

### Excerpt from *The Family* (Chapter One)

A bomb attack on a DCI while travelling in a private taxi confirms Glasgow has moved on from chibblings after the clubs spill out, the female spats, the muggings. This is a much more cynical and scary climate of crime in No Mean City. An attack on Jackie, in charge of the investigation into The Father, the infamous and recently deceased leader of The Family, a collective of the most feared crime families in the country, breaks the code of the traditional mob not to involve the police nor the public in their turf wars. This is a real game changer; even more so as she's Hubert Kaminski's daughter, a man who doesn't take prisoners.

I turn away, pull my hood over my head and scurry along Sauchiehall Street; just another disturbed man in Glasgow that night. *In the name of sweet Jesus, what happened back there?* I ask myself, as I splash through the puddles on the pedestrian precinct in Buchanan Street.

*Jackie, left close to death on a Glasgow street, and you standing over her like a vulture on carrion.*

Jesus, the unholy voice in my head is back. It has a habit of turning up in times of stress, or when my mania or depression opens the door into my mind to let it out. "Go away," I tell it, then sit down on one of those black marble seats to think back. "Why was Jean Dempsie there, what did she, they, have to do with it? I wanted to help Jackie; but I couldn't, I was frozen to the spot."

*Well, you made the call.*

I rest my head in my hands. "Christ, it was her or me." I had succumbed to another bloody double bind, I make the call, lose Jackie; don't, I'm a dead man. Don't make the call, save Jackie; do, I lose Jackie. I need to make another call.

Hubert is on the warpath. His daughter is now in a hospital bed in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. He's a hard man with a harder reputation and he wants answers, he wants arrests. The teams have been active on the streets and a DCI, his DCI, has been attacked. He needs to get those who did this and he seldom fails.

At his desk, bedecked with pictures of his family, his new wife, one of Jackie as a child on holiday, he pulls out his "crook book", as he calls it. His first call is to Davy McGing, the boss of the McGing firm, only the most powerful team in Glasgow. Is this a mob hit? If anyone knows, he will.

"Davy, it's me."

Hubert doesn't need to introduce himself, Davy is expecting this call. "Aye, how's it goin' big man, you on about Jackie?"

"Don't suppose you'd know anything about it?"

"Blown up in a taxi?"

"Gold star; what do you know?"

There's one thing Davy knows; his telephone is tapped, not by Hubert but most likely MI5, given his prominence in the Glasgow underworld and his days gun running to Northern Ireland.

"Hitting a DCI in a taxi on a Glasgow street, who the fuck would be daft enough to do that?"

Hubert draws enough breath to deliver a blast. "Look, son," he says, even although Davy is only two years younger than his sixty-three, "I don't give a fuck how many of each of you fuckers kill each other, no member of the public nor police officer gets caught up, injured or harmed, in your fucking wars. You know the score; you got that?"

Davy puts the phone back to his ear. "Aye, no problem, big man. Hubert?"

"What?"

"You know Jackie ran with the bad boys."

Hubert isn't sure whether to applaud his daughter's courage or condemn her stupidity. His daughter's relationship—good or bad—with the Glasgow teams is known and understood, as is his: it paid dividends.

"You taking over, Davy?"

"Eh?"

"The Father in waiting?"

"Suicide that, Chief."

"You keep me posted if you hear anything."

"Aye, sure, Hubert. Hear she's in a bad way."

"Aye, but she'll survive. She's a fighter."

"Just like her dad?"

"Mind, Davy."

Hubert's 'mind' always meant something. Those who knew him knew exactly what he meant by it.

"I'll get back tae ye' if I hear anything; watch yourself."

"Always do wee man."

Hubert ends the call and Davy waits for the usual 'click' before replacing the receiver. He

nearly says “Cheerio arsehole, I know you are there.” Davy would never reveal anything by telephone; both he and Hubert understood this. If Davy knew anything, he’d contact Hubert personally, directly.

