

Deadly Divisions

The Spectre Chronicles

Paul Ferris and
Reg McKay



Mainstream Publishing *ebooks*



DEADLY DIVISIONS

The Spectre Chronicles

Paul Ferris
Reg McKay



MAINSTREAM
PUBLISHING

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

CONTENTS

Fond Farewell

Respect

Marathon Mouse

House Call

A Very Private Sherricking

It's For You

Stick to Snap

Better Late?

Blue Blues

Civic Duty

A Dog's Life

Furtive Al Fresco

Power Breakfast

Go to Work on an Egg

Alarm Call

Cold Enough for Coats

A Wee Drive in the Country

Singing the Wrong Song

Chicken Teeth

Twentieth-century Chats

Paper Chase

Free Lunch Blues

Dear Harsh Place

Dead of Night

Left-wing Pansies

Hippies and Helmets

Love on the Clyde

Right In It
Hollow Walls
Mea Culpa
Light Bulbs in Dark Corners
A Lumber
One Line'll Do
The Debt Collectors
Pals' Act
Into Safe-keeping
Seen it All Before
The Smart Move
The Old the New and the Same
The Bells

1 APRIL 1989

It started as a joke. A good joke. Not sensible but it's what we did when we were kids. How we lived. Like the chicken runs - knocking off a motor, something a bit tasty, and searching out the polis. Aggravating the buggers then you're off with them on your tail. Not smart but funny as fuck when you lost them miles off their patch. Jokes like that were useful, toning up the driving skills - unless you ended up in the jail or frying in some burned-out wreck. A kids' game but lessons well learned for future years, whatever happened. Besides, everyone did it. Everyone I knew.

But this, this was a joke, that's all it was. Someone else's joke. Until things changed. First it turned useful then it turned serious. Now it's my secret. And it's going to stay that way.

A

FOND FAREWELL

The razor blade zipped through her white flesh and she was glad. Just a few more zigzags to add to the crooked white tramlines running down her forearm. Pain would cleanse her, flush out her degradation, awaken her real self. Cathy Brodie turned on the cold tap, drenching her arm till the water turned red and looked up to stare out of the window above the sink. She would watch him leave and hurt herself.

This one room was her world and it stank of cooked lard, dampness, sour milk, stale cigarette smoke. And him. She knew the cramped room so well she could describe it without turning to look. A crazy angled wardrobe, its door gaping open like a slaver's mouth. The skinny-legged, canary-yellow kitchen table, fag-end scarred and littered with her entire food supply. The ragged-edged, faded Paisley pattern carpet that had been pillaged from a smaller room and didn't fit. Stuffed black plastic bags lining one wall, her worldly belongings from a better time and another place.

'Double, in case you need it, doll,' the landlord had wheezed with a grin and a wink, nodding at the metal-framed bed. The mattress dipped deeply in the middle, wearing a collage of stains, a legacy from long-gone strangers. Old springs creaked when she lay on it and when he, when they . . .

Scrubbity Screech

Scrubbitty Screech

Scrubbity Screech

The bed's lament mocked and tormented her. Haunted her still. She wanted to leave the window, cross the room and turn on the radio, blotting out the grating echo with loud, trashy pop music. But she couldn't. She must stay at her post making certain he had gone before she could take up the shreds of her existence once again. The room didn't bother her but that stench did. Cooked lard, dampness, sour milk, stale cigarette smoke. And him. Human mulch. It reeked of desperation. She sliced her arm again.

The top of his greasy head appeared as he slowly waltzed out of the close mouth directly below. She could still smell that dank, sweat-sour hair and it made her retch. He was whistling through his teeth, some tuneless, self-congratulatory mess. A big man, so broad across the shoulders people were forced to step into the gutter to let him pass. Tall, he was a giant in this city of underfed runts. Flat feet made him waddle, adding a comic grace that threatened to spoil his menace, but no one laughed apart from strangers and the suicidal.

In the middle of the street he stopped and stretched his arms out. The cat who'd scoffed the kipper. A happy man satisfied with his lot, at home in his own territory; safe, sound, confident. Stooping to light one of his small cheap cigars, cupping his hands against a non-existent breeze, he exhaled a trailing blue cloud and went on his way, crossing to the pavement at the other side of the road. Walking his walk. Moving on to his next victim.

Cathy Brodie opened her dressing gown and splashed freezing water between her legs. The cold shocked and stung, punching the breath from her lungs as she knew it would. Watching him pad away, she scooped blood-pink water onto her body, rubbing at the filth between her legs, scrubbing at the folds of her sex with her fingernails. All the time watching him leave.

