
Opening Extract from...

Black and Blue

Written by Ian Rankin

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BLACK AND BLUE

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2016 Introduction

The novel I'm writing just now (*Rather Be the Devil*) features a minor character from *Black and Blue*, and this has necessitated a reread of the first truly successful novel in the Rebus series. The first instalment of the series – *Knots and Crosses* – had been published in 1987 to no fanfare whatsoever. Rebus's adventures thereafter had garnered good reviews and growing sales, but still I was what's known by publishers as a 'midlist' author – selling reliably, just about earning back the advance on royalties, but not exactly making a splash.

Black and Blue was Rebus's eighth outing, and things had changed. The book was written at a time of personal turmoil. The younger of my two sons had been born with a genetic condition known as Angelman Syndrome. My wife and I were living in France back then, and struggled with the medical bureaucracy as well as the technical language used by the various paediatric specialists. The nearest hospital lay thirty-five miles from our ramshackle farmhouse, and we would drive there with Kit two or three times a week. There were even lengthier journeys to Bordeaux to see more specialists, all of this undertaken while our emotions churned and questions crashed through our brains.

Afterwards, I would climb a home-made wooden ladder into the farmhouse attic and go back to con-

structing my new book. In that stuffy space, I got to play God. I could control the universe and everyone in it, and I could use Rebus as my punchbag, taking out on him all the chaos and frustration of my family life.

Therapy, yes, but potentially unreadable were it not for the fact that I had a storyline bigger and better than any I'd used before.

It started with a visit by an old university friend from Edinburgh. She told me about something that had happened to her brother. He worked in the North Sea oil industry and had returned home one weekend, getting into a conversation with two strangers in a bar. These men were heading to a party and said he should come. So he accompanied them to a deserted and dilapidated flat in a block in Craigmillar. Just as he realised something was very wrong, the men grabbed him, tied him to a chair, wrapped a plastic carrier bag around his head, then left. He was able to wrestle himself free of his bonds, after which he hightailed it to the local police station. Officers went with him to the building but could offer no explanation. His cash and credit cards had not been taken. The modus operandi was not one the cops had come across before. The men had been strangers to my friend's brother . . .

'And that's the end of the story,' she said.

But I knew it was only the beginning: I needed to give it closure, albeit in a fictional setting. Alas, in my version the oil worker was not so lucky. I met my friend's brother years later, and he said he'd been startled at the way 'his' story had turned out on the pages of my book.

One other thing I had was James Ellroy. I had been feasting on his books, and, hearing him interviewed, was surprised to find that some of the cases and characters in his LA quartet of novels were plucked from real life. I hadn't considered doing that in a book before, and it got me thinking about Bible John. Bible John had killed three women in late 1960s Glasgow and had never been caught. He had met his victims at the Barrowland Ballroom and had apparently quoted snatches of the Bible to one of them, hence the nickname given to him. He became a bogeyman for kids such as me growing up in Scotland at that time – *be home by five o'clock or Bible John'll get ye!* I was interested in the notion of a killer who has achieved near-mythical status. I wondered what he was doing in the present day . . . and what he would do if some copycat arrived on the scene to steal his notoriety.

Well, he would want to find that person before the police did, wouldn't he, so as to dispense his own form of justice?

So far so good, but my friend's brother had given me another idea: the book would be set around the oil industry, allowing me to look at Scotland's industrial past, present and potential future. Oil had come to be tied to Scottish politics, so the novel would of necessity have a political slant, too.

I did more research than for previous books, though I could never wangle an invite to visit an oil platform and had instead to rely on information from acquaintances in the industry, as well as long chats with inebriated oil workers as they travelled by train between Edinburgh and Aberdeen. I was also

unable to visit Shetland, so depended on books – no access to the internet back then. When I did eventually visit Shetland a few years later, I was confronted by an elderly gentleman who demanded to know how I'd managed to get to Mousa Broch when *he* was the only boatman who took visitors there. When he was reluctant to believe I'd used only a guidebook and my imagination, I felt I'd done a job I could be proud of.

