NEIL LANCASTER

THE NIGHT WATCH



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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This book is dedicated to my wonderful sisters, Judith and Helen
We did OK, right?

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SCOTT PATERSON YAWNED as he left the dark streets of Edinburgh and drove towards the leafier suburb of Ravelston. It was pitch black, dry and cloudy, and the city was deserted this early in the morning.

His head felt heavy after spending the evening with some pals in a nice pub in the centre of town. He'd drunk some champagne, smoked a joint, and snorted a line of Charlie, so whilst he probably shouldn't have been driving, he was hardly drunk. He was, however, knackered after a whirlwind of emotions and celebrations. A few days ago, he'd been given a 'not proven' verdict at the High Court. He'd gone from facing a life sentence in Saughton Jail to freedom, and it was all a little hard to take in. He settled with pleasure into the soft leather seat of the BMW X5, and yawned again. Time to go home and continue getting reacquainted with the wife.

His phone buzzed on the seat next to him. He picked it up and looked at the screen, his eyes widening as he saw the name of the caller. Jackie McLennan. *The* Jackie McLennan. A man to be feared and revered in equal measure.

'Jackie, my man,' he said.

'Scotty, I just heard. You're out of Saughton and dinnae tell me, eh?' a rough Edinburgh accent barked in his ear.

Jackie was a serious face from the Edinburgh underworld with fingers in all sorts of pies. Scott hadn't seen him for a while, but then he hadn't seen anyone after almost a year on remand in Saughton Jail, awaiting trial for a rather nasty murder.

'Ach, you know. Been busy, catching up with my lady and my boys.'

'Aye, I guess. So, a not proven then. You jammy bastard, how'd you pull that off, eh?'

'Innocent as a wee lamb. The cop in charge got fucked by my lawyer, and the rest is history. What a shame, eh?' he guffawed.

'Fucking Teflon-boy, you are. Rumours were, you were bang-to-rights for a life stretch.'

Paterson opened his mouth to retort, but paused, distracted by movement in his rear-view mirror. A big, dark car suddenly pulled out of a side street. It was accelerating hard to catch up with him. Within seconds, it closed the distance until it was only a few feet from his bumper. Its bright halogen headlamps pierced the darkness, flooding his car with blinding, white light. Scott was a man of the world, and a car that close, with its lights on full beam, meant only one thing.

Trouble.

Either a cop car, or worse, a rival gang. The cops didn't bother him too much. He had a gram of coke in his pocket, and a small knife in the door of the car, but he could either ditch those before the cops pulled him, or just brazen it out. Worst case, if it was a lone cop, he would intimidate the life out of the bastard. Scott was used to doing that. At well over

six feet tall and close to eighteen stone of solid muscle, it wasn't hard. A tooled-up rival gang was a different matter altogether. He'd made plenty of enemies in his years as a gang enforcer for hire, and he was always ready for trouble. His hand gripped the phone, his eyes dropped to the door pocket where he was reassured to see the glint of the lock-knife.

His jaw set tight, and he growled softly, under his breath. No one fucked with Scott Paterson. Not the cops, and certainly not some wee gadgies wanting to make a name for themselves.

'I'm gonna have to go, Jackie. I've got company.'

'You okay?'

'Aye, someone on my tail. I'll call you later.' He hung up without waiting for a reply, hoping Jackie wouldn't be offended.

Then it happened. He watched in the rear-view mirror as an arm came out of the pursuing car's window. It clamped an oscillating blue light on the roof.

Fuck. Cops. Even worse, not regular cops, but a specialist unit by the look of the car, a decent-sized SUV with a covert light. They probably had him under surveillance, but he was sure he hadn't seen anyone. Only been out a few days and the bastards were already trying to fuck him over. Anger flared in his chest like sudden indigestion.

Paterson floored the powerful BMW and roared off, gathering speed along the long, straight road. The cop car accelerated, too, but Scott was making good ground. Seeing the junction ahead he swiftly turned right onto Strachan Road, heading towards Ravelston. He mashed his foot to the floor again. The BMW screamed as it sped along, tyres protesting. Soon the streetlights ended, and he found himself on

Ravelston Dyke Road. It was a dark and lonely stretch, lined with woodland on either side. The cop car briefly disappeared, so he quickly lowered the passenger window. Reaching into the door pocket, he tossed the lock-knife out over the low wall and into the woodland, closely followed by the small wrap of cocaine. He checked his rear-view mirror, to see the pursuing cop car screech back into view in hot pursuit, blue lights strobing and flickering through the surrounding trees.

