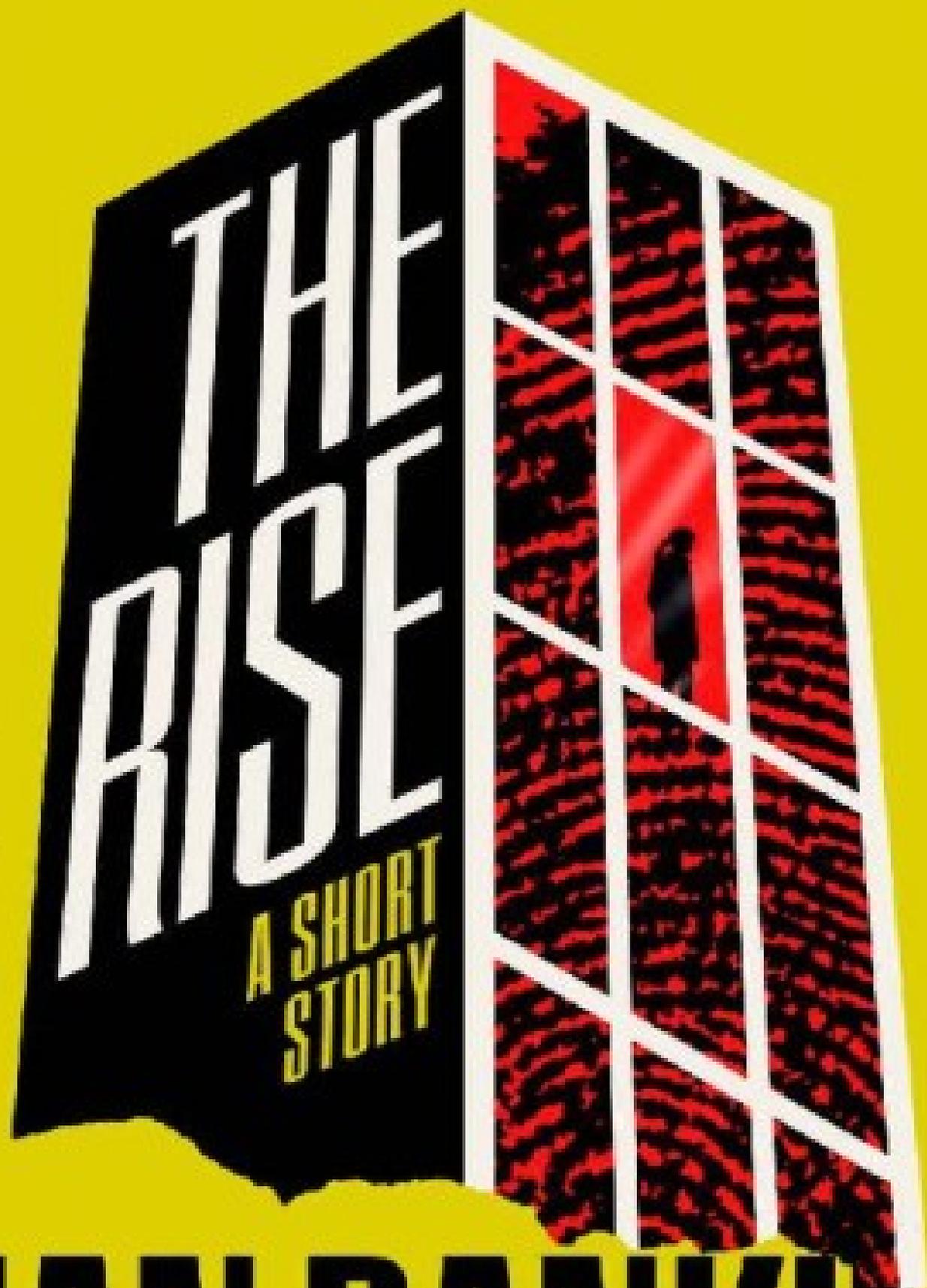


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AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

THE
RISE

A SHORT STORY

IAN RANKIN

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Gish arrived at The Rise on her mountain bike, so had no trouble parking. The drop-off area in front of the building was filled with marked and unmarked police cars plus two vans, one grey and one black – the first belonged to the mortuary, the second to the Scene of Crime team. Gish's first view of The Rise had been as she turned off Park Lane. Twelve storeys high and facing Hyde Park.

London at 2 a.m. was as quiet as it ever got but there was still traffic. No media as yet but they would come. She noted that few of the darkened windows felt the need for blinds or curtains, reckoned those who could afford to live in the building would want the rest of the world to know what they were missing. Gish locked her bike and stripped off her waterproofs, stuffing them into her saddlebag as she approached the Scene of Crime van, whose rear doors stood wide open, the interior illuminated.

'Hello, George,' she said to the man who emerged from within. 'Look after my stuff?'

He nodded and took the bag from her, offering in return a set of disposable overalls and shoe covers. Gish got ready quickly.

'Gang's all here,' she commented, gesturing towards the other vehicles.

'You're the last,' he agreed, peering at her bike.

'Saving the planet, George.' She gave him a thin smile and headed for The Rise's front door, pulling on the pale blue latex gloves despite hating the feel of them. The ground floor was brightly lit, floor-to-ceiling glass walls showing her the reception area, with two sofas and a low table, wall-mounted TV, and what looked like a seven-foot-tall cactus. A huddle of figures dressed identically to her could be seen around the reception desk. A uniformed officer guarded the door.

'Detective Sergeant Gish,' she told him. He made a note on his clipboard and pressed a teardrop-shaped plastic fob

against a discreet black box next to the door, which clicked open. Gish indicated the fob.

‘Belongs to the victim’s girlfriend,’ the officer explained, pushing the door open.

Gish walked inside, controlling her breathing even though her heart had other ideas. As she passed the cactus she saw that it was made of green glass, its needles formed of what looked like sex toys. Behind the reception desk stood an open doorway. The body lay on the floor, half in and half out of this other room. A glimpse inside showed her another desk, an array of CCTV screens, and a sink with a kettle alongside it. Detective Inspector Jack Milton appeared in the doorway, manoeuvring his way carefully past the corpse. His eyes widened as he recognised Gish. He walked towards her, turning so they were both facing the incident scene.

‘Thought Collins was on the rota for tonight,’ he said.

‘Sick again, apparently.’

‘Guy’s a complete waste of a cop salary,’ Milton muttered. ‘What do you think of the art?’ He nodded towards the cactus.

‘Is that what it is?’

‘There’s another one next to the lift, dolls’ arms rather than . . .’ He cleared his throat. ‘Deceased’s name is Dwayne Hogarth. Night-shift security, but this being the place it is they’re all called “concierges”. Twenty-three years old and has worked here just over a year.’

‘Cause of death?’

‘He was thumped from behind, but what probably killed him was his left temple connecting with a corner of the marble reception desk as he went down. Bleed on the brain, the doctor presumes. Autopsy will tell us more.’

Gish angled her head a little. ‘And the girlfriend?’ she asked.

Milton studied her, perhaps wondering how she knew. ‘Found him lying there and called it in. Regular thing,

apparently. She'd stop by for an hour or two to break the monotony. She's upstairs now in the spa.'

'Spa?'

'Therapists on call 24/7. There's a cinema, too – reclining chairs and its own popcorn machine. Gym, twenty-metre pool, underground car park—'

'Anything from the surveillance cameras?' Gish interrupted.

'System's switched off.' Milton offered a shrug. 'We'll be asking the building's owner about that. He lives in the penthouse.' He paused, running his tongue across his lips. 'What do you think happened?'

'Not an accident,' Gish replied. 'Smears of blood on the floor in front of the victim's head. Whoever hit him started dragging him into the control room but then stopped for some reason. Okay if I take a look?' She was gesturing towards the doorway. Milton nodded, so she moved towards the Scene of Crime team.

'He was face down,' Milton explained. 'Girlfriend rolled him on to his back.'

Surfaces were being checked for fingerprints and other trace evidence. A photographer was videoing the scene. A couple of the team knew Gish and nodded a greeting. Dwayne Hogarth was dressed in a black suit, white shirt and thin black tie. The outfit probably came with the job, but the shoes were his own – cheap and scuffed. His head was turned to one side, eyes vacant and glassy. He was lean and of medium height. An evening paper sat on the desk, folded open at the puzzles page. There was a pen there, too. The margins of the paper were a mass of doodles but not a single puzzle had been attempted.

Stepping around the body, Gish found herself in the control room. The surveillance screens were blank. A small refrigerator hummed. There was a metal box affixed to one wall, a numeric keypad attached to its front. Gish touched a gloved finger to the side of the box and pulled. It was

unlocked. Inside sat rows of hooks, each with a teardrop-shaped fob attached.

All except one.

Gish couldn't see any obvious numbering system. She sensed Milton coming to stand alongside her.

'I'd assume this is usually kept locked,' she said. Then she pointed to the empty hook. 'We need to know which door.' She watched Milton nod.

'Owner might be able to help.'

'He lives on the premises, you said?'

'Duplex penthouse – he spelled it out for me. Means two whole floors.'

'So you've already met?'

'He saw the commotion outside, came down to the lobby. He was the one who suggested Rosa should wait in the spa.'

'Rosa's the girlfriend?' Gish didn't need an answer to her question.

'Waiting for us one floor up,' Milton said.

'Well, I'm ready if you are.'

Milton nodded slowly and led the way. Once inside the lift, he produced another teardrop and touched it to an electronic screen before tapping the number for the floor they wanted. He saw the look Gish was giving him. 'Not from the hook,' he explained. 'Owner handed it over. He had one to spare.'

'What's his name?' Gish began peeling off her overalls, Milton doing the same.

'Allan Franklyn. That's Allan with two l's and Franklyn with a y. He was very particular. Guy's a high-end developer. Don't suppose he got this piece of prime in a fire sale.'

'Maybe I'll see if he'll do me a deal.'

'You still with your mum?'

Gish nodded. 'Carers come in three times a day; makes a difference. How about you – daughter still at uni?'

‘Graduated.’ Milton pulled back his shoulders in a show of pride. ‘She’s working in an auction house.’

‘I forget her name.’

‘Phoebe.’

‘And there you were thinking Art History was a waste of her talent.’

‘Still not going to make enough to look after her dad in his twilight years.’

Gish looked at him. ‘How long now?’

‘Three months, two weeks, two days.’

‘Not that you’re counting.’

‘I’ve an app on my phone that does it for me.’

Their smiles lasted until the lift doors opened, delivering them into a plush waiting area. There were signs for treatment rooms, a sauna, steam room and pool. Two figures rose from a banquette as they approached. One of the two was the constable who’d been acting as babysitter. The other was a distraught young woman who could barely control the tremors running through her body. A wastepaper bin on the floor next to her was already halfway full with crumpled and sodden sheets of paper towel. Her eyes were on the folded overalls the detectives were carrying.

‘Rosa?’ Gish said, receiving a twitched nod in reply. Gish identified herself and Milton. ‘Let’s sit down again.’ The constable moved away a few paces while Milton settled next to Gish, the pair of them facing Rosa.

‘This must be very distressing,’ Gish began. ‘And I’m sorry for your loss. How long had you been going out together?’

‘Four months.’ Rosa tore another sheet from the roll in front of her and wiped it across her reddened nose.

‘So Dwayne was already working here?’

‘He liked the job. Said it was cushy, but the nights could be a drag.’

‘He worked nights exclusively?’

‘Ten till six.’

‘Did you visit him regularly?’

‘Only when I couldn’t sleep.’

‘You live nearby?’

Rosa snorted, blinking back fresh tears. ‘Who can afford to live round here? I’m in Catford, and even that’s a stretch.’

‘What do you do, Rosa?’

‘Work in a café. I do some singing, too. R’n’B. Hoping a record company will take notice.’

‘Is that how you met?’ Gish watched the young woman nod. Gish leaned forward a little towards her. ‘Anyone else help him stave off the boredom? Other friends, I mean.’ She watched Rosa shake her head. ‘How long have you had the fob that lets you in?’ Rosa started to shift uncomfortably. ‘You’re not in trouble,’ Gish reassured her.

‘Against the rules though, isn’t it?’

‘If Dwayne’s based in reception, why couldn’t he just open the door?’

Rosa fidgeted again. ‘He liked it when I surprised him. He might be in the control room, or doing a floor patrol. When he came back, there I’d be.’

Milton cleared his throat. ‘I’m sure you’ve already been told, Rosa, but we’ll need a formal statement. We also need to notify Dwayne’s next of kin. I assume you can help us there?’

‘I can let you have their number, just as soon as *she* gives me back my phone.’ She gestured towards the constable.

‘You’ll get your phone back,’ Gish assured her. ‘But we’d appreciate it if you didn’t share what’s happened, tempting though that might be. We need to make sure Dwayne’s family hear the news in the proper way.’

Rosa seemed to see the sense of this and nodded slowly.

‘When you arrived tonight,’ Milton asked, ‘did you see anyone? Someone who might have just left?’

‘No.’

‘Did you go into the control room?’

Rosa shook her head. ‘Why all the fuss?’

‘It wasn’t an accident, Rosa. We have reason to believe Dwayne was attacked.’

‘What?’

‘Has he ever been in any trouble that you know of?’

‘Because he’s black, you mean?’

‘No fallings-out or money worries?’

‘Who doesn’t worry about money?’ She paused, taking in her surroundings. ‘Well, none of this lot do.’ She turned her attention back to the detectives. ‘Who’d want to hurt him?’

‘That’s what we need to find out,’ Gish said. ‘So if you think of anything that could help us . . .’ She rose to her feet, as did Milton. ‘The constable here will give you a contact number.’

They headed back to the lift. Another tap of the fob and they were heading upwards, not to a numbered floor this time but one with the single letter P. Neither had anything to say, their minds busy filing and sifting. When the doors opened again they were in a carpeted lobby, its walls festooned with garish paintings. Milton paused in front of one.

‘It was in the papers when this place opened,’ he said. ‘Art collection worth seven figures.’

‘You’d have to pay me to live with it,’ Gish countered. ‘I’ve been here ten seconds and I’m getting a migraine.’ She pressed the bell of the single polished wooden door. The man who eventually opened it seemed to Gish a born performer. His prematurely greying hair was slicked back from a high forehead, his crisp white shirt open at the neck, displaying tufts of chest hair. He was tanned and toned, stretching an arm out in welcome, his shirt cuffs flapping, cufflinks removed.

