

Devine Intervention

by

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Chapter One

I felt the cold iron bars on my face as the tears ran down my face. I had run as far as I could away from the class bully. I pressed my head against the school perimeter railing and watched the blurred images of people passing by. I was surrounded by other pupils who sang: “Tubby flubby you’re just a big cry baby!”

Suddenly, one of the blurred images outside the school stopped, and said: “Listen son, I’ve seen you getting bullied before. Why don’t you go and stand up to him, he’s smaller than you.”

I blinked to clear the tears from my eyes and found I was looking at an old man who stared at me with understanding written across a wrinkled face. The intensity of his stare seemed to reach down into my subconscious and pull something up.

I pushed the bars away and turned around to face Gary Tosh, who was indeed smaller than me. I glared around at the circling pupils, which made them stop chanting. Then I strode toward Tosh with a new found bravado, but I didn’t know what I was going to do. I stared into his eyes and for a moment saw primal fear then I screamed as pain I had never felt before ran through my stomach: the bully had swiftly kicked me in the balls.

The chanting started again as I fell to the ground in a mass of tears and Tosh towered over me with an evil grin painted on his face. “Help me...anybody,” I pleaded. I looked over to the perimeter railing, but there was no one there. Suddenly a hand was thrust out to me and a voice said: “Give me your hand, and I will save you.”

My mobile ring tone brought me out of the reverie. I looked at my gloved hands covered in blood and below them the pleading face of Gary Tosh with the ducting tape I had stuck over his mouth. I wiped my hands and answered the mobile. “Yeah, Devine.”

“Sir, it’s DS White here, we’ve got some news on the Dewar case.”

I gazed in horror as blood dripped off the end of the phone, “Okay, I’ll see you at the station.”

All through the meeting at Police Scotland Headquarters in Dundee I listened to Derek White and Susan Moran talk about the new evidence they had found about some case, but my mind was watching Tosh make muffled pleas for his life after I had punched and kicked his useless body. His wrists and ankles were bound; there was to be no escape!

“What have I done to deserve this!” screamed the pathetic drug user through the tape.

He didn’t remember me! This made me angry, and I raised him up and punched him across the room. I then crouched down where he lay and looked into his drugged eyes and said: “Think playgrounds Gary, think a fat kid, think a kick in the balls.”

As I watched his eyes register something, I thought: am I locked in an endless karmic dance with this sad soul. Was this what both of us were born for?

“Sir?” Moran asked.

I regained the present, and said: “Yes, that’s fine, go ahead.”

I climbed the tenement stairs in Arbroath which I had climbed hours before. I pulled on a pair of shoe protectors then ducked under the police tape across the open door frame after announcing myself as DCI Devine and showing my warrant card to the young, local copper standing outside the apartment.

“Ah, sir,” said Derek White as he approached me.

“Jeez! What’s this Derek?” I asked looking in disbelief at the dead body of Gary Tosh.

There was a large pool of dark- red blood, which was seeping into the carpet under a long slash across the side of his neck.

“The victim’s name is Gary Tosh – a known drug user.”

“Wasn’t drugs that did this,” I said as I gently moved the head, looking at the slash. I then stood up and watched the people in white suits dust and analyse.

I looked at the television in the corner of the room as it hissed with static. *Someone must have slipped in here after I left*, I thought.

A green protective suit entered the room and nodded to me.

“James,” I said, acknowledging Doctor Cochrane the Pathologist, “another druggie,” I continued.

“Yes well, this one came into contact with a rather large knife!”

I walked over to the window and stared down at the flashing lights on the police vans. He had put up no resistance as I raised him off the sofa. The bully I feared when I was a kid had no great body strength due to a life of self-abuse. I had exacted my revenge and left him beaten but alive. He would never have been able to identify me. Could it have been another druggie that entered and slashed his throat? I asked myself.

“Time of death? I reckon about three AM.” Cochrane said.

“Okay, thanks James.”

I walked over to where DS White was crouched beside the body. “What do you reckon Derek?”

He stood up and sighed. “Could be a drug dealer sir, but I’ve never seen this before,” he said pointing at the rope binding the limbs.

“There’s some nasty buggers goin’ around. We’ve seen some bad things where these dealers are after their money. Who found the body?”

“A neighbour wondered why the front door was open.”

“Okay Derek, start shaking up the area and round up the local dealers. Get Susan down from Dundee to give you a hand.

I drove past where the primary school I went to used to be – now a supermarket car park ironically next to Arbroath Police Station. The streets were becoming slick with a drizzle which had drifted in off the North Sea. I decided to head back to Dundee as Metallica’s Enter Sandman filled the car.

I had a problem!

Chapter Two

My mobile rang as I was reading and listening to Classic FM. I looked at the time - it was one AM.

“Sir, its Derek here. There’s been a body found in Arbroath.”

“What? Another one!”

“This one’s swinging from a crossbar between goalposts in Victoria Park.”

“Yes, I know Victoria Park. I’m on my way.

