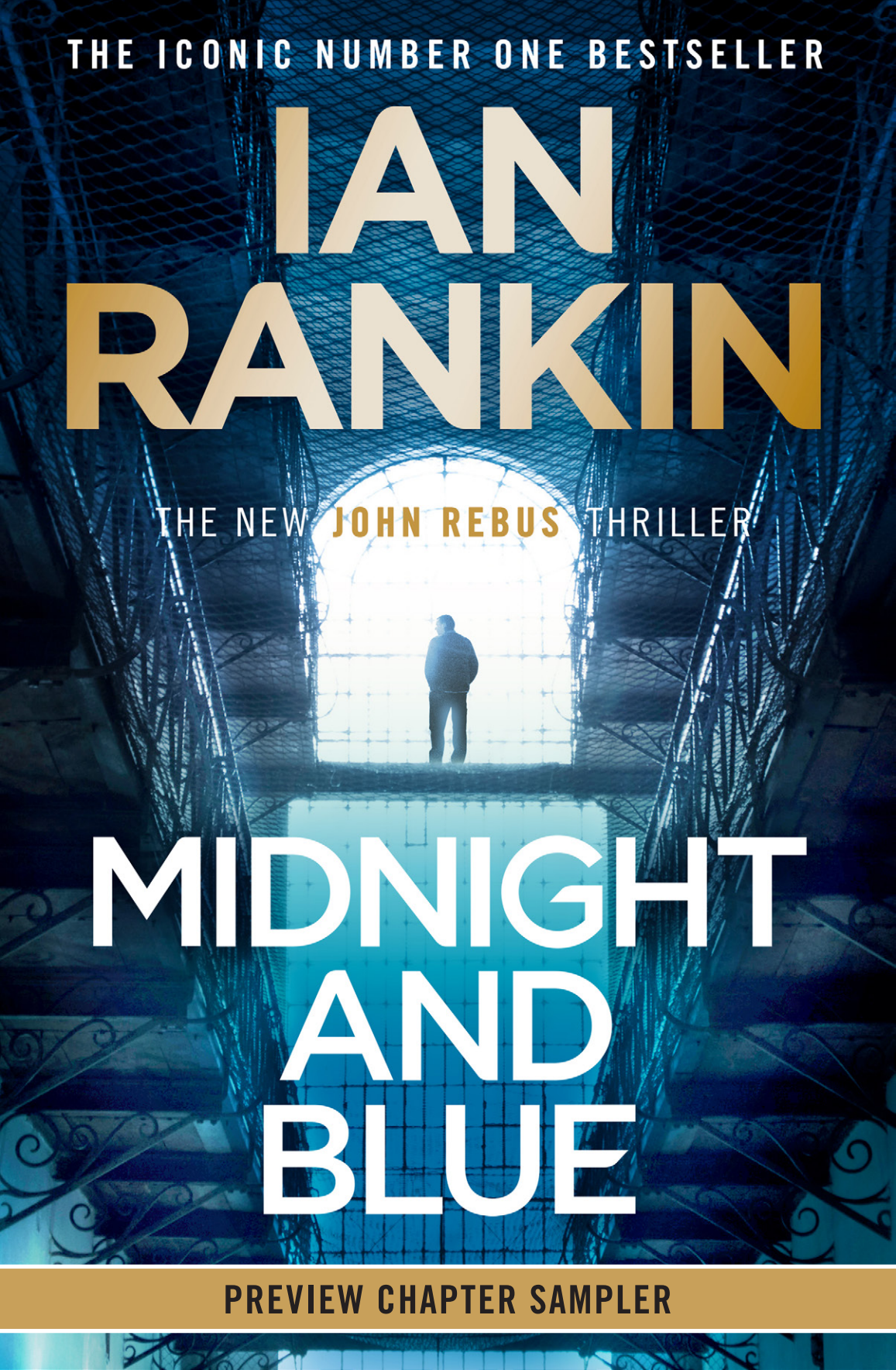

THE ICONIC NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER
IAN RANKIN
THE NEW JOHN REBUS THRILLER
MIDNIGHT AND BLUE
PREVIEW CHAPTER SAMPLER

MIDNIGHT AND BLUE

THE NEW REBUS THRILLER • COMING OCTOBER 2024

John Rebus spent his life as a detective putting Edinburgh's most deadly criminals behind bars. Now, he's joined them...

As new allies and old enemies circle, and the days and nights bleed into each other, even the legendary detective struggles to keep his head.

That is, until a murder at midnight in a locked cell presents a new mystery. They say old habits die hard...

However, this is a case where the prisoners and the guards are all suspects, and everyone has something to hide.

With no badge, no authority and no safety net, Rebus walks a tightrope – with his life on the line.

