

Flash Flood

Night Ride

The cut and shut Golf GTX was painted matt black. It was doing eighty, racing through the downpour. Jamie had always wanted to drive the Golf; it was way better than his Mini Cooper, with its sticky gearbox. Josh now had a nearly new Porsche. Jamie had been allowed to borrow the Golf, long-term, not quite a gift, not yet. Josh had called it part of his promotion package, now that Jamie was in charge of the car wash. "If you do good, Jamie son, who knows, eh? And don't fuckin' crash it, eh? The Golf's no' new but it's no' worth nothin', eh?"

Jamie Nichols (17) was the youngest of the brothers. Now that Uncle Tone was on the way out, Josh (27) was acting up, running the show from Glasgow, calling the shots. The other two Nichols brothers, Jed (25) in Edinburgh, and Jem (23) in Aberdeen were running the outposts of the family business. But the main action was still in Glasgow under Josh and still doing well without Uncle Tone. It was all working out. It was because Josh was ruthless.

Josh was taking over Uncle Tone's patch. Jamie was moving up too. The car wash was ticking over nicely: the customers were happy with the gear. The fuzz was staying away, taking their cut on the side. Some of the customers got their cars washed twice a week and when they came into the cabin to pay him, Jamie supplied their needs. There were all sorts, some of them in suits, some in joggers and trainers. No questions asked. It was all looking good.

Tuesday nights were always quieter. Jamie had left Alfie Bradley in charge for the all-night shift, as Josh used to do when he wanted a break. Alfie had worked for Josh for years and if he stepped out of line, Josh would squash him.

Jamie was heading out to his Uncle Tone's residential caravan near Auchenleckie. His uncle was in hospital: cancer: no hope. Everyone knew where he kept his spare key under the gas bottle. The caravan was nearly new, comfortable, with central heating and three bedrooms, two shower bathrooms and a big comfy water bed. He had never done it in a water bed but Josh said it was amazing.

Jamie glanced across at Ellie. She was Josh's latest ex-girlfriend, dumped by him two days earlier, therefore freely available. Ellie was a touch of class, well-spoken, from a posh house in Jordanhill. "Goes like a well-oiled wee sewing machine, Jamie son, eh? Just pop her a couple o' these in a Vodka-Coke, eh?"

No one knew where Jamie was, who he was with. He had phoned her mobile, picked her up from the bus shelter near her house. It had been raining heavily for most of the day. Then the rain stopped for a few hours and it had been cool and breezy but dry; typical Glasgow Fair

Flash Flood

weather. Then, just as she got in the car, the first rumbles of thunder had sounded in the distance and big spots of rain had started again.

When he drew up at the bus shelter it was the first time he had seen her since that first time, two weeks ago. Then she had been sitting in Josh's Porsche, smiling at him, sticking her tongue out. Just like then, she looked stunning, amazing. This time she was like a hippy of olden times, her short blonde hair tucked up under a black beret, with an ankle length fake-fur coat, and wearing shiny black high-heeled knee-length boots with a huge black and white plastic bag draped over her shoulder. She pulled open the door, smiled and stuck her tongue out, threw herself onto the seat, then leaned over and kissed him on the lips. No one had ever done that, kissed him like that. She tasted of peppermint and her lips were soft and wet. Gave him a hard-on right away.

Ellie Simpson said she had told her mother that she was staying overnight with her friend, Vicky, and that Vicky was set up to cover for her if anyone phoned to check-up. What she had actually told her mother that she was doing another overnight baby-sit for Paula Borthwick. That was how she had met Josh. When he came to collect Paula one time he had asked for her mobile number.

Ellie knew Paula was into drugs, crack cocaine. One night when Ellie was baby-sitting, Paula had returned drunk. When she checked, Ellie had pretended to be asleep. Then she had crept down and watched, discovered where Paula stashed her stuff. There was a mountain of it, all in tiny sachets. Ellie only stole a few each time she overnighted. It was good stuff. Paula was a laugh, and she had tons of clothes. They were about the same size. Ellie had said she was going to a fancy dress party and wanted to dress up as a hippy and Paula had rooted out a pile of things which she gave Ellie, free of charge.

Another thing that Ellie had not told Rob was that her bag contained her school clothes. She planned to get Jamie to drop her off near her school before eight o'clock tomorrow morning but she had not wanted to annoy him by telling him this. Nor did she say that she had been to the Auchenleckie caravan five times before with Josh, during their brief romance. Anyway, she liked Jamie better than Josh, mainly because he didn't smoke and was gentler, not so frightening. And Jamie was also better looking. She knew the Nicholls were all gangsters, drug dealers. That was the attraction, a way of getting back at her father, who had dumped them and gone off to live with his girlfriend to Bellshill, on promotion to Head of Drugs. What a laugh. If he had ever tried drugs he would know how pointless it was to try to stop people getting them. Even her mother popped from time to time, but not crack, or if she did, Ellie had not found her hiding place. Nothing could beat crack. Nothing.

Josh glanced sideways again. Her seat was pushed fully back at full recline and her bare feet were up on the dash. Ellie was wearing yellow hot pants and a thin red halter top, no bra,

Flash Flood

her nipples popping out, bare mid-rift, with a silver ring in her naval; no tights, and no seat belt to spoil the view. He had taken her for a quick drink at the bikers' pub. They had all been ogling her but she had ignored them, which Jamie liked. After a second drink she was all over him, snogging him and rubbing her hand on his thigh, under the table. The pills were working, just like Josh said. Then, back in the car, they had sniffed a line of the best stuff to add a bit of sparkle.

He had wondered if she wanted to do it in the car park but had been too timid to ask. Jamie knew she was teasing him: she was good at it. He was hard and ready. It was sticking up inside his joggers, like a banana. He had seen her looking at it - before she giggled and closed her eyes.

