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Written by Ian Rankin

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IAN
RANKIN
TOOTH
AND NAIL



*For Miranda, again,
but this time for Mugwump too . . .*

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Prologue

She drives home the knife.

The moment, she knows from past experience, is a very intimate one. Her hand is gripped around the knife's cool handle and the thrust takes the blade into the throat up to the hilt until her hand meets the throat itself. Flesh upon flesh. Jacket first, or woollen jersey, cotton shirt or T-shirt, then flesh. Now rent. The knife is writhing, like an animal sniffing. Warm blood covering hilt and hand. (The other hand covers the mouth, stifling screams.) The moment is complete. A meeting. Touching. The body is hot, gaping, warm with blood. Seething inside, as insides become outsides. Boiling. The moment is coming to an end all too soon.

And still she feels hungry. It isn't right, isn't usual, but she does. She removes some of the clothing; in fact, removes quite a lot of it, removes more, perhaps, than is necessary. And she does what she must do, the knife squirming again. She keeps her eyes screwed tightly shut. She does not like this part. She has never liked this part, not then, not now. But especially not *then*.

Finally, she brings out her teeth and sinks them into the white stomach, until they grind together in a satisfying bite, and whispers, as she always does, the same four words.

'It's only a game.'

* * *

It is evening when George Flight gets the call. Sunday evening. Sunday should be his blessed relief, beef and Yorkshires, feet up in front of the television, papers falling from his lap. But he's had a feeling all day. In the pub at lunchtime he'd felt it, a wriggling in his gut like there were worms in there, tiny blind white worms, hungry worms, worms he could not hope to satisfy. He knew what they were and they knew what they were. And then he'd won third prize in the pub raffle: a three-foot high orange and white teddy bear. Even the worms had laughed at him then and he'd known the day would end badly.

As it was doing now, the phone as insistent as last orders. Ringing with whatever bad news couldn't wait until the morning shift. He knew what it meant of course. Hadn't he been expecting it these past weeks? But still he was reluctant to pick up the receiver. At last he did.

'Flight speaking.'

'There's been another one, sir. The Wolfman. He's done another.'

Flight stared at the silent television. Highlights of the previous day's rugby match. Grown men running after a funny-shaped ball as though their lives depended on it. It was only a bloody game after all. And propped up against the side of the TV that smirking prize, the teddy bear. What the hell could he do with a teddy bear?

'Okay,' he said, 'just tell me where ...'

'After all, it *is* only a game.'

Rebus smiled and nodded at the Englishman across the table. Then he stared out of the window, pretending once more to be interested in the blur of dark scenery. If the Englishman had said it once, he had said it a dozen times. And during the trip, he had said little else. He also kept stealing precious legroom from Rebus, while his collection of empty beer cans was creeping across the table, invading

Rebus's space, pushing against the neatly folded stack of newspapers and magazines.

'Tickets, please!' yelled the guard from the other end of the carriage.

So, with a sigh, and for the third time since leaving Edinburgh, Rebus sought out his ticket. It was never where he thought it was. At Berwick, he'd thought it was in his shirt pocket. It was in the outer top pocket of his Harris tweed jacket. Then at Durham he'd looked for it in his jacket, only to find it beneath one of the magazines on the table. Now, ten minutes out of Peterborough, it had moved to the back pocket of his trousers. He retrieved it, and waited for the guard to make his way forward.

The Englishman's ticket was where it had always been: half-hidden beneath a beer can. Rebus, although he knew every word almost by heart, glanced again at the back page of one of his Sunday papers. He had kept it to the top of the pile for no reason other than a sense of devilment, enjoying the thick black letters of the headline – SCOTS WHA HAE! – beneath which was printed the story of the previous day's Calcutta Cup clash at Murrayfield. And a clash it had been: no day for weak stomachs, but a day for stout hearts and determination. The Scots had triumphed by thirteen points to ten, and now here Rebus was on a late evening Sunday train packed with disappointed English rugby supporters, heading towards London.

London. Never one of Rebus's favourite places. Not that he was a frequent visitor. But this was not pleasure. This was strictly business, and as a representative of the Lothian and Borders Police, he was to be on best behaviour. Or, as his boss had put it so succinctly, 'No fuck-ups, John.'