As I sped down the dual carriageway between Dundee and Arbroath I thought: *God! What have I started?* I gazed at the red tail lights in front and remembered earlier that night: The figure of a man leaving the Arbroath Boys Club and walking toward my car. I reached into the glove department and grabbing a pair of gloves I pulled them on. I then leaned over and opened the passenger door as Jimmy Forbes looked in.

“Can I help you mate?” he asked.

I showed him my warrant card as I said: “Detective Chief Inspector Devine. I’d like a word with James Forbes.”

“What can I do for you?” He asked with a sigh.

“Get in.”

He looked around and sighed again then slid into the passenger’s seat, while I remembered the bastard threatening me as a young footballer that he was going to head-butt me if I tackled him.

“There’ve been reports of someone who fits your description following children around here.”

“Oh come on I’m clean, I haven’t done anything like that for years!”

I parked my car behind the Command Unit which sat at the edge of the grass. I pulled on shoe covers and walked across the wet turf toward a group of dark figures as the pale, autumnal moon hung in the sky. Torch beams were searching the darkness. Some white suits had their beams pinned on something hanging from the goalposts. I made out the familiar shape of Derek White and walked toward him.

“Derek. What’s this now? Not druggies this time. Disgruntled football managers perhaps!”

“Sir! Yeah, Arbroath’s becoming Midsomer I reckon!”

Derek and I often softened the discovery of such atrocities with a little humour – it was our way of dealing with the job. The other officers and scientists usually just shook their heads and either laughed or frowned.

As I gazed at the lifeless face of Forbes with his tongue hanging out of his twisted mouth my mind was doing somersaults. *How the hell could this have happened? I just beat him up and left him where he threatened me all these years ago: near the 18 yard box on the first pitch in Victoria Park.*

“He’s James Forbes and lives at 42 Seaton Road. A man walking his dog found him. The Pathologist has just arrived. We’ll get more information when they take him down.”

I turned and looked at the dark outline of Whiting Ness, the rock mass that ended the park and started the sandstone cliffs on their northward journey. I inhaled the sea air and wondered what exactly was going on. I wanted retribution, but not death for these guys! This was no murderous drug dealer.

On the way back home I wondered if I should carry on with my pre-retiral revenge spree as David Bowie’s ‘Aladdin Sane’ nursed my ear drums. Somebody was watching me. Whoever it was had the killer instinct and considerable strength. Stringing up that body would take some doing unless there was more than one.

I parked my BMW on the drive outside my bungalow and then entered the darkened, empty house. My wife, June, died a year ago, and now my leisure time was filled with thoughts of the past.

My mobile rang as I searched the fridge for a beer.

“Yeah, Devine”

“Sir its Derek. It seems as if Forbes was beaten and then hung.

“Okay, thanks Derek. Keep me informed.”

I pulled the ring on a can of export and sat down in the lounge and switched on the television then took a long slug from the can. I watched the screen but my mind was back outside the Boys Club.

“I’ll give you a lift home Jim,” I said as I turned on the ignition.

“It’s okay, I’ll walk”

“No, I insist,” I said as the car sped off.

I drove out the darkened road that led along the deserted Victoria Park to the cliffs.

“Okay stop the car, I want out!” Forbes shouted.

“All right Jim,” I said as I pulled into the side next to the sea.

I placed my hand on his seat belt before he released it and tightened it around his neck.

“Okay Jim do you remember playing here against the Boys Club in the seventies?”

“What? You’re crazy!”

I punched him in the face. “Crazy! Come on, don’t you remember threatening young players?”

He struggled and tried to release the seat belt catch. “I’ll report you to somebody!”

I pulled the belt tighter. “Who are you going to report me to Jim?”

He tried to punch me, but I caught his fist and bent his wrist.

The house phone rang as I watched some late night game show.

“Dad, I’m sorry to phone so late, but I knew you’d still be awake.” Rachel, my daughter, said.

“Hey Baby! What’s up?”

“I can’t stop thinking about mum, and I just wanted to see if you were okay.”

“Yeah I know. I’m okay I still drink myself to sleep, but I’m okay.”

“I remember the stories you used to read to me at night when I couldn’t sleep.”

“You’re not wanting me to dig out your old books are you?”

“No, I just wanted to hear your voice.”

“Anytime baby. How are Dave and Jamie?”

“They’re fine.”

“Okay, off to sleep with you.”

“Right, good night dad.”

“Night Rach.”

My mind flashed back to the car and Forbes. “You’re not going to tell anybody about this, because if you do I’ll put you inside for messing about with kids. D’you understand me you fucker!”

I released his fist and he just stared at me through the darkness. I then grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket and pulled him round to face me. “You bullies have no idea what you do to a young mind. A lifetime of shame; thinking all the time that you’re weak for just taking it, afraid to tell anyone in case they laugh, or worse, the bully finds out that you’ve told someone.”

“Oh come on!”

