One
'He’s not here,’ the desk sergeant said.
‘So where is he?’
‘Out on a call.‘
Fox stared hard at the man, knowing it wouldn’t do any good. The sergeant was one of those old-timers who reckoned they’d seen it all and faced most of it down. Fox glanced at the next name on his list.
‘Haldane?’
‘Sick leave.’
‘Michaelson?’
‘Out on the call with DI Scholes.’
Tony Kaye was standing just behind Fox’s left shoulder. An instant before the words were out of his mouth, Fox knew what his colleague was going to say.
‘This is taking the piss.’
Fox turned to give Kaye a look. News would now travel through the station: job done. The Complaints had come to town, found no one home, and had let their annoyance show. The desk sergeant shifted his weight from one foot to the other, trying not to seem too satisfied at this turn of events.
Fox took a moment to study his surroundings. The notices pinned to the walls were the usual stuff. It was a modern police station, meaning it could just as easily have been the reception area of a doctors’ surgery or DSS office, as long as you disregarded the sign warning that the Alert Status had been lifted from LOW to MODERATE. Nothing to do with Fox and his men: there’d been reports of a blast in woodland outside Lockerbie. Kids, probably,
and a good long way from Kirkcaldy. Nevertheless, every police station in the country would have been notified.

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

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

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

‘She’s not in yet.’

Kaye made a show of checking his watch.

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

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

And seldom entirely cooperative.

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

‘That’s right.’

‘How long to drive there – twenty minutes?’

‘Provided you don’t get lost.’

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

Joe Naysmith was holding a pamphlet about home security. He plonked himself on one of the chairs by the window and started reading. Fox and Kaye shared a look.
'What do you reckon?' Kaye asked at last. 'Whole town’s out there waiting to be explored…'

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

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

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

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

‘He was an economist.’

‘What about Gordon Brown?’ Fox had added.

‘Kirkcaldy,’ Naysmith had confirmed, nodding slowly.

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

Or …

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

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

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

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

Joe Naysmith had become inured to comments about his latest designer buy, but he did turn the collar up. There was a fierce wind blowing in from the North Sea. The water was choppy, and puddles along the promenade offered evidence that the tide was prone to break over the sea wall. The gulls overhead looked to be working hard at staying airborne. There was something odd about the design of this waterfront: almost no use had been made of it. Buildings tended to face away from the view and towards the
town centre. Fox had noted this elsewhere in Scotland: from Fort William to Dundee, the planners seemed to deny the existence of any shoreline. He’d never understood it, but doubted Kaye and Naysmith would be able to help.

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

‘Where’s he going?’ Naysmith complained.

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

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

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

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

‘Is it worth the risk?’ Tony Kaye asked.

‘What risk?’

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

‘I’m feeling reckless today,’ Fox countered. ‘I’ll take a chance …’

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

Paul Carter was the reason they’d come to Fife. Carter held the rank of detective constable and had been a cop for fifteen years. He was thirty-eight years old and came from a family of cops – both his father and an uncle had served in Fife Constabulary. The uncle, Alan Carter, had actually made the original complaint
against his nephew. It involved a drug addict, sexual favours, and turning a blind eye. Two other women then came forward to say that Paul Carter had arrested them for drunken behaviour, but offered to drop any charges if they would be ‘accommodating’.

‘Does anybody actually ever say “accommodating”?’ Kaye muttered, halfway down a page.

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

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

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

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

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

Not much, except bring his police force into disrepute.

‘Reminds me a bit of Colin Balfour,’ Tony Kaye said. ‘Remember him?’
Fox nodded. Edinburgh cop who liked to visit the cells if women were being held overnight. The prosecution against him had faltered, but an internal inquiry had seen him kicked off the force anyway.

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

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

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

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

‘Could be,’ Naysmith agreed.

Kaye slapped a hand down on the pile of papers in front of him.

‘So where does any of this get us? How many days are we going to be shuttling backwards and forwards?’

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

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

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

‘Where do you think they make it?’

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

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

Which he wouldn’t.

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

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

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

‘And?’

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

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

‘Hello?’ It was a woman’s voice.

‘DI Scholes, please.’

‘Who’s calling?’

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

‘Hold on, I’ll put you through.’

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

‘Nicely played,’ Tony Kaye said. Then, to Naysmith: ‘Back into your donkey jacket, Joe. Let’s get that jackhammer started . . .’
Detective Inspector Ray Scholes ran a hand through his short black hair. He was seated in the station’s only interview room. Fox had offered him any location he liked, as long as it had a table and four chairs.

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

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

‘Only “almost”?’ Malcolm Fox had responded, busying himself with the paperwork.

‘All set,’ Naysmith was now telling them.

‘Happy to start?’ Fox asked Scholes.

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

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

‘Never know when something important’s going to crop up.’

‘How long before it rings again?’ Fox asked. ‘Will it be her every
time, or have you split the task between your friends?’ Fox looked
towards Tony Kaye. ‘What is it usually – five minutes or ten?’

‘Ten,’ Kaye stated definitively.

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

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

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

‘Still is.’

‘We both know he’s not coming back.’

‘How come you hate cops so much?’

