

THE ICONIC NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER

# IAN RANKIN

THE NEW **JOHN REBUS** THRILLER



# A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES

DIGITAL CHAPTER SAMPLER

# A SONG FOR THE DARK TIMES

COMING 1 OCTOBER 2020

*'He's gone...'*

When his daughter Samantha calls in the dead of night, John Rebus knows it's not good news. Her husband has been missing for two days.

Rebus fears the worst – and knows from his lifetime in the police that his daughter will be the prime suspect.

He wasn't the best father – the job always came first – but now his daughter needs him more than ever.  
But is he going as a father or a detective?

As he leaves at dawn to drive to the windswept coast – and a small town with big secrets – he wonders whether this might be the first time in his life where the truth is the one thing he doesn't want to find...

THE ICONIC NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER

IAN  
RANKIN

THE NEW JOHN REBUS THRILLER

A SONG  
FOR THE  
DARK  
TIMES

FAMILY COMES FIRST  
EVEN BEFORE THE TRUTH

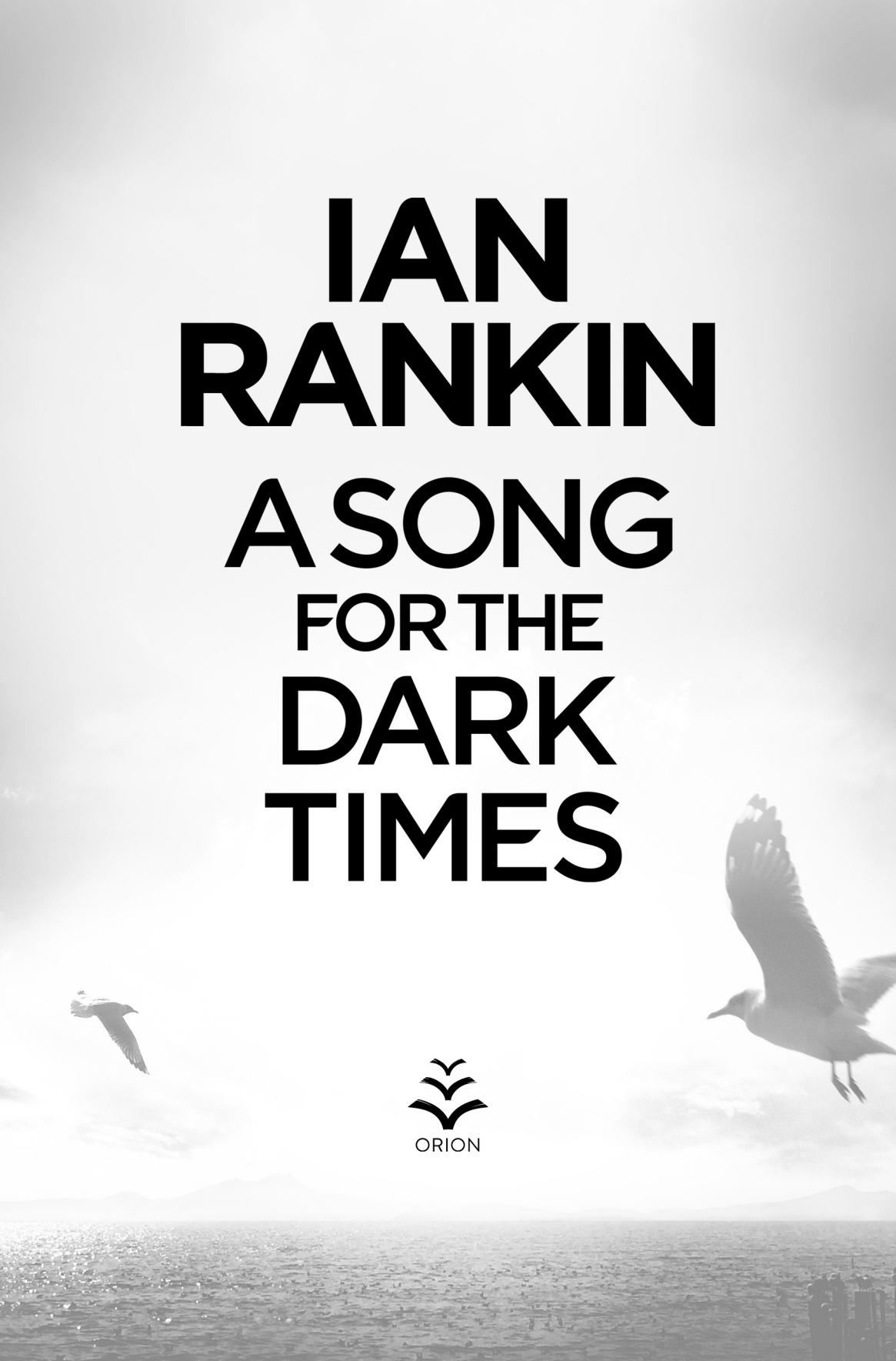
CLICK HERE  
to watch Ian introduce

A SONG  
FOR THE  
DARK  
TIMES

AND NOW READ ON FOR AN EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK...

**IAN  
RANKIN**

**A SONG  
FOR THE  
DARK  
TIMES**



First published in Great Britain in 2020 by Orion Fiction,  
an imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd.,  
Carmelite House, 50 Victoria Embankment  
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © John Rebus Ltd. 2020

The moral right of Ian Rankin to be identified as the author  
of this work has been asserted in accordance with the  
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted  
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the  
prior permission of both the copyright owner and the  
above publisher of this book.

All the characters in this book are fictitious,  
and any resemblance to actual persons, living  
or dead, is purely coincidental.

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

ISBN (Hardback) 978 1 4091 76897 8  
ISBN (Trade Paperback) 978 1 4091 7698 5  
ISBN (eBook) 978 1 4091 7700 5

Typeset by Deltatype Ltd, Birkenhead, Merseyside  
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



[www.orionbooks.co.uk](http://www.orionbooks.co.uk)

In the dark times  
Will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will also be singing.  
About the dark times.

**Bertolt Brecht**

We love making damaged people our playthings.

**Jon Ronson**

# Prologue

Siobhan Clarke walked through the emptied flat. Not that it *was* empty; rather the life had been sucked from it. Packing crates sat the length of the hallway. The kitchen cupboards gaped, as did the door to the tenement stairwell. The window in the main bedroom had been opened to air the place. It looked bigger, of course, without the furniture and the restless figure of John Rebus himself. Bare light bulbs dangled from each ceiling. Some curtains had been left, as had most of the carpeting. (She'd run a vacuum cleaner over all the bedrooms the previous day.) In the hall, she studied the boxes. She knew what they held, each one written on in her own hand. Books; music; personal papers; case notes.

Case notes: one bedroom had been filled with them – investigations John Rebus had worked on, solved and unsolved, plus other cases that had held an interest for him, helping keep him busy in his retirement. She heard footsteps on the stairs. One of the movers gave a nod and a smile as he hefted a crate, turning to go. She followed him, squeezing past his colleague.