I couldn’t look at the bastard so I stared through the windscreen: stared into the mocking darkness. I then turned back and punched Forbes and then thumped his head off the glove department. He recoiled and then slumped forward and his head hung loosely over the seat belt. I then got out and walked around to the passenger’s door and opened it then released the seat belt catch. Forbes lunged forward and his head hit the glove department. I pulled the bastard out and closed the door with my foot. I dragged him across the grass and left him unconscious on the football pitch.

Chapter Three

The Whitehall Theatre lies in what I suppose you would call Dundee University land, not on the campus, but on the fringe in an area of old factory buildings and new concrete factory units.

I parked my car in the car park at the rear of the building. "Well, here we are," I said with no great enthusiasm.

"Oh come on you old grump," said Lesley, an acquaintance I had met when on a case involving an advertising company where she was a designer.

We were there to see John the Mystic a celebrated medium. Something Lesley liked and I despised due to a psychic wasting enormous amounts of time on a case where a child was missing after a murder.

We sat in the dark at the back of the lower level and watched the guy supposedly channel spirits and then give guidance to living relatives. Then, after pausing for a drink of water, he announced that there was a spirit of a well-built man, which had appeared in front of him – a man who had died of a heart attack. He then left the stage and ran up the side aisle toward us and I felt my heart rate increase.

"Oh no," I whispered to Lesley as the medium stood in front of us.

"The spirit wants to talk to you sir," said the man shaking my hand.

I was handed a microphone as the guy ran back to the stage.

"What's coming through is of fire and metal and a terrible thirst," the medium announced.

I thought of my father who had worked in a foundry in Arbroath. I didn't like to admit it, but my old man died of a heart attack.

"The name John's coming through and Margaret."

I was beginning to feel uncomfortable as these were my parents' names. Lesley took my hand and I felt better.

"The sea figures large here as I can see a harbour and boats - also cliffs. Does this mean anything to you?"

Arbroath, I thought; so I answered: "Yes."

The medium wiped the sweat from his brow and continued. "You must stop what you're doing son – these people were young when they did what they did. There's a bad one pushing you..."

He then sat down and asked the audience to give him a moment. Then, after a while he stood up and in a wavering voice said: "If the man would like a personal sitting after the show I have more information."

Then the curtains closed and the lights came up. Lesley looked at me and said: "Wow you must be glad we came now?"

"Let's go and get a cup of tea," I said rising out of my seat.

"Are you going to have a personal with him then?" Lesley asked as I handed her a polystyrene cup filled with milky tea.

"I don't know. I have to admit the details he gave seem to point toward my late father." I said as I wondered about how to get out of having to explain about what I was doing to people that I had to stop. The bell rang, and with relief I drank up and said: "Okay Lesley, let's get back."

After the show Lesley and I waited in the foyer where some tables surrounded by chairs had been set out. Another ten people were awaiting the appearance of John the Mystic. He finally showed up with a towel around his shoulders and a plastic water bottle and pointed to me.

"You first sir."

Lesley and I sat down at a table and he said "I don't wish to offend, but the information is for you only sir."

I looked at Lesley and said "You don't mind do you?" I asked with some relief.

"Of course not," she said rising up.

I took her hand and whispered "I'll tell you about it later."

“Okay, I’ll be straight with you sir,” said John the Mystic when we sat facing one another out of earshot of the others,

“Right you are,” I said warily.

“That was one of the strongest spirit channels I have felt. The spirit that wanted to talk to you wanted to give you a warning to, as I said on stage, stop whatever it is you are doing. I would strongly urge you to do what is asked. Apparently someone or something in the spirit world has a grievance toward you.

“Who could this be and can I be harmed.”

“There are many malevolent spirits my friend. You can be attacked, but I have now put a protective shield around you, but the best thing to do is heed what you’ve been told.

I dropped Lesley off and drove home with my mind in over-drive. I parked the car and entered the dark house and immediately switched on the lights. There was an envelope on the mat, which I thought was strange at that time of night. I picked it up apprehensively and walked into the lounge and sat in my swivel seat and switched the television on. The late news filled the screen as I opened the letter with a manically beating heart. It was from Rachel saying that she had called round and would call back again tomorrow. I sank back into my chair and laughed with relief.

The wind whipped around me as I clung onto the cliff. I looked down and watched as waves crashed into the rocks at the foot of the cliffs and receded in a white froth. My feet were starting to slip from the ledge they were pushing down on. I felt panic rise in my stomach and spread up to my head.

“Give me your hand,” said a voice from above. I looked up and saw a figure with wings silhouetted in the large moon. I loosened my grip, and a scream erupted in my mind: “For Christ’s sake - don’t!” A foot slipped free from the ledge and I tried to dig the other farther in. A gust of wind crashed into me and dislodged one of my hands and I gazed down in terror at the frothy hell below as I swung out.

“For pity’s sake take my hand, and I will save you,” said the figure.

My other foot slipped, and I grabbed the proffered hand.

