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Saints of the Shadow Bible

Written by Ian Rankin

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Ian Rankin

Saints of the
Shadow Bible



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1

A flatbed lorry had arrived, the name of a local scrapyards stencilled on its doors. The previous night, a flimsy cordon had been erected, consisting of three-inch-wide tape with the word POLICE on it. The tape ran from an undamaged tree to a fence post and from there to another tree. The driver of the flatbed had sliced through it and was preparing to winch the crashed VW Golf up the slope towards the waiting ramp.

‘Not a bad afternoon,’ Rebus said, lighting a cigarette and examining his surroundings. A stretch of narrow country road on the outskirts of Kirkliston. Edinburgh Airport wasn’t far away, and the roar of approaching and departing passenger flights punctuated the rural scene. They had come in Clarke’s Vauxhall Astra. It was parked on the opposite verge, flashers blinking in a warning to approaching drivers. Not that there seemed to be any.

‘It’s a straight road,’ Clarke was saying. ‘Surface wasn’t icy or greasy. Must have been going at a fair clip, judging by the damage . . .’

True enough: the front of the Golf had become concertinaed on impact with the venerable oak tree. They made their way past the torn fencing and down the slope. The driver from the flatbed jutted out his chin in greeting but otherwise wasn’t about to ask who they were or why they were there. Clarke carried a folder, which was good enough for him – meant they were official, and therefore probably best avoided.

‘Is he okay?’ Rebus asked.

‘He’s a she,’ Clarke corrected him. ‘Car’s registered to Jessica Traynor. Address in south-west London. She’s in the Infirmary.’

Rebus was walking around the car. It was less than a year old,

pearl-coloured. From what he could see of the tyres, there was plenty of tread on them. The windscreen was gone, driver's-side door and boot gaping, both airbags deployed.

‘And we’re here because . . .?’

Clarke opened the folder. ‘Mainly because her father seems to have friends. Word came down from on high: make sure we’ve not missed anything.’

‘What’s to miss?’

‘Hopefully nothing. But this area’s notorious for boy racers.’

‘She’s not a boy, though.’

‘She drives the kind of car they like.’

‘I wouldn’t know.’

‘I think the Golf still qualifies as a “hot hatch”.’

Rebus wandered over towards the flatbed. The man from the scrapyard was reeling out a cable with a large hook on the end. Rebus asked him how many Golfs ended up in the compactor.

‘A few,’ he conceded. He sported oily blue overalls under a scuffed leather jacket, and dirt was ingrained on his palms and under his nails. The baseball cap he wore was so grubby the lettering on it was indecipherable, and a thick greying beard covered his chin and throat. Rebus offered him a cigarette, but the man shook his head.

‘Roads around here used as racetracks?’ Rebus continued.

‘Sometimes.’

‘You on a diet or something?’ The man looked at him. ‘Cutting back on your vocabulary,’ Rebus explained.

‘I’m just here to do a job.’

‘But this isn’t the first crash like this you’ve seen?’

‘No.’

‘How regular?’

The man considered this. ‘Every couple of months. Though there was one last week, the other side of Broxburn.’

‘And it’s cars racing each other? Any idea how it gets arranged?’

‘No,’ the man stated.

‘Well, thanks for sharing.’ Rebus walked back towards the Golf. Clarke was peering through the open door, examining the interior.

‘Take a look,’ she said, handing Rebus a photograph. It showed a brown suede boot in what seemed a woman’s size, framed against the floor of the car.

‘I don’t see any pedals.’

‘That’s because it was in the passenger-side footwell.’

‘Okay.’ Rebus handed the photograph back. ‘So you’re saying there was a passenger?’

Clarke shook her head. 'It's one of a pair of Ugg boots belonging to Jessica Traynor. The other was on her left foot.'

'Ugg?'

'That's what they're called.'

'So it flew off on impact? Or came off when the medics pulled her out?'

'First patrol car on the scene, the officer took a few shots on his phone – including the boot. Jessica was still in the car at the time. Ambulance arrived a few minutes later.'

Rebus pondered this. 'Who found her?'

'A woman on her way home from Livingston. She works shifts at a supermarket there.' Clarke was studying a typed sheet of paper from the folder. 'Driver's-side door was open. Impact could have done that.'

'Or the driver tried to get out.'

'Unconscious. Head resting against the airbag. No seat belt.'

