

Lost on Main Street

Frank Chambers

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Prologue

Ship Inn Sauchiehall Street Glasgow, 1978

‘Where the hell?’ Kevin, assistant manager of three weeks is pacing the street outside the bar talking to himself. Inside, the bar is three quarters full, good for a Wednesday, but for how much longer? ‘Why this bloody night?’ he asked the empty street. It is his first night left in charge and The Alert, the bar's top crowd pullers, are booked to play. Extra staff have been drafted in from the weekend shifts, including the two sisters, Kevin cannot tell apart and can't stand. The sisters who seem to know everything about the local music scene that he does not, and who are not slow in letting him know it.

‘Come on,’ he pleads, willing every van that approaches to pull into the space he has reserved with two chairs and a plank of wood. Kevin disliked most of the bands that played in the pub but he positively hated The Alert with their smart arsed poster of General Kitchener saying ‘Be Alert,’ followed by ‘Your country needs lerts.’ Long haired layabouts were bad enough but university student long haired layabouts were just about as much as Kevin could bear. ‘You better do something, it's five to eight.’ One of the sisters was at his side.

‘I know the bloody time.’

‘I’m just saying.’ Kevin waits, he knows there will be more. ‘They will be drinking up and heading for the Burns Howff if there is not somebody on those boards in ten minutes.’

‘Do you think I don’t know that. Your blind pal is the only person not staring at the empty stage.’

‘I’m just saying, that’s all.’ The sister turned, made her way back inside and down the stairs to the basement bar, pursued by Kevin.

‘What do you suggest I do? If the band does not turn up what can I do about it?’

‘I was just saying.’

‘I know you were just saying, but what exactly can I do?’

Sister number two meets them at the foot of the stairs, an empty tray in her hand. ‘Nobody is ordering any more. They will be off once they finish their drinks.’

‘Aye, your sister has just told me that but what can I do about it?’

Sister number two has a possible solution. She hesitates for a moment before deciding to throw Kevin a life line. ‘Well there are two guys that used to play in here before their band broke up. They have been in here since six o’clock.’

‘And?’

‘They have a guitar with them.’

‘So?’

‘So, we could ask them to play until the band turn up.’

Kevin did not like being bailed out of his difficulty by his nemesis but he had no ideas of his own. ‘Are they any good?’

‘I don’t know what they would be like now, but if this crowd leaves.....’ Kevin knew the unsaid words were ‘the boss will do his nut.’

‘OK. Ask them if they can do a half hour for us.’

Sister number two made her way through the cluster of tables stopping at a skinny kid, long hair, leather bomber jacket (made for a kid even skinnier than himself), flared jeans and cowboy boots. Exactly like fifty percent of the crowd.

After a short conversation, sister number two returned with the skinny kid in her wake. ‘Mr McGuire. He can do a spot for you if you want.’

‘Can I do my own stuff?’ the kid asked. Kevin's heart sank.

‘Mm. Bands in here do covers son, maybe the odd one or two of their own. You know what the punters are like if you played in here.’

‘I know, but I only have an acoustic guitar and the songs we did in the band are too complicated. Anyway I don’t really know that many other songs to sing, apart from my own. I only did backing vocals with the band.’

‘What about your pal?’

‘Oh he can't stay. He has to catch the overnight bus to London.’

Kevin exhaled loudly and closed his eyes. ‘Aye OK, do your own stuff, but just till the band turns up. Say a fiver and a drink for you and your pal?’

‘Fair enough.’

The skinny kid made his way to the stage while Kevin headed for the back office, thinking it's bad enough listening to the usual shite, but some kid singing his own songs, ‘I don’t think so.’ For Kevin it was Elvis and no one else but Elvis.

Chapter 1

It was January, it was cold, it was pouring with rain and the number 5 bus was late.

Donny had a decision to make. He could stay where he was, dry under the bus shelter on Kingspark Road, taking his chances on the number 5 eventually turning up, or he could walk the half mile, in the rain, to the Battlefield Rest where he would have the chance of catching the number 6 or the 4, as well as the 5.

