

THE No. 1 *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLER

Stuart MacBride

THE
MISSING
AND
THE DEAD



THE NEW LOGAN McRAE NOVEL

Stuart MacBride

THE MISSING AND THE DEAD



HarperCollins*Publishers*

Harper
An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers
1 London Bridge Street
London, SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

First published by HarperCollinsPublishers 2014

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Ebook Edition © December 2014 ISBN: 9780008105952
Version: 2014-12-02

Dedication

For the brave loons and quines
who made Grampian Police
the great force it was

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About the Author

By Stuart MacBride

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Without Whom

As always I've received a lot of help from a lot of people while I was writing this book and I'd like to thank: Ishbel Gall, Prof. Lorna Dawson, Prof. Dave Barclay, Dr James Grieve, and Prof. Sue Black, for all their forensic cleverness; Deputy Divisional Commander Mark Cooper, Sergeant Bruce Crawford, and the excellent officers and support staff of B Division, everyone at the Mintlaw Road Policing Unit; Alison Cowie, Lisa Shand, and all the OST instructors; Fiona, Magnus, and Alan; Sarah Hodgson, James Johnson, Julia Wisdom, Louise Swannell, Oliver Malcolm, Sarah Collett, Roger Cazalet, Kate Elton, Sarah Benton, Damon Greeney, Kate Stephenson, Lucy Dauman, Anne O'Brien, Marie Goldie, the Dumbartonshire and Bishopbriggs Wild Brigade, and all the lovely people at HarperCollins (you're all great); and Phyllis Patterson and the team at Marjacq Scripts, for keeping my cat in shoes all these years.

More thanks to the naughty Alex, Nadine, Dave, Maureen, Al, Donna, Zoë, Mark, Peter, Russell, Chris, Christopher, Scott, and Catherine. And Russell (who inspired Bikini Golf).

A number of people have helped raise a lot of money for charity by bidding to have a character named after them in this book: Dean Scott, Syd Fraser, and Denise Wishart (Tony's mum).

And, as per tradition, saving the best for last: Fiona and Grendel.

I've taken the occasional liberty with the street names and geography of the northeast, for what, I hope, are obvious reasons. But I've been entirely accurate about how beautiful the place is. Don't take my word for it – get up there and see for yourself. It's great.

Faster. Sharp leaves whip past her ears, skeletal bushes and shrubs snatch at her ankles as she lurches into the next garden, breath trailing in her wake. Bare feet burning through the crisp, frozen grass.

He's getting louder, shouting and crashing and swearing through hedges in the gloom behind her. Getting closer.

Oh God ...

She scrambles over a tall wooden fence, dislodging a flurry of frost. There's a sharp ripping sound and the hem of her summer dress leaves a chunk of itself behind. The sandpit rushes up to meet her, knocking the breath from her lungs.

Please ...

Not like this ...

Not flat on her back in a stranger's garden.

Above her, the sky fades from dirty grey to dark, filthy, orange. Tiny winks of light forge across it on a plane on its way south. The sound of a radio wafts out from an open kitchen window somewhere. The smoky smear of a roaring log fire. A small child screaming that it's not tired yet.

Up!

She scrambles to her feet and out onto the slippery crunch of frozen lawn, her shoes lost among the garden paths. Tights laddered and torn, painted toenails on grubby feet. Breath searing her lungs, making a wall of fog around her head.

Run.

Straight across to the opposite side as the back door opens and a man comes out, cup of tea in one hand. Mouth hanging open. 'Hoy! What do you think you're—'

She doesn't stop. Bends almost in half and charges into the thick leylandii hedge. The jagged green scrapes at her cheeks. A sharp pain slashes across her calf.

RUN!

If He catches her, that's it. He'll drag her back to the dark. Lock her away from the sun and the world and the people who love her. Make her *suffer*.

She bursts out the other side.

A woman squats in the middle of the lawn next to a border terrier. She's wearing a blue plastic bag on her hand like a glove, hovering it over a mound of steaming brown. Her eyes snap wide, eyebrows up. Staring. 'Oh my God, are you ...?'

His voice bellows out across the twilight. 'COME BACK HERE!'

Don't stop. Never stop. Don't let him catch up.

Not now.

Not after all she's been through.

It's not fair.

She takes a deep breath and runs.

'God's sake ...' Logan shoved his way out of a thick wad of hedge into another big garden and staggered to a halt. Spat out bitter shreds of green that tasted like pine disinfectant.

A woman caught in the act of poop-scooping stared up at him.

He dragged out his Airwave handset and pointed it at her. 'Which way?'

The hand wrapped in the carrier bag came up and trembled towards the neighbour's fence.

Brilliant ...

'Thanks.' Logan pressed the button and ran for it. 'Tell Biohazard Bob to get the car round Hillview Drive, it's ...' He scrambled onto the roof of a wee plastic bike-shed thing, shoes skidding on the frosty plastic. From there to the top of a narrow brick wall. Squinted out over a patchwork of darkened gardens and ones bathed in the glow of house lights. 'It's the junction with Hillview Terrace.'

