

One

1

'He's not here,' the desk sergeant said.

'So where is he?'

'Out on a call.'

Fox stared hard at the man, knowing it wouldn't do any good. The sergeant was one of those old-timers who reckoned they'd seen it all and faced most of it down. Fox glanced at the next name on his list.

'Haldane?'

'Sick leave.'

'Michaelson?'

'Out on the call with DI Scholes.'

Tony Kaye was standing just behind Fox's left shoulder. An instant before the words were out of his mouth, Fox knew what his colleague was going to say.

'This is taking the piss.'

Fox turned to give Kaye a look. News would now travel through the station: job done. The Complaints had come to town, found no one home, and had let their annoyance show. The desk sergeant shifted his weight from one foot to the other, trying not to seem too satisfied at this turn of events.

Fox took a moment to study his surroundings. The notices pinned to the walls were the usual stuff. It was a modern police station, meaning it could just as easily have been the reception area of a doctors' surgery or DSS office, as long as you disregarded the sign warning that the Alert Status had been lifted from LOW to MODERATE. Nothing to do with Fox and his men: there'd been reports of a blast in woodland outside Lockerbie. Kids, probably,

and a good long way from Kirkcaldy. Nevertheless, every police station in the country would have been notified.

The button on the counter had a hand written sign next to it saying Press For Attention – which was what Fox had done three or four minutes ago. There was a two-way mirror behind the counter, and the desk sergeant had almost certainly been watching the three arrivals – Inspector Malcolm Fox, Sergeant Tony Kaye and Constable Joe Naysmith. The station had been told they were coming. Interviews had been arranged with DI Scholes, and DSs Haldane and Michaelson.

‘Think this is the first time we’ve had this stunt pulled on us?’ Kaye was asking the desk sergeant. ‘Maybe we’ll start the interviews with you instead.’

Fox flipped to the second sheet of paper in his folder. ‘How about your boss – Superintendent Pitkethly?’

‘She’s not in yet.’

Kaye made a show of checking his watch.

‘Meeting at HQ,’ the desk sergeant explained. Joe Naysmith, standing to Fox’s right, seemed more interested in the leaflets on the counter. Fox liked that: it spoke of easy confidence, the confidence that these officers *would* be interviewed, that delaying tactics were nothing new to the Complaints.

The Complaints: the term was already outdated, even though Fox and his team couldn’t help using it, at least among themselves. Complaints and Conduct had been their official title until recently. Now they were supposed to be Professional Ethics and Standards. Next year they’d be something else again: the name Standards and Values had been mooted, to nobody’s liking. They were The Complaints, the cops who investigated other cops. Which was why those other cops were never happy to see them.

And seldom entirely cooperative.

‘HQ means Glenrothes?’ Fox checked with the desk sergeant.

‘That’s right.’

‘How long to drive there – twenty minutes?’

‘Provided you don’t get lost.’

The phone on the desk behind the sergeant started to ring. ‘You can always wait,’ he said, turning to lift the receiver, keeping his back to Fox as he started a muffled conversation.

Joe Naysmith was holding a pamphlet about home security. He plonked himself on one of the chairs by the window and started reading. Fox and Kaye shared a look.

‘What do you reckon?’ Kaye asked at last. ‘Whole town’s out there waiting to be explored ...’

Kirkcaldy: a coastal town in Fife. Kaye had driven them there in his car. Forty minutes from Edinburgh, most of them spent in the outside lane. As they had crossed the Forth Road Bridge, they’d discussed the long queue of traffic on the opposite carriageway, heading into the capital at the start of another working day.

‘Coming over here, stealing our jobs,’ Kaye had joked, sounding his horn and giving a wave. Naysmith seemed to be the one with the local knowledge.

‘Linoleum,’ he’d said. ‘Used to be what Kirkcaldy was famous for. And Adam Smith.’

‘Who did he play for?’ Kaye had asked.

‘He was an economist.’

‘What about Gordon Brown?’ Fox had added.

‘Kirkcaldy,’ Naysmith had confirmed, nodding slowly.

Now, standing in the police station’s reception area, Fox weighed up his options. They could sit and wait, growing restless. Or he could phone his boss in Edinburgh with a complaint of his own. His boss would then call Fife HQ and eventually something would happen – the equivalent of a wee boy running to his daddy when the big kid’s done something.

Or ...

Fox looked at Kaye again. Kaye smiled and batted Naysmith’s leaflet with the back of his hand.

‘Break out the pith helmets, young Joe,’ he said. ‘We’re heading into the wild.’

They parked the car on the seafront and stood for a few moments staring out across the Firth of Forth towards Edinburgh.

‘Looks sunny over there,’ Kaye complained, buttoning his coat. ‘Bet you wish you’d worn more than a donkey jacket.’

Joe Naysmith had become inured to comments about his latest designer buy, but he did turn the collar up. There was a fierce wind blowing in from the North Sea. The water was choppy, and puddles along the promenade offered evidence that the tide was prone to break over the sea wall. The gulls overhead looked to be working hard at staying airborne. There was something odd about the design of this waterfront: almost no use had been made of it. Buildings tended to face away from the view and towards the

town centre. Fox had noted this elsewhere in Scotland: from Fort William to Dundee, the planners seemed to deny the existence of any shoreline. He'd never understood it, but doubted Kaye and Naysmith would be able to help.

Joe Naysmith's suggestion had been a beach walk, but Tony Kaye was already heading for one of the wynds leading uphill towards Kirkcaldy's shops and cafés, leaving Naysmith to dig out eighty-five pence in change for the parking. The narrow main street had roadworks on it. Kaye crossed to the other side and kept climbing.

