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Fleshmarket Close

Written by Ian Rankin

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DAY ONE

Monday

'I'm not supposed to be here,' Detective Inspector John Rebus said. Not that anyone was listening.

Knoxland was a housing scheme on the western edge of Edinburgh, off Rebus's patch. He was there because the West End guys were short-handed. He was also there because his own bosses couldn't think what to do with him. It was a rainy Monday afternoon, and nothing about the day so far boded anything but ill for the rest of the working week.

Rebus's old police station, his happy hunting ground these past eight or so years, had seen itself reorganised. As a result, it no longer boasted a CID office, meaning Rebus and his fellow detectives had been cast adrift, shipped out to other stations. He'd ended up at Gayfield Square, just off Leith Walk: a cushy number, according to some. Gayfield Square was on the periphery of the elegant New Town, behind whose eighteenth- and nineteenth-century façades anything could be happening without those outside being any the wiser. It certainly felt a long way from Knoxland, further than the three factual miles. It was another culture, another country.

Knoxland had been built in the 1960s, apparently from papier mâché and balsa wood. Walls so thin you could hear the neighbours cutting their toenails and smell their dinner on the stove. Patches of damp bloomed on its grey concrete walls. Graffiti had turned the place into 'Hard Knox'. Other embellishments warned the 'Pakis' to 'Get Out', while a scrawl that was probably only an hour or so old bore the legend 'One Less'.

What shops there were had resorted to metal grilles on windows and doors, not even bothering to remove them during opening hours. The place itself was contained, hemmed in by dual carriageways to north and west. The bright-eyed developers had scooped out subways beneath the roads. Probably in their original drawings, these had been clean, well-lit spaces where neighbours would stop to chat about the weather and the new curtains in the window of number 42. In reality, they'd become no-go areas for everyone but the foolhardy and suicidal, even in daytime. Rebus was forever seeing reports of bag-snatchings and muggings.

It was probably those same bright-eyed developers who'd had the idea of naming the estate's various high-rise blocks after Scottish writers, and appending each with the word 'House', serving merely to rub in that these were nothing like real houses.

Barrie House.

Stevenson House.

Scott House.

Burns House.

Reaching skywards with all the subtlety of single-digit salutes.

He looked around for somewhere to deposit his half-empty coffee cup. He'd stopped at a baker's on Gorgie Road, knowing that the further from the city centre he drove, the less likely he would be to find anything remotely drinkable. Not a good choice: the coffee had been scalding at first, quickly turning tepid, which only served to highlight its lack of anything resembling flavour. There were no bins nearby; no bins at all, in fact. The pavements and grass verges, however, were doing their best to oblige, so Rebus added his litter to the mosaic, then straightened up and pushed his hands deep into his coat pockets. He could see his breath in the air.

'Papers are going to have a field day with this,' someone was muttering. There were a dozen figures shuffling

around in the covered walkway between two of the high-rise blocks. The place smelled faintly of urine, human or otherwise. Plenty of dogs in the vicinity, one or two even wearing collars. They would come sniffing at the entrance to the walkway, until chased off by one of the uniforms. Crime-scene tape now blocked both ends of the passage. Kids on bikes were craning their necks for a look. Police photographers were gathering evidence, vying for space with the forensic team. They were dressed in white overalls, heads covered. An anonymous grey van was parked alongside the police cars on the muddy play area outside. Its driver had complained to Rebus that some kids had demanded money from him to keep an eye on it.

‘Bloody sharks.’

Soon, this driver would take the body to the mortuary, where the post-mortem examination would take place. But already they knew they were dealing with homicide. Multiple stab wounds, including one to the throat. The trail of blood showed that the victim had been attacked ten or twelve feet further into the passage. He’d probably tried to get away, crawling towards the light, his attacker making more lunges as he faltered and fell.

‘Nothing in the pockets except some loose change,’ another detective was saying. ‘Let’s hope someone knows who he is . . .’