I sat up and wiped the sweat from my forehead and stared into the darkness of my bedroom. I looked at the red digital figures of my alarm clock: it was 3:10 AM. Throwing off the duvet I jumped out of bed and made my way down to the kitchen with images of the winged figure from the nightmare flooding my mind. I opened the fridge and the bright light hurt my eyes. I grabbed a yoghurt drink and shut the door. Switching on the radio and putting on the lights I sat at the breakfast bar as late night jazz flooded the kitchen.

I used to have the same dream when I was a kid with always with the same result. I wondered if the medium show had brought it on.

Chapter Four

In 1973 I was walking down Arbroath High Street with two mates, Andy Matthews and Mike Smith. We were laughing about trying to date some girls we knew, who just weren't interested.

"Hey Mike, how did you get on with Jenny?" I asked as I heard footsteps running up behind us.

I turned and saw Johnny McKenzie and a mate of his approaching fast.

"Run – it's Mackenzie!" I shouted.

Andy and Mike shot off like hares. I was caught by a kick to the thigh which paralysed my leg. I was then pushed into a shop doorway. The two bullies then grabbed me and began a torrent of kicks and punches. I felt the first blows, but after that my body seemed to switch off. My mind rose up away from that horrible doorway, and I saw a winged figure descend toward me

"Give me your hand, and I will save you," said the dark figure.

I grasped it, and I found myself outside my parents' house with blood running down my face.

All this ran through my mind as I had the grey-haired Mackenzie pinned up against the door where he had attacked me. I had a knee stuck in his groin and a gloved hand around his throat.

"Don't make a sound," I said as I kicked open the door of the empty shop and we both stumbled in.

"What the fuck!" he screamed as I reasserted my hold on the bastard. I punched him across the jaw and felt joy run through me. *This pathetic creature used to terrorise teenage Arbroath*, I thought as I watched the blood run down his chin.

"Hey man, I've got a family," he hissed as I kicked the door shut with the heel of my boot.

"I remember you – you're that little poofter that used to hang around the teenage disco at the Community Centre in the old days," he went on.

An unfortunate choice of words as I pushed my knee further into his groin and head-butted him. I let him fall into the darkness as I pulled a rope from my jacket. I then grabbed his body and pushed him over on to his stomach and pulled his hands together and tied his wrists together I then wiped his forehead with a medical wipe. He was murmuring and cursing as I gagged him with an old rag. I then tied his ankles together and stood up. And for a moment I gazed through the dark at the guy who used to give me nightmares.

I kicked the bastard and said: "Listen up you fucker, I'm Detective Chief Inspector Devine and if you say anything about this to anybody I will make life very difficult for you and your family. You got that?"

I heard a muffled reply, so I opened the door and walked out on to the High Street. I walked up to Kirk Square and round on to Hill Place where I got into my car and drove around to the High Street, parking outside the bingo hall I settled down to watch the empty shop doorway. I checked that there were no surveillance cameras on this part of the street.

Arbroath High Street on a cold Monday night was not a busy place; a few drunken marines from the local base passed-by looking for another pub. I looked at my watch – it was half past nine. A few kids on skate boards stopped beside the shop doorway and lit up cigarettes then moved on.

After an hour and a half I phoned in an anonymous call to the local police about noises from the empty shop on the High Street. I looked over at the doorway one more time before starting the engine and heading back to Dundee.

I was heading off to bed with the evening paper under my arm when my mobile erupted into life.

"Yes Derek?" I asked the phone.

"Sorry to interrupt your evening sir,"

"No you're not. I have a beautiful model waiting for me upstairs." I said with a grin.

"This is becoming a bad habit – there's been another body found in Arbroath.

My heart began to pound and I felt that it might leap out of my chest.

“Where this time?” I asked as if I didn’t know.

“In an empty property on the High Street.”

“Okay Derek, I’ll just have to tell the model that I prefer you instead.”

It was almost midnight when I turned on to Arbroath High Street. A light rain had begun as I parked the car and walked up to where several uniforms were standing outside the empty shop front.

“DCI Devine,” I said. “Is DS White inside?”

“Yes sir,” said a sergeant with a brown, well-trimmed moustache.

I pulled on a pair of shoe covers and gloves then entered the shop.

“Sorry to pull you away from the blond sir.” Derek said as he came toward me through the shaded light provided by a temporary lamp.

“A chance would be a fine thing,” I said looking at the body of Mackenzie.

“His name is John Mackenzie – a local man - stayed in Moir Place.”

I noticed the rope I had tied his hands together with was now around his neck as I knelt down and lifted one of his arms to look for marks around the wrist.

Suddenly the shop was full of men with white suits so I replaced the arm quickly.

“The cavalry’s arrived,” I quipped.

“Yeah and here’s Custer,” whispered Derek as the Pathologist strode through the doorway.

“We seem to be meeting quite a lot at the moment Steven,” Cochrane said as he gazed at the body.

“Yes, it’s becoming quite a habit isn’t it?” I said running a hand through my hair.

