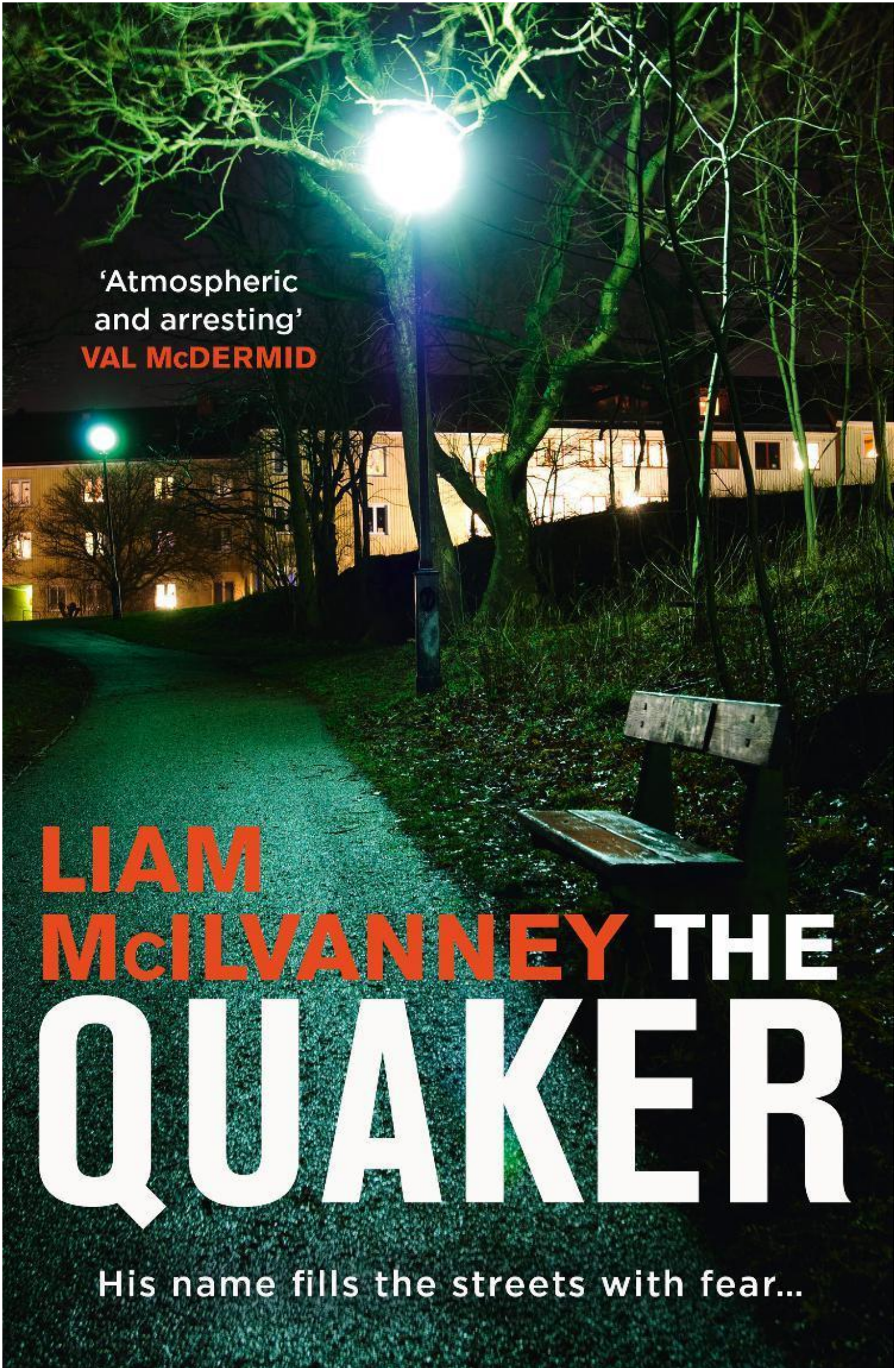
'Atmospheric and arresting'
VAL McDERMID
LIAM McILVANNEY
THE QUAKER
His name fills the streets with fear...

Liam McIlvanney

The Quaker

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The Quaker is watching you…In the chilling new crime novel from award-winning author Liam McIlvanney, a serial killer stalks the streets of Glasgow and DI McCormack follows a trail of secrets to uncover the truth…Winner of the 2018 McIlvanney Prize for Scottish Crime Book of the YearA city torn apart.It is 1969 and Glasgow has been brought to its knees by a serial killer spreading fear throughout the city. The Quaker has taken three women from the same nightclub and brutally murdered them in the backstreets.A detective with everything to prove.Now, six months later, the police are left chasing a ghost, with no new leads and no hope of catching their prey. They call in DI McCormack, a talented young detective from the Highlands. But his arrival is met with anger from a group of officers on the brink of despair.A killer who hunts in the shadows.Soon another woman is found murdered in a run-down tenement flat. And McCormack follows a trail of secrets that will change the city – and his life – forever…

Содержание

LIAM McILVANNEY THE QUAKER

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Dedication

For Caleb
Surely, he walks among us unrecognized:
Some barber, store clerk, delivery man …
Charles Simic, ‘Master of Disguises’
The houses are all gone under the sea.
The dancers are all gone under the hill.
T. S. Eliot, ‘East Coker’
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MEN AND BITS OF PAPER

‘We are suffering from a plethora of surmise, conjecture, and hypothesis.’
Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘Silver Blaze’

Prologue

That winter, posters of a smart, fair-haired young man smirked out from bus stops and newsagents' doors across the city. The same face looked down from the corkboards of doctors' waiting rooms and the glass display cases in the public libraries. Everyone had their own ideas about the owner of the face. Rumours buzzed like static. The Quaker worked as a storeman at Bilsland's Bakery. He was a fitter with the Gas Board, a welder at Fairfield's. The Quaker waited tables at the old Bay Horse.

Some said he was a Yank from the submarines at the Holy Loch. Others said he was a Russian from off the Klondykers. He was a city councillor. The leader-aff of the Milton Tongs. A parish priest. He had worked with multiple murderer Peter Manuel on the railways. He was Manuel's half-brother, Manuel's cellmate, he'd helped Manuel abscond from Borstal in Coventry or Southport or Beverley or Hull. There were Quaker jokes, told in low voices in work-break card-schools and the snugs of pubs. The word was magic-markered on bus shelters, sprayed on the walls of derelict tenements. It rippled through the swaying crowds on the slopes of Ibrox and Celtic Park. QUAKER 3, POLIS 0. His name crept into the street-rhymes of children, the chanted stanzas of lassies skipping ropes or bouncing tennis balls on tenement gables.

And always there was the poster: IF YOU SEE HIM PHONE THE POLICE. The poster looked like someone you knew, like a word on the tip of your tongue. If you looked long enough, if you half-closed your eyes, then the artist's impression with the slick side-parting would resolve itself into the face of your milkman, your sister's ex-boyfriend, the man who wrapped your fish supper in the Blue Bird Café.

The face was clean-cut, the features delicate, almost pretty. To some of the city's older residents he looked like a throwback to a stricter, more disciplined age. A well-turned-out young man. Not like the layabouts and cornerboys who lounged on the back seats of buses, flicking their hair like daft lassies, tugging at their goatee beards.

Jacquilyn Keevins, the first victim, was killed on 13 May 1968. Strangled with her tights. Left in a back lane in Battlefield.

The Ballroom Butcher. The Dance Hall Don Juan with a Taste for Murder. The Quaker was something to talk about when you got tired of talking about football or the weather. That year of 1968, the worst winter in memory set in just after Halloween. On the first day of November a storm battered the city, shouldering down through the banks of tenements, scattering slates and smacking down chimney stacks.

On 2 November, Ann Ogilvie went out to the dancing at the Barrowland Ballroom and failed to come home. She was found two days later in a derelict tenement in Bridgeton.

On through Bonfire Night and St Andrew's Day the weather stayed bad. The football card was clogged with postponements, unplayed fixtures piling up. The posters on gable ends, where the Quaker's face had been pasted in threes as though he were a candidate for office, were pulped and defaced by the pelting sleet.

All winter, people wrote to DCI George Cochrane and the Quaker Squad at the Marine Police Station in Anderson Street. The letters waited on Cochrane's desk each morning. People wrote to denounce their friends and neighbours, relatives, enemies. The Quaker's names were Highland, Lowland, Irish, Italian. Sometimes the writer was anonymous, sometimes the letters were signed. As December wore on, the missives came in the form of Christmas cards, festive scenes of horse-drawn carriages and starlit stables bearing the names of evildoers in righteous capitals. A team of detectives followed these up, chasing the names across the map of the city.

The city itself was changing, its map revised by the wrecking balls. Slum clearance. Redevelopment. Whole neighbourhoods lost as the buildings came down. Streets cleared. Families dispersed. Some went to the big new schemes on the edge of the city but most of them left. They lit out

for the coastal new towns or further afield, to Canada, the States, they took ship as Ten Pound Poms for Adelaide and Wellington. New lives in sunny elsewheres, the grime of the tenements left behind.

For those who stayed, it was the winter of the Quaker. There was no escape from the blond side-parting and the crooked smile. Like a slew of frozen mirrors, the posters threw back to the city its half-familiar face. Men with short fair hair, men with overlapping teeth, men with the thin slightly sensuous lips of the artist's impression would find themselves scrutinized in pubs and restaurants, underground carriages. Glancing up from the *Evening Times* as the bus took a bump they'd catch the fierce, unguarded stares of their fellow citizens. Whispers rasped around them, neighbours monitored their movements. Cards were issued by the Chief Constable to men who matched the wanted man's description: *The holder of this card is certified as not being the Quaker.*

Another big storm hit the city on 25 January. Burns Night. The morning after the storm was when number three was found, torn and sprawled in a Scotstoun backcourt, like something ransacked by the wind. Marion Mercer's unwitting smile joined those of Jacquilyn Keevins and Ann Ogilvie on the splashes of the *Record*, the *Tribune*, the *Daily Express*.

Jacquilyn Keevins. Ann Ogilvie. Marion Mercer.

And then, in the weeks since Marion Mercer, nothing. The murders that had gripped a city stopped. The days ticked past, the weeks turned into months. With the warmer weather it was hard to keep the killings in mind, that wintry horror. The frenzy ebbed. The air began to clear. Suddenly it was six months since the Quaker's last killing. The prospect that he might strike again was like the memory of last year's snow: you couldn't picture it. There were queues once more outside the dance halls. Bouncers rocked on their heels outside the Plaza and the Albert. Women stood in line for the coat-check in the Barrowland and the Majestic. Blue-tuxedo'd band-leaders cracked jokes about the Quaker before leaning in to the mic for the next slow ballad. The university cancelled its night-bus service for female students. The city was moving on, looking out. News items from the wider world – riots in Belfast, the Kennedy bother at Chappaquiddick, One Small Step for Man – displaced the local stories in the *Tribune* and the *Record*. A new decade was coming, new money, new buildings going up along the central streets, citadels of glass and steel. Dead, imprisoned for another crime, or living somewhere else, the Quaker was fading from the city's sense of itself, dwindling to a whisper, a half-forgotten melody.

Only the shirtsleeved men in the Murder Room at the Marine Police Station in Partick kept at their task. In a fourteen-by-ten upstairs room, they stalked the Quaker through box files of witness statements. For months these men had been trying to piece it together, searching for motive and meaning in rubbled backcourts. Three endings. Three bodies. Crumpled and sprawled, dumped like rubbish. *I thought it was a mannequin, a tailor's dummy. It looked like a bundle of rags. An old coat or blanket.* No one ever thinks that it's a body. A woman. Someone with a book half-read, a favourite song, bitter secrets, a patch of eczema behind her ear.

Then the newspapers started to turn. Detectives who had been the subject of reverent profiles – George Cochrane pictured in his mackintosh and trilby, gripping his pipe like a Clydeside Sherlock; Chief Constable Arthur Lennox in his pristine blues, flanked by a portrait of the queen – found themselves discussed with scoffing brusqueness. An element of black humour crept into the coverage. The papers had fun with the notion of CID men brushing up their dance moves as they mingled with the punters at the Barrowland Ballroom. In July, the *Tribune* ran an old photo of the Quaker Squad detectives at the scene of Jacquilyn Keevins's murder, walking three-abreast down Carmichael Lane, looking for clues. The picture had a caption: *Romeo, Foxtrot, Tango: The Marine Formation Dance Team*.

Jacquilyn Keevins

Everyone thinks that I changed my mind and that was what got me killed. Shaking their heads at my folly or at the capriciousness of fate. As though changing your mind was so terrible. As though I should have known better. But I didn't change my mind. I told Mum and Dad that I was going to the Majestic – they were right about that – but that was never the plan. I was going to the Barrowland all along.

I was going to the Barrowland because I was meeting a man.

The shoes that I'd bought in Frasers the previous Saturday were pinching my toes as I walked down the hill to the bus. I was wearing an emerald green crepe dress I'd just re-hemmed. The dress was sleeveless and my arms felt cool against the satin lining of my coat. I was conscious of my perfume – Rive Gauche – filling the lower deck of the bus and I remember noticing that the conductress had a ladder in her tights, all the way down the inside of her left leg, and thinking that she ought to have a spare pair in her bag.

Why did I lie to my parents? I'm not sure. I think it was to make it more complete. The secret, I mean. The man I was meeting was called William. He was tall, with good hair he was forever running a hand through, and strong slim forearms under folded sleeves. I hadn't known him long. There was something distant about him, something reserved. I wondered if maybe he'd turn out to be married but I didn't care. It had been a long time since someone had asked me out. The boy was the problem. Wee Alasdair. Just turned six. It puts them off, a kid does.

I got off the bus at Glasgow Cross and walked up the Gallowgate to the Barrowland and joined the queue under the green-and-red neon. Once I'd checked my coat in the foyer I climbed the stairs to the ballroom. That's the bit I loved, climbing towards everything, the music suddenly loud and the dancers whirling into view. I hurried the last few steps and the ballroom gulped me in. I felt safe there, secret, in the darkness and the lights.

I bought a bitter lemon at the bar and took a seat at a table so that people knew I was waiting for someone.

I lit a cigarette and looked at my watch. William was already fifteen minutes late. Benny Hamlin and the Hi-Hats played 'Boom Bang-a-Bang' and I was cross because I always liked to dance to that. I lit another cigarette, watched the smoke drift up towards the shooting stars on the ceiling.

