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Shatter the Bones

Written by Stuart MacBride

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**STUART
MACBRIDE**

**Shatter the
Bones**



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six days later

I

‘Three minutes.’

‘Fuck.’ DS Logan McRae leant on the horn, its harsh *breeeeeeep* barely audible over the wailing siren and the burbling radio. ‘Get out of the bloody way!’

‘...to show we’re all thinking about them. So, this is Alison and Jenny McGregor with Wind Beneath My Wings...’ There was a swell of violins, and then the singing started: ‘*Did—*’

‘Christ, not again.’ DC Rennie switched the car radio off and ran a hand through his spiky-gelled mop of blond hair. Checked his watch again. ‘We’re not going to make it, are we?’

Another blast on the horn.

‘Finally!’ The moron in the Toyota Prius edged closer to the kerb and Logan floored the accelerator, sending the CID pool car roaring around the outside, hands wrapped so tightly around the steering wheel his left palm ached. ‘Time?’

‘Two minutes forty.’ Rennie grabbed the handle above the passenger door as Logan threw the manky Vauxhall around the Hazlehead roundabout. A screech of tyres, the pinging clunk of a plastic hub-cap parting company with one of the wheels. ‘Aaagh...’

‘Come on, come on.’ Logan overtook the 215 bus to Westhill

– a Range Rover coming the other way slammed on its brakes, the driver wide-eyed and swearing.

Through the lights, ignoring oncoming traffic.

Logan wrenched the wheel to the left, the pool car's back end kicking out as he chucked it around the corner onto Hazledean Drive.

Rennie squealed. Closed his eyes. 'Oh God...'

'Time?'

'We're going to die...'

'TIME, YOU IDIOT!'

'One minute fifty-six.'

A group of schoolchildren milled about outside the swimming pool, turning to watch as the car flashed past.

Logan changed down, aiming the Vauxhall at a rust-red speed bump. Catch it dead centre and the wheels would go either side of the four-foot-wide lump. No problem... The car lurched into the air, and battered back down against the potholed tarmac.

'Are you *trying* to kill us?' Rennie checked his watch again. 'One minute thirty.'

The constable was right: they weren't going to make it. Logan took the next speed hump without slowing down.

'Aaaagh! One minute ten.'

Couldn't even *see* the phone box yet.

'Come on!'

The car slithered around the next corner, wheels kicking up a spray of grit as they fishtailed towards Hazlehead Park. No way in hell they were going to make it.

'Thirty-nine, thirty-eight, thirty-seven, thirty-six...' Rennie braced himself against the dashboard. 'Maybe they'll wait?'

Logan stuck his foot hard to the floor, rocking back and forth in his seat. 'Come on you piece of shit.' Left hand throbbing where it was wrapped around the wheel. Bushes flickered past the window, a drystone dyke little more than a grey knobbly blur. Sixty-five miles an hour. Sixty-six. Sixty-seven...

'Five, four, three, two, one.' Rennie cleared his throat. 'Twenty past.'

The police radio crackled. *'Control to Charlie Delta Fourteen, is she—'*

Rennie snatched up the handset. 'Still en route.'

'Still en...? It's twenty past—'

'We bloody know!' Logan took another speed bump at seventy, the car jerking as it leapt into the air. This time when it hit the tarmac there was a loud metallic banging noise followed by a deafening growl. Then the whole car juddered, a scraping sound, and the rear wheels bounced over something.

Logan glanced in the rearview mirror. The exhaust was lying dented and battered in the middle of the road. 'Tell them to get roadblocks up all round the park – every exit!'

One more corner, the engine roaring like an angry bear, and there it was. A British Telecom phone box – its Perspex skin covered with spray-paint tattoos – sitting outside the grubby concrete rectangle of a public toilet. No sign of anyone. No parked cars. No passersby.

The Vauxhall skidded to a halt in a cloud of pale dust. Logan hauled on the handbrake, tore off his seatbelt, jumped out, and sprinted for the phone box.

Silence, just the crunch of his feet on the gravel.

He yanked the box's door open and was engulfed in the eye-watering reek of stale urine. The phone was sitting in the cradle, the shiny metal cord still in place. It was about the only thing in there that hadn't been vandalized.

But it wasn't ringing.

'Time?'

Rennie staggered to a halt beside him, sunburnt face an even deeper shade of pink than usual. Panting. 'Two minutes late.' He twirled around on the spot. 'Maybe they haven't called yet? Maybe they've been held up? Or something...'

He stared at the padded brown envelope sitting on the shelf where a telephone directory should have been.

Logan dug a pair of blue nitrile gloves out of his pocket and hauled them on. He picked up the envelope. It was addressed to 'THE COPS'.

Rennie wiped a hand across his mouth. 'You think it's for—'
'Of course it is.' The flap wasn't sealed. Logan levered it open and peered inside. 'Jesus.'

'What? What did they...'

He reached inside and pulled out a crumpled ball of white paper, stained red in the centre. He eased the bundle open.

A little pale tube of flesh lay in the middle – a pink-varnished nail at one end, a bloody stump at the other. A little girl's toe.

