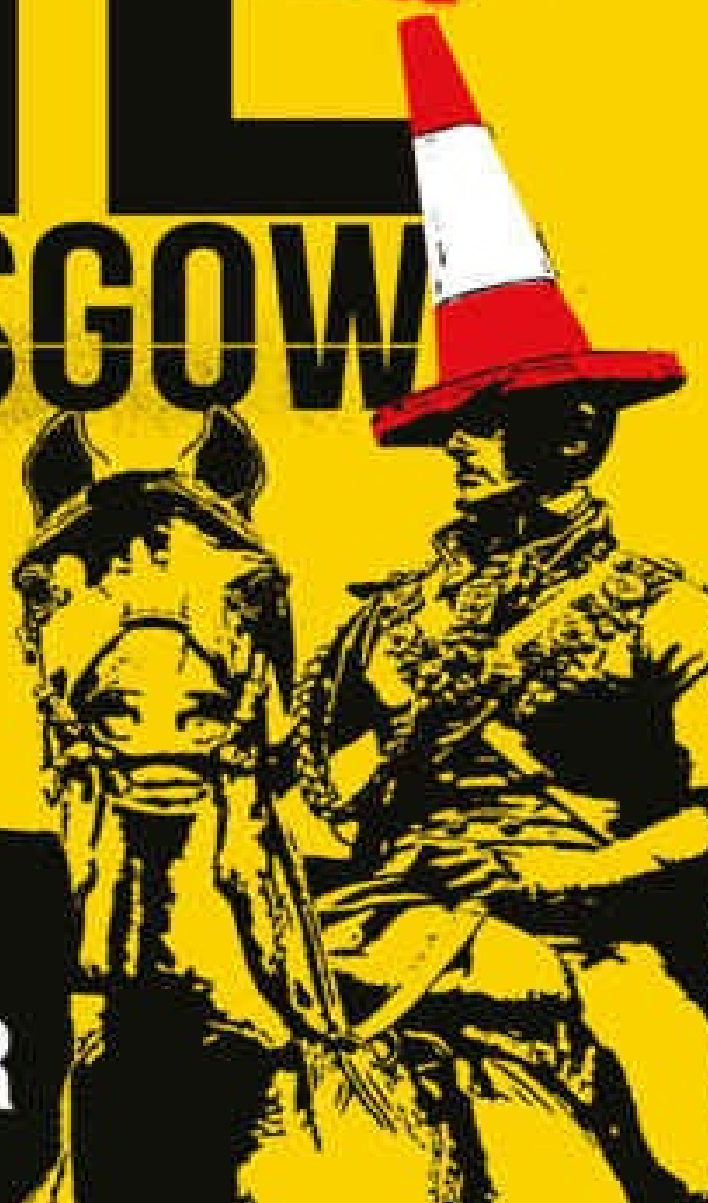


SOMETIMES THE TRUTH BRINGS A WHOLE LOT OF TROUBLE

WAYS TO DIE IN GLASGOW

JAY
STRINGER



WAYS TO DIE IN GLASGOW

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EOIN MILLER MYSTERY SERIES

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JAY STRINGER
WAYS TO
DIE IN
GLASGOW

A Rumpus in Five Parts

 THOMAS & MERCER

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PART ONE

'Dead people are . . .

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

PART TWO

'Never trust a . . .

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

Seventeen

Eighteen

Nineteen

Twenty

Twenty-One

PART THREE

'What scares me . . .

Twenty-Two

Twenty-Three

Twenty-Four

Twenty-Five

Twenty-Six

Twenty-Seven

Twenty-Eight

Twenty-Nine

Thirty

Thirty-One

Thirty-Two

PART FOUR

'It doesn't matter . . .