Black and Blue was published in January 1997, by which time we were back living in Edinburgh and going through yet more hoops to get Kit the help he needed. My publisher had realised that this could well be my 'breakout' book, so had pumped some money into publicity, as well as redesigning the look of my book jackets – a moody black and white photo of a forest and a striking new typeface. It looked very different to other crime novels out there on the bookshop shelves, and this helped it stand out from the crowd. The reviews were very good, and the hardback went into a second printing, which was a first for me. Towards the end of the year, it won the prestigious Gold Dagger Award for the best crime novel published in the UK that year, a prize I'd never before even been shortlisted for. When it came out in paperback, it sold four times as many copies as my previous Rebus books, though it still failed to penetrate the bestseller lists.

But I wasn't quite 'midlist' any more, and I felt my apprenticeship was complete. I'd written a book in which the complex figure of Rebus could properly breathe, grow and enthral. And that title? Yes, it's a Rolling Stones album, as my previous book *Let*

It Bleed had been. But oil was sometimes known as 'black gold', while the police used to be 'the boys in blue'. So: *Black and Blue*. Music also plays a larger part in the book than had been the case in my previous offerings. I even invented a band, the Dancing Pigs. Except I didn't really. That was the name of a new wave band from 1979–80, formed in Fife with a young Ian Rankin on vocals ('singing' would be putting it too strongly). We only ever played about a dozen shows, maybe fewer, but the rehearsals (at the YWCA in Cowdenbeath) were fun and the local Hell's Angels seemed to take a shine to us. And in *Black and Blue*, we became one of the biggest bands on the planet.

Our keyboard player Dauve Young died a couple of years back. Rest In Peace, Dauve – the Dancing Pigs remain forever young . . .

Ian Rankin

BLACK & BLUE

Empty Capital

Weary with centuries
This empty capital snorts like a great beast
Caged in its sleep, dreaming of freedom
But with nae belief ...

Sydney Goodsir Smith,
'Kynd Kittock's Land'

1

'Tell me again why you killed them.'

'I've told you, it's just this *urge*.'

Rebus looked back at his notes. 'The word you used was "compulsion".'

The slumped figure in the chair nodded. Bad smells came off him. 'Urge, compulsion, same thing.'

'Is it?' Rebus stubbed out his cigarette. There were so many butts in the tin ashtray, a couple spilled over on to the metal table. 'Let's talk about the first victim.'

The man opposite him groaned. His name was William Crawford Shand, known as 'Craw'. He was forty years old, single, and lived alone in a council block in Craigmillar. He had been unemployed six years. He ran twitching fingers through dark greasy hair, seeking out and covering a large bald spot at the crown of his head.

'The first victim,' Rebus said. 'Tell us.'

'Us' because there was another CID man in the biscuit-tin. His name was Maclay, and Rebus didn't know him very well. He didn't know anyone at Craigmillar very well, not yet. Maclay was leaning against the wall, arms folded, eyes reduced to slits. He looked like a piece of machinery at rest.

'I strangled her.'

'What with?'

'A length of rope.'

'Where did you get the rope?'

'Bought it at some shop, I can't remember where.'

Three-beat pause. 'Then what did you do?'

'After she was dead?' Shand moved a little in the chair. 'I took her clothes off and was intimate with her.'

'With a dead body?'

'She was still warm.'

Rebus got to his feet. The grating of his chair on the floor seemed to unnerve Shand. Not difficult.

'Where did you kill her?'

'A park.'

'And where was this park?'

'Near where she lived.'

'Where's that?'

'Polmuir Road, Aberdeen.'

'And what were you doing in Aberdeen, Mr Shand?'

He shrugged, running his fingers now along the rim of the table, leaving traces of sweat and grease.

'I wouldn't do that,' Rebus said. 'The edges are sharp, you might get cut.'

