

**Malcolm Mackay**

**HOW** —  — **A** — **GUNMAN** — **SAYS** **GOODBYE**

*"The hyperbole is justified.... Crime writing with ambition."*

**A Novel**

—**FINANCIAL TIMES**

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***HOW A  
GUNMAN  
SAYS  
GOODBYE***

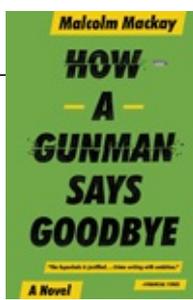
***Malcolm Mackay***



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[\*\*Begin Reading\*\*](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Reading Group Guide](#)

[An Excerpt from \*The Sudden Arrival of Violence\*](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

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*To my parents*

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# 1

Careful on these stairs. That would be some return, falling flat on his face the first day back. Not the first time he's been to the club since he had his hip replaced. He's been haunting the place for the last two weeks. Letting everyone see he's back. New hip, same old Frank. Someone got the message. Frank had a phone call this morning from John Young. Young's the second in command, Peter Jamieson's right-hand man. When Young calls you up and invites you to the club, it's usually because Jamieson wants to see you. For some people, that could be very bad news. For Frank, it's good. The recovery from the holiday—that was all fine. Enjoyable, for a while. It's nice to put your feet up and not even think about work. It got boring, though. When your work is your life, a long holiday is a bad thing. He's been itching to return to work. To be back in the loop. It's taken a couple of weeks to convince people but it seems to have worked.

He goes through the double doors at the top of the stairs. Into what's known these days as the snooker room. The club and dance floor are downstairs, but they're for customers. People in the business, people who know what the club's really about, tend to stay upstairs. There's a bar to your right as you come in the door. The main floor is taken up with snooker tables. They became Jamieson's passion a couple of years ago. He has plenty of little hobbies. Harmless things to pass the time and relieve the pressure. He'll get bored of snooker eventually and drift along to something else. Golf, probably. Right now, it's snooker and horse racing. Not too many people in the snooker room at this time of day. A couple of hardy alcoholics at the bar. A few recognizable faces at the tables, killing time. One of them's a loan shark that Frank's seen at the club in the last couple of weeks. Seems to be hanging around a lot. Kenny McBride, Jamieson's driver, is there too. Nobody that could be mistaken for important.

At the far end of the room is a short corridor. Rooms on both sides, offices, but only one that matters. Bottom of the corridor on your left-hand side, Peter Jamieson's office. The room in which he runs his organization. He has a number of legit businesses, like the club, but they exist only to serve their illegitimate counterparts. Money is cleaned through the club; people like Frank are given false jobs here to explain their income. He's the security consultant for the club, apparently. The security consultant is walking along the corridor, making sure he hides the last trace of his limp. He's fit enough to work, but he has to prove that to everyone. If they see the slight limp that remains, they'll think he's still an old cripple. He's sixty-two now, which is old enough. But he's no cripple. He's quite determined about that.

Knocking on the door and waiting for a response. Someone's calling for him to come in. He opens the door, seeing the familiar scene in front of him. Jamieson's sitting behind his desk on the far side of the large room, facing the door. There are a couple of televisions behind him, usually showing horse racing. Not today. Today they're both switched off. John Young is sitting on the old leather couch to Jamieson's left. He's always there. It's a little trick they pull. Means that when someone sits opposite Jamieson, they can't see Young, but he can see them. They're a sharp pair, these two.

‘Frank,’ Jamieson’s saying, and standing up. ‘Good to see you, pal.’ This is more of a greeting than he expected. He was in the club a couple of days ago, saw Jamieson then. This is different, though, and they both know it. This is the official return.

He’s shaken hands with both Jamieson and Young, very uncharacteristic, and is now sitting in front of the desk.

‘It is good to have you back, Frank,’ Jamieson’s saying. ‘A relief, to be honest with you.’

Frank’s nodding politely. Better not to look too pleased with yourself. Better to remember what happened in your absence. Things change, even in the space of three months. They hired Calum MacLean, for a start. That was Frank’s recommendation. Calum has talent, and he’s smart. He’s young, too; Frank can’t remember if he’s even turned thirty yet. Jamieson would never say it, but Calum is Frank’s long-term replacement. Right now, he’s his backup, but he can’t even play that role. Injured on a job, both hands badly cut up. Frank hasn’t seen Calum for a while. Not since before the trip to Spain. It’s probably past time to pay a visit. Keep up to date. Things change, and you have to know about it to stay fresh.

‘You’ll take a glass of whiskey,’ Jamieson’s telling him. ‘You driving? Och, you can still have one.’

He’s filling two celebratory glasses. Celebrating the return of Frank MacLeod.

‘Oh, you know, I think your tan is fading,’ Jamieson’s saying with a smile. He sent Frank away for a couple of weeks, to stay in his little Spanish villa. Frank’s first foreign holiday in twenty years. A lovely relaxing break, if you like that sort of thing.

‘Good,’ Frank’s saying. ‘Hard to blend into a crowd round here, looking like a fucking Oompaloompa.’

Jokes out of the way, down to business. ‘Good to have you back, because we’re in need of your talents,’ Jamieson’s saying. ‘We need to send out a little message, and you’re the man for the job. We might have used Calum, but he’s out of action. That’s meant things running longer than they should have. Made us look a little weak.’

‘How is Calum?’ Frank’s asking. Making it sound like genuine concern for the boy. More concerned about the state of play within the organization. He respects Calum, but this is a cut-throat business. A boy with Calum’s talent doesn’t stay as backup for long.

Jamieson’s taking longer than expected to answer the question. Puffing out his cheeks, glancing at Young. Frank’s watching carefully. He knows Jamieson’s not convinced of Calum’s loyalty. That’s why Frank went to see Calum before flying to Spain. Tried to persuade him that organization-work was the way to go. The old head, winning round the young freelancer. Didn’t quite work.

‘Honestly? I think the boy’s still swinging the lead. Only one of his cuts was serious. It’s been patched up long enough for him to come to me and tell me he’s ready to work. I sent our doc round to have a look at him a couple of days ago. I don’t want to push him too much, but he reckons the boy’s good to work.’

Frank’s nodding. It all makes sense. Calum was a freelancer. Never worked for an organization before. He was brought in for the Lewis Winter job. Kill Winter, a dealer for Shug Francis. He did the job well, by all accounts. Shug worked out it was Calum who killed his man. Stupidly decided to strike back. Sent big Glen Davidson to kill Calum. It didn’t go well. Davidson’s knife may have slashed Calum’s hands, but it ended up ripping a hole in Davidson’s side. Another one of Shug’s men dead.

‘Best not to push him,’ Frank’s saying. ‘He’s not used to being in an organization. Freelancers go to run wild. Give him time.’