‘Ghastly,’ he said. ‘Just bloody hellish.’

‘Mr Franklyn,’ Milton said, ‘this is DS Gish.’

Franklyn took her hand and squeezed the life from it, then led both detectives past more art and into a huge open-plan living space with floor-to-ceiling windows on three sides. Gish couldn’t help herself, drawn to the view as if by a magnet. Hyde Park and its lamp posts lay spread out in front of her.

‘Let me show you something,’ Franklyn said. ‘Dark glass!’ he called out. The window in front of Gish went black, the lights outside suddenly invisible.

‘That’s quite a trick,’ she was forced to admit.

‘Hellish expensive, but part of The Rise’s wow factor.’

‘Not much wow factor from a body in your reception area,’ Milton said coldly.

Franklyn turned to him. ‘I’m sorry, I’ve forgotten your name.’

‘Detective Inspector Milton.’

Franklyn nodded. ‘And we’ve not met before? Before tonight, I mean?’

‘I’d say we move in very different circles, sir.’

Gish had torn herself away from the window and was studying a large spiral staircase in the middle of the room, each step made of illuminated glass. ‘How well did you know Dwayne Hogarth, Mr Franklyn?’ she asked.

‘We chatted in passing.’

‘Has he had cause to report anything to you? Suspicious characters, attempts to break in . . . ?’

‘Nothing,’ Franklyn stated.

Gish was circling one of the floor-standing sculptures. ‘Same for the other concierges?’

‘Nothing’s been brought to my attention.’

‘You won’t mind us asking them?’

‘Not at all. I’ll give you their details.’

‘Who was it that hired Mr Hogarth?’

‘Me personally.’

‘So you’d have had him vetted?’

There was a pause before Franklyn spoke. ‘Absolutely.’

‘Are all the properties occupied currently?’ Milton asked.

‘God, no.’ Franklyn’s relief at the change of subject was palpable. ‘There are sixteen units in total. Including mine I’d say six are permanently occupied.’

‘And the other ten?’

Franklyn gave a shrug.

‘An actual answer would be nice,’ Gish said, her tone stiffening.

‘A few are owned by hedge funds,’ Franklyn eventually conceded. ‘One corporation keeps theirs for visiting bigwigs ...’

‘And the rest?’

‘A smattering of owners who live elsewhere and might require a London pied-à-terre. All sorts really.’

‘So how much are we talking about?’ Milton asked.

Franklyn made show of working it out in his head. ‘Maybe ten?’ he ventured.

‘Ten million?’ Milton checked.

‘For one of the smaller units,’ Franklyn confirmed.

While Milton puffed out his cheeks, Gish had another question. ‘The five permanent occupants other than yourself – who would they be?’

‘Discretion is one of the reasons people choose to live here. That and the security.’

‘I wouldn’t say security’s your strong point,’ Gish said. ‘The deceased’s girlfriend could get in any time she liked.’

‘That’ll be one of the ancillary fobs – opens the main door but nothing else. Strictly against protocol for him to have passed it on to her.’

‘But,’ Milton added, ‘you handed me a spare, too, and this one gets me lift access.’ He showed Franklyn the fob.

‘Each owner has a couple of sets.’ Franklyn gave a shrug.

‘Any idea why the security cameras are switched off?’

Franklyn’s jaw tensed. ‘Are they?’

‘Screens are blank.’

‘Then someone must have done something.’

‘To come back to that list of residents . . .’ Gish persisted.

‘Privileged information,’ Franklyn stated.

‘This is a murder inquiry, Mr Franklyn,’ Milton countered.

Franklyn stared at him. ‘I thought he fell.’

‘He was attacked by person or persons unknown.’

The man looked aghast.

‘So if we could have those names?’ Gish pushed.

Franklyn took a further moment to compose himself. ‘Of course,’ he eventually mumbled, taking a deep breath. ‘Princess Aisha,’ he began to recite, ‘Lev Godunov, Joe Spalding, Jessica Forrester, Roisin Gallacher.’ He checked against his fingers. ‘That’s it.’

‘Roisin Gallacher?’ Milton echoed, glancing in Gish’s direction. ‘Would she be the same Roisin Gallacher who’s married to Eddie Gallacher?’

‘You’d have to ask her that.’

‘We’ll be sure to. In fact, we’ll be questioning all of them,’ Milton stated. ‘We’ll also need to verify that the other flats are currently vacant.’

‘They’re not going to be happy.’

‘Aisha?’ Gish checked. ‘Where is she princess of?’

‘Her father’s a sheikh. She’s lived here for a while.’ Franklyn thought for a moment. ‘Though she’s not been seen for a couple of weeks. Ditto her bodyguards.’

‘Why does she need bodyguards?’

Franklyn shrugged. ‘It’s usually a prestige thing.’

‘Lev Godunov?’ Milton prompted.

‘He has a couple of minders, too. Made a lot of money in Russia. Energy, I think. Middleman rather than producer. Russians like my buildings. The windows don’t open.’ Franklyn paused, then winced. ‘That’s a joke, by the way. Sorry, appalling taste.’

‘And Ms Forrester?’

‘Actor. Google her – you’ll know the face. Joe Spalding meantime is an art dealer – he’s in New York just now. In hospital, in point of fact.’

‘So if we were to knock on doors tonight we might only find Mrs Gallacher, Mr Godunov and Ms Forrester at home? In a twelve-storey building?’

‘Welcome to London,’ Franklyn said.

‘Speaking of doors,’ Gish continued, ‘we noticed the key box in the security room was open. Would that usually be the case?’

‘Absolutely not.’

‘And one of the fobs is missing. Would you be able to tell which?’

Franklyn’s brow furrowed. ‘I would think so.’

‘In that case, would you mind coming with us? I have to warn you, you’ll have to pass by Mr Hogarth’s body.’

Franklyn considered for a second before nodding. Milton was looking around him at the sculptures dotted about the room.

‘I recognise Brancusi. Maybe Giacometti, too?’

‘Bravo, Inspector.’ Franklyn watched Milton give a modest shrug. ‘I’m lucky to have Joe as a friend as well as a neighbour. He sometimes points me in the right direction.’

‘Did he help choose the art in the rest of the building?’

Franklyn shook his head. ‘We employ a curator. He’s very sharp. Knows all the right people.’

‘The cacti – are those by the Chapman Brothers?’

‘School of.’ Franklyn examined himself. ‘Am I suitably attired, do you think?’

‘We’ll get you a set of overclothes,’ Gish assured him. As they headed to the door, Milton paused in front of a selection of framed paintings and photos. One photo showed two men hard at work in a boxing ring.

‘Are you a fan?’ he inquired.

‘That’s my father on the left,’ Franklyn said. ‘He won a few fights in his day.’ He patted his pockets to make sure he had his own fob on him, then pulled open the door and ushered the two detectives out.

Gish went to the Scene of Crime van to fetch a suit for Franklyn. A cordon had been set up and the rubberneckers had started to gather, phones held up in front of their faces. George was still busy in the back of the van, opening and closing drawers. He was the most organised guy she knew – everything in its place, all potions and powders accounted for. When she asked for another set of overclothes he almost rolled his eyes.

‘Tell your boss I’m not made of them. We’ve got a budget, same as everybody else.’

But he handed over the goods and she thanked him. The uniform guarding the building let her in with a nod, clipboard not needed. Franklyn changed into the overalls, slipped on the overshoes and donned the tight gloves. He looked rightly nervous, eyes flitting constantly towards the prone body. Milton, by now identically attired, patted him on the shoulder before leading the way. Inside the control room, Gish noted the sheen of sweat on the developer’s forehead.

‘Okay?’ she asked. He managed to nod, though his face had lost some of its colouring. He checked the CCTV equipment.

‘I think it’s been tampered with,’ he said.

‘Does the footage go to a server off-site?’ Gish asked.

‘Just the hard disk here,’ Franklyn answered, crossing to the key box, which Milton opened for him. He studied the layout.

‘Six is missing,’ he stated. ‘That’s Jessica’s apartment. Oh God. Should I call her to check?’

‘Probably best if we visit in person,’ Milton advised. ‘Which floor do we need?’

‘The sixth. Should I come with you?’

‘Maybe as far as her door. We’ll take it from there.’

When they reached the sixth floor, Gish noted three doors, one of them marked Fire Escape. ‘Those stairs,’ she asked Franklyn, ‘can anyone access them?’

‘To go down, yes. Wouldn’t be much use in a fire otherwise.’

‘And the other door?’

‘Another apartment. Both owned by Mickey Tan.’

‘He’s Forrester’s landlord?’ Gish watched Franklyn nod.

‘The other one’s vacant at present,’ he said.

Milton was already at the actor’s door, his ID held open. Gish followed suit, making a zipping motion across her lips for Franklyn’s benefit. Having pressed the buzzer, Milton wasted no time before giving the door a thump.

‘What do we do if no one opens up?’ Gish asked.

‘Sledgehammer,’ Milton answered.

Franklyn’s Adam’s apple bobbed. ‘There’s a master fob in my company office. It’s only half a dozen streets away.’

But they could hear the sound of a chain being engaged, then a lock turning. The door was opened as far as the chain would allow, a woman's face blinking blearily into the light.

‘Allan?’ she said. ‘What’s going on?’

Milton introduced himself and Gish and asked if they could come in.

‘I’m in my PJs,’ Forrester said. But then she relented and undid the chain. Gish signalled to Franklyn that he should wait outside. While Forrester retreated to the bathroom to put on a dressing gown, Milton and Gish prowled the rooms. The apartment wasn’t big and only had the one window looking on to Hyde Park. The living room wasn’t tidy, nor was the kitchen area. A second bedroom, utility cupboard and bathroom. When they regrouped in the living room, the detectives shared a look. No one else was here.

Forrester was fussing with her hair when she entered. Gish thought she recognised her from something but couldn’t say what. There were framed photos on a couple of walls showing the actor with others of her profession, all of them better known to Gish. A solitary award sat on an occasional table beside the sofa.

‘So what’s all the fuss?’ Forrester asked, perching on the edge of a leather chair.

Milton began to explain. ‘There appears to have been an intruder—’

‘How did they get past Dwayne?’ Forrester interrupted.

‘I’m afraid Mr Hogarth is dead.’

She put a hand to her mouth. ‘No,’ she said from behind her fingers.

‘Have you been asleep all this time?’ Milton asked.

‘Since about midnight.’

‘You’re here alone?’

‘Tonight, yes.’

‘No visitors? Nothing woke you up?’

She stared at Milton. ‘What are you saying?’

‘The intruder seems to have taken only the one key from the control room . . .’ Milton broke off as he watched her leap to her feet. The detectives followed her into her bedroom. She slid open the wardrobe and checked the contents of a jewellery box, while Gish took the opportunity to glance inside the ensuite.

‘Everything’s here,’ Forrester said. ‘I’m a light sleeper, I’d have known if someone came in.’ Her eyes flitted around the room before meeting Gish’s. ‘Mickey,’ she stated.

‘Mickey Tan?’ Gish guessed.

‘The bloody rent. I’m only a bit behind.’ She stalked back into the living area and opened her purse. ‘Nothing taken.’ She turned again to the two detectives. ‘The man’s got a thing for me. One of my TV shows, he’s obsessed with it.’

‘Why would he have attacked Mr Hogarth?’ Milton asked her. ‘Wouldn’t he just ring your doorbell?’

Forrester seemed to consider this, her lips pressed together. ‘Mickey knows people,’ she said. ‘He’s chummy with that Gallacher woman for a start – or with her husband anyway. Maybe he asked a favour, some thug who’d come and put the fear of God into me.’

‘For some rent arrears?’ Gish sounded sceptical, but Milton looked like he was at least considering the possibility.

‘What if they come back?’ Forrester was saying, eyes widening. ‘They’ve got the fob – what’s to stop them?’ She stretched her arms out to reinforce her point.

‘I’m sure the access code on your lock can be changed,’ Gish said calmly.

‘It better bloody be,’ Forrester muttered, collapsing on to a chair. ‘I’ve been saying for ages, one night-time doorman isn’t enough. There used to be two. Our service charges never go down but the service does. The smell from the bin store . . .’ Forrester made show of rolling her eyes.

‘Until your fob’s reprogrammed,’ Gish said, ‘I’d suggest you keep your door bolted, and make sure you use the spyhole and security chain.’

‘You bet I will.’

True to her word, when the detectives left, they heard the clunk of the door lock and the rattle of the security chain. Allan Franklyn was waiting for them along the hall.

‘Would you mind going back to the key box,’ Gish told him, ‘and bring up the fob for the other flat?’

He swallowed back whatever questions he had and headed to the lift. Gish turned to face Milton.

‘Did you recognise her?’

‘Definitely seen her in something, playing an English rose.’

‘She has the looks – and the voice.’ Gish paused and thought for a moment. ‘Mickey Tan and Eddie Gallacher though? All for a bit of late rent?’

‘We don’t know how much she owes,’ Milton countered. ‘Or what else might be going on. People who get obsessed don’t always think straight.’ He took a call from downstairs, the team checking that Franklyn had permission to be there. Milton acknowledged the fact then started discussing door-to-door. There weren’t too many to check, so it shouldn’t take long. ‘One person of interest,’ he added into the phone. ‘Mickey Tan. Let’s see what we can find.’ He listened for a moment, then locked eyes with Gish. ‘Do we want a full sweep?’ She nodded. ‘Okay, a full sweep – parking garage, bin stores, whatever. Need to be seen to be diligent. Chief’s going to want to tell the TV cameras that much.’

He ended the call, walked to the door of the vacant unit and rang the bell. After a moment he pressed his ear to the door, then crouched to peer through the letterbox.

‘Old-school,’ Gish said as Milton attempted to straighten up.

‘Older than some,’ he agreed, before turning his attention to the nearest painting. ‘Banksy,’ he stated.

‘How do you know this stuff?’

‘Gives me and Phoebe something to talk about.’

The lift doors opened and they watched Allan Franklyn step out, wiping fresh perspiration from his brow. He held up the fob then touched it against the lock. The door clicked open and Gish led the way, flicking the hallway light on. The place boasted not one stick of furniture and the surfaces looked to have been cleaned professionally.

‘What’s your thinking?’ Franklyn plucked up the courage to ask.

‘Did you know Ms Forrester owes her landlord rent?’ Gish asked in return.

‘Mickey did ask me to have a quiet word on his behalf.’

‘A large sum, is it?’

