

THE ICONIC NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER

IAN RANKIN

& SIMON READE

A NEW PLAY

REBUS: A GAME CALLED MALICE

'Ian Rankin is a genius' Lee Child

Ian Rankin

The International Number One Bestseller

‘Rankin is a phenomenon’

Spectator

‘Britain’s No. 1 crime writer’

Mirror

‘Worthy of Agatha Christie at her best’

Scotsman

‘Quite simply, crime writing of the highest order’

Express

‘Rebus is an outstanding creation’

Sunday Telegraph

‘Rankin is a master storyteller’

Guardian

‘Ian Rankin is a genius’

Lee Child

‘Rebus is one of fiction’s greatest creations’

Marian Keyes

IAN RANKIN
& SIMON READE
REBUS:
A GAME CALLED MALICE

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS



ORION

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CHARACTERS

John Rebus Early-to-mid 60s. A retired police detective. Dogged, socially awkward.

Stephanie Jeffries A lawyer in her late 40s/early 50s. Refined and self-confident. She has invited Rebus to be her 'plus one' tonight.

Harriet Godwin Around the same vintage as Stephanie. She comes from old money. Apparently diffident but with a core of steel. She is hosting tonight's dinner party.

Paul Godwin Harriet's husband – her second. He is around her age, maybe a year or two younger or older. He, too, comes from money, though probably not 'old' money. His parents would have been professional people, sending their son to the right schools where advancement could be assured. He is in finance of some nebulous kind.

Jack Fleming In his mid-to-late-fifties. He has worked his way up from unpromising roots, by dint of cunning, venality and muscle. He is stocky, still pugnacious, handsome in a chiselled way. He owns nightclubs and at least one casino. A sharp dresser; a ladies' man.

Candida Jones Young (late 20s?), glamorous and prone to show off her body in somewhat skimpy clothing. She describes herself as an 'influencer' and seems to live most of her life online. But she was also educated privately and possesses shrewdness and intellect.

Act One

We open in the drawing room of a palatial Georgian-era house in Edinburgh's wealthy New Town. A meal has just finished. Some detritus remains but not much – maybe a bowl of fruit. The table however boasts an array of glasses and bottles: Champagne, red wine and white, a carafe of water. Probably port and sherry too, with whisky or brandy to come.

The characters are seated around the table – except for REBUS who prowls the room as if taking inventory. CANDIDA has her face in her phone screen, merrily texting away, maybe primping and taking the occasional pouting selfie. The room has two doors, one at either end. The walls are covered with works of art showing Parisian boulevards, white beaches/blue seas, still lifes of flowers in vases. These are of the Scottish colourist school (S. J. Peploe is a good comparison). There is also a large bookcase which will be perused by REBUS, a sofa or chaise longue, and an occasional table on which sits a floral display, still in its elaborate wrapping from the florist's.

The seated characters – all except HARRIET (and CANDIDA) – are poring over their copies of a dossier, handed out by HARRIET as part of a game she has devised. (HARRIET is looking pleased with herself. Her game has captured her guests' imaginations.) The audience watch as they digest what they are reading.

HARRIET You all look baffled.

PAUL Give us a chance, Harriet!

JACK I need to focus.

CANDIDA Yes, you do.

PAUL Another drink, Jack?

CANDIDA Jack's had more than enough.

JACK Didn't realise I was dating my mother. *(he signals to PAUL for a refill. The others continue to study their dossiers)*

STEPHANIE *(eventually)* So Lord Manningham's body was found in the billiard-room, which sits adjacent to the orangery. Bludgeoned to death, presumably with the missing Chinese vase. How rare was this vase anyway, do we know? Those details can be important.

HARRIET There speaks the advocate. Getting to the heart of the matter.

PAUL Why not? *I* have, now and then.

JACK And look where that got you ...

PAUL looks uncomfortable. Sees HARRIET looking at him and shakes his head at her – there's nothing to be discussed.

STEPHANIE Maybe the gardener was in cahoots with the poacher. Lord Manningham was on to the poacher – only a matter of time before he rumbled the truth.

CANDIDA Maybe he was the one stealing from the wine cellar – vintage Bordeaux fetches top dollar.

JACK It's certainly pricy enough in the restaurants you like me to take you to, my sweet.

CANDIDA That's the mark-up.

JACK *(to PAUL)* You were in the wine trade for a bit, Paul, weren't you?

PAUL I dabbled.

HARRIET As in most things.

PAUL (*nettled*) What's that supposed to mean?

STEPHANIE (*before HARRIET can answer*) Would the gardener know how to sell stolen wine though?

PAUL (*his irritation towards his wife deflected*) What about the vicar? He'd already had a tour of the wine cellar so he knows what's there.

JACK The clergy are old soaks in my experience – all that blood of Christ.

CANDIDA When did you ever go to church?

JACK They come to the casino – in mufti, mind.

STEPHANIE Plus the church roof needs fixing and there isn't the money.

HARRIET (*picking up the empty cafetière*) I'll leave you to mull it over while I top this up. (*she exits*)

PAUL And speaking of topping up ... (*he*

gets up and moves around the table, checking who needs their glass replenishing)

JACK It's a cigarette I need. And some thinking time.

CANDIDA They'll kill you, you know.

JACK Something has to. *(he checks he has his cigarettes and lighter and leaves by the other door, the one leading to the front of the house rather than the kitchen)*

STEPHANIE Means, motive and opportunity – that's what they say, isn't it, John?

REBUS They used to in my day.

They turn and acknowledge REBUS's presence for the first time.

CANDIDA MMO, I like it.

PAUL What about the brother though? Doesn't he seem a bit too good to be true? And there's been no love lost between him and Lord Manningham since they argued about the witch woman he started dating.

CANDIDA Madame Violet? Vampire rather than witch.

PAUL Well, she got her teeth into the poor brother. *(the joke is weak, with a reaction to match)*

STEPHANIE The two of them together maybe? There's nothing to say we're dealing with a single killer.

PAUL Hedging your bets? Come on, Stephanie, you're the lawyer. Surely you've worked it out by now.

STEPHANIE And John's a detective but he's yet to share any startling insights.

REBUS Maybe I'm holding back. And I'm a *retired* detective, don't forget. Replaced by box-ticking and gender awareness courses.

PAUL Stephanie's right though, John. This must be meat and drink to you.

REBUS I've had plenty of both tonight, thanks to you and Harriet.

PAUL Well, the dinner party was Harriet's idea – and once she gets an idea ...

STEPHANIE I only ever see her at the gym. The number of times I've invited her to lunch or a cocktail ...

PAUL She's not much of a one for gadding about. And the house needs so much looking after.

CANDIDA (*to PAUL*) So which one of you invited Jack, Paul?

PAUL Harriet thought it would be nice to meet him in the flesh.

STEPHANIE And hiring a chef for the night?

PAUL (*puffed up*) Brendan was all my idea, I'm proud to say.

CANDIDA Brendan? *That* Brendan? From Jack's casino?

STEPHANIE (*to PAUL*) You chose well. Everything was just perfect.

CANDIDA (looking towards the door to the kitchen) Is it too late to say hello? Maybe when Harriet comes back.

REBUS (steering them back to the game) Thing is, in my day we didn't find ourselves investigating too many murders in country piles owned by Lord and Lady Whatsit.

CANDIDA I think you'll find Lady Manningham owns it outright – lived there before she remarried.

PAUL (exasperated) I honestly haven't a clue. Harriet came up with the whole thing. Threw herself into it.

CANDIDA Impressive. She should be able to monetise that. There's bound to be a market.

PAUL She reckoned it might be a bit of fun.

STEPHANIE She's maybe misjudged our sleuthing abilities though.

REBUS (at the bookcase) Not particularly a whodunit fan. I'm seeing Sherlock

Holmes and Edgar Allan Poe, and that's about it. Unless you're the reader, Paul?

PAUL I leave books and art to Harriet.

REBUS So where do your interests lie?

PAUL I watch TV, especially sport.

REBUS *(has been expecting more)* Is that it?

PAUL I work long hours most days.

REBUS I bet you do. Investments, you said? Property? Adding more steel and glass to the poor old Edinburgh skyline?

PAUL Whatever brings in an honest bawbee, John.

REBUS Looks to me like honesty pays.

PAUL Mostly, I'm what's called an angel. I invest in start-ups in the hope of a return at some point further down the line.

REBUS You're a gambler then?

PAUL (*raw nerve touched*) It's only gambling if you don't know what you're doing. (*quoting*) 'Speculate to accumulate'.

CANDIDA (*to PAUL*) Isn't that how you and Jack met? One night at the casino? Before my time, of course.

PAUL You make me sound ancient.

STEPHANIE Compared to Candida, most of us are. (*bringing them back to the game again*) The vicar is a large man, isn't he? From his description, I mean. And the footprints outside the orangery are a size 10. But then the gardener isn't exactly petite.

PAUL Do the footprints even belong to the killer? What sized feet did Lord Manningham have?

REBUS Probably the same in death as in life.

STEPHANIE You need to enter the spirit of the game, John.

PAUL (*raising whisky bottle*) Unless you'd rather opt for a different kind of spirit?

STEPHANIE The tiny details can be the most important.

REBUS Though they can make you miss the bigger picture. (*he has turned his attention to the art on the walls*) These are nice.

PAUL Nice? They're the crème de la crème.

REBUS Worth a bit then? (*REBUS goes to touch one of the frames*)

PAUL No touching – most of them have alarms fitted.

STEPHANIE Harriet's very proud of her Scottish Colourists. Am I right in saying it's the finest collection still in private hands, Paul?

PAUL That's what Harriet always says.

CANDIDA Motive's what we should be looking for, isn't it? Could they have had

financial worries? The problem with old money is that there seldom seems to *be* any – it's all tied up in land and the constant repairs of those big draughty houses. My parents were old money, taught me a lesson – give me new money any day of the week.

REBUS Was that what attracted you to Jack?

CANDIDA (*looking offended*) What makes you think it wasn't love at first sight? (*she sees the look on his face*) Only teasing – Jack's wallet was certainly no deterrent.

STEPHANIE (*reading her dossier*) You might be on to something, Candida. The bank manager had visited Lord Manningham first thing that morning – meaning it was urgent.

CANDIDA Jack's the only person I know who still uses a bank – with a proper office, I mean. Face to face meetings over a whisky. He says they're less likely to lie to him when he can stare them in the eye. (*wistful*) I like being around people who have money.

REBUS (*patting his pockets*) Then maybe I should apologise.

PAUL Don't tell me you didn't get a decent pension from the police?

REBUS Depends what you mean by decent.

PAUL Thirty years' service, you said. Gold watch and all that.

REBUS And now my time is my own.

CANDIDA If you'd been a bent cop, you wouldn't have to worry about money.

REBUS *(slyly)* And what would you know about bent cops, Candida?

CANDIDA *(realising she may have said the wrong thing; drawing the word out)*
Nothing.

REBUS Jack told you a few things, has he? Or maybe he just doesn't realise you're listening in on his business while apparently busy with your phone?

STEPHANIE *(stepping into what is becoming an awkward conversation)* You do miss the job, John. No use denying it. If they

wanted you back, you'd jump at the chance.

REBUS Jumping's not really in my repertoire.

CANDIDA Health is important though – health and lifestyle – (*casting an eye over REBUS's physique*) especially for men of your age.

REBUS I grew up in a time before health and lifestyle. (*he is next to the bouquet of flowers now, fingers playing over the elaborate wrapping*)

CANDIDA Yes, I can believe that.

HARRIET enters with the refilled cafetière. Momentarily taken aback as she sets eyes on REBUS.

HARRIET I've been so flustered today I've not had the chance to unwrap them.

STEPHANIE A secret admirer, Harriet?

HARRIET I just thought they'd add something to the room.

PAUL (*a hint of jealousy*) But then Brendan

arrived and your focus was elsewhere. We were discussing motive. I have to say, I'm beginning to question yours. (*he sees she looks anxious*) What's the matter? Is something wrong?

HARRIET I looked for Brendan in the kitchen but there's no sign of him. He can't have gone, he promised to tidy up.

PAUL Maybe you frightened him off. You were practically salivating when you described him in his whites. All those little visits to the kitchen during the meal ...

HARRIET (*making an effort to ignore this*)
What were you saying about motive?

PAUL This little game of charades of yours.

CANDIDA Is that what it is? I've been trying to describe it to my followers. (*she sees REBUS's quizzical look*) On Instagram.

STEPHANIE Candida did explain it to you, John. She's an Instagram influencer.

CANDIDA Not just Instagram – all the available media platforms.

REBUS You mean there's more than one?

STEPHANIE (*to CANDIDA*) I doubt you'll find any evidence of John on Instagram or Facebook, or anywhere else for that matter.

CANDIDA Oh my God.

