

**C. J. DUNFORD**

**ONLY THE  
DEAD  
KNOW**

A person in a dark coat stands on a rocky cliff overlooking the ocean. The sky is overcast and grey, with several birds in flight. The title 'ONLY THE DEAD KNOW' is written in large, bold, yellow, textured letters across the top half of the image.

**A DANIEL 'UNEASY' TRUCE MYSTERY**

# Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Title

Copyright

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER 7

CHAPTER 8

CHAPTER 9

CHAPTER 10

CHAPTER 11

CHAPTER 12

CHAPTER 13

CHAPTER 14

CHAPTER 15

CHAPTER 16

CHAPTER 17

CHAPTER 18

CHAPTER 19

CHAPTER 20

CHAPTER 21

CHAPTER 22

CHAPTER 23

A Chat with C.J. Dunford

# About the Book

After a traumatic military tour in the Middle East, Daniel 'Uneasy' Truce returns home with PTSD. Something happened there. Something he never wants to come out.

A few hand-shakes later, Truce lands a new job in a ragtag investigations unit. He may be emotionally awkward, but he's got a knack for reading body language. Problem is, his boss hates him. Calls him mentally unsound. She gives Truce the dirty work. That's how he ends up with "the crazy old bat" case.

At 11 a.m. every morning, June drops by her local police station to report a murder she witnessed. Initially the cops took her seriously. They visit the alleged victim's home to find him very much alive. But June won't give up, and her daily appearances become a nuisance. Truce is tasked to investigate. To shut her up. Soon June winds up dead-hit by a car. Was it really an accident? Truce thinks there's more to the case. That maybe someone just doesn't want the truth to come out ...

Only the Dead Know is the first book in the Daniel 'Uneasy' Truce Mystery series.

# About the Author

C.J. Dunford is one of Caroline Dunford's pseudonyms. She lives in Scotland in a cottage by the sea with her partner and her two young sons. As all authors are required to have as much life experience as possible she has been, at various times, a drama coach, an archery instructor, a counsellor, a qualified psychotherapist, a charity worker, a journalist, a voice actor, a hypnotherapist, and a playwright. Today she writes mainly novels, the odd (often very odd) short story, theatre plays, the occasional article, teaches and mentors. She can't remember a time when she didn't write or tell stories and seriously doubts that she could remain sane if she stopped doing so.

Readers can connect with C.J. Dunford on various social media platforms:



C.J. DUNFORD

# ONLY THE DEAD KNOW

A Daniel 'Uneasy' Truce Mystery





# »be« by BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT

Digital original edition

»be« by Bastei Entertainment is an imprint of Bastei Lübbe AG

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. This book is written in British English.

Copyright © 2018 by Bastei Lübbe AG, Schanzenstraße 6-20, 51063 Cologne, Germany

Written by Caroline Dunford as C.J. Dunford

Edited by Al Guthrie

Project editor: Lori Herber

Cover design: Christin Wilhelm, [www.grafic4u.de](http://www.grafic4u.de)

Cover illustrations © shutterstock: Bastian Kienitz | Carlos Caetano | Maurizio

Callari | Frank Brehm\_frankolor

E-book production: [DTP.company](http://DTP.company)

ISBN 978-3-7325-6339-5

[www.be-ebooks.com](http://www.be-ebooks.com)

Twitter: [@be\\_ebooks\\_com](https://twitter.com/be_ebooks_com)

# CHAPTER 1

He thinks it's paint.

He feels as if he's been thrown in the deep end of a pool. Everything is muffled. Obscured. Air pounds his ear drums. A high-pitched whine cuts through his head as his vision blurs. Suddenly the world tilts, and he's on his back looking up at the paint raining down on him. A sharp pain pierces his hip, like someone has stuck a dagger through to the bone. His right arm feels as if it is on fire. All he can smell is dust. The paint splatters softly on his face.

Seconds.

