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Opening Extract from...

Whisky from Small Glasses

A D.C.I. Daley Thriller

Written by Denzil Meyrick

Published by Polygon

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WHISKY FROM SMALL GLASSES

A D.C.I. Daley Thriller

Denzil Meyrick

Polygon

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For Fiona, Rachel and Sian

Prologue

Lights sparked and flashed before her eyes. The movement of her limbs slowed as though of its own accord. The pain she had felt was dull now; the panic subsiding. She was aware that her bowels had opened; she no longer cared. Her last, her remaining emotions, were a fading mixture of anger, injustice and overwhelming sadness, the cause of which she could barely recall.

All she was, all she had ever been, was seeping away: her loves, desires, likes and dislikes, the things that made her angry, the things that made her sad, made her laugh, made her cry; now all diminished. Her final moments were descending into a fading abyss – the surreal detachment of the brain soothing its own way to oblivion.

Suddenly, as the light began to dim, the face of a small, blond blue-eyed child filled her thoughts. Only for an instant did the terrible choking pain, the struggle for breath, the fight to stay alive, return.

1

The body ebbed and flowed rhythmically in concert with the seaweed and flotsam and jetsam trapped in the bay of the low rocky cove. A Styrofoam cup, a fisherman's glove with three fingers missing, a drinks bottle, label so bleached by sun and sea that only a hint of its former contents were now discernible, and orange plastic netting which had ensnared a small crab, reluctant to quit the purpose for which it was intended: all of these floated and bobbed in unison with the corpse.

The naked body of a woman lay face down in the water, limbs spread in a lazy 'X' shape. Her skin looked waxy – a horrible cross between yellow and grey, turning black at her feet, hands and the back of her neck. The remains were bloated, consistent with time spent in water. Small areas of her lower back and thighs were gnawed, most likely by prawns, indicating the corpse had spent at least some time further out to sea.

Surprisingly though, and most repellent, were the two bright red ribbons that held her hair in bunches, a hairstyle redolent of childhood and happiness, one horribly incongruous with the rotting corpse now souring the sea tang of the mild spring day.

With almost six years' service in uniform, Detective Constable Archie Fraser was new to the CID. That new in fact that he hoped he was surveying the scene on the beach with what could be considered the appropriate degree of professional detachment. A young WPC and the pale-looking dog-walker who had alerted the police looked on with the mixture of abject horror and fascination so common in humanity faced with death; especially of the gruesome variety. A large black Labrador snuffled and pawed at the sand, undisturbed by the corpse.

'Could you put your dog back on the lead, please, Mrs MacPherson?' Fraser bellowed with a confidence he did not feel. It would not be beyond possibility for the dog to catch an unusual scent on the air and proceed to wade into the water to investigate its source.

His short time in Kinloch had already been difficult. Only last month his ultimate superior – one Inspector MacLeod, Sub-Divisional Commander – had cause to reprimand him on discovering a young female shoplifter handcuffed to a very hot radiator while her captor answered an urgent call of nature.

'Focus, boy, focus!' MacLeod had shouted in his high-pitched Highland accent. 'The last thing I need is the Discipline Branch descending on me because you've seen fit to roast some daft bint. You're bloody lucky she was too stupid to make the complaint.'

Fraser had noticed how his boss referred to *the* something, in the way a foreigner would; tourists regularly took him for a German or Scandinavian, and not from the Isle of Harris that was his home. A long period of admonishment ensued, after which Fraser resolved to improve in every way and pay many less visits to the Taste of India restaurant.

‘Karen, could you come over, please?’ Fraser summoned the WPC.

She walked slowly towards him, never taking her eyes from the body, in the way a child would have been asked to pat a snake.

‘What’s up?’ he enquired. ‘Surely this isn’t your first stiff?’ Her doe-eyed nod was barely perceptible. Having worked his probationary period in Glasgow, Fraser was no stranger to dead bodies: murders, drowning, suicides, accidents – occasionally even some natural deaths. All were part of the daily diet of Glasgow’s finest. The difference now was that for the time being at least the crime scene was his responsibility. No van full of colleagues likely to appear; the Serious Crime Squad over a hundred miles away; even his DS off sick, laid low with a persistent ‘early retirement’ back. Right here, right now, he was the senior CID officer on duty in the Sub-Division, the only CID officer on duty in the Sub-Division.