Maclay snorted. Rebus walked over towards the wall and stared at him. Maclay nodded briefly. Rebus turned back to the table.

'Describe the park.' He rested against the edge of the table, got himself another cigarette and lit it.

'It was just a park. You know, trees and grass, a play park for the kids.'

'Were the gates locked?'

'What?'

'It was late at night, were the gates locked?'

'I don't remember.'

'You don't remember.' Pause: two beats. 'Where did you meet her?'

Quickly: 'At a disco.'

'You don't seem the disco type, Mr Shand.' Another snort from the machine. 'Describe the place to me.'

Shand shrugged again. 'Like any other disco: dark, flashing lights, a bar.'

'What about victim number two?'

'Same procedure.' Shand's eyes were dark, face gaunt. But for all that he was beginning to enjoy himself, easing into his story again. 'Met her at a disco, offered to take her home, killed her and fucked her.'

'No intimacy then. Did you take a souvenir?'

'Eh?'

Rebus flicked ash on to the floor, flakes landed on his shoes. 'Did you remove anything from the scene?'

Shand thought it over, shook his head.

'And this was where exactly?'

'Warriston Cemetery.'

'Close to her home?'

'She lived on Inverleith Row.'

'What did you strangle her with?'

'The bit of rope.'

'The same piece?' Shand nodded. 'What did you do, keep it in your pocket?'

'That's right.'

'Do you have it with you now?'

'I chucked it.'

'You're not making it easy for us, are you?' Shand squirmed with pleasure. Four beats. 'And the third victim?'

'Glasgow,' Shand recited. 'Kelvingrove Park. Her name was Judith Cairns. She told me to call her Ju-Ju. I did her same as the others.' He sat back in the chair, drawing himself up and folding his arms. Rebus reached out a hand until it touched the man's forehead, faith-healer style. Then he pushed, not very hard. But there was no resistance. Shand and the chair toppled backwards on to the floor. Rebus was kneeling in front of him, hauling him up by the front of his shirt.

'You're a liar!' he hissed. 'Everything you know you got straight from the papers, and what you had to make up was pure dross!' He let go and got to his feet. His hands were damp where he'd been holding the shirt.

'I'm not lying,' Shand pleaded, still prone. 'That's gospel I'm telling you!'

Rebus stubbed out the half-smoked cigarette. The ashtray tipped more butts on to the table. Rebus picked one up and flicked it at Shand.

'Are you not going to charge me?'

'You'll be charged all right: wasting police time. A spell in Saughton with an arse-bandit for a roomie.'

'We usually just let him go,' Maclay said.

'Stick him in a cell,' Rebus ordered, leaving the room.

'But I'm him!' Shand persisted, even as Maclay was picking him off the floor. 'I'm Johnny Bible! I'm Johnny Bible!'

'Not even close, Craw,' Maclay said, quietening him with a punch.

Rebus needed to wash his hands, splash some water on his face. Two woolly suits were in the toilets, enjoying a story and a cigarette. They stopped laughing when Rebus came in.

'Sir,' one asked, 'who did you have in the biscuit-tin?'

'Another comedian,' Rebus said.

'This place is full of them,' the second constable commented. Rebus didn't know if he meant the station, Craigmillar itself, or the city as a whole. Not that there was much comedy in Craigmillar police station. It was Edinburgh's hardest posting; a stint of duty lasted two years max, no one could function longer than that. Craigmillar was about as tough an area as you could find in Scotland's capital city, and the station fully merited its nickname – Fort Apache, the Bronx. It lay up a cul-de-sac behind a row of shops, a low-built dour-faced building with even dourer-faced tenements behind. Being up an alley meant a mob could cut it off from civilisation with ease, and the place had been under siege numerous times. Yes, Craigmillar was a choice posting.