Detective Chief Inspector Steel's smoky voice rasped out of the handset's speaker. '*How have you no' caught the wee sod yet?*'

'Don't start. It's ... Woah.' A wobble. Both hands out, windmilling. Then frozen, bent forward over an eight-foot drop into a patch of Brussels sprouts.

'What have I told you about screwing this up?'

Blah, blah, blah.

The gardens stretched away in front, behind, and to the right – backing onto the next road over. No sign of her. 'Where the hell are you?'

There – forcing her way through a copse of rowan and ash, making for the hedge on the other side. Two more gardens and she'd be out on the road.

Right.

Logan hit the send button again. 'I need you to—' His left shoe parted company with the wall. 'AAAAAAAARGH!' Cracking through dark green spears, sending little green bombs flying, and thumping into the frozen earth below. THUMP. 'Officer down!'

'Laz? Jesus, what the hell's ...' Steel's voice faded for a second. '*You! I want an armed response unit and an ambulance round to—'*

'Gah ...' He scrabbled upright, bits of squashed Brussels sprouts sticking to his dirt-smearred suit. 'Officer back up again!'

'Are you taking the—'

The handset went in his pocket again and he sprinted for the fence. Clambered over it as Steel's foul-mouthed complaints crackled away to themselves.

Across the next garden in a dozen strides, onto a box hedge then up over another slab of brick.

She was struggling with a wall of rosebushes, their thorned snaking branches digging into her blue summer dress, slicing ribbons of blood from her arms and legs. Blonde hair caught in the spines.

'YOU! STOP RIGHT THERE!'

'Please no, please no, please no ...'

Logan dropped into the garden.

She wrenched herself free and disappeared towards the last house on the road, leaving her scalp behind ... No, not a scalp – a wig.

He sprinted. Jumped. Almost cleared the bush. Crashed through the privet on the other side, head first. Tumbled.

On his feet.

There!

He rugby-tackled her by the gate, his shoulder slamming into the small of her back, sending the gravel both crunching onto the gravel. Sharp stones dug into his knees and side. The smell of dust and gravel scratched into the air.

And she SCREAMED. No words, just a high-pitched bellow, face scarlet, spittle flying, eyes like

chunks of granite. Stubble visible through the pancake makeup that covered her thorn-torn cheeks. Breath a sour cloud of grey in the cold air. Hands curled into fists, battering against Logan's chest and arms.

A fist flashed at Logan's face and he grabbed it. 'Cut it out! I'm detaining you under—'

'KILL YOU!' The other hand wrapped itself around his throat and squeezed. Nails digging into his skin, sharp and stinging.

Sod that. Logan snapped his head back, then whipped it forward. *Crack* – right into the bridge of his nose.

A grunt and she let go, beads of blood spattering against his cheek. Warm and wet.

He snatched at her wrist, pulled till the hand was folded forward at ninety degrees, and leaned over the joint.

The struggling stopped, replaced by a sucking hiss of pain. Adam's apple bobbing. Scarlet dripping across her lips. 'Let me go, you *bastard!*' Not a woman's voice at all, getting deeper with every word. 'I didn't do anything!'

Logan hauled out his cuffs and snapped them on the twisted wrist, using the whole thing as a lever against the strained joint.

'Where's Stephen Bisset?'

'HELP! RAPE!'

More pressure. 'I'm not asking you again – where is he?'

'Aaaaagh ... You're breaking my wrist! ... Please, I don't—'

One more push.

'OK! OK! God ...' A deep breath through gritted, blood-stained, teeth. Then a grin. 'He's dying. All on his own, in the dark. He's *dying*. And there's nothing you can do about it.'

The windscreen wipers squealed and groaned their way across the glass, clearing the dusting of tiny white flakes. The council hadn't taken the Christmas decorations down yet: snowmen, and holly sprigs, and bells, and reindeer, and Santas shone bright against the darkness.

Ten days ago and the whole place would have been heaving – Hogmanay, like a hundred Friday nights all squished into one – but now it was deserted. Everyone would be huddled up at home, nursing Christmas overdrafts and longing for payday.

The pool car's wheels hissed through the slush. No traffic – the only other vehicles were parked on the side of the road, being slowly bleached by the falling snow.

Logan turned in his seat and scowled into the back of the car as they made the turn onto the North Deeside Road. 'Last chance, Graham.'

Graham Stirling sat hunched forwards, hands cuffed in front of him now, dabbing at his blood-crusted nostrils with grubby fingers. Voice thick and flat. 'You broke my nose ...'

Sitting next to him, Biohazard Bob sniffed. 'Aye, and you didn't even say thank you, did you?' The single thick eyebrow that lurked above his eyes made a hairy V-shape. He leaned in, so close one of his big sticky-out ears brushed Stirling's forehead. 'Now answer the question: where's Stephen Bisset?'