Frank might not want to be replaced, but it’ll happen eventually. When it does, it should be Calum

who takes over. For Jamieson's sake, it needs to be someone like Calum. Someone who lives the job and respects and understands it. There are far too many silly little buggers running around thinking they're gunmen. They're not. They're just men with guns. He was thinking about this a lot in Spain. Thinking that he might just be the last of his generation. Frank, Pat and Bob are being replaced by Kyle, Connor and Jordan. Kids doing grown-up work. A talent like Calum is rare. Always was, but more so now. You have to handle him with care, make sure you don't lose him to someone else.

'I'll speak to him again, if you want,' Frank's saying. Hoping Jamieson will be smart enough to say no.

He's grimacing. 'Nah. You can only pass off that conversation as friendly once. Any more and he knows it's me putting the squeeze on him.' Jamieson's sharp all right. 'Never mind the boy,' he's saying, 'it's you I want to talk about. How's the hip?'

'Hip's good,' Frank's saying with a smile. 'Much better than before I went off.'

Jamieson's nodding. This is what he wants to hear. 'Good. I have a job for you.' Lowering his voice now, getting more serious. He's about to order a man's death—it seems right that it should be solemn. 'Shug's been hard at work trying to get networks set up. He has more than one supplier. I think he's getting his supply from down south. Can't find any locals he's using. We've managed to put a stop to a few of the networks, but one of them's become a problem.'

This is what Frank expected to hear. It tallies with the rumours. Shug getting a little desperate. Word is Jamieson's hired Nate Colgan to make sure no network gets off the ground. Intimidation and beatings. Stops anyone becoming enough of a problem that they have to be removed. Obviously one's got through.

'There's a kid called Tommy Scott,' Jamieson's saying. 'Wee bastard of a thing. We didn't think much of him. He used to be a peddler. Street stuff. Ran with a gang, sold to them—shit like that. Used to do deliveries on a bicycle. A fucking bike! I guess I underestimated the bastard. I've been getting complaints. The kid cutting into our market, up Springburn way. I tried sending a warning, but the little bastard's tough. Determined, too. Got one of his gangs providing security for his peddlers. One has three or four guys delivering for him now, but a couple of months ago he had none. He's growing fast, and stepping on toes. I'm fed up of hearing people complain. I need my people to know I'll protect their patch. I need Shug-bloody-Francis to know his men aren't safe.'

No great surprises here. Shug tries his luck with a bunch of ambitious young men in the business. One proves to be better than the rest. Now Frank has to deal with him. It's bad luck for the kid.

Before he leaves the office, Young is showing him a photo of Scott. Telling him the address. A tower block, second floor from the top. Well, that's just bloody brilliant. Very few places worse than that. Having to make an exit from a tower block is never ideal. You're always a long way from your getaway. But location apart, it's a soft job. They're breaking him back in gently. Jamieson will be preparing a big move against Shug Francis. He must be. Should've done it by now. Shug's been targeting Jamieson, so Jamieson must squash him or be considered feeble. This may be the first strike in that squashing. Scott looks like a typical council-estate kid. Greasy hair, tracksuit, probably a bunch of silly tattoos up his arm. It should be easy. He has one little mate who hangs around with him a lot, according to Young's info. Andy McClure. Known as Clueless.

Frank's walking out of the club now. A few little butterflies beginning to stir. Three months away. His last job had been a couple of months before that. It's a long time idle, especially at his age. He's nodding a polite goodbye to a few of the familiar faces on his way out. He's dropping into the driver's seat of his car. Those who know his business will understand that he's back. A visit to Jamieson without stopping at the bar means work. Jamieson said it was a relief for him. He has no idea. Who

you live the job, you realize how empty life can be without it. Those three months began to dra  
Spain was nice, but it's not Frank's style. Sunshine retirement is for other people. He wants the rain o  
Glasgow. The tension of the job. The thrill of it. That's his life. Oh, it's so good to be back.

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## 2

A typical day in the life of Tommy Scott. Out of bed about ten o'clock. Used to get up late because he'd been drinking and partying late the night before. These days it's because he works late. Out of bed and into the shower. Didn't used to shower every day, but you have to make an effort now. Presentation is important. They taught him that at one of the workshops the job centre made him attend about six months ago. He didn't care then, didn't listen. Stuck in a room with a bunch of junkies and no-hopers. Tedious embarrassment. He remembered that advice when Shug's right-hand man, Fizzy, made a little remark suggesting that he looked like he'd just stumbled out of a town block. He had. Point was, he needed to look like he hadn't. So now it's a shower every day, and a new wardrobe. Nothing fancy, just new and clean. Then breakfast. Then work.

He used to hate his work. Walking the streets, trying to compete with the other peddlers. Hell of a job. The things he had to do. He used to go around the estates on a bicycle to save time. You can't be credible on a bicycle. On reflection, it was an embarrassment. He understands better now. He's done with the bike. Done with all the low-grade shit he had to do. All the mistakes of the past will stay with the past. There's a lot back there. Even at the age of twenty-six he's managed to drop the ball a good number of times. A victim of the lifestyle. Started out as a teenager who liked to party, then became a teenager who lived to party. Weekends. Then all week long. Did some drugs. Slept around a lot. Had a kid at nineteen that he's seen twice since it was born. Had another at twenty-one. Never seen that one. Hasn't seen the mother since she was six months gone. Mistakes of the past. Can't carry them with you—too much weight. Hasn't had a girlfriend for a couple of months, too busy with work.

Breakfast time. A bowl of cornflakes with a sprinkling of sugar and some milk that's on the borderline of whiffy. Gulp it down; he has more important things to do. A meeting. A business meeting. Who would have thought, three months ago when he was pissing about on a bike, selling badly cut coke and any other garbage he could lay his hands on, that Tommy Scott would have a business meeting. Back then, it was house parties through the week, clubs at the weekend. Now it's work. Just work. Nothing else matters, not until he has what he's looking for. That's money, by the way. Real money. Not just enough to live on. Not just enough to see him through a wild weekend and pay the bills. Enough to buy a car. Enough to buy a house. He's going to get it too, he's convinced.

It was a fluke, if we're being honest. But then, it usually is, isn't it? He'd heard a few stories on the street about Shug Francis. Word was that he was trying to force his way in. Trying to take territory from Peter Jamieson. Tommy had done work for Jamieson before, peddling. Didn't last. The price of running the network for Jamieson didn't like Tommy's lifestyle. Shug was struggling to find anyone to deal for him. Peddlers he could get. Easy to find a halfwit to stand on a street corner and hand out sweeties for money. He needed better people. People further up the chain. Someone who could build and run a network, not just be a part of it. The word going round now is that Jamieson had Lew Winter rubbed out. There's a counter-rumour that says it was Winter's girlfriend and her bit on the side, but that sounds too much fun to be true. Winter's death scared people away. If that's what happened to the last guy running a network for Shug. Another guy was beaten senseless before he

could even start. They say Nate Colgan did the beating. Scary bastard, that one. A couple of other guys were bought off; they're both working for Jamieson now.

