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Set in Darkness

Written by Ian Rankin

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**IAN
RANKIN
SET IN
DARKNESS**



For my son Kit, with all my hopes, dreams and love

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Part One

The Sense of an Ending

And this long narrow land
Is full of possibility . . .

Deacon Blue, 'Wages Day'

Darkness was falling as Rebus accepted the yellow hard hat from his guide.

'This will be the admin block, we think,' the man said. His name was David Gilfillan. He worked for Historic Scotland and was coordinating the archaeological survey of Queensberry House. 'The original building is late seventeenth century. Lord Hatton was its original owner. It was extended at the end of the century, after coming into the ownership of the first Duke of Queensberry. It would have been one of the grandest houses on Canon-gate, and only a stone's throw from Holyrood.'

All around them, demolition work was taking place. Queensberry House itself would be saved, but the more recent additions either side of it were going. Workmen crouched on roofs, removing slates, tying them into bundles which were lowered by rope to waiting skips. There were enough broken slates underfoot to show that the process was imperfect. Rebus adjusted his hard hat and tried to look interested in what Gilfillan was saying.

Everyone told him that this was a sign, that he was here because the chiefs at the Big House had plans for him. But Rebus knew better. He knew his boss, Detective Chief Superintendent 'Farmer' Watson, had put his name forward because he was hoping to keep Rebus out of trouble and out of his hair. It was as simple as that. And if – *if* – Rebus accepted without complaining and saw the assignment through, then maybe – *maybe* – the Farmer would receive a chastened Rebus back into the fold.

Four o'clock on a December afternoon in Edinburgh;

John Rebus with his hands in his raincoat pockets, water seeping up through the leather soles of his shoes. Gilfillan was wearing green wellies. Rebus noticed that DI Derek Linford was wearing an almost identical pair. He'd probably phoned beforehand, checked with the archaeologist what the season's fashion was. Linford was Fettes fast-stream, headed for big things at Lothian and Borders Police HQ. Late twenties, practically deskbound, and glowing from a love of the job. Already there were CID officers – mostly older than him – who were saying it didn't do to get on the wrong side of Derek Linford. Maybe he'd have a long memory; maybe one day he'd be looking down on them all from Room 279 in the Big House.

The Big House: Police HQ on Fettes Avenue; 279: the Chief Constable's office.

Linford had his notebook out, pen clenched between his teeth. He was listening to the lecture. He was *listening*.

'Forty noblemen, seven judges, generals, doctors, bankers . . .' Gilfillan was letting his tour group know how important Canongate had been at one time in the city's history. In doing so, he was pointing towards the near future. The brewery next door to Queensberry House was due for demolition the following spring. The parliament building itself would be built on the cleared site, directly across the road from Holyrood House, the Queen's Edinburgh residence. On the other side of Holyrood Road, facing Queensberry House, work was progressing on Dynamic Earth, a natural history theme park. Next to it, a new HQ for the city's daily newspaper was at present a giant monkey-puzzle of steel girders. And across the road from that, another site was being cleared in preparation for the construction of a hotel and 'prestige apartment block'. Rebus was standing in the midst of one of the biggest building sites in Edinburgh's history.

'You'll probably all know Queensberry House as a hospital,' Gilfillan was saying. Derek Linford was nodding, but then he nodded agreement with almost everything the

archaeologist said. 'Where we're standing now was used for car parking.' Rebus looked around at the mud-coloured lorries, each one bearing the simple word DEMOLITION. 'But before it was a hospital it was used as a barracks. This area was the parade ground. We dug down and found evidence of a formal sunken garden. It was probably filled in to make the parade ground.'

In what light was left, Rebus looked at Queensberry House. Its grey harled walls looked unloved. There was grass growing from its gutters. It was huge, yet he couldn't remember having seen it before, though he'd driven past it probably several hundred times in his life.