'I need to go to hospital.'

'You need a stiff kicking is what you need.' Biohazard curled a hand into a hairy fist. 'Now tell us where Bisset is, or so help me God, I'm going to—'

'Detective Sergeant Marshall! *Enough.*' Logan bared his teeth. 'We don't assault prisoners in police cars.'

Biohazard sat back in his seat. Lowered his fist. 'Aye, it makes a mess of the upholstery. Rennie'll find somewhere quiet to park. Somewhere dark.'

DS Rennie pulled the car to a halt at the pedestrian crossing, tip-tapping his fingers on the steering wheel as a pair of well-dressed men staggered across the road. Arms wrapped around each other's shoulders. Singing an old Rod Stewart tune. Oblivious as the snow got heavier.

Their suits looked a lot more expensive than Rennie's. Their haircuts too – his stuck up in a blorpy mop above his pink-cheeked face, neck disappearing into a shirt collar two sizes too big for it. Like a wee boy playing dress-up in his dad's clothes. He glanced over his shoulder. 'You want the court to know you cooperated, don't you, Graham? That you helped? Might save you a couple of years inside.'

Silence.

Stirling picked a clot of blood from the skin beneath his nose and wiped it on the tattered fabric of his dress.

'The DI's serious, Graham, he's not going to ask you again. Why not do yourself a favour and tell him what he needs to know?'

A pause. Then Stirling looked up. Smiled. 'OK.'

Biohazard pulled out an Airwave handset. 'Bout time. Come on then – address?'

His pink tongue emerged, slid its way around pale lips. 'No. You and the boy have to get out. I talk to him,' pointing at Logan, 'or we go back to the station and you get me a lawyer.'

'Don't be stupid, Stirling, we're not—'

‘No comment.’

Logan sighed. ‘This is idiotic, it’s—’

‘You heard me: no comment. They get out, or you get me a lawyer.’

Rennie’s face pinched. ‘Guv?’

‘No comment.’

Logan rubbed his eyes. ‘Out. Both of you.’

‘Guv, I don’t think that’s—’

‘I know. Now: out.’

Rennie stared at Biohazard.

Pause.

Biohazard shrugged. Then climbed out onto the empty pavement.

A beat later, Rennie killed the engine and followed him. ‘Still think this is a bad idea.’

Clunk, the door shut, leaving Logan and Graham Stirling alone in the car.

‘Talk.’

‘The forest on the Slug Road. There’s a track off into the trees, you need a key for the gate. An old forestry worker’s shack hidden away in there, *miles* from anywhere.’ The smile grew hazy, the eyes too, as if he was reliving something. ‘If you’re lucky, Steve might still be alive.’

Logan took out his handset. ‘Right. We’ll—’

‘You’ll never find it without me. It’s not on any maps. Can’t even see it on Google Earth.’ Stirling leaned forward. ‘Search all you like: by the time you find him, Steve Bisset will be long dead.’

The pool car’s headlights cast long jagged shadows between the trees, its warning strobes glittering blue-and-white against the needles. Catching the thick flakes of snow and making them shine, caught in their slow-motion dance to the forest floor.

Logan shifted his footing on the frozen, rutted track. Ran his torch along the treeline.

Middle of nowhere.

He wiped a drip from the end of his nose. ‘Well, what was I supposed to do? Let him no-comment till Stephen Bisset dies?’

The track snaked off further into the darkness, bordered on both sides by tussocks of grass, slowly disappearing under the falling snow, glowing in the torchlight.

On the other end of the phone, Steel groaned. ‘*Could you no’ have let the nasty wee sod fall down the stairs a few times? We’re no’ allowed to—*’

‘You want to tell Stephen’s family we let him freeze to death, all alone, in a shack in the forest because we were more concerned with following procedure than saving his life?’

‘*Laz, it’s no’ that simple, we—*’

‘Because if that’s what you want, tell me now and we’ll head back to HQ. You can help Dr Simm pick out a body-bag. Probably still got some nice Christmas paper knocking about, you could use that. Wrap his corpse up with a bow on top.’

‘*Will you shut up and—*’

‘Maybe something with kittens and teddy bears on it, so Bisset’s kids won’t mind so much?’

Silence.

‘Hello?’

‘*All right, all right. But he better be alive. And another thing—*’

He hung up and marched over to the pool car.

Biohazard leaned against the bonnet, arms folded, shoulders hunched, one cowboy boot up on the

bumper. Nose going bright red, the tips of his taxi-door ears too. He spat. Nodded at the ill-fitting suit behind the steering wheel. ‘The wee loon’s right, this is daft.’

‘Yeah, well, I’ve cleared it with the boss, so we’re doing it.’

A sniff. ‘What if Danny the Drag Queen tries it on when you’re out there?’

Logan peered around Biohazard’s shoulder.