Rebus knew why he was there. He'd upset some people, people who mattered. They hadn't been able to deal him a death blow, so had instead consigned him to purgatory. It

couldn't be hell because he knew it wasn't for ever. Call it a penance. The letter telling him of his move had explained that he would be covering for a hospitalised colleague. It had also stated that he would help oversee the shutting down of the old Craigmillar station. Everything was being wound down, transferred to a brand new station nearby. The place was already a shambles of packing cases and pillaged cupboards. Staff weren't exactly expending great energy solving ongoing cases. Nor had they put any energy into welcoming Detective Inspector John Rebus. The place felt more like a hospital ward than a cop-shop, and the patients were tranquillised to the hilt.

He wandered back to the CID room – the 'Shed'. On the way, he passed Maclay and Shand, the latter still protesting his guilt as he was dragged to the cells.

'I'm Johnny Bible! I fucking am and all!'

Not even close.

It was nine p.m. on a Tuesday in June and the only other person in the Shed was Detective Sergeant 'Dod' Bain. He glanced up from his magazine – *Offbeat*, the L&B newsletter – and Rebus shook his head.

'Thought not,' Bain said, turning a page. 'Craw's notorious for grassing himself up, that's why I left him to you.'

'You've as much heart as a carpet tack.'

'But I'm as sharp as one, too. Don't forget that.'

Rebus sat at his desk and considered writing his report of the interview. Another comedian, another waste of time. And still Johnny Bible was out there.

First there had been Bible John, terrorising Glasgow in the late 1960s. A well-dressed young man with reddish hair, who knew his Bible and frequented the Barrowland Ballroom. He picked up three women there, beat them, raped them, strangled them. Then he disappeared, right in the middle of Glasgow's biggest manhunt, and never resurfaced, the case open to this day. Police had a cast-iron description of Bible John from the sister of his last victim. She'd spent close on

two hours in his company, shared a taxi with him even. They'd dropped her off; her sister had waved goodbye through the back window ... Her description hadn't helped.

And now there was Johnny Bible. The media had been quick with the name. Three women: beaten, raped, strangled. That was all they'd needed to make the comparison. Two of the women had been picked up at nightclubs, discos. There were vague descriptions of a man who'd been seen dancing with the victims. Well-dressed, shy. It clicked with the original Bible John. Only Bible John, supposing he were still alive, would be in his fifties, while this new killer was described as mid-to-late twenties. Therefore: Johnny Bible, spiritual son of Bible John.

There were differences, of course, but the media didn't dwell on those. For one thing, Bible John's victims had all been dancing at the same dancehall; Johnny Bible ranged far and wide through Scotland in his hunt for victims. This had led to the usual theories: he was a long-distance lorry driver; a company rep. Police were ruling nothing out. It might even be Bible John himself, back after a quarter century away, the mid-to-late twenties description flawed – it had happened before with apparently watertight eyewitness testimony. They were also keeping a few things quiet about Johnny Bible – just as they had with Bible John. It helped rule out the dozens of fake confessions.

Rebus had barely started his report when Maclay swayed into the room. That was the way he walked, from side to side, not because he was drunk or drugged but because he was seriously overweight, a metabolism thing. There was something wrong with his sinuses too; his breathing often came in laboured wheezes, his voice a blunt plane against the grain of the wood. His station nickname was 'Heavy'.

'Escorted Craw from the premises?' Bain asked.

Maclay nodded towards Rebus's desk. 'Wants him charged for wasting our time.'

'Now that's what I call a waste of time.'

Maclay swayed in Rebus's direction. His hair was jet black, ringed with slick kiss-curls. He'd probably won Bonniest Bairn prizes, but not for a while.

'Come on,' he said.

Rebus shook his head and kept typing.

'Fuck's sake.'

'Fuck him,' Bain said, getting to his feet. He unhooked his jacket from the back of the chair. To Maclay: 'Drinkie?'

Maclay wheezed out a long sigh. 'Just the job.'

