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of small-town life are perfectly painted’
Scotland on Sunday

‘Unique, atmospheric and all-consuming’
Journal of the Law Society of Scotland

A note on the author

Denzil Meyrick was born in Glasgow and brought up in Campbeltown. After studying politics, he pursued a varied career including time spent as a police officer, freelance journalist and director of several companies in the leisure, engineering and marketing sectors. Denzil lives on Loch Lomond side with his wife Fiona.

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www.denzilmeyrick.com
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NO SWEET SORROW

A DCI DALEY THRILLER

Denzil Meyrick

Polygon

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For my wife Fiona

'The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.'

—'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening',
Robert Frost

PROLOGUE

Eleven years earlier

The children stood in the long caravan, their father's blood splattered up the sides of the boy's white trainers. He was tall for his fifteen years, face pockmarked by acne. His sister, three years his junior, used her elder sibling like a shield against the three police officers who stood before them in the cramped space. A bloodied carving knife lay on the vinyl floor of the cooking area like a punctuation mark between the youngsters and the officers of the law.

The uniformed men offered only platitudes, anxious to assess the situation rather than lay hands on the children. They were painfully aware that, as first responders under these circumstances, their job was to contain the situation until somebody with the right qualifications appeared to deal with the horror before them.

That someone was Emily Kilvington, a detective sergeant in Lincolnshire Police's Child Protection Unit. Having had to force her way through the crowds on Skegness's seafront, then navigate a difficult path in between caravans and holidaymakers in the labyrinthine holiday park, she was late. Late was her middle name. Harassed, and finding it hard

to focus, she stepped into the caravan, nodded to one of her colleagues, and took in the scene.

The day was sticky and hot, even for July. Kilvington wiped a film of sweat from her forehead, pushed back her blonde hair, and knelt in front of the siblings.

'Hi, my name's Emily,' she said softly.

The boy stared past her to the uniformed officers. Both children remained silent.

'Lads, wait outside, would you?'

'You sure, boss?' He was the oldest of the three, with a gnarled face.

'If I wasn't sure, I wouldn't have asked you, Dalton.'

Constable Dalton leaned in to her. 'We haven't searched them. Waited until you arrived, like they told us. Pretty obvious where the murder weapon is, mind you.' He nodded to the bloody knife on the floor.

'I hadn't noticed that – or the body lying behind them. Top marks for observation, Terry!' said Kilvington without whispering, making the boy snigger at the obvious sarcasm.

'You're in charge, sergeant.' Dalton sounded less than pleased. He jerked his head to his colleagues, and they left the caravan.

'What're your names?' she asked, having to crane her head up to meet the eyes of the boy.

'I'm Sam. She's Charlie – Charlotte. Broughton, that's our second name.'

'Hi, Charlie,' Kilvington tried, hoping to entice the girl out from behind her brother's tall frame.

'Hi,' the girl replied, without showing herself.

Kilvington nodded and smiled. Her priority was to keep the children calm, while making sure they left the murder

scene and were properly checked over, medically, forensically and mentally.

'Okay. Is this man your dad?' Kilvington took in the body. The face was mottled grey, the distinct colour of death. His lifeless eyes stared up at the ceiling, as his blood congealed around him like a frozen pond. It had emanated from a dark wound in his now still chest.

'Yeah,' said Sam. 'He's our dad.'

'*Was* our dad.' The voice came from the girl. She peeked around her brother's shoulder.

'Yes, I'm sorry,' said Kilvington.

Sam shrugged. 'Everybody dies sometime, don't they?'

'That's true,' said Kilvington. 'Is your mum around?'

'She's dead.' Sam's reply was without emotion.

The caravan was stifflingly hot now, almost unbearable. Kilvington was aware of a bead of sweat trailing down her nose. She banished it with a flick of her hand. This wasn't the time to unpick the whole story. That would come later. 'Listen, we need to get this sorted, okay?'

Sam inclined his head a fraction.

'My priority is your wellbeing. Do you understand that?'

Sam shrugged.

'I want you to come outside with me. Don't worry, nobody will see you. We've shut off this part of the site. We'll get you checked over in the hospital, then we can chat properly. Is that fine with both of you?'