‘Only a few thou. When Jess moved in . . . well, the rent was hilariously low.’

‘Because Mr Tan was a fan of her work?’

‘First time they met he asked for a selfie and an autograph. Second time, he brought a whole binder of cuttings. My distinct feeling is that she needn’t have paid any rent at all, in exchange for certain favours. She made it pretty clear to Mickey that such an arrangement was not on the cards. He backed off and the rent started to climb. But by then Jess was in love with The Rise.’ He offered a shrug.

‘He’s never resorted to threats or intimidation?’ Milton asked.

‘God, no.’

‘Ms Forrester reckons he’s good friends with Roisin Gallacher. A friend of her husband’s, too.’

‘Not for me to say,’ Franklyn said, avoiding eye contact. Milton walked up to him so that the two were face to face. ‘Do you know Eddie Gallacher’s whereabouts, Mr Franklyn?’

‘Absolutely not.’

‘His wife’s never dropped a hint or let anything slip? You know he’s a wanted man, been on the run for a couple of years now?’

‘We’ve never met, never spoken.’

Gish interjected with a question of her own. ‘Do you have an address for Mr Tan?’

Franklyn broke eye contact with Milton. ‘In the office,’ he said. ‘I think he lives in a mews off Kensington Church Street. Prefers traditional to contemporary.’

‘Why is this apartment vacant?’

‘Investment properties often sit empty their whole lives. You might call it their *raison d’être*.’

‘I could call it some other things, too,’ Gish commented under her breath. Then, a little louder: ‘We need his home address sooner rather than later.’

‘I can go to the office now, if you’re finished with me.’

Gish checked with Milton before nodding. ‘And bring the master fob, please. We need to go door-to-door. It’ll help us navigate the lift. You also need to reprogramme Ms Forrester’s fob and lock.’

Franklyn hesitated. ‘You won’t go barging into any more of the vacant units? We don’t want a diplomatic incident. Not just the princess, but other nationalities, some very well-connected people.’

Gish shook her head. ‘Not without the necessary paperwork. But we do need to speak to the other residents, the ones actually here. That would be Mr Godunov and Mrs Gallacher. So if you could let us have their apartment numbers . . . ?’

But there was no sign of life from behind Lev Godunov’s door. Milton posted a note through the letterbox.

‘Old-school,’ Gish said again.

‘You’d send him a TikTok?’ Milton teased.

‘Do you even know what TikTok is, Jack?’ As they headed up to the next floor, she then asked the obvious question: ‘Why Forrester?’

‘Maybe we should have asked her about stalkers. She wouldn’t be the first woman in the public eye to have one.’

‘She seemed focused on Mickey Tan.’

‘She’s got rent arrears and possible eviction staring at her – maybe she thinks a bit of heat on him is no bad thing.’

Gish nodded her agreement. ‘Getting him to back off and buying herself some breathing space.’ She glanced at Milton. ‘It’s still a stretch to connect it all to Eddie Gallacher. I seem to remember you were one of the team who tried taking him down.’

‘Lots of teams tried taking him down, Gillian. Slippery as a soaped mackerel, that one.’

‘So you’ve got history.’

Milton’s tone stiffened. ‘History which is not going to affect my professionalism.’

‘Of course not, Jack,’ she said.

When they rang Roisin Gallacher’s bell the door was opened immediately, as though the woman had been waiting for them. She was in her forties, fully clothed and with her face made up, even at 4 a.m. To Gish’s mind she was wearing well, though these days you could never tell how much of that was good genes and how much was good surgery. Gallacher studied the detectives from top to toe, ignoring their IDs.

‘He’s not here,’ she said. ‘Whoever told you he is is spinning you a line – as ever.’

‘This isn’t about your husband, Mrs Gallacher,’ Gish said.

‘What then?’

‘There’s been an incident in the main lobby. The concierge, I’m sorry to say . . .’

Without saying anything, Gallacher turned and headed back into her flat. Gish and Milton followed. By the time they

caught up, she was at the window, peering down at the roofs of the police vehicles below. Looking around the room, Gish reckoned Gallacher had brought her previous home with her. There were red velvet curtains with elaborate ties, while gaudy ornaments covered every available surface. Framed photos had been fixed to the walls, mostly showing sunshine holidays, Gallacher's oversized, bare-chested husband with an arm wrapped around her. There was a sunken seating area in the middle of the room, taken up by a battered leather sofa, leaving no room for the matching recliner that looked like the woman's usual perch. A vape sat on one chair-arm and there was an aroma of apples in the air.

'Dwayne's dead,' Gallacher said, statement rather than question. Then she turned to face the detectives. 'I don't understand – why would anyone . . . ?'

Milton took a step towards her. 'That's what we're trying to discover, Mrs Gallacher. You knew him well, did you?'

'He was a sweetheart.'

'Not like your husband then.'

She glared at him and her eyes narrowed. 'I know you, don't I? You were one of those that was always out to nab my poor Eddie, trying to pin anything and everything on him.' Her voice had coarsened, the veneer gone. 'Well, you can't put Eddie in the frame for this.' She retreated to her chair and sucked on the vape.

'He has an alibi, does he?' Milton said. 'We'll need to verify that by checking his whereabouts.'

'You can bloody whistle,' she spat back at him.

'We think downstairs was maybe an intended robbery gone wrong,' Gish said. 'But we'd welcome any other theories.'

'My Eddie has enemies, of course he does – but mostly *your* side of the law. I doubt any of them would come for me. Dear old Joe Spalding's never got on the wrong side of anyone. Lev's another matter entirely. We all know the story with Russians and their money. He's got bodyguards though –

as has Aisha, though hers are more like prison guards, poor cow.'

'And Jessica Forrester?'

'Turns her nose up at the likes of me. Barely a word out of her.'

'Do you know her landlord?'

'Seems harmless enough.'

'What does that mean?'

'Everyone knows he has a thing for Forrester.' Gallacher gestured towards the window. 'I've seen him out there, just staring from across the road like a kid with a crush, hoping she'll take pity and invite him in.'

'Isn't that a bit creepy?' Gish inquired.

'My Eddie stalked me for weeks once he'd decided he wanted me. It was flattering, though my boyfriend at the time probably didn't think so.' She took another drag on the vape.

'You live here alone, Mrs Gallacher?' Milton asked.

'Yes.'

'Nothing different about tonight? You didn't happen to see or hear anyone turning up between eleven and midnight?'

'No, but they'd have been caught on security, wouldn't they? Have you lazy sods not checked that yet?'

'System's down. Place isn't as secure as you might think.' Milton's phone pinged and he held its screen to his face, jaw tightening. Then he looked around and saw a glossy travel magazine sitting on a coffee table. He started scribbling his phone number on the cover. 'Thanks for your time,' he said as he wrote. 'Tell your husband I was asking for him.'

Job done, a jerk of the head told Gish there was some urgency here. As they headed back to the lift she asked what was going on.

'We need to get suited up again.' He was pressing '-1' on the screen. 'Something waiting for us down there.'

The lift doors were almost closed when something appeared in the gap and fluttered to the ground. The magazine cover, torn into tiny pieces.

The underground car park had a low concrete roof and was dimly lit. There were spaces for a couple of dozen cars, but only half that number were in residence, and half of those were covered with dust sheets. One of the team was waiting for them.

‘We could smell it as soon as we came down here,’ he said. Yes, and Gish could smell it, too, despite the industrial-sized fan on the ceiling. It was something you never forgot, long after it had left your nostrils and lungs. She looked behind her, towards a door with a sign on it saying Bin Store. Forrester had been mistaken about that particular cutback.

The detective was leading them towards where two of his colleagues stood. They were at the rear of a gloss-black Bentley. Its boot was wide open. Inside lay a stained white duvet, and within the duvet a corpse, curled in on itself.

‘Male, not too many years on his clock,’ the detective commented. ‘What do you reckon – been here a few weeks?’

‘You forced the boot?’ Gish asked.

‘Didn’t need to. Car’s unlocked.’

‘Do we know whose it is?’

‘We’ll soon find out.’

‘Okay,’ Milton said, having sucked in some air between his teeth, ‘we need Scene of Crime down here. Plus the doctor, who’s probably just got himself back to bed. You okay to do all that, Rob?’

The detective nodded and walked away a few paces, pulling out his phone. Gish indicated to Milton that he should join her at the front of the vehicle. She pointed to the number plate.

‘LG,’ she said.

‘For Lev Godunov?’ Milton nodded his agreement. ‘Who seems to have made himself scarce.’

‘We need to search his flat.’

‘We need to search *all* the flats, Gillian. Which isn’t to say our bosses will agree.’

‘Reckon there’s a connection with the concierge?’

‘Has to be.’ Milton pinched the bridge of his nose, then gave himself a bit of a shake. ‘Who do you think he is?’

‘Could it be Godunov himself? No windows to throw him out of, so . . . ?’

‘Do we reckon anyone else upstairs is in danger?’

‘I suppose it’s possible.’ One of the other detectives was coming towards them.

‘Cursory check but I can’t find anything in his pockets. Suit and shoes are expensive – Savile Row or similar.’

Gish and Milton made show of agreeing, without actually saying anything.

‘Sixteen apartments,’ Gish calculated, ‘and we’ve been in four.’

Milton held up a hand to cut her off. ‘Best we don’t mention our visit to Mr Tan’s empty unit. Unless we want to explain the lack of a search warrant. Could make things a bit difficult for us.’

Gish nodded. ‘Lot of ground left to cover. Lucky the night is still young.’

‘It’s nearly morning. Another hour or two and I’ll be ready to drop.’

‘I’ll make a few calls,’ Gish said, ‘haul in as many additional bodies as I can.’

‘Meantime let’s go talk to Franklyn again, see if he can verify the car belongs to Godunov.’

Gish nodded and dug in her pocket for her phone. She snapped a photo of the car and its number plate, then walked to the boot and got a close-up of the decomposing face.

‘Just on the off chance,’ she explained to Milton.

‘I’ll settle for off chances right now,’ Milton told her as they made their way back to the lift.

In the morning the squad gathered in a suite of offices at the police station in Paddington. Gish had managed about half an hour’s sleep at home, waking with her head against her computer keyboard when the carers arrived to get her mother ready for breakfast. Gish had kissed her mother’s forehead and watched her smile – today, she remembered her. A neighbour would look in later and an old friend had also promised to drop by. There were more good people than bad in the world, they just made less noise – she had to keep reminding herself of that.

She’d printed out a sheaf of background info on all the players, enough to drain her ink cartridge, and brought it with her in a carrier bag. The Chief Super had already given his first speech to the team. Franklyn had identified the Bentley as belonging to Lev Godunov, whose description had now been circulated. Franklyn had taken one look at the face in the boot of the car and had to swallow down some bile. He had then shaken his head, looking as if his whole world was falling apart at speed. The Chief was hoping for better things from the autopsy. He’d warned that journalists – professional and amateur – were circling, leaving no room for screw-ups, leaky ships or lone wolves. At which point he had scanned the faces in front of him as if seeking out Jack Milton, but Milton was conspicuous by his absence, creeping in later, after the Chief had gone.

Gish handed him the fruits of her labours. ‘Franklyn changed his name to make himself sound posher. Used to be plain Alan with one l and Franklin with an i. Fee-paying school paid for by his parents. His dad was a pro boxer and did pretty well from it. Got out before he was too damaged and went into business. Franklyn decided to ditch university and go into property instead.’ She watched him try to stifle a yawn. ‘No sleep?’ He shook his head. ‘Much the same here.’ She tapped a finger against the energy drink on her desk.

‘Caffeine tablets for me,’ Milton said. ‘Though I’ll suffer for it later.’ He unlocked his phone’s screen and turned it

towards her. There was a grainy colour photograph there. Two men, one in a suit raising the beefy arm of the other, who was naked to the waist and wearing boxing gloves. ‘That’s Franklyn’s dad there – Benny Franklin. See who’s beside him?’ Gish shook her head. ‘None other than Eddie Gallacher. In his younger days he fancied himself as a promoter, including a few of Benny’s fights.’

Gish continued to study the screen. ‘Where did you find it?’

‘Mate of mine used to run the crime desk at the *Express*. He put me in touch with an old lag from sports. I bought him breakfast an hour ago and this was the result.’

‘So you weren’t just dodging the Chief?’

‘Call it a satisfying by-product.’

‘Franklyn told us he didn’t know Eddie Gallacher.’

‘Might still be true.’

‘You don’t sound convinced.’

Milton gave a shrug. ‘Any more news from the Bentley?’

‘Autopsy this morning. Double autopsy, in point of fact. The smart money regarding the car seems to be on manual strangulation.’ She paused. ‘Be a bit stupid, wouldn’t it? I mean, assuming the Russian did it – why leave the body in your own car, unlocked, somewhere it was bound to be noticed?’

‘That’s something we need to ask Mr Godunov. He still not answering his phone?’

She shook her head. ‘Could have it switched off.’

‘Less chance of us tracking it that way, I suppose.’ Milton scratched at his unshaved jaw. ‘So what’s next?’

‘We’ll have approval to enter his apartment in the next hour or so.’

‘What about the others?’

‘The princess’s embassy have been in touch. They want to ensure there are going to be no “diplomatic repercussions”.’

‘Do they know where she is though?’

‘If they do, they’re not saying. We’ve also had someone from the Foreign Office, ordering us to wear our softest possible shoes. And a couple of law firms after the same thing on behalf of their corporate clients.’

Milton was sifting through the paperwork she’d handed him. ‘Mind summing this up for me?’ he asked. ‘I’m not at my sharpest.’

Gish took a gulp of her drink, feeling her nerves jangling. ‘I’d say the princess was almost under house arrest. Reading between the lines she’s always been a problem child. Loved to party and splurge Daddy’s money, her face in all the right society columns. It eventually caught up with her and she’s quietened right down. Been in London three and a bit years, with side trips to Los Angeles, Cannes, Paris and Rome.’ She watched Milton flip a few pages. ‘Jessica Forrester meanwhile hasn’t had a decent role in quite some time. She sells memorabilia and video messages to fans from her own website. Couple of TV adverts and some voice work but that’s about it. Roisin Gallacher – well, I doubt there’s much the online world could tell you that you don’t already know. Husband a career criminal who’s probably shifted more pharmaceuticals in his time than every chemist shop in the land combined.’ She paused while he turned more pages. ‘Very little info on Lev Godunov and Michael Tan. Tan grew up in Hong Kong.’ She looked up at Milton. ‘Though there’s no CCTV from The Rise itself we’re checking public surveillance from the road outside and cameras in the vicinity. Might get lucky. Joseph Spalding is indeed an art dealer and has been all his adult life. Specialises in nineteenth- and twentieth-century sculpture. Currently in a hospital in New York after being the victim of a hit-and-run.’

