

Armed Candy

A True-Life Story of Organised Crime

Reg McKay



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Armed Candy is a real-life story of sex, drugs, crime and murder told in a real city in real time. It has only been possible to write it due to the courage of beautiful Kay, who lived it all and survived. Almost all the names have been changed – pubs, areas and people – for an important reason. This book is not about finger pointing or blame. It is about understanding and survival; the survival of one important person – Kay.

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This is dedicated with love to my big Paul – you know who
you are. Always.

Kay

March 2002

To all the working girls – walk tall.

Reg McKay

March 2002

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The Beginning

THE END

'I loved him yet wanted him dead.'

'Must have been . . .'

'Hard? Still is, worse each day.'

'And he was so young.'

'The police thought it was just another street shooting. Another young boy wasted in some petty squabble. If they only knew who was behind it all . . .'

'But why was he killed?'

'They were scared of him. Terrified he'd take over.'

'Was it a one off?'

'No way - just the start. Disappearances, suicides, people gunned down and worse. Craziness. All unsolved, all unrelated. As if.'

'Do you know who killed them?'

'Tes, and why and who gave the orders.'

'Did you tell the police anything?'

'Not a cheep. Do that and you lose self-respect, you lose everything. Besides, they think the women are just arm candy, nooky machines.'

'What are they then?'

'Some of us are more. I am . . . I was much more.'

'Will you tell me who killed them?'

'Everything, so you can tell people. As many people as possible. I'm out of it now but it needs to be stopped.'

'They'll kill you when they suss you've been talking.'

'They don't scare me anymore.'

'And you. Will you tell me what you've done? All of it? Truthfully?'

'Even when I don't like it or don't understand. I've needed to speak for a long time, too long.'

'Okay, where will we start?'

'At the beginning of the end I suppose . . .'

Hot for Winter (1998) – Part One

Red-varnished, manicured fingers gently tug a taut pencil skirt up at the knee as a slim leg slowly lifts and crosses, revealing a slither of silk stocking. A small, squat woman with tightly permed hair waddles quickly over to the empty leather armchair in her shapeless floral frock, flops down, folds her podgy hands across her belly and begins to answer questions. Yes, they'd been married for twenty-three years. Yes, she preferred him as her. She was proud of how good he looked. Of course she knew all about the young men he brought home. Definitely, they were a bit rough but handsome and so virile. They'd often have tea together with the best china, biscuits and all. No, she didn't think it was wrong. She sometimes watched if they let her. Beside her, her husband adjusted his skirt again, preened and giggled. Yes, she'd been a Methodist Sunday school teacher all her adult life. Voices protested and gasped while the questioner raised her eyebrows in her trademark expression of mock shock.

Nobody in the house was watching daytime TV. They'd more to concern them than another stale portion of histrionic confessions. In the kitchen a lean-bodied woman with a handsome, life-beaten face made yet more tea, pushing short blonde hair off her face, anxiously rubbing her scalp where the roots turned mousy. Two men sat open-legged at opposite ends of a battered sofa, ignoring each other. The heavily built middle-aged one slurped lager from a can. The pasty-faced younger one teased at some tobacco, rolling a joint on the glossy cover of a car magazine. Both gave all their attention to their simple,

everyday actions. A tall, good-looking young man paced in front of the window, peering out at the street as if wishing he was already there. Broad-shouldered and dark-haired, he seemed over-large for the room, locked in and too vital for its limited floor space.

The twittering of the television and clatter of spoons in mugs were the only sounds in the flat till the lager drinker spoke out in a voice ravaged by too many cheap cigarettes.

‘Paul, sit at peace, man. Yer giving me the heebie-jeebies.’ He was ignored. ‘Come oan, Paul, yer safer waiting in here. Besides, it’s bloody brass monkeys oot there.’ The restless young guy turned and shrugged, grimacing and mocking in one look as he headed for the door. ‘Suit yersel then. Ye always fuckin’ do.’ With his fist gripping the handle, Paul turned and sucked tut-tut through his teeth, shaking his head at the company who looked back po-faced, emotionless, slack-jawed.

