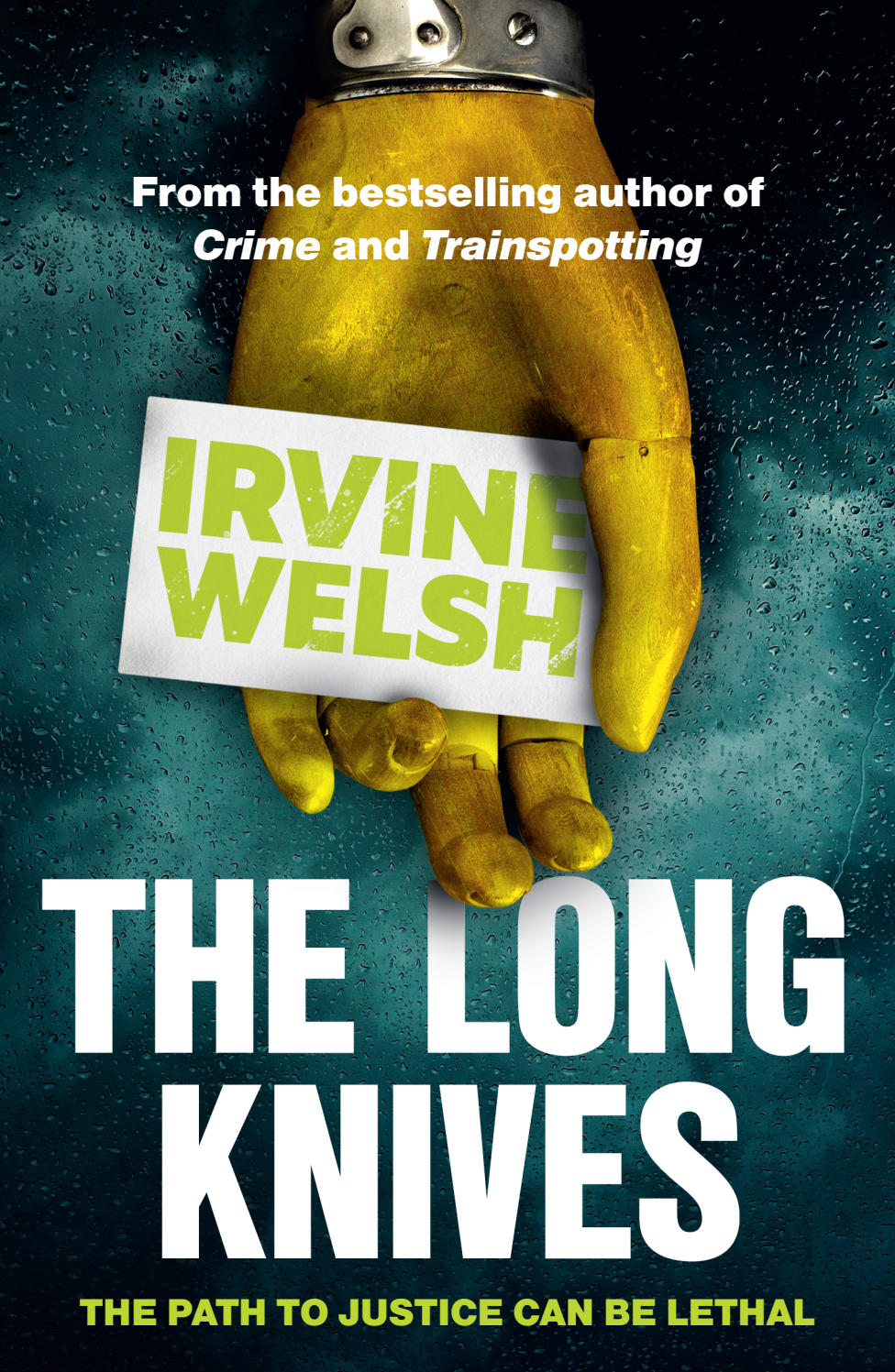

From the bestselling author of
Crime and *Trainspotting*
IRVINE WELSH
THE LONG KNIVES
THE PATH TO JUSTICE CAN BE LETHAL

IRVINE WELSH

Irvine Welsh was born and raised in Edinburgh. His first novel, *Trainspotting*, has sold over one million copies in the UK and was adapted into an era-defining film. He has written twelve further novels, including *Crime* and the number one bestseller *Dead Men's Trousers*, four books of shorter fiction and numerous plays and screenplays. Irvine Welsh currently lives between London, Edinburgh and Miami.

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This book is dedicated to the vivid and immortal spirit of Bradley John Welsh.

Every day missed, every moment inspiring.

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An adversary is someone you want to defeat. An enemy is someone you need to destroy. With adversaries, compromise is virtuous: after all, today's adversary could be tomorrow's ally. But with enemies, compromise is an unsatisfactory appeasement.

In our modern age, we are losing the distinction between the two.

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Prologue

He's stripped to his boxer shorts. Secured to the moulded plastic chair. Wrists and ankles strained white against the ties. Dimpled gooseflesh trembling. Apart from those candy-striped underpants, there's just one other item he wears: the brown leather hood we pulled over his head. But he's soundless now, as I watch him from the other end of the large, empty warehouse. I mirror his silence as I sit down in a similar chair, in order to study him from afar.

You're always a student. In this game, as in life, there is no absolute knowledge. All you have are your own experiences, what you observe and infer through your senses, nourished, hopefully, with a little imagination. And, of course, that quality that his class of people is painfully deficient in: empathy. Most of the time this deficit seems to serve them well, in their limited way, as they blunder on chasing their bottom lines and profit margins, stunningly unaware that they are also part of the world they are systematically fucking up.