Well, he would do his best. Not that he reckoned there was much he *could* do, right or wrong. But he would do what he could. And if that meant wearing a clean shirt and tie, polished shoes and a respectable jacket, then so be it.

‘All tickets, please.’

Rebus handed over his ticket. Somewhere in the corridor up ahead, in the no-man’s-land of the buffet car between first and second class, a few voices were raised in a verse of Blake’s *Jerusalem*. The Englishman across from Rebus smiled.

‘Only a game,’ he said to the tins in front of him. ‘Only a game.’

The train pulled in to King’s Cross five minutes late. It was a quarter past eleven. Rebus was in no hurry. A hotel room had been booked for him in central London, courtesy of the Metropolitan Police. He carried a typed list of notes and directions in his jacket pocket, again sent up from London. He had not brought much luggage with him, feeling that the courtesy of the Met would extend only so far. He expected the trip to last two or three days at most, after which time even they would realise, surely, that he was not going to be of much help to them in their investigations. So: one small suitcase, one sports bag and one briefcase. The suitcase contained two suits, a change of shoes, several pairs of socks and underpants and two shirts (with matching ties). In the sports bag were a small washbag, towel, two paperback novels (one partly read), a travel alarm clock, a thirty-five millimetre camera with flashgun and film, a T-shirt, retractable umbrella, sunglasses, transistor radio, diary, Bible, a bottle containing ninety-seven paracetamol tablets and another bottle (protected by the T-shirt) containing best Islay malt whisky.

The bare essentials, in other words. The briefcase contained notepad, pens, a personal tape recorder, some blank tapes and prerecorded tapes and a thick manila file filled with photocopied sheets of Metropolitan Police paper, ten-by-eight inch colour photographs held together in a small ring-binder affair and newspaper clippings. On the

front of this file was a white sticky label with one word typed upon it. The word was WOLFMAN.

Rebus was in no hurry. The night – what was left of it – was his. He had to attend a meeting at ten on Monday morning, but his first night in the capital city could be spent however he chose. He thought he would probably choose to spend it in his hotel room. He waited in his seat until the other passengers had left the train, then slid his bag and briefcase from the luggage rack and made for the sliding door to the carriage, beside which, in another luggage rack, sat his suitcase. Manoeuvring these out of the train door and onto the platform, he paused for a moment and breathed in. The smell was not quite like any other railway station. Certainly it was not like Waverley Station in Edinburgh. The air wasn't quite foetid, but it did seem to Rebus somehow overused and tired. He felt suddenly fatigued. And there was something else in his nostrils, something sweet and revolting at the same time. He couldn't quite think what it reminded him of.

On the concourse, instead of making directly for the Underground, he wandered over to a bookstall. There he purchased an A-Z of London, slipping it into his briefcase. The next morning's editions were just arriving, but he ignored them. This was Sunday, not Monday. Sunday was the Lord's day, which was perhaps why he had packed a Bible along with his other possessions. He hadn't been to a church service in weeks ... maybe even months. Not since he'd tried the Cathedral on Palmerston Place in fact. It had been a nice place, light and bright, but too far from his home to make for a viable proposition. And besides, it was still organised religion and he had not lost his mistrust of organised religion. If anything, he was warier these days than ever before. He was also hungry. Perhaps he would grab a bite on the way to the hotel....

He passed two women having an animated discussion.

‘I heard it on the radio just twenty minutes ago.’

‘Done another, has he?’

‘That’s what they’re saying.’

The woman shivered. ‘Don’t bear thinking about. Did they say it was definitely him?’

‘Not definitely, but you just know, don’t you?’

There was a truth in that. So, Rebus had arrived in time for another small piece of the drama to unfold around him. Another murder, making four in all. Four in the space of three months. He was a busy little man, this killer they had named the Wolfman. They had named him the Wolfman and then they had sent word to Rebus’s boss. Lend us your man, they had said. Let’s see what he can do. Rebus’s boss, Chief Superintendent Watson, had handed the letter over to him.

