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Resurrection Men

Written by Ian Rankin

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IAN RANKIN

RESURRECTION MEN



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'Then why are you here?'

'Depends what you mean,' Rebus said.

'Mean?' The woman frowned behind her glasses.

'Mean by "here",' he explained. 'Here in this room? Here in this career? Here on the planet?'

She smiled. Her name was Andrea Thomson. She wasn't a doctor – she'd made that clear at their first meeting. Nor was she a 'shrink' or a 'therapist'. 'Career Analysis' was what it had said on Rebus's daily sheet.

2.30–3.15: Career Analysis, Rm 3.16.

With *Ms* Thomson. Which had become Andrea at the moment of introduction. Which was yesterday, Tuesday. A 'get to know' session, she'd called it.

She was in her late thirties, short and large-hipped. Her hair was a thick mop of blond with some darker streaks showing through. Her teeth were slightly oversized. She was self-employed, didn't work for the police full-time.

'Do any of us?' Rebus had asked yesterday. She'd looked a bit puzzled. 'I mean, do any of us work full-time . . . that's why we're here, isn't it?' He'd waved a hand in the direction of the closed door. 'We're not pulling our weight. We need a smack on the wrists.'

'Is that what you think you need, Detective Inspector?'

He'd wagged a finger. 'Keep calling me that and I'll keep calling you "Doc".'

'I'm not a doctor,' she'd said. 'Nor am I a shrink, a therapist, or any other word you've probably been thinking in connection with me.'

'Then what are you?'

'I deal with Career Analysis.'

Rebus had snorted. 'Then you should be wearing a seat-belt.'

She'd stared at him. 'Am I in for a bumpy ride?'

'You could say that, seeing how my *career*, as you call it, has just careered out of control.'

So much for yesterday.

Now she wanted to know about his feelings. How did he feel about being a detective?

'I like it.'

'Which parts?'

'All of me.' Fixing her with a smile.

She smiled back. 'I meant—'

'I know what you meant.' He looked around the room. It was small, utilitarian. Two chrome-framed chairs either side of a teak-veneered desk. The chairs were covered in some lime-coloured material. Nothing on the desk itself but her A4-sized lined pad and her pen. There was a heavy-looking satchel in the corner; Rebus wondered if his file was in there. A clock on the wall, calendar below it. The calendar had come from the local fire brigade. A length of net curtaining across the window.

It wasn't her room. It was a room she could use on those occasions when her services were required. Not quite the same thing.

'I like my job,' he said at last, folding his arms. Then, wondering if she'd read anything into the action – defensiveness, say – he unfolded them again. Couldn't seem to find anything to do with them except bunch his fists into his jacket pockets. 'I like every aspect of it, right down to the added paperwork each time the office runs out of staples for the staple-gun.'

'Then why did you blow up at Detective Chief Superintendent Templer?'

'I don't know.'

'She thinks maybe it has something to do with professional jealousy.'

The laugh burst from him. 'She said that?'

'You don't agree?'

'Of course not.'

'You've known her some years, haven't you?'

'More than I care to count.'

'And she's always been senior to you?'

'It's never bothered me, if that's what you're thinking.'

'It's only recently that she's become your commanding officer.'

'So?'

'You've been at DI level for quite some time. No thoughts of improvement?' She caught his look. 'Maybe "improvement" is the wrong word. You've not wanted promotion?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Might be I'm afraid of responsibility.'

She stared at him. 'That smacks of a prepared answer.'

'Be prepared, that's my motto.'

'Oh, you were a Boy Scout?'

'No,' he said. She stayed quiet, picking up her pen and studying it. It was one of those cheap yellow Bics. 'Look,' he said into the silence, 'I've got no quarrel with Gill Templer. Good luck to her as a DCS. It's not a job I could do. I like being where I am.' He glanced up. 'Which doesn't mean here in this room, it means out on the street, solving crimes. The reason I lost it is . . . well, the way the whole inquiry's being handled.'