Stirling was slumped in the rear seat, blood dried to a black mask that hid the lower half of his face. Bruises already darkening the skin beneath both eyes. The blue sundress all mud-stained and tattered after the chase through the gardens. Shivering.

‘Think I’ll risk it.’ Logan pulled out the canister of CS gas from his jacket pocket, ran his thumbnailed finger across the joint between the safety cap and the body. ‘But just in case, get his hands cuffed behind his back. And I want the pair of you ready to charge in.’

Logan popped open the back door and leaned into the car. It smelled of sweat and fear and rusting meat. ‘Out.’

Twigs snapped beneath his feet as they picked their way between the grey-brown branches, following the circle of light cast by Logan’s torch. A tiny dot, adrift on an ocean of darkness.

Something *moved* out there. Little scampering feet and claws that skittered away into the night.

Logan flicked the torch in its direction. ‘How much further?’

He jerked his chin to the left. ‘That way.’ The words plumed out from his mouth in a glowing cloud caught in the torchlight. Curling away into the night. Dragon’s breath.

Down a slope, into a depression lined with brambles and the curled remains of long-dead ferns already sagging under the weight of snow. More falling from the sickly dark sky.

Stirling’s feet clumped about in Rennie’s shoes, the scuffed black brogues and white socks looking huge beneath the torn sundress and laddered tights.

Up the other side, through the ferns – brittle foliage wrapping around Logan’s trousers, leaving cold wet fingerprints. ‘Why him? Why Stephen Bisset?’

‘Why?’ A shrug. The torchlight glinted off the handcuffs’ metal bars, secured behind his back. His fingers laced together as if they were taking a casual stroll along the beach. ‘Why not?’ A small sigh. ‘Because he was *there*.’

Logan checked his watch. Fifteen minutes. Another five, and that was it: call this charade off. Call in a dog team. Get the helicopter up from Strathclyde with a thermal-imaging camera. Assuming Stephen could pull enough rank to get them to fly this far north on a Friday night in January.

They stumbled on between the silent trees. Fallen pine needles made ochre drifts between the snaking roots, the branches too thick to let the snow through.

He stopped, pulled up his sleeve – exposing his watch again. ‘Time’s up. I’m not sodding about here any longer.’ He grabbed the plastic bar in the middle of the handcuffs and dragged Stirling to a halt. ‘This is a waste of time, isn’t it? You’re never going to show me where Stephen Bisset is. You want him dead so he can’t testify against you.’

Stirling turned. Stared at Logan. Face lit from beneath by the torch, like someone telling a campfire horror story. Tilted his head to the left. ‘You see?’

Logan stepped away. Swung the torch’s beam in an arc across the trees, raking the needle-strewed forest floor with darting shadows ...

A sagging wooden structure lurked between the trunks, in a space that barely counted as a clearing, partially hidden by a wall of skeletal brambles.

Stirling’s voice dropped to a serrated-edged whisper. ‘He’s in there.’

Another step. Then stop.

Logan turned. Shone the torch right in Stirling's face, making him flinch and shy back, eyes clamped shut. Then took out his handcuff key. 'On your knees.'

A thick stainless-steel padlock secured the shack's door. It had four numerical tumblers built into the base, its hasp connecting a pair of heavy metal plates – one fixed to the door, the other to the surrounding wall. Both set up so the screw heads were inaccessible.

Logan flicked the torch beam towards Stirling. 'Combination?'

He was still on his knees, both arms wrapped around the tree trunk, as if he was giving it a hug. Hands cuffed together on the other side. Cheek pressed hard against the bark. 'One, seven, zero, seven.'

The dials were stiff, awkward, but they turned after a bit of fiddling. Squeaking against Logan's blue-nitrile-gloved fingertips. Clicking as they lined up into the right order. The hasp popped open and he slipped the padlock free of the metal plates. Slipped it into an evidence bag.

Pushed the door.

Almost as stiff as the padlock wheels, it creaked open and the stench of dirty bodies and blood and piss and shite collapsed over Logan. Making him step back.

Deep breath.

He stepped over the threshold. 'Stephen? Stephen Bisset? It's OK, you're safe now; it's the police.'

Bloody hell – it was actually colder *inside* the shack.

The torch picked out a stack of poles and saws and chains. Then a heap of logs and an old tarpaulin. Then a cast-iron stove missing its door. Then a pile of filthy blankets.

'Stephen? Hello?'

Logan reached out and picked one of the poles from the stack. Smooth and shiny from countless hands over countless years. A bill hook rattled on the end, the screws all loose and rusted. 'Stephen? I've come to take you home.'

He slipped the hook under the nearest blanket and lifted.

Oh Christ ...

Outside. The cold air clawed at the sweat peppering his face. Deep breath.

Logan rested his forehead against a tree, bark rough against his skin. The smell of pine nowhere near strong enough to wash away the shack's corrupt stench.

Don't be sick.

Be professional.

Oh God ...

Deep breath.