Thirty-Three

Thirty-Four

Thirty-Five

[Thirty-Six](#)

[Thirty-Seven](#)

[Thirty-Eight](#)

[Thirty-Nine](#)

[Forty](#)

[Forty-One](#)

[Forty-Two](#)

[Forty-Three](#)

[Forty-Four](#)

[PART FIVE](#)

['Who died and . . .](#)

[Forty-Five](#)

[Forty-Six](#)

[Forty-Seven](#)

[Forty-Eight](#)

[Forty-Nine](#)

[Fifty](#)

[Fifty-One](#)

[Fifty-Two](#)

[Fifty-Three](#)

[Fifty-Four](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[About the Author](#)

WAYS TO DIE IN GLASGOW

PART ONE

‘Dead people are rude like that.’

—Lambe

I'm baw deep in Jenny Towler when they come looking for me. I don't hear it at first because Jenny's doing all that fake shouting she thinks turns me on, and there's guys in the other rooms getting the same doing. But then I hear people running up the stairs, and the back of my neck goes—does that tingling thing that always saves my arse—and I'm up and moving.

They barge in through the door, a bald man covered in tattoos and some skinny blond guy carrying a gun. You know you've pissed someone off when they send a gun.

Baldy tries first. He calls my name and steps forward, reaching for me. That's easy enough—he's unarmed and my blood is up. I grab his outstretched arm and haul him towards me, then hit him in the neck with my other hand, almost punching through him. I feel something pop, and he hits the floor with a gurgling sound. Fuck yeah. That's good.

I hear the roar in my ears, the one my doctor warns me about.

Bouncy.

Bouncy.

Then I think about the blond. I turn around as he raises the gun. This isn't one of those visits that want me to walk away from. I've got a few seconds before he pulls the trigger. It would take me *a few seconds* to get across to him; the maths don't look good. His hands rock as he squeezes the trigger a couple times, and things go into slo-mo. Jenny T screams, and the blond turns and shoots her first. Her brain sprays across me and onto the wall behind us. Jenny always gets in trouble when she's with me. This gives me time to move, but before I can do it, the bald guy grabs my leg. He's climbed to my knees, still gurgling, one hand covering his throat while the other has my ankle.

I kick him in the face, once, twice.

On the second he lets go and tries to block me with his hand. Fuck that—he's annoyed me now. I follow all the way through with a third kick, and his nose pops inwards. A fourth is even harder, and his eye socket wobbles a little more than it's supposed to. He stops moving, and his eyes go all glassy. I turn back to the blond with the gun, but he's already sidestepped Jenny T and he shoots me, for real, in the fucking leg.

I've never been shot before.

I don't think I like it.

My leg goes cold. I would have expected heat, but like I say, I'm new to this. I think I'm going to throw up. I hold it in for a second, looking tough, but then I bend over and heave, and Baldy gets a full coating of my lunch. Blondie steps in closer, maybe to laugh at the wounded naked man throwing up his guts like a little boy. But that's his last mistake. I lunge at him, yelling, lift him off his feet and throw him against the wall.

I grab the gun by the barrel and swing the butt into his face. It connects hard. He falls down and I turn the gun around, feeling the weight and the power of it.

'I liked Jenny'—I put the gun into his mouth—'I really fucking liked her.'

I squeeze the trigger and take the top of his head off. He looks like a tin of baked beans, waiting for a spill. Normally I hate guns, but this is fun.

I try to steady myself, but my leg is still numb and the world is getting far away. A blackout is coming, and I can't let that happen. I press the warm tip of the gun into my own wound, and the pain shoots through the coldness, giving me the kick I need to stand up. I stumble out the door and down the stairs. I think people are there watching me; I see them a million miles away at the edge of my

vision, guys who've been fucking in the other rooms.

~~To them this place is probably just a bit of fun, bang for your buck and all that.~~

But I went to school with Jenny T, and now I'm pissed off.

Gotta find out who wants me dead and why.

But first I've got this whole being shot thing to deal with. I push out through the front door and turn right. My Uncle Rab lives a mile away. Can I walk that far on this leg? One way to find out. Things keep getting blurry, and the world comes back to me in flashes. I'm lying in a doorway, trying to stand up again. Then I'm being licked in the face by a cat as I rest on the grass outside Ibrox Library. Then I'm banging on the doorway to Rab's building before I remember he keeps spare keys under a slab in the front yard, for the nights he gets pished and loses his own set.