‘Oh?’

‘On a Manhattan street, broad daylight. He was on his way to see a client. Multiple injuries but he’s expected to pull

through. Which leaves us with our developer . . .’ She paused while Milton flicked to the relevant pages. ‘Big question there is where the money came from for The Rise. Let’s just say the funding involves a number of offshore entities.’

‘Dodgy money, in other words.’

‘Lent by people who would rather keep their identities hidden, though I wouldn’t be surprised to see the likes of Godunov and Tan involved.’

‘How about Eddie Gallacher?’

‘Gallacher might have a few million to play with, but this feels like a bigger game altogether.’

‘Arab oil maybe?’

‘Maybe,’ Gish conceded. ‘Bottom line is, this was far and away Franklyn’s biggest project and he borrowed heavily to fund it.’

‘Well, let’s try to keep things as simple as we can. That way we’re less likely to get swamped. We have two deaths, most likely connected, a bunch of people we can’t locate or talk to, and no clear motive – does that just about sum it up?’ She gave a slow nod. ‘We also have a missing fob for Forrester’s apartment but no one seems to have gone in there, or if they did they were some kind of ninja. She’s got a fan by the name of Michael Tan who stares at her from the street like a weirdo . . .’ Milton trailed off.

‘We’re bringing him in for interview,’ Gish confirmed.

‘What time?’

‘Any minute.’

‘It should be us asking the questions.’

She puffed out her cheeks. ‘There are less tired brains out there, Jack.’

‘Maybe so, but we know more than they do.’ He popped another tablet from its blister pack and crunched down on it. Gish lifted her can to her lips.

‘Okay then,’ she said.

‘Thank you for coming in, Mr Tan,’ Milton said, taking one of the two seats across the table. Gish placed herself next to him and got her first good look at Mickey Tan. He was in his thirties, slim and smooth-skinned. He wore a brass-buttoned blazer over an open-necked shirt and cravat. Someone had provided him with a cardboard beaker of weak, warm liquid, which he was frowning at.

‘For a nation that venerates tea,’ he announced, ‘the English seldom excel in its science.’

‘Sorry to disappoint you.’ Milton looked to the officer who had just finished setting up the recording equipment. The man nodded to indicate that everything was good to go. ‘Thanks, Will.’

Tan watched the officer leave then turned to the two detectives. ‘Do I need legal representation?’

‘We’re just gathering information here, Mr Tan,’ Gish said, looking at her notes. ‘You were born in Hong Kong – is Michael a typical boy’s name there?’

‘It’s not untypical. Besides, my parents were Anglophiles, as am I.’

‘What’s your favourite thing about the country?’ Milton asked. ‘Maybe our TV and film?’

Tan gave a brief smile. ‘You’ve been talking to Jessica.’

‘Have we?’

‘I assume so.’

‘You’re also aware of what took place last night at The Rise?’ Milton watched the man nod. ‘When was the last time you visited?’

‘Maybe a week or ten days back.’

‘Did you know Dwayne Hogarth?’

‘We exchanged pleasantries.’

Gish cleared her throat. ‘You don’t seem particularly affected by his death.’

‘I’m not in the least affected.’ Tan made show of checking his fingernails. ‘He was a security guard, and London is a dangerous city. I would expect the police to appreciate that more than anyone.’

‘We think whoever killed Mr Hogarth wanted to gain entry to Jessica Forrester’s apartment,’ Milton stated.

Tan’s complacency vanished. ‘What?’

‘There’d been a bit of a falling-out between the two of you.’

‘Hardly a falling-out – she owed me rent, that’s all.’

‘And seemed increasingly unable or unwilling to pay. And since she’s already turned down your proposal of payment in kind . . .’ Milton let his words hang in the air. Tan was shaking his head vigorously.

‘No, no, no. I asked Allan Franklyn to have a discreet word and left it at that. My thinking was that a lawyer’s letter could be the next step.’ He paused. ‘Maybe Allan went to see her. Maybe he’s who you should be talking to.’

‘Would you say you’re infatuated with Ms Forrester?’ Gish asked.

‘Not infatuated, no. The TV shows, the films, the visual culture – that unique English sense of humour – those are my passion.’ He wagged a finger at the two detectives. ‘Allan had a thing for her though, I’m sure of that. But he’s too uptight, too British to attempt to take things further. Yes, the more I think about it . . .’ He thought for a moment. ‘Then there’s the Gallacher woman. She detests Jessica for her looks and her talent. Maybe it drove her to do something outlandish.’

‘That’s odd,’ Milton said. ‘We were told you’re good friends with Mrs Gallacher. Or maybe with her husband?’

Tan offered no answer, so Gish sifted through her notes again. ‘Do you know the other residents, Mr Tan? Lev Godunov, for example?’

‘A simple thug.’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘Anyone who made their fortune post-glasnost is, *ipso facto*, a thug, one step up from a street hooligan.’

‘Princess Aisha?’

Tan considered. ‘You can never get near her due to those bodyguards of hers. She’s like a caged songbird. She wasn’t always like that. I don’t like the way she looks now. She is fading away.’

‘How does she get on with Ms Forrester?’

Tan offered a shrug. ‘They have beauty and poise in common.’ He seemed content to leave it at that. Milton emptied the double espresso he’d bought from a nearby café and rubbed a thumb across his lips.

‘Do you have a vehicle in The Rise’s car park?’ he asked. Tan shook his head. ‘A parking space, then?’

‘Two, actually. But I don’t see the need for a car in central London.’

‘Well,’ Gish added, ‘it’s a short walk from your home in Kensington, I suppose.’ She tapped her pen against the pile of papers in front of her. ‘Would you like to see the CCTV we have of you hanging around outside the building?’ Milton shifted slightly in his seat, knowing the bluff for what it was, but Tan hunched his shoulders, pressing his hands together and lowering his head.

‘What of it?’ he said, his voice little more than a whisper.

‘Were you there last night, Mr Tan?’ Gish watched him nod. She placed her elbows on the table. ‘What time was this?’

‘Ten, maybe ten-thirty.’

‘Did you see anything?’

‘No.’

‘Not even Ms Forrester? Doesn’t that get a bit frustrating?’

‘Was Dwayne Hogarth at his desk?’ Milton added.

Tan’s eyes narrowed in thought. ‘I think so. Reading something maybe.’

‘No one entered or left the building?’

Tan shook his head. ‘I didn’t stay long. It was a cold night.’

‘Peeping Toms aren’t usually so easily dissuaded.’ Tan looked ready to argue, but Milton cut him off with another question: ‘Did you happen to notice any activity in the other apartments?’

‘Lights were on in the penthouse.’

‘What about Mrs Gallacher?’

‘I don’t remember.’

‘Do you have access to the garage, Mr Tan?’

Tan seemed puzzled by the change of topic. ‘Of course. The same fob does both lift and apartment door.’

‘So as the owner, do you have a spare fob to Ms Forrester’s flat?’

Tan shook his head. ‘She has both sets.’

‘How about your other flat?’ Gish asked. ‘The one next door to Ms Forrester? Must be tempting on a cold dark night – and you’d be so much closer to your prey.’

Tan glowered at her, saying nothing.

‘You’ll know,’ Milton took over, ‘that Lev Godunov keeps his car in the car park?’

‘A Bentley – exquisite but ostentatious.’

‘A body’s been found in it.’

Tan sat stunned for a moment. ‘Whose body?’

Milton offered a shrug. ‘We’re in the process of finding out. Can you think of anything that might help us?’

‘I haven’t been in that garage for . . . well, probably since I purchased the apartments. This is . . .’ He sought the right word. ‘Bewildering.’

Gish and Milton sat in silence for a few moments, wondering if he might have anything else to say, but all he did

was swirl the beaker of cold tea, shaking his head slowly and staring at its surface with unblinking eyes.

‘You should go home,’ Milton said an hour later. The clock on the office wall showed noon.

‘So should you,’ Gish replied. ‘And yet here we are.’

The desks they’d been allotted meant they faced each other, hers already messier than his. ‘I don’t have a mother waiting for me,’ he countered, checking that his latest coffee cup was empty.

‘Below the belt, Jack.’ His mouth twisted in what she took to be an apology. An email arrived on their respective computers at the exact same moment.

‘CCTV from cameras on the street,’ Gish said. Milton was already studying the message.

‘There’s Tan,’ he said, clicking on one of the attached stills. ‘Timed at just after ten.’

Gish was still reading the accompanying notes. ‘No cameras pointed at The Rise itself though the forecourt is partially visible. Plenty of passing traffic – vans, buses, cabs and cars. Couple of delivery bikes stopping for a breather. A few office drunks heading home on foot . . . Uber arrives on cue, delivering Rosa to the building. No actual footage of her but the number plate checks out.’

‘Go to the last file,’ Milton said, peering at his screen.

This was a video clip from after Rosa had made the call and the police had started to arrive. Three men appeared to be heading for the building but then stopped, taking in all the activity. They watched for a good half-minute before carrying out a short conversation. The man in the middle was towered over by those flanking him, but he did most of the talking, the other two deferring to him. Eventually they turned and started walking away. The officer who’d trawled the CCTV had added a still, a close-up that was probably too blurry to be useful. Gish picked up her phone anyway and called Allan Franklyn.

‘It’s DS Gish,’ she told him. ‘I want to describe someone to you – male, around six feet, heavy-built, shaven-headed,

cream trench coat. I'd say probably late thirties to mid-forties. Accompanied by two larger gentlemen . . .' She listened, her eyes meeting Milton's. She gave a little nod. 'I might send you a picture, see if that helps confirm anything.' She paused, listening again. 'No other news, but it's early days. Thanks for your help.' She ended the call. 'Lev Godunov,' she told Milton, 'often wears a light-coloured trench coat.'

'Let's get the photo circulated, see if it helps. Since he didn't go home, what do you reckon?'

'Hotel maybe.'

'Needle-in-a-haystack stuff.' His eyes met hers. 'You didn't ask Franklyn about his dad and Eddie Gallacher.'

'Best done face to face, no?'

They both turned their heads to watch a detective called Amberson approach from across the room, shrugging off the jacket and scarf she'd been wearing.

'How was it, Emma?' Gish asked.

'I've seen worse. And at least the pathologist wasn't Creepy Connors.'

'Connors is okay once you get to know him,' Milton said. Neither woman looked convinced.

'Who do you want me to start with?'

'Dwayne Hogarth,' Gish said.

'The blow from behind was with something heavy but blunt. A cosh or similar. But it was falling into the marble desk that killed him.'

'Not murder then.'

'Still a homicide,' Milton countered. 'It's for the lawyers to argue the finer points.'

'In any event, he'd have been unconscious from the blow to his skull. Pathologist reckons if it had been called in and paramedics had got to him, there's a chance he could have been saved.' They took a collective moment to digest this.

‘And the body in the boot?’ Gish eventually asked.

‘Dead before he was placed there. Damage to the windpipe suggests manual strangulation, so well done if you had that on your bingo card. Bruising elsewhere on the body indicates a struggle of some kind. Nothing useful beneath the fingernails. Trace evidence is still being analysed. No distinguishing features such as tattoos or birthmarks and nothing at all in any of the pockets.’

‘Ethnicity?’

‘Possibly eastern Mediterranean but more likely Middle Eastern.’ Amberson paused. ‘More to come, I dare say, but I knew you’d want it quick.’

‘We appreciate it,’ Gish said, watching Amberson head to her own desk.

‘Why does she always have to chew gum?’ Milton complained.

‘Because otherwise she smokes half a pack a day,’ Gish reminded him. ‘Middle East means the princess, right?’

‘Only if you want to start jumping to conclusions. Plenty of owners we still don’t know anything about. Plus anyone who lives there could have an Arab contact of some kind – maybe even our concierge.’

‘We’ve got the rest of the staff coming in later,’ Gish said. ‘Cleaners, handymen, the lot. Maybe they can shed some light.’

‘And the deceased’s abode?’

Gish checked on her computer. ‘Visited first thing this morning. He shared with two others. One he’d known since school; the other a newer acquaintance. It’s a flat in Edmonton. Dwayne’s space was the utility room. Plumbing for a washing machine but no actual machine. Bit of hash and some skins sitting on a tea tray next to the single mattress. Spare work suit hanging from a nail. Other clothing stuffed into one of those big blue Ikea bags.’

‘Living the dream,’ Milton mused.

‘Might explain why he’d rather catch up with Rosa at his place of work.’

‘I’ve been thinking about that.’ Milton leaned back in his chair. ‘You’re night-time security, in charge of a block where most of the units are never used. You’ve got access to all the keys and a girlfriend who visits regularly . . .’

‘Why not take advantage?’

Milton offered a shrug.

‘Maybe his mind wasn’t as devious as yours, Jack.’

‘I can’t help my nature, Gillian.’ Milton smiled tiredly. ‘Family?’ he asked.

‘Parents are still married. Liaison visited them. Devastated, naturally. Two sisters, neither of them currently in the UK. Dwayne was the youngest. More photos of him dotted around the place than of his sibs.’

Milton was shaking his head slowly. ‘Hellish thing,’ he muttered.

‘It always is.’ Gish swallowed down a yawn.

‘You really should clock off,’ Milton advised.

‘Soon as you get up to go, I’m right there with you.’

‘What about your mum?’

‘Friends and neighbours looking in.’

A landline started ringing on a vacated desk. Amberson, who was still on her feet, walked over to answer it. After replacing the handset, she looked in the direction of Milton and Gish.

‘That was reception. There’s a man downstairs by the name of Godunov. Any interest to you . . .?’

They ended up in the same interview room as for Michael Tan, video camera and microphones checked and ready. An extra chair had been found for the man accompanying Lev Godunov. He was in his sixties and sported thick silver hair and tortoiseshell-framed glasses.

‘Interesting you felt the need for a lawyer,’ Milton said once they were settled. Godunov said something to the lawyer in Russian.

‘English, please,’ Milton said, indicating the recording equipment. ‘Saves us the cost of a translator.’

‘Mr Godunov,’ the lawyer obliged, ‘has come here out of a sense of civic duty.’

‘Very public-spirited of him. Where are his henchmen?’