‘It’s no’ jeest that, Archie.’ The WPC had a strong local accent. ‘I mean, this is Kinloch – I probably know her.’

How could he forget? The crime locus was three miles away from one of the most unique places he had ever been to, let alone lived and worked in. Kinloch. The town was situated on a peninsula one hundred and fifty miles away from Glasgow, on Scotland’s rugged west coast; alternatively, miles away from anywhere, as Fraser had come to think of it. Around ten thousand people lived in what could best be described as a modern alternative to the 1950s. Everyone knew everyone else, down to the tiniest detail of family, even personal, life. Sometimes, when working on a case, the young policeman had the distinct impression that everybody knew what he was trying to find out, but of course were never going to tell.

Another symptom of such a close-knit community was an inherent distrust of strangers, including policemen. Fraser's uncle, himself a retired police officer, had advised him always to have friends outside 'The Job', as the force was habitually known to initiates. He believed that because many cops both worked and socialised together, it left them isolated, introverted and out of touch. 'You keep your ear to the ground, son, especially in a wee place like Kinloch,' Uncle Davie had declared sagely. 'I mean, you're never goin' tae find anything oot about these people unless you get out an' talk tae them. Socialise, spend a few bob, buy a couple o' drinks, and you'll see they'll soon open up.'

Archie had mixed feelings about this strategic advice: for a start Davie had had his ear to the ground, and bought so many drinks, and so regularly, that he was now awaiting a liver transplant. Also, this was Kinloch, a place most definitely apart. However, he thought that some of what Davie had said could be useful. As the town was his first posting as a DC, he resolved to immerse himself in the community. He tried to join the local golf club, though sadly they were full. Unabashed, he tried the local tennis and cricket clubs, both with the same result. He was briefly elated when the town's Gaelic choir had contacted him in the hope he could swell their dwindling numbers; sadly Fraser was about as tone deaf as it was possible to be.

He had tried visiting the local pubs when off duty. Kinloch had a goodly number of such establishments – far too many according to some of the town's more temperate residents. They conformed to small communities within the community. For instance, regulars at the Shore Bar wouldn't consider crossing the threshold of the Royal Borough across the road.

Subtly, each establishment catered for a slightly different clientele: rowdy youths attended Pulse, a noisy disco-cum-bar in the Main Street, while their more cerebral peers became habitués of the Old Bothy, in the square. Roman Catholics preferred the Douglas Arms, while so-called ‘blue noses’ headed for the Royal. There was a pub that catered for lawyers, doctors and businessmen; another favoured by tradesmen and factory workers; and one hostelry, situated conveniently next to the bookmakers on the High Street, was dedicated solely to horse racing, the ‘sport of kings’ playing 24/7 on large screens. It was situated conveniently next to the bookmakers on the High Street. Jenny’s, tucked away in a small back street, was the end of the line. Those who behaved badly enough to be banned from all the other premises – and many had – gravitated there. The ‘tick book’ was legendary, as were the fights. Locals referred to it as the ‘*Star Wars* Bar’, for reasons that were obvious.

Fraser had visited them all. Typically, as he walked into the room the conversation would stop, resuming in a more modulated fashion moments later. People would gradually drift away, leaving the young detective with one of Kinloch’s small army of drunks who barely knew nor cared where they drank, as well as a glaring publican, counting the cost of lost customers.

‘Can I say something?’ Mrs MacPherson said timidly. ‘The tide’s on the turn . . . well, could it . . . could she . . . not drift back out?’

The young officer had not considered this. ‘Right, Karen, time to get your feet wet. We’ll need to get her above the water line. Even if we corrupt forensics it’s better than her ending up on Islay.’

‘Can ye no’ dae it yersel’, Archie? This gies me the dry boak.’ Fraser gently reminded the WPC why she was being paid, and after removing shoes, tights and socks where appropriate, the pair waded into the few inches of water.