I let meself in and turn his shower on. Reckon I should clean up.

The dog's asleep in the kitchen. Great guardian. Little black and tan boxer, built for fighting, but Rab's gone soft and spoiled him rotten, so now he runs around just like barrels don't. I fuss the woman's head, then stumble into the bathroom. There's blood on my hands, and it smears all over the shower dials as I turn up the warm water.

Then I'm done.

I wake up with something like a hangover. Then I remember that I'm not hung over, I'm dead. Except I'm not.

I should be. I mean, I feel like I am. I've got a headache and I can barely move, and warm water hitting me in the face. I try and climb out of the bath, but I don't have the energy. Red water swilling down the drain. That's odd—why is the water red?

Oh yeah. Blood.

Oh yeah. I got shot.

I'm not a doctor. I did get a doctorate off the Internet, but it was a comedy one that came with a cuddly toy and a year's worth of coupons for the slots at Las Vegas. I check out my thigh. There's a hole in the front that looks like a large burst zit—nothing to worry about. Round at the back, though, a hole big enough to stick my thumb into. I try it, just for a laugh.

I don't laugh.

I throw up.

Note to self: Don't do that again.

Okay, I'm not dead, so the bullet must have missed anything that would kill me. But my skin is kinda white, and I'm moving really slow. That can't be good. I know a girl who can fix me up, but I gotta get going. I drag myself up the side of the bath, then lower myself down to the bathroom floor. I look for my clothes but can't find them. I guess I forgot to get dressed again when Blondie was shooting me. Did I walk all the way here in the nip?

Jaysus.

Not again.

People round here have learnt to live with me, I guess. Or to run away.

I crawl out into the hallway and pull Rab's phone down off the table, then dial a number and explain my situation, polite like, with a minimum of swearing. My doctor agrees to come round and get me. I can't climb up to the door buzzer, but I can make it to the front window, so I drop the key down into the yard so she'll be able to let herself in like I did.

Then I think, fuck it, this bit of floor looks nice.

A scream wakes me up. Well, more of a yelp.

Then I realise it was mine.

I'm lying on my belly, and my doctor, Beth, is sitting on the floor beside me, cross-legged with my wounded thigh in her lap. She's got nice blond hair that falls across her face as she works, and her cheeks flush a little when she's worried. Beth worries a lot when she's with me. She's stitching the wound closed with a needle and thread.

And it hurts like buggery.

There's a cord wrapped around my thigh, tight.

'What's that?'

'Don't ask.'

'How's my leg look?'

'Don't ask.'

I sniff the air. 'Why does the place smell of bleach?'

She pauses longer this time, her eyes flicking to mine for a second before concentrating on my leg again. She brushes some of that nice blond hair out of her eyes. 'Don't ask.'

Great, she's in a mood.

Beth and me go back a few years. When I was locked up, she was the doc who came and tried to fix my brain. Talked to me about what I'd done and how I felt about it. Asked what I remembered. Uncle Rab never visited, but Beth would come and spend time with me. We got to talking about everything. Then she convinced the judge I should be allowed out on my own. I'm meant to have appointments with her every week, but sometimes I forget, and she never reports me.

I think she likes me.

I try and turn over, but she holds me in place, so I talk into the carpet. 'It's going to be okay, aye?'

'I'm not sure.'

'How no? You're a doctor.'

'Mackie, I'm your psychiatrist. All I know about bullet wounds is what I've seen in films.'

'They don't teach that stuff at head doctor school?'

'Of course not. Look'—she pats my bare ass and slides out from under me, showing that she's finished—'we should get you to a hospital.'

'No way.'

'Mack—'

'No way. Uh-uh. They have to report shite like this, and then I'll be back inside. And they'll see all the favours you been doing for me, and that one time you got me those—yeah, you know—and you'll lose your licence, aye?'

'You're blackmailing me?'

'No, I'm looking out for you. I like what we got together, this weird little thing, and I wouldn't want them to lock you up or nothing.'