Rebus didn’t know who he was, but he knew what he was: he was a case, a statistic. More than that, he was a story, and even now the city’s journalists would be scenting it, for all the world like a pack sensing its quarry. Knoxland was not a popular estate. It tended to attract only the desperate and those with no choice in the matter. In the past, it had been used as a dumping ground for tenants the council found hard to house elsewhere: addicts and the unhinged. More recently, immigrants had been catapulted into its dankest, least welcoming corners. Asylum-seekers, refugees. People nobody really wanted to think about or have to deal with. Looking around, Rebus realised that the

poor bastards must be left feeling like mice in a maze. The difference being that in laboratories, there were few predators, while out here in the real world, they were everywhere.

They carried knives. They roamed at will. They ran the streets.

And now they had killed.

Another car drew up, a figure emerging from it. Rebus knew the face: Steve Holly, local hack for a Glasgow tabloid. Overweight and bustling, hair gelled into spikes. Before locking his car, Holly tucked his laptop under his arm, ready to bring it with him. Street-savvy, that was Steve Holly. He nodded at Rebus.

‘Got anything for me?’

Rebus shook his head, and Holly started looking around for other more likely sources. ‘Heard you’d been kicked out of St Leonard’s,’ he said, as if making conversation, eyes everywhere but on Rebus. ‘Don’t tell me they’ve dumped you out here?’

Rebus knew better than to rise to it, but Holly was beginning to enjoy himself. ‘Dumping ground just about sums this place up. School of hard knocks, eh?’ Holly started to light a cigarette, and Rebus knew he was thinking of the story he’d be writing later on: dreaming up punning sentences and scraps of twopenny philosophy.

‘Asian bloke, I heard,’ the journalist said at last, blowing smoke and offering the packet to Rebus.

‘We don’t know yet,’ Rebus admitted: his words the price of a cigarette. Holly lit it for him. ‘Tan-skinned . . . could be from anywhere.’

‘Anywhere except Scotland,’ Holly said with a smile. ‘Race crime though, got to be. Only a matter of time before we had one.’ Rebus knew why he stressed the ‘we’: he meant Edinburgh. Glasgow had had at least one race murder, an asylum-seeker trying to live his life on one of that city’s thick-skinned estates. Stabbed to death, just like the victim in front of them here, who, searched and

studied and photographed, was now being placed in a body-bag. There was silence during the procedure: a momentary mark of respect by professionals who would thereafter get on with the job of finding the killer. The bag was lifted on to a trolley, then wheeled beneath the cordon and past Rebus and Holly.

‘You in charge?’ Holly asked quietly. Rebus shook his head again, watching the body being loaded into the van. ‘Give me a clue then – who is it I should be speaking to?’

‘I shouldn’t even be here,’ Rebus said, turning away to make for the relative safety of his car.

I’m one of the lucky ones, Detective Sergeant Siobhan Clarke was thinking to herself, by which she meant that she at least had been given a desk of her own. John Rebus – senior in rank to her – hadn’t been so fortunate. Not that fortune, good or bad, had had anything to do with it. She knew Rebus saw it as a sign from on high: we’ve no place for you; time you thought of chucking it in. He’d be on the full police pension by now – officers younger than him, with fewer years on the force, were throwing in their cards and readying to cash their chips. He’d known exactly the message the bosses had wanted him to take. So had Siobhan, who’d offered him her own desk. He’d refused, of course, said he was happy to share whatever space was available, which came to mean a table by the photocopier, where mugs, coffee and sugar were kept. The kettle was on the adjacent windowledge. There was a box of copier paper under the table, and a broken-backed chair which creaked in complaint when sat upon. No telephone, not even a wall-socket for one. No computer.

‘Temporary, of course,’ Detective Chief Inspector James Macrae had explained. ‘Not easy, trying to make space for new bodies . . .’

