

# Parallel Lines

## *The Glasgow Supremacy*

**R. J. Mitchell**

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## Reviews

"They call Scottish crime fiction 'tartan noir' - and if that's the case, then the thread of red that runs through *Parallel Lines* is a river of blood, and the blacks and greens are the bruises on a battered corpse. This book doesn't pull any punches in its depiction of a deadly cops-and-robbers feud that strays far beyond the procedural into the personal. At the core of the story is a traditional love triangle - the hero, the villain and the girl that gets between them - but it's Mitchell's first-hand knowledge of what goes on behind the police station's closed doors that sets the book apart. This is a real page-turner: once that plot is set in motion, like a car with its brake pipes cut hurtling down a steep Glasgow street - and that's an image from the book you won't forget - it carries the reader right through to its bullet-strewn climax."

ALAN MORRISON, Group Arts Editor, Herald & Times

"RJ Mitchell has joined the ranks of Scottish crime writers with a stunning debut thriller, *'Parallel Lines: The Glasgow Supremacy'*. It packs a punch that Mike Tyson would have been proud of.

"The action rages relentlessly through the streets of Glasgow with bent coppers, double-crossing gang members, brutal action and more twists than a downhill slalom race, leading to a tension-filled climax that paves the way for a sequel the reader will surely demand."

RUSSELL LEADBETTER, Chief literary critic, Evening Times.

# Chapter 1

“Code sixty-three, armed robbery in progress, Smith’s Pawnbrokers, 11 Argyle Street. Any station to attend.” The hiss of the radio jolted the two men into action.

“Bloody hell, Gus, that’s just round the corner!” exclaimed DC Kenny Hardie.

“Go, it’s the corner of Robertson Street at Argyle Street, we must be about a quarter of a mile from it. Straight down Wellington Street, Kenny; I’ll stick the light on the roof. Come on, man, put yer fuckin’ foot down or we’ll miss the whole shebang. DS Thoroughgood from Wellington Street, any descriptions, reggy numbers for motors involved?”

“That’s a negative,” crackled the voice from the control room. “All we’ve got is the raid alarm. Treat with utmost caution. The Tactical Firearms Unit has been alerted but ETA is five minutes. They’re coming from the other side of the Clyde, that’s a big shout this time of the afternoon. So you’re the nearest station, DS Thoroughgood.” The controller warned again: “Treat with caution, repeat, treat with caution!”

“Thanks for your concern, mate,” said the DS out loud.

Kenny Hardie’s temperature, as well as his heart rate, was rising fast. The veteran DC blurted out from behind the steering wheel: “Gus, there it is the other side of Argyle Street. You’re first out. Watch your arse, son.”

Hardie’s words of warning could have been coming from the dark side of the moon for all the likelihood they had of making an impact on Gus Thoroughgood; he was

surfing a whitewater adrenalin ride and the DS wanted bodies.

Immediately taking in the key elements of the scene before him, Thoroughgood sprung out of the Ford Focus in one fluid movement. A green Mondeo parked at the corner of the pawnbroker's looked decidedly dodgy. He could see it was one up with a male behind the wheel, but by then the detective was halfway through the pawnbroker's door and the shit was about to hit the fan, big time.

The first shot rang out before Thoroughgood had taken one step inside the premises. His subconscious registered the sound of the shooter as a shotgun even as his blood ran cold. The impact on the roof brought a fall of plaster and a chorus of screams from the shopgirl behind the counter.

Standing inside the door was armed robber one, complete with balaclava; for a vital split second he paused, surprised to see Thoroughgood diving through the door. The DS threw himself at the criminal and managed to knock the sawn-off out of his grasp with the impact of the collision. It landed on top of the counter, drawing further screams from the petrified girl. Right at that moment, though, her welfare was not top of Thoroughgood's agenda.

Detective and villain hit the ground with a thud, Thoroughgood just managing to get his hands round his opponent's neck. This was a fight to the death, and Thoroughgood had no intention of coming second. Over and over they rolled, smashing into the counter and bringing the shooter down, conveniently into the grasp of the criminal.

Thoroughgood moved his grip from flesh to firearm as he attempted to stop it being levelled at him. The acrid smell of whisky and smoke almost knocked him

out as it seeped from the ned's balaclava. The two tightened their embrace on the sawn-off until it was forced upwards, and another shot into the roof brought a deluge of plaster down on the pair.