I see her jaw move against her cheek, like she's biting down on something; then she puts her hand up in the air. 'Whatever. What happened, anyway?'

I roll over onto my back and haul myself up into a sitting position with my wounded leg stretched out in front of me like a dead weight. I pull at the cord cutting off the blood supply, but she puts her hand on mine and stops me. She brushes that hair away from her face again and then nods. 'Come on, what happened?'

‘They shot me.’ I try for the joke, but she doesn’t laugh. I drop my voice and look at the floor for a minute. ‘They killed Jenny, Beth. They killed Jenny T.’

She sits back down on her haunches and looks cut up. ‘No, Mack. Nobody shot Jenny. We’ve talked about this.’

‘Then who the hell was I shagging last night?’

She looks like she’s going to carry on speaking, give me one of her speeches about the way I deal with loss or grief or some other shite, but she stops. She picks a small knife up off the floor next to me and works the blade under the cord around my thigh, avoiding cutting the skin that has swelled up around it.

‘Ever had pins and needles?’

She smiles at me with that twinkle in her eye, then cuts the cord.

Fucking.

Hell.

I thought getting shot was painful. That was quick and merciful compared to what comes next. Fire races down my thigh, running up and down my leg. It eats away at both the entrance and exit wounds and I can’t help but let out a silly little yelp. The pain runs around my foot and eats at my toes, and my head starts to feel like it’s wobbling.

Beth starts rubbing at my leg, at all the bits that are hurting, and talking about the blood supply and nerve endings. Then I remember that I’m naked and try to cover myself up before things get really embarrassing.

‘Nothing I’ve not seen before,’ she laughs, then stands up and fetches a vial of pills from her bag in the doorway. ‘You didn’t take your pills yesterday, did you?’

These English birds, they have some silly ideas.

‘I hate them.’

‘I know, but you need them.’

She hands a couple of pills to me, and I slip them into my mouth, beneath my tongue, then make a show of swallowing. She opens my mouth and waggles her finger for me to raise my tongue, then waggles it again for me to swallow the pills for real this time. I do. I sit and wait for things to get boring again.

Gotta fight it.

Gotta fight the pills.

Need to know who tried to kill me.

Need to know who killed Jenny T.

Beth then looks down at me kinda funny, something in her eyes. ‘Did you do it, Mackie?’

‘Do what?’

‘You *know* what.’ She bends down and whispers, ‘*The dog.*’

Beth helps me to my feet and leads me out into the hallway.

What I hadn't noticed when I'd come in last night was that someone had ransacked the place. Mail is scattered across the floor. Rab's wallet is lying in the corner with its contents all over around it. The furniture is tipped on its side in the living room, and the bottoms have been slashed on as if someone was looking for a hiding place. Rab's keys are here, so he was too. And he wouldn't have left without them. He's not an idiot like me. Someone came here and took him. Why would someone be after both of us? The only things we have in common are blood and our amazing singing voices.

Then Beth leads me into the kitchen and what's left of my wee heart breaks.

The fuckers killed Rab's dog.

Beth has cleaned up the mess, which is why I could smell bleach, but has left the wee man lying on top of a bin bag. He looks peaceful. His head is a mess, and it looks a lot like the wound in my leg. I guess he was a good guardian after all, tried to stick up for his old man and the bastards shut him up.

I ruffle the hair on his head again.

Now I'm fucked off.

Shoot me? Aye. I'm an annoying shite—I get that.

Shoot Jenny T to get to me? Well, she chose to be with me, I guess; she took her chances.

Grab my Uncle Rab? Well, Rab's pissed off a lot of people.

But shoot a dog?

I'm going to fuck them up big.

Then I remember something. 'Wait.' I turn to Beth. 'You think I'd do this?'

She looks nervous, like she knows she's wrong to doubt me.

'Well, you know, Mack, after that conversation we had yesterday, after some of the things you said, I don't know. I thought maybe—'

'What conversation?'

'You don't remember?'