To which Rebus had responded with a smile and a shrug, Siobhan realising that he daren’t speak: Rebus’s own particular form of anger management. Bottle it all up for

later. The same issues of space explained why her desk was in with the detective constables. There was a separate office for the detective sergeants, who shared with the clerical assistant, but no room there for Siobhan or Rebus. The Detective Inspector, meantime, had a small office of his own, between the two. Ah, there was the rub: Gayfield already had a DI; had no need of another. His name was Derek Starr, and he was tall, blond and good-looking. Problem was, he knew it. One lunchtime, he'd taken Siobhan for a meal at his club. It was called The Hallion and was a five-minute walk away. She hadn't dared ask how much it cost to join. Turned out he'd taken Rebus there, too.

'Because he can,' had been Rebus's summing up. Starr was on the way up, and wanted both new arrivals to know it.

Her own desk was fine. She did have a computer, which Rebus was welcome to use whenever he liked. And she had a phone. Across the aisle from her sat Detective Constable Phyllida Hawes. They'd worked together on a couple of cases, even though they'd been in different divisions. Siobhan was ten years Hawes's junior, but senior to her in rank. So far, this hadn't seemed an issue, and Siobhan was hoping it would stay that way. There was another DC in the room. His name was Colin Tibbet: mid-twenties, Siobhan reckoned, which made him a few years younger than her. Nice smile which often showed a row of smallish, rounded teeth. Hawes had already accused her of fancying him, couching it in jokey terms, but only just.

'I'm not in the baby-snatching business,' Siobhan had responded.

'So you like the more mature man?' Hawes had teased, glancing in the direction of the photocopier.

'Don't be daft,' Siobhan had said, knowing she was meaning Rebus. At the end of a case a few months back, Siobhan had found herself in Rebus's arms, being kissed by him. Nobody else knew, and it had never been discussed

between them. Yet it hung over them whenever they were alone together. Well . . . hung over *her* anyway; you could never tell with John Rebus.

Phyllida Hawes was walking to the photocopier now, asking where DI Rebus had disappeared to.

‘Got a call,’ Siobhan answered. It was as much as she knew, but the look Hawes gave indicated that she thought Siobhan was holding back. Tibbet cleared his throat.

‘There’s a body been found in Knoxland. It’s just come up on the computer.’ He tapped his screen as if to confirm this. ‘Here’s hoping it’s not a turf war.’

Siobhan nodded slowly. Less than a year back, a drugs gang had tried muscling in on the estate, leading to a series of stabbings, abductions and reprisals. The incomers had been from Northern Ireland, rumours of paramilitary connections. Most of them were in jail now.

‘Not our problem, is it?’ Hawes was saying. ‘One of the few things we’ve got going for us here . . . no schemes like Knoxland in the vicinity.’

Which was true enough. Gayfield Square was mostly a city centre operation: shoplifters and troublemakers on Princes Street; Saturday-night drunks; break-ins in the New Town.

‘Bit like a holiday for you, eh, Siobhan?’ Hawes added with a grin.

‘St Leonard’s had its moments,’ Siobhan was forced to agree. Back when the move was announced, word was she’d end up at HQ. She didn’t know how that rumour had started, but after a week or so it had begun to feel real. But then Detective Chief Superintendent Gill Templer had asked to see her, and suddenly she was going to Gayfield Square. She’d tried not to feel it as a blow, but that was what it had been. Templer herself, on the other hand, *was* bound for HQ. Others were dispersed as far afield as Balerno and East Lothian, a few opting for retirement. Only Siobhan and Rebus would be moving to Gayfield Square.

‘And just when we were getting the hang of the job,’ Rebus had complained, emptying the contents of his desk drawers into a large cardboard box. ‘Still, look on the bright side: longer lies for you in the morning.’