Donny chose the latter. Wrong call. He was halfway between two stops when the number 5 sped past. It was not a good start to the evening. Before he reached the Battlefield Rest, a former station on the old tram routes now converted into an Italian restaurant, a number 6 passed, but with his heavy guitar case to carry, he could not run fast enough to catch it.

He reached the stop dripping wet, where he huddled with the other travellers under the inadequate modern shelter, while diners could be spied happily eating and drinking in the warmth and comfort of the capacious former tram shelter beside them. When a bus eventually did turn up, it was another number 5.

Forty minutes late, Donny descended the stairs to the basement of Blackfriars, already knowing he would be

last on the list and last on the list meant playing to an audience comprising the compère, a few die-hards and those too polite to leave, before the final act had their turn.

Tuesday night was Songwriters Club open mike night and Donny was a regular. He was also a regular at similar nights scattered across the city, but the Songwriters was his favourite, despite the fact that a band played in the upstairs bar and robbed the Songwriters Club of most of its potential audience. Nice 'n Sleazy and the Glad Café attracted a bigger crowd at their open mike nights, but it was not guaranteed that you would get on, and if you did, it was usually only the one song. Downstairs at Blackfriars, you got to do at least two.

Pushing open the heavy swing doors at the foot of the stairs was difficult enough while carrying a guitar case, to do it quietly was impossible, and faces turned disapprovingly towards Donny, as he clumsily made his entrance. It looked like a good crowd though, but irrelevant to him as most looked like participants rather than watchers. They would be out the door as soon as they had done their spot, either upstairs to watch the band, or off to catch another open mike. The Songwriters Club's original ethos of mutual support and encouragement had slipped in recent years, Donny lamented.

Already on stage was Paul, another regular and the worst culprit of all. Paul Mallden was a student at Strathclyde University, young, good looking and talented but utterly ruthless. He lived in one of the student residences round the corner on High Street and had no trouble arriving early, often first, to put his name on compère Billy's list. He would then go back to his flat returning just in time for his spot, usually when the audience was at its maximum. When he came down from

the stage, he would down his complimentary pint, before disappearing into the night.

‘Still raining then?’ It was Colette, a rare ally of Donny’s in the dog-eat-dog world of the undiscovered singer songwriter.

‘Aye, just a bit.’

‘I told Billy you were definitely coming tonight and that you have been on last twice recently, so he put you on after me, just before the interval.’

‘Thanks, you’re a pal. Can I get you a drink?’

‘No I’m fine. I am sitting up the back.’

‘OK. Can you take my guitar? I want to ask Billy if he can back me.’

Donny and Colette had become good friends, despite being unlikely associates. Donny was nearing forty and easy-going by nature. He earned enough from music to maintain a simple lifestyle and was generally content with his lot. Colette, on the other hand, was a high achiever, accustomed to pushing herself. She was a Doctor at the Royal Infirmary, a fine musician and singer, and still only twenty-five.

After a visit to the bar, Donny located Billy standing at the side of the stage and wandered over. ‘Thanks for putting my name down, I waited forty minutes for a bus.’

‘No problem mate.’

‘Can you back me on one of my songs, a kind of reggae thing?’

‘Sure.’

Billy, known as Billy Bongo was a legend in the the local music scene. His reputation, not surprisingly, was gained by taking his bongo drums to open mike sessions and offering his services. It was amazing how much his contribution could enhance the performance of a lone singer guitarist. He was soon much in demand for paid gigs and recording sessions, and although these days his

instrument of choice was the cajon, the moniker had stuck.

‘Cheers. See you later.’ Donny made his way as unobtrusively as possible through the audience and slipped into a seat beside Colette, turned towards the stage and pretended to be interested in the final verse and chorus of Paul’s second song.

Polite, if grudging, applause followed the last strum of the guitar and Billy is back on the stage, microphone in hand.

‘Mr Paul Malldon, the best thing to come out of Liverpool since the Beatles. Put your hands together, one more time.’ More polite applause and a raised arm from the Merseyside minstrel as he stepped down from the stage.

