

# Dying Light

Stuart MacBride

Published by Harper

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

[Click here to buy this book and read more](#)

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.  
Please print off and read at your leisure.

---

# 1

The street was dark as they entered the boarded-up building: scruffy wee shites in their tatty jeans and hooded tops. Three men and two women, nearly identical with their long hair, pierced ears, pierced noses and pierced God knew what else. Everything about them screamed 'Kill Me!'

He smiled. They would be screaming soon enough.

The squat was halfway down a terrace of abandoned two-storey buildings – dirty granite walls barely lit by the dull streetlights, windows covered with thick plywood. Except for one on the upper floor, where a thin, sick-looking light oozed out through the dirty glass, accompanied by thumping dance music. The rest of the street was deserted, abandoned, condemned like its inhabitants, not a soul to be seen. No one about to watch him work.

Half past eleven and the music got even louder; a pounding rhythm that would easily cover any noise he made. He worked his way around the

doorframe, twisting the screwdriver in time with the beat, then stepped back to admire his handiwork – three-inch galvanized woodscrews all the way round the door, holding it solid against the frame, making sure it stayed irrevocably shut. A grin split his face. This would be good. This would be the best one yet.

He slipped the screwdriver back into his pocket, pausing for a moment to stroke the cold, hard shaft. He was hard too, the front of his trousers bulging with barely concealed joy. He always loved this bit, just before the fire started, when everything was in place, when there was no way for them to escape. When death was on its way.

Quietly he pulled three glass bottles and a green plastic petrol can from the holdall at his feet. He spent a happy minute unscrewing the bottles' caps, filling them with petrol and popping the torn rag fuses in place. Then it was back to the screwed-shut front door. Lever open the letter box. Empty the petrol can through the slot, listening to the liquid splash on the bare, wooden floorboards, just audible through the pounding music. A trickle seeped out under the door, dribbling down the front step to form a little pool of hydrocarbons. Perfection.

He closed his eyes, said a little prayer, and dropped a lit match into the puddle at his feet. *Whooooomp*. Blue flame fringed with yellow raced under the door, into the house. Pause, two, three, four: just long enough for the blaze to get going.

Throw a half brick in through the upstairs window, shattering the glass, letting the throbbing music out. Startled swearing from inside. And then the first petrol bomb went in. It hit the floor and exploded, showering the room with burning fuel. The swearing became screaming. He grinned and hurled the remaining bottles into the blaze.

Then it was back to the other side of the road, to lurk in the shadows and watch them burn. Biting his lip, he pulled his erection free. If he was quick he could come and go before anyone arrived.

He needn't have hurried. It was fifteen minutes before anyone raised the alarm and another twelve before the fire brigade turned up.

By then everyone was dead.

## 2

Rosie Williams died the way she'd lived: ugly. Lying on her back in the cobbled alley, staring up at the orange-grey night sky, the drizzle making her skin sparkle, gently washing the dark red blood from her face. Naked as the day she was born.

PC Jacobs and WPC Buchan were first on the scene. Jacobs nervously shifting from foot to foot on the slick cobbled road, Buchan just swearing. 'Bastard.' She stared down at the pale, broken body. 'So much for a quiet shift!' Dead bodies meant paperwork. A small smile crept onto her face. Dead bodies also meant overtime and Christ knew she could do with some of that.

'I'll call for backup?' PC Steve Jacobs fumbled for his radio and called Control, letting them know the anonymous tip-off was for real.

*'Hud oan a mintie,'* said Control in broad Aberdonian. There was a pause filled with static and then, *'You're goin' ta have ta hold the fort oan yer own for a bit. Everyone's off at this bloody fire.'*

*I'll get ye a DI soon as one 'comes available.'*

'What?' Buchan grabbed the radio off Jacobs, even though it was still attached to his shoulder, dragging him off balance. 'What do you mean, "as soon as one becomes a-bloody-availble"? This is murder! Not some sodding fire! How the hell does a fire take precedence over—'

The voice of Control cut her off. '*Listen up,*' it said, '*I dinna care what problems you've got at home: you bloody well leave them there. You'll do as you're damn well told and secure the crime scene till I can get a DI to you. And if it takes all bloody night that's how long you wait: understood?*'

Buchan went furious scarlet, before spitting out the words, 'Yes, Sergeant.'

'*Right.*' And the radio went dead.

Buchan started swearing again. How the hell were they supposed to protect a crime scene with no IB team? It was raining for God's sake; all the forensic evidence would be getting washed away! And where the hell were CID? This was supposed to be a murder enquiry – they didn't even have an SIO!

She grabbed PC Jacobs. 'You want a job?'

He frowned, suspicious. 'What kind of job?'

'We need a Senior Investigating Officer. Your "mate" lives around here doesn't he? Mr Police Bloody Hero?'

Jacobs admitted that yes, he did.

'Right, go wake the bastard up. Let *him* deal with it.'