True, her flat was five minutes’ walk away. No more rush-hour drives through the centre of town. It was one of the few bonuses she could think of . . . maybe even the only one. They’d been a team at St Leonard’s, and the building had been in much better shape than the current drab edifice. The CID room had been larger and brighter, and here there was a . . . She breathed in deeply through her nostrils. Well, a *smell*. She couldn’t quite place it. It wasn’t body odour or the packet of cheese and pickle sandwiches Tibbet brought to work with him each day. It seemed to be coming from the building itself. One morning, alone in the room, she’d even placed her nose to the walls and floor, but there seemed no specific source for the smell. There were even times when it vanished altogether, only to reappear by degrees. The radiators? The insulation? She’d given up trying to explain it, and hadn’t said anything to anyone, not even Rebus.

Her phone rang, and she picked it up. ‘CID,’ she said into the mouthpiece.

‘Front desk here. Got a couple who’d like a word with DS Clarke.’

Siobhan frowned. ‘Asked for me specifically?’

‘That’s right.’

‘What are their names?’ She reached for a notepad and pen.

‘Mr and Mrs Jardine. They said to tell you they’re from Banehall.’

Siobhan stopped writing. She knew who they were. ‘Tell them I’ll be right there.’ She ended the call and lifted her jacket from the back of her chair.

‘Another deserter?’ Hawes said. ‘Anybody’d think our company wasn’t wanted, Col.’ She winked at Tibbet.

‘Visitors to see me,’ Siobhan explained.

‘Bring them in,’ Hawes invited, opening her arms wide. ‘More the merrier.’

‘I’ll see,’ Siobhan said. As she left the room, Hawes was stabbing the photocopier button again, Tibbet reading something on his computer screen, lips moving silently. No way she was bringing the Jardines in here. That background odour, and the mustiness, and the view over the car park . . . the Jardines deserved something better.

Me too, she couldn’t help thinking.

It was three years since she’d seen them. They hadn’t aged well. John Jardine’s hair was almost all gone, and what little was left was salt-and-pepper grey. His wife Alice had some grey in her hair, too. It was tied behind her, making her face seem large and stern. She’d put on some weight, and her clothes looked as if she’d chosen them at random: a long brown corduroy skirt with dark-blue tights and green shoes; checked blouse with a red checked coat thrown over the whole. John Jardine had made a bit more effort: suit and tie, and a shirt which had seen an ironing board in recent memory. He held out his hand for Siobhan to take.

‘Mr Jardine,’ she said. ‘Still got the cats, I see.’ She plucked a couple of hairs from his lapel.

He gave a short, nervous laugh, shuffling to one side so his wife could step in and shake hands with Siobhan. But instead of shaking, she squeezed Siobhan’s hand and held it quite still in her own. Her eyes were reddened, and Siobhan felt there was something the woman was hoping she’d read in them.

‘They tell us you’re a sergeant now,’ John Jardine was saying.

‘Detective sergeant, yes.’ Siobhan was still holding Alice Jardine’s stare.

‘Congratulations on that. We went to your old place first, and they told us to come here. Something about CID being reorganised . . . ?’ He was rubbing his hands together

as though washing them. Siobhan knew he was in his mid-forties, but he looked ten years older, as did his wife. Three years ago, Siobhan had suggested family therapy. If they'd taken her advice, it hadn't worked. They were still in shock, still dazed and confused and in mourning.

'We've lost one daughter,' Alice Jardine said quietly, finally releasing her grip. 'We don't want to lose another . . . that's why we need your help.'

Siobhan looked from wife to husband and back again. She was aware that the Desk Sergeant was watching; aware, too, of the peeling paint on the walls, the scored graffiti and Wanted posters.

'How about a coffee?' she said with a smile. 'There's a place just round the corner.'

So that was where they went. A café which doubled as a restaurant at lunchtime. A businessman was seated at one of the window tables, finishing a late meal while talking into his mobile phone and sifting through paperwork in his briefcase. Siobhan led the couple to a booth, not too near the wall-mounted speakers. It was instrumental music, background pap to fill the silence. Probably meant to be vaguely Italian. The waiter, however, was one hundred per cent local.