‘Mr Godunov’s bodyguards are waiting outside.’

Gish slid a printout across the table. ‘Might have been more civic-minded to come and talk to us last night. You were at the scene after all. But instead, here you are, caught on camera, deciding to make a run for it.’

Godunov studied the sequence of photos while Gish in turn studied him. Bull-necked and with a shaven head, the eyes small and deep-set. He was no longer wearing the cream-coloured raincoat, and bristles were starting to show where he had been unable to shave. He met her gaze.

‘I admit to a momentary loss of nerve.’

‘What did you think was happening?’

‘Something serious.’

‘And you didn’t want to be involved?’ Gish watched the man shrug. ‘But now you know Dwayne Hogarth is dead.’

Godunov gave a deep sigh. ‘I liked Dwayne a lot. We talked often, mostly about his life. It was some sort of burglary, yes?’

‘We’re keeping an open mind.’

‘But Jessica’s fob?’

Jack Milton leaned forward. ‘Not something we’ve publicly announced, Mr Godunov. Who told you?’

The lawyer muttered something in Russian from behind his hand. Then, to the detectives: ‘My client would rather not say. It is an irrelevance.’

‘In a murder inquiry, we decide what’s relevant.’

‘Perhaps, but he has a legal entitlement—’

‘Did whoever told you about the fob,’ Gish interrupted, eyes drilling into Godunov’s, ‘mention anything else – something that made you decide to come here with a lawyer in tow?’

‘My car,’ Godunov admitted.

‘Your car.’ Gish held up a photo of the Bentley. ‘With an unidentified male murder victim in its boot.’

Godunov looked pained. ‘I know nothing about this.’

‘When did you last use your car?’

‘Over a month ago, maybe longer.’

‘Is it usually kept unlocked?’

‘It is in a secure car park. Sometimes maybe I get complacent.’

‘Any idea who the victim might be? Male, late twenties, six feet tall, of Middle Eastern appearance?’ Gish watched him shake his head. ‘We’ll need your fingerprints for purposes of elimination, Mr Godunov.’ Godunov looked to his lawyer, whose only advice was a one-shouldered shrug.

Milton had a question of his own. ‘Any idea why someone would choose *your* car, Mr Godunov?’

‘To cause me trouble maybe. Or because it was unlocked and not covered with a dust sheet. Have you seen those other cars? Bugattis, Ferraris, Aston Martins – no space for anything larger than an overnight bag.’ He considered for a moment. ‘Though Aisha has her Range Rovers. But almost certainly locked and alarmed.’

‘Begs the question of why you were so trusting – no enemies, Mr Godunov?’

‘None spring to mind.’

‘So when you say someone might have wanted to get you into trouble—’

‘My client,’ the lawyer broke in, ‘is being generous with his time and candid in his answers. You can’t seriously think he would deposit a body in his own vehicle and leave it there, where it was bound to be found?’

The question remained unanswered, the silence in the room lengthening until Gish broke it.

‘How did Dwayne seem the last few times you talked with him? Nervous or different in any way?’

Godunov started to shake his head but then stopped. ‘Actually there *was* something. Not the last time we spoke but a few weeks back. He was slightly . . . overwrought one night. I was coming home from a nightclub and he usually wanted to hear about the glamorous people I’d rubbed shoulders with, especially the women – always the women. But he was sullen, not even looking at me. So I asked him what was wrong. One of the residents had asked him if he could score some drugs. Dwayne got the feeling it was because of the colour of his skin. She’d just assumed he would be part of that world . . .’

‘She?’ Gish checked.

Godunov glanced in his lawyer’s direction. ‘Jessica Forrester,’ he then said. ‘Dwayne said she’d been out partying and didn’t want to stop.’ He paused. ‘I stayed to talk with him and he became much calmer.’

‘Did he happen to mention that he does use recreational drugs?’

Godunov nodded. ‘But only the occasional smoke to help him relax before sleep. There was a time though . . .’

‘What?’

Godunov stared at Gish. ‘I’m assuming you know.’

‘Let’s not assume anything.’

‘Well, he had some trouble when he was young.’

‘To do with drugs? Involving the police?’

Godunov nodded while Gish and Milton shared a look.

‘But none of this explains why someone wanted to gain entry to Jessica’s apartment,’ Godunov continued, ‘or why a body ended up in my Bentley.’

Gish couldn’t help but agree with the Russian, though she kept that agreement to herself. ‘How well would you say you know the other residents?’ she asked.

‘We never mix. That’s the whole point of The Rise.’

‘Would any of them know you keep your car unlocked?’

‘No. Though anyone could have tried the doors.’

Milton shifted slightly as a prelude to asking his own question. ‘You say you don’t mix with the other residents – does that go for Jessica Forrester?’ He watched the Russian give a slow nod. ‘You didn’t talk to her about her run-in with your friend Dwayne?’

Godunov offered another shrug. ‘Dwayne was soon back to his normal self. Water under the bridge, as you say . . .’

‘How did you make your money, Mr Godunov?’ Gish asked, almost casually.

‘What does it matter?’

‘Mr Franklyn mentioned energy . . .’

‘Allan talks too much. It’s one of his many failings.’

‘Would you happen to be an investor in The Rise?’

‘I fail to see how this can have any bearing on your investigations,’ the lawyer interrupted, making show of studying his expensive-looking wristwatch. ‘My client has many meetings scheduled for the rest of the day. I think we’re done here.’

‘Not by a long chalk,’ Milton stated. ‘Fingerprints and DNA still to be taken, after which our team will need to search Mr Godunov’s apartment.’

The lawyer opened his mouth to object but Godunov patted his arm.

‘That’s fine. Business can always wait.’ His eyes moved between the two detectives. ‘I have nothing to hide, despite what you may think.’ Gish thought she saw traces of a smile cross his face as he spoke.

Walking back into the office, Milton and Gish shared a look.

‘Whole new set of questions,’ she stated.

Amberson, who was seated at her computer, felt Gish’s hand land on one shoulder.

‘Rush job, Emma. Dwayne Hogarth – has he ever been on our radar?’

‘How far back do you want me to go?’

‘Is the womb asking too much?’ Gish crossed the room to her desk. Milton was already seated, running a finger thoughtfully down one cheek. ‘We need to go back to The Rise,’ she told him.

‘I suppose we do. Can either one of us drive without falling asleep at the wheel?’

‘Only one way to find out, Jack,’ Gish said, reaching for her jacket.

The crime scene tape was still cordoning off the reception desk and control room. A concierge stood by the lift, next to a man in chef’s whites and a hostess trolley complete with covered silver salvers. When the doors opened, the chef wheeled the trolley into the lift while the concierge keyed in the required floor before stepping back. Gish and Milton squeezed in beside the chef. The name of a five-star hotel on Park Lane was embroidered on his uniform.

‘Bit of a step up from Deliveroo,’ Milton commented. ‘Who’s the lucky recipient?’

‘Eighth floor.’

‘Roisin Gallacher? She often order from you?’

‘They all do.’

‘You know what happened here last night?’

‘I heard.’

‘Good that it hasn’t affected Mrs Gallacher’s appetite.’

‘People have to eat.’ The doors opened and the chef manoeuvred his trolley through the gap. Gish and Milton were silent as the lift continued to the penthouse. No one was answering, however, and the same was true at Jessica Forrester’s door.

‘The spa?’ Gish suggested. Milton nodded his agreement. They found Forrester on the banquette there, legs tucked beneath her, dressed in a plump white robe. Her hair was wet from a recent swim and she was sipping white wine with Allan Franklyn. Only a few centimetres separated them, though both shifted when they recognised the detectives.

‘Two birds with one stone,’ Gish said. Then, to Franklyn: ‘Could you make yourself scarce for ten or fifteen minutes?’

‘Is there news?’

‘Ten or fifteen minutes,’ Gish repeated. Franklyn looked questioningly at Forrester before rising to his feet and making for the lift. Gish took his place while Milton stayed standing.

‘One quick question, Ms Forrester,’ Gish began. ‘Why did you think Dwayne Hogarth might be able to supply you with drugs?’

Forrester took a few seconds before managing a look of amazement. ‘Who says I did?’

‘Dwayne told one of your neighbours. He wasn’t happy about it, either. I’m just wondering if he brought it up with you at any point?’

‘How could he – it’s not remotely true!’ Colour had flooded Forrester’s pale cheeks.

‘Then why was he so upset?’

‘How the hell would I know?’

‘And why make the accusation? Any bad blood between the two of you?’

‘Absolutely not.’ She ran a hand through her hair. ‘Wait though . . .’

‘Yes?’

‘A few weeks ago, he tried hitting on me. I’d come back from a party a bit tiddly. He asked if I wanted him to help me back to my flat. Came out from behind the desk, took me by the arm. I shook myself free, sobering up fast.’ She looked at Gish. ‘You know how it is. I’ve had more than my fair share.’

Gish nodded. ‘We’ve spoken with Mr Tan. Hopefully he won’t be hanging around outside any more.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Won’t stop him wanting paying though,’ Milton cautioned.

‘So you’re saying you rejected Dwayne’s advances?’ Gish continued.

‘Bloody right I did – and I could see he wasn’t happy about it. That poor girlfriend of his, I very much doubt she was the only woman in his life.’ She looked to left and right as though checking for eavesdroppers. ‘One night, I had a problem with my heating. I called reception but no one answered so I went down. Nobody behind the desk or in the control room. But then I hear the lift. It’s heading up to floor eight. When it comes down again, Dwayne steps out looking very pleased with himself.’

‘Floor eight being Mrs Gallacher’s?’

‘Soon as he saw me, the grin disappeared. But his tie was gone, shirt open at the neck. He knew he’d been caught.’ She widened her eyes in triumph. ‘There’s your reason for lying about me!’ But she was just getting into her stride. ‘If he wanted to get back at me, maybe he arranged for someone to get into my flat. Scare me into moving out. Mickey and him could have planned it together – was it Mickey he was talking to about me wanting drugs?’

‘We’re not at liberty to say.’

‘Maybe it was the Gallacher woman herself – I wouldn’t put anything past her.’ She paused. ‘I *am* thinking of moving on though. Well, obviously I am, after all that’s happened.’

‘Is that what you were discussing with Mr Franklyn?’ Milton asked.

‘Allan’s portfolio is extensive. He’s confident he’ll find me something.’ She fell silent as the lift doors opened and Franklyn himself emerged, touching a finger to his wrist.

‘We’re just about done here,’ Milton told him.

‘You want me to leave?’ Forrester asked. Milton nodded. She pushed her bare feet into a pair of hotel-style slippers and crossed the floor, giving Franklyn’s arm the slightest brush with her palm as she passed him.

‘Anyone want a drink?’ Franklyn asked, gesturing towards an unmarked door.

‘Can you manage an espresso?’ Milton inquired.

‘Single or double?’

‘Double.’

‘Make that two,’ Gish added. While Franklyn was gone she showed Milton her phone. It was a text from Amberson. Dwayne Hogarth had indeed come on to the radar of the Metropolitan Police during his early teenage years.

‘Possession, plus possession with intent to supply,’ Milton recited. ‘Slap-on-the-wrist stuff.’ He handed the phone back and the two sat in silence, gathering their thoughts as they listened to their coffees being made.

‘Here we are,’ Franklyn said, carrying a tray which included sachets of sugar as well as the cups and saucers. He sat down, and after a moment Milton decided to do the same. ‘Good chat with Jess?’

‘She tells us you’re going to find her another apartment.’

Franklyn winced. ‘No promises. She hardly has what could be called a limitless budget.’

‘And then there’s the matter of her current record as a tenant,’ Milton added.

‘Well, quite.’

There was a pause while they sipped their drinks.

‘This is good,’ Milton said.

‘We only provide the best.’

‘Been a few cutbacks though, no? Staffing, for example.’

‘Economic realities.’ Franklyn offered a shrug.

‘Not something I’d have thought your owners had to worry about.’

‘You probably haven’t noticed, but the rich worry more than most.’

‘We spoke with Michael Tan earlier,’ Gish added.

‘Oh yes?’

‘Was he one of your backers?’

‘My backers?’

‘Getting this place off the ground. I mean, you don’t exactly come from money.’

‘My dad did all right for himself.’

‘How about Eddie Gallacher?’ Milton asked. ‘I dare say he had cash that needed laundering. And it’s not as if the two of you don’t have a connection, him having promoted a few of your dad’s fights. So when you told us you’d never met him . . . ?’

‘I suppose it’s feasible that when I was a kid . . . but there were always a lot of men hanging around Dad . . .’ His voice trailed off.

‘So none of his money is tied up in The Rise?’

Franklyn shook his head.

‘Maybe his wife then?’ Milton persisted. ‘Bearing in mind what’s hers is really his, making it about as grubby as money can get.’ Franklyn continued to shake his head. ‘Then how

about the princess's family – the Gulf states still own big chunks of this city.'

'I do have Gulf backers, as it happens,' Franklyn admitted, 'but not Aisha's father.' He gave a sigh. 'And I fail to see what any of this has to do with Dwayne or the missing fob or the body in the garage.'

'Let's turn to Dwayne then,' Gish said. 'Did you know he'd been in trouble with the police?'

'No.'

'You told us earlier you'd had him vetted. Did he come from an agency?'

'Someone recommended him.' Franklyn's shoulders were slumping.

'Would that someone have been Roisin Gallacher?'

'Yes.'

'And that was good enough for you?'

'No one ever complained about him. He kept good time, always smartly dressed . . .'

'He got on better with some residents than others. Liked to chat to Lev Godunov. We've spoken to Mr Godunov, too – have you been in contact with him?'

'Lev?' Franklyn rested his elbows on his knees, hands squeezed together.

'You're not very good at this, Mr Franklyn,' Gish went on. 'The prevaricating and lying, I mean. Anyway, you ended up doing us a favour. Mr Godunov came to see us once he knew about his car, gave us his version of events. Would you say he's a friend? A call like that is the sort of thing friends would do.'

'Not especially a friend.'

'A backer then?'

Franklyn conceded as much by nodding slowly. Milton asked a question of his own in the resulting silence.

‘Mrs Gallacher vouched for Dwayne – so she must have known him pretty well, yes?’

‘I don’t know.’ Franklyn rubbed at his forehead as if that would help him remember. ‘She definitely said she knew him and reckoned him a hard worker.’

‘Was this put down in writing, or just a chat between the two of you?’

‘A chat. I called him in for an interview after, told him what the job entailed.’