By half-past nine I knew he wasn't coming. My bitter lemon was finished and I'd smoked all but two of my cigarettes. I remember how angry I felt, close to tears, not because he'd stood me up but because everything was spoiled, the night and the dress and the music and everything. I was sorting my lipstick and getting ready to leave when a shadow fell on my handbag and stayed there. When I turned and looked up, there he was. The lights from the stage were behind him and I couldn't really see his face. I'd forgotten how tall he was, how well-spoken.

'I'm so sorry I'm late,' he said. 'May I still join you?'

That's how he spoke. He offered me a cigarette and lit it with a nice gold lighter but he didn't take one himself. He didn't smoke, just carried a pack for occasions like this.

He bought me another bitter lemon and got another pack of Embassy Filter from the vending machine and draped his raincoat over a vacant chair. He had a nice woollen scarf that he folded and placed on the chair beside him. He was really good looking with his sharp jaw and his straight nose and his short fair hair in a neat side shed. He wore a regimental tie and a brown chalkstripe suit. Stylish. I couldn't stop grinning, leaning in to get my cigarette lit, resting my hand on his hand as he held the flame.

The music was loud so it was a struggle to talk but he asked me about my day and he spoke about his job. I wasn't really listening so much as just enjoying his voice, Glasgow but sort of refined, not like your typical city neds, whining out of the sides of their mouths like someone letting air out of a balloon.

He was different altogether. A lot of the guys you'd see in the Barrowland were hard men, or thought they were, always spoiling for a fight. I'd see them in the Vickie on my night shift, carting their sore faces into A&E. I want to say that they didn't look so clever right then, with their faces gaping open, but the truth is they looked every bit as clever – or every bit as dumb – sitting there with their shirts drenched in blood, pleased as punch, already working out how they'd tell it to their mates. William was different, he seemed older, more sophisticated, somebody who knew things. Good dancer, too.

We left at half-eleven and walked down the Gallowgate to where he'd parked his car. Outside in the streetlights he looked younger than he had in the ballroom. He was twenty-five, maybe twenty-six, though he acted a little older than he was. Even so, I was older by five or six years and I liked it, it made me feel more in control.

His car was a sleek white affair, quite new-looking. He held the passenger door for me while I settled myself in the red leather seat, then he closed the door before walking round to the driver's side. I leaned against him when the car turned a corner and looked up into his face but he stared straight ahead and kept his hands to himself. He was talking away about decimalization with this earnest look on his face and when the car stopped at a red light I started poking him in the ribs, trying to get him to laugh if nothing else. It was nice he was such a gentleman but he needed to relax a bit. Nothing was going to happen anyway – it was my time of the month – but you'd want some fun from a night at the jiggin.

We got out of the car and he walked me to the closemouth. And now, when we stepped into the darkened close, it all seemed to change, like a switch had flicked. He caught me by the shoulders and pressed his mouth against mine, hard, so that my head bumped against the wall of the close. About time, I thought. Then his hands were busy and his breathing got loud.

'Not here,' I told him. 'Come on.'

I took him down the hill to the lane behind Carmichael Place. I was laughing to myself, because it was like I was fifteen again. This was where you would come with boys, after the pictures or church socials, this is the place you'd winch a little before you went home. I hadn't been down here in fifteen years, but it was still just the same, the garages and the garden gates.

It was dark in the lane, away from the lights. The ground is all grassy with stones jutting out – not cobbles but ordinary stones, sharp and uneven, and my heel caught on one of the stones and I clutched at his arm, fell against him, really, and I remember I was laughing, I couldn't stop laughing, it all seemed so funny and my mouth was locked open in this soundless laugh and that's when he hit me in the mouth.

At first I didn't know what happened. I thought maybe I'd slipped and bumped his shoulder or maybe someone had come running out of the lane and burst right between us and knocked me out of the way. I staggered backwards and clattered into the double doors of a garage, they rattled and shook. I raised my fingers to my mouth and took them away with something dark and glistening on them. That's when I looked up and saw him stumping across the lane with his fist raised high. I screamed then but I needed to swallow first and the scream was kind of thin and half-hearted and he stopped it with another punch and there was a kind of judder like you were bumping downstairs and then the ground was scraping my face and I looked up with the eye that could still open and he was standing over me, tugging loose his tie and sawing his head back and forth as he did it.

That was all. Now my father looks like he will never smile again, like he's forgotten the language of smiling and he's suddenly old, old, old, he's a wee small leprechaun, The Incredible Shrinking Man, his collars gaping, his jacket sleeves hanging down past his knuckles, and my mother walks around in a Valium trance. They try to put on happiness for Alasdair's sake but you can't fake it, a child isn't fooled. The boy knows that something's wrong and of course he thinks it's his fault.

They worried, when I was out in Germany, Mum and Dad. Anything could happen in a country like that. They were so pleased when I came home, back to the flat in Langside Place, to the numbered buses and the local shops, the streets where nothing bad could happen. It's hard for them to face the

truth: I would have been safer in Germany, in that cramped Army house in Bad Godesberg, tramping through the rain to the NAAFI store.

There are things we need to remember. I tell them to Alasdair, lying weightlessly beside him on the narrow single bed, wishing I could smell his skin. I pour them into his ears while he sleeps and I tell myself that when his eyelids flicker – his transparent eyelids with the red veins down them and the long blond lashes – then the words are getting through. I tell my boy about himself. How he used to be scared of the coalman with his leather apron and his grimy face. How, when I leaned over to say goodnight, he would play with my hair, twist it in his fingers. He did that whenever he was tired. Sitting on my lap, leaning back against my chest, he would throw his wee arm up and clutch at my hair. Now he'll forget. There'll be no one to remind him that he did that. Or that he liked the Monkees. Or that he shouted 'Lollo!' when a lorry went past or called a helicopter 'Uppatuptup'. My folks won't remember. They love him, but they won't remember those things and it seems hard to think that they'll be lost.

What could matter more than this? Not revenge, certainly; not catching the man. People think the murdered dead are chewed up by hatred, lusting for vengeance, we can't rest till our killer is caught. I couldn't care less. If a man is hanged in Barlinnie Gaol or locked up in Peterhead for the next fifteen years will that help Alasdair sleep at night? Will it give me back my sense of smell?

For a while I thought I was different from the others. Better. Less to blame. I was the first. I had no way of knowing that he even existed. But the others, the second girl and the third: when they walked up those stairs to the noise and the lights and the shooting stars, they knew. They knew a man had picked up a woman on that dance floor and taken her home and killed her. But they went anyway.

And then I saw I was wrong, I was kidding myself. I knew he was out there too. I knew it all along. We all do.

1

DI Duncan McCormack sat at a desk in the empty Murder Room. It was the dead time between shifts. The night shift had knocked off at seven; the day shift wouldn't start till eight.

McCormack was early, on a point of principle. You're planning to sit in judgement on a group of your colleagues, you better be early. You better show them all the respect you can.

He lit a cigarette. This early, the Murder Room had a churchly peace. He hadn't turned on the lights, and the morning sun threw a soft gloss on the hooded typewriters and the glass ashtrays and the grey metal bellies of the wastepaper baskets. It was the usual shabby office, with its jumble of scuffed desks and unmatched chairs and olive drab filing cabinets, but for McCormack such rooms could be magical places. Mysteries were solved here. Murders redeemed. Lives that had been turned upside down could sometimes – with work and skill and the needful visitation of luck – be righted.

Luck, though. Luck wasn't a word you associated with the Quaker case. Nothing about this case had been lucky.

He rose and crossed to the one long wall that was free of shelving. There were maps here with coloured push-pins marking the murder scenes. There were photographs of three women, the familiar before-and-after shots. You couldn't look from the oblivious smiles to the sprawled bodies without your stomach dropping. Without feeling personally guilty.

He stopped in front of one of the smiles to acknowledge his own share of guilt. He had worked this one, the first one. Jacquilyn Keevins. Down on the South Side. In the spring of last year. A botch job, a case that was jiggered from the first. Mistakes. Dud intel. Sloppy direction. They'd wound the thing up after only two weeks. Then came Ann Ogilvie over in Bridgeton, and Marion Mercer out west in Scotstoun. That's when they knew for sure they were dealing with a multiple. That's when the legend started to form, the dark tales and rumours – a whole city in thrall to the arrogant, Bible-quoting strangler that the papers dubbed the Quaker.

And that's when the Quaker Squad set up shop in the old Marine, the nearest station to the Mercer locus. And this is where they'd been ever since, as the weeks turned into months and the man from the Barrowland Ballroom refused to be caught.

And now, just to add to the fun and games, they had Detective Inspector Duncan McCormack on their backs. On secondment from the Flying Squad, McCormack was tasked with reviewing the Quaker investigation, learning lessons, making recommendations. Everyone knew what this meant. Scale the thing down. Scale it down before we squander more money. Get us all out of the mess we've made.

McCormack was turning from the photos on the wall when the telephone rang. A shrill, tinny jangle in the silent room. He looked at the door as though someone might burst in to answer the phone and then gingerly, frowningly, reached for the receiver.

'Murder Room. McCormack.'

He felt like a butler in a play. Someone playing a part. There was a soft rasping sound, a kind of shadow-laughter, then the moist, masticating clicks of a man preparing to speak. 'No nearer, are you?'

'Say it again?'

'You're no nearer catching him. After all this time.'

The voice was local, Glasgow. Nicely spoken. Fifties, McCormack decided. Possibly older.

'Can you tell me your name, sir?'

'A year you've had. More than a year. Some people might view that as careless. Wasteful, even.'

'Sir, do you have information you'd like to impart?'

'Impart?' The soft laugh. 'I'll impart all right, son. I'll impart the name of the man who did it. How's that?'

'On you go, then.'

‘Michael Ferris. Michael Ferris is the bastard you want. F-E-R-R-I-S, 12 Dollar Terrace, Maryhill. Are you writing this down?’

‘Thank you for your help.’

McCormack put the phone down and turned to see a shape in the doorway, broad shoulders blocking the light. Big shaggy head of blond hair. Goldie was the detective’s name. McCormack had pegged him early as a loudmouth. Blowhard. Also, he thought he knew the guy from somewhere.

‘Christ, mate. I never heard you come in.’

Goldie rocked on his heels. ‘Michael Ferris?’

‘How did you know?’

Goldie shrugged. ‘It’s the same nutjob. Phones every three or four days.’

‘Right.’ McCormack nodded. He smiled his crooked smile. ‘Look, I don’t think we’ve met properly. I’m Duncan McCormack.’

‘You think we don’t know your name?’ Goldie didn’t appear to see the proffered hand. ‘You think we don’t know who you are?’

‘Should I take that as a compliment?’

‘Well, it’s the closest you’re gonnae get in this room, buddy.’

‘Fair enough. It’s fucked up, this whole situation. I get it. But look, mate. We all want the same thing here.’

‘Really?’ Goldie chewed his lip. His fists were plunged in the pockets of his raincoat and he spread his arms. ‘You want to get on with catching bad guys? Like, you know, proper police work? Because I thought you wanted something else.’

You could rise to it, McCormack thought. Or you could take a breath, see the job through, write your report and be done with this shit. File this fucker’s face for future reference. Make sure he gets what’s coming at some point down the line.

‘I want what we all want.’

‘Right. My mistake,’ Goldie was saying. ‘I thought you were here to grass us up. Do your wee spy number.’

McCormack smiled tightly. Do you know James Kane? he wanted to ask. James Arthur Kane, the man who ran Dennistoun for John McGlashan? The man who just landed a twelve-stretch at Peterhead? That James Kane? I put him away. I did the police work that nailed him. He’s the fourth of McGlashan’s boys that I’ve nailed in the past year, while you’ve been shuffling your lardy arse in this shitty room. Filing papers. Sticking pins in a corkboard.

But he said nothing and now Goldie was smiling. ‘You don’t even know, do you?’

McCormack tried to keep the tightness out of his voice. ‘Don’t know what, Detective?’

‘Where you know me from? Jesus Christ. We worked the first one together. Jacquilyn Keevins.’

‘Right. Right. Of course.’

It was true. That’s where he’d seen him. How had he missed it? McCormack cursed his own stupidity. It was as if one lapse of memory proved Goldie’s point – there was only one detective present.

Goldie jabbed himself in the chest with a stubby finger. ‘And I’m still working it. Me and the others. What are you doing?’

‘I’m doing my job, Detective. Police work. Same as you are.’

‘Naw, Inspector. Naw.’ Goldie’s teeth were bared in a sneer, eyes bright with scorn above the bunched cheeks. ‘Naw. See, you cannae be the brass’s nark and do good police work. Know why? Because good police work doesnae get done on its own. You need your neighbours to help you. And who’s gonnae help you after this?’

He was using ‘neighbours’ in the special polis sense, meaning your partners, the guys you shared a station with. McCormack watched as Goldie tugged his cigarettes and lighter from his raincoat

pocket, tossed them on the desk. Goldie was whistling under his breath and fuck this, McCormack decided, enough was enough.

'You know a guy called James Kane?' he asked.

'Yeah, yeah.' Goldie was hanging his raincoat on the hat-rack. 'You put one of Glash's soldiers away. And that gets you a pass? Maybe in your book. In mine, you need to turn up every day. Be a polis. Earn it all again.'

McCormack shook his head. Be a polis. The fuck would you know about that? McCormack had his finger raised to jab it at Goldie when he heard the smart rap of heels in the corridor.

'What's the score here?' The boss, DCI George Cochrane, was on the threshold, tall and thin and oddly boyish in his belted gabardine. He read the battle stance of Goldie and McCormack. 'The hell's going on, DS Goldie?'

'Friendly discussion, sir.' Goldie smiled, still looking at McCormack. 'We're all friends here.'

'Fine. Let's keep it that way.' Cochrane bustled through to his own office, spreading the cherry scent of pipe tobacco. At the ribbed glass door he paused. 'And Goldie? We'll be doing some parades with Nancy Scullion over the coming week. Drop by her flat this evening, would you? Check what times she'll be free.'

'Sir.'

Goldie took his seat. McCormack crossed to one of the big sash windows, unsnibbed it, hooked his fingers in the metal lifts and tugged it open. The smell of the river came in on the breeze; the Clyde met the Kelvin just south of the office. He thought about Nancy Scullion. He'd heard the name a lot around the office. If the Murder Room was a cult, its High Priestess, the Delphic Oracle of the Marine Police Station, was Nancy Scullion. Sister of the third victim, she had spent the evening of 25 January in Barrowland Ballroom with her sister and the killer. He sat between them in the taxi on the way back to Scotstoun, where the sisters lived just a few streets apart. Nancy was drunk, blootered, smashed on gin and Babycham, but she'd heard him banging on about caravan holidays in Irvine, growing up in a foster home, getting verses of the Bible off by heart.