Is she having me on? I stare at her, and she blinks back at me a few times. No. She's being serious. I don't remember talking to her yesterday, but then I don't remember much of anything other than being shot. I'm good at forgetting things, have been ever since they sent me down to the jail. And I've been drinking—well, that makes it easier. Most of yesterday is a big black hole.

'What did I say?'

'I'll tell you later,' she says. 'First, let's get this mess sorted.'

We find me some clothes out of Rab's closet, a shitty cheap-looking trackie that he probably uses when he pretends to go running. Then we turn to housework. Don't want any signs of this mess if the cops come round; they would get in the way of what I need to do. Beth helps me put the furniture back where it should be, and when it's the right way up, you can't see the ripping. We clean the hallway and the bathroom, and then bundle up the wee man with a few of his toys. I help myself to Rab's wallet and a knife from the kitchen.

He won't mind.

We pack our bundles into the back seat of Beth's car, a small little French thing that's meant to be eco-friendly, and she looks over the roof at me before we climb into the front.

'You're not going to do something stupid, are you?'

'Course not, hen.'

Stupid? No.

I'm gonna kill a bunch of shitey bastards to avenge a hooker and a dog.

If that's stupid, then call me Elmer Fucking Fudd.

I was woken by the phone ringing. I lay and listened to it, waiting for the machine to kick in. Yes, I still had one. It had been my father's and was one of the few things I'd managed to retrieve from our old office when the bailiffs came in. It was twenty years old. I'd had to buy an adaptor to make it work with a modern phone. I'd thought about recording a new message when I took over the business, but people seemed to expect a male voice when they called a private investigator. It was still loaded with my father's old Rockford special: 'Ireland Investigations. Leave your name and number and we'll get back to you.'

I reached for my pack of emergency cigarettes but saw it empty and crushed into a ball on the floor. I only remembered smoking two of them the night before, but I also only remembered drinking one bottle of wine, and my head told me there had been more than that. I opened the drawer and found my electronic cigarette and sucked down the vapour, pretending it was the same. Sometimes you can sense a shitty day is on the way. I liked to give them levels—scores out of ten. The game was to guess at the start what level of shite the day would achieve. I'd got pretty good at it. I judged I was at the beginning of a seven. Maybe I'd be able to get it down to a six if I went for a run later, got some air into my brain and cleared out the booze.

I usually went for a run every day, but I'd been skipping it for a week, and already I was feeling the guilt, imagining the fat cells in my body taking hold. I ignored the phone. I'd had a lot of calls from journalists over the past couple of months and had got used to blanking them. I lay back and stared at the ceiling, but when the message started to record, I heard an educated voice. An east coast accent that carried the fake hint of Englishness you could only get from expensive Edinburgh schools.

I heard the name of a law firm and the start of a phone number.

I heard money.

Money would be good for the rent.

I fell out of bed and made it to the phone before the woman on the other end had finished. She paused for a moment when I picked up, and a little doubt crept into her manicured voice. I probably sounded like hell. I certainly didn't sound like someone who should be taking calls from her kind of law firm. She asked again if she'd called the offices of Ireland Investigations, and I said yes. I didn't tell her that she'd also called the bedroom.

She asked me to attend a meeting with her employer at 11.23 a.m.

I got a kick out of the precision in that request, and decided to show up at 11.25.

The name of the firm was Hunter & Simpson. I lied and told her I'd heard of them and that I didn't need the address. My father had taught me long ago, always pretend you've heard of someone if they have money. Always pretend you're on their level and that they should be paying you for things. He was better at pretending than me. He wasn't the one who'd lost the office. It wouldn't be difficult to find the address. They'd be online, or in the phonebook. Failing that, all law firms had offices in the same area of Glasgow. They were never hard to find.

The timing of the meeting would have given me time for a morning run, but my need to pay the rent beat my need to feel the burn. I had errands in town and invoices to drop off.