'My wife used to work here,' another of the group said, 'when it was a hospital.' The informant was Detective Sergeant Joseph Dickie, who was based at Gayfield Square. He'd successfully contrived to miss two out of the first four meetings of the PPLC – the Policing of Parliament Liaison Committee. By some arcane law of bureaucratic semantics, the PPLC was actually a *subcommittee*, one of many which had been set up to advise on security matters pertaining to the Scottish Parliament. There were eight members of the PPLC, including one Scottish Office official and a shadowy figure who claimed to be from Scotland Yard, though when Rebus had phoned the Met in London, he'd been unable to trace him. Rebus's bet was that the man – Alec Carmoodie – was MI5. Carmoodie wasn't here today, and neither was Peter Brent, the sharp-faced and sharper-suited Scottish Office representative. Brent, for his sins, sat on several of the subcommittees, and had begged off today's tour with the compelling excuse that he'd been through it twice before when accompanying visiting dignitaries.

Making up the party today were the three final members of the PPLC. DS Ellen Wylie was from C Division HQ in Torphichen Place. It didn't seem to bother her that she was the only woman on the team. She treated it like any other task, raising good points at the meetings and

asking questions to which no one seemed to have any answers. DC Grant Hood was from Rebus's own station, St Leonard's. Two of them, because St Leonard's was the closest station to the Holyrood site, and the parliament would be part of their beat. Though Rebus worked in the same office as Hood, he didn't know him well. They'd not often shared the same shift. But Rebus did know the last member of the PPLC, DI Bobby Hogan from D Division in Leith. At the first meeting, Hogan had pulled Rebus to one side.

'What the hell are we doing here?'

'I'm serving time,' Rebus had answered. 'What about you?'

Hogan was scoping out the room. 'Christ, man, look at them. We're Old Testament by comparison.'

Smiling now at the memory, Rebus caught Hogan's eye and winked. Hogan shook his head almost imperceptibly. Rebus knew what he was thinking: waste of time. Almost everything was a waste of time for Bobby Hogan.

'If you'll follow me,' Gilfillan was saying, 'we can take a look indoors.'

Which, to Rebus's mind, really was a waste of time. The committee having been set up, things had to be found for them to do. So here they were wandering through the dank interior of Queensberry House, their way lit irregularly by unsafe-looking strip lights and the torch carried by Gilfillan. As they climbed the stairwell – nobody wanted to use the lift – Rebus found himself paired with Joe Dickie, who asked a question he'd asked before.

'Put in your exes yet?' By which he meant the claim for expenses.

'No,' Rebus admitted.

'Sooner you do, sooner they'll cough up.'

Dickie seemed to spend half his time at their meetings totting up figures on his pad of paper. Rebus had never seen the man write down anything as mundane as a

phrase or sentence. Dickie was late thirties, big-framed with a head like an artillery shell stood on end. His black hair was cropped close to the skull and his eyes were as small and rounded as a china doll's. Rebus had tried the comparison out on Bobby Hogan, who'd commented that any doll resembling Joe Dickie would 'give a bairn nightmares'.

'I'm a grown-up,' Hogan had continued, 'and he still scares me.'

Climbing the stairs, Rebus smiled again. Yes, he was glad to have Bobby Hogan around.

'When people think of archaeology,' Gilfillan was saying, 'they almost always see it in terms of digging *down*, but one of our most exciting finds here was in the attic. A new roof was built over the original one, and there are traces of what looks like a tower. We'd have to climb a ladder to get to it, but if anyone's interested . . . ?'

'Thank you,' a voice said. Derek Linford: Rebus knew its nasal quality only too well by now.

'Creep,' another voice close to Rebus whispered. It was Bobby Hogan, bringing up the rear. A head turned: Ellen Wylie. She'd heard, and now gave what looked like the hint of a smile. Rebus looked to Hogan, who shrugged, letting him know he thought Wylie was all right.

'How will Queensberry House be linked to the parliament building? Will there be covered walkways?' The questions came from Linford again. He was out in front with Gilfillan. The pair of them had rounded a corner of the stairs, so that Rebus had to strain to hear Gilfillan's hesitant reply.

'I don't know.'

His tone said it all: he was an archaeologist, not an architect. He was here to investigate the site's past rather than its future. He wasn't sure himself why he was giving this tour, except that it had been asked of him. Hogan screwed up his face, letting everyone in the vicinity know his own feelings.

'When will the building be ready?' Grant Hood asked. An easy one: they'd all been briefed. Rebus saw what Hood was doing – trying to console Gilfillan by putting a question he could answer.