‘OK, grab her other arm, Karen, and mind and pull gently – we want to disturb this as little as possible.’ The police-woman looked doubtfully at the body, but did as she was told, looking away as she grabbed the left wrist, lips pursed in distaste. ‘One, two, three . . .’ They started to pull. To the collective horror of all three on the beach, the corpse, with a great issue of dark fluid and some more solid matter, broke neatly apart, with the deep sucking noise of a plunger working on a blocked sink. Both police officers, having put more effort into their task than required, fell backwards onto the shingle, the top half of the deceased now some two feet away from the rest of the remains.

In what seemed like a split second, the fetid stench emanating from the newly cleft body induced the dog to stand tall on all fours and emit a mournful howl, as the WPC retched copiously over her uniform, still sitting on the shingle where her assistance to the CID had left her. Body fluids seeped darkly into the sand; even the local seagull population had registered the events and were now swirling in a squawking frenzy over the bay.

‘Fuck!’ Fraser momentarily forgot the presence of Mrs MacPherson, who was herself looking on in disbelief, as though she was waiting for someone to come bounding from behind a rock to confirm the whole ghastly episode was an elaborate joke, of the type played out on late-night TV.

Just then, movement to his right caught Fraser’s eye. Three figures were walking purposefully down the beach towards him.

The slight, taut figure of Inspector MacLeod was unmistakable at their head. It took the Inspector a few moments to grasp exactly what was in front of him. One of his DCs was getting up from the sand, leaving the torso of a dead woman, and a WPC was spewing at his feet. A woman he did not know was sobbing convulsively, while a large black dog happily wagged its tail at the new arrivals. Only feet away, the rest of the body could barely be made out in the badly discoloured water. A sickening stench was all pervasive.

‘What the fuck are you doing, boy?’ MacLeod’s temples displayed throbbing veins. ‘In all my years in the police I have never seen the like.’

‘I was merely trying to . . .’

‘You were merely trying to fuck things up, as usual.’ The Inspector was incandescent. ‘Aye, and all our careers along with it. I dread to think what they taught you at the training college. In my day you were shown how to preserve the crime scene, not tear the bloody thing in half!’ As though suddenly remembering others were there, MacLeod visibly took hold of himself and addressed the moaning WPC next to him. ‘Sergeant Shaw, please do your best to ensure that the remains are contained at this locus.’ Turning to a stocky man in a well-worn sports jacket with patched sleeves, he said, ‘Sandy, are you able to make any kind of examination under these circumstances?’ At that he looked towards Fraser with a thunderous glare.

Sandy, whom Fraser recognised as one of the local doctors, ran his hand through greying locks as he surveyed the scene. ‘Well, Charles, I can only concur with your accurate assessment.’ His accent was straight out of the Scottish public-school system. ‘I, too, have never attended such an incident

in thirty years of medicine.’ He looked at the young DC with a pursed mouth that spoke of nothing but contempt, then leaned over the landed portion of body, rubbing his chin.

MacLeod walked away from the group, gesturing to Fraser to come with him. Once out of earshot, he grabbed the younger man’s arm and on tiptoe addressed the DC’s right ear with spitting vitriol. ‘You listen to me, constable. Since you arrived at my station you’ve lurched from one crisis to the next.’ Fraser could feel his face redden. ‘As soon as this sorry mess is over I’ll be recommending to HQ that you are not only unsuited to the CID, but to police work in general. Be absolutely sure that the cack will land on your head, not mine. We’ll be the laughing stock of the force by tea time at this rate.’

Fraser resisted an urge to grab his superior and fling him bodily to the ground. He was considering what to say in his defence when a shout from the doctor turned both of their heads.

‘One for the big boys, I’m afraid, Charles.’ The doctor was brushing sand from his trousers as the policemen walked back over to the scene. ‘It’s murder, nasty business.’

‘How can you be so sure, Sandy?’ The inspector looked doubtfully at the medic.

‘Oh, quite easily, Inspector MacLeod. She has a ligature around her neck.’