Has it only been seconds? Less?

He doesn't know.

But he smells it now. The singed coppery smell of — it's not paint. It's ...

Daniel Truce wakes. His body shudders from the crown of his head to the tips of his toes. He feels like a guitar string someone is plucking hard. He grinds his hands into his eye sockets, and colour explodes across his vision. But he can't erase the scene from his mind's eye. It pulls him back. He takes his hands away and stares up at the ceiling. Tiny cracks in the paint trace a crazy pattern across the white plain, like a road map seen from a distance. He tries to focus on the haphazard "map" — imagining some long-lost civilisation. He can no longer feel the blood streaking his face. He rubs his face and holds his trembling hands in front of him. They're clean. It's over. Nothing he could have done. Nothing he can do now except move on. He repeats

the mantra in his head. It's a lesson he is still trying to learn.

Truce staggers towards the shower, pausing only to look at the gaunt stranger in the mirror. A girlfriend once told him he looked like Jake Gyllenhaal. He had to Google him, but he quite liked the comparison.

He runs his hand through his hair as if he can physically push away the nightmares. He could never voice how much he hates this weakness. How much it makes him hate himself. 1 ...2 ...3 ... He takes a deep breath and exhales before turning on the tap. He has to check it's water that comes out. No, he can never tell anyone. They would all be too understanding.

Forty-five minutes later — he has learnt to allow himself time — he returns to the mirror, adjusting his tie. His old regiment's tie. Silk with red lines, it's exactly the kind of thing that anyone not in the know would easily overlook. But for Truce, these colours give him a sense of security and remind him of a world where he once understood everything. Where he fitted.

It's possible to pair the tie with matching socks. But the thought of what Leighton would say, stops him. Suits are the one thing he's allowed himself to splurge on. Becoming an orphan at an early age instilled in him the need to look after himself. Having money in the bank is important to him. There's never been anyone he could turn to for help financially. The only person Truce has ever relied on is Leighton. And more often than not it's been Leighton who's needed a loan from him.

Strange seeing himself in a uniform after not being in one for so long. Despite the cost, it still doesn't look right on him. He tugs at the tie.

"That you all ready for another day at the Big Blue Barn?" Leighton, his auburn hair wild and unkempt, sticks his head unannounced round Truce's door. His chin is



covered with mottled ginger whiskers. Try as he might, Leighton can never manage to grow a beard.

“I keep telling you it isn’t blue.”

Leighton comes in and perches on the end of the bed. His civvies are casual to the point of dilapidation. “The civilian world, it’s all mad. The police station isn’t blue, and you don’t have to wear a uniform. That’s not sporting, I tell you. It’s not exactly giving the criminals a fair chance.”

“Like yourself?” says Truce, a smile tugging playfully at the edge of his mouth.

“Was that the glimmer of a sense of humour there?” says Leighton, folding his arms across his chest. “You’d better watch that. Could be the start of you turning into a proper human being.”

Truce turns and picks up his bag — “a man-bag” the shop assistant had called it. “I need to go.”

“Have a nice day at the office, love.” Leighton snickers. “Tea’ll be on the table when you get home.”

Truce whips out a clout at Leighton’s head, but as usual, he evades it. “Get a job,” Truce says.

Leighton shrugs and calls after Truce, “If I see a reason to, I will.”

\*\*\*

Truce lowers himself into his Audi R8 and presses the button that starts the engine. He still finds it odd not to use a key. He settles back into his seat, ready for the drive. Hopefully the Bridge won’t be too busy. Still, he doesn’t regret buying in Edinburgh. The drive across the Forth to work every morning must be one of the most beautiful commutes in the world.

He thinks back over what Leighton said about needing a reason to get a job. As if contributing to the household bills weren’t reason enough. It was always the same with him.