Fox stared at the man across the desk. Scholes was in his mid-
thirties but looked younger. A freckled face and milky-blue eyes.

An odd image flashed up in Fox’s memory: a big bag of marbles
he’d owned as a boy. His favourite had been a pale-blue one, its
flaws only visible when you peered at it, turning it slowly between
your fingers …

‘That’s an original question,’ Tony Kaye was answering Scholes.

‘I doubt we’re asked that more than a few dozen times a month.’

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

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

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

‘There’s always one,’ Kaye conceded.

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

‘A bit.’

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

‘No comment.’

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

‘Nothing ever came of it,’ Scholes stated.
‘Not straight away, not until Teresa Collins decided she’d had enough . . .’ Fox paused. ‘Did you know Carter’s uncle?’

‘He was a cop.’

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

Scholes shrugged.

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

‘Is that the starters finished, then?’ Scholes asked eventually.

‘Are we moving on to the meat and veg?’

‘Meat and veg?’

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

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

‘I wasn’t.’

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

‘No.’

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

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

‘Eighteen seconds.’

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

‘Why did you have her number?’

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

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

‘That’s it.’

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

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

‘Yes.’
‘Did you spend time with Carter when the two of you were off duty?’
‘Few beers now and then.’
‘And clubs . . . away days to Edinburgh and Glasgow.’
‘It’s no secret.’
‘That’s right. It all came out in court.’
Scholes snorted. ‘Cops stick together and like a drink now and then – hold the front page.’
‘Carter was a DC, you’re a DI.’
‘So?’
‘So he’d never been promoted. Lowest rank in CID, and he’d been a cop as long as you.’
‘Not everybody wants promotion.’
‘Not everybody merits it,’ Fox stated. ‘Which was it with Paul Carter?’
Scholes was opening his mouth to answer when the interview room door opened. There was a uniformed woman there.
‘Sorry to interrupt,’ she said, not looking sorry at all. ‘Thought I’d better say hello.’ She saw that Naysmith was switching off the recorders. Reaching the desk, she introduced herself as Superintendent Isabel Pitkethly. Fox stood up with a certain reluctance and offered his hand for her to shake.
‘Inspector Malcolm Fox,’ he stated.
‘Everything all right?’ Pitkethly looked around the room. ‘Got everything you need?’
‘We’re fine.’
She was almost a foot shorter than Fox but much the same age – early forties. Collar-length brown hair, blue eyes glinting behind her spectacles. She wore a regulation white blouse with epaulettes at the shoulders. Dark skirt falling to just above her knees.
‘Ray behaving himself?’ She gave a nervous laugh, and Fox could see that the past few weeks had left their mark on her. She probably saw herself as captain of a tight ship, and now the structure had been damaged from within.
‘We were only just getting started,’ Tony Kaye said, not bothering to disguise the complaint.
‘Funny, I thought we were on to cheese and biscuits,’ Scholes countered.
‘DI Scholes does actually have to be at another meeting in five minutes,’ Pitkethly said. ‘Procurator Fiscal has a case to prepare . . .’
Scholes wasted no time getting to his feet. "Gentlemen, it's been a pleasure."

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

'Mid-afternoon, probably.'

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

'Couple of missed calls?'

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

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

'I was about to suggest it,' Fox answered.

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

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

'Better had. Can't trust Scholes and his crew not to come in here and wipe their cocks over everything …'
the chain of command would invite him to their office and tell him the same thing.

This is a good crew here.
We’ve got work to do.
It’s in nobody’s interest that officers are kept back from their duties.
Naturally, no one wants a whitewash.
But all the same . . .
‘So if any concerns could be brought to me in the first instance . . .’
Colour had risen to Pitkethly’s cheeks. Fox wondered how elated she’d been when promotion had come, when she’d been offered her own station to run. And now this.
She’d been told what to say, but hadn’t had time for a rehearsal. Her voice drifted off and she started to clear her throat, almost bringing on a fit of coughing. Fox liked her all the better for this apparent awkwardness. He realised she’d maybe called in no favours, but had been summoned to Glenrothes.

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

She had managed to compose herself. She was nodding, her eyes focused on his.
‘We’re not in the business of making waves,’ he went on. This, too, was a speech he’d made many times, in rooms much like this.
‘We just want the truth. We want to know procedures were followed and no one thinks they’re somehow above the law. If you can help us get that message across to your officers, that would be great. If there’s a room we could use as a base, so much the better. It needs to be lockable, and I’ll need all the keys. I’m hoping we’ll be out of your hair in a week.’
He decided not to add ‘or two’.
‘A week,’ she echoed. He couldn’t decide if this was coming as good or bad news to her.
‘I was told this morning that DS Haldane’s on sick leave . . .’
‘Flu,’ she confirmed.
‘Flu, palsy or plague, we need him for interview.’
She nodded again. ‘I’ll make sure he knows.’
‘A bit of local knowledge might be useful, too – just where we can get a decent lunch or sandwich. But nowhere your officers would go.’

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

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

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

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

‘What?’

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

‘Nothing,’ she stated.

‘Never any doubts?’

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

‘Well?’ Kaye asked.

‘Much as expected.’

‘Michaelson might be around – want him next?’

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

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

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