2

Detective Inspector Jim Daley reflected on the dispiriting nature of shopping for trousers, as he handed his credit card over to the assistant in the fashionable clothes store. In his twenties – even in his thirties – he had been able to maintain a respectable waistline without the deployment of starvation diets or drastic fitness regimes. Now in his early forties – as he liked to think of forty-three – and especially after giving up cigarettes, he felt his stomach now capable of gaining inches overnight. It was not without a little trepidation that he eyed a suit or a pair of jeans he had not worn for a few weeks. Often, trying to get them on, there would follow a desperate tugging at a straining zip, a grunting wrestle with a recalcitrant waistband, a holding in of both breath and stomach, as he fought to get the garment into a position whereby he could move, sit or stand without a trouser button shooting into the air like a misdirected bullet; worse still, without hearing the sickening rip of stitching tearing apart over a more than ample backside.

He had resolved therefore to make a new start as far as trousers were concerned: go out and buy a pair that more suited his thickening frame, regardless of how unpalatable the thought was of having a matching age and waist size.

After all, he would get older, diet and join a gym, thus ensuring that these numbers would diverge in an acceptable manner in the near future.

He caught a glimpse of himself in a full-length mirror as he left the shop. Was that overweight middle-aged man really him? He consoled himself with the fact that he was six feet three and still had his own hair and teeth. Sure, women found him attractive, just not the woman he wanted to, or so it seemed. Tall, dark, getting fatter, older and handsome – that summed up Jim Daley.

The theme tune from *The Sopranos* jolted him from thoughts of sartorial insecurity to an equally perplexing subject: his wife Liz. She called infrequently when he was at work and he had become used to these calls containing at least a modicum of bad or unwelcome news.

‘Hi, Liz. Everything OK?’ He always sounded so lame when he had to speak to her unexpectedly. He felt an involuntary frisson of excitement at the sound of the well-spoken, smoky tones.

‘Oh hi, darling. That was quick. Is it OK to talk?’

‘Yeah, no bother. I’m actually . . .’

She gave him no time to finish. ‘Great. Just to let you know, Jill wants me to go up to the caravan at Granton for a few days. Anyway, I thought, the weather’s nice, and it’s not as though we’ll be doing anything, so I’m leaving in a couple of hours.’

Daley was used to being presented with a *fait accompli*. He marvelled at the effortless way Liz, again, managed to impart her intention to do as she pleased, while at the same time make him feel as though he was in some way responsible. He attempted a rear-guard action. ‘I’ll be home about five. We

could go to the wee pub for a couple of drinks, or get a curry or something – make a night of it. You could go up to Jill’s in the morning.’

Without a pause, Liz’s reply was as predictable as it was swift. ‘Oh, what a pity you didn’t mention it before. She’s invited me to dinner tonight as well. Mark has some boring guest to entertain. I’ve already said I would go. Sorry, darling.’

‘Oh, OK,’ was all he could muster. He guessed it was true what people said: once a partner had been unfaithful, it was really difficult to regain the trust that was so important in any relationship. And Liz had been spectacularly unfaithful. The first incident – he knew of – was with her gym instructor. Sent home early by the force’s medical officer after taking a baseball bat across the head during a drug raid, he thought he heard noises as he gained the stairs of their new detached home in the village of Howwood. The vision of Liz on hands and knees on their bed while her paramour worked energetically behind her was seared onto his memory. Suffering from a hair-trigger temper as well as an acute headache, Daley proceeded to render the third party insensible with a swift upper-cut, dragged him by the hair onto the small balcony, and dispatched him neatly over the railing and onto the garden below.

The sight of a naked man struggling to stand up, with what looked alarmingly like a broken leg, in a neighbour’s shrubbery, accompanied by the shrieks of an obviously frantic woman, constituted more than enough reason for the good people of Howwood to call the police. Eventually, after much pulling of strings and dire warnings regarding the diminishment of his prospects, a deal was done behind the scenes, and Daley – forced to attend anger management

classes – was left to resurrect, as best he could, the remnants of his career. Having reached Detective Inspector in his mid-thirties, Jim Daley could reasonably have hoped for Superintendent or beyond before retirement. This was now most unlikely. As for Liz, she had vowed undying love for him and tearfully cited boredom and loneliness as an excuse for her behaviour. Although Daley realised he was wrong, his almost cloying love for her saw him take the only action that seemed palatable: forgiveness. Since then, even when close friends and colleagues alerted him to likely dalliances, he chose to ignore them, having neither the strength nor will to do the sensible thing and leave her. Though he would never let her know, he was head over heels in love with her, and, even though he barely believed it himself, was prepared to accede to almost anything in order to keep their relationship afloat.