'I ...' His throat closed, strangling the words. Pressed his forehead into the bark so hard it stung. Tried again. 'I should kick the living shit out of you.'

Stirling's voice oozed out from the darkness. 'He's beautiful, isn't he?'

The phone trembled in Logan's hands as he dug it out and called Steel. 'I've found Stephen Bisset.'

There was a whoop from the other end. Then, '*Laz, I could French you. Is he ...?*'

'No.' Though if he ever woke up, he'd probably wish he was. 'I need an ambulance, and an SECT team, and a goon-squad, and a Crime Scene Manager, and someone to stop me stringing Graham Bloody Stirling up from the nearest tree.'

Big Tony Campbell slung his jacket over the back of his chair and slumped down. Aberdeen City Divisional Commander, the Big Boss, Arse-Kicker In Chief: a large man, with broad shoulders and hands to match. His bald head gleamed in the last rays of a dying sun, seeping across the rooftops of the city and into the office. The only hairs loyal enough to cling on above the neckline were his eyebrows – heavy, black, and bushy.

He pointed to the seat on the other side of the polished wooden desk. ‘Sit.’ Then swivelled around and hunched down, giving Logan a perfect view of his shirt coming untucked from the waistband of his trousers. Exposing a swathe of thick dark fur.

Logan settled into the nominated seat and stifled a yawn, covering it with his hand as Big Tony Campbell re-emerged with a bottle of Highland Park in one hand and two crystal tumblers in the other. They went on the desk.

A healthy portion of whisky glugged into both glasses, then the Divisional Commander handed one over. ‘They tell me Stephen Bisset’s going to live.’

Logan licked his teeth – rough and unbrushed. ‘Yes, sir.’

‘Might’ve been better if you’d arrived too late.’ His fingers hovered over the folder that sat in front of the computer. He didn’t touch the manila surface, as if it might be infectious. ‘Castrated, teeth ripped out, chest slashed open and “implants” forced inside, repeatedly raped ... Never mind all the broken bones.’ The corners of his mouth curdled. ‘A non-elective sex change courtesy of Jack the Ripper. Still ...’

He raised his glass and Logan did the same. Clinking the two together, before taking a sip.

Warmth slid all the way down into Logan’s belly, leaving smoky footprints behind.

The Divisional Commander spun his seat around till it faced the window. Gazed out over his domain as darkness claimed it. Took another drink. ‘Your boss tells me you’re not really cut out to be an Acting Detective Inspector.’

‘Does she now?’ Backstabbing cow ...

Well, unless this was promotion time? Time to stop *acting* up and make the step for real. With the pay rise that went with it. OK, so he wouldn’t get overtime any more, but swings and roundabouts. Logan sat up straighter in his chair. ‘Actually, sir, I think she’s—’

‘Don’t get me wrong,’ the Divisional Commander held up a hand, ‘it’s not that you *can’t* do the job – the Bisset investigation more than proves that – but she seems to think you don’t *like* doing it. The man management, the spreadsheets, the meetings, the budget balancing.’ Another sip. ‘Is she right?’

Don’t fidget.

‘Well, sir, it’s ... Detective Chief Inspector Steel, sometimes—’

‘You see, Logan,’ he turned back, a smile stretching his face, ‘it’s important to me that my officers achieve their full potential. And it’s my privilege and *duty* to help them do that.’ A little salute with the tumbler. ‘Especially when I can give them the tools they need to shine.’

Oh no.

Don’t say it.

Not the two words *no* police officer *ever* wanted to hear.

The whisky curdled in Logan’s stomach. His smile was lemon-rind and ashes, but he pulled it off

anyway. 'Sir?'

Please don't ...

'I think I've got a development opportunity that would be *perfect* for you.'

Too late.

Cromarty: Seven to Eight, Rising. Occasionally Severe.

‘... and while we’re on the subject: guess who gets out today?’ Logan let the pause grow as the two officers stared at him. ‘Alex Williams.’

A groan.

The Constables’ Office wasn’t a big room. Magnolia, with a big pinboard covered in mugshots on one wall next to a whiteboard; posters, reports, notices, calendars, and more whiteboards on the other. Scuffed blue carpet tiles covered in layers of tea and coffee stains. A workbench on two sides doubling as desks; four office chairs – plastic scratched, foam-rubber poking out of frayed-edged fabric; the same number of steam-powered computers; Logan and two other officers, all kitted up and ready for the off. A throat-tickling smell of stale feet, pickled onion crisps, and shoe polish.

Logan rubbed a hand across the stubble covering his head. ‘So I’m putting a grade one flag on this house. Anything happens, I want someone there in under five minutes.’

Deano fiddled with the CS gas canister clipped to the front of his fluorescent yellow high-visibility waistcoat, twisting the gunmetal canister round and round in its leather case with big spanner fingers. Winding the spiral bungee cord attached to the base in knots. His broad shoulders stretched the black police-issue T-shirt tight. Even slouched in the swivel chair he was clearly the tallest person in the room. ‘Tenner says they make it till Wednesday.’

