that took a bit too much care over what they looked like. Brylcreemed hair, neat moustache, silver tie pin, shoes shined. Probably thought he looked quite the thing. To McCoy, he just looked like what he was: a wide boy. Raeburn dropped the paper towel into a bin by one of the tables and peered over at McCoy. Didn't look happy to see him. Didn't look happy at all.

'What you doing here?' he asked.

'Was at a call round the corner. Just came to see if there was anything I could do?' said McCoy.

'Did you now?' said Raeburn, looking amused. 'Think we'll manage. Plenty of us boys here already.'

'Okay.' McCoy resisted the urge to tell Raeburn exactly where to shove his boys. 'Any news?'



‘Getting there,’ said Raeburn. ‘Getting there . . .’

He held his finger up. Wait. Took his suit jacket off, smoothed down his pale blue shirt. Decided he was ready to speak.

‘Actually, McCoy, there is something you can do to help. Need you to go back to the shop, tell Billy on the front desk to start calling round. Want anyone who hasn’t already gone on their holidays back in, soon as. Need the manpower for the door-to-doors.’

McCoy nodded, kept his temper. Tried not to look at the row of new telephones on the bar.

‘So the sooner the better, eh?’ added Raeburn, looking at the door.

McCoy stood there for a minute, trying to decide what to do. The pub had suddenly gone silent, could even hear the big black flies buzzing against the windows. Knew everyone was watching, waiting to see what would happen. Round twenty-odds in the continuing fight between Raeburn and McCoy. They’d even opened a book back at the shop: how long will it take before one lamps the other? Current best bet was about a week.

McCoy took a breath, smiled. Being talked to like that was almost more than he could take but he knew that unless he did exactly what Raeburn told him, he’d be on report soon as Raeburn’s fat fingers could fill out the form. Raeburn’s plan was simple. Just keep pushing and pushing in the hope McCoy’d react and then he would have an excuse to get rid of him. McCoy wasn’t going to give the bastard the satisfaction. Not today anyway.

‘Will do,’ he said cheerily.

He was outside the pub before his fists uncurled. He got his cigarettes out his pocket, was lighting up, thinking of the various and many ways he’d like to hurt Raeburn, when he looked up and Wattie was standing there.

‘Heard you were here, sir,’ he said.

‘Was at a call. Offered to help but seems Raeburn’s fine as he is. Wants me to get back to the shop.’

Wattie’s blond hair was stuck to his head with sweat. Dark rings spread around the underarms of his short-sleeved shirt. He wiped a hanky across his forehead, noticed McCoy looking.

‘Been doing door-to-doors, up and down the bloody stairs of these closes,’ he said. ‘I’m sweating like a glassblower’s arse.’

McCoy laughed. ‘Christ, Wattie, where’d you get that one?’

Wattie grinned. ‘My dad used to say it.’ He opened his top button, loosened his tie. ‘First time I’ve actually known what he meant.’

‘So that’s the bold Raeburn’s great idea, is it?’ asked McCoy. ‘Interview a load of people who’ve seen and heard bugger all so he can tick that off on his list? He’s even stupider than I thought.’

‘Harry, come on, It’s no my fault that Raeburn is—’

‘I know, I know,’ said McCoy. ‘Just joking.’

Wattie was right. It really wasn’t his fault. Poor guy, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea and he knew it. Had to take his hat off to the bastard for that one. What better way to wind McCoy up than by keeping him away from what was going to be the biggest case of the year and bringing Wattie in as his right-hand man. Rubbing salt in the wound didn’t come into it.

Wattie held up a list of addresses. ‘Got to ring a few more bells. Want to come with me?’

McCoy nodded and they set off up Maryhill Road, sticking to the shady side of the street.

‘Any news?’ he asked.

Wattie shook his head. ‘Nothing we didn’t know last night. Alice Kelly’s still missing and half the Glasgow force are running around like blue-arsed flies trying to find her.’

‘What’s the mum saying?’ asked McCoy, as they walked

round a queue of people waiting at the bus stop outside McGovern's.

'Not much. If the poor cow's no crying, she's almost cata-tonic. Her sister's come from Linlithgow, she's up there with her now. Next-door neighbour's taken the baby in.' Wattie got his hanky out his pocket, wiped the sweat from his forehead again. 'You should see the house, it's mental. Like a bloody shrine. Celtic, the Pope and John F. Bloody Kennedy.'

McCoy smiled. 'Sounds like every other good Catholic household. Half the houses in Glasgow are like that.'

'Maybe,' said Wattie. 'But the whole bloody place was covered. I even got a tea in a mug with the bloody Lisbon Lions on it.'

'Surprised you managed to swallow it through your gritted teeth,' said McCoy. 'She give a statement?'

Wattie nodded. 'Seems the wee girl was cracking on all morning, asking her mum for money for a cone. The baby was playing up and her moaning wasn't helping, so she gives in and says the girl can have five pence.'

McCoy looked back down the street. 'She go into Coccozza's?'

Wattie shook his head. 'She met the neighbour that's taken the baby when she came out the close, told her she was going up to Jaconelli's.'