Jamie was free until ten o'clock tomorrow morning, when he was due to cash-in with Josh and pick up new supplies for the car wash. He had not told Ellie about this, so as not to spoil the fun. He would drop her off at her Vicky's place in Bearsden on the way back to Josh's place. No point telling her this yet. Best to keep it romantic, that's what her kind liked. It was a good plan.

They raced along the twisting road. Because of the storm it felt like night-time. Only another ten minutes and they would be at the caravan. It was at a great spot, overlooking the loch, looking out to Ben Lomond and the other mountains. He changed down, the engine whined. The car slewed into the bend and he accelerated out of it, becoming airborne for a microsecond over the hump then thudding down, skidding onto the steep downslope, hitting ninety.

His eyes were drawn back to her. Ellie's legs were spread wide, her hands stroking her inner thighs, eyes still closed with a tiny smile on her lips. It was the caked-on make-up that made her look older, he decided. She said she was nineteen. Josh had said she was "OK, just legal". God, Jamie thought, she's gorgeous, luscious, like a big ripe, juicy strawberry. Definitely the best so far.

Jamie felt the car jiggle and turned back to the road.

'Jesus!'

The hill burn to his right was gurgling onto the road, turning it a mini-river. The Golf's wheels were plowing through water inches deep and the car was lifting, aquaplaning, the rear end twitching. He was heading for the tight bend before the bridge over the river fifty odd metres below.

Unseen in the swirling rain five miles away, the wall of the dam loomed in the darkness, its spillways overflowing. The alarm was ringing in the control centre in the black and white multi-

Flash Flood

storey office building twenty-odd miles away. The technician looked at the display on the master screen, clicked on the icon and initiated the slow process of opening the valve to relieve the pressure on the damaged section of the dam wall, near the fish ladder. The repair was scheduled for next month. Because of the wet winter and spring, there was no shortage of water in the system. As a result of the storm it was a busy night. Sewage works were overflowing; water treatment plants were sounding alarms. He did not give the Auchenleckie reservoir another thought.

Jamie pumped the brakes. No effect. He hauled on the handbrake. No effect. He slammed the gearbox into second. No effect.

'Oh God, no, no. NO!'

The car began to rotate. Ellie was screaming. The car entered the bend sideways and hurtled down the steep embankment, cartwheeling and thudding repeatedly until it came to rest upside down, its front end overhanging the river bank. The windscreen had compressed then popped out. Both occupants were unconscious, Jamie hanging from his seat belt, Ellie crumpled into a heap on the roof, one arm hanging out through the windscreen aperture, the red LED numerals on her watch pulsing: 20.27.

The river was in flood, its level rising steadily as the first flush from the sluice arrived. The car began to sink into the soft earth of the bank, cold muddy water lapping over the girl's arm, seeping around her.

Three miles upstream of the Auchenleckie bridge, Eddie Galvin sensed the change of water pressure against the back of his legs. He looked over his shoulder towards the dam wall in the far distance. Directly above the sluice gate, raised on a pole fixed to the upper rim of the dam, a rotating yellow light winked through the swirl of the downpour. He reeled in quickly, waded out of the river, and clambered out onto the nearest bank, moving as quickly as his repaired knee would allow. When he reached safety, he groaned. He was on wrong side of the river, his van parked beyond the bridge, in the layby near the Auchenleckie turn off. He would have to take the long way. With his gammy leg it would take forever.

Flash Flood

Chaos Theory

Normally Tuesday evenings were a dawdle but earlier, heavy rain had caused flooding and traffic was slow, with lots of minor shuts and bumps caused by impatience. PC Gemma Brownlee was already running late on her personal schedule. She had been ready to head back to the station to sign-off when they had been sent to check out a burglary incident. Gemma recognized the address; but a call was a call and had to be answered.

Miss Vera Henderson explained, in her slow, precise, soprano voice: "My neighbour Isobel Ibbotson is on holiday, visiting her sister in Southport. Belle always tells me when she is going away so that I can keep an eye on her property. I saw them through her kitchen window. As you can see the blinds are down, Belle always does that, even though I advised her against this aberration many times over. They intruders had torches, flashing against the blinds. Three torches. Therefore, one must assume that there is three men or more. Of course officers, they might not be all men, or perhaps a mixture of men and women, or even, one must admit, three or more women. I expect they are long gone by now - given that it took you fifty-three minutes to respond to my call. Are you taking notes, young man? Lewis always takes notes for Morse on the television. Or do you record everything on your walkie-talkies, nowadays?"

Vera Henderson had called 999, making it official in the system. She had learned that calling 101 meant she might have to wait hours for someone to respond, if they came at all. It was Gemma's third time responding to similar calls from Miss Henderson. Long retired, Miss Henderson had been a Speech Therapist. Nowadays she filled her life with committees. Among others, she was the minutes' secretary for the Liberal Democrats group and an active member of the Community Council. She wrote frequently to the *(Glasgow) Herald* and the *Milngavie and Bearsden Herald* on a wide range of topics from dog fouling to refugees and falling standards in grammar, written and spoken. She was also the organizer of her neighbourhood watch group, most of whom also met as a book club in her house twice a month. Her sightings always involved three men or more men, often in hoodies, always flashing torches. Usually she spotted them in the small hours of the morning, when things were quiet.

Miss Henderson made excellent coffee and always had a selection of freshly baked scones on offer. Gemma had learned that the elderly lady had been reporting these sightings for over twenty years. Miss Henderson required careful handling and could not be rushed. It took nearly an hour to check the Ibbotson house and report back to assure Miss Henderson that it was secure and that there were no signs of attempted entry.

They had been heading back to Maryhill Police station to sign out when they received a further call:

Flash Flood

"Maryhill Control to Car H3. Traffic incident at Bearsden Cross. A taxi and an elderly lady driver. Please investigate. The blockage is causing a massive tailback. 103 had been inundated with calls."