'Construction begins in the summer,' Gilfillan obliged. 'Everything should be up and running here by the autumn of 2001.' They were coming out on to a landing. Around them stood open doorways, through which could be glimpsed the old hospital wards. Walls had been gouged at, flooring removed; checks on the fabric of the building. Rebus stared out of a window. Most of the workers looked to be packing up: dangerously dark now to be scrabbling over roofs. There was a summer house down there. It was due to be demolished, too. And a tree, drooping forlornly, surrounded by rubble. It had been planted by the Queen. No way it could be moved or felled until she'd given her permission. According to Gilfillan, permission had now been granted; the tree would go. Maybe formal gardens would be recreated down there, or maybe it would be a staff car park. Nobody knew. 2001 seemed a ways off. Until this site was ready, the parliament would sit in the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall near the top of The Mound. The committee had already been on two tours of the Assembly Hall and its immediate vicinity. Office buildings were being turned over to the parliament, so that the MSPs could have somewhere to work. Bobby Hogan had asked at one meeting why they couldn't just wait for the Holyrood site to be ready before, in his words, 'setting up shop'. Peter Brent, the civil servant, had stared at him aghast.

'Because Scotland needs a parliament *now*.'

'Funny, we've done without for three hundred years ...'

Brent had been about to object, but Rebus had butted in. 'Bobby, at least they're not trying to rush the job.'

Hogan had smiled, knowing he was talking about the newly opened Museum of Scotland. The Queen had come

north for the official opening of the unfinished building. They'd had to hide the scaffolding and paint tins till she'd gone.

Gilfillan was standing beside a retractable ladder, pointing upwards towards a hatch in the ceiling.

'The original roof is just up there,' he said. Derek Linford already had both feet on the ladder's bottom rung. 'You don't need to go all the way,' Gilfillan continued as Linford climbed. 'If I shine the torch up . . .'

But Linford had disappeared into the roof space.

'Lock the hatch and let's make a run for it,' Bobby Hogan said, smiling so they'd assume he was joking.

Ellen Wylie hunched her shoulders. 'There's a real . . . atmosphere in here, isn't there?'

'My wife saw a ghost,' Joe Dickie said. 'Lots of people who worked here did. A woman, she was crying. Used to sit on the end of one of the beds.'

'Maybe she was a patient who died here,' Grant Hood offered.

Gilfillan turned towards them. 'I've heard that story, too. She was the mother of one of the servants. Her son was working here the night the Act of Union was signed. Poor chap got himself murdered.'

Linford called down that he thought he could see where the steps to the tower had been, but nobody was listening.

'Murdered?' Ellen Wylie said.

Gilfillan nodded. His torch threw weird shadows across the walls, illuminating the slow movements of cobwebs. Linford was trying to read some graffiti on the wall.

'There's a year written here . . . 1870, I think.'

'You know Queensberry was the architect of the Act of Union?' Gilfillan was saying. He could see that he had an audience now, for the first time since the tour had begun in the brewery car park next door. 'Back in 1707. This', he scratched a shoe over the bare floorboards, 'is where Great Britain was invented. And the night of the signing, one of the young servants was working in the kitchen.'

The Duke of Queensberry was Secretary of State. It was his job to lead the negotiations. But he had a son, James Douglas, Earl of Drumlanrig. The story goes, James was off his head . . .'

'What happened?'

Gilfillan looked up through the open hatch. 'All right up there?' he called.

'Fine. Anyone else want to take a look?'

They ignored him. Ellen Wylie repeated her question.

'He ran the servant through with a sword,' Gilfillan said, 'then roasted him in one of the kitchen fireplaces. James was sitting munching away when he was found.'

'Dear God,' Ellen Wylie said.

'You believe this?' Bobby Hogan slid his hands into his pockets.

Gilfillan shrugged. 'It's a matter of record.'

A blast of cold air seemed to rush at them from the roof space. Then a rubber-soled wellington appeared on the ladder, and Derek Linford began his slow, dusty descent. At the bottom, he removed the pen from between his teeth.

'Interesting up there,' he said. 'You really should try it. Could be your first and last chance.'

'Why's that then?' Bobby Hogan asked.

'I very much doubt we'll be letting tourists in here, Bobby,' Linford said. 'Imagine what *that* would do for security.'

Hogan stepped forward so swiftly that Linford flinched. But all Hogan did was lift a cobweb from the young man's shoulder.