But how do you find a killer in a place full of them?

READ ON FOR A SNEAK PREVIEW OF THE LANDMARK 25TH REBUS THRILLER...

IAN RANKIN

MIDNIGHT AND BLUE



ORION

First published in Great Britain in 2024 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. 2024

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 3987 0942 3
ISBN (Trade Paperback) 978 1 3987 0943 0
ISBN (eBook) 978 1 3987 0948 5

Typeset by Deltatype Ltd, Birkenhead, Merseyside

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



www.orionbooks.co.uk

Before

A quick in and out, just as a favour. A big favour, a favour meriting repayment at some point down the line. A quick in and out – not even that actually. Breaking without entering. The alarm would kick in, though it always took time for anyone to respond. There might be cameras, but he was in his balaclava, the one that covered everything except the eyes. Gloved too, of course.

'You don't have to go in,' he'd been told. 'Leave that to us.'

The main door was almost too easy, though, and once it was unlocked, what was to stop him? Might even be a bit of petty cash lying around, a phone or an iPad, nothing anyone would bother about. He knew he had a couple of minutes. Maybe even five or ten.

But looking around the inside, it was just a nail bar. Not much to pocket other than manicure files and varnish. No cash register, just a card reader. If there'd been a computer, it had been unplugged and carried home for the night. Two more doors at the back of the room – toilet to the left and office to the right. The office was locked, too. Yale lock. He pulled off his gloves with his teeth so he could get a better grip on the smaller of his picks. Ten seconds was all it took. He crossed the threshold and switched his phone's torch on. When he recognised what was

sitting on the desk, he clenched his free hand, the one holding the pick. Clenched his teeth, too, and let out a hiss of breath between them.

Then he turned and ran, not noticing that the sharp little lock pick had pierced the flesh of his palm, a few tiny droplets of blood left behind on the fake wooden floor as he made good his escape …

Day One

1

Rebus sensed that something was wrong even before the alarm sounded. He was in the queue for breakfast, listening to the Wizard coughing up half a lung as usual. Nobody ever mentioned the hierarchy; it just happened naturally. Those liable to throw their weight around or go off on one ended up closest to the food while everyone else gathered behind in a ragged line. The Wizard was two places ahead of Rebus, which was fine. He probably wasn't any older, but he looked it, and he'd been in prison longer than just about anyone else on the hall. His real name was Gareth Wallace, the nickname stemming from his long grey locks and longer beard. He arched forward as he coughed, not bothering to cover his mouth. New arrivals would make COVID jokes until they realised none were being heard for the first time. When Rebus turned to look behind him, he found Ratty there, seemingly more shrunken with each passing day. Ratty's eyes, narrower even than usual, were for once not focused on the progress of the queue. He gave a slight nod when he realised he had Rebus's attention.

There was a blur of movement as one of the white-shirted officers hit the alarm. The ringing was sudden and piercing, accompanied by other officers arriving, milling, conferring. Then the order – back to cells – followed by complaints and questions.

'Room service today,' an officer called Eddie Graves announced, beginning the process of shepherding the reluctant flock. 'Wish I was as lucky.' Graves had a complaint for every occasion, as if fortune was forever favouring the inmates.

'How long but?' someone asked.

'Soon as we get you indoors,' Graves answered.

Though Ratty was a good eight inches shorter than Rebus, he had the knack of seeing and knowing everything. 'It's Jackie,' he told Rebus. Sure enough, two officers – Novak and Watts – filled Jackie Simpson's doorway, faces close together, conversing in an undertone. Though other officers were forming a makeshift cordon, Rebus and several others had to pass this cell to get to their own.

'Keep moving,' came the order, hands flapping, arms outstretched. But as with a motorway crash, traffic inevitably slowed for a gawp. There were two more officers inside the cell. On the lower bunk Rebus could make out a prone and bloodied figure. Another man lay on the upper bunk and seemed in slightly better shape, in that the officers were trying to rouse him while ignoring his cellmate. Rebus remembered the name of the upper bunk – Mark Jamieson. He'd known him briefly on the outside. Not that he'd ever mentioned as much in here; Jamieson wouldn't have thanked him.

'Come on, John,' Graves said, pressing a hand to his shoulder. 'Don't make things difficult.' They locked eyes for a moment. Graves's jaw was tensed and some of the colour had drained from his face.

'It's not in my nature to make things difficult,' Rebus assured him. 'Unlike some.' He gestured over Graves's shoulder to where Darryl Christie sat at one of the circular tables near the food station. Two officers were flanking him while he finished his breakfast, taking his time, savouring each drop. Neither officer seemed minded to interrupt.

'Darryl!' Graves called out. 'Back to your cell, please!'