'Anythin' to eat wi' that?' His vowels were flat and nasal, and there was a venerable dollop of bolognese sauce on the belly of his short-sleeved white shirt. His arms were thick and showed fading tattoos of thistles and saltires.

'Just the coffees,' Siobhan said. 'Unless . . . ?' She looked at the couple seated opposite her, but they shook their heads. The waiter headed off in the direction of the espresso machine, only to be diverted by the businessman, who also wanted something and obviously merited a level of service which an order of three coffees couldn't hope to match. Well, it wasn't as if Siobhan was in any great rush to return to her desk, though she wasn't sure she was going to take much pleasure from the conversation ahead.

'So how are things with you?' she felt obliged to ask.

The couple looked at one another before replying. 'Difficult,' Mr Jardine said. 'Things have been . . . difficult.' 'Yes, I'm sure.'

Alice Jardine leaned forward across the table. 'It's not Tracy. I mean, we still miss her . . .' She lowered her eyes. 'Of course we do. But it's Ishbel we're worried about.'

'Worried sick,' her husband added.

'Because she's gone, you see. And we don't know why or where.' Mrs Jardine burst into tears. Siobhan looked towards the businessman, but he wasn't paying attention to anything other than his own existence. The waiter, however, had paused by the espresso machine. Siobhan glared at him, hoping he'd take the hint and hurry up with their drinks. John Jardine had an arm around his wife's shoulders, and it was this which took Siobhan back three years, to an almost identical scene: the terraced house in the West Lothian village of Banehall, and John Jardine comforting his wife as best he knew how. The house was neat and tidy, a place its owners could take pride in, having used the right-to-purchase scheme to buy it from the local council. Streets of near-identical houses all around, but you could tell the ones in private ownership: new doors and windows, tidied gardens with new fencing and wrought-iron gates. At one time, Banehall had thrived on coal-mining, but that industry was long gone, and with it much of the town's spirit. Driving down Main Street for the first time, Siobhan had been aware of boarded-up shops and For Sale signs; people moving slowly under the weight of carrier bags; kids hanging around the war memorial, aiming playful high kicks at each other.

John Jardine worked as a delivery driver; Alice was on the production line at an electronics factory on the outskirts of Livingston. Striving to do well for themselves and their two daughters. But one of those daughters had been attacked during a night out in Edinburgh. Her name was Tracy. She'd been drinking and dancing with a gang of friends. Towards the end of the evening, they'd piled into

taxis to go to some party. But Tracy had been a straggler, and the address of the party had slipped her mind during the wait for a cab. The battery on her mobile was flat, so she went back inside, asked one of the lads she'd been up for a dance with if he'd lend her his. He went outside with her, started walking with her, telling her the party wasn't that far.

Started kissing her; not taking no for an answer. Slapped her and punched her, dragged her into an alley and raped her.

All of this Siobhan had already known as she'd sat in the house in Banehall. She'd worked the case, spoken with the victim and the parents. The attacker hadn't been hard to find: he was from Banehall himself, lived only three or four roads away, the other side of Main Street. Tracy had known him at school. His defence was fairly typical: too much drink, couldn't remember . . . and she'd been willing enough anyway. Rape always made for a tough prosecution, but to Siobhan's relief, Donald Cruikshank, known to his friends as Donny, face permanently scarred by the raking of his victim's fingernails, had been found guilty and sentenced to five years.

Which should have been the end of Siobhan's involvement with the family, except that a few weeks after the trial had ended had come news of Tracy's suicide, her life ending at nineteen years of age. An overdose of pills, found in her bedroom by her sister Ishbel, four years younger than her.