Constable Nicholson pulled the sides of her mouth down and dug her hands into the gap between her stabproof vest and her black uniform top. Hunched her shoulders, setting the no-nonsense black boots wobbling. Scowled. ‘Hospital or mortuary?’

Deano stuck his head on one side. The overhead light glinted against the thinning patch of hair on the top of his forehead. Grey hair swept back at the sides. ‘I’m going to say ... hospital.’

She pulled out a hand – it had a small tartan wallet in it. ‘I’ll take: mortuary by Saturday.’ The officer blinked at Logan. ‘Sarge?’

‘Are you and Constable Scott *seriously* taking bets on when someone’s going to assault or murder their partner?’

Shrug.

‘OK.’ He dug a hand into his pocket. ‘I’ll have a fiver on: nobody dies.’

Deano accepted the cash and hid it away. ‘Fool to yourself, Sarge. But far be it from me to dampen your faith in—’

‘Sorry.’ The door banged open and Constable Quirrel backed into the room, carrying a tray loaded with four mugs and a plate of rowies. Thin-faced, with a number-two haircut of pale ginger and a set of watery blue eyes. A least a head shorter than everyone else in the room. ‘What? What did I miss?’

‘Alex Williams got released.’

‘Is it six months already?’ Quirrel handed out the mugs – starting with Logan – then worked his way around the room with the plate. He took the last rowie and slotted his narrow bum into the only vacant chair. ‘Bags I don’t have to—’

‘Tufty,’ Logan pointed at him, ‘I hereby deputize you to go tell Alex’s partner, “It’s that time again.”’

‘But, Sa-arge ...’ His eyebrows bunched for a moment, scrunching up his eyes. Then a smile. ‘Wouldn’t it be *better* if someone from Domestic Abuse did it? You know, laid out all the options

They're the experts, and we wouldn't want to—'

~~'Do what you're told.'~~ Logan took a bite of rowie, chomping through the waxy crust and into the butter, lard, and salty goodness inside. 'And try not to be a dick while you're there. Last thing you need is more complaints.' A nod. 'Next.'

Deano clicked the mouse and the image on the computer screen changed to a photo of a small-ish fishing boat – rust-streaked along one side of the blue hull, the name '*COPPER-TUN WANDERER*' picked out in fading white paint. The picture sat beside one of a middle-aged man in a bright orange jacket, hair hanging damp around his leathery face, bottle of beer in one hand, what looked like a dirty big haddock in the other.

It was all written across the bottom of the PowerPoint slide, but Logan read it out anyway. 'Charles "Craggie" Anderson, fifty-two, missing for a week and a bit now. Tufty?'

'Yeah ...' Constable Quirrel pulled out his notebook and flicked through to near the end. 'Spoke to his friends and neighbours again: he's not been in touch. Got on to the Coastguard and there's no sign of the *Copper-Tun* washing up anywhere. Waiting to hear back from ports in Orkney, Shetland, and Norway in case he's done a runner.'

'Right. When you've been round Alex Williams's, you and Deano hit Whitehills, Macduff, Portsoy, and Gardenstown. Do a door-to-door of all the boats. Did anyone see Charles Anderson the night he went missing? Anyone hear where he was going? Did he have any money problems? You know the drill.'

Deano nodded. 'Sarge.'

'And keep Tufty on a tighter leash this time, OK? Never known a probationer to get in so much trouble.'

Quirrel blushed. 'How was I supposed to know she wasn't wearing any pants?'

'I repeat: tighter leash. That's five missing persons we've got on the books now. Be nice if we could *actually* find this one.' Pause. 'Last, and by all means least, we have a new edict from on high. We are Moray and Aberdeenshire Division. From this point on anyone caught calling it the "Mire" gets a spanking. Any questions?'

Deano gave the canister of CS one last fiddle. 'Aye, is that the good kind of spanking, or the bad kind?'

'You're disturbed, you know that, don't you?' Logan finished his rowie and sooked the grease from his finger. Stood. 'Deano and Tufty, you're in the Postman Pat van. Janet and me are away to split some druggies.'

'Sarge?' Nicholson took the patrol car round the hairpin bend, changing down for the hill. Off to the left, the North Sea shone like a polished stone. Yachts and tiny fishing boats bobbed lazily in the harbour.

Made a nice change after the horrible weekend.

On the other side of the bay, Macduff shone in the afternoon sunshine.

Then the view was swallowed by the pale harling walls of the Railway Inn. Old-fashioned Scottish houses lined the road, all towered over by the intimidating grey Victorian bulk of the Health Centre. Nicholson shifted her hands along the steering wheel, voice light and carefree. 'Sarge, has anyone spoken to you about the pool? You know, how it's going?'