Farther up the street a young man came out of a tenement close. Small, dark haired and slightly built, he was

dressed in denims, T-shirt, a shiny dark blouson and a baseball cap pulled low on his head. In that rig-out he had to be young and a stranger to that street of housebound, friendless oldies and working girls who only emerged at night to barter barely clothed bodies for that night's supply of smack. If the young guy had known the area he would've crossed the road, avoiding the man now padding his way. Cathy Brodie stayed stock still, watching and worrying for the stranger as he kept walking smartly, perkily towards trouble.

As the men drew near, the small one looked up smiling, saying something Cathy couldn't hear but which brought a sneer to that big slimy face that had lain on her pillow minutes before. She knew the look too well. It promised violence. The big man swivelled, reaching into his jacket for the long-bladed knife he kept there.

BANG

The young man pulled a pistol from the back of his jeans, swiftly reached up and shot the other in the face, buckling his knees and dumping him in a heap on the pavement. Crouching over the body the outsider stuck the gun barrel between those fat lips and shot him again.

BANG

Pocketing his pistol, he walked away as if nothing had happened. Two buildings down he hesitated, swiftly scanning the street and the windows, his blue-eyed stare arching past his silent audience before he turned abruptly and disappeared up a close.

A loud, steady beat thumped in Cathy's chest, her stomach fluttered and sea waves roared in her ears. Since her tormentor had hit the deck she hadn't been able to take her eyes off the crumpled mess of his body splayed on the ground. A trickle of blood ran from his skull across the paving stones.

The baby had been grumbling for food for the past hour, but only then did Cathy hear him. Going over to the old

Moses basket wedged on the floor against the bed she picked up her son, shooshing and stroking his face, kissing his cheek. Cuddling her child in close to her breast, Cathy gently, rhythmically sashayed on the spot, smiling for the first time in a long while and softly sang her favourite reggae lullaby,

Everything gonna be all right

Everything gonna be all right . . . Yea

Everything gonna be all right

RESPECT

‘ADDIE!’

‘Whiiit?’

‘IT WAS ADDIE DONE THE HIT!’

‘Eeeeehhh?’

‘JAMES – fucking – ADDISON!’

‘Cannae hear ye, man.’

‘Wee minute.’

‘Whiit . . .’

Joe ignored the last question, left his seat and wound his way through the mob of drinkers till he found the source of the racket. He smelled her before he saw her, standing in her own no-go zone, the hardened drinkers anxious not to get too close. Madge had drunkenly shit herself years before and never quite broken the habit. A ragged woollen coat hung open, revealing layers of cardigans and jumpers covering a pastel summer dress soiled grey as the Glasgow skies. On her feet, wellington boots – one green, one black. Naked legs akimbo, the skirt hiked high up short tartan thighs, her red-mottled face thrown back, a toothless mouth wide open.

‘Awww hey, big shpenderrrr,

‘Shpeeend . . . a lissshle tiime wi MEEEEeeee.’ She bawled more than sang, white gobs of spittle spraying the air in front of her.

‘Zaaa minute yese waaaalked in the joint . . .’ and she flounced up and down, less sex symbol, more child bursting to pee.

‘Very nice, doll,’ Joe smiled his most reassuring smile. These alky grannies could be lethal.

‘Helloooooo, darlin, want tae buy wee Madge a drink?’ and the woman winked suggesting more might be on offer if he treated her well. ‘Ah’m awfy thirsty, shon. Dae anything for a wee shwally. Anything at all.’

‘Course, hen. Here’s a few bob for singing so sweet. Bet ye used tae be a professional.’ Close up, Joe could see that Madge’s matted grey hair was tobacco stained at the front and a green, lumpy stain ran down her temple.

‘Been a profeshional at a few things, shon,’ she replied with a leer.

‘Ah’m sure, doll. Ah’m sure,’ Joe turned and headed back to his table. Behind him Madge was already burrowing her way to the bar, the fiver clutched in her mitt.

‘Right, that’s better. Hear me now, wee man?’

‘Sure, Joe. That was one fucking racket, eh?’ Fergie pulled on his pint of export and lit another roll-up. ‘Wee Madge aw right?’

‘Aye, on good form.’

‘Offer yese any extras?’ Fergie’s eyebrows were lifted high, his head tilted to the side. Without a word they both knew he was teasing his friend on his current lack of female companionship. Joe hadn’t been laid in a month, an all-time record since his early teenage years.

‘Whit dae you think?’

‘Ah think ye might be tempted . . .’ Fergie hadn’t completed the sentence before his mate grabbed him in a headlock and was noisily kissing his forehead. ‘Get aff, ye big poof. Christ sakes, oor secret’s well oot noo.’ Around them, nervous men backed off, uncertain and unsure if the scuffle between the known street faces was in fun or serious but taking no chances either way.