A flash lit the sky and in the distance thunder rumbled as the first huge spots of rain splashed the windscreen. Gemma let out a slow sigh of despair. Her evening was already planned - quick shower, a light meal and then down to studying for her Sergeant's exams coming up next month. Beside her, her buddy pressed the switch on his personal radio:

"Car H3 to Control. On our way. ETA five minutes."

'OK, Bat Woman, here we go.'

He switched on the siren and the blue flashing lights. Gemma pulled out to overtake. She suppressed a smile as she glanced across at PC Rob Rattray. Rob was twenty-four, five years her junior, straight out of police college and still full of self-assured enthusiasm. He had been with her, for seven months, on and off. He was very open and she knew everything about him, or so she thought.

Rob was only child. His father, Bill, worked for a civil engineering contractor building motorways and his mother, Olivia, was as a criminal defence lawyer. Following in his father's engineering footsteps, Rob had gained an M Eng. in Aeronautical Engineering from Glasgow University. From a child Rob had wanted to be a pilot in the RAF but, when he applied on first graduating from Glasgow he had failed the aptitude tests. To get away from home he had studied at Manchester University for a PhD in Systems Modelling and Integration, but it had not worked out. Rob had decided to "give the police a go from a few years" but, he advised, "if something more exciting comes up, I'll take-off."

His main hobby was flying model aeroplanes and drones. Gemma had seen the photographs and had suffered his detailed explanations with good grace, smiling, letting it wash over her. She also learned that although he had had a few girlfriends, there had been no one serious. He towered a full head above her, thin to spindly, with ginger hair, soft blue eyes and a fresh, pink, innocent face. He had a nearly new Honda S2000 soft-top sports car and a Transit van, to transport his drones. He lived in an apartment block near Bothwell Castle, on the outskirts of Hamilton, near his parents.

After a few months of listening to his ramblings, Gemma decided that his parents had done a good job, and that she liked Rob, in a big sister sort of way. A few times when she thought he might have been about to ask her out on a date, she had headed him off by telling him she was meeting her boyfriend. This was a straight lie. She had not had a boyfriend since Tim

Flash Flood

Blackie had killed himself in a head-on crash. If Gemma had an ideal man in her mind, he would be older, experienced, not frivolous. Preferably not in the force: marriages between serving officers seldom lasted. Gemma was hoping for someone like her brother-in-law, Hamish Borthwick, an IT manager with a RBS. Hamish seemed steady, sensible, and he worked regular hours.

Gemma could not fathom why had Paula kicked him out. Gemma had never understood her sister. Perhaps it was the ten-year gap between them. Perhaps it was that Paula was taller, slimmer, more elegant while Gemma was shorter with a sturdy frame. Clearly, Hamish was still besotted with Paula: he ran back every time she called, even when she was still seeing other guys on the side. It was like *EastEnders* or *River City*, lived out in Jordanhill. Crazy. A few months earlier, when Paula had taken up with the odious Josh Nichols, Gemma had intervened, stepping over the police line to reveal to Paula what was known and what she suspected about the Nichols/Toner clan. Paula was not receptive to such advice: she never had been. The conversation had ended in a screaming match.

Josh Nichols was the heir apparent to Anthony Toner (Big Tone), the used car dealer who the grapevine said was 'laundering' for the Manchester cartel who supplied his drugs. Gemma had no idea whether Paula was still seeing Josh Nichols, but she knew from her mother that Hamish was still on the scene, intermittently. Paula was playing Hamish like a patsy, making up with him for a week or so then kicking him out again. After she hooked up with Josh, suddenly Paula seemed to have more money. She was driving a nearly new Jaguar, and had enrolled her twin boys in the Kindergarten at the High School of Glasgow. Paula was living the high life, using local girls as baby-sitters to mind the boys when she was out partying.

Gemma had to admit to herself that she was worried. Even though Paula's flower shop was in a good location, with five ladies running it seven days a week, surely it could not support the lifestyle she was now living? Was Paula using it as a cover to push drugs? Revisiting these thoughts always caused an empty feeling in the pit of her stomach. Each time it came to mind, Gemma shrugged it off, hoping that if Paula was involved in drugs, this would not have repercussions for her if the drugs squad eventually snagged the Toner/Nichols cabal.

After the argument Gemma had closed her ears to her mother's whining. Paula was on her own. If Hamish ever became available, well, maybe. Gemma had always fancied him.

The crunch at Bearsden Cross had happened when an elderly widow had stopped part way through the junction, leaving her car's rear end exposed. Similar shuts had happened before at this junction, caused by the awkward positioning of the traffic lights at a pedestrian crossing. Despite Rob's prediction, because of the extensive flooding, it took them nearly a quarter of an hour to reach the scene.

Flash Flood

The rain was sheeting down again and intermittent crashes of thunder rolled closer. It was dark, almost like night-time. As she climbed out of the car, Gemma surveyed the scene. Gemma recognised the small white Toyota Aygo. She set her face to what she hoped would pass as 'impassive and professional', reached into the boot for her viz jacket, tucked her curly auburn hair under her hat, forced it firmly down on her head, and switched on her torch.

The Aygo driver Mrs Ellen Brady (83), a widow thirty-odd years, had been a local primary head teacher and was well known in the community. She was a neighbour and close confidant of Miss Vera Henderson and together they waged war on the East Dumbarton Council on a wide range of topics, but mainly on road safety and traffic calming measures. Attractive, fresh-faced she was mostly friendly and pleasant. However, when crossed, Ellen Brady had an acid tongue and relished any opportunity for an argument. Local shopkeepers and supermarket assistants treated her with great caution.

The previous year the widow had been awarded three penalty points for slow driving while returning to Bearsden on the treacherous road from Auchenleckie. Over the years there had been several campaigns in the social media and local newspaper about her slow driving. Unfortunately for Gemma, she had been the officer who had reluctantly filed the paperwork in the case, forced to do so by her superiors. Mrs Brady's record had showed five warnings for similar offences. The Fiscal's office had pressed charges. The case had been widely reported in the local and national press. Gemma had been the recipient of a great deal of negative publicity and several weeks of hate emails and corrosive tweets.