He smiled to himself, his confidence rising now the contraband was gone, and he was certain they couldn't have seen him ditch it. If they were CID officers, they'd never have a breath machine with them and they'd certainly never have a field drug test kit. If he made enough of a fuss, they'd probably leave him alone. Police manpower in this bit of Edinburgh was shite, and they'd have no desire to wait for ages with an angry Scott Paterson. They were almost universally fucking cowards.

As quickly as he'd accelerated to get away from the pursuing police car, he stamped on the brakes and pulled to the side of the road, just past the entrance of the empty car park of Ravelston Golf Course. He sighed, totally relaxed now. They had nothing on him at all, he chuckled to himself, his eyes glued to the rear-view mirror.

The cop car stopped close behind him, almost touching his rear bumper, headlights on full beam, the pulsing blue light blinding him.

'Jesus suffering fuck,' he said to himself, flipping the mirror up to avert the beams of light. Turning to the wing mirror, he saw the cop car door open, and a shadowy form step out. Through the glare he could just see the cop's hi-viz ballistic

vest as it began to move towards him. Cheeky bastard, he thought. He was going to make his life a misery.

He'd only seen one person get out of the car. Whoever it was had made a big mistake.

Paterson decided that he was going to stay put. The fucker could come to him. He turned the music up and began to scroll through Facebook on his phone. The photos from his celebration a few days ago were there, and he grinned at the pissed carnage that had ensued.

A full minute had passed before he looked up again. The lights were still burning into the back of his car, but there was no sight of the cop. He killed the music and squinted, trying to see what the hell the pig was playing at. Was he trying to freak him out?

He looked down at his phone again, but he couldn't concentrate. Something tickled at his subconscious. He'd been stopped by cops a million times, and they always approached the car. They were usually all over him like a cheap suit. Suddenly, the cop car's headlamps and blue flashing light died, and the BMW was plunged into darkness.

'What the fuck?' he murmured, wishing that he hadn't tossed his blade.

He looked at the car behind him. It was quiet and inert in the gloom, as shadowy and ominous as the night itself. He leaned out of his open window and strained to hear, but his engine was too loud. He pressed the ignition button, and the BMW fell silent. Everything was suddenly shrouded in darkness. The only sound was the engine ticking as it cooled, and the soft breeze whispering through the trees. The silence was almost physical in its intensity. He flinched at a rustling noise from

the edge of the woods beside his car. He swivelled his head towards it, his eyes wide, but could see nothing through the deep, impenetrable blackness.

'Fuck this for a game of soldiers,' he said, opening the door and stepping out, pulling himself up to his full height, muscles tensed, massive shoulders squared. 'What the fuck is going on?' he bellowed towards the car.

Nothing. He felt a prickle along his spine as he waited. There were no other cars, no one else on the street. At that moment, the full moon broke through fast-moving clouds and a shaft of light hit the car, momentarily bathing him in a pale glow. Long shadows crept across the road and then vanished into the trees as the moon disappeared.

'I'll have my fucking lawyer on you bastards,' he shouted, his voice loud, but without the furious anger of before. He walked up to the silent cop car that was black enough to melt into the night. There was no sign of a blue light on the roof, and nothing on the dash. What was the stupid bastard up to? Despite the cool autumnal air, a bead of sweat ran down his spine. His heart thudded. He swallowed and turned towards his car.

As he strode back, he glanced around once more. Again, nothing. He tried to stay calm as he peered through the still-open door of his vehicle. The interior light was on, illuminating everything in a soft glow. It would be fine. He would just drive home and forget this ever happened. But he couldn't escape the feeling that he was missing something.

Then he saw it.

His car key had gone. It was no longer in the slot next to the steering wheel.

Paterson groped around in the footwell, hoping it had fallen onto the floor, but after a moment, he stopped. He stood up, blinked, balled his hands into tight fists. His nails dug into his palms as he took a ragged breath and his insides turned to ice.

'Where the fuck are you?' he yelled, but he sounded scared. His words were quickly swallowed up by the surrounding trees and the deep, velvety night.

There was a faint cackle of laughter behind him. The snap of a twig under a boot. Paterson froze. He turned slowly, looking into the undergrowth for the source of the noise. Something moved, came out of the dense trees, a slow-moving shadow, only just visible. He gasped, sucked in a lungful of air.

The shape approached, one arm outstretched, clutching something.

Scott Paterson cried out in terror and turned to sprint into the darkness.

He ran for his life.