Rebus held his breath until they'd gone. Not that he'd been expecting to be asked along. That was their whole point. He stopped typing and reached into his bottom drawer for the Lucozade bottle, unscrewed the cap, sniffed forty-three per cent malt and poured in a mouthful. With the bottle back in its drawer, he popped a mint into his mouth.

Better. 'I can see clearly now': Marvin Gaye.

He yanked the report from the typewriter and crumpled it into a ball, then called the desk, told them to hold Craw Shand an hour, then release him. He'd just put down the phone when it started ringing.

'DI Rebus.'

'It's Brian.'

Brian Holmes, Detective Sergeant, still based at St Leonard's. They kept in touch. His voice tonight was toneless.

'Problem?'

Holmes laughed, no humour. 'I've got the world's supply.'

'So tell me the latest.' Rebus opened the packet one-handed, in mouth and lit.

'I don't know that I can, with you being in shit.'

'Craigmillar's not so bad.' Rebus looked around the stale office.

'I meant the other thing.'

'Oh.'

'See, I'm ... I might have gotten myself into something ...'

'What's happened?'

'A suspect, we had him in custody. He was giving me a shit load of grief.'

'You smacked him.'

'That's what he's saying.'

'Filed a complaint?'

'In the process. His solicitor wants to take it all the way.'

'Your word against his?'

'Right.'

'The rubber-heels will kick it out.'

'I suppose so.'

'Or get Siobhan to cover your arse.'

'She's on holiday. My partner for the interview was Glamis.'

'No good then, he's as yellow as a New York cab.'

A pause. 'Aren't you going to ask me if I did it?'

'I don't *ever* want to know, understood? Who was the suspect?'

'Mental Minto.'

'Christ, that brewhead knows more law than the procurator-fiscal. OK, let's go talkies.'

It was good to be out of the station. He had the car windows rolled down. The breeze was almost warm. The station-issue Escort hadn't been cleaned in a while. There were chocolate wrappers, empty crisp bags, crushed bricks of orange juice and Ribena. The heart of the Scottish diet: sugar and salt. Add alcohol and you had heart *and* soul.

Minto lived in one of the tenement flats on South Clerk Street, first floor. Rebus had been there on occasions past, none of them savoury to the memory. Kerbside was solid with cars, so he double-parked. In the sky, fading roseate was fighting a losing battle with encroaching dark. And below it all, halogen orange. The street was noisy. The cinema up the road was probably emptying, and the first casualties weretearing themselves away from still-serving pubs. Night-cooking in the air: hot batter, pizza topping, Indian spice.

Brian Holmes was standing outside a charity shop, hands in pockets. No car: he'd probably walked from St Leonard's. The two men nodded a greeting.

Holmes looked tired. Just a few years ago he'd been young, fresh, keen. Rebus knew home life had taken its toll: he'd been there in his own marriage, annulled years back. Holmes's partner wanted him out of the force. She wanted someone who spent more time with her. Rebus knew all too well what she wanted. She wanted someone whose mind was on her when he was at home, who wasn't immersed in casework and speculation, mind games and promotion strategies. Often as a police officer you were closer to your working partner than your partner for life. When you joined CID they gave you a handshake and a piece of paper.

The piece of paper was your decree *nisi*.

'Do you know if he's up there?' Rebus asked.

'I phoned him. He picked up. Sounded halfway to sober.'

'Did you say anything?'

'Think I'm stupid?'

Rebus was looking up at the tenement windows. Ground level was shops; Minto lived above a locksmith's. There was irony there for those who wanted it.

'OK, you come up with me, but stay on the landing. Only come in if you hear trouble.'

'You sure?'

'I'm only going to speak to the man.' Rebus touched Holmes's shoulder. 'Relax.'

The main door was unlocked. They climbed the winding stairs without speaking. Rebus pushed at the bell and took a deep breath. Minto started to pull the door open, and Rebus shouldered it, propelling Minto and himself into the dimly lit hallway. He slammed the door shut behind him.