Turning his head slowly, Christie took in both Graves and Rebus. 'Right you are, Michelle,' he called out. Michelle for

Michelle Mone. Graves, the serial moaner, tried as ever not to show that the name irritated him. Rebus sensed that the grin Christie threw in Graves's direction was meant not for the officer but for him.

John Rebus had a cell all to himself. It consisted of a narrow bed, toilet and sink. The toilet had no door but was in an alcove, allowing a modicum of privacy. There was a small desk and some storage space, plus a shelf for personal effects. He had piled here all the books he had promised himself he would read. Inside one of them he kept photos of his daughter and granddaughter. He wasn't sure why he wanted them to remain private, but he did. A wall-mounted flat-screen TV had a slot at the side for DVDs, and there was also a landline telephone, again fixed to the wall. Calls had to be prearranged and paid for, and of course were monitored if there were any staff available. Beneath the bed was a small safe for valuables, which Rebus never bothered to lock.

This was his home now, and had been for the past six months. When he'd first arrived at HMP Edinburgh, they'd assessed him and put him in an overnight cell. Because he was ex-police, it was then decided that he should transfer not to one of the general halls but to the Separation and Reintegration Unit. This was where they kept the prisoners who were either in danger or were a danger to themselves. Some of them Rebus never saw. They remained in their cells, occasionally yelling a complaint but mostly staying silent. There was an enclosed yard where exercise was taken, its walls heavily graffitied with names, sometimes with the word 'paedo' or 'nonce' added.

Rebus felt hemmed in, not only by walls but by the same daily faces too. He had visited the prison many times during his detective years – he recalled being shown the Hanging Shed, now long demolished – but this was different. The various smells were never going to be showered away. Testosterone and wariness filled what air there was. Drug use was hard to

miss. He had always known the place simply as Saughton, though the branding on the officers' shirts these days declared it HMP Edinburgh. Prison, nick, jail, chokey, inside – many names but only one game: incarceration.

There were four general halls – Gyle, Swanston, Trinity and Whitecraig. Gyle was for women prisoners while Whitecraig housed the sex offenders. Trinity and Swanston were a mix of those awaiting trial on remand and those already convicted. One day, three months into his life sentence, the governor, Howard Tennent, had summoned Rebus to his office. It was large and modern and had a table and chairs for meetings. Tea was offered and there was even some shortbread.

'How would you feel about joining the general population in Trinity?' Tennent had asked while Rebus bit into a biscuit.

'What's happened?' Rebus had asked back.

'Two things. For one, we're short of accommodation in the SRU, so we could do with your bed.'

'And?'

The governor had shifted slightly in his chair. 'Darryl Christie is ready to vouch for you, meaning you'll be protected. He seems to think you did him some sort of favour a while back.'

'He means getting rid of the competition – not that I did. My lawyers are busy with the appeal.'

'You were there when Cafferty died, though.'

'Again, not true. The coronary came after.' Rebus had paused. 'Is Trinity Christie's patch?'

Tennent swept a few crumbs from the table in front of him. 'He's guaranteeing your safety, John, and we have a single cell that's just been vacated. You've been off the force a good few years – I doubt you'll come across too many guys you put in here. In fact, I've had a look. Just a few minor habituals, none of them minded to get on the wrong side of Darryl and his lads.' He had fixed Rebus with a look. 'So what do you say?'

'I say that if someone does me in, I want you grieving at the graveside.'

Tennent had given a thin smile before rising to his feet, Rebus snatching a final biscuit as he was ushered from the room.

Well, it'll make a change, he had thought to himself, while all too aware that ex-cops were unlikely to be welcomed with open arms. Aware, too, that Darryl Christie might at any time change his mind, leaving him wide open to attack.

It was an hour before his cell door was unlocked long enough for cold toast and a mug of stewed tea to be handed over. The officer's name was Kyle Jacobs – nicknamed Kylie by the men on the hall. Rebus had made friends with him over the past weeks, Jacobs eager to hear tales from Rebus's CID days. He was in his late twenties with short, well-groomed hair and heavily tattooed arms. He had two uncles who'd been Lothian and Borders Police and Rebus had pretended to know the names.

'This looks appetising,' Rebus said as he took the plate.

'Best we could do. The eggs would have walked in here by themselves.'

'So what's happening out there?'

'Someone stabbed Jackie in the neck. He's done for.'

'How about Jamieson?'

'Doped to the eyeballs. A nasty gash on his forehead.'

'Taken out of the game, basically. Found the weapon?'

Jacobs looked around. 'I've already said more than I should.'

Rebus had edged forward, hoping for a glimpse down the hall, but the young officer crowded in on him. A raised voice came from behind the door of the next cell along.

'Will you hurry the fuck up, Kylie! My belly thinks my throat's been cut!'