As Paul strode down the stairs, the woman abandoned the teapot and the kitchen, picked up the phone and dialled.

‘He’s gone. Naw, that’s whit Ah’m sayin’. He’s no waiting in here for the taxi. He’s oan the street. Aye, that’s right. Right. Good.’ She rattled the phone back in its cradle before bawling, ‘Hey, you! Get the hell away frae that windae. What are ye, fucking kamikaze?’ The older man with the lager jumped and slunk back, slouching down in his seat by the electric-barred fire. Snatching up the remote control, the woman zoomed the TV volume to maximum before heading back to the kitchen. Out in the close you could hear him – the cross-dressing, bisexual accounts clerk from Hull – revealing he and his frump wife would have three-in-a-bed sex sessions whenever opportunity allowed. The two men sat dully staring at the screen. The woman fretted in the kitchen, wiping imaginary crumbs from the beige Formica surfaces for the umpteenth time that day.

It was a grey winter afternoon and the streets of Glasgow were shrouded in a frosty haze, threaded through with

bitter, damp cold. Paul stamped his feet on the pavement and looked about him. This was his scheme, his area. What had he to be scared of? Besides, he was Simmy, Paul Sim, and he wasn't frightened of anything or anyone. From a primary school nearby, young children were straggling homewards, wrapped stiff in scarves, gloves and thick coats. Here and there shop-bought ski hats with bobbles displayed a leaning towards the Green rather than the Orange, designer labels rather than the Green. Paul smiled as he watched the youngsters bursting with energy in spite of the weather and the mummification. It took him back to that time when he would run and run in spite of it all. They starved him, beat him, locked him up but he just kept going. Buzz-Bob. Buzz-Bob. Buzz-Bob. He wondered if these little toerags felt as he had at their age - free and forgetful of what was waiting for them back there, eventually. Drunk, vengeful, angry, violent adults - he knew them all. Most of these kids wouldn't be spared that - this was one of the worst schemes in Glasgow after all.

'Fuck it,' he thought, 'the weans are havin' a great time.' And he smiled as he turned again to watch them.

A little fat boy in a puffed-out maroon ski-suit was lumbering after a group of girls who were forced to run slowly to glean some scream-worthy excitement from the sport. Three lassies were playing Chinese ropes at the side of the road. The gangly one in the middle hiked up her short skirt, bending, stretching, twisting and leaping the multi-coloured rubber bands as cars sped past yards away. In a flourish the girls half-chanted, half-sang, their breath streaming misty grey in the cold air,

New York

London

Paris

Rome

Wherever ye go

No place like home

Before upping the tempo and ending in a flurry,

It's hot

It's hot

It's bloody, bloody hot

It's hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, hot, HOT.

The lanky girl's legs moved in a blurred fury before stamping to a finale astride the rubber ropes, hands on her hips.

'She'll have good shagging thighs when she grows up,' thought Paul, smiling to himself. It was the kind of observation he would've shared out loud with his woman and she would've punched him on the shoulder while giggling and squeezing her thighs together. Christ, he missed her. Felt lost without her.

BANG. Paul instinctively stooped and swivelled, reaching one big hand inside his jacket. His eyes scanned the street, missing nothing, till they came to rest on one scantily clad scallywag making a pistol of his fist. Paul followed the kid's aim and, sure enough, found the culprit. A skinny little kid wearing cheap canvas sandshoes, oversize denims and a manky-looking shirt was holding the latest in kidology - a pug-nosed pistol firing special caps that exploded like a bullet heading your way. BANG, the kid shot at a playmate as if to demonstrate his agreement with Paul's thoughts.

'Yer fuckin' deid,' the boy protested. 'Lie doon when yer shot or Ah'll gie ye a fucking doing.' BANG. Paul almost jumped, even when he knew the gun was a fake.

'Gun cost a fuckin' fortune,' he muttered, looking at the child's pale, unwashed face and thin clothes. 'Aye, like he paid for it.'

Grass verges split the road like a dual carriageway so he had to watch both sides in case the taxi driver was lost.