She said and did all the right things: she showed great interest in him, they made passionate love, declared satisfied happiness, promised unerring loyalty, but all to no avail. Now that trust was absent, only the slavery of obsession remained. Daley was forced to endure the nods and winks of colleagues; the police of course being a small community where gossip was rife. Had Liz been less attractive her indiscretions would probably have gone unnoticed, however, such were the rumours of her wanton nature, every male colleague now reckoned that they had a chance with her.

‘Anyway, you know what the traffic’s like in the morning.’ Liz pronounced ‘morning’ with that annoying intonation that had crept into everyday usage from Australian sitcoms, as though the knowledge or concept of the morning was something entirely alien to the listener.

The habit annoyed Daley, who hardened his reply. 'Yeah, whatever you think, Liz. When will you be back?'

'Oh, you know me, darling – go with the flow.' He did. Anyway, better dash. I've left one of those microwave curries out for you. Ring you later. Bye. Love you.' The term of affection was an obvious afterthought.

Daley stood with the handset to his ear for a few moments. So little said; so much left unsaid: it summed up their marriage. He walked back to the car park, made a mental note to get his car washed, then drove to the station.

Jim returned to his office by way of the coffee machine. On reaching the second floor and his shared office he could hear the dulcet tones of his DS swearing volubly at his computer. 'You know, I'm buggered how they think that getting us tae dae all this typing ourselves is cost effective.' DS Brian Scott was more agitated than normal, which was, indeed, saying something. 'When I joined up you just had tae scribble something doon and wait for some daft wee lassie in the typing pool tae dae the business. Noo, well, I'll tell ye, Paisley's goin' like a fair, while I'm up here learnin' tae be a fuckin' secretary.'

'Ah, DS Scott.' Daley aped the clipped Kelvinside tones of their boss. 'It's incumbent upon us all to integrate with new policing methods.' He grinned at Scott's exasperation.

'Aye, and fuck him tae. It's getting tae be you need a degree in this shit jist tae dae yer ain job.' Scott was smiling in spite of himself. An IT specialist he most certainly was not; a highly effective, sometimes inspired police officer he most certainly was. His brusque manner and tendency to ignore the rulebook had hampered his progress through the ranks,

and he would no doubt end his career as a DS. Daley felt that it was a role tailor made for his gritty determination, and he valued his assistance more than he would ever admit. Simply, they made a good team.

Daley walked to his large paper-strewn desk. A yellow Post-it note placed on top of a mountain of files announced 'Numpty wants to see you!' in Scott's bold, untidy hand. 'When did his magnificence call?' Daley enquired, looking up just in time to see Scott's computer screen turn a brilliant blue.

'Oh, just efter you left. He's in a right stooshie aboot some-thin'. He didna' even pull me up aboot whit a coup this place is.' He swung his chair around to face Daley, left hand outstretched in a gesture of disbelief at his computer screen. 'I mean, whit the fuck is this a' aboot?'

Draining his coffee, Daley went over to Scott's desk, where he deftly pressed a few keys on the computer, restoring it to the report on which the DS was working. 'Just how many computer courses have you been on? It must be dozens now.'

Scott's face took on a look of rueful resignation, 'Aye, a few, but you've got tae remember, Jim, every time I get a chance tae go up tae the college it's mair like a break from my dear lady wife. That's a great wee bar they've got there, an', well, by the time yiv sobered up in the morning, yiv well an' truly lost the thread aboot whit the fuck they're on aboot.'

Daley chuckled to himself as he took the lift to the top floor of the building. As the elevator doors swished open he marvelled, not for the first time, at the steep upward curve in the standard of opulence in this portion of the station. Gone was the bare functionality of the other three floors, to be replaced by dark wood panelling, tasteful paintings, picked

out by soft up-lighting and thick carpeting punctuated by tall verdant pot plants. Even the civilian staff were of a more aesthetically pleasing variety; a woman in a tight-fitting skirt wiggled past him in a cloud of expensive perfume that reminded him of Liz.