'Where's he going?' Naysmith complained.

'Tony has a nose,' Fox explained. 'Not just any old café will do.'

Kaye had stopped at a doorway, made sure they could see him, then headed inside. The Pancake Place was light and spacious and not too busy. They took a corner table and tried to look like regulars. Fox often wondered if it was true that cops the world over tended to act the same. He liked corner tables, where he could see everything that was happening or might be about to happen. Naysmith hadn't quite learned that lesson yet and seemed happy enough to sit with his back to the door. Fox had squeezed in next to Kaye, eyes scanning the room, finding only women intent on their conversations, past being interested in the three new arrivals. They studied their menus in silence, placed an order, and waited a few minutes for the waitress to return with a tray.

'Good-looking scone,' Naysmith commented, getting to work with his knife and the pat of low-fat spread.

Fox had brought the folder with him. 'Don't want you getting too comfortable,' he said, emptying its contents on to the table. 'While the tea's cooling, you can be refreshing your memories.'

'Is it worth the risk?' Tony Kaye asked.

'What risk?'

'A smear of butter on the cover sheet. Won't look exactly professional when we're doing the interviews.'

'I'm feeling reckless today,' Fox countered. 'I'll take a chance ...'

With a sigh from Kaye, the three men started reading.

Paul Carter was the reason they'd come to Fife. Carter held the rank of detective constable and had been a cop for fifteen years. He was thirty-eight years old and came from a family of cops – both his father and an uncle had served in Fife Constabulary. The uncle, Alan Carter, had actually made the original complaint

against his nephew. It involved a drug addict, sexual favours, and turning a blind eye. Two other women then came forward to say that Paul Carter had arrested them for drunken behaviour, but offered to drop any charges if they would be 'accommodating'.

'Does anybody actually ever say "accommodating"?' Kaye muttered, halfway down a page.

'Courtroom and newspapers,' Naysmith replied, brushing crumbs from his own copy of the case notes.

Malcolm Fox had some of those newspaper reports in front of him. There were photos of Paul Carter leaving court at the end of a day's testimony. Pudding-bowl haircut; face pitted by acne. Giving the photographer a hard stare.

It was four days since the guilty verdict had been delivered, along with the sheriff's comment that Detective Constable Carter's own colleagues seemed 'either wilfully stupid or wilfully complicit'. Meaning: they'd known for years Carter was a bad cop, but they'd protected him, lied for him, maybe even attempted to falsify witness statements and put pressure on witnesses not to come forward.

All of which had brought the Complaints to town. Fife Constabulary needed to know, and in order to reassure the public (and more importantly, the media) that the investigation would be rigorous, they had asked a neighbouring force to run the inquiry. Fox had been given a copy of Fife Constabulary's Suspension Policy and Suspension Process Considerations, along with the Chief Constable's written report outlining why the three officers under investigation were still at work, this being 'in the best interests of the force'.

Fox took a sip of tea and skimmed another page of notes. Almost every sentence had been underlined or highlighted. The margins were filled with his own scribbled queries, concerns and exclamation marks. He knew most of it by heart, could stand up and recite it to the café's customers. Maybe they were gossiping about it anyway. In a town this size, sides would have been taken, opinions rigidly formed. Carter was a slimeball, a sleazebag, a predator. Or he'd been stitched up by a low-life junkie and a couple of cheap dates. Where was the harm in anything he'd done? And what had he done anyway?

Not much, except bring his police force into disrepute.

'Reminds me a bit of Colin Balfour,' Tony Kaye said. 'Remember him?'

Fox nodded. Edinburgh cop who liked to visit the cells if women were being held overnight. The prosecution against him had faltered, but an internal inquiry had seen him kicked off the force anyway.

‘Interesting that the uncle’s the one who spoke up,’ Naysmith commented, drawing them back to the current case.

‘But only after he retired from the force,’ Fox added.

‘Even so ... Must have stirred up the family a bit.’

‘Could be some history there,’ Kaye offered. ‘Bad blood.’

‘Could be,’ Naysmith agreed.

Kaye slapped a hand down on the pile of papers in front of him. ‘So where does any of this get us? How many days are we going to be shuttling backwards and forwards?’

‘As many as it takes. Might only be a week or two.’

Kaye rolled his eyes. ‘Just so Fife Constabulary can say they’ve got one bad apple and not a whole cider factory?’

‘Do they make cider in factories?’ Naysmith asked.

‘Where do you think they make it?’

Fox didn’t bother joining in. He was wondering again about the main player, Paul Carter. There was no use trying to interview the man, even though he was available. He’d been found guilty, held in custody, but had yet to receive a sentence. The sheriff was ‘deliberating’. Fox reckoned Carter would go to jail. Couple of years and maybe a listing on the Sex Offenders Register. He was almost certainly talking to his lawyers about an appeal.

Yes, he’d talk to his legal team, but not to the Complaints. The man had nothing to gain by grassing up his mates at the station, the ones who’d stood by him. Fox couldn’t offer him any kind of deal. The most they could hope for was that he would let something slip. If he talked at all.

Which he wouldn’t.

Fox doubted anyone would talk. Or rather, they’d talk but say nothing worth hearing. They’d had plenty of warning this day was coming. Scholes. Haldane. Michaelson. The sheriff had singled them out for their conflicting or confused testimony, their muddying of the water, their memory lapses. Their immediate boss in CID, Detective Chief Inspector Laird, had escaped criticism, as had a detective constable called Forrester.