'You must have had similar feelings before in the middle of a case?' She had taken her glasses off so she could rub the reddened skin either side of her nose.

'Many a time,' he admitted.

She slid the glasses back on. 'But this is the first time you've thrown a mug?'

'I wasn't aiming for her.'

'She had to duck. A full mug, too.'

'Ever tasted cop-shop tea?'

She smiled again. 'So you've no problem then?'

'None.' He folded his arms in what he hoped was a sign of confidence.

'Then why are you here?'

Time up, Rebus walked back along the corridor and straight into the men's toilets, where he splashed water on his face, dried off with a paper towel. Watched himself in the mirror above the sink as he pulled a cigarette from his packet and lit it, blowing the smoke ceilingwards.

One of the lavatories flushed; a door clicked its lock off. Jazz McCullough came out.

'Thought that might be you,' he said, turning on the tap.

'How could you tell?'

'One long sigh followed by the lighting of a cigarette. Had to be a shrink session finishing.'

'She's not a shrink.'

'Size of her, she looks like she's shrunk.' McCullough reached for a towel. Tossed it in the bin when he'd finished. Straightened his tie. His real name was James, but those who knew him seemed never to call him that. He was Jamesy, or more often Jazz. Tall, mid-forties, cropped black hair with just a few touches of grey at the temples. He was thin. Patted his stomach now, just above the belt, as if to emphasise his lack of a gut. Rebus could barely see his own belt, even in the mirror.

Jazz didn't smoke. Had a family back home in Broughty Ferry: wife and two sons about his only topic of conversation. Examining himself in the mirror, he tucked a stray hair back behind one ear.

'What the hell are we doing here, John?'

'Andrea was just asking me the same thing.'

'That's because she knows it's a waste of time. Thing is, we're paying her wages.'

'We're doing some good then.'

Jazz glanced at him. 'You dog! You think you're in there!'

Rebus winced. 'Give me a break. All I meant was . . .' But what was the point? Jazz was already laughing. He slapped Rebus on the shoulder.

'Back into the fray,' he said, pulling open the door. 'Three thirty, "Dealing with the Public".'

It was their third day at Tulliallan: the Scottish Police College. The place was mostly full of recent recruits, learning their lessons before being allowed out on to public streets. But there were other officers there, older and wiser. They were on refresher courses, or learning new skills.

And then there were the Resurrection Men.

The college was based at Tulliallan Castle, not in itself a castle but a mock-baronial home to which had been added a series of modern buildings, connected by corridors. The whole edifice sat in huge leafy grounds on the outskirts of the village of Kincardine, to the northern side of the Firth of Forth, almost equidistant between Glasgow and Edinburgh. It could have been mistaken for a university campus, and to some extent that was its function. You came here to learn.

Or, in Rebus's case, as punishment.

There were four other officers in the seminar room when Rebus and McCullough arrived. 'The Wild Bunch', DI Francis Gray had called them, first time they'd been gathered together. A couple of faces Rebus knew – DS Stu Sutherland from Livingston; DI Tam Barclay from Falkirk. Gray himself was from Glasgow, and Jazz worked out of Dundee, while the final member of the party, DC Allan Ward, was based in Dumfries. 'A gathering of nations,' as Gray had put it. But to Rebus they acted more like spokesmen for their tribes, sharing the same language but with different outlooks. They were wary of each other. It was especially awkward with officers from the same

region. Rebus and Sutherland were both Lothian and Borders, but the town of Livingston was F Division, known to anyone in Edinburgh as 'F Troop'. Sutherland was just waiting for Rebus to say something to the others, something disparaging. He had the look of a haunted man.

The six men shared only one characteristic: they were at Tulliallan because they'd failed in some way. Mostly it was an issue with authority. Much of their free time the previous two days had been spent sharing war stories. Rebus's tale was milder than most. If a young officer, fresh out of uniform, had made the mistakes they had made, he or she would probably not have been given the Tulliallan life-line. But these were lifers, men who'd been in the force an average of twenty years. Most were nearing the point where they could leave on full pension. Tulliallan was their last-chance saloon. They were here to atone, to be resurrected.

