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Written by Ian Rankin

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IAN RANKIN

THE FALLS



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1

'You think I killed her, don't you?'

He sat well forward on the sofa, head slumped in towards his chest. His hair was lank, long-fringed. Both knees worked like pistons, the heels of his grubby trainers never meeting the floor.

'You on anything, David?' Rebus asked.

The young man looked up. His eyes were bloodshot, dark-rimmed. A lean, angular face, bristles on the unshaved chin. His name was David Costello. Not Dave or Davy: David, he'd made that clear. Names, labels, classification: all very important. The media had varied its descriptions of him. He was 'the boyfriend', 'the tragic boyfriend', 'the missing student's boyfriend'. He was 'David Costello, 22' or 'fellow student David Costello, in his early twenties'. He 'shared a flat with Ms Balfour' or was 'a frequent visitor' to the 'disappearance riddle flat'.

Nor was the flat just a flat. It was 'the flat in Edinburgh's fashionable New Town', the 'quarter-million flat owned by Ms Balfour's parents'. John and Jacqueline Balfour were 'the numbed family', 'the shocked banker and his wife'. Their daughter was 'Philippa, 20, a student of art history at the University of Edinburgh'. She was 'pretty', 'vivacious', 'carefree', 'full of life'.

And now she was missing.

Detective Inspector John Rebus shifted position, from in front of the marble fireplace to slightly to one side of it. David Costello's eyes followed the move.

'The doctor gave me some pills,' he said, finally answering the question.

'Did you take them?' Rebus asked.

The young man shook his head slowly, eyes still on Rebus.

'Don't blame you,' Rebus said, sliding his hands into his pockets. 'Knock you out for a few hours, but they don't change anything.'

It was two days since Philippa – known to friends and family as 'Flip' – had gone missing. Two days wasn't long, but her disappearance was out of character. Friends had called the flat at around seven in the evening to confirm that Flip would be meeting up with them within the hour at a bar on the South Side. It was one of those small, trendy places which had sprung up around the university, catering to an economic boom and the need for dim lighting and overpriced flavoured vodkas. Rebus knew this because he'd walked past it a couple of times on his way to and from his place of work. There was an old-fashioned pub practically next door, with vodka mixers at a pound-fifty. No trendy chairs though, and serving staff who knew their way around a brawl but not a cocktail list.

Seven, seven-fifteen, she probably left the flat. Tina, Trist, Camille and Albie were already on their second round of drinks. Rebus had consulted the files to confirm those names. Trist was short for Tristram, and Albie was Albert. Trist was with Tina; Albie was with Camille. Flip should have been with David, but David, she explained on the phone, wouldn't be joining them.

'Another bust-up,' she'd said, not sounding too concerned.

She'd set the flat's alarm before leaving. That was another first for Rebus – student digs with an alarm. And she'd done the mortise lock as well as the Yale, leaving the flat secure. Down a single flight of stairs and out into the warm night air. A steep hill separated her from Princes Street. Another climb from there would take her to the Old Town, the South Side. No way she'd be walking. But records from her home telephone and mobile had failed to find a match for any taxi firm in the city. So if she'd taken one, she'd hailed it on the street.

If she'd got as far as hailing one.

'I didn't, you know,' David Costello said.

'Didn't what, sir?'

'Didn't kill her.'

'Nobody's saying you did.'

'No?' He looked up again, directly into Rebus's eyes.

'No,' Rebus assured him, that being his job after all.

'The search warrant . . .' Costello began.

'It's standard, any case of this kind,' Rebus explained. It was, too: suspicious disappearance, you checked all the places the person might be. You went by the book: all the paperwork signed, clearance given. You searched the boyfriend's flat. Rebus could have added: *we do it because nine times out of ten, it's someone the victim knows.* Not a stranger, plucking prey from the night. It was your loved ones who killed you: spouse, lover, son or daughter. It was your uncle, your closest friend, the one person you trusted. They'd been cheating on you, or you'd cheated them. You knew something, you had something. They were jealous, spurned, needed money.