How do I put myself in the shoes of this shivering figure? Well, let me give it a try: I am in a completely terrifying environment, over which I have no control. I can see nothing through the suffocating hood covering my head and face except a sliver of my own body and the timber floor of the warehouse. (This cladding oddly makes this captive look sinister, as if *he* is the oppressor. But no, he's totally in our power.)

I don't know how I'm doing here, but it's obvious he's not in a good place. Frankly, it's not even comfortable for me, as much as I'm glad to be in my circumstances, rather than his. A slight nausea is rising inside me. Will it worsen if I get closer? I stand up and walk towards him, almost tiptoeing across the floorboards to maintain silence. Speculating that every step closer might furnish me with more information as to his emotional state.

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Yes . . . once again, he strains against the bounds. It's futile. His wrists and ankles are as if welded to the hard chair. His arms are white and flabby through indolence and decadence. Now the sinews strain demonically in them, across his oddly sculpted shoulders, under his wobbling boy tits.

Beneath his moonless amice, I'm guessing that fireworks are going off. The thin leather buckles inwards as he inhales, his tongue maybe intermittently pushing it out, as he tastes the skin of dead animal. Maybe he screws his eyes down to that vague source of light underneath his chin, yes, a chink of it, spilling through the slash in the mask, cut there to let oxygen in. Now he's obviously marshalling himself – *this is exciting* – as he tenses his body further, sucking in deeply, then bellowing, — WHAT THE FUCK . . .

Not the first shout-out since he woke, but once again he only hears his muffled voice ricochet coldly around the huge and cavernous space. He must be thinking of how he got here, what this dramatic disturbance to his existence constitutes. There's his dutiful *Samantha*, how he disappointed her. But that bitch was made for disenchantment; trained, like so many women of her class, to absorb psychic hurt and cry softly into her pillow at night, or maybe in the arms of a lover, while presenting that stoical, loyal face to the world. Their darling children *James and Matilda*; maybe it's been tougher on those kids. Well, it's soon going to get a lot thornier. That college essay to discuss, the rugby game or school play sadly missed due to *pressures of work*; those are the least of his worries now. This is the shit that the prick ought to have thought through before he embarked on his life of making others miserable. His sister, *Moira*, the barrister; what is it with them? I suspect she will feel the loss of him the most. That dull, domestic life that he never really had – his solid work of corruption and the enrichment of the already wealthy ate up all his time – how he must now crave it. What disrupted this?

My call: urging him to come back. To return to a place he was done with, apart from the visits to his sister in order to see the kids.

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Now he's still again. I retreat, maintaining my silence from the corner of the capacious space, sinking back into my chair. He must be so cold: his flesh is pulsing in the raw, dank air. I know from my own experience how you still notice those minor horrors, even as you splash around in a sea of abject terror. I'd like to discuss this with him, but I'm wary of slipping into the torturer's indulgence of gloating torment. This is not the game we are playing. Above all, it would feed the lie that this was about him. He is not, and never will be, the narrator of this tale. This is not the final chapter. It's just the last that this particular character will feature in.

Men like him usually tell the story.

In business.

Politics.

Media.

But not *this* time: I repeat, he is not writing *this* story. And *this* abdication is unwittingly at his own bequest!

And she is probably the very last person he would think about. Even less than me with my personal nemesis, whom we sadly only managed to incapacitate: as one gets older the atrocities of childhood grow more vivid than those in an adolescence and adulthood blunted by hormones. But to such men, we will just be obscure pieces of collateral damage, in a warehouse full of the souls they've ruined and impaired through the selfish meeting of their own immediate, base needs.

He is not writing this story.

She enters, looking magnificent in checked trousers, trainers and a short coat, which she slips off, revealing a ready-for-business tank top. Her arms are lean and gym-toned. Her hair pinned up, under her flat cap. In her hand, the tool bag that means this cannot end well for him. Oh, we've learned from the last time. The slurp of the plastic draught excluder on the door must have registered, even on the other side of that stifling hood.

She smiles, touches my shoulder. I rise from this old chair. We walk slowly across the floor towards him. A creak on one of the boards. His

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body tenses again, as he pushes back in his seat. Now he can hear the sound of footsteps: somebody creeping closer. Is he thinking: *perhaps there's more than one of them?*

— Who's there? Who is this? His voice is softer, more tentative now.

We walk slowly around him. So close he must feel our presence shimmer. It's not the heat; it's just the aura of other human beings in his proximity. He smells something, his sinuses whine softly under the mask, as he tries to ascertain what it is. Perhaps old books. Is he in a library? It's her perfume. Unique and rare, it's called Dead Writers. It is allegedly inspired by novelists like Hemingway and Poe. The black tea, vanilla and heliotrope notes actually do make it smell like an old drawing room stuffed full of antique books. Not a lot of women would have the balls to wear such a fragrance.

But not a lot of women, or men, have her balls. If he ever did, that will very soon cease to be the case.

— What do you want? Look, I have money . . . His muffled voice trails off into a plea.

We respond with a silence so thick he must feel it clog his lungs. Drowning him.

He's brought this on himself. Again.

Samantha.

The children.

All he ever did was set self-indulgent traps for them to get through. Testing their loyalty. And he had nearly repaired his last mess, almost convinced her to join him in London, to make a go of it again, on a bigger stage, where he was reascendant.

Oh yes, we know everything about him. Neither of us are gamblers by nature. The more research you do, the surer something is. Know their vanities and weaknesses. Help them to fall on their own swords. When all is said and done, that's what they really crave, that drama of utter disgrace and humiliation. It's the most compelling chapter of the narcissist's biography. What they are always working

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towards, in the face of whatever nonsense they choose to delude themselves with.

How he must hate himself right now. Detest the weakness that led him here. This punishment, at the hands of a force he can't understand; how much self-loathing must that induce?