I checked myself in the bathroom mirror. Always a mistake. Never do that *before* the shower. Only do it *after*, if it's been a good shower. It was usually best to avoid the whole reflection thing until it was time to straighten your hair and apply the make-up. My father didn't teach me that. The red wine showed in my eyes, and the cigarettes came back with a rattling cough. I managed to have that perfe

kind of hangover shower; the kind that freezes time and holds the water in the air around you. I'd be trying to switch to decaf coffee, but I broke the foil on a new jar of the real stuff and drank two large cups. The pastry probably wasn't strictly necessary to help chase away the hangover, but it didn't do any harm.

My Bridgeton flat used to have two bedrooms. Now it had one bedroom and an office piled with filing boxes, paperwork and old furniture. I dug out the telephone directory, but it didn't have a listing for the law firm. I fired up the ailing laptop and left it clicking over while I picked an outfit for the day. I wanted to make at least an effort to impress, so I found my best suit, a Primark special that looked like it had been ironed by a blind man, and fought with my hair for ten minutes. I checked on the laptop, restarting it a couple of times until it worked, and then typed the name of the firm in the small search box and sent the request to the gods of Google.

It fired back the address on West Regent Street, naturally enough, and also a few news stories. I scanned through mentions of the company being started by two young upstarts, Fiona Hunter and Douglas Simpson, who had each walked out on huge jobs in the city's biggest law firm. They both posed for the camera on the steps to their office building. Two young and sickeningly attractive people, each with a perfect suit and tan. They looked just like the woman on the phone had sounded.

Money.

I downgraded my estimation and put the day at only a two on the shitey meter. My last decision before leaving the flat was an important one: heels or flats? If in doubt, the answer was always sunglasses.

I left in a good mood, choosing to ignore that I'd forgotten my keys.

I walked across Glasgow Green, sucking in the fresh morning air and trying to blow away the cobwebs in my head. The Green was great in the morning, with only a smattering of joggers and dog walkers. The sun beat down on the Clyde, which looked like an actual river at the Green, not the pipe of brown sludge it turned into once you got to the city.

At the other end of Glasgow Green I walked out onto Saltmarket.

This part of town looked run down, but beneath the dust and soot lay some of the finest buildings in town. Old properties in Glasgow had a habit of burning down in time for new developers to come in, but around Saltmarket and the Green you could still see the old city.

Halfway up the road, nestled between a bar and a Chinese takeaway, stood Crowther & Co., a walk-in law firm that was open to the public twenty-four hours a day. The frontage was painted white with the firm's name in Gothic script beside an image of a skull wearing a judge's wig. The exterior gave off a very rough-and-ready impression, but the inside couldn't have been more different. Smooth and tidy, the waiting area was a narrow space made up of clean sofas that lined two walls and framed a reception desk. Behind the desk sat the receptionist, a large Ukrainian man named Alexei. He looked like a hairless bear, but he was as friendly as a puppy, always keen to please and to show off his new English words.

'Salutations, Sam.' His grin spread wide.

He looked me up and down, lingering in all the places he thought I didn't notice. Alexei was harmless, though. I didn't want to make him feel awkward.

'Hiya, Alexei, how you doing?'

'I'm spiffy.'

I had no idea what that meant, but I rolled with it. 'That's good to hear. The lord and master of the home?'

'Yes, go on in.'

I stepped past the desk and pushed through the door set into the wall at the rear. The room beyond was a larger space, with filing cabinets lining the walls and three desks arranged in a semicircle. One of the desks was occupied, though the others were piled high with papers. Fran Montgomery was in his late fifties, with a fuzzy face and the hands of a mechanic. He'd known my father, back in the day, and he'd always tried to throw business to us. He smiled at me now and waved at the empty seat in front of the desk.

'Hey, hen. What can I do for you? Is it invoice time already?'

I plucked two envelopes out of my bag as I sat down, and passed them both to him.

'Double trouble,' I said. 'The Boswell thing and the Johnny Shaw case.'

He laughed and typed something into the computer on his desk, loading up the files. 'Shaw, the guy with the paint tins?'

'Art installations, I think he called them.'

'Aye, that'll be that modern art that people talk about.'

