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**Opening Extract from...**

# **Exit Music**

Written by Ian Rankin

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**IAN**  
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**EXIT**  
**MUSIC**



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**Day One**

Wednesday

15 November 2006

The girl screamed once, only the once, but it was enough. By the time the middle-aged couple arrived at the foot of Raeburn Wynd, she was kneeling on the ground, hands over her face, shoulders heaving with sobs. The man studied the corpse for a moment, then tried shielding his wife's eyes, but she had already turned away. He took out his phone and called the emergency number. It was ten minutes before the police car arrived, during which time the girl tried to leave, the man explaining calmly that she should wait, his hand rubbing her shoulder. His wife was seated kerbside, despite the nighttime chill. November in Edinburgh, not quite cold enough for a frost but heading that way. King's Stables Road wasn't the busiest of thoroughfares. A No Entry sign prevented vehicles using it as a route from the Grassmarket to Lothian Road. At night it could be a lonely spot, with not much more than a multistorey car park on one side, Castle Rock and a cemetery on the other. The street lighting seemed underpowered, and pedestrians kept their wits about them. The middle-aged couple had been to a carol service in St Cuthbert's Church, helping raise money for the city's children's hospital. The woman had bought a holly wreath, which now lay on the ground to the left of the corpse. Her husband couldn't help thinking: a minute either way and we might not have heard, might be heading home in the car, the wreath on the back seat and Classic FM on the radio.

'I want to go home,' the girl was complaining between sobs. She was standing, knees grazed. Her skirt was too short, the man felt, and her denim jacket was unlikely

to keep out the cold. She looked familiar to him. He had considered – briefly considered – lending her his coat. Instead, he reminded her again that she needed to stay put. Suddenly, their faces turned blue. The police car was arriving, lights flashing.

‘Here they come,’ the man said, placing his arm around her shoulders as if to comfort her, removing it again when he saw his wife was watching.

Even after the patrol car drew to a halt, its roof light stayed on, engine left running. Two uniformed officers emerged, not bothering with their caps. One of them carried a large black torch. Raeburn Wynd was steep and led to a series of mews conversions above garages which would once have housed the monarch’s carriages and horses. It would be treacherous when icy.

‘Maybe he slipped and banged his head,’ the man offered. ‘Or he was sleeping rough, or had had a few too many ...’

‘Thank you, sir,’ one of the officers said, meaning the opposite. His colleague had switched the torch on, and the middle-aged man realised that there was blood on the ground, blood on the slumped body’s hands and clothes. The face and hair were clotted with it.

‘Or someone smashed him to a pulp,’ the first officer commented. ‘Unless, of course, he slipped repeatedly against a cheese-grater.’

His young colleague winced. He’d been crouching down, the better to shine light on to the body, but he rose to his feet again. ‘Whose is the wreath?’ he asked.

‘My wife’s,’ the man stated, wondering afterwards why he hadn’t just said ‘mine’.

‘Jack Palance,’ Detective Inspector John Rebus said.

‘I keep telling you, I don’t know him.’

‘Big film star.’

‘So name me a film.’

‘His obituary’s in the *Scotsman*.’

‘Then you should be clued up enough to tell me what

I've seen him in.' Detective Sergeant Siobhan Clarke got out of the car and slammed shut the door.

'He was the bad guy in a lot of Westerns,' Rebus persisted.

Clarke showed her warrant card to one of the uniforms and took a proffered torch from the younger of the two. The Scene-of-Crime unit was on its way. Spectators had started gathering, drawn to the scene by the patrol car's blue beacon. Rebus and Clarke had been working late at Gayfield Square police station, hammering out a theory – but no prime suspect – in an unsolved investigation. Both had been glad of the break provided by the summons. They'd arrived in Rebus's wheezing Saab 900, from the boot of which he was now fetching polythene overshoes and latex gloves. It took him half a dozen noisy attempts to slam shut the lid.

'Need to trade it in,' he muttered.

'Who'd want it?' Clarke asked, pulling on the gloves. Then, when he didn't answer: 'Were those hiking boots I glimpsed?'

'As old as the car,' Rebus stated, heading towards the corpse. The two detectives fell silent, studying the figure and its surroundings.

'Someone's done a job on him,' Rebus eventually commented. He turned towards the younger constable. 'What's your name, son?'