Right from the start, Leighton would go his own, lazy way unless he saw a good “reason” to do otherwise. It was amazing he'd lasted so long in the military police, but then he only went in because Truce had. Apparently he couldn't think of anything better to do. And they had to do something. It's not like a children's home will keep you forever. It was find a place to go, or join the waiting list for a council flat. Truce had always needed boundaries. He had known that if he didn't get his feet secured on the ground, if he didn't have rules to follow, then he'd fall apart. Leighton could drift anywhere. Ever since they first met as kids, he'd anchored himself to Truce. Truce, who found it nigh on impossible to make friends, had welcomed his friendship like a desert traveller finding an oasis. Okay, so Leighton could be an annoying jerk, but he was Truce's annoying jerk. He was always there. Leighton always had his back. Chalk and cheese, but somehow an indivisible team.

But Truce follows orders. He likes to know where he stands. He likes to define himself. “By your job?” He can almost hear Leighton mocking him. “You're a sad man.”

But Truce would disagree. There's right, and there's wrong. It's easier to get by when you see the world in black and white. Shades of grey are for Civvie Street. Only now, to his dismay, he lives in Civvie Street.

He arrives at the ex-country house, now home to the experimental team he is part of, and parks in his clearly labelled space: Daniel Truce, Special Advisor to the Combined Special Crimes Task Force, Police Scotland. It's still not clear if he's ever going to get a warrant card. The outgoing head of his regiment, Major Percival Bay — a decent man despite his overly posh name — pulled strings to get him the job.

“Can't have those considerable talents of yours going to waste,” he'd said. “Because you can't exactly stay in the services now, can you? Consider this just another way to

serve your country. You were one of the best Military Police Officers we had. Always straight as a die. Always got your man, as they say in the Westerns, even though you were scrupulously correct.”

Truce remembers the conversation as if it were only a few minutes ago. His military career snuffed out in an instant. It was the first time he'd lost a man who'd gone AWOL.

He should be grateful that Major Bay had gone to school with some police bigwig, landing Truce his current gig. But he isn't. He'd endured three gruelling rounds of interviews with important people in the service he was unlikely to ever see again. Some of them incredulous that one of his main talents was his ability to read people. Until he “read” them and told them what he saw. “Just like Sherlock Holmes,” one of the older men had said, and guffawed in delight. But Truce knows he is nothing like the famous detective. He's no genius, and his talent for reading others is learned. Starting at the age of eight, he's now read every book he can find on behaviour, human and animal — because he simply doesn't get people. Without being able to read their involuntary cues, he knows he'd spend his days in a state of perpetual surprise and a feeling of overwhelming chaos.

But the hardest part of getting this job had been passing his psych-evaluation. Therapy hadn't helped, as far as Truce is concerned. It's made everything worse. He was better coping on his own, so he used all his skills to lie about how mentally well he was — and he'd won.

He gets out of the car, checks the contents of his man bag twice and, when he can't avoid it any longer, walks into the building.

He nods to Bob on the desk as he holds up his pass. At least he thinks it's Bob. One sergeant on the wrong side of middle age sliding into slow oblivion is about the same as another. Bob grunts back at him in acknowledgement and

then speaks. The Bobs don't often speak, so Truce stops to listen. "She's in a rare mood."

Truce gives a brisk nod of understanding and walks into the open-plan office.

"Truce." Her voice has all the warmth of a blast freezer. Chief Superintendent Lydia Rose looks pointedly at her watch. She is younger than Truce, barely cussing thirty, and fiercely ambitious.

Truce glances at one of the wall clocks. 8:02 a.m. If he's late, it's by two minutes at most. No matter that he was on site at the start of his shift. Late is late.

"Ma'am," he says and waits. "It won't happen again."

"My office, now."