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So Shug's severely short-handed. Beginning to look like his attempt at muscling in is going to peter out, like so many others. Then Tommy bumps into David 'Fizzy' Waters in a petrol station. Completely random. Fizzy was filling up his car; Tommy was buying a lottery ticket. You have to dream, don't you? Fizzy was on his way out. Tommy abandoned the magic numbers and chased after him. Fizzy had no idea who he was, but Tommy introduced himself. How often will a chance like that come along? He told Fizzy he was interested in helping Shug out. Told him he knew the streets well, which was true. Told him he was connected, which was less true. Gave him his number, told him to call. Couple of weeks went by—nothing. Then the phone call. A couple of crappy, menial jobs peddling and delivering, proving your worth. Then they stepped it up.

Initiative. That's what they were looking for. Someone who could think for himself. Act without having to run to them all the time. People in charge don't like you running to them with every little problem. So he did things for himself. He used the clout that working for Shug gave him, to get new contacts. In no time he became the employee he had told Fizzy he already was. Now he's much more than that. Now he has a list of good contacts to sell to. He has a number of people working for him too, as peddlers and couriers. He set up the sort of local network in a couple of months that Shug expected to have to build himself. Would have taken Shug six months, easy. And Tommy's making the money he wants.

They didn't trust him at first. They didn't say so, but he's not daft, he could tell. They thought he was another dimwit from the estates. A peddler and nothing more. Actually, his background had helped him out. His years partying, hanging around in a street gang, throwing time and opportunity away. That's become useful, because he knows useful people. He's close enough to one of the street gangs to use them. They've carried out a few beatings for drugs. They've done some peddling for money. Mostly small-scale, but it helps that people know they're backing you up. They have to be handled carefully, they're volatile and untrustworthy, but good PR. Your own little battalion of thugs. Very useful.

Used to be Tommy and his best mate from childhood, Andy McClure. Just the two of them. Tommy and Clueless, to use his unfortunate but accurate nickname. Partying together, working together and, when money trouble dictated, living together. They shared everything. Money, needles, women. They still do. Tommy understands the importance of having someone he can trust. All these new contacts, all these new colleagues, only interested in him because of cash. Same reason he's interested in Shug. They'd throw him over the first chance they got. Not Andy—he'll be by his side to the end. You need that. Just someone you know you can turn to. Doesn't take Clueless to big meetings though; he has nothing smart to contribute.

He's thinking about that as he leaves the flat and makes his way out of the building. Clueless is going to be pissed off that this is another meeting he's not at. He thinks he should be there. He sees himself as the right-hand man, a key player. But he's not. Not bright enough to be a useful right-hand man. Besides, Tommy isn't important enough yet to need one. He's still a low-scale dealer, although he's rising fast. He has a good number of peddlers; he's pushing into good areas. He's sending the right messages. But he's not a big player. Important to Shug, sure, but not to anyone else. That meeting might help change that. A couple of guys who control the patch on a few large estates in Lanarkshire. Big area with big demand. They're known, but not important to the big organization. They have ambitions too. Good to have on board. Men of ambition should stick together.

They're eyeing him up as he's walking into the pub. Trying to decide if he's serious or not.

They've heard he's a rising star. They need a new supplier. A rising star with good connections would be ideal. They're cousins, apparently. Ian and Charlie Allen, although he doesn't know which is which. They don't look like family to Tommy as he's walking over to them. Both middle-aged. One of them tall, has a mop of fair hair, pockmarked cheeks. The other one looks short and tubby, with a shaved head and glasses. None of that matters, although the age can be an issue. Tommy's young, and he looks young. Middle-aged men don't like that. They want someone with their own experience level. Makes them feel comfortable, thinking they're working with someone like themselves. But they can live with discomfort, if the deal's good.

Shaking their hands. Smiling to both. Introducing himself and sitting opposite. Projecting confidence. He's nervous, but he knows how to hide it now.

'I've heard you're looking for a new supplier,' he's saying quietly, the pleasantries out of the way. People like this don't play about. Get to the point—they respect that. 'An operation like yours needs someone reliable, consistent and with good variety. I can offer that. I can match your need.' He's been thinking those words over on the way here. They sound good to him. They sound like what the Allens will want to hear.

'We've been let down by our last supplier,' the chubby one's saying. He won't say more than that, no detail. You don't bad-mouth a supplier publicly, even if he's let you down. If he finds out you've blackened his name, he might choose to do something about it. Suppliers tend to be dangerous men. 'How big is your operation?'

'Bigger than you need,' Tommy's telling them.

That's true. Shug has a deal with a major supplier, but the supplier's getting tetchy. Shug isn't moving enough gear yet, that's why a deal like this will impress the boss. Tommy isn't supposed to know that they're struggling to shift gear, but it's obvious. A big supplier doesn't want someone small on his books. Shug needs to increase deliveries or lose supply.

'We have everything you need,' Tommy's telling them, 'and then some. We can match your demand with ease. If your demand increases, which I'm sure it will, then we'll have no trouble with that. We only provide quality product. Your customers will like what we provide.' It's good sales patter. Ingratiating. A little bit creepy.

'Good to know,' the chubby one's saying, and nodding. 'We'll be in touch in the next couple of days.' They're getting up and leaving. Business meeting over.

It went well. They were never going to commit one way or the other just yet. They wanted to meet him, hear what he had to say. See if he was a serious kind of guy. They heard what they wanted to hear. No need to discuss money. Both sides will know what the market price is when the transactions are being done. It'll vary, deal to deal. Tommy's convinced they're going to call and agree to the hook-up. They won't get a better one. This'll be a big boost with Shug. Such a rare opportunity. Shug's struggling to get people on board. Tommy could be his most important dealer. He could become senior. Not just have good money, but be truly rich. Powerful too. That's what he's thinking as he's walking back home. Get some lunch. Check on some of the peddlers. Only a couple should be running low. It's a Wednesday, sluggish demand. Top them all up tomorrow, before the weekend burst. Keep his business ticking over nicely. His business.

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## 3

Sitting outside a tower block, watching the rain bounce off the windscreen. Waiting and watching. Making sure you're not seen. A boring but necessary part of the job. The most boring part of this job tops the most interesting part of a normal job. People would think him odd, sitting in his car like this. Any passer-by could see you and remember your face. Take your registration. A couple of days later they hear about a man being murdered nearby; they do their civic duty and report you to the police. Frank's heard every story there is to hear. All the different ways people are caught out. The sob-stories of a hundred halfwits, locked up because of one mistake.