\* \* \*

WPC Watson had the nastiest collection of bras and pants that Logan had ever seen. All of her underwear looked like it had been designed by World War One zeppelin manufacturers on an off day – uniform baggy-grey. Not that he got to see a lot of Jackie's underwear these days, but for a brief spell their shifts were in synch. Logan smiled sleepily and rolled over, the light from the hallway spilling through the open door, illuminating the rumpled bed.

He squinted at the alarm clock: almost two. Still another five hours before he had to report for work and yet another bollocking. Five whole hours.

*Click*, the light in the hall died. A soft silhouette filled the doorway, having a bit of a scratch as it scuffed its way back into bed. WPC Jackie Watson wrapped her unbroken arm around Logan's chest and settled her head against his shoulder, unfortunately sticking the curly ends of her hair up his nose and into his mouth. Discreetly spitting them out, he kissed the top of her head, feeling the cool length of her body pressed against him. She ran a finger over the inch-long trails of scar tissue that crisscrossed his torso and Logan thought: maybe five hours wasn't so long after all . . .

Things were just getting interesting when the doorbell went.

'Damn it,' mumbled Logan.

'Ignore it, probably just drunks.' The doorbell rang again, more insistent this time. As if the sod

on the other end was trying to drill his way into the building with his thumb.

'Bugger off!' Logan shouted into the darkness, causing Jackie to dissolve into a fit of the giggles, but it didn't deter the phantom ringer. Then Logan's mobile phone joined in the noisy pre-dawn chorus. 'Oh for God's sake!' He rolled off, provoking a groan of displeasure, and grabbed the phone from his bedside cabinet. 'WHAT?'

*'Hello, sir? DS McRae?'* PC Steve Jacobs: the Fabled Naked Swordsman of Old Aberdeen.

Logan let his head slump, face first, into the pillow, still holding the phone to his ear. 'What can I do for you, Constable?' he asked, thinking that this had better be damned important if it was going to distract him from a naked WPC Watson.

*'Er . . . sir . . . We've kinda got a body . . . an—'*

*'I'm not on duty.'*

WPC Watson made a noise that said, yes he bloody well was, but not one that concerned Grampian Police.

*'Aye, but everyone else is off at some fire and we've no SIO, or IB or anything!'*

Logan swore into the pillow. 'OK,' he said at last. 'Where are you?'

The doorbell went again.

*'Er . . . that was me . . .'*

Sodding hell.

Logan grunted his way out of bed and into some clothes, before lurching out of his flat, down the stairs and out the main door, looking ruffled and



unshaven. PC Steve, infamous for his striptease rendition of Queen's *A Kind of Magic*, was standing on the top step.

'Sorry, sir,' he said, looking sheepish. 'Across the road: naked woman. Looks like she's been battered to death . . .' And any thoughts Logan had of having fun in the wee small hours disappeared.

At quarter past two on a Tuesday morning the harbour was pretty much deserted. The grey granite buildings looked unnatural and jaundiced in the streetlights, their edges blurred by the drizzle. A huge supply vessel, painted luminous orange, was tied up at the bottom of Marischal Street, its lights bright haloes as Logan and PC Jacobs made their way round the corner to Shore Lane. It was a narrow one-way street at the heart of Aberdeen's red light district: one side a five-storey wall of dirty granite and darkened windows, the other a collection of random-sized buildings. Even at this time of night, the smell was something special. Three days of torrential rain followed by a week of blazing sunshine had left the sewers full of drowned rats, rotting fragrantly. There were sodium lights bolted to the buildings, but most of them were bugged, leaving small islands of yellowed light in a sea of darkness. The cobbles were slick beneath their feet as PC Steve led Logan to a dark pool halfway down, where a WPC crouched over something white sprawled across the lane. The body.

The WPC stood at the sound of their approach, shining her torch full in their faces. 'Oh,' she said, without enthusiasm. 'It's you.' Stepping back, she played her spotlight over the naked corpse.

It was a woman, her face battered and broken, one eye swollen nearly closed, the nose mashed flat, broken cheekbone, broken jaw, missing teeth. She wore a necklace of dark red bruises and nothing else.

She was no spring chicken: the thick white flesh of her thighs rippled with cottage-cheese cellulite; stretch marks making sand dune ripples across her stomach; and in between, short rough stubble: long overdue for another homemade Brazilian wax. A rose and a bleeding dagger were emblazoned on the milk-bottle skin just above her left breast, the tattooed blood refusing to wash away in the rain.

'Jesus, Rosie,' said Logan, dropping to one knee on the cold, wet cobbled street so he could get a better look at her. 'Who the hell did this to you?'

'You know her?' This from the unfriendly-looking WPC. 'You one of her regulars?'

Logan ignored her. 'Rosie Williams. Been working the streets down here for as long as I can remember. God knows how many times she's been done for soliciting.' He reached forward and felt for a pulse on her neck.

'Believe it or not, we already did that,' said the WPC. 'Dead as a doornail.'