'I don't know.' I leant into the chair, getting comfortable. 'I thought there was something timeless almost classic, about the way the police cars looked when he was finished.'

He chuckled, a gentle rumble that spread from his gut and rolled upwards.

'Aye, all right. If you say so. How did the background check go?'

'Well, you can probably build something around his arresting officer. Lindsay—you've heard of him?' I waited for him to nod before proceeding. 'Yeah, fancies himself a gambler, likes to lose big i

town, was seen drinking in the casino only a few hours before his shift, so the arrest itself would be questionable.'

'Could work, but it's too late. Johnny's decided to plead guilty. He says he's too proud of the work to let it go unclaimed, wants credit for it.' He scanned through my invoices for a second. 'You'll take a cheque, right?'

I raised my eyebrow, and he chuckled again before scrawling a quick signature across both and sliding them into his to-do pile. He passed me a sheet of paper and waited while I scanned down it, a divorce case that was getting messy. The marriage had ended in theft and accusations of domestic abuse.

'Fancy taking a look into the husband on that one for me? See if you can get anything?'

I folded the paper into my bag and started to stand up before thinking better of it. 'Fran, do you know anything about Hunter & Simpson? I think they want to hire me for something.'

'Oh, aye. The new breed. It's all the rage with the kids. They show up, flash some cash, take a couple of high-profile cases and get their names in the papers, take on a few celebrities as clients. Then at their first chance, they sign media deals and get onto TV and into publishing, ditch the law practice. These guys are hunting out celebrity criminals, true crime cases, so they want the saucy stuff.'

'Not worth working with them?'

'Did you not listen to a word I said? Cash? Celebrities? Who wouldn't want in on that? Just remember me when you're rich, okay?'

I left with his chuckle rolling out the door after me.

Hunter & Simpson's office was on West Regent Street overlooking Blythswood Square. The grey stone front of the building looked down its nose at me as I walked up the steps. These things must have been designed specifically for solicitors.

Blythswood Square was a small, fenced-off garden which used to be one of Glasgow's most notorious red light districts. By day you'd pay to get screwed by lawyers, and by night you'd pay for the real thing. The council and cops had worked together to try and clean up the square; they'd cut back all the bushes and trees, and mounted large metal fences around the garden with gates that were locked at night. Now the hookers had moved further down the hill, towards the riverfront, and the solicitors were all a lot more tense.

Inside the front door of the building, I checked the directory, looking to see which floor the firm was on, only to find that they used all of it. The recession hadn't reached this far up the street. The reception area was decorated in muted shades of black and tan. Anything that didn't share that colour scheme was made of glass. A woman who was far too young and far too skinny greeted me. She took my name and waved me into a large waiting area.

She didn't whisper that she was a child slave or beg for help.

She didn't ask if I could sneak her a cheeseburger.

The waiting area was more comfortable than my flat, with two large leather sofas and a glass coffee table full of the morning's papers. I sat there, flicking through a newspaper, until the receptionist came back and said that Ms Hunter was ready to meet me. I checked the time on my phone: 11.23.

The receptionist led me through a glass door and up a small staircase to the top floor. It was decorated in a similar vein, but a lot of sleet grey had been added to the colour scheme, and the glass panels were frosted. She knocked on a large door straight ahead of us and then left me outside while she went in alone. She stepped back out and held the door wide for me to walk through, before shutting it after me and returning to whatever she did while she refused to eat. The office was large but minimal, a strange combination. There was a desk against the far wall, with a large window behind it. There were a sofa and coffee table along the wall to my right, and a large framed photo of Glasgow's dockyard on the left.

'Nice photo, isn't it?' The young woman who rose from behind the desk was from the news store. She looked even more expensive in the flesh, and my clothes instantly felt jealous. Her dark pin-striped suit was pressed and tailored, and her shirt was probably silk, but I was no expert. Her fake tan was so expensive, you'd think it was real anywhere other than Glasgow, and her eyes were the sharpest blue I'd ever seen.

'It's great. Where'd you get it?'

