

The Tower

A Novel by
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For my mother and father.
And for my wife and son.
And for all the lost souls of the *Lancastria*.

“Did he who made the lamb make thee?” William Blake

“Let Glasgow flourish.” City’s motto

*“But the unhappy childhood and youth of the exception is transfigured
into spirit.”* Soren Kierkegaard, Journals, 1848

Part One

Chapter One

A pallid moon hung over the tower the night Matt Kelly and Leggy found the treasure. Venus looked down on both and a superstitious man would have said it was some kind of portent. Something meaningful. Neither Matt nor Leggy were looking for signs nor moons nor venuses that night. They were walking in silence along Prospecthill Road the same as they had done every Friday night for the last ten years: ignoring the cold and thinking about the curry they were carrying and the beers they had in the bag to go with it. The silence was broken only by the occasional car or taxi creeping along through the slush and slopping some grey matter up onto the snow covered pavements. As they approached the Circus they thought they heard a sound, something, like a star, or perhaps an angel, falling from the night sky into the soft snow.

As they turned the corner past the church they saw what had fallen. It wasn't a star or an angel or any kind of sign; it was a man, or rather a boy-man, lying flat on his back looking up at the stars with his once forever open and then forever shut eyes. His chest was covered with blood, fresh blood, still running into the white snow. His eyes, Matt saw, were green. He wore a tracksuit and trainers. And his face wore the scars of a Glasgow youthdom. This was not the first time that the boy's body had bled. Matt knew him. Or he knew his kind. One of the army who hung around the chip shop or Rutherglen Main Street. Clueless, soulless, and up for anything.

Leggy had his mobile out but Matt stopped him.

"He disnae need an ambulance," he said.

"But we should call the polis or something," said Leggy.

“Naw,” said Matt, “I’m sorry for the poor cunt, but that’ll no change anything and only land us wae problems. I’ve seen hundreds of dead bodies, now I’ve seen another. Let’s keep walking.”

Matt walked on. And Leggy, slowly, reluctantly, followed him.

They hunched their bodies down the hill towards the multi-storey a little colder than before, and there, protruding from under a car, was a sports bag. White as the snow that surrounded it, emblazoned with pink letters which glinted and glittered in the street lights. A woman’s bag. For going to the gym or the swimming. Matt pulled the bag out from under the car and opened it up. It was packed with bank notes. Matt wisnae sure if Leggy understood. He looked around. Nobody. Nothing. Matt zipped the bag up. He looked at Leggy. They took the bag and cut back round the side of the boozier and into the concrete forest behind. They didn’t speak. There was no need. They mazed their way through the scheme and entered the tower by the back door. They went past the bins and took the lift up to Matt’s on the fifteenth floor. Outside, some silvery black clouds had suddenly blown in from somewhere tapping the moon and Venus. The white world’s days were numbered.

Up on the fifteenth floor, Matt, Leggy and the white bag with pink fluorescent letters sat looking at each another. Matt got up and went into the kitchen. He uncorked a bottle of red wine and poured two tumblers full. He gave Leggy one and put the other on the table. Squatting down, he opened the bag.

“Let’s count it, eh?” said Matt.

He tossed Leggy a wad of fifty pound notes. Leggy took a slug of his wine and sat down Buddha-like on the floor and started counting. Matt sat at the table with bundles of bank notes around him.

“I’m gonnae need a pen and paper, Matt,” said Leggy.

Matt opened up a drawer and handed him some.

They counted in silence for half an hour, three-quarters, an hour.

In the Toryglen sky, the weather had unselfconsciously turned to rain; the wind was buffeting the tower. Matt looked out and thought he saw something far off up in the sky over Cathkin Braes. He started. A light shining weakly like a boat's in a fog. It seemed to be trying to take some kind of form. It expanded a little. Throbbled. And then shrank again. Matt squinted and couldnae make anything out. It was dark and the window was streaked with rain. He turned back to the count.

“How much do you get?” asked Leggy.

“Two hundred and twenty thousand.”

“I've got two hundred and sixty.”

Matt stood up and filled their glasses.

“This is it, Leggy, this is it, fuck, fuck.”

Leggy didnae look so sure. He had a bad feeling in his stomach. This was crossing his line. He emptied his glass.

Matt was walking up and down excitedly.

“Leggy, Leggy, we've done it, we've got the key, the way out awe this fucking shit hole, man.”

Leggy was starting to get panicky.

“That money came fae somewhere, Matt. Somebody will be looking for it. That boy, that fucking poor boy, it came fae him, or he was taking it somewhere, tae somebody. And,” he said, his eyes flaring and his arms flailing, “we don't really know if he was dead, mibbe he was only fucking injured. We huf tae go back.”

Leggy was out of the living room, making for the front door.

“Leggy, Leggy, don't be fucking daft, wait,” shouted Matt after him.