Frank long ago learned how to be careful. You sit, and you watch, and you wait. You are patient. You scout a location properly. Then you move quickly. The speed at which he does his work, from order to completion, has always been his trademark. It's one of the things that will separate him from Calum. Calum's good, but he's slow. Ponders the job. Takes too long in scouting. It reassures people like Jamieson to have things done quickly. Makes them think it was nice and easy.

Watching the clock. Watching the door. He doesn't know if it's the right door to watch. Doesn't even know if he's on the correct side of the building. Scott could be tucked up in bed already. Or he might have a squad of spotty-faced little mates in there with him. Better to wait, play it safe. He's thinking that he should probably have parked further away from the building. His eyesight isn't perfect, less so in this rain. Better to be close enough to see the door. Better to reduce the amount of walking he has to do as well. Sort of dump where the lifts could be out of order. That might be too much for him. Climbing all the way up there and back down again. Nope, that wouldn't do. Even if he were young and fit, that would mean too long an exit time after the kill. Something else to worry about. Still, that's what scouting is for.

It's nearly two o'clock in the morning now. Enough waiting around. Nobody's used the door he's watching. There isn't a single light visible on this side of the building. Many of the flats are empty. Frank knows that. One by one, they're ripping these monstrosities down. Good riddance. They seem like horrible places to live. They're certainly horrible places to do a job. As people move out, the flats are left empty. When there's only a handful occupied, the council moves the occupants. The fewer people living in the building, the more unpleasant it becomes. Other people start using the building for their own ends. Homeless people. Junkies. People dump things there. Can't be a nice place for a guy like Scott to live. No wonder he's taking the stupid risk of working for Shug. Taking the risk of following in Lewis Winter's footsteps. Living like this is a reason to be desperate.

Frank's getting out of the car and pressing the button on his key to lock it. Hip's a little stiff. Sitting in the car like that isn't good for it. Doctor told him that. Told him he needed to be careful with it for a little while. Don't overreach, that's what he said. Frank told him he was a security consultant. The doc smiled, said something about an office job being a good thing. Frank nodded along. Now he's walking towards the door of the building, pulling up his hood. It's raining, but there might also be CCTV. Most of the cameras don't work, but you still take the precaution of pulling up your hood. And it is raining, after all.

He's in the doorway. There's a camera up in a corner, but even with a brief glance he can see it's useless. It looks like some little scamp has decided he doesn't like being watched and has smashed the thing. It makes this a good door to enter through. A useful bit of scouting. Into the lobby, confronted by two lifts. Neither seems to be out of order. More good news. Nobody around. He's pressing the button to call the lift. Nobody inside when the doors open. Inside and pressing the button for the second-from-top floor. It's a long way up and a slow lift. Watching the lights tick up, praying they don't stop on another floor. Other people out and about, bumping into him. The lift stops on the thirteenth floor, second from the top. Out into the cold corridor. Silent and empty, just how he likes it. Now he's looking at door numbers. Trying to find Scott's, so that he'll be able to get to it in a hurry for the hit. Trying to work out what side of the building it's on, so that he can watch for the lights.

Towards the end of the corridor, on his right, he finds what he's looking for. Flat 34B. Door closed, silence inside. He's checking the surroundings. Nothing of note, except the flat opposite. Flat 35A. The door is directly opposite Scott's front door. Would be nice to know if there was anyone living there. He might have to check that out tomorrow morning. Find out who lives where, and who's likely to hear suspicious noises. Frank's not dumb enough to stand right in front of a door with a peephole. He's up against the wall that the door is on, taking sideways glances at it. Looking for signs of security. Certainly no cameras up here. Door doesn't look like it has any unexpected locks on it either. That might become important, but hopefully not. He's seen all he needs to for now. He's smiling to himself as he's walking back towards the lift. It all looks as simple as he'd hoped. He's looking back along the corridor as the lift doors open for him. There are a couple of places where you can see wet footprints. He'll have to remember that if it's raining tomorrow night.

The job will be tomorrow night. He's decided on that as the lift's returning to the ground floor. A simple job with no complications. No need to delay it any longer than that. Out of the lift and through the lobby. Out to his car. Still raining. Rain's a mixed blessing. More chance of leaving footprints behind. More chance of falling on your arse, if you need to move quickly. But it does give an excuse for a hood. And it keeps people indoors. There's much to be said for that. He's in the car, starting it up and pulling away. Driving through the city at night, as he has so many times before. Changing city though—lurching from an industrial past to a shiny future in one ungainly bound. You have to know the place. Every nook and cranny, as the old ones would say. It takes a second before his memory reminds Frank that he is one of the old ones.

He's outside his house. Closing the car door quietly and heading up the garden path. He'll be using a different car tomorrow. Leaving the house earlier, too. Still, you develop the habit of carefulness and you stick to it. He's through the front door, closing it quietly. Locking it. He won't put a light on. He knows where everything in the house is. He can move about in the dark just fine. The need for silence has gone, though. There's nobody to wake up. Nobody to hide from here. There's never been anyone in his life. Well, nobody close enough that they would live with him. Been a few women over the years, but he never let it get serious. When he was in Spain there was an Englishwoman. Mid-forties, funny, presentable. She was there visiting her son. She kept saying how silly it was that people their age were having a holiday romance. Didn't stop her enjoying it. All Frank's ever had were short romances. Holiday romances, you could call them. Holidays from the life he's chosen for himself.

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## 4

There's no escaping the fact that Clueless is a moron. A complete clot of a human being, truth be known. Tommy Scott's always known it, but he's a loyal friend and he tries his best. Sometimes though, sometimes Clueless shows signs that he's learning. Like right now, for instance. He's coming in the front door of the flat. Scott sent him across the hall with a bag of gear. They stash a lot of stuff under the floorboards in the empty flat opposite. Less chance of it being found there. Scott doesn't keep big amounts near him for long—he's smarter than that. He picks it up from Shug's supplier, then moves it on to his peddlers in quick time. Common sense says you can't hold it for long. Anyway that's just the routine they go through. Clueless has gone across the hall to hide the stuff. Taking longer than usual to come back. Now he's coming in the front door, and there's a strange look on his face. He usually specializes in a fine line of vacant expressions. This look is more baffled.

Clueless has come in the front door and closed it behind him. 'I just saw some guy in the corridor' he's saying.

'Yeah?' Scott says. He could feign interest, but it's usually better not to encourage him.

'Yeah. I looked through the peephole before I came out, like you said to. There was this guy. Old guy, he was. Looked old, anyway. Had a big jacket on. Had the hood up. He was against the wall like that,' he's saying, mimicking Frank's stance. 'Looking at your door.'

Okay, now he's interested. 'Yeah? Did he just leave?'

'Aye. I waited for him to get in the lift, and then I came in here.'