REBUS Instagram sounds to me like a dealer who makes speedy deliveries. We actually had a guy back in the day, arrested him half a dozen times. Called himself Sellagram Tam ...

CANDIDA (*having checked her phone*) No Twitter, no Snapchat – you're not anywhere!

REBUS Except right here, grounded in what I like to think of as reality. (*aside to himself*) Unlike some ...

CANDIDA I could set you up on YouTube, you'd be a genuine curiosity. I'm serious – maybe I'll write a blog post. You're like a unicorn.

REBUS Pretty much how I felt towards the end of CID, the last of a very old breed.

PAUL *(to HARRIET, who is pouring coffee for those who want it)* Any chance you can give us a few extra clues, darling? Your game has got us well and truly stumped.

HARRIET Maybe later.

REBUS I never said I was stumped.

STEPHANIE Yes, you've got that look. I remember it well from your days on the force ...

The action freezes and lighting changes, maybe a sound effect to signal what is about to occur. REBUS walks through the room, pausing at each character as he addresses the audience.

REBUS 'Read the room' – it's a phrase that gets bandied about these days. Someone, usually a politician, says the wrong thing – strikes the wrong chord – and it's because they've failed to read the room. The room being the court of public opinion. But when you're a detective, you DO read the room, quite literally. That's what Stephanie meant. The living-room, the office, the alleyway. You study it and you begin to notice things, certain subtle truths, staring you in the face. Just look at this place with

its art and books and fancy flowers. It's telling a story, as are its current inhabitants, of course, all playing a game of some kind, maybe even games plural. Stephanie brought me here tonight as part of a game, and I came because ... well, I used to think there was a spark there. Maybe, old fool that I am, I still do. And our hosts, so wealthy that their idea of a takeaway is to buy a chef and install him in front of an Aga. The air crackles between them when they speak ... Then there's Candida – just because she seems all surface doesn't mean she's not playing a game of her own. As for Jack Fleming, well, he's the reason I agreed to come, and I'm probably the reason why he'd rather be out on the doorstep, cold as the night is. Jack's done well for himself by breaking any number of laws and trampling those who dare to get in his way. He's well due a reckoning ...

The action resumes, JACK entering, shaking the chill night air from him – or making show of doing so.

JACK Beautiful sky, crisp and clear. So are the charades done and dusted?

HARRIET You didn't see Brendan, did you?

JACK Quiet as the grave out there. I've never liked that about the New Town – you come here at night and it's like everyone's hiding. Done a runner, has

he? Paid in full upfront? (*HARRIET nods*)
Mug's game. (*back to the game*) So was
it the boozy butler?

PAUL We were wondering if the wine was
maybe purloined rather than quaffed.

JACK (*pointedly to PAUL, who is raising a
glass to his lips*) It's much the same
thing to some people – people who'd
rather others paid their tab. (*the meaning
is implicit: PAUL has run up a sizeable
tab at JACK's casino*)

STEPHANIE (*again, trying to steer the
conversation away from conflict*) I have
to say, Harriet, the heroine of your story
could be based on you.

HARRIET What makes you say that?

STEPHANIE Well, she's sporty, plays tennis and
hockey. You once told me you played
hockey at school. And you're always
promising me we'll play tennis one day
...

REBUS But then that would make the victim
Paul.

CANDIDA Well that can't be right. (*she glances at the notes*) Drinking heavily and spending too much time at the village pub, where he's chummy with the rough-edged landlord. (*she breaks off, meaningful look towards JACK*) Oh, I see what you mean.

JACK What makes you think I'm not the handsome brother who now stands to inherit?

CANDIDA But then that would make me the vampire woman!

They look towards HARRIET.

HARRIET (*nervous laugh*) It's just a game.

CANDIDA M'lady's closest friend is an antique dealer – didn't you say you collect antiques, Stephanie?

REBUS Does that make me an antique?

CANDIDA It makes you the detective, John. Except there is no detective.

REBUS Which makes the scenario slightly less than plausible – apologies, Harriet. But in the real world the professionals

immediately take over. Scene of Crime Team, Major Incident Squad, fingerprints and forensics, evidence-gathering and interviews.

CANDIDA (*still looking at her phone*) So, Mr Expert, help put us out of our misery.

REBUS The missing vase is the key – I think we can agree on that. But is it a fortuitous murder weapon, or the reason the murder happened in the first place? How valuable was it and was it insured?

STEPHANIE Attempted insurance fraud? The last recourse of those in dire financial straits ...

CANDIDA (*looking up from her phone*) And strictly speaking, Jack, it's not charades – that's where you mime something and your team has to guess what it is.

JACK (*nodding*) Used to be on the telly. Una Stubbs and Lionel Blair.

CANDIDA I loved Una Stubbs. She was in Sherlock.

JACK She was. And Lionel was Tony

Blair's dad. (*CANDIDA narrows her eyes; she knows he is lying/teasing*) Not that you'd know who Blair was either.

CANDIDA Labour Prime Minister. Fought an illegal war in Iraq. Born here in Edinburgh and schooled at Fettes College.

JACK How do you know all that? No, don't tell me – you follow him on Instagram?

CANDIDA John has no presence, can you believe that?

JACK I can believe most things of people like John. (*to REBUS*) But good on you – if it wasn't for the casino I'd steer clear, too, but it pays to advertise, and I'm the public face so I suppose I'm obliged.

HARRIET How is your casino doing, Jack? I've given up trying to get Paul to take me.

JACK (*to PAUL*) You need to stop hiding Harriet away, Paul. We've a nice restaurant you could treat her to, as you well know. Or isn't it refined enough for your good lady? New chef's bedded in, if that's what's worrying you. Food is back to where it was before Brendan

slung his hook. *(to HARRIET)* It's a classy place, Harriet, trust me, as befits an owner at the top of his game. Anyway, you'd be welcome any time. You might even change Paul's luck.

An awkward moment

HARRIET *(to PAUL; a hint of steel)* I thought you told me you tended to win?

JACK *(too heartily, after an awkward pause)* He does – that's what I mean! He'll break the house one of these days – if I don't break his fingers first. *(he laughs, PAUL attempting to join in. Slight discomfort in the room at the mention of violence. CANDIDA gives a look that says PAUL's gambling prowess is far from the truth. HARRIET seems to suspect this, too, now)*

PAUL *(thinking he's off the hook)* Lady Luck, Jack – always put your trust in her.

STEPHANIE The victim liked gambling, too. *(she holds up her dossier)* After-hours card games at the pub, rolling home late. More like you all the time, Paul.

PAUL *(brushes this off with a fake laugh)* Ready for a malt or maybe a brandy,

Jack? How about everyone else? Time for a top-up? *(he checks but the various bottles are mostly empty)* Some host I make – back in two ticks. *(he leaves by the door to the kitchen)*

REBUS So your casino is bucking the trend, Jack?

JACK What trend?

REBUS I thought betting was all virtual these days. I sometimes wake up with the TV still on and every advert's for online gambling.

JACK I make enough to get by. Besides, a physical casino is more of a lifestyle choice.

REBUS That word again.

JACK You don't just go there to have a flutter. It's got a bit of razzamatazz, a bit of glamour. It's theatre and music and food and drink.

REBUS Which is fine until the poor punter goes home and finds himself broke.

JACK Come and see for yourself some night. Pile of chips on the house.

REBUS Brown sauce or vinegar?

STEPHANIE How did you get into gambling, Jack? Casinos, I mean.

JACK I thought I told you?

STEPHANIE *(shifting slightly – he is referring to pillow talk, albeit from long back, but something she'd rather was kept hidden from the others)* Maybe I've forgotten.

JACK I started off with one bookmaker's, just one. Ended up making a name for myself, expanding. A casino seemed the logical next step. Axminster carpets, flock wallpaper, proper champagne. Pure class.

REBUS I always reckon you can't buy class off-the-peg.

JACK Which is why my suits are tailor-made. I can give you his name if you like?

STEPHANIE (*intake of breath; it's all getting a bit tense*) It's been a fabulous evening, Harriet. I'm so glad you invited me to see how you live. And now I'll have to put in a bit more effort at the gym to work this off. (*she pats her stomach*)

HARRIET I do love the gym. Paul's always having a go at me for spending more time there than here. Nonsense of course ...

STEPHANIE And it's not as if *he* doesn't gallivant.

CANDIDA I use a TikTok exercise regime. Three minutes a day to wellness. (*to REBUS*) It's another social platform, very useful for influencers.

JACK Christ, don't get her started on all that stuff ...

CANDIDA (*ignoring him*) First you have to lead the sort of life your followers don't. Upmarket; sophisticated; just about attainable if they really really try. You give them lots of little glimpses ...

JACK Hence the twenty thousand photos on her phone.

CANDIDA (*ignoring him again, showing her phone screen around the table*) For example, here I am showing my followers each of tonight's courses. See all those little hearts? Seven hundred and ten for the scallop starter. (*she checks the screen again*) Twelve ... fifteen ... twenty-five – still climbing.

JACK Don't ask me how, but she makes decent money from it.

CANDIDA It's not rocket science. Once you're a name, companies come to you to help them get noticed online. They'll comp you clothes and cosmetics, travel and holidays – you name it.

REBUS So basically you're in advertising?

CANDIDA Influencing, John.

REBUS It's a different world.

CANDIDA (*to HARRIET*) Is it OK to mention to my followers that you used a chef, or shall I say it was all home-cooked?

JACK

(to CANDIDA) I told you on the way here, a bit of discretion would make a nice change.

CANDIDA I'm not naming names or anything. I've not even posted a picture of the house.

JACK So all those loo breaks during the meal, you weren't snapping photos of the hallways and staircase?

CANDIDA Swear to God.

JACK (coldly) Or nipping to the kitchen to catch up with Brendan?

CANDIDA If I'd known he was there I might have.

HARRIET (attempting to defuse the situation) I can actually cook, I rather enjoy it, but Paul argued that it would lead to me spending all day in the kitchen, so he suggested Brendan. Actually, a free advert might be just what Brendan needs. He's not long set up on his own, according to Paul.

JACK I told him he was taking a big risk

leaving the casino. It was Paul who told him cooking for private clients was a gold mine. Mind you, I'd probably have ended up firing him anyway – a record of 'inappropriate conduct'. *(he is staring at CANDIDA)*

CANDIDA *(her dander up)* One drunken snog, Jack. One. And months back at that. Can't a girl enjoy herself?

REBUS *(enjoying the growing animosity between CANDIDA and JACK)* This Brendan sounds an interesting character.

HARRIET Well, he was the perfect gentleman with me. *(to CANDIDA)* His company is called Brendan's Fare. F-a-r-e. I'm sure he'd appreciate any help. *(she shares a look with JACK – she has taken sides in this 'war', CANDIDA's side to be precise. CANDIDA types the name into her phone)*

REBUS If you're looking for a replacement chef, Jack, I'm at a bit of a loose end. I used to cook once upon a time. Might be why my wife left me – only so many fish fingers a woman can take ...

They fall silent, awkward at REBUS's glib confession. PAUL returns with a couple of bottles and starts replenishing glasses.

PAUL Neither hide nor hair of Brendan.

PAUL offers wine to HARRIET. She places a hand over her glass, but he removes it.

PAUL Let your hair down for once, Har. You might even enjoy it.

STEPHANIE *(defending her friend)* I think Harriet's enjoying herself fine, Paul.

HARRIET *(attempting levity)* It's OK, Stephanie. Paul's right, it's not as if I have to drive home after.

PAUL That's my girl. *(he fills her glass and moves on to CANDIDA)*

JACK *(to PAUL)* We were just discussing Brendan actually. And how you stole him away from me. *(flustered, PAUL spills a little wine)*

CANDIDA Clumsy.

JACK I seem to think you even bankrolled him, Paul. Would that be right? And now here you are rubbing my face in it.

PAUL rubs at the spilt wine with a serviette.

PAUL He was never going to be happy

preparing serving after serving of steak and chips, Jack.

CANDIDA (*taking the bottle from PAUL and pouring for herself*) Hand/eye coordination, Paul. You should take up a sport.

PAUL I did think of joining a gym, not that long back actually.

REBUS Keeping an eye on Harriet? It seems to be the only time she's let out on her own.

STEPHANIE gives REBUS an admonishing look. He is being as subtle as a doorpost.

PAUL (*awkwardly*) Harriet's free to live her own life.

STEPHANIE I'm glad to hear it. The days of chaining us to the stove or duster are long gone.

CANDIDA I can't remember the last time I cooked anything.

REBUS Reckon I could become an influencer with my fish fingers, Candida?

CANDIDA *(taking him seriously)* On TikTok maybe. If you did something amusing with them.

JACK *(surface levity but definitely having a dig at REBUS)* Maybe get your wife to re-enact leaving you while you dish them up. *(this earns him a dark look from REBUS)*

PAUL has moved on to STEPHANIE with the wine.