As Rebus and McCullough took their seats, a uniformed officer walked in and marched briskly to the head of the oval table where his chair was waiting. He was in his mid-fifties and was here to remind them of their obligation to the public at large. He was here to train them to mind their p's and q's.

Five minutes into the lecture, Rebus let his eyes and mind drift out of focus. He was back on the Marber case . . .

Edward Marber had been an Edinburgh art and antique dealer. Past tense, because Marber was now dead, bludgeoned outside his home by assailant or assailants unknown. The weapon had not yet been found. A brick or rock was the best guess offered by the city pathologist, Professor Gates, who had been called to the scene for a PLE: Pronouncement of Life Extinct. Brain haemorrhage brought on by the blow. Marber had died on the steps of his Duddingston Village home, front-door keys in his hand. He had been dropped off by taxi after the private

viewing night of his latest exhibition: New Scottish Colourists. Marber owned two small, exclusive galleries in the New Town, plus antique shops in Dundas Street, Glasgow and Perth. Rebus had asked someone why Perth, rather than oil-rich Aberdeen.

'Because Perthshire's where the wealth goes to play.'

The taxi-driver had been interviewed. Marber didn't drive, but his house was at the end of an eighty-metre driveway, the gates to which had been open. The taxi had pulled up at the door, activating a halogen light to one side of the steps. Marber had paid and tipped, asking for a receipt, and the taxi-driver had U-turned away, not bothering to look in his mirror.

'I didn't see a thing,' he'd told the police.

The taxi receipt had been found in Marber's pocket, along with a list of the sales he'd made that evening, totalling just over £16,000. His cut, Rebus learned, would have been twenty per cent, £3,200. Not a bad night's work.

It was morning before the body was found by the postman. Professor Gates had given an estimated time of death of between nine and eleven the previous evening. The taxi had picked Marber up from his gallery at eight thirty, so must have dropped him home around eight forty-five, a time the driver accepted with a shrug.

The immediate police instinct had screamed robbery, but problems and niggles soon became apparent. Would someone have clobbered the victim with the taxi still in sight, the scene lit by halogen? It seemed unlikely, and yet by the time the taxi turned out of the driveway, Marber should have been safely on the other side of his door. And though Marber's pockets had been turned out, cash and credit cards evidently taken, the attacker had failed to use the keys to unlock the front door and trawl the house itself. Scared off perhaps, but it still didn't make sense.

Muggings tended to be spontaneous. You were attacked on the street, maybe just after using a cash machine. The

mugger didn't hang around your door waiting for you to come home. Marber's house was relatively isolated: Duddingston Village was a wealthy enclave on the edge of Edinburgh, semi-rural, with the mass of Arthur's Seat as its neighbour. The houses hid behind walls, quiet and secure. Anyone approaching Marber's home on foot would have triggered the same halogen security light. They would then have had to hide – in the undergrowth, say, or behind one of the trees. After a couple of minutes, the lamp's timer would finish its cycle and go off. But any movement would trigger the sensor once again.

The Scene of Crime officers had looked for possible hiding places, finding several. But no traces of anyone, no footprints or fibres.

Another scenario, proposed by DCS Gill Templer:

'Say the assailant was already inside the house. Heard the door being unlocked and ran towards it. Smashed the victim on the head and ran.'

But the house was high-tech: alarms and sensors everywhere. There was no sign of a break-in, no indication that anything was missing. Marber's best friend, another art dealer called Cynthia Bessant, had toured the house and pronounced that she could see nothing missing or out of place, except that much of the deceased's art collection had been removed from the walls and, each painting neatly packaged in bubble-wrap, was stacked against the wall in the dining room. Bessant had been unable to offer an explanation.

'Perhaps he was about to re-frame them, or move them to different rooms. One *does* get tired of the same paintings in the same spots . . .'