The only light in the flat comes from the TV in the corner. The sound's down low. Scott's over at the window, peeking out through the gap in the curtain, looking down at the car park. 'Switch that TV off,' he's saying to Clueless. Waiting a few seconds for complete darkness, and watching as a figure moves across the car park. Down towards the road and into a car.

He left, which is a good thing. Means he's probably not going to try anything tonight. Silly old bastard. Oh, this is a chance. This is a big chance.

'Who was that guy anyway?' Clueless is asking him. 'Should I have done something?'

'No, you did the right thing.' Pausing. How much does he tell his friend? He'll need him, so he has to tell it all. 'I think that guy works for Peter Jamieson.'

'Jamieson? Shit, you think that old guy was after us?'

'I reckon he was. And I reckon he'll be back. See, if I'm right, that old fart was here to try and kill us. Only, when he does come back, we're going to be waiting for him.'

'Are we?' Clueless is pausing, thinking about this. Takes a while. 'Isn't this the sort of thing we should be telling Shug about? Let him deal with it?'

'No,' Scott's saying. It would be the easy thing to do, but not right. Initiative. That's what they want. Use your initiative. Deal with it yourself and really impress them.

There's no prospect of sleep tonight anyway. Not with the worry in the back of his mind that Frank MacLeod might come right back. Might not have been him, but who else? Fizzy, that's Shug's right hand man, warned him. Said that Jamieson was a tough bastard, that he has gunmen on his staff. The

most dangerous one is Frank MacLeod. Old guy that's killed loads and always got away with it. Bit of a legend, it seems. Would be a big blow to Jamieson if he ended up dead. Big boost for Shug, if one of his men did it. What an opportunity! Shit, something like this only comes along once in a lifetime. They have to grab the chance. Kill him. Kill a man. Shit, never done that before. Never even thought about it. Scott's thinking about that as they get ready to go out. Killing a man is something else. It's crossing some sort of line. But he has to. Doesn't have a choice. Kill or be killed. And it's such a great chance for him.

Out into the rain and the cold, looking for a gun. Any sort of gun. Anything that's capable of doing the job. There are places you can go, professional gunrunners. They sell any time, but only to the right people. They have to know you, know that they can trust you. They won't sell to the likes of Scott, and he knows it. One day they'll be desperate for his business, queuing up, but not tonight. They're bloody expensive too, and he doesn't have much cash on him. So they're going for the cheap option. They won't get such a good gun, but who cares? As long as it goes bang and Frank MacLeod falls down and doesn't get back up, then it's good enough. Might not be clean, either. Scott knows all the parlance. Clean is when a gun hasn't been used in any other crime that can then be linked to you, if you're caught with it. They won't get a weapon that can guarantee them that. Cheap and available—that's what matters.

His name's Donall Tokely. Everyone calls him Spikey, for reasons most people have forgotten. Seems to have had something to do with a childhood hairstyle. When Scott and Clueless ran with their gang in this area, Spikey was in there with them. A year or so younger, but a tough little bastard. He and a few of the other gang members ended up in jail. Got three years for robbery. The day he got out he stole a charity collection tin from a newsagent's. In the last year he's got closer to people at the serious end of the business. Made connections through his mother, of all people. She sells counterfeit clothes from her house. Spikey got pally with some of her suppliers, and he's gone up in the world since. The rumours said he was handling weapons. People were bringing old stuff across from Northern Ireland, and Spikey was selling it for them. He showed a handgun to Scott a couple months ago. Told him if he was serious about setting up a network, then he should buy one. Scott said no thanks. Not now, anyway. Well, this is the new now, and now he wants to buy that gun.

They're banging on his door, waiting impatiently. So what if he's fast asleep? They need this done quickly. This is life, death and business. Scott wants all the preparation time he can get. He doesn't actually know what he needs to do, but it seems obvious that he will need time. They have to be careful with this one. Frank MacLeod is, amongst other things, a very dangerous man. Banging on the door again. Scott's trying to remember if Spikey still lives with his mother. He's far more afraid of that beefy old witch than he is of Spikey. Heard a few stories about her that made him sick in his stomach. The sound of a latch being pulled back; now the door's opening.

'Tommy. Shit! Tommy. Do you know what time it is? Are you off your face or something?' Spikey's staring at him through half-closed eyes. Scott always liked Spikey. They seemed to have similar ambitions. He always thought of Spikey as a cut above most of their other friends. Now something's changed. Scott understands that. His ambitions have far outgrown Spikey's. Scott's moving on to a different level, and leaving mediocrity like Spikey behind.

'Listen, mate,' he's saying, making sure to get the 'mate' in there. 'I need a gun. Like, right now. Nothing fancy, just something that works. I don't have much cash on me, but I'll pay what I've got and owe you the rest. You know I'm good for it. I can pay you either in cash or gear—your choice. We can probably make a good deal on gear, as it happens.'

Spikey's looking at him with a frown. Too many words to process at this hour. 'You want a gun.'

thought you didn't want one.'

'I do now.'

'Uh-huh. But I don't have any. Not just now. I can get you one, if you want, but it'll take a few days. You should have said. When I had them, I mean.'

'How can you not have guns?' Scott's asking. There's a bit of anger in his voice that Clueless and Spikey have both noticed. 'You sell the fucking things for a living.'

'Yeah, okay, back off a wee bit, huh? I do sell them. I sold a shitload of them a few weeks ago. Made a good pile out of it. Sold the lot to the one buyer. Same people I got them off, actually. They wanted them back. Paid up to get them, too. Nice profit for nothing. I've got more coming, though, you'll wait.'

That was the go-to option. Where the hell do they go to now? The only other people with guns that Scott knows are people who probably won't sell to him. Spikey's such an idiot. Scott knew it as soon as Spikey told them about selling the guns back to the previous owners. He doesn't seem to get it. They sell the guns to him, and then buy them back at a higher price. Only one reason why you throw money away like that. They have someone willing to pay a much higher price now. If Spikey had anything resembling a brain in his head, he'd have turned down their offer and gone looking for the better offer himself. Nope, he took the quick profit. No ambition. No initiative. That's why he'll never get anywhere.

'Do we have to use a gun?' Clueless is asking.

'If he has a gun and we don't, we're fucked. Even two to one. This guy's a professional, and we're not. We have to do this right. So that we can show Shug that we know how.'

Mark Garvey. Nasty piece of work. Sells guns, though, everyone knows it. Sells to some of the worst people. Seems to be able to keep himself off the police radar, God alone knows how. Must be one lucky bastard, because he's in it up to his armpits. Robbers, gunmen, dealers, pimps—the whole nine yards. Some people say he shut up a couple of his own suppliers before they had the chance to drop him in it. Might be bullshit. There's a lot of it about. Scott knows where he lives, or at least where he used to live. If he's moved, then they're about to wake up the wrong guy.

Knocking on another door. A nicer area this time. The door's opening. Attractive woman in her thirties, short nightdress.