'Nearly there,' the second man said, puffing out his cheeks. He was perspiring and she hoped he was all right. Probably in his mid fifties and carrying too much weight around his middle. Edinburgh tenements could be murder. She herself wouldn't be sorry not to have to climb the two storeys again after today.

The main door to the tenement had been wedged open with a folded triangle of thick cardboard – the corner of a packing case, she guessed. The first mover, tattooed arms bared, had reached the pavement and was making a sharp turn, left and left again, passing through a gateway. Beyond the small paved area – probably a neat

garden in the distant past – stood another open door, this one leading to the ground-floor flat.

‘Living room?’ he asked.

‘Living room,’ Siobhan Clarke confirmed.

John Rebus had his back to them as they entered. He was standing in front of a row of brand-new bookcases, bought at IKEA the previous weekend. That trip – and the clash of wills during the shelves’ assembly – had put more strain on the friendship between Rebus and Clarke than any operation they’d worked on during their joint time in CID. Now he turned and frowned at the box.

‘More books?’

‘More books.’

‘Where the hell do they keep coming from? Didn’t we make a dozen trips to the charity shop?’

‘I’m not sure you factored in how much smaller this flat is than your old one.’ Clarke had crouched to give some attention to Rebus’s dog Brillo.

‘They’ll have to go in the spare room,’ Rebus muttered.

‘I told you to ditch those old case notes.’

‘They’re sensitive documents, Siobhan.’

‘Some are so old they’re written on vellum.’ The mover had made his exit. Clarke tapped one of the books Rebus had shelved. ‘Didn’t take you for a Reacher fan.’

‘I sometimes need a break from all the philosophy and ancient languages.’

Clarke studied the shelves. ‘Not going to alphabetise them?’

‘Life’s too short.’

‘What about your music?’

‘Same goes.’

‘So how will you find anything?’

‘I just will.’

She took a couple of steps back and spun around. ‘I like it,’ she said. Wallpaper had been removed, the walls and ceiling freshly painted, though Rebus had drawn the line at the skirting boards and window frames. The heavy drapes from his old living room’s bay window fitted the near-identical window here. His chair, sofa and hi-fi had been placed as he wanted them. The dining table had had to go – too large for the remaining space. In its place stood a modern drop-leaf, courtesy of IKEA again. The kitchen was a narrow galley-style affair. The bathroom, too, was long and narrow but

perfectly adequate. Rebus had baulked at the idea of a refit: ‘maybe later’. Clarke had grown used to that refrain these past few weeks. She’d had to bully him into decluttering. Thinning out the books and music had taken the best part of a fortnight, and even then she would sometimes catch him lifting an item from one of the boxes or bags destined for the charity shop. It struck her that he didn’t have much in the way of family mementoes or what could be termed ‘heirlooms’ – no bits and pieces that had belonged to his parents; a handful of framed photos of his ex-wife and his daughter. Clarke had suggested he might want to contact his daughter so she could help him move.

‘I’ll be fine.’

So she had applied for a week’s leave and rented a small van, big enough for runs to IKEA, the charity shop and the dump.

‘Cornicing’s the same as your old place,’ she said, studying the ceiling.

‘We’ll make a detective of you yet,’ Rebus said, hefting more books onto a shelf. ‘But let’s save the next lesson for after we’ve had that mug of tea you’re about to brew . . .’

At the end of the kitchen was a door leading out to the enclosed rear garden, a large expanse of lawn with an ornamental border. Clarke let Brillo out before filling the kettle. Opening cupboards, she noted that Rebus had rearranged her work of the previous day – obviously there was some system he preferred: pots, tins and packets lower down; crockery higher up. He had even swapped around the cutlery in the two drawers. She popped tea bags into two mugs and lifted the milk from the fridge. It was the old fridge from the upstairs flat – same went for the washing machine. Neither fitted quite right, jutting out into the room. If it were her kitchen, she’d always be bruising a knee or stubbing a toe. She’d told him they wouldn’t fit, that he should replace them.

‘Maybe later,’ had come the reply.

The two movers did not require tea – they seemed to work on a supply of fizzy drinks and vaping. Besides which, they were almost done. She heard them fetching more boxes.

‘Living room?’ one asked.

‘If you must,’ Rebus answered.

‘One more trip, I reckon. You’ll want to lock up after us.’

‘Just pull the door shut when you’re finished.’

‘No last wee sentimental look-see?’

‘I’ve got the meter readings, what else do I need?’

The mover seemed to have no answer to this. Clarke watched him retreat as she took the mugs through.

‘Forty years of your life, John,’ she said, handing him his tea.

‘Fresh start, Siobhan. Keys are going to the buyer’s solicitor. Post’s being redirected.’ He seemed to be wondering if he’d forgotten anything. ‘Just bloody lucky this place fell vacant when it did. Mrs Mackay had been here almost as long as me. Son living in Australia, so that’s her twilight years taken care of.’

‘Whereas you couldn’t bear to move even fifty yards.’

He fixed her with a look. ‘I can still surprise you, though.’ He jabbed a finger towards the ceiling. ‘You reckoned they’d be carrying me out of there in a box.’

‘Is everyone this cheery when they move house?’

‘Maybe you’re forgetting why I’m moving.’

No, she hadn’t forgotten. COPD: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. He was finding stairs too much of a chore. So when the For Sale sign appeared in the downstairs front garden . . .

‘Besides,’ he added, ‘two flights wasn’t fair on Brillo and those poor wee legs of his.’ He looked around for the dog.

‘Garden,’ Clarke explained.

The pair of them headed through the kitchen and out of the door. Brillo was sniffing his way around the lawn, tail wagging.

‘Settled in already,’ Clarke commented.

‘Might not be so easy for his owner.’ Rebus peered up at the tenement windows that surrounded them, then gave a sigh, avoiding eye contact with Clarke. ‘You should go back to work tomorrow. Tell Sutherland you don’t need the full week.’

‘We’ve stuff to unpack.’

‘And you’ve a murder waiting for you. Speaking of which: any news?’

Clarke shook her head. ‘Graham’s got his team assembled; doubtful I’d make much of a difference.’

‘You’d make a difference,’ Rebus countered. ‘I think I’m just about capable of lifting things from boxes and failing to find anywhere to put them.’

They shared a smile, turning as the movers arrived. The men entered the living room and reappeared a few seconds later.

‘Reckon that’s us,’ the older man said from the kitchen doorway. Rebus approached him, digging banknotes from his pocket. Clarke watched as Brillo came trotting up to her, settling on his haunches, eyes expectant.

‘You going to promise me you’ll look after him?’ Clarke asked. The dog angled its head, as if considering how best to answer.

## ii

Siobhan Clarke’s own flat was just off Broughton Street, across the city from Rebus. One storey up in a tenement she’d been considering moving out of for the past several months. DCI Graham Sutherland had gone from being an occasional colleague – albeit several rungs above her – to her lover. Sutherland headed one of the major incident teams. His own home was in Glasgow, and he’d asked her to move in with him.