Rebus took the photographs from Clarke and studied them while Clarke spoke. 'The supermarket worker called 999 just after eight in the evening, no light left in the sky. No street lamps either, just the distant glow from Edinburgh itself.'

'Boot's closed,' Rebus said, handing the photos back.

'Yes, it is,' Clarke agreed.

'Not any more, though.' Rebus walked around to the back of the car. 'Did you open this?' he asked the man from the scrapyard, receiving a shake of the head in answer. The boot was empty, except for a rudimentary toolkit.

'Scavengers, maybe?' Clarke suggested. 'Car was here all night.'

'Why not take the toolkit?'

'Don't suppose it's worth much. Anyone could have opened it, John – ambulance driver, our guy . . .'

'I suppose so.' He tried closing the boot. It was undamaged, and stayed locked once shut. The key was in the ignition, and he pressed the button to unlock the boot again. A clunk told him he had been successful.

'Electrics still seem to work,' he said.

'Sign of a well-made car.' Clarke was sifting through the paperwork. 'So what do we think?'

'We think a car was travelling too fast and came off the road. No sign of a prior collision. Was she maybe on her phone at the time? It's been known to happen.'

'Worth checking,' Clarke agreed. 'And the Ugg?'

'Sometimes,' Rebus said, 'footwear is just footwear.'

Clarke was checking a message on her phone. ‘Seems its owner is back in the land of the living.’

‘Do we want to speak to her?’ Rebus asked.

The look Clarke gave him was all the answer he needed.

Jessica Traynor had a room to herself at the Royal Infirmary. The nurse explained that she had been lucky – a suspected fracture of one ankle, some bruised ribs, and other minor injuries consistent with whiplash.

‘Her head and neck are in a brace.’

‘But she’s able to talk?’ Clarke asked.

‘A little.’

‘Any sign of alcohol or drugs in her bloodstream?’

‘Looks the clean-living type to me. She’s on painkillers now, though, so she’ll be woozy.’ The nurse paused. ‘Do you want to speak to her father first?’

‘He’s here?’

The nurse nodded again. ‘Arrived in the middle of the night. She was still in A and E at the time . . .’ She had stopped by a window. It gave a view into Jessica Traynor’s room. Her father was seated bedside, holding her hand in his and stroking her wrist. Her eyes were closed. The brace seemed to be constructed of thick squares of polystyrene foam, fixed in place with an array of metal clamps. Looking up, her father saw the faces at the window. He checked his daughter was asleep, then placed her hand gently on the bed and rose to his feet.

Exiting the room quietly, he ran his fingers through his mop of silver and black hair. He wore the trousers from a pinstripe suit – the jacket was draped over the back of the chair next to his daughter’s bed. His white shirt was creased, and the cufflinks had been removed so the sleeves could be rolled up. Rebus doubted the expensive-looking watch on his left wrist was a fake. He had taken off his tie at some point, and undone the top two buttons of his shirt, showing tufts of greying chest hair.

‘Mr Traynor,’ Clarke said, ‘we’re police officers. How is Jessica doing?’

His large eyes were dark-ringed from lack of sleep and there was vending-machine coffee on his breath when he exhaled.

‘She’s all right,’ he eventually said. ‘Thank you.’

Rebus wondered if Traynor’s tan had come from a sunbed or a winter holiday. Probably the latter.

‘Are we any clearer on what happened?’ Clarke was being asked.

‘We don’t think another vehicle was involved, if that’s what you mean. Maybe just a case of too much acceleration . . .’

‘Jessica never drives fast. She’s always been super-cautious.’

‘It’s a powerful car, sir,’ Rebus qualified.

But Traynor was shaking his head. ‘She wouldn’t have been speeding, so let’s rule that out right now.’

Rebus glanced down at the man’s shoes. Black brogues. Every inch the successful businessman. The accent was English, but not cut-glass. Rebus remembered Jessica’s age from the notes in Clarke’s folder: twenty-one.

‘Your daughter’s a student?’ he surmised. Traynor nodded. ‘At the University of Edinburgh?’ Another nod.

‘What’s her course?’ Clarke added.

‘Art history.’

‘Which year is she?’

‘Second.’ Traynor seemed to be growing impatient. He was watching his daughter through the glass. Her chest rose and fell almost imperceptibly. ‘I have to go back in . . .’

‘There are a couple of things we need to ask Jessica,’ Clarke told him.

He looked at her. ‘Such as?’