Logan unzipped one of the pockets on his stabproof and pulled out a packet of Polos. Liberated one from its foil prison. Popped the mint in his mouth and crunched. 'Take it from me: CID's a mug game.' The stabproof vest was like a fist, squeezing his chest with every breath. Handcuffs clickin

against the seatbelt clasp. Extendable baton poking into his thigh. Limb restraints digging into the small of his back. ~~Bet Batman's utility belt never gave him this much gyp.~~ 'Still don't see why you want to join.' Crunch, crunch, crunch. 'Polo?' Wiggling the pack at her.

Past the junction and the road widened out into Castle Street with its much grander houses. Nicholson waved at an old woman having a sneaky fag outside the Castle Bar. 'Come on, Sarge, you were CID for years. You *know* why.'

Logan popped another Polo. 'Yeah, in the old days, maybe. Now they hive off all the interesting bits of the job and give them to specialist groups. If you're not on the Major Investigation Team you're not going to catch a murder.' He counted each one off on his fingers. 'Then there's Rape Team, Violence-Reduction Teams, Domestic Abuse Teams, Drugs Teams, Housebreaking Teams, blah, blah, blah teams.' A shrug. 'All that's left for CID is the boring crap no one else wants to do.'

Right, onto Seafield Street. Climbing again, Banff Bay glinting in the rear-view mirror. The sky above, saltire blue. Unblemished by clouds or airplane-trail scars.

'Didn't stop you catching Graham Stirling, did it?'

True.

Logan smiled. 'Forget CID, Janet. *Divisional* policing – that's where all the cool kids are.'

Her shoulders slumped a bit.

The houses on the right were huge. He turned his head to watch them drift by. 'How much do you think one of those cost?' All fancy granite with cornices and bay windows and those raised blocks around the doors, windows, and gable ends. Grey slate roofs and manicured gardens. The occasional gnome.

Nicholson sighed. 'More than we'll ever make.'

'Don't get me wrong, the Sergeant's Hoose will be nice when it's finished, but I'm tired of living out of boxes.'

A call crackled out of the car's radio. '*Control to Bravo India, hello?*'

'Aye, aye.' Logan turned the volume up. 'Must be something big if they're bothering the boss.'

'Come on, Sarge, I don't want to be one of those cops who spends their whole career in one place. Got a glass ceiling to shatter.'

A woman's voice came through the speakers, deep and smooth: '*Bravo India to Control, safe talk.*'

'*Aye, ma'am, we've got another Cashline machine gone walkabout. Owner says they got about twenty-seven grand of stock as well. Broch Braw Buys, on Gallowhill Road, Fraserburgh.*'

Not another one.

'*Twenty-seven thousand pounds? Who's he trying to kid?*'

'*So he says, like.*'

'Sarge?'

Past the bowling green, and the houses got a lot more councilily. Semidetached with streaked harling walls and rusting satellite dishes.

'*Probably swinging for a hefty insurance claim. Get the scene secured and I'll be there soon as I can ...*'

Logan turned the radio down again. Have to pop past Broch Braw Buys later and see what was going on. But with any luck it'd be someone else's problem by then.

'Sarge, are you—'

'How about this: I'm off to court tomorrow for the trial. You want to be in charge while I'm gone? mean, you couldn't be Duty Sergeant, but you could run the team.'

Nicholson chewed on the inside of her cheek.

‘It’ll look good on your CV. You can start doing some of the briefings too. It all helps.’

‘Deal.’ She leaned forward, squinting against the sunshine at the cars droning towards them. ‘The boy on his mobile phone?’

Logan shielded his eyes. ‘The ugly one in the blue Fiesta?’

The Fiesta rumbled past, followed by three other vehicles. Then a tiny gap ... Then a Passat.

Nicholson’s finger jabbed one of the buttons mounted in the middle of the dashboard and the unit blues flickered into life. Another button and a short siren woop blared out.

The Passat’s driver slammed the brakes on, slithering to a halt about six feet away. An auld man goggled out at them, hands curled into fists around the steering wheel, tartan bunnet all squint on his head.

She gave him a nod, then pulled a U-turn. Put her foot down. The acceleration pushed Logan in his seat. Added its weight to the stabproof vest’s crushing fist.

Cars parted before them, clearing the way through to the blue Fiesta with the ugly driver. The thing was shiny and polished, like new. Nicholson wheeched up right behind it and tapped the horn. The siren changed tone. Insistent. Demanding.

Mr Ugly glanced back at them, his face a curdled mess through the rear window. A pause ... then he pulled in to the kerb.

Nicholson parked behind him. She fiddled with the Airwave clipped to the front of her vest. ‘Control, I need a PNC check on a blue Fiesta.’

Logan reached into the back of the patrol car for his hat and climbed out into the sunshine. Shook one leg like a dog getting its belly scratched. Bloody police-issue trousers were made of burning an and sandpaper. He did a slow walk around the Fiesta to the driver’s window. Rapped his knuckles on the glass.