She'd toured every room, paying particular attention to Marber's bedroom, not having seen inside it before. She called it his 'inner sanctum'.

The victim himself had never been married, and was quickly assumed by the investigating officers to have been gay.

'Eddie's sexuality,' Cynthia Bessant had said, 'can have no bearing on this case.'

But that would be something for the inquiry to decide.

Rebus had felt himself side-lined in the investigation, working the telephones mostly. Cold calls to friends and associates. The same questions eliciting almost identical responses. The bubble-wrapped paintings had been checked for fingerprints, from which it became apparent that Marber himself had packaged them up. Still no one – neither his secretary nor his friends – could give an explanation.

Then, towards the end of one briefing, Rebus had picked up a mug of tea – someone else's tea, milky grey – and hurled it in the general direction of Gill Templer.

The briefing had started much as any other, Rebus washing down three aspirin caplets with his morning latte. The coffee came in a cardboard beaker. It was from a concession on the corner of The Meadows. Usually his first and last decent cup of the day.

'Bit too much to drink last night?' DS Siobhan Clarke had asked. She'd run her eyes over him: same suit, shirt and tie as the day before. Probably wondering if he'd bothered to take any of it off between times. The morning shave erratic, a lazy run-over with an electric. Hair that needed washing and cutting.

She'd seen just what Rebus had wanted her to see.

'And a good morning to you too, Siobhan,' he'd muttered to himself, crushing the empty beaker.

Usually he stood towards the back of the room at briefings, but today he was nearer the front. Sat there at a desk, rubbing his forehead, loosening his shoulders, as Gill Templer spelt out the day's mission.

More door-to-door; more interviews; more phone calls.

His fingers were around the mug by now. He didn't know whose it was, the glaze cold to the touch – could even have been left from the day before. The room was stifling and already smelt of sweat.

'More bloody phone calls,' he found himself saying, loud enough to be heard at the front. Templer looked up.

'Something to say, John?'

'No, no . . . nothing.'

Her back straightening. 'Only if you've anything to add – maybe one of your famous deductions – I'm all ears.'

'With respect, ma'am, you're not all ears – you're all talk.' Noises around him: gasps and looks. Rebus rising slowly to his feet.

'We're getting nowhere fast.' His voice was loud. 'There's nobody left to talk to, and nothing worth them saying!'

The blood had risen to Templer's cheeks. The sheet of paper she was holding – the day's duties – had become a cylinder which her fingers threatened to crush.

'Well, I'm sure we can all learn something from *you*, DI Rebus.' Not 'John' any more. Her voice rising to match his. Her eyes scanned the room: thirteen officers, not quite the full complement. Templer was working under pressure: much of it fiscal. Each investigation had a ticket attached to it, a costing she daren't overstep. Then there were the illnesses and holidays, the latecomers . . . 'Maybe you'd like to come up here,' she was saying, 'and give us the benefit of your thoughts on the subject of just exactly *how* we should be proceeding with this inquiry.' She stretched an arm out, as if to introduce him to an audience. 'Ladies and gentlemen . . .'

Which was the moment he chose to throw the mug. It travelled in a lazy arc, spinning as it went, dispensing cold tea. Templer ducked instinctively, though the mug would have sailed over her head in any case. It hit the back wall just above floor level, bouncing off and failing to break. There was silence in the room as people rose to their feet, checking their clothes for spillage.

Rebus sat down then, one finger punching the desk as if trying to find the rewind on life's remote control.

*

'DI Rebus?' The uniform was talking to him.

'Yes, sir?'

'Glad you've decided to join us.' Smiles all around the table. How much had he missed? He didn't dare look at his watch.

'Sorry about that, sir.'

'I was asking if you'd be our member of the public.' Nodding to the opposite side of the table to Rebus. 'DI Gray will be the officer. And you, DI Rebus, will be coming into the station with what could turn out to be some vital information pertaining to a case.' The teacher paused. 'Or you could be a crank.' Laughter from a couple of the men. Francis Gray was beaming at Rebus, nodding encouragement.