They looked up the hill, could see the familiar awning of Jaconelli's in the distance.

'Cone's only four pence up there, it's five in Coccozza's. If she went to Jaconelli's she'd have a penny left for the penny tray, was going to get a bazooka joe. Mum thought she was just coming down to Coccozza's across the street. Only reason she let her go.'

'So?' asked McCoy, getting his cigarettes out his pocket. 'Let me guess. Seen in Jaconelli's then?'

Wattie shook his head. 'Nope. The last sighting was the

neighbour. Saw her walking up Maryhill Road before she went back in the close. She disappeared into thin air somewhere between her flat and Jaconelli's.

'And what's Raeburn saying to that?' said McCoy, stopping to light up.

Wattie checked his list of addresses, looked up the street and they started walking again.

'He's saying someone must have seen her. He's got every bugger he can get a hold of, including me, doing door-to-doors. Forty-six is up here, no answer last night or earlier this morning.'

'He's from Govan, Raeburn. Glasgow born and bred,' said McCoy, shaking his head. 'You'd think he'd realise these door-to-doors are a waste of time.'

Wattie looked at him. 'How come?'

'There's a reason no one's answering. Today's Fair Friday. Most of the people that were around yesterday will have left today for their holidays. You're going to be knocking on a lot of empty doors. Even if somebody did see her, they'll no be back for a fortnight.'

Wattie looked pained. 'Shite. Never thought of that.'

'Aye well, you're from Greenock, that's an excuse. Raeburn should have, though. Whole bloody city is on holiday for the next two weeks.'

Wattie checked his bit of paper, stopped outside a close. 'This is us. They knocked the door last night, no answer. Trying again.'

'Great,' said McCoy. 'Please don't tell me it's the top flat.'

'You're in luck,' said Wattie, stepping into the dark of the close. 'First floor.'

They tramped up the stairs. Inside of the close was cool and dark, with just the noise of a radio from one of the flats. Sounded like Lulu, of all people.

'Where's the dad?' asked McCoy, as Wattie knocked on the door.

‘Belfast, apparently. Working. Been away for a week or so.’

No reply. Tried again.

‘Mother got a boyfriend?’ asked McCoy.

‘Don’t know,’ said Wattie.

‘Should find out. You know as well as me, nine times out of ten it’s the dad or the stepdad.’

Knocked again. They waited.

‘Told you,’ said McCoy. ‘Be away on their holidays.’

Wattie nodded, looked at his bit of paper.

‘How many more?’ asked McCoy.

A quick totting-up. ‘Another twelve.’

They walked back down the stairs, could hear the radio better now. Definitely Lulu. ‘I’m A Tiger’. They stepped out the close, back into the heat and the glare of the sun.

‘Well, much as I’d like to accompany you on your travels, Wattie, I have my orders. Have to get back to the shop.’

Wattie looked pained. ‘Harry, you know working with Raeburn isn’t up to me. I didn’t even want—’

McCoy held his hand up. ‘I know, I know. Don’t worry about it, it’s between me and Raeburn. And I’m not that bothered. Quite enjoying the peace and quiet. But you stick in there. This is a big case, see what you can learn.’

Wattie grinned. ‘Then report back to you?’

‘Did I say that? Now, beat it before Raeburn sends out the search party.’

Wattie nodded, started walking up the road, stopped and turned. ‘Forgot to say. Think Raeburn might be putting you on they bank robberies.’

‘What?’ said McCoy, dismayed. ‘You’re joking, aren’t you?’

Wattie grinned. ‘Thought you’d be happy. Got to be better than twiddling your thumbs, though.’

‘Not for me, it’s not. I like twiddling my thumbs.’ Dawned on him. ‘And this would be the robberies you and Raeburn

have been on for two months and still haven't got anywhere? Great. Tell him thanks but no thanks.'

'Not sure you've got much of a choice,' said Wattie. 'What you going to say to him?'

McCoy sighed. Knew Wattie was right. Just when things couldn't get any worse, they had.

'Please tell Detective Sergeant Raeburn I would be delighted to help with the investigation in any way I can.'

Wattie smiled. 'I'll maybe not say it exactly like that. Files are on my desk. Have a look.'

Wattie waved, walked up the road looking back down at his bit of paper. McCoy watched him go, couldn't believe how hot it was already. Might get a taxi to the shop, wasn't sure he could face walking there, not in this weather. Anyway, wasn't like he was going to get a hold of anyone. Anyone who had holidays would have gone by now, and even if they hadn't, they weren't stupid enough to answer the phone and get pulled back in. He opened his packet of fags and realised he'd only one left. Crossed the street to the newsagent. There was a board leaning against the wall outside. Crossed wire covering the headline.

'SEARCH CONTINUES FOR MISSING GIRL'.

Raeburn had his work cut out for him. This was the kind of case that sells papers, gets people talking, wanting to know all the grisly details. The kind that gets a braying crowd outside the court. Pitt Street would be on him too. Longer the girl was missing, the more incompetent the polis would look and the big boys couldn't have that. They'd want her found, soon as. And if she was dead by the time Raeburn found her? Then he'd better get the guy who did it. And quick.