If Flip Balfour was dead, her body would turn up soon; if she was alive and didn't want to be found, then the job would be more difficult. Her parents had appeared on TV, pleading with her to make contact. Police were at the family home, intercepting calls in case any ransom demand should arrive. Police were wandering through David Costello's flat on the Canongate, hoping to turn up something. And police were here – in Flip Balfour's flat. They were 'babysitting' David Costello – stopping the media from getting too close. This was what the young man had been told, and it was partly true.

Flip's flat had been searched the previous day. Costello had keys, even to the alarm system. The phone call to Costello's own flat had come at ten p.m.: Trist, asking if he'd heard from Flip, only she'd been on her way to Shapiro's and hadn't turned up.

'She's not with you, is she?'

'I'm the last person she'd come to,' Costello had complained.

'Heard you'd fallen out. What is it this time?' Trist's voice had been slurred, ever-so-slightly amused. Costello hadn't answered him. He'd cut the call and tried Flip's mobile, got her answering service, left a message asking her to phone him. Police had listened to the recording, concentrating on nuance, trying to read falseness into each word or phrase. Trist had phoned Costello again at midnight. The group had been to Flip's flat: no one home. They'd been ringing round, but none of her friends seemed to know anything. They waited until Costello himself arrived at the flat, unlocking it. No sign of Flip inside.

In their minds, she was already a Missing Person, what police called a 'MisPer', but they'd waited till next morning before calling Flip's mother at the family home in East Lothian. Mrs Balfour had wasted no time, dialling 999 immediately. After receiving what she felt was short shrift from the police switchboard, she'd called her husband at his London office. John Balfour was the senior partner in a private bank, and if the Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders Police wasn't a client, someone certainly was: within an hour, officers were on the case – orders from the Big House, meaning Force HQ in Fettes Avenue.

David Costello had unlocked the flat for the two CID men. Within, they found no signs of a disturbance, no clues as to Philippa Balfour's whereabouts, fate, or state of mind. It was a tidy flat: stripped floors, fresh paint on the walls. (The decorator was being interviewed, too.) The drawing room was large, with twin windows rising from floor level. There were two bedrooms, one turned into a study. The designer kitchen was smaller than the pine-panelled bathroom. There was a lot of David Costello's stuff in the bedroom. Someone had piled his clothes on a chair, then placed some books and CDs on top, crowning the structure with a wash-bag.

When asked, Costello could only assume it was Flip's work. His words: 'We'd had a falling-out. This was probably her way of dealing with it.' Yes, they'd had arguments

before, but no, she'd never piled up all his stuff, not that he could remember.

John Balfour had travelled to Scotland by private jet – loaned him by an understanding client – and was at the New Town flat almost before the police.

'Well?' had been his first question. Costello himself offered an answer: 'I'm sorry.'

Much had been read into those words by CID officers, discussing the case in private. An argument with your girlfriend turns nasty; next you know, she's dead; you hide the body but, confronted by her father, innate breeding takes over and you blurt out a semi-confession.

I'm sorry.

So many ways to read those two short words. Sorry we argued; sorry you've been troubled; sorry this has happened; sorry I didn't look after her; sorry for what I've done . . .

And now David Costello's parents were in town, too. They'd taken two rooms at one of the best hotels. They lived on the outskirts of Dublin. The father, Thomas, was described as 'independently wealthy', while the mother, Theresa, worked as an interior designer.

Two rooms: there'd been some discussion back at St Leonard's as to why they'd need two rooms. But then, when David was their only son, why did they bother to live in an eight-bedroom house?

There'd been even more discussion about what St Leonard's was doing in a New Town case. The nearest cop shop to the flat was Gayfield Square, but additional officers had been drafted in from Leith, St Leonard's and Torphichen.

'Someone's been pulling strings,' was the universal view. 'Drop everything, some posh bit's done a runner.'

Privately, Rebus didn't disagree.

'Do you want anything?' he said now. 'Tea? Coffee?'

Costello shook his head.

'Mind if I . . . ?'

Costello looked at him, seeming not to understand. Then realisation dawned. 'Go ahead,' he said. 'The kitchen's . . .' He started to gesture.

'I know where it is, thanks,' Rebus said. He closed the door after him and stood for a moment in the hallway, glad to be out of the stifling drawing room. His temples throbbed and the nerves behind his eyes felt stretched. There were sounds coming from the study. Rebus stuck his head round the door.

