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The Necessary Death of Lewis Winter

Written by Malcolm Mackay

Published by Mantle

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**THE
NECESSARY
DEATH OF
LEWIS WINTER**

MALCOLM MACKAY





First published 2013 by Mantle
an imprint of Pan Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
Pan Macmillan, 20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-0-230-76897-0

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

Typeset by Ellipsis Digital Limited, Glasgow
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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To Sam & Alex

CHARACTERS

- Calum MacLean** – A twenty-nine-year-old gunman, living in Glasgow. Freelance; life is better alone. How long can that last when you have his talent?
- Peter Jamieson** – He’s worked hard and smart to build his little empire. Still growing fast, and he needs the best people to do his dirty work if that’s to continue.
- John Young** – Jamieson’s right-hand man. Sharp as a tack. Loyal, conscientious; twenty years side by side will do that.
- Lewis Winter** – Twenty-five years of criminal activity, and still near the bottom. One good deal can change all that. Change everything.
- Frank MacLeod** – Gunman for Peter Jamieson. The best, frankly. But you can’t fight age. You pass sixty, and things need replacing, like a hip.
- DI Michael Fisher** – It takes dedication to fight organized crime. You pursue the bad guys, whoever the hell they are.
- Hugh ‘Shug’ Francis** – Ambition means wanting more, even when you have enough. A car ring is enough, the drug trade is so much more.
- Zara Cope** – It’s not the life she’d have chosen, an older man wanting her to settle down. But Winter’s a good man, learning to fight for more, and she likes that.
- Nate Colgan** – You do what Nate tells you, when he tells you. Even his employers know that. Only his daughter, and maybe her mother, Zara, think differently.
- George Daly** – Unconventional muscle. Be a good friend and keep your head down. Pray for no promotion. Responsibility is deadly.

Martin 'Marty' Jones – Loan shark, pimp, pain in the arse, profitable. That last one is why people suffer him.

Kenny McBride – Being a driver for Peter Jamieson isn't hard. All you have to do is know the way and not screw up.

William MacLean – Thirty-one and he runs his own garage. Not a bad achievement. If only he didn't have to worry about his little brother Calum.

PC Joseph Higgins – Not an obvious young cop, with his rough family background. But he works hard, and works quietly.

Stewart Macintosh – You're in your early twenties, you're free and single. Of course you're going to go out and have a good time.

David 'Fizzy' Waters – He's been working on cars with Shug since they were in school. Always backing him up, no matter what.

Glen Davidson – A freelance gunman, looking for something more profitable. Not subtle, but very, very confident.

PC Paul Greig – A lot of people don't trust Paul. Probably why he's still a PC at thirty-eight. But there are few who know the streets better.

Tom Shields – Another young guy, just looking to have a good time, much like his flatmate Stewart.

Neil Fraser – Typical muscle. Big and angry. Blunt of fist and blunt of mind. A useful employee for Jamieson.

PC Marcus Matheson – A young cop, so bright and determined. A lot will depend on who he learns from.

Adam Jones – Manager of Heavenly nightclub. It hasn't earned its name, but like his brother Marty, he's profitable.

Norman Barnes – A lawyer. He takes what cases he's given, and they're rarely anything pleasant.

DC Ian Davies – Retirement isn't too far away if he can keep his head down. The joy of working under Fisher is that Fisher doesn't trust others to do much of the work.

1

It starts with a telephone call. Casual, chatty, friendly, no business. You arrange to meet, neutral venue, preferably public. You have to be careful, regardless of the caller, regardless of the meeting place. Every eventuality planned for, nothing taken for granted. Tempting to begin to trust; tempting, but wrong. A person could be your friend and confidant for twenty years and then turn away from you in an instant. It happens. Anyone with sense remembers that bitter reality; those without sense will learn it.

Saturday afternoon, football on the radio in the background, sitting on the couch with a book. *The Painted Veil* by William Somerset Maugham, if you must know, and he's fascinated by it. It has lured his attention away from the radio; he doesn't know what the score is any more. The older he gets, the less important that seems. The telephone rings – landline, not mobile – taking his attention away from everything. A marker placed across the line he's on (never fold the page to mark your place), and he's getting up.

'Hello.'

'Calum, how are you, pal? John Young here.'

'John. I'm well. You?'

‘You know, same old. Been a while since we saw you down the club. Thought I’d call you up, see how you were. You keeping busy?’

‘Busy enough. Comes and goes, you know how it is.’

‘I do that. You hear about old Frank MacLeod – in having his hip done? Yep, out of the world for a few months at least. Hell of a thing, for a guy so active.’

‘I heard. Shame for him.’