Behind the closed door the sound of a giggling female was plain. The nameplate read simply: SUPERINTENDENT JOHN DONALD. COMMANDER DIV. CID. Daley knocked loudly three times. After a few moments of mumbled voices, the familiar 'Come' served as an invitation for Daley to enter. He opened the door and stepped inside, straight-backed and confident.

Donald was sitting behind an unfeasibly large desk that made the rest of the office seem shrunken. An attractive woman stood over him clutching a file, looking intently on as the superintendent busily appended his signature to a document.

'Ah, Jim.' Donald's eyes flitted towards him then back to his papers. He gestured airily with his left hand. 'Make yourself comfortable while I satisfy the rapacious appetite for my time this young lady seems to harbour.'

Same old, same old. Jim was used to his boss's eccentricities; at times it felt as though he had worked for this man for his entire career. As a young probationary cop Donald had been Daley's shift sergeant. On his first posting to Paisley CID, as a raw DC, Donald was his DS. Not long after Daley's promotion to DS in A-Division in Glasgow, Donald arrived as the all-powerful DCI. They were once described as star-crossed. He wished they weren't.

The man that sat in front of him now bore hardly any resemblance to the foul-mouthed, overweight Philistine of what

seemed like a very long time ago. Steadily Donald had ironed out all his imperfections. He stopped drinking, took up running, golf and squash, and consequently lost piles of weight. He spent a great deal of time abroad or under a sun-bed ensuring that his permanent tan was just that. Even his hair had undergone a transformation: gone were the thick black curls cut close to the scalp; now thinning, his gelled coiffure made him look like a hackneyed version of an East End gangster.

His manner had changed accordingly: the harsh accent of Glasgow's East End was now modulated to the clipped tones of middle-class Bearsden, taking him much further socially than it had in geographic reality. His notorious temper was kept in check by sycophancy to superiors or aloof arrogance to those of a lesser rank. Yet Daley had never been in any doubt as to how thin this facade was; Donald was as notorious for his self-seeking ruthlessness as he was respected for being a mediocre police officer who had transformed himself into a truly talented administrator and political mover. The letters BA, LLB after his name bore testament to the hard work and determination it had taken to climb from the mire of a piss-poor childhood to his current middle-class comfort.

Donald signed the document with a flourish, then flamboyantly waved the paper in the air to dry the fountain-pen ink he had used. 'Now, Di, don't be frightened to bring in as many papers for me to sign as you want. My door is always open, you know.' He leered at the young woman who nodded dutifully then left the room. 'Now, Jim, sorry about that, breaking in a new girl, so to speak. One long round of paper-work in here. Now where did I put that . . . ah, here it is.' He lifted a black file from the desk and removed what looked like a number of printed e-mails. 'Bit of bother in our new

dominions. Kinloch, to be exact. There's no point me blustering on, scan these and we'll get on wi' it.'

Daley noticed how the polished edge of his accent tarnished slightly once the secretary had gone. For many, this would have appeared to be an acknowledgement of their shared past; to Daley however it was more an indication of how far down he was in the pecking order. Donald obviously felt there was little point in turning on the charm for his senior DI. He opened the file and began to browse its contents. After a few minutes he looked up from the papers and cleared his throat to divert Donald's attention from the copy of *Perfect Home* his superior was avidly consuming.

'Oh right, Jim. So, there you have it. Bit of a crisis down there in terms of manpower, and experience too. The Sub-Division is run by a teuchter called Charles MacLeod, a right little shit and the very worst kind of social climber. They have a DS who's no more use than ornament, and a few eager young DCs. Do you remember Davie Fraser from A-Division? His nephew Archie's there.'

'If he's anything like his uncle, the pubs will be doing a fine trade.' Daley had a sinking feeling in his stomach. Strathclyde Police had undergone yet another phase of reorganisation in an attempt to save money. His Division had been amalgamated with what had been the old Argyll Constabulary, meaning that Paisley HQ was now responsible for parts of the West Coast of Scotland that few could pronounce, never mind find on a map.

'Quite so, Jim, quite so. Poor man. I think his liver is on the way out. Never met a man who loved a drink more.' Donald looked rueful. 'Anyway, I'm reliably informed his nephew is cut from entirely different cloth.'