'Goodyear, sir ... Todd Goodyear.'

'Todd?'

'Mum's maiden name, sir,' Goodyear explained.

'Ever heard of Jack Palance, Todd?'

'Wasn't he in *Shane*?'

'You're wasted in uniform.'

Goodyear's colleague chuckled. 'Give young Todd here half a chance and it's *you* he'll be grilling rather than any suspects.'

'How's that?' Clarke asked.

The constable – at least fifteen years older than his

partner and maybe three times the girth – nodded towards Goodyear. ‘I’m not good enough for Todd,’ he explained. ‘Got his eyes set on CID.’

Goodyear ignored this. He had his notebook in his hand. ‘Want us to start taking details?’ he asked. Rebus looked towards the pavement. A middle-aged couple were seated kerbside, holding hands. Then there was the teenage girl, arms wrapped around herself as she shivered against a wall. Beyond her the crowd of onlookers was starting to shuffle forward again, warnings forgotten.

‘Best thing you can do,’ Rebus offered, ‘is hold that lot back till we can secure the scene. Doctor should be here in a couple of minutes.’

‘He’s not got a pulse,’ Goodyear said. ‘I checked.’

Rebus glowered at him.

‘Told you they wouldn’t like it,’ Goodyear’s partner said with another chuckle.

‘Contaminates the locus,’ Clarke told the young constable, showing him her gloved hands and overshoes. He looked embarrassed.

‘Doctor still has to confirm death,’ Rebus added. ‘Meantime, you can start persuading that rabble to get themselves home.’

‘Glorified bouncers, that’s us,’ the older cop told his partner as they moved off.

‘Which would make this the VIP enclosure,’ Clarke said quietly. She was checking the corpse again. ‘He’s well enough dressed; probably not homeless.’

‘Want to look for ID?’

She took a couple of steps forward and crouched beside the body, pressing a gloved hand against the man’s trouser and jacket pockets. ‘Can’t feel anything,’ she said.

‘Not even sympathy?’

She glanced up at Rebus. ‘Does the suit of armour come off when you collect the gold watch?’

Rebus managed to mouth the word ‘ouch’. Reason they’d been staying late at the office so often – Rebus only



ten days from retirement, wanting loose ends tied.

'A mugging gone wrong?' Clarke suggested into the silence.

Rebus just shrugged, meaning he didn't think so. He asked Clarke to shine the torch down the body: black leather jacket, an open-necked patterned shirt which had probably started out blue, faded denims held up with a black leather belt, black suede shoes. As far as Rebus could tell, the man's face was lined, the hair greying. Early fifties? Around five feet nine or ten. No jewellery, no wristwatch. Bringing Rebus's personal body-count to ... what? Maybe thirty or forty over the course of his three-decades-plus on the force. Another ten days and this poor wretch would have been somebody else's problem – and still could be. For weeks now he'd been feeling Siobhan Clarke's tension: part of her, maybe the best part of her, wanted Rebus gone. It was the only way she could start to prove herself. Her eyes were on him now, as if she knew what he was thinking. He offered a sly smile.

'I'm not dead yet,' he said, as the Scene-of-Crime van slowed to a halt on the roadway.

The duty doctor had duly declared death. The SOCOs had taped off Raeburn Wynd at top and bottom. Lights had been erected, a sheet pinned up so that onlookers no longer had a view of anything except the shadows on the other side. Rebus and Clarke were suited up in the same white hooded disposable overalls as the SOCOs. A camera team had just arrived, and the mortuary van was standing by. Beakers of tea had materialised from somewhere, wisps of steam rising from them. In the distance: sirens headed elsewhere; drunken yelps from nearby Princes Street; maybe even the hooting of an owl from the churchyard. Preliminary statements had been taken from the teenage girl and the middle-aged couple, and Rebus was flicking through these, flanked by the two constables, the elder of whom, he now knew, was called Bill Dyson.

'Rumour is,' Dyson said, 'you've finally got your jotters.'

'Weekend after next,' Rebus confirmed. 'Can't be too far away yourself.'

'Seven months and counting. Nice wee taxi job lined up for afterwards. Don't know how Todd will cope without me.'

'I'll try to maintain my composure,' Goodyear drawled.

