

GENE KERRIGAN THE RAGE

AUTHOR OF
DARK TIMES
IN THE CITY
SHORTLISTED FOR THE
CWA GOLD DAGGER

A DEADLY CHOICE
NO ONE
WOULD WANT TO MAKE



Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Gene Kerrigan

Dedication

Title Page

Epigraph

Part 1: The Smoking Garden

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

Part 2: The Job

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Part 3: The Calm

Chapter 39

Chapter 40

Chapter 41

Chapter 42

Chapter 43

Part 4: The Storm

Chapter 44

Chapter 45

Chapter 46

Chapter 47

Chapter 48

Chapter 49

Chapter 50

Chapter 51

Chapter 52

Chapter 53

Chapter 54

Chapter 55

Chapter 56

Chapter 57

Chapter 58

Chapter 59

Chapter 60

Chapter 61

Chapter 62

Chapter 63

Chapter 64

Acknowledgements

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About the Book

Vincent Naylor is a professional thief, as confident as he is reckless. Just ten days out of jail, and he's preparing his next robbery. Already, his plan is unravelling.

While investigating the murder of a crooked banker, Detective Sergeant Bob Tidey gets a call from an old acquaintance, Maura Coady. The retired nun believes there's something suspicious happening in the Dublin backstreet where she lives alone.

Maura's call inadvertently unleashes a storm of violence that will engulf Vincent Naylor and force Tidey to make a deadly choice.

The Rage is a masterpiece of suspense, told against the background of a country's shameful past and its troubled present.

About the Author

Veteran journalist Gene Kerrigan is the author of four novels, the most recent of which, *Dark Times in the City*, won the Irish Crime Fiction Book of the Year and was shortlisted for the CWA Gold Dagger.

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Novels

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Never Make a Promise You Can't Break

For Pat Brennan and Evelyn Bracken

GENE KERRIGAN
THE RAGE

HARVILL SECKER  LONDON

The law was something to be manipulated for profit and power. The streets were dark with something more than night.

Raymond Chandler,
Trouble Is My Business

His fingers gripped the thick wooden rail, both hands clenching so hard that it felt like he might crush the wood to splinters. His breathing was shallow, the air sucked in and expelled in short puffs, hardly seeming to reach down as far as his lungs. His shoulders and chest were suddenly sweaty. It crossed his mind that something serious might be happening, something more than a panic attack. He was a big man, and fit, but he was a smoker, and at forty-seven he was carrying the consequences of a few failed New Year's resolutions. There was fear, and there was relief too. Let someone else, or no one else, deal with this - he'd have no choice but to let it all go. The tension of recent days would be swept away as his body shut down and everything evaporated in a smothering rush of mortality.

If that happened, Holly would feel the pain of it, then she'd accept his absence as just another fact of life. Like the creases around her eyes, regrettable but inevitable - and no big deal in the long run. And Grace and Dylan would feel the shock of the loss, but they were already shaping lives of their own. It was the way of things.

And without his protection Maura Coady would die. Sooner or later the lunatic would come out of the shadows and take a few minutes to crush out the small amount of life left to her.

It was towards the end of a warm April evening, a foretaste of summer. Detective Sergeant Bob Tidey was standing on the north bank of the River Liffey, on the boardwalk overhanging the dark water. Upriver, to his right, the sun left a golden glow on the clouds above the Phoenix Park. Behind him, on the quays heading into the city centre, the sound and the smell of traffic.

A city going about its business, getting ready to wind up the day. Smug and oblivious.

Bob Tidey had been born here, grew up here and raised a family, he knew the city and loved it and served it and hated the way it could turn a blind eye. He was gripping the rail so hard his fingers hurt - his arms and shoulders pushed and pulled at the wooden rail, as though he was trying to shake it, to shake the entire boardwalk, to shake the whole fucking city. He pushed himself away from the rail.

The way things had gone, there was no good way out of this, no moral thing to do. The banker's murder, the Maura Coady situation - Tidey's last conversation with the brass had shut down the safe options.

He lit a cigarette and tried to still the shaking in his hands. He took a deep drag, let the smoke out slowly, then began to walk up along the boardwalk towards O'Connell Bridge.

No moral thing to do. But something had to be done.