‘Sure is. Can’t picture him with his feet up. Be good to see you again, Cal, been too long. You should come down the club tomorrow, after lunch. We’ll shoot a few frames of snooker, have a few drinks. Be fun.’

‘Sounds like a plan. I’ll drop by about two-ish.’

‘Good stuff, see you tomorrow.’

The clues are all there if you care to look for them. Perhaps you don’t care to; most people don’t. A casual conversation: two people who know each other on a first-name basis, without being too close. Friends who see each other on a weekly rather than daily basis. Friends who don’t care. Phone calls like that are made so often, so why care? It’s a job offer. A very definite offer of something long-term and lucrative. Does he want long-term and lucrative?

Small flat, small car, small savings, but always enough. He works for need, not luxury. Long-term means risk, and risk is to be avoided. There are gamblers in the business, but they all lose eventually, and the cost is final. So don’t gamble. You

don't need to. There are two reasons why people do: one acceptable, and one not. The unacceptable reason is greed, the prospect of more money, which they don't actually need. The other reason is the thrill, and that's different.

He hasn't been in the club since he heard about Frank's operation. Old man goes into hospital to have hip replaced. It's no news to most. Those who know Frank – what he does – know different. He's old, but he's still great, still important. Like a boxer who loses speed but learns tactics, he's as dangerous as he has ever been. He's from a generation ago, the golden-olde times before the intrusion of modern technology, modern policing and modern sensitivities. So many were left behind. Time marched, but Frank had always moved a step faster. The work he had done in the past was still needed, just the process was different. Now he was gone, for a few months at least, and would have to be replaced. He would be replaced by a younger man. A short-term replacement, for now.

Now Calum can focus on nothing. Another job is another job – nothing more. That doesn't concern him. Being enveloped in the suffocating bosom of the Jamieson organization concerns him. For the likes of Frank MacLeod, it was comforting, a guarantee of work and security. For Calum MacLean, it's a threat of enforced regular work, a loss of freedom. What is worth that?

2

The club is in the city centre, a small entrance leading into a large building. Nobody on the door on a Sunday afternoon. Usually a handful of people in at the bar, upstairs at the eight snooker tables. Not today. Today on the door a sign: *Closed for cleaning*. A tatty sign, trotted out every time privacy is required. Suspicious, obvious, but people didn't ask questions. Calum ignores the sign, opens the door and walks in.

It always seems dim inside, even with every light on. On his right he can see the large, scuffed dance floor, and on the far side the DJ's booth. There's a bar running the length of the side wall, gaudy lighting, bottles of every variety – none that he likes. He doesn't drink alcohol, although he's never understood in his own mind why. Self-control, most probably. It's not a moral thing. He loathes the club too, loathes that lifestyle, the sweaty cattle market, the pointless racket. It always came back to him that he hated it because the point was to attract women, and he isn't deemed attractive to women, no matter how dark it is.

A wide carpeted staircase in front of him, short steps that are easily misjudged. A lot of people have tripped going up them, overreaching. Calum is always careful, fearful not of

being hurt, but of looking stupid. At the top of the stairs is a pair of wooden double doors with rectangular windows. He pushes one open and steps into the snooker hall. Eight green tables, two rows of four, plenty of room between each. Scoreboards on the walls, little machines beside each one. Pay a pound, get thirty minutes of light on your table. They make little money, not enough to justify the space they require, but they're one of Peter Jamieson's bewildering array of improbable passions. There's a bar against one wall, small, old-fashioned. No flavoured vodka here, just beer and whiskey. It's closed today. Cleaning, apparently.

John Young is standing at a table in the middle of the room, chalking his cue. The balls are scattered about the table, none yet potted. He may just have started, he may have been hopeless. Calum has never seen him play before, doesn't know. He knows Jamieson is good. Everyone knows Jamieson is good. Everyone knows Jamieson has had lessons from professionals. Young must have learned something from his boss.

'Calum, how are you?'

'Fine.' He's walking across to the cue rack and picking one out. He's wearing jeans and a T-shirt; he can only play well in a T-shirt. Sleeves get in the way.

Young shoves all the reds back into the centre of the table and racks them in the triangle. He carefully places the balls on their spots. Everything precise, placed by a man who plays

often, and plays with a serious partner. ‘Good weather out,’ he finally says.

‘It is. You break.’

Young bends, lines up the shot and hits it. Only one red runs loose, the white coming right back up the table. Safe – a break to make the next shot difficult. No letting you win.

It stays serious until it becomes obvious that Young is going to win, and easily. Calum has effort, Young has skill, and it takes ten minutes for those two to be widely separated. Then talk.