‘I’ll have to think about it,’ she’d said. She’d visited his place several times, stayed over just the once. Though divorced, there were signs of his ex-wife around the place, and she doubted he had bothered to buy a new bed.

‘Maybe a flat in the city centre would be more your thing,’ he had suggested, without managing to sound enthusiastic, since when he’d directed her towards a couple of properties he’d found online, his emails headed FYI. One of them she’d actually quite liked. Without saying anything, she’d driven through to Glasgow and parked outside the building, getting out and walking around, getting a feel for the area. It was fine, she told herself. It wouldn’t be bad.

Then she’d driven home.

Rebus had basically dismissed her this evening. She’d suggested takeaway curry from his favourite place, but he had shooed her out.

‘Take a break. Go tell your boyfriend you want back on the team.’

She checked her phone. It was nearly eight o’clock and Sutherland hadn’t replied to either of her texts, so she put her jacket on, grabbed her keys and headed downstairs. It was a short drive to Leith police station – she could almost have walked it. She paused halfway to dive into a shop, emerging again with a carrier bag. Parking by Leith Links, she made for the police station and was buzzed in. She climbed the imposing marble staircase to the upper floor and entered the MIT room. Two familiar faces looked up from their computers.

‘Aren’t you on holiday?’ DC Christine Esson asked.

‘That’s why I’m bringing you souvenirs.’ Clarke emptied out the bag of shopping: salted peanuts, crisps, chocolate brownies and bottled water.

‘Better than a postcard,’ DC Ronnie Ogilvie said, just beating Esson in a dash to the treats.

‘Boss gone home?’ Clarke asked.

‘Meeting at the Big House.’ Esson retreated to her desk with her share of the swag. Clarke followed her, peering over her shoulder at the computer screen.

‘Rest of the team?’

‘You’re looking at the late shift.’

‘How’s it shaping up?’

‘You’re on a break,’ Esson reminded her. ‘How’s the move going?’

‘How do you think?’ Clarke had turned towards the wall behind Esson – the Murder Wall. It was covered by a large corkboard covered in blue felt. There were photos of the victim and the locus pinned to it, plus maps, some details of the autopsy, and a staffing rota. Her own name had been crossed out. Typical that she’d arranged to take time off during a really quiet spell, only to have a big case pop up on day one. She’d tried telling the DCI that she could postpone her break, but he’d been adamant: ‘John needs you – he’d never say it, might not even know it, but it’s the truth.’

‘We’re getting a bit of outside pressure,’ Ronnie Ogilvie said through a mouthful of crisps.

‘Because he’s rich?’

‘Rich and connected,’ Esson qualified. ‘His father, Ahmad, is worth squillions but thought to be under house arrest somewhere in Saudi Arabia.’

‘Thought to be?’

‘The Saudis aren’t exactly being forthcoming. We have a human rights charity to thank for the gen.’

Clarke was scanning the information on the wall. Salman bin Mahmoud had been a handsome young man. Age twenty-three. Drove an Aston Martin. Lived in a four-storey Georgian town house on one of Edinburgh’s best New Town streets. Short black hair and a neat beard. Brown eyes. A couple of the photos showed him smiling but not laughing.

‘Not every student gets a DB11 for their birthday,’ Clarke commented.

‘Or lives in a house with five spacious bedrooms.’ Esson was standing next to her. ‘Best thing is, he wasn’t even studying here.’ Clarke raised an eyebrow. ‘Enrolled at a business school in London, where he happens to have a lease on a penthouse apartment in Bayswater.’

‘So where’s the Edinburgh connection?’ Clarke asked.

Esson and Ogilvie shared a look. ‘You tell her,’ Ogilvie said, opening one of the bottles of water.

‘James Bond,’ Esson obliged. ‘He was a nut for James Bond, especially the films, and more specifically the early ones.’

‘Meaning Sean Connery?’

‘Son of Edinburgh,’ Esson said with a nod. ‘Apparently both homes are filled with memorabilia.’

‘Explains the DB11 but doesn’t answer the really big question – what was a rich Saudi student with a James Bond fetish doing in the car park of a carpet warehouse on Seafield Road at eleven o’clock of a summer’s night?’

‘Meeting someone,’ Ogilvie suggested.

‘Someone who stabbed him and left him bleeding to death,’ Esson added.

‘But didn’t rob him or even bother to drive away in his expensive car.’ Clarke folded her arms. ‘Any joy from CCTV?’

‘Plenty sightings of the car. Heriot Row to Seafield Road with no obvious stops.’

‘Salamander Street’s just along the way – used to be popular with sex workers,’ Clarke mused.

‘We’re checking.’

‘Is his mother coming to claim the body?’

‘Embassy seem to be taking care of things – reading between the lines, I’d say they don’t want her travelling.’

Clarke looked at Esson. ‘Oh?’

‘Maybe afraid she wouldn’t go back.’ Esson gave a shrug.

‘What did the father do that put him in the bad books?’

‘Who knows? The family are from the Hejaz region. I’ve done a bit of reading and he’s by no means the only one under house arrest. The usual charge is corruption. Probably just means he’s pissed off a member of the ruler’s family. Some pay a hefty fine and are released, but it’s not happened to Ahmad yet.’

‘It’s always the money, isn’t it?’

‘Not always, but often enough.’

There was a sound behind them of a throat being cleared. When they turned, DCI Graham Sutherland was standing in the doorway, feet apart, hands in the trouser pockets of his charcoal suit.

‘I must be seeing things,’ he said. ‘Because I could have sworn you were only halfway through a week’s much-needed leave.’

‘I come bearing gifts.’ Clarke gestured towards the desk.

‘There’s no place for bribery in Police Scotland, Detective Inspector Clarke. Can I invite you to step into my office for a carpeting?’ He started towards the door at the far end of the room, opening it and gesturing for Clarke to precede him into the cramped, windowless space.

‘Look,’ she began as soon as the door was closed. But Sutherland held up a hand to silence her, seating himself at his desk so that he was facing her.

‘Shocking as this news will be, we’re managing fine without you, Siobhan. I’ve got all the resources I need and a blank cheque should I need more.’

‘The flat move’s almost done, though.’

‘Great news – you can put your feet up for a couple of days.’

‘What if I don’t want to put my feet up?’

Sutherland’s eyes narrowed but he said nothing. Clarke held her hands up in a show of surrender.

‘But be honest with me – how’s it really going?’

‘A clear motive wouldn’t go amiss. And what friends we’ve been able to talk to haven’t exactly been forthcoming.’

‘They’re scared of something?’

Sutherland shrugged and ran a hand down his burgundy tie. He was in his early fifties and not far shy of retirement, but proud that he had kept his figure along with his hair, the latter the subject of unfounded rumours of a weave. ‘We’re getting help from the Met – they’re looking at his London contacts. Seems he wasn’t a great one for going to classes, though. Nightclubs and racecourses were more his thing.’ He broke off. ‘None of which should be of any interest to you.’ He changed position slightly on his chair. ‘How’s John doing?’

