

12th April 1974

ONE

‘Who on earth is going to set off a bomb in Woodlands?’ asked McCoy. ‘It’s the back arse of Glasgow.’

‘The IRA?’ asked Wattie.

‘Maybe,’ said McCoy. ‘It’s Easter Friday I suppose. Not sure blowing up a shitey rented flat in Glasgow is the best way of striking at the British Establishment, not exactly the Houses of Parliament, is it?’

They were standing in the middle of West Princes Street looking up at the blown-out windows and scorched sandstone of what had been the flat at number 43. The flats around had suffered too: cracked windows, torn curtains hanging out, a window box filled with daffodils sitting face down in the middle of the road. McCoy got his fags out and lit one, waved the match out, and dropped it on the wet street.

‘How come you know it’s rented anyway?’ asked Wattie.

‘They all are around here, rented or sublet, no rent book, no contract. Half of Glasgow’s waifs and strays live in the flats around here.’

‘You think that’s it started? Here I mean?’ asked Wattie. ‘Bombings?’

McCoy shrugged. 'Hope not but you know what they say. Glasgow is just Belfast without the bombs.'

'Until now that is,' said Wattie.

A shout from one of the firemen and they stepped back onto the pavement as a fire engine attempted a three-point turn in the narrow road. The whole street was a mess of fire engines, hoses, ambulances, police cars, uniforms trying to set up ropes to cordon the area off. The flats around 43 had been evacuated, residents standing in the street looking shocked, dressed in an assortment of different clothes from pyjamas and blanket-covered underwear to a man in a pinstripe suit and socks holding a cat in his arms.

A burly fireman emerged from the close and took his helmet off, sandy hair stuck to his head with sweat. He spat on the ground a couple of times and wandered over.

'It's safe,' he said. 'You can go up now.'

McCoy nodded. 'Any bodies?'

'One,' he said. 'Half of him's all over the walls, other half's burnt to a bloody crisp.'

McCoy's stomach turned over at the thought.

'All yours,' said the fireman and headed off to the reversing fire engine.

'Shite,' said McCoy. 'We're going to have to go up there, aren't we?'

'Yep,' said Wattie. 'You want to throw up now and get it over with?'

'Smartarse,' said McCoy, feeling like that was exactly what he wanted to do. 'Maybe we should wait for Faulds? He's on his way.'

'Any other excuses you can think of?' asked Wattie. 'Or is that it?'

McCoy sighed. 'Let's go.'

They ducked past the firemen rolling the hose back onto the wheel and headed into the close. Streams of water running

down the stairs, stink of smoke and burnt wood in the air. They trudged up the stairs, making for the top-floor flat and the inevitable gruesome scene.

‘You remembering about tonight?’ asked Wattie.

‘How could I forget it?’ said McCoy. ‘You keep reminding me every five minutes. I’ll be at your dad’s at six as instructed.’

‘He’s booked a Chinese,’ said Wattie. ‘Down in the town. It’s cheap.’

‘Great,’ said McCoy, making a mental note to eat before he went. A Chinese restaurant in Greenock whose selling point was that it was cheap sounded like a recipe for indigestion at best, food poisoning at worst.

They were at the top landing now. Front door of the flat had been burst open by the firemen, was hanging half on-half off its hinges. McCoy gave it one more go.

‘Maybe we should wait for Phyllis Gilroy?’ he asked. ‘What do we know about bomb casualties? She’s the medical examiner after all, she’s going to be much more use than you or me.’

Wattie sighed, looked at him. ‘Look, if you don’t want to go in, it’s fine. I’ll go.’

‘Really?’ asked McCoy. ‘That would be brill—’

‘Aye, and I’ll make sure and tell Murray when we get back to the station all about my commanding officer who was too scared to look at a crime scene.’

‘You really are becoming a bit of a smartarse, Watson,’ said McCoy.

‘Learnt from the best. Ready?’ asked Wattie and pushed the door aside.