‘You been working for anyone lately?’ Young asks. This is the first real mention of business, the first open acceptance that this is what the meeting is really about.

The question is misleading. Calum works, he has to. What Young wants to know is if he’s been working repeatedly for the same person, or just drifting around. He probably knows the answer already; he wants to see if Calum can surprise him. He can’t.

‘No. Bits and bobs. Freelance. As ever.’

Nothing for another minute or two. More shots carefully picked out, even when the frame is won, even when the maths prove it. When it’s over, and the balls are being laid out again – best of three – Young speaks again.

‘We’re without anyone now. Shame to lose Frank for a few months.’

‘Didn’t see it coming?’

Young laughs. A short laugh, not a happy one. 'Frank's one of those guys that can't admit when there's something wrong with him. Not until it's too late. He should have warned us. He knew for ages and said nothing.' He shrugs, a what-can-you-do shrug.

Calum's turn to break. It's messy: reds everywhere, white in the middle of the table. Trying too hard. Young feels confident enough to talk early.

'How old you now, Calum?'

'Twenty-nine.'

'Gettin' old.' Young laughs, self-deprecatingly; he's a podgy but youthful forty-three. His eyes twinkle when he laughs, like he means it; his forehead crinkles and his tousled dark hair seems to fall forward. He looks jolly, but you never forget who he is. 'You thinking about settling down?'

It's a professional question, not personal. 'I haven't thought about it at all. Time might come. I don't feel like I need it. I like my freedom, but I'll see how the wind blows.'

Young nods. It's a demand. He's saying that if he settles with Jamieson, then he doesn't want to be overworked. It's a demand that Young can live with, one that fits with other wishes.

Talk quiets. The frame is getting more serious. Young was too casual, too confident. He's missed three shots that he should have made, and Calum is ahead. Calum misses a shot he would usually miss. Young concentrates. He starts

knocking in shots, making a break that requires skill. He needs to get as far as the blue to guarantee the win, and he gets there at the first attempt. They shake hands. Young thanks him for coming.

3

When he knows the boy has gone, he puts his cue back on the rack and crosses the room to the back corridor. At the far end is Jamieson's office. Two knocks and Young enters without waiting for a reply. They've been friends since they were in their late teens, since they were both starting out in the trade. Thrown together by circumstances – a chance meeting on a shared job – they recognized immediately how much each could do for the other. Jamieson was in charge, that was clear; Young the right-hand man. No other right-hand man earns so much or is given so much control. He's trusted.

'You are the brains,' Jamieson would tell him when drunk, 'I am the balls. It works.'

It wasn't that Young lacked courage, or that Jamieson wasn't smart. Young could get his hands dirty, but Jamieson's instinct for the nasty work was unrivalled, and evident from a young age. Jamieson was intelligent, but Young was tactical, and that was an important difference. Separately they were talented; together they were lucrative.

Jamieson has to be in charge. He has to be seen to be in charge. It doesn't matter what either of them thinks; their

employees and their rivals have to believe that the man they fear most is the man in charge. Perception. PR. You would be amazed how important that is in a trade like this. Being in charge comes with a downside, though. You're at the top of the tree, where everyone can see you, where so many others want to be. Jamieson can handle that, no problem. Besides, their operation isn't yet quite big enough to spook the top dogs into action. Yet.

Jamieson is sitting where he always sits, on the swivel chair behind his desk, facing away from the door. The desk faces the door, the chair rarely does. There are two televisions on a long stand behind the desk, both showing horse racing, another passion. He gambles, not because he needs to, not because it's a thrill, but because he has a need to beat other people. In this case, the bookies. He isn't trying to be rude when he sits with his back to you; he's just the sort of person who can be consumed by the things that interest him.

Horses don't interest Young in the least. Miniature Irishmen torturing dumb beasts in the name of a sport funded by the gullible and controlled by the idle rich. His seat in the office is on a small leather couch at the right side of the well-lit room, just beside the large window. There are newspapers on the table, mostly local, some national, scanned for any references to their work. These days you need to spend more time checking websites to make sure people don't make unfortunate references to you. Young sits and waits.

'I spoke to the boy MacLean,' he tells Jamieson when he's sure both races have finished.

'Boy? How old is he anyway?'

'Twenty-nine.'

'That all? Feels like he's been around for ages. What did he say?'

'I think he'll do it, if he's one of two or three. Doesn't want the full workload.' Jamieson is concentrating now, sitting forward, hands gently tapping on the table. This is his tool to focus on what matters, the constant patter of hands on desk. 'He ain't exactly a bag of laughs,' Jamieson smiles. 'But I like him. He's good. Smart. Quiet. Frank says he's the best of the new breed. I agree. We'll make him an offer.'