Broad, tree-lined avenues edged with grass were the only promise the planners had kept in building the scheme as the model estate for the twentieth century. Paul had always liked the streets – it was the shitty houses and desperate people he hated. On the other side of the road a saloon car pulled in.

‘Wanker taxi driver doesn’t even know the area,’ Paul cursed.

‘Yo, Simmy!’ A familiar face shouted out of the open driver’s window. Paul grinned and swaggered across the street – walking tall, chin out, confident. As he reached the grass shoulder he leaned over to talk with his friend. Paul always looked people straight in the eye – stared them down. He didn’t like what he saw. Frowning, he growled and reached inside his jacket,

BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG.

Behind him, near the school, the scruffy waif spun and pointed his cap gun in all directions. Finding no ambush he turned again and ran at the red-faced maroon Michelin man still teasing the girls, kneed him to the ground and blasted him three times in the head from point-blank range. BANG. BANG. BANG. The victim sat on the road, snotter flowing down his chin as he wailed for his mammy.

People turned to see what the noise was as the car burned rubber and sped away. They knew the motor and its driver well but would tell the police nothing – those were the rules. Only then did they notice the heap spread out on the grass. Three bullets had hit Paul. He’d hang onto life for four hours but, even as he lay on the sodden ground, Paul Sim was dying.

Street Party (1998)

Kay faced a dangerous decision. Left for home and safety. Right for trouble and danger. She never went to that scheme – not since he'd threatened to shoot her. The car engine ticked over as an impatient queue grew behind her. A hackney cab taxi blasted its horn and the driver gesticulated, mouthing 'Fucking useless women drivers – get oan wi it for Christ's sake.' Normally she'd give him the V sign and offer to give him a slap. Normally she wouldn't hesitate at a crossroads. Normally she wouldn't think of going right.

She turned to her young niece in the passenger seat and apologised, 'Sorry – I just have to.' Spinning the car round to the right, she slipped into the fast-flowing traffic and off towards certain trouble.

The teenage girl protested, 'Kay! Where are we going for fuck's sake? Ye'd better turn back, man.' Kay drove on silently ignoring her pleas. 'Ye crazy cunt. We're right in the shit now.' The teenager slid down in her seat till the top of her head was below the door level, pulling the collar of her anorak up over her ears, her mouth, her nose. With no explanation and nothing to say, Kay drove on, leaning over the steering wheel, tight-lipped and grim-faced.

Police cars blocked off the street and blue uniforms were out in force. Down the middle of the road, a stretch of grass was taped off around a long crimson stain, stark and beautiful against the frosted green backcloth. A copper blocked Kay's entry to the street with a raised hand.

'Is it Shuggie?' she shouted to him.

‘Shuggie who, hen?’ he asked, swaggering over to speak with her.

‘Shuggie Patterson, a pal of mine – that’s his house just there.’

‘Naw, it’s somebody else, doll. Don’t you go bothering yer gorgeous little heid about nothing.’

‘Thank God for that,’ she replied with obvious relief.

‘Is he a good friend of yours, like?’ The young policeman was now leaning in the car window, his face inches from hers. She could smell last night’s curry and stale lager on his breath through a thin veil of mint chewing gum his jaw constantly worked on.

‘No, just a pal, you know.’

‘Just good friends, eh?’ he said with a wink. He was a young guy, good looking in a clear-eyed fresh-faced sort of way and full of himself. Not Kay’s type at all.

‘No. No like that,’ she grinned. ‘Just a pal.’

‘Silly man. Silly man. What, is he queer?’

‘Ye’d better ask his wife,’ she replied, arching her eyebrows and playing along with his predictable little game.

‘No my style – complications. Free an’ easy, that’s me. How’s about yersel, doll?’ Before the policeman allowed her to drive away he pestered her for her name and phone number. She obliged, writing it down in his notebook in bold capital letters. As they drove away, her niece piped up,

‘That’s no your phone number!’

‘No, and I’m no called Freda either.’ The niece pulled her face back into its customary scowl, crossed her arms and stared out of the side window at streets that bored her like everything else did. All the way home to Arden, on the city’s southern border, the two women sat in silence. The niece was furious and had decided to tell her mother of Kay’s recklessness as soon as she got home.