‘Forrester’s the one we should be talking to,’ Kaye said suddenly, breaking off from his argument with Naysmith.

‘Why?’

‘Because her first name’s Cheryl. My years of experience tell me that makes her a woman.’

‘And?’

‘And if one of her colleagues was a sex pest, surely she’d have had an inkling. Surrounded by blokes circling the wagons when the rumours start flying ... She’s got to know something.’ Kaye rose to his feet. ‘Who’s for a refill?’

‘Let me check first.’ Fox took out his phone and found the number for the station. ‘Maybe Scholes is back from his wee jaunt.’ He punched in the number and waited, while Kaye flicked the back of Naysmith’s head with a finger and offered his services as a barber.

‘Hello?’ It was a woman’s voice.

‘DI Scholes, please.’

‘Who’s calling?’

Fox looked around the café. ‘I’m from the Pancake Place. He was in earlier and we think he left something.’

‘Hold on, I’ll put you through.’

‘Thank you.’ Fox ended the call and started gathering up all the paperwork.

‘Nicely played,’ Tony Kaye said. Then, to Naysmith: ‘Back into your donkey jacket, Joe. Let’s get that jackhammer started ...’

2

Detective Inspector Ray Scholes ran a hand through his short black hair. He was seated in the station's only interview room. Fox had offered him any location he liked, as long as it had a table and four chairs.

'And a socket,' Joe Naysmith had added. The socket was for the electrical adaptor. Naysmith had set up the video camera and was now just about finished with the audio recorder. There were two microphones, one pointed at Scholes and one centred between Fox and Tony Kaye. Kaye had his arms folded, a scowl on his face. He'd already told Scholes how much they'd enjoyed his little ruse.

'I don't call official police business a "ruse",' Scholes had shot back at him. 'On the other hand, *this* almost certainly qualifies as a waste of time.'

'Only "almost"?' Malcolm Fox had responded, busying himself with the paperwork.

'All set,' Naysmith was now telling them.

'Happy to start?' Fox asked Scholes.

Scholes was nodding when his phone sounded. He answered it by identifying himself as 'Ray Scholes, public enemy number one.' Sounded like his girlfriend on the other end, asking him to pick up something for dinner. But she knew about the Complaints.

'Yeah, they're here,' Scholes drawled, eyes on Fox. Fox drew a finger across his throat, but Scholes was in no hurry. When he eventually ended the call, Fox asked if the phone could be switched off. Scholes shook his head.

'Never know when something *important*'s going to crop up.'

'How long before it rings again?' Fox asked. 'Will it be her every

time, or have you split the task between your friends?’ Fox looked towards Tony Kaye. ‘What is it usually – five minutes or ten?’

‘Ten,’ Kaye stated definitively.

Fox turned his attention back to Ray Scholes. ‘I doubt there’s anything you can do that hasn’t been tried a hundred times. So why not just switch the phone off?’

Scholes managed a bit of a smile as he complied, Fox thanking him with a nod.

‘Was DC Carter a good cop, in your opinion?’ Fox then asked.

‘Still is.’

‘We both know he’s not coming back.’

‘How come you hate cops so much?’

Fox stared at the man across the desk. Scholes was in his mid-thirties but looked younger. A freckled face and milky-blue eyes. An odd image flashed up in Fox’s memory: a big bag of marbles he’d owned as a boy. His favourite had been a pale-blue one, its flaws only visible when you peered at it, turning it slowly between your fingers ...

‘That’s an original question,’ Tony Kaye was answering Scholes. ‘I doubt we’re asked that more than a few dozen times a month.’

‘I just don’t know why you’d want to punish everyone who’s ever worked with Paul.’

‘Not everyone,’ Fox corrected him. ‘Just the names mentioned by the sheriff.’

Scholes snorted. ‘Call that a sheriff? Ask anyone on the force – Colin Cardonald’s just the man to stick the knife in. Number of cases where he’s tried everything possible to swing it the defendant’s way ...’

‘There’s always one,’ Kaye conceded.

‘Was there any history between Sheriff Cardonald and DC Carter?’ Fox asked.

‘A bit.’

‘And between the judge and yourself?’ Fox waited, but no answer came. ‘Are you saying that Sheriff Cardonald singled out certain names because of a grudge?’

‘No comment.’

‘A complaint was made about Paul Carter almost a year back, wasn’t it? His own uncle said Carter had admitted taking advantage of a woman. The claim was investigated ...’ Fox made show of looking for the relevant page in his notes.

‘Nothing ever came of it,’ Scholes stated.

‘Not straight away, not until Teresa Collins decided she’d had enough ...’ Fox paused. ‘Did you know Carter’s uncle?’

‘He was a cop.’

‘That’s a yes, then. Why do you think he said what he said?’

Scholes shrugged.

‘Yet another grudge? And the three women – the original complainant plus the two who came forward later – more grudges? Lot of grudges piling up against your friend, the “good cop” Paul Carter.’ Fox leaned back in his chair, feigning interest in some of the pages of text. The newspaper cuttings were in full view on the desk. Kaye and Naysmith knew that silence was useful sometimes, and that when Fox leaned back like that it wasn’t because he’d run out of questions. Naysmith checked the equipment; Kaye studied his wristwatch.

‘Is that the starters finished, then?’ Scholes asked eventually. ‘Are we moving on to the meat and veg?’

‘Meat and veg?’

‘Where you try taking me down with Paul. Where you make out I lied in court, tried putting the fear on the witnesses ...’

‘Teresa Collins states that you were in the car with Carter when he pulled up beside her and told her he’d be coming to her house later that day for sex.’