‘He didn’t have any experience?’

‘Not as such.’

‘Any of your other staff arrive here by the same route?’

‘No.’

‘Sure about that?’

‘Positive.’

‘So a known criminal’s wife tells you to hire someone and you just do it? No background check, no qualms?’

‘Roisin promised I wouldn’t regret it.’

‘Didn’t turn out so well for Dwayne though, did it?’

‘No,’ Franklyn was forced to admit. ‘No, it didn’t.’

The trolley sat outside Roisin Gallacher’s door, presumably awaiting collection. Milton pressed her buzzer. Opening up, she rolled her eyes before turning on her heel, shuffling back to her armchair. The two detectives followed. The TV was blaring; some daytime game show.

‘Mind turning that down?’ Milton asked.

‘Sound off!’ Gallacher commanded, the TV obeying her words.

‘Thank you.’

‘So what the hell do you want?’ she demanded.

‘Good meal?’ Gallacher didn’t bother answering. ‘Filled Eddie in on all the unpleasantness?’

She glared at Milton. ‘No business of yours.’

‘Tell you what is our business though – your boyfriend.’

‘My what?’ she guffawed.

‘Young Dwayne, with his late-night assignments up here. Dwayne who only got the job thanks to your persistence.’

While Gallacher and Milton stared one another out, Gish decided to speak.

‘How did you meet him anyway?’

Gallacher took a deep breath, turning her attention from Milton. ‘I do a lot for charity. He was volunteering at a youth group. I visited a few times and liked what I saw.’

‘You got friendly?’ Gish kept her tone conversational.

‘He was a bright kid with few prospects – we all know where that can lead.’

‘You more than most,’ Milton muttered.

‘So you offered him a helping hand,’ Gish went on, talking over her colleague, ‘got him the job here?’

‘He was a good lad.’ Gallacher’s eyes were growing liquid.

‘I’m not convinced your Eddie would be of the same opinion,’ Milton broke in. ‘Jealousy is a powerful emotion. I’m guessing if word reached him . . .’

‘You’ve got an evil mind,’ Gallacher spat at him, eyes narrowing to slits.

‘So evil I’m even thinking maybe you knew Dwayne from further back than you’re telling, knew him in a minor dealing capacity? We all know the big fish would rather have kids handling the merchandise. They’re cheap and disposable.’

‘I met him at a youth club!’ Gallacher bawled. ‘And now he’s dead and all you lot can do is try to drag Eddie into it because you’re too lazy or thick to do the hard work!’ She leapt to her feet and marched to the door, hauling it open. ‘I should never have let you in. I won’t make that mistake again.’

‘Mrs Gallacher,’ Gish said calmly, ‘we are going to find whoever killed Dwayne, I promise you that.’

‘When you do, give me the name before you do anything else. Twenty grand if you do.’

‘You know we can’t do that, Mrs Gallacher,’ Gish said as Milton made his exit. She followed him and the door closed with a slam behind her.

‘Twenty grand is tempting,’ Milton said.

‘I’ve known coppers bought for less,’ Gish agreed. She checked the screen of her phone. ‘Team’s arrived with Lev Godunov. Want to take a look?’

‘Might as well,’ Milton said, summoning the lift.

Godunov’s door stood ajar, the man himself looking gloomy just inside, his arms folded, head bent. His lawyer was following the search team from room to room, keeping a close eye.

‘Icons,’ Milton said appraisingly, studying the display that ran along both walls of the hallway.

‘Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century,’ Godunov said, perking up a little.

‘They’re fabulous. Did you bring them with you from Russia?’

‘Some.’

‘Lot of art collectors in this place,’ Gish added. ‘You, Mr Franklyn, Mr Spalding . . .’

‘Joe Spalding does not collect. He buys and sells. His skill is spotting something worth more than its owner realises. As for Allan . . . his taste is not mine.’

‘So the art in the lobbies and reception . . . ?’ Godunov screwed up his face.

‘It was worse in the early days. Some pieces are no longer here.’ The Russian stared at Milton. ‘When will my car be returned?’

‘When the lab have finished with it.’

‘When it was removed, reporters were outside, taking their pictures. Now I need to replace it.’

‘I’m sorry about your car,’ Gish said, ‘but I’m sorrier for the victim found in it.’

‘You’re right – I apologise. My brain is . . .’ Godunov made a spinning motion with one finger.

‘You didn’t tell us you were one of the backers who helped get this place off the ground,’ Milton commented.

‘Why should it matter?’ Godunov peered at Milton. ‘My money is my own, legitimately earned.’

The search team were crossing the hallway from one room to another. Recognising Milton and Gish, their leader offered a shrug, meaning no news. Gish noticed that Milton was flagging fast, his attention on the display of icons, eyes glazing over.

‘Thanks again for your cooperation,’ Gish told Godunov. When she made her exit, Milton slouched after her.

‘I’m calling it a day,’ she said. ‘And so are you.’

‘Whatever you say.’

‘I’m going to get an Uber. You take the car and promise me you’ll head straight home to bed.’

‘Scout’s honour.’

‘I can’t really see you as a scout, Jack.’

‘I was though – probably still got the badges somewhere.’

They said their goodbyes in the reception area. The concierge was still on duty on one sofa, so Gish collapsed on to the other, next to the sex-toy cactus. She took out her phone but found herself staring at its blank screen. She was thinking of Godunov’s Bentley. A boot big enough to accommodate a body. But what else had he said? She frowned in thought. Range Rovers. Belonging to the princess.

Range Rovers plural.

She turned to the concierge. ‘Princess Aisha has two cars, yes?’

He shook his head. ‘Three. The Aston Martin’s a beauty.’

‘So an Aston and two Range Rovers?’ She watched him nod, then got back to her feet. ‘Mind lending me your fob?’ she said. ‘My colleague took ours . . .’

The car park lights flickered on as she exited the lift. She could hear the traffic on Bayswater Road, horns sounding their constant irritation. The ramp was protected by both a barrier and a ceiling-to-floor metal grille. The Major Incident team had been busy here, too, the bay belonging to the Bentley taped off and dust sheets removed from all the remaining vehicles. A solitary Range Rover sat parked alongside a silver Aston Martin. Next to them was an empty bay. Gish took out her phone, walking over to the ramp where the signal was stronger.

‘Emma?’ she said when her call was answered. ‘I’m standing in The Rise’s garage. The princess owns three cars but only two are here.’ She read out the number plates of the ones she could see. ‘We need to trace the missing Range Rover. Concierge might have the number plate. I’m assuming she left in it, taking her retinue with her. I’m heading home for a few hours but my phone will be on. Oh, and if Jack Milton tiptoes into the office at any point, text me, will you?’ She ended the call and walked over to the Range Rover, peering through one of its tinted windows.

‘Where are you, Aisha?’ she said to herself in a whisper. ‘And what the hell have you done?’

The following morning saw both Gish and Milton well-rested for their visit to the Chief Superintendent’s office. The Super’s name was Ben Jeffries. He was a sandy-haired Scot whose one-time rugby prowess was on show to visitors thanks to a variety of framed photographs. To Gish’s mind, Jeffries was about ten pounds too heavy for the three-piece suits he insisted on wearing these days, his shirt collar always appearing to be on the verge of strangling him. Jeffries was reading from the DNA analysis of the body in the Bentley.

‘A rush job, so by no means conclusive,’ Milton felt compelled to say.

‘On the other hand,’ Gish countered, ‘it’s starting to make sense. If he really is from the Middle East, chances are he connects to the princess. She left The Rise around the time his murder took place.’

‘A few days either side,’ Milton qualified.

Jeffries looked up from his reading. ‘Meaning she might have left before the killing?’

‘Or shortly after,’ Gish said. ‘The missing car could provide an answer.’

‘We’ve got people looking for it,’ Jeffries assured her. ‘Has the Bentley offered us any clues?’

‘Lab reckon it was wiped down. A few smears but no usable prints. They found a couple of hairs on the duvet he was wrapped in, seem to belong to another party. Strands are about three times the length of the victim’s own hair.’

Jeffries looked at Gish. ‘Female?’ he surmised.

‘We need that search warrant, sir,’ Gish pressed.

‘Foreign Office say no. There are diplomatic niceties, apparently.’

‘Due respect, sir, do they need to know?’

‘They’ll know afterwards when the embassy gives them an earful. PM’s got a trade trip coming up. If we rock the boat, it’ll be me who gets thrown overboard.’ Jeffries paused and sighed before turning his attention to Milton. ‘What’s your take, Jack?’

‘I see no reason to doubt Gillian’s instincts. But meantime I’m wondering about our dead concierge and his relationship to the wife of one of our Most Wanted.’

‘I know you’d love to see him in the frame for it, but is Eddie Gallacher even in the country?’

‘How would we know? Special Branch intelligence has been non-existent.’

‘Is there no one else you fancy for it?’

‘I mean, it could be some random who reckoned there’d be easy money in the building, or else Dwayne’s past was catching up with him. Then there’s a potential crime of passion if he’d stopped servicing Mrs Gallacher. Plus there was no love lost between him and the actress.’ Milton gave a theatrical shrug. ‘Take your pick.’

‘That’s your job rather than mine, Jack.’ There was a knock at the door. ‘Yes?’ Jeffries called out. The door opened partway and Amberson’s head appeared.

‘Sorry to interrupt, sir.’

‘What is it, Emma?’

Amberson sidled in, carrying a sheet of paper. ‘The Range Rover’s turned up.’

‘Where?’ Gish asked.

‘Believe it or not, it’s in a pound. Sat on a double yellow line enough days that it got towed.’

‘Double yellow lines where?’

‘A private airfield just east of Romford. There’s a drop-off zone next to the terminal. It was abandoned there.’

‘Okay,’ Jeffries said, ‘let’s send officers to the airfield and the car pound. Everything so far is circumstantial, but it sounds like progress.’

‘Good work, Em,’ Gish said.

‘Yes, good work,’ Jeffries agreed. ‘But now more of it’s needed, from all concerned.’

It was their cue that the meeting was over. Gish, however, paused at the door and turned. Jeffries headed off what she was about to say by holding one hand up, palm towards her.

‘I know, Gillian, I know – the search warrant. Leave it with me.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ Gish said, making her exit.

Mid-afternoon, Gish was seated at her computer, going through the material the Scene of Crime team had shared. Tests they'd run, prints identified and unidentified, blood-spatter patterning, trace evidence lifted and analysed. Gish reckoned whoever had attacked the concierge had been wearing gloves. So far the only identifiable fingerprints belonged to Rise staff and Allan Franklyn. Dwayne Hogarth's right index finger had been pressed to the numerical lock on the front of the key box. She imagined his attacker threatening him into unlocking it. But had Dwayne then selected the fob his attacker wanted? Had he been scared and confused? Or had he maybe selected the fob belonging to Jessica Forrester as some sort of petty revenge? But if that were the case, why hadn't she woken up when the intruder walked in? Then there was the CCTV. Switched off, the hard drive erased. Only Dwayne Hogarth's prints on the machine. The lab's assessment of the security system was withering. It wasn't of a quality they'd expect. The original sales prospectus for The Rise described the place as state-of-the-art, but corners had obviously been cut. Scene of Crime had included a whole file of photos and video from the night. Gish popped her earbuds in to listen to the various conversations.

'Go ask George for some more luminol,' someone said at one point.

'You know he'll tell us we're using too much.'

Gish smiled, remembering George's words when she'd asked for a spare set of coverings. She unplugged herself when she realised Milton was standing at her shoulder.

'What have you got?' he asked.

'Not exactly a Hollywood blockbuster. How about you?'

'Been trying to make sense of all the other owners. Law changed recently, so ill-gotten gains are harder to turn into bricks and mortar. Turns out people aren't keen on playing. You've got Channel Islands companies buying on behalf of trusts, and who's behind those trusts no one can say. Seems that's how at least some of Franklyn's financing came his way.'

Also, at least one emirate's wealth fund, though not the princess's – he told us the truth about that at least.'

'Anything to suggest Eddie or Roisin Gallacher had a hand?'

Milton shook his head in frustration. 'No word from the airfield or the pound?'

'Not yet, but in better news . . .'

'What?'

'Collins is back and feeling a little bit better. I've got him rechecking the street camera footage. Should keep him occupied for a while. Just think, though, if he hadn't pulled a sickie it'd be him sitting here rather than me.'

Milton rolled his eyes. 'Is there anyone we're ruling out at the moment?'

'They're all still in play as far as I'm concerned.'

'Agreed.'

'Not to mention your notion of a random attacker or someone who hasn't crossed our line of sight yet.' She turned her attention to her computer screen.

'I meant to ask earlier, was your mum okay when you got back?'

'She was fine. And you went straight home, yes?'

'I bet you had eyes and ears in here, just in case.'

'Maybe I did and maybe I didn't.'

He grinned. 'How about we take a short break? Café on the corner, my treat?'

'Thanks, but I want to stick at this. You could always bring me one back.'

'That would make me look like the slacker though.'

'Or the one who can pull rank.'

She watched him shake his head and seat himself at his own desk. 'Am I copied in on that Scene of Crime stuff?' he

asked.

‘You should be, but I warn you it’s going to bore the pants off you.’

‘A risk I’m willing to take. If you see me dropping off, give me a shake.’

‘Roger that,’ Gish said.

The call from the airfield came an hour later. The detective sergeant’s name was Boothroyd. When he got through to Milton, Milton asked him to wait while he put him on speakerphone. Gish had come around the desk so she was standing next to his chair. She leaned down a little and Milton held the phone in the space between them.

‘Go ahead,’ he told Boothroyd.

‘We have footage of the car arriving. Two males, one female. Not much luggage. They’d booked a Cessna Citation Mustang, destination an airfield near Cannes. People here seem to think they were going to swap planes there for something that would get them to the Arabian Gulf in more comfort. I’m waiting for clearance before they’ll give me passport info on the three. The Range Rover meantime picked up four days’ worth of fines before it was hauled . . .’

Gish stepped away for a moment and called Allan Franklyn. When he answered she asked how many bodyguards the princess had.

‘Three,’ he confirmed. Gish ended the call and held three fingers up, watching Milton give a nod.

‘Other team haven’t found much at the pound,’ Boothroyd was saying. ‘Car’s interior looks clean. Doors are locked. Authorisation needed before we can crack open the boot. I doubt we’ll find much.’