‘If the wee cow wants to risk her life that’s up to her,’ the teenager thought. ‘But no way should she’ve dragged me in there with her, man. No wi him still running around. No

fucking way the mental cunt should've done that. My ma will treat her to a right doing.' Kay cried slow, silent tears, hoping the girl wouldn't notice.

Parking the car outside the block, Kay spotted her older sister, Amabel, leaning out of her flat window shouting and waving her arms. Before she heard the words she knew what they were. As she pushed the car door open Amabel's screams became audible.

'They've goat him. He's fuckin' deid. Stone fuckin' deid. YA BEAUTY.'

Kay beamed a smile, punched the air and howled, 'Yes. Yesss. YESSSS.' Her niece skipped round the car stooping and hugging her aunt awkwardly where she sat. By the time Kay had stepped out of the vehicle a swarm of people were on the road, the pavement, up closes, leaning over their verandas. They were embracing, kissing each other, singing and dancing. Her sister emerged laughing, shimmying, lifting her skirt, flashing her knickers. Some of the faces emerged. Serious gangsters who'd been lying low for weeks, now outside celebrating like a war had just ended and they were the victors. Kay found herself being hugged right, left and centre. Her small frame was hoisted and swung round with the ease of adults playing rough games with a toddler. Her sister grabbed her in an embrace and they were kissing and dancing down the street arm-in-arm.

'I'M FREE,' Kay hollered as a toothless old man slobbered on her cheek. 'He's gone. Out of it. FINISHED.'

The party moved inside and raged on for weeks. Throughout it all, Kay was the centre of attention. In private moments she felt stymied between joy and grief. After all they'd just killed Paul, her lover, her partner, her man, her Paul.

No Room (1968)

The stone stairs were freshly primed in terracotta red with neat, white borders. The ceramic wall tiles sparkled crystal and crisp even in the limp, jaundiced light of the yellow bulbs. This stairwell spelled class. This was a tenement as tenements were meant to be – not a slum but lasting quality, deserving respect. Not everyone accepted the responsibilities that came with living in such a place.

They heard the blare of rock music as soon as they opened the front door of their flat.

‘She’s at it again,’ she said, looking at him with the tight-lipped grimace that reminded him more and more of her sour-faced mother. He raised his eyebrows in telegraphed sympathy just to keep the peace. Young, hardworking, thrifty and staidly wrapped in tweed outfits and gabardine coats – the couple were typical of the tenement’s residents. Flower power, love-ins and personal freedom meant nothing to them. His hair would stay short and greased and hers a lacquer-heavy rock ‘n’ roll beehive till they collected their pensions. They would take cautious, deliberate steps through life the way their parents had. Not like their downstairs neighbour, Abigail Petrie, with her short skirts and sassy walk and joss sticks and boyfriends and music.

As they stepped down the stairs the clip-clop, clip-clop of their sensibly heeled shoes drowned slowly as the music wrapped around them in an obscene crescendo. By the storm doors she deployed what she considered her subtly disapproving glance and he thought of as her glass-shattering glower. On the ground floor with the breeze from outside, they could talk once again.

‘What in crivens sake is she up to now?’ she started with a question she would answer herself.

‘Goodness knows, dear,’ he responded in role.

‘Party, party, party every night. She’s a blooming disgrace, so she is.’

‘Yes, dear.’

‘He’ll be away on his travels again, no doubt.’

‘I’m sure you’re right, dear.’

‘She’ll be up to no good when his back’s turned.’

‘I’m SURE you’re right, dear.’ As she stepped out on to the pavement he peeked over his shoulder and back up the close in the direction of the music, the memory of other nights still sweet and sticky and carefree. He smiled.

‘No wonder they took her weans off her. This very afternoon as well. Not that that seems to have stopped her.’

‘No, dear, I’m sure you’re right.’ His smile turned stale as he thought of the girls – lovely young things, tiny, cute and full of energy. Lovely. Taken away now, God knows where.

‘She’ll get her comeuppance one of these days, you mark my words she will.’