The drizzling rain muffled the sound of drunken voices singing and shouting somewhere back along

the docks. Logan stood, looking up and down the alley. 'IB? PF? Duty doctor?'

The WPC snorted. 'You must be bloody joking. They're all sodding about at that fire. Much more important than some poor cow who got battered to death.' She folded her arms. 'Wouldn't even send us a proper SIO, so we had to make do with you.'

Logan gritted his teeth. 'You got something to say, *Constable?*' He stepped close enough to smell the stale cigarette smoke on her breath. She stared back at him, her face a thin line of displeasure.

'How's PC Maitland?' she asked, her voice as cold as the corpse at their feet. 'Still alive?'

Logan bit back the reply. He was her senior officer; he had a responsibility to behave like a grown-up. But what he really wanted to do was find one of those greasy, rotting, bloated rats and shove it right up her—

Shouts sounded from the other end of the alley, where it connected with Regent Quay. Three men staggered round the corner, lurching into one another, fumbling with their trousers, laughing as streams of steaming urine splashed against the alley walls. Logan turned back to the smug, defiant WPC. 'Constable,' he said with a thin smile, 'you're supposed to be securing the crime scene. So why can I see three men *pissing all over it?*'

For a moment it looked as if she was going to answer back, then she stormed off up the alley, shouting 'Hoy! You! What the bloody hell do you think you're playing at?'

That left Logan and PC Steve with the battered remains of Rosie Williams. Logan dragged out his mobile phone and called Control, asking for an update on the duty doctor, Identification Bureau, pathologist, Procurator Fiscal and the rest of the circus that was meant to roll up whenever a suspicious death was discovered. No joy: everyone was still tied up at the big fire in Northfield, but DI McPherson would be with them as soon as possible. In the meantime Logan was to stay where he was and try not to get anyone else killed.

An hour later there was still no sign of DI McPherson, or the IB, but the duty doctor had arrived. At least it had stopped raining. The doctor struggled his way into a white paper scene-of-crime suit before trudging down Shore Lane, ducking under the blue 'POLICE' tape WPC Buchan had grudgingly stretched across the alley.

Doc Wilson wasn't at his best at half past three in the morning, a fact he made abundantly clear by dropping his medical bag in a ratty-smelling puddle and swearing a blue streak. The bags under his eyes were family sized, his nose red and raw from a late summer cold.

'Morning, Doc,' said Logan, getting nothing but a grunt in reply as the doctor squatted down over the corpse and felt for a pulse.

'She's deid,' he said, stood, and started back for his car.

'Hold on a minute.' Logan grabbed his arm. 'Is

that it? “She’s deed?” We know she’s dead: care to hazard a guess when and what of?’

The doctor scowled. ‘That’s no’ my job; ask a bloody pathologist.’

Surprised, Logan let go of the old man’s arm. ‘Rough night?’

Doc Wilson ran a tired hand across his face, making the stubble scritch. ‘Sorry. I’m just knackered . . .’ He cast a glance over his shoulder at Rosie’s naked body and sighed. ‘Best guess: blunt trauma. The bruising’s no’ that advanced, so circulation must’ve stopped pretty quickly. Given the lividity I’d say you’re lookin’ at three, maybe four hours ago.’ He stifled a yawn. ‘Beaten to death.’

It was twenty past four before anyone else turned up, and by then Doc Wilson was long gone. The sun was already on its way, the sky a soft lemon stain wisped with grey, but Shore Lane remained shrouded in shadow.

The Identification Bureau’s filthy white Transit Van reversed up the alley from the dual carriageway, a lone IB technician in white SOC coveralls guiding it in. Both rear doors opened and the ritual fight with the crime scene tent began: wrestling metal poles and blue plastic sheeting up over Rosie Williams’s body. A generator roared into life, chugging blue smoke out into the early morning – diesel fumes fighting with the stench of rotting rat – setting a pair of

arc lights crackling. The Procurator Fiscal appeared not long after, parking at the far end of the alley where it emptied out onto Regent Quay. She was an attractive blonde in her early forties, looking almost as tired as Logan felt, smelling faintly of smoke. A serious-looking younger woman trailed along behind her: all frizzy hair, wide eyes and clipboard. Logan brought them up to speed as they struggled into a matching set of white paper over suits, then had to go through the whole thing again when the pathologist turned up. Dr Isobel MacAlister: tired, irritable and more than happy to take it out on Logan. Nothing like an ex-girlfriend to take all the fun out of a crime scene. And there was *still* no sign of DI McPherson. Which meant Logan was still responsible if anything went wrong. As if he didn't have enough to worry about. The only upside was that it wouldn't be his problem for long: there was no way they'd leave him in charge of a murder enquiry. Not with his recent track record. Not after he'd almost got PC Maitland killed in a botched raid. No, this case would go to someone who wouldn't screw it up. He checked his watch. Almost five. Still another two hours to go before his day shift was supposed to start and he'd already been at it for half the night.

With a tired sigh, Logan stepped from the cold light of dawn into the SOC tent. It was going to be a long day.