'That's one thing you're good at,' Dyson was saying, as Rebus went back to his reading. The girl who had found the body was called Nancy Sievewright. She was seventeen and on her way home from a friend's house. The friend lived in Great Stuart Street and Nancy in Blair Street, just off the Cowgate. She had already left school and was unemployed, though hoping to get into college some day to study as a dental assistant. Goodyear had done the interview, and Rebus was impressed: neat handwriting, and plenty of detail. Turning to Dyson's notebook was like turning from hope to despair – a mess of hastily scrawled hieroglyphs. Those seven months couldn't pass quickly enough for PC Bill Dyson. Through guesswork, Rebus reckoned the middle-aged couple were Roger and Elizabeth Anderson and that they lived in Frogston Road West, on the southern edge of the city. There was a phone number, but no hint of their ages or occupations. Instead, Rebus could make out the words 'just passing' and 'called it in'. He handed the notebooks back without comment. All three would be interviewed again later. Rebus checked his watch, wondering when the pathologist would arrive. Not much else to be done in the meantime.

'Tell them they can go.'

'Girl's still a bit shaky,' Goodyear said. 'Reckon we should drop her home?'

Rebus nodded and turned his attention to Dyson. 'How about the other two?'

'Their car's parked in the Grassmarket.'

'Spot of late-night shopping?'

Dyson shook his head. 'Carol concert at St Cuthbert's.'

‘A conversation we could have saved ourselves,’ Rebus told him, ‘if you’d bothered to write any of it down.’ As his eyes drilled into the constable’s, he could sense the question Dyson wanted to ask: *What would be the bloody point of that?* Luckily, the old-timer knew better than to utter anything of the kind out loud ... not until the other old-timer was well out of earshot.

Rebus caught up with Clarke at the Scene-of-Crime van, where she was quizzing the team leader. His name was Thomas Banks – ‘Tam’ to those who knew him. He gave a nod of greeting and asked if his name was on the guest list for Rebus’s retirement do.

‘How come you’re all so keen to witness my demise?’

‘Don’t be surprised,’ Tam said, ‘if the suits from HQ come with stakes and mallets, just to be on the safe side.’ He winked towards Clarke. ‘Siobhan here tells me you’ve wangled it so your last shift’s a Saturday. Is that so we’re all at home watching telly while you take the long walk?’

‘Just the way it fell, Tam,’ Rebus assured him. ‘Any tea going?’

‘You turned your nose up at it,’ Tam chided him.

‘That was half an hour ago.’

‘No second chances here, John.’

‘I was asking,’ Clarke interrupted, ‘if Tam’s team had anything for us.’

‘I’m guessing he said to be patient.’

‘That’s about the size of it,’ Tam confirmed, checking a text message on his mobile phone. ‘Stabbing outside a pub at Haymarket,’ he informed them.

‘Busy night,’ Clarke offered. Then, to Rebus: ‘Doctor reckons our man was bludgeoned and maybe even kicked to death. He’s betting blunt force trauma at the autopsy.’

‘He’s not going to get any odds from me,’ Rebus told her.

‘Nor me,’ Tam added, rubbing a finger across the bridge of his nose. He turned to Rebus: ‘Know who that young copper was?’ He nodded towards the patrol car. Todd

Goodyear was helping Nancy Sievewright into the back seat, Bill Dyson drumming his fingers against the steering wheel.

‘Never seen him before,’ Rebus admitted.

‘You maybe knew his grandad though ...’ Tam left it at that, wanting Rebus to do the work. It didn’t take long.

‘Not Harry Goodyear?’

Tam was nodding in confirmation, leaving Clarke to ask who Harry Goodyear was.

‘Ancient history,’ Rebus informed her.

Which, typically, left her none the wiser.

Rebus was giving Clarke a lift home when the call came in on her mobile.

They did a U-turn and headed for the Cowgate, home to the city's mortuary. There was an unmarked white van sitting by the loading bay. Rebus parked next to it and led the way. The night shift consisted of just two men. One was in his forties and had the look – to Rebus's eyes – of an ex-con. A faded blue tattoo crept out of the neck of his overalls and halfway up his throat. It took Rebus a moment to place it as some sort of snake. The other man was a lot younger, bespectacled and gawky.

'I take it you're the poet,' Rebus guessed.

'Lord Byron, we call him,' the older man rasped.