'Erm, we're looking for Mark Garvey,' Scott's saying. A light's gone on behind her. Hmm, maybe not quite so attractive now. Bottle-blonde, crow's feet, not the best skin. Would still look good with a bit of make-up on.

The woman's gone. Garvey's standing in the doorway now, frowning. Early fifties, bottle-brown hair, trying to look young for the wife, no doubt. Hard to keep up with a second marriage.

'What do you want?' Garvey's asking. Looking at Scott, paying Clueless no attention. At a glance he knows who matters here.

'We need a weapon,' Scott's saying quietly. Maybe Garvey doesn't tell the little wife everything. 'Anything usable will do us.'

'Will it now? Good for you. I think you got the wrong address.' He's moving to close the door.

'I think we got the right address,' Scott's saying, sticking his foot in the jamb. 'I know you don't sell to strangers. Fair enough. I have an organization behind me. I can either pay you cash or set up a good deal on gear. Your choice. This could become a standing arrangement.'

'No, it couldn't,' Garvey's saying. 'Now get your foot out of my door before I lose my rag.'

'We're in a hurry here. Helping us out won't be forgotten.'

'You listen to me,' Garvey's saying, leaning forward aggressively. He's not a big man, but the

movement does the trick. Scott's pulled his foot away. 'If you're in a hurry for a piece and you got an organization behind you, then you go to the organization. That's what it's there for. You don't go waking me up in the middle of the fucking night, understood?' He's closed the door. Not with a slam that might be heard by the neighbours, and a guy like Garvey doesn't want the neighbours knowing he's had visitors.

Plodding the streets again. They've tried two more dealers. Ignored by one, door shut on them by the other. Scott doesn't know any others. The old gang probably have something, but he's not so close that they'd give it to him. They protect their valuables jealously. He could go to Shug. Would probably get a gun from him. But that would render the whole thing pointless. Shug would almost certainly send someone else round to do the job. Then they'd only get credit for reporting it. Creed doesn't go far.

Plodding back to the flat, Clueless complaining. He's been no bloody use. They're back where they started, and Scott's thinking hard. Trying to work out how you bring down a killer like Frank MacLeod. How two men stop one man and his gun. This is the initiative that matters.

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## 5

Doing the rounds. Nothing special, just putting in an appearance. It matters. People need to see that you're active, that you're keeping an eye on them. Puts a little pressure on. John Young's had one meeting already this morning. Went to see one of their two main suppliers. Had to be particularly careful with that one. Suppliers are a tetchy bunch. They need to be wary, fair enough. Police operations against the big importers tend to be better funded, better run. The better funded and run they've become, the harder suppliers have become to deal with. This was a casual meeting. A little business, mostly just getting a subtle message across. Young's heard rumours about people that matter switching suppliers. People falling out like bloody school kids. That's dangerous for everyone. He's a little more reassured now. Supplier says it's small stuff. Contained. A couple of people squabbling over money. Won't turn violent. Isn't contagious.

First little concern calmed. Now on to the next one. There are always plenty. This one's closer to the business. People really aren't very bright. It surprises Young every day how stupid people can be. People who really should know better. It's money that does it, you know. Greed makes people stupid. Stupid to a point where they're willing to risk vastly more than they stand to gain. Marty Jones runs a dirty little operation that makes money. He's basically a pimp. Nobody likes him much, but he does his job and he makes money. He cuts the organization in, and in exchange gets the benefits of being part of the Jamieson group. Marty supplies a product that people want to use, and he makes good money. But that's never enough for people like Marty. They can't just be happy with what they've got. Not until they learn.

Young's had Marty watched this morning. Just got a call that he's gone to the nightclub that his brother runs. Perfect. The scene of the crime. Young's pulling up outside the club and getting out of the car. Huffing and puffing. Could do with losing some weight, he's realizing. Into the club. Unfamiliar. Asking a woman mopping the floor in the foyer where he can find the manager. She's pointing along a corridor. He would laugh at the lack of security, if it didn't remind him of their own. Along the corridor, finding a door with 'Manager' written on it. Not knocking, just going in. Polite little place. Grim. Marty sitting on a chair in front of the desk, his brother Adam in the chair behind him. They're both looking at Young and neither knows what to say. Just the start he wanted.

There's an old chair at the side of the room. Young's taking his place in it.

'I think you both know why I'm here,' he's saying. No smile, no jokes, no playing the smartars. This is business and they need to understand how serious it is.

'I'm not sure...' Marty's saying, and stopping. He's not sure what to say.

'I know that you two have been running private parties out of this place. I know that you've been using merchandise provided by us. I know that you've been making a tidy profit from it, and not passing that profit on. I'm not going to tell you to stop the parties. I've come here alone, as a gesture of my goodwill. You're making money. Good. You cut us in. You're making connections with other organizations through these parties. Good. We can all benefit from that.' He's looking at Marty now. 'In the next couple of days you're going to come round to the club and show me the books on the

parties. You're going to provide the back-pay of our cut. We're going to make an agreement that works for both of us. If not, I'll come round here again and I won't be alone.'

He's getting up and leaving. Neither of them says a word. They've been caught red-handed. Marty's just smart enough to know that he has to play this straight. He'll cut them in. He knows what the price will be, if he doesn't. The threats were all a little clichéd, but it's what they understand. Young isn't the sort to go in and be violent from the start. That would ruin any prospect of profiting from this. On the other hand, you can't be too subtle with them. They need to understand what will happen if they don't clean up the mess they've made. The money isn't huge, but it was worth Young making the appearance himself. They need to know they can't ignore the organization. Everyone needs to know that. But it's more than that. These parties have potential. It was when he found out who was attending that he became most interested. People with important roles in some big organizations. People it would pay to be close to. People with information—Young's favourite weapon.

One quick meeting before lunch and then back to the club. This one matters most. No role is more important than defending themselves from their enemies. Only way to do that is to find out what your enemies are up to. He's at a flat he uses a lot. Small place, but secure and neatly positioned to make it impossible for an observer to see who's coming and going from which flats. Good place to meet people that you don't wish to be seen meeting. He has been using it for a while, though. He's already keeping his eye open for a suitable alternative. His contact is there before him. Long-term contact, not entirely reliable. That's why he has to do the waiting. Young will be last in and first out. The contact will wait for him to arrive and give him time to get away before leaving.

'So you're working nights,' Young's saying, taking a seat at the kitchen table. It's a sparsely furnished flat, always cold.

'This week and next,' Greig's nodding. PC Paul Greig. Rather too enthusiastic a contact. Young's known him for years. A cop in his late thirties destined never to rise from the bottom of the heap. Seems to have talent as a cop. Also has a reputation. So bent that even the criminals can't trust him. But occasionally he delivers.

'Tell me what I need to know,' Young's saying.