'I'm putting the kettle on.'

'Good idea.' Detective Constable Siobhan Clarke didn't take her eyes from the computer screen.

'Anything?'

'Tea, please.'

'I meant—'

'Nothing yet. Letters to friends, some of her essays. I've got about a thousand e-mails to go through. Her password would help.'

'Mr Costello says she never told him.'

Clarke cleared her throat.

'What does that mean?' Rebus asked.

'It means my throat's tickly,' Clarke said. 'Just milk in mine, thanks.'

Rebus left her and went into the kitchen, filled the kettle and searched for mugs and tea-bags.

'When can I go home?'

Rebus turned to where Costello was standing in the hall.

'Might be better if you didn't,' Rebus told him. 'Reporters and cameras . . . they'll keep on at you, phoning day and night.'

'I'll take the phone off the hook.'

'Be like being a prisoner.' Rebus watched the young man shrug. He said something Rebus didn't catch.

'Sorry?'

'I can't stay here,' Costello repeated.

'Why not?'

'I don't know . . . it's just . . .' He shrugged again, ran his hands through his hair, pulling it back from his forehead. 'Flip should be here. It's almost too much. I keep remembering that the last time we were here together, we were having a row.'

'What was it about?'

Costello laughed hollowly. 'I can't even remember.'

'This was the day she disappeared?'

'The afternoon, yes. I stormed out.'

'You argue a lot then?' Rebus tried to make the question sound casual.

Costello just stood there, staring into space, head shaking slowly. Rebus turned away, separated two Darjeeling tea-bags and dropped them into the mugs. Was Costello unravelling? Was Siobhan Clarke listening from behind the study door? They were babysitting Costello, yes, part of a team running three eight-hour shifts, but they'd brought him here for another reason, too. Ostensibly, he was on hand to explain names that occurred in Philippa Balfour's correspondence. But Rebus had wanted him there because just maybe it was the scene of the crime. And just maybe David Costello had something to hide. The betting at St Leonard's was even money; you could get two-to-one at Torphichen, while Gayfield had him odds-on favourite.

'Your parents said you could move into their hotel,' Rebus said. He turned to face Costello. 'They've booked two rooms, so one's probably going spare.'

Costello didn't take the bait. He watched the detective for a few seconds more, then turned away, putting his head around the study door.

'Have you found what you're looking for?' he asked.

'It could take some time, David,' Siobhan said. 'Best just to let us get on with it.'

'You won't find any answers in there.' He meant the computer screen. When she didn't answer, he straightened a little and angled his head. 'You're some sort of expert, are you?'

'It's something that has to be done.' Her voice was quiet, as though she didn't want it to carry beyond the room.

He seemed about to add something, but thought better of it, and stalked back towards the drawing room instead. Rebus took Clarke's tea through.

'Now that's class,' she said, examining the tea-bag floating in the mug.

'Wasn't sure how strong you'd want it,' Rebus explained. 'What did you think?'

She considered for a moment. 'Seems genuine enough.'

'Maybe you're just a sucker for a pretty face.'

She snorted, fished the tea-bag out and tipped it into the waste-bin. 'Maybe,' she said. 'So what's *your* thinking?'

'Press conference tomorrow,' Rebus reminded her. 'Reckon we can persuade Mr Costello to make a public appeal?'

Two detectives from Gayfield Square had the evening shift. Rebus headed home and started to fill a bath. He felt like a long soak, and squeezed some washing-up liquid under the hot tap, remembering it was something his parents had done for him when he was a kid. You came in muddy from the football pitch, and it was a hot bath with washing-up liquid. It wasn't that the family couldn't afford bubble-bath: 'It's just washing liquid at a posh price,' his mother had said.

Philippa Balfour's bathroom had boasted over a dozen different 'balms', 'bathing lotions' and 'foaming oils'. Rebus did his own stock-take: razor, shaving cream, toothpaste and a single toothbrush, plus a bar of soap. In the medicine cabinet: sticking plasters, paracetamol and a packet of condoms. He looked in the packet – one left. The sell-by was the previous summer. When he closed the cabinet, he met the gaze of his reflection. Grey-faced, hair streaked grey, too. Jowly, even when he stuck out his chin. Tried smiling, saw teeth which had missed their last two appointments. His dentist was threatening to strike him from his list.