It was the criminal who was on top now, and he rammed the firearm down onto the cop's jugular until slowly the air seemed to seep from his lungs as the constriction mounted.

*Where the fuck is Hardie when you need him?* Thoroughgood thought. He forced himself to scan the walls of the shop for anything that could help break the ned's killer grip. There it was, a foot to the left of the counter, a fire extinguisher mounted on the wall. Thoroughgood aimed his size ten at the catch holding it to the plaster and the contact brought a shudder, but nothing more. It was time to gamble.

Thoroughgood put all his power into a left hook to his assailant's ribs and surged his body weight upwards. It wasn't enough to knock the thug off but it allowed the cop to grab the neck of the extinguisher, which promptly came crashing down onto the ground. That moment also allowed the robber to regain his breath, and he was once again using the sawn-off to crush the oxygen from Thoroughgood's throat and lungs.

Flicking at the catch on the extinguisher, Thoroughgood could feel consciousness slipping away from him fast. With one final supreme effort from what was likely to be his last breath, the DS concentrated his fast-fading energy on firing the extinguisher at his assailant. Everything went white. Caught off-guard, the villain was snow-blinded.

Thoroughgood smashed a right hand off his jaw; at last, movement. Stunned, the robber lost the grip on the firearm and Thoroughgood's forehead met the bridge of his nose with sudden impact. A satisfying crack

resounded as bone, blood and mucus burst forth in a froth that produced a raspberry ripple effect on the surrounding foam. This time all of the robber's momentum was going backwards, and the cop seized his moment.

Thoroughgood rolled free and turned on his man with his police-issue baton. A swift left jab with the point of the implement meant the robber was left more than momentarily breathless. It was game over as Thoroughgood smashed on the cuffs, making sure that they were tight enough to turn the skin on the criminal's wrist red.

"You're nailed, fucker," growled the gasping DS as another boot from his size ten took the last remnants of the air from the gunman's lungs.

Meanwhile, Hardie was otherwise engaged. The green Mondeo had sped off almost the minute the driver had spotted the all-too-obvious form of the CID Focus in his rear view. The lookout posted on the corner opposite the pawnbroker's was now fleeing on foot towards Clydeside down Robertson Street.

A foot chase was not one of Hardie's favourite activities. He was forty-two going on fifty-two and had a bronchial problem brought on by his thirty-a-day habit, while "a bevvy" was his favourite method of relaxation. Hardie was no favourite to catch a spring-heeled criminal twenty years younger and at least two stone lighter than him.

Caught up in his own thoughts and focused on the disappearing back of his quarry, Hardie was snapped from his reverie when the crack of a gunshot whistled over his right shoulder before ricocheting off a parked car five yards to his left. Thoughts of self-preservation were brought firmly to the forefront of his mind: the distant but still comforting wail of sirens meant back-up

was on its way. Hardie grabbed for his airwave radio before bulleting in an update:

"Code 21, CID officer engaged in foot chase south, down Robertson Street towards Clydeside. Suspect armed with handgun, wearing black hooded jacket and what looks like a stocking mask over his head."

Delivered in one huge breath, Hardie gulped another before attempting to take stock of his situation. Looking ahead, he saw the suspect change direction along Clydeside, weaving in and out of the late afternoon traffic. He bolted down the steps to the front of the Waterfront Pub, making for one of the nearby footbridges that would take him over the Clyde and into Carlton Place, on the south side of the river that flowed through the heart of Glasgow.

Hardie barked into his PR: "He's making for footbridge leading into Carlton Place. Unit to attend south side of footbridge immediately."

By this time, Hardie was descending the steps at the riverside boozer. As he reached the bottom tread he saw the robber turn towards him. The hunter had become the hunted. The stocking mask was pulled up on top of the criminal's head, and Hardie guessed his target was in his late twenties. The gap between them was around thirty feet, and the handgun was levelled at head height. Behind it the villain, flashed a feral grin as a glint of late afternoon sunshine caught on the pistol.

Time stood still and Hardie wondered if it was another one of the alcohol-fuelled nightmares that plagued his sleeping hours.