STEPHANIE I won't, thanks. *(she has lifted cigarettes from her bag)* Comfort break.

REBUS I didn't know you still smoke?

STEPHANIE I'm a woman of mystery.

JACK Good idea – mind if I join you?

STEPHANIE I do mind actually. Need to check my messages. *(she holds up her phone)* Privacy required.

JACK Some juicy trial in the offing? I've not seen any smoke signals.

STEPHANIE That's good – means the system is still just about functional. *(she exits through the door leading to the front of the house)*

JACK *(to REBUS)* Know something we don't, John?

REBUS About what?

JACK Her latest case.

REBUS She's a woman of mystery, didn't you hear? – these days at least, eh, Jack?

JACK *(choosing to ignore the question)*
You and her been going out long?

REBUS We're not going out at all.

JACK But you used to?

REBUS Did we? Not really. Cops and lawyers just get thrown together sometimes, same as lawyers and their clients. Anyway, these days I'm on hand if she needs a plus one. That's all there is to it.

JACK Friends without benefits, eh? (*to HARRIET*) Did you know we'd have a copper in our midst, Harriet? Is that where the after-dinner entertainment comes in?

REBUS Is that what I am?

JACK Don't flatter yourself – I meant the game.

HARRIET I'd no idea John was a detective until he introduced himself – Stephanie didn't divulge who she was bringing. I suppose it has added a certain ... dimension. I was going to have us dress up as various characters. Role-playing. But I thought it might be too much like hard work.

JACK I can just see Candida in a little maid's outfit.

CANDIDA Dream on, buster. I'd rather be the widow who stands to inherit.

REBUS Willing to kill for it?

HARRIET That's rather a leading question, Inspector.

CANDIDA How much are we talking about?

REBUS *(to HARRIET)* How much are we talking about, Harriet?

HARRIET I hadn't given it any thought. There'd be no inheritance tax, so it's not as though Lady Manningham would have to sell the manor house.

JACK Happy marriage, was it? I notice they don't have kids. You don't either, do you?

HARRIET *(sharing an awkward look with PAUL)*
No, well ...

PAUL Never really saw the point. They grind you down, don't they? *(to REBUS, trying to change the subject)* You'll have seen a lot of changes, John? No more *Dixon of Dock Green* – now it's all staring at computer screens.

REBUS That's true.

PAUL Cyber crime and online stalking ...

REBUS Yet when it comes down to it, human nature hasn't changed. Most crimes still boil down to the seven deadly sins. I'm sure Harriet's whodunit is no different.

HARRIET Pride, lust, greed ... *(she falters)*

JACK Sloth?

PAUL Envy's one, isn't it?

HARRIET *(watching PAUL pop a grape into his mouth)* Gluttony ...

CANDIDA That's five.

REBUS Six actually.

HARRIET What are we forgetting? Pride, lust, greed ...

REBUS Wrath. The red mist killers often say descends on them.

CANDIDA *(suddenly interested)* How many killers have you met?

REBUS Probably more than I think. Maybe the same goes for you. (*he means JACK*)
One more thing ...

JACK Yes, Detective Columbo?

Smiles and chuckles around the room; fingers wagged at REBUS as if to say 'he got you there'.

REBUS There are always some who think they'll get away with it. They think they're too smart to ever be caught, or too important to face prosecution even if they are.

HARRIET But all these new technologies, don't they make it much more difficult to escape justice? Crimes present *and* past?

REBUS They do, which is why I'm all for them. A case might go unsolved for years or even decades until something turns up that brings everything into focus. (*he is referring to JACK, trying to unsettle him*)

PAUL Can't say I'm too happy about all the surveillance these days – your phone and computer spying on you ...

CANDIDA It's just a case of tweaking your preferences. Never allow 'all cookies'. I

mean, unless they're the ones *I'm* offering. My brand partners are hand-picked. Oh, and always cover the camera on your computer with a piece of tape – a sticking plaster does the job.

REBUS

(after they've all taken a moment to digest this) All the surveillance in the world can't compete with a copper's nose – a copper like our friend Columbo. Some of the guys I learned from, they could read a criminal as if he were a book open at the index. The way a suspect acted, their little facial tics and tells, the sweat forming on the brow, a slight tremor entering the voice. *(he is now focussing on JACK, who is exhibiting none of these as yet)* I worked with a guy once who had the sharpest instincts I ever saw. Bill Carter, his name was. If Stephanie were here, she'd tell you.

JACK

Why bring up Bill Carter?

REBUS

Why not?

JACK

Because there's a bit of history there, as I suspect you know. *(to the room at large)* Bill Carter was an utter shite of a human being. Got it into his head that he was going to put me behind bars, even if he had to break every rule in the book.

CANDIDA *(innocently)* Is this to do with your wife?

JACK *(angrier)* No, it bloody isn't!
(composing himself, mindful of his surroundings) A man I barely knew, a Glasgow man, did a runner one day and Carter decided to point the finger at me – without a shred of evidence.

REBUS No hard evidence, certainly. But mud does have a way of sticking to you, always has done.

An uncomfortable silence. HARRIET stares at PAUL as if only now realising the sort of man her husband has been cosying up to.

JACK I repeat – no evidence. Then or now.

REBUS Just a copper's instinct.

HARRIET *(interested, but also trying to calm things)* But who was this man, Jack? The one who disappeared?

JACK He was called Ray Collins. Owned a string of gaming arcades on the west coast. Rumour was, he'd run up a mountain of debt and headed for sunnier climes.

REBUS It's hard to disappear though, isn't it? And not turn up again, I mean. The other rumour current at the time was that he'd been about to make a move into Edinburgh, open his own casino, right here on your patch, Jack – and bigger, classier than the competition.

JACK Not a grain of truth in it.

REBUS No truth in the story about those mountains of debt either. Plenty of money left to his estate. *(he turns to CANDIDA)* Why did you bring up Jack's wife?

CANDIDA Well, she died, didn't she?

JACK *(still irritated, but also now reflective)* Ten years ago.

HARRIET Such a tragedy, Jack.

JACK *(regaining a measure of composure)*
I'll never forgive myself.

HARRIET Just horrible.

PAUL Devastating.

JACK Aye, that's the word, Paul –
devastating. And it still is, all these years
later.

The room goes quiet for a moment, during which STEPHANIE re-enters.

STEPHANIE *(jokingly)* Did somebody die?

JACK flinches, leaps up and leaves the room by the same door.

What did I say?

CANDIDA He was just remembering his wife.

STEPHANIE Oh Christ. *(to JACK, offstage:)* I'm
sorry, Jack!

CANDIDA She drowned, didn't she?

STEPHANIE Swimming-pool of their villa. Too
much booze. Jack wasn't able to save
her.

REBUS I'm sure he found a consoling
shoulder. *(he means STEPHANIE, as she
well knows)*

CANDIDA Not mine. I was years away from
meeting him.

PAUL (to *REBUS*) Is all of that true? About that man Collins?

REBUS You're better asking Stephanie.
(*STEPHANIE looks surprised at being mentioned*)

PAUL (to *STEPHANIE*) Why's that?

STEPHANIE (recovering a measure of poise) I assume we're talking about Ray Collins?
(*PAUL and REBUS both nod*) There was a court case. I mean, Mr Collins's family thought he was owed money when he disappeared.

PAUL Owed by Jack?

STEPHANIE There was no proof, no paperwork. A gentlemen's agreement, they said.

HARRIET You seem to know an awful lot about it.

STEPHANIE I was on the team.

PAUL The legal team?

HARRIET No, the curling team – she’s a lawyer, Paul!

PAUL (*to STEPHANIE*) Prosecution or defence?

STEPHANIE Defence. I was defending Jack.

PAUL They sued Jack? Ray Collins’s family?

STEPHANIE No, there was nothing like enough evidence to bring a case. I was defending what happened next. An ... associate of Mr Collins was sent to Edinburgh – to Jack – with the intention of ... applying some pressure.

REBUS Mad Malky Chisholm.

PAUL He sounds nice. So where does the courtroom come in?

STEPHANIE Jack was accused of assaulting Mr Chisholm.

PAUL Ah.

HARRIET (all but clutching her pearls) And did he? Assault him?

STEPHANIE (with an advocate's discretion) Mr Chisholm was taken to A & E after falling down a flight of stairs.

REBUS A flight of stairs wearing steel-toed boots.

PAUL Bloody hell ...

STEPHANIE (annoyed by *REBUS*) I don't remember you being anywhere near that case, John.

REBUS shrugs.

HARRIET So Jack was charged with the assault?

STEPHANIE Chisholm wasn't talking and Jack denied any involvement. But a detective called Bill Carter pursued him.

CANDIDA Bill Carter. (to *REBUS*) That's who Jack and you were talking about.

REBUS nods. STEPHANIE has put the pieces together now.

STEPHANIE Jack was charged and taken to court – but we had an excellent team and the case had no merit.

REBUS Not proven.

STEPHANIE Bill Carter appeared to be conspiring against my client on a number of unproven fronts. The judge wasn't happy at having his time wasted by a witch-hunt.

HARRIET *(to PAUL)* Just as well you've not cleaned out his casino yet, Paul – doesn't sound the sort of man you want to get on the wrong side of.

PAUL *(defensively)* Jack's all right. More than that, he's a loyal friend, sticks by you. Anyone need a top-up? John, you've been nursing that red for a while – fancy changing up a gear to a fine malt?

REBUS Aye, why not.

PAUL And there's still cheese in the kitchen if anyone's hungry.

HARRIET Plus the grapes, if Paul's not guzzled

them all. Gluttony is the one sin we seem not to frown on these days. *(to STEPHANIE)* While you were out, John was telling us the seven deadly sins are still the main reason people go to the bad.

STEPHANIE Gluttony, envy, sloth ... *(she begins to struggle)*

CANDIDA *(quickfire; eyes still glued to her phone screen)* Pride, lust, greed and wrath. *(the others are surprised by her; she beams a brief smile in their direction – people have underestimated her in the past)*

STEPHANIE So which do we reckon was responsible for Lord Manningham's demise? And is the vase really as crucial to the puzzle as John thinks?

CANDIDA Wouldn't it break? I mean, if you hit someone with it hard enough to kill them?

REBUS You'd be surprised how little force a blunt object needs in order to crush someone's skull.

CANDIDA It's always a servant, isn't it? The

revenge of the lower orders on their entitled betters. Can't say I blame them. Doesn't do to scrutinise where a lot of inherited wealth comes from. Usually means grinding down more than a few innocent people. Hence all those statues coming under attack and buildings renamed.

She has not looked up from her phone so cannot see the fresh surprise on the faces of those around her. They are having their minds changed about her.

HARRIET Was social influencer your first career choice, Candida?

PAUL Rather than political activist.

CANDIDA I always wanted to run my own business. My parents were keen to help but lacked the wherewithal. Besides, I was determined to prove myself – sink or swim. When I went freelance I formed a limited company – decided not to bother going the offshore route – the tax savings have to be balanced against the amount of attention HMRC pays you. I suppose I could have stayed Schedule D self-employed but I took my accountant's advice. A few more fees to pay, being a company, but there are perks, too. *(she breaks off and holds up her phone)* Salmon main course has seven thousand views now. A few thumbs down from vegans though. Doesn't do to get on the wrong side of them ...

HARRIET We were talking about cyber-stalking earlier. Being so ... available ... online, do you ever have any problems?

CANDIDA *(blithely)* Dick pics, you mean?

HARRIET Do I?

CANDIDA I've had my share. Any woman on the 'net is going to get those.

HARRIET Good heavens.

STEPHANIE It's sadly true, Harriet. Middle-aged lawyers are not immune. Mostly they go to my office e-mail. If we bother to trace them it's usually ex-clients or friends of and a warning suffices.

CANDIDA But then you get upskirters, too. Nightclubs are notorious but it can happen anywhere – getting out of a taxi, standing on an escalator ...

REBUS and PAUL share a look, this is unknown territory to them.

HARRIET It really is another world.

CANDIDA You need to be careful at that gym you and Stephanie go to. Prime location for a bit of voyeurism.

HARRIET I doubt my leotard would find too many admirers.

CANDIDA You'd be surprised. Whenever I post a photo in a bikini or sportswear, the messages come flooding in, some sicker than others – and I don't mean sick in a good way.

REBUS Is there ever a good way to be sick?

STEPHANIE Youth speak, John. *(to CANDIDA)* You can report them, you know.

CANDIDA Oh, I do – sometimes. And I block and I block and I block. But they just open a new account, hide behind a fresh avatar, and I'm back to square one.

PAUL What does Jack say about it all?

CANDIDA Used to be, he'd have a meltdown. Want to smash them all in the face. So I stopped telling him – not good for his blood pressure.

HARRIET How did you two meet?