Gemma leaned back into the police car:

'Gird your loins, Rob, this is warfare. The Aygo is Mrs Brady. Remember her? I told you about her, slow driving? Right, here's what we'll do. You call Control, explain how bad it is here, and ask for a back-up car. If they can spare two, even better. Then get your viz on and put out cones around the taxi. Make the first three cars in each direction do multi-point turns and send them around the side streets. Most will be locals and will know how to get around the blockage. When you have enough space to manoeuvre, re-position the cones, try to get them moving - thirty cars each way in single file, then changeover, you know the drill. Don't take any snash from them. They'll all have a good reason why you need to get them through first. I'll check out our incident drivers and see if we can get their vehicles moved. OK?'

'Piece of cake, Bat Woman!'

At the Aygo, Gemma chapped on the window; Mrs Brady rolled it down by an inch.

'Hello, Mrs Brady, how are you today? Do we need an ambulance?'

A voice spoke to Gemma from behind. 'It wuz her fault, daft old bitch. She's an effing menace, ask anaywan.'

Flash Flood

'Are you the other driver, sir?'

'Aye, Ah um.'

'May I assume that you are unhurt?'

'Naw, am awright.'

'Then please wait in your cab, sir. I'll be happy to hear your views later. Thank you.'

'Aye, well jist don't believe a word she says. Ah wiznae jumpin' the lights. Ah'd a missed her if she hudnae stooped deed fur nae reason.'

Gemma gave him a hard stare and he scuttle back to his taxi. She turned back to the Aygo and stooped to speak through the slot. Before she could make her request Mrs Brady said:

'Oh, it's you again, Miss Brownlee. Just my luck. Well, despite his atrocious grammar and his vehement protests, it is clearly his fault. Ask anyone in the Estate Agents, they'll tell you. That blonde lady in the window, she's Diane Ellison. Diane's my neighbour. She saw it all. Go on, ask her, why don't you? Diane agreed to stay behind in the shop until you arrived. Tuesday is there late night anyway. I refused to move because I knew if I did he would say it was my fault. I know how it works, you know. I have been smashed into from behind before. So I am just exactly where I was when he hit me, waiting at the red light. Except I think he shoved me a few feet forwards. You can do measurements and take photographs to prove it, can't you? I've seen it all on the *Breakfast Show; roadside forensics*, I think they called it.'

Fortunately, both cars were drivable and Control provided a second car to help with the traffic chaos. Nevertheless, it took almost two hours to clear the get statements and clear the backlog. Then, when it did not matter, the storm blew through and the rain stopped.

Gemma and Rob were two minutes short of Maryhill Police Station when their radio crackled to life:

'Control to Car H3. We have a report of a serious crash at the Auchenleckie Bridge. A car has left the road and is upside down near the river. A fisherman called Edward Gavin called it in. He's at the scene but cannot reach the car. He thinks there is a person trapped inside. Fire and Rescue and an ambulance have been dispatched but there is flooding on the route. I will update you asap information is made available. Over.'

Rob switched on the siren and the blue lights. As Gemma swung into a U-turn, Rob pressed his radio button:

'Car H3 to Control, on our way. Control, do you have the mobile for Eddie Gavin, he's a friend of mine.'

'Control to Car H3, I will text it to your personal mobile. Out.'

Flash Flood

'Rob, who's Eddie Gavin?'

'Eddie is the President of *'Flight Light'* our model aeroplane flying club. He used to be in the RAF but he had a crash and damaged his left knee, so he was pensioned out. That was years ago. He's ancient, even older than my dad.'

'Right, got that. But why do you want to speak to him?'

'Just an idea. It might be useful.'

Rob's mobile pinged and he made the call.

'Eddie, Rob Rattray here.'

'Yeah, Eddie, I know, I know. We're on our way to you just now. Yip, the cavalry is coming behind us, full strength.'

'Yeah, I know. Look, Eddie, do you have your big drone with you, in the van?'

'Good, is the camera working again?'

'Good, great. How is the weather there? Can you fly it out, take it down and have a look-see, a recon?'

'Yeah. I know, Eddie, I know. Don't worry.'

'Great, we should be with you in say, twenty minutes, so get it set up now, will you?'

'Thanks. Yeah, yeah. Your right, just like the old days, flying a mission again. Thanks.'

'So, Rob, what was that about?'

'Eddie is a convert to drone flying. He was a fixed-wing man and drones are too like helicopters for his taste. It took ages, but I eventually wore him down into allowing us to fly drones at the club. Now he is a complete convert. He's mad that he did not think of to recon idea himself.'

'So, Rob, this Eddie Gavin, he's going to fly this drone with a video camera on board to check on the occupants?'

'Yeah, of course it might be a stolen car, Gemma, dumped, empty. That's happened before, you know.'

'I know that Rob, but we have to assume that it's a crash, don't we? I know that bridge. Its fifty metres or more above the river and the banks are nearly vertical. I think we should ask Control to get the Mountain Rescue Team, what do you think?'

'Won't the Fire and Rescue boys be miffed?'

Flash Flood

'Who cares. We have to cover ourselves. Call Control.'

'Yeah, I'll call Control, see what they say.'

'Car H3 to Control. Be advised that there is a sheer drop of about fifty metres down to the river at the Auchenleckie Bridge. We advise that you alert Lomond Mountain Rescue to get back-up.'

'Thank you for that Car H3. The matter is already in hand. They may be a while. They are on another call near Ardlui. It will be down to Fire and Rescue. Essential radio traffic only, please. We are very busy here. Out.'

'Well, that's us telt, eh?'

'Rob, do you think this drone idea will work? Will we be able to use it to check for occupants?'

'Don't see why not. Drones are the new way ahead. They use them widely in the military. We should be using them ourselves. You'll see what I mean.'