‘Fingerprints could be useful,’ Milton stated. ‘I’ve just been told Princess Aisha had three bodyguards looking after her. If only two flew out, I’d put good money on the body at The Rise being the third.’

‘Going to be a bit of fuss when this gets out.’

‘Tell me about it, Boothie.’ Milton’s eyes met Gish’s, seeming to ask if she had anything to add. She gave a shake of the head but then thought of something.

‘How did they all seem? Can you tell from the footage?’

‘Not really. But the person who dealt with them in the terminal thought the female passenger looked zonked. He was told she’s a nervous flyer and had taken something.’

‘What date was all this?’ Gish asked into the phone.

‘October eighth,’ Boothroyd said.

Gish could see Milton doing the calculation in his head. Autopsy had estimated the death as occurring two to three weeks prior to the body being found. The princess had flown out exactly seventeen days ago.

‘It fits,’ she told Milton. He thanked Boothroyd and ended the call. ‘Reckon this gets us our search warrant?’ she asked.

‘I reckon it does,’ he agreed.

They took a Scene of Crime team with them. Allan Franklyn, keen to minimise media interest, opened the underground car park so they could leave their vehicles there. He accompanied them in the lift to Princess Aisha’s floor, reading through the search warrant as if seeking a reason not to cooperate.

‘There are two flats,’ he said. ‘Aisha has one, her bodyguards the other. At night, one of the guards stays on a chair outside her door.’ He watched as Gish and Milton wrestled with their latex gloves. With the three additional Scene of Crime officers, the lift was full. Franklyn hadn’t been given any outerwear. His job was to let them in, nothing more. Having unlocked the door, he stood back, but once they were inside he couldn’t help pushing the door open with his foot, giving him a view of the open-plan living area. Gish gave him a stern look and pushed the door closed before lifting a handful of mail from the floor. Parking fines, three separate envelopes. She showed them to Milton.

‘Signs of a struggle,’ one of the other officers announced. A chair tipped over; a broken wine glass next to one still

intact; wine stains on the table and floor. The officer who had spoken was studying both glasses. ‘Decent-enough prints, I reckon.’

The wine bottle was on one of the worktops in the kitchen area. ‘Barolo,’ Milton clarified. A corkscrew lay next to it, cork still attached. There were two bedrooms but one had been turned into an office. The other, wood-panelled with an ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling, contained an unmade bed. A large mirror-walled dressing room off it showed signs of hurried packing – drawers gaping, hangers tossed to the floor.

‘Must be a hundred pairs of shoes here,’ someone commented.

Gish and Milton stood staring at the bed with its rumpled sheet.

‘No duvet,’ Gish said.

‘Now there’s a surprise. Crime of passion? Lover’s tiff gets out of hand?’

‘You’ve seen photos of the princess, Jack – reckon she could overpower a professional bodyguard?’

‘If he’d been plied with enough alcohol and rogered senseless maybe.’ He turned his head to her. ‘So what’s *your* theory?’

‘The two glasses mean, yes, she was maybe closer to one of her guards than the others. Her family finds out. They want the poor sod dealt with and the princess brought home, well away from any whiff of scandal.’

‘Why hide the body?’

Gish thought for a moment. ‘Left *in situ* we’d have the very public scandal they want to avoid. At the same time, they only need the body to stay hidden long enough to get on a plane and out of our jurisdiction. Maybe they took the body down to the garage intending to stuff it in a Range Rover and dump it somewhere. But then they see the Bentley, sitting there unlocked with its nice big boot.’ Gish shrugged.

‘Works for me,’ Milton eventually said. ‘Chief’s going to need to talk to the Foreign Office again. I don’t suppose extradition will be on anyone’s agenda.’

‘Doesn’t stop us doing our job.’

‘And then wait for them to sweep it all under the carpet.’

Gish made a face and returned to the living area. There was a large photo in an ornate frame on one wall, showing the princess and her family. She stared at it, then her eyes swept the rest of the room, with its luxury finishes and views to die for. She hoped Aisha had enjoyed her brief taste of freedom – and maybe even of love.

Milton was explaining to the Scene of Crime team about the missing duvet and how it was almost certainly already at the lab. The room they were in was a murder scene, so every scrap of evidence had to be found and recorded.

‘I’ll let George know we need more bodies,’ Milton was told.

Gish opened the door to the hallway. Lev Godunov and Allan Franklyn were standing by the lift, having as heated a conversation as was possible without either man’s voice being raised. They broke off at Gish’s approach.

‘We’re going to need to get in there,’ she explained, indicating the bodyguards’ apartment.

‘Fob’s in the key box downstairs,’ Franklyn said.

‘I’ll leave you to your tasks,’ Godunov muttered, entering the lift. Once the doors had closed, Gish fixed Franklyn with a look.

‘Lev has the ear of several core investors,’ he explained. ‘They’re not happy with me. Some even want me pushed off the board.’ He took a deep breath and exhaled. Gish turned at the sound of a door opening. Milton emerged from the princess’s apartment.

‘At least we’ve some news for the Chief,’ he said.

‘You go tell him,’ Gish said, ‘and then ask for another search warrant.’ She gestured towards the bodyguards’ door.

Milton stared at it, then at Gish.

‘Are you not coming?’

‘I’ll catch you up. Someone needs to be here to deal with George’s moaning and complaining.’

Milton didn’t look convinced, but managed a slow nod, eyes still on her. ‘You okay?’ he inquired.

‘Some foreign nationals just got away with murder and kidnap, Jack. So, no, I wouldn’t exactly describe myself as okay.’

Milton looked as if he were trying to think of something to say, something reassuring. In the end he gave up and headed to the lift.

‘Tea maybe?’ Franklyn said once Milton was gone.

‘Tea would be great.’

‘Spa or penthouse?’

‘Penthouse if that’s okay with you – less chance of bumping into a resident. And by the way, the longer you can keep this to yourself the better.’ She pointed towards the princess’s flat.

‘I’m not known for being the soul of discretion but I’ll do my best. You’ve got to the bottom of it then?’

‘Getting there,’ Gish said.

They were silent the rest of the way to the penthouse. Gish stripped off her protective layer as she followed him inside and studied the various works of art while he got busy with their drinks. He brought her mug over to her.

‘Your colleague seemed very knowledgeable,’ he said.

‘His daughter works in an auction house. He tries to keep up with her.’

‘That explains why his name seemed familiar – I last saw her at a private view.’

‘She’s called Phoebe,’ Gish said, taking a sip from her mug. Franklyn walked over to a chair and she followed,

perching on the edge of a sofa.

‘Phoebe, yes,’ he said. ‘This was a month or so back. We got talking over the drinks. Maybe too many drinks to judge by my head the next morning. She was quite charming.’

‘I don’t really know her.’ Gish took another sip.

‘I appreciate you’ve been otherwise engaged, but is there progress regarding Dwayne?’

‘Not much.’

‘Jess is still insisting on moving out – and even more insistent that I should be able to help. She sees it as my fault.’

‘Your fault?’

‘Only the one guard on nights, keys held on the premises. Same complaints as my investors . . .’ He shook his head. ‘I’ve wracked my brain but I still can’t see why her – why her specifically. Robbery can’t be the motive, she has nothing worth taking compared to others around her.’ He paused as though something had occurred to him.

‘What is it?’ Gish asked, watching as he shook his head again.

‘If theft isn’t the motive,’ he pressed on, ‘then it had to be personal – a stalker or similar. But they got the fob, they had her at their mercy . . . and nothing happened. Nothing at all. Were they frightened off? They hadn’t meant for Dwayne to die, but now that he had . . . I’ve been turning it over day and night and I’m no further forward. Could his death have nothing at all to do with the missing fob? A jealous lover, or someone he was in debt to? A message of some kind to someone else?’

‘You mean Roisin Gallacher?’

‘I suppose I do. Then again, they could have just taken the wrong fob – panicking once they’d coshed poor Dwayne. It didn’t open the door they thought it would and they’d no way of telling which was the one they actually wanted.’ Franklyn gulped at his tea then looked down at it. ‘Not enough milk,’ he said, rising to his feet. ‘Is yours okay?’

‘It’s fine.’

Gish was thinking back to the moment she’d stood in front of the open key box: the gap where one fob should have been; Franklyn working out that Forrester’s was the missing fob.

‘The fobs are identical?’ she checked with him on his return. ‘No special markings or anything?’

‘To look at, yes, they’re all the same,’ he agreed.

‘They never get mixed up?’

He thought for a moment but could only shrug.

‘Would you be willing to come with me while I try them?’

‘You mean try every door? Don’t you need one of your search warrants?’

‘We’re not going inside. We need some means of labelling them though. A marker pen maybe.’

‘How about Post-it notes? Wrap each fob in one and write the apartment number on the note?’ He left the room and came back a minute later holding a small block of coloured paper sheets.

‘Let’s go,’ Gish said.

Daytime security watched with interest from the sofa as they ducked under the crime scene tape and walked into the control room. They added each apartment’s number to a Post-it wrapped around the corresponding fob. Gish then stuffed them into her pockets and they set off. Apartments 1 to 4 worked as expected. After each door clicked open, they closed it again. When they reached apartment 5 however, the fob refused to work. Gish tried twice; each time a soft beep told her the door wasn’t going to open. Franklyn frowned and insisted on trying for himself with the same result.

‘I don’t understand,’ he muttered.

‘I think I do.’ Gish led him in silence up one floor to the door of Jessica Forrester’s apartment. This time, the fob worked. As Gish eased open the door, there was a shriek from within. The security chain was in place, but through the gap

Gish watched as Forrester came into view, armed with a carving knife. Gish held both hands up.

‘It’s DS Gish, remember?’

‘You frightened the life out of me!’

‘Do you mind opening the door?’

Forrester did so, while Franklyn assured her that everything was fine.

‘It isn’t though, is it? I’m scared to death they’ll come back.’

‘I can promise you they won’t,’ Gish said, walking inside. ‘They were never here in the first place.’ Then she turned towards Franklyn. ‘The door that wouldn’t open was the art dealer’s, yes?’ She watched him nod. ‘The keys were switched to lead us down the wrong bloody road. You’ve got the master fob at your office – I need to open Spalding’s apartment.’

‘I can have it here in half an hour.’ He seemed ready to leave, but paused. ‘Search warrant?’

‘I’ll get it, don’t worry. Meet me outside Mr Spalding’s door.’

‘Never here?’ Forrester echoed once Franklyn had made his exit.

‘Mind if I sit for a minute?’ Gish gestured towards the knife. ‘And it’d be nice if you could get rid of that.’

Forrester mumbled an apology as she retreated to the kitchen. A moment later she was back and Gish realised she was not going to get the privacy she needed.

‘Sorry,’ she said, ‘do you mind if I . . . ?’

‘Oh, yes – back there along the hall. First door on the left.’

Gish smiled her thanks as she got up and headed to the bathroom. Having locked the door, she settled on the loo and got busy on her phone. She was looking again at the Scene of Crime footage. After a few minutes she got up, making show of flushing the toilet. Forrester had poured them glasses of

water. Gish thanked her but said she had to be going. At the door, she paused for a moment.

‘It was never about you, so there’s no need to move out. And if Mickey Tan starts hassling you again, give me a call, okay?’

‘Understood,’ Forrester said, in a tone that suggested she still had questions.

Gish took the lift back to the princess’s floor and found George, arms folded, silently judging the Scene of Crime team for their profligacy with his powders, liquids and evidence bags. ‘Sorry if we’re keeping you busy,’ Gish said. George offered a grunt by way of response. ‘Remind me how big a team you had with you two nights back.’

‘Seven, wasn’t it?’

‘Sounds about right. You remember the clipboard on the door?’ She watched him nod. ‘Where would I find that info?’

‘I assume it’s in your office.’

‘They don’t let you have a copy?’ He looked at her the way a teacher would look at a perennially failing student.

‘Thought not,’ Gish said, turning away from him and calling the station. Amberson picked up. Gish told her what she needed and asked how things were in the office.

‘We’re struggling along,’ was the response. ‘Not all of us get to do the exciting stuff. Added to which, Collins seems to have taken a shine to me.’

‘You have my sympathies.’

‘I’m a big girl. I reckon I can make him cry any time I want.’

‘No doubt about it, Emma. You’ll get me those names, yes?’

‘I’m guessing it’s yet another top priority?’

‘Sorry to be so predictable.’ Gish almost managed a smile as she ended the call.

‘Any news of Mr Spalding?’ Gish asked fifteen minutes later as Franklyn handed her the fob outside the art dealer’s door.

‘Some improvement. Broken ribs, fractured jaw and hip. The search warrant arrived okay?’

‘Yes,’ Gish lied. She pulled her latex gloves back on and told Franklyn to stay outside.

‘Wouldn’t I be useful to you?’ he countered. ‘I know Joe’s apartment, how everything should look.’

Gish saw the sense of this. ‘Just don’t touch anything,’ she warned him.

The interior was spartan, hinting at an organised mind, a buttoned-up approach to life. She told Franklyn as much.

‘Joe buys and sells rather than keeps,’ he explained.

‘He’s not married, no partner?’

‘Divorced a decade or so back. She was a socialite. That was how they met. He sold a few pieces for her when her first marriage failed.’

Gish noted that the windows were black. ‘Can we do anything about that?’

‘Only if you can mimic Joe’s voice.’ He gestured towards a wall switch and Gish flicked the ceiling lights on.

She toured the room for a couple of minutes before pausing at a writing desk. It looked antique and stood on slender, ornately carved legs. The wastepaper bin below it was contemporary and utilitarian. Gish lifted something from it: a large cardboard envelope. It was marked with the branding of an express delivery company.

‘No name or address,’ Gish commented. The envelope was sealed but felt empty. For want of a large enough evidence bag, Gish placed it on the bureau. ‘Probably how they got in,’ she explained to Franklyn. ‘Arrived at reception, held it up to the glass. All they needed was to get inside that first door.’ She thought for a moment. ‘Some bikes were spotted on CCTV. It would have looked like any other drop-off.’

‘This was always their destination,’ Franklyn said in an undertone, scanning the room. He strode towards the only bedroom, Gish following in his wake. Wrapping one hand in a voluminous handkerchief, he slid open the fitted wardrobe, then the chest of drawers.

‘Modern design means precious few hiding places,’ he said.

‘I think it’s high time you told me,’ Gish advised.

But instead he marched into the kitchen and started opening drawers and then cupboards.

‘What on earth?’ he muttered, standing back so Gish could see what lay behind the final door. On top of two small stacks of dinner plates sat a couple of crash helmets. Gish snapped a photo with her phone.