Instantly a crack rang out and Hardie hit the deck, rolling under a nearby bench in one desperate movement. The shot hit woodwork and Hardie let out a gasp of relief that was almost over before it had begun.

The DC hazarded a quick glance from under the bench. The net was off his mark once again.

Hardie staggered to his feet and made for the bridge. As he looked along the foot span he had to blink to shed his disbelief at the scene now confronting him: the net was bolting at full speed straight towards him.

At the other end of the bridge a Tactical Firearms Unit vehicle had just screeched to a halt and two black uniform-clad figures were taking their first steps on to the bridge. Hardie could see, even from the opposite end of the bridge, the levelling of the Heckler and Kochs belonging to his armed colleagues. The robber had decided, presumably without much thought, that the portly detective was by far the easier option when it came to his own survival.

His pistol was out again and assuming its familiar position: pointing straight at Hardie.

*Oh fuck, thought Hardie. This is it.*

In the distance he heard “Stop, armed police!” A shot cracked across the bridge and Hardie jumped. But as the DC hit water he found he wasn’t alone in the drink, for the gunman broke the surface almost simultaneously.

The grimy fluid of the Clyde closed over him as Hardie’s first thought was *Fuck, I’ve been shot, is this what it feels like?*

The murky depths continued to envelop him and he sank deeper, panic beginning to seep through. He tried to decide whether he would die of the bullet wound or drown first.

*Come on son, give it a fuckin’ go,* he told himself and kicked for the surface, wondering if he had enough oxygen in his nicotine-stained lungs to fire him through. Piercing flickers of the bright spring sunshine made him realise that he was almost there.

*Keep going,* the voice in his head said.

The cool air hit his face and Hardie knew he’d made it. Breathing hard and trying to stay calm, he spat out the gut-wrenching contents of the river. Hardie looked down at the cold fluid splashing around his torso and gritted his teeth, fearing the worst. But there was no red liquid spreading out from his substantial midriff.

A voice from the bridge punctured Hardie’s thoughts.

“You all right, mate?” Can you make it to the side?”

Hardie almost surprised himself when he heard his voice shout:

“Nae bother, bud.” And sure enough his arms worked, one in front of the other as he swam to the riverbank. Then smack, his leading hand rapped against a solid sodden object bobbing in the water to his right.

*Fuckin tyre, this shithole is full of them,* thought Hardie. Wrong. Seeping from the floating form of the now-deceased robber were his vital fluids, mingling with the putrid water in an ever-widening ruby pool. Robber number two was indeed dead and belly-up in his watery grave in the Clyde.

*Well, fuck you, matey,* thought Kenny Hardie.

## Chapter 2

“Lucky bastard,” grinned Thoroughgood as he looked at the opposite bunk in the ambulance.

Hardie raised his eyebrows in mock indignation. “I hardly think two lungfuls of that sewer of a river is what you’d call lucky. Fuck only knows what germs have worked their way into my system. You wait and see: before you know it I’ll have pneumonia, that’s how fuckin’ lucky I am!”

The two detectives were on their way to the city’s Royal Infirmary Casualty department, Hardie to have checks done after his unplanned dip in the Clyde, Thoroughgood because Detective Super Tomachek insisted that a cautionary check-up was needed.

Rather than any genuine fears over his officer’s health, Tomachek needed to ensure that Strathclyde Police would avoid assuming liability at a later date for any claims from their employee. The political correctness sweeping through the police and, in particular, Scotland’s biggest force, made Thoroughgood wince with disgust.

Hardie was even more vehement and vocal in his anger at the politicians who now seemed to be turning a cop’s life into a bureaucratic nightmare of endless paper mountains.

“Anyway, it’s okay for you. A few scratches and a keeker, big deal. I’ve ’ad bigger cuts shaving,” mocked Hardie. “Looks like I’m in here overnight for tests and observations when the only medicine I need is a pint of Stella. So what’s happened with the rest of the gang?”

“Well, your man is in the morgue waiting on his post mortem. Mine is being interviewed at Stewart Street and

the green Mondeo was found abandoned halfway down Meadowside Street, in Partick. So I guess you could say two out of three ain’t bad, old son.”

The ambulance drew to a halt, and the driver and his mate padded round to open the doors.

“Okay, lads, welcome to your hotel!” said the chauffeur.