Flash Flood

Eye in the Sky

The emergency response was not going to plan. The Auchenleckie road was flooded in dozens of places. One patch was too deep for the Fiesta. Forcing a detour along a C-road with passing places, adding nine miles. Far behind them the two Fire and Rescue vehicles and the ambulance were snarled by a gridlock caused by traffic lights failures. Despite initial Rob's estimate, it took Car H3 forty-three minutes to reach the scene. He logged their arrival with Control at 21.33.

The rain had stopped but the continuing intermittent flashes of lightning and rumbles of thunder signaled that the storm was not yet over. The roar from the river filled the air, making it difficult to hear what was being said. With the heavy cloud cover, it was now fully dark but warm and misty. Eddie Galvin had reversed his vehicle as near to the edge as he dared to go and had the back door open, working on the drone, doing the pre-flight checks, checking camera and the video link. The aircraft was much bigger than Gemma had imagined, nearly a metre in diameter.

'The batteries were down; I used my portable generator to re-charge them; I've got the back-ups on charge.'

'Excuse me, could we move the generator away, cut down the noise, please.'

'Sure, Miss. Right, Rob, get the batteries fitted and position the craft for take-off. At least there's no wind, at least for the minute, anyway.'

'I'm Gemma, is it OK to call you Eddie.'

'Sure.'

Eddie sat on a camp chair at the side of the road. Resting on his lap was a purpose made tray for his video screen with the drone remote controller fixed by its side. The screen showed a bright patch of grass illuminated by LED's on the drone's undercarriage. Rob stood clear. The drone rose slowly then swooped into the chasm. Gemma tracked its flight by watching the winking light on its upper surface. She found it difficult to switching between the image on the screen from the on-board camera and the actual drone, and decided to leave the flying to Eddie and concentrate only on the video feed.

As the rear end of the car came into shot she said:

'Eddie, hold it there, please. I need to get the registration.'

'OK?', said Eddie.

'Thanks, got it.'

Flash Flood

The numbers were upside down and scanned the wrong way, but she was practised at this, copying what she saw and then holding her notebook upside down to read the numbers to Control.

The drone moved to the front of the car and adjusted the camera. The image came into view of a body hanging upside down, white tee-shirt hanging loosely, exposing a torso, its head submerged.

'Oh God! Looks like a youth. He must be dead. Another boy racer.'

'Sadly, I have to agree,' said Eddie. 'Were you made aware that they opened the sluice, flooding the river? It's done by remote control, about two hours ago, maybe. Only happens a few times a year. All of us who fish this river know to watch out for it. Tonight's the highest I've ever seen it, well above normal, run-off from the storm. Perhaps it was already flooded when it went down off the road?'

'Eddie, can you try to see inside, just in case there is anyone else the car?', asked Gemma.

'Sure. I nearly missed it. Kind of wish I had. The way things are going it'll be fully submerged soon enough.'

The camera focus changed and the bright LED array angled through the aperture that had held the windscreen. In the rear of the car a jumble of objects floated on the surface.

'What's that?' said Gemma. 'It looks like a fur coat. Is that a boot? A high-heeled black boot? It's a female boot. Definitely. Are we sure the victim is a male? Zoom out and check again, please.'

'No boobs, hairy chest, and look at the stomach,' said Rob, 'the tattoo. What does it say?'

Gemma did her copying routine as for the car number plate then turned her notebook upside down.

'Dedicated to Shagging
Enquire below.'

'Control to Car H3. The incident vehicle is untaxed and uninsured. According to DVLA records it was scrapped after a crash last year. The form was submitted by a Joshua Nichols.'

'Thanks, Control.'

'Joshua Nichols has a Porsche Cayenne in his name; do you want the registration?'

Gemma felt the cold hand of foreboding grip her stomach. Could the coat and boots be anything to do with Paula?

'Eh, yes, why not?'

Flash Flood

'I'll text it to your mobile. Out.'

'Gemma, what do you think?' said Rob. 'If there is a girl down there we need to find her, get her to safety. Seconds count. We can't wait on Fire and Rescue. I'll have a go at going down, will I?'

'No, Rob. No, we have to wait for help. Eddie, can you do a search along the banks, near the car.'

'Aye,' said Eddie, 'there was a time when I could have made down there no bother. Nowadays, no chance.'

They watched the screen on the laptop as the drone moved slowly along the water's edge on the far side.

'What's that black and white thing?' said Rob.

'It's a woman's bag. Can you get a better view of it, Eddie?'

'Sure.'

The drone hovered near the bag and the camera lens zoomed again. Part of a school blazer was visible. The badge came into sharp focus.

'St Al's!' said Rob. 'My old school. St Aloysius College. Look, a Prefect, see the cord on the lapel.'

'Eddie, the pink thing, can you get a better view?'

The drone moved and the camera focused again.

'Nickers!' said Gemma. 'Looks like we have a missing girl. Ninety-nine percent certain. Rob, get onto Control. Give them an update and tell them we need Fire and Rescue here pronto, pronto.'

'No, Gemma, we can't wait. She could be lying down there somewhere with the river rising. . .'

'No, Rob, do as your told without arguing for once. Call Control. Eddie, keep searching the banks with the drone. I'll run down to the bridge and look from there, maybe I'll see something. It's not quite so steep on the other side, maybe we could get down from there.'

'Gemma, this is wrong, I must have try.'

He was already over the edge, picking his way carefully downwards. Gemma mind froze. The image of Tim's burned out car and the aftermath of the accident, going to tell his mother, came rushing back. Rob seemed so vulnerable, just a boy.

He shouted up, 'did I never tell you about my Norway trip, with the OTC when I was at GU. I can do this, trust me.'

Flash Flood

The mud slide started without warning. The steep embankment below Rob Rattray's feet gave way. Encased in mud and foliage he slid down, gathering speed. Together the policeman and the lump of earth crashed into the river and he disappeared below the surface.

'Oh, God! Eddie, get the drone to follow that debris.'