Nancy's description was holy writ. It was the tablets of the law for the men at these desks. They parsed it and probed it, took apart its description of a well-dressed modern man, with his short fair hair and his neat raincoat, his gallantry and his hair-trigger temper. Good manners. Nice diction. A cut above the common ruck of East End hoodlums and toughs. A golfer, no less, whose cousin had recently scored a hole in one. Polite but masterful, a man of strong views, who called for the manager when the cigarette machine malfunctioned and forced him to refund Nancy's money. A man who spoke darkly about sinful women in the taxi back to Scotstoun. Who professed to spend his New Year's Eves in prayer while the rest of the world gave itself over to drink and hilarity.

McCormack knew it all. After barely a week he knew the details about as well as if he'd been here all along.

Brown chalkstripe suit, regimental tie. Thick watchstrap. Embassy Filter. Overlapping two front teeth. Suede boots. Dens of iniquity. Woman taken in adultery. Hole in one.

This was the litany and these men blitzed it. Every man on the squad had criss-crossed the city, chasing these leads. In a hundred barber-shops these detectives had traded nods in the mirror with gowned customers as the barber slipped his scissors into a breast pocket and took the artist's impression in both hands. At specially convened meetings of city golf clubs they watched the blazer-buttons wink like coins as the members passed a laminated image along the rows. They took the picture to all the tailors on Renfield Street and Hope Street. They went to the churches, chapels, gospel halls of all denominations, spoke to priests, lay preachers, ministers. They visited dentists' surgeries, asked permission to sift their records.

And nothing worked.

The man with the short hair and overlapping teeth, the smartly dressed dancer in the desert boots whose cousin scored a hole in one, the zealot who quoted scripture in the back seat of a taxi,

the man who raped and killed Jacquilyn Keevins and Ann Ogilvie and Marion Mercer; that man remained a ghost.

Now, as the day shift straggled in, hooking their fedoras on the hat-rack, shucking out of their blue raincoats, McCormack felt something like pity. This was the prime gig, the career-making case, and it had all turned sour.

There was a smell in the room, a brassy tang beneath the sweat and cigarettes. The smell was embarrassment, McCormack decided. They're sore at having their shortcomings and befuddlement exposed to an outsider, the brass's nark from St Andrew's Street. But it was more than that, too. They were flat out affronted. With the details they had. All the specifics. That litany of ties and teeth and Old Testament imprecations.

Every man in that squad had made arrests on not a tenth of what they had to go on here. So what had gone wrong this time? How had they failed so badly? These were the questions that hung in the air and DCI Cochrane seemed to sense them as he stubbed his Rothmans out in an ashtray and slapped his hand on the side of a filing cabinet to bring the room to order.

We haven't been thorough enough, he told them. We haven't been systematic. We missed something the first time round and we need to put it right.

There was a pile of buff folders on top of the filing cabinet, maybe twenty-five or thirty. Cochrane turned and gathered them awkwardly in his arms and leaned over to drop them on the nearest desk.

'These are men we spoke to after one and two. After Keevins and Ogilvie. Men with records. Sexuals. We may have been too hasty to rule them out. I want you to roust out these individuals, bring them in. We'll see what Nancy Scullion makes of them.'

McCormack looked along the line and caught Goldie's eye. Goldie shook his head and looked away.

Cochrane clapped twice, chafed his hands together. 'Right. Now let's divvy these up and get cracking.'

The men shuffled forward and each lifted three or four folders, carried them back to their desks.

Ten minutes later Goldie went out for a piss and McCormack sidled over to his desk, started leafing through the folders. He pulled one out. A sorry-looking soul called Robert Kilgour, forty-two years of age, whose vulpine face seemed faintly familiar. Kilgour had been released from Peterhead in '67 after serving two years for a sexual assault carried out in Mill Street in the East End of Glasgow, about a mile south-east of the Barrowland Ballroom. He'd been interviewed after the first killing, and it was McCormack himself – he remembered it now, and here was the sheet, rattled out on his own trusty Underwood – who'd grilled him in his Cowcaddens flat. Kilgour had a solid alibi – he'd been visiting friends in Ayrshire on the night of the killing and stayed overnight in Kilmarnock – and they'd ruled him out pretty quickly. There was nothing much more in the file, just a record of Kilgour's flittings. He'd moved around a lot in the past eighteen months. His current address was in Shettleston – a tenement scheduled for demolition.

Goldie was back, standing by the desk, hands on his hips. McCormack looked up. 'When you get round to this guy here' – he tapped the Kilgour file – 'let me know. I want to come along.'

Goldie glanced down at the file, back at McCormack. He dragged his chair out with a scrape, thudded down into it, jockeyed it closer to the desk. 'Your funeral,' he said.

2

The sky-blue Vauxhall Velox came nosing round the corner into the empty street. In the closemouth of a gutted tenement, Robert Kilgour watched it pass, gravel crackling under the tyres, the two men hunched on the front bench-seat, the slim passenger, heavyset driver.

Kilgour moved from the shadows towards the open air. He stood in the doorway, watched the pink taillights floating in the dusk. He pinched the bridge of his nose and his fingers came away wet, dripping, he shook the sweat from them. Framed in the back windscreen he could see the two heads in silhouette, twisting to look. They would know he couldn't have got far. Another fifty yards, another hundred they would stop, turn and come back. He had to move now.

He tried to remember the layout of these streets. His own flat was only three or four streets away but he had run blindly when he spotted the parked Velox as he crossed to his building. As he ran he'd been aware of nothing but the sound of the car's engine and now he was lost. It was barely three weeks since he'd moved to this district. They kept knocking bits of it down. Every time you went out there was another gap-site, another missing street, you never knew where you were.

Across the street was a block of empty tenements. It struck Kilgour that there was another dead street beyond this and then maybe the main road. Buses, bars, shops. People. Places to hide.

He took a breath, closed his eyes for a second, tugged his sweat-soaked shirt away from his chest. Then he left the closemouth at a sprint, running low with his hands up around his head, as though fearful of falling debris. Without looking he knew the car had stopped. There was a hollow crunch as the driver found reverse and a veering screech as the car swung round. Kilgour made it into the building across the street, feet slapping through the echoey close and he heard the engine's angry rasp as the driver found first and ramped up through the gears.

Emerging into the dark backcourt Kilgour heard the car suddenly louder, the engine's whine stretching as the car took the corner and gunned down the straight.

He'd been heading straight across the backcourt but now he sheered off to the left, nearly slamming into a metal clothes-pole. The hard-packed earth was strewn with bricks and rubble and his ankles flexed and buckled as he ran. He ran with his hands out in front of him, feeling for clotheslines and other impediments in the gathering dark and soon a black wall reared up in front of him. He scrambled on to the roof of a midden, hauled himself on to the wall and dropped down into the next backcourt.

He kept running, weaving from side to side like a man dodging bullets. He couldn't hear the car, the only sound now was Kilgour's own breathing and then his running foot kicked something, a tin can that sparked and rattled over the broken ground, splitting the night like a burst of gunfire. When he reached the next wall and struggled on to the midden he was losing heart, his legs were heavy, the fight was draining out of him.

Before him was a big patch of waste ground: bricks and rubble, puddles catching the last of the light. He raised his eyes and saw the squat low outline, a building shaped like a shoebox.

Kilgour slipped over the wall. He drew his sleeve across his brow and picked his way through the rubble. His knees almost gave way as he pushed through the double doors.

'Did you win?' The barman was smiling as he passed him his change.

Kilgour stared at the red stupid face.

'What?'

'The race you were in, did you win it?'

Sweat was dripping from Kilgour's brow on to the bar-top, spotting a beermat. McEwan's Export: the Laughing Cavalier, with his foaming tankard of ale. Kilgour shook his head and slipped the change into his pocket and tried to still the tremor in his leg.

He was sick of running. He'd been running – one way or another – for over two years, since he'd walked out of Peterhead on a wet spring morning with his worldly goods in a black BOAC flight bag. He was sick of moving, changing flat every couple of months. But what could you do? It followed a pattern. For a while things would go well in a new flat. Then someone would place him, make the connection. And then it would start. Dogshit through the letter box. Catcalls from the local kids. Crude words scrawled on his door. Rocks through the windows. Getting jostled in the street. That's when he'd look for another place.

You could change your name, but why give them the satisfaction if you hadn't done anything wrong?

He heard the pub doors rattle. He didn't look round. He stared down at the bar-top and in the vertical black groove of a cigarette burn he saw the gable end of a building, a dark street. He saw a woman on the pavement, sitting up now, clutching her throat, choking, retching, her torn blouse hanging open, her skirt shucked up around her waist. Her face was pink and gorged, her eyes bulging and bloodshot, swimming in tears. A rope of snot and saliva swung from her upper lip. He remembered the burst of pain in his head and the ground swinging up to smack him, and a dead weight on his back, a man sitting astride him, forcing his arm up his back. He'd lain there, oddly placid, with his face pressed to the gritty street and the weight on his back until the siren drew closer and gulped to a stop and a pair of black boots filled his line of vision.

Now he watched in the whisky mirror as the burly man shooed the barman away and the thin man shook his head.

Kilgour wiped a hand down his face. The same hand reached for the whisky and then pulled back. He reached into his jacket pocket for his smokes and then changed his mind. The cops watched him. He could see his own face in the gantry mirror, sick and scared, the features obscured by the 'FIN' of 'FINEST SCOTCH WHISKY'. He looked bad, he was sweating, the hair at his temples in damp little spikes.

Then his leg started again, his right leg shaking, the knee joint flexing. He reached out for a drink and his hand knocked the glass, whisky pooling on the sticky bar-top. When he bolted to the Gents he could sense them coming after.

'Robert Kilgour?'

Piss and carbolic. The bare lightbulb flaring in the scuffed steel of the trough.

'Kilgour,' he said. The cop had pronounced it to rhyme with 'power': Kilgour rhymed it with 'poor'.

'Why did you run?'

The fat cop had backed him up to the trough.

'Why did you run, Kilgour?'

Kilgour glanced at the other cop, the tall one. He was still looking at the tall one when the fat one kicked his legs from under him and Kilgour slammed on to the dark concrete, his elbow cracking on the floor, the back of his head catching the lip of the trough. Then the fat one reached down and hauled him up like a bag of chaff and dumped him into the trough. Kilgour waggled his arms for balance, his hands paddling in the piss and running water, he felt the cold wet soaking into the arse of his trousers. He struggled to his feet, wiping his hands on the front of his jacket.

'How did you know it was you we were looking for?' The tall one had a different voice, softer, not a city accent. Kilgour felt the old injustice welling up again and fought to keep the tremor from his voice.

'It's always me. Ever since that lassie on the south side. The Keevins lassie. It's always me you're looking for.'

Kilgour's hand was in his pocket again. The fat one leaned forward and Kilgour flinched but the man gripped Kilgour's wrist and yanked his hand from his pocket. The cigarette packet flipped out and landed on the tiled floor. The two-tone red stripe: Embassy Filter. The cops exchanged a look.

'Smile.'

Kilgour looked up, uncertain. His eyes slid to the tall one, *Who is this lunatic?* and the fat one stepped forward and gripped Kilgour's jaw in the V of his right hand, thumb and fingers compressing the flesh. 'I told you to smile. You fucking nonce. Don't you know how to smile?'

He released his grip. Kilgour's lips drew back, exposing his teeth in a queasy sneer. They were ordinary teeth, nicotine-brown, averagely crooked.

'Good enough.' The fat one tugged the cuffs from his jacket pocket. 'Turn round.'

The cuffs went on. As they frogmarched Kilgour through the pub they passed a table of four men, near the door. Dominoes. Boiler-makers. Metal ashtray needing emptied.

'Hey!' One of the men was on his feet, a stocky man in a grey suit jacket. Pocked face. Rangers scarf. 'Hey! What's the score here? Ah'm talking to you. Hi! Fuckin' Zed Cars.'

The cops stopped. The fat one nodded for the other to take charge of Kilgour and rocked unhurriedly up to the table. He had two or three inches on the man with the scarf.

'You've got something to say?'

'The boy done nothin',' the man was saying. 'Mindin' his own fuckin' business. You think we didnae see that?'

'Just like you, eh? Mindin' your business.'

The man snorted. 'Fuckin' police state youse are runnin'.'

The cop stepped back and pointed at Kilgour. 'You know this guy? Is he a friend of yours?'

Rangers scarf kept his eyes locked on the cop's. 'I know he was minding his own fuckin' business. Till you cunts started.'

'Uh-huh. OK. The missus kick you out or something? Is that what this is about? You needing a bed for the night?'

The man glowered, said nothing.

There was a whisky and a half-pint of heavy on the table in front of the man with the scarf. The cop leaned forward and tipped the half-pint over, just pushed it with three fingers in an oddly camp gesture. 'Tsk, would you look at that.' The liquid spread across the tabletop, spilled over the edge in three ropy columns, spattering the lino. 'I've gone and spilled your drink. That was clumsy.'

'Bud, leave it.' The man's friends were grabbing his sleeves, pulling him back down into his chair. 'Leave it, Bud. It's not worth it.'

The cop took up the whisky glass and poured it on to the floor, raising the glass smartly as he poured so that the whisky formed a long golden string that hissed on the lino. He replaced the glass on the table, upside down, his fingertip resting on the base.

'My advice? And I say this in a spirit of reconciliation and public service. Be like your friend over here. Mind your own fucking business.'

Outside on the pavement, Kilgour found his courage. 'Youse huckled me for the last one. No remember? You've done me already. I'm in the clear.'

The night air was cool on their forehead and cheeks.

'This time's different.' A big hand pushed Kilgour towards the car, the Velox parked on the waste ground. When the hand gripped his shoulder, Kilgour tried to shrug it loose.

'How's it different?'

The thin one had the door open and the heavy one bundled him into the car.

'This time there's a witness.'

3

‘Sandy’s what she said.’ DCI George Cochrane dragged a chair from a vacant desk and straddled it, crotch splayed. He rubbed two hands up and down his face. ‘Sandy. Fair. Light-coloured. I don’t know how else to say it.’

They were in the Murder Room at the Marine, maps on the wall, boxed statements on the shelves, the sun already burning in the high sash windows. Photos pinned to the board behind Cochrane’s head. The victims’ smiling faces. The victims’ naked bodies.

Jacquilyn Keevins. Ann Ogilvie. Marion Mercer.

‘Flaxen.’ Goldie couldn’t help himself. ‘Straw-coloured, sir. Pale blond.’