“Next, the spooks,” Hubert says, calling Jean Dempsie, section head, MI5, Glasgow Office.

Jean’s phone buzzes. “It’s the Chief,” Margaret Johnston, her admin, informs.

“I told you, no calls.” Jean slams her phone down.

“Just one minute, sir.”

Dempsie paces her office floor, not because she is agitated, which she is normally; it’s part of her exercise regime: don’t sit at your desk, keep on your feet, walk up and down your office, burn the calories, kill the stress. Running intelligence services in a place like Glasgow had its obvious demands. “Glasgow is a bloody tinderbox and I’m the bloody smoke alarm,” she’d spell out, word by word, step by step, as she walked the floor.

Margaret gets fed up with her boss’s keep-them-waiting games. ‘ma’am, it’s Hubert, you know what he’s like.”

Dempsie takes the call standing up. “Hubert, you OK?”

“As well as could be expected, Jean.”

“Jackie?”

“I believe you were there.”

“Yes, indeed, official business, matters of national security, you know I can’t—”

“Oh, you can’t say; ‘political immunity in the interests of the state’, but she’s *my fuckin’* daughter, Jean, my fuckin’ daughter.”

“Hubert—”

“Aw, fuck off.” Hubert loses his rag and crashes the phone down. He’s in no mood to discuss MI5 and Police protocol, but he’ll find out soon enough why she was involved.

For the meantime, he’ll return to his official duties, soon to be the first Chief Constable of Police Scotland, charged with leading Strathclyde Police into the new national police force.

“Bloody cheek,” Dempsie says, puffing. “That’s it.” She’s done her thirty breadths of the office. “That’ll do.” She drops onto her office sofa. “Police Chief or not, no bloody way does he get classified information.” Her phone buzzes again. “Fucks sake, Margaret can you no—”

“It’s Rooney, ma’am.”

“Jesus, Hubert first, then Rooney. Tell him—”

“He says he’s about to talk to the papers.”

“Put him through.” She wipes the sweat from her arms. “Where did he go? Headed off, not part of the plan. No problem, Hubert’ll pick him up.” She presses hands-free and strips off her top to the delight of the office leeches leering through the internal office windows. “Well, Rooney?” She dries her armpits and rolls on antiperspirant.

“Why were you there Jean?”

“Just enjoying the show, Rooney.”

I coory into a doorway next to Buchanan Street Subway. “Jackie, she’s—”

“No, Rooney, she’s in the GRI, she survived.”

I thank the gods.

“But?” she says, then “fuck,” she adds, chastising herself. ‘But’ was the word she was thinking, but not the one she should have used. “Watch what you say,” I hear her say to herself. “She could have been killed.”

“You said I was—”

“You were at risk, Rooney.”

“What do I do now?”

In asking this, I know there’ll be no answer.

“I am not in the business of giving advice to mentally ill criminals, Rooney.” She ends the call and dons a fresh shirt taken from her desk. The leeches go back to their intelligence inquiries.

It *is* time to panic.

I move onto George Square at a pace. I have to get away, out of sight, to hide, to think.

Where could I go, where Hubert wouldn’t find me?

*Where would a bad man go?*

“To hell, that’s where I deserve to be.”

I find a seat in the middle of the Square. There I’ll watch and sit for a while, take stock, try to make sense of it all. People speed through the square, to get home, to get out of the rain, but that’s not the main reason to get out of Glasgow, for them to get home this night. Only a fool, a drunk or a madman would be sitting in a wet but packed George Square this night.

*They’ll find you there.*

“I’ll go ... underground.”

*They’ll dig you up.*

I look around. Our chat draws looks from passers-by. However, a man on a bench in Glasgow’s George Square talking to himself doesn’t draw too much attention. “Poor man, he

needs a doctor,” combines with a few shaking heads.

“It is OK, God loves you.” I say, raising my hand in a show of peace. “God is good.”