‘Just to make sure we have all the facts.’

‘She’s sleeping.’

‘Maybe you could try waking her up.’

‘She’s sore all over.’

‘What did she tell you about the accident?’

‘She said she was sorry about the Golf.’ Traynor’s attention had shifted to the window again. ‘It was a birthday present. Insurance cost almost as much as the car . . .’

‘Did she say anything about the accident itself, sir?’

Traynor shook his head. ‘I really do need to go back in.’

‘Mind if I ask where you’re from, Mr Traynor?’ The question came from Rebus.

‘Wimbledon.’

‘South-west London?’

‘Yes.’

‘And by the time you heard about Jessica, flights to Scotland would have finished for the day – did you take the train?’

‘I have access to a private plane.’

‘So you’ve been awake all night and half of today? Might be you could use some shut-eye yourself.’

‘I managed an hour or two on the chair.’

‘Even so . . . Your wife wasn’t able to join you?’

‘We’re divorced. She lives in Florida with someone half her age who calls himself a “personal trainer”.’

‘But you’ve told her about Jessica?’ Clarke checked.

‘Not yet.’

‘Don’t you think she should know?’

‘She walked out on us eight years ago – Jessica doesn’t get so much as a phone call at Christmas.’ The words were tinged with bile. Traynor was exhausted, yes, but in no mood to forgive. He turned towards the two detectives. ‘Is this because I called in a favour?’

‘Sir?’ Clarke’s eyes had narrowed at the question.

‘I happen to know a couple of people in the Met – phoned from the plane to make sure everything up here was kosher. Thing is, as you said yourself, it was the kind of accident that could happen to anyone.’ His tone hardened. ‘So I don’t see what’s to be gained from you talking to her.’

‘We didn’t *quite* say it could happen to anyone,’ Rebus broke in. ‘Straight stretch of deserted road – has to be a reason why the car decided not to stick to it. The locals out that way like to do a bit of racing once the sun’s gone down . . .’

‘I’ve already told you, Jessica was the safest driver imaginable.’

‘Then you’ve got to wonder what was causing her to do the speed she was doing. Was it maybe road rage? Was she trying to get away from someone tailgating her? Questions only *she* can answer, Mr Traynor.’ Rebus paused. ‘Questions I’d have thought you’d want to have answered too.’

He waited for this to sink in. Traynor ran his hand through his hair again, then gave a long sigh.

‘Give me your number,’ he conceded. ‘I’ll call you when she’s awake.’

‘We were just going to grab something from the café,’ Rebus told him. ‘So if it’s in the next twenty minutes or so, we’ll still be here.’

‘We can bring you a sandwich, if you like,’ Clarke added, her face softening a little.

Traynor shook his head, but took her card when she offered it.

‘Mobile’s on the back,’ she said. ‘Oh, and one more thing – could we take a look at Jessica’s phone?’

‘What?’

‘I’m assuming it’ll be by her bedside somewhere . . .’

Traynor was starting to look annoyed again, but turned and went into the room, emerging moments later with the device.

‘Thank you, sir,’ Clarke said, taking it from him and turning to lead Rebus back down the corridor.

Rebus headed outside for a cigarette while Clarke bought the drinks. When he returned, he brought a hacking cough with him.

‘Should I see if they’ve a spare bed in the emphysema ward?’ she asked.

‘I wasn’t lonely out there – hard to know if staff outnumbered patients or vice versa.’ He took a sip from the cardboard cup. ‘I’m going to guess tea.’

She nodded, and they drank in silence for a moment. The café opened on to the hospital’s central concourse. There was a shop across the way, people queuing for sweets and crisps. Further along, another concession specialising in health foods was doing no trade at all.

‘What do you make of him?’ Clarke asked.

‘Who? The David Dickinson lookalike?’

Clarke smiled. ‘Bit more George Clooney than that.’

Rebus shrugged. ‘He wears expensive suits and travels by private jet – I want to marry him, naturally.’

‘Join the queue.’ Her smile widened. ‘You have to say, though – he does love his daughter. Probably head of some big corporation, but drops everything to come north.’

Rebus nodded his agreement and managed another mouthful of tea before pushing the cup away.

‘What you said to him about road rage,’ Clarke went on, ‘was that off the top of your head?’

‘Just trying to think of reasons why a careful driver would be putting the foot down.’

‘It’s an idea. Reckon she lives in the city?’