Daley hoped so. His experience of Davie Fraser was one of having to follow him from bar to bar when he was a young cop, watching the man who was supposed to be showing him the ropes steadily becoming more inebriated and objectionable by turns.

‘Do you mind me asking what this has to do with me?’ He knew what the answer was going to be, however being direct would mean Donald would be unable to dollop his usual helping of sugar onto an unpalatable request.

‘Straight to the point, Inspector Daley. That’s what I like to hear.’

Daley had the impression that Donald was a bit disappointed, and would rather have had the chance to dish out his usual jargon on ‘duty’ and ‘chances for advancement’, the normal precursor to a shit job. ‘I need someone there with a bit of experience, to get this solved quickly and prove to those yokels that our way is the best way. Fuck knows, we’ll have to get them to toe the line somehow, and this affords us the perfect opportunity.’

‘So you want me down there, sir?’ Daley moved the conversation away from a lecture on the difference in policing methods between city and county divisions.

‘Yes, Jim, in fact I’d like you down there first thing tomorrow morning. The body is on the way to the mortuary in Glasgow. That prick Crichton will do the necessary this evening at about seven, and I’d like you to be there.’

Daley paused momentarily to take this in. He was being sent to a far outpost of the empire to investigate a murder that could take forever, while the wayward Liz was at the other end of the country doing, well, he dreaded to think. ‘I see, sir. What about personnel?’ was all he could think of to say.

‘I have you booked on the first flight in the morning. You will of course be much better informed after the PM. Take a look on the ground yourself, then we’ll decide who we can spare to send down there with you. Take that file, and I’ll send anything else we’ve got downstairs. No doubt we can spare Tweedledum and a few other bodies should the situation require it.’ Donald had what could best be described as a strained relationship with DS Scott.

Daley’s mind returned to the images he had seen on the e-mails: a young woman, ligature, body dumped at sea, and a locus distant from usual amenities. This was not going to be an easy inquiry. ‘Have the Support Unit been informed yet, sir?’ He was referring to the group of elite Strathclyde officers who specialised in various disciplines now required of a modern police force: firearms, dog branch, crowd control, underwater unit and so on. Daley reckoned the underwater unit would be handy bearing in mind the circumstances of the death.

‘Not as yet, Jim. I think it wise to wait until we have some kind of results from the PM, no matter how preliminary. Of course, you realise, in terms of expenditure this is going to be a killer. We’ve already had a full SOCO team down there. The burden of expense falls to us, the investigating department. I hope you’ll bear that in mind when you’re on the ground?’

‘As you know, sir, cost is always to the forefront of my mind during every inquiry.’ Daley smiled, knowing his boss was well aware of his attitude to the bean counters many senior officers had been forced to become.

‘Luckily,’ Donald chose to ignore the irony of the last statement, ‘because this is new territory, so to speak, we are able

to introduce a degree of flexibility into our spend. However, Jim, the pot is by no means bottomless. Please take that on board.'

Daley was about to make some sarcastic reply, when Donald continued on an entirely different subject without the need for an intake of breath. He, it seemed, had developed all the skills of the politician. 'And how is Liz? Everything back to normal in that department?'

Daley bridled as a leer crossed Donald's face. Only a few weeks had passed since Liz had flirted outrageously with the superintendent at a retirement party. The couple had rowed late into the night when they returned home, with Liz claiming that she was only trying to advance his career with a little 'networking' – yet another modern term he couldn't stand. Anyway, Donald's body language had made it abundantly clear that 'networking' was the last thing on his mind. Loyally DS Scott had administered a left hook to a colleague who had insinuated that something illicit was afoot.

'Mrs Donald and I really must have you for dinner.'

Mrs Daley's more likely to have you for breakfast, Daley thought, somewhat uncharitably.

'Anyway, better get on, we both have plenty to do.' The superintendent stood, hand outstretched. Daley shook it in acceptance of the dismissal. 'Pick up your tickets from Kirsty next door – and don't forget to keep me informed. Don't take any shit off that little bastard MacLeod. Any trouble there and I've got a few tricks up my sleeve. Good hunting, Jim.'