‘I wasn’t.’

‘When she made her complaint, you phoned her and tried to get her to withdraw it.’

‘No.’

‘Her mobile phone had your number in it. Date, time and duration of call.’

‘As I said in court, it was a mistake. How long did the call last?’

‘Eighteen seconds.’

‘Right – soon as I realised, I hung up.’

‘Why did you have her number?’

‘It was on a bit of paper on one of the desks in the office.’

‘You got curious, so you called the mystery number?’

‘That’s it.’

Tony Kaye was shaking his head slowly, making evident his disbelief.

‘So you deny telling her to ...’ Fox glanced at his notes again, ““back the fuck off”?”

‘Yes.’

‘Did you spend time with Carter when the two of you were off duty?’

‘Few beers now and then.’

‘And clubs ... away days to Edinburgh and Glasgow.’

‘It’s no secret.’

‘That’s right. It all came out in court.’

Scholes snorted. ‘Cops stick together and like a drink now and then – hold the front page.’

‘Carter was a DC, you’re a DI.’

‘So?’

‘So he’d never been promoted. Lowest rank in CID, and he’d been a cop as long as you.’

‘Not everybody wants promotion.’

‘Not everybody merits it,’ Fox stated. ‘Which was it with Paul Carter?’

Scholes was opening his mouth to answer when the interview room door opened. There was a uniformed woman there.

‘Sorry to interrupt,’ she said, not looking sorry at all. ‘Thought I’d better say hello.’ She saw that Naysmith was switching off the recorders. Reaching the desk, she introduced herself as Superintendent Isabel Pitkethly. Fox stood up with a certain reluctance and offered his hand for her to shake.

‘Inspector Malcolm Fox,’ he stated.

‘Everything all right?’ Pitkethly looked around the room. ‘Got everything you need?’

‘We’re fine.’

She was almost a foot shorter than Fox but much the same age – early forties. Collar-length brown hair, blue eyes glinting behind her spectacles. She wore a regulation white blouse with epaulettes at the shoulders. Dark skirt falling to just above her knees.

‘Ray behaving himself?’ She gave a nervous laugh, and Fox could see that the past few weeks had left their mark on her. She probably saw herself as captain of a tight ship, and now the structure had been damaged from within.

‘We were only just getting started,’ Tony Kaye said, not bothering to disguise the complaint.

‘Funny, I thought we were on to cheese and biscuits,’ Scholes countered.

‘DI Scholes does actually have to be at another meeting in five minutes,’ Pitkethly said. ‘Procurator Fiscal has a case to prepare ...’

Scholes wasted no time getting to his feet. ‘Gentlemen, it’s been a pleasure.’

‘How soon can we have him back?’ Fox asked Pitkethly.

‘Mid-afternoon, probably.’

‘Unless the Fiscal has other ideas.’ Scholes had switched his phone back on and was checking for messages.

‘Couple of missed calls?’

Scholes looked at Fox and smiled. ‘How did you guess?’

Pitkethly seemed to be wondering the same thing. ‘Can I have a word in my office, Inspector Fox?’

‘I was about to suggest it,’ Fox answered.

A minute later, Kaye and Naysmith were alone together in the interview room.

‘Do I pack it all up?’ Naysmith asked, his hand resting on the tripod.

‘Better had. Can’t trust Scholes and his crew not to come in here and wipe their cocks over everything ...’

‘Sit down,’ Pitkethly instructed from behind her desk. Fox stayed standing. The desk was empty. There was another at a right angle to it, and this second desk boasted a computer and busy-looking in-tray. The window had a view on to the car park outside. There were no knick-knacks on the sill; no photos of loved ones. The walls were bare except for a No Smoking sign and a year-planner.

‘Been here long?’ Fox asked.

‘Few months.’

‘And before that?’

He could see she was annoyed: somehow he was the one getting to ask the questions. But politeness demanded an answer.

‘Glenrothes.’

‘HQ?’

‘Wouldn’t it be quicker just to look at my file?’

Fox raised both hands by way of apology, and when she nodded towards the chair he decided not to refuse a second time.

‘I’m sorry I wasn’t here this morning,’ she began. ‘I was hoping the two of us might have had this discussion before your work began.’ It sounded like a prepared speech, because that was what it was. Pitkethly probably had friends at HQ in Glenrothes, and had gone there for a bit of advice on dealing with the Complaints. Fox could have written the script for her. Most cases, someone up

the chain of command would invite him to their office and tell him the same thing.

This is a good crew here.

We've got work to do.

It's in nobody's interest that officers are kept back from their duties.

Naturally, no one wants a whitewash.

But all the same ...

'So if any concerns could be brought to me in the first instance ...' Colour had risen to Pitkethly's cheeks. Fox wondered how elated she'd been when promotion had come, when she'd been offered her own station to run. And now this.

She'd been told what to say, but hadn't had time for a rehearsal. Her voice drifted off and she started to clear her throat, almost bringing on a fit of coughing. Fox liked her all the better for this apparent awkwardness. He realised she'd maybe called in no favours, but had been summoned to Glenrothes.

Here's what you have to get through to him, Superintendent ...

'Can I get you a drink?' he asked. 'Some water?' But she waved the offer away. He leaned forward a little in his chair. 'For what it's worth,' he said, 'we'll try to be discreet. And quick. That doesn't mean we'll be cutting corners – I promise you we'll be thorough. And we can't give you any tip-offs. Our report goes to your Chief Constable. It's up to him what he does with it.'

She had managed to compose herself. She was nodding, her eyes focused on his.