He follows her obediently into the only office on the open-plan floor with a door. Her perfume lingers in the air, like the tinge of sulphur that hangs in the air after Hogmanay fireworks. He swallows a cough. Rose sits and picks up a file. Her desk has what might be termed significant acreage. Its blue leather top shines with polish. A tiny gold motif is etched around the edge. Apart from the file, she has a small wooden in, out and pending trays. There is a sheaf of paper in the out section. Nothing else. Even her computer is on another small table to her side. The surface appears to have no purpose other than to be empty. A reminder that Rose is always on top of the job. She holds the file above her desk, half-way across, in the no man's land. He doesn't reach for it, and she doesn't hand it to him. Classic powerplay.

"I've got one for you," says Rose. "Right up your street. Woman who keeps coming in to a local station at Dunfarlin to report a murder. Every day, 11 a.m. on the dot, the same murder. People are beginning to set their watches by her. Something you might be advised to emulate, considering today's tardiness."

"You want me to investigate, ma'am?" says Truce.

Rose leads the experimental team under the Police Scotland re-organisation banner. It has a kind of floating brief and is filled with officers who have a cornucopia of odd skills. DS Herbert worked in IT, but joined the thin blue line when he realised the pay was better. DS Finnigan was a failed forensic scientist — a divorce during her final exams led to a downward spiral into working in retail, but now scooped up by the force. DI Random was a plumber before he'd heard the siren call to join. Undiagnosed dyslexia had held him back at school. Then he'd taken the MENSA test for a laugh and scored so highly that it had been — well, noticed. Now, he was known for his incisive mind and unfailing ability to gauge the threat level of a crime scene in a decrepit building. DS Blue, was one of the oddest, a young woman in her thirties, built like an athlete and strangely silent about her past. Truce had lost count of the number of languages she could speak. A cast of wayward characters in one sense. It was the kind of place Truce should have fitted into.

“Think you’re something special, do you, Truce? That you can succeed where others fail?”

He thinks of the number of servicemen he’s tracked down in the past, the kind of conditions he’s worked under, and his long, long list of successes. “I have some skills, ma’am,” he says.

“I don’t want you to investigate it. I want you to shut her up. Supposedly your people skills are legendary. Show me you can handle this and maybe I’ll let you play with the big boys later.”

“Ma’am?”

“When she first delivered her eye-witness report, it was fully followed up. I don’t know how it is overseas in your foreign fucking resorts of an army camp, but here we don’t pussy-foot around.” She pauses.

Truce watches her consciously slow her breathing to regain control of herself. He wonders why he upsets her so

much. He is clenching his fists tightly below her eyeline, wanting nothing more than to launch a tirade in defence of his fellow servicemen. But he knows better than to rise to her bait.

She continues, "Anyway, it's an engaging story except the man she claims she saw killed is walking around alive and well."

"Twins, ma'am?"

"Life isn't a TV show, Truce." She sighs and pushes back a stray hair that has had the audacity to escape her sleek, blonde ponytail. For a moment Truce wonders if with her hair down and minus the scowl, she might look human. She glances down at the file. "But yes, the investigating officer did check. Woman's a nut job."

"I see, ma'am," says Truce, although he doesn't have a clue where this is going.

"Which is why," says Rose, "I thought we could send you in. You could talk to her: mental case to mental case."

He doesn't take this bait, either. While it wasn't uncommon for this kind of harsh comment to go unremarked in the army, Truce knows that she is out of line for someone in a civilian service. No doubt why she took him into her office. He focusses his attention on the wall, looking just past her left ear, so she won't notice he isn't looking at her anymore. He deliberately slows his breathing, as Rose did, and doesn't let his attention waiver. *Stay calm. Be civil.* He won't tell her what he thinks of her.

"May I speak freely, ma'am?" he asks.

"This isn't the bloody army," says Rose.

"I get the feeling you don't like me, ma'am."

"Oh, and what gives you that idea?"

Truce could say he's noticed that whenever he comes into a room, she never raises her eyebrows when she catches sight of him, but he doubts she knows this is a totally involuntary facial tic all humans have. It's a sign of pleasure at seeing someone.