He'll soon be free of it all. It's time.

Her head turns sharply to me, eyes suddenly set with a luminous ferocity. She moves at a feline speed, her arms at his boxer shorts in a sudden uncompromising tug, yanking them down. He squirms in helpless violation as his penis and balls flop helplessly between his legs. With the jerking convulsions of his body ebbing and flowing, and the nervous gurgling, I read him as scared but perhaps also hopeful. While this alludes to the darkest contravention, it also hints at a harmless if potentially humiliating rugby-club prank, one so beloved of the darker elements on the fringes of his circle.

I know this feeling.

Could this babbling yet erupt into a collusive chuckle? *The Evans. The Alasdairs. The Murdos. The Roddys. Those bloody cards . . .*

This he would take right now.

But something freezes him again. Maybe it's her scent: it says something else.

— Stop, he pleads, his high voice breaking, possibly reminding him of his schooldays. Perhaps he'd be walking home, in his uniform, running into a group of council-estate boys – or council *schemes* as they call them here – from a nearby comprehensive. Would they take delight in punching his fat arms, dancing around him in a morbid revelry at the marks they caused, knowing they would bruise? I think so.

That was a long time ago. He had made himself into a different man. The gym and sports, to his satisfaction, had sabotaged the pudgy trajectory of his youth. The victimhood had been shed with the flab. Of course there was the sloth of a complacent middle age and his career; first-class travel, lavish expenses, late nights, and he reverted to the

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unappetising version of himself we see now. The burgeoning corpulence exemplified by the white ball of gut, the fleshy jowls capitulating to gravity, and those moobs an infant could suckle on. But it didn't matter. Now he was a winner. He could *buy* beautiful women.

Yes, he'd *stepped on a few toes* . . . I wonder if he's trying to think: *which ones?* That terrible problem with that Graham character; a dark urge he had to satisfy. It almost ruined him.

Now her.

Now me.

Surely not: she wouldn't be on his radar after all this time.

Perhaps it was business.

And sure enough, he asks in sudden inspiration, — Is this about the Samuels contract? There's no need to – NO!

He squeals out as her hands, covered in latex gloves, touch him: he can feel the thin gossamer rubber stickiness and his penile skin retracts under their graze. — NO!

And I play my part, simply by laying my own hand on his shoulder. He recoils, and I wager he has never felt such a cold touch.

The uncompromising pulse of terror surges so keenly through his body, sparking it into a tensile spasm, that I'm briefly concerned the ties will snap under the power it fuses through him.

But there's no way: it just slashes them deeper into his wrists and ankles.

I lift my brandishing hand, leaving his body to the air that stings at his exposed floppy cock and balls. Her evaluating touch, strangely gentle, now also gone. Leaving a vacuum of even greater discomfort.

But not for long. We are not going to make the same mistake twice. Again, I touch him without touching him. Nobody has a frostier caress that me, inchoate, inhuman. His prick literally contracts a further inch under it.

She is warmer for sure, not that he will feel any benefit, as she starts wrapping the leather strap around his genitals. Applying the devastating tourniquet. Turns the wooden handle to pull it tautly.

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— PLEASE!

He feels the noose tighten.

— No, please . . . he says softly this time, in response to the twisting pain. And yes, there's a brief sense of arousal; he knows these games, and the infliction of sexual pain on others, even if he was always the one in control. But not now. Now he's experiencing the air escaping from his lungs, as the sweat and tears roll down his cheeks, dripping onto his chest from under the hood as his penis engorges with the blood trapped in it . . . then . . .

. . . I open the case and she removes the six-inch knife.

. . . then the cut . . . a beautiful motion as the blood spurts out. She pulls at his cock and hacks, but it won't come away! His loud, pig-like squeals . . . we never bargained for this, the knife was razor-sharp, but we are prepared. We dispense with the ceremonial blade, as I produce a serrated one from the bag and hand it to her. Through his splattering blood and cries I feel mildly deflated – Father's knives have again proven deficient to my task of vengeance – but this does not last as under her frantic sawing, the muscles in her arms pumped, his genitals finally snap away in her hand. Eureka!

Is he, I wonder, experiencing a strange relief, a giddy lightness in brain and body, as something burdening is whipped from him . . . perhaps just before he senses it will never return?

Because she's holding it aloft, that beautifully grotesque trophy, as he ascertains that this is not an encumbrance that has been removed from him, but something close to the very essence of who he is . . .

— AAAAGGHHHEEEEE . . .

. . . An animal squeal, like nothing I have heard before; it bellows out from under the mask . . . holds its pitch in a resonant drill, as he slumps forward, perhaps hoping that unconsciousness will deliver him from the pain. Maybe he's praying for the blessed liberation of death; anything to take him into a different realm. And he surely must feel that this is happening, but only after many more screaming heartbeats in purgatory.

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She holds the genitals at arm's length, regarding them, then him, before dropping them into the plastic box.

Does he sense the whiff of perfume? If so, it's soon overwhelmed, as he shouts out, through the burning inferno of pain that disintegrates his spirit, a familiar name: — LENNOX . . .

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Day One

Tuesday

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1

Ray Lennox pulls in a long breath. This fans rather than extinguishes the burning embers in his chest and calves. Fighting past the pain, he forces himself into a steady rhythm. At first it's galling, then lungs and legs start working together like seasoned lovers rather than first-time daters. The crisp air carries the fresh whip of ozone. In Edinburgh, autumn often seems the default setting, no more than a rogue isobar away. But the towering trees are yet to shed, and weak sunlight dances through a canopy of leaves above him, as he bombs on down the footpath along the river.