Order restored, the two slumped back in their seats till Joe gestured his friend to move in close.

'Addie. James Addison is getting the credit for the hit on that big slippery bastard,' Joe finally finished his sentence without shouting.

'Big cunt deserved it. Well, nae chance of the polis clearing up that crime then, eh?' Fergie was nodding as if he'd said something profound rather than something everyone already knew.

'Nae chance at aw,' replied Joe with the hint of a grin. 'They'll never track Addie down. Except . . .'

'Whit?'

'Word is somebody's grassed him tae the polis.'

'Yer kiddin?'

'Naw.'

'Shit. But how could they . . .'

'We'll have tae see whit we can dae.'

'Aye, course we will.'

'But they'll never catch Addie, man.'

'Never have . . .'

'Never will . . .'

'Never in a month of Sundays . . .'

18 AUGUST 1989

It used to be a joke but it's far from funny now. At times like this I get drunk - morose pissed. Hang around in company being sociable enough on the face of it but in truth buried deep in my own thoughts. Two sides of me - one public, one private - trying to work out the one that's really me. At these times I can't think of the now or even the recent. Instead I think back to the how and that joke that's become deadly serious.

It was an extension of the false name hoo-haa. You know, police stop you for speeding and you rhyme off someone else's name and details. Unless you had a serious grudge against some sod you gave them a false ID.

Trick is to be fluent in everything they ask. It got so I had invented various characters. Sammy Mackie, Joe McLean, Bertie Meldrum - I knew everything about them: jobs, football team, preferred drink, who they were shagging, their mothers' maiden names. In any given situation I chose a name at random, playing the part till the coppers let me go. From speeding to arrests on more serious matters. As long as I wasn't confronted by a familiar face I conned them along till they showed me the door.

It was a hoot and useful but I was denied the best part of the joke. I mean they went looking for Sammy Mackie, Joe McLean, Bertie Meldrum in fictitious houses in real streets and I wasn't there to witness them scratching their nuts.

Then I traced her, my mam, after all these years. Traced her too late. I didn't like what I found out. Didn't like it at all. Grew up that day. Starting thinking about right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable. Felt responsible for what happened to her - guilty for not being there. Doing nothing wasn't an option. I had to act. That's when I turned the joke into a weapon and I've been tooled-up ever since.

SURVEILLANCE NOTES

Sean Ferguson (aka Fergie)

Mid to late 20s, small build, dark-brown hair. Ex Shamrock team. Fast on his feet and handy with a blade. Done a five stretch and lesser stints. Bit of a wisecracker, easily thrown, not the brightest bulb. Would be dead by now if it wasn't for his one friend, Joe Murphy. Weaknesses - too many to list.

Joe Murphy

Late 20s early 30s, small built, dark-red hair. Respected. Never part of a gang when young but known by them all. Street fighter and still handy with his fists. Smart, moved into rackets. No jail time worth talking about. Known by all the major players who leave him alone. Weakness - his friend Fergie.

A

MARATHON MOUSE

‘Boss! Boss!’ the call was accompanied by a timid knock on the door.

‘Beat it, Shuggie. Ah’m busy.’

‘But, Boss . . .’

‘Dae Ah have tae come oot there an tell yese?’ Andy Grimes wasn’t used to having to give orders twice. He noted with satisfaction, though no surprise, that the interruption ceased and turned his full leer on his companion once again. The young woman smiled as his big podgy hand clumsily cupped her naked breast free from her dress. The tight neckline cut sharply into her soft white flesh but she knew that to complain or even wince would bring grief. ‘Very nice, doll. Very nice.’

Andy Grimes stared down at the young woman where they stood in the middle of his office. Next door, staff busied themselves getting The Cat’s Whiskers Club ready for the lunch-time crowd – scores of cowed, wan-faced men who’d soon be arriving for a pint, a sandwich and cheap thrill chasers from the lap dancers, strippers and scantily clad waitresses. ‘Wee minute, hen.’ Andy Grimes strode across the room, his customary ruddy complexion reddening even more from the effort, and pulled the door wide open, ‘Here, Maggie, gonnae make sure there’s plenty o sparkly white wine cooling – we got a civic party the day.’ Grimes slammed the door shut and turned. ‘Now, doll, where were we? Oh aye, let there be light.’ As he snatched at a row of switches, strip lights overhead flickered, stuttered and burst into life, filling the room with a cold white glare.