‘I’m sure you’re right, dear,’ he said as they marched briskly side by side towards the bus stop and her parents’ house for their regular Thursday evenings of damp, de-crusted Spam sandwiches, seven-card whist and maybe one small bottle of her old man’s bitter-tasting export, if he was lucky. At the street corner he hovered just for an instant and looked up at the window with the lights shining through the loosely drawn purple curtains and wished he were trapped inside with her.

Behind the purple curtains Abigail was having a good time, unlike the rest of her day. Abigail – she hated her name – just her luck to have a spiteful mother with Victorian pretensions. The old witch had hated every second of her pregnancy and never missed an opportunity to tell her only daughter about her views on sex and relationships.

‘It’s disgusting. Men are disgusting. You’re a one-off, Abigail, and you’re disgusting,’ her ma had riled through every day of her childhood. ‘But your soft father adores you, Abigail.’ As ever, the emphasis was on a long-winded gale fizzling into a sarcastic nasal whine.

Her father did cherish her. Even that very afternoon when they’d come to take the girls from her she’d had to give in to that gentle, kindly man.

‘Just for a while, pet. Just a wee while till you get sorted out,’ he’d reasoned. ‘When you and Jacob get settled a bit more. You know, settled down. They’ll only be up the road after all.’ While her father had soft-soaped, her poker-faced mother packed the girls’ clothes with abrupt, impatient movements. Her father was trying to ease the pain but her mother would use this as another opportunity to hurt Abigail. She’d felt like stamping her foot and telling her parents to take a hike but knew she’d be better off without the two girls. She was too young to be tied down and her husband, Jacob, was hardly ever there. She suspected he was trawling the gay bars but, in truth, didn’t know where he was. Not that she minded, but she did resent having to take care of everything. Well, she’d a life to live, fun to have and it was hard to feel free with two young girls trailing after you. No, she’d let them go willingly but she wouldn’t let on to her mother.

‘Come on, pet, you’ll be able to see them all the time. We’ll take care of them, you know that.’ Her father was still fretting.

‘I know, Dad, I just feel like a failure.’

‘HAAAH.’ It was the first noise her mother had uttered since she’d entered the flat and loud enough to set Kay and Amabel crying. Amabel, her oldest at five years, was named in secret revenge for her own name. Kay, her two-year-old baby, she’d just named after some blousy, wet-lipped pop singer – here today, gone tomorrow and who could care less.

‘We are short of space here. Could really use a bigger flat.’ Abigail’s voice quavered. ‘It’ll be a better life with you out of the city. In the big house in the village.’ Abigail’s parents were well-to-do, with their own business and a large home in a sheltered idyll of quaint cottages, green fields and old-world charm a few miles south-east of Glasgow. The girls’ lives would surely be full of privilege and opportunity, as hers had once been.

‘Okay, Dad, I’ll let them go with you.’ She was relenting graciously, the tears welling up in her father’s eyes and the trigger for her final act of grace. At first she simpered then she howled.

‘Don’t give us that act, you.’ Her mother had finally rediscovered the power of speech. Abigail coiled into her armchair, pushing her face deep into her folded arms, and wept louder.

‘Leave her alone, for goodness sake.’ Her father rose to her defence as ever. After another ten minutes of fussing, her mother was sent to the car with the girls while her father slipped back into the flat to give Abigail a cuddle and a handful of banknotes.

‘Just take care, Abby, and don’t worry your head. Everything’s going to be okay. We’ll take good care of them.’

We don’t know for sure exactly what Abigail Petrie did next. She may have sat there, as her father left her, weeping and grieving for her children all night till exhaustion quietened her ache. She may have, but it’s not likely. Her parents, Fred and Meg Petrie, had come for their granddaughters because of their mother’s lifestyle and neglect. But Abigail wasn’t slothful, quite the reverse. She took great care, investing considerable thought and energy into everything that was important to her. It was just her children had no place in her priorities – not then, not now, not ever.