Sixty minutes later Hardie was reclining in his bed with the GRI’s medical staff fretting over him and various tubes attached for company.

Thoroughgood was ready to go, the X-rays revealing that his cranium was fully intact, something Thoroughgood thought was sure to disappoint Divisional Commander John Brown when he made the regulation welfare visit to his wounded-in-action officer.

Materialising at Hardie’s bedside, the DS radiated sarcastic concern:

“You’ll be okay, faither, just take it easy and let them do their stuff. Fancy a small wager on who gets here first, Tomachek or old ‘Grizzly’ Brown? They’ll be falling over themselves to get here and check on their injured hero.”

Hardie was unimpressed. “It’s always the fuckin’ same. The minute you do anything good, the uniform want to pat you on the back as well as the CID brass. For ninety per cent of the rest of the time they treat you like a leper, unless they get the chance to boot you in the balls. I’ll need to get the nurse to put a sign up on the ward door: ‘Out to tea or unavailable for comment.’”

The rising voices alerted Hardie’s nurse, a burly red-headed sister who Thoroughgood thought should have had three stripes on her shoulder. The sister didn’t disappoint: “How, I ask, is Mr Hardie to recuperate with you raising his blood pressure by encouraging him to lay bets, DS Thoroughgood? You know where the door is.”

The DS nodded sheepishly at the fiery sister and winked at his colleague: “I’ll look in tomorrow sometime, Kenny. Hopefully a few days off the sauce will see you come out of here good as new, probably better.”

“Fuck off, arse!” was the mild-mannered reply from the poorly patient, and as Thoroughgood headed off he could already hear the admonishment from the sister.

Thankful to be making his way down one of the GRI’S grimy corridors, Thoroughgood tried not to dwell on the events of a shift that had been anything but just another day at the office. Sure, it had been a close call, but then he’d had plenty of those during his service. It was at times like these that he wondered what might have been if he’d managed to pursue his preferred career as a historian.

Thoroughgood’s entry into the police had been a distant second choice, but one borne of necessity after a youthful mistake had seen him almost leave Glasgow University without a degree or a future, back in 1988.

The previous summer, Thoroughgood had worked as a bartender when the city enjoyed its year as one of the UK’s five national Garden Festivals. With licensing laws permitting the hostelrys of the West End to open until two a.m., Thoroughgood had found himself regularly spilling in the front door of his student flat in Lawrence Street as dawn broke. This had a disastrous effect on his degree and, in particular, the dissertation he was attempting to write for the start of the new term in October. The simple answer had been plagiarism.

Great wads of Thoroughgood’s paper on the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 were lifted from existing books. The naïve nineteen-year-old was hauled up in front of the University Senate and humbly accepted his punishment. The dissertation had third class slapped on

it: in layman’s terms a fail, and Thoroughgood’s dream of a PhD spent studying private archives in France was to be no more than that. His failure meant that within twenty-one days of his graduation, with the world at his feet, he found himself on the end of the drill sergeant’s Doc Martens at Tulliallan.

And the rest was indeed history.

*What a fuckin’ day! Kenny was right, I could do with a beer,* thought the DS.

Home for Gus Thoroughgood was a large ground-floor tenement flat in Partickhill Road in the West End. But that could wait a while. First he had to get back to Stewart Street nick and uniform were, for once, only too happy to give him a lift.

Jumping into his pride and joy, a gleaming blue RX-8 Mazda, one of the few luxuries he allowed himself, Thoroughgood switched on the ignition and switched off one of the more frantic days he could remember in his service. The voice of Fish sprang to life on the CD player. Sometimes Thoroughgood thought he’d been caught in an Eighties time warp when it came to music. The music of Marillion provided a comforting security blanket of happy teenage memories.

Parking his car outside the flat he headed across Highburgh Road and up the steps of his local, the Rock. One pint of Kronenburg later and the world already seemed a better place. The DS fingered his mobile and placed his delivery order with the local Chinese, the Amber, down in Byres Road.

“Forty minute,” said an Oriental accent at the other end of the phone.

Time to finger the sports pages of his favourite paper, the *Telegraph*, unwind a bit and then enjoy the delights of a weekend off before nightshift. Maybe a visit to Firhill to watch the latest torturous instalment of Partick

## Chapter 3

Thistle's quest for promotion from the Scottish Second Division. Perhaps a game of squash and then a hospital visit to check on Hardie's progress.