Automatically the young woman covered her breast with her arms. 'Naw, naw, hen. That's no the point. The point is we need tae see yese. Ah'll show ye.' Grimes reached down and roughly yanked the dress up and over her head, ripping seams and leaving her naked. 'Nice thought, darling, but ye'll have tae wear knickers for the show. Well, at the start o the night onyroads. Heh, heh, heh . . .'

'Boss! Boss!' called the same male voice, wee Shuggie Reid, known as 'The Mouse'. 'Ah'm sorry, boss, but it's urgent.' The knocking on the door was now more persistent.

'Ah'll fuckin show ye urgent, ye little bam,' Grimes turned and strode towards the door again, his fists clenched, his chin jutting forward. The door swung open and there to his surprise stood not Shuggie but Maggie Small, the only person in the club who he'd listen to - usually.

'Get oot o ma road, Maggie, Ah'm gonna gie that wee prick a good kickin.'

'Andy, you'd better listen.' Grimes turned and stared at her, eye to eye. Usually he softened whenever she was around, from that first time he'd spotted her dancing in that show. Tall, as tall as him, black hair, blue eyes, a full, voluptuous figure that turned heads wherever and whenever. She was beautiful but that wasn't all. Maggie had class. She spoke well. Didn't put out for a couple of free drinks like all the other girls. She kept secrets better than anyone he knew. Maggie Small held his respect and trust and for Andy Grimes that was a one-off. His furious glower transformed into his usual angry scowl and he nodded for her to speak on. 'There's been a shooting.'

'So, it's fuckin Glesca we live in no the Vatican fuckin City.'

'The boys think you should know right away.'

'The boys better be right,' he warned. Maggie turned and signalled to the small man hovering at a safe distance through the open door. Shuggie 'The Mouse' Reid was usually a cocky little man, always wisecracking, taking the

piss. Today, his face was drained of colour, one hand constantly rubbing at a cheek as he stepped forward slowly.

'This better be good, Mouse.' Grimes spoke quietly, almost inaudibly, always a bad sign. Shuggie's lips moved but at first no words emerged. 'Christ sake get oan wi it.'

'It's yer bro,' Shuggie squeaked, much like the rodent of his nickname.

'Whit's ma brother?'

'He's been shot,' Shuggie stepped back as he murmured the words.

'Whit . . .'

'Shot, Boss, he's shot deid.' Shuggie's voice rose to a high-pitched squeal.

'Deid?' Grimes had a puzzled, contemptuous look on his face as if Shuggie had deliberately chosen to talk in a language he would not understand. 'Whit ye mean DEID? You fucking stupid or something?' Grimes looked around the room, searching out confirmation of the obvious madness of the little message bringer. Maggie Small caught his eye and gave him one curt nod of her head. Tears welled up in Grimes' eyes, his fat chins wobbled and his arms flailed out – an overgrown baby seeking comfort. Instead he found Shuggie's gullet. 'Ye filthy wee cunt. Ah'll fuckin massacre yese. Ah'll fuckin rip yese apart.' Shuggie's feet were hoisted off the ground as Grimes shook him from side to side by his throat.

'Andy! Let him go, Andy!' Maggie Small was having no luck in her pleas, a sure sign Grimes was fit to murder. Her voice was signal enough for the men who had been hovering outside the door waiting for Shuggie to pass on the news – a short straw he'd won by virtue of having failed to pay up his gambling debts from their regular three-card brag schools. The Mouse was always in debt, always being landed with the worst jobs.

The men teemed into the room and set about trying to prise Andy Grimes' fingers from Shuggie's throat. The task

was complicated, requiring to be achieved without hurting or angering their boss in any way. They milled round him as he swung Shuggie to the edge of the room and proceeded to batter his head against the wall.

‘Andy, come oan it wisnae Shug, man . . .’

‘Let him be, Boss . . . please . . .’

‘Oh, man, he’s no breathin . . .’

Shuggie Reid had gone limp and was being thrashed against the wall like some dead rat in a terrier’s jaw. Grimes’ face was crimson, the colour of the blood now smearing his flock wallpaper. In the centre of the room, the naked young woman stood and stared, her jaw gaping loose and one knuckle rubbing against her lips and teeth.

‘Come on, let’s get you out of here,’ Maggie Small said to the girl, scooping up her discarded dress from the floor.

‘Whit’s going oan?’ she asked. Maggie looked over at the ruck of men and noticed that Shuggie’s face had turned dark blue and his front teeth had been knocked out.

‘It’s just a misunderstanding. Nothing to worry about – they’ll make sure he’s OK.’ Maggie pulled the dress over the woman’s head and instructed her to slip her arms into the sleeves as she would with an infant. ‘He’ll be all right.’

‘Naw, no him. Ah mean wi the job. Did Ah get the job?’ the girl asked, her gaze unmoving from the battle.