Siobhan had visited the parents, all too aware that nothing she could say would change anything, but still feeling the need to say *something*. They had been failed, not so much by the system as by life itself. The one thing Siobhan hadn't done – the thing she'd had to grit her teeth to stop herself doing – was visit Cruikshank in jail. She'd wanted him to feel her anger. She remembered the way Tracy had given evidence in court, her voice fading away to nothing as the phrases stuttered out; not looking at

anyone; almost ashamed to be there. Unwilling to touch the bagged exhibits: her torn dress and underwear. Wiping silent tears away. The judge had been sympathetic, the defendant trying not to look shamefaced, playing the role of the real victim: wounded, a large muslin patch covering one cheek; shaking his head in disbelief, raising his eyes to heaven.

And afterwards, the verdict delivered, the jury had been allowed to hear of his previous convictions: two for assault, one for attempted rape. Donny Cruikshank was nineteen years old.

'Bastard's got his whole life ahead of him,' John Jardine had told Siobhan as they left the cemetery. Alice had both arms around her surviving daughter. Ishbel was crying into her mother's shoulder. Alice looking straight ahead, something dying behind her eyes . . .

The coffees came, jarring Siobhan back to the present. She waited until the waiter had gone, off to fetch the businessman's bill.

'So tell me what's happened,' she said.

John Jardine poured a sachet of sugar into his cup and started stirring. 'Ishbel left school last year. We wanted her to go to college, get some kind of qualification. But she had her heart set on hairdressing.'

'Of course, you need a qualification to do that, too,' his wife interrupted. 'She's going part-time to the college in Livingston.'

Siobhan just nodded.

'Well, she was until she disappeared,' John Jardine stated quietly.

'When was this?'

'A week ago today.'

'She just upped and went?'

'We thought she'd gone to work as usual – she's at the salon on Main Street. But they phoned to see if she was sick. Some of her clothes had gone, enough to fill a backpack. Money, cards, mobile . . .'

‘We’ve tried phoning it umpteen times,’ his wife added, ‘but it’s always switched off.’

‘Have you spoken to anyone apart from me?’ Siobhan asked, lifting her cup to her lips.

‘Everyone we could think of – her pals, old school-friends, the girls she worked with.’

‘College?’

Alice Jardine nodded. ‘They’ve not seen her either.’

‘We went to the police station in Livingston,’ John Jardine said. He was still stirring the contents of his cup, showed no inclination to drink it. ‘They said she’s eighteen, so she’s not breaking the law. Packed a bag, so it’s not like she was abducted.’

‘That’s true, I’m afraid.’ There was more Siobhan could have added: that she saw runaways all the time; that if she herself lived in Banehall, maybe she would run away, too . . . ‘There hadn’t been any fights at home?’

Mr Jardine shook his head. ‘She was saving for a flat . . . already making lists of the stuff she’d buy for it.’

‘Any boyfriends?’

‘There was one until a couple of months back. The split was . . .’ Mr Jardine couldn’t find the word he was looking for. ‘They were still friends.’

‘It was amicable?’ Siobhan suggested. He smiled and nodded: she’d found his word for him.

‘We just want to know what’s going on,’ Alice Jardine said.

‘I’m sure you do, and there are people who can help . . . agencies who look out for people like Ishbel who’ve left home for whatever reason.’ Siobhan realised that the words were coming too easily: she’d said them so many times to anxious parents. Alice was looking to her husband.

‘Tell her what Susie told you,’ she said.

He nodded, finally placing the spoon back on its saucer. ‘Susie works with Ishbel at the salon. She told me she’d

seen Ishbel getting into a flash car . . . she thought it might be a BMW or something.'

'When was this?'

'A couple of times . . . the car was always parked a bit further down the street. Older guy driving.' He paused. 'Well, my age at least.'

'Did Susie ask Ishbel who he was?'

He nodded. 'But Ishbel wouldn't say.'

'So maybe she's gone to stay with this friend of hers.' Siobhan had finished her coffee but didn't want another.

'But why not tell us?' Alice asked plaintively.

'I'm not sure I can help you answer that.'