From what we do know of Abigail Petrie, however, we can surmise what she did that day. It’s likely that she remained

still for maybe five minutes or so, until certain that her father wasn't going to come back in for some forgotten knick-knack or teddy bear or whatever it was that kids need. She probably stood by her purple curtains and peeked through the edge, checking that the car had left the street. Reassured she was on her own she'd count the money in her fist, calculating the pleasure it could bring and the number of days or weeks she would phone in sick to her work at the fancy hairdressing salon in the city centre. Abigail would've poured a drink, put a record on the stereo and sat rolling a fat joint while she made her plans for the evening.

Would it be a pub or a disco in the city centre or a little party closer to home? The essential ingredients were alcohol, drugs and sex - lots of sex. She could pass the signal to one of her men friends. Many of them lived in the street and had wives who hated her, feared her, and made life as difficult as they could for her. Abigail wouldn't look twice at most of these men if she were out on the town on the pull. She knew her strengths - tiny with a neat waist, full breasts and a backside that looked just right in anything tight or short. She had piercing eyes she made up to their full effect and an infallible come-to-bed look. Abigail played to her assets. She could pick up anyone when she put her mind to it, but that alone wasn't enough. She enjoyed a little spice with her seductions.

Maybe she invited her next-door neighbour - the young Christian woman with the puritanical, policeman, pain-in-the-ass husband - to come round for coffee, chat and unannounced extras. The husband was always griping about the noise from Abigail's house just because they were having a wee party. He'd taken to phoning the factor and carping on about Abigail forgetting her turn to wash the stairs, leaving a pram out on the landing or whatever. Lately, religious tracts had been pushed through her door as if to remind her he was still on her case.

‘What that man needs is a good shag,’ she would have proclaimed. ‘But then that’s a contradiction for a Wee Free policeman with violent tendencies.’ And she’d howl with laughter, feeling all superior and spiteful as hell.

Perhaps Abigail did sit and weep for her children all night or, then again, maybe she partied with her neighbours’ husbands, or seduced the young Christian woman from next door, or shared her with her girlfriends, or went out to a club and got stoned and laid. That’s what Kay’s mother did best – she wasn’t the fretting kind.

Farewell The Hanging Tree (1978)

Kay thought about The Hanging Tree as she leaned against the wall of her grandparents' house, prising chuckies out of the cement with her fingernails, waiting for her grandfather to drive her away from the village for the last time. She was staving off boredom and impatience, counting what she wouldn't miss about the quaint hamlet. The Hanging Tree came high up the list.

Even in broad daylight, on a sunny day, with her grandfather clutching her hand, that tree sent the shivers running through her if she got too close. Alone, it took all her nerve to run under the sweeping green branches reaching down for her and only her. At night in bed, she heard the swishing of the tree calling out to her to come across the village and feel the coarse bark of its trunk while the man dangled by his neck from a bough with a slow, steady creak. The Hanging Tree terrified her but she always ended up there somehow.

It wasn't the only part of the village Kay didn't like. Worst of all were the other children. She was smaller than anyone else her age and many younger than her, but she couldn't understand why that meant no one liked her. Amabel, her older sister, hadn't helped but instead joined in. When they started shouting, 'BAW JAWS, BAW JAWS, TURD BREATH, TURD FACE' and chasing Kay through the playground, Amabel had been right there, laughing and joking with the group. When they caught Kay and tossed her in the air higher and higher till they stepped back and she landed with a crunching thud on her back on the tarmac, Amabel

stood over her, grinning and pointing. Day one at school: that's how it started and how it stayed.

It was different when she played the violin. One day, when left alone and bored with the exercises, Kay started mucking about, pretending she was playing the tune in her head. Unnoticed, the teacher slipped back into the room and stood silently behind her listening till finally she asked, 'Who taught you that, Kay?' The five-year-old Kay jumped, thinking she was in serious trouble for not doing her exercises.

'No one, miss.' Kay hung her head and waited for the onslaught.

'It was beautiful.'

'Miss?'

'Almost perfect and not an easy piece. Play some more for me.' Kay looked up at the woman, trying to fathom if she was laying a booby-trap like her grandmother did all the time.

'Please, Kay.' If she refused to play she'd definitely be in the bad books. If she played she might be in trouble. She took the safer option, wedging the instrument under her chin and lifting her bow. She played by ear, not knowing where she'd picked up the melodies. It was the first thing that was really hers and hers alone.