“Gut feeling, ma’am,” is all he says.

Rose sits back in her chair. “I simply don’t see the point of adding you to my team. My team works well as it is. I have good detectives. I handpicked everyone. As far as I am concerned you’re here as a big favour to someone. Everyone else has earned their place on the team. I don’t like interlopers. Now, scoot off and prove me wrong.” Finally, she shoves the file across the desk.

Too hard, though, and the paper flies off the desk, threatening to spill everywhere. Truce catches it mid-air. His reflexes still whip-sharp. He nods to her. “Ma’am.” Not even raising so much as an eyebrow to suggest that he knows she did that deliberately, that she wanted him on his knees picking up the papers. That she wanted to remind him who was boss. He leaves and finds somewhere to sit and read it. It’s all about hot-desking in here. Prevents anyone from bringing in family photos or pot plants. Nothing distracting and no sense of belonging. Not so different from some army units after all.

Trevor Cooper, middle-aged, with warts speckling his neck, specialising in the gorier aspects of major events, wanders over. He has a nose for sniffing out the gruesome details. “Anything juicy?”

“Nothing for you, Trevor. Just some older woman seeking attention.”

“Sounds serious,” says Cooper. “Going to have to give her a right seeing to, are you?”

Truce wonders for the umpteenth time why people think that, being ex-military, he would find laddish innuendo a bonding experience.

“Ever had a woman with no teeth suck your cock?” asks Trevor. “Quite an experience.”

“Reminiscing about your gran again, Coop?” asks Wendy Klein, looking up from her position at the next desk.

“If you’ve not got anything better to do, you should profile Truce here,” says Cooper. “Either that or give him

some counselling. I'd say Rose has been digging her thorns in again. Know about pricks, don't you Klein?"

Truce watches Wendy's face. She has a pretty mouth, a straight nose and big blue eyes. Red curls frame her face. It's a proper red, not like Leighton's brownish-red imitation. Wendy's hair is glorious. Perhaps too much so. Maybe it comes out of a bottle. But she is, Truce has noticed, quite lovely, and her eyes make her an interesting genetic abnormality. She's the team psych profiler. Tall and slender, Wendy masters her facial expressions to appear deceptively innocent. She's the least readable of all the office personnel.

Wendy leans over the desk towards Cooper. "I know how to spot a man trying to make up for his inadequacies." She lowers her voice. "Serious inadequacies."

Cooper sneers. "Don't try to get into *my* head, darlin'. You'll learn things you'd never find in your text books." But he backs off with some comment about leaving Truce to enjoy his granny.

Truce looks at Wendy. He can see she is thinking of the same retort, and he smiles.

"He's not worth the mental energy," says Wendy. "Can I see your file?"

"Sure." Truce hands it over. "Nothing exciting."

Wendy scans through the pages. "I don't know," she says. "You've got to wonder what drives someone to do this. Is there something she wants to confess, that she's hiding behind this ridiculous story? You know, one day she'll come in and casually mention the three babies under the floorboards from twenty years ago. Or she's being blackmailed by someone and is too afraid to tell the true story. But then why would she risk coming into a station at all? Or is she desperate for attention — again because maybe she's guilty of some long-forgotten crime?"

"Or maybe she believes she saw this murder. Or wants to be locked up in a nice, warm cell with three free meals a

day for wasting police time.”

“People are a lot less complicated in your world, aren’t they?” says Wendy, handing the folder back.

“You’re bored,” says Truce. “You’ve not had an interesting case for weeks.”

Wendy sighs. “You might be right. But that’s terrible. It means I want something awful to happen.”

“It’s your job, and you’re good at it,” says Truce. “It’s not like you’re making people commit violent and sadistic crimes.”

She gives him a slight smile. “Well, if your granny turns out to be anything other than slightly screwed up, let me know. Always happy to help you, Uneasy.” And she wanders off, leaving him gaping after her, wondering how she came across his army nickname. Or why she even bothered.