CANDIDA In Venice.

HARRIET How romantic.

CANDIDA He was on business and I was doing
a photo shoot.

HARRIET You were a model?

CANDIDA Sweet that you'd think that. But I did
work in fashion – executive assistant,
that sort of thing. The photo shoot was
all very *Death in Venice*.

HARRIET You know the film?

CANDIDA Of course – who doesn't?

PAUL What film? (*he looks to REBUS, who
just shrugs*)

CANDIDA Giudecca. Jack was staying at the
Cipriani.

HARRIET (*wistfully*) My first husband took me there on our honeymoon ...

PAUL (*raising his glass*) Callum, of blessed memory.

HARRIET I've not been back since.

CANDIDA The photographer was paying me a bit too much attention. This was as the shoot was finishing. You know what Italian men are like. Jack was at a nearby table and noticed. He marched towards us, holding a wine bottle by the neck. Didn't say anything, didn't need to. The look he gave was enough. (*she breaks off*) Would a wine bottle qualify as a blunt instrument? Maybe one of the ones missing from the cellar? (*she picks up her dossier. PAUL and HARRIET do the same. As they begin to read, muttering theories to each other, STEPHANIE signals for REBUS to join her away from the table. They will talk together in a slight undertone*)

STEPHANIE Is Jack the reason you agreed to come?

REBUS I seem to remember you wanted me here so I could give you my impression of the host and hostess.

STEPHANIE Maybe so, but your eyes lit up when I mentioned that Jack would be here, too.

REBUS Bill Carter went to his grave without getting the one result he craved.

STEPHANIE Jack's wife died in an accident. Malky Chisholm was a walking disaster area. End of.

REBUS Maybe.

STEPHANIE How about Harriet and Paul – or have you been too focussed on winding Jack up?

REBUS I'm on the case, Stephanie, fear not
...

PAUL (*noticing them*) Is this team-work? The forces of law and order solving the hideous crime behind our backs?

REBUS and STEPHANIE return to the table.

STEPHANIE We were just wondering what we might have missed.

REBUS Speak for yourself.

PAUL You think you know the answer, John?

REBUS Let's wait till Jack comes back. *(he picks up a dossier. To HARRIET:)* It's very well done. Have you ever been a writer?

HARRIET Goodness, no.

REBUS *(gesturing towards the art on the walls)* A painter maybe?

PAUL *(has been standing behind HARRIET; he grasps her shoulders, more tightly than she seems comfortable with)* My dear darling Harriet has never needed a paying job in her life.

HARRIET *(wriggling free)* The paintings in here are by the Famous Three – Corbie, Amberson and Drinnan. They were Callum's passion. He'd amassed a sizeable collection even before we married. This house was his parents' – they passed it on to us when they could no longer manage the stairs.

PAUL It all costs an arm and a leg to insure,

too.

REBUS Yes, you mentioned the alarms.

PAUL Frankly, give me cash over art any day. (*backtracking, sensing HARRIET'S displeasure*) Not that they're not lovely. Callum had a good eye. I mean ... (*gestures towards a beach scene*) That one of the south of France.

HARRIET (*pointedly*) Colonsay actually.

CANDIDA I get invited to openings sometimes. Video installations; performance art – I like a lot of it.

PAUL I'm betting Jack doesn't.

CANDIDA No, he's a philistine, much like you. Not that he's ever on the guest list. I think this is the first time we've ever been invited anywhere as a couple – so thank you, Harriet.

HARRIET (*a growing warmth between them*)
You're very welcome, Candida.

CANDIDA So what happened to him, your first

husband? If you don't mind me asking.

HARRIET A heart attack.

PAUL Burned the candle at both ends did Callum.

CANDIDA (*to PAUL*) You knew him?

PAUL One of my oldest and dearest friends. I was knocked for six when I heard. Dashed round here to offer Harriet my support and, well, things progressed from there.

STEPHANIE (*intervening to support HARRIET*) I wish we were doing your game justice, Harriet. You obviously put so much into it. Floorplans and sketches, all the plotting and the character biographies ...

HARRIET It was actually a lot of fun.

STEPHANIE The orangery though ...

HARRIET Yes?

STEPHANIE Well, it leads to the billiard room.

Rather than heading outside after the killing, could the culprit have moved further into the house?

CANDIDA The carpet's described as beige though – and no muddy footprints.

REBUS *(to CANDIDA)* Are you still happy with blunt-force trauma? It's the obvious answer, of course, but *(to STEPHANIE)* you've seen the same cases as me, Stephanie – autopsy might tell a different story. Say he'd been poisoned. Poisoned just before, I mean. Whoever bludgeoned him couldn't know that. Their blow knocked him out but it's the poison that killed him.

CANDIDA And Madame Violet would know all about poisons!

PAUL So the murder weapon we're looking for might not be the murder weapon?

REBUS One thing I've learned, take nothing and no one at face value. Healthy scepticism is like an antidote. Having said which, oftentimes the obvious conclusion turns out to be the right one.

STEPHANIE I get the feeling John is toying with

us. It's one of the many traits that make him hard to like.

REBUS Along with?

STEPHANIE Smugness for one thing. And holding others to a higher standard than you set yourself.

PAUL You're being cross-examined, John.

REBUS And I plead guilty as charged. Tell me, how long was it before you two married?

PAUL From cross-examination to interrogation!

HARRIET Six months. A short wooing.

PAUL (*defensively*) But it's not as if we started as strangers. We knew one another pretty well.

HARRIET I'm not sure back then I even knew who *I* was, never mind anyone else. (*she looks at PAUL, who stares back. The temperature in the room has dipped. PAUL pours himself another drink*)

PAUL (to *HARRIET*; *irritated*) This game of yours hasn't quite worked out, has it? Too tricky. What you should have had was something more straightforward – a bit of music or something.

CANDIDA Something to dance to! I love being on the dance floor, as long as it's not with Jack – the way he moves is embarrassing. I've got a video. (*she checks that the door is closed; JACK is not about to come in*) Take a look. (*she finds the video on her phone; REBUS takes the phone from her and looks at the screen*)

REBUS I see what you mean. Is this Jack's casino?

CANDIDA A club in Dubai. I got comped for the whole trip. Probably should have left Jack at home. As he gets older, the heat gets harder for him.

REBUS (*swiping the phone's screen*) Is this the same trip?

CANDIDA The hotel was six-star. I mean, beyond five. Rafts out in the water with sunbeds on them. Plus iPads so you can

order drinks. The waiters swim out with your order on an inflatable tray. The water was so blue and lovely, I couldn't stop posting photos.

The phone is passed to STEPHANIE, who shares what she can see with PAUL and HARRIET.

HARRIET He really doesn't suit those trunks, does he?

PAUL takes the phone.

PAUL Budgie-smugglers! I'm surprised he didn't make you delete these. They're not exactly flattering.

CANDIDA Which is why I'd never put them on social media. I mean, don't get me wrong, Jack looks OK when he's dressed.

PAUL *(studying one photo in particular)*
You do wear a bikini well, Candida, no one could say you didn't.

CANDIDA Yes, no one ever has.

JACK opens the door and enters tentatively. CANDIDA snatches her phone back.

PAUL We were about to send out a search party ... *(JACK downs the nearest drink, rubs the back of his hand across his*

mouth) What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost.

CANDIDA (*noticing something is very wrong*)
Jack?

JACK (*after a further moment*) There's a
body. Upstairs. Head smashed in ...
blood ... (*he shakes his head, robbed of
speech*)

PAUL What?

CANDIDA You're kidding.

HARRIET Don't joke, Jack.

JACK Do I look like I'm joking?!

REBUS (*businesslike*) Whereabouts exactly?

JACK Master bedroom. The en-suite.

HARRIET Brendan?

REBUS I need you all to stay here. I'll go
see. (*he pauses at the door. Gives*

CANDIDA – and her phone – a warning look) Just don't, OK? (CANDIDA nods and REBUS exits by door to front hall)

PAUL This can't be happening.

HARRIET *(echoing her previous question)*
Brendan?

STEPHANIE *(to JACK)* Jack, what the hell?

JACK shakes his head, refills his glass, sits down heavily on a chair at the table. CANDIDA is unlocking her phone. STEPHANIE reaches a hand out to stop her.

STEPHANIE Best listen to John. This is his show
now.

*The room goes silent, the actors seemingly in shock as the lights go down.
End of Act One*

Act Two

Only the briefest of moments has passed since Act One ended. Setting and characters as before. Everyone on stage except REBUS.

HARRIET *(to JACK)* I don't understand. Are you sure?

JACK I know a dead body when I see one.
(he breaks off, having said too much)

PAUL But who the hell is it?

JACK I didn't get a close look – face down on the tiles ...

HARRIET It has to be Brendan.

CANDIDA Not necessarily. Maybe an intruder. Brendan heard or saw something, confronted them, and fled afterwards.

PAUL I suppose that's feasible. I mean, there's no other reason for Brendan to be in our en-suite. *(to JACK)* Come to think of it, what were *you* doing there?

JACK *(with a shrug)* Having a nosy.

CANDIDA He does it all the time. My underwear drawer's never the way I left

it.

STEPHANIE (with distaste, to JACK) Jack!

JACK (to CANDIDA) You'd be advised to keep that gob of yours shut! I knew it was a mistake bringing you.

CANDIDA So why did you? Why not one of your 'hostesses' from the casino? Micro IQs to match their micro dresses.

JACK Don't tempt me. *(he pauses, stares at STEPHANIE. His tone softens as he explains)* At first I thought it was just going to be the four of us, nice and cosy. You, me, Paul and Harriet. I was looking forward to that. But then when Paul said you were bringing a date, I knew I had to even things up. *(CANDIDA is looking at STEPHANIE too now, wondering if there's history between JACK and her)*

When CANDIDA starts tapping at her phone, STEPHANIE snatches it away.

STEPHANIE You heard what John said!

CANDIDA I wasn't going to tell anyone – not yet. I'm not stupid.

PAUL When was the last time any of us saw Brendan?

CANDIDA Mine would be in the casino.

JACK Same here.

PAUL You sure about that, Jack? You didn't feel the need to confront him, give him a piece of your mind? Kitchen's a bit too close to here, you might be heard. Upstairs on the other hand ...

JACK (*prickly*) I haven't set eyes on him since he left my employ. You on the other hand ...

PAUL I hardly saw him to say two words to. I was in the shower when he arrived. He was focussed on the food when I got the bottles from the fridge.

STEPHANIE So you did see him?

JACK Happy with the price you were paying him, was he? Didn't maybe try angling for more or he'd down tools?

PAUL Nothing like that.

tone like that might call for a few home truths.

PAUL is silenced.

HARRIET What do you mean, Jack?

JACK Paul knows. Favours owed et cetera.

CANDIDA One of Brendan's things in the restaurant was, he liked to come out and chat with the diners. Did you ask him not to, Harriet?

HARRIET I don't think it came up.

CANDIDA Maybe he meant to, but then ... *(she gestures upwards – Brendan's death got in the way, she means)*

HARRIET You're saying that was maybe why he was killed? So he didn't blurt something out at the table? All three of you knew him. *(she means PAUL, JACK and CANDIDA)*

STEPHANIE Actually ... *(they all look at her)* I've just been thinking about what Candida said. I did get taken to dinner once or twice – to the casino I mean. And the chef did put in an appearance.

CANDIDA A kiss on the back of the hand?

STEPHANIE Now you mention it, yes.

CANDIDA Mmm. *(she is lost in a momentary reverie – Brendan obviously did the same to her)* And there I was thinking I was special.

JACK *(dismissively)* Anything in a skirt – Brendan was never fussy. *(he sees the looks CANDIDA and STEPHANIE are giving him)* Present company excepted, obviously.

CANDIDA You, Paul, regularly leaving to fetch more drinks ... Harriet, you in and out with the food ... Jack and Stephanie and their cigarette breaks ... any one of you could have met up with Brendan.

JACK Don't leave out your good self. As far as we know, you're the only one who let the corpse grope her arse in a pantry.

CANDIDA stares daggers. The ensuing awkward silence in the room lasts a good five or ten seconds, everyone suspecting everyone else. REBUS re-enters by the door to the kitchen rather than the door he used previously.

REBUS Blunt force trauma.

CANDIDA

Just like the game!

REBUS

(waking his phone) I took a picture of his face. As good as I could manage without moving him too much. *(to HARRIET)* Are you OK to take a look? *(she nods and he shows it to her. All eyes are on her and it takes her a few moments to come to a conclusion)*

HARRIET

(trying to recover a vestige of composure, perhaps also slightly relieved) It's not Brendan. Thank God.

REBUS

You're sure? *(he shows the screen to PAUL)*

PAUL

(defensively) I hardly said more than hello to him. I was in the shower when the doorbell rang. Everything was in the swing by the time I came back down. I got some drinks from the fridge ...