Minto was ready for violence until he saw who it was. Then he just snarled and strode back to the living room. It was a tiny room, half kitchenette, with a narrow floor-to-ceiling cupboard Rebus knew held a shower. There was one

bedroom, and a toilet with a doll-house sink. They made igloos bigger.

'Fuck do you want?' Minto was reaching for a can of lager, high-alcohol. He drained it, standing.

'A word.' Rebus looked around the room, casually as it were. But his hands were by his sides, ready.

'This is unlawful entry.'

'Keep yapping, I'll show you unlawful entry.'

Minto's face creased: not impressed. He was mid-thirties but looked fifteen years older. He'd done most of the major drugs in his time: Billy Whizz, skag, Morningside speed. He was on a meth programme now. On dope, he was a small problem, an irritation; off dope, he was pure radge. He was Mental.

'Way I hear, you're fucked anyway,' he said now.

Rebus took a step closer. 'That's right, Mental. So ask yourself: what have I got to lose? If I'm fucked, might as well make it good and.'

Minto held up his hands. 'Easy, easy. What's your problem?'

Rebus let his face relax. 'You're my problem, Mental. Making a charge against a colleague of mine.'

'He laid into me.'

Rebus shook his head. 'I was there, didn't see a thing. I'd called in with a message for DS Holmes. I stuck around. So if he'd assaulted you, I'd've known, wouldn't I?'

They stood facing one another silently. Then Minto turned and slumped into the room's only armchair. He looked like he was going to sulk. Rebus bent down and picked something off the floor. It was the city's tourist accommodation brochure.

'Going somewhere nice?' He flicked through the lists of hotels, B&Bs, self-catering. Then he waved the magazine at Minto. 'If one single place in here gets turned, you'll be our first stop.'

'Harassment,' Minto said, but quietly.

Rebus dropped the brochure. Minto didn't look so mental

now; he looked done in and done down, like life was sporting a horseshoe in one of its boxing gloves. Rebus turned to go. He walked down the hall and was reaching for the door when he heard Minto call his name. The small man was standing at the other end of the hall, only twelve feet away. He had pulled his baggy black T-shirt up to his shoulders. Having shown the front, he turned to give Rebus a view of the back. The lighting was poor – forty-watt bulb in a flyblown shade – but even so Rebus could see. Tattoos, he thought at first. But they were bruises: ribs, sides, kidneys. Self-inflicted? It was possible. It was always possible. Minto dropped the shirt and stared hard at Rebus, not blinking. Rebus let himself out of the flat.

'Everything all right?' Brian Holmes said nervously.

'The story is, I came by with a message. I sat in on the interview.'

Holmes exhaled noisily. 'That's it then?'

'That's it.'

Perhaps it was the tone of voice that alerted Holmes. He met John Rebus's stare, and was the first to break contact. Outside, he put out a hand and said, 'Thanks.'

But Rebus had turned and walked away.

He drove through the streets of the empty capital, six-figure housing huddled either side of the road. It cost a fortune to live in Edinburgh these days. It could cost you everything you had. He tried not to think about what he'd done, what Brian Holmes had done. The Pet Shop Boys inside his head: 'It's a Sin'. Segue to Miles Davis: 'So What?'

He headed in the vague direction of Craigmillar, then thought better of it. He'd go home instead, and pray there were no reporters camped outside. When he went home, he took the night home with him, and had to soak and scrub it away, feeling like an old paving slab, walked on daily. Sometimes it was easier to stay on the street, or sleep at the station. Sometimes he drove all night, not just through

Edinburgh: down to Leith and past the working girls and hustlers, along the waterfront, South Queensferry sometimes, and then up on to the Forth Bridge, up the M90 through Fife, past Perth, all the way to Dundee, where he'd turn and head back, usually tired by then, pulling off the road if necessary and sleeping in his car. It all took time.