Billy does lay it on a bit thick but everyone laps it up, and they can almost believe they are really in somewhere like the Troubadour club at the height of the singer songwriter boom, with Joni Mitchell or James Taylor lurking in the shadows, checking out the new kids in town. Under Billy’s spell, Donny forgets that his wet jeans feel like solid boards strapped to his legs, and that the water cascading from his hair is forming a river flowing down his neck. This was why Donny came to the Songwriters. He was relaxed and mellow in his world.

‘Next up tonight, we have a great talent and a big favourite here at the Songwriters. Big hand, ladies and gentlemen. Miss Cathy Riddle.’

A dark cloud descended and enveloped Donny. He could now feel the water running down his back and the burning sensation in his legs from the sodden jeans. It was also painfully clear that he was not in the Troubadour club, and Glenn Frey would not be tapping him on the shoulder saying, I’m putting this band together and we’re looking for another songwriter. No, it was most definitely

a basement in Glasgow on a wet Tuesday night. Cathy Riddle had that effect on him.

Cathy had been playing the circuit almost as long as Donny, though she was about ten years his junior. She was nice enough, had a pleasant voice and could certainly play the guitar, but her songs, they were something else. To start with there was the subject matter, all female genital mutilation and victims of abuse. Gritty subject matter in a song was acceptable to Donny, but in Cathy's hands it was just so, so depressing. Then there was the music, clumsy chord progressions, leaden rhythms and monotonous melodies. It was surprising how many people needed a smoke when Cathy Riddle took to the stage. Donny did not smoke, so there was nothing else to do but grin and bear it.

When Billy had completed an introduction that Madonna would have been proud of, it was straight into the the first song, without the usual long-winded explanation of how it came to be written, which was some consolation. Eight bar introduction, simple but catchy, then into the first verse. A nice chord progression repeated twice, before ending with the hook. Verse two the same, but you could anticipate the hook coming now and you were waiting for it to arrive, longing for it even, and then into the bridge on the minor chord. It was the kind of song, some say, no one can write any more, being in that classic, timeless mode that the modern songwriter is often too self-conscious and aware of what has gone before, to make it sound natural and spontaneous. It was like something by McCartney or early Elton John, though with a distinctly contemporary feel, no rhyme was contrived and every word fitted effortlessly into the rhythm with nothing forced. Donny did not need the club rules of only original songs to tell him this was not some obscure cover sneaked in. No, material this good does not

stay hidden for long, but from Cathy Riddle, that's what Donny could not understand. A fluke perhaps, the product of those nights when the stars all line up for the songwriter and the first chords you strike sound just right, then melodies fit easily on top and words just pop into your head. It was the only logical explanation, a bit of luck, a diamond among the dross.

The second song was even better, a declaration of love, sincere and moving, sung to a lilting melody over a lovely chord progression in A minor. Once again perfect. Cathy left the stage to loud applause and warm congratulations from her fellow songwriters.

'Glad I'm not up next.' Colette spoke for the entire room, apart from the poor sod who was up next.

Billy was back at the mike. 'Cathy Riddle, ladies and gentlemen.' The compère encouraged the audience to keep the applause going by raising both arms, palms facing upward. 'That was tremendous, absolutely tremendous. One more time. Miss Cathy Riddle.' Billy's outstretched arm lead everyone's eye to Cathy, who had returned to her seat, looking a bit embarrassed at all the acclaim.

The night progressed surprisingly well after that. Billy announced that Cathy would do another song before the end of the night, which meant the crowd all stayed. Everyone was desperate to see if Cathy could pull it off for a third time, or would she revert to her usual material. It was difficult to gauge what her peers were hoping for but she was very popular all of a sudden. Even Paul Mallodon stayed on, and was the first to move in on the Club's new celebrity. If Cathy's star was on the rise then he would latch on to it, if he could. At the end of the night, others had followed Paul's lead and a small crowd congregated around Cathy's table. Colette and Donny headed for the stairs.