'Get in line, pal,' Rebus muttered, turning away from the mirror before undressing.

The retirement party for Detective Chief Superintendent 'Farmer' Watson had commenced at six. It was actually the third or fourth party of its kind, but was to be the last – and the only official gathering. The Police Club on Leith Walk

had been decked out with streamers, balloons and a huge banner which read FROM UNDER ARREST TO A WELL-DESERVED REST. Someone had dumped a bale of straw on the dance-floor, completing the farmyard scene with an inflatable pig and sheep. The bar was doing roaring business when Rebus arrived. He'd passed a trio of departing Big House brass on his way in. Checked his watch: six-forty. They'd given the retiring DCS forty minutes of their valuable time.

There'd been a presentation earlier in the day at St Leonard's. Rebus had missed it; he'd been babysitting at the time. But he'd heard about the speech made by Assistant Chief Constable Colin Carswell. Several officers from the Farmer's previous postings – some now retired themselves – were on hand to say a few words. They'd stuck around for the evening's proceedings, and looked to have been drinking the afternoon away: ties discarded or hanging limply askew, faces shiny with alcoholic heat. One man was singing, his voice battling the music from the ceiling-mounted loud-speakers.

'What can I get you, John?' the Farmer said, leaving his table to join Rebus at the bar.

'Maybe a small whisky, sir.'

'Half-bottle of malt over here when you've a minute!' the Farmer roared at the barman, who was busy topping up pints of lager. The Farmer's eyes narrowed as he focused on Rebus. 'Did you see those buggers from the Big House?'

'Passed them as I came in.'

'Bloody orange juices all round, then a quick handshake before home.' The Farmer was concentrating on not slurring his words, overcompensating as a result. 'Never really understood the phrase "biscuit-ersed" before, but that's what those lot were: biscuit-ersed to a man!'

Rebus smiled, told the barman to make it an Ardbeg.

'A bloody double, mind,' the Farmer ordered.

'Been enjoying a drink yourself, sir?' Rebus asked.

The Farmer blew out his cheeks. 'Few old pals came to see me off.' He nodded in the direction of the table. Rebus

looked, too. He saw a posse of drunks. Beyond them stood tables spread with a buffet: sandwiches, sausage rolls, crisps and peanuts. He saw faces he knew from all the Lothian and Borders Divisional HQs. Macari, Allder, Shug Davidson, Roy Frazer. Bill Pryde was in conversation with Bobby Hogan. Grant Hood was standing next to a couple of Crime Squad officers called Claverhouse and Ormiston, and trying not to look as though he was sucking up to them. George 'Hi-Ho' Silvers was finding that DC Phyllida Hawes and DS Ellen Wylie weren't about to fall for his chat-up lines. Jane Barbour from the Big House was exchanging gossip with Siobhan Clarke, who'd at one time been attached to Barbour's Sex Offences Unit.

'If anyone knew about this,' Rebus said, 'the bad guys would have a field day. Who's left to mind the store?'

The Farmer laughed. 'It's a skeleton crew at St Leonard's, all right.'

'Good turn-out. Wonder if I'd get as many at mine.'

'More, I'd bet.' The Farmer leaned close. 'The brass would all be there for a start, just to make sure they weren't dreaming.'

It was Rebus's turn to smile. He lifted his glass, toasted his boss. They both savoured their drinks, then the Farmer smacked his lips.

'How long d'you think?' he asked.

Rebus shrugged. 'I've not got my thirty yet.'

'Can't be long though, can it?'

'I'm not counting.' But he was lying: most weeks he thought about it. 'Thirty' meant thirty years of service. That was when your pension hit the max. It was what a lot of officers lived for: retirement in their fifties and a cottage by the sea.

'Here's a story I don't often tell,' the Farmer said. 'My first week on the force, they had me working the front desk, graveyard shift. This young lad – not even in his teens – comes in, walks straight up to the desk. "I've broke my wee sister," he says.' The Farmer's eyes were staring into space. 'I can see him now, the way he looked, the exact words . . .