'Car H3 to Control. We have a double emergency. PC Rattray had slipped over the edge of the embankment and has fallen into the river. We have no visual contact. Where the hell is the Fire and Rescue Team?'

'Control to Car H3. Your call is logged at 22.03. Fire and Rescue anticipate around twelve minutes, repeat twelve minutes. Can you confirm that the driver of the incident vehicle is dead? Can you identify him?'

'Yes, he's dead and no, we don't know who he is. But it's Rob we need to find, and the girl. Can we get a helicopter here to help us with the search? I'm not sure where it could land, I'll get back to you on that.'

'Car H3, be advised that there is a no-fly order in place because of the storm. Glasgow Airport is closed as well. I will ask for the Coastguard Helicopter. Standby.'

'Eddie, have you seen anything?'

'Sorry, no. Nothing. I have only a few minutes of power on these batteries. I'll bring it up and we will change over first. Let's hope the storm does not hit us again.'

'Control to Car H3. No luck with the Coastguard, they are already on a call, a yacht in trouble near Helensburgh. They are unlikely to be with you for at least an hour. Command has been informed of your situation. Two further cars have been deployed and a second ambulance. Standby for further instructions.'

'Gemma,' said Eddie, 'you could ask them to check downstream, where the rivers join, before they flow into the Kelvin ay Milngavie.'

'That's miles away. Surely. . .'

'Wait up! Look, there's Rob, he's on the far bank. It's his torch I spotted.'

'Eddie, you are a genius! I'll tell Control. Now Eddie, make my night - find that girl for me, please.'

'Look, he's shouting. Can you hear what he's saying? My ears have gone long ago.'

'No, the noise of the river is masking him.'

'Gemma, look, he's flashing a message. It's Morse code. Wait up.'

'Write this down Gemma,' said Eddie.

"arm in water
body trapped under
presume girl.
presume dead.
sorry."

Flash Flood

Rob pointed his torch beam at the spot. Eddie flew the drone closer to record the image of the arm. It was caught in a branch of a submerged tree. The rest of the body was hidden below the swirling muddy water.

In the distance a loud continuous rumble started, not thunder, more of a crashing sound.

'What was that?' asked Gemma.

'Sounds like something bad is happening at the dam. It's due to be repaired soon, I heard. Hell, if it the dam has given way. Christ, Rob! We need to get Rob out of there. Is his radio working?'

'No, nor his mobile. Must have been zapped by his swim!'

'Wait up! I can send Morse with the LEDs on the drone.'

Rob got the warning and immediately began climbing, quickly gaining ground. Eddie followed him with the drone. As Rob reached the road on the far side of the bridge the tidal wave arrived. Initially the river level rose by ten meters, submerging the Golf and, Gemma guessed, carrying it downstream.

Gemma contacted Control, made her report.

Rob was wet, subdued. Under protest he sat in the Fiesta, with the engine running and its heating on full. Eddie provided strong black coffee from a flask and tuna mayo sandwiches from his goody box.

The drama was over. They had done their best, which had not been enough to save the victims of the crash.

The siren and flashing lights of the Fire and Rescue wagons filled the air.

Gemma spoke to the Rescue Commander, explained the situation. Tom Armstrong was not a happy man.

'So, we have ploughed our way out here when we could be better used elsewhere and now you say that there's nothing we can do?'

'Come over here, have a look. Do you fancy sending any of your team down there, with the river the way it is? If you like, have a look at the video material from the drone. See what you think. It's your call what you do with your team, but for my money, we have to wait until the river goes down before we can do a proper search, although I doubt we will find anything material. My view, and I have advised my Control, is that both bodies we spotted, and any

Flash Flood

others who may have been in the car, will end up being found in the River Kelvin, maybe the Clyde. I've cancelled the ambulance. It was about ten miles away anyway.'

'Where's this video evidence. We'll need a copy for our records.'

'I'm sure Mr. Galvin will be happy to oblige, if you ask him nicely. Try calling him Wing Commander.'

'Is he a Wing Commander?'

'No, he was a Flight Lieutenant, but flattery almost always works.'

'Ah, yes, I see what you mean about the river. I'll just get my team to take our own record video, just for the record.'

'Be my guest. When a relief car gets here to preserve the scene I need to get my colleague to A&E to get him checked out.'

Flash Flood

Home Truths

Martha Simpson was chilling, watching a recorded episode of *Celebrity MasterChef*. She was nearly a third of the way into her second bottle of Prosecco and the uppers were holding in the centre of the zone, her mind spinning out another fantasy.

I have to get back to the gym soon, she told herself. Maybe next week. Thank God Ellie is out, I need some me time, running the website is hard work. It's OK for Paula, she dumps it all on me, the smarmy bitch. She must be out partying. But hey, the new set-up at the shop is working well. The ultra-secure website that Josh's geeky guy Rob has set up, it's excellent. Clever that, how when they order online and then add the special promo codes, secretly stating their 'additional needs'. Looks like they are only buying flowers, with extra plant food taped inside. Nice one. That Rob is a genius, making the whole thing run on PayPal, making it look legit, and with no grubby money to handle. But hey, I'm the one at the sharp end, working my butt off. She'd better give me that fucking bonus, when we get next month's figures. Typical Paula, saying she dreamt the whole thing up. No way. I bet she got the idea of using a website from Hamish. Poor Hamish. Maybe I could get him over some night, when Ellie's out at Vicky's place, ask for help with my wireless router, see where it goes. Nah, he'd never come. But Rob, he might come, he looks eager. Josh says he's a 'special recruit', almost family. Wonder what that means. He's so cute, looks like seventeen. Or maybe I could get him out on a date, go back to his place. Hey Martha, you're not that old, not when you're tarted up. Yip, time for another bottle and a few wee helpers, keep it going.

Mungo, the ancient black Labrador was curled in his basket, snoring and farting in equal measure. Perhaps he needs a widdle walk? Nah, Ellie took him out, didn't she?