‘Without talking to him, of course, there’s no way to be sure,’ Franklyn said, largely to himself.

‘Sure of what?’

Franklyn took a moment to make his mind up. ‘One evening, six or seven weeks back, Aisha arrived at Joe’s door. She told him she had a couple of drawings she was keen to sell. He couldn’t believe what she showed him.’ He paused for effect. ‘They were by Leonardo.’

‘Da Vinci, I presume?’

‘Practically priceless. A gift from her father, she said. Joe was absolutely staggered. He arrived at mine in need of a stiff drink. I mean, how do you go about placing such treasures? You need a collector with the deepest possible pockets, and on top of that there’s the provenance . . .’

‘Meaning?’

‘If her father found out she’d sold them, he might cry foul and try to get them back – claim they were a loan rather than a gift. Aisha had no paperwork, nothing to verify that she was the rightful owner.’

‘She’s a rich woman, why did she need the money?’

‘She comes from a rich family – hardly the same thing. I think she wanted to start a new life – that was Joe’s assumption, too. Either with a lover or else on her own, independently wealthy for the very first time. It’s why he went to the US. He had a couple of billionaires who’d shown interest.’

‘He didn’t take the drawings with him?’

‘And risk losing or damaging them?’

‘You reckon they were in this apartment?’

‘Aisha had handed them over to him.’

‘He doesn’t have an office or a bank vault or anything?’

‘He thought The Rise was safe. Safe and discreet.’ Franklyn’s face grew gloomier. ‘Is this her father’s doing, do you think? Maybe she confessed all. With Joe halfway across the world, all anyone had to do was break in and snatch them.’

Gish nodded, as she felt was expected of her.

‘So,’ Franklyn continued, growing animated, ‘they get into the building, force Dwayne to open the key box and tell them Joe’s apartment number. Once that’s done they have no more use for him. They come here, take the drawings, and leave before Rosa arrives?’

‘Leaving behind their helmets?’

‘Yes, why would they do that?’

‘I’ve got an inkling. But tell me, if you were Joe, where would you have hidden the drawings?’

‘I’m not sure I would. Far too tempting to leave them on display so I could stare at them all day.’

‘He never had visitors or anyone to clean the flat?’

‘Yes, but they could always be slipped into a drawer and then brought out again.’

‘Almost too easy for the thieves.’

‘Who by now are probably back in their own country. One more crime destined to go unpunished.’ Franklyn paused,

perhaps starting to wonder why he was more excited than the detective who'd just cracked the case. 'Are you going to alert DI Milton?'

'Absolutely. I also need to contact the police in New York, see if despite his fractured jaw Mr Spalding can verify your story.'

Franklyn's eyes widened. 'Am I a suspect?'

'How many people knew? Did you or Mr Spalding happen to mention the drawings to Jessica Forrester or Roisin Gallacher? Maybe even to Dwayne Hogarth? The catalyst seems to have been Mr Spalding's hospitalisation – how many people knew about that?'

'It was in the papers!' Franklyn argued back. 'He was hit by a car outside a gallery in Greenwich Village. The gallery had a show on called Hit And Run – that's why the media decided it was newsworthy.' Franklyn rubbed at his mouth with the back of his hand.

'Which hospital is Mr Spalding in, do you know?'

'Saint Somebody's – I've got a note of it in my apartment. Want me to fetch it?'

Gish nodded. Once he'd gone she pulled out a chair from beneath the dining table and sat down, pinching the bridge of her nose, eyes closed.

'Now you've gone and done it, Gillian,' she whispered to herself. She arched her neck and tried to think of alternatives but none could dislodge what she already felt she knew. When her phone buzzed it was a text from Milton. The Chief was happy and the search warrant was on its way. Gish knew she had to leave this place the way she'd found it. She put the envelope back in the bin beneath the desk, took one last look around, and closed the door after her.

Roisin Gallacher was standing by the lift, her eyes marked by heavy bouts of crying. She looked as if she hadn't slept since their last meeting.

'My Eddie knows about Dwayne,' she stated. 'Knows he's dead, I mean. But other stuff, too.'

‘He didn’t hear it from us.’

Gallacher just nodded. ‘He says a little fling isn’t always a bad thing but if I do it again he’ll cut my head off.’ She took a deep breath. ‘A man who’s cheated on me time and time again. He’s got one on the go right now. She was on holiday. He persuaded her to stick around. He’s got her tucked away in a villa ten minutes from his place.’ She paused to draw in some more breath. ‘Some of his old muckers – well, they’re my old muckers, too. They tell me things.’ She peered at Gish with calculating eyes. ‘You want him, you can sodding well have him.’ When she reached out an arm, Gish saw that her fist was wrapped around a scrap of paper. Gish took it, knowing it would be an address. ‘For what it’s worth, he definitely didn’t do for Dwayne. If he had, he’d have made sure I knew.’ She nodded slowly and with certainty. ‘I think he just couldn’t be bothered.’ She summoned the lift and disappeared into it.

An hour later, Gish was back at the station. She handed the slip of paper to Amberson.

‘What’s this?’ Amberson asked.

‘There’s an officer at Special Branch, name of Oliver Carlyle. You give him this and tell him it’s where he’ll find Eddie Gallacher. He’s going to owe us favours from here till doomsday.’ Gish gestured towards the note. ‘So what do I get in return?’

‘Will a photocopy of the list from the clipboard do?’ Amberson lifted it from her desk and handed it over.

‘Perfect,’ Gish said.

Milton had been to the café. He held up his cup as he walked to his chair. ‘I’d have got you one if I’d known. Everything okay with the Scene of Crime team?’

‘Hunky-dory. Does the Chief reckon we’ll get any joy?’

‘If you mean a prosecution, no. He reckons best case is, it’ll give the Foreign Office a bit of leverage in any trade talks.’

‘Whoopee-doo.’

‘So what else were you doing there?’ When she met his eyes he gave a smile. ‘I could see the cogs turning, Gillian.’

‘Give me a bit of time, see if those cogs lead to anything useful.’ She stared at his cup. ‘I can’t believe you didn’t buy me one.’

‘And it’s bloody delicious, too,’ he said, holding the drink to his nose and inhaling.

Gish tutted and booted up her computer, finding the Scene of Crime footage and running it again, this time with the clipboard list for company . . .

Jack Milton lived on a red-brick terraced street in Finchley. Most of the small front gardens had been turned into off-street parking. Milton’s BMW X4 just about fitted the space available. There was a light on in the downstairs room despite the lateness of the hour. Gish got the feeling someone was expected. She rang the bell and waited. Milton’s voice came from behind the door.

‘Who is it?’

‘Gillian.’

The door was unlocked, Milton peering out. ‘Something up?’ he asked.

‘You tell me.’

His eyes had been on the street but now he looked at her. The silence lengthened between them until he relented and pulled the door properly open. He led the way into a living room with a separate dining area to the rear. The wallpaper was a bit loud for Gish’s taste and possibly for Milton’s, too. She reckoned his wife had chosen it and he’d been loath to change it after her death.

‘Want a drink?’ He lifted a near-empty bottle of lager from the floor next to his chair and waved it in her direction. Gish shook her head. ‘I don’t find sleep easy these days,’ he went on. ‘It’s why I don’t mind being on call. Off-duty now though.’ He watched as she settled herself on the chair opposite his. She seemed to be gathering her thoughts, so he sat back and waited.

‘The first thing that struck me as odd,’ she began, ‘was when you took me to meet Allan Franklyn. He seemed to know you from somewhere. But it wasn’t you, it was Phoebe. They’d met at a private view. In his penthouse, when you got talking about art, you didn’t bring up Phoebe. Odd, as I say. But even before that, there was the look on your face when you came out of the control room and saw me standing there. It wasn’t just that you’d been expecting to see Collins. No, it wasn’t just that. I checked by the way – turns out you were the one who put Collins on the rota that night. Now why would you do that, Jack?’ She gave him the chance to answer, but Milton just tipped the beer bottle to his mouth, so she pressed on.

‘All told there were thirteen of us inside the building that night – professionals, I mean. Thirteen signed in at the front door. Nobody bothers to check who’s coming out though. When I looked at the footage, there were a couple of bodies I couldn’t account for. They were in the same overalls as everyone else, but they made the count two too many.’ She paused. ‘You told George you needed a couple of spare outfits – I just asked him and he never forgets. That was another strange thing. Not so strange though, if there were two people inside who you needed to get out. You’d already gained a bit of time by switching the fobs in the key box. That was quick thinking, by the way – when you saw the missing fob you knew it would lead us straight to where your boys were hiding. You were going to be there throughout, making sure the investigation took as many wrong roads as necessary – easy enough to do with Collins by your side, happy to be led by the nose. An actress with a stalker; a gangster’s wife – they all played their part.’ She paused again. ‘When did your boys realise they were stuck inside? That a witness had arrived and set alarm bells ringing? Safest thing to do was retreat and let you figure something out – you being the brains of the operation, after all.’ She reached into her pocket and brought out an A4 sheet, unfolding it. It showed a series of still photos from the Scene of Crime team’s recording. She held it up so Milton could see. ‘No masks with the suits, so they couldn’t cover their faces. They tried their best, but they also couldn’t

afford to look too shifty. George doesn't know them – no one at Scene of Crime does. But you do, don't you?

‘Never seen them before in my life.’

Gish managed a thin smile. ‘Oh, but you have. Even *I* know them. Two of those not-so-very-rare bad apples the Met seems to produce. Kicked off the force a few months back, due to bad behaviour spanning almost a decade. Take a closer look, Jack – you've worked with both of them in recent years. Haldane and Robertson. Two disgraced ex-cops who wouldn't be averse to doing a job for good money. An easy job at that, quick in and out, property owner thousands of miles away.’ Gish folded the sheet and tucked it back in her pocket. ‘They had to leave their helmets behind though. My guess is, you gave them your car keys. They could exit the building, same as everyone else, and use your car, come back later and collect the bike from wherever they'd left it. Sound plausible to you, Jack?’ She waited, but he had nothing to add. ‘I've not spoken with Phoebe yet, but I will.’

‘You leave her out of this!’ Milton growled.

‘How can I? It has to be her who told you. Met Allan Franklyn at a drinks party – he drank too much and wanted to impress her, so he asked if she knew anyone who might want a couple of rare drawings. *Very* rare drawings. Told her what they were and where they were. Then he backs off, realises what he's done, tells her to forget all about it. But not long after, she sees a news report of Spalding's accident and mentions it to you along with the story of those drawings. Drawings now possibly sitting in an empty London flat. Did you do a few night-time drive-bys, scope the place out?’ She stopped, content to let the silence stretch between them.

‘A lot of supposition, Gillian,’ Milton eventually said, his focus on the bottle he was still holding. ‘So who have you shared it with? The Chief? Maybe your pal Emma?’

‘Why?’

‘I'm just curious.’

‘Say I’ve told no one. What would you do about it, Jack? Hold me here until Haldane and Robertson can be summoned? Or would you do the job yourself?’

Milton drained the bottle and placed it back on the floor. ‘It was a good plan,’ he said quietly. ‘A victimless crime, if it hadn’t been for the corner of that stupid desk.’

‘Joseph Spalding and Princess Aisha were victims, Jack.’

‘So he lost a sale and she lost – what?’

‘The chance to get away from her family for good.’

‘Turns out she was never going to get that chance though. And you know as well as I do no one’s going to court or prison for what happened to that poor sod in the Bentley.’ Milton shook his head slowly, then took a deep breath. ‘Phoebe applied for a position at The Rise – curating their collection. Didn’t get past the first interview with some posh recruitment agency. It wasn’t that she didn’t know her stuff – she knew a damned sight more than they did – but she lacked “polish” – the very word they used. Used it to her face. She sat pretty much where you’re sitting now and she cried her heart out, nothing I could do to help. Then she found out they gave the job to a lad her age, no experience but parents who happen to own an art gallery in Cork Street.’

‘Knows all the right people,’ Gish said, remembering Franklyn’s words.

‘The light went out of her after that. Even when she got the job at the auction house, she thought it was for her looks rather than her talent. When she holds one of the paintings up, the photo makes the nationals. That’s all that matters to her bosses. It’s why she was at that drinks party. Nothing to do with brains or hard work. All they want from her is a nice short dress . . .’ He closed his eyes for a moment. ‘Too many years I’ve been doing this job, Gillian, and what good’s come of it? It’s all turned to ash. Look at this city, the dirty billions swilling about – don’t tell me that gives you a warm glow of a night? The villains we never get near touching, all the crap we’re supposed to clean up . . .’ His voice died away to a sigh.

‘We’ve got Eddie Gallacher though,’ Gish said. ‘His wife gave me an address. Fed up of him at long last. I passed it along to Special Branch.’ She saw the look he gave, resentment simmering. ‘So what do we do now, Jack? Do you come with me and make your statement?’

Milton had risen to his feet. He was standing in front of her, towering over her, jaw jutting, fists bunched.

‘Haldane and Robertson are already at the station,’ she told him. ‘Waiting in a couple of interview rooms. Amberson and Collins brought them in an hour ago. Neither of them seems to be holding back.’

Whatever fight there had been in him seemed to leave Jack Milton. ‘I need to let Phoebe know – can I do that at least, Gillian?’

‘So you can ask her to come and get the pictures?’ Gish shook her head. ‘Where are they anyway?’

‘Bedroom. They really are beautiful, you know.’

‘Let’s go take a look at them then.’

‘It was a good plan,’ Milton repeated, more to himself than to her.

Gish nodded slowly, following him out of the room and up the stairs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo © Hamish Brown

Ian Rankin was born in the Kingdom of Fife in 1960 and graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1982. He is the internationally bestselling author of the Inspector Rebus and Detective Malcolm Fox novels, as well as a string of standalone thrillers. His books have been translated into thirty-six languages and are bestsellers on several continents. Rankin is the recipient of four CWA Dagger Awards and in 2004 won America's celebrated Edgar Award for *Resurrection Men*. He has also been shortlisted for the Edgar and Anthony Awards in the USA, and won the British Book Award for Crime & Thriller Book of the Year in 2022, Denmark's Palle Rosenkrantz Prize, the French Grand Prix du Roman Noir and Germany's Deutscher Krimipreis. Rankin is the recipient of honorary degrees from the universities of Abertay, St Andrews, Hull and Edinburgh, and has received the knighthood for services to literature.

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