



VAL McDERMID

CREATOR OF TV'S *WIRE IN THE BLOOD*

A DARKER DOMAIN

'VINTAGE STUFF: UNPLUG THE PHONE, LOCK THE DOOR
AND PREPARE TO READ IN A SITTING' *GUARDIAN*

HarperCollins E-Books

ISBN 978-0-00-728745-1

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*A
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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of Meg and Tom McCall, my maternal grandparents. They showed me love, they taught me about community, and they never forgot the shame of standing in line at a soup kitchen to feed their bairns. Thanks to them, I grew up loving the sea, the woods and the work of Agatha Christie. No small debt.

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Acknowledgements

It started when Kari ‘Mrs Shapiro’ Furre made a bizarre discovery in the *casa rovina* down the hill. The Giorgi family of the Chiocciola contrada offered their suggestions; the wonderful Mamma Rosa fed us like kings and taught us like little children; Marino Garaffi continues to breed the finest pigs, even the ones that get stuck. Their friendship, their kindness and their generosity brightens my summers.

In Fife, I owe thanks to my mother for her memories; to the many miners and musicians whose songs and stories weave in and out of my childhood memories; to the fellow Raith Rovers supporter who suggested it was about time I wrote another book set in the Kingdom; and to the communities I grew up among who were shattered by the 1984 strike and its aftermath.

Professor Sue Black was generous as ever with her expertise and reminds me that the mistakes are mine.

Some of the people who made this book possible are beyond thanks. My father Jim McDermid, my miner grandfathers Tom McCall and Donald McDermid and my *brevet* uncle Doddy Arnold all opened doors into the world of working men, a world whose demands cut short their lives.

And finally, a nod of appreciation to the team who always push me to make the book the best I can manage - my editor Julia Wisdom, my copy editor Anne O’Brien and my agent, Jane Gregory. Not forgetting Kelly and Cameron, whose patience is entirely remarkable.

Wednesday 23rd January 1985; Newton of Wemyss

The voice is soft, like the darkness that encloses them. 'You ready?'

'As ready as I'll ever be.'

'You've told her what to do?' Words tumbling now, tripping over each other, a single stumble of sounds.

'Don't worry. She knows what's what. She's under no illusions about who's going to carry the can if this goes wrong.' Sharp words, sharp tone. 'She's not the one I'm worrying about.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Nothing. It means nothing, all right? We've no choices. Not here. Not now. We just do what has to be done.' The words have the hollow ring of bravado. It's anybody's guess what they're hiding. 'Come on, let's get it done with.'

This is how it begins.

Wednesday 27th June 2007; Glenrothes

The young woman strode across the foyer, low heels striking a rhythmic tattoo on vinyl flooring dulled by the passage of thousands of feet. She looked like someone on a mission, the civilian clerk thought as she

approached his desk. But then, most of them did. The crime prevention and public information posters that lined the walls were invariably wasted on them as they approached, lost in the slipstream of their determination.

She bore down on him, her mouth set in a firm line. Not bad looking, he thought. But like a lot of the women who pitched up here, she wasn't exactly looking her best. She could have done with a bit more make-up, to make the most of those sparky blue eyes. And something more flattering than jeans and a hoodie. Dave Cruickshank assumed his fixed professional smile. 'How can I help you?' he said.

The woman tilted her head back slightly, as if readying herself for defence. 'I want to report a missing person.'

Dave tried not to show his weary irritation. If it wasn't neighbours from hell, it was so-called missing persons. This one was too calm for it to be a missing toddler, too young for it to be a runaway teenager. A row with the boyfriend, that's what it would be. Or a senile granddad on the lam. The usual bloody waste of time. He dragged a pad of forms across the counter, squaring it in front of him and reaching for a pen. He kept the cap on; there was one key question he needed answered before he'd be taking down any details. 'And how long has this person been missing?'

'Twenty-two and a half years. Since Friday the fourteenth of December 1984, to be precise.' Her chin came down and truculence clouded her features. 'Is that long enough for you to take it seriously?'

Detective Sergeant Phil Parhatka watched the end of the video clip then closed the window. 'I tell you,' he said, 'if ever there was a great time to be in cold cases, this is it.'

Detective Inspector Karen Pirie barely raised her eyes from the file she was updating. 'How?'

'Stands to reason. We're in the middle of the war on terror. And I've just watched my local MP taking possession of 10 Downing Street with his missus.' He jumped up and crossed to the mini-fridge perched on top of a

filing cabinet. 'What would you rather be doing? Solving cold cases and getting good publicity for it, or trying to make sure the muzzers dinnae blow a hole in the middle of our patch?'

'You think Gordon Brown becoming Prime Minister makes Fife a target?' Karen marked her place in the document with her index finger and gave Phil her full attention. It dawned on her that for too long she'd had her head too far in the past to weigh up present possibilities. 'They never bothered with Tony Blair's constituency when he was in charge.'

'Very true.' Phil peered into the fridge, deliberating between an Irn Bru and a Vimto. Thirty-four years old and still he couldn't wean himself off the soft drinks that had been treats in childhood. 'But these guys call themselves Islamic jihadists and Gordon's a son of the manse. I wouldn't want to be in the Chief Constable's shoes if they decide to make a point by blowing up his dad's old kirk.' He chose the Vimto. Karen shuddered.

'I don't know how you can drink that stuff,' she said. 'Have you never noticed it's an anagram of vomit?'

Phil took a long pull on his way back to his desk. 'Puts hairs on your chest,' he said.

'Better make it two cans, then.' There was an edge of envy in Karen's voice. Phil seemed to live on sugary drinks and saturated fats but he was still as compact and wiry as he'd been when they were rookies together. She just had to look at a fully leaded Coke to feel herself gaining inches. It definitely wasn't fair.

Phil narrowed his dark eyes and curled his lip in a good-natured sneer. 'Whatever. The silver lining is that maybe the boss can screw some more money out of the government if he can persuade them there's an increased threat.'

Karen shook her head, on solid ground now. 'You think that famous moral compass would let Gordon steer his way towards anything that looked that self-serving?' As she spoke, she reached for the phone that had just begun to ring. There were other, more junior officers in the big squad

room that housed the Cold Case Review Team, but promotion hadn't altered Karen's ways. She'd never got out of the habit of answering any phone that rang in her vicinity. 'CCRT, DI Pirie speaking,' she said absently, still turning over what Phil had said, wondering if, deep down, he had a hankering to be where the live action was.

'Dave Cruickshank on the front counter, Inspector. I've got somebody here, I think she needs to talk to you.' Cruickshank sounded unsure of himself. That was unusual enough to grab Karen's attention.

'What's it about?'

'It's a missing person,' he said.

'Is it one of ours?'

'No, she wants to report a missing person.'

Karen suppressed an irritated exhalation. Cruickshank really should know better by now. He'd been on the front desk long enough. 'So she needs to talk to CID, Dave.'

'Well, yeah. Normally, that would be my first port of call. But see, this is a bit out of the usual run of things. Which is why I thought it would be better to run it past you, see?'

Get to the point. 'We're cold cases, Dave. We don't process fresh inquiries.' Karen rolled her eyes at Phil, smirking at her obvious frustration.

'It's not exactly fresh, Inspector. This guy went missing twenty-two years ago.'

Karen straightened up in her chair. 'Twenty-two years ago? And they've only just got round to reporting it?'

'That's right. So does that make it cold, or what?'

Technically, Karen knew Cruickshank should refer the woman to CID. But she'd always been a sucker for anything that made people shake their