Trying to get into Holyrood Park through a warren of backstreets, he comes upon it: the entrance in the car park of an unremarkable housing development of flats. On seeing it, his ears ring, forcing him to stop. He can't believe it.

This isnae the tunnel . . .

It's the Innocent Railway Tunnel, completed in 1831. It lies directly beneath Edinburgh University's Pollock Halls of Residence, yet it's a secret to most of the students who reside there. He's an expert on Edinburgh's tunnels, but has never gone through this one. Stops at its entrance. Ray Lennox knows that it isn't the one in Colinton Mains, where he was attacked as a young boy, a tunnel, now bedizened in a gaudy art, that he's walked through scores of times since.

You don't scare me.

But this one does. More than their source at Colinton, this dark, narrow passageway evokes these terrible memories. He knows that despite its name, numerous deaths – including

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those of two children in the 1890s – have taken place in this tunnel.

Lennox can't go on. Feels his legs quivering.

It's only a fucking cycle path, he thinks, noting the bollards and mesh fencing stacked at the side of the tunnel mouth. They are about to do some work. He's read that there's maintenance planned.

Yet the grown man cannot enter the dimly lit tunnel in which the light – and liberation – at the end feel like a lifetime away. It snakes into the oblivion Lennox knows will swallow him. This one will not let him go. The eerie sensation in the thickening, gelid air, a force field that he cannot breach. His ears ring. He turns and storms back out onto the main road. Starts accelerating again, trying to outrun his shame, first to the Meadows, heading to Tolcross, astonished as to why someone who can look at dead bodies, into the eyes of killers and the haunted family members of their victims without flinching, wondering how such a man cannot run through a tunnel. He cries out, trying to banish the intrusive thoughts from his head. Circling round, not knowing where he's going, he comes upon the Union Canal, and sprints down a section of towpath, passing his local pub, run by Jake Spiers, Edinburgh's most obnoxious publican, before returning breathless to his second-floor flat in Viewforth. Here the Victorian tenements look disdainfully at the showy new-build waterfront homes and offices that will never outlast them.

Collapsing onto his built-in window seat, Lennox lets his lungs settle. He thought he had proven to be the master of his fears. The Innocent Tunnel wasn't even the guilty one. Yet he looks in trembling reassurance at the Miami Marlins baseball bat that he keeps in the corner by the door, for security purposes.

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Why is this shit coming back?

He turns to survey the neat rear greens tended by the downstairs neighbours of the high-ceilinged, bay-windowed dwellings. This part of town has always seemed an independent mini state to him. He moved here from his old place in Leith several months ago. Cohabitation with his fiancée, Trudi Lowe, was mooted, but they opted against it.

Trudi had claimed to be on board with this, though after the sale of his Leith flat, she failed to see the logic of him buying rather than renting. She came around once he told her that the property market was buoyant and that it was a good investment. A couple of years at either his or her flat would allow them to rent out the other place and save more money, thus setting them up to buy somewhere bigger further down the line. She conceded to his logic. However, Lennox doesn't want to live in a house, at least not for a while. Flat life suits him. Their marriage plans were iced following a trip to Miami, which was supposed to be relaxing, but turned out traumatic though ultimately cathartic. He is a magnet for trouble of the worst kind.

It's why I was put here.

Across in his kitchen area, on the marble worktop, the mobile phone vibrates. He rises and heads for it, moving with greater urgency when he sees the display flash: TOAL. Makes it just in time. — Bob, he breathlessly gasps, settling back down into his original berth.

Nothing speaks as eloquently of disaster as Toal's silences.

This protracted one moves Lennox to explanation: — Was out for a run. Just got to you in time.

— Are you at home? Toal's voice is set in the confidential hush he knows so well.

— Aye. From the window seat, Lennox looks around the lounge-kitchen of his two-bedroom flat. The patterned

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wallpaper is as shit as ever. It's exactly the same as that which adorns the local pub, and Lennox suspects Jake Spiers's hand in knock-off. It's hard to live with, but stripping it is a big job, and one he has baulked at. He thinks of asking his almost perennially resting actor brother, Stuart, who fancies himself as an odd-job man, to undertake the task, though this has potential hazards.

— I'll be round in five minutes. Be ready, Toal warns.

— Right. Lennox hangs up and makes a beeline for the shower. He's concerned. Toal is a desk cop who never leaves Police HQ at Fettes if he can help it. So Lennox busies himself and is just drying his collar-length hair when his boss appears at his door.

Toal's potato-like head, decorated by thinning grey hair and deep worry lines, shakes in the negative as Lennox offers him tea or coffee. — We're heading for a warehouse down at Leith docks. Found something not very pretty.

— Aye?

Bob Toal's ulcerated pout involves a tight scrunching of his eyes and a blowing out of his lips. — A homicide.

Lennox fights back a snigger. The department has taken to using the American term for murder, as the original word in a Scottish accent was deemed to sound too close in tone to the clichéd catchphrase of the TV cop played by Mark McManus in the endlessly repeated hit show *Taggart*.

He finds seriousness easier when Toal elaborates: — A poor bastard bound and castrated.

— Fuck sake. Lennox throws on a jacket and follows his retreating boss out the door.

— Worse than that, the guy's a Tory MP, Toal adds, rubbernecking to Lennox as he charges down the tiled stair.

Lennox's response is a caustic, — Most of Scotland helping us with our inquiries then.

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— You know him. Ritchie Gulliver. Toal's scrutinising gaze is on him.

Lennox is jarred, but fights it back with the minimal raise of a brow. — Right.

Toal coughs out the grim recap. — Gulliver came off the sleeper this morning; he uses it fairly regularly and was positived by train staff. That was around 7 a.m. He checked into the Albany, a boutique hotel he used for liaisons down the years. They're known to be discreet; he comes up by the goods entrance in the car park at the rear. The night porter was just finishing his shift and had left the key under the mat outside room 216. They brought him two breakfasts there at 7.45, but nobody saw the other party. The trays were left outside the room, the waiter chapped and headed off. Toal throws open the stair door and gulps some air.