"I've broke my wee sister." I hadn't a clue what he meant. Turned out he'd pushed her down the stairs, killed her.' He paused, took another gulp of whisky. 'My first week on the force. Know what my sergeant said? "It can only get better." ' He forced a smile. 'I've never been sure he was right . . .' Suddenly his arms went into the air, the smile broadening into a grin. 'Here she is! Here she is! Just when I thought I was being stood up.'

His embrace almost swamped DCI Gill Templer. The Farmer planted a kiss on her cheek. 'You're not the floor-show by any chance?' he asked. Then he mimed a slap to his forehead. 'Sexist language – are you going to report me?'

'I'll let it go this time,' Gill said, 'in exchange for a drink.'

'My shout,' Rebus said. 'What'll you have?'

'Long vodka.'

Bobby Hogan was yelling for the Farmer to go settle an argument.

'Duty calls,' the Farmer said by way of an apology, before heading unsteadily across the floor.

'His party piece?' Gill guessed.

Rebus shrugged. The Farmer's speciality was naming all the books of the Bible. His record was just under a minute; no way would it be challenged tonight.

'Long vodka,' Rebus told the barman. He raised his whisky glass. 'And a couple more of these.' He saw Gill's look. 'One's for the Farmer,' he explained.

'Of course.' She was smiling, but the smile didn't reach her eyes.

'Fixed a date for your own bash?' Rebus asked.

'Which one is that?'

'I just thought, first female DCS in Scotland . . . got to be worth a night out, hasn't it?'

'I drank a Babycham when I heard.' She watched the barman dribble angostura into her glass. 'How's the Balfour case?'

Rebus looked at her. 'Is this my new Chief Super asking?'

'John . . .'

Funny how that single word could say so much. Rebus

wasn't sure he caught all the nuances, but he caught enough.

John, don't push this.

John, I know there's a history between us, but that's long dead.

Gill Templer had worked her arse off to get where she was now, but she was also under the microscope – plenty of people would want her to fail, including some she probably counted as friends.

Rebus just nodded and paid for the drinks, tipping one of the whiskies into the other glass.

'Saving him from himself,' he said, nodding towards the Farmer, who was already on to the New Testament.

'Always the willing martyr,' Gill said.

A cheer went up as the Farmer's recitation finished. Someone said it was a new record, but Rebus knew it wasn't. It was just another gesture, another version of the gold watch or mantel-clock. The malt tasted of seaweed and peat, but Rebus knew that whenever he drank Ardbeg from now on, he'd think of a small boy walking through the doors of a police station . . .

Siobhan Clarke was making her way across the room.

'Congratulations,' she said.

The two women shook hands.

'Thanks, Siobhan,' Gill said. 'Maybe it'll be you one day.'

'Why not?' Siobhan agreed. 'Glass ceiling's what truncheons are for.' She punched her fist into the air above her head.

'Need a drink, Siobhan?' Rebus asked.

The two women shared a look. 'About all they're good for,' Siobhan said with a wink. Rebus left the pair of them laughing.

The karaoke started at nine. Rebus went to the toilets and felt the sweat cooling on his back. His tie was already off and in his pocket. His jacket was slung over one of the chairs near the bar. Personnel at the party changed as some headed off, either to prepare for the night shift or because

their mobile or pager had news for them. Others arrived, having been home to change out of work clothes. A female officer from the St Leonard's comms room had turned up in a short skirt, the first time Rebus had seen her legs. A rowdy quartet from one of the Farmer's postings in West Lothian arrived bearing photos of the Farmer from a quarter-century before. They'd slipped a few doctored prints into the mix, grafting the Farmer's head on to beefcake bodies, some of them in positions which went several leagues beyond compromising.

Rebus washed his hands, splashing some of the water on to his face and the back of his neck. Then of course there was only an electric hand-drier, so he had to use his handkerchief as a towel. Which was when Bobby Hogan walked in.

'See you're bottling it too,' Hogan said, making for the urinals.

'Ever heard me sing, Bobby?'

'We should do a duet: "There's a Hole in My Bucket".'

'We'd be about the only buggers who knew it.'

Hogan chuckled. 'Remember when it was us that were the young turks?'