Jacobs started closing Rebus's door.

'Don't be a stranger,' Rebus told him.

He settled on the edge of his bed, listening to the door locking. The normal routine would have had him helping at the library. He'd been offered floor polishing or the kitchens, but

being around books had appealed more. The library wasn't far from the NHS unit and its nursing staff. Rebus got his regular supply of COPD inhalers there, always with the warning that he shouldn't pass them on – 'Some users tweak them to make bongs,' he'd been told. Not that cannabis was the biggest problem inside. Spice and its chums had been causing havoc for several years. Ketamine, nitazene, etizolam, bromazolam – Rebus couldn't keep up, which didn't matter as most of the prisoners just called them 'benzos' and didn't seem to mind exactly which doses and combinations they were being offered. The drugs were easy to hide and there was no giveaway aroma. From noon onwards you could see the benzos taking their toll, slack faces atop immobile frames. There were ketamine users whose addiction had led to bladder problems and colostomies. They were known as Pissbag One, Two and Three. Nursing staff carried oranges with them because they diluted the effects of spice. Rebus had also seen plenty evidence of self-harm, prisoners whose arms bore scarring, some of it fresh and raw from the razor blade's work. No one ever discussed it; it was just another fact of life behind bars.

Tennent had been right about one thing: Rebus hadn't become aware of any real grudges against him. There was one guy, JoJo Peters, three murders to his name, who'd been put away after a cold-case trawl that Rebus had been involved in. But he was suffering from dementia these days and barely left his cell. The other prisoners made regular checks on him and took him treats. Rebus had stopped by one day and Peters had stared straight through him while chewing a toffee with the few teeth he'd managed to keep.

'Shouldn't be here,' a younger prisoner had commented, arriving with another handful of sweets. 'Home or a hospice if they had any heart.'

Word had obviously filtered down to Darryl Christie, who had stopped Rebus in the hall later.

'Reckon JoJo could pose a problem?' he'd asked.

'Definitely not.'

Christie had nodded slowly and turned away, watched by a couple of officers. Rebus doubted they'd have been quick to respond even if Christie had launched himself at him. The place was short-staffed – all prisons were – and it was at near-capacity. Other jails were even more crowded, but life here was made easier for all concerned if someone like Christie exerted a level of control.

The day Rebus had moved into his permanent cell, Christie had come calling. He'd gained some weight and wore his hair long, swept back from his forehead. He'd wanted to thank Rebus for getting rid of Morris Gerald Cafferty. But Rebus had been convicted of attempted murder rather than murder proper. Even so, the judge had handed down the mandatory life sentence, despite Rebus's protestations that he'd only meant to scare Big Ger by putting a cushion over his face. The prosecution hadn't liked that, presenting Cafferty as a wheelchair-bound Mother Teresa rather than a thuggish career criminal. Rebus's past run-ins with the man had been dusted off and held up to the jury for their consideration and condemnation. Still, Cafferty had died, leaving a vacuum of sorts – once his cocky lieutenant, Andrew Downs, had been scared off and run out of town. Christie's town, controlled at a distance, while inside HMP Edinburgh he sat on his throne – or at least the chair at Rebus's desk.

'Settling in? Anything I can get you? I know you had a bit of a thirst on the outside – harder to source in here. Pills, on the other hand – uppers and downers – you'll soon forget you've got four walls around you. You'll forget everything bad.'

'No chance of any Sanatogen then?' Christie looked blank. 'Forget it,' Rebus said. Then: 'Am I supposed to thank you for this?'

Rebus had known him since Christie was in his late teens, keening for retribution after his sister's murder. Paths were open to him back then and he'd chosen the one leading here. Rebus had been in the room the night Christie had shot and killed an enemy. He'd seen a madness behind the young

man's eyes and had assumed he'd end up in the secure unit at Carstairs. But the law dictated otherwise.

'One thing you can do for me, lifer to lifer,' Christie had said that day in the cell, rising to his feet so he was eye to eye with the standing Rebus.

'What?'

'Run me through it. Help me picture the scene.' His voice had dropped, but his eyes glittered. 'Was he scared? Did he show it? Did he beg?' He ran his tongue across his lips. His breath was bad and his skin sallow. 'Come to think of it, how did *you* feel? It was a long time coming. Too long for many …'

'I actually had a bit of respect for the guy,' Rebus had eventually replied. 'He had a code of sorts, things that were beyond the pale. Not every toerag can say the same.'

Then he'd sat down on his bed, picked up a book and pretended to start losing himself in it, leaving Christie to stand his ground, dragging a hand through his hair before walking out.