'We're not in the business of making waves,' he went on. This, too, was a speech he'd made many times, in rooms much like this. 'We just want the truth. We want to know procedures were followed and no one thinks they're somehow above the law. If you can help us get that message across to your officers, that would be great. If there's a room we could use as a base, so much the better. It needs to be lockable, and I'll need all the keys. I'm hoping we'll be out of your hair in a week.'

He decided not to add 'or two'.

'A week,' she echoed. He couldn't decide if this was coming as good or bad news to her.

'I was told this morning that DS Haldane's on sick leave ...'

'Flu,' she confirmed.

'Flu, palsy or plague, we need him for interview.'

She nodded again. 'I'll make sure he knows.'

‘A bit of local knowledge might be useful, too – just where we can get a decent lunch or sandwich. But nowhere your officers would go.’

‘I’ll have a think.’ She was getting to her feet, signalling the end of the meeting. Fox stayed in his seat.

‘Did you ever have an inkling about DC Carter?’

It took her a few moments to decide whether she was going to answer, at the end of which she shook her head.

‘None of the women working here ...?’ he pressed.

‘What?’

‘Gossip in the toilets ... warnings of wandering hands ...’

‘Nothing,’ she stated.

‘Never any doubts?’

‘None,’ she said firmly, crossing to the door and holding it open for him. Fox took his time; gave her a little smile as he passed her. Kaye and Naysmith were waiting for him at the end of the corridor.

‘Well?’ Kaye asked.

‘Much as expected.’

‘Michaelson might be around – want him next?’

Fox shook his head. ‘Let’s go back into town, grab a bite, drive around a bit.’

‘Just to get a feel for the place?’ Kaye guessed.

‘Just to get a feel for the place,’ Fox confirmed.

3

Kirkcaldy boasted a railway station, a football club, a museum and art gallery, and a college named after Adam Smith. There were streets of solid, prosperous-looking Victorian villas, some of which had been turned into offices and businesses. Further out were housing schemes, some of them so recent there were still plots waiting to be sold. A couple of parks, at least two high schools, and some 1960s high-rises. The dialect was not impenetrable, and shoppers stopped to talk to each other outside the bakeries and newsagents.

'I'm nodding off here,' Tony Kaye commented at one point. He was in his own car's passenger seat, Joe Naysmith driving and Fox in the back. Lunch had comprised filled rolls and packets of crisps. Fox had called their boss in Edinburgh to make an initial report. The call had lasted no more than three minutes.

'So?' Kaye asked, turning in his seat to make eye contact with Fox.

'I like it,' Fox answered, staring at the passing scene.

'Shall I tell you what I see, Foxy? I see people who should be at work this time of day. Scroungers and the walking wounded, coffin-dodgers, jakeys and ASBOs.'

Joe Naysmith had started humming the tune to 'What a Wonderful World'.

'Every car we've passed,' Kaye went on, undeterred, 'the driver's either a drug dealer or he's hot-wired it. The pavements need hosing down and so do half the kids. It tells you all you need to know about a place when the biggest shop seems to be called Rejects.' He paused for effect. 'And you're telling me you *like* it?'

‘You’re seeing what you want to see, Tony, and then letting your imagination run riot.’

Kaye turned to Naysmith. ‘And as for you, you weren’t even born when that song came out, so you can shut it.’

‘My mum had the record. Well, the cassette anyway. Or maybe the CD.’

Kaye was looking at Fox again. ‘Can we please go back and ask our questions, get whatever answers they want to dump on us, and then vamoose the hell out of here?’

‘When did CDs start appearing?’ Naysmith asked.

Kaye punched him on the shoulder.

‘What’s that for?’

‘Cruelty to my gearbox. Have you ever even driven a car before?’

‘Okay,’ Fox said. ‘You win. Joe, take us back to the station.’

‘Left or right at the next junction?’

‘Enough’s enough,’ Tony Kaye said, making to open the glove box. ‘I’m plugging in the satnav.’

Detective Sergeant Gary Michaelson had grown up in Greenock but lived in Fife since the age of eighteen. He’d attended Adam Smith College, then done his police training at Tulliallan. He was three years younger than Ray Scholes, married, and had two daughters.

‘Schools here good?’ Fox had asked him.

‘Not bad.’

Michaelson was happy to talk about Fife and Greenock and family, but when the subject turned to Detective Constable Paul Carter, he offered as little as Scholes before him.

‘If I didn’t know better,’ Fox commented at one point, ‘I’d say you’d been put through your paces.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Coached in what not to say – coached by DI Scholes, maybe ...’

‘Not true,’ Michaelson had insisted.

It was also untrue that he had altered or deleted notes he had taken during an interview conducted both at the home of Teresa Collins and in the very same interview room where they were now seated. Fox recited part of Teresa Collins’s testimony:

‘You can charge me with anything you like, Paul. Just don’t think you’re putting your hands on me again. She didn’t say that?’

‘No.’

‘Verdict suggests otherwise.’

‘Not much I can do about that.’

‘But there was a bit of personal history between Carter and Ms Collins. You can’t have been unaware of it.’

‘*She* says there was a history.’

‘Neighbours saw him coming and going.’

‘Half of them known to us, by the way.’

‘You’re saying they’re liars?’

‘What do you think?’

‘Doesn’t really matter what I think. How about the missing page from your notebook?’

‘Spilled coffee on it.’

‘Pages underneath seem fine.’

‘Not much I can do about that.’

‘So you keep saying ...’