REBUS

(interrupting) Alibis aren't what I'm asking for right now. You knew him. You booked him for tonight.

PAUL

I just wanted to help him.

REBUS Prise him away from his previous employer, you mean?

PAUL Anyway, that's not him.

STEPHANIE So where *is* Brendan?

CANDIDA (*to REBUS; shrewdly*) You left by one door and came back by another.

REBUS Not much escapes your attention. And why did I do that?

CANDIDA To see if both doors led to the staircase.

REBUS Bingo. (*he is tapping a number into his phone*) Meaning any of us could have gone upstairs.

PAUL What are you doing?

REBUS This whole house is a crime scene. (*he holds the phone to his ear*)

PAUL Well, I for one am leaving the scene. I need a breath of air.

REBUS (sternly; professionally) Nobody leaves this room.

PAUL You can't keep me here – it's my house!

HARRIET Strictly speaking, Paul, it's *my* house, and I think you should do as John says.

CANDIDA (to *REBUS*) You really think it was one of us? Why not Brendan? He's the one who's done a runner.

REBUS He's on my list. (*REBUS's call is answered*) Yes, hello. My name is John Rebus. I need to report a suspicious death. I've checked for a pulse and I can't find one. The address is 75 Heriot Row. (*listens*) No, it's not a flat – very much a main door property. Scene of Crime team and a police doctor needed. (*listens*) No, but I used to be. Quick as you can, please. You've got my number if you need me. (*listens*) Many thanks. (*he ends the call*)

PAUL How long till they get here?

REBUS Not long. Depends if it's a busy

night.

PAUL How busy can they be?

STEPHANIE Not all of Edinburgh is like Heriot Row, Paul.

PAUL So we're stuck here until then?

STEPHANIE Just as I was about to have a cigarette.

JACK waves his pack at her, offering.

REBUS No one's going outside – not until the team gets here.

HARRIET But what if we need ...?

PAUL There's a dead body upstairs, Harriet. Surely to Christ you can control your bladder. *(he notices that REBUS is holding something, studying it)* What's that?

REBUS The deceased's debit card.

STEPHANIE Was that wise, John? Tampering with the crime scene?

REBUS Wisdom was seldom mentioned in my annual review. His name's Alan White – mean anything to any of you?

PAUL Never heard of him.

HARRIET Me neither.

STEPHANIE That name rings a vague bell ... (*she glances towards JACK*)

CANDIDA Want me to do a search?

REBUS Why not? Just make sure that's all you do, eh?

CANDIDA holds her hand out towards STEPHANIE, who, with slight reluctance, hands her phone back to her.

What about you, Jack? Alan White?

JACK You sound like you might be the one who knows him.

REBUS (*playing with JACK*) I might have done – not *known* him exactly but heard his name. Long time ago ... (*he turns his attention to STEPHANIE*) Why don't you enlighten us, Stephanie?

STEPHANIE (*after taking a moment to weigh things up*) Probably not the same man – too much of a coincidence. But there was a detective in Glasgow with that name. He was on the investigation looking into Ray Collins’s disappearance. He had dealings with DI Carter here in Edinburgh.

REBUS Is that right?

JACK You already knew, didn’t you?

REBUS Bill Carter bequeathed me all his case-notes when he died. Hundreds of pages of neat handwriting and neat theories.

JACK Meaning supposition and rumour? He always saw what he wanted to see.

REBUS (*brushing this aside*) You might say I’ve retained an interest in the case.

STEPHANIE The Ray Collins case? Why didn’t you tell me? (*REBUS shrugs*) But you never knew Alan White yourself?

REBUS No, but you did – and so did Jack

here. Ray Collins's disappearance, then the near-fatal beating given to Malky Chisholm ...

STEPHANIE An allegation dismissed by the court.

REBUS You'd know better than me, Stephanie. Alan White stood in the witness box in front of you. In front of you, too, Jack. Want to take another look at the photo? Maybe this time you'll recognise him.

JACK Ancient history, Rebus. Back when the force had more room for bent coppers. Besides, you lot always looked the same to me – stale and sleekit and pasty-faced. *(meaningful pause)* No offence.

HARRIET *(to REBUS)* Let me see if I understand. Are you saying this detective came to the house tonight because of some connection to Jack?

REBUS I'm saying it's a strange sort of coincidence. What do you think, Stephanie?

STEPHANIE I'm not sure what I think.

REBUS

There you are in court, doing your best to instil doubt in the jury's minds, using all your prodigious debating skills to chip away at every witness and each bit of testimony, eventually securing the result you've been paid for – paid terrifically well, I'm betting. You and your client, long evenings spent planning your lines of attack, weary afterwards, easier to check into a hotel than trudge home ...

STEPHANIE

(angered by this) A fantasy concocted by your friend Bill Carter. That's what he left behind for you, John – his febrile imagination, along with his obsession.

CANDIDA

(reading from her phone) White's finished with Police Scotland. I've got a couple of photos from his retirement do. Looks like he still lives in Glasgow. Divorced with a grown-up son. *(pause as she studies her screen)* Cute-looking. Set himself up as a private investigator seven years back – father rather than son, I mean. His contact details. *(she shows REBUS the screen of her phone. He allows himself a moment's excitement – reads from CANDIDA's phone screen. There is a phone number there for the detective agency. He taps the number into his own phone)*

STEPHANIE Won't it just go to his mobile upstairs?

CANDIDA It's a landline.

REBUS The type of job where out-of-hours contact isn't unusual – gives us a reasonable chance. *(he listens, his face grows less animated)* Answering machine. *(listens a moment longer)* Hi there. My name is John Rebus. I need to speak to someone urgently about Mr Alan White. My number is *(he gives his mobile phone number)*. I stress again that this is urgent. I'm ex-Police Scotland, the same as Alan, and I'm calling from Edinburgh – a house on Heriot Row. I'm hoping that will mean something to you. Please call me back as soon as you get this message. *(he repeats his phone number and ends the call)*

CANDIDA *(still reading from her phone screen)*
Office off Sauchiehall Street – Glasgow city centre – means he's doing all right for himself. Lives in a flat there, too, by the look of it. Modern penthouse job. Those don't come cheap, even in Glasgow.

REBUS *(genuine admiration)* Ever thought of coming to work for Police Scotland?

We could use a few like you. *Semper vigilo.*

PAUL What are you on about?

STEPHANIE The motto of Police Scotland, Paul. It's Latin.

CANDIDA Always vigilant.

REBUS Top marks.

HARRIET (*anxious*) We were all absent, weren't we? During the meal, I mean. (*to REBUS*) We were discussing it when you were upstairs. We thought the victim must be Brendan, so we had that wrong, but all the same – cigarette breaks and toilet breaks and fetching bottles and whatnot. (*to CANDIDA*) I have to say it, but you were absent more than most.

CANDIDA No, I wasn't!

JACK I used to think it was cystitis or something. Turns out she just needs regular re-preening so she can send another pouting snap of herself to her weird fans.

CANDIDA (*correcting him*) Followers.

HARRIET (*to JACK*) Then there's you with your apparent need for a cigarette every ten minutes.

JACK And each time I went out, I opened the front door – I'm sure you all heard me.

HARRIET So that was your first trip upstairs – the one where you conveniently found the body?

JACK Don't start pointing fingers, Harriet. Once fingers start pointing, you never know where they'll end up.

HARRIET Yes, you said much the same to Paul. It makes me wonder what's going on between the pair of you.

CANDIDA Lord Manningham and the local inn-keeper ...

PAUL (*ignoring this tangent*) I doubt he came in by way of the front door anyway – someone would have seen or heard him.

STEPHANIE Not a window either – all those security precautions you're so proud of, Paul.

CANDIDA Then he must have come through the kitchen. Brendan would have been in and out carrying stuff, no? Could something have happened to him? How else did this Alan White get past him?

REBUS thinks for a moment then exits through the door to the kitchen.

PAUL Where's he going? *(to REBUS'S disappearing figure)* Stay in this room, you said!

CANDIDA *(to JACK)* Cystitis. God you're such an embarrassment, Jack.

JACK *(ignoring her; to PAUL)* What the hell have you got me into?

PAUL This has nothing to do with me!

JACK Last thing I need is more police attention.

PAUL Ditto. *(he realises too late what he has said. HARRIET is staring at him)*

HARRIET (coldly) What do you mean, Paul?

PAUL Nothing, darling.

HARRIET It doesn't sound like nothing.

JACK We're just teasing you, Harriet.

HARRIET Teasing? At a time like this?

JACK You're quite right – it was in bad taste. My apologies.

CANDIDA This isn't part of it, Harriet? You and John, concocting this between you? No murder victim upstairs? A pretend phone call to 999? Hang on though ... It was you who found the body, Jack. Means you'd have to be in on the prank, and you'd have let something slip. I know you too well.

JACK Do you now?

CANDIDA Well, let's just say I know enough.

JACK And I know about you, too,
sweetheart, trust me.

REBUS enters.

REBUS Kitchen's definitely messy. No sign
of a struggle though. He either left in a
hurry, or ... *(he raises his eyes to the
ceiling)*

PAUL Hidden in one of the rooms upstairs?
We should go look.

REBUS The team will do that. Less we
contaminate the house the better. *(pause
as they are left to their thoughts)*

CANDIDA This is more fiendish than your
story, Harriet.

REBUS Well, at least we can clear that up.
(REBUS goes to the bookcase) Edgar
Allan Poe – the one of his I remember
best is *The Purloined Letter*, the answer
hidden in plain sight, visible to all. *(he
walks to the occasional table)* Beautiful
flowers – you were too busy to unwrap
them, you said, Harriet. But you're a
woman to whom details matter. The
room was immaculate when we arrived.
So there has to be a reason ... *(with a
flourish he undoes the wrapping. The*

flowers are sitting in an ornate Chinese vase)

CANDIDA The murder weapon!

REBUS *(checking the vase)* A smear of blood
on the rim ...

HARRIET Ketchup.

REBUS *(peers into the vase and removes something)* Looks like the killer dropped a brass button. Maybe torn off in the struggle.

STEPHANIE Like the ones on the blazer the pub landlord always wears! Why though, Harriet? Why him?

PAUL Bravo, John.

HARRIET *(answering STEPHANIE's question)* I'm not sure, to be honest – I just needed it to be SOMEone.

REBUS But back in the real world – I assume you have a contact number for Brendan, Harriet?

HARRIET His details are in my phone – but it's charging in the sitting room.

REBUS Go fetch it then – straight there and back, mind.

HARRIET exits.

JACK No reason for me and Stephanie not to nip out for a smoke then.

REBUS *(to JACK)* You're staying right here, where I can keep an eye on you.

JACK You're almost as paranoid as your old pal Carter. Bully Boy Bill, they used to call him. Not averse to beating a confession out of a suspect back in the days when there were no cameras. I dare say you did your share, too, with Bully Boy as your mentor. *(he gestures towards STEPHANIE)* The reason Stephanie tore apart every witness in that courtroom is because Carter provided her with so much ammo – she ended up convincing the jury that it was the cops on trial rather than poor humble Jack Fleming. Ingrained corruption from the top down. *(he blows STEPHANIE a kiss)*

STEPHANIE *(on the defensive)* I was just doing

my job, same as I would for any client.

JACK (*wagging a finger*) You forget, I've seen plenty of your colleagues at work over the years – you went way beyond, Steph, way beyond.

REBUS ‘Way beyond’, yes I'm sure. But just because she got you off, doesn't mean you weren't guilty as charged.

JACK I'm a simple businessman – ask Paul here. I provide dozens of jobs. I work hard. I do a hell of a lot more for charity than you do.

REBUS Citizen of the year, eh? Well, let me ask you something – how did you get out to the raft?

JACK (*puzzled*) The what?

REBUS The raft moored off the beach in Dubai – waiters swimming out to it with chilled drinks – *swimming*, mind.

JACK glowers at CANDIDA. But this is left hanging as HARRIET returns. She checks her phone.

HARRIET Didn't hear a peep from upstairs. I do hope Brendan's safe, wherever he is.

REBUS If he didn't bump into Jack, he should be. *(he focuses his attention on JACK)* Snooping around upstairs. Maybe you came up against a face from the past, one you couldn't forget because he'd tried so hard to pin a murder on you, then gave evidence in the GBH case. A copper who knew there's no smoke without fire.

JACK Blah blah blah.

REBUS *(to the room at large)* It's all in Bill Carter's files. All of it. *(he shares a look with STEPHANIE. She folds her arms and looks stern – she has been used – he's only here because of those files)*

STEPHANIE *(to REBUS)* Some date you are.

JACK *(to REBUS)* Did you know he'd be here tonight? Our dead private eye? Maybe you're the one who let him in.

REBUS To what purpose? See, that's what we need to know – why was he upstairs in the first place? Why here, why tonight?