The flat was half normal and half a wet, blackened mess. Smell of smoke was stronger inside, hit them as soon as they went in, catching in the back of their throats. There was another smell under it, something a bit like a Sunday roast. McCoy got a hanky out his pocket, held it over his nose and mouth,

didn't do much good. They walked through the hall and into the living room, feet squelching on the sticky mud of ash and water that now covered the carpet.

The living room must have been where the bomb had gone off. The tattered curtains were flapping in the breeze, blowing in and out the missing window frames. The mud was thicker in here as well, covering their shoes. McCoy was following Wattie in, trying to keep behind him so he blocked out the view – he was a good few inches taller than McCoy and a lot broader too. His plan was working fine until Wattie squatted down to pick up a half-melted LP out the mud and suddenly McCoy could see everything.

The bamboo-effect wallpaper by the fireplace looked like someone had splattered red paint all over it. He caught sight of hair and a tooth stuck into it before he managed to look away. On the floor, by what was left of the couch, there was what looked like a pile of burnt clothes. McCoy looked a bit closer, saw the white of a bone sticking out the pile and stepped back, familiar dizziness hitting him.

'Paul McCartney. *Ram*,' said Wattie peering at the label of the warped LP. 'Bloody awful.' He sat it back in the mud. 'Just like that album you made me buy. What was it? Inside Outside? Christ, you all right?' he asked.

McCoy was backed against the far wall, counting his breaths, trying not to pass out. He managed a nod, held his hanky up to his nose again, trying to block the roast beef smell. He looked around the flat, studiously avoiding looking down at the remains of the inhabitant. It looked like every other flat in Woodlands. Faded wallpaper, wee gas burner to cook on, an armchair that was sinking into itself, damp patches on the ceiling and walls. Why would anyone want to blow up a dump like this?

'I'll just go over by the window, get some fresh air,' he said, edging along the wall. Got to the big hole where the window had been and stuck his head out.

‘What a mess,’ said Wattie. ‘There’s a bit of his skull embedded in the plaster above the fireplace.’

‘That right?’ said McCoy, keeping his eyes firmly on the crowd in the street below and trying not to imagine what a bit of skull embedded in a wall looked like.

‘I thought you were over all this shite?’ said Wattie.

‘I thought I was too,’ said McCoy. ‘Tell you what, I’ll have a look around and see if I can find anything with his name on it, eh?’

He caught Wattie shaking his head as he edged back towards the hallway and made his way into the bedroom. It was still intact, bomb next door hadn’t made too much difference. Looked like the door had caught fire and been doused, that was about it. An unmade single bed, sleeping bag opened out over it. Wee set of drawers with an ashtray and a copy of *Melody Maker* on it. There was a poster of Black Sabbath on the wall, a couple of pictures of Ferraris above the bed. A young guy living here then.

He opened the drawers, usual array of pants and socks, scud book under a pile of T-shirts. Not many clues, couldn’t find anything with a name on it. Opened another drawer. A jumper, pair of 747 jeans. Couple of folded shirts. He closed it and walked over to the window. Glass was gone, took some breaths of fresh air. Down below, a panda car was weaving through the crowd and the parked fire engines. It pulled over as close to the flat as it could get and Hughie Faulds stepped out the back seat. He smoothed himself down, stretched. McCoy didn’t blame him, not easy to squash a six-foot-four frame into the back of a Viva. Faulds looked up at the flat, saw McCoy and waved.

McCoy shouted through, ‘Faulds is here!’

He sat down on the bed for a minute. Smelt stale, pillow-case was shiny with hair grease. He wasn’t quite sure what he was looking for. Just looked like any other rented flat. Noticed

there was a suitcase at the side of the drawers. He hauled it onto the bed and opened it up. Just more clothes – three button-down shirts, a tie, pair of baseball boots. He closed it, put it back, walked back through to the living room, took up his position by the window.

‘You think they’ll be able to get his wallet?’ asked McCoy.

Wattie looked at the burnt body, breathed in through his teeth. ‘Doubt it. If it was hot enough to do that to him, it’ll have been hot enough to burn his wallet into nothing.’

‘Probably right,’ said McCoy. ‘Think we’ll leave it to Gilroy to try and find it.’

Broad Belfast accent boomed in: ‘How’d you manage to get him up here?’