He remembered he was in a station car, not his own. If they needed it, they could come fetch it. When he reached Marchmont, he couldn't find a parking space on Arden Street, ended up on a double yellow. There were no reporters; they had to sleep some time, too. He walked along Warrender Park Road to his favourite chip shop – huge portions, and they sold toothpaste and toilet-rolls too, if you needed them. He walked back slowly, nice night for it, and was halfway up the tenement stairs when his pager went off.

2

His name was Allan Mitchison and he was drinking in a hometown bar, not ostentatiously, but with a look on his face that said he wasn't worried about money. He got talking to these two guys. One of them told a joke. It was a good joke. They bought the next round, and he bought one back. They wiped tears from their eyes when he told his only gag. They ordered three more. He was enjoying the company.

He didn't have many pals left in Edinburgh. Some of his one-time friends resented him, the money he still made. He didn't have any family, hadn't had for as long as he could remember. The two men were company. He didn't quite know why he came home, or even why he called Edinburgh 'home'. He had a flat with a mortgage on it, but hadn't decorated it yet or put in any furniture. It was just a shell, nothing worth coming back for. But everyone went home, that was the thing. The sixteen days straight that you worked, you were supposed to think about home. You talked about it, spoke of all the things you'd do when you got there – the booze, the minge, clubbing. Some of the men lived in or near Aberdeen, but a lot still had homes further away. They couldn't wait for the sixteen days to end, the fourteen-day break to begin.

This was the first night of his fourteen days.

They passed slowly at first, then more quickly towards the end, until you were left wondering why you hadn't done more with your time. This, the first night, this was the longest. This was the one you had to get through.

They moved on to another bar. One of his new friends was carrying an old-style Adidas bag, red plastic with a side pocket and a broken strap. He'd had one just like it at school, back when he was fourteen, fifteen.

'What have you got in there,' he joked, 'your games kit?'

They laughed and slapped him on the back.

At the new place, they moved to shorts. The pub was heaving, wall-to-wall minge.

'You must think about it all the time,' one of his friends said, 'on the rigs. Me, I'd go off my head.'

'Or blind,' said the other.

He grinned. 'I get my share.' Downed another Black Heart. He didn't used to drink dark rum. A fisherman in Stonehaven had introduced him to the stuff. OVD or Black Heart, but he liked Black Heart best. He liked the name.

They needed a carry-out, keep the party going. He was tired. The train from Aberdeen had taken three hours, and there'd been the paraffin budgie before that. His friends were ordering over the bar: a bottle of Bell's and one of Black Heart, a dozen cans, crisps and smokes. It cost a fortune, buying that way. They split it three ways even, so they weren't after his cash.

Outside, there was trouble finding a taxi. Plenty about, but already taken. They had to pull him out of the road when he tried to flag one down. He stumbled a bit and went down on one knee. They helped him back up.

'So what do you do exactly on the rigs?' one of them asked.

'Try to stop them falling down.'

A taxi had stopped to let a couple out.

'Is that your mother or are you just desperate?' he asked the male passenger. His friends told him to shut up, and pushed him into the back. 'Did you see her?' he asked them. 'Face like a bag of marbles.' They weren't going to his flat, there was nothing there.

'We'll go back to our place,' his friends had said. So there was nothing to do but sit back and watch all the lights.

Edinburgh was like Aberdeen – small cities, not like Glasgow or London. Aberdeen had more money than style, and it was scary, too. Scarier than Edinburgh. The trip seemed to take for ever.

'Where are we?'

'Niddrie,' someone said. He couldn't remember their names, and was too embarrassed to ask. Eventually the taxi stopped. Outside, the street was dark, looked like the whole fucking estate had welshed on the lecky bill. He said as much.

More laughter, tears, hands on his back.

Three-storey tenements, pebble-dashed. Most of the windows were blocked with steel plates or had been infilled with breeze blocks.

'You live here?' he said.

'We can't all afford mortgages.'

True enough, true enough. He was lucky in so many ways. They pushed hard at the main door and it gave. They went in, one friend either side of him with a hand on his back. Inside, the place was damp and rotten, the stairs half-blocked with torn mattresses and lavatory seats, runs of piping and lengths of broken skirting-board.