‘He says he can manage. He’d much rather I was at work, being useful and productive.’

‘Is that so?’ Sutherland managed a thin smile. Clarke felt she was losing this particular battle.

‘Will I see you later?’ she enquired.

‘Relegated to the sofa?’

‘I probably couldn’t be that cruel.’

‘Maybe I’ll risk it then.’

‘I bought extra provisions on the off-chance.’

He nodded his thanks. ‘Give me another hour or two?’

‘Careful you don’t burn out, Graham.’

‘If I do, they’ll need a fresh, fully rested replacement. Know anyone who’d fit the bill?

‘I’ll give it some thought, DCI Sutherland . . .’

### iii

Rebus had to give a slight tug on Brillo’s lead. Having been for their evening walk to the Meadows, the dog had made for the tenement’s main door.

‘We’re both going to have to get used to this,’ Rebus said, pushing open the gate. ‘But trust me, in time you can get used to just about anything.’ He had managed to avoid looking up at the curtainless window of his old living room. When he unlocked the door to his new flat, he caught a slight aroma beneath the smell of fresh paint: the merest trace of the previous occupant. It wasn’t really perfume; it was a blend of who they’d been and the life they had lived. He had a note of Mrs Mackay’s new address in Australia, in case the redirection service failed. He had left something similar in his old flat. He had an inkling it had been bought to be let out to students – no real surprise there. Marchmont had always been student turf, the university just the other side of the Meadows. Rebus had only very occasionally had to complain about a noisy party, and even then not for several years. Were students cut from different cloth these days? Less rowdy; more . . . well, studious?

Walking into the living room, manoeuvring between boxes, he realised his computer had yet to be unpacked. No rush: they weren’t doing the broadband for another couple of days. At Siobhan’s suggestion he had one night begun composing a list of people he needed to notify of his changed circumstances. It hadn’t even covered half a sheet – and come to think of it, when was the last time he’d seen it? He could hear Brillo in the kitchen, feasting on dry food and fresh water. Rebus hadn’t bothered with dinner; he never seemed particularly hungry these days. There were a few bottles of beer in the kitchen, and several bottles of spirits sitting on the shelf of the alcove adjacent the window. A couple of nice malts, but he wasn’t really in the mood. Music, though: he should select something special. He remembered moving into the upstairs flat with Rhona half a lifetime ago. He’d had a portable record player then and had put on the second Rolling Stones album, grabbing Rhona and dancing her around the vast-seeming room.

Only later had the walls begun to close in.

When he peered at the spines of his LPs, he saw that they weren't in anything like the same order as upstairs. Not that there had been any real sense of cataloguing – it was more that he'd known pretty much where he'd find whatever he wanted to hear. Instead of the Stones, he decided on Van Morrison.

'Aye, you'll do,' he said to himself.

Having eased the needle onto the vinyl, he stepped back. The record skipped. He looked down at the floor. Loose floorboard. He placed his foot on it again and the same thing happened. He stabbed a finger at the offender.

'You're on my list now, pal,' he warned it, keeping his footsteps soft as he retreated to his chair.

It wasn't long before Brillo curled up on the floor next to his feet. Rebus had promised himself that he'd unpack a few more boxes before bedtime, but he realised there was no urgency. When his phone buzzed, he checked the screen before answering: Deborah Quant. He'd asked her a while back if they were courting. She'd replied that they were friends with benefits – which seemed to suit both of them just fine.

'Hiya, Deb.'

'Settling in?'

'Thought you might have popped round to check.'

'Busy day, mostly thanks to your lot.'

'I'm long retired, Deb.' Rebus paused. 'I'm guessing this is the Saudi student?'

'Police and Procurator Fiscal don't seem to trust me to establish cause of death any more.'

'You reckon pressure's being applied?'

'From all sides – government here and in London, plus our friends in the media. Added to which, Muslim burials usually take place within two to three days – embassy are pushing for that to happen.'

'Handy for whoever killed him, if you can't keep the body for future examination . . .'

'Which I've explained until I'm blue in the face.'

'So it's the full tourniquet, eh?' He paused again. 'I take it you didn't find anything out of the ordinary?'

'Thin-bladed knife, maybe four to six inches long.'

'Did they know what they were doing?'

'They went for his neck rather than chest, abdomen or stomach.'

I'm not a hundred per cent sure what that tells us, but then that's not my job. Angle of incision suggests someone of similar height and probably right-handed. Can I assume you've been discussing it with Siobhan?'

'She's champing at the bit.'

'But she's a loyal friend, too.'

'I've told her I'll be fine from here in.'

'So where are you right now?'

'Chair in the living room, Brillo at my feet.'

'And you've got the hi-fi set up, so all's well with the world.'

'Will I see you tomorrow?'

'I'll try.'

'You work too hard.' He listened to her laughter.

'It was the right move to make – you do know that, don't you?'

'For the sake of my lungs maybe.'

'Try spending a day without them, John. Give Brillo a scratch behind the ears from me. We'll catch up soon.'

'Night, Deb.'

And then she was gone. She lived less than a mile away, in a modern block where minimalism ruled. Her possessions were few because there was nowhere to keep them – no Edinburgh press or understairs cupboard, no nooks and crannies. Just clean lines that repelled the very notion of clutter. Her office at the mortuary was the same – no files were allowed to linger long on her desk.

Rebus thought again of the books he'd decided he couldn't live without, even if he would never read them; the albums he played maybe once or twice a decade but still clung to; the boxes of case files that seemed a veritable part of him, like an extra limb. Why would he part with them when he had a spare bedroom no overnight guest ever graced? His only family consisted of his daughter and granddaughter, and they never opted to stay. That was why he had ditched the old bed and replaced it with a two-seater sofa, leaving space for more bookshelves, the suitcase he doubted he would ever use, and his second-best record player, the same one he'd had when dancing with Rhona that first night. It no longer worked but he reckoned he could find someone to fix it. He would put it on his list.

When he went into the kitchen to make a mug of tea, he examined the central heating timer. Mrs Mackay had left the instruction manual but it looked straightforward enough.

'Heating bills are quite reasonable,' she'd told him. But then she had always opted for another layer of wool rather than an

extra degree on the thermostat. He wondered if her various cardigans, pullovers and shawls had accompanied her to Australia. He wouldn't bet against it.

While the kettle boiled, he walked into the main bedroom. With the double bed, plus his old wardrobe and chest of drawers, floor space was limited. Siobhan had helped him make up the bed, only having to shift Brillo half a dozen times in the process.

'Tell me he doesn't sleep next to you,' she'd said.

'Of course not,' Rebus had lied.

The dog was watching now from the hallway. Rebus checked his watch. 'Soon enough,' he said. 'Just one more mug of tea and maybe another record, eh?'