But it was too late. Leggy was out and tearing down the stairs two at a time. Too crazed even to wait for the lift. Matt ran after him. On the twelfth floor he took the lift down. He could hear Leggy coming. Panic. The skids and the crashes of a man possessed echoed through the building. He waited at the door. Leggy burst out and past him. Matt managed to get a hold of him and pull him back into the building. In the dark they heard it, a motor slowly moving round the Circus. It came round the corner and they

could see the lights. The car stopped at the bus stop. Matt saw there were four shadows through the rain, four men. It stood still for a while as if sniffing the air. Trying to pick up a scent through the rainfall. Then the engine started up and it moved off around the bend.

“For fuck’s sake, Leggy, come on, back upstairs. We cannae go out now. He was dead. I swear to you, I swear to you, he was dead.”

Leggy was crying. Matt put his arm round him.

“Come on, Leggy, don’t worry, it’ll be alright, come on.”

Matt led Leggy into the lift. The doors closed with a low swoosh. The little number illuminated. Fifteen.

Chapter Two

Matt Kelly woke up. There was a soft howl sweeping through the house. Leggy was still sleeping on the bed opposite him. His legs twitched a little under the blankets. Matt got up and walked around the flat. He saw there was a window open slightly in the toilet. He pulled it shut and put down the clip. The howling stopped. He went into the living room and looked out the window up to the church. The rain was still battering against the windows. He saw lights and a group of people gathered round the place where they saw the boy. The polis were there in strength.

The bundles of notes were all over the living room. Matt went into the cupboard and got a sports bag out and stuffed the notes inside. He took it into the spare bedroom and put it in the wardrobe. Then he got a bin bag and put the white holdall in it and tied it off. He would dump it somewhere in Govanhill. Fuck, it was just a holdall. He heard Leggy stirring. What to do about Leggy? That was definitely a problem. Leggy was more than a holdall. Leggy had a conscience. When he saw that the boy was dead when we saw him that would make it easier. It would be in the papers the night.

He went into the kitchen and started to prepare some tea and breakfast.

Leggy appeared in the doorway, his face gravelled with stubble and his hair sticking out at contradictory angles. He had the blanket wrapped round him as if he were on some kind of dirty protest. Against life, perhaps. Or fate. When he spoke he sounded calmer.

“It’s fucking freezing in here, man.”

“I’ll turn up the heater,” said Matt.

They ate their breakfast in silence.

“I’ll have to go,” said Leggy, “I’m going into the town wae Donna.”

“The polis and that are at the turn into the scheme, you can see it all from the window.”

“I’m gonnæ go over the field.”

Leggy got up and went into the bedroom. He came back with his clothes on and his hair straightened.

“See ye the morrow, Matt,” he said, opening the front door.

“Aye, see ye the morrow, Leggy,” said Matt, but a strange feeling had descended on Matt Kelly. He couldnae put a name to it. But it was there. He heard the door bang. Looking out through the wind and the rain, he stood transfixed by the lights and the shine of the luminous jerkins of the polismen on Saturday overtime.

Matt spent the morning on the couch reading Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*. He had everything clear in his mind. This was his chance to get away once and for all. There were many, how shall we say, technical problems, he knew that much. He wasn’t daft. He knew that both the police and the people who belonged to the money would be vigilant. He would have to leave Glasgow. Britain, too, perhaps. Yet, he couldn’t suddenly leave or start spending money. That would make him suspect. Six months and then simply slip away with his suitcases. And Leggy, too. Leggy was the biggest problem. He was a good person, that was the thing. A misanthrope like Matt could disappear, nobody would miss him. Nobody would care. But Leggy was different, his family, his wife. And Matt knew that his conscience would still be hectoring him about the boy.

He got up and went into the room. He took the bag out of the wardrobe. He had a plan. The money wasn’t safe in his flat, anything could happen. Somebody could find it, Leggy could have another mad brainstorm. On the floor below there were a couple of boarded up houses. The Eadies’ flat was one of them. Rab Eadie had gone to school with Matt. They had been pals. But that was an age ago, the family had grown up and

the parents had gone to a care home in Rutherglen, and Rab was in London doing God knows what, his sisters scattered across the globe. Moira, Matt had heard, was living in Venice married to an Italian. Fucking hell, thought Matt, Moira Eadie lounging in a gondola. He wondered how you translated “whit the fuck are you looking at ye wee prick” into Italian. And Maggie. Matt had even loved Maggie once. Aye, he had loved her. Matt shuddered.

His plan was to open the shutter and hide the bag in the house. He still had the key. His mother and old Mrs Eadie had been friends of a sort.

Matt crept down the back stairs. There was only one occupied flat on that side of the landing but still he had to be cautious. There was a sometimes single parent in it. He heard the baby crying at night. And he heard the barnies she had with the boyfriend. He had seen her a few times in the lift or in the street. Thin and pale. Like some grotesque Glasgow Madeline Usher. If Poe had grown up in a Glasgow housing scheme, what real horror tales he could have told. Probably a drug or cheap wine junkie of some sort wae a wean and her fuckin’ “it’s because I’m a single parent” righteousness.