'That's how I recognised him,' the young attendant told Rebus. 'I was at a reading he gave just yesterday ...' He glanced at his watch. 'Day before yesterday,' he corrected himself, reminding Rebus that it was past midnight. 'He was wearing the exact same clothes.'

'Hard to ID him from his face,' Clarke interrupted, playing devil's advocate.

The young man nodded agreement. 'All the same ... the hair, that jacket and the belt ...'

'So what's his name?' Rebus asked.

'Todorov. Alexander Todorov. He's Russian. I've got one of his books in the staffroom. He signed it for me.'

'That'll be worth a few quid.' The other attendant sounded suddenly interested.

'Can you fetch it?' Rebus asked. The young man nodded and shuffled past, heading for the corridor. Rebus studied

the rows of refrigerated doors. 'Which one's he in?'

'Number three.' The attendant rapped his knuckles against the door in question. There was a label on it, but no name as yet. 'I wouldn't bet on Lord Byron being wrong – he's got brains.'

'How long has he been here?'

'Couple of months. Real name's Chris Simpson.'

Clarke had a question of her own. 'Any idea how soon the autopsy will get done?'

'Soon as the pathologists get their arses down here.'

Rebus had picked up a copy of the day's *Evening News*. 'Looking bad for Hearts,' the attendant told him. 'Pressley's lost the captaincy and there's a caretaker coach.'

'Music to DS Clarke's ears,' Rebus told the man. He held the paper up so she could see the front page. A Sikh teenager had been attacked in Pilrig Park and his hair lopped off.

'Not our patch, thank God,' she said. At the sound of footsteps, all three of them turned, but it was only Chris Simpson returning with the slim hardback book. Rebus took charge of it and turned to the back cover. The poet's unsmiling face stared back at him. Rebus showed it to Clarke, who shrugged.

'Looks like the same leather jacket,' Rebus commented. 'But he's got some sort of chain round his neck.'

'He was wearing it at the reading,' Simpson confirmed.

'And the guy you brought in tonight?'

'No chain – I had a quick look. Maybe they took it ... whoever mugged him, I mean.'

'Or maybe it's not him. How long was Todorov staying in town?'

'He's here on some sort of scholarship. Hasn't lived in Russia for a while – calls himself an exile.'

Rebus was turning the pages of the book. It was called *Astapovo Blues*. The poems were in English and called things like 'Raskolnikov', 'Leonid', and 'Mind Gulag'. 'What does the title mean?' he asked Simpson.

‘It’s the place where Tolstoy died.’

The other attendant chuckled. ‘Told you he had a brain on him.’

Rebus handed the book to Clarke, who flicked to the title page. Todorov had written an inscription, telling ‘Dear Chris’ to ‘keep the faith, as I have and have not’. ‘What did he mean?’ she asked.

‘I said I was trying to be a poet. He told me that meant I already was. I think he’s saying he kept faith with poetry, but not with Russia.’ The young man was starting to blush.

‘Where was this?’ Rebus asked.

‘The Scottish Poetry Library – just off the Canongate.’

‘Was anyone with him? A wife maybe, or someone from the publisher?’

Simpson told them he couldn’t be sure. ‘He’s famous, you know. There was talk of the Nobel Prize.’

Clarke had closed the book. ‘There’s always the Russian consulate,’ she suggested. Rebus gave a slow nod. They could hear a car drawing up outside.

‘That’ll be at least one of them,’ the other attendant said. ‘Best get the lab ready, Lord Byron.’

Simpson had reached out a hand for his book, but Clarke waved it at him.

‘Mind if I hang on to it, Mr Simpson? Promise I won’t put it on eBay.’

The young man seemed reluctant, but was being prodded into action by his colleague. Clarke sealed the deal by slipping the book into her coat pocket. Rebus had turned to face the outer door, which was being hauled open by a puffy-eyed Professor Gates. Only a couple of steps behind him was Dr Curt – the two pathologists had worked together so frequently that they often seemed to Rebus a single unit. Hard to imagine that outside of work they could ever lead separate, distinguishable lives.

‘Ah, John,’ Gates said, proffering a hand as chilled as the room. ‘The night’s grown bitter. And here’s DS Clarke,

too – looking forward, no doubt, to stepping out from the mentor’s shadow.’