He wondered how many times he would wake up in the night and not know the new route to the bathroom. Maybe he'd leave the hall light on.

'Or stop drinking bloody tea,' he muttered to himself, heading back into the kitchen.

## iv

But it wasn't his need to pee that woke him at 5 a.m. It was a call. He fumbled for both his phone and the bedside lamp, waking Brillo in the process. He couldn't quite focus on the screen but pressed the phone to his ear anyway.

'Dad?' His daughter Samantha's urgent voice.

'What's wrong?' he asked, sitting up, growing more awake by the second.

'Your landline – it's been cut off.'

'I meant to tell you about that . . .'

'About what?'

'My landline's not the reason you're calling at this hour. Is it Carrie?'

'She's fine.'

'What then? Are you all right?'

'It's Keith.'

Her partner, Carrie's father. Rebus swallowed. 'What's happened.' He listened as Samantha began to sob quietly. Her voice cracked when she spoke.

'He's gone.'

'The bastard . . .'

‘Not like that . . . I don’t think so anyway.’ She sniffed. ‘I mean, I don’t really know. He’s disappeared. It’s been two days.’

‘And things were all right at home?’

‘No worse than usual.’

‘But you don’t think he’s just – I don’t know – maybe gone on a bender somewhere?’

‘He’s not like that.’

‘You’ve reported him missing?’

‘They’re sending someone to talk to me.’

‘They probably told you two days isn’t long?’

‘Yes. But his phone just goes to voicemail.’

‘And he didn’t pack a bag or anything?’

‘No. We’ve got a joint bank account – I looked online and he’s not bought anything or taken money out. His car was left in the lay-by near the church.

Rebus knew where she meant – a five-minute walk from their home. He had parked there himself once to take in the view. Samantha lived on the edge of the village of Naver, on the wild north coast eight miles east of Tongue. The wind had rocked Rebus’s car as he’d sat in it.

‘Problems at work?’ he asked. ‘Money troubles?’

‘He knew I’d been seeing someone,’ she blurted out.

‘Right,’ Rebus said.

‘But that’s over and done with. It’s not why he left – I’m sure it’s not. He’d have taken his things. The key was still in the ignition . . . Parked so close to the house . . . it doesn’t make any sense. Does it make sense to you? I’m just . . . I’ve been awake all night going over it again and again, and I’m scared the police will think I had something to do with it.’

Rebus was quiet for a moment. ‘Why would they think that, Samantha?’

‘Because everyone here knows we were going through a rough patch. And they know about me and Jess.’

‘He’s the guy you were seeing? Did Keith ever square up to him?’

‘I don’t know. But this can’t have anything to do with Jess. It really can’t.’

‘Most likely outcome is that Keith will turn up – I’m speaking from experience here.’

‘I’ve got such a bad feeling, Dad.’

‘I can be there before lunchtime. What time are they coming to talk to you?’

‘They didn’t say.’ She took a deep breath. ‘I’ve got to get Carrie to school, I told them that.’

‘It’s going to be okay, Sammy, I promise.’ Sammy: his name for her until she’d decided she was too grown-up for it. For once, she didn’t correct him.

‘Thank you,’ she said instead, so quietly he almost didn’t catch it.

# Day One

# 1

Siobhan Clarke woke to a text from Rebus. She decided it could wait until she'd made coffee. It was just gone seven and Graham Sutherland had already gone. She wondered if she should be unnerved by his ninja-like ability to dress and depart without her noticing.

'Could have made me a drink, though . . .'

She tramped back to her bedroom, still in her pyjamas, mug cupped in both hands. Placed it on the bedside table and lifted her phone, swiping it awake.

*Big favour. Look after Brillo today. Key under half-brick next to front door. Talk later.*

'The hell?' Clarke seated herself on the edge of the still-warm bed and made the call.

'I'm driving,' Rebus warned her. 'Don't want to get a ticket.' His old Saab had no hands-free option. She could hear the engine churning.

'Where's the fire?'

'Samantha. Her partner's gone AWOL.'

'You're driving to Tongue?'

'Not quite – they moved to the next village along a couple of years back.'

'And you reckon your rust bucket's up to the job?'

'I almost asked to borrow yours.'

'Why didn't you?'

'It was five o'clock. I wasn't sure you'd have thanked me.'

'I'd also have held you back with a few questions.'

'That too. Brillo doesn't need much looking after – a bit of a walk

and you can leave him to his own devices while you go beg for a place on the MIT.'

'You don't want me unpacking for you?'

'It's all done.'

'Liar.'

'Don't you go rummaging through my stuff without my say-so.'

'You reckon you'll only be away for the day?'

'Mispers, Shiv – they almost always turn up eventually.'

'Where are you now?'

'Just south of Pitlochry.'

'On the dreaded A9?' She paused. 'Is Samantha all right?'

'Would you be?'

'How long's he been gone?'

'Two days, one night.'

'Suicide risk?'

'Not overly.'

'Oh?' Clarke tipped the mug to her mouth.

'Samantha says she was seeing someone else.'

'Ah.'

'He didn't pack a bag; car left near the house; hasn't used his debit card.'

'Maybe trying to give her a fright?'

'In which case he'll be getting a slap.'

'From her or from you?'

'Let's catch up later. You know where Brillo's stuff is.'

'I did until you rearranged the kitchen.'

'Always good to have a challenge, Shiv.'

In the time she took to shape her reply, Rebus had ended the call.

It was just after ten by the time she reached the MIT office. The room was buzzing with activity, Graham Sutherland leaning over Christine Esson's desk as she explained to him whatever was on her computer screen. When he spotted Clarke, Sutherland broke off the conversation and sauntered in her direction.

'Can't seem to keep you away, DI Clarke,' he said, folding his arms as he planted himself in front of her.

She gave a shrug and what she hoped was an endearing smile. 'John's headed out of town. I've literally got nothing else to do.'

'But like I said, I've a full complement here.' He gestured to the

desks. Clarke recognised everyone: Esson and Ogilvie; DSs Tess Leighton and George Gamble, another DC called Phil Yeats. She'd worked with them before as part of Sutherland's team. They all knew about her and the boss. Only Gamble ever gave her any stick.

'No DI that I can see,' she commented.

'That would be me.'

She turned towards the doorway. Malcolm Fox had just entered, carrying a sheaf of paperwork.

'You get around, Malcolm,' Clarke said.

'Major Crime Division are taking an interest,' Sutherland explained, not sounding exactly thrilled about it. 'They've loaned us DI Fox for the duration.'

'Making daily reports to our elders and betters, I dare say.'

'Above all else, I'm a team player, Siobhan – you know that.'

Clarke couldn't help glancing in Tess Leighton's direction. The look Leighton gave her signalled that the relationship she'd had with Fox hadn't lasted.

'I can be useful, sir,' Clarke said, turning her attention back to Sutherland. 'You know I can.'

Sutherland took his time considering. 'It would mean sharing a desk with Malcolm.'