'I think the Lewis Winter investigation is almost as dead as he is. Pretty much only Fisher working on it now, and even he has other things to do these days. People have lost interest.'

Young's nodding along. Trying to make it look like he doesn't already know this. Just let the contact talk. Don't annoy or scare him.

'Fisher's problem is that he can't put the pieces together,' Greig's saying now. He's experienced. He knows what Young wants. 'He has all the names that matter, just can't put them in order. He knows there's something between Shug and Jamieson. He knows Glen Davidson was involved and that he disappeared. He knows Lewis Winter was involved and he's dead. He knows Davidson called this guy MacLean just before he disappeared. He knows MacLean moved house the day after. Doesn't take much of a genius to piece it together, but you need evidence. I don't think he'll find any, either. Too many professionals involved.'

Young's looking at him. The mention of Calum is always a worry. They've tried to keep him off the radar for as long as possible, but it was never going to last. That's the business.

'So Fisher's putting all these pieces together, is he?' Young's asking. Making it seem like he doesn't much care. Fooling no one.

Greig's shrugging. 'He's got the pieces, but it would take one hell of a leap to make a case with them. Maybe a better cop could. Get one of those bolts of inspiration. Fisher ain't that kind of cop. He won't let go, sure, but he won't go anywhere with it.' Another shrug.

Young's nodding, not believing. Fisher's dangerous enough. Takes an idiot to underestimate someone so tenacious. Respect your enemy.

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Into the car and driving through the city. Heading back to the club, but taking a detour. Fisher's house is twenty minutes out of his way. A journey worth taking. Not to do anything. You don't do anything to a cop. But you need to know what they're up to. You find out about them and their family. Find out about their friends. Their lifestyle. Any little detail that might have value later on. All for defensive purposes, not attack. He doesn't need to drive past the house, but he finds it easier to work things out with a clear picture before him. See the house—imagine the man inside. No family worth speaking of. Few friends. There has to be a weakness. Has to be. They've checked his emails and phone, but found nothing. There are other things they can do. Get a key to the house. Have a peek about inside. Check his browser history. Information. If you find nothing of value, create it. That's last-resort territory. However much a pain Fisher is, he's still a cop. And you don't provoke a cop.

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## 6

Frank had a good night's sleep. There was a day, rather a long time ago, when he would be nervous the hours before a job. Not any more. Having a routine settles you. It becomes familiar and enjoyable. Takes the edge off the preparations. Once the job's actually started, it's easy. Your focus becomes the dominant emotion. No room for worry. He's up and showering, having his breakfast, checking the newspaper. He needs to find out about the occupants of the flats, but that's easy enough. One early phone call to a contact. He'll get the info through a third party. Probably more than a third party, fourth or fifth. Anyway, somewhere down the line you get to some old woman working in an office for the local postal service. She'll never hear Frank's name, never know that the information is for criminal use. She'll get a small payment and share the information about who occupies which flat. It's the best Frank can do at such short notice. Hardly the most reliable info. Chances are there'll be people crashing in an empty flat or two in that building. That's the risk you take. You can only work with the best information to hand.

Reading the paper, then heading out to the shop. Walk a little every day. Exercise the hip, build up your strength. Also, be seen in the community. Frank's spent years playing a part locally. Looking like the slightly sad ageing gent, living all by himself. He's never been close to his neighbours, but he makes sure they see just enough of him to prevent them getting nosy. He's heading to the corner shop at the bottom of the road. A short walk, but it means he'll be seen acting normal on the day of a job. That's what this is about. He doesn't need the pint of milk and packet of biscuits he'll buy. He just wants to be seen being his normal, ordinary self. If anyone round here knows what he does for a living, then they've never mentioned it. Never even suggested that they know. Maybe they're just smart enough to keep their mouths shut.

The shopkeeper's seen him. A couple of other people were in the shop, too. Now he's back at the house, wasting the afternoon away. It's the one downside of the job. When you're working, you have to stay away from all your colleagues. It's a strange thing. The older he gets, the more he enjoys going to the club and seeing people there. Shoot a frame of snooker, waste a couple of hours. He goes along two or three times a week when there's no work on. Ostensibly to play the role of security consultant, but to make the job seem convincing. In truth, he enjoys the company. You stay away from the person who hires you for a job. You keep your distance for at least a few days afterwards, sometimes as much as a week. Depends on the heat. There probably won't be much for someone like Scott. It'll be a gang-related death. Not likely to get a lot of traction with the media, not unless it's a particularly slow news day. The police won't make a big play of it, either. Better not to scare the locals with talk of gangland killings.

The afternoon has gone. He's cooking his dinner. Nothing too heavy, and nothing exotic. You don't want your innards to trip you up. There will be some nerves at the time. Not a lot, experience deals with that, but there might be something. The nerves can come in a rush. If everything goes well, no surprises, then he'll be fine. When everything happens quickly, and exactly as expected, he can get through a job without feeling the slightest flutter. That's not healthy, he knows it. You should have

some nerves. Keeps you on your toes. If a surprise comes along, then the nerves come with it. They can come in a wave, race up on you and consume you. It's how you handle those that matters most. Experience helps, but it's not everything. You can have no experience, but a calm mind. You can have a mountain of experience, as Frank does, and the nerves can still cripple you. It's happened. People get surprised by something and freeze. Never happened to Frank.

It's dark outside now. He's starting to prepare. Getting the plain clothing on. A little bit of a cliché to dress in black. The colour doesn't matter much, but when you're working in the night it's a reasonable precaution to go dark. The most important factor is making sure the clothing has no distinguishing marks. You wear nothing that can be accurately described. You make sure that the police can't find replicas and show it to the world. Utterly plain, worn only once and then destroyed. He'll cover his face. He doesn't on every job. If you have a job where there's no prospect of witnesses or cameras, then why bother? Sometimes you have to be ultra-careful to get close to someone. That can mean no covering your face because that makes you stand out. These days it's balaclavas more and more. The good old days—no such thing as CCTV. Back then, he wouldn't have worn one for the job.

He's leaving the house at ten minutes past ten. He'll be at the flats before eleven, but he'll spend some time while sitting and watching. Give it as much time as possible. Make sure everyone's fast asleep. Make the job so much easier. It's not raining tonight, which is something. He's parked a little further away from the building tonight. He knows roughly which windows to watch now. No lights on in the flat that he's sure belongs to Scott. There are two lights on in a flat three floors down, but he's not worried about them. The key to his calm is the information that was put through his letter box in the afternoon. There's nobody in the flat opposite. Nobody in the flat next door, either. Only one other occupied flat on that entire floor, and it's at the opposite end of the corridor. The flat directly beneath is occupied and that's the one concern. The man who lives there might hear the gunshot. Might be too deep asleep to hear it. Might hear it and not realize what it is. With a floor between them, it shouldn't matter. Frank will be out by the time anyone hearing the shot has clambered from their bed.