'Susie mentioned something else,' John Jardine said, lowering his voice still further. 'She said this man . . . she told us he looked a bit shady.'

'Shady?'

'What she actually said was, he looked like a pimp.' He glanced up at Siobhan. 'You know, like off the films and TV: sunglasses and a leather jacket . . . flash car.'

'I'm not sure that gets us any further,' Siobhan said, immediately regretting the use of 'us', tying her to their cause.

'Ishbel's a real beauty,' Alice said. 'You know that yourself. Why would she just run off like that without telling us? Why did she keep this man a secret from us?' She shook her head slowly. 'No, there's got to be more to it.'

Silence fell on the table for a few moments. The businessman's phone was ringing again as the waiter held the door open for him. The waiter even gave a little bow: either the man was a regular, or a decent tip had changed hands. Now there were only three customers left in the place, not the most thrilling prospect.

'I can't see any way of helping you,' Siobhan told the Jardines. 'You know I would if I could . . .'

John Jardine had taken his wife's hand. 'You were very good to us, Siobhan. Sympathetic and all that. We

appreciated it at the time, and so did Ishbel . . . That's why we thought of you.' He fixed her with his milky eyes. 'We've already lost Tracy. Ishbel's all we've got left.'

'Look . . .' Siobhan took a deep breath. 'I can maybe put her name into circulation, see if she turns up anywhere.'

His face softened. 'That'd be great.'

"Great" is an exaggeration, but I'll do what I can.' She saw that Alice Jardine was about to reach out for her hand again, so started to rise from the table, checking her watch as if she had some pressing appointment awaiting her at the station. The waiter came over, John Jardine insisting on paying. As they finally made to leave, the waiter was nowhere to be seen. Siobhan pulled open the door.

'Sometimes people just need a bit of time to themselves. You're sure she hadn't been having any problems?'

Husband and wife looked at one another. It was Alice who spoke up. 'He's out, you know. Back in Banehall, bold as brass. Maybe that's got something to do with it.'

'Who?'

'Cruikshank. Three years, that's all he served. I saw him one day when I was at the shops. I had to go down a side street so I could throw up.'

'Did you speak to him?'

'I wouldn't even spit on him.'

Siobhan looked to John Jardine, but he was shaking his head.

'I'd kill him,' he said. 'If I ever met him, I'd have to kill him.'

'Careful who you say that to, Mr Jardine.' Siobhan thought for a moment. 'Ishbel knew this? Knew he was out, I mean?'

'Whole town knew. And you know what it's like: hairdressers are first with the gossip.'

Siobhan nodded slowly. 'Well . . . like I said, I'll make a few phone calls. A photo of Ishbel might help.'

Mrs Jardine dug in her handbag and brought out a folded sheet of paper. It was a picture blown up on to a

sheet of A4 paper, printed from a computer. Ishbel on a sofa, a drink in her hand, cheeks ruddy with alcohol.

‘That’s Susie from the salon next to her,’ Alice Jardine said. ‘John took it at a party we had three weeks ago. It was my birthday.’

Siobhan nodded. Ishbel had changed since she’d last seen her: allowed her hair to grow and dyed it blonde. More make-up, too, and a hardening around the eyes, despite the grin. The hint of a double chin developing. The hair was centre-parted. It took Siobhan a second to realise who she reminded her of. It was Tracy: the long blonde hair, that parting, the blue eyeliner.

She looked just like her dead sister.

‘Thanks,’ she said, placing the photo in her pocket.

Siobhan checked that they were still at the same telephone number. John Jardine nodded. ‘We moved one street away, but didn’t need to change numbers.’

Of course they’d moved. How could they have gone on living in that house, the house where Tracy had taken the overdose? Fifteen Ishbel had been when she’d found the lifeless body. The sister she’d doted on, idolised. Her role model.

‘I’ll be in touch then,’ Siobhan said, turning and walking away.