He unscrewed the shutter and opened the door with the key. The house smelt terrible, and it was baltic. Matt wandered through it going in and out of the rooms. It wasn’t really much, he thought. The summit of corporation largesse. Municipal socialism. He went into Rab’s old room. A musty worn carpet was on the floor and there were still some posters on the wall. Jake Burns and Paul Weller and Frank Zappa looked down at him. Zappa had a mad look on his face. An appropriate one, thought Matt, for this dive. He went into the girls’ room and sat down on the floor for a while trying to breathe in something of the ghosts of the place. He saw Moira and Maggie and he thought of the fantasies and the hours of mental pleasure he’d had with them both, though now it somehow felt incestuous.

He went back into the living room and opened the big cupboard. There was a lot of old junk and Matt put the bag in there under the remains of an old two man tent.

He moved back out onto the landing and sealed everything up. He

thought he saw a form behind the glass of the other flat but knew that she wouldn't open the door. That was the thing, nobody opened their door now. And that was fine. Matt liked it like that. Everybody alone standing before their own God. Alone for a while and then forever. He slipped into the back stairwell and was quickly back in his own chamber of the tower.

Around half past two Matt went out. He was carrying the bin bag with the white sports holdall and his idea was to walk over to Victoria Road and dump it somewhere en route. He would have a couple of jars on Vicky Road and head home. The rain had stopped and, like a testament to the hardiness of the Glasgow spirit, there were some football matches taking place on the ash parks. Matt lingered for a while watching one of them. It wisnae much of a game and, just as he was heading off, Matt was pleased to see that a full scale battle erupted. After a while he grew bored and drifted off. He dumped the bag in a skip on Alison Street. He bought a paper and made for the Vicky Bar. He toyed with the idea of phoning Mick, not Leggy for fuck's sake, but decided against it. His own company was good enough the day. He ordered a pint and sat down at a table. He scanned for the story. A small piece on page five across from a photo of a guy in a badly-fitting Santa suit with nicotine stained hands surrounded by weans to the headline *Santa spreads Xmas cheer in Ruchazie*.

Youth Found Dead in Prospecthill Circus

A man's body has been found in the early hours of the morning (Saturday) at the entrance to Prospecthill Circus in the south of Glasgow by a passing police patrol. The man, who has not been identified, is believed to have been in his early twenties. He had been stabbed in the chest and police believe that he died from his wounds and that the extreme cold would have made it almost impossible for him to survive the night. The man's body was found at half past five and according to initial forensic reports the time of death was thought to have been shortly

beforehand. Police sources say that they believe the death to be linked to drugs and gang warfare. There has been a long history of such crime in Glasgow's south side. Anyone who has any information or was in the area at the time is asked to contact the police.

Matt was overwhelmed with annoyance. He knew Leggy would be reading this. The boy was still alive when they found him. Matt didnae feel bad. Leggy should have examined him. Got up close if he cared that much. And, anyway, he had genuinely thought the boy was dead.

“Waant tae buy a stereo?”

Matt looked up. There was a guy standing in front of him carrying a box.

“Naw, naw, I don’t waant tae buy a stereo.”

The guy moved on to the next table. There was a gang of young men drinking bottles of beer with little pieces of lemon sticking out of them making them look like Molotov cocktails. They showed some interest.

“Ma cousin’s looking fur wan. Dae ye waant me tae call her and ye can speak tae her?” said one of the boys.

The boy got up and went to the pay phone. The guy followed him. Matt couldnae believe it. Another one of the boys picked up the box and ran out the back door with it. Matt saw the boy hand the guy the mouthpiece.

“Hallo, hallo hallo,” he was shouting into the phone.

The table of boys burst into a cacophony of hoots and jeers.

Matt finished his pint in a oner and left the pub.

The rain had miraculously stayed off. Matt was preoccupied with Leggy’s reaction. How could he be so moral about some piece of junkie scum? Matt couldn’t take Leggy’s simplistic mindset. We’re all one. We’re all the same. If something goes wrong with somebody, we’re all responsible in some fucking abstract mystical sense. We’re all our brothers’ keepers.

Matt was moving automatically up the hill as if he were going to work in the hospital.

Ah well, he thought, the rain is still off I might as well walk home. I'll go down over Prospecthill Road past the prefabs. Leggy's problem was that he was still a Christian. What sort of God would make this? How could Leggy still believe contrary to all the evidence? He stopped at the top of the hill and looked down over Toryglen and Rutherglen. At this distance it looked unreal. Like some nightmarish hell inspired landscape painting. Aye, the work of demons. Matt wanted to pick it up and crumple it in his hand. Throw it out into space. Let it float around for a thousand million years.

It's all a pure accident. Everything. All this shit is just an accident. And sometimes within the big accident there are smaller, almost unseen, accidents that bring a boon to someone. Last night was one of those small ones. Imperceptible to the universe. The predetermined life of that boy gave him and Leggy a chance. Saving him would have made no difference. Circumstances were too great. They hung over that boy like a blanket blotting out the sun. He would make Leggy see the sun. Convince him of the correctness of his actions. Matt kept walking, now faster, and then faster again, down the hill towards the world he was starting to make.