'Long dead,' Rebus said, half to himself. Hogan thought he'd misheard, but Rebus just shook his head.

'So who's next for the golden cheery-bye?' Hogan asked, ready to head out again.

'Not me,' Rebus stated.

'No?'

Rebus was wiping at his neck again. 'I can't retire, Bobby. It would kill me.'

Hogan snorted. 'Same here. But then the job's killing me too.' The two men studied one another, then Hogan winked and yanked open the door. They walked back out into the heat and noise, Hogan opening his arms wide to greet an old friend. One of the Farmer's cronies pushed a glass towards Rebus.

'Ardbeg, right?'

Rebus nodded, sucked at where some had spilled on to the

back of his hand, then, picturing a small boy with news to impart, raised the glass and downed it.

He took the set of keys from his pocket and unlocked the main door of the tenement block. The keys were shiny new, cut just that day. His shoulder rubbed against the wall as he headed for the stairs, and he kept a tight grip on the banister as he climbed. The second and third shiny keys unlocked the door to Philippa Balfour's flat.

There was no one inside, and the alarm hadn't been set. He switched on the lights. The loose rug underfoot seemed to want to wrap itself around his ankles, and he had to fight his way loose, holding on to the wall. The rooms were just as he'd left them, except that the computer was now missing from its desk, having been transferred to the station, where Siobhan was certain someone from Balfour's Internet service provider could help bypass the password.

In the bedroom, someone had removed the neat pile of David Costello's clothes from the chair. Rebus presumed the culprit to be Costello himself. He wouldn't have done so without permission – nothing left the flat unless okayed by the bosses. Forensics would have checked the clothes first, maybe taken samples from them. Already there were rumours of belt-tightening. A case like this, the cost could spiral skywards like smoke.

In the kitchen, Rebus poured himself a big glass of water and went through to sit in the drawing room, pretty much where David Costello had sat. A little of the water dribbled down his chin. The paintings on the walls – framed abstracts – were playing tricks, moving with him as he moved his eyes. He bent down to place the empty glass on the floor, and ended up on his hands and knees. Some bastard had spiked the drinks, only explanation. He turned and sat down, closed his eyes for a moment. MisPers: sometimes you worried in vain; they either turned up, or didn't want to be found. So many of them . . . photos and descriptions were always passing through the office, the faces slightly out of focus as though they were in the process of becoming

ghosts. He blinked open his eyes and raised them to the ceiling, with its ornate cornicing. Big flats, the New Town had, but Rebus preferred it where he lived: more shops, not quite so smug . . .

The Ardbeg, it had to've been spiked. He probably wouldn't drink it again. It would come with its own ghost. He wondered what had happened to the boy: had it been accident or design? The boy would be a parent himself these days, maybe even a grandparent. Did he still dream about the sister he'd killed? Did he remember the young, nervous uniform standing behind the reception desk? Rebus ran his hands over the floor. It was bare wood, sanded and sealed. They hadn't taken the boards up, not yet. He felt for a gap between two planks and dug his nails in, but couldn't get any purchase. Somehow he knocked the glass and it started rolling, the noise filling the room. Rebus watched it until it stopped in the doorway, progress blocked by a pair of feet.

'What in the hell's going on?'

Rebus stood up. The man in front of him was in his mid-forties, hands in the pockets of a three-quarter-length black woollen overcoat. The man opened his stance a little, filling the doorway.

'Who are you?' Rebus asked.

The man slid a hand from his pocket, angled it towards his ear. He was holding a mobile phone. 'I'm calling the police,' he said.

'I'm a police officer.' Rebus reached into his own pocket, brought out his warrant card. 'DI Rebus.'

The man studied the card and handed it back. 'I'm John Balfour,' he said, his voice losing a little of its edge. Rebus nodded; he'd already figured as much.

'Sorry if I . . .' Rebus didn't finish the sentence. As he put the warrant card away, his left knee unlocked for a second.

'You've been drinking,' Balfour said.

'Sorry, yes. Retirement do. Not on duty or anything, if that's what you mean.'

'Then might I ask what you're doing in my daughter's flat?'

'You might,' Rebus agreed. He looked around. 'Just wanted to . . . well, I suppose I . . .' But he couldn't find the words.