Cochrane twisted a finger into the corner of his eye. He gave no indication of having heard Goldie. ‘Jokes you can do.’ He nodded heavily. ‘Acting the clown. Catching killers? That’s the tricky part for you boys, right? The fucking hotshots.’ He stood up sharply and the chair scraped on the floor. ‘Scottish Crime Squad. Fucking Flying Squad. What’s the matter, they don’t teach you how to read witness statements?’ Goldie said nothing. Cochrane tugged his shirt away from his chest, blew down its front. ‘Sandy, she said.’

Goldie shifted in his chair. ‘*She* said.’

‘Meaning what?’

‘The doormen tell it different, sir. The manager, too. Mid-brown, maybe darker. And the boy and girl, the couple, who came forward after the first one; they had him mid-brown, too.’

‘We’ve been through this, Detective. She’s the witness.’

‘Plus the height. The doormen call it five-eight, nine. Not six foot.’

‘She’s the one shared the taxi with him. She’s the one was in his company for most of the night.’

Goldie cleared his throat. ‘She’s the one too pissed to know her own name. Her *own* colour of hair.’

Cochrane turned his back, stared at the wall, the map of the city. ‘He says you punched him,’ he said.

‘What’s that, sir?’

Cochrane kept his back to them. ‘Kilgour. Your suspect. The nonce. He says you assaulted him.’ Cochrane turned. ‘What’s Boy Wonder going to say about that, hmm? How’s that gonnae look in his report?’

Goldie shrugged. The question was put to Goldie but it was McCormack who had to answer it.

‘DS Goldie behaved professionally throughout the arrest.’

‘It’s not going into your wee report? When you tell the brass how we’re doing it wrong?’

McCormack said nothing. He figured Cochrane had a right to be aggrieved. He had watched his biggest case, the case that would define him, become a slow-motion nightmare. Three women murdered and still no one charged. Months slipping past, the task getting bigger, not smaller. There were thousands of fair-haired men in this city, tens of thousands, men between twenty-five and thirty-five, men with overlapping teeth. Men who matched the photofit, the artist’s impression. Men who smoked Embassy Filter. But the papers didn’t get any kinder as time went on and the pressure from the brass didn’t slacken. If Cochrane was sore he had every excuse.

The suspect, Kilgour, had been held in the cells overnight. There was a magistrate’s court attached to the Marine and the cells were often busy. They’d given Kilgour a mate, put him in with a fairy they’d lifted on Kelvin Way. Cold white tiles. A shitter with no seat.

They’d arranged a parade for the morning. Nancy Scullion, sister of the third victim, Marion Mercer. At 10 a.m. a squad car picked Nancy up from her work – she was a secretary at Harland and Wolff’s – and took her to the Marine. Ten minutes later she was being driven back to Govan. She’d walked down the line of men, looked at Cochrane and shaken her head. In the foyer, she told

Cochrane, 'You think it's number four, don't you? It's not really like him.' Kilgour was number four. Kilgour went home. Kilgour was a waste of everyone's time.

Now Cochrane had his hands behind his head, fingers laced, his teeth bared in a bitter grin. 'You know what they're calling us? The fucking papers?'

The two men knew. Everyone knew. But Cochrane told them anyway.

'The Marine Formation Dance Team.' Cochrane smiled. 'Cute, eh? Fucking clever.'

The Quaker Squad had been haunting the city's dance halls for the past year, brushing up their dance skills, mingling with the punters, looking for the man with the overlapping teeth and the regimental tie, the short fair hair and the desert boots. It was easy to spot the cops: they were the ones watching the men, not the women.

'I'd say we've never seen anything like it, but even that's not true.'

The two detectives nodded. They knew what Cochrane was talking about. It was Manuel all over again. Another dapper killer. Peter Manuel. Another stain on the city's name. Ten years back. Cochrane had worked it. Goldie too. McCormack was too young.

'Happening again, sir, isn't it?' Goldie grimaced.

McCormack remembered. He'd been too young to work it but not too young to remember. The crowds outside the High Court during the trial, men and women in their good clothes, wee boys climbing on the High Court railings. He was working in C Div at the time, lodging with Granny Beag in Partick. Manuel was convicted of seven murders, confessed to eight more. They hanged him on 11 July. McCormack's birthday. Waking up in Granny's flat, coming through for breakfast, the present on the kitchen table, the radio on, Granny Beag sitting in her quilted dressing-gown and fur-lined slippers, a lit cigarette in the ashtray, they announced it on the radio. *Sentence of execution was carried out on Peter Manuel in Barlinnie Prison at one minute past eight this morning.* McCormack unwrapping the parcel. *His body was buried in an unmarked grave in the prison grounds.* A watch, a Rolex Tudor with a leather strap, the watch he still wore.

Cochrane stood up, dragged the chair over to the other desk, rested his hands on its back. 'Sometimes I think it never stopped.' He sighed out some smoke. 'Him down in Manchester. Brady. He's one of ours, too, God help us. Pollok boy. You got a minute, McCormack?'

'Sir.'

McCormack followed Cochrane into the narrow office next to the Murder Room. He closed the door behind him.

'Did he hit him?'

'Like I said, sir, DS Goldie behaved professionally.'

'Ah fuck it. Guy's a nonce. Who gives a shit. Had your boss on the phone.' Cochrane was stubbing his Rothmans in the ashtray, jabbing it into the scuffed red metal.

'You're my boss.'

'Your real boss. DCI Flett. Wants to know how long we're planning to keep you. When we might be able to spare you.' McCormack rode the little punch of irony on the last two words. Cochrane had stopped jabbing the cigarette butt and now he folded it over on itself, pressing down hard with the ball of his thumb. 'Told him you're playing it close to your chest. Any thoughts, though? How long this might take?'

'Few more days. Another week, maybe.'

'Then we learn our fate.'

Cochrane moved round the desk to stand beside McCormack. McCormack could smell something carious under the older man's tobacco breath, a rottenness that made him breathe in shallow sips. Above the height of four feet, the wall of Cochrane's office was frosted glass through which the torsos of the day-shift detectives floated like clouds.

'No slackers here.' Cochrane nodded through the glass. 'No shirkers, Detective.'

McCormack took this to mean that there were no Roman Catholics in the Murder Room. Thinks I'm a Prod, McCormack realized. Probably thinks all Highlanders are Wee Frees.

'Busy bees.' McCormack nodded. 'Work rate's not a problem, clearly.'

The word 'problem' tilted the atmosphere in Cochrane's office. He felt Cochrane giving him the stare.

'What do you suppose it might be then, Detective? The "problem"?'

'You'd know that better than I would, sir.'

'Uh-huh. Right. Well. You find out what it is, you let me know. First cab. Understood?'

McCormack watched the white shapes, avoided Cochrane's gaze. 'You'll see the report, sir. It'll come to you. In the normal course of things.'

'Normal course of things?' Cochrane kicked a wastepaper basket as he stepped right up close to McCormack. The clouds drifted in the Murder Room. 'This isn't the normal course of things. This is you parachuting into my station to stitch me fucking up. Me and those boys out there. Tell the CC how we fucked it up. How you'd have done it better.'

'We're all on the same side here, sir. We all want him caught.'

'Is that right? You've been a polis how long, McCormack? How long you been on the force?'

'Thirteen years, sir.'

'Twenty-seven.' Cochrane slapped his own chest. 'Twenty-seven years. You make a lot of friends in that time.'

'This a threat, sir?'

'It's a statement of fact, Detective. I've got three years to go. Three years till I've done my thirty and I'm out. You're not gonnae fuck that up for me, son.'

Back in the Murder Room, McCormack tried to focus on the report he'd been reading, a press statement in Cochrane's lurid prose: *The man we are seeking is a man of dark urges and lawless drives. He may keep irregular hours. Anyone with inform—*

'That for my benefit?'

Goldie had appeared beside his desk.

'What?'

'The wee performance back there. Backing up a fellow officer. Look at me: I'm a good guy after all. One of the lads. That what that was about?'

McCormack shook his head. The whole Kilgour thing had been a stunt, he realized. It was Goldie declaring that McCormack and McCormack's review could take a fuck to themselves. It was also a test. Goldie had known that Kilgour would complain. He'd known that Cochrane would want to know what happened. If McCormack backed up Kilgour, well, what do you want from a rat? If he backed up Goldie he was weak as piss.

'Got one or two things on my plate just now, Detective. One or two concerns. Am I on Detective Sergeant Goldie's Christmas card list? That's not one of them.'

'Well, that's handy.'

Goldie had a smoke in his mouth, fumbling in his pockets for a light. The cigarette bobbed up and down under Goldie's muffled curses. McCormack watched him for a few seconds then produced his Dunhill lighter, sparked it angrily.

'Here.'

He lit Goldie's then he lit one of his own. They stood smoking, watching the river, not talking. A minute ticked past.

'Fucking cheek on him, but.' Goldie was studying the end of his cigarette. 'Moaning about the press.'

'They're not on his case?'

'They're on his case, aye. But maybe he should stop holding press conferences every five minutes.'

McCormack said nothing. Goldie was right. Cochrane had run to the media with every development, however slight. His line was that they should use it to their advantage, the media interest. Keep feeding the papers little tidbits. The *Record* and the *Express* were like a daily door-to-door to every household in the city.

But the papers needed something to write about between killings. They needed an excuse to put the artist's impression on the front page, the half-smiling clean-cut killer, limned in pencil. They needed 'QUAKER' in a forty-point Tempo, stark black print on the off-white pulp. And when there was nothing else, when there were no 'developments', they wrote about the Murder Squad. Their failings, their wasted efforts. *How Long Must We Live in Fear? Will the Dance Hall Butcher Never Be Caught?*

'Think we'll get him?'

'We?'

'You. Us. Whatever.'

'Will we fuck. We were beat from the start. The first one did it. The Magic Stick. That's what screwed us. Should have got him then.'

McCormack felt the rebuke. Jacqui Keevins was the first victim. She'd been at the dancing, the Majestic Ballroom on Hope Street. The Magic Stick, everyone called it. The cops went there the following night, team-handed, put her photo up on a screen, asked for patrons who'd been there the night before to come out and talk to them in the foyer. A bloke recognized her, said he'd danced with her at the start of night but lost track of her later on.

The cops were stoked. This was the early break you always look for, the sign that you're on the right track. Too bad the guy was making it up. Too bad he was a bullshit-merchant, attention-seeker. By the time he came clean it was too late. When the truth emerged – Jacqui Keevins had been at the Barrowland, not the Majestic – two weeks had passed. The trail was cold.

'So. What you planning to do?'

McCormack flicked his cigarette end out of the open window. 'I'm planning to keep my eyes open. I'm planning to review the evidence. Write an honest report.'

'Right. Shut us down, you mean. Put us out of our misery.'

'Not my decision, Detective.'

'At least look us in the eyes when you shaft us, eh? Give us that much.'

4

McCormack woke with a weight on his chest, the blankets damp and tangled. He struggled up, the headboard clacking against the bedroom wall. His hand scrabbled in the drawer of his bedside cabinet, found the inhaler. Two deep puffs and the panic subsided. His hand reached blindly out, dropped the inhaler back in the drawer.

He banked the pillows behind him and lay back, tugging the covers away from his sweating legs. The sound of his breathing, normally no sound at all, rasped in his ears as though he was snorkelling. It's OK, he told himself: the bad part is over. He craned round to see the luminous green hands on Granny Beag's alarm clock: nearly ten past four.

The night air felt cold on his shins. He stripped his T-shirt, mopped his armpits and the hollow at his breastbone, balled the damp garment and tossed it into a corner.

With the panic over, a sense of shame rose in its place. There was no need for these theatrics, though he knew well enough where his panic came from. It came from the nights in Ballachulish, nights when he'd wake to the clamour in his parents' bedroom, his father choking and hacking and the calm yellow tone of his mother's voice talking his father through it. The sounds his father made were like those of a suffering beast – wild, rending cries and heaving snuffles that shuddered through the darkened house. Then McCormack would hear the bedsprings creak as his mother got up to come downstairs and boil the kettle. She would fill a bowl with hot water and Vicks, and McCormack's father would hobble down to sit at the kitchen table with a tea-towel over his head, inhaling the vapours he hoped would flare his passages, bring some air to his crusted lungs.

McCormack's own asthma was inherited, but from his mother, not his father. What destroyed his dad's lungs and brought him to a hard, slow death with a basin on his lap was working at the British Aluminium Company's plant in Kinlochleven. Willie McCormack worked in the furnace room, one of the big men – six-footers all of them – who spent their days crust-breaking, tapping, changing the anodes. You couldn't see a yard in front of your face, the air soupy with dust and fumes, and a noise like Hades. They learned later that the fumes contained sulphur dioxide and something called 'polyaromatic hydrocarbons', but no one at the time had heard of such words. When his father died the cause of death was listed as 'pulmonary obstruction', but what really killed him was British Aluminium.

McCormack found a fresh T-shirt in the dresser. He filled a glass of water at the kitchen sink and then stood at the living-room window. Some folk thought being a policeman was dangerous work. The choice in Balla was the plant at Kinlochleven or the Balla quarries. McCormack's grandfather – his *seanair* – worked in the slate quarries all his days. It was hard, dirty work – not as hazardous as the aluminium plant, and not a patch on the mines – but it was dangerous too. Dynamited rock could shoot out crowbars like javelins if they were carelessly left in. A guy standing next to McCormack's *seanair* was killed that way.

The last quarry closed in 1955 but McCormack had already left for the city. Coming south to join the City of Glasgow Police was like coming up for air. McCormack left the Highlands to escape the dust and smog and grime, the sound of the hooter four times a day. Glasgow was the Dear Green Place, a city of parks and boating ponds, the Botanic Gardens, the bowling greens of Kelvingrove.

It was a city he knew fairly well, his mother's city and – even more – his granny's city. Granny Beag had grown up in Ballachulish, but she married a lowlander called Thomas Beggs, a welder in the shipyards, and flitted down to Glasgow, where McCormack's mother grew up, meeting McCormack's father at a dance at the Highlanders' Institute. Granny Beag was a short woman, not much over five feet tall, though her sharp tongue and guardsman's carriage gave her the presence her stature belied. When McCormack was young he misheard 'Granny Beggs' as 'Granny Beag' – that is, 'little granny' – and the name stuck. For Granny Beag, Glasgow was like the Highlands without the kirk ministers

and the stink of fish. You could meet people from all over the Gaeltacht, not just from your own village, and you could hear the language spoken whenever you fancied, in the Highlanders' Institute or the Park Bar. And you needn't see a minister or a kirk elder from one year's end to the next unless you sought them out.