'We can't stay here for ever, can we?' said Sam in a matter-of-fact way. 'What do you want us to do?'

Kilvington got to her feet. 'I'll take you and your sister outside. There's an ambulance waiting to drive you to the hospital. I'll come too.'

'Whose side are you on?' Charlie asked.

'You might not believe this, but I'm on your side.'

'But you're a police, right?' said Sam.

'Yes. Though, remember, we don't all do the same job. I'm here to look after you. But I can't do that here.'

'Our dad *was* a police.' The past tense was emphasised. Charlie stepped out from behind her brother. She was thin, dressed in a pair of shorts and a faded T-shirt.

This information took Kilvington aback, but she tried not to let it show. 'I see. Where did he work?'

'Manchester. That's where we're from.'

'Okay, we can talk about this once we get you sorted. Are you ready to go?' She smiled at them both.

Sam nodded to his sister. 'Come on, let's do this.'

They walked towards Kilvington.

Just as they were at the detective's side, Charlie looked up into her face. 'My dad used to say that kids get a beating from police. Said he'd beat us himself if we got caught doing stuff. He used to do it anyway.'

Kilvington was about to reply when she felt a sharp pain in her side. She grabbed at it, her mouth gaping open. When she felt her own warm blood flow over her hand, she screamed.

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'You gonna believe this?' DS Brian Scott was sitting opposite Daley in the glass box. He was leaning back on a chair, feet up on the big desk, reading the local newspaper.

Daley was standing, examining a huge map of the peninsula on the wall. 'I'll believe anything now. After what we've seen in our careers, who knows what's going to happen, eh?'

'True, big man, very true. It's like Miranda's box every day in here, so it is.'

Daley raised his brows and carried on running one finger down the main road into Kinloch. Carefully, he studied every turn-off, side road and farm track as he went. 'What's the latest in the *Kinloch Herald*?'

'It says here that a group o' climbers fae Oxford University are coming here to walk the Peninsula Way next week. They're acclimatising themselves for Everest.'

'What's so amazing about that?'

'They're camping, Jimmy. It's December – bloody freezing.'

'Colder on Everest.'

'You think? I near froze off my haw-maws last week when you had me on that obs job doon at the bus terminus. I'd bet you it was warmer at base camp that night.'

'You know the score, Bri. We have that intelligence from up the road that drugs are being smuggled into the area on public transport. That means the bus or the plane.'

'Or the ferry.'

'Hard to keep tabs on the ferry when it only operates between May and September. As you've pointed out, this is December.'

'But when did we get that intel again, big man?'

'The middle of October. Do you listen to any of the briefings?'

Scott thought for a moment. 'If I remember right, it was me who did that one.'

'It was! Even less excuse.'

'You know me, Jimmy. When I'm up there it's all about presentation and that. I was having problems wac my iPad, if you remember.'

'I remember the Rangers' team photo appearing at one point. Oh, and a picture of you on holiday in Spain.'

'Ach, I throw these in to lighten the load. You know that.'

'You don't know how to work it, you mean.'

'It's something different every couple o' days. You switch the bloody thing on, and it looks totally different to what it did the day before. It's like jumping into the motor no' knowing where the steering wheel is. How can they no' just leave stuff alone?'

'Updates, Brian – progress. Mind you, it's not that long ago you were drawing cartoons on that old whiteboard we had at Stewart Street. I suppose I should be grateful.'

'Tommy Rogan! Dae you remember that prick? He used to go mental.' Scott laughed heartily.

'He's dead,' said Daley absently.

'Eh? Tommy's deid? Man, he was a decent bugger, mind.'

Daley sighed at his colleague's ability to shift his assessment of a person depending on whether they were dead or alive. For Scott, death clearly involved elevation to sainthood. There were a few notable exceptions, but in the main this was his default position as far as the deceased were concerned.

'He was younger than me. The big C, I bet. He smoked like a lum.'

'No, he jumped in front of a train after years of being mocked by his colleagues because of his buck teeth.'

'Right.' Scott looked suddenly guilty, remembering the cartoons he'd drawn on the whiteboard so long ago.

'Nah, only kidding. It was a heart attack.' Daley rubbed his own chest at the very thought.