‘Oh that. Yes, you got the job all right.’

‘Thank God. Ah thought that wee shite had blown it for me.’ Grimes had finally dropped Shuggie but was now stamping on his prone body as the other men pleaded his case.

‘When can you start, eh . . . what do I call you?’ Maggie Small asked.

‘Ah’ve decided oan Suzie with a zed. Dead classy, eh? No doing anything the night. Right away if yese want.’

‘Right away it is,’ said Maggie, leading the woman out of the room, tugging against her persistent fascination with

Shuggie's torment which was now reaching a finale as Andy Grimes ran out of steam but not temper.

'How dae ye think Ah'll get oan? Dae ye think Ah'll fit in aw right?' Suzie asked, hovering at the door as if reluctant to miss any of the stramash. Maggie stayed with her, straightening her dress and her hair, watching Grimes head to his desk and his phone.

'Who the fuck ye think this is? Get him oan the line NOW,' Grimes roared into the mouthpiece. Over by the wall, the group of men were trying to revive Shuggie, debating whether or not he was dead. 'Ah want tae know who did it,' bellowed Grimes, clenching the phone hard into his face. 'Listen, Ah need tae know . . . like now. You hearing me, ye cunt? Good, well sort it.' Grimes smashed the receiver onto the cradle. Snatching at a bottle of his favourite brandy he poured a large glassful. Two gulps later, 'Get that wee fuckin stiff oot o ma sight.' Suzie giggled nervously as the men lifted Shuggie Reid's still unconscious body. 'An you, doll, yer a smasher. Fix her up, Maggie.'

'Thank you, Mr Grimes,' Suzie replied with another nervous giggle and a half curtsy.

'You can call me Andy, pet.'

'Thank you, Mr . . . Andy,' and another girlish giggle.

'You'll fit in here very well, little Suzie with a zed,' Maggie reassured her, finally leading the new girl out of the room. 'Very well indeed.'

SURVEILLANCE NOTES

Andy Grimes

Mid 40s, about six foot, heavily built, balding with a comb-over. Started as a doorman in city-centre pubs before moving on to protection rackets against the same pubs. Now he owns them as well as taxi firms, building companies, demolition squads, scrap-metal yards and a whole heap more. HQ - The Cat's Whiskers Club in Clyde Street, Glasgow, officially a lap-dancing dive but anything and anybody is available at a price. Grimes likes to socialise with people in power - has the money to do it. Done only minor time in spite of his foul temper and vicious streak. Carries a gun at all times. Weaknesses - greed and young girls.

Maggie Small

Mid to late 20s, very tall, black hair, green eyes, good body. From Coatbridge but you wouldn't know it to hear her talk. Started as a topless dancer in a club. Face of an angel but a gold-digger's heart. Runs Grimes' girls, The Cat's Whiskers and a few other businesses. No husband or boyfriend. A loner. Very ambitious, likely to take over from Grimes. Weaknesses - none identified.

Shuggie Reid (aka The Mouse)

Middle 50s, under five foot tall, thinning grey hair. Dapper wee guy, always wisecracking. Worked for Grimes for the last ten years but been a player with every major team since he was a teenager. The Mouse is just a loyal foot soldier, does whatever he's told. Weaknesses - gambling debts.

A

August 1989

HOUSE CALL

‘OPEN UP.’ Cathy Brodie was startled by the shout and turned just in time to watch her door splinter and crack.

‘What the . . .’ Two men came running into the room, pistols in their hands, sweeping round to all four corners. One started throwing cupboard doors open, under the sink, chest of drawers and that wardrobe falling open, terminally wounded. The other stooped and looked under the bed before kicking and shaking the black plastic bags. The pair of them were gibbering away, shouting stuff at her that wasn’t registering with Cathy. She wondered if they’d bought their anoraks at the same shop and why, then questioned her own sanity for having the thought.

‘PUT THAT DOWN NOW,’ one crouched a few feet from her, his gun held in two hands pointing directly at her, flecks of spittle spraying her face from his shout.

‘Put what down?’ she asked in a little voice she didn’t recognise as her own. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, her baby lying on one arm, the feeding bottle in her other hand.

‘NOOOOW.’

‘Don’t go shouting at the lass, you. Can you no see she’s feeding the wean?’ The newcomer was known to Cathy, as he was to everyone in the city who read the local evening papers or watched crime reports on the television. DCI Alex Birse seemed to fill the room. It wasn’t just his physical presence. Closer to seven than six foot, broad as brick shit house and with a huge head crowned with a shock of thick, white hair – he was unforgettable. But it was more than that.