When her daughter married a Ballachulish man and moved back to the village, Granny Beag was dismayed. The real Highlands – or as much as you wanted of them – were right here in Glasgow, in the tenements of Partick and Maryhill. She took her revenge by encouraging her grandson to come down to the city whenever he liked. McCormack spent whole summers at the flat in Caird Drive. The old woman was lonely – the welder had died shortly after the war – and it pleased her to have a young man in the house, a boy she could pamper and feed. She taught him Gaelic songs and told him stories of the village in the days of her youth and showed him off to the shopkeepers on Dumbarton Road. When his mother remarried and moved down to London with her new husband, McCormack spent more and more time at the flat.

Towards the end, when Granny Beag was dying of lung cancer, she told McCormack she was leaving the flat to him. Her daughter was well provided for, thanks to her new husband, and she wanted the place to go to McCormack. 'It'll be a base for you when you're down in the city, and maybe you'll end up working here. And it'll be a place,' she said, avoiding his eye, 'a place where you can bring people back.' *People*, she said, as if she'd known all along, as if she'd worked it out.

McCormack moved in straight away. When he finished training and started as a constable in C Div, he bussed it to work from the Caird Drive flat. He changed nothing, kept all of Granny Beag's furniture, her old-fashioned copper pots and the cream-coloured crockery with the green trim. He drank in the Park Bar, went to concerts at the Institute, played shinty for Glasgow Mid-Argyll. He was becoming what she'd wanted him to be all along, the choicest specimen of Caledonian manhood, an urban Highlander.

Now, as he stood looking out at the city, he wondered if he'd come far enough. Maybe he should have followed his mother to London, a real city, a world city, where nobody bothered if you were a teuchter or a taig or anything else. Maybe there was still time. Maybe if he did a good job here he could think about getting away, apply to the Met, get off down to London or further afield. Half the population of Glasgow seemed to be clearing out; another Highlander more or less would never be missed. He rinsed his glass under the tap, turned it upside down on the draining board and padded back to bed.

5

The train rocked to a halt. Alex Paton looked up from his paper and wiped a little porthole in the window's condensation. There was an advert painted on a gable at the far side of the platform – UNCLE JOE'S MINT BALLS KEEP YOU ALL AGLOW – and he knew at once where they were. This was Wigan. This was properly north, where you started to feel you were nearly home. He put aside his paper and leaned back against the headrest, closing his eyes. The station announcer's voice was muffled by the glass. It was now, Paton reckoned, 1963 or 64. No man on the moon. His father still alive in the single end on Hopehill Road. Bloody England hadn't yet won the World Cup. The doors slammed, the whistle blew, and the train hauled off on its journey north. By the time they rolled into Glasgow Central in three hours' time it would be 1959.

It was always 1959 in Glasgow and Paton was always nineteen. The ten years since he'd left for London fell away and the old life came back. He was Swifty from the Fleet, even the way he walked came back. The train from Euston was a time machine. You knew, of course, that life carried on in your absence but it was hard somehow to credit it. Glasgow would always be Glasgow, the sooty city where time stood still. Although, three hours later, as he shook himself awake with the train approaching Central, it was clear that this was no longer true. They were passing the Gorbals. Or where the Gorbals once stood. Now the Gorbals was a great bald prairie of mud. A single gas-lamp stood like a stunted tree and behind it rose the high flats, storey on storey, towers crowding each other with their broad square shoulders. They seemed to block out the light. He had to press his cheek against the window and crane right up to see the hard flat top of the nearest tower.

He checked his watch: plenty of time. He was back in Glasgow to look at a job. He lived in London now and he did jobs mainly in commuter towns in the stockbroker belt. Kent. Essex. He was good at what he did and seldom short on offers. You had to be selective, though. Paton never worked with the same crew more than twice, and he never did more than three jobs a year. He preferred a small number of big jobs to a large number of small ones. He also preferred not to work in Glasgow. In fact, you could call that a rule – in so far as rules applied to his line of work. But big jobs had been thin on the ground just of late and this Glasgow thing had seemed worth a look.

Now, as he folded his paper he wasn't so sure. They said the ones who lasted longest were those who kept their work and home life separate. Don't shit in your own nest. But was it still your nest if you'd flown it ten years back? Maybe in that case what mattered was the length of people's memories, whether or not they still remembered you.

In the compartment, passengers were pulling on raincoats and gathering their bags. Paton liked to travel by train. When he came back to Glasgow – which wasn't often – he took the slow train, not the express. He liked the rhythm of the journey, the carriages filling and draining and filling once more as local people made their short commutes and the train climbed up through the accents of England, through Oxford and the Midlands, up through Lancashire and Cumbria. Then over the border, Dumfries and then home.

Home? Paton pulled his holdall from the overhead rack as the carriage clanked across the Clyde and shunted under the great glass canopy of Central.

They remembered him all right. When his phone rang last week it took less than a second to place the voice. Dazzle from Hopehill Road. Stephen Dalziel. They'd known each other since they were six years old. They lived in the same street, went through St Roch's together, ran in the Fleet, tanned a few sub-post offices, shared their hundred days of borstal. 'Hoosey,' Paton remembered with a smile; that was what you called it; *Daein' hoosey*. They got tattooed on the same day at Terry's: a lion rampant on the shoulder for Dazzle; a wee swallow on the back of each hand for Paton. They hadn't spoken in ten years but Paton could picture the dark-brown eyes, the yellow shine of Dazzle's

buzzcut, the purple acne scarring round the mouth. A job had come up, Dazzle told him. A job requiring particular skills.

Before the train had properly stopped, Paton had his arm through the pull-down window of the door, wrenching the handle.

He walked out briskly, the holdall tight to his side. The concourse was quiet. He left the station by the Hope Street exit and walked up Waterloo Street. At the junction with Pitt Street he flagged a cab and gave the driver the address of a small hotel on Argyle Street.

The sun was out for once, and the men on Bothwell Street had their jackets slung over their shoulders, hooked on one finger. It didn't look too shabby, the old place, not when the sun was shining.

The desk clerk at the Parkside Hotel was a fat, pale youth with thinning Brylcreemed hair. Paton paid in advance, letting the clerk glimpse the crisp English banknotes in his wallet. A radio was playing in the back office and a vaguely cabbagey smell was coming from somewhere.

'Up from London?' the clerk said. The flesh of his neck bulged over the tightly buttoned collar. Paton wanted to reach over and flip the top button with his finger and thumb, let the pressure off those veins.

Paton nodded.

'Long journey, sir.' The clerk pursed his plump lips. 'You'll be tired.'

Paton nodded. He scooped his key from the desk and turned to go.

'Could I arrange for something in the way of relaxation?'

Paton stopped. He bounced the key in his hand a couple of times. 'What did you have in mind?'

The clerk saw that he'd made a mistake. His eyebrows dropped. A pink sliver of tongue came out and wetted his lips. 'Something from the bar, perhaps. A wee reviver? Small whisky?'

Paton held the clerk's wavering gaze. 'I'll take a rain check on that.'

His room was on the second floor. A bed, a desk, a spindly chair. A tiny etching on the wall showed the spire of the university through the trees of Kelvingrove Park. He crossed to close the curtains. He opened the wardrobe to the silvery jangle of coat-hangers and hung up his jacket and trousers and shirt and lay on the bed in his Y-fronts and vest. There were still two hours before Dazzle's driver was due to pick him up. A walk in the park? A swift half in one of the teuchter pubs on Argyle Street? In the end, he dozed on the candlewick bedspread and studied the cornicing.

'You'll see changes, all right.' They were driving through Anderston, heading west. The pillars of the new motorway bridge loomed up in the darkness. The driver had introduced himself as Bobby Stokes.

'How do you know Dazzle, then, Bobby?'

Stokes frowned. 'I don't. Not really. I know him through Cursiter. Cursiter's the muscle. You'll meet him.'

They passed the Kelvin Hall on the left-hand side, the Art Gallery looming on the right.

'So what's the job?'

Stokes took his time overtaking a bus. Paton thought he hadn't heard. Eventually Stokes said, 'Better let Dazzle fill you in on that.'

'I get it.' Paton wound down the window to flick his cigarette-end. 'You're the driver.'

The driver took him to a tenement block in Scotstoun. Two flights up. Dazzle answered the door and showed them through to the living room where a great bear of a man in a brown leather jacket was squeezed into a chair at a round Formica-topped table. Paton and Stokes joined him. It looked like a card game without any cards.

'You've met Bobby,' Dazzle said to Paton. 'This is Brian Cursiter.'

The big man put his hand out as if for an arm-wrestle. Paton shook it. There was a bottle of White Horse on the table and a stack of upturned tumblers. Paton reached for the bottle and filled out a measure of whisky.

Dazzle rose and went through to the kitchen, returning with a four pack of tinnies, McEwan's Export. He passed them out.

Paton sipped his whisky, set his glass on the table.

'OK,' he said. 'Fill me in. What's the mark?'

'Glendinnings.' Dazzle pulled the ring on his beer-can and the contents fizzed over: he clamped his mouth to the opening and slurped.

'The auctioneer's? They still on the go?'

'What, you think the world stops because you've fucked off to London?'

The others laughed. Paton sipped his whisky and waited. Dazzle wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and started to explain the job. Glendinnings was an old-school auction house in the city centre. It was also, according to Dazzle, the agent for a forthcoming contents sale. Big house in Perthshire, one of the shooting estates. The owners had died; now the son in London was selling it off, lock, stock and barrel. There were some paintings that had the valuers excited – a Raeburn and an early Peploe – but the good stuff was the jewels. Diamonds, mainly. Pearls. Bit of gold. They had an insider, a girl in the office. Cursiter knew her. (At this point the big bloke tipped two fingers in a mock salute.) The plan was to hit the place a week from now, just after midnight on the night before the sale. The nightwatchman was sixty-something, ex-army, bad hip, walked with a limp. Sometimes the firm gave him a short-term deputy in the run-up to a big sale. The stones would be in the safe in the MD's office.

'What about access?'

Dazzle smiled and jerked his head towards Cursiter, who was slouching down in his seat and working his fingers into the ticket pocket of his jeans. In a minute he was holding up a Yale key between his thumb and forefinger. It looked like a pin in his massive hand. He snapped it down on the desk.

'Basement door,' he said, grinning. 'We just walk in at midnight. No fuss. No drama. The night before the auction.'

Paton sipped his whisky.

'Bath Street, right?'

'Aye.'

'So it's central. Good chance of being spotted. Some busybody clocks a light.'

'It's all commercial, though,' Dazzle said. 'Round there. There's nothing residential for five or six blocks.'

'And the security's just the two bodies – we're sure about this?'

They all turned to Cursiter 'That's max. Could be just the old fella on his own.'

'Do we have a plan of the building? Do we know the layout?'

'Jenny'll get one.'

Paton nodded. The others said nothing, they were waiting for the verdict. He twisted his whisky glass on the tabletop, turned back to Cursiter. 'This your girlfriend?'

'Who?'

'Your insider. The secretary.'

'She's the cashier. No, she's not my girlfriend.'

'You've fucked her, though, right?'

'Yeah. I mean, twice. Three times.'

Paton was nodding. 'So they can link to you from her.'

'Naw, that's—'

'And they can link to us from you.'

'No! Look. It's not like that. Nobody knows.'

'Nobody knows what – that you fucked her?'

'That's what I'm saying.'

'Explain it to me. What's your name – Brian? Explain it to me, Brian. How did you meet her?'

Cursiter looked at Dazzle; Dazzle nodded. Cursiter planted his elbows on the table. 'Jenny McIndoe she's called. Nice lassie. She does the day-job at Glendinnings but works nights in a hotel out near Drymen. Used to have lock-ins. I took her upstairs a couple of times.'

'When the bar was empty?'

'What?'

'You said nobody saw you. You took her upstairs when the bar was empty?'

'Not empty. But nobody knew who I was. It was just mugs. Old guys from the village. Some hikers maybe. They didn't know me from Adam.'

'And you never met her outside the hotel?'

'Never.'

'Who said romance was dead? And how did she know you were in the market for information, Brian? Information about jewellery auctions. Since nobody knew who you were.'

Cursiter shrugged. 'We got talking.'

'Yeah.' Paton drained his whisky. 'That's what I figured.'

The others were quiet. There was a scratching at the inner door, the high tragic whine of a lonely dog.

Paton smoked his cigarette. 'She know what kind it is?'

'What kind what is?'

'The safe. What make.'

'I don't know. Does it matter?'

Paton looked round the table. 'Well, you boys certainly know your business.'

'Fuck you then.' Cursiter reared back, one arm swinging loose behind his chair. 'Mister Bigtime fucking London. You don't want in? There's the door.'

'Hey, now. Come on.' Dazzle was on his feet. Paton was grinning at the floor and shaking his head, stubbing his smoke out in the ashtray. He stood up, lifted his jacket.

'Well, come on, Dazzle.' Cursiter was pouring himself another shot. 'We need this kind of attitude? We need this kind of shit?'

'Nice meeting you fellows. Mr Dalziel: I'll see you again.'

Paton was ruing it all. The trip from London, the hotel room, wasting time with these losers. Ice heist at an auctioneer's? A sub-post office was more in their line. Screwing meters. Fucking bubble-gum machines. He shrugged into his jacket.

'Hold on, Alex. Brian.' Dazzle was pointing at Cursiter. 'Number one: shut the fuck up. You're not running this job: I am. Number two—' he pointed at Paton – 'Alex: hear the man out. You've come this far.'

Paton picked at something on the shoulder of his jacket. He shrugged, took his seat, reached for his smokes. 'What's the take, then?'

'Big.' Cursiter was still rankled, touchy. 'Big. Don't worry about that.'

'They might be different things, friend. Your idea of big. My idea of big. You got a figure?'

'Hundred grand. Minimum.'

They all looked at Paton.

Paton smoked.

'We'd need another man.'

Dazzle frowned, looked around the others in turn. 'It's a four-man job, Alex. It's all worked out.'

'Is it?' All the glasses were empty now and Paton stood up and moved them into the centre of the table. 'Stokes is in the car, right?' He moved one of the glasses to the edge of the table. 'The rest of us go in through the basement door. We need a man on the door. In case someone decides to stick their nose in.' He lifted another glass and smacked it down in the centre of the table. 'We move down the corridor and deal with the watchman. Lover Boy here' – Cursiter was the whisky bottle, and Paton

slid it along the table a foot or so – 'stays with the watchman. Or watchmen. That leaves Dazzle and me.' Paton pinched the final two glasses between his finger and thumb and lifted them with a trilling click and placed them down at his side of the table. 'We go on to the office. I do the safe. Dazzle's spare, in case something comes up. Troubleshooter. But we need another man on the door.'