— The second breakfast, for a lover?

— I would assume so, says Toal, opening the car door, but not getting in, looking over at Lennox.

— So you want to know where I've been this morning?

— C'mon, Ray, you know how these things work.

— I was in bed till 7 a.m., then I went for a run. No witness or corroboration, maybe some CCTV footage –

— Okay, okay. Toal raises his hands and gets in the car. They drive off, heading to Leith docks. — Everyone who was involved in the Gulliver questioning around Graham Cornell in the Britney Hamil case, Toal mutters, — Amanda Drummond, Dougie Gillman, myself; we all have to account for our movements.

Lennox remains silent. *The top brass are rattled.* He looks at the time on his phone. It's just past 10 a.m. as they head down Commercial Street. — Who tipped us off he was in the warehouse?

— There was a call, a tape sent to us at 9.17 a.m., and Toal plays a robotic voice on his phone:

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'You will find the body of Ritchie Gulliver MP in a warehouse unit, number 623, off the Imperial Dock in Leith. Please remove before the rats take one of their own.'

— Varispeed and synthesised vocals, done on a decent recorder. We're got an IT team on it trying to remove the filters, but they say it's a proper job and it's unlikely they'll be able to clean it up.

— So . . . Lennox thinks out loud, — if he had his breakfast at around 7.45, how did he get from a city-centre hotel room to a dock warehouse, naked and dead, in not much more than an hour?

— No record of him leaving the hotel. There's CCTV at the front, but not at the back in the staff car park.

It had been assumed his exposing of Gulliver's homosexual affair with a man who was prison-bound, had this infidelity not come to light, would have ended the then MSP's career. But this didn't happen. Though they now lived five hundred miles apart, Gulliver's wife publicly stood by him, as he relaunched his career in Westminster with a safe Oxfordshire seat. It was a spectacular comeback, and his brand of racism, specialising in the baiting of travelling people, proved a locally popular platform on which to reboot.

If Lennox has little compassion for Conservatives in general and Ritchie Gulliver in particular, this changes when he sees the bound and naked body. He has witnessed some horrendous murder scenes, but this bath of blood, both shooting across the concrete floor, and bleeding out into a dark pool congealing at Gulliver's feet, puts it up there with the most flesh-creepingly awful. He has to bend down to see the parliamentarian's face.

The features are frozen in a dumb, twisted terror, as if inspecting the bloodied stumpy area where his genitals once hung, and outraged at their removal.

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Did they make him bear witness? Probably not; Lennox notes the marks around his neck, not deep enough to indicate a strangulating device, but perhaps a tightened hood. The MP obviously died in excruciating agony, his blood ebbing away, possibly while he slowly choked. It's that horrific stump Lennox can't take his eyes off as he feels a spasm shiver through his own body. It takes him a while to fully register the other people in the room.

Forensics expert Ian Martin attends to the blood pools on the concrete floor. A straight-backed, bird-faced man with thinning brown-grey hair, he detachedly takes pictures. Willowy Amanda Drummond, normally pale-skinned, looks more drawn than ever, snapping on her new higher-resolution camera phone. Crew-cutted Brian Harkness gags and rubs his throat as sweat breaks from him. Watery-eyed, he waves a hand to excuse himself, running past Lennox and Toal to a toilet. It's a male one, and ironically with a set of genitals drawn onto the symbol. As he and Toal acknowledge the sound of vomiting, Lennox scrutinises the artwork. — Is this old or recent? He moves over, sniffing at it, and scents a faint aroma of the marker. — Recent. They have a dark sense of humour.

Toal pouts in distaste, looking to Ian Martin. — Get somebody to check it for dabs.

— Already have, Martin responds, on his haunches, not looking up, engrossed in the blood pattern spattering out from Gulliver's groin. — Nothing. The perp might have been playful, but they certainly weren't careless. Whether by enticement or coercion, by the consistency and temperature of the blood, he was brought here and killed around 9 a.m. They're done by 9.45, that's when they put the rat tape into us and Radio Forth. Martin looks at his watch. — We were on the scene by 10.05.

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Then Lennox hears a familiar growl, — Left the perr cunt like a lassie, telling him that the hatchet-faced Dougie Gillman has just arrived at the crime scene.

This observation is followed by a high, nasal whine, — Well, sooner you thin me wi that particular lassie, Uncle Doogie, tell ye that fur nuthin – fuck sake . . . His new partner, roly-poly Norrie Erskine, is abruptly shocked into uncharacteristic silence as he sees the body.

This pair are old associates. Once known as Uncle Doogie and Uncle Norrie, Gillman and Erskine were two road-safety cops who toured the Lothian schools with a slapstick double act. Even as a dour straight man to the wisecracking west-coaster, Gillman was chronically miscast just by virtue of being cast at all, and Lennox struggles in fascination to get to grips with that incarnation of his long-standing nemesis. While Gillman got out of uniform into Serious Crimes, 'Uncle Norrie' Erskine's career took a completely different trajectory. Honing his showbiz talents in amateur dramatics before going to college and becoming a minor pantomime star, he also gathered credits as a bent cop in *Taggart* and a sex offender in *River City* on his CV.

When the acting work dried up and there was a divorce to pay for, Erskine rejoined the force. Following his transfer to Edinburgh Serious Crimes from Glasgow, his new boss Bob Toal displayed a hitherto unseen situationist humour, deciding to reunite Uncle Doogie and Uncle Norrie as a detective partnership. This move raised several eyebrows, and induced quite a few chuckles.