Part 1
The Smoking Garden

1

Lying on his back, Emmet Sweetman opened his eyes.

Everything was familiar, but all wrong.

A dark raindrop—

Falling from the ceiling—

He was lying on the floor of his wide front hallway, the cold, hard marble beneath his back. All around him, the familiar dark green walls topped with the moulded cream cornices that bordered a high white ceiling. To his left, the antique walnut table where he dropped his keys when he came home each evening. He'd never seen the table like this, from below. Underneath, barely visible in the shadows, there was a scrawl in pink chalk - *VK21*.

Someone did that in the auction room, probably, where Colette bought it.

Falling slowly, from the ceiling, a dark raindrop—

All wrong—

He felt a desperate need for certainties. Time and place and other people, and where he was in relation to it all.

Dark out—

Late, now—

Lunch with—

Then—

In an instant, the day unfolded in his mind, moments emerging one from the other. Afternoon, long meeting - fat fella from the Revenue Commissioners, then more fucking lawyers—

Evening, late home, tired, the sound of his car keys dropping onto the walnut table.

Colette—

There was—

On his way up the stairs to join her—

Doorbell—

'I'll get it.'

Now, watching the dark raindrop, falling so slowly it was still only halfway to the floor, he felt a rush of cold flooding through his body. It felt like his flesh had suddenly fused with the marble beneath him. His mind stretched towards something he didn't recognise, failed to connect—

Turning on the stairs, coming down again—

Two men on the doorstep—

The one on the left wore a hoodie, a scarf across the lower half of his face. The one on the right, his shadowed face under a baseball cap, had a midget double-barrelled shotgun and it all happened together.

The flash.

The impossibly loud bang.

The incredibly fast movement.

Lying on his back, Emmet Sweetman opened his eyes.

Dark raindrop, falling—

From skull to toes his body was icy cold.

Oh, Jesus—

The one in the hoodie was—

God, no—

Leaning forward, bending down. He looked into Emmet Sweetman's eyes—

Big black handgun.

No—

The dark raindrop—

Still falling from the ceiling—

Jesus, please—

2

The court opened for business in – Bob Tidey glanced at his watch – fifteen minutes. Lots of time for a smoke. He got out of the lift on the second floor of the Criminal Courts of Justice building, walked through the cafeteria and out into the Smoking Garden. There were four or five others stealing a last few puffs. Bob Tidey preferred the old Four Courts building, where smokers had to go out into the yard to enjoy their vice. The new building was an uninhibited display of affluence, but there was something indecent about splashing out so generously to facilitate a bad habit. The Smoking Garden had several tastefully designed wooden benches, where you could sit and have a puff and a coffee. It was decorated with plants and saplings and a lot of thought had gone into the design of the receptacles for stubbing out your cigarette. Despite all this, the area already seemed a little frayed about the edges – abandoned Coke cans and cardboard coffee cups, carelessly discarded butts.

Bob Tidey's disposable lighter should have been disposed of a couple of days back. He had to flick it several times before he got a tiny flame. He was leaning forward, hands cupped to light the Silk Cut, when his mobile rang.

Tidey let the flame die.

'Yeah?'

The voice was raspy, unmistakable.

'That thing we talked about, Mr Tidey – you said we could, you know, have a chat. See if there's anything can be done.'

'That'll depend, Trixie. The kid's got to open up, just to me, it won't go on the record. Get him to—'

'I told him. I think he's OK with that.'

'Good.'

'We need to talk, Mr Tidey.'

'Look, I'm at a meeting. I'll drop by when I can.'

'That'd be great.'

'No promises, OK?'

'Whatever you think - it's your game, Mr Tidey.'

It took several attempts to get the lighter working. Tidey took a long drag, sucking the shit out of the Silk Cut. Low tar was a scam, he reckoned - it meant he smoked twice as many. Ought to go back on the Rothmans.

The courts had eaten up a significant amount of Bob Tidey's working life over the past twenty-five years and ordinarily the courtroom routine was something he welcomed and enjoyed. For civilians, the courts were approached reluctantly, as defendants, litigants or witnesses. For the police, they were the goal to which months of hard work were devoted - where you got to bring your case into the winners' enclosure or watch it vanish down the toilet. Bob Tidey felt at home here.