It buzzed down and Mr Ugly glared up at him. ‘What?’ The word came out like a gob of phlegm from a crooked mouth full of crooked teeth. Definitely a Birmingham accent. Thick eyebrows, broad face, dimpled chin, a spattering of angry red spots along the line of his jaw.

OK. Going to be one of those.

Logan unhooked the elastic band holding his body-worn video shut and slipped the front down, setting it recording. ‘You do know it’s an offence to use your mobile phone while driving, don’t you, sir?’

A scowl. ‘I wasn’t using no mobile.’

‘We saw you, sir.’

He faced the front again. Worked his jaw, making the fault line of spots ripple. A couple of volcanoes in the chain ready to blow. ‘Prove it.’

‘Name?’

Silence. More tectonic activity. Then, ‘Martyn Baker, with a “Y”. Sixteenth December, Nineteen Ninety-Three. Thirty-eight Dresden Road, Sparkbrook. Birmingham.’

Name, date of birth, and address. The crook’s version of name, rank, and serial number. Just like that. No stranger to giving his details to the police, then. Logan printed it all down in his notebook. ‘Stay in the vehicle, sir.’ Then around to the boot of the car and onto Control for a background check.

Nicholson pulled on her peaked cap and sauntered over, thumbs tucked into the armholes of her stabproof, like Rumpole of the Bailey. She jerked her chin up. ‘Sarge? Car’s registered to a Martyn Baker—’

‘Nineteen Ninety-Three, thirty-eight Dresden Road, Birmingham?’

‘That’s him. AKA Paul Butcher, AKA Dave Brooks. Got a sheet two miles long: housebreaking aggravated assault, possession of a Class A, possession with intent, beat the crap out of his girlfriend and his mum ... Bit of a charmer, by all accounts.’

‘Certainly failed the attitude test.’ Logan looked back at the car. Baker’s narrowed eyes were right there in the rear-view mirror. Staring at them. ‘Any outstanding warrants?’

‘Not so much as an overdue library book.’ She shifted from foot to foot. ‘You want to do him for the phone?’

‘Denies it.’

A snort. ‘Really? Law-abiding citizen like him?’

The Airwave clipped to Logan’s chest bleeped four times: a point-to-point call. A quick glance and there was PC Scott’s shoulder number on the screen. His voice boomed out of the speaker. ‘*Shi Uniform Seven, it’s Dean, you safe to talk?*’

He hunched one shoulder forward, tilting his head so his mouth was up against the microphone. Pressed the button. ‘Go ahead, Deano.’

‘*Got ourselves an assault in Whitehills. The Drookit Haddie on Harbour Place. Bunch of scrotos gave an old boy a battering. Me and Tufty are waiting for the ambulance.*’

‘Suspects?’

‘*Nah: everyone in the pub’s come down with amnesia. And Maggie’s been on – there’s a coo loose on the B9031 round about Gamrie.*’

‘OK. We’ll see to it. Make sure you get the CCTV from the pub.’

Nicholson’s face soured. ‘A cow wandering about on the road. Not exactly *Silence of the Lambs*, is it?’

‘Careful what you wish for.’ Logan let go of the handset and turned back to Mr Ugly’s Fiesta. ‘No all it’s cracked up to be.’

‘So ... what are we going to do with Plukey Pete?’

But Logan was already walking up to the driver’s window. ‘Tell me, Martyn-with-a-“Y”, what brings you all the way from thirty-eight Dresden Road, Birmingham, to the streets of sunny Banff?’

Another dose of the evil eye. ‘Personal, isn’t it. Now you done? ’Cos you’re infringing my right to free movement and that.’

‘I see ...’ He drummed his fingers on the roof of the car. ‘You know what, Mr Baker, I was going to let you off with a warning, but I have reason to believe you wouldn’t pay any attention to it. As such I’m confiscating your mobile phone as evidence—’

‘Aw, bugger off!’ The line of spots simmered. ‘You’re not taking my bloody phone.’

‘Under Common Law I have the power to seize any items suspected to be used in the execution of a crime. Or would you like me to do you for resisting instead?’ Logan popped his wrist forward and checked his watch. ‘I’ve got a couple of hours to spare. Step out of the car, Mr Baker.’

Baker folded over until his forehead brushed the steering wheel. ‘*Fine.*’ Then dug in his pocket and came out with a big Samsung job, the case all battered and scratched. The screen cobwebbed with cracks radiating out from the bottom left corner. He handed it over. ‘Happy?’

‘Delirious, sir. I’ll make out a receipt for the phone.’ But he took his time over it. ‘Drive carefully, Mr Baker.’ A smile. ‘We’ll be keeping an eye out to make sure you’re OK.’

Nicholson stared after the Fiesta as it drove away. ‘Think he’s dealing? Making a delivery? Maybe on the run from someone?’

‘Or D, all of the above ...’ Logan slipped the phone into a brown paper evidence bag. Labelled ‘D’. ‘But who knows, maybe he’s off for a romantic assignation with a nice sheep?’ Dumped the bag in the

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