He's sitting watching the door. The hip's starting to grumble a little. It's these moments when he wishes he still smoked. Used to. Used to smoke thirty a day. Right up until Peter Jamieson told him the rough tobacco he smoked smelled terrible. That didn't matter. He then told Frank that he could always recognize the smell on his clothes. That mattered. You can't have a distinctive smell as a gunman. No more than you can have a distinctive look, mannerism or sound. You see many kids in the business today covered in tattoos. Morons, every single one. Marking their bodies with immediately distinctive designs. Stupid. So he was worried about the smell, especially with fewer people than ever smoking. Back in the day, the smell blended in. Not any more. So he quit smoking, and began munching through a packet of extra-strong mints every day instead. That might have been a great leap forward for his lungs, but not for the smell. The minty-fresh gunman. Still too distinctive, so he quit the mints, too.

Nothing, and more nothing. The last lights in the building going out. It's twenty past midnight when the door opens and a figure emerges. A young man. Hard to get a good look from here. Definitely too short to be Scott. Could well be his mate, though. Looks like the kind of little oaf that Clueless McClure undoubtedly is. He's walking along the side of the building and round the corner. Out of view. Going home for the night. Frank's smiling to himself. One less thing to worry about. It'll be Scott alone, and that's a job he can deal with. Okay, he's honest enough to accept that there isn't a whole lot of glory in this job. When he was away, Calum did the Winter job cleanly. Then he handled the Davidson attack. Glory in that. They might think he's milking his hand injuries, but they admit

the job he did. Brave and smart, they all say. Kept his head clear throughout. This is nothing like the  
A simple job to send a message. There was always that thought in the back of Frank's mind when he  
was away. People forget about you. Forget that you're capable of doing a good job as well. The flavor  
of the month gets all the attention. You need to do something to grab it back. Even something simple  
like this.

He's waited another half-hour in the darkness. Waiting for any sort of movement. Any sign of  
light. Giving it a little more time. The clock's reached one. Enough waiting. He's out of the car. A  
little thing he's never driven before. Nippy and uninspiring. He'll switch back to his own car as soon  
as he's done here. This'll be the only time he'll ever be near this car. No one could possibly link it  
to him. Pulling on his balaclava and walking across the car park. Nobody in sight. Cold, but dry. Walking  
briskly up to the door. Suppressing that last hint of a limp. It's a recognizable feature. In through the  
door, confident the camera doesn't work. Pressing the button for the lift and stepping in as the door  
opens. A slight twinge of nerves in the pit of his stomach. Someone else could be calling the lift.  
Maybe he should have left it an hour later. Too late for these thoughts now. Kill the nerves and focus.  
You're past the point of no return.

The lift's opening on Scott's floor. Frank's stepping slowly out, looking left and right. The lights  
are on all night in the corridor, but there's no sign of life. All doors closed. Silence reigns. Walking  
softly to the left, along the corridor. Reaching into his inside coat pocket for the gun. A small thing he  
picked up from his supplier. He has three suppliers that he rotates, so none realizes how much work he  
does. Been working with them all for a long time. There's trust there now. Still better not to let any of  
them know your work schedule. The gun isn't powerful, he can see that. Good enough to guarantee a  
kill at short range. That's all it needs to be. Checking around him as he reaches the door. Knocking  
twice. Loud enough to wake Scott, but not a dramatic thump that might make him wary. Frank  
standing slightly to the side. Just out of view of the peephole. A man in a balaclava with a gun at his  
side is not a man you open the door to. Waiting. Ready to knock again. Then something strange.  
It sounds like a crack in the distance. Things are going white. He can feel his legs give way. Is it his hip?  
No, he's realized as he's falling forward against the door of Scott's flat, it's worse than that.

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# 7

Everything's blurry. Dark around the edges, with an uncomfortable light in the middle. Closing his eyes again, that seems easier. It's taking a few seconds, fuzzy moments of discomfort, but now he's remembering where he is. He's keeping his eyes shut anyway. The sooner he opens them, the sooner he has to confront the situation. Better to be silent. Better to listen.

'I think he moved, Tommy, I think I saw him move. Definitely.'

A nasal exclamation. So much for lying still and listening. Stay still. You're not dead yet. You can still retrieve this. As long as you're breathing, things can turn around. He can hear them both walking up and down the corridor. They're not doing anything. Pacing the floor, trying to work out what to do with their prize. They have Frank MacLeod where they want him. They just don't know what to do next.

He's opening his eyes now, looking at them. Look for the detail that matters. Tommy Scott is holding the gun. He has it down at his side. He looks pained. Looks like he's trying to work something out. The expression of a kid who's in over his head. The corridor's dimly lit. Lamplight, it looks like Scott's little mate, Andy 'Clueless' McClure, is standing beside him. He looks excited, lost in the thrill of the moment. Adrenalin controlling intelligence. Not that there was much of that to begin with. Scott was always the brains of this little operation. Frank's in no place to judge, though. He's the one lying on the floor, just inside the front door. Everyone's more intelligent than him right now. The dingy corridor he's lying in opens into the kitchen at the bottom. There are two closed doors on his right and one on his left. The front door's behind him. The only way out.

He can't even remember it happening. He remembers knocking on the front door. Just after one o'clock in the morning. Feeling the reassuring gun in his right hand, out of view of the door. Ready to step inside, and shoot. Quick job, in and out, leave the body. So simple. Now he's waking up inside the flat. The front door didn't open first, he's sure of that. Someone got him from behind. Must have come out of the flat opposite—two steps and they were right behind him. Knocked him out, dragged him into the flat. He didn't hear them, didn't expect them. Now Tommy Scott's walking up and down the corridor with Frank's gun in his hand. What a disaster! Humiliation. Forty-four years in the business since the day John 'Reader' Benson paid him buttons to beat the snot out of a scrawny racecourse bookie. Been in some tight spots since then. But nothing like this. This is too tight to move.

Tommy's just noticed that Frank's awake. Might as well try to sit up. Tommy's marching back along the corridor towards him. Twenty-six years of age, skinny, dark-haired and always tired looking. Used to be a peddler. A street dealer. Used to go round the estates on a bicycle selling wraps to kids. A bicycle, for Christ's sake! Of course nobody took him seriously. How Shug Francis saw anything in him is a mystery. Nevertheless, he did. Desperation maybe. Anyone willing and able was welcome, regardless of ability. Jamieson's stamped on all of Shug's other efforts. Shug brought Tommy on board. Gave him a strong supply. Scott took it and set up his own little network. Frank underestimated him. He's seeing that now. Judging him on what he's done before. Not judging him on what he's doing now. Still thinking of Scott as that greasy kid on the bike. Now Scott's standing over

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