

CHAPTER 1

The wind howled as it administered a series of stinging slaps to his face. It had been a long, hot summer, the days warm and balmy, but tonight the weather had broken, and it was unusually stormy.

‘What’s wrong with you, uni boy? A wee bit of wind and you’re burrowing into your tunic like a ragged-arsed mole digging for his life. Tell me, what the fuck did you join the Glasgow polis for anyway?’

Thoroughgood couldn’t have answered this question even if he wanted to, but before he had time to think up a suitable reply his inquisitor spoke again, raising his voice above the icy gusts that seemed to slice through their woollen ‘monkey suits’.

‘You fuckin’ students are all the same – think you can turn up with your bloody degrees and run the show before the ink has dried on your warrant cards but...’

Thoroughgood ground to a halt, aware that his tormentor was no longer next to him. As he turned around, the senior cop jabbed a finger into his shoulder, a breath of stale alcohol washing over the rookie. He found himself mesmerised by Davidson’s mouthful of rotten teeth, which resembled a blown fuse box.

‘It don’t work that way out here, you wanker. It is what I say that goes and it is me that calls the shots. When I say jump, you ask how high, because doing what I say is the only way you’re gonnae stay alive on these streets. Do you understand me, uni boy?’

Thoroughgood attempted to provide an answer but found words hard to come by for a second time and settled instead for

a nod of his head.

Davidson glared at Thoroughgood, but the probationer, a mounting anger at his treatment at the hands of his tutor cop rising inside him, met the older man's spiteful stare with a seething resolve that he would not be cowed. Davidson's hat sat at an angle that slightly covered a headful of straw hair; his eyes were cruel and grey, set into a pale and ghoulish face. As Thoroughgood stared back at him, their close proximity brought home the sense of latent violence that seemed to perpetually accompany Davidson.

'Now, listen good, *boy*,' hissed the senior cop. 'I don't like middle-class, sponging, student scum and I couldn't give a fuck whether you make it out the other side of your probation dead or alive, but what I do care about is keeping my own hide in one piece. So while you are with me you play by my rules. Your education, uni boy, starts right now.'

Thoroughgood attempted to subdue his shame that a male in his late thirties, whose physique was far from imposing and inclined to strain the silver buttons of his tunic, was indeed doing a very good job of intimidating him. While physically Davidson was no man-mountain, it was the experience and knowhow that he had gained on two tours of Northern Ireland during the height of the Troubles and his reputation for dealing out brutal and systematic beatings that kept Thoroughgood's mounting anger in check.

Davidson took another step closer. 'Rule number one for any beat cop is *know where you are*. Stay sharp, stay alive. You may have all the brains in the world, uni boy, but now we're gonnae find out if you have the wits to go with them, cos wits is what keeps you safe 'n' sound on the street.'

The senior cop's lecture was ended by the chimes of an ice cream van and within seconds a golden-roofed, blue-sided vehicle emblazoned with the words 'Mojito's Ices: Satisfaction Guaranteed' came into view at the top of Braidendmuir Street.

'Move it,' spat Davidson out of the side of his mouth, immediately setting off up the hill towards the van. About fifty

yards from the vehicle he turned into the doorway of a derelict tenement close and gestured to Thoroughgood to do likewise.

Davidson's eyes remained homed in on the van before he eventually spoke. 'You never know what's drawn out of the woodwork by the icy. Did you know that junkies have a sweet tooth? Ice cream, chocolate and all that shite helps them fight their cravings.'

'Nope,' said Thoroughgood, taking his hat off and running the fingers of his right hand through his mop of black hair.

'Junkies equals warrants. So you stay awake and we might just get ourselves a body here.'

Within seconds the deserted street was teeming with kids and their mothers, high-pitched chatter and shrill cackling filling the air, but Davidson's hopes that any of the criminal fraternity would oblige him with an appearance were left unfulfilled.

As the last of the van's customers walked away, licking their purchases, the senior cop stepped forwards. 'Stay here,' he barked.

The rookie watched in fascination as the former soldier approached the driver of the vehicle, a young, dark-haired male who Thoroughgood put in his early twenties. There ensued an increasingly heated conversation, which ended with Davidson grabbing the driver by the scruff of his denim jacket and half dragging him out the vehicle sales window.

A combination of the blowing gale and distance meant, infuriatingly, that no matter how hard Thoroughgood strained his ears he could not hear a word of the exchange.

Having clearly made his point, Davidson propelled the obviously shaken ice cream man back through the window and, as he did so, a brown paper envelope found its way onto the service counter before being quickly scooped up by Davidson and shoved into his left-hand breast pocket.

Ten yards from the tenement close Davidson shouted, 'Time to move out, uni boy,' and without waiting for a reply marched off as the ice cream van sped down the road in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER 2

They continued to pound the concrete pavement between grimy, graffiti-stained tenements, some shuttered up with steel casing, others showing signs of life that looked anything but human.

Desperate though he was to ask the senior cop about what had just taken place, Thoroughgood decided he would be damned if he would give Davidson the chance to slap him down again with one of his vicious rebukes. Besides, in Thoroughgood's eyes, it was obvious enough what he had seen.