Throughout the interview, Fox knew better than to make eye contact with Tony Kaye. Kaye’s infrequent contributions to the questioning showed his growing irritation. They were getting nowhere and would almost certainly continue to get nowhere. Scholes, Michaelson and the allegedly flu-ridden Haldane had not only had plenty of time to choreograph their answers, they’d also already premiered the routine in the courtroom.

Teresa Collins was lying.

The other two complainants were chancers.

The judge had helped the prosecution at every available turn.

‘Thing is,’ Fox said, slowly and quietly, making sure he had Michaelson’s attention, ‘when your own force’s Professional Standards team looked into the allegations, they reckoned there might be something to them. And don’t forget: it wasn’t Ms Collins who started the whole process ...’

He let that sink in for a moment. Michaelson’s focus remained fixed to a portion of the wall over Fox’s left shoulder. He was wiry and prematurely bald and his nose had been broken at some point in his life. Plus there was an inch-long scar running across his chin. Fox wondered if he’d done any amateur boxing.

‘It was another police officer,’ he continued, ‘Paul Carter’s uncle. Are you calling him a liar too?’

‘He’s not a cop, he’s an ex-cop.’

‘What difference does it make?’

Michaelson offered a shrug and folded his arms.

‘Battery change,’ Naysmith broke in, switching off the camera. Michaelson stretched his back. Fox heard the clicking of vertebrae. Tony Kaye was on his feet, shaking each leg as if trying to get the circulation going.

‘Much longer?’ Michaelson asked.

‘That’s up to you,’ Fox told him.

‘Well we all still get paid at the end of the day, eh?’

‘Not in a rush to get back to your desk?’

‘Doesn’t really matter, does it? You tidy up one crime, another two or three are just around the corner.’

Fox saw that Joe Naysmith was going through the pockets of the equipment bag. Naysmith knew he was being watched, looked up, and had the good sense to look contrite.

‘The spare’s still charging,’ he said.

‘Where?’ Tony Kaye asked.

‘The office.’ Naysmith paused. ‘In Edinburgh.’

‘Meaning we’re done?’ Gary Michaelson’s eyes were on Malcolm Fox.

‘So it would seem,’ Fox answered, grudgingly. ‘For now ...’

‘What a complete and utter waste of a day,’ said Tony Kaye, not for the first time. They had retraced their route back to Edinburgh, still mainly in the outside lane. This time, the bulk of the traffic was heading into Fife, the bottleneck on the Edinburgh side of the Forth Road Bridge. Their destination was Police HQ on Fettes Avenue. Chief Inspector Bob McEwan was still in the office. He pointed to the battery charger next to the kettle and mugs.

‘Wondered about that,’ he said.

‘Wonder no more,’ Fox replied.

The room wasn’t large, because Counter Corruption comprised a small team. Most Complaints officers worked in a larger office along the corridor where Professional Ethics and Standards handled the meat-and-potatoes workload. This year, McEwan seemed to be spending most of his time in meetings to do with restructuring the whole department.

‘Basically, writing myself out of a job,’ as he had put it himself. ‘Not that you should worry your pretty little heads ...’

Kaye had thrown his coat over the back of his chair and was seated at his desk, while Naysmith busied himself switching the batteries in the charger.

‘Two interviews conducted,’ Fox told McEwan. ‘Both somewhat curtailed.’

‘I take it there was a bit of resistance.’

Fox gave a twitch of his mouth. ‘Tony thinks we’re talking to the wrong people anyway. I’m beginning to agree with him.’

‘Nobody’s expecting miracles, Malcolm. The Deputy Chief Constable phoned me earlier. It takes as long as it takes.’

‘Any longer than a week and I might run a hose from my car exhaust,’ Kaye muttered.

‘It takes as long as it takes,’ McEwan repeated for his benefit.

Eventually they settled down to review the recordings. Halfway through, McEwan checked his watch and said that he had to be elsewhere. Then Kaye received a text.

‘Urgent appointment with the wife and a bottle of wine,’ he explained, patting Fox’s shoulder. ‘Let me know how it turns out, eh?’

For the next five minutes, Fox could sense Naysmith fidgeting. It was gone five anyway, so he told his young colleague to bugger off.

‘You sure?’

Fox gestured towards the door, and soon he was alone in the office, thinking that maybe he should have praised Naysmith for his work behind the camera. Both picture and sound were sharp. There was a notepad on Fox’s lap, but it was blank apart from spirals, stars and other assorted doodles. He thought back to something Scholes had said, about the Complaints wanting to drag everyone else down with Paul Carter. Carter was history. What reason was there to suppose Scholes and the others would keep breaking the rules? Of course they’d look out for each other, stick up for each other, but maybe a lesson had been learned. Fox knew he could put the investigation into cruise control, could ask the questions, log the responses and come to no great conclusions. That might be the outcome anyway. So what was the point of busting a gut? This, he felt, was the subtext of the whole day, the thing Tony Kaye had been bursting to say. The three officers had been named and shamed in court. Now they were the subject of an internal inquiry. Did all that not comprise punishment enough?

In the Pancake Place, Kaye had mentioned Colin Balfour. The Complaints had put together just about enough of a case to see him drummed out of the force, but they’d stopped short of implicating two or three other officers who had attempted a cover-up. Those officers were still working; never a hint of trouble.

No complaints, as the saying went.