Lennox has heard that Erskine's modus operandi is to resume the double act, often in the most inappropriate of circumstances.

— Aye, well, somebody fucked the cunt up, Gillman muses, looking at Lennox.

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— Oh no they didn't, Erskine says, obviously distressed, but forcing cartoon wild eyes at the po-faced Gillman for a response. When none is forthcoming, he turns to Lennox in half-apology. — If ye dinnae laugh, ye'll cry, he appeals, upturning his palms.

Lennox forces a tight smile. He can see that Erskine is rocked. Sheet-white, his hands shake. It's a strange reaction for a seasoned Serious Crimes officer to have, albeit that the situation is particularly gruesome. Then again, Lennox considers, being too scared to run through a railway tunnel because of something that happened nearly thirty years ago also constitutes an unusually acute display of hypersensitivity.

We are a weird bunch.

Drummond, who has put her phone away and has been conferring with Ian Martin, looks unimpressed, while Harkness returns from the bathroom, averting his eyes from Gulliver's bound body. Toal, who has studiously ignored the antics of his charges, mournfully declares, — This is going to go all over the place, with the Scottish elections next month.

Gillman suddenly decides to pitch in, putting on a Chinese accent, — Well, zis poor bastard has had rast erection by rooks of things.

As Drummond shudders and Toal pouts, Lennox sees Gillman is testing Erskine's potential to offer them even more disquiet.

On cue, a still-shaky Erskine forces out, in an oriental accent, — Drugras spreckurate crastration?

Drummond, approaching Lennox, shoots Erskine a withering glance, but Toal again pretends not to have heard. With his retirement imminent, Lennox believes his boss may now be giving up on trying to school Gillman, and by proxy Erskine, in political correctness protocol. Then his boss seems to pick up

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on Drummond's look, proclaiming, — Enough, as Lennox notes the old dog still has a bark.

Gillman smiles then nods, as if he's been caught cheating at a game. Lennox knows how this gallows humour operates. Underneath the forced bravado, certainly Erskine, and even the hard-nosed Gillman, are shocked at what they are witnessing

— The warehouse has been empty for years, Drummond, cradling her iPad, informs them. — Still owned by the Forth Ports Authority. The door was secured by two bolted padlocks. They were sheared off, probably with industrial bolt cutters . . . She glances at the covered body. — A security guard walks the perimeter, but didn't see anything suspicious. There's nothing in the warehouse to steal, so no CCTV cameras on this side. From the Seafield Road end there will be vehicle and foot traffic pixels, which Scott McCorkel and Gill Glover are checking out.

Lennox nods, and approaches Ian Martin, who is shining a torch at the red genital area. A couple of severed tendons hang, like strings of spaghetti. Lennox feels something shift inside him. — Strange severing wound. It's like they used two separate cutting instruments, one with a straight blade, the other serrated. Martin makes a sawing motion as he turns to Lennox. — Perhaps the first wasn't doing its job, or maybe they wanted him to feel it. To suffer, he speculates. He holds up a plastic bag for Lennox's inspection. There is a red fibre inside. — This is all the forensic evidence yielded so far.

This disturbs Lennox. Amateurs rarely get this lucky. He stops again to regard the countenance of Ritchie Gulliver, face frozen in terror, marks around his neck. Martin agrees it's likely that a hood was placed over him and secured tightly.

— Had he been drugged into unconsciousness?

— I thought so at first, and I won't be surprised if Gordon Burt finds traces of something. He holds the plastic bag up to

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the light, — when we get him to the path lab and the post-mortem. But do you see this indentation in his forehead? Martin points at an almost square red mark. It's like Gulliver's been smashed by something, experienced the sort of blow that would knock you unconscious. — That is puzzling.

Lennox thinks about how boxers achieve knockouts; often by a punch at speed that battered the brain against the back of the skull. This might have had a similar effect. Suddenly, he thinks of the MO of Rab Dudgeon, nicknamed the Carpenter of Lunacy. But he is safely inside Saughton Prison. Again, he looks at the waxy countenance of Gulliver, strives to remember someone who was prepared to let the innocent man he was having an affair with go to prison, in order to protect his own career. Can't see him. Despite speaking of this case so much with his psychotherapist, Sally Hart, it is just another dead face, albeit a deflated one.

One big question is hanging in the air, and Lennox asks it. — Any sign of his genitals?

— Gone, Martin sings, with a melodic aspect in his voice, — no trace at all. No blood trail, so it's probable they were bagged up almost immediately.

— So the perp took the boy's tackle away with him, Gillman shouts, then looks to Drummond, — or away with her, please excuse the sexism.

— Trophy? Maybe search the Tynecastle boardroom, Erskine laughs. Nobody else does.

— I'll be glad to get out of this circus, Lennox hears Bob Toal remark to himself, an uncharacteristically unguarded comment, which Drummond also picks up on.

She sidles up to Lennox. — What are you thinking, Ray?

Ray Lennox is thinking about an incident that took place three weeks ago in London.

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2

Sitting in Bob Toal's car is always a strange experience for Lennox. His boss traditionally values silence, but the radio robustly plays 'The Lebanon' by the Human League. Lennox realises that but for the presence of his superior he would be singing along, the crawling, prohibitive Edinburgh traffic failing to dampen his spirits. Ironically, the only nagging concern he has is his own good cheer; after all, he is investigating a horrific crime. But his personal extreme antipathy for the victim, following their previous conflict, is proving hard to shake.

He regarded Gulliver as a provocative, grandstanding bigot who cynically deployed a divisive racism and sexism to gain political traction. And if their victims are finally turning on abusive men of power, then that is, perhaps, an honourable instinct for a citizen, but useless for a policeman. It confirms to him how hopelessly miscast he is. Now he is in the frame, albeit reluctantly, for the retiring Bob Toal's job. Steals a glance at his boss's jowly profile.