Clarke prickled but kept her mouth shut – no point in arguing that, as far as she was concerned, she’d long ago left Rebus’s shadow. Rebus himself offered a smile of support before shaking hands with the ashen-faced Curt. There had been a cancer scare eleven months back, and some of the man’s energy had failed to return, though he’d given up the cigarettes for good.

‘How are you, John?’ Curt was asking. Rebus felt maybe that should have been *his* question, but he offered a reassuring nod.

‘I’m guessing box two,’ Gates was saying, turning to his associate. ‘Deal or no deal?’

‘It’s number three actually,’ Clarke told him. ‘We think he may be a Russian poet.’

‘Not Todorov?’ Curt asked, one eyebrow raised. Clarke showed him the book, and the eyebrow went a little higher.

‘Wouldn’t have taken you for a poetry lover, Doc,’ Rebus commented.

‘Are we in the midst of a diplomatic incident?’ Gates snorted. ‘Should we be checking for poisoned umbrella tips?’

‘Looks like he was mugged by a psycho,’ Rebus explained. ‘Unless there’s a poison out there that strips the skin away from your face.’

‘Necrotising fasciitis,’ Curt muttered.

‘Arising from *Streptococcus pyogenes*,’ Gates added. ‘Not that I think we’ve ever seen it.’ To Rebus’s ears, he sounded genuinely disappointed.

Blunt force trauma: the police doctor had been spot-on. Rebus sat in his living room, not bothering to switch on any lights, and smoked a cigarette. Having banned nicotine from workplaces and pubs, the government were now looking at banning it from the home, too. Rebus wondered how they’d



go about enforcing *that*. A John Hiatt album was on the CD player, volume kept low. The track was called 'Lift Up Every Stone'. All his time on the force, he hadn't done anything else. But Hiatt was using stones to build a wall, while Rebus just peered beneath them at the tiny dark things scuttling around. He wondered if the lyric was a poem, and what the Russian poet would have made of Rebus's riff on it. They'd tried phoning the consulate, but no one had answered, not even a machine, so they'd decided to call it a night. Siobhan had been dozing off during the autopsy, much to Gates's irritation. Rebus's fault: he'd been keeping her late at the office, trying to get her interested in all those cold cases, all the ones still niggling him, hoping that maybe they would keep his memory warm ...

Rebus had dropped her home and then driven through the silent pre-dawn streets to Marchmont, an eventual parking space, and his second-floor tenement flat. The living room had a bay window, and that was where his chair was. He was promising himself he'd make it as far as the bedroom, but there was a spare duvet behind the sofa just in case. He had a bottle of whisky, too – eighteen-year-old Highland Park, bought the previous weekend and with a couple of good hits left in it. Ciggies and booze and a little night music. At one time, they would have provided enough consolation, but he wondered if they would sustain him once the job was behind him. What else did he have?

A daughter down in England, living with a college lecturer.

An ex-wife who'd moved to Italy.

The pub.

He couldn't see himself driving cabs or doing precognitions for defence lawyers. Couldn't see himself 'starting afresh' as others had done – retiring to Marbella or Florida or Bulgaria. Some had sunk their pensions into property, letting flats to students – a chief inspector he knew had made a mint that way, but Rebus didn't want the hassle.

He'd be nagging the students all the time about cigarette burns in the carpet or the washing-up not being done.

Sports? None.

Hobbies and pastimes? Just what he was doing right now.

'Bit maudlin tonight, are we, John?' he asked himself out loud. Then gave a little chuckle, knowing he could maudle for Scotland, gold medal a nap at the Grump Olympics. At least he wasn't being sewn together again and slid back into drawer number three. He'd gone through a list in his mind – offenders he knew who'd go overboard on a beating. Most were in jail or under sedation on the psycho ward. Gates himself had said it – 'There's a fury here.'

'Or furies plural,' Curt had added.

True, they could be looking for more than one attacker. The victim had been whacked on the back of the head with enough force to fracture the skull. Hammer, cosh or baseball bat – or anything else resembling them. Rebus was guessing that this had been the first blow. The victim would have been poleaxed, meaning he posed no threat to his attacker. So why then the prolonged beating to the face? As Gates had speculated, no ordinary mugger would have bothered. They'd have emptied the pockets and fled. A ring had been removed from one finger, and there was a line on the left-hand wrist, indicating that the victim had been wearing a watch. A slight nick on the back of the neck showed that the chain might have been snapped off.