'Can't have you heading back to the Big House in less than showroom condition, can we, son?' Hogan said. Linford ignored him, probably feeling that he could well afford to ignore relics like Bobby Hogan, just as Hogan knew he had nothing to fear from Linford: he'd be heading for retirement long before the younger man gained any position of real power and prominence.

'I can't see it as the powerhouse of government,' Ellen Wylie said, examining the water stains on the walls, the flaking plaster. 'Wouldn't they have been better off knocking it down and starting again?'

'It's a listed building,' Gilfillan censured her. Wylie just shrugged. Rebus knew that nevertheless she had accomplished her objective, by deflecting attention away from Linford and Hogan. Gilfillan was off again, delving into the history of the area: the series of wells which had been found beneath the brewery; the slaughterhouse which used to stand near by. As they headed back down the stairs, Hogan held back, tapping his watch, then cupping a hand to his mouth. Rebus nodded: good idea. A drink afterwards. Jenny Ha's was a short stroll away, or there was the Holyrood Tavern on the way back to St Leonard's. As if mind-reading, Gilfillan began talking about the Younger's Brewery.

'Covered twenty-seven acres at one time, produced a quarter of all the beer in Scotland. Mind you, there's been an abbey at Holyrood since early in the twelfth century. Chances are they weren't just drinking well-water.'

Through a landing window, Rebus could see that outside night had fallen prematurely. Scotland in winter: it was dark when you came to work, and dark when you went home again. Well, they'd had their little outing, gleaned nothing from it, and would now be released back to their various stations until the next meeting. It felt like a penance because Rebus's boss had planned it as such. Farmer Watson was on a committee himself: Strategies for Policing in the New Scotland. Everyone called it SPINS. Committee upon committee . . . it felt to Rebus as if they were building a paper tower, enough 'Policy Agendas', 'Reports' and 'Occasional Papers' to completely fill Queensberry House. And the more they talked, the more that got written, the further away from reality they seemed to move. Queensberry House was unreal to him, the idea of a parliament itself the dream of some mad god:

'But Edinburgh is a mad god's dream/Fitful and dark . . .'
He'd found the words at the opening to a book about the city. They were from a poem by Hugh MacDiarmid. The book itself had been part of his recent education, trying to understand this home of his.

He took off his hard hat, rubbed his fingers through his hair, wondering just how much protection the yellow plastic would give against a projectile falling several storeys. Gilfillan asked him to put the hat back on until they were back at the site office.

'You might not get into trouble,' the archaeologist said, 'but I would.'

Rebus put the helmet back on, while Hogan tutted and wagged a finger. They were back at ground level, in what Rebus guessed must have been the hospital's reception area. There wasn't much to it. Spools of electric cable sat near the door: the offices would need rewiring. They were going to close the Holyrood/St Mary's junction to facilitate underground cabling. Rebus, who used the route often, wasn't looking forward to the diversions. Too often these days the city seemed nothing but roadworks.

'Well,' Gilfillan was saying, opening his arms, 'that's about it. If there are any questions, I'll do what I can.'

Bobby Hogan coughed into the silence. Rebus saw it as a warning to Linford. When someone had come up from London to address the group on security issues in the Houses of Parliament, Linford had asked so many questions the poor sod had missed his train south. Hogan knew this because he'd been the one who'd driven the Londoner at breakneck speed back to Waverley Station, then had had to entertain him for the rest of the evening before depositing him on the overnight sleeper.

Linford consulted his notebook, six pairs of eyes drilling into him, fingers touching wristwatches.

'Well, in that case—' Gilfillan began.

'Hey! Mr Gilfillan! Are you up there?' The voice was

coming from below. Gilfillan walked over to a doorway, called down a flight of steps.

‘What is it, Marlene?’

‘Come take a look.’

Gilfillan turned to look at his reluctant group. ‘Shall we?’ He was already heading down. They couldn’t very well leave without him. It was stay here, with a bare lightbulb for company, or head down into the basement. Derek Linford led the way.