Fox used the remote to switch off the recording. All it proved was that they were doing what was expected of them. He very much doubted the bosses at Fife Constabulary HQ required further bad news; they just wanted to be able to say that the judge's comments had not been ignored. Scholes, Haldane and Michaelson needed only to go on denying everything. And that meant Tony Kaye was right. It was the other CID officers they should be talking to – if they wanted to be thorough. And what about Carter's uncle? Shouldn't they also get his side of the story? Fox was intrigued about the man's motive. His evidence in court had been brief but effective. The way he told it, his nephew had paid him a visit one afternoon after a few drinks. He'd been garrulous, talking about the ways in which policing had changed since his uncle's day. Not so many corners could be cut, and there were fewer fringe benefits.

But there's one perk I get that maybe you and my dad never did ...

Fox was reminded that he hadn't spoken to his own father in a couple of days. His sister and he took it in turns to visit. She was probably at the care home right now. The staff liked you to avoid mealtimes, and by mid-evening a lot of the 'clients' (as staff insisted on calling them) were being readied for bed. He walked over to the windows and stared out at the darkening city. Was Edinburgh ten times the size of Kirkcaldy? Bigger, surely. Back at his desk, he switched on his computer and sat down to do a search.

Just under an hour later, he was in his car and heading for his home in Oxfangs. There was a supermarket almost on his doorstep, and he stopped long enough to grab a microwave curry and a bottle of Appletiser, plus the evening paper. The story on the front page concerned a drug dealer who had just been found guilty and sent to jail. Fox knew the detective who had led the inquiry – he'd been the subject of a Complaints investigation two years back. Now he was smiling for the cameras, job done.

How come you hate cops so much? The question Scholes had asked. Time was, CID could cut corners and be sure of getting away with it. Fox's task was to stop them doing that. Not for ever and a day – in a year or two he would be back in CID himself, rubbing shoulders with those he had scrutinised; trying to put drug dealers behind bars without bending the rules, fearful of the

Complaints and coming to despise them. He had begun to wonder if he could do that – work with officers who knew his past; work what everyone regarded as ‘proper’ cases ...

He stuffed the newspaper into the bottom of his basket, covered by his other purchases.

The bungalow was in darkness. He’d thought of buying one of those timers that brought a light on at dusk, but knew this was no real deterrent to housebreakers. He had little enough worth stealing: TV and computer, after which they’d be looking around in vain. A couple of homes near him had been broken into in the past month. He’d even had a police constable on his doorstep, asking if he’d seen or heard anything. Fox hadn’t bothered identifying himself as a fellow officer. He’d just shaken his head and the constable had nodded and headed elsewhere.

Going through the motions.

Six minutes, the curry took. Fox found a news channel on the TV and turned the sound up. The world seemed to be filled with war, famine and natural disasters. An earthquake here, a tornado there. A climate-change expert was being interviewed. He was warning that viewers needed to get used to these phenomena, to floods and droughts and heatwaves. The interviewer managed somehow to hand back to the studio with a smile. Maybe once he was off air, he would start running around pulling out clumps of his hair and screaming, but Fox doubted it. He pressed the interactive button on the remote and scanned the Scottish headlines. There was nothing new on the explosion outside Lockerbie; the Alert Status at Fettes had been MODERATE, same as at Kirkcaldy. Lockerbie: as if that benighted spot hadn’t seen enough in its history ... Fox flipped to a sports channel and watched the darts as he ate the remainder of his meal.

He was just finishing when his phone started ringing. It was his sister Jude.

‘What’s up?’ he asked her. They took it in turns to call. It was his turn, not hers.

‘I’ve just been to see Dad.’ He heard her sniff back a tear.

‘Is he okay?’

‘He keeps forgetting things.’

‘I know.’

‘One of the carers told me he didn’t make it to the toilet in time this morning. They’ve put him in a *pad*.’

Fox closed his eyes.

‘And sometimes he forgets my name or what year it is.’
‘He has good days too, Jude.’
‘How would *you* know? Just because you pick up the bills doesn’t mean you can walk away!’
‘Who’s walking away?’
‘I never see you there.’
‘You know that’s not true. I visit when I can.’
‘Not nearly enough.’
‘We can’t all lead lives of leisure, Jude.’
‘You think I’m not looking for a job?’
Fox squeezed his eyes shut again: *walked into that one, Malc.*
‘That’s not what I meant.’
‘It’s *exactly* what you meant!’
‘Let’s not get into this, eh?’
There was silence on the line for a few moments. Jude sighed and began speaking again. ‘I took him a box of photographs today. Thought maybe the pair of us could go through them. But they just seemed to upset him. He kept saying, “They’re all dead. How can everyone be dead?”’
‘I’ll go see him, Jude. Don’t worry about it. Maybe the thing to do is phone ahead, and if the staff don’t think it’s worth a visit that day—’
‘That’s not what I’m saying!’ Her voice rose again. ‘You think I *mind* visiting him? He’s our *dad*.’
‘I know that. I was just ...’ He paused, then asked the question he felt was expected of him. ‘Do you want me to come over?’
‘It’s not me you need to go see.’
‘You’re right.’
‘So you’ll do it?’
‘Of course.’
‘Even though you’re busy?’
‘Soon as I’m off the phone,’ Fox assured her.
‘And you’ll get back to me? Tell me what you think?’
‘I’m sure he’s fine, Jude.’
‘You *want* him to be – that way he’s not on your conscience.’
‘I’m putting the phone down now, Jude. I’m putting the phone down and heading out to see Dad ...’

4

The staff of Lauder Lodge, however, had other ideas.

It was past nine when Fox got there. He could hear a TV blaring in the lounge. Lots of people coming and going – looked like a shift changeover.

‘Your father’s in bed,’ Fox was told. ‘He’ll be asleep.’

‘Then I won’t wake him. I just want to see him for a minute.’