'Very salubrious.'

'It's all right once you get up.'

They climbed two storeys. There were a couple of doors off the landing, both open.

'In here, Allan.'

So he walked in.

There was no electricity, but one of his friends had a torch. The place was a midden.

'I wouldn't have taken youse for down and outs, lads.'

'The kitchen's OK.'

So they took him through there. He saw a wooden chair which had once been padded. It sat on what was left of the linoleum floor. He was sobering up fast, but not fast enough.

They hauled him down on to the chair. He heard tape being ripped from a roll, binding him to the chair, around and

around. Then around his head, covering his mouth. His legs next, all the way down to the ankles. He was trying to cry out, gagging on the tape. A blow landed on the side of his head. His eyes and ears went fuzzy for a moment. The side of his head hurt, like it had just connected with a girder. Wild shadows flew across the walls.

'Looks like a mummy, doesn't he?'

'Aye, and he'll be crying for his daddy in a minute.'

The Adidas bag was on the floor in front of him, unzipped.

'Now,' one of them said, 'I'll just get out my games kit.'

Pliers, claw-hammer, staple-gun, electric screwdriver, and a saw.

Night sweat, salt stinging his eyes, trickling in, trickling out again. He knew what was happening, but still didn't believe it. The two men weren't saying anything. They were laying a sheet of heavy-duty polythene out on the floor. Then they carried him and the chair on to the sheet. He was wriggling, trying to scream, eyes screwed shut, straining against his bonds. When he opened his eyes, he saw a clear polythene bag. They pulled it down over his head and sealed it with tape around his neck. He breathed in through his nostrils and the bag contracted. One of them picked up the saw, then put it down and picked up the hammer instead.

Somehow, fuelled by sheer terror, Allan Mitchison got to his feet, still tied to the chair. The kitchen window was in front of him. It had been boarded up, but the boards had been torn away. The frame was still there, but only fragments of the actual window panes remained. The two men were busy with their tools. He stumbled between them and out of the window.

They didn't wait to watch him fall. They just gathered up the tools, folded the plastic sheet into an untidy bundle, put everything back in the Adidas bag, and zipped it shut.

'Why me?' Rebus had asked when he'd called in.

'Because,' his boss had said, 'you're new. You haven't been around long enough to make enemies on the estate.'

And besides, Rebus could have added, you can't find Maclay or Bain.

A resident walking his greyhound had called it in. 'A lot of stuff gets chucked on to the street, but not like this.'

When Rebus arrived, there were a couple of patrol cars on the scene, creating a sort of cordon, which hadn't stopped the locals gathering. Someone was making grunting noises in imitation of a pig. They didn't go much for originality around here; tradition stuck hard. The tenements were mostly abandoned, awaiting demolition. The families had been relocated. In some of the buildings, there were still a few occupied flats. Rebus wouldn't have wanted to stick around.

The body had been pronounced dead, the circumstances suspicious to say the least, and now the forensic and photography crews were gathering. A Fiscal Depute was in conversation with the pathologist, Dr Curt. Curt saw Rebus and nodded a greeting. But Rebus had eyes only for the body. An old-fashioned spike-tipped set of railings ran the length of the tenement, and the body was impaled on the fence, still dripping blood. At first, he thought the body grossly deformed, but as he stepped closer he saw what it was. A chair, half of it smashed in the fall. It was attached to the body by runs of silver tape. There was a plastic bag over the corpse's head. The bag, once translucent, was now half-filled with blood.

Dr Curt walked over. 'I wonder if we'll find an orange in his mouth.'

'Is that supposed to be funny?'

'I've been meaning to phone. I was sorry to hear about your ... well ...'

'Craigmillar's not so bad.'

'I didn't mean that.'

'I know you didn't.' Rebus looked up. 'How many storeys did he fall?'