'As long as he promises not to copy my classwork.' Clarke knew what Sutherland was thinking – just as Fox would be keeping an eye on them and reporting back to his bosses, so she'd have an eye on him, keeping Sutherland in the loop.

Fox seemed ready to remonstrate, but decided on a resigned shrug instead. 'Fine by me,' he said. 'Catching the killer is the priority.'

'Well said. I'll leave the two of you to find a spare chair from somewhere and then get reacquainted.'

They watched Sutherland retreat to his office. Fox held out a hand.

'Welcome aboard.'

Clarke stared at the hand. 'My town, my ship. You're the passenger here.' She heard Tess Leighton stifle a laugh. Fox's face began to redden.

'Same old Siobhan,' he eventually said. 'Light on charm, heavy on offensive. Almost like you learned from the master. Speaking of whom . . .'

'House move's done and dusted.'

‘But his health’s okay? I mean, no worse than it was?’

‘Phone him sometime and ask.’

‘I gave up trying.’

Clarke was looking around, in search of a free chair.

‘Maybe the support office.’ Fox gestured towards the corridor.  
‘I’ll do it if you like.’

Clarke nodded her agreement.

‘While you make us some tea.’ He made his exit quickly, before she could respond.

Clarke marched over to the kettle, checked it for water and switched it on.

‘There’s a kitty,’ George Gamble growled from behind his desk.  
‘Five quid in the tin.’

‘And hello to you too, George.’ Gamble seemed to be wearing the same suit as ever – three-piece in too loud a check. His hair was still unruly, face blotchy, stomach straining against his waistcoat. Seated opposite him, Tess Leighton seemed a ghost by comparison – slender, pale-skinned, hollow-eyed. Both were good enough detectives in their different ways, even if Gamble seemed to be counting the days and hours until retirement. Clarke had only worked with them once before, and was better acquainted with Esson and Ogilvie, both of whom came from her team at Gayfield Square. Phil Yeats was another of Sutherland’s regulars, a fair-haired twenty-something who specialised in doing what he was ordered to do, no more and no less.

Esson had brought a mug to the kettle, ready for a refill.

‘What’s the story?’ she asked quietly.

‘John’s off north to see his daughter.’

‘Leaving you in the lurch.’

‘We’d pretty well finished the move. Just a few boxes left.’

‘Find anything interesting tucked away in his flat?’

‘No porn or dead bodies. Turns out he likes a Jack Reacher book, though.’

‘I’m more of a Karin Slaughter girl. They’re both coming to Edinburgh if you—’

‘Christine,’ Clarke broke in, ‘when exactly were you planning to tell me about Fox?’

‘What’s to tell? Far as I knew, you were on leave.’

‘So when I dropped by yesterday . . .?’

‘I thought it might annoy you ever so slightly.’

‘I’m not annoyed – I just like to be appraised.’

Esson puckered her mouth for a moment. ‘See anything of DCI Sutherland last night?’

Clarke glared at her. ‘What if I did?’

‘He didn’t spill the beans either – same reasoning, I’m guessing. We just wanted you to unwind. DI Fox tends to have the opposite effect.’

The kettle had finished boiling. Clarke lifted it too high as she poured, scalding liquid slopping from the first mug. She cursed under her breath.

‘Break’s obviously done you a power of good,’ Esson teased, watching Fox carry what looked like an interview-room chair into the office.

Clarke ignored her, finished making the tea and carried both mugs to Fox’s desk. He was moving his things to one side – laptop, stationery, phone charger – with all the delicacy a man of his proportions could muster. Clarke tried to get comfortable on the chair. Fox hefted his mug in what looked like a toast before taking a sip.

‘So where are we?’ Clarke asked.

‘To start with, we’re treating it as homicide,’ Fox obliged. ‘No weapon recovered as yet, and nothing substantive from CCTV – though we’re still looking. Victim was an overseas student and there have been a few attacks recently.’

‘Oh?’

‘Mostly in St Andrews actually – rich kids hounded by local idiots. But there have been a couple of incidents around the Meadows. Students have organised themselves so no one needs to be out there at night on their own. Then there’s the race angle – Brexit has led to a rise in attacks, mostly verbal but occasionally physical.’

‘In Edinburgh?’

‘Again, just a few reports. But one of the victim’s close friends was beaten up a few weeks back.’

‘That’s interesting.’

‘Not far from the deceased’s home. We’re not seeing an obvious connection as yet, but it’s on our radar.’

‘What about Salman’s lifestyle? I know he liked James Bond, but that’s about it.’

‘The guy seems to have lived like James Bond too.’ Fox put a series of photographs up on his screen. ‘These are from his social media. Nightclubs and champagne. The Aston he drives in Edinburgh is a new model, but in London he has a classic DB5.’

‘Isn’t drinking frowned on? I assume he’s a practising Muslim . . .’

'Different rules seem to apply.' Clarke watched shot after shot of Salman bin Mahmoud, in immaculate tailoring, embracing a succession of glamorous young women in clubs and at sporting events.

'You'll notice he favours a martini,' Fox commented.

'What about drugs?' she asked as another page of photos appeared, courtesy of Fox's finger on the trackpad.

'Not as far as we know.' Fox began to tap at the faces. 'That one's the daughter of a Conservative MP. And this one is Scottish gentry – Lady Isabella Meiklejohn. Her dad owns a goodish chunk of the Flow Country.'

'The what?'

'Caithness and Sutherland. Peat bog mostly.'

'They all look like supermodels.'

'Wonder what attracted them to the exotic playboy millionaire.'

Fox was rewarded with a twitch of the mouth from Clarke that almost constituted a smile.

'How rich was he?'

'We don't really know. His father's been under house arrest for a while, but there's obviously still money – only so far you can run a lifestyle like that on credit. We've added photos of his Edinburgh abode to the Murder Wall.' Fox gestured in their general direction. 'And the Met have sent us some of his London pad – not too shabby in either case.'

'And he wasn't known to us before this happened – neighbours complaining of wild parties, speeding tickets on the streets of the New Town?'

'A fistful of parking fines that went unpaid. He wasn't keen on walking any distance to his front door, which meant leaving the Aston on the occasional yellow line.'

'Catnip to the wardens.'

Fox nodded his agreement. He had come to the end of the photographs. Clarke sat back in her chair. It wasn't exactly built for comfort – she was going to have to bring in a cushion from her living room. 'So what do you think happened?'

'It comes down to the locus. Seafield Road that time of night – he was either at the start of a long drive south or else he was meeting someone.'

Clarke nodded her agreement. 'None of his friends live out that way?'

'Not that we've found.'

'Maybe he was looking for a hot hatch to race. Not unknown of

an Edinburgh night, especially in the suburbs. If I had a car like his, I'd be tempted.'

'Carjacking gone wrong is certainly something we're looking at. Aston's been examined; only its owner's prints. Plenty fuel and no obvious mechanical issues.'