‘We try not to disturb clients once they’re in bed.’

‘Didn’t he used to stay up for the ten o’clock news?’

‘That was then.’

‘Is he on any new medication? Anything I don’t know about?’

The woman took a moment to weigh up whether an accusation was being made, then gave a resigned sigh. ‘Just a minute, you say?’ Fox nodded, and she nodded back. Anything for a quiet life ...

Mitch Fox’s room was in a new annexe to the side of the original Victorian property. Fox walked past a room that had, until a couple of months back, been home to Mrs Sanderson. Mrs Sanderson and Fox’s father had become firm friends during their time in Lauder Lodge. Fox had helped Mitch attend her funeral, no more than a dozen people in the crematorium chapel. No one had come from her family, because no family had been traced. There was a new name next to the door of her old room: D. Nesbitt. Fox got the feeling that if he peeled away that sticker, there’d be another underneath bearing Mrs Sanderson’s name, and maybe another beneath that.

He didn’t bother knocking on his father’s door, just turned the handle and crept in. The curtains were closed and the light was off, but there was a good amount of illumination from the street

lamp outside. Fox could make out his father's form under the duvet. He had almost reached the bedside chair when a dry voice asked what time it was.

'Twenty past,' Fox told his father.

'Twenty past what?'

'Nine.'

'So what brings you here, then?' Mitch Fox turned on the lamp and started to sit up. His son moved forward to help him. 'Has something happened?'

'Jude was a bit worried.' Fox saw that the shoebox full of old family photos was on the chair. He lifted it and sat down, resting it on his knees. His father's hair, wispy, almost like a baby's, had a yellowish tinge. His face was thinner than ever, the skin resembling parchment. But the eyes seemed clear and untroubled.

'We both know your sister likes her little dramas. What's she been telling you?'

'Just that your memory's not what it was.'

'Whose is?' Mitch nodded towards the shoebox. 'Because I couldn't tell her the exact spot where some photo was taken fifty-odd years ago?'

Fox opened the lid of the box and lifted out a handful of snaps. Some had writing on the back: names, dates, places. But there were question marks, too. Lots of question marks ... and something that looked like a tear stain. Fox rubbed a finger across it, then turned the photo over. His mother dandled a child on either knee. She was seated on the edge of a rockery.

'This one only goes back thirty years,' Fox said, holding the photo up for his father to see. Mitch peered at it.

'Blackpool maybe,' he said. 'You and Jude ...'

'And Mum.'

Mitch Fox nodded slowly. 'Any water there?' he asked. Fox looked, but there was no jug on the bedside cabinet. 'Get me some, will you?'

Fox went into the adjoining bathroom. The jug was there, along with a plastic tumbler. He reckoned the staff didn't want Mitchell Fox guzzling water at night, not if it meant trouble in the morning. The pack of incontinence pads sat in full view next to the sink. Fox filled jug and tumbler both and took them through.

'Good lad,' his father said. A few drops dribbled from his chin as he drank, but he needed no help placing the drained tumbler next to him by the bed. 'You'll tell Jude not to worry?'

'Sure.' Fox sat down again.

'And you'll manage to do it without falling out?'

'I'll try my best.'

'Takes two to make an argument.'

'You sure about that? I think Jude could have a pretty good go in an empty room.'

'Maybe so, but you don't always help.'

'Is this you and me arguing now?' Fox watched his father give a tired smile. 'Want me to go so you can get back to sleep?'

'I don't sleep. I just lie here, waiting.'

Fox knew what the answer to his next question would be, so he didn't ask it. Instead, he told his father that he'd just spent a fruitless day over in Fife.

'You used to love it there,' Mitch told him.

'Where?'

'Fife.'

'When was I ever in Fife?'

'My cousin Chris – we used to visit him.'

'Where did he live?'

'Burntisland. The beach, the outdoor pool, the links ...'

'How old was I?'

'Chris died young. Take a look, he should be in there somewhere.'

Fox realised that his father meant the shoebox. So they lifted out the contents on to the bed. Some of the photos were loose, others in packets along with their negatives. A mixture of colour and black-and-white, including some wedding photos. (Fox ignored the ones of him and Elaine – their marriage hadn't lasted long.) There were blurry snaps of holidays, Christmases, birthdays, works outings. Until eventually Mitch was handing a particular shot to him.

'That's Chris there. He's got Jude on his shoulders. Big, tall, strapping chap.'

'Would this be Burntisland then?' Fox studied the photograph. Jude's gap-toothed mouth was wide open. Hard to tell if it was laughter or terror at being so high off the ground. Chris was grinning for the camera. Fox tried to remember him, but failed.

'Might be his back garden,' Mitch Fox was saying.

'How did he die?'

'Motorbike, daft laddie. Look at them all.' Mitch waved a hand

across the strewn photographs. 'Dead and buried and mostly forgotten.'

'Some of us are still here, though,' Fox said. 'And that's the way I like it.'

Mitch patted the back of his son's hand.

'Did I really love it in Fife?'

'There was a park up near St Andrews. We went there one day. It had a train we all sat on. There might be a photo if we look hard enough. Lots of beaches, too – and a market in Kirkcaldy once a year ...'

'Kirkcaldy? That's where I've just been. How come I don't remember it?'

'You won a goldfish there once. Poor thing was dead inside a day.' Mitch fixed his son with a look. 'You'll put Jude's mind at rest?'

Fox nodded, and his father patted his hand again before lying back against the pillows. Fox sat with him for another hour and a half, looking at photographs. He switched the lamp off just before he left.