‘Bound to – maybe even in a flat bought by Mr Pinstripe.’

‘So what was she doing out there in the first place? It’s more or less a road to nowhere.’

‘Something else for us to ask her,’ Rebus agreed. ‘What did her phone offer up?’

‘Unanswered calls and texts.’

‘No sign she was using it while driving?’

Clarke shook her head. ‘On the other hand, if her dad is as sharp as he dresses . . .’

‘He might have decided to delete any evidence of her stupidity.’ Rebus nodded slowly.

Clarke's own phone pinged, alerting her to a message. 'It's Page,' she said, checking the screen. 'Wants an update.'

'That won't take long.'

Another ping.

'And with perfect timing, Jessica's awake.' Clarke started to rise from the table.

'Taking your tea with you?' Rebus asked.

'What do you think?' came the reply.

The same nurse was just leaving Jessica Traynor's room as they arrived.

'Go easy on her,' she said in an undertone.

'We're famous for it,' Rebus assured her.

The bed was still flat, the patient staring towards the ceiling. She moved her eyes, blinking a few times as she focused on the new arrivals. Her lips were moist, as though she'd just accepted some liquid from the beaker on the nearby tray. Her father was seated again, holding her hand as before.

'Jessica,' Clarke began, 'I'm Detective Inspector Clarke and this is Detective Sergeant Rebus. How are you feeling, or is that a stupid question?'

'Like I got hit by a car.'

'I saw the state of your Golf. The airbag probably saved your life. Silly not to have your seat belt fastened.'

Traynor stiffened as he took this in. Jessica's eyes widened. 'I always do up my seat belt,' she protested.

'The motorist who found you, the one who called for the cavalry, says you weren't strapped in.'

'Couldn't it have come undone on impact?' Traynor asked.

'I've not heard of that happening,' Clarke told him. Then, to his daughter: 'Any idea why one of your boots ended up on the passenger-side floor?'

'I don't understand.' Jessica Traynor's eyes flitted from one face to another.

'There you are in the driver's seat,' Clarke obliged, 'but one of your Uggs somehow lands the other side of the central console. Again, it's something I've not come across before.'

Her father leaned in towards her. 'The officers were asking me earlier if someone was maybe driving too fast behind you, causing you to do what you did.'

‘I don’t know what happened.’ Tears were filling Jessica Traynor’s eyes.

‘Was there some sort of race going on?’ Clarke asked. ‘Maybe you got in the way and they forced you off the road?’

‘No . . .’

Traynor had risen from his chair. His daughter had her eyes screwed shut and he was asking her if she was in pain.

‘I don’t want to think about it,’ she told him. ‘I don’t want to remember any of it. The car went off the road, that’s all.’

With her hand still in his, Traynor turned towards the two detectives. ‘Probably best if you leave now. Give her some time to recover.’ His eyes told them he would brook no argument. But still Clarke lingered. It was Rebus, however, who spoke.

‘We just need Jessica’s address here in Edinburgh.’

‘Why?’ The question came from the bed. Jessica had balled her free hand into a fist. Her eyes were still closed but her face looked pained.

‘We just do,’ Clarke said.

Traynor gestured towards the corridor. ‘Jessica,’ he said, ‘just try and relax. I’m going to show the officers out.’

‘I still don’t understand why they’re here.’

‘They’re leaving right now.’ He gave her wrist a final squeeze, then let it go, extending an arm to indicate to Rebus that he should lead the way.

Once they were out in the corridor and the door was closed, he proffered the address. Clarke tapped it into her phone.

‘Speaking of which . . .’ Traynor held out a hand, palm up. Clarke dug his daughter’s phone from her pocket and handed it over.

‘Does Jessica have flatmates?’ she asked.

‘Another student. Her name’s Alice or Alison – I only met her once.’

‘Does she know about Jessica?’

‘I’m guessing she’d be here if she did.’

Rebus had a question of his own. ‘Is Jessica seeing anyone?’

‘A boyfriend? There was someone called Forbes. She hasn’t mentioned him lately.’

‘Is Forbes a first name or a last?’

‘I’ve really no idea.’ Traynor’s eyes were trained on the window and the bed beyond. ‘I need to get back.’

‘If she confides anything . . .’

He turned to face Rebus, then nodded slowly before re-entering his daughter’s room. They watched him take his seat again.

'You don't think she was alone out there,' Clarke suggested.
'I don't even think she was driving,' Rebus replied.