A few of the prisoners referred to Christie as 'the Don'. The first few times it had happened, Rebus had felt it necessary to respond that he was no Vito Corleone. But it kept happening anyway. Rebus knew all too well that Christie's protection was a mixed blessing; it didn't do to rile the guy unnecessarily. So he kept himself to himself, worked all the hours he could in the small but well-stocked library, and got to know a few of his companions, finding out who could be trusted to any extent and who should be avoided. He thought of Cafferty sometimes, not quite with remorse. The life sentence felt like Cafferty having one last laugh at Rebus's expense.

The level of noise rose as the morning progressed, complaints from behind the locked doors. Rebus's neighbours on both sides – Billy Groam and Everett Harrison – gave occasional kicks and thumps. Harrison had music playing as usual. Rebus had given up asking him to turn it down. Harrison was of Caribbean descent and had a Liverpudlian accent. He worked for a Merseyside-based trafficker of drugs and people, and had been caught in Edinburgh with a consignment of the former.

Rebus had asked him once if encroaching on Christie's turf meant he had to watch his back.

'Anyone comes at me, they better have nuclear capability,' Harrison had retorted. And it was true that he seemed to get on well with Christie, the two men playing pool together and sometimes even sharing a console game. Smiles and laughs, pats on the back and handshakes. Rebus was almost convinced.

His door was unlocked at one o'clock. An officer he didn't recognise told him that food was being served in Swanston Hall, so he'd need to get changed. On your own hall, you could wear what you liked, but when visiting elsewhere, prison-issue polo shirts and sweatshirts were required, their colours indicating what level of inmate you were. Blue for short-term, brown for those not yet tried in court, maroon for sex offenders. The long-termers like Rebus wore dark green. He'd been told it was so the officers watching on CCTV could keep tabs. Last thing they wanted was lifers meeting kiddie-fiddlers during free flow.

Having swapped his faded red polo for green, Rebus stepped out of his cell and saw that a cordon had been set up around the crime scene, courtesy of blue-and-white-striped POLICE tape draped between some parking cones. A scene-of-crime team was still busy, those inside the cell covered head to toe to prevent trace contamination. The governor meantime was in conversation with a cop Rebus recognised – Detective Sergeant Christine Esson. Spotting Rebus, she raised an eyebrow before turning her attention back to Howard Tennent.

'We all know what happened,' Billy Groam muttered, walking a few paces ahead of Rebus. 'Bad blood between Jackie and that bawbag Chris Novak. You saw him this morning same as I did, standing outside the cell making sure all his mates had their stories straight.'

Yes, Rebus remembered the two officers, faces almost touching as they talked. Novak and Valerie Watts. Rumour was they were more than just colleagues. But then rumours were like oxygen in a place like this, keeping the heart pumping and the mind active.

The line had slowed to a shuffle, giving Rebus time to check out who else he might know from the old days. He couldn't see Haj Atwal, who usually ran scene-of-crimes, but then he could be outside, busy at his well-equipped van. Rebus wondered if any of the crew had their phones on them, or had they been locked away as they would be for normal visitors? Whatever had been brought in would be taken out again, the prison staff would make sure of that.

Speculation and information ran up and down the line as it moved. Mark Jamieson had been taken to hospital to be checked over. Chris Novak had been on the overnight shift, which meant he was pulling a double, since he'd still been on duty at breakfast. Same went for Valerie Watts – and wasn't *that* a happy coincidence? The lads in the cells either side of the crime scene hadn't heard raised voices or anything, though Billy Groam across the way swore he'd heard a cell being unlocked at some point before dawn.

'Jackie's cell?' Rebus checked.

'Who else's?' Groam muttered.

Rebus had known Jackie Simpson. He would visit the library for DVDs while boasting that he'd never read a book in his life.

'The streets were my school,' he'd told Rebus once. 'And now I'm the teacher!'

By which he meant that he taught other prisoners how to get through a locked door, *any* door. He'd even offered to show Rebus.

'What makes you think I don't already know?' Rebus had replied.

He'd also told Rebus about his feud with Officer Novak. 'Bastard grabbed me by the throat one time. Inside my cell so it wasn't on camera. Told me my boy was a deadbeat like his dad. It'll be a different story when I get out of here.'

'In which case you'll be paying this place a return visit pronto,' Rebus had warned him.

As the line moved closer to lunch, Rebus asked Groam how he reckoned Novak had killed Simpson.

'Smuggled in a shank, didn't he? Or maybe he confiscated it, kept it tucked away for future use. Cell door was locked, John – you reckon one of us magicked our way in there?'

'Simpson got on okay with his cellmate?'

'Mark's a pussycat, barely out of his teens. Plus the size of him, you could fit him in Jackie's back pocket. Jackie would have ripped his head off if he'd tried anything.'

'Benzos can make a man act out of character.'