'So he didn't pull off the road for a breakdown.' Clarke nodded again. 'Mobile phone records?'

'Have been requested in full. So far it looks like his last call was to a male friend – actually the same one who was mugged. He says they were just chatting about this and that, plans for the weekend and such.'

'How long before he was killed?'

'A couple of hours.'

'Have you talked to his friend?'

'Me personally?' Fox shook his head. 'I've not long arrived.'

Clarke made eye contact and held it. 'Why *did* they send you, Malcolm?'

He offered a slow shrug. 'It qualifies as Major Crimes, Siobhan.'

'Why, though?'

'Because certain people insist.'

'Our political masters, you mean?'

'There are international ramifications. With us leaving Europe . . .'

'We need all the trading friends we can get – including regimes?' Clarke guessed. 'But the Saudi rulers don't exactly see the deceased's father as a bosom buddy, so why the pressure?'

'I really can't say.'

'Which is a diplomatic way of telling me not to push it?' Clarke cocked her head. 'Are we going to hit brick walls along the way, Malcolm? People we won't be allowed to question, information that's not going to be forthcoming?'

'I honestly have no idea.' Fox lifted the mug to his lips again. 'But something tells me you're going to clamber over any walls you find – almost like you learned from—'

Clarke stopped him with a wagged finger. 'Anything John Rebus taught me is long gone, and so is he.'

She hoped the words sounded more confident than she herself felt.

## 2

Rebus had forgotten how long the drive took. A distance of around 250 miles and he could swear he'd done it in under four hours in the past. Today, however, it was more than five, with just the one stop to refuel car and driver both, giving the Saab's bonnet a re-assuring pat to let it know he appreciated the effort. The A9 itself hadn't been too bad considering – some lorries and caravans and a couple of sets of roadworks. The process of dualling was ongoing and would continue to be ongoing long after Rebus had headed to the traffic-free highway in the sky. He hadn't thought to bring anything. There was just the one CD in the car – a compilation Siobhan had burned for him. She'd written the words 'Songs for Dark Times' on the disc in black felt pen. He'd asked her to explain the title.

'Some to make you think,' she'd said, 'some to calm you down or get you dancing.'

'Dancing?'

'Okay, nodding your head then.'

It was indeed a mixed bag. One track might be funk that sounded beamed down from the 1970s, the next a piece of Brian Eno minimalism. Leonard Cohen sang about love and loss, and another band about post-Brexit England. Then there was Black Sabbath with 'Changes'.

'Nice touch, Siobhan . . .'

At the petrol station, adding a toothbrush and toothpaste to his purchases, he'd asked the woman at the till if they sold CDs.

'All Bluetooth these days,' she'd explained.

'Hopefully not after brushing,' Rebus had replied.

The rain had arrived well before Tain, accompanying him to Altnaharra and beyond, thirty-odd miles of single-track road, but mercifully free of other vehicles. His eyes felt gritty and his spine, shoulders and backside ached. When he paused in a passing place to relieve his bladder, he took deep breaths in an effort to appreciate his wilderness surroundings. Steep peaks, glassy lochs, bracken and birdsong. Not that he had taken in much of the scenery, being too preoccupied with thoughts of Samantha. Her mother, Rhona, had died a few years back. There had been a sparsely attended funeral in a commuter town outside London. Samantha had grown up in the flat in Arden Street, eventually moving with her mother to London. Then back to Edinburgh for work, before finally settling in Tongue with Keith. Carrie had arrived thanks to IVF – a final throw of the dice, in Samantha’s words. They’d moved a few further miles east from Tongue to a modern bungalow that kept the heating bills down. Rebus had met Keith only a handful of times, preferring to visit during working hours. Likewise, Keith seldom accompanied Samantha and Carrie on their rare trips to Edinburgh.

Did Rebus even know his surname? Samantha must have told him. In one ear and out the other probably. Seemed to work hard enough, though, provided for his family. Last job Rebus knew of was helping decommission the old nuclear power plant at Dounreay. There’d been a leak the previous year and Rebus had phoned to check Keith was all right. Samantha had assured him that all the tests had come back negative.

‘You’ll still need a bedside light then?’ her father had joked.

Dounreay wasn’t exactly next door to Naver. About a forty-five-minute drive each way. He’d once asked Samantha why they didn’t move closer to Keith’s work. The answer was Carrie. She had friends and was in a good school. Put those on the scales and the commute weighed nothing.

Good old Keith. So why had Samantha been seeing another man?

As he passed by Tongue, Rebus switched off the wipers. The sun had broken from behind a bank of cloud. The sea, when he caught sight of it, was gleaming and calm. The wind had died down. Past Tongue was another stretch of single-track road, winding inland so that he lost sight of the sea again for a bit. Eventually he reached Naver, driving through the village. As he passed Samantha’s bungalow, he checked for a patrol car, seeing no sign of one. The church was a few hundred metres further along, the lay-by just in front of it. Keith’s dark blue Volvo XC90 sat there.

Rebus drew to a stop behind it and got out, rolling his shoulders to loosen them. The key had been removed from the Volvo's ignition and the doors were locked. Rebus peered inside without noting anything unusual. He estimated the distance back to the bungalow – a walk of a few minutes? He doubted public transport was plentiful, though there was a bus stop on the other side of the road. Maybe Keith had hitched a ride or organised a taxi or something. Maybe mates from Dounreay had taken him drinking in Thurso and he'd woken up ashamed at something he'd done, lying low in a hotel or a spare room until he could summon the courage to confess.

After all, hadn't Samantha confessed?

Or had she? Had she told Keith, or had she been found out? Rebus watched as a car approached. It was a Mondeo rather than a marked vehicle, but he somehow knew it was the police. Unmarked meant CID, so it was no surprise when the car pulled up next to Rebus's Saab, blocking half the carriageway. The driver put the flashers on and got out, leaving his door ajar, engine running.

'Can I help you with anything, sir?' he asked Rebus, in a tone that suggested something needed explaining. He was in his late twenties, short black hair already going silver at the temples. Clean-shaven, square-jawed, ruddy-cheeked, broad-shouldered. In other circumstances, Rebus might have taken him for a farmer.

'You're here to question my daughter,' he said. 'And that's why I'm here.'

The man arched his back a little, as if for a more appraising look. 'You'll be John Rebus then?' He saw Rebus attempt to disguise his surprise. 'Internet makes it easy these days. I ran your daughter's name and there you were.'

'It's her partner you should be interested in.'

'Everybody interests me, sir.' A hand was shoved towards Rebus. 'I'm a detective sergeant, all the way from Inverness.'

'Long way to come.'

'Not nearly as far as some.'

Rebus shook the proffered hand. 'Does the detective have a name?'

'Robin Creasey.'

'And you know I'm ex-CID?'

'Strictly civvie street now, though.'

'Is that you telling me not to get involved?'

'Of course you're involved – you're her family. But if this *does* turn out to be police business . . .'

‘It’ll be none of *my* business?’ Rebus guessed.