The shiny new Criminal Courts of Justice lacked the historic heft of the old Four Courts, the higgledy-piggledy layout and countless nooks and crannies where quiet deals were done. Instead, it offered light and space, technology and comfort, all the bells and whistles that the legal community of a proud and prosperous little nation could desire. The building was conceived in the exuberant period when money was plentiful. There was so much of the stuff that the right kind of people earned big bonuses sitting around all day just thinking up new things to spend it on. The tables of the golden circles groaned with the weight of the feast. Their admirers piled into the property gambling game and sufficient crumbs fell to minimum-wage level to keep the skulls happy. Everyone knew the money-go-round

would keep spinning as long as two or three bad things didn't happen simultaneously - then four or five bad things happened at once.

By the time the shiny new Criminal Courts of Justice building opened for business it had become clear that the plentiful supply of money was imaginary. At first it seemed almost a technical hitch, like someone needed to sort out a knotty little arithmetic problem. Then, house prices went through the floor, jobs evaporated, factories and businesses that had been around for decades folded overnight. There were hundreds of thousands of houses and flats empty, hundreds of unfinished estates in which no one lived or would ever want to live, all built with borrowed money to take advantage of tax breaks. The knowledge that all the backslapping and arrogance of the previous decade was nurtured in bullshit made the country blush like a teenager caught posing in front of a mirror.

Bob Tidey was in the law and order business, and whatever else went belly-up there'd always be hard men and chancers and a need for someone to put manners on them. He'd taken wage cuts, but he could live with that. These days his needs were few.

At first he missed the make-do atmosphere of the Four Courts, now used solely for the lucrative civil law end of the business. But wherever the legal tournaments might be held, Tidey felt at home with the intricate preparation of cases, the tension, the post-trial comedown. Do the job right and it wasn't often the villains managed to slide out of the handcuffs. And on the rare occasion they did, he could bide his time. The thing about criminals, they usually give you a rematch.

This, though, was the first time he'd come to court in a role other than that of investigator. In a few minutes he'd be in a courtroom on the fourth floor, preparing to commit perjury.

Fuck it.

Made your bed, don't complain about lying on it.

Once you make a witness statement, in the aftermath of an alleged offence, that's that. Go on the stand and deviate from the written word and the defence barrister will spend the next half-hour dancing on your bones.

Tell me, Detective Sergeant, were you lying then or are you lying now?

Answering questions about that evening in Brerton's pub, after the hubbub died down, he'd kept it simple.

'I didn't see anything.'

'We'd better take a statement, anyway, just for the record.'

'No problem.'

I heard a commotion somewhere behind me and I tried to ignore it. I thought it was just someone being loud, the way it is in pubs sometimes. By the time I turned round it was all over.

End of story.

Nothing in that to help or harm either side.

That evening, when he turned round from where he was sitting at the bar of Brerton's, the batons were already swinging. Two gobshites ended up in handcuffs, followed by a trip to Beaumont A&E and a night in the cells at Turner's Lane.

Asking for it.

The gobshites, late teens, maybe twenty or so, were brave with drink. Loud, playing tough guys, throwing unfunny and insulting remarks around the pub, then laughing and staring down the regulars. A nervous young barman who asked them to cool it was told to fuck off. The gobshites laughed so hard they squeezed their eyes shut and rocked in their seats.

Bob Tidey was having a quick bite to eat, after a long, lunchless day, on his way back from a fruitless journey to see a potential witness in an insurance fraud. When two uniforms arrived at Brerton's, looking pissed off, like they'd

had to interrupt a tea break, the gobshites quickly sobered up. Just what you need, when there's dozens of people chasing even minimum-wage jobs - a court appearance and a job conviction on your record. They suddenly looked like the dim-witted boys they were. It should have ended there, with a warning, and an order to leave the pub. Instead, just as the gobshites moved towards the exit, their exaggerated swagger implying that leaving was their own idea, one of the uniforms crooked a finger, beckoned and called after them. 'Let's hear an apology to the customers, lads. And make it sincere.'

The two gobshites stood awkwardly, their faces a mixture of embarrassment, fear and anger.

'It's over,' one of them said.

The Garda raised an eyebrow. 'I'm not hearing anything that sounds like repentance.'

The other gobshite couldn't stop the anger pushing through the fear. 'Go fuck yourself.'