Scott dunked a chocolate Hobnob into his tea. 'Aye, he'd a hell o' a diet, mind you. His idea o' healthy eating was having one pie instead o' two for his lunch.'

'I just can't work it out. They must be offloading the drugs somewhere between here and Glasgow. But we've had observations all the way up and down. Nothing.'

'Could just be a false lead – a red herring.'

'It could, I suppose. But you know the source was sound.'

Scott shrugged. 'Aye, the best.' He looked down at his shirt, where a lump of chocolate had been dislocated by the hot tea and landed there. 'Oh, ya bastard!'

Desk Sergeant Shaw appeared through the open door just as Scott was in mid-expetive. 'Another operation gone wrong, Brian?'

'No. Look at the state o' this.' He pointed to his stained shirt. 'Ella hates me eating chocolate. Says it clogs up the arteries. I'll need to try and get this off. It's evidence!'

'Sir, new intel from Glasgow in your inbox,' said Shaw.

'Och, just tell the man. All this inbox-outbox stuff is driving me up the wall.'

'A party of fifteen backpackers just boarded the bus in Glasgow heading here to Kinloch. They want us to check them when they arrive.'

Daley sat heavily in his big chair. 'What's the betting it's the Oxford University Mountaineering Club?'

'Sorry?' said Shaw.

'Next week they're coming, Jimmy. It said so in the paper.'

'Which is dated . . . ?'

Scott turned to the front page of the *Kinloch Herald*. 'Friday – aye, you're right enough.'

'Okay. Brian, a nice piece of overtime for you. When does the bus get in, Al?'

'Six sharp, sir.'

'Why me again? It's bloody awkward having to search poor folk coming off a bus. Probably never done anything wrong in their lives. That bus is like the slow horse to China as it is, without getting someone poking up your arse wae a torch when you get off.'

'Who else is going to supervise it?' said Daley.

'You've no' done one yet!'

'Right. Let's work this out.' Daley pointed to his chest. 'Me, chief inspector.' He pointed to Scott. 'You, sergeant. Simple!' He smiled broadly. 'Why don't you take a couple of hours off? You can have that shirt sorted before Ella gets back from work.'

'Aye, true,' said Scott, stroking his chin.

'How's she getting on, Brian?' Shaw asked.

'Just fine. She needed something to keep her mind occupied. Working behind the bar in the County's just the thing.'

She did bar work when we first got married. You know my Ella, she can bring a tear to a glass eye wae those jokes.'

'Learned all she knows from you, eh?' Shaw turned on his heel and left.

'What's up wae him, Jimmy? He's had a face like a squelched plook for weeks.'

'His wife's left him. Don't tell anyone. He told me in confidence.'

'Don't tell anyone? This is Kinloch. They likely know why she left, who she went wae and where they're shacked up!'

'She's at her mother's in Livingston. It's just some time apart.'

'Huh! I've heard that before. Sure, my Ella was heading for New York no' that long ago.'

'Only because you were permanently pished, Brian.'

'That's over now.'

'I hope so.'

'Trust me. And wae Ella behind the bar at the County, where would I go?'

Daley smiled. 'Brian, I've known you all these years. You're like a bloodhound when it comes to whisky.'

'Don't you mean a St Bernard?'

'We've been through this dog thing.'

'I suppose.'

Daley swung his chair back to face the map. 'We've got to get to grips with this new drug supply. Four overdoses in the last fortnight alone – one fatality. They're cutting it with fentanyl. It's a bloody epidemic up the road.'

'It'll be cut wae other shit, too.'

'Yeah, that's what they're saying at the lab.' Daley swung back round. 'I'm worried about Alasdair.'

'Who?'

'Alasdair Shaw – the man who was standing there a couple of minutes ago.'

'Right, I see. Because of his wife, you mean?'

'Yes. Remember, I know what it's like, Brian.'

'The only difference is that he's got a broken heart, and you were delighted.'

'Not true!'

'And the band played on.' Scott levered his feet off the table and stood. 'Right, I'm off.'

As Daley watched his old friend go, he marvelled at his skill in distilling everything down to the lowest common denominator. For Brian Scott, the world was black and white. Sadly, when it came to marriage, and just about everything else, Daley's world was distinctly grey.