## CHAPTER 2

The satnav tells Truce it's one hour and twenty minutes to the relevant local nick, if he takes the fast route as opposed to the ecological one. Truce decides, if he puts his foot down, he can make it in time for his subject's 11 a.m. report.

One hour forty-five minutes later, he's swearing like a true army man as his satnav gets him locked into yet another one-way system that wasn't included in its data. When he finally gets to the nick, the woman is long gone. Fortunately, the desk sergeant, who bears an uncanny familial resemblance to Bob, has her home address.

When Truce draws up outside June Mills' home he is reminded of the older flats down in St Leonards in Edinburgh. Grey, weather-worn stone, built in a semicircle with communal staircases, the flats embodied a time when a family counted itself lucky to have two rooms. At one time it might have been slum territory, but it has been distinctly smartened up. Walls knocked down, flats melded into each other, and luxuries like running water added.

He checks the file. June is sixty-five and will remember the flats from the old days. She probably feels she is living the good life here. There is a small patch of green outside the flats that is surrounded by an iron rail. A handful of children are scampering around a ball. It can't properly be called a game. There is a distinct lack of cooperation between the players, mainly due to them ranging in age from very small to small. He looks up at the flats that curve gently around the green and sees at least two faces at windows watching the kids. There's an open staircase in

the middle and, at the bottom, a couple of bikes rest against the wall. They're not chained. It all feels a bit like stepping back into the good old days of community living. Whatever else June might be, she's not some pensioner stuck halfway up a tower block looking for an excuse to make contact with the outside world. He wouldn't be surprised if one or more of her neighbours drop in from time to time to see if she is okay and share a cup of tea.

He takes a last look over his shoulder at the kids playing outside and wonders if the place will be as peaceful when this lot turn into teenagers. The one who currently has the soft ball is biting it hard, a good quarter jammed into his small mouth in a possessive manner.

June's door shines with a glossy layer of fresh paint. It's a deep grassy green. The letterbox and knocker gleam apart from the tell-tale spots of cleaner near the door edges. Truce surmises June's eyesight isn't as good as it used to be. He knocks, careful not to leave a mark. In a surprisingly short time, the door swings open and the phrase "merry widow" sounds so loudly in his head for a moment, he fears he has said it out loud.

June has left her hair white, but it is styled in a feathered pixie cut. She is wearing enormous silver hoop earrings and restrained make-up suitable for a woman her age. But it's the skimpy leopard-skin top, knee-length leather skirt and strands of multi-coloured beads round her neck that surprise him. These coupled with her fluffy bunny slippers mark her, in Truce's view, as out of the usual. Of course, there's nothing wrong with that. But could it signify forgetfulness or irrationality? He shows his card.

"I was wondering if I might have a word, ma'am?"

She smiles, showing teeth with thinning and faded enamel. Her skin isn't bad, but Truce reckons she hasn't always been in good health. There are dark shadows under her eyes and a few laughter lines. But her eyes are bright and welcoming.

“Come in, officer,” she says. “I’ll put the kettle on. I was making shortbread this morning for the primary school sale. Now I have an excellent excuse to try it. I take it you’re a biscuit man?”

“Indeed, I am,” says Truce easily. He listens.

“So many young men your age are cyclists. Whippet thin, yet still watching their carbs. Honestly, I ask you, who wants bones and wires on top of them? Not at all comfy, I’d think.”

“I admit I’m not a fan of the size-zero model,” says Truce.

June ushers him into a cosy, impeccably clean, living room with two plush fabric sofas opposite each other. The whole room is covered in a profusion of patterns, bright colours that don’t exactly clash, but you wouldn’t want to sit in here with a headache. He sees no sign of cat hair. There is also a small table with two chairs. Truce moves towards the sofas before June can suggest the table. He wants to be able to see her feet.