Now Martha's mind drifted off to her daughter. When Ellie was about, Martha was circumspect, using one bottle as a decoy, keeping it almost full while topping up from a different hidden bottle.

That's were Ellie's the best, looking after him. She always has. If Ellie knows about my problem, Martha thought, she is hiding it well. That girl's too bright for her own good. At least she is not trouble, and the school are happy with her progress. And Paula's happy with her, says she's great with the twins, reads them stories, plays games with them.

To escape from Ellie, Martha popped three pills, washed them down another glass of Prosecco. The judder came as the chemicals flooded into her system.

Aaah, yes, Martha, yes, yes, yes! That's it baby, right back in the zone again. And the promo Clients, they're really pleased with the home delivery service, flowers with a package of drugs

Flash Flood

taped inside. No point in telling Paula about the tips. Every little helps, yes. And hey, and that website, I can even go in as a faker, get my own stuff with the money through nice Auntie Vera's PayPal account that Thomas set up for her last year. She thinks I cancelled it for her when all I did was change the password. She can afford it, bloody old hag, rolling in it she is, all that money from her old dad. Now that's genius, Martha girl. Pure carat gold genius. PayPal to PayPal, probably untraceable.

The TV show came to an end and Martha flipped channels until she found a film.

Oh God, how nice, *Love Actually*. Just right. Colin Firth and Hugh Grant. Delicious. She drained the glass and topped it up again. She thought about sniffing a line, then decided to leave it until the good bit, near the end, with Colin and the girl in the restaurant in Portugal.

Inevitably, Martha's thoughts slipped into the old caustic groove of her ex-husband Thomas and Elaine, the daughter of her ex-best friend Frances Brady. Elaine, pillar of the church in Bearsden, Elaine who had offered to walk the dog when Martha could not get back over from the shop in time. Elaine who had a key for this house. Elaine who had sneaked under the radar and stolen Thomas from her; Elaine who made him apply for the job in at the new Police Scotland Campus at Gartcosh, made them move to that fancy apartment in Bothwell Castle to get away from me and Ellie. Well, fuck you, Elaine Brady. Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you. He was never much good in bed anyway. Not like Josh. No, Josh is special. Extra special. Paula would explode if she knew. But he would never tell. Not Josh. That set-up with the caravan and the water bed, that *is* special. And the bondage thing. *Fifty Shades of Auchenleckie*.

She focused on the film. Oh Colin, baby, baby; that girlfriend of yours with the cold, she's faking it! Colin, she's cheating on you. Jack her in. Go to your place in France and I'll be waiting for you, honey. Fuck it, I need that line now.

The house phone started ringing. She hated to be disturbed when she was needy. Who the hell could that be? Josh always used the special mobile he had given her, just for them. But he hadn't called for months, not since Paula. Fuck it, it'll be another sales call. Bastards! Let the message machine take it, that's what it's fucking for.

She laid out the line and sniffed along slowly. The zinging started at once, then all was calm and she was floating.

"Martha, Paula, ring me back at once. You're mobile's down."

Martha snatched up the phone. 'Paula, it's me here. Sorry, I was in the loo. How can I help?'

Flash Flood

'Look, I know it's late, but do you think Ellie could nip 'round, stay for the night? Josh is suddenly available and he's on his way over. He's taking me somewhere special, he says. His country retreat. Intriguing or what?'

'Sorry? Ellie is with you, is she not?'

'Martha, are you high? You sound a bit slurred. Christ, it's Tuesday, for fuck sake. No, Ellie is not with me. Where is she?'

'But Paula, she said she was going to your place, to babysit. I'm sure that's what she said.'

'Christ Martha, how much have you had? Maybe she's gone to Bearsden, to Vicky's. So, right, no Ellie. Fuck. I can't phone any of the other kids at this time of night, can I? So, it has to be you. Get 'round here, quick as you like. And don't bring that smelly mutt of yours. Five minutes max. Oh, and Martha, no more anything else tonight, right?'

The phone was dead. Paula was a fucking witch. Martha stared at herself on the mirror. Oh Christ, Martha, look at you. You look like your fucking ninety-five. Get a grip. If Josh sees you like this, you'll never make it back onto that water bed.

Martha knew she had no alternative. She raced upstairs, threw off her clothes, dived under the shower, set it to seven, the maximum she could stand, and scrubbed herself clean.

Ten minutes later she arrived at Paula's. The rain was off and the wind was up, cooler. The Porsche was idling and as she walked past Josh winked at her. Paula's front door flew open the woman trotted over on her heels. She was wearing a cobalt blue mini-skirt a charcoal blouse with a bolero jacket which was a match with the skirt. As always, Paula looked stunning.

'Martha, no more stuff tonight. Party's over, right? I'll probably be back early doors. Josh is rigid about his collections at ten o'clock. You get the boys breakfasted and ready for Kindergarten. If I'm not here in time, you take them. Here's the keys for the Jag, right?'

'Yeah, no worries, Paula. Enjoy.'

Martha closed the front door as the Porsche shot off, its tyres screaming.

After negotiating the traffic at Bearsden, the road to Auchenleckie opened up in front of him. Josh floored the pedal and the car reared forward. It hit the ton a few seconds later and was still accelerating when he saw the first bend ahead and braked hard. Josh was high, injected, sniffed and randy.

'Right, Paula doll, let's see the flesh. Get your tits out first and then get down on the big boy and say 'hello and welcome to paradise'.'

Flash Flood

The car raced on along the centre of the narrow road. Fortunately, there was no contra-traffic. When it reached the deep flooded section the car smashed through, its four-wheel drive working overtime to get traction.

When the Porsche hit the rise where Jamie had lost control of the *Golf*, it was already too late. Josh Nichols slammed on the brakes but the road was slick with mud and the Porsche smacked into the back of the Fire and Rescue wagon, still travelling at high speed. The lab later estimated ninety-three miles per hour.