The wrapping paper was covered in congealed blood, but Logan could still make out the laser-printed message: 'MAYBE NEXT TIME YOU WON'T BE LATE'.

2

‘Did your mother find you under the *idiot* bush?’ DCI Finnie jabbed his finger toward the graffitied phone box, where a lone Investigation Bureau technician in full SOC get-up was dusting for prints. ‘Is *that* why you thought it’d be a good idea to compromise every tenet of *evidentiary procedure* by opening the envelope, when any halfwit—’

‘What if it was instructions? Where to go next?’ Logan jerked his chin forward. ‘Would you have left it?’

Finnie closed his eyes, sighed, then ran a hand through his floppy brown hair. With his wide rubbery lips and sagging face, the head of CID was looking more like a disappointed frog with every passing year. ‘If you’d been here on time instead of—’

‘There was no way in hell we were ever going to make it all the way here from Altens in six minutes!’

‘You were supposed to be—’

‘We were *two minutes* late. Two minutes. And in that time they manage to print off a note, hack off a little girl’s toe, stick it all in an envelope, address it to the “The Cops”, and bugger off without a trace?’

‘But—’

‘If they did the amputation here there’d be blood everywhere.’

Finnie puffed out his cheeks, then blew out a long, wet breath. 'Bloody hell.'

'We weren't *meant* to get here in time; it was a set-up.'

A shout echoed out from somewhere behind them. 'Detective Superintendent? Hello? Is it true you've found Jenny's body?'

Finnie sagged for a second, then narrowed his beady little eyes. 'Are these bastards *psychic*?'

It was a baggy woman, wearing jeans and a pale blue shirt that was stained navy under the arms and between the breast pockets. She lumbered up the dusty road, her greying hair tied in a puffball behind her sweaty face. A spotty man trotted along beside her, fiddling with a huge camera.

The head of CID squared his shoulders, voice a hard whisper. 'Get that envelope back to the lab: I want it run through every bloody test they've got. Not *tomorrow*, or *next week*, or when Peterhead stop clogging up the system with their bloody gangland execution: *today*. ASAP. Understand?'

Logan nodded. 'Yes, Guv.' He turned away, making for the phone box just as Spotty the Cameraman took his first picture.

'Is it her? Is it Jenny?'

Finnie's voice boomed out into the warm afternoon, 'DS TAYLOR, GET THIS BLOODY CRIME SCENE CORDONED OFF!'

The IB tech was busy lifting a print from the cracked Perspex wall of the phone box, just beneath a set of pornographic stick men done in black marker pen.

Logan knocked on the metal frame. 'Any joy?'

She peered up at him, a thin band of skin the only thing visible between her steamed-up safety goggles and white facemask. 'Depends on your definition of "joy". This thing's clattered with prints and I'll bet you a tenner none of them belong to our guy. But on the *plus* side: I've found three used condoms, a pile of fossilized dog turds, two empty Coke cans, it's

like a microwave oven in here, and I'm kneeling in dried-up pish. Who could ask for more?'

'Condoms?' Logan wrinkled his nose. In a phone box that smelled like a urinal? And they said romance was dead. 'You got the envelope?'

She pointed at the case beside her. 'If you sign for it, you can have the lot.'

'You left it out in the *sun*? Why isn't it packed in ice?'

The tech wiped the arm of her SOC suit across her glistening forehead. 'Where the hell am I going to get ice from? Anyway, not like they're going to sew the bloody thing back on, is it?'

'No wonder Finnie does his nut...'. Logan opened the battered metal case. A black Grampian Police fleece was folded up inside it, the padded envelope in its clear plastic evidence pouch resting in the middle. At least she'd had the common sense to keep it insulated. He filled in the chain of evidence form and stood. 'Right, if you see any—'

'MCRAE!' Finnie's voice was loud enough to make them both flinch. 'I SAID ASAP, NOT WHEN YOU BLOODY FEEL LIKE IT!'

Logan turned the rattling Vauxhall into Queen Street. They'd stuck the battered exhaust in the boot and now the pool car roared and bellowed like a teenager's first hatchback, the choking smell of exhaust fumes filling the interior.

Sitting in the passenger seat, DC Rennie tutted. 'Thought they'd all be out at Hazlehead by now...'

Grampian Police Force Headquarters loomed at the end of the road – an ugly seventies-style black-and-white building, blocky and threatening, the roof festooned with communications antennae and early warning sirens. The Sheriff and JP Court building next door wasn't much better, but even that was welcoming compared with the crowd gathered on FHQ's Front Podium car park.

TV crews, reporters, photographers, and the obligatory

crowd of outraged citizens clutching banners and placards: 'DON'T HURT OUR JENNY!', 'THE WIND BENEATH OUR WINGS!!!', 'WERE PREYING 4 U ALISON AND JENNY!', 'LET THEM GO!!!!!!' Tears for the cameras. Grim faces. What's the world coming to, and hanging's too good for them.

A few protesters turned to watch the Vauxhall grumble past.

Rennie sniffed. 'How come it's the ugly ones that always want to get on the telly? I mean, don't get me wrong: it's tragic and all that, but none of this lot ever even met the McGregors. So how come they're out here bawling their eyes out like their mum just died? Not natural, is it?'