He sits and sinks very low into the seat, enveloped by the overly plush cushions. *Springs going, not replaced for a while*, thinks Truce. *June is on a budget.*

“Won’t be a mo,” she says.

Truce nods, but makes no move to follow her. As soon as she’s gone, he is up and looking for the side table, sure it must be somewhere around. He finds it tucked behind one of the sofas. He sets the table between them and to one side. Then he takes a quick peek at the framed photos on the shelf above an aged electric fire, the kind with the fake plastic log and the little fan that spins underneath to give the pretence of real flames. It was the height of sophistication in the seventies. He catches a glimpse of an old black-and-white wedding photo. There is also a selection of pictures of children, some black and white and some in colour. Her siblings? Her children? Grandchildren? A large colour one of a young woman in a wedding dress,



all flouncy and frills. Eighties wedding, he thinks, probably her daughter.

June comes back in with the tray, and he takes it from her before she can move the small table to a more convenient position and sets it down.

“What a gentleman,” she says and sits down opposite him with a sigh. “Shall I be mother and pour for us?”

“It looks like you are,” he gestures to the photos.

“Ah, yes, my daughter, Jeannie. She made such a beautiful bride. Her two little ones are fully grown now. Both doctors.” She beams with pride.

Truce makes a mental note that she has access to medical knowledge. “In Scotland?” he asks.

“Scottish NHS,” says June proudly. “Calum was offered a well-paying job in the States, but he chose to stay with the people who trained him.”

“Hard job,” says Truce.

June smiles and goes through the process of ensuring he has his tea just how he likes it, neither too hot or too cold, and that he has nice biscuit in his saucer. She still hasn't asked him why he is here.

As if she had read his mind, she looks over at him, her eyes twinkling, “I'm assuming it's not bad news. You seem too relaxed for that.”

“You're very observant, Mrs Mills.”

“Oh, I don't know about that. My eyes aren't as sharp as they used to be, but I'm as keen as I ever was up here.” She taps the side of her forehead. “Probably more so,” she says with a laugh, “I was a right ditzy mare as a teenager.”

Truce has no idea how to respond to this, so he doesn't. “It's about the murder you reported.”

“Ah, I thought that was the most likely reason for your visit. I take it you've come to ask me to desist in my visits to the station?”

“Why would you say that?”

“Och, I know I sound daft. I feel sorry for the boys dealing with me. I’ll take them a few treats. I’m a great fan of those baking programmes. They probably mark me down as a lonely old bird looking for attention.”

“And are you?”

“I like you, officer! Officer — sorry, I couldn’t make out the name on your badge.”

“Truce, Daniel Truce.”

“Well, Mr Truce, I am not lonely. I’m down at bingo every week. I still have connections with the school my daughter and grandkids went to — a sort of honorary member of the PTA. My cakes for the bake sales are an institution in themselves. I babysit for a lot of the young mums round here, and I’m head of the local residents’ association. I go to the community council meetings and always say my piece! They all know me. I won’t say I have hundreds of friends, but I have four ladies who I see regularly. We do pot luck suppers among ourselves and have little outings — shopping, cinema, even the pantomime at Christmas. And I don’t exactly live like a nun. Since Mr Mills died ten years ago — taken very early he was, bad heart — there have been a few pairs of shoes under my bed. Not many, mind. But I’m not quite out of the game yet.”

Truce lets her words run over him. She is sitting directly opposite him. She placed her cup down before he started speaking. Her back is straight and both feet are on the ground. Her hands are in her lap, and apart from when she gestures, they remain still. No fidgeting. She’s tense and on the defensive, but she’s not nervous. There’s a clipped edge to her voice that suggests anger.

“Many people would have given up by now,” said Truce. “It must seem like the police aren’t listening to you.”

June shakes her head. “No, they did listen. The sergeant at the station even explained that they had investigated thoroughly.” For the first time, her hand flutters, a