They came out into a narrow hallway, rooms off to both sides, and other rooms seeming to lead from those. Rebus thought he caught a glimpse of an electrical generator somewhere in the gloom. Voices up ahead and the shadowplay of torches. They walked out of the hallway and into a room lit by a single arc lamp. It was pointing towards a long wall, the bottom half of which had been lined with wooden tongue-and-groove painted the selfsame institutional cream as the plaster walls. Floorboards had been ripped up so that for the most part they were walking on the exposed joists, beneath which sat bare earth. The whole room smelt of damp and mould. Gilfillan and the other archaeologist, the one he’d called Marlene, were crouched in front of this wall, examining the stonework beneath the wood panelling. Two long curves of hewn stone, forming what seemed to Rebus like railway arches in miniature. Gilfillan turned round, looking excited for the first time that day.

‘Fireplaces,’ he said. ‘Two of them. This must have been the kitchen.’ He stood up, taking a couple of paces back. ‘The floor level’s been raised at some point. We’re only seeing the top half of them.’ He half-turned towards the group, reluctant to take his eyes off the discovery. ‘Wonder which one the servant was roasted in . . .’

One of the fireplaces was open, the other closed off by a couple of sections of brown corroding metal.

‘What an extraordinary find,’ Gilfillan said, beaming at his young co-worker. She grinned back at him. It was nice

to see people so happy in their work. Digging up the past, uncovering secrets . . . it struck Rebus that they weren't so unlike detectives.

'Any chance of rustling us up a meal then?' Bobby Hogan said, producing a snort of laughter from Ellen Wylie. But Gilfillan wasn't paying any heed. He was standing by the closed fireplace, prying with his fingertips at the space between stonework and metal. The sheet came away easily, Marlene helping him to lift it off and place it carefully on the floor.

'Wonder when they blocked it off?' Grant Hood asked.

Hogan tapped the metal sheet. 'Doesn't look exactly prehistoric.' Gilfillan and Marlene had lifted away the second sheet. Now everyone was staring at the revealed fireplace. Gilfillan thrust his torch towards it, though the arc lamp gave light enough.

There could be no mistaking the desiccated corpse for anything other than what it was.

Siobhan Clarke tugged at the hem of her black dress. Two men, patrolling the perimeter of the dance floor, stopped to watch. She tried them with a glare, but they'd returned to some conversation they were having, half-cupping their free hands to their mouths in an attempt to be heard. Then nods, sips from their pint glasses, and they were moving away, eyes on the other booths. Clarke turned to her companion, who shook her head, indicating that she hadn't known the men. Their booth was a large semi-circle, fourteen of them squeezed in around the table. Eight women, six men. Some of the men wore suits, others wore denim jackets but dress shirts. 'No denims. No trainers' was what it said on the sign outside, but the dress code wasn't exactly being enforced. There were too many people in the club. Clarke wondered if it constituted a fire hazard. She turned to her companion.

'Is it always this busy?'

Sandra Carnegie shrugged. 'Seems about normal,' she yelled. She was seated right next to Clarke, but even so was almost rendered unintelligible by the pounding music. Not for the first time, Clarke wondered how you were supposed to meet anyone in a place like this. The men at the table would make eye contact, nod towards the dance floor. If the woman agreed, everyone would have to move so the couple could get out. Then when they danced they seemed to move in their own worlds, barely making eye contact with their partner. It was much the same when a stranger approached the group: eye contact; dance floor nod; then the ritual of the dance

itself. Sometimes women danced with other women, shoulders drooped, eyes scanning the other faces. Sometimes a man could be seen dancing alone. Clarke had pointed out faces to Sandra Carnegie, who'd always studied them closely before shaking her head.

It was Singles Night at the Marina Club. Good name for a nightclub sited just the two and a half miles from the coastline. Not that 'Singles Night' meant much. In theory it meant that the music might hark back to the 1980s or '70s, catering for a slightly more mature clientele than some of the other clubs. For Clarke the word singles meant people in their thirties, some of them divorced. But there were lads in tonight who'd probably had to finish their homework before coming out.

Or was she just getting old?

It was her first time at a singles night. She'd tried rehearsing chat lines. If any sleazeball asked her how she liked her eggs in the morning, she was ready to tell him 'Unfertilised', but she'd no idea what she'd say if anyone asked what she did.

I'm a detective constable with Lothian and Borders Police wasn't the ideal opening gambit. She knew that from experience. Maybe that was why lately she'd all but given up trying. All of them around the table knew who she was, why she was here. None of the men had tried chatting her up. There had been words of consolation for Sandra Carnegie, words and hugs, and dark looks at the men in the company, who'd shrivelled visibly. They were *men*, and *men* were in it together, a conspiracy of bastards. It was a man who had raped Sandra Carnegie, who had turned her from a fun-loving single mum into a victim.