The two guys with the guns went from being in control to deferential monkeys the minute Birse appeared. Even Cathy ignored the pistol wavers and looked up at the florid face of Birse.

‘Ah’m no in the mood for time wasting, Cathy, so you’ll no be wanting tae see a warrant? Good.’ Birse signalled behind him and two other men entered to join their colleagues in searching the room. ‘Where the fuck’s wee Jeannie? Tell her tae get her arse in here right noo. Get cracking. What yese think this is, a fucking knitting bee?’ Into the room came a woman, the only one in police uniform. ‘Take care o the wean, eh?’ Birse barked. Jeannie Stirk approached Cathy holding out her arms.

‘No way,’ the power had returned to Cathy’s voice and she was having none of it.

‘C’moan,’ said Birse, ‘grab the kid for fuck’s sake.’ Cathy shied away, holding the child in tight, shaking her head and her body, lulling against her baby’s frightened crying.

‘It’s a boy, isn’t it?’ Jeannie Stirk had moved in closer but not too close. ‘A wee smasher too.’ Cathy nodded and smiled against her better judgement. ‘He’s got his mammy’s nose. Just a wee button nose, haven’t you?’ Jeannie stretched over and smiled down at the wee boy’s face. ‘A wee cracker, so you are. You’re going to break an awful lot of hearts when you grow up.’

‘For Christ’s sake get a move oan wid yese?’ Birse had no time for all this baby palaver. He didn’t like babies. He didn’t like people. He liked money and power and his football team and that was that.

‘He’ll be okay with me, Cathy,’ Jeannie ignored her boss’s grumbling. ‘I’ll take good care of him, promise.’ Cathy looked Jeannie Stirk in the face, not at the uniform but straight into her brown eyes and decided she could trust the woman.

‘He was in the middle of a feed,’ Cathy explained. ‘He’ll get grumpy if . . .’

‘No problem. His auntie Jeannie can take care of that, can’t she, wee soldier.’ Jeannie wrapped the baby and bundle up in her arms as Cathy handed over the half-full feeding bottle.

‘Right you,’ barked Birse, ‘oot o here wi the wean. Get doon tae the car.’

‘But I’m supposed to stay around,’ Jeannie protested. ‘You’re supposed to have a female present . . .’

‘You trying to tell me the rules? Want tae stay permanently in a uniform DC Stirk? Get that fuckin wean intae the motor and stay there till Ah tell yese.’ Halfway to the door, Jeannie asked,

‘What do I call him?’

‘Tim,’ replied Cathy.

‘Aye, aifter his famous granddaddy,’ sneered Birse. Giving Jeannie Stirk a few minutes to move away from the front door, Birse turned and looked down on Cathy Brodie. ‘This’ll no take long, Cathy, if yer smart.’

Around them the four policemen continued to ransack the bedsit. One was emptying the contents of a bag of sugar onto the tea leaves and instant coffee he’d already poured on the table. Another was pulling all the cleaning materials apart, leaving abstract patterns of soap powder, slimy washing-up liquid and now bleach all over the floor next to the sink. Another had scattered the baby’s clothes around the room and moved on to tearing apart the paper nappies, shredding each one carefully and thoroughly. The last had ripped open the black bags and Cathy caught sight of outfits she’d worn in better times. Now all dated and useless, she couldn’t bear to part with them, that would be to admit that her life could never be good again.

‘Ye’ve been in aw day,’ Birse’s hand clasped Cathy by the chin, turning her face to look up at him.

‘Aye,’ she replied.

‘It wisnae a question but a statement o fact.’

‘Ah’ve been in all day.’

‘Awfy wee place here, Cathy, must drive ye mad, eh?’

‘No.’

‘Jist you and the nipper and these four walls. Whit dae ye get up tae – tae pass the time like?’

‘Tim takes up most o ma time.’

‘Aye but no it aw, eh? Whit dae ye dae for a wee bit pleasure?’ Cathy looked at him puzzled. ‘Tae pass the time when the nipper’s sleeping?’

‘Nothing much. Jist read sometimes and listen tae music.’

‘Oan the tranny?’

‘Aye.’ Birse turned and glowered at one of the policeman who immediately picked the transistor radio off a shelf, ceremoniously dropped it on the floor and stamped on it. ‘He’s an awfy clumsy bastard that one. Now let’s cut the crap – whit happened this morning?’

‘Nothing much, Ah just fed Tim and cleaned up the . . .’