PAUL (remembering the chat from earlier)
Means, motive and opportunity.

CANDIDA MMO.

JACK (to *REBUS*) You knew I'd be here – did you tell him? (he watches *REBUS* shake his head. Turns to *CANDIDA*) Maybe you blabbed then? Put something on the internet that he saw. (she shakes her head. *JACK* turns to *STEPHANIE*) You knew him back in the day, didn't you? And you left the room a few times ...

STEPHANIE I've not set eyes on him since the trial.

HARRIET (to *REBUS*) Brendan's number. (HARRIET shows *REBUS* Brendan's details on her phone. He taps a number into his own handset)

CANDIDA Shouldn't they be here by now? If this is all real, I mean?

STEPHANIE As John says, maybe it's a busy night.

During the following, REBUS will move towards the door and make his exit while on the phone.

REBUS

Is that Brendan? Brendan, hello – it's good to hear your voice. I'm calling from Harriet and Paul Godwin's. *(the other cast members share looks – relief that Brendan is alive and one mystery is about to be solved)* No, no, no, the meal was fine, no problems on that score. You've left the kitchen in a bit of a state though. I need to ask you about that – and one or two other things ...

The door closes behind him. PAUL rushes over and presses his ear to the door.

HARRIET

Paul!

PAUL

(fiercely) Shut the hell up, woman!

Sharp intakes of breath from the women – HARRIET's sharpest of all. PAUL, realising.

I mean, it's our house, isn't it – we have a right.

STEPHANIE

(correcting him) Harriet's house, Paul.

PAUL

We're husband and wife, Stephanie – half and half – I'd have thought a lawyer would know that.

CANDIDA

What is he saying? *(she means REBUS)*

PAUL

It'd be easier to hear with a bit of

hush.

The room goes silent. CANDIDA and HARRIET join him at the door, listening. JACK and STEPHANIE have come together at the opposite end of the room. They speak in an undertone.

JACK He knows about us, doesn't he? I mean, obviously he does.

STEPHANIE He didn't hear it from me.

JACK It'll have been in those bloody case notes. Hotel security guards are notorious. Half of them are ex-cops and they'd sell their granny's passport for a bottle of Famous Grouse. Why the hell did you bring him along tonight?

STEPHANIE *(a meaningful look towards the trio at the door)* I needed those sharp instincts of his. But as it turns out, John had an ulterior motive.

JACK That motive being me.

STEPHANIE So it would seem.

JACK *(softening a little)* Look, about what happened ... back then, I mean.

STEPHANIE I'm a big girl, Jack. You got what you wanted.

JACK It would never have worked, Steph. Between us, I mean. You must have known that. It's not like I was the first ...

STEPHANIE What do you mean?

JACK Well, word gets around ...

STEPHANIE How dare you!

CANDIDA (*noticing them*) What are you two muttering about?

STEPHANIE (*regaining her composure for the 'public gallery'*) The body upstairs – what else? (*she and JACK return to the table, albeit awkwardly. HARRIET and CANDIDA do the same, though PAUL stays at the door, ear pressed to it*)

HARRIET It really couldn't have been any of us, could it? We're nice people ... mostly.

STEPHANIE As John often says, everyone's fine

ninety-five per cent of the time, even psychopaths. On the surface, I mean.

HARRIET Jekyll and Hyde?

STEPHANIE Like the killer in your game.

CANDIDA (*looking at JACK*) The pub landlord.

STEPHANIE Having felt the need to dispatch Lord Manningham doesn't mean they're likely to kill anyone else. They've dealt with the one problem that was messing with their equilibrium.

CANDIDA A friendship soured? Maybe a loan that wasn't being repaid?

STEPHANIE Whatever the reason, afterwards the killer goes back to being a model citizen, and those around them know no different.

CANDIDA A model citizen like Jack here, giving so generously to charity.

PAUL (*joining the others at the table*) He's either gone outside or upstairs. Can't hear a thing. (*to HARRIET*) Sorry about

earlier, old girl. Nerves have gone to pot tonight.

HARRIET Nobody's managed to explain why that man was in our en-suite.

STEPHANIE Just because he ended up in the bathroom doesn't mean he was attacked there.

CANDIDA Killed elsewhere on the premises and dragged somewhere more private?

JACK (*enthused by this idea*) By a killer who needed to keep the body hidden until everyone had gone home. (*his eyes dart between PAUL and HARRIET*) A killer or killers who didn't think anyone visiting would have need to be in that bedroom, that bathroom.

HARRIET What's that supposed to mean?

PAUL Don't be absurd!

JACK Is that what I am, Paul?

CANDIDA There'd be smears of blood, wouldn't there? Across the floor, I mean.

From wherever he was attacked to where he was found.

JACK I didn't see any. Just a bit in the bathroom.

PAUL Why in the world would a private detective be skulking around our house in the first place? You're the only connection, Jack.

STEPHANIE Was it the first floor he was interested in? The bedroom suggests he was looking for valuables. Then there are your upper floors ...

HARRIET The whole house is far too large for us. But downsizing would mean selling most of Callum's collection – and I could never do that.

JACK and PAUL share a look.

CANDIDA You should sub-divide. This part of town, you'd make a killing – pardon my French.

HARRIET Do you know who constructed this place? Its first owners, I mean? They were called Lord and Lady Manningham.

CANDIDA Ha!

HARRIET I don't know a great deal about them but they also had a country pile in Perthshire. No doubt they made their money from slavery or something equally unsavoury. They passed this house on to their son, who hosted parties for a spiritualist known as Madame Violet. Her adherents were known as 'the Hive' and used to drink blood.

CANDIDA She's real? I need to look that up.

JACK snatches her phone away.

JACK You and your bloody contraption! How the hell does the battery never die? *(he tosses it on to the sofa; CANDIDA goes to retrieve it)*

PAUL *(eyes on the door)* What's keeping him? *(he goes to the door, presses his ear to it again)*

STEPHANIE approaches HARRIET, places a hand on her shoulder.

STEPHANIE Are you all right?

HARRIET *(wistfully)* It was meant to be a pleasant diversion, that's all. I wanted you to meet Paul.

STEPHANIE (*meaningfully, with a look in PAUL's direction*) And after everything I'd gleaned from you, I was keen to meet him, too. (*turning her attention back to HARRIET*) I'm a lawyer, Harriet, as well as a friend. I was concerned for you.

HARRIET Concerned?

STEPHANIE Sometimes the most important things are the ones people don't quite summon up the courage to say out loud.

Before HARRIET can respond to this, the door opens and REBUS re-enters. He notes that PAUL has been standing by the door.

REBUS Well, he was ready to deny it until I told him a man was dead.

PAUL Deny what?

A tense pause prior to the revelation.

REBUS Alan White paid off your chef.

HARRIET Paid Brendan?

REBUS White would pretend to be helping in the kitchen. That was his cover so he could recce the house. He then told

Brendan he could knock off early, White would clear everything up. Brendan was at the end of a long shift, so he agreed. White had given him quite a lot of money.

HARRIET But I didn't see anyone in the kitchen apart from Brendan – you believe his story?

REBUS I've no reason not to. He stayed out of the way until Brendan left. After that, he probably headed straight upstairs, bypassing the dining-room. *(pause. A revelation is coming)* White told Brendan he was a private detective, hired by a spouse to find evidence of infidelity.

PAUL *(aghast)* What?

REBUS *(to HARRIET)* Hired by you, Harriet.

PAUL *(to his wife; scandalised)* Harriet!

REBUS Brendan thought the story plausible. He'd always found you a bit shifty, Paul – sorry I can't sugar-coat the pill. The way you used to hang around the casino, eyeing up the hostesses when you weren't bending Jack's ear ...

JACK (with a chuckle) He had the measure of you all right, Paul. (he shakes his head slowly) Cheating on Harriet though – that's beyond the pale.

PAUL Keep out of this, Jack!

JACK Or what? (squaring up to PAUL) Fancy your chances, do you? Well, here I am – I'll even let you have the first punch, how's that? You'll be in hospital before you can throw a second.

PAUL (not about to accept that challenge; turning to HARRIET) I swear to God, Harriet, I'm not like that. I've never ... (disbelieving) And you paid for a private detective? Paid him to snoop on me in our house? For Christ's sake!

HARRIET But I didn't! It's not true! Yes, there are times I've thought ... (she breaks off before saying too much) I mean, I've wondered if you're keeping something from me. And those moments when you lose your temper and nearly ... (turning to REBUS) But I wouldn't know the first thing about going to a private detective.

REBUS (after a moment's consideration) I'm inclined to believe you.

HARRIET What?

REBUS I believe you.

The others take this in.

CANDIDA So why would he lie to Brendan?

REBUS Maybe to conceal the real reason for wanting to be here.

STEPHANIE The real reason being?

REBUS I'm working on that. Candida, can you get busy, see if you can dig up any of Alan White's recent cases?

REBUS's phone pings a message. He checks the screen.

Scene of Crime team are here. I'll let them in and point the way. All of you, stay here.

He exits.

JACK *(angrily, to CANDIDA)* You enjoying yourself?

CANDIDA *(ignoring his tone)* Most excitement I've had in ages.

JACK If I'd known this is what turns you

on, I'd have arranged for a murder sooner. *(he picks up one of the dossiers)* Didn't really need any of this, did you, Harriet?

PAUL is standing in front of the seated HARRIET.

PAUL The missing vase as murder weapon – a bad husband, drinking the cellar dry and spending his nights elsewhere – your revenge, Harriet? On me? The goody-two-shoes brother – is that Callum by any chance? We were like brothers, me and him. You didn't know Rebus was coming, but you'd invited your lawyer friend. Trying to tell her between the lines, her or maybe me, hoping I'd change my ways and bend to your will?

HARRIET Bend *you* to *my* will? *(she snorts; home truths coming out. She has grown steely)* I only really kept you around in the early days to stop the wolves from circling. *(to CANDIDA)* As you found in Venice, Candida.

CANDIDA Wolves aren't so bad sometimes – better than the alternative, I mean.

PAUL *(simmering anger)* Well thank you, my dear wife, thank you very bloody much! To think I put you on a pedestal!

HARRIET

Is that what you did? Then why does it feel more like a cage?

PAUL has no answer to this. He sits down heavily, pours a fresh drink, a large one.

CANDIDA

How long do you think we'll be stuck here?

JACK

I told the casino I'd look in on my way home.

CANDIDA

Most likely meaning you won't *come* home.

JACK

Well, it's not like there's much waiting for me there, eh? Not for a long time.

STEPHANIE

(answering CANDIDA's question)
They'll probably just take brief statements tonight. Here or at the station. Formal interviews tomorrow. Hair samples and mouth swabs for the DNA. Fingerprints, all of that. For purposes of elimination. *(she pauses)* If you didn't hire him, Harriet, who did? Any enemies or dark secrets? When it's a murder inquiry, you don't want to hold anything back that might come to light later.

PAUL

We're not the type to have secrets.

(to HARRIET) Are we? I mean, not the kind Stephanie means. *Dark* secrets.

STEPHANIE That would make you unique in my experience.

PAUL (almost at the end of his tether) Well, your experience is the criminal classes – not the New Town; not the likes of us.

HARRIET Police cars ... in THIS street. We'll be pariahs. A retired judge lives next door ...

CANDIDA You'll be the absolute opposite of pariahs, Harriet, trust me. This isn't the 1950s. My bet is, you'll be invited to every dinner party in the city and beyond. You're about to become celebrities. Isn't that the most amazing luck? And it goes for the rest of us, too. (to HARRIET) Your first step should be to get an agent.

PAUL Rather than a lawyer?

CANDIDA You'll need one of those for the contracts, obviously. But the agent will secure the best price for your story – you won't be hot for long, no one ever is. The agent will whisk you on to the right

chat shows, negotiate your fee for any appearances on TV or in the glossies. I know a couple of names I'd probably trust to handle you – I mean, they're sharks obviously, but it won't be you they bite.

JACK So who are you selling your story to, Candida?

CANDIDA Right now I'm a bit busy doing as I was told.

JACK Doing as you're told? First time for everything.

STEPHANIE You need to start looking like you're cooperating, Jack. No holding back.

JACK (*sneering*) Is that a friend talking or a lawyer? I've got nothing to hide.

STEPHANIE I refer you to my earlier answer. (*JACK looks bemused, so she elucidates*) Everybody has secrets.

JACK Even you, Stephanie. Just remember that.

CANDIDA People always tell me I'm an open book. The more they think that, the better for me.

REBUS re-enters.

PAUL Well?

REBUS SIO will come and talk to us in a bit. Police doctor's up there with the Scene of Crime crew. They'll start photographing and collecting evidence. *(to CANDIDA)* Any joy?

CANDIDA Joy is a relative concept. Give me two more minutes.