‘Better take some silver bullets with you, John,’ he had said. ‘It looks like you’re their only hope.’ And then he had chuckled, knowing as well as Rebus knew himself that he could be of little help in the case. But Rebus had gnawed on his bottom lip, silent in front of his desk-bound superior. He would do what he could. He would do *everything* he could. Until they saw through him and sent him back home.

Besides, perhaps he needed the break. Watson seemed glad to be rid of him, too.

‘If nothing else, it’ll keep us out of one another’s hair for a while.’

The Chief Superintendent, an Aberdonian, had earned the nickname ‘Farmer Watson’, a nickname every police officer beneath him in Edinburgh understood. But then one day Rebus, a nip of malt too many beneath his belt, had blurted out the nickname in front of Watson himself, since when he had found himself assigned to more than his fair share of tedious details, desk jobs, lookouts and training courses.

Training courses! At least Watson had a sense of humour. The most recent had been termed 'Management for Senior Officers' and had been a minor disaster – all psychology and how to be nice to junior officers. How to *involve* them, how to *motivate* them, how to *relate* to them. Rebus had returned to his station and tried it for one day, a day of involving, of motivating, of relating. At the end of the day, a DC had slapped a hand onto Rebus's back, smiling.

'Bloody hard work today, John. But I've enjoyed it.'

'Take your hand off my fucking back,' Rebus had snarled. 'And don't call me John.'

The DC's mouth fell open. 'But you said ...' he began, but didn't bother finishing. The brief holiday was over. Rebus had tried being a manager. Tried it and loathed it.

He was halfway down the steps to the Underground when he stopped, put down his suitcase and briefcase, pulled open the zip on his sports bag and found the transistor radio. Switching it on, he held it to his ear with one hand while the other turned the tuning dial. Eventually, he found a news bulletin, listening as the other travellers passed him, a few of them staring, but mostly ignoring him. At last he heard what he had been waiting for, then switched off the radio and threw it back into the sports bag. Now, he released the two catches on his briefcase and brought out the A-Z. Flipping through the pages of street names at the back, he remembered just how large London really was. Large and populous. Something like ten million, was it? Wasn't that twice the population of Scotland? It didn't bear thinking about. Ten million souls.

'Ten million and one,' Rebus whispered to himself, finding the name he had been looking for.

The Chamber of Horrors

‘Not a pretty sight.’

Looking around him, Detective Inspector George Flight wondered whether the sergeant had been referring to the body or to the surrounding area. You could say what you liked about the Wolfman, he wasn't choosy about his turf. This time it was a riverside path. Not that Flight had ever really thought of the Lea as a 'river'. It was a place where supermarket trolleys came to die, a dank stretch of water bordered on one side by marshland and on the other by industrial sites and lo-rise housing. Apparently you could walk the course of the Lea from the Thames to up past Edmonton. The narrow river ran like a mottled black vein from east central London to the most northerly reaches of the capital and beyond. The vast majority of Londoners didn't even know it existed.

George Flight knew about it though. He had been brought up in Tottenham Hale, not far from the Lea. His father had fished on the Navigation section, between Stonebridge and Tottenham Locks. When he was young he had played football on the marshes, smoked illicit cigarettes in the long grass with his gang, fumbled with a blouse or a brassiere on the wasteland just across the river from where he now stood.

He had walked along this path. It was popular on warm Sunday afternoons. There were riverside pubs where you could stand outside sipping a pint and watching the Sunday sailors plying their crafts, but at night, only the

drunk, the reckless and the brave would use the quiet and ill-lit path. The drunk, the reckless, the brave ... and the locals. Jean Cooper was a local. Ever since the separation from her husband, she had lived with her sister in a small, recently-built estate just off the towpath. She worked in an off-licence on Lea Bridge Road, and finished work at seven. The riverside path was a quick route home.

Her body had been found at nine forty-five by a couple of young lads on their way to one of the pubs. They had run back to Lea Bridge Road and flagged down a passing police car. The operation thereafter had about it a fluid, easy movement. The police doctor arrived, to be met by detectives from Stoke Newington police station, who, recognising the *modus operandi*, contacted Flight.