It was like the sound of a starting pistol, and the two policemen and the two gobshites went at it. Four young men doing what a certain kind of young man always longs to do - lock horns.

Bob Tidey took a sip of watery pub coffee. He heard the sound of baton connecting with soft tissue. He looked up and saw a spray of blood fly horizontally away from the mouth of the bigger of the two gobshites. He watched the other one cowering, one hand raised in front of his face, then he heard a scream and saw a baton knock the hand away, then a backhand blow from the same baton smacking the side of the gobshite's face.

It lasted twenty seconds tops. Tidey swallowed the last of his coffee, chewed what remained of his ham and cheese sandwich and left.

'Bob?'

The call came four hours later, when Tidey was at home, watching the highlights of a Champions League match that

didn't have any highlights.

'Derek Ferry, Turner's Lane.'

'Derek, long time.'

They'd started in the force around the same time, worked at the same station for a few months.

'What it is, Bob, two of our lads picked up a couple of drunk and disorderlies this evening, down in Brerton's. One of the lads recognised you, went back to have a word and you were gone.'

'Finished my sandwich, nothing to hang about for.'

'What I was hoping - the two drunks - it turns out one of them's the son of an adviser to the Minister for Commerce and Enterprise.'

'Bad luck.'

'The parents are making a fuss - they've sent a photographer down to take snaps of the bruises. Our lads are charging the two idiots with assaulting a Garda. Probably the best thing to do, in the circumstances.'

True enough. You leave bruises on the son of someone connected, there's going to be a fuss. Best thing to do is charge him with whatever's credible, and that puts the parents and their legal people on the back foot. Most likely, everyone agrees to back off and it's like nothing ever happened.

'I didn't see anything,' Tidey said.

'The lads were just wondering, if—'

'Sorry, Derek, I was sitting with my back to it all.'

Ferry hesitated just a moment, and when he spoke he managed to keep the disappointment out of his voice.

'We'd better take a statement, anyway, just for the record.'

'No problem.'

If this thing ended up in court Tidey wasn't inclined to be a police witness. He'd little appetite for hanging a conviction on a couple of drunken jobs who'd had the bad luck to bump into a couple of coppers equally eager to

spray testosterone over everything in sight. On the other hand, to give evidence that confirmed the amateurism of the two uniforms was the route to professional isolation. In some circumstances it might be the right thing to do - but he'd no interest in sacrificing his career on the altar of justice for a couple of drunken fools.

It's a rule of life. When fools - in uniform or out - start a stupid fight, leave them to it. And when the two jobs were hit with a D&D charge it should have been a quick fine, over and out. But these jobs' parents brought in a team of legal heavyweights, and everyone was fearful of backing down, so months later it was about to squander court time.

Tidey's statement was so bland that his name wasn't on the original witness list. Then, the previous evening, he'd got the call that brought him down to the Criminal Courts of Justice.

Best to stick to the story in the statement. Get on the stand, get off it, get out of it.

He stubbed the butt of the Silk Cut, popped a Tic Tac into his mouth and went back inside.

'Sergeant Tidey?'

The tall barrister with the wrinkled face was waiting when Bob Tidey stepped out of the lift on the fourth floor. His first name was Richard, and his perpetually dour expression had earned him the nickname Mopey Dick. He was prosecuting the case in which Tidey was a witness. 'A word, if you please?' he said. He was holding a sheaf of papers in one hand.

Tidey nodded. Mopey Dick led the way to the glass barrier overlooking the massive circular atrium around which the building was designed. He took off his wig, stroked his thin grey hair and put the wig back on. He spent a few seconds carefully adjusting it, gazing down at the small figures milling about the ground-floor lobby. He looked up at Tidey, as a doctor might look at a patient for whom the results were ambiguous.

'We've got a problem. Or, to be more precise, *you've* got a problem.'

3

Doesn't get much better than this.

Bopping down Henry Street, the warm mid-morning sun above and a free day ahead.

Feeling good.

There was a swagger to Vincent Naylor's walk. Ten days since he'd got out of prison.

The pedestrianised street wasn't too busy this morning. He caught an appraising glance from a woman with blonde hair and dangling earrings that were half the size of her face.

And looking good.