'Whenever you're ready, DI Gray.'

Gray leaned forward on the table. 'So, Mrs Ditchwater, you say you saw something that night?'

The laughter was louder. The teacher waved them quiet. 'Let's try to keep this serious, shall we?'

Gray nodded, turned his eyes to Rebus again. 'You definitely saw something?'

'Yes,' Rebus announced, coarsening his voice. 'I saw the whole thing, Officer.'

'Though you've been registered blind these past eleven years?'

Gales of laughter in the room, the teacher thumping the table-top, trying to restore order. Gray sitting back, joining the laughter, winking across at Rebus, whose shoulders were rocking.

Francis Gray was fighting hard against resurrection.

'I thought I was going to wet myself,' Tam Barclay said, lowering the tray of glasses on to the table. They were in the larger of Kincardine's two pubs, lessons finished for the day. Six of them forming a tight circle: Rebus, Francis Gray, Jazz McCullough, plus Tam Barclay, Stu Sutherland and Allan Ward. At thirty-four, Ward was the youngest of

the group and the lowest-ranking officer on the course. He had a tough, spoilt look to him. Maybe it came from working in the south-west.

Five pints, one cola: McCullough was driving home afterwards, wanted to see his wife and kids.

'I do my damnedest to *avoid* mine,' Gray had said.

'No joking,' Barclay said, squeezing into his seat, 'near wet myself.' Grinning at Gray. '"Blind these past eleven years".'

Gray picked up his pint, raised it. 'Here's tae us, wha's like us?'

'Nobody,' Rebus commented. 'Or they'd be stuck on this damned course.'

'Just got to grin and bear it,' Barclay said. He was late thirties, thickening around the waist. Salt-and-pepper hair brushed back from the forehead. Rebus knew him from a couple of cases: Falkirk and Edinburgh were only thirty minutes apart.

'I wonder if Wee Andrea grins when she bares it,' Stu Sutherland said.

'No sexism, please.' Francis Gray was wagging a finger.

'Besides,' McCullough added, 'we don't want to stoke John's fantasies.'

Gray raised an eyebrow. 'That right, John? Got the hots for your counsellor? Better watch, you might make Allan jealous.'

Allan Ward looked up from the cigarette he was lighting, just glowered.

'That your sheep-frightening look, Allan?' Gray said. 'Not much to do down in Dumfries, is there, except round up the usual ewes?'

More laughter. It wasn't that Francis Gray had made himself the centre of attention; it seemed to happen naturally. He'd been first into his seat, and the others had congregated around him, Rebus sitting directly opposite. Gray was a big man, and the years told on his face. And because he said everything with a smile, a wink or a glint

in his eye, he got away with it. Rebus hadn't heard anyone making a joke about Gray himself yet, though they'd all been his target. It was as if he were challenging them, testing them. The way they took his comments would tell him everything he needed to know about them. Rebus wondered how the big man would react to a jibe or joke directed against him.

Maybe he'd have to find out.

McCullough's mobile sounded, and he got up, moving away.

'His wife, odds-on,' Gray stated. He was halfway down his pint of lager. Didn't smoke, told Rebus he'd given up a decade back. The two of them had been outside during a break, Rebus offering the packet. Ward and Barclay smoked too. Three out of six: it meant Rebus could feel comfortable lighting up.

'She's keeping tabs on him?' Stu Sutherland was saying.

'Proof of a deep and loving relationship,' Gray commented, tipping the glass to his mouth again. He was one of those drinkers, you never saw them swallow: it was as if they could hold their throat open and just pour the stuff down.

'You two know each other?' Sutherland asked. Gray glanced over his shoulder to where McCullough was standing, his head bowed towards the mobile phone.

'I know the type,' was all Gray said by way of answer.

Rebus knew better. He rose to his feet. 'Same again?'