Logan parked around the back, abandoning the battered car next to the police vans. 'Get everything up to the third floor.'

Rennie rummaged the evidence bags out from the back seat. 'I mean public displays of grief for someone you've never met are just creepy, they... Is this dog shite?' He held one of the bags up, peering at the grey-brown lumps inside. 'It is! It's dog—'

'Just get it up to the bloody lab.' Logan turned and made for the back doors.

'So how long's it going to take?'

'Urgh...'

The man in the white Tyvek suit shuddered, then lifted the toe from the bloodstained note and slipped it into an evidence bag. His voice came out muffled from behind the facemask. 'A wee girl, for God's sake.'

The lab at FHQ was a fraction of the size of the main facility on Nelson Street and it looked more like a messy kitchen than a state-of-the-art forensic facility. It even had a fridge-freezer, gurgling away to itself by the door, covered in novelty shaped magnets. A little digital radio played Northsound One just loud enough to be heard over the whine of the vacuum table as someone dusted a length of metal pipe for prints.

Logan hauled at the crotch of his oversuit. Some funny bugger must've changed the label, because there was no way in hell this was a Large. 'So, how long?'

'Give us a break, we've only had the stuff fifteen minutes.'

'Finnie wants everything tested ASAP.'

'There's a shock.' The technician bent over the crumpled note again, taking a swab of sticky dark-red blood and slipping it into a little plastic vial. 'If I put a rush on the DNA you'll get it back in an hour—'

'There's a media briefing at six!'

'—hour and a half tops. Best I can do.'

'Can't you—'

'This isn't the telly, I can't just *magic up* a DNA profile in time for the adverts. Can probably do you a blood-type, though.' He took another swab, then wandered over to the work surface beside the fridge. 'As for the rest of it...' He sighed, adjusted his safety goggles, then looked across the room. 'Sam? How long for fingerprints?'

Nothing.

Logan peered at the shape huddled over the vacuum table. The baggy white SOC suit made her completely anonymous, even to him. 'Samantha?'

The tech tried again. 'Sam?'

Still nothing.

'SAM: HOW LONG FOR FINGERPRINTS?'

She looked up from her length of iron pipe. One end was wrapped in a clear plastic evidence bag, the metal inside dark and stained. She hauled at the elastic on her suit's hood – exposing a shock of bright scarlet hair – and pulled a tiny black headphone out of her ear. 'What?'

'Fingerprints.'

'Oh.' She looked at Logan and smiled... Probably. It was difficult to tell under the full SOC get-up. 'That you in there?'

Logan smiled back behind his own mask. 'Last time I checked.'

‘Got your envelope in the superglue box. Not holding my breath though, been in there ten minutes already and nothing’s come up.’

‘O rhesus negative.’ The tech held up a card. ‘Does that help?’

Same as Jenny McGregor.

‘Post mortem?’

‘No idea.’ The man picked up the evidence bag with the toe in it – using two fingers as if it was a dirty nappy – handed it to Logan, then wiped his gloves down the front of his oversuit. ‘The Ice Queen’s off at a conference in Baltimore, and the silly sod they got in to cover for her’s off with the squits. So...’

Logan tried not to groan. ‘When’s her highness back?’

‘Tuesday week.’

Brilliant.

He signed for the toe, then headed down to the mortuary: quiet and cold in a subterranean annex off the Rear Podium car park. The duty Anatomical Pathology Technician was sitting in a small beige office by the cutting room, feet up on the desk, reading a celebrity gossip magazine.

Logan knocked on the door frame. ‘Got some remains for you.’

‘Ah, indeed.’

‘WAG LOVE CHEAT EXCLUSIVE!’ went into a desk drawer, and the APT unfolded herself from the chair. Tall, thin, and insect-like, with trendy glasses and wide flat face, fingers constantly moving. ‘Is the hearse in the loading bay?’

Logan held up the bag containing the tiny chunk of flesh and bone.

‘Oh...’ She raised a broad, dark eyebrow. ‘I see. Well, we’ve had a busy day; I dare say this will represent a change of pace when Mr Hudson returns from his illness.’ She prowled through to the cold storage room, selected a metal door, opened it, and slid a large metal drawer out of the wall.

A waxy yellow face stared up at them. Swollen golf-ball

nose; scraggy grey beard; the skin around the forehead and cheeks slightly baggy, as if it hadn't been put back properly.

The APT frowned. 'Now that's not right. *You* should be in number four.' Sigh. 'Never mind.' She opened up the next one along. 'Here we go.'

'I need the PM done soon as possible. We have—'

'Sadly, with Dr McAllister away, and Mr Hudson ... *indisposed*, it may be a few days before we can do anything.' She reached towards him, fingers searching like the antennae on a centipede. 'May I have the remains?'

Logan got her to sign for the toe, then watched her solemnly place the little pale digit in the drawer. It looked vaguely ridiculous: a tiny nub of flesh in an evidence bag, lying in the middle of that expanse of stainless steel. Then she slid the drawer back into the wall and clunked the heavy door shut.

Out of sight, but definitely not out of mind.