Dazzle looked at the other two with his eyebrows raised and Cursiter pouted and Stokes shrugged and Dazzle spread his arms. 'Fine, Alex. Good. We get another man. Anything else?'

'Aye.' Paton moved the glasses back to their original positions. He sat down and reached for the bottle and filled his own glass. He pushed the bottle into the centre of the table. 'The timing's wrong.'

'Timing's not – there's no leeway, Alex. Stuff only gets there the day before. It has to be the tenth.'

'I don't mean the date. I mean the time. We don't go in at midnight. We do it in the morning. Before anyone arrives.'

Cursiter reached for the bottle and filled the glasses and waited for Paton to explain.

'You don't need all night to do a safe. Do it in half an hour if you can do it at all. We're wearing boiler suits, toolbelts, we're a crew of sparkies, plumbers, whatever. When it's over we walk out the front door, to the van parked down the street. This way, we're only over the railings on the way in, not the way out. Cuts down the risk.'

Stokes was playing with the zipper on his Harrington jacket, running it up and down. 'So, you're saying we wear masks? Is that the idea?'

'No masks. We don't need masks. We're a crew of workies. We're four guys in boiler suits. We're invisible. We're not trying to hide, we're not skulking about looking dodgy, so no one's paying attention. It's like four cops: you remember the uniform, you don't remember the faces or the hair or anything else.'

At this point the door handle clanged and the kitchen door swung open. The dog came skidding triumphantly into the room and stopped, its head raised, abruptly self-conscious, like a bull entering the bull-ring. It looked at the faces and trotted straight over to Paton and plumped its chin down on his thigh, twitching its brows. Paton drew his hand across the animal's head, feeling the smooth curved cap of the skull under the fur, and flattened the ears. Then he scratched the loose skin under the dog's jaw and the tail whacked against the carpet.

'Looks like we've found the fifth man,' Dazzle said.

Paton stroked the dog as he talked.

'We need a van. We need walkie-talkies. We need boiler suits, workboots, toolbelts. Balaclavas. We need some sort of decal or paint job on the side of the van, Such-and-such Electricians or Plumbers.'

Dazzle was writing it down. He finished with a flourish and tossed the pen down on the table.

'Right. Fine. We'll get to it.'

'Van's the priority.'

'Fine. We lift one on the night before the job. Easy.'

Stokes shook his head. 'I like to know what I'm driving, Daz. How it handles. You don't want surprises.'

'So drive it around on the night. Get the feel of it. A van's a van.'

Paton was still clapping the dog. He rubbed its belly and the creature emitted a high voluptuous whine. 'Stokes is right,' Paton said. 'You don't steal a van on the night before a job. Use your head, Daz. The owner gets up for a piss at 2 a.m., opens the curtains to check on his van. The van's gone. He reports it stolen. Patrol car clocks it parked in Bath Street at six in the morning. We're fucked before we start. You don't do a job in a stolen van.'

'What, then?'

'We buy one. Now. Tomorrow. Give Stokes time to drive it, break it in.'

'We *buy* it. *We* buy it?' Cursiter was incredulous. 'You're that keen to go about buying vans, it comes out of your end.'

Paton looked at Dazzle. Dazzle shrugged.

'You planning to walk home, are you?' Paton turned to Cursiter. 'After the job. Take a bus? Maybe wait for a taxi? We buy a van, it comes out of everyone's slice. If the payoff's what you say it is, it won't make any difference.'

'Aye but there's other outlays, overheads.'

Paton waited. The other three exchanged a look. Dazzle spoke.

'He means McGlashan.'

Paton had moved to London before John McGlashan took over from Eddie Lumsden. He knew who McGlashan was. He just didn't see the relevance.

'You've got your own arrangement there. That's your business, you do what you like with your share. Dazzle: you call another meet in three days when you've got the gear ready, the plan of the building. Not here, though. We meet someplace else.'

Paton scooped his cigarettes from the table and stowed them in his jacket pocket.

'Actually, hold on here.' Cursiter's big hand was raised. 'We all kick in for the van but you don't kick up to Glash?'

'The van's a necessity. It's part of the job.'

'McGlashan's a necessity, mate. McGlashan's a fucking necessity. Round here.'

'I don't live round here, Brian.' Paton buttoned his jacket. 'I live in London. Mr McGlashan will have to visit London if he wants to collect.'

'He might do that,' Cursiter said. 'He might just do that. Everyone kicks up to McGlashan, fella. Sooner or later. Some way or other.'

Paton shrugged. The dog got up and trotted across the floor and lay down in front of the dead electric fire.

'So you're in?' Dazzle's chin lifted in challenge. Everyone looked at Paton.

Paton frowned. He'd been looking for a reason to say no and he couldn't find one.

'Kinda looks that way, doesn't it?'

'He-e-ey!' Dazzle snatched up the whisky and twirled off the cap, but Paton clamped his palm across his glass.

'One thing.' He looked at each face in turn and then back to Dazzle. 'Why's McGlashan not moving on this himself? Why's he leaving it to you boys?'

For a moment nobody spoke. Paton had the feeling they had discussed this question before he came, worked out how much to tell him.

'He's not been himself.' It was Dazzle who spoke. 'He thinks the polis are watching him. He's been cagey. For months now. Everyone's frightened to move. Do anything. Till this gets sorted out. This Jack the Ripper shit.'

'But they're not watching you?'

'They're not watching him, probably. He's just paranoid. Anyway, who'd watch us, Swifty? We're not a big enough deal. We're the waifs and strays, mate. Slip through the cracks.'

Stokes turned to Paton. 'The Quaker, they're calling him.'

'London, Bobby,' Paton said. 'I live in London. Not the moon. We get the papers down there.'

He removed his hand and Dazzle poured the shots and they all clinked glasses and drank.

Ten minutes later, he sat in the passenger seat of Stokes's Zodiac, thinking it through. He liked to hole up after a job was done, get off the streets fast and go to ground for three or four days. The hotel was no good.

'I'll need a place,' Paton said. 'Somewhere quiet.'

Stokes nodded. 'For afterwards, like? I know a guy can probably help. Want me to set it up?'

There was a black market in houses. Everyone knew this. Glasgow never had enough houses and the clearing of the slums had only made things worse. There was an underground trade in vacant flats in buildings slated for demolition. Families would scrape together a couple of hundred quid for the keys to a room-and-kitchen in a condemned tenement. They'd get a few months' breathing space before the wrecking crews arrived, give them time to get something else sorted. That would be fine. A flat in a condemned block would be just the ticket.

He took Stokes's number when they pulled up outside the hotel. 'Set it up then, Bobby. I'll be in touch.'

6

McCormack sat at his desk in the Murder Room, staring at a typewritten document. The document was two pages long, held together by a paper clip. It contained the witness statement of a man who had danced a single dance with Ann Ogilvie on the night of 2 November 1968, in the Barrowland Ballroom in the city's East End. Ann Ogilvie, victim number two. Later that night, at some point between midnight and 3 a.m., Ann Ogilvie was strangled with her own American tan tights, having been raped, beaten and bitten by the killer known as the Quaker.

Every twenty-five seconds the pages of the witness statement rippled in the breeze from a circular fan on McCormack's desk. But McCormack wasn't reading the words. He was basking in hatred. The tension in the stuffy room was like a palpable force, a malevolent beast that crouched invisibly on top of the cabinets, stalked between the legs of desks, breathed its rank breath on McCormack's neck. The tension amplified every sound. Typewriter keys sliced the air like cracking whips. A filing cabinet drawer rolled open with a rumble of thunder. People lunged at ringing telephones, desperate to silence their clamour.

He knew, of course, what was causing the problem. The problem was him. He was the rat. The tout. The grass. Resentment came at him in waves from the shirtsleeved ranks.

But what did you expect? It was Schrödinger's cat: the observer affects the experiment.

Ten days ago Duncan McCormack had been the man of the hour. Ten days ago he'd been sipping from a tinnie in the squad room at St Andrew's Street, watching his Flying Squad colleagues ineptly gyrating with a couple of more or less uniformed WPCs and some of the younger typists from Admin. It wasn't yet noon but the party was hotting up. There were muffled whoops as someone upped the volume on the Dansette. All three shifts of detectives were present. Guys had left the golf course or the pub, or wherever they went on their days off. Brothel, maybe. Everywhere he looked people perched on desks or gathered in grinning groups with their plastic cups of whisky and vodka.

Flett was edging towards him through the throng. DCI Angus Flett, commander of the Flying Squad. Chins were tipped in greeting, cigarettes raised in two-fingered benedictions. Flett gripped elbows, punched shoulders, clapped backs, threw mock punches, twisted his hips in that drying-your-backside-with-a-towel move when he passed a dancing typist.

The squad room looked like Christmas. Strings of paper bunting were pinned above their heads. Two desks had been pushed together to form a makeshift bar. Bottles of spirits clustered in the centre: Red Label, Gordon's, Smirnoff, Bacardi. Four-packs of beer in their plastic loops, green cans of Pale Ale, red cans of Export. Someone had gone out for fish suppers and the sharp tang of newsprint and vinegar and pickled onions mingled with the smoke and sweat and alcohol.

On an adjacent table stood a large birthday cake edged with blue piping, a '12' standing proud of the icing on blue plastic numerals. Twelve was the tariff. Twelve years in Peterhead. They'd watched him cuffed and taken down to the cells, James Kane, one of McGlashan's lieutenants. It took them over a year to build the case and now they'd got him. Attempted murder. Serious assault. Conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. Guilty on all three counts. Au revoir, fuckface. Have a nice life.

McCormack raised his can of Sweetheart Stout to salute Angus Flett. He felt the beer sway inside the tinnie. He didn't like beer. He'd drunk just enough so the can wouldn't spill. He liked whisky well enough but he was playing shinty tomorrow, a grudge match against Glasgow Skye, and he wanted to stay fresh.

'The hard stuff, Duncan?'

McCormack worked his shoulders, straightened up. 'Got a game tomorrow, boss.'

'A game? I'd say war would be nearer the mark. I watched a match once, up in Oban. Jesus. Tough game. They say ice hockey's based on it.'

McCormack shrugged, sipped his tinnie.

'Anyroads, need to talk to you, son. Won't take long.'

In Flett's office, McCormack closed the door behind him, muffling the noise of the party. Flett got straight to business.

'Job's come up, son. I'm putting you forward.'

McCormack nodded slowly. When Flett sat down with the sun at his back, McCormack noticed that he hadn't shaved; little filaments of stubble caught the light.

'What's the job, sir?'

'It involves a change of scene. You'll be based in Partick. The old Marine.'

'That's the Quaker inquiry. They've got Crawford, already. They need another Squad guy?'

Flett held his hand out flat, palm down, swivelled his wrist.

'It's not a straightforward job, Detective. It's not the operational side of things. I had Levein on earlier' – he nodded at the phone on his desk. 'The feeling is, it's gone on too long, the whole circus. Guts is, he wants us to review the investigation. See where things went wrong. What can be learned. Make recommendations.'

Peter Levein. Head of Glasgow CID. Bad bastard. Due to retire at the end of the year, to no one's regret.

'Recommend what? What's Cochrane saying about this?'

'Nothing he can say. They haven't caught him, have they? He's not going to like it, but he'll cooperate.'

McCormack was still frowning. 'Make recommendations as in shut it down?'

Flett leaned forward. 'Do you need it spelled out, son? This job? It's not a popularity contest.' Flett nodded at the door. 'You think those fuckers out there like me? Think I want them to?'

'It's not that, sir.'

'What, then?'

'I'm a thief-taker, boss. That's what I know.'

'This still McGlashan? You're still on about McGlashan?'

'We're close, sir. We're gonnae get him.' He jabbed his thumb at the door, at the sounds of beery triumph. 'See that, sir? That's nothing. That's just the start. We're building the case. We'll bring it all down, the whole rotten empire.'

'All right, McCormack.'

'What – you think I'm making it up?'

'No, Duncan.' Flett spread his hands. 'No, I'm sure you are close. Thing is. Nobody knows who McGlashan is. *We* know who he is. The poor bastards in Springboig and Barlanark and Cranhill: they know. But the punters out there? The ratepayers? They've no idea. They know about the Quaker, though. Jesus.' He tapped the folded *Tribune* on his desk. 'They know about him.'

'So we tell them.' McCormack shifted in his chair. 'We've got people who deal with the papers, haven't we? We fill them in. Give them the goods. Glasgow crime lord, reign of terror. Fear on the streets.'

'Give them what, exactly? If we had solid on McGlashan we wouldn't need the bloody papers, we'd just arrest him. It's more complicated, son. They've got a hold of this Quaker thing and they're not letting go. They want answers. They want to know why we're still fannying about after all this time. It's not McGlashan that's making us look like— What: you got something to say, Detective?'

McCormack was shaking his head. 'Naw, it's just, I was under the impression that the guy who headed up the Flying Squad was the head of the Flying Squad. My mistake. Not the editor of the *Glasgow Tribune*.'

'Oh for fuck sake, Duncan, catch yourself on. It's always worked like this. Keep the papers off your back, you keep the councillors happy, the MPs. It buys you the space to do the real job.'

'This isn't the real job?'

Flett held his hands up. 'I know. I know. Look. You do a job on this Quaker thing we'll go after McGlashan. You head up the team. You pick your men. I'll give you everything you need. But first it's this. Son, you're either ready or you're not. I thought you were. Have I made a mistake?'

Had he? Maybe the whole thing was a mistake, McCormack thought. Maybe joining the police was a mistake. Leaving Ballachulish.

'You want to be a fucking DI all your life. One of the lads—'

'I'm not one of the lads.'

'Good. I'm glad to hear it. I'll bell Levein. Start on Monday. Now get out there and enjoy yourself.'

So now he was sitting in the Murder Room at the Marine. Enjoy yourself, indeed. *The feeling is, it's gone on too long?* Jesus, tell me about it, McCormack thought. He'd been here barely a week, listening in on the morning briefings – *eaves*dropping, it felt like. Days that dragged like months. Absorbing the hatred of his colleagues. A spectator at the daily taskings, a nodding auditor of tactical discussions. He listened to the detectives talking about the case – Earl Street, Mackeith Street, Carmichael Lane – and it bothered him. The men were so sure there was a meaning, some mystical link connecting the victims or the places where they were killed. As if the murders were a language, a code. A work of bloody art.

There had to be a link, they thought, but the men in this room couldn't find it. The three victims were unknown to each other, lived in different parts of the city. They had no mutual friends, no common bonds of church or political party. Two of them had husbands in the forces, but this fact – which seemed so promising at first – now looked like a coincidence. The worst kind of coincidence, the kind that costs you a couple of hundred man-hours before you realize it means nothing. But now it seemed clear. The women were bound by nothing more than luck or fate, whatever word you hit on for the actions of the Quaker.