'Will you leave, please?'

Rebus bowed his head a little. 'Of course.' Balfour moved so that Rebus could pass him without any contact. Rebus stopped in the hallway, half turned, ready with a further apology, but Philippa Balfour's father had walked over to the drawing-room window and was staring out at the night, hands gripping the shutters at either side.

He walked downstairs quietly, halfway sober now, closed the main door after him, not looking back, not looking up at the first-floor window. The streets were deserted, pavements glistening from an earlier downpour, street light reflected in them. Rebus's shoes were the only noise to be heard as he started the climb back up the slope: Queen Street, George Street, Princes Street, and then North Bridge. People were heading home from pubs, seeking taxis and lost friends. Rebus took a left at the Tron Kirk and headed down the Canongate. A patrol car was parked kerbside, two bodies inside: one awake, the other asleep. They were detective constables from Gayfield, and had either drawn the short straw or were disliked by their boss: no other way to explain this thankless night-shift. Rebus was just another passer-by to the one who was awake. He had a newspaper folded in front of him, angled towards what light there was. When Rebus thumped the roof of the patrol car, the paper flew, landing on the head of the sleeper, who jerked awake and clawed at the smothering sheets.

As the passenger-side window was wound down, Rebus leaned on the sill. 'Your one o'clock alarm call, gentlemen.'

'I nearly shat myself,' the passenger said, trying to gather up his newspaper. His name was Pat Connolly, and he'd spent his first few years in CID waging a campaign against the nickname 'Paddy'. His colleague was Tommy Daniels, who seemed at ease – as he did in all things – with his own nickname of 'Distant'. Tommy to Tom-Tom to Distant Drums to Distant was the logic behind the name, but it also

said much about the young man's character. Having been so rudely awakened from sleep, upon seeing and recognising Rebus all he'd done was roll his eyes.

'Could've fetched us a coffee,' Connolly was complaining.

'Could have,' Rebus agreed. 'Or maybe a dictionary.' He glanced towards the newspaper crossword. Less than a quarter of the grid had been filled in, while the puzzle itself was ringed by doodles and unsolved anagrams. 'Quiet night?'

'Apart from foreigners asking directions,' Connolly said. Rebus smiled and looked up and down the street. This was the heart of tourist Edinburgh. A hotel up by the traffic lights, a knitwear shop across the road. Fancy gifts and shortbread and whisky decanters. A kiltmaker's only fifty yards away. John Knox's house, hunched against its neighbours, half hidden in scowling shadow. At one time, the Old Town had been all there was of Edinburgh: a narrow spine running from the Castle to Holyrood, steep vennels leading off like crooked ribs. Then, as the place became ever more crowded and insanitary, the New Town had been built, its Georgian elegance a calculated snub to the Old Town and those who couldn't afford to move. Rebus found it interesting that while Philippa Balfour had chosen the New Town, David Costello had elected to live in the heart of the Old.

'Is he home?' he said now.

'Would we be here if he wasn't?' Connolly's eyes were on his partner, who was pouring tomato soup from a thermos. Distant sniffed the liquid hesitantly, then took a quick gulp. 'Actually, you could be the very man we want.'

Rebus looked at him. 'Oh aye?'

'Settle an argument. Deacon Blue, *Wages Day* – first album or second?'

Rebus smiled. 'It *has* been a quiet night.' Then, after a moment's reflection: 'Second.'

'Ten notes you owe me,' Connolly told Distant.

'Mind if I ask one?' Rebus had crouched down, felt his knees crack with the effort.

'Fire away,' Connolly said.

'What do you do if you need a pee?'

Connolly smiled. 'If Distant's asleep, I just use his thermos.'

The mouthful of soup almost exploded from Distant's nostrils. Rebus straightened up, feeling the blood pound in his ears: weather warning, force-ten hangover on its way.

'You going in?' Connolly asked. Rebus looked at the tenement again.

'Thinking about it.'

'We'd have to make a note.'

Rebus nodded. 'I know.'

'Just come from the Farmer's leaving do?'

Rebus turned towards the car. 'What's your point?'

'Well, you've had a drink, haven't you? Might not be the best time for a house call . . . sir.'