Gemma heard the impact. The crump sound was strangely muted, and lasted only a few milliseconds.

It was the Tom Armstrong who reacted first, shouting instructions to his team to douse the Porsche with foam in case of a fire.

Together Gemma and Tom made the inspection of the grisly remains. Her mind was numb, but she went through the motions.

'Car H3 to Control. We have a secondary traffic incident. A vehicle travelling at high speed has collided with a fire service vehicle. The vehicle is the Porsche that you earlier advised is registered to a Joshua Nichols. The driver is a male, presumably Nichols. The passenger is female. Her name is Paula Borthwick. Both are clearly dead. There are no other injured. We do not require an ambulance. Please arrange for a morgue pick-up.'

'Control to Car H3. Details acknowledged and now in the system. Do you have an update on the original incident? The Coastguard Helicopter should be with you in nine minutes.'

'Car H3 to Control. The Rescue Commander has deployed a four-man team to try to search the riverbank from the far side of the bridge. So far they have not located anything of interest. It is almost pitch dark now. The Commander has set up lights on the bridge. Over.'

'Car H3, be aware our colleagues monitoring media feeds have advised that that pictures of the damaged *Golf* have been tweeted. Expect media contact soon. The back-up vehicles will be with you in twelve minutes. When they arrive you and PC Rattray will stand down. Chief Inspector McMaster is making his way separately to your location to support your efforts. PC Brownlee, Command have advised that your personnel file shows a that your sister is a Paula Borthwick. Can you confirm that the victim is indeed your sister?'

'Yes, I was just about to advise that information.'

'PC Brownlee, Command advises that you should be aware that these conversations have been recorded and will be reviewed in due course. Our condolences. Out.'

Flash Flood

Exit, Stage Left

In the early hours of Wednesday morning Anthony Toner was visited in hospital by his solicitor, Mrs Olivia Rattray. He at once discharged himself from hospital and returned to his apartment at Bothwell Castle to try to retrieve his crumbling empire.

The first priority was Paula's house. A clean-up squad arrived a few minutes before three in the morning. Paula's personal stash was removed, with her computer, iPad and back-up phones.

Martha was warned to stay shtum and not to report her daughter missing or advise Paula's family. Martha was told that the flower shop scam would be re-invented in a few months' time, and that she would be in charge, if she kept her mouth shut. Or else.

In parallel Paula Borthwick's flower shop was raided, her stock of drugs removed and the shop set alight by a professional.

Jamie's car wash was closed, the gear removed and the place sanitised. Alfie Bradley has not been reported missing by his family or friends.

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The police investigation was a slower affair, and considerably less efficacious.

The bodies of Joshua Nichols and Paula Borthwick were examined and drugs detected.

Warrants were issued, but searches found no drugs or computing equipment at their homes or business premises. As the flower shop was registered in the name of Martha Simpson, no immediate connection with Paula Borthwick was made.

On Wednesday afternoon, the body of Ellie Simpson was discovered in the River Clyde, downstream of Museum of Transport, near its junction with the River Kelvin. Like the other two bodies, the corpse was subjected to a full forensic investigation. This revealed that Ellie was under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time of her death by drowning.

Two days later, when the river had subsided, the corpse of Jamie Nichols was found. It was still strapped inside the Golf, two miles downstream of the Auchenleckie bridge. His remains also tested positive for drugs and alcohol.

In the wake of the arson attack at the flower shop, Martha Simpson was interviewed by DCI Iain Montgomery of the Serious Crime Squad. Martha who was clean, more or less, was

Flash Flood

slightly drunk and very jittery and tearful. Inconveniently for the police her solicitor Mrs Olivia Rattray was present.

Shortly after the police left her home in Jordanhill, Martha Simpson's body was subjected to a massive overdose of cocaine. It appeared that she had first killed the Labrador, then herself. There was no evidence to the contrary and eventually it was concluded that she had committed suicide although she left no note. Police Scotland had expected Mrs Rattray to raise the issue of police harassment in connection with the death, but she did not. Eventually this 'suicide' was viewed as a 'good result'.

Within a few hours of Martha's death, her ex-husband was suspended by Police Scotland, on full pay, pending the outcome of an internal investigation. Unfortunately for Thomas, neither he nor his new wife could not satisfactorily explain the large amounts of money in Elaine Simpson's various bank accounts. Disappointingly, there was insufficient hard evidence to press for a prosecution or disciplinary action. Nonetheless, Thomas decided to resign and take his pension. He plans to set up as a private investigator. Thomas and Elaine Nichols have been added to the Toner/Nichols watch list.

Hamish Borthwick was also interviewed by DCI Iain Montgomery. Borthwick at once agreed to allow a full investigation of his personal and work computers and telephone accounts. Following a visit from Police Scotland, RBS immediately re-configured Borthwick's access to their main frame, as a precaution.

RBS granted Hamish leave of absence to care for his twin sons. The twins have been withdrawn from the Kindergarten, at the Head Teacher's request.

In his absence, RBS decided to re-organise Hamish Borthwick's section and he accepted their generous redundancy package.

In the Police Scotland and RBS investigations nothing untoward was found, nothing connecting Hamish to the Toner/Nichols drugs gang.

Gemma was interviewed vigorously and at length on several occasions by DCI Iain Montgomery. Her laptop, iPad and telephone calls and internet activities were vetted and found to be clean.

Rob Rattray, who was regarded by the media as the hero of the Auchenleckie bridge drowning tragedy drama, was treated with kid gloves. He made things simpler for all concerned

Flash Flood

when he re-signed from Police Scotland. Rob advised his former colleagues that he is planning to return to Manchester University to re-start his PhD studies.

Anthony Toner is in remission, living at home. Jed and Jem have been recalled to Glasgow, to help reset the family business.

Gemma failed her Sergeant's exams.

She is helping Hamish with the twins, staying over most nights.

Hamish is planning to change direction, and has applied to Strathclyde University for Teacher Training.