*You have to hide, numpty.*

“Yes, somewhere to keep my head down.”

*Gartnavel Royal, you’ll be safe there, you’ll get some treatment.*

“People know me there.”

I worked there as a forensic psychologist in a time when I was sane and the world was mad. Now, in Glasgow, everything is mad, including me.

*Somewhere you’re not known. Hairmyres Hospital.*

“Will I get in?”

*You, an expert in admissions to psychiatric hospitals, you’ll get in.*

“It’s not that easy.”

*You’ll know what to do.*

“Remind me.”

*First you go to A and E.*

“Yes.”

*Convince them you’re mad, that won’t be hard, then tell them you won’t leave, that MI5, Strathclyde Police, and the Glasgow underworld are all out to kill you.*

I tell them the truth?

*You got it.*

I walk all the way to Hairmyres Hospital in East Kilbride, almost twelve miles away, but I am as high as a kite and move like the last train out of Glasgow on a Friday night. I get there and present myself at the reception in A and E. I tell this woman behind the glass, the receptionist, that I need to see a doctor.

“Name?”

I push my chest out. “God ... The Father.”

“Address?”

“The promised land.”

“Don’t be cheeky, son.” She looks over her glasses. “I’ve had a day full of smart arses, druggies, alxies, paranoids, hypochondriacs, cut fingers, colds, flus, and those out to entertain me. Now, why are *you* here?”

*“Mea culpa. I just killed a man.”*

“Put a gun right to his head, pulled the trigger now he’s dead,” she sings. “Right, sit down there.” She points to a seat at the front of the waiting room.

I hear her calling the police as a busy medic arrives to take the next patient. “Yes, officer, he said he has just killed a man; yes, yes, yes.”

“Hold on, Denise.” The medic is talking to her, but looking at me, becoming interested at my talking aloud. He comes over. “You’re talking to yourself.”

“I’m talking to ... Jesus.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m The Father.”

“And why are you here?”

“The police and MI5 want to kill me.”

He looks at me, no he studies me for a few seconds, maybe because I look like I’ve been in a crime scene, which I have. I say I won’t leave. He moves behind the glass and talks into a phone. A few minutes later, a burly male nurse arrives with a female sidekick. This man kneels down close. “You need to come into hospital,” he says. I tell him I am in hospital. “A different hospital,” he says. I tell him I need safety and I am staying put.

“You can’t stay here,” the doctor says, coming out of his glass tank.

The nurse adds, “We want you to come into the mental health unit for assessment,”

That’s it, I grab him by the neck. “I am God, and I will destroy you all,” I scream into his face.

Then these two polis arrive, pin me to the seat and handcuff me. Next thing, I’m being “escorted” along these long barren corridors out of the main hospital and into the mental health unit.

*Going to the big hoose, Rooney?*

“Going to the happy hoose, bastard.”

“How to make friends and endear oneself,” the male nurse says, pointing the way.

Jackie knows nothing of this. She’s in a limbo, in A and E, between the living and the dead. From the surface of her mind, she hears, “In the name of the Father...,” then, “Ms Kaminski, do you hear me?” For her, it could have been seconds between these two sets of words, yet it was hours. Her oblivion, shattered by the latter voice, is only eclipsed by a sharp sensation of light. “Ms Kaminski, can you hear me?” The light from Dr Sumita Mukherjee’s pen torch pierces her eyes.

The combination of sensations collide in her head, bringing her around as she coughs up her first words since the incident. “Where the fuck?”

“It’s OK, you’re safe,” Mukherjee says. “You’re in hospital.” He is a busy surgeon with a

list of patients lining up pre-op, but he'll talk to this one.

"Will I live?"

"You'll live, Inspector, but it'll be a while before you're on your legs, and even then, the left pretty much untreatable. You'll never be without a support, but you'll survive."

"Thanks a bunch, Doctor," she says, as she succumbs to the anaesthesia. Then, with the sensitivity of an IED disposal operative, Liz Clark, the attending nurse, lifts her bandaged arms, lacerated by the explosion, and, one at a time, places them close to each of her sides.