But still there was the feeling that the map might hold the key, the six Ordnance Survey sheets tacked to the Murder Room wall. Each locus was within a hundred yards of the victim's house. The sites themselves formed no kind of pattern, so was it the Barrowland, then? Did the ballroom itself mean something to the killer?

McCormack knew there wasn't much history to the building. The original ballroom above the 'Barras' market had burned down in the late fifties – an insurance job, supposedly. The new Barrowland, with its sprung hexagonal floor and its ceiling of shooting stars, was opened in 1960. Time enough for the killer to make his own history with the place. But then, if the killer had been a regular, wouldn't somebody have known him? They'd have his name by now, he'd be in a remand cell at Barlinnie waiting for his trial.

Didn't the map mean anything? What about the wider area: the Gallowgate, Glasgow Cross? At one point Cochrane had invited a lecturer from Strathclyde Uni to address the squad, an expert on the development of the city. McCormack had read the lecturer's report. The Gallowgate was one of the oldest parts of Glasgow, Dr Mitchell told the Murder Room. The four streets forming Glasgow Cross – the Gallowgate, the Trongate, the High Street and the Saltmarket – were part of the original hamlet on the Clyde. But Glasgow was unusual: it grew up around two separate centres. There was the fishing village and trading settlement on the Clyde, but further up the hill was the religious community centred on the Cathedral and the Bishop's Castle. In medieval times there was open countryside, maybe some farmland, between the two settlements.

In time, the trading settlement on the river grew to eclipse the upper town. The Gallowgate, where the Barrowland was located, stood at the heart of the growing town. And maybe you could see the Quaker – with his puritanism and his biblical imprecations, his rants about adultery and 'dens of iniquity' – as representing in some sense the revenge of the upper town upon the godless lower city.

McCormack pictured the detectives shifting in their chairs. They would see no mileage in this, but Cochrane would have warmed to the idea of a righteous visitation, a historical reprisal, murders somehow plotted by the streets.

McCormack yawned and stretched, returned the witness statement to its folder. Across the way a detective sat at a desk opening letters with a paperknife. McCormack watched him slit an envelope, tug out the folded sheet, flatten it out on the desk. After a pause his hands paddled at the typewriter keys. Then he put the letter back in its envelope, dropped it in a tray, reached for the next one.

'More fan mail?' McCormack had drifted over. The man looked up, grunted, waved a hand at the out-tray: be my guest.

McCormack drew up a chair. The letter on the top of the pile was written in a tight, crabbed hand. It came in an airmail envelope, sky blue with chevron edges, though the postmark was local.

To whom it concerns. The man you want is Christopher Bell. He resides at 23 Kirklands Crescent in Bothwell and drives a van for Blantyre Carriers. He is out in his van at all times of the day and night and frequently burns 'rubbish' in the back garden of this property though it is against the rules of his tenancy to do so. On two occasions in recent months he has been seen with deep scratches on his face. He has reddish fair hair, goes into Glasgow for the dancing. Everyone round here has suspicions of this character and even the wee boys in the street call him the Quaker.

There was no signature and no address. The detective nodded at the pile of letters and told McCormack that six months ago they'd get twice as many. Three times. He seemed pained by the city's fickleness, its timewasters' dwindling stamina.

'Are you vetting them?' McCormack asked. 'Or do they all get checked out?'

The man looked up slowly, fixing McCormack in his gaze. 'Now that would be good, wouldn't it? Two years down the line he's killed another four women. Someone finds out we've had a letter all along, naming the killer in so many words. Of course we check them.'

It was the hard calculus of police work. If you got your man then all the effort, all the statements taken, the knocking on doors, the ID parades, the hours of surveillance, the sifting of dental records, it was all worthwhile. If you didn't get him then you might as well not have bothered. If you'd sat on your hands the result would be the same: the case still open, the killer still free.

You knew that was part of the deal. You knew that some crimes went unsolved, for all the hours and the sweat that got thrown at them. It was nobody's fault and no one was handing out blame. But it was hard not to take it personally. There were men in this room who had worked all three. Jacquilyn Keevins. Ann Ogilvie. Marion Mercer. Three women who'd gone to the dancing and never come home. Mothers of young children. You were failing them all.

McCormack went back to his desk, rolling his shirtsleeves to the elbow. As he watched the day shift go about their tasks there grew in him a kind of despair at the very diligence of these men. They were only undefeated because they kept trying. Day after day they sat at their desks beneath the high windows in the late summer heat and worked their leads. Dark patches bloomed at their armpits, down the backs of their shirts. The smell of sweat and cheap nylon was pushed about by the table-fans along with the blue clouds of cigarette smoke.

They worked the telephones ('Goldie, Marine Murder Room'), they typed up reports, collated statements, while McCormack sat at the end of the room like some kind of exam invigilator. He wanted to leave his chair and weave between the desks, placing his hands on the shoulders of these men, on their forearms, to calm their efforts, still their labour.

They were getting further away from it, he thought. Further away from the truth, not closer to it. They couldn't understand why the methods that had worked in the past weren't working now. They didn't change tack. They didn't try different things. They did the same things, only harder.

They needed some luck. No, McCormack thought: what they needed wasn't luck. What they needed was another death. To redeem their time, give them a fresh start, another crack at the Quaker.

He looked up to see Goldie standing at the map, lost in the grid, the dainty streets, the spidery contour lines, the sweeping arcs of train-tracks and rivers, the square white blanks of the public parks, the solid black geometry of the public buildings – the railway stations and churches, the hospitals and schools, the post offices, the army barracks.

Everyone did it. When someone sat down after a spell at the map, ten minutes would pass and a chair would scrape and another shirtsleeved figure would be stood there, hitching his trousers and leaning into the grid. It was a rota, an unscripted vigil. The detectives stood in turn before the Ordnance Survey sheets, waited for the map to yield its secrets.

He was losing it, McCormack thought. They all were. They had thrown so much at this inquiry. Talking to reporters, feeding the papers till the whole city, the whole country could think of nothing but the Quaker, the Quaker, that clean-cut face on the posters. It came down to numbers. Fifteen months of work. A hundred cops in teams of twelve working fourteen-hour days. They'd taken 50,000 statements. They'd interviewed 5,000 suspects, visited 700 dentists, 450 hairdressers, 240 tailors. Scores of churches and golf clubs. How many man-hours did it come to – a million? Two? How could all these numbers add up to zero?

And how could you let it go? How could you stop now, admit it was over, you'd done as much as you could? You couldn't. You couldn't let go. You kept on, placed your faith in police work. Placed your faith in procedures. Luck. Magic. Santa Claus. Pieter Mertens. Mertens the clairvoyant. Mertens the paragnost. *I see a room in an apartment. A river is close. Also a factory. A crane can be seen from the window …*

McCormack watched the roll of fat bulging over Goldie's collar. He heard Goldie ask a sergeant called Ingram where Cochrane was.

'DCI Cochrane?' McCormack spoke up. 'I saw him half an hour ago in the car park. He was getting his wife a lift home in a squad car. What?'

The look between Goldie and Ingram; Goldie grinning at the floor.

'His wife.' Goldie snorted. 'Is that what they're calling it?'

'It's not his wife.' Ingram came over with two mugs of tea, set one down in front of McCormack. 'It's the witness, sir. Sister of Marion Mercer.'

'The third victim.'

'Yeah. Nancy Scullion. Shared a taxi with our man.'

They didn't like saying *The Quaker* in the station, it smacked of the tabloids. It was always 'our man', 'the killer', 'the perpetrator'. McCormack turned to Goldie.

'The schoolgirl smirk, Detective: is there some point you're trying to make here or is this how you normally look?'

Goldie's face darkened, the lower lip curling. 'It's called a joke, sir. The chief and the victim's sister. They're pretty close.'

'DCI Cochrane and Mrs Scullion, you mean?'

Goldie looked across at Ingram, back to McCormack. He opened his hand in a gesture of impatience. McCormack set his tea to one side, leaning his elbows on the desk. He felt an urge to let his head slide down to the desk, pillow it briefly in his folded arms.

'Sorry, can I get this clear, Detective? You're suggesting that DCI Cochrane is having improper sexual relations with a witness in a murder investigation? That's your insinuation?'

Goldie smiled slowly and shook his head, not meeting McCormack's eye. 'That's in your mind. You're the one who thought she was his wife.'

McCormack took a pull on his mug, grimaced. The tea was scalding but he swallowed it down, savoured the pain. He was vexed with himself. It was his own innocent error that had opened the door for Goldie. He thought back to the scene in the car park, Cochrane helping a woman into the passenger seat of a squad car, closing the door solicitously and tapping the roof for the car to move

off. It was the air of intimacy, the gentlemanly stoop of Cochrane's shoulders. He ought to have known that she wasn't his wife.

McCormack looked round the office. The heads were all bent to their work but he felt that they were silently chalking this up, another facer for the turncoat, another round to Derek Goldie. He sat at his desk, spotting the files with sweat and watching the men ignore him, lean in close to mutter to one another. They were like a surly class with a strap-happy teacher.

The canteen was worse. Even the uniforms knew to avoid him. When he took his tray to a table the others would finish up, drain their glasses, scrape to their feet. Three days of this and McCormack gave up. He took to lunching out, up Dumbarton Road to a small Italian place popular with university lecturers and doctors from the Western. On the third day of this he sat in his window seat and thought: I'm becoming a ghost. I'm fading away. The best I can hope is that they ignore me altogether, start acting as if I'm not there. They're never going to connect with me unless I force them to.

That was why he'd gone out on a tasking with Derek Goldie. It was time to act, try to break down the squad's reserve. He'd seen enough of the Murder Room operations; now he needed to come out on a job. He chose Goldie, the malcontent, the troublemaker. Big, sneering, blond, cocksure Derek Goldie. The roster told him Goldie was on late shift, 6 p.m. till 2 a.m., tasked with chasing up known sex offenders, bringing them in for identity parades.

And then Goldie had spent the whole shift winding him up, driving too fast, abusing suspects. It ended up with the beating he handed to the poor sap in the toilets of that shithole pub in Shettleston.

McCormack winced at the memory. He'd made his choice, lied for Goldie, covered his back. He wasn't stupid enough to think that this would make him Goldie's best pal but shouldn't it buy him a bit of goodwill? Fat chance. If anything, Goldie's hostility rose. Goldie had taken his backing as a personal affront, as if McCormack lacked the courage to stand his ground, couldn't even scab with proper conviction.

7

‘It’s Jeff Arnold, Rider of the Range!’

‘Fuck off.’ Dazzle was laughing, he couldn’t keep the pistol straight. He dropped his arm and composed himself and raised it again, fired.

Nothing. The others jeered.

‘It’s too low!’ Dazzle gestured with the gun. ‘You’d never target somebody at that height. What are you aiming for, his knackers?’

Five big bottles of Bass, empty, stood in a line on top of a rock, thirty feet off, under a stand of silver birch.

‘Give us it here.’ Cursiter took the gun from Dazzle. He broke it open, dug a fistful of rounds from his jacket pocket and thumbed them home. He snapped the cylinder shut, planted his feet and sighted down his straight right arm and squeezed off six shots in quick succession.

The bottles shone guilelessly in the dappled light. The men’s laughter rang round the clearing. Cursiter ran his tongue along his upper gum, shaking his head.

Now it was Campbell’s turn, the new guy, the fifth man. Cursiter reloaded the pistol and held it out by the barrel. Campbell took the gun in both hands, turning it over as though it was an object whose precise purpose eluded him. He was younger than the others, early twenties, with long straight hair and bell-bottom cords that whispered when he walked. He shuffled over to where Cursiter had stood and squinted at the bottles. Holding the gun tight against his waist like a quick-draw artist he pulled the trigger.

The middle of the five bottles burst with a bright *pock*, the glass dissolving in a silvery fizz. They all cheered and Campbell turned smiling, his hands spread in benediction, pistol dangling from his index finger.

‘House,’ Paton said. ‘Thank fuck.’ He was on his feet, dusting the seat of his jeans. He hadn’t been keen on this shooting lark to begin with. ‘Can we get some work done now?’

Cursiter took the pistol and stowed it in his jacket and they moved off in a ragged group, five men, stretching and yawning, down towards the cottage at the lochside.

Dazzle had booked it in a false name, collecting the key from the hotel in Rowardennan. They were supposed to be a party of hikers. They’d done a solid two hours’ planning in the cottage that morning before breaking for lunch and a spot of extempore target practice. Jenny McIndoe, Cursiter’s contact in the auctioneer’s, would be joining them that evening with the floor-plans of Glendinnings.

The path narrowed for the final stretch and they marched in Indian file out of the trees. The white block of the cottage had swung into view when Dazzle, at the head of the file, gave a backhanded slap to Paton’s chest. They all bumped to a stop.

‘Is it Jenny? Is Jenny early?’

A dark blue Rover 2000 was parked beside Stokes’s Zodiac on the apron of gravel in front of the cottage.

‘It’s not hers.’ Cursiter was frowning. ‘That’s not Jenny’s car.’

They stared at the scene and a stout, bald-headed man in an orange cardigan came round the side of the cottage He stopped in his tracks when he saw the five men framed by the trees.

They started forward, awkward, bumping each other, trying to look normal. Normal hikers. The man stepped out across the grass to meet them.

‘George Brodie,’ he said. ‘Landlord. You’ll be Mr Maxwell’s party.’

‘I’m Maxwell.’ Dazzle had his hand out. The landlord shook it. He took the others’ hands in turn. No one else ventured a name.

‘Right. Well. You’ve brought the weather anyway.’ Brodie had his hands on his hips, like a fitness instructor. ‘I just wanted to make sure you were settled all right. Had everything you need.’

Dazzle nodded. ‘We’re fine, thanks.’

‘The shop in the village.’ Brodie jabbed a thumb over his shoulder. ‘It shuts early. Catches people out. Anyway,’ he was moving towards the car, ‘I got some provisions.’ He hauled on the Rover’s passenger door, lifted two carrier bags from the footwell. ‘Just milk, bread. What have you.’

Dazzle took the bags. ‘That’s very kind of you. Appreciate it.’

Brodie shrugged, hands in his trouser pockets, thumbs out. ‘You’ll be off up the loch the morrow, then?’

He was looking at their feet, Paton noticed. Dazzle was the only one wearing hiking boots. Three of them wore trainers; Stokes in bloody winkle-pickers.

‘That’s the plan.’ Dazzle was nodding again. ‘Up to Crianlarich. Take it from there.’