When I got back home I went straight to the cupboard in the kitchen where I kept my drink and pulled out a bottle of whisky. I poured a generous amount into a glass and swallowed the lot. The warming sensation as it ran down my throat made me feel a lot better; so I poured another measure and strolled into the lounge and slumped into my favourite chair.

Some bastard must have been waiting until I left the High Street before entering the empty shop and strangling Mackenzie, I thought as I took a swig from the glass. There’s no way anyone was waiting in the shop or out the back of the property unless they can mind read.

I stood up and stared at my reflection in the darkened glass of the window, which suddenly became my wife.

“Christ, what’s going on here June?” I asked her.

All I wanted to do was get some revenge on these bullies by giving them a damn good thumping; now I’ve got their murders on my conscience. And worse some mad bastard’s following me around! I thought.

My mind wanted to press on further and think about the spirit world and the advice from the psychic at the show, but I managed to drown that thought with a long slug of whisky.

I looked at the picture on the coffee table of my 30th anniversary on the force party. A group of smiling faces. Maybe I should have retired, but what would I have done – played bowls? No this was my life, my work and my hobby.

“A good man,” Chief Constable, Barry Gilcrist, had said, “well-liked by his colleagues, but not liked so much by the other fraternity.”

I took another slug of whisky and sat down. I started to laugh. Was I losing my mind? I had to push on and find this crazy fucker even if it meant more murders – oh well!

Chapter Five

The sun was peeking between the buildings as I drove down Lochee Road and turned into West Marketgait where the Tayside headquarters of Police Scotland sat gazing at a former mill building across the road. I turned into the car park and parked then sat for a moment watching people make their way to the Sheriff Court House, which was adjacent to the station. My head thumped and I regretted the last whisky I had the previous night.

In my office I switched on my computer while I looked at the pink memo stickers which surrounded the monitor. I clicked on the icon of past cases and was presented with folders going back some thirty years.

Who had been released in the last few months or so? I wondered. Some bastard, who carried a grudge against me. Probably easier to think of the ones who hadn't got a grudge against me!

Derek White knocked on my door so I exited the program and clicked the internet explorer button as I said: "Come in Derek."

"Sir, did you get the Fiscal's report on the Forbes murder? I left it on your desk."

"Yes." I lied as I typed 'football results' in Google. "How are we getting on Derek?"

"Not great sir," he said with a quivering upper lip.

"Well, call a meeting for eleven in the incident room."

"Sir," he said as he left.

I was coming under pressure from above so I would have to shake things up. How was I going to find the culprit without compromising myself? I would have to deflect some of the evidence that was going to point in my direction. I've always done things my way, not by the book all the time, but always above board and fair – occasionally a bit heavy-handed maybe. I just thought I was due this for all these years of graft and all the shit I had to take from both sides of the fence.

I walked into the incident room and said: "Okay ladies and gentlemen let's get down to business." In the room was my regular team of DS Derek White and DC Susan Moran along with, at the insistence of my boss, DS John Milne and DC Dave Ross from Arbroath.

The Arbroath men usually deal with small local issues, but because of the seriousness of the situation had been drafted in to provide local knowledge and help us with a guide to local villains.

"We've really got to move this along. What have we got? Three murders in Arbroath and no suspects."

"They've all got one thing in common, said Derek, "the bodies were all tied up and beaten before being killed," he continued.

"We're not going to use the serial word yet. There's a lot of drugs around in Arbroath, let's look at it from that point of view," I said.

"We've been shaking down most of the local dealers without much success," said Milne looking at Ross.

"Well let's start shaking the trees a little harder and see what drops out!" I ordered.

As I was closing my office door Detective Chief Superintendent Bruce Mann said "Can I have a word Steven?" as he approached through the open plan CID room.

"Certainly sir," I said holding the door open.

He strolled over to the window and raised a few of the slats of the blinds and looked up and down the street as if he was checking to see if we were being watched. "The Chief Constable has had several Angus Councillors phoning him about these murders in Arbroath. They're concerned about public safety as you can understand. I know you've dealt with the papers. I need you as lead officer to speak to the television people who are coming here this afternoon at three. Try to calm the public down – Christ, they're talking about wanting the marines from RM Condor to patrol the streets! Tell them we're putting extra uniforms on the streets and that we're interviewing several suspects."

"You want me to lie Bruce!"

“No...not exactly – we are increasing street patrols.”

I looked at my watch, it was 6PM, the STV interview had gone reasonably well on the steps at the front of the building, but I wouldn't be watching it, because I have always gone on a strict diet after seeing myself on television. I now sat with three names I had written down on my pad. I had spent hours searching through the past case files, and these individuals were the result of the work. James Kilpatrick, a man who killed his wife to get the house they owned in Broughty Ferry paid off from the insurance was released almost a year ago. He had tried to make it look like suicide by putting the body in a sealed up car with the engine running.

The look he gave me as he was led away all these years ago still gives me sleepless nights.