‘We understand one another.’ Creasey looked at Rebus’s car. ‘You’ve just arrived, eh? I can feel the heat coming off the engine.’

‘I might need to get that seen to.’

Creasey offered a broad smile. ‘Let’s go see your daughter then.’ But he paused halfway to his Mondeo, scanning his surroundings. ‘Odd place to leave the car, isn’t it? I wonder if he was much of a churchgoer . . .’

Samantha kept biting off bits of her fingernails throughout the interview. The living room was messy, most of the damage done by Carrie. Rebus doubted Samantha had even noticed. The same was true in the kitchen – the previous day’s dishes piled in the sink; breakfast leftovers on the table. Rebus had made them mugs of tea. Samantha was on a chair, Creasey the sofa. Rebus took the spare chair, moving toys and books from it. Creasey kept his questions short but incisive. Problems at work? At home? Was this sort of behaviour out of character? Could she give him Keith’s phone number, and those of his friends and family? Rebus learned that Keith’s surname was Grant and his parents were deceased. He had a sister in Canada but they weren’t close. Did he ever go for a swim – there was a beach nearby, after all? No, because he’d never learned.

‘He didn’t drown himself,’ Samantha stated.

She’d tried his phone, of course, but had he maybe used his bank card? He had not. Why did she think he’d left the car in the lay-by? She shook her head in response, choosing a fresh fingernail to gnaw on. Rebus noticed how many framed photographs there were in the room, mostly posed shots of Carrie, taken at her school – but family holidays too, everyone smiling for the camera. In the flesh, Samantha looked tired, hair long and straggly with an increasing amount of grey in it. Rebus reckoned she’d lost some weight, her face gaunt, skin loose at the neck.

‘You should tell him,’ he announced, just as the interview was winding down. His daughter gave him a hard stare. ‘He’ll find out anyway, if he’s as thorough as I think he is.’

Creasey looked from daughter to father and back again, content to bide his time. Samantha focused her eyes on the wooden floor at her feet.

‘There was a guy I was seeing for a while. It’s finished now, but Keith found out. Hard to keep secrets in a place this size.’

'How long ago was this?'

'A couple of months.'

'This other man – a friend of his?'

She shook her head. 'He runs a commune. That's what you'd probably call it. Keith and me were curious, so we visited one day. Keith didn't go back, but I did.'

'So Keith does know the man?'

'His name's Jess Hawkins. Far as I know they just met the once, and only really for a quick handshake.'

'When Keith found out, he didn't go looking for Mr Hawkins?'

'I told him not to. Whatever it was, it had ended by then.'

'How did he find out?' Rebus asked. 'Did you tell him?'

She shook her head again. 'A note – anonymous, of course.'

'Someone in the village, then?' Samantha shrugged. 'Do you still have it?'

'No.'

'Have you seen Mr Hawkins since?' Creasey enquired.

An eventual slow nod of the head. 'In social situations, yes.'

'I appreciate you sharing this with me, and I have to ask if you think it could have anything at all to do with Keith's disappearance.'

'I don't think so.'

'There must have been an impact on your relationship, though?'

She glared at the detective. 'I don't remember booking to see a counsellor.'

Creasey held up a hand in appeasement. 'It's just that it might explain Keith's actions – he needs to go somewhere to clear his head, think things through.'

'He's had a couple of months to do that,' Rebus reasoned.

'Time for things to fester,' Creasey countered. Rebus noticed that he hadn't touched his tea. It sat on the floor on a ceramic coaster. 'I'd imagine things were difficult, Samantha. Did he retreat into himself, or is he more the type who lashes out?'

Samantha gave a snort. 'Keith's never ever raised a hand to me.'

'You talked? Tried to work things out?'

'When he was around.'

'He started staying out more than usual?'

'He had his hobby people. They probably saw more of him than Carrie and me did.'

'What's the hobby?'

'Local history. There's an old POW camp back towards Tongue.'

They're looking at its history, doing some excavating. There's a half-baked plan to open it to tourists.'

'Maybe not so half-baked – you're on the North Coast 500 after all. Plenty new visitors.'

'Mostly speeding past in their sports cars,' Samantha said dismissively. Creasey turned towards Rebus.

'It's a circuit that's become popular with drivers.'

'I know,' Rebus replied. 'I might live in the far-off lands to the south, but news sometimes travels.'

Creasey decided to ignore Rebus's tone and turned his attention back to Samantha. 'What do you think's happened to Keith, Samantha?'

'Something.'

'Could you be more specific?'

'An accident maybe.' She offered a shrug and checked her phone. 'I need to fetch Carrie soon.'

A glance at his watch told Rebus his daughter was exaggerating – school wouldn't finish for another hour or two. He saw Creasey come to the same conclusion, yet nod all the same.

'One last question then – when did you last see or speak to Keith?'

'That same evening. After dinner, he said he was going out.'

'He didn't say where?'

'No.'

'And he seemed all right?'

Samantha nodded slowly.

'Then let's leave things for now.' Creasey got up from the sofa and handed her a business card. 'I'll file a missing person report, but if he does turn up or anything changes . . .' Samantha gave another nod. 'Are the keys to the Volvo here? I wouldn't mind checking the interior. I'll pop them through your letter box when I'm finished.'

'On the table by the front door.'

Creasey stretched out his hand to take hers. 'People almost always come back,' he said. She returned the handshake without looking in the least bit convinced.

Rebus got up and said he would see the detective out. Creasey lifted the car keys while Rebus opened the door. Both men stepped outside, Rebus closing the door after them, making sure it wasn't locked.

'You reckon it's nothing to worry about?' he enquired.

‘Early days. If she’d not mentioned the affair and I’d found out after, I might have wondered what else she wasn’t telling me.’ He paused, studying Rebus’s face. ‘I know she’s not always had it easy. She was twelve, wasn’t she, when that nutcase got hold of her? Held a fearsome grudge against you.’

‘Thirty-odd years back.’

‘Then a hit-and-run in her twenties. She was in a wheelchair for a time. Still has a trace of a limp when she walks.’

‘Is this us playing detective Top Trumps?’

‘Aren’t Top Trumps a bit after your time?’

‘You’re forgetting I’ve got a granddaughter – plus a daughter who’s turned out perfectly well adjusted, despite your insinuations.’

‘I’ve not met too many folk who’re “perfectly” well adjusted, Mr Rebus.’

‘Go look at the car, head home, file your report.’

‘Leaving you here to do what exactly?’

‘Help my daughter as best I can.’ Rebus opened the door and disappeared back inside.

AVAILABLE 1 OCTOBER 2020

PRE-ORDER YOUR COPY NOW



WATERSTONES  
SIGNED EXCLUSIVE EDITION

AMAZON.CO.UK

HIVE.CO.UK

AUDIO

EBOOK

OR FROM YOUR LOCAL INDEPENDENT BOOKSHOP

INTERNATIONAL PRE-ORDERS...



USA



CAN



AUS



NZ