REBUS seats himself on the sofa. STEPHANIE joins him. Their conversation will be semi-private.

STEPHANIE Are you OK?

REBUS I'm fine. Just a bit rusty.

STEPHANIE Doesn't look that way to me. *(she tries to squeeze his hand but he pulls away)* You know, don't you?

REBUS *(with a look towards JACK)* It was in Bill Carter's notes.

STEPHANIE He had eyes and ears at the hotel?
(she reflects on this while REBUS nods)
You know what trials are like, John –
pressure cooker meets trench warfare.
Strange alliances can form for the
duration.

REBUS You crossed a line though,
Stephanie. Lawyer copping off with
client.

STEPHANIE Smart young woman meets edgy
older man.

REBUS Back then, I thought ‘edgy older
man’ was going to be my role.

STEPHANIE Thing is though, you were never
quite my type.

REBUS Not enough gangster chic? *(he is
trying to make a joke of it, but her words
have cut him)* Aye, looking back I can
see that. You were always at your best
defending bad boys. They put a spring in
your step, and now I know why.

STEPHANIE *(giving him a hard look)* Only ever
that one time, John. What the hell do
you take me for?

REBUS

Doesn't really matter, does it?

Having cut her just as she cut him, he crosses to the table, joins the others. STEPHANIE follows, albeit slowly, almost reluctantly, his words having done their job.

JACK

I've been thinking – what about Brendan? He takes a bung from the private eye but then changes his mind. Goes in search of him, intent on handing the money back and making him leave. There's an argument, it gets out of hand.

REBUS

And they do this in whispers? Arguments usually involve a bit of volume.

JACK

Solid floors and walls, sturdy doors.

PAUL

Was the door open or closed when you found him, Jack?

JACK

(thinking) Bedroom door was slightly ajar – I might not have gone in otherwise. Bathroom door was mostly open.

PAUL

Not much attempt at concealment then?

JACK

Getting your story ready, Paul? Good

man. I'd do the same in your shoes.

STEPHANIE No sign of a weapon, Jack?

JACK shrugs. She turns to REBUS, who shakes his head – no weapon.

HARRIET I remember a film where a leg of lamb was the murder weapon. Everyone ate it, meaning no evidence.

JACK How about a Chinese vase? We only have your word for it that you used ketchup. Maybe you should check again, John – evidence lying in plain view, just like you said.

PAUL You're not really helping, Jack.

JACK Give me one reason why I should.

CANDIDA *(eyes on her phone screen)* This is interesting. One of White's cases, he worked with a museum in Glasgow, helped them retrieve a painting that had been stolen in broad daylight.

REBUS reads from her screen.

After that, a couple more museums took him on. One in Paris, one in London. He didn't get anywhere those times though.

STEPHANIE Any purloined artworks hidden under your bed, Harriet?

HARRIET I think the cleaners would have noticed.

JACK You do have that big painting above the bed though.

HARRIET Callum's favourite Amberson. Definitely not stolen from any gallery.

REBUS has been circling the room, the pieces falling into place for him. PAUL may be sharing growingly nervous glances with JACK, JACK's face a sternly composed mask in reply. REBUS's phone buzzes and he answers the call.

REBUS Hello? *(listens)* Oh yes, yes, thank you for getting back to me – I appreciate it's late. Do you mind giving me your name? *(he takes a pen from the table so he can write on one of the dossiers)* Jane Turnbull. And you work for Alan White, Ms Turnbull? *(listens)* Well, I'm sorry, but I need to share some dreadful news with you. There's been an unexplained death and we have reason to believe that the deceased is Mr White. *(listens for a slightly longer time)* I really am terribly sorry. Is there someone you can call, a friend who could come and be with you? Are you in Glasgow? *(listens)* No, I'm in Edinburgh, at the house on Heriot Row. *(listens)* That's right. Yes, that's the number. Do you happen to know why Mr White came here tonight? *(listens – everyone hanging on his every word and*

facial gesture) Hmm. And the client's name? *(listens)* I appreciate that, but this is a police inquiry and we'd like to get to the bottom of it – I'm sure Alan would have wanted that, too. *(listens, and writes a name on the dossier)* And would you have a way of contacting this individual, a phone number say? *(listens)* It would be hugely useful, yes. Uh-huh. *(listens – everyone in the room on tenterhooks)* Yes, very relevant, I'm sure. And when did this client start to have doubts? *(listens)* Thank you. That's helpful. You'll be contacted by one of my colleagues to take a proper statement, and if you need me at any time you have my number. I'm sorry again for your loss. Thank you. *(he ends the call)*

STEPHANIE 'Colleagues'?

REBUS Old habits die hard. *(he shows CANDIDA the name on the dossier)* Think you can work your magic?

PAUL So what did she say?

JACK Don't keep us bloody guessing, man!

REBUS Small tremor in your voice there, Jack? Maybe I should take you up on

your offer of a casino visit – game of poker between the two of us. *(to the room)* White came here tonight to do a first recce. My feeling is, when he saw Brendan he realised what was happening and decided he might be able to get inside the house. He collared Brendan outside and made the offer. *(he sees that CANDIDA is waving her phone in his direction. He checks her screen, takes the phone from her and holds it out towards HARRIET)* Do you know him at all?

HARRIET

(studying the screen) Should I?

REBUS

Probably not. *(reading from the phone)* His name is Elliot Freeman. *(he gauges reaction around the room. There are shrugs, blank looks)* No one? Elliot Freeman? *(reads some more)* Based in London, independently wealthy. A patron of the arts. In fact, he's a collector – *(meaningfully)* has a special fondness for Scottish paintings of the pre-war period. Names like Corbie and Drinnan and Amberson. *(he has walked across to the paintings, studying them as he passes)* Earlier this year he bought a few pieces privately – meaning not at auction. According to White's assistant, Freeman was beginning to have doubts about their provenance.

STEPHANIE

Doubts? You mean he thought they

were stolen?

REBUS Actually, at first he wondered if maybe they were forgeries, albeit very good forgeries. But he had them checked and they were the real McCoy, which was odd because he thought he had a pretty good idea who they'd belonged to. *(he is facing HARRIET)*

HARRIET Me?

REBUS Not unknown for a seller to want to remain discreet, meaning anonymous. But he'd read in an interview about Callum's collection and how much it meant to you personally. He was mystified, so he decided to dig a little deeper. *(he is studying one of the paintings very closely)* He engaged the services of Alan White, an investigator with a reputation in the art world.

HARRIET I'm still not sure I ... What are you suggesting, John? That I'm in league with this Freeman character?

REBUS *(to PAUL)* Don't get too close, you said, Paul. Alarms, et cetera. Not the only reason not to get too close though, eh?

HARRIET

Leave Paul out of this – those paintings have nothing to do with him. They belonged to Callum – they’re all I have left of him!

PAUL

(has been building up to this, rises to his feet in an explosion) Bloody Callum! Always bloody Callum! They’re fakes, woman! These ones. The ones lining your own bloody walls. *(he lifts one painting down from the wall and approaches HARRIET with it)* Don’t get too close, yes, or you might actually SEE something for a change – if you could ever be bothered to look past your narrow bloody privilege! Do you even see ME any more, or am I just like everything else in this house? A faint echo of Callum, the only man you could ever allow yourself to love? *(he looks at the painting, studies it – then punches a hole through it. Gasps from the onlookers)* Fake. All of them. I knew damned well you wouldn’t notice. You’ll never know the thrill I got from switching them. It was like I was freeing myself from you and Callum and everything else. And it was so easy to do once I’d—

JACK

(interrupting, urgent) Shut the hell up, Paul!

REBUS

Ah yes, of course you know.

PAUL Know? He's the one who put me in touch with the forger!

JACK Shut your bloody trap before I—

REBUS *(to JACK)* You won't be doing anything, not with a posse of Edinburgh's finest one floor above us.

JACK *(to PAUL)* If you hadn't kept racking up such huge bloody losses you wouldn't have needed the money!

HARRIET *(has been aghast and still is; she takes the ruined painting from PAUL, as tenderly as though it still holds real value for her)* Forgeries? All of them? *(her eyes bore into PAUL'S)* There are more vampires around us than we might think. I always knew you were among their number, the way you came fluttering along, with Callum still warm in his coffin. Always hovering. Accidental meetings that were anything but. At any other time, you wouldn't have stood a chance. You think *I'm* two-dimensional? Maybe so, but at least I'm real. What I'm looking at now has always been fake. Slapdash at that, no finesse – strictly amateur hour.

PAUL *(suddenly drained)* I cared about you, or tried to. I really did. But I could never measure up to Callum, not the way you'd re-cast him after death, far from the reality of the man I knew, the man he never showed you.

Momentary silence. The cast are in shock, mostly.

JACK Right, to hell with it, I'm out of here. Murder Squad know where to find me.

REBUS I don't think so.

JACK *(all menace)* Try stopping me. *(he makes for the door but stops when REBUS speaks)*

REBUS Candida, show me that photo again, will you? The one from Dubai. *(there is a staring contest between JACK and REBUS while she finds it. REBUS speaks to JACK)* She showed it to us when you were out of the room. Lovely picture of you, Jack, nice and relaxed, beetroot-coloured gut hanging over your ridiculous trunks.

PAUL *(with a measure of venom; any friendship between him and JACK now history)* Budgie-smugglers!

CANDIDA hands REBUS her phone. REBUS holds it out for JACK to see.

JACK

So?

REBUS

So when did you learn to swim, Jack? You said at the time you couldn't save your wife because you were scared to death of water. You looked around for a hook or something so you could drag her to the side of the pool, but by then it was too late. Yet here you are, out of your depth on a raft so you can be served chilled drinks on your holiday by waiters who have to swim to you.

CANDIDA

(disbelieving) Scared of water? You were in your school swimming team, Jack. You showed me your medals.

JACK

Shut it.

CANDIDA

You never did exhibit much remorse, said the marriage wouldn't have lasted ... Though you were happy enough with the life insurance. Yes, you were very happy about that ...

JACK

Who the hell wants to listen to you? Know what you're good for? Showing your arse around the gaming tables, keeping the punters well-oiled. Only half a step away from the escort you used to be.

CANDIDA Escort? Only in your grubby little mind. I was a PA and bloody good at it, while you, mon cher, are good for one thing and one thing only. *(she waves her phone at him)* Your extensive list of contacts – the legit punters from the casino, not your criminal pals – all of which are tucked away in here now, meaning I can finally kiss you goodbye.

JACK *(growling)* I can destroy you.

CANDIDA Not if I destroy you first. Some of the video and audio I've got ... *(she waves the phone again)* Well, let's just say you're lucky John here is *ex-CID*.

REBUS The SIO upstairs isn't though. I'm sure they'd be interested in anything you want to share.

JACK looks at the faces around him, feeling betrayed. He grabs CANDIDA's phone and throws it to the floor, stomping on it for good measure. He stops when he notices CANDIDA's amusement.

CANDIDA All safely stored on The Cloud, Jack. Well out of your reach.

Silence in the room. HARRIET has walked to the wall and is staring at one of the remaining paintings, her fingers brushing its surface. REBUS approaches her.

REBUS Stephanie brought me here tonight because she was worried about you.

HARRIET (distantly) Worried?

STEPHANIE (in confirmation and consolingly, to *HARRIET*) Everything you didn't quite say at the gym ... you painted a picture of a man who was overly controlling.

PAUL I never laid a hand on her!

STEPHANIE Abuse doesn't have to be physical. You never liked the thought of Harriet leading her own life. You wanted her here, swaddled. Your little nest egg.

REBUS (to *PAUL*) Stephanie is good at reading people – lawyers usually are.

STEPHANIE But a detective like John sees the big picture.

HARRIET (understanding) And instead of abused and abuser, you find Paul to be little more than a common criminal.

PAUL (pleading) Harriet, please, for pity's sake.

CANDIDA (*referencing the deadly sins, to PAUL specifically*) Jealousy and greed.

REBUS (*to STEPHANIE, referring to JACK*) He could swim.

STEPHANIE (*nodding*) New evidence. Case needs to be reopened.

REBUS And then there's his role in the forgery. Forgery *and* theft ...

JACK (*at breaking point*) Stuff the lot of you. (*he pours himself a large whisky*) You think you're smart, Rebus, but you're strictly second division.

REBUS You mean I'm no Bill Carter? I suppose that's true – but I get the job done, no corners needing to be cut.

HARRIET (*still with questions needing answers*) The detective upstairs – Alan White. Which one of us killed him? Had he worked out about the forgeries? In which case ... (*she points towards PAUL and JACK*) Or was it to do with the man who disappeared? (*her finger stays pointed at JACK*)

REBUS

(in confirmation) Accidental death. He's having a good look around and suddenly he's caught short – you see it a lot with housebreakers. The nerves get to them. He can't risk the downstairs bathroom – steady stream of visitors, plus it's within sight of the front door and therefore anyone stepping outside for a smoke might spot him. But what's this in front of him? A handy en-suite. Marble floor though, still wet from the shower Paul took. White's trainers have flat soles, they make less noise that way. But on a slippery floor ... He loses his footing, tips backwards, cracks his head against the corner of the sink. There's a little smear of blood there, just where you'd expect it.