Two lagers, three IPAs. On his way to the bar, Rebus pointed towards McCullough, who shook his head. He still had most of his cola, didn't want another. Rebus heard the words 'I'll be on the road in ten minutes . . .' Yes, he was on the phone to his wife. Rebus had a call he wanted to make too. Jean was probably finishing work right around now. Rush hour, the journey from the museum to her home in Portobello might take half an hour.

The barman knew the order: this was their third round of the evening. The previous two nights, they'd stuck to

the college premises. First night, Gray had produced a good bottle of malt, and they'd sat in the common room, getting to know each other. Tuesday, they'd met in the college's own bar for an after-dinner session, McCullough sticking to soft drinks and then heading out for his car.

But at lunchtime today, Tam Barclay had mentioned a bar in the village, good rep.

'No trouble with the locals,' was the way he'd put it. So here they were. The barman looked comfortable, which told Rebus he'd dealt with intakes from the college before. He was efficient, not over-friendly. Midweek, only half a dozen regulars in the place. Three at one table, two at one end of the bar, another standing alone next to Rebus. The man turned to him.

'Up at the cop school, are you?'

Rebus nodded.

'Bit old for recruits.'

Rebus glanced at the man. He was tall, completely bald, his head shining. Grey moustache, eyes which seemed to be retracting into the skull. He was drinking a bottle of beer with what looked like a dark rum in the glass next to it.

'Force is desperate these days,' Rebus explained. 'Next thing, they'll be press-ganging.'

The man smiled. 'I think you're having me on.'

Rebus shrugged. 'We're here on a refresher course,' he admitted.

'Teaching old dogs new tricks, eh?' The man lifted his beer.

'Get you one?' Rebus offered. The man shook his head. So Rebus paid the barman and, deciding against a tray, hoisted three of the pints, making a triangle of them between his hands. Went to the table, came back for the last two, including his own. Thinking: best not leave it too late to phone Jean. He didn't want her to hear him drunk. Not that he was planning on getting drunk, but you could never tell . . .

'This you celebrating the end of the course?' the man asked.

'Just the beginning,' Rebus told him.

St Leonard's police station was mid-evening quiet. There were prisoners in the holding cells waiting for next morning's court appearance, and two teenagers being booked for shoplifting. Upstairs, the CID offices were almost empty. The Marber inquiry had wound down for the day, and only Siobhan Clarke was left, in front of a computer, staring at a screen-saver in the form of a banner message: WHAT WILL SIOBHAN DO WITHOUT HER SUGAR DADDY? She didn't know who had written it: one of the team, having a bit of a laugh. She surmised it referred to John Rebus, but couldn't quite work out the meaning. Did the author know what a sugar daddy was? Or did it just mean that Rebus looked after her, watched out for her? She was annoyed to find herself so irritated by the message.

She went into the screen-saver options and clicked on 'banner', erased the present message and replaced it with one of her own: I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, SUCKER. Then she checked a couple of other terminals, but their screen-savers were asteroids and wavy lines. When the phone on her desk started ringing, she considered not answering. Probably another crank wanting to confess, or ready with spurious information. A respectable middle-aged gent had called yesterday and accused his upstairs neighbours of the crime. Turned out they were students, played their music too loud and too often. The man had been warned that wasting police time was a serious matter.

'Mind you,' one of the uniforms had commented afterwards, 'if I'd to listen to Slipknot all day, I'd probably do worse.'

Siobhan sat down in front of her computer, lifted the receiver.

'CID, DS Clarke speaking.'

'One thing they teach at Tulliallan,' the voice said, 'is the importance of the quick pick-up.'

She smiled. 'I prefer to be wooed.'

'A quick pick-up,' Rebus explained, 'means picking up the phone within half a dozen rings.'

'How did you know I was here?'

'I didn't. Tried your flat first, got the answering machine.'

'And somehow sensed I wasn't out on the town?' She settled back in her chair. 'Sounds like you're in a bar.'

'In beautiful downtown Kincardine.'

'And yet you've dragged yourself from your pint to call me?'