‘Right. Well, the weather should hold. If you believe the radio.’ Brodie scowled up, shading his eyes with the fat blade of his hand. They all stood around looking at the sky as if something was about to drop out of it.

‘So.’ Dazzle hoisted one of the bags. ‘Thanks again, Mr Brodie. Much obliged.’

‘Righto.’ Brodie gripped the roof of the Rover as he eased himself into the driver’s seat. He reached for the door-handle. ‘Just post the key through the letter box when you’re leaving.’

‘Will do.’

They watched him three-point-turn beside Stokes’s Zodiac, spraying gravel, nosing past Dazzle’s Triumph. Too many cars: they should have thought of that. The Rover gave a double toot of its horn as it wobbled up the track.

Inside, Stokes went straight to the fridge and hauled out more bottles of Bass, two at a time, set them up on the table. He went down the line of bottles with his bottle-opener, his elbow jerking. The bottle-tops skittered on to the table. Each man reached wordlessly for his bottle, tilted it in a spread palm.

The fun and games among the trees seemed a long time ago. Paton took a matchstick and scraped some mud from the sole of his training shoe. There was an odd smell in the room, he’d noticed it earlier. Cinnamon, maybe. Something sweet and spicy.

‘You think he …?’ Stokes jerked his head at the window, the path leading up to the trees.

‘You mean is the landlord deaf?’ Paton carried his bottle over to an armchair in the corner and flopped down. ‘I don’t think so. Nor, unfortunately, is he blind.’ Paton waggled his bottle at the table, where a street map of Glasgow was spread out.

‘It’s a map,’ Dazzle said. ‘So what?’

There was a pencil line tracing the getaway route from Bath Street to the Gorbals but you probably couldn’t have seen it from the window.

‘Five guys with Glasgow accents,’ Paton said. ‘A map of the city of Glasgow.’

‘A map doesn’t mean anything.’

‘Not yet it doesn’t.’

Dazzle shrugged. There wasn’t much point in taking this further. The guy was suspicious or he wasn’t. He’d heard them shooting in the woods. So what? What did that prove? Plenty of people went shooting in the woods.

‘Hey, there’s peaches and corned beef here and everything.’ Campbell had been unpacking the carrier bags. He turned to face the others, hoisting a tin of peaches in each hand, grinning.

‘Highland hospitality.’ Dazzle stood, yawned. ‘Are we working here or what?’

They all sat at the table. Stokes reported on the van. It was handling well. He’d driven it round Govan a few times. He was planning to stow a can of petrol in the back (‘That’s a little Dillinger trick’) in case they got involved in a prolonged chase. The van was off the road for the moment, getting a decal at one of McGlashan’s garages.

‘He know about it?’ Paton said.

'McGlashan? Does he know about the job? No.' Stokes spread his hands. 'He knows there *is* a job, aye. But he doesn't know what it is.'

'He's expecting his taste, though,' Cursiter said.

This was why London was better, Paton thought. Nobody ran London. It was too big to run. You had the freedom to work how you liked. You were your own man.

'Yeah. Well. We've been through that.'

They worked on the game-plan. They finalized times. They'd go in at 5.30, long before the staff started to arrive, before the buses started running on Bath Street.

They broke it into pieces, little blocks of narrative. The entry. The watchman. The safe. They went over each piece. The time before, the time after. They went over it again. Leaving the building. The getaway. The idea was that Paton would take the goods – the jewels and any cash – in a toolbox and stow them in the safe house. Only Stokes knew the address of Paton's safe house; the others just knew it was in Bridgeton.

Paton's plan was that the string would make off in the van while he strolled down the hill to Central Station and caught a low-level train to Bridgeton.

'Or you could just use your time-machine,' Dazzle said.

'How's that?'

'They shut the station at Bridgeton,' Stokes explained. 'Few years back. You can't get a train.'

Paton looked round the faces, nodded. 'Buses still run?'

'Last time I looked.'

'I'll take the bus, then.'

Cursiter set his bottle down with a thump. 'You just walk down Hope Street with the gear in your hand and jump on a bus? Quite the thing?'

'We've covered this,' Paton said. 'The best getaway is the one that isn't. The one no one clocks as a getaway. I'm just a guy on his way to work.'

In another half-hour they had done all they could do until Jenny arrived with the plans. Dazzle produced a bottle of Grouse. The others started talking about stuff they would buy. Cars. John Stephen suits. Trips to New York. High-class hoors. Paton thought about time. How much time his share would buy him. How much time before he would have to do another job. Or the time he'd spend inside if they got caught.

Then they heard the hiss of wheels, a car door slam, high-heels mashing through gravel.

Dazzle opened the door.

The first thought Paton had was how far out of Cursiter's league this woman was. You knew, as soon as you clapped eyes on her, that she had fucked Cursiter as a purely instrumental act, a means of getting her hands on a share of a hundred thousand pounds. She was wearing a red woollen coat, cinched at the waist, belted, black high-heels. Her hair was black, glossy, bobbed.

She stood there enjoying the impression she was making.

'The age of chivalry is past,' she said. No one knew what to say to that. Her shoulders slumped theatrically. 'What's a girl got to do to get a drink around here?'

'Sorry!' Dazzle was on his feet, scuttling over to the cupboard for another glass.

'Did you bring the plans?' Paton was put out by the woman's appearance. He'd expected someone nervous and fretting, a dolly from the typing pool, out of her depth. The woman's poise and beauty changed the balance in the room. Her beauty seemed to put her in charge.

'I was about to ask who's the gaffer here.' She took the glass from Dazzle and held it high, in front of her face. Her nails were lacquered a vivid red. 'Think we've answered that question.'

'Our friend here put it together,' Paton said, nodding at Dazzle. He didn't know if it was a names thing, if she was supposed to know their names.

'But now you're in charge.'

'I've had some experience.'

'I'll bet.'

She set her drink down on the table and started working the buttons on her red coat. Cursiter rose and went to stand behind her. As he drew the unbuttoned coat from her shoulders, he leaned in to kiss her on the neck. She flinched away, clapped a palm to her neck as if slapping a mosquito, wiped the fingers down the skin. 'I think we've had enough of that, darling, haven't we?' She was wearing a short shift dress in a clingy black fabric.

Cursiter turned away. He tossed her coat on the back of a kitchen chair.

What she drew from her bag, rolled up in a tube and tied with string, were the blueprints from when the building was remodelled as an auctioneer's. Previously the address had been a private house. The architect had partitioned some of the rooms for offices and knocked others together to form the showroom.

Paton spread the blueprints out on the kitchen table, on top of the map, and the others gathered round.

'Somebody's not going to miss these?' Campbell asked.

'What's to miss? They go back where they came from tomorrow.'

The blueprints showed the basement door, the point of entry. The basement floor held storerooms and the nightwatchman's cubbyhole, down a corridor on the right-hand side. On the ground floor were offices, toilets, a small staff tearoom. The first floor held the big showroom and the manager's office, where the safe was housed.

'This comes off,' Paton said. 'Even if it doesn't come off, they're going to come for you. You know that. They'll know it's an inside job.'

She was looking out the window and she raised her arms now in a long, slow stretch, fingers interlaced, her shoulder blades lifting in the clingy fabric. The window was turning glossy in the dusk. Paton could see the glass clouding where she blew out a sigh. She twisted her head to look coolly at Paton. 'You think I'll fall apart, break under questioning, blurt it all out?'

'I think you should be prepared. I think these people can be very persistent.'

'There's seventeen people know about this sale. I imagine at least some of them have more interesting backgrounds than mine. Anyway,' she flashed a smile at Paton; 'if it comes off, there's other things we need to decide. Like who's getting what?'

'Nothing to decide,' Paton said brusquely. 'Six-way split. Equal shares. End of discussion.' Paton stood up. He could have argued for a larger share of the take – he was the skilled tradesman, after all; the rest were just manual labour – but he knew from experience the trouble this caused. An equal split was clean and straightforward. If the take was big enough you didn't worry about trying to leverage a bigger share. Make the split, move on, everyone's happy.

'You'll be taken care of,' Dazzle told her. 'Same as everyone else. No one's stiffing anybody.'

She looked at Paton through her fringe. 'Well, I hope that's not the case.'

They drove back separately, leaving ten minutes between each car. Paton went last, in Dazzle's Triumph, the smell of dog, dog hairs on the upholstery, he thought of the dog resting its chin on his thigh, the mobile eyebrows, the sad, wet, intelligent eyes.

'That Jennifer,' Dazzle said, shaking his head. He looked across at Paton then back to the road.

Paton cracked the window an inch, kept it open while they drove, the smells of the night mingling with his cigarette smoke.

'I handle gelly for a living,' Paton said. 'Not for fun.'

8

'That's four bob, bud.'

McCormack put a ten-shilling note on the bar and took a pull at his pint, the brown sourness cutting through the milky head. *After Work You Need a Guinness*. The Smiddy was quiet, a trio of pensioners nursing their halves at one end of the bar, two guys in suits and ties playing pool. He thought he'd missed the rest of the day shift but then one of the pool players bent into the light to play a shot. It was Goldie, his features puffy and harsh in the overhead glare.

McCormack scooped his change from the bar and took his pint across to a table, opened the *Evening Times* at the sports section. He could see the TV, hear the click of the pool balls behind him. *Ask the Family* was finishing up and then it was the opening credits of *Z-Cars*, the patrol car's flashing headlights and a dotted line across a map of the city. He thought of the maps in the Murder Room and the boxes above them, boxes that ran on shelves covering three sides of the room.

At first he'd thought it was some kind of storeroom. They'd set up their Murder Room in the station's storage area and these boxes held the archives of all the old cases. Then it came to him that the boxes were current, the boxes were the Quaker files.

On his first afternoon he took down the first two boxes and leafed through them. Witness statements. He took a box from the middle and one from the end of the twenty-odd yards of shelving. Each was filled with the same buff folders of typed statements, the verbatim accounts of those who had some connection – however tenuous – with one of the victims. He tallied the boxes and made his calculation. There were fifty thousand witness statements on the Murder Room shelves.

He thought again about the madness of that number. You had fifty thousand statements and no suspect.

A shadow fell on his *Evening Times*. McCormack looked up. The angry one, Goldie, was stood there in front of him, pool cue in hand. He shook the cue like a spear. McCormack thought for a moment that he was being challenged to fight but it was only a game that the burly man wanted.

'Ten bob a throw?'

'Fine.' McCormack eased out from behind the table, followed Goldie to the lighted baize. 'Last of the big spenders.' McCormack meant this as a joke but Goldie wheeled round.

'Fine then, nicker a game.' He tossed his cue on the table. 'Rack them up, I'm away for a pish.'

McCormack took the plastic triangle down from the lampshade. He swept the balls together, lifted and dropped the stripes and spots until the pattern was right, the black nestling in the centre.

When Goldie came back McCormack broke off. They played the frame in silence. McCormack won, dropped the black with Goldie stuck on three. They racked up again and Goldie broke off viciously, the balls spreading in slow motion and something clunked home in a middle pocket and rumbled down.

'Stripes?' Goldie said. McCormack bent to check the ball as it slotted home, nodded. Goldie surveyed the table.

'You know what bothers me about you?' Goldie kept his eyes on the table, chalking his cue. 'Don't take this personal, but you know what gets me?'

'My clearance rate? My impeccable taste in clothes?'

'You sit there every day like you're one of us. You listen to our conversations. You drink our coffee. And all the time you're taking notes for your wee report, what we're doing wrong. I've worked this inquiry fifteen months.' He was watching the tip of his cue, tiny blue clouds rising as the chalk-cube scuffed it. 'Fifteen months. You're gonnae take a fortnight to tell me how I should've done it different.'

'You think I should take fifteen months to write my report?'

'Aye, very good. But that's not even it.' Goldie waited till McCormack had played his shot, a long five that rattled the mouth of the left baulk pocket, failed to drop. 'You know what it is? You sit there – day in, day out – the fucking boy genius of the Flying Squad, the man with the answers. And have you made one suggestion? Have you made a single positive contribution to what we're trying to do here?'

'I'm writing the report, mate. That's my brief. If I get involved in the investigation it just muddies the waters.'

'Aye. Fair enough.' Goldie lifted his pint from the windowsill and took a pull. 'Or maybe you're just as fucking lost as we are. Could that have something to do with it?'

'Ah come on, now. Don't sell yourself short. I've got some catching up to do to be as lost as you are.'

Goldie's laugh was soft, he was nodding to himself. 'We're getting it now, are we? The big insight. This should be fucking good. How lost are we, DI McCormack? Where did we go wrong?'

It occurred to McCormack as he straightened up that a pool cue was a useful object, its fat end nicely weighted for connecting with someone's mouth. He held the cue at arm's length and leant it gingerly against the wall. He planted his palms on the pool-table's edge and leaned down into the light.

'All right then, DS Goldie. Listen to yourself. *I've worked this inquiry fifteen months.* You're boasting about that? You should be embarrassed. Fifteen months and you've never had a sniff. What does that tell you?'

Goldie's face was in shadow. He didn't say anything. He was bouncing his cue on the floor, you could hear the rubberized end bumping on the lino. McCormack leaned down further into the light. 'No thoughts? What about this then. How many parades have you held?'

'How many what?'

'ID parades. How many have you held? Do you even know?'

'This is how you spend your time? Doing sums in your wee book?'

'Three hundred and twelve, Detective. Three hundred and twelve. That's a number, don't you think?' McCormack frowned. 'What's the plan, you bring the entire male population of Glasgow to the Marine one by one? Get Nancy Scullion to check them out?' He spread his arms. 'She's seen three hundred guys, mate. She's no idea what the Quaker looks like any more. Assuming she ever did. I could be the fucking Quaker. You could, for all she knows.'

'Spent an evening with him,' Goldie said. 'She was in his company. Shared a taxi.'

'Poured into the taxi. Pished, by all accounts. Hers included. You said it yourself, for fuck sake. You said it to Cochrane.'

'She was there!' Goldie threw an arm up and his cue caught the lampshade, sent it swinging. His face danced in and out of the yellow glare. 'She saw him. She spoke to him. What – we just fucking ignore her?'

McCormack reached out to steady the shade. 'I don't think she's feeling ignored, exactly. Anyway, at this stage it hardly matters.'

'Because you're shutting us down.'

'Cause you're not fucking catching him.'

'And why's that?'

'Because he's dead, Detective.' McCormack swirled the last of the black in his glass, skulled it. 'He's dead or else he's gone, he's left the city. It's seven months since the last one. You think he's biding his time? It's finished. You had your window, you never took it. We playing pool here or what?'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.