'I took it myself.'

I gave her a second look. Photography was my real passion, and I'd been studying it at university when I'd had to quit to take over the family business. She offered me her hand for a shake, and I noticed she was wearing cufflinks. That struck me as odd. Her perfume had a masculine edge to it, a slight musk.

'Fiona Hunter,' she said. 'And you must be Ms Ireland.'

I nodded, and said, 'Yes, Sam.'

'Ireland Investigations.' She said the name of my company as if she was walking round it and kicking the tyres. 'That's a brave name in this town.'

‘I suppose my dad was making a point when he chose it.’

She looked at me again for a second, as if she was placing me from a memory. ‘I’ve seen you. On the Green on a Saturday, maybe? Are you a runner?’

I smiled. ‘Yes. You won’t see me on the Green on a Saturday morning, though. I go there at night to unwind. It’s right by my flat.’

‘Pollok Park, then? Parkrun? What’s your PBT?’

‘I’ve been sneaking in just under twenty for the last few weeks. I’m pushing for nineteen, but keeps beating me.’

‘Twenty minutes is a great time. Six-minute miles? Getting any faster than that is hard going.’ She gave me a smile, and I knew what was coming. ‘I’m at seventeen minutes.’

Runners. ‘Well done,’ I said through gritted teeth. We pretend to be supportive, but really? It’s all pissing up the wall. Am I faster than you? Are you fitter than me? Do you spend more money on your running shoes? I wanted to hate her for that alone.

‘I liked what you did with that insurance case.’ She saved me from plotting her slow murder on the running track. ‘And the way you tried to avoid the publicity. That’s a quality we admire.’

I’d picked up a case a few months previously that had got me some attention. An insurance firm had hired me to check over a few formalities before they paid out on a tenement building that had collapsed on London Road. It had turned out to be more involved, and I’d set the ball rolling for the police on what turned into a major fraud investigation. The newspapers had come calling, but I stayed discreet and refused to talk to them. Now didn’t seem like the right time to tell Ms Hunter that the only principle I’d been holding out for was the one called *the right price*.

‘Discretion like that is better than any business card. Your name is coming up at all the right dinners. We’re in a similar position right now.’ She paused for a moment, and I wondered if she was waiting for me to say something, but then she continued. ‘We’ve had some success in our dealing and we’re looking to expand the business, take on new people. After seeing that you know how to handle things, we would like to give you a try.’

Give you a try. She actually said that, like testing a car. My need to pay the rent was slowly giving way to the need to make cheap points.

‘I don’t really do test drives.’

She stopped me short. ‘You’re not interested?’

Was I? Hell yes.

‘Naturally, I—’

She stopped me short again by turning and walking back to her desk. She sat behind it and waved for me to take the opposite seat, which I did.

‘I’m going to level with you, Sam,’ she said. ‘My partner, Douglas—he has a lot of family connections in town. There are a lot of people he wants to bring in, established investigators, people who’ve been around for years and already know all the right handshakes. Not people I want to do business with if I can help it. They make my skin crawl. I’m pushing hard for you to be given the chance. I’m hoping you won’t let me down.’

I didn’t say yes, but I didn’t need to. She placed a manila envelope on the desk and slid it toward me.

‘What is it?’

A very expensive shrug. I wondered if they taught them at rich school. ‘Legal papers. Borin really. Have you heard of Rab Anderson?’ I nodded. Anderson was a Glasgow celebrity. Which is one way of saying *dangerous*. She continued. ‘There’s a craze at the moment. True crime memoirs. These

guys like to get paid for admitting in print things they used to dispute in court. We spend more time these days dealing with publishers than we do with prosecutors, but there's money in it, so we're not complaining. Anderson's on his third book, and one of our clients is taking legal action, but we can't find him to serve the papers.'

Did I really want approval from a rich lawyer badly enough to tangle with one of the South Side best-selling authors?

Did I really want to be employed by someone who could do 5K so much quicker than me?

Hunter smiled at me and started talking money, and I decided, yes—yes, I did.

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