Thoroughgood thought ten to one his portly sidekick would be back in harness for the ten p.m. start on Wednesday night. Not that much to look forward to, he mused, for the events of the last twelve hours had planted a seed of doubt that his life was indeed arse for elbow. The old cop's saying "You don't live to work, you work to live" was, Gus Thoroughgood admitted to himself, all too true. But maybe at the age of thirty-seven he was starting to get it the wrong way round.

Wednesday nightshift, 2200 hours: Thoroughgood watched the ambling shape of Kenny Hardie framed in the doorway of the DS' room at Stewart Street nick. Sure enough, Hardie had discharged himself from the GRI on Saturday, leaving half an hour after Detective Super Tomachek had made the second senior officer visit that afternoon, to check on his welfare.

The first evening on the nightshift was always a hard one to call. Quieter than the weekend for obvious reasons, sometimes dead, but at times surprisingly explosive. Thoroughgood finished trawling the notes left for him on the crime management computer system by the backshift, but looked up long enough to nod in the direction of the kettle. Hardie's eyebrows shot up.

"You're supposed to be looking after me, rather than me nursemaiding you. What is it anyway, one lump or two in yer coffee?"

"That dip in the Clyde addled your brains where all that Stella Artois failed? You know damn fine, you old jake, now get on with it and then we can take a look at an enquiry left for us by these lazy gits in Group One CID," said Thoroughgood.

As he considered the back of his burly partner, Thoroughgood admitted to himself that hats had to be taken off to Hardie. The DS was well aware he had been paired up with Hardie in order to benefit from the forty-something's considerable experience and the gut-instinct approach which had brought Hardie an erratic stream of spectacular successes over his twenty-three years of service.

Okay, Hardie might not be in the best of shape, but he made up for it with a brain that was alert to the slightest clue. The problem with Hardie was a loose tongue which landed him in hot water with a growing regularity.

They both knew that was exactly the reason why Thoroughgood was the superior ranking officer.

While Hardie looked at the world with a cynical gaze, Thoroughgood followed a much more measured and almost analytical approach which in turn had irritated some of the dinosaurs above him in the CID chain of command. However, after eighteen months of working together, the two had smoothed out the kinks in their relationship, at work and at play. In short, they were comfortable in each other's company.

Top of the agenda tonight was an enquiry over a serious assault outside one of Glasgow's ever-increasing number of pubs. Happy now his coffee had been slammed down in front of him, Thoroughgood briefed his colleague.

"This is one of Declan Meechan's boozers. Some kid went and got bevvied up on the cheap booze on students' night, then picked a fight with one of the doormen, or according to the backshift note, the lot of them."

"The boy, an eighteen year old called Terry Devlin, went outside to continue his altercation and ended up with a fractured skull. The CCTV tape shows him getting laid into by one doorman in particular, a Franny Hillkirk. Unfortunately, he did one before uniform got to the scene. So far address checks have come up with hee-haw. The boy had a knife in his possession but one of the witness statements from another student says he saw Hillkirk punting Devlin drugs earlier in the evening. We need to get a hold of Hillkirk, and that won't be easy. Meechan won't want one of his boys doing time or, more like it, the adverse publicity that would attract.

Meechan's whole operation is as slick as tanker spill and this might be a way in. So, let's just go for a nice little chat with the management and see where that takes us."

The red CID Focus pulled up outside Babylon, in Sauchiehall Street. The market Meechan was catering for was obviously young. Cheap booze nights for students during the week, then the kids from the city's schemes at the weekend. Assaults at places like Babylon were ten-a-penny, especially at the weekend when they acted as a release for all the testosterone that had built up over the week. Babylon catered for all the needs of its young clientele, drink or drugs, and was the perfect launchpad for a night's clubbing.

Thoroughgood was forced to admit to himself that Declan Meechan had done pretty well for a young ned from Belfast, graduating from teenage gang member to all-too-efficient steward on the doors of some of the toughest pubs in the area. And now he was number two to Jimmy Gray, the Partick and West End crime overlord.

Gray had been particularly grateful for the way his young lieutenant had ruthlessly cleared up a small outbreak of trouble with a Maryhill mobster called Archie Gallagher. He had subsequently been found minus his limbs floating down the Clyde last October. The reward for Meechan's clean-up job was control of Gray's burgeoning city centre pub and club operation.