Hubert wants to see her and her colleagues from Strathclyde Police HQ at Pitt Street to interview her. Dr Mukherjee will protect her as long as he can, to recover the strength she needs to deal with the reality of this.

PC John McCourt is on traffic duty on Sauchiehall Street, near to the scene of Jackie's attack on Holland Street. Following the incident, all leave is cancelled and double shifts are mandatory. Main routes in and out of the city are cordoned off, including right there where the attack happened. Traffic control is creating chaos. The only consolation is this is a Saturday. Had it been a weekday, Glasgow would be gridlocked.

"Turn off ... aye you, you," John bellows at a cabby, gesturing to a diversion sign with a large black arrow on a white background pointing down Elmbank Street. "Aye, that way, you fucker." *Jesus Christ, is this why I became a polis?* he asks himself. In a hard place of hard people, he knows why he became a polis. A philosopher mind and a boxer body, he had opportunities daily to exercise both.

"Aye, so I will. When the fuck will you be done here?" the cabby calls, window down, cig in fingers, hand hanging down deep over the side of his taxi. He takes another massive draw to finish the sentence. "Fuckin' terrible—fuckin' ridiculous—fuckin' war zone."

McCourt slaps the top of the black car. "Everyone in this city has an opinion. Shut the fuck up and get the fuck off the street."

The cabby snatches at the steering wheel, creating a screech reminiscent of a New York cab as he does a three-point-turn. "Fuckin' war zone," he repeats.

How many more times would this happen today before he finishes his shift, before he packs the uniform in his locker and hurries out of the station to be a normal punter? Then he'll do some cursing of his own as he heads home through the diversions and the build ups on the alternative roads, adding another twenty minutes onto a long and weary shift.

He empathises with the taxi driver, though, and he'll be back in the morning for more of the same. The forensic team won't give the scene the all-clear until it's happy; until they have

photographed, measured, dusted, swabbed and analysed. They're under no pressure from anyone: whether it's the Council, who gets the complaints, the Roads Department, who want to repair the road, or the public, who are sick of the disruption. They'll do their job well, as will he. This is a particularly sensitive one, though; it involves Jackie Kaminski, a cop like himself.

"I had to go somewhere for safety, security."

*Heaven?*

"I needed—"

*Sectioned?*

People talking to themselves is acceptable in Hairmyres Hospital mental health unit. George Smith, staff nurse, pays scant attention as he mingles with the patients. I am talking into my tea. "I got myself detained, by my own hand. *They* said I was mentally ill. *They* said I was 'at risk to others and noncompliant with treatment...'"

*You were delusional, my friend, and hearing voices.*

"Just you."

*God?*

"I was..."

*Off it?*

"I was—I am—in control."

*Leave, then.*

"I will, when I am ready—"

*When?*

"When the time is right—"

*When they let you out, you mean.*

"I'll go back and Glasgow will look after its faither as it does its weans."

George sidles up, taking up position behind me. I hear his breath and feel his eyes boring into the back of my head. "You want some more tea, Sean? It'll be lunch before you get more."

"No, I'm fine, George, this is good."

"Looks cold to me, but suit yourself."

"Where was I?"

George gets close. "You hearing something, Rooney?"

I look heavenly. "God will rain down burning sulphur on the unrighteous ones."



George takes out his notepad, talking as he writes. “Delusional material of a religious nature and oral hallucinations still prevalent.”

“Jackie, my Jackie. Did I—”

*Make that call?*

George leans over me. “What, Rooney? What did you do?”

“I wasn’t—”

“What, Rooney?”

*Responsible?*

“I will atone for my sins. In here, I will make amends. Please exact the punishment I deserve, warder.” I strip off my shirt and await his whip. “Please do it now, I am ready.”