‘Nae shagging then? Mean they stains oan they sheets urny shagging stains? See’s that sheet up.’ One of the squad pulled on his leather gloves. With a sour look across his face, scooping the sheet off the bed he held it in front of him, as far away as possible, and started moving towards Birse. ‘Fuck’s sake, close enough, man. Can smell it frae here.’ Birse turned sideways and gave an exaggerated show of examining the sheet carefully. ‘Mmm, looks like a nooky stain tae me, hen.’ Gripping the sheet he turned and rammed it into Cathy’s face. ‘Whit’s it look like tae you, eh? Eh?’ The woman wanted to be sick. She’d planned to strip those sheets after she’d fed her baby, make a trip to the launderette and wash that man out of her life forever. Now the smell of him was back in her head, wakening the memories and the disgust, wiping out her celebration of freedom. ‘You oan the game, Cathy?’

‘No.’

‘Half this street is.’

‘Well Ah’m no.’

‘Oh for fuck sake,’ the exclamation of horror came from one of the gun-toting cops now standing near the kitchen sink. Everyone turned to look at him with his hand stuck inside a small white bundle, his face twisted in disgust, his other hand flapping in the air. ‘Shite,’ he moaned. ‘It’s shite,’ he looked like he was going to throw up. His three comrades in arms started to laugh at him but not Birse.

‘Yer an incompetent wee wanker. Fuckin tolly so ye are. And they gie you a gun?’

‘Jesus Christ.’ As the policeman pulled the bundle off his paw it gave out a wet, smacking plop and the sweet smell of milky faeces. His fingers, wrist and anorak cuff were smeared in beige-coloured crap. Birse just shook his head and turned back to Cathy.

‘Ah don’t give a monkey’s fuck whit ye get up tae but the DSS might, eh? Stop yer benefit cheques I reckon.’ Cathy knew what he was saying was true, especially if the report came from the police, and she could ill afford it.

‘Look, Ah wisnae up to anything this morning. You didnae come here to enquire after my love life did yese?’

‘Smart lassie. Naw, yer right. It’s that windae Ah’m more interested in.’ Birse gripped her arm, leading her to the kitchen sink and the only window in the room. ‘Shift, you,’ Birse snapped at the cop still feebly rinsing baby shit off his hand and sleeve.

Cathy thought back to that morning, the cold water and the razor blade. She tugged at her sleeve and felt the wounds still raw in her arm. The view was the same but different. Now crowded with blue uniforms, police cars, yellow incident tape and a mêlée of onlookers. Just he wasn’t there, lying there on the ground staring with dead eyes at the sky. But his blood and brains still smeared the wall and pavement and they made her happy in spite of her present company.

‘You saw it all, didn’t yese?’ Birse looked out of the window as he spoke to her. ‘Then ye phoned the polis.

Except ye didnae leave yer name. Did yese?’

‘It wisnae me that belled ye.’

‘An ye telt us who did it. Didn’t ye?’

‘No, I . . .’

‘But a call’s no good enough tae us ye see. We need a name ’n’ address. We need a body, a witness.’

‘But it wisnae me . . .’

‘How did you know it was James Addison?’

‘Who?’

‘Dinnae come the wise cunt wi me, Cathy.’ Birse gripped her by the shoulders, his face pressed so close to hers she could feel the heat of his breath and the stink of stale whisky and last night’s curry. ‘Addie. Fucking James Addison – how did you know it was him?’

‘Ah didn’t. Ah mean, Ah don’t know James Addison. Ah saw nothing.’

‘Cos nae cunt in the polis knows whit he looks like,’ Birse continued. ‘Never had the pleasure o meeting the wee prick. Huv we?’

‘Mr Birse, Ah saw nothing. Honest.’

‘So, if ye recognised Addie ye must know the spooky wee bastard. Be familiar with him like.’ Two other cops had moved in close to Cathy’s sides, their body weight leaning against her, staring into her face.

‘No.’

‘Maybe that’s his spunk clarted ower yer sheets.’

‘No.’

‘Maybe yer faither knew him.’

‘No, Ah . . .’ Birse pulled a pistol from his jacket and held it against Cathy’s cheek.

‘You got nothing tae say, Miss Catherine Brodie?’ He nudged her lips with the barrel. ‘Ye sure, hen?’ He pushed the gun against her teeth. ‘Certain?’ Gun oil and metal against her tongue. ‘Accidents can happen ye know. This is an awfy dangerous world. Especially for weans.’

‘Please, don’t . . .’

‘We’re jist looking for some cooperation.’

‘Ah don’t know anything.’

‘Besides, maybe somebody else should be looking aifter that wean. Ah’m sure the welfare would be dead interested tae find oot you’re oan the game.’

‘Ah’m no.’

‘An yer drug habit.’

‘Whit? Whit dae ye mean?’ One of the cops leaning into her side had reached into his inside pocket and was waving a small plastic bag full of brown powder in her face, smiling all the while.