'I called Jean first. Had a spare twenty-pence piece . . .'

'I'm flattered. A whole twenty pee?' She listened to him snort.

'So . . . how's it going?' he asked.

'Never mind that, how's Tulliallan?'

'As some of the teachers would say, we have a new tricks–old dog interface scenario.'

She laughed. 'They don't talk like that, do they?'

'Some of them do. We're being taught crime *management* and victim *empathy response*.'

'And yet you still have time for a drink?'

Silence on the line; she wondered if she'd touched a nerve.

'How do you know I'm not on fresh orange?' he said at last.

'I just do.'

'Go on then, impress me with your detective skills.'

'It's just that your voice gets slightly nasal.'

'After how many?'

'I'll guess four.'

'The girl's a marvel.' The pips started sounding. 'Hang on,' he said, putting in more money.

'Another spare twenty pee?'

'A fifty, actually. Which gives you plenty of time to update me on Marber.'

'Well, it's all been very quiet since the coffee incident.'

'I think it was tea.'

'Whatever it was, the stain's not budging. For what it's worth, I think they over-reacted, sending you into purdah.'

'I'm wasting money here.'

She sighed, sat forward. The screen-saver had just kicked in: I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, SUCKER scrolling right to left across the screen. 'We're still looking at friends and associates. Couple of interesting stories: an artist Marber had fallings-out with. Not unusual in the business, apparently, but this came to blows. Turns out the artist is one of these New Scottish Colourists, and leaving him out of the exhibition was a definite snub.'

'Maybe he whacked Marber with his easel.'

'Maybe.'

'And the second story?'

'That one I've been saving up to tell you. Did you ever see the guest list for the preview?'

'Yes.'

'Turns out not everyone who turned up was on the list. What we had were people who'd signed Marber's guest book. But now we've printed off a list of the people who actually got invites. Some of them were at the exhibition, hadn't bothered to RSVP or sign the book.'

'This artist was one of them?' Rebus guessed.

'God, no. But a certain M. G. Cafferty was.'

She heard Rebus whistle. Morris Gerald Cafferty – Big Ger, to those in the know – was the east coast's biggest gangster, or the biggest one they knew about. Cafferty and Rebus went back a long way.

'Big Ger a patron of the arts?' Rebus mused.

'He collects paintings, apparently.'

'What he doesn't do is smack people over the head on their doorsteps.'

'I bow to your superior knowledge.'

There was a pause on the line. 'How's Gill doing?'

'Much better since you left. Is she going to take it any further?'

'Not if I finish this course – that was the deal. How about the L-plate?'

Siobhan smiled. By L-plate Rebus meant the latest addition to CID, a detective constable called Davie Hynds. 'He's quiet, studious, industrious,' she recited. 'Not your type at all.'

'But is he any good?'

'Don't worry, I'll slap him into shape.'

'That's one of the prerogatives, now you've been promoted.'

The pips were sounding again. 'Do I get to go now?'

'A concise and helpful report, DS Clarke. Seven out of ten.'

'Only seven?'

'I'm deducting three for sarcasm. You need to address this attitudinal problem of yours, or—'

The sudden hum on the line told her his time was up. It was taking some getting used to, being addressed as 'DS'. She sometimes still introduced herself as Detective Constable Clarke, forgetting that the recent round of promotions had been kind to her. Could jealousy be behind the message on her screen? Silvers and Hood had stayed the same rank – as had most of the rest of CID.

'Narrowing the field nicely, girl,' she told herself, reaching for her coat.

Back at the table, Barclay lifted a mobile phone and told Rebus he could have borrowed it.

'Thanks, Tam. I've actually got one.'

'Are the batteries flat?'

Rebus lifted his glass, shook his head slowly.

'I think,' Francis Gray said, 'John just prefers things done the old-fashioned way. Isn't that right, John?'

Rebus shrugged, tipped the glass to his lips. Above the rim, he could see the bald man standing sideways on to the bar, watching the group intently . . .