'You're probably right . . . Paddy,' Rebus said, making for the door.

'Remember what you asked me?'

Rebus had accepted a black coffee from David Costello. Popped two paracetamol from their foil shroud and washed them down. Middle of the night, but Costello hadn't been asleep. Black T-shirt, black jeans, bare feet. He'd made an off-licence run at some point: the bag was lying on the floor, the half-bottle of Bell's sitting not far from it, top missing but only a couple of decent measures down. Not a drinker then, Rebus surmised. It was a non-drinker's idea of how you handled a crisis – you drank whisky, but had to buy some first, and no point lashing out on a whole bottle. A couple of drinks would do you.

The living room was small, the flat itself reached from a turreted stairwell, winding ever upwards, the stone steps worn concave. Tiny windows. They'd planned this building in a century where heat was a luxury. The smaller the windows, the less heat you lost.

The living room was separated from the kitchen only by a step and what looked like partition walls. An open doorway,

double-width. Signs that Costello liked to cook: pots and pans hanging from butcher's hooks. The living area was all books and CDs. Rebus had trawled the latter: John Martyn, Nick Drake, Joni Mitchell. Laid-back but cerebral. The books looked like stuff from Costello's English Literature course.

Costello was seated on a red futon; Rebus had chosen one of two straight-backed wooden chairs. They looked like the stuff he saw on Causewayside, placed outside shops for which the description 'antique' encompassed school desks from the sixties and green filing cabinets salvaged from office refits.

Costello ran his hand through his hair, didn't say anything.

'You asked if I thought you did it,' Rebus said, answering his own question.

'Did what?'

'Killed Flip. I think that's how you phrased it: "You think I killed her, don't you?" '

Costello nodded. 'It's so obvious, isn't it? We'd fallen out. I accept that you have to regard me as a suspect.'

'David, right now you're the *only* suspect.'

'You really think something's happened to her?'

'What do you think?'

Costello shook his head. 'I've done nothing but rack my brains since this all started.'

They sat in silence for a few moments.

'What are you doing here?' Costello asked suddenly.

'As I said, it's on my way home. You like the Old Town?'

'Yes.'

'Bit different from the New. You didn't want to move nearer Flip?'

'What are you trying to say?'

Rebus shrugged. 'Maybe it says something about the pair of you, the parts of town you prefer.'

Costello laughed drily. 'You Scots can be so reductive.'

'How's that?'

'Old Town versus New, Catholic/Protestant, east coast/west . . . Things can be a mite more complicated than that.'

'Attraction of opposites, that's all I was getting at.' There was another silence between them. Rebus scanned the room.

'Didn't make a mess then?'

'Who?'

'The search party.'

'Could have been worse.'

Rebus took a sip of coffee, pretended to savour it. 'You wouldn't have left the body here though, would you? I mean, only perverts do that sort of thing.' Costello looked at him. 'Sorry, I'm being . . . I mean, it's just theoretical. I'm not trying to say anything. But the forensics, they weren't looking for a body. They deal in things you and me can't even see. Flecks of blood, fibres, a single hair.' Rebus shook his head slowly. 'Juries eat that stuff up. The old idea of policing, it's going out the window.' He put down the gloss-black mug, reached into a pocket for his cigarette packet. 'Mind if I . . . ?'

Costello hesitated. 'Actually, I'll take one from you if that's all right.'

'Be my guest.' Rebus took one out of the packet, lit it, then tossed both packet and lighter to the younger man. 'Roll yourself a joint if you like,' he added. 'I mean, if that's your thing.'

'It's not.'

'Student life must be a bit different these days.'

Costello exhaled, studying the cigarette as if it was something alien to him. 'I'd assume it is,' he said.

Rebus smiled. Just two grown-ups having a smoke and a chat. The wee sma' hours and all that. A time for honesty, the outside world asleep, no one eavesdropping. He got up and walked over to the bookshelves. 'How did you and Flip meet?' he asked, picking a book at random and flipping through it.

'Dinner party. We clicked straight away. Next morning, after breakfast, we took a walk through Warriston Cemetery. That was when I first felt that I loved her . . . I mean, that it wasn't just going to be a one-night stand.'