Clarke had persuaded Sandra to turn hunter – that was the way she'd phrased it.

'We've got to turn the tables on him, Sandra. That's my feeling anyway . . . before he does it again.'

Him . . . he . . . But there were two of them. One to carry

out the assault, the other to help hold the victim. When the rape had been reported in the newspapers, two more women had come forward with their stories. They'd been assaulted – sexually, physically – but not raped, not insofar as the law defined the crime. The women's stories had been almost identical: all three were members of singles clubs; all three had been at functions organised by their club; all three had been heading home alone.

One man on foot, following them, grabbing them, and another driving the van which pulled up. The assaults took place in the back of the van, its floor covered with material of some kind, maybe a tarpaulin. Kicked out of the van afterwards, usually on the outskirts of the city, with a final warning not to say anything, not to go to the police.

'You go to a singles club, you're asking for what you get.'

The rapist's final words, words which had set Siobhan Clarke thinking, seated in her cramped cupboard of an office; seconded to Sex Crimes. One thing she knew: the crimes were becoming more violent as the attacker grew in confidence. He'd progressed from assault to rape; who knew where he'd want to take it from there? One thing was obvious: he had something about singles clubs. Was he targeting them? Where did he get his information?

She wasn't working Sex Crimes any more, was back at St Leonard's and everyday CID, but she'd been given the chance to work on Sandra Carnegie, to persuade her back into the Marina. Siobhan's reasoning: how would he know his victims belonged to singles clubs unless he'd been in the nightclub? Members of the clubs themselves – there were three in the city – had been questioned, along with those who'd left or been kicked out.

Sandra was grey-faced and drinking Bacardi and Coke. She'd spent most of the evening so far staring at the table-top. Before coming to the Marina, the club had met in a pub. This was how it worked: sometimes they met in the

pub and moved on elsewhere; sometimes they stayed put; occasionally some function was arranged – a dance or theatre trip. It was just possible the rapist followed them from the pub, but more likely he started in the dance hall, circling the floor, face hidden behind his drink. Indistinguishable from the dozens of men doing the selfsame thing.

Clarke wondered if it was possible to identify a singles group by sight alone. It would be a fair-sized crowd, mixed sex. But that could make it an office party. There'd be no wedding rings, though . . . and while the age range would be broad, there'd be no one who could be mistaken for the office junior. Clarke had asked Sandra about her group.

'It just gives me some company. I work in an old people's home, don't get the chance to meet anyone my own age. Then there's David. If I want to go out, my mum has to babysit.' David being her eleven-year-old son. 'It's just for company . . . that's all.'

Another woman in the group had said much the same thing, adding that a lot of the men you met at singles groups were 'let's say less than perfect'. But the women were fine: it was that company thing again.

Sitting at the edge of the booth, Clarke had been approached twice so far, turning down both suitors. One of the women had leaned across the table.

'You're fresh blood!' she'd shouted. 'They can always smell that!' Then she'd leaned back and laughed, showing stained teeth and a tongue turned green from the cocktail she was drinking.

'Moira's just jealous,' Sandra had said. 'The only ones who ever ask her up have usually spent all day queuing to renew their bus pass.'

Moira couldn't have heard the remark, but she stared anyway, as if sensing some slight against her.

'I need to go to the toilet,' Sandra said now.

'I'll come with you.'

Sandra nodded her agreement. Clarke had promised:

you won't be out of my sight for a second. They lifted their bags from the floor and started pushing their way through the throng.

The loo wasn't much emptier, but at least it was cool, and the door helped muffle the sound system. Clarke felt a dullness in her ears, and her throat was raw from cigarette smoke and shouting. While Sandra queued for a cubicle, Clarke made for the washbasins. She examined herself in the mirror. She didn't normally wear make-up, and was surprised to see her face so changed. The eyeliner and mascara made her eyes look hard rather than alluring. She tugged at one of her shoulder straps. Now that she was standing up, the hem of her dress was at her knees. But when she sat, it threatened to ride up to her stomach. She'd worn it only twice before: a wedding and a dinner party. Couldn't recall the same problem. Was she getting fat in the bum, was that it? She half-turned, tried to see, then turned her attention to her hair. Short: she liked the cut. It made her face longer. A woman bumped against her in the rush for the hand-drier. Loud snorts from one of the cubicles: someone doing a line? Conversations in the toilet queue: off-colour remarks about tonight's talent, who had the nicest bum. Which was preferable: a bulging crotch or a bulging wallet? Sandra had disappeared into one of the cubicles. Clarke folded her arms and waited. Someone stood in front of her.