Vincent's hair was dark and curly. Everything decorating his tall, slim frame, from his Tag Heuer shades down to his charcoal Converse sneakers, he'd bought in the days immediately after he got out of the Joy. Treated himself to some fresh style - blue striped shirt from Thomas Pink, grey jacket from Pull and Bear, Sean John jeans.

He turned left into HMV.

Back to the scene of the crime.

He took off the shades and hooked them on the V of his shirt and went up the stairs two at a time up towards the DVD department. Hang a right at the dog-leg—

Half expecting to meet the Geek.

Little bollocks.

Most mornings he was up early and out, driving down to Clontarf for a run along the seafront - he got a rush from the mixture of freedom, the fresh air and the stretch of

muscle and sinew. The body, Vincent often told his brother Noel, is the temple of the soul.

This morning, he'd skipped the run. Vincent was in HMV in search of a Tommy Tiernan DVD. Noel had recommended it. 'He'd make a cat laugh,' he'd said. Vincent was meeting some of his mates tonight at Noel's house in Coolock. Lift a few cans, a bite to eat, watch a DVD and have a laugh. Part of the fun of getting out of prison was the reunions.

'If you don't mind,' the Geek said in his prissy little voice.

That afternoon, fourteen months ago, Vincent Naylor had just arrived in HMV, moved past the new CDs and DVDs, headed for the stairs, in search of the *Columbo* box set. He'd seen it upstairs here a few days before, reduced to half nothing. His gran doted on Peter Falk. She'd seen most of the *Columbo* episodes but that didn't matter. Once she got her hands on the DVDs it'd take a crowbar to get her away from the telly.

'Left side of the stairs,' the Geek said. 'It's the rule.'

What fucking rule?

Geek written all over him. Collarless shirt, black waistcoat and jeans, he's wearing a little Pete Doherty hat and he's got shades, and - no kidding - the shades are perched on the brim of the hat, which must have seemed cool when he was looking at himself in the mirror this morning.

They met midpoint on the stairs, just before Vincent reached the dog-leg up to the right, and if the Geek had kept his stupid mouth shut everything would have been fine. Vincent was on the right-hand side, fingers skimming the metal handrail. He hadn't even seen the little bollocks and if the fool hadn't made a thing of it Vincent might have stepped around him, all things being equal, though probably not.

'What's your problem?' he asked the Geek.

The Geek just stood there inside his smug little face, looking down at Vincent, throwing a glance towards the security guy up near the front door, knowing he was safe within sight of the bouncer. His face, though, gave him away. Little shade of red creeping across his cheeks.

Vincent Naylor stared him out, tilted his head to one side, looked right into the creep's eyes, moved his face forward no more than two or three inches. And the Geek blinked. He let out a small, dismissive noise and he stepped away from the handrail, walked around Vincent, and Vincent turned and watched him go. He knew the little bollocks would look back, so he put a smile on his face and waited, and when the Geek turned and looked back and saw Vincent standing there, it must have been the scornful smile that gave the Geek a dose of the stupids. His face flared as he turned away and headed for the exit.

Probably feeling he was safe enough now, the Geek looked back at Vincent and shouted, loud enough so everyone at ground-floor level could hear, even above the pounding of some stupid hip-hop shit, '*Scumbag! Skanger!*'

Vincent came down off the stairs in one jump. The Geek was suddenly moving, accelerating out the door, into the street, turning right and heading up towards the Spire.

The security guy held up a hand and said, 'Take it easy,' but Vincent was past him, leaning forward, legs pumping.

The Geek was twenty yards ahead, running through the thin crowd of shoppers like his legs were made of flower stalks. Vincent knew the Geek's mangy little heart was in his scrawny little throat, and his stupid little brain was fluttering like a sparrow in the shadow of a hawk. Vincent's fury vanished, and he grinned. He accelerated, enjoying the ease with which he could narrow the gap between them. The Geek was barely past the junction with Moore Street.

When Vincent caught up with him he gave a little push on his shoulder and the Geek went stumbling forward, his knees hitting the ground, then his hands, then his face, his

HMV bag hitting the bricks with a noise like something was coming apart inside. His Pete Doherty hat was on the ground and Vincent gave a little whoop as he stood on the Geek's shades,

'What's your hurry, smart-arse?'