Another was John Roy who had been released a few months ago. He had battered a shopkeeper to death in Arbroath with a baseball bat in the days before closed circuit television. It took a lot of police work to trap him. He pulled a finger across his throat while looking at me as he was being sent down.

Marie Croal killed a family she was cleaning and cooking for in Carnoustie then took off with their car and emptied their bank account. We eventually tracked her down, with the help of the Met, in London. She sent me a lot of threatening letters throughout the years. Croal was in a low security mental hospital – having been stepped down from high security. I should have crossed her off the list, but something told me not to.

Great, I thought, as I stood up and grabbed my jacket, *these model citizens released and back on the streets*. I sighed and switched out the light and closed my door, I'd had enough!

I thought that it was time to get night lights installed – the ones that come on when you pull into the driveway - as I left the car in the driveway and looked apprehensively at my house wrapped in darkness.

A smell of burning flowed out of the house as I opened the front door. My heart rate sped as I ran in and switched on the lounge lights and saw the words 'take my hand, and I'll save you' scorched into the carpet.

“Now I'm really getting freaked!” I shouted at the ceiling.

I ran through the house checking every room and window. Finally, I tried the backdoor, but it was locked. If someone had been into my house they locked the door as they left! I threw my keys onto the settee and went to the booze cupboard in the kitchen and retrieved a bottle of Grouse. I poured a generous measure into a glass and then swallowed the lot. I then opened the kitchen window and then ran through to the lounge and opened the window there.

Jesus, I thought, *have I got some bad spirit following me around? No one could have done this – it was my way of getting out of bad situations when I was a kid. Could I have made... no!* There had to be some rational explanation. The next day I would get another carpet laid.

I went to the gun cupboard under the stairs and grabbed my pistol and a box of cartridges. I ran a hand along my shot gun which I kept loaded just in case and wished I'd never started all this. *Maybe it was coming anyway*, I thought, as I locked the cupboard.

I slept with the pistol under my pillow and dreamt of my wife running from me then falling over a cliff. I ran to the edge of the cliff and tried to reach for her, but I couldn't reach her flailing arms.

I wiped the tears from my face and cried: “No!”

A cool breeze swept across my face as I regained consciousness. I realised I had left the bedroom window open. The sun was shining through the trees in my garden as I closed the window and headed into the bathroom for a shower.

I cursed when I saw what some bastard had done to my carpet as I made my way into the kitchen for some much needed coffee. *Either someone had a set of keys for my house, or I was dealing with something fucking weird*, I thought, as I switched the kettle on.

It must have been my lucky day because as I was sitting in my office reading the newspaper Derek White knocked on my door and entered.

“Derek?” I said.

“How are you sir?”

“Fine. Sit down,” I said nodding to the chair in front of my desk.

“I’ve been doing some checking on murderers who have been released lately, who came from the local area. And I’ve come up with some names.”

“Oh,” I said feigning slight interest. “Who?”

“There’s a John Roy from Arbroath who was released three months ago. He’s staying in Arbroath. There’s Marie Croal, released last year. The last one’s a long shot because of his age. His name is James Kilpatrick, he killed his wife in the Ferry; tried to make it look like suicide.”

“I remember Kilpatrick. He looked respectable...played on it, but underneath – just another ruthless killer.” I said. “Right, well done Derek, I’ll check out Kilpatrick. Will you see to Mr Roy?”

“Okay sir,” said Derek as he stood up

Chapter Six

I pulled up in front of 6 Cairnhill Road in the Broughty Ferry suburb of Dundee as the late afternoon sun was starting its descent. The house, an old block built two storey building, sat facing south, looking over the river Tay from an elevation above street level.

I left my car and climbed the stairs and crossed the driveway which ran along the front of the property and swept down to street level at either end. The portico, a stone canopy supported by trimmed tree trunks painted green, looked out of place.

A brass plaque with a button had press written under it. I rang the bell and stepped back on to the driveway and looked in the darkened lower windows for a sign of life. I felt I was being sized-up from the darkness. I rang the bell again and knocked on the heavy panelled door painted the same green that decorated the canopy supports.

The door eventually opened slowly and a man stepped forward. He was balding and what hair he had was grey. A grey goatee hung from his face.

“DS Devine, I never thought I would see you again.”

“Its DCI Devine now James.”

“Ah, right. And is this a social call?”

“I’m investigating murders in Arbroath.”

“And you thought that seeing as I’ve just been released I would be on a killing spree to get back at the establishment – right!”

“Come on now James, I’m just doing my job.”

“Look Chief Inspector Devine, I’ve done my time. What I did was wrong. There hasn’t been a day over the last eighteen years where I’ve woken up and not regretted what I did. If I could go back and stop what I did I would - a thousand times.”

“I have to ask you where you were on Thursday 25th of August at 11pm.”

“I would have been in bed. I’m sixty four for heaven’s sake.”

“How about the second of September at midnight?”