'Are you the condom attendant or what?'

Laughter from the queue. She saw that she was standing beside the wall dispenser, moved slightly so the woman could drop a couple of coins into the slot. Clarke focused on the woman's right hand. Liver spots, sagging skin. The left hand went to the tray: her wedding finger was still marked from where she'd removed her ring. It was probably in her bag. Her face was machine-tanned, hopeful but hardened by experience. She winked.

'You never know.'

Clarke forced a smile. Back at the station, she'd heard

Singles Night at the Marina called all sorts of things: Jurassic Park, Grab-a-Granny. The usual bloke jokes. She found it depressing, but couldn't have said why. She didn't frequent nightclubs, not when she could help it. Even when she'd been younger – school and college years – she'd avoided them. Too noisy, too much smoke and drink and stupidity. But it couldn't just be that. These days, she followed Hibernian football club, and the terraces were full of cigarette smoke and testosterone. But there was a difference between the crowd in a stadium and the crowd at a place like the Marina: not many sexual predators chose to do their hunting in the midst of a football crowd. She felt safe at Easter Road; even attended away matches when she could. Same seat at every home game . . . she knew the faces around her. And afterwards . . . afterwards she melted into the streets, part of the anonymous mass. Nobody'd ever tried to chat her up. That wasn't why they were there, and she knew it, hugging the knowledge to her on cold winter afternoons when the floodlights were needed from kick-off.

The cubicle bolt slid back and Sandra emerged.

'About bleedin' time,' someone called out. 'Thought you'd a fellah in there with you.'

'Only to wipe my backside on,' Sandra said. The voice – all tough, casual humour – was forced. Sandra started fixing her make-up at the mirror. She'd been crying. There were fresh veins of red in the corners of her eyes.

'All right?' Clarke asked quietly.

'Could be worse, I suppose.' Sandra studied her reflection. 'I could always be pregnant, couldn't I?'

Her rapist had worn a condom, leaving no semen for the labs to analyse. They'd run checks on sex offenders, ruled out a slew of interviewees. Sandra had gone through the picture books, a gallery of misogyny. Just looking at their faces was enough to give some women nightmares. Bedraggled, vacuous features, dull eyes, weak jaws. Some victims who'd gone through the process . . . they'd had

unasked questions, questions Clarke thought she could phrase along the lines of: *Look at them, how could we let them do this to us? They're the ones who look weak.*

Yes, weak at the moment of photographing, weak with shame or fatigue or the pretence of submission. But strong at the necessary moment, the crackling moment of hate. The thing was, they worked alone, most of them. The second man, the accomplice . . . Siobhan was curious about him. What did he get out of it?

'Seen anyone you fancy?' Sandra was asking now. Her lipstick trembled slightly as she applied it.

'No.'

'Got someone at home?'

'You know I haven't.'

Sandra was still watching her in the mirror. 'I only know what you've told me.'

'I told you the truth.'

Long conversations, Clarke setting aside the rule book and opening herself to Sandra, answering her questions, stripping away her police self to reveal the person beneath. It had begun as a trick, a ploy to win Sandra over to the scheme. But it had evolved into something more, something real. Clarke had said more than she'd needed to, much more. And now it seemed Sandra hadn't been convinced. Was it that she didn't trust the detective, or was it that Clarke had become part of the problem, just someone else Sandra could never wholly trust? After all, they hadn't known one another until the rape; would never have met if it hadn't happened. Clarke was here at the Marina, looking like Sandra's friend, but that was another trick. They weren't friends; probably would never be friends. A vicious assault had brought them together. In Sandra's eyes, Clarke would always remind her of that night, a night she wanted to forget.

'How long do we have to stay?' she was asking now.

'That's up to you. We can leave any time you like.'

'But if we do, we might miss him.'