All very cosy, thought Thoroughgood, but how long would it take Meechan to turn on the hand that had fed him so generously?

As the two detectives made their way past one of Meechan's stewards, both officers found their attention drawn to the bar where a dark-haired young woman was holding court with the staff.

Celine Lynott was a real looker, as Hardie might describe her: thirty-three years old, of mixed parentage with coffee-coloured skin that glowed in the fluorescent lighting of the bar. Her luxuriant hair was curled in a series of unruly tresses cascading over her shoulders, and her chestnut eyes could burn a hole in you. She may have run Meechan's three toughest city centre bars, but Celine Lynott's style of management was almost regal. She had been brought up in Hayburn Street, Partick, and then found herself a place as a croupier at Jimmy Gray's Riverboat Casino before being snapped up by Meechan as the extremely glamorous face of his club empire.

Meechan trusted her implicitly and knew everything about her, or so he thought. Everything but the fact she'd been one of Thoroughgood's informants years back in his early days as a Detective Constable, that and a little bit more besides. Kenny Hardie, aware of the undercurrents that would soon be at work, arched his left eyebrow in (he thought) a fine impersonation of his hero, spaghetti Western star Lee Van Cleef.

*There may be trouble ahead,* thought the DC.

"Good evening, officers. We don't usually welcome gentlemen as distinguished as yourselves to Babylon on a Monday night. I assume you are here on business, not pleasure?" asked Celine. Playing to her audience of staff and hangers-on, Celine failed to betray the slightest acknowledgement, either in her expression or in the timbre of her voice, that she had any familiarity with Thoroughgood.

*Ten years can pass so quickly,* he thought.

Thoroughgood was keenly aware there would always be some way that Celine Lynott could get to him. It was a chapter in his life he had found all too hard to close.

"Hi Celine."

Unusually for him, Kenny Hardie, perhaps sensing his gaffer's reticence, took the lead.

"We're here to see Declan Meechan, you know, about that business of your over-enthusiastic door policy. We hate to disturb him, but—"

"I'm sorry, Declan isn't here tonight. In fact, he's out of the city, but if you'd like to come up to the office we can discuss things there."

Celine gestured at one of the staff.

"Jimmy, make sure this bar is sparkling and keep the security on their toes. I don't think our guests would appreciate being disturbed. Okay, officers, if you'd like to follow me ..."

Thoroughgood shot his sidekick a glance. After almost two years of working together the two detectives could operate without the use of words, and Hardie was aware his boss was telling him to button it. But the burly DC couldn't help indulging in a mischievous wink as the pair made their way up the stairs behind the curvaceous shape of Celine Lynott.

Upstairs in her office Celine wasted no time.

"So, how can I help you? You've got the whole incident on one of our CCTV tapes, which were taken by the officers who were first here last night. And I guess half a dozen witness statements from a group of drunken students. You'll be hoping the student fails to pull through and then you'll go after our licence. I hear he's in intensive care?" Her eyes never left Thoroughgood's.

"What if the young guy pulls through? I reckon you're struggling to make anything stick. Why the visit, Gus? Just for old times' sake?"

"Look, Celine, I'm not here to play games. The bloody gorillas you keep on the doors are the worst in the city; every weekend the streets outside your pubs are a war zone. Outside your pubs means it's on our streets,

and that's gotta stop. When a kid is lying in hospital with a fractured skull and a head covered in boot prints, something has to be done. How convenient your doorman Franny Hillkirk has gone walkabout and you don't seem to have a current address for him. Either that, or your chargehand gave the uniform boys a bumner.

"So why don't we start with a current address for Hillkirk. Did you know that we've also got a witness statement saying Hillkirk was seen supplying the kid with ecstasy an hour before the assault? How do you like running a pub staffed by thugs and drug dealers?"

Celine's lips curled almost into a sneer. "I don't know what you mean. All our staff are hired in accordance with the company policy of Gray's Leisure. Mr Meechan takes a personal interest in their suitability."

Her forthright delivery brought a surge of anger through Hardie's veins, and before he could stop himself the DC butted in. "Well, that's a real endorsement of your door staff. What about you, Celine? Did Meechan take a personal interest in your suitability?"