They turned and Hughie Faulds was standing there, size of him filling up the doorway.

‘Wasn’t easy,’ said Wattie. ‘Believe me.’

Faulds grinned, ‘Sure it’s just a bit of blood and guts, Harry. You must be used to it by now?’

‘Getting there,’ said McCoy, purposely keeping his eyes on the flats across the road. Old man in a cardigan staring back at him. ‘This look familiar?’ he asked.

‘That’s why I’m here, is it?’ asked Faulds. ‘Bloody bomb expert now, am I?’

‘Yep,’ said McCoy. ‘Don’t think anyone else on the force has ever seen a bomb site never mind knowing anything about it.’

Faulds barely glanced over at the damage then nodded. ‘Seen this scenario more than a few times back in Belfast. This place hasn’t been bombed at all.’

‘What?’ asked McCoy.

Faulds pointed at the pile of clothes by the couch. ‘This stupid bugger’s blown himself up trying to make one.’ He moved closer to the burnt mess, sniffed. ‘Almonds? Smell it?’

McCoy shook his head, wasn't taking the hanky off his nose again for anyone.

'A wee bit,' said Wattie. 'Why's that?'

'Means he was using Co-op mix,' said Faulds.

'What?' asked McCoy, getting increasingly lost.

'Called Co-op mix because you can get most of the ingredients for it in your local Co-op. Simple to make and pretty effective. Standard UDA and IRA stuff.'

'You sure?' asked McCoy. 'If one of them is involved we'll be off the hook. It'll go straight to the Special Branch boys. They'll be taking this one over.'

Faulds nodded over at what was left of the body. 'It happens more often than you'd think,' he said. 'Just 'cause it's easy to buy the ingredients they think that's all there is to it, that anyone can do it. Believe me, it's not as easy to make a bomb as these clowns think.'

'You sure that's what it is?' asked Wattie.

Faulds nodded. 'Textbook.' He looked around. 'And besides, why else would a bomb go off in a flat like this? Not exactly a legitimate target, is it?'

McCoy stayed at the wall and watched as Faulds wandered round examining the scene properly. Doing what McCoy should really be doing. Faulds pulled his suit trousers up to his calves and squatted down in front of the body to get a better look.

'Nasty,' he said. 'The bloke must have been right over it when it went off, probably trying to get the detonator connected.' He nodded over at the wall. 'Not sure you're going to get a dental identification either, all looks too fragmented. Half his jaw and teeth are sticking in that wall.'

He stood up, picked up a book that was floating in the sludge by the fireplace. Tried to shake some of the wet mud off, peered at the cover. '*The Life and Death of St Kilda*. You read it?'

McCoy shook his head.

Faulds peeled the front cover back, squinted at the faded ballpoint pen message. 'To Paul. Happy Birthday from Henry.'

'Shite,' said McCoy, 'Paul. Could be either side. Protestant or Catholic.'

'What were you hoping for?' asked Faulds. 'Finbar?'

'That would have been good,' said McCoy. 'That or Gary. Don't get many Catholics called Gary.'

Wattie appeared from the hallway, sodden pile of bills and junk mail in his hand. 'They're all different,' he said. Started reading them out. 'Miss E. Fletcher, Thomas Wright, The Occupier, Mr S.A. Bowen, C. Smith. Just goes on and on.'

'Any Pauls?' asked McCoy.

Wattie looked through the pile again. 'A Peter, but no Paul.'

'You done, Faulds?' asked McCoy.

Faulds nodded. 'Can't see anything out the ordinary. Just what you'd expect when a daft bugger doesn't know what he's doing.'

'So if it's Co-op mix, chances are it's paramilitary. You heard much about that in Glasgow?' asked McCoy.

Faulds shook his head. 'Not much. A few lads pretending they're in with the boys, showing off in the pubs. Mostly just fundraising here, maybe somebody hiding out that had to get out of Ireland. I can ask someone back home. See what the story is. Can I get back to Tobago Street now? Do my proper job?'

McCoy nodded. 'We'll come with you,' he said. 'Last thing I want is to be here when Special Branch turn up.'