‘Maybe we should check her airms for tracks, boys?’ Birse gripped her forearm and twisted, opening the fresh wounds under the cloth, sending fiery pain shivering through her body. ‘Or are ye a bit secret wi yer habit? Shootin up in the veins, a bit lower down maybe?’ Birse’s big hand rubbed her thigh and pushed its way into her crotch. ‘Whit the fuck?’ A baby’s cries drew him to a sudden halt.

‘Sorry, boss, but we’ve had a shout.’ Jeannie Stirk was standing in the room, baby Tim Brodie cradled in her arms.

‘You takin the piss, Stirk?’

‘No, the chief wants you back in for a press conference on the shooting.’

‘Fuckin press. Bloody pariahs. But let’s pander tae the bastards by all means. Dinnae want a bad press, dae we? No, no. Murderers walking the fuckin street but God save us frae a bad press.’ Birse’s colleagues were well aware that he had a special relationship with certain members of the media, passing out stories when it suited him and receiving payments in return. Most detectives did, just he was the worst. It was the official PR role he resented not the press. ‘Right, boys, back tae the motor. Pronto.’ Birse waited while the cops trotted out of the room and their footsteps could be heard echoing down the stone stairs of the close.

‘Mr Birse, I really know nothin. I didnae make any phone call.’ Cathy’s voice was trembling in spite of her will, her

face full of tears, her legs shaking, a slow crimson stain seeping through her sleeve. Birse moved in close, preventing her from backing away by wrapping one big paw round her buttocks.

‘Ah’m coming back, doll, an next time Ah’ll be oan ma oan. Savvy?’ With that Birse turned and left the flat, roaring orders at the other cops as he strode down the stairs.

Jeannie Stirk looked at the devastation of the room and wondered why it had all been necessary. Handing the baby back to his mother, Jeannie and Cathy paused, holding the bundle together. They were about the same age, the same height, the same build. So much in common and so far apart. Two sides of some war that neither invented nor wanted. Caught up in the rules, play or get out – if you can. They looked at each other – one frightened and trembling, the other sad and mournful – till a persistent bleating car horn signalled Birse’s impatience. As the cop made sure the baby was safely deposited in his mother’s arms, her fingers stroked the back of the woman’s hand. Soft, gentle, reassuring and swift, it was enough. Both women thought they knew what that touch meant, but were they talking the same language?

SURVEILLANCE NOTES

DCI Alex Birse

In his 50s, huge man, thick white hair, red complexion, eyes too small to notice colour. Wears expensive suits, heavy gold rings and bangle. Old-school detective for over 30 years. Almost sacked five or six times for extreme violence against prisoners or the public. Investigated twice for corruption - not proven. Lives well above his salary. Drinks heavily. Freemason. Season ticket holder at Ibrox - doesn't miss a game whatever is happening. High profile and unofficial press contacts. Always armed whether warrants issued or not. Well connected. Regular at Cat's Whiskers. Lives alone. Has no discernible sex life. Weakness - booze.

DC Jeannie Stirk

Looks about 30, black hair, around five foot six, full figure. Nothing much known. Not from here. Check origins. Check name. Married? One to watch?

A

August 1989

A VERY PRIVATE SHERRICKING

‘Fuck it, we’re too late, man.’ Fergie backed up abruptly, pushing his mate Joe deeper into the close mouth.

‘Jesus Christ, Fergie, cool it man. Ye’ll blow our cover. Place is hoaching wi rozzers.’

‘Sorry, Joe, Ah’m jist a bit edgy.’

‘Edgy? Yer jittery enough tae get us hung.’

‘Sorry, man.’

‘Never mind that. Jist mind whit Ah telt ye. Cool. Stay cool. No feart. No worried. No wide. Cut the gallus swagger. Jist look as if yer oan yer way tae visit yer mammy.’

‘Cathy Brodie’s too young tae be ma mammy but.’

‘Fuck sakes, Fergie, are you totally fuckin thick the day? Pretend it’s yer ma. Think it in yer heid and yer body’ll look like it’s being dragged oan its way tae dae its duty.’

‘Think so?’

‘Look, ye either buckle doon or Ah’m oot o here.’

‘It was your idea but.’

‘Fuck, c’moan.’ The two men staggered out into the daylight of the street. The forty-yard walk seemed endless in the babble of the police busying themselves around the scene of crime, the metallic whispering of their radios, the shouted jokes and orders. But they made it across the street, into the close, and were soon at Cathy Brodie’s front door.

‘That’s a pure liberty, man.’ Fergie was severely affronted by the battered-in door and wanted to debate the immorality of unnecessary police aggression right there in the close. Joe had other ideas and unceremoniously yanked