'Tends not to turn them into the Hulk, though. Plus, aye, Mark was zonked as usual. Zonked *and* whacked across the head with something. You've seen the batons Novak and his gang carry. Way he sees it, cops aren't going to break sweat. Jackie's just another con to them. One less to worry about.'

There were some wolf-whistles and whoops as they trooped into Swanston, the prisoners there letting them know what they thought of the incursion. But they were curious, too, wanting to know what had happened and why, so there was a charm offensive of sorts. Rebus studied each and every face, recognising none, for which he was grateful. On his home turf, Darryl Christie reigned, but Rebus didn't know how far his kingdom stretched. Christie himself settled with his food, seemingly unconcerned, but his eyes remained wary and he made sure he was flanked by two of the bigger bastards from Trinity, one of them Everett Harrison. Rebus watched as a prisoner approached and tapped Harrison on the shoulder. Harrison got up, all grins, and the two men hugged, then patted each other's upper arms, checking the musculature. Rebus realised they must have known one another on the outside, and he felt his gut clench.

'His name's Bobby Briggs,' Groam confided. 'From the west coast.'

'I know him,' Rebus admitted in an undertone.

Groam fixed him with a look. 'From your days in the filth?'

'Where else?'

'Half Trinity thinks you were moved in because Tennent wants someone on the inside.'

'Wasn't like that.' Rebus scooped up more potato. The food was lukewarm at best, but anything tasted better than confinement. It reminded him of fare from a primary school or some second-rate holiday camp. One day a week they got burgers. After that, a lot of prisoners started counting down the days till next time. Everybody liked burgers. But today it was chicken in a white sauce, plus mushy potatoes. Rebus didn't finish his, and Groam angled his head towards the plate.

'Fill your boots,' Rebus said.

He was thinking of Christine Esson. In days past, he might have known her phone number. He assumed she was still based at Gayfield Square. Time was, she worked under DI Siobhan Clarke, but Clarke had moved on. Esson hadn't looked at all fazed by her surroundings, every inch the professional. Whatever mentoring Clarke had done, it had paid off.

He realised that someone was staring at him from the far side of the hall, that someone being Bobby Briggs. Then Briggs was on his feet and lumbering in Rebus's direction. Rebus got up and backed towards the nearest officer.

'Trouble's coming,' he informed him.

'Easy, Bobby,' the officer cautioned, holding up a hand in warning. Briggs stopped a couple of feet short of Rebus, jabbing a finger as he spoke.

'Bastard stitched me up,' he snarled, eyes glowing, teeth showing. Spittle flew from his mouth, flecks of it hitting Rebus's face.

'That was in another century, Bobby,' Rebus argued. 'And it's not why you're in here now.'

Everett Harrison had approached, pressing a palm to Briggs's shoulder. 'Everything all right, Bobby?'

Briggs didn't take his eyes off Rebus. 'Lied through their teeth in the witness box, him and his lot. I got five years.'

'That's right, Bobby,' Rebus offered. 'The victim kicked his own ribs till they broke – I keep forgetting.'

'Maybe you forget, but I never will. Your card's marked, Rebus.'

'Whatever you say, Bobby.'

Briggs looked ready to pounce, but Harrison's grip on him had strengthened and the officer's hand was half an inch from the alarm. With effort, Harrison turned the man around and began leading him back into the body of the hall, his arm draped around his shoulders.

'Might take the rest of my meals in my cell,' Rebus told the officer, on whose forehead a sheen of sweat had appeared.

'I'll make a note of it,' he said. 'Bobby's not someone you want to get on the wrong side of.'

'Maybe I'll send him a box of Quality Street as a peace offering …'

Twenty minutes later, they were on their way again, being waved off and blown kisses by some of their hosts. Outside the deceased's cell, Esson and her colleagues had been replaced by the governor and another man, the latter smart-suited, hair immaculate, tie crisply knotted. It took Rebus the briefest moment to place him – Malcolm Fox, formerly Professional Standards and now Organised Crime. Fox was happiest behind a neat desk, inbox empty and a boss's arse waiting to be peppered with kisses. Rebus almost blurted aloud what he was thinking:

Fuck are you doing here?

Fox clocked him, almost as if he'd been expecting him. While the governor kept talking, Fox's attention was all on Rebus. Rebus in turn narrowed his eyes, letting Fox know he had questions. Fatalities were the preserve of a major incident team, and Fox was not and never would be MIT. Rebus turned his head by degrees as he walked, maintaining eye contact. An officer was gesturing for him to enter his cell.

'We're being cooped up again?' Rebus complained.

'Afraid so.'

'Whatever happened to human rights?' Groam piped up. 'We've hardly been out today.'

'A mate of ours is dead, Billy,' Everett Harrison shot back. 'A few extra hours banged up is fuck all.'