HARRIET

An accident? And you knew all along?

REBUS

A copper's instinct.

HARRIET

But you made us think ...

REBUS

You could liken it to shaking the tree, seeing what fruits might fall.

CANDIDA

So none of us is the killer? *(a glance*

towards JACK) Not tonight anyway.

STEPHANIE Just people with secrets, some darker than others.

JACK *(to PAUL)* You set this in motion, Paul. I blame you for this whole mess. Don't think I'll forget.

PAUL I wish I'd never met you. *(he turns towards HARRIET)* We were all right, weren't we, Harriet? For a time anyway?

HARRIET turns her face away from him, saying nothing.

STEPHANIE Enjoyed yourself this evening, John? *(he offers a modest shrug)*

CANDIDA It'd make one hell of a podcast. *(to REBUS)* Promise me you'll think about it.

REBUS's phone has pinged a text, which he is reading.

REBUS It's from the SIO. Transport's waiting to take us to Leith Police Station. A few questions to answer. About the deceased, and forged paintings, and a suspicious drowning. *(to PAUL and JACK)* Casino might not be seeing either of you for quite some time. *(he opens the door to the front of the house)* Don't keep them waiting. *(the cast begin to gather up their few bits and*

bobs – phones, maybe jackets, spectacles, bags, cigarettes. JACK takes a final slug of whisky, exhaling loudly. PAUL offers HARRIET his help, but she ignores him. Chance here for last looks filled with meaning – HARRIET and PAUL; CANDIDA and JACK. HARRIET leaves first, followed by JACK and PAUL. CANDIDA pauses on the threshold, turns her head back towards REBUS)

CANDIDA Call me, John. Call me anytime. *(she exits. Now only REBUS and STEPHANIE are left)*

STEPHANIE Will you? Call her, I mean?

REBUS You've got to be kidding.

STEPHANIE I'm sorry for what I said earlier. About not ... *(she breaks off as he waves away her apology)* You've still got it, John. I doubt you'll ever lose it. You should feel proud. *(she exits with a backward glance at him, leaving the door open. REBUS closes it. He is alone on stage now. He takes a moment to compose himself, enjoying the sudden quiet in the room. He pours a whisky and savours its aroma, studies the ruined painting. But before he can drink, he addresses the auditorium)*

REBUS

Between you and me, I'd pretty much finished reading the room by the time the starter was being cleared away. Paul and Jack – I could see something between them, some hold Jack had over Paul that had tempted Paul to cross a line. But I could see, too, that he'd enjoyed crossing that line. No regrets. And Candida? She was sharp, too sharp for Jack, so why was she with him? Not for his tough-guy image, that didn't seem to impress her at all. But he had friends in high places as well as low, people who could be very useful to her as she climbed the social ladder. Harriet and Paul – well, theirs wasn't much of a marriage at all, Stephanie was right about that. Maybe the fact that Paul is the controlling type and has a good conceit of himself had been attractive to Harriet in the early days, but those days were long, long gone. She was tired of that life and tired of him. Plus she knew he was hiding things, lying to her, covering things up. Probably explains the dinner invitation – she wanted to see Paul and Jack in a room together. Would something slip? Would the truth emerge? *(he pauses; takes a sip of whisky, rolls it around his mouth)* Then there's Stephanie. Dear sweet Stephanie. Still attracted to Jack, God help her. Not as savvy as Candida in that regard. Blinkered and beguiled. *(he sighs)* Well, John, win some, lose some. You lost Stephanie a long time back. But her instincts were correct. Harriet was unhappy and Paul was the root cause.

And now she's free of him, if that's what she wants. *(he studies his surroundings)* Edinburgh at its most gilded and dangerous, a city where vampires dwell. A city full of malice. Yes, malice – that's what Harriet's game was. Her way of telling her story, hoping others would see it for what it was. A game called malice. *(he raises his glass in a toast, drinks again and exhales)* And then there's me, John Rebus. But I'm not a game to be played. *(he gestures towards the bookcase)* Maybe I'm more like a book, a book that's best left closed. I read the room. The room doesn't read me ...

REBUS puts down his glass slowly, takes a last look around, maybe lingering on the smashed painting and the others still on the walls. Then he opens the door, exits, closing the door after him with slow deliberation.

CURTAIN

THE END

An Afterword

A Game Called Malice started life during the long days of Covid lockdown. I don't think that's a coincidence. People were confined to their living-quarters for increasing (and increasingly claustrophobic) stretches of time. Some relationships were prone to fray. The world outside began to have less and less meaning. In a quest for social interaction, people planned and hosted Zoom dinner parties and the like. Some of us turned to games and puzzles (mainly jigsaws and cryptic crosswords in my case). I began to muse on the idea of writing something about a small group of people in a confined space, their layers of personality peeling the longer they stayed put.

Back in my student days, one of the few dramas on our literature course was *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee. It was an incredible and indelible dissection of one marriage in particular and relationships in general. The threads that bind a couple or a group of friends or a family can be thin indeed, and it doesn't take much to cause them to snap. The film that was eventually made of the play, featuring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, benefited from the fact the audience knew that the actors were surviving the stormiest of relationships in the real world. Mostly it played out in one room, over one night, with only four actors.

Then one day during lockdown the film version of another famous play appeared on TV – *An Inspector Calls*, starring the wonderful Edinburgh-born performer Alastair Sim. You probably know the play – it remains a set text in many schools and is a perennial bestseller – but to be honest it had passed me by. This was my first viewing and it astonished me. I

began to wonder: what if the family in J. B. Priestley's play lived in a wealthy enclave of Edinburgh? And what if the titular Inspector happened to be called John Rebus? By his very presence, would we begin to witness cracks in the veneer of an apparently happy marriage?

Since I was spending a portion of lockdown life completing puzzles, I decided that there would be a puzzle being played within my play. Years ago I wrote a short story where Rebus is invited to a role-playing murder mystery where participants dress up as various figures in the story and have to work out which one of them is the killer. Whenever I've taken part in these evenings myself, I've proved to be woefully inept in the detecting department. The town of Cromarty hosts a crime fiction festival each year and the local Am Dram Society has been known to put on just such an event. On the occasions I've been present, I have failed to unmask the murderer. Often times I guess too soon – as used to be the case when I played Cluedo. The game in my play – a game called Malice – would borrow from Cluedo and from the traditional English whodunit. The victim would be a titled gentleman, murdered in his country pile, with a cast of suspects including a clergyman, a gamekeeper, and, yes, even the butler. The play's first act would introduce us to the guests at a refined Edinburgh dinner party and we would watch them try to unlock the secrets of the game while giving away secrets of their own, revealing aspects of their true (and less refined) nature.

I decided on a cast of six for two reasons. One, it seemed a manageable number; and two, to echo the title of Luigi Pirandello's iconoclastic stage play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. As well as the married hosts of the party, I already had John Rebus, and I knew he would find himself well out of his comfort zone. It made sense that he would not himself have been invited (the hosts being above his pay grade, as it were) but would be someone's 'plus one', that person being a senior lawyer, Stephanie Jeffries. She has invited Rebus for a specific reason, but he has his own agenda

which she will only discover as the action of the play progresses.

The two final guests comprise a mismatched couple – rough diamond Jack Fleming and glamorous Candida Jones (the archetypal older man/younger woman scenario). But again, as the evening wears on, we see that games are being played within their relationship and the power may not lie where we would expect it. Six characters, all harbouring secrets, all with histories (sometimes shared) needing to be explored or exorcised. Trapped within a single unchanging set (a townhouse drawing room), all I had to do was increase the heat beneath this pressure-cooker, and as I've found in the past, Rebus is very good at bringing people and events to the boil.

I was not doing all of this alone, however. Thanks to the wonders of the internet and Zoom technology, my co-writer Simon Reade and I thrashed out plot points, rejigged the set and dialogue, and basically brainstormed on a regular basis – without ever meeting in the flesh. Such was life during lockdown. Simon, being a proper playwright, sees problems and potential issues that I don't and the drama benefited from his wisdom.

A Game Called Malice had its world premiere at the Queen's Theatre in Hornchurch in February 2023, the cast being led by the wonderful John Michie as Rebus. That version, however, is not quite the one you have in front of you. The prospect of publication – and future touring for the play – has given Simon and me the chance to revise the original script, adding depth to the characterisation, moving a few more pieces around, and inking in a further red herring or three. There may even be more jokes – there's certainly more tension.

This is my third full-length stage play and the second to feature John Rebus. The fun for me in putting a whodunit on the stage is that the audience gets to play detective in real time. We all become Rebus, sniffing out clues and trying to decide which characters are lying to us and why. When I watched the

play in Hornchurch, I got an incredible buzz as the audience responded with gasps and occasional laughter (thankfully only in the right places), and I then enjoyed eavesdropping during the interval as theories and suspects were discussed and mooted over G and Ts and glasses of wine – in a delicious echo of the play’s very own first act. I don’t remember anyone getting the right answer.

Did you?

Ian Rankin

Production Photography

From The World Premiere
A Game Called Malice

All photos © Mark Sepple

Cast List from the World Premiere

First performed at Queen's Theatre Hornchurch, February
2023

John Michie as John Rebus
Rebecca Charles as Harriet Godwin
Billy Hartman as Jack Fleming
Emily Joyce as Stephanie Jeffries
Forbes Masson as Paul Godwin
Emma Noakes as Candida Jones

Plate Section



John Michie as John Rebus



Billy Hartman as Jack Fleming



John Michie as John Rebus and Emily Joyce as Stephanie Jeffries



**Emily Joyce as Stephanie Jeffries, Emma Noakes as Candida Jones and
Rebecca Charles as Harriet Godwin**



Emily Joyce as Stephanie Jeffries, John Michie as John Rebus, Forbes Masson as Paul Godwin and Emma Noakes as Candida Jones



Forbes Masson as Paul Godwin and Emma Noakes as Candida Jones



Rebecca Charles as Harriet Godwin, Billy Hartman as Jack Fleming and John Michie as John Rebus



Full cast and set

About the Authors

Ian Rankin is the multi-million copy worldwide bestseller of over thirty novels and creator of John Rebus. His books have been translated into thirty-six languages and have been adapted for radio, the stage and the screen.

Rankin is the recipient of four Crime Writers' Association Dagger Awards, including the Diamond Dagger, the UK's most prestigious award for crime fiction. In the United States, he has won the celebrated Edgar Award and been shortlisted for the Anthony Award. In Europe, he has won Denmark's Palle Rosenkrantz Prize, the French Grand Prix du Roman Noir and the German Deutscher Krimipreis.

He is the recipient of honorary degrees from universities across the UK, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and has received an OBE for his services to literature. In 2022 he received a knighthood as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Website: IanRankin.net

Twitter: [@Beathhigh](https://twitter.com/Beathhigh)

Facebook: [IanRankinBooks](https://www.facebook.com/IanRankinBooks)

Simon Reade is an award-winning dramatist whose feature films include the critically acclaimed *Journey's End* (director Saul Dibb, Lionsgate/BFI), and the ground-breaking *Private Peaceful* (director Pat O'Connor, Goldcrest). A frequent collaborator with Michael Morpurgo, Simon's hit theatre adaptations of the war stories include *An Elephant In The Garden*, *Toro! Toro!* and the international touring sensation *Private Peaceful* which has played Hong Kong, Australia, Dublin, off-Broadway, theatres across the UK and London's West End. Previous theatre collaborations include the Royal Shakespeare Company productions of Ted Hughes' *Tales From Ovid* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (both with Tim Supple), and *Epitaph For The Official Secrets Act* (with Paul Greengrass). Adaptations for Theatre Royal Bath Productions include *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Curtain* (starring Robert Powell), EM Forster's *A Room With A View* (starring Felicity Kendall) and *Pride & Prejudice* (subsequently revived at Regents Park/Sheffield Crucible/Guthrie Theater Minneapolis). He is the author of *Dear Mr. Shakespeare: Letters to A Jobbing Playwright* (Oberon).

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Dark Road
Rebus: Long Shadows

With William McIlvanney

The Dark Remains

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First published in Great Britain in 2023 by Orion Fiction,
an imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd.,
Carmelite House, 50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company

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Rebus: A Game Called Malice was first performed at Queen's Theatre Hornchurch on 2nd February 2023. Produced by Queen's Theatre Hornchurch in association with Daniel Schumann and Lee Dean.

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

ISBN (eBook) 978 1 3987 2114 2

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