“Again I would have been in bed. My neighbours would be able to corroborate my story; I usually see them as I prepare for bed. I live alone.”

“And I suppose the same for the seventh of September at around 9 pm?”

“Ah well there I can help you, because I was staying with my sister in Paisley the weekend of the fifth and the sixth and I stayed over on the Monday – the seventh and came home on the Tuesday.”

“Can I have your sister’s name and address?”

“Yes of course.”

He disappeared into the hallway and then returned a few minutes later with a piece of paper.

“There you are.”

“Well thanks for your help Mr Kilpatrick,” I said as I turned away.

“Despite what you think of me Mr Devine, I miss my dear Elaine!”

There was one thing Kilpatrick and I shared: losing our wives, I thought as I drove through the rush hour traffic. I felt sorry for the poor bastard. I would be scoring him off my list.

I noticed a blue van sitting in my driveway as I turned into my street and I remembered that I had called in by a carpet store and chose a carpet in the morning. The guy was able to lay it right away so I gave him my spare key.

My mobile rang as I opened the front door, and I had to step out of the way of a carpet layer carrying a roll of underlay.

“Yes – Derek?” I answered.

“Sir, John Roy now stays with his mother in Arbroath, and he wasn’t pleased to see us. He told us to fuck off and leave him alone to start with, but after we managed to calm him down we found out that he was at home with his mother on two of the nights of the murders. He had no alibi for the third night, because his mother was at the bingo that night.”

“Okay Derek, good work. We can rule out Kilpatrick as well.”

The carpet layer came back into the house and asked: “What do you want done with your old carpet?”

“Could you leave it in my garage,” I replied. I hadn’t decided what I was going to do with it.
“Just some drunken bugger at a party I had I’m afraid,” I said shrugging my shoulders.

Later that evening I turned off the television and picked up the newspaper. I then collapsed back into my easy chair as my mobile chimed.

“Yeah, hullo?”

“Sir its Derek, I forgot to tell you about Marie Croal.”

“Derek, you got to take up drinking or something.”

“The ‘or something’ sounds fine, if I could find the time.”

“What about Marie Croal?”

“She has a cast iron alibi – she’s been an inmate in Royal Tayview Mental Hospital for a year.”

“What’s that about,” I said with a sinking feeling.

“Apparently she was diagnosed in the prison as having personality disorders and sectioned to Carstairs. At the end of her sentence she was admitted to Tayview.”

“Right Derek thanks. I’ll see you tomorrow mate,” I said as I shut my mobile.

Chapter Seven

I sat back and watched my grandson, Jamie, play with his toys in front of the television in Rachel's living room. The boy had the same pale blue eyes and blond hair as his mother and his grandmother.

Rachel entered from the kitchen and handed me a mug of coffee.

"Thanks for the dinner Rach, "I said as I took a sip.

"Any time, dad."

"What's wrong with that husband of yours doesn't he want to sit here with you?"

"I've told you dad - he's working."

"He's always working!"

"That's rich coming from you. Anyway, the mortgage on this place is horrendous," Rachel said as she lifted Jamie, who had become bored with the toys and wandered over to his mother. "So you've come over to criticize Dave," she continued.

"No, of course not. Do I need a reason to come see my daughter and grandson?"

"Oh dad, no. I'm glad to see you!"

"Look, if you need some money..."

"Thanks dad, but no. I've started working a few hours a week at ASDA."

"Okay baby. There's something I need to warn you about..."

"Oh what is it this time: a mad axe man on the loose? I've been looking over my shoulder all my life because of that job of yours. Dad... it's time to quit," she interrupted.

"I'm retiring next year."

"Good! Remember what happened to mum!"

"I won't let anything happen to you or Jamie," I said, as painful memories jumped into my mind, and tears started to fill my eyes.

"I know dad – you big softy," she said with a smile. The same smile her mother used to give me.

"It's just; there've been some murders in Arbroath, and the perp might be after me. So promise me you'll be careful"

"Oh, *I promise!*"

As I drove through Broughty Ferry with thoughts of my grandson playing on centre stage my mobile burst into life. I pulled into the side of the road and put the hazards on.

"Yeah, Devine," I answered.

"Take my hand, and I'll save you," said a rasping, breathless voice.

I looked at the screen, but there was no number – in fact there was nothing! I put the phone back to my ear, and said: "Who's there?"

"I know you like it, and you can't stop," said the voice.

"Look who is this?" I shouted. But the line was dead.

The Sign announced: Royal Tayview Low Security Psychological Hospital as I pulled up at the main gate check point which had a large hedge stretching into the distance on either side.

A guard approached my car as I lowered the driver's window.

"I'm here to see Dr Rennie. I'm DCI Devine – Police Scotland." I said flashing my warrant card.

"Could you wait a minute sir?" The guard said as he entered his kiosk.

After a moment he reappeared and, with a quick look around the inside of my car, said:

"Okay sir, on you go."