'A rare talent,' repeated the headmaster to her grandparents. 'Gifted and only seven years old.' Her grandfather sat in his armchair and beamed. 'We should encourage the gift, foster it along.' Her grandmother perched on the edge of her chair, knees clamped together, ankles tucked in, face set in a stiff caricature of beatific respect. 'There's a special school in Edinburgh for such musical prodigies. I'd like you to think about Kay going there.' In the corner Amabel sniggered till silenced by a freezing scowl from her grandmother. Amabel struggled to pronounce prodigies so next day the other kids cat-called Kay by shouting,

'SPECIAL SCHOOL
SPECIAL SCHOOL
DAFTIES GO TO SPECIAL SCHOOL.'

Kay heard no more about the school in Edinburgh till months later when her music teacher sighed, 'It's such a shame your grandmother doesn't want you to go to Edinburgh. Still, I suppose she wants you with her. Understandable. Now, let's try another tune.'

Her grandmother took more than music from Kay. One time, for no reason, she sat Kay down on a kitchen chair, wrapped a towel around her shoulders and cut off her shoulder-length hair with broad-bladed household scissors. The chopping hurt less than the grip the woman had on her locks, pulling and tugging the hair from her scalp.

'Sit at peace, you. They'll not ogle you now. Not having it, you hear,' Meg Petrie ranted as the thick, dark-brown tresses fell to the ground. Later, Kay looked at her podgy cheeks and ragged shorn hair in the bathroom mirror – the spitting image of an orphan beggar boy in a picture storybook she'd read.

Next day at school was a day of anticipated torment. When the final bell rang they were waiting for her at the gate as promised. She slipped over the metal railings at the side of the building and ran, anywhere, just away. When she staggered into a field on the outskirts of the village they caught her and held her by the arms.

'Kay's turned into a boy. Kay's turned into a boy,' chanted a group of girls.

'Can you play at football now, Kay?' laughed a small boy.

'Or maybe you're good at fighting, eh? Do you want to box, eh? Do you, eh?'

'No sitting down to pee now, Baw Jaws.' It was a girl's voice.

'Show us how you piss, Kay. Go oan.' It was a boy's call followed by sniggers and giggling.

'Well, she can't with you holding her hands, can she?'

‘Let her free then.’

‘Naw, she’ll run off again.’ The group circled around her.

‘We’ll have to give her a hand, then.’ An older girl, a tall blonde all the boys fancied, stepped forward and stood in front of Kay.

‘Go oan,’ someone encouraged.

‘Aye.’

‘Dare ye.’

‘Ye’re chicken. Bet ye’re too feart.’

‘Right, but naebody tells, okay?’ Blondie was pointing about her, especially at the boys.

‘Right,’ the group hollered and giggled. Kay froze as the blonde girl leaned forward, ceremoniously unfastening the buttons at her waist. For long seconds nothing happened. The skirt felt loose but stayed in place. Blondie giggled, reached out and yanked Kay’s grey school skirt and navy-blue bloomers down to her knees.

‘Haaaa, think ye’re missing something there, Turd Breath.’

‘How can ye pee standing up, man?’

‘SHOW US. SHOW US. SHOW US . . .’ the group chanted.

‘Ah’ll show ye.’ A boy pushed forward and stood in front of Kay, who was sobbing and clawing uselessly against the hands gripping her arms. Penis shielded in his hand, the boy leaned back, pushed out his pelvis and shot his urine in a perfect, high curve to splatter over Kay’s stomach and legs. Girls’ voices yelped with glee. Some hid their faces and looked away, only to turn and ogle her again. Boys jumped up and down, pushing and wrestling each other. Children clasped themselves between the legs, hopping from foot to foot.

‘It’s the lassies’ turn now,’ a boy bellowed above the rumpus. ‘Fair’s fair.’ The squawks of horror from the girls were matched by the boys’ cries of excitement. ‘She’s next. Get her.’ The boys chased after the tall blonde. All the girls scampered across the field with the boys in pursuit, abandoning Kay weeping where she stood.