The only sound breaking the silence was the metallic chink of Davidson's whistle, the chain entwined through the silver buttons of his woollen tunic. In Thoroughgood's mind it was like the sound of a cowboy's spurs, the noise echoing in time with Davidson's footsteps.

Thoroughgood had noticed that none of the other shift cops bothered to wear the whistle, which seemed to be strictly for ceremonial occasions, unless you were a probationer. Now he knew why the senior cop persisted in wearing his. What Davidson wanted to send out was a warning, before he was even seen, that the sheriff was in town. It only added to Thoroughgood's impression that this place they called Lennox Hill was more like the Wild West than a slum on the outskirts of Glasgow.

The area was widely regarded as the 'arse end' of the north of the city and one in which the heroin problem had turned half the population into feral zombies who would sell their grannies for a tenner bag of smack. To newly commissioned Constable Z325, Angus Thoroughgood, it felt like stepping into a parallel universe.

Having graduated from the University of Glasgow earlier that year, class of '89, Thoroughgood was not long into his probationary period in police service, having negotiated his disastrous basic training course at the Scottish Police College by the skin of his teeth. Already, his university life seemed like some kind of surreal dream from which he had been snatched, thrown instead into a company of wolves who were intent on administering their version of 'justice' on a population who hated and despised the police in equal measure.

The Lennox Hill station, or 'the Hill', as it was dubbed, was a five-man affair with one long-serving officer detailed as station constable and four others rotating on two-man patrols. The fact that the radio reception in the area was erratic and that there were several blank spots where there was no coverage had already led to the local cops being ambushed on more than one occasion by the natives. When the residents of Lennox Hill did not seethe in silent resentment, they indulged in their favoured pastime of playing the hundred-yard hero, brave enough to hurl abuse on a passing patrol only when the gap was big enough.

While he knew that Davidson, or 'Dangerous', as he was known to everyone in Zulu Land, as Z-division was nicknamed, was a source of valuable and potentially life-saving information, it was his constant sniping at Thoroughgood's former status as a student that really got under his skin – that, and Davidson's persistent assertion that the rookie cop was an information plant 'for the brass'.

After they had checked a row of shops, front and back, at the top of 'the Hill', Thoroughgood found it increasingly hard to concentrate, his mind drifting in the direction of the west end, where most of his mates would be out on the piss. Meanwhile, he was stuck pounding the streets with Glasgow's answer to Wyatt Earp.

His mind already longing for the 3 a.m. piece break, Thoroughgood couldn't help checking his wristwatch. He knew it was a mistake.

'Bored? Good, old-fashioned, honest coppering not what you

were promised when they signed you up, you smug little shite? Never mind the fuckin' time, where are we?'

Thoroughgood had switched off and the furtive glance he made around him for confirmation of his whereabouts revealed as much.

He felt the impact of Davidson's right forearm ram across his chest and then gasped in astonishment as he saw the glint of a knife, which had appeared from nowhere and was now just inches below his chin.

'What did I tell you five minutes back, uni boy? *Know where you are at all times*. Here we fuckin' are and you've switched off already. What happens if we get jumped and need to put out a 21-call for urgent assistance and you don't know where the hell we are?'

The pressure on his throat and the glinting menace of the knife just below his chin ensured that Thoroughgood remained silent, but in truth he had been left speechless by the actions of the man who was supposed to be tutoring him in the art of the beat cop.

A smile of malicious relish spreading across his face, Davidson drew his forearm back but quickly manoeuvred the sharp point of the knife into the flesh just under the probationer's chin.

'Where we are is the old gas works – and your grave, if I want it to be, uni boy. What would happen if I slit your throat and left you for dead, bleeding out and dumped in one of the old tanks? It'd be easy enough to explain – the smart-arsed graduate wouldn't listen to his senior man, stormed off and got his throat cut for his troubles by our friendly locals. And it'd mean one less headache for me to worry about.'

Thoroughgood eventually found his words, but when he spoke he didn't recognise the hoarse rasping of his own voice. 'You're a fuckin' madman, Davidson. You can't be serious – you're my tutor cop, for Chrissakes...'

The point of the blade remained lodged against the underside of Thoroughgood's chin as Davidson stared down the younger cop, the familiar scent of his stale, alcoholic breath filling the

space between them.

'Jesus Christ can't save you, Thoroughgood, but I can. Or not...' Davidson let his words fade into an ominous silence before continuing. 'You know how I survived two tours of duty in the province, uni boy? By staying switched on and relying on my wits every minute of every fuckin' day. You walk the streets with Billy Davidson then you stay switched on, cos I'm not taking a blade in the back for some smartarse bookworm who's still wet behind the ears.'

The pressure from the blade increased until Thoroughgood thought his skin was about to break. His eardrums seemed about to burst as the hammering of his heart went into overdrive and he almost stopped breathing.

Then Davidson pulled the knife back, flicked the switchblade's button, recoiled the four inches of gleaming steel into its ivory handle and slipped it snugly into the poacher's pocket that had clearly been custom-made inside the left breast of his tunic. A feral smile swept across the senior cop's features before he spat contemptuously onto Thoroughgood's immaculately polished shoes.