By the time he arrived, the scene was organised but busy. The body had been identified, questions asked of nearby residents, the sister found. Scene of Crime Officers were in discussion with a couple of people from Forensics. The area around the body had been cordoned off and nobody crossed the tape without first of all donning polythene cover-alls for their feet and hair. Two photographers were busy taking flash photographs under portable lighting powered by a nearby generator. And next to the generator stood an operations van, where another photographer was trying to fix his jammed video camera.

‘It’s these cheap tapes,’ he complained. ‘They look like a bargain when you buy them, but then halfway through you find there’s a twist or a snag in them.’

‘So don’t buy cheap tapes,’ Flight had advised.

‘Thank you, Sherlock,’ had been the cameraman’s ill-meant response, before once again cursing the tapes, the seller of the tapes and the seller’s market stall in Brick Lane. He’d only bought the tapes that day.

Meantime, having discussed their plan of attack, the forensic scientists moved in towards the body armed with

sticky tape, scissors and a pile of large polythene bags. Then, with extraordinary care, they began to 'tape' the body in the hope of lifting hairs and fibres from the clothing. Flight watched them from a distance. The portable lights cast a garish white glow over the scene, so that, standing further back in unlit gloom, Flight felt a bit like someone in a theatre, watching a distant play unfold. By God, you had to have patience for a job like this. Everything had to be done by the book and had to be done in meticulous detail. He hadn't gone near the body yet himself. His chance would come later. Perhaps much later.

The wailing started again. It was coming from a police Ford Sierra parked on Lea Bridge Road. Jean Cooper's sister, being comforted in the back of the car by a WPC, being told to drink the hot sweet tea, knowing she would never see her sister alive again. But this was not the worst. Flight knew the worst was still to come, when the sister would formally identify Jean's body in the mortuary.

Jean Cooper had been easy enough to identify. Her handbag lay beside her on the path apparently untouched. In it were letters and house keys with an address tag attached. Flight couldn't help thinking about those house keys. It wasn't very clever to put your address on your keys, was it? A bit late for that now though. A bit late for crime prevention. The crying started again, a long plaintive howl, reaching into the orange glow of the sky above the River Lea and its marshes.

Flight looked towards the body, then retraced the route Jean had taken from Lea Bridge Road. She had walked less than fifty yards before being attacked. Fifty yards from a well-lit and busy main thoroughfare, less than twenty from the back of a row of flats. But this section of path depended for light upon a street lamp which was broken (the council would probably get round to fixing it now) and from whatever illumination was given from the windows of the

flats. It was dark enough for the purpose all right. Dark enough for murder most foul.

He couldn't be sure that the Wolfman was responsible, not completely and utterly sure at this early stage. But he could feel it, like a numbing injection in his bones. The terrain was right. The stab wounds reported to him seemed right. And the Wolfman had been quiet for just under three weeks. Three weeks during which the trail had gone stone cold, as cold as a canal path. The Wolfman had taken a risk this time however, striking in late evening instead of at the dead of night. Someone might have seen him. The need for a rapid escape might have led him to leave a clue. Please, God, let him have left a clue. Flight rubbed at his stomach. The worms were gone, consumed by acid. He felt calm, utterly calm, for the first time in days.

'Excuse me.' The voice was muffled, and Flight half-turned to let the diver past him. This diver was followed by another, both of them holding powerful torches. Flight did not envy the police frogmen their job. The river was dark and poisonous, chilled and most probably the consistency of soup. But it had to be searched now. If the killer had dropped something into the Lea by mistake, or had thrown his knife into the river, it had to be recovered as soon as possible. Silt or shifting rubbish might cover it before daybreak. Simply, they couldn't afford the time. And so he had ordered a search just after hearing the news, before he had even left his warm and comfortable home to hurry to the scene. His wife had patted him on the arm. 'Try not to be late.' Both knew the words were meaningless.

He watched the first frogman slip into the water and stared entranced as the water began to glow from the torchlight. The second diver followed the first into the water and disappeared from view. Flight checked the sky. A thick layer of cloud lay still and silent above him. The weather report was for early morning rain. It would

dissolve footprints and wash fibres, bloodstains and hair into the hard-packed soil of the path. With any luck, they would complete the initial scene of crime work without the need for plastic tents.

‘George!’