He kicked the little bollocks in the ribs. The Geek rolled to one side and flattened his right hand on the ground, to lever himself up to one knee. His scream was girlish when Vincent stood on his fingers. Vincent's next kick broke the Geek's nose and that was when a gum-chewing security man from some shop or other pushed Vincent aside and said, 'That's enough.' There was a second security man off to Vincent's left and he raised a hand and said, 'Back off.'

Vincent nodded and said, 'Sure,' and drew back his foot and kicked the Geek in the ribs one last time, hard. Then he turned, ready to do a fade, and found a copper six feet away and closing fast. Someone stuck out a foot and when Vincent turned and ran he tripped and went down.

He looked up at the Garda and - like he was showing off a magic trick - the fucker was suddenly hefting a baton. The Garda said, 'Give me an excuse.'

Six months later, Vincent's solicitor put down his fountain pen, leaned back in his big chair and said, 'Your best bet - you were provoked by his remarks, you felt that you and your family had been deeply insulted and you don't know what came over you.'

'I'm not pleading guilty,' Vincent said, and the solicitor shook his head.

'Twelve months,' the judge said when it got to court, and Vincent was out in eight.

Now, upstairs in HMV, Vincent looked at the *Columbo* box set. Cheaper than ever. No point buying it, though - his gran had shuffled off three months before Vincent got out. When that happened he applied for compassionate parole but - seeing it was just two days after he spat in the face of

a screw who'd been asking for it - there was no fucking point.

He searched the comedy DVDs and had a look at the Tommy Tiernan. Seemed OK. For just a moment he found himself casually scoping the place. Just the one spotty loser at the cash register. There was a wide, deep pocket inside Vincent's jacket.

Daft.

He went to the register and paid up.

Only losers risk a stretch for the price of a DVD.

Sooner or later, Vincent Naylor knew, he'd be back in jail. It was part of the game. You play the odds and most of the time, if you're good enough, you'll go free and clear with a profit. Sooner or later the odds run out and that's the dues you pay. But that thing with the Geek, no more shit like that. No percentage in it. The months in the Joy had cooled his blood, given him time to think it all through.

Doing the Geek was fun, but the reward wasn't worth the risk. No more emotional shit - all business from here on. Vincent Naylor knew that with all the care in the world he couldn't stop his luck from running out some day. But before then he'd play it smart. No petty shit, no reckless moves. All business. Business is business and fun is fun. And if you do the first one right, you'll have lots of time for the other.

Spitting in the screw's face - that was a bit of a relapse. Vincent cursed himself for a day or two, but what the fuck, he wasn't a saint.

The way Vincent saw it, there are two kinds of work. The routine stuff - that's good for walking-around money. A few hundred here, a few hundred there - jobs that are safe and easy. Then there's the real thing - maybe not more than a couple of jobs like that in a year. The upside is they cough up the kind of money that takes a while to spend, and that's worth the increased risk of a stretch in the Joy. The next

time Vincent Naylor went to jail it would be for something worthwhile.

4

The defence barrister looked over the top of his glasses at Bob Tidey. 'That *is* you, isn't it, Detective Sergeant?' He was pointing at a large flat-screen television, one of several visible to the judge, the jury and the witness. The picture on the screen was frozen, the image of poor quality.

Tidey said, 'It appears to be.'

'And in this image, you're looking - where?'

'What we're looking at here,' Tidey said, 'is just a snapshot, one instant in a fast-moving event—'

'Quite the contrary, Detective Sergeant,' the defence barrister said. 'It's a video, not a snapshot, and it makes a nonsense of your sworn evidence, does it not?' He raised a small remote control. 'Let's see that again, shall we?'

Outside the courtroom, Mopey Dick hadn't used any sugar to sweeten the medicine. 'They've got a video - just a few seconds - of the incident in Brerton's. Someone got it on their mobile.' He took off his wig again, draped it over his hand, shook his head. 'There's very little to see - a couple of batons swinging. In the normal scheme of things this wouldn't either help or hurt our case.'

'But?'

'The video moves about a bit, and for a second or two it shows you sitting at the bar, looking towards the action. Then it swings back and the two policemen can clearly be seen striking the two defendants.'

He held up a sheet of paper.

'*I heard a commotion somewhere behind me,*' that's what you said. '*By the time I turned round it was all over.*'