'Better get that gob cleaned off before the sergeant catches you, uni boy.'

But before Thoroughgood could react, the noise of a diesel engine filled the silence of the night. He saw an approaching Ford Escort Mark III, liveried in white with the red side stripes that had earned Strathclyde police vehicles the nickname of 'jam sandwiches'.

'Sergeant Rentoul is a stickler for the smart uniform, Thoroughgood, and he won't be happy with the bull on your boots being covered by a huge gob,' said Davidson, filling the air with his harsh laughter.

The police vehicle drew to a stop yards away and from the driver's door the hulking shape of the senior shift sergeant, Jimmy Rentoul, hoisted himself out of the motor and ambled his way towards the two cops. The creases in the sleeves of his tunic and fronts of his woollen trousers were razor sharp, the army service

ribbon fixed to his uniform breast stood to attention, and the peak of his cap reflected Thoroughgood's features in it, such was the gleam of its shine.

'Well, well, Davidson and Thoroughgood. I'm delighted to see you're not dossing your way through the night shift.' Rentoul, who had been scrutinising Thoroughgood's appearance from top to bottom, stopped short as his gaze fell upon the slimy green substance on the probationer's right foot. Immediately a giant index finger bore into Thoroughgood's chest. 'What the fuck is this, son?'

Realising that whatever explanation he offered would be pointless, Thoroughgood played it straight. 'I'm sorry, Sergeant Rentoul, I must have caught it round the back of the gas works. Thought I'd heard a noise back there but it was nothing. Must've missed the gob shite on my boot on the way out. I will clean it off immediately.'

'Not before I've finished with you, son. Now listen to me, and listen good. If I ever see the uniform of Her Britannic Majesty's police service soiled in such a manner again I will have you up on a charge of neglect. Do you understand me?'

'Yes, Sergeant,' stammered Thoroughgood.

'Remember I know your story Thoroughgood. A smartarse just out of Glasgow university with a degree in – what was it again...'

'Medieval History, Sarge,' said Davidson.

'Aye, that's it. Thanks, Billy boy. Medieval fuckin' history, that's right. You tell me what use that's gonnae be to you out on the streets of the Hill?' Rentoul paused but before Thoroughgood could answer he spoke again. 'Absolutely no fuckin' use, is the answer you are searchin' for. But then we both know that – just like we both know the reason you're here.'

'Sorry, Sergeant, I don't know what you mean,' replied Thoroughgood, trying to control his nervousness at this new line of questioning.

This time the palm of Rentoul's left hand rammed into Thoroughgood's chest, propelling him back into the crumbling

brick wall behind him. The probationer flung out his arms, just managing to keep himself upright.

‘The reason you are here, you son of a bitch, is that you are a grass for the brass. You’ve been sent here to inform on my shift and to try and get some of the toughest cops in this man’s army busted out of it. But let me tell you this, you snivelling little arsewipe, that’s no’ gonnae be happening any time soon. You are almost four months into your two-year probationary period and you know who’s gonna have the biggest say in whether you make the grade as a cop?’

Thoroughgood knew the question was rhetorical and silently grimaced.

‘Jimmy bloody Rentoul, is the answer you are looking for. Do you think I’m gonnae allow one of my veterans to lose his uniform for a nancy-boy university graduate who’s touting to the bosses? No way, son. No fuckin’ way. I will be watching you every step of the way. I will know, before you do, when you need to take a shite. Let me promise you, there is no way you are going to make it through the box of delights I have waiting for you, Thoroughgood,’ Rentoul took another step forward, so that his face was millimetres away from the rookie’s. ‘Now get your fuckin’ notebook out, shit-for-brains, and let your sergeant sign it.’

Thoroughgood tried to keep his emotions masked as he shakily flicked the breast button of his tunic open and pulled out the notebook, opening it at the day’s tour of duty page. Before he could hand it to Rentoul the sergeant ripped it out of his grip.

In the background Davidson helpfully piped up, ‘You not going to fill the location of the sergeant’s sign-in before you hand it to your superior officer, Thoroughgood?’

Rentoul took a sideways glance at the senior cop and gave a disgusted, knowing nod of his head, before returning the black, plastic-covered notebook emblazoned with the words ‘Strathclyde Police’ back to Thoroughgood.

‘Well... Fill the location in here, *Constable* Thoroughgood,’ said Rentoul, drawing the last two words out with dripping sarcasm.

R.J.Mitchell

‘Blackmill Gas Works, Blackmill Road, sergeant,’ said Thoroughgood lamely as he wrote the date, location and time of the sign-in in a quivering hand and proffered the book back for his gaffer’s supervisory signature.

Rentoul scribbled his name and slammed the book into Thoroughgood’s right shoulder. Then, turning to Davidson, he asked, ‘How long you give him, Billy boy? You think he’ll make it to six months?’

‘I wouldnae be betting your money or mine on that, gaffer,’ Davidson replied gleefully.