You can't be Toal.

You can't play politics with all those arseholes.

Reality looms in the form of Police HQ, Fettes, the featureless seventies building that takes its name from the grand private school next to it.

As if there is any doubt about whom we serve.

— Let's get on it, Ray, Toal says, glancing at his wristwatch. — Set up an incident room and we'll meet there in fifteen minutes.

He's just settled at his desk when Amanda Drummond

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comes into the open-plan office. A furtive look in her eyes and a tightness around her thin-lipped mouth. For the first time he notes her hair has been cut shorter. Unlike most women, Lennox thinks it suits her and makes the observation, — New look.

— Yes. She matches his bland assertion with cool affirmation.

They find a room and pin an image of Gulliver, phantom smirk always threatening to break out, onto the board. Placing his movements and associates there, a skeleton of the victim's life starts to form. They then start going through videos of his speeches. The content is depressing. Gulliver has achieved a constituency among some in those socio-economic groups he wouldn't piss on if they were ablaze.

Lennox exhales sharply and rolls his eyes, turns the sound down on his computer. After all, they are looking out for undesignated people. He freezes the screen and taps it at the image of a fat guy in a brown suit, who is in the wings as Gulliver speaks. — This boy is . . . ?

Drummond has a delegate list of key conferences with portrait photos. — Chris Anstruther, an MSP who was a colleague of his before he went to Westminster . . . I think . . . She points at the chubby image and they try to reconcile the two.

This is real poliswork, Lennox thinks. *Boring, shitey poliswork.*

As the clips play on, Lennox becomes aware that Drummond is restless, manifested by changes in her breathing pattern. Senses she is working up to say something. Sure enough, as another video snippet ends, she looks at him and intones, low and measured, — You know I applied for the job? Chief Super?

— Yes, I heard.

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His partner, Amanda Drummond, only recently promoted, is now cast as the ambitious outsider. Lennox knows that this will upset many long-serving officers, and Dougie Gillman springs satisfyingly to mind.

— I know I've only just been made DI so I don't expect to get it –

— You never know –

— but at least it flags me up, lets them know I'm around.

Lennox nods, smiles to himself. He remains silent as his mind flashes back to a conversation he had many years ago with a troubled mentor, Bruce Robertson. During a cocaine blitz, Lennox said pretty much the exact same words to his racist, misogynistic senior partner. He was subsequently promoted while Robertson hanged himself. He nods to Drummond as a growing cacophony of non-stop chatter in an adenoidal west coast accent foreshadows the entrance of Norrie Erskine, along with the menacingly silent square-jawed Dougie Gillman. They are followed by jittery Brian Harkness, small, squat Gillian Glover, spindly Faginesque Ally Notman, and those badly tailored veteran monuments to dubious lifestyle choices: Doug Arnott, Tom McCaig and Jim Harrower. Last are red-headed Scott McCorkel and camp metrosexual Peter Inglis, deeply locked in technical conversation.

On Lennox's signal, they settle on the challenging red plastic chairs, looking at the airbrushed portrait picture of Gulliver. Toal enters and addresses them. — First thing: we leave the schoolboy humour out of this. He lets a sweeping gaze linger a beat on Erskine and Gillman. — Second: as always, we observe confidentiality. This time we do so with extreme mindfulness. Ritchie Gulliver was a former member of our Police Committee. Ray, he turns to Lennox, — you head this up.

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Lennox nods at Toal. He realises that his boss is openly putting him in pole position for the promotion, and can't look to the reaction of the others. But not for the first time, he wonders if he's the best person for his superior's job.

He points to the pinned image of the self-satisfied Gulliver. The MP, tipped for a junior Cabinet post in Health, looks like he's just advocated the mass sterilisation of working-class women or something else from his 'controversial' repertoire. — We need to investigate Ritchie Gulliver's past . . . Lennox says. — This guy's life seems to have been a monument to personal gain and self-interest, so I'm guessing we won't have any shortage of people with some sort of grievance against him; business associates, political rivals, hookers, girlfriends, boyfriends, jealous partners of either. He pauses, aware of Gillman's raised eyebrows. — Whatever you think of him, this is a heinous crime and a terrible thing to happen to anyone. You know what to do. Let's nail the fucked-up bastard who did this, he says, aware that his voice is unable to find its usual force of conviction.

More shards of relevant information from the team are placed on the board; pictures, documents, Post-it notes and scribblings. They attempt to fit them into a narrative of Gulliver's last days and hours. Gillian Glover confirms that the London- and Oxfordshire-based MP was still separated from his wife, who had stayed up in Perthshire with their children. When he came up from London to visit his offspring, Ritchie Gulliver always stayed at his sister Moira's place, which was close to the home of his estranged wife.

As the meeting ends, Lennox heads to his desk, pondering his existential crisis. He came into this game to stop sex predators preying on the vulnerable, namely children. Apprehending those who have done this admittedly unspeakably

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vicious and deranged thing to a corrupt man who, in service of his wealthy masters, demonised the most marginalised members of society, was never on his to-do list.

He decides to leave the office. Data sifting may now be the real police work, but he still has a strong foothold in a bygone era, and that stuff is best left to the millennial IT nerds.

Now I'm thinking like Gillman! Not so long since him, Robbo and Ginger regarded me as one of those nerds . . .

Getting into his Alfa Romeo, Lennox drives west towards the Forth Bridges, heading into Fife and journeying north. Something about leaving the city and crossing the Firth always induces a mild euphoria in him. It evokes the possibility of freedom, or at least escape from a confining life.