George turns to me as he dishes out the oral medication. “I’m afraid you’re away again, son. All the religious stuff.” I stand up and face him. “You need a tablet?” He hands me a pill.

“No, none for me, Angel Gabriel. I get mine, Haldol, by injection every two weeks. *That* is a sign of getting better.”

“You sure?”

“I’m fine.”

*In safe hands.*

“That’s good, my man. I don’t want to zonk you out. You were doing so well.”

“My son, in forty days I will leave this place and I will lead my children through the gates of righteousness.” I make sure my voice carries through the ward.

“Sure, Rooney.” George takes a mental note to inform Doctor Melville. “The gates of righteousness,” he says and writes.

Sixteen hours from his 4 a.m. departure, John McCourt arrives home. It’s ten past nine and he’ll be up at three the next morning to do it all again.

“Hi, hon,” Mary says, as he enters and drops his jacket over the back of the dining room chair. His dinner is ready. Monday is pasta night and she makes the perfect bolognaise sauce to go with fresh spaghetti. She puts a glass of red in his hand. This is a dinner he’ll enjoy. She’s seen this exhausted and strained face many times. This time, however, it’s a tired, lined face. Though fit as a flea, he looks older than his forty-five years and, although he won’t admit it, retirement at fifty seems a long way away. They were divorcees before they met and married, and Jamie came along in their late thirties. At six, he’s a real handful. It is late though and he’s tucked up in bed. John is relieved; although he would have liked to spend

time with him, an hour of après dinner reading, two glasses of wine, his nightly meditation, and a crash into bed, are as much as he can deal with this night. He sits on the edge of his bed and digs his head into his Descartes' meditations. "I think, therefore, I am," he murmurs to himself. "But, what am I?"

Mary picks this up. "You are a good cop, darlin', and a fine husband and father, that's what you are," she says, from the other side of the bed.

"Thanks, sweetie."

"Tell me, hon, the chief inspector?"

"She's a DCI."

"So she is. How is she?"

"She'll get there."

"Who did it?"

She knows better than that, but she wants to draw it out, to get him talking, to debrief in the way she and other polis wives well understand.

"Who knows, the mob? But it's unusual."

"Do you know her?"

"Aye, everybody knows Jackie."

It's ten o'clock and he's about ready for bed, but he can't resist the news. Although national, it's about Glasgow.

"It's always about here," Mary confirms.

They both move closer to the screen, not wanting to turn the sound up for fear of disturbing Jamie.

"Highlighted by an attack on a Strathclyde Police detective," the presenter reports, "Glasgow is hit by a succession of shootings, the like not seen since the Glasgow turf wars. Then, mob violence claimed the lives of over sixty people."

"Now the Father's gone there's a vacuum. A war, the like of not known before, is happening on the streets of Glasgow. The crime lords are out to claim the throne, and the turf."

"More late nights for you, hon."

"Par for the course, darlin', since Arthur Johnston's demise."

"Any ideas who killed him?"

"The Father had his enemies, but none has come forward to claim his throne. Anyway, the overtime money'll come in handy." He pulls her across the bed. "I have to keep you in a custom you have become accustomed to."

“No-one keeps me, polisman.” She pushes him off. “But, I’m worried about you. I don’t like you being out there. People are getting hurt.”

“Don’t worry about me. I’m too streetwise to be caught out by those jumped-up street neds. We take precautions. You know that.”

“Aye, sure, but watch yourself.”

“I will darlin’, don’t you worry about that.”

She tucks him in as a mother would. There will be no sex this night, nor much sleep for either of them. She’s preoccupied, worrying about her man, and he’ll re-run the scenes of Glasgow that day, knowing more bloodletting is inevitable.

The Father’s death preceded Jackie’s attack and now the Family has fallen apart, creating a void that individual gang leaders will try to fill. Murders will occur, and some of them will be police officers. Notwithstanding the double shifts, late nights and early mornings, which will be the norm for her husband for some time to come, Mary has a good reason to be worried.