Flight turned to greet the newcomer. The man was in his mid-fifties, tall with cadaverous features lit up by a wide grin, or as wide as the long and narrow face would allow. He carried a large black bag in his left hand, and stretched out his right for Flight to shake. By his side walked a handsome woman of Flight’s own age. In fact, as far as he could recall she was exactly one month and a day younger than him. Her name was Isobel Penny, and she was, in a euphemistic phrase, the cadaverous man’s ‘assistant’ and ‘secretary’. That they had been sleeping together these past eight or nine years was something nobody really discussed, though Isobel had told Flight all about it, for no other reason than that they had been in the same class together at school and had kept in touch with one another ever since.

‘Hello, Philip,’ said Flight, shaking the pathologist’s hand.

Philip Cousins was not just a Home Office pathologist: he was by far the *best* Home Office pathologist, with a reputation resulting from twenty-five years’ worth of work, twenty-five years during which, to Flight’s knowledge, the man had never once ‘got it wrong’. Cousins’s eye for detail and his sheer bloody doggedness had seen him crack, or help crack, several dozen murder investigations, ranging from stranglings in Streatham to the poisoning of a government official in the West Indies. People who did not know him said that he looked the part, with his dark blue suits and cold grey features. They could not know about his quick and ready humour, his kindness, or the way he thrilled student doctors at his packed lectures. Flight had

attended one of those lectures, something to do with arterial sclerosis and hadn't laughed so much in years.

'I thought you two were in Africa,' he said now, pecking Isobel on the cheek by way of greeting.

Cousins sighed. 'We were, but Penny got homesick.' He always called her by her surname. She gave him a playful thump on his forearm.

'You liar!' Then she turned her pale blue eyes to Flight. 'It was Philip,' she said. 'He couldn't bear to be away from his corpses. The first decent holiday we've had in years and he says he's *bored*. Can you believe that, George?'

Flight smiled and shook his head. 'Well, I'm glad you were able to make it. Looks like another victim of the Wolfman.'

Cousins looked over Flight's shoulder towards where the photographers were still photographing, the crouched scientists still sticky-taping, like so many flies about to settle on the corpse. He had examined the first three Wolfman victims, and that sort of continuity helped in a case. It wasn't just that he would know what to look for, what marks were indicative of the Wolfman; he would also spot anything not in keeping with the other killings, anything that might hint at a change of *modus operandi*: a different weapon, say, or a new angle of attack. Flight's mental picture of the Wolfman was coming together piece by tiny piece, but Cousins was the man who could show him where those pieces fitted.

'Inspector Flight?'

'Yes?' A man in a tweed jacket was approaching, carrying several cases and trailing a uniformed constable behind him. He placed the bags on the ground and introduced himself.

'John Rebus.' Flight's face remained blank. 'Inspector John Rebus.' The hand shot out, and Flight accepted it, feeling his grip strongly returned.

‘Ah yes,’ he said. ‘Just arrived, have you?’ He glanced meaningfully towards the bags. ‘We weren’t expecting you until tomorrow, Inspector.’

‘Well, I got into King’s Cross and heard about ...’ Rebus nodded towards the illuminated towpath. ‘So I thought I’d come straight over.’

Flight nodded, trying to appear preoccupied. In fact, he was playing for time while he tried to come to grips with the Scotsman’s thick accent. One of the forensic scientists had risen from his squatting position and was coming towards the group.

‘Hello, Dr Cousins,’ he said, before turning to Flight. ‘We’re pretty much finished if Dr Cousins wants to take a look.’ Flight turned to Philip Cousins, who nodded gravely.

‘Come on, Penny.’

Flight was about to follow them, when he remembered the new arrival. He turned back to John Rebus, his eyes immediately drifting down from Rebus’s face to his loud and rustic jacket. He looked like something out of *Dr Finlay’s Casebook*. Certainly, he looked out of place on this urban towpath at the dead of night.

‘Do you want to take a look?’ Flight asked generously. He watched as Rebus nodded without enthusiasm. ‘Okay, leave your bags where they are then.’