'Or to spend any more time looking at blood splatters,' said Wattie.

'You, Watson,' said McCoy, 'need to shut your trap.'

Faulds grinned. 'He's not wrong though, is he? Must be a bit of a drawback for a detective, being scared of the sight of blood.'

'Not as bad as being a big Irish arsehole. Let's go.'

TWO

‘Results are back.’

McCoy looked at the doctor. Hadn’t really thought that much about it but he was suddenly a bit worried. He’d come in a few weeks ago, sore stomach had finally got the better of him. Was finding it hard to eat, was in pain most of the time. The doctor had sent him to the hospital where he’d drank a pint of chalky stuff then got an X-ray.

‘Right,’ he said.

The doctor, a miserable-faced Dundonian with a handlebar moustache, took the leg of his glasses out his mouth, put the X-ray down, and looked at him. Smiled.

‘It appears, Mr McCoy, that you have a peptic ulcer.’

‘A what?’ he asked.

‘An ulcer in the lining of your stomach. That’s what’s been causing the pain.’

‘Christ,’ said McCoy.

‘I’d rather you didn’t blaspheme,’ said the doctor.

‘Sorry,’ said McCoy, although he wasn’t. ‘So what do I do now?’

‘You stop drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes, you eat plain food, white mainly. Boiled fish, porridge, milk, rice, bread

not toast. That sort of thing. If the pain gets bad drink some Pepto-Bismol.'

McCoy was about to say Christ again, managed to stop himself.

'If you stick to that regime the pain should lessen,' said the doctor. 'As a policeman, I imagine you have a stressful occupation, irregular hours, none of that helps. Try and look after yourself. That's the best advice I have. I'm afraid we have no treatment that cures it or really helps very much. All down to you, I'm afraid.'

McCoy stood in the street outside the surgery and lit up. Could still smell the smoke from the flat on his clothes. He was only thirty-two, how had he ended up with a bloody ulcer? Thought that was something fat old men got. He watched as a man came out the off-sales across the street with a clinking plastic bag in his arms, started running for the bus. There was one thing he was sure of though – there was no way he was giving up smoking and drinking, wasn't even a possibility. If that left him with a diet of white food and Pepto-Bismol then so be it. He looked at his watch. Better get going if he was going to get to Greenock. Walked across the street to where he'd parked his car. At least the diagnosis had one upside – it was a perfect excuse not to have to eat rotten Chinese food tonight.

McCoy managed to make it to Wattie's dad's flat just after six and was led by Wattie's dad – Call Me Ken – into a tidy wee living room. Anaglypta wallpaper painted beige and a swirly green carpet, coffee table with a plate of salmon paste sandwiches sitting on it. Three-bar fire blasting out heat. Home sweet home.

Mary, Wattie's girlfriend, was sitting on a leatherette couch by the window, still looking a bit bewildered at what had happened to her. McCoy was a bit surprised too, was more used to seeing her in newsrooms and at crime scenes than

sitting on a couch holding a baby's bottle in one hand and a furry koala bear in the other.

'How's you?' asked McCoy, sitting down beside her.

'Exhausted,' said Mary, looking glum. 'And to think I used to complain about working a double shift. All I did was sit at my desk drinking tea and smoking fags. Didn't know I was born. Heard you saw a bombing today?'

Not all of Mary's previous life as a reporter had been submerged into Wee Duggie and his nappies then. Her dress sense certainly hadn't either. She was wearing some kind of short denim skirt with red platform boots and a purple T-shirt that said 'Keep on Trucking' with a picture of a man hitchhiking on it.

McCoy nodded. 'Some arse blew himself up with his own bomb.'

'Special Branch taking it?' asked Mary.

McCoy nodded, accepted a drink from Call Me Ken.

'Douglas has just taken the baby next door to see the neighbours,' Call Me Ken said. 'He'll be back in a minute.'

'Don't worry, I see enough of him at work,' said McCoy.

'Was only a matter of time, I suppose,' said Mary. 'Bombs in London, Birmingham, Manchester. Bound to happen here.'

'Looks like it,' said McCoy.