The gates opened, and I drove up the steep driveway until the Victorian mansion appeared from behind big fir trees and glowered at me. The front elevation was defined by three pointed facades, the middle of which contained the main door.

I parked and glimpsed an annex at the rear from the nineteen seventies as I walked up to the steps which led to the front door. I felt a million eyes peering at me from behind the darkened windows.

“DCI Devine to see Dr Rennie, “I said as I showed my warrant card to the receptionist.

“Please take a seat,” she said lifting a phone receiver.

I sat in an area opposite the main desk and stared out a window at a well-manicured lawn fringed with a small privet hedge.

“Chief Inspector Devine?” said a blond woman in a white lab coat.

“Yes,” I said rising off my seat, “Dr Rennie?”

“You want to talk to me about Marie Croal?”

“Well, Yes I would like a word.”

“Will you follow me?”

I followed her along a passage until she entered a room with Dr Rennie Psychologist on the door in gold letters.

“Take a seat Chief Inspector,” she said pointing toward the only seat in front of a desk overflowing with paper.

“Just a few questions Doctor,” I said as I sat down and looked at the paintings of country scenes on the walls.

“Marie – does she get many visitors?”

“No one comes to see her. She has no family.”

“So she has no real contact with the outside world?”

“None. She’s never been outside the grounds since she was admitted. So there’s no way she could have committed or instructed somebody to commit the murders you told me about on the phone.” The doctor picked up a paper clip and began to play with it. “You knew she was abused as a youngster at a home in Dundee?” she asked while keeping her eyes on the clip.

“No I didn’t.”

“We think she kept it hidden under layers of emotion until the conditions in the prison brought the suffering to the surface, and she began wanting to kill herself and others around her.”

“She was sectioned to Carstairs?”

“Yes. Where she saw out the rest of her term, and then she was assessed as unfit to be released or stepped down in security.”

“So how did she end up here in low security?”

“Ah well, she was given a new wonder drug, which was withdrawn in America because of some bizarre effects. Marie, however, seemed to make great progress under it and was eventually recommended for a security step down and admitted here.”

“Okay doctor. Thanks for your time. Oh, one last thing: would it be okay for me to see her?”

I was led through white corridors, which smelled strongly of disinfectant, by a male nurse until we reached a set of swing doors with a small wire-meshed glass panels. The nurse took a card from his pocket and swiped it through a sensor and then pushed one of the doors open. He then asked me to follow him.

I found myself standing in a large room painted pale blue. The television in the corner was advertising Scotland as a place to visit while a nurse sat playing draughts with a thin, red-haired woman at a table in the middle of the room.

“Where’s Marie?” asked the male nurse.

“She’s in her room,” answered the nurse at the table.

The male nurse then led me along a corridor flanked by three open doors on both sides. A nurse was reading to a patient in one room as I passed by, and a patient slept on her bed in another. Eventually the nurse leading me stopped outside room number five, which had Marie Croal on a card in a brass holder on the white door.

“Marie, there’s someone here to see you,” said the nurse to a plump woman with greying, short brown hair.

The room was painted the same pale blue as the main room. A bed with a dark blue duvet took up one corner of the room while a desk with books and a CD player occupied another. Marie sat at the desk staring out of the window chewing gum. She never turned around to acknowledge us.

For once in my life I didn’t know what to say, so I just also stared out of the window.

“Speak to her,” said the nurse as he picked up a gum wrapper with a groan, “I’ll be back in twenty minutes,” he said as he left the room.

He seemed to be under the misapprehension that I was a relative or a friend, I thought. I wondered what I was doing there, because this poor soul couldn’t have murdered anyone either directly or indirectly.

“A great view,” I said awkwardly.

She just kept on chewing, so I looked at the paintings on her walls. One was of angels with white wings hovering over a woman kneeling and praying. The other was of a woman on a horse dressed in chainmail leading an army of armoured women.

After twenty awkward minutes the male nurse returned and said: “Time up, I’m afraid.”

“Thank you,” I said as I left and then “goodbye Marie,”

But it wasn’t worth it as she just kept on looking out of the window.

Darkness was beginning to descend as the blue Transit van turned into Lamley Terrace and stopped outside number twelve – part of a terrace of ten former council houses. John Roy opened the passenger’s door and shouted his farewells.

I jumped out of my car and crossed over the road. “Can I have a word John?” I asked as I slipped between two parked cars.

“I wondered how long it would be before you turned up!” exclaimed Roy as he shut his gate.

“You come to beat me up then?”

“Come on now John – just a quiet word.”

“I told your pet monkeys – I had nothing to do with the murders. I stay in every night. You can ask my mother.”

“Oh yeah, I remember your mother swearing that her baby boy was home the night Mr Duncan was beaten to death!”

“Listen man, I served my time for the mistake of a skint youth,” he said with the same wild eyes I remembered from twenty five years ago.

“Okay John – tell your mother I’m asking for her.”

“Oh yeah!” he said sarcastically as he turned and walked along the front garden path.

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