The two men started forward together, Cousins and Isobel a couple of yards in front. Flight pointed towards them. ‘Dr Philip Cousins,’ he said. ‘You’ve probably heard of him.’ But Rebus shook his head slowly. Flight stared at him as though Rebus had just failed to pick out the Queen from a row of postage stamps. ‘Oh,’ he said coldly. Then, pointing again: ‘And that’s Isobel Penny, Dr Cousins’s assistant.’

Hearing her name, Isobel turned her head back and smiled. She had an attractive face, round and girl-like with a shiny glow to her cheeks. Physically, she was the

antithesis of her companion. Though tall, she was well-built – what Rebus's father might have called big boned – and she boasted a healthy complexion to balance Cousins's sickly colour. Rebus couldn't recall ever having seen a really healthy looking pathologist. He put it down to all the time they spent standing under artificial light.

They had reached the body. The first thing Rebus saw was someone aiming a video camera towards him. But the camera moved away again to focus on the corpse. Flight was in conversation with one of the forensics team. Neither looked at the other's face, but concentrated instead on the strips of tape which had been carefully lifted from the corpse and which the scientist now held.

'Yes,' said Flight, 'no need to send them to the lab yet. We'll do another taping at the mortuary.' The man nodded and moved away. There was a noise from the river and Rebus turned to watch as a frogman broke the surface, looked around him, and then dived again. He knew a place like this in Edinburgh, a canal running through the west of the city, between parks and breweries and stretches of nothingness. He'd had to investigate a murder there once, the battered body of a tramp found beneath a road bridge, one foot in the canal. The killer had been easy to find: another tramp, an argument over a can of cider. The court had settled for manslaughter, but it hadn't been manslaughter. It had been murder. Rebus would never forget that.

'I think we should wrap those hands up right away,' Dr Cousins was saying in a rich Home Counties voice. 'I'll have a good look at them at the mortuary.'

'Right you are,' said Flight, going off to fetch some more polythene bags. Rebus watched the pathologist at work. He held a small tape recorder in one hand and talked into it from time to time. Isobel Penny meantime had produced a sketch-pad, and was drawing a picture of the body.

'Poor woman was probably dead before she hit the

ground,' Cousins was saying. 'Little signs of bruising. Hypostasis seems consistent with the terrain. I'd say she certainly died on this spot.'

By the time Flight returned with some bags, Cousins, watched intermittently by Rebus, had taken readings of the air temperature and of internal temperature. The path on which they all stood was long and reasonably straight. The killer would have had ample visual warning of any approach. At the same time, there were homes and a main road nearby, so any screams would surely have been heard. Tomorrow there would be house-to-house enquiries. The path near the body was littered with rubbish: rusting drinks cans, crisp packets, sweet wrappers, torn and faded sheets of newsprint. In the river itself floated more rubbish and the red handle of a supermarket shopping-trolley broke the surface. Another diver had appeared, head and shoulders bobbing above the water. Where the main road crossed over the river, a crowd had gathered on the bridge, looking down towards the murder scene. Uniformed officers were doing their best to move the sightseers on, cordoning off as much of the area as they could.

'From the marks on the legs, dirt, some grazing and bruising,' continued the voice, 'I would say the victim fell to the ground or was pushed or lowered to the ground on her front. Only later was she turned over.' Dr Cousins's voice was level, disinterested. Rebus took in a few deep breaths and decided he had postponed the inevitable long enough. He had only come here to show willing, to show that he wasn't in London on a joyride. But now that he was here he supposed he should take a good close look at the body for himself. He turned away from the canal, the frogmen, the sightseers, and all the police officers standing behind the cordon. He turned away from the sight of his baggage standing all alone at the end of the path and gazed down on the corpse.

She was lying on her back, arms by her sides, legs together. Her tights and knickers had been pulled down to knee level, but her skirt was covering her, though he could see it was rucked up at the back. Her bright ski-style jacket was unzipped and her blouse had been ripped open, though her bra was intact. She had long straight black hair and wore large circlet earrings. Her face might have been pretty a few years ago, but life had ravaged it, leaving its marks. The killer had left marks, too. There was blood smeared across the face and matting the hair. The source of the blood was a gaping hole in the woman's throat. But there was also blood lying beneath her, spreading out from under the skirt.