'Great,' said Mary. 'Big story, and here I am stuffing paper hankies down my bra to mop up the leaks and singing Coulter's Candy every five bloody minutes.'

McCoy grinned. 'You wouldn't have it any other way.'

'Oh yes I bloody would. I'd take a full-time nanny any time. Cannae afford it, not unless we win the pools.' She sighed. 'So what else is going on in the big bad world out there?'

'Not much,' said McCoy. 'Got a roasting from Murray yesterday. All your fault.'

'Me?' asked Mary.

'He'd been to Pitt Street and shite rolls downhill. They shout at him, he shouts at me. The *Daily Record's* on a crusade at the moment. "Our Violent Streets" on the cover and half the bloody pages inside.'

'They do that every couple of years,' said Mary. 'Means they've got no real stories.'

'I know that and you know that,' said McCoy. 'Somebody just needs to let Pitt Street know.'

They looked over as the living-room door opened and Wattie appeared carrying the baby, big smile on his face.

'Told you he'd be delighted,' said McCoy. 'Born to be a daddy.'

'Dad! Get the camera,' said Wattie. 'Want one of the baby and his godfather.'

McCoy got up and Wattie plonked the baby in his arms. Minute he did, it all came flooding back. Was the smell that did it really, baby powder and wool and milk. Didn't think he'd held a baby since Bobby.

'You okay?' asked Mary.

He nodded. Funny thing, he was. Wee Duggie was a bonny wee thing, a tuft of blond hair and sleepy blue eyes. A click and a flash and that was that. Wattie took the baby back, held him up to McCoy's cheek, told him to 'give Uncle Harry a kiss', and the baby obligingly slavered on his cheek.

Wattie looked alarmed, started sniffing. 'No again.' Held the baby's bum up to his nose and sniffed.

'I think he's got a dirty nappy,' said Wattie, attempting to hand him over to Mary on the couch.

'And what's up with you?' asked Mary. 'Your hands stopped working all of a sudden?'

'It's no a man's job, hen,' said Call Me Ken.

That decided it.

'Changing table's next door,' said Mary. 'He's yours as much as mine. Get on with it.'

Wattie mumbled something under his breath and headed for the door as Call Me Ken shook his head.

‘You tell him,’ said McCoy. ‘Angela used to make me do it too.’

‘You heard from her?’ asked Mary.

‘Nope, not for a while, still in America, I think,’ said McCoy.

A shout came through from the bedroom. ‘Mary! Where’s the powder stuff?’

Mary rolled her eyes and got up. ‘Lucky her.’

They’d a couple more drinks in the flat, few more photos of Harry holding the changed and now fragrant Wee Duggie trussed up in some outfit Mary’s mum had knitted and then Call Me Ken announced it was time to head to the dreaded Chinese.

‘You been there?’ asked McCoy under his breath.

Mary turned round so Call Me Ken shouldn’t see her and mouthed, ‘Bloody rotten. For Christ’s sake don’t eat the pork.’

McCoy nodded. Mary would eat anything. If she thought it was bad there was no way he was even tasting it.

McCoy, Wattie and Call Me Ken stepped out the close. McCoy felt a bit lightheaded as the fresh air hit him, realised he’d drunk a bit more than he’d thought. Wattie’s dad’s flat was high on a hill behind the town. From up here, you could see way out over the shipyards, and across the Clyde Estuary, distant hills still topped with snow, glowing pink in the dying light.

‘God’s Own Country,’ said Call Me Ken as they started walking down the hill. ‘Best view in the world.’

Might’ve been God’s Own Country over the river and in the hills and lochs of Argyll but in Greenock it was anything but. Whole town seemed grey, miserable-faced people hurrying past, all wrapped up against the cold wind coming in from the water. They passed some closed-up shops, wooden boards over the windows covered in graffiti. A group of kids were

sitting on an abandoned car with a smashed windscreen, fire going in a metal rubbish bin lighting up the scene. And like Glasgow, there were the inevitable lads on the corners freezing in wee bomber jackets and wide trousers. All pinched faces, all passing fags and cans, all looking for trouble.