'I've nothing to do, though.'

'Haven't you got a toy you can play with?' Harrison cupped his own groin, grinning.

Rebus waited until he had the man's attention. 'I want to thank you for saving my neck back there.'

'Bobby holds his grudges. He wants to see you turning on a spit.'

'I thought I was under Darryl Christie's protection.'

'In here you are, but this is just one hall.'

'Everybody in!' the governor called out.

Everyone went in.

Rebus sat on his bed, rubbing a hand across his jaw and occasionally glancing towards the wall-mounted landline. He was aware of a dull cacophony – more complaints about the lockdown, shouted responses from the officers on duty. Eventually, around four, his door rattled open.

'Stretch your legs,' Graves said. 'There's already a queue for the showers if you feel the need.'

'I'll manage,' Rebus said. The temporary cordon had gone from in front of the murder scene, but there was tape stretched across the closed door. Prisoners mingled, chatted, set up games of cards, trying to avoid looking at that tape. Two of them headed for the pool table and picked up cues. No one was being allowed out of the hall for activities, but freedom was relative and they were determined to savour it, while trying for the solemnity they felt the day required. No jokes for a change, no teasing or gentle bullying.

'You're not due to see the nurse or anything?' Graves checked. 'Enough meds?'

'Plenty meds,' Rebus confirmed.

'Lucky you. I could do with some myself. Back's been giving me gyp.'

'I'm sure Darryl can sort you out. You only have to ask.'

Rebus walked past Graves's scowl, shaking his legs as if loosening them. He tried to look as if he was just circling the hall, no real destination in mind. He'd done four circuits before

the queue at Darryl Christie's table was cleared. Rebus took the seat opposite him.

'What's with you and Bobby Briggs?' Christie asked.

'He thinks I lied in court.'

'And did you?'

'Pious perjury, we called it.'

'In other words, you *did* fit him up?'

Rebus shook his head. 'He'd done the crime. We just couldn't quite prove it.'

'So you gave the jury a version they'd fall for?' Christie nodded his understanding.

'He was about to rip my head from my shoulders back there.'

'Everett had you covered,' Christie said with a shrug. 'So if you've come looking for an apology …'

Rebus shook his head again. 'I need a phone for an hour.'

Christie took his time folding his arms. 'What makes you think I have a phone?'

'You've probably got a dozen of them. Either smuggled in up someone's arse or brought in by one of the staff for a bung. If there's a choice, I'd prefer something from the latter batch.' Rebus watched a thin smile spread across Christie's face. 'I can pay the going rate, if that's what you're wondering.'

'You don't know what the current rate is.'

'So enlighten me.'

Christie unfolded his arms and pressed his palms flat against the table. 'What's wrong with the landline in your cell? Let me guess – you need to make sure no one's listening in. But that still begs the question. My guess is it's to do with what happened to Jackie Simpson.'

'So what *did* happen to Jackie?'

'How would I know?'

'By pressing a few pills into the right hands.'

'I'd be wasting good product. Even the uniforms know it was one of them, maybe more than one. They're going to have trouble keeping a lid on it, too. Jackie was well liked. Lot of the guys want to do the right thing by him.'

'Start a riot, you mean?'

'Do I?' Christie leaned across the table, eyes level with Rebus's. 'My office in five minutes,' he stated, getting to his feet and turning away.

Rebus stayed where he was and counted the seconds. There were plenty of looks from those who wondered what was going on.

'Just getting my Special K order in,' he told the nearest of them, raising his voice for the benefit of everyone else.

Eventually he took the short stroll to Christie's cell. The door was ajar a few inches. Rebus nudged it further open with his foot and stepped inside. It was comfortable enough – TV and music player and a pile of recent car and bike mags. There were photos on one wall, including several of Christie's murdered sister and one of him astride a Harley-Davidson.

'They won't let me carpet the place,' Christie pretended to complain. He was standing under the high window, legs parted, hands behind his back. 'Do you mind shutting it?' He nodded towards the door. Rebus did as he was told.

'So how much?' he asked into the silence.

'A grand,' Christie informed him. Then, having watched Rebus take this in, he gave a snort. 'Just this one time then.' He held out his right hand. There was a small, basic-looking mobile phone sitting in it. 'Passcode is four zeroes. Reception can be dodgy, so try clambering onto your toilet seat. Bonus is, they can't see you from the peephole. They can hear you, though, so keep your voice down, and best phone while things are lively. At dead of night sound carries even further, and your neighbours will have their ears pressed to the wall.'

Rebus reached out for the device, but Christie had wrapped his hand around it again.

'Something to consider: you take this, you're not on their side any more, you're on ours. If you're found with it, you'll be locked down solid for a while. You get that, right?'