'Turning her over,' said Dr Cousins to his tape recorder. He did so, with Flight's help, and then lifted the woman's hair away from the nape of her neck. 'Puncture wound,' he said into his tape recorder, 'consistent with larger wound to the throat. An exit wound, I'd say.'

But Rebus wasn't really listening to the doctor any longer. He was staring in horror at where the woman's skirt was rucked up. There was blood on the body, a lot of blood, staining the small of the back, the buttocks, the tops of the thighs. From the reports in his briefcase, he knew the cause of all this blood, but that didn't make it any easier to face the reality of it, the cold clear horror of it all. He took in more deep breaths. He had never yet vomited at a murder scene and he wasn't about to start now.

'No fuck-ups,' his boss had told him. It was a matter of pride. But Rebus knew now that the purpose of his trip to London was very serious indeed. It wasn't to do with 'pride' or 'putting up a good show' or 'doing his best'. It was to do with catching a pervert, a horrifically brutal sadist, and doing so before he could strike again. And if it took silver bullets, by God silver bullets there would be.

* * *

Rebus was still shaking when, at the operations van, someone handed him a plastic beaker of tea.

‘Thanks.’

He could always blame his gooseflesh on the cold. Not that it was cold, not really. The cloud cover helped and there was no wind. Of course, London was usually a few degrees warmer than Edinburgh at any time of year and there wasn’t the same wind, that bitter and biting wind which whipped across the streets of Edinburgh in summer as well as winter. In fact, if Rebus were asked to describe the weather on this night, the word he would use would be balmy.

He closed his eyes for a moment, not tired, just trying to shut out the sight of Jean Cooper’s cooling body. But she seemed etched onto his eyelids in all her grim glory. Rebus had been relieved to note that even Inspector George Flight was not unmoved. His actions, movements and speech had become somehow damped or more muted, as though he were consciously holding back some emotion, the urge to scream or kick out. The divers were coming up from the river, having found nothing. They would look again in the morning, but their voices betrayed a lack of hope. Flight listened to their report and nodded, all the time watched, from behind his beaker of tea, by Rebus.

George Flight was in his late forties, a few years older than Rebus. He wasn’t short, yet he had an appearance best described as stocky. There was the hint of a paunch, but a much greater hint of muscle. Rebus didn’t rate his own chances against him in a clinch. Flight’s wiry brown hair was thin at the crown, but thick elsewhere. He was dressed in a leather bomber jacket and denims. Most men in their forties looked stupid in denims, but not Flight. They fitted his attitude and his brisk, businesslike walk.

A long time before, Rebus had graded CID men into three sartorial groups: the leather-and-denim brigade, who

wanted to look as tough as they felt; the suit-and-tie dapper merchants, who were looking for promotion and respect (not necessarily in that order); and the nondescripts, men who wore anything that came to hand of a morning, their year's fashions usually the result of an hour's shopping in a big-name department store.

Most CID men were nondescripts. Rebus reckoned he himself fell into that group. Yet catching a glimpse of himself in a wing-mirror, he noticed that he had a dapper look. Suit-and-ties never got on with leather-and-denims.

Now Flight was shaking hands with an important looking man, who other than for the handshake, kept his hands in his pockets and listened to Flight with head angled downwards, nodding occasionally as though deep in thought. He wore a suit and a black woollen coat. He couldn't have been more crisply dressed if it had been the middle of the day. Most people were beginning to look fatigued, their clothes and faces crumpled. There were only two exceptions: this man and Philip Cousins.

The man was shaking hands with Dr Cousins now and even extended a greeting to Dr Cousins's assistant. And then Flight gestured towards the van ... no, towards *Rebus!* They were coming towards him. Rebus brought the beaker away from his face, and swapped it from his right to his left hand, just in case a handshake was in the offing.

'This is Inspector Rebus,' Flight said.

'Ah, our man from north of the border,' said the important looking man with a wry, rather superior smile. Rebus returned the smile but looked to Flight.

'Inspector Rebus, this is Chief Inspector Howard Laine.'

'How do you do.' The handshake. Howard Laine: it sounded like a street-name.

'So,' said Chief Inspector Laine, 'you're here to help us with our little problem?'