As predicted, the Chinese was a dive. Didn't stop everyone getting stuck in though. Wattie's two brothers turned up just as they all arrived. Both looked like Call Me Ken – dark hair, maybe five foot seven. God knows where Wattie had come from. The milkman? James was a joiner, Robby a plumber. Nice enough lads, and boy could they put it away. More pints, spring rolls, ribs, curry, chow mein then double brandies and banana fritters to finish. McCoy picked at everything, pretended it was delicious.

After the dinner they headed to the Imperial, one of Greenock's supposedly nicer bars, a few more of Wattie's pals from school joining them. They sat down at the back, pulled a couple of tables together. Wattie kept asking him every five minutes if he was okay, if he was enjoying himself, as he sank pint after pint bought for him 'to wet the baby's head'. McCoy told him he was having a great time, made sure he didn't see him looking at his watch wondering how soon he could make an exit without being rude.

He was just ordering another round at the bar, kitty glass full of money in his hand, when James sidled up and handed him a wrap of speed. And that was that. Best-laid plans gone in a few lines snorted off the top of the cistern in the gents.

Three hours later he still hadn't left, still wasn't in his bed getting an early night. Instead he was wide awake, standing at the bar of some place called the Rotunda chewing his lip. Maybe wasn't the worst club he'd been in, but it was close. Some basement dive that seemed to be part of the bus station. Club seemed to have been decorated by someone who only bought orange things. Orange paint on the walls, orange carpet,

orange plastic lampshades hanging over the bar. That was Greenock for you, the glamour never stopped.

He leaned on the bar watching the barman trying to explain to some wobbling drunk guy in a brown checked suit with the widest lapels McCoy had ever seen, that he'd had enough. Predictably, the drunk guy was having none of it so the argument was on. He watched them and wondered if West Princes Street was really the beginning of something bad. Maybe more bombs were about to start going off in Glasgow. Thought about the guy Paul sitting there, piecing the thing together. Was probably killed instantly, wouldn't even know what had happened to him. Didn't matter what cause you supported, getting blown up for it couldn't be worth it, not for anyone. Supposed the real question they should be asking was who the bomb was intended for, who it was really meant to blast into tiny pieces.

The argument was still going on, had got to the pointing fingers at each other stage. He looked at his watch, just past one. Was getting to that dangerous time of the night. The time when the winchers and the couples and the one-off lumbers had found each other and a lot of guys were starting to realise they weren't going to be one of them. So they'd drink some more and start looking for a way to be offended. A spilt pint, an overheard remark, praise for the wrong football team.

He could see Wattie reflected in the mirror behind the bar. Tie undone, hair all over the place, slumped between his two brothers on the shiny orange vinyl bench along the wall. For a big lad he was useless at holding his drink. Decided he wouldn't miss him if he headed off, he'd see him at work on Monday, assuming Mary didn't batter him black and blue when he got home that was. McCoy was just about to finish the last of the double Bells he'd kept for the road and to try and quieten the speed down when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

He sighed. He'd almost got away scot-free. Decided to ignore it in the faint hope he'd imagined it. That didn't work, another tap, harder this time. He'd two choices as far as he could see. Get his police badge out and tell the guy not to be daft or try and brazen it out and head for the door. Soon as he opened his mouth he'd have to do one or the other. Glaswegian accent would give him away and that was all an angry and pissed-up Greenock Wide Boy would need to start trouble. He swallowed over the whisky, grimaced and turned around.

'Can I help you, pal?' he said in his least friendly manner.

First thing he noticed was that the guy was smiling, second thing was he had hands like fucking hams. Two big rings on the fingers of the left one.

'Somebody said you were a cop,' he said.

Proper American accent, just like the films. Now that he looked at him it made sense. White teeth, blond crew cut, blue blazer with silver buttons over a pale checked shirt. Looked a bit like Jack Nicklaus. McCoy nodded.

'Can I buy you a drink?' the man said. 'Whisky?'

McCoy nodded again, still not quite sure what was going on.

The guy pointed over to a quiet corner at the back of the club. 'Sit over there,' he said. 'I'll bring it over.' And then he was lost in the scrum at the bar.