Taking the main road to Perth, he admires the way Scotland starts to unravel its beauty, first slowly, then with a building drama. Driving off the dual carriageway onto a largely one-track road, he passes through the small village at the foothold of a range of hills, spying the entrance to the turn-off for the cottage owned by his sister Jackie and brother-in-law Angus. Carrying on up the narrow road, crossing over a stone bridge where it satisfyingly broadens, he sees, poking through thinning silver birch and oak trees, the spires of a much more substantial dwelling. This big pile is the Gulliver family home. On arrival, he finds it locked up. He goes around the back to try and look inside, coming upon a corpulent woman with implausibly spindly legs. Putting rubbish out in a series of dump bins, she stares at him in suspicion until he flashes his police ID and she dissolves into a teary-eyed compliance. — Aye, she's at her sister's thank God, the woman who introduces herself as Hilda McTavish confirms. — It's a terrible business.

— Have you spoken to her?

— Your officer . . .

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— Gillian . . .

— Aye, Gillian Glover, Hilda says, — she telt Missus Gulliver the news. I spoke to the poor woman, just for a minute, but I dinnae ken what her plans are. What is she going to tell those poor bairns?

That they're better off withoot their cunt of a faither?

Lennox asks Hilda about any suspicious dealings Ritchie had, or anybody unusual who might have been around the family house.

— No . . . he was seldom up here. He never saw those children enough, if you ask me. Hilda closes one eye. — But carrying on with other men like that, him a married man too, I dinnae approve, Mr Lennox, I dinnae approve. Hilda puckers her lips and shakes her head.

For a brief second, Lennox thinks of old British crime shows set in stately homes, *and the murderer is . . . you were so homophobic that you were disgusted by Ritchie Gulliver's actions . . . disgusted enough to remove the man's genitals* . . . then cut to a psychotic Hilda holding up a pair of bloodied bolt cutters: *Ah dinnae approve!*

Fighting down a subverting levity with the dark thought: *it's inevitable I'll be in the fucking frame myself, given my history with Gulliver*, Lennox thanks her. Returns to his car, as a phone call from Drummond comes in. She tells him that Gulliver's London flat in Notting Hill is empty. — The Met officers got access but found nothing incriminating. Even though Gulliver was a former MSP and has family and business connections, it doesn't answer why he was back home. There's no parliamentary recess in Westminster, Drummond intones in that breathless, slightly anxious way of hers. As if any intervention will make her lose the thread.

She is voicing Lennox's own thoughts. What was an MP for an Oxfordshire constituency doing back in Edinburgh in the

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middle of the week, other than getting tortured and murdered? Gulliver had been politically dead in the water, disgraced after his homosexual affair with a man suspected of child murder. Then he gets a safe Tory seat down south. It was an unlikely turn of affairs, even given the limp-wristed white-collar gangsterism of the old boy network. What did he have on the establishment nonces to buy such favours? One person who might shed some light upon this is Ritchie Gulliver's sister.

Moira Gulliver and her brother were close, and Lennox ironically has a tenuous connection with her through his own sister. If Ritchie's house is palatial enough, then Moira's, the traditional Gulliver homestead, a twenty-minute drive away, and where her brother was most inclined to stay when he returned to Scotland, is a bona fide castle. It encompasses a medieval tower, with Georgian and Victorian add-ons. As he rings a bell, by an impressive wooden door in a huge arch, the disconcerting bark of dogs fills the air. A woman with long dark hair and fine, sharp features answers. Lips and breasts jut out from a thin body and implausibly tiny waist, to the extent Lennox immediately suspects implants.

Moira Gulliver is a lawyer and a colleague of his sister, Jackie. There is no hostility in her voice as she greets him. — You must be DI Lennox, and her posh tones remain highly enunciated, but there's weariness in them, her eyes indicating a struggle through medication's fog. — This is terribly distressing, she says, fighting back a sob, and her grief seems real. Lennox is sabotaged by the thought that there was perhaps more to Gulliver than the opportunistic, rabble-rousing bigot he presented to the world.

— Yes. Sorry for your loss.

Moira bristles and Lennox is briefly shamed. They both know that he isn't particularly downcast. — Jackie is a very good lawyer; she swiftly changes the subject to his sibling.

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— She's certainly very good at telling me that. Lennox smiles, before realising that levity is perhaps not desirable at this moment.

This is confirmed when Moira ushers him through to a large drawing room. — I wish Ritchie was here, so that I could tell my brother the same, and she stifles another whimper, pointing him in the direction of a huge armchair. Again, her pain skewers a blade of guilt into him. — Of course, she recovers her composure, — you know that Jackie and Angus have a cottage nearby. They used to come a lot when the boys were younger, and bring them over here. Do you have children?

— No, Lennox says. Trudi wants kids, but it holds little appeal for him. There are too many existing ones to be saved. — Yourself?

— Alas no. I had a hysterectomy at an early age, due to a cancerous tumour, she says, totally mater-of-fact. Lennox doesn't sense any partner. It's a big house to live in alone.

Then a giant mastiff bounds over and Lennox feels himself freeze. — Don't worry about Orlando. He really is the cliché of the big softie, she explains. On cue the dog sniffs his hand, and heads off. — Jackie still has her dog . . .

— Aye, Lennox nods, thinking about the strange mutt at his sister's. Can't even recall its name. He isn't big on domestic pets.

Moira pours herself a large glass of white wine. — Can I interest you in something, DI Lennox? . . . It seems strange calling you that when your sister is a friend and colleague –

— Ray is fine, and no thanks with the drink, Lennox says, wanting one more than he can believe. He makes a mental note to call his sponsor, fireman Keith Goodwin.

Moira Gulliver, tucking her shiny black hair behind one ear, sits down with her wine. From the bottle, Lennox can tell it's a decent Sancerre.

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