Rebus gave a slow nod. 'I get it.'

'And if the boss finds out you've been naughty, there'll be

no more tea and biscuits in his office. So you need to be really sure.'

'I'm sure.'

'And it *is* to do with Jackie Simpson?'

'Maybe,' Rebus confessed. As Christie's fist relaxed, he plucked the phone from it and slipped it into his pocket. 'How do I get it back to you?'

'It's yours till breakfast. Hand it over then. Fair warning – it's got about twenty minutes' battery left on it. Call it a free taste. If you decide you need to up the dosage, we can talk numbers.' Christie held out his hand and Rebus took it, returning the grip as best he could while they shook.

'One last thing,' Rebus said. 'How come you're so pally with a guy who plays for another team?'

'Harrison, you mean?' Christie considered for a moment. 'His manager's a Scouse wanker called Hanlon. But maybe there's a transfer window opening. Could be he'll change strips …' He gave a slow wink before turning his back on Rebus, angling his head to gaze at the high window. It was open as far as it would go – a scant few inches – but air was air. Christie seemed to be appreciating it as he clasped his hands behind his back again.

Meeting over.

As soon as he was back in his cell, Rebus headed to the toilet pan and stepped onto it. But nobody was being locked up yet, meaning anyone could yank his door open and catch him in the act. So he bided his time, and after twenty minutes a couple of prison officers arrived accompanying two detectives, presumably from the MIT. One male and one female, late twenties or early thirties, the male looking the more senior. Rebus couldn't put names to either of them. This was the signal for the prisoners to be herded back into their cells, amidst the usual volley of complaints, bluster and cursing, plus queries as to whether they'd be allowed out in time for their next meal. As soon as

Rebus's door was locked, he climbed onto the lavatory again and made the call. A female voice answered.

'Yes?'

He remained silent, wondering how long it would take her. The answer: eight seconds. Then a sigh.

'John?'

'Hello, Siobhan.' He cupped one hand around his mouth and the phone.

'There was no voice telling me the call's being monitored.' Again Rebus waited. Again Siobhan Clarke sighed. 'Oh Jesus, John, what if you're caught?'

'You thought I'd be phoning, though, didn't you?'

'It's Christine Esson you need to speak to, not me.'

'Yes, I saw her earlier. She looked the part.'

'That's because she *is* the part.'

'Do I detect a note of jealousy?'

'Sod off.'

'It's good to hear your voice, Siobhan. How've things been?'

'Sammy and I went to check your flat a few days back. Starting to smell a bit damp, so we're putting the heating on an hour a day. Is that all right?'

'Did Sammy have Brillo with her?'

'He was looking all over for you. We gave him a run on the Meadows and he was looking there, too.'

'Give him a scratch behind the ears for me.'

'Will do.' Clarke paused. 'Carrie wants to see you. She's gotten good at drawing. There's one of Brillo she wants you to have.'

'I can't have her seeing me in here, Shiv. You know that.'

'She'd be fine, John.'

'She might, but I wouldn't.' He paused. 'How about you – you doing okay, all things considered?'

'How long have you got?'

'Maybe ten more minutes.' Rebus held the phone away from him. The battery indicator was already flashing. 'Can you get me Christine's number?'

'Not a good idea.'

'How about Malcolm Fox? Is he speaking to you?'

'What's Fox got to do with anything?'

'He was at the crime scene, getting the lowdown from the governor by the look of it.'

'Bit odd.'

'That's what I thought. Reckon you can shed any light?'

'I'll do what I can. No promises. But you'll owe me, and you know what I want.'

It was Rebus's turn to exhale. 'I'll think about it.'

'She's missing you rotten.'

'I said I'll think about it. Nice talking to you, Shiv. Don't be a stranger.' He ended the call but stayed where he was. The battery light was still flashing red. How many minutes did he have? He tried to think who else to call. His solicitor? They'd have clocked off for the day, or be out of the office – the receptionist would have her excuses ready as per. There was always Deborah Quant, but then she'd done the autopsy on Cafferty and given evidence at Rebus's trial, and somehow that had cooled whatever ardour there had still been. He could talk to Sammy, but he'd be seeing her at the next visit. The Oxford Bar? He smiled at the thought – the sounds of the regulars in the background as Kirsty picked up. But then what? No, there really wasn't anyone. Besides, the light was no longer flashing. The burner phone was dead.

READY FOR MORE?

PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2024

UK PRE-ORDERS

WATERSTONES
SIGNED COPIES

INDEPENDENT BOOKSHOPS
SIGNED COPIES

AMAZON.CO.UK

EBOOK

AUDIOBOOK

INTERNATIONAL PRE-ORDERS

AUSTRALIA

NEW ZEALAND

CANADA

U.S.A.