'Nothing left at the scene?' Curt had asked, reaching for the chest-cutters.

Rebus had shaken his head.

Say the victim had put up some sort of struggle ... maybe he'd pushed a button too many. Or could there be a racism angle, his accent giving him away?

'The condemned ate a hearty meal,' Gates had eventually remarked, opening the stomach. 'Prawn bhuna, if I'm not mistaken, washed down with lager. And do you detect a whiff of brandy or whisky, Dr Curt?'

‘Unmistakably.’

And so it had progressed, with Siobhan Clarke fighting to stay awake and Rebus seated next to her, watching as the pathologists went about their business.

No grazes on the knuckles or shreds of skin under the fingernails – nothing to suggest that the victim had been able to defend himself. The clothing was chain-store stuff and would be sent to the forensic lab. With the blood washed off, the face more clearly resembled the one on the poetry book. During one of her short naps, Rebus had removed the volume from Siobhan Clarke’s pocket and found a potted biography of Todorov on the flyleaf. Born 1960 in the Zhdanov district of Moscow, former literature lecturer, winner of numerous awards and prizes, author of six poetry collections for adults and one for children.

Seated now in his chair by the window, Rebus tried to think of Indian restaurants near King’s Stables Road. Tomorrow, he would try looking in the phone book.

‘No, John,’ he told himself, ‘it’s already tomorrow.’

He’d picked up an *Evening News* at the all-night petrol station, so he could check the headlines again. The Marmion trial was continuing at the Crown Court – pub shooting in Gracemount, one dead, one lucky to be alive. The Sikh teenager had escaped with bumps and bruises, but hair was sacred to his religion, something the attackers must have known or guessed.

And Jack Palance was dead. Rebus didn’t know what he’d been like in real life, but he’d always played tough guys in his films. Rebus poured another Highland Park and raised his glass in a toast.

‘Here’s to the hard men,’ he said, knocking the drink back in one.

Siobhan Clarke got to the end of the phone book’s listing for restaurants. She’d underlined half a dozen possibles, though really all the Indian restaurants were possible – Edinburgh was a small city and easy to get around. But they would

start with the ones closest to the locus and work their way outwards. She had logged on to her laptop and searched the Web for mentions of Todorov – there were thousands of hits. He even featured in Wikipedia. Some of the stuff she found was written in Russian. A few essays came from the USA, where the poet featured on various college syllabuses. There were also reviews of *Astapovo Blues*, so she knew now that the poems were about Russian authors of the past, but also critiques of the current political scene in Todorov's home country – not that Mother Russia had actually been his home, not for the past decade. He'd been right to term himself an exile, and his views on post-glasnost Russia had earned him a good deal of Politburo anger and derision. In one interview, he'd been asked if he considered himself a dissident. 'A constructive dissident,' he had replied.

Clarke took another gulp of lukewarm coffee. This is your case, girl, she told herself. Rebus would soon be gone. She was trying not to think about it too much. All these years they'd worked together, to the point where they could almost read one another's mind. She knew she would miss him, but knew, too, that she had to start planning for a future without him. Oh, they would meet for drinks and the occasional dinner. She'd share gossip and titbits with him. Maybe he would nag her about those cold cases, the ones he was trying to dump on her ...

BBC News 24 was playing on the TV, but with the sound turned off. She'd made a couple of calls to check that no one as yet had reported the poet missing. Not much else to be done, so eventually she turned off the TV and computer both, and went through to the bathroom. The lightbulb needed changing, so she undressed in the dark, brushed her teeth, and found she was rinsing the brush under the hot tap instead of the cold. With her bedside light on, a pale pink scarf draped over it, she plumped up the pillows, and raised her knees so she could rest *Astapovo Blues* against them. It was only forty-odd pages, but had still cost Chris Simpson a tenner.

*Keep the faith, as I have and have not . . .*

The first poem in the collection ended with the lines:

*As the country bled and wept, wept and bled,  
He averted his eyes,  
Ensuring he would not have to testify.*

Flicking back to the title page, she saw that the collection had been translated from the Russian by Todorov himself, 'with the assistance of Scarlett Colwell'. Clarke settled back and turned to the second poem. By the third of its four stanzas, she was asleep.