There was no reaction on her features, but the temperature in the office seemed to have dropped five degrees.

"Perhaps it's time you left, gentlemen. As I said, Mr Meechan is unavailable and he has instructed me to tell you that he has provided all the co-operation he needs to through our lawyer, Charles Coyle.

"You've been very quiet, DS Thoroughgood, and I'd prefer it if your colleague also stayed that way until he has left the premises."

Thoroughgood decided the best form of defence was attack.

"Listen Celine, the bottom line is that we have an out-of-date address, and a check with the council housing

office shows Hillkirk hasn't stayed in Springburn Way for over a year. So you are either wasting police time or attempting to pervert the course of justice. Have it your way. Do you want to come down to the station to help us with our enquiries? Then we can get Mr Coyle to join us and it will all be quite cosy. It's your call but I've got a search warrant for Hillkirk's address here."

The DS produced the legal document and laid it out on the desk. "So why give yourself grief over the home address of a jumped-up thug?"

Celine seared Thoroughgood with a stare of unrelenting ferocity, but her hands dropped to the PC keyboard and she brought up the employee details for Franny Hillkirk. "Springburn Way is the home address we have for him but there's a second address for his mother, an Iris Hillkirk, at flat 21c, 12 Eccles Street, Springburn. That's all we have. You can look at the computer for yourself if you don't believe me."

"That wasn't so painful, was it? If your chargehand had been more cooperative in the first place it would have been unnecessary; seems like your staffing problems aren't just on the door, Celine. See you around."

As an afterthought Thoroughgood added, and instantly wished he hadn't: "Oh, and tell Declan I was asking for him, would you?"

Celine said nothing, but her eyes met Thoroughgood's, holding his gaze in a moment that said more than any words ever could. And again, Thoroughgood found his emotions going through the mixer.

The two officers headed back out to the Focus. The silence between the two was almost deafening: it was Hardie who was first to break it.

“Look gaffer, I’m sorry about back there. The words came out before I could help myself.”

“Listen, faither, this business can be used to make life extremely difficult for Meechan. It doesn’t help matters, you upsetting his staff with your throwaway lines. Let’s just see if we can get a hold of this Hillkirk character. Eccles Street, that’s up opposite Springburn office, isn’t it? Let’s go and see if Franny’s home.”

The Focus swung off onto the M8 before taking the Springburn turnoff and there was silence once again, except for the sound of the pouring rain which seemed to provide a continual soundtrack for life in Glasgow.

Thankfully the lifts at 12 Eccles Street were working, much to Hardie’s relief. Four flats on the level. As they scanned their way round each one the officers’ attention was immediately drawn to the doorway of flat 21c, which lay open. Thoroughgood turned to Hardie and signalled to his mate to draw his baton. The DS took a step into the doorway and reached for the light switch, flicking it on, but the hall remained in darkness. Fortunately, the light from the landing offered some help. Thoroughgood gave the whistle that had been the universal warning used by neds in the city ever since he had joined the cops. A simple three-note shrill, first up and then down and up once again.

Still silence.

By this time Thoroughgood had reached bedroom one, Hardie right behind him. The DS turned on his mini-Maglite and poured the torchlight over the walls of the room. The bed was smashed against a wall and there were obvious signs of a disturbance. A cup of coffee lay half drunk on the table next to the bed. Thoroughgood shook his head as he reached Hardie in the hallway. Bedroom two empty. The kitchen showed signs of use, although the fridge had milk dated from two days ago.

That left the lounge at the front of the flat. The lounge was empty, but an icy draft was coming from the door leading out to the small balcony. Thoroughgood strained his ears and thought he could hear a screeching noise coming from outside.

The DS made his way out through the balcony door and took in the spectacular skyline provided by the twenty-first floor view. The shapes and silhouettes of Glasgow’s skyline, shadows in the spring night. Then he took hold of the metallic railing boxing the small utility area in and felt his hand catch on fabric. Automatically he glanced down and there in the dark night sky he saw the inert form of a body swinging gently in the midnight breeze. Franny Hillkirk had been home all right, but someone else had got to him before the detectives. Someone who had made sure his silence would be eternal.

Was it, pondered Thoroughgood, the same someone who may have been watching the detectives?