McCoy found an empty seat by a wee round table, pulled another one over. Over here, away from the dance floor, 'Do The Bump' had thankfully faded away to a distant background rumble. He got his fags out, lit up, and wondered what the guy wanted. Decided he didn't care that much and was about to make a break for it when he spotted him weaving through the crowd on the dance floor, tin tray with two whiskies and two pints on it. God knows what they fed Americans but whatever it was it must be good stuff, the guy was about as

broad as he was tall. He put the tray down on the table. Smiled, pointed at the tray.

‘I got you a beer too,’ he said. ‘Seems like the way they do it here.’ He held out his hand to shake. ‘Andrew Stewart.’

McCoy shook it, his pale hand disappearing into the massive paw.

‘Harry McCoy,’ he said, holding up the pint. ‘Cheers.’

Stewart sat down, took a slug of the beer, grimaced.

‘Sorry,’ he said. ‘Still can’t get used to this beer.’ He pointed over at Wattie and his pals. ‘I heard one of the guys over there talking, they said you were a cop?’ McCoy nodded. ‘Great, maybe you can help me. My son’s gone missing.’

So that was it. He wanted advice off the clock. McCoy was happy to take his drink but no way was he getting into this, not at this time, and besides he had the perfect excuse. He held his hand up.

‘Sorry to interrupt you, Andy, but I’m a Glasgow cop. Means nothing here. You need to speak to the Greenock guys.’

‘I already did,’ said Stewart. ‘Waste of time, they’re not interested.’

‘Ladies’ choice!’ shouted the DJ over the beginning of ‘Seasons In The Sun’. ‘Go get them!’

McCoy waited for him to shut up then asked, ‘What age is he? Your son?’

‘Twenty-two,’ said Stewart. ‘He just turned twenty-two a couple of—’

‘And how long has he been missing?’ McCoy asked.

‘Three days,’ said Stewart. ‘I got here yesterday, went to see them straight off the plane—’

McCoy held his hand up again, determined to cut him off and get going.

‘There’s your problem,’ he said. ‘He’s an adult, hasn’t been missing that long. I’m going to be honest, he’s not going to be a priority.’ Until they find a body, he thought, but no

point going down that road now. 'You might be better off with a private detective?'

'That's what they said.' Stewart dug in his pocket, pulled out a card. 'Recommended a guy called . . .' He peered at the card. 'Bernard Raeburn?'

'Christ!' said McCoy. 'That's the last person you need, he's bloody useless. Let me have a think, there has to be someone better than—'

He looked up and realised Wattie was standing there, swaying back and forward, face grey, eyes half shut.

'I need to go home,' he said. 'I don't feel well and Mary's going to kill me. I'm fucked, Harry, you need to help me.' And with that, he turned his head away and was sick all over the dance floor.

'For fuck sake!' said McCoy, pulling his legs out the way of any splashes. Stewart looked horrified. Wattie wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his suit. Looked miserable.

'I don't feel well,' he said. 'Think it must have been the chow mein.'

The bar staff were looking over, didn't look happy. A heavy-looking guy with rolled-up shirt sleeves revealing 1690 tattoos pushed the bar gate up, started walking towards them.

'Fuck sake, Dougie!' said James, appearing out the dry ice leaking over from the dancefloor. 'You minging bastard!'

McCoy finished his whisky, stood up, put his arm around Wattie, tried to steady him, kept his head facing away from his, had no desire to smell the sick on his breath.

'James, you head the barman off at the post,' he said. 'I'll take this daft bastard home.'

Stewart was still sitting there, pint halfway up to his mouth, shock on his face.

'Sorry, pal, got to go,' McCoy said to him. 'Good luck.' He started trying to guide Wattie towards the door. Shouted over his shoulder, 'Remember! Don't waste your money on Raeburn.'

Stewart nodded and stood up. The barman appeared behind him, pulled his arm and spun him around.

‘Hoy! Pal! Was that fucking mess you?’

McCoy left Stewart shaking his head and trying to explain to the barman it was nothing to do with him and shoved Wattie towards the stairs and up to the exit before he was sick again. Chow mein, my arse. Ten bloody pints more like.