‘Time for one before we head?’ Donny asked.

‘Why not. I’m on nights for the rest of the week.’

The pair entered the upstairs bar where the Shivering Sheiks were announcing their final number, ‘Its All In The Game’, and that they would be joined on stage by a guest singer. The crowd had already thinned out a bit, so there was some space at the bar.

‘Pint of Best and a Lime and Soda.’

‘Well, what did you think?’ Colette asked.

Donny sucked in air then let it out slowly, his cheeks bulging. ‘Well I did not expect her to do it a third time, that’s for sure. I must admit that was three very good songs. No idea where they came from, but three very good songs.’

‘Maybe she is just getting better’.

Donny tilted his head and stared at Colette, his eyes open wide. ‘All of a sudden after ten years. I doubt it.’

The pair spotted an empty table and, once the drinks arrived, took a seat as the Sheiks struck their final chord.

‘Do you know that was written by a Vice President of America?’

‘What was?’

‘The song the band just played, the tune was written by Charles Dawes, who was Vice President in the nineteen-twenties. Someone else added the lyrics in the fifties. He is also a Nobel Prize winner.’

‘How do you know all this stuff?’

‘Well while you were filling your head with irregular bowel movements, I was filling mine with music trivia.’

‘Very funny, Donny. Now back to Ms Riddle. Perhaps she has been working with someone, plenty of songwriters work as a team.’

‘There is nothing of Cathy in those songs, nothing whatsoever. The question is, is she simply lying when she says they are her songs, or has the real writer given them

to Cathy to pass off as her own. If the latter is the case the question is why?’

‘Perhaps they thought that they didn't have the right image to attract the record companies, so they let someone else perform the songs. You are always saying that it's the writer that makes all the money.’

‘Good point but why choose Cathy Riddle? She's not exactly Beyonce is she?’

‘That's a bit cruel. Anyway why are you so annoyed about Cathy's songs? Sounds like green cheese to me.’

‘I'm not annoyed and I'm not jealous. I'm just curious, that's all.’

‘It would be interesting to see if she has any more right enough. We might find out next week.’

‘If she comes back, that is.’

After they downed their drinks, Colette gave Donny a lift back to his flat on the South Side before she headed home to the West End. Nothing more was said about the Songwriters Club's new star. Colette had a good gig coming up on Saturday night, and she filled Donny in with all the details during the fifteen minute drive.

Cathy however was the only thing on Donny's mind as he climbed the stairs and turned the key in the door of his top floor flat.

Chapter 2

Inside the flat Donny put the kettle on, then opened his guitar case and placed his guitar on its stand, before putting the case away in a cupboard. It was good to have it near at hand, so he could pick it up, whenever the notion struck.

Donny liked his flat and liked living in Mount Florida. It was not as trendy as the West End or the Merchant City. Not even trendy for the South Side where most of the biz was centred on Shawlands about a mile away. For Donny however it had music credentials, and that was important to him.

His bedroom window overlooked the house on Carmunnock Road where Alan McGee, founder of Creation records and the man who discovered Oasis, was brought up. Primal Scream's front man Bobby Gillespie was raised just round the corner. The pub across the road once featured a house band consisting three former members of The Sensational Alex Harvey Band plus Dan McCafferty of Nazareth, both Scottish supergroups of the seventies. Then there was Hampden Park, home of Scottish football, but also a major concert venue which was just along the road. Donny had paid to see Bruce Springsteen, U2, Oasis and The Red Hot Chilli Peppers, and for free he had watched The Rolling Stones, The Eagles and many others through the west tunnel, a secret viewing point, known only to local music fans. Donny had also found out that folk classic and contender for

Glasgow's national anthem, The Jeely Piece Song, had been penned nearby, when local writer Adam McNaughton viewed the new high rise flats in Castlemilk from his window.

Yes, the area had a musical heritage and Donny liked to suck in that air, though he had long since given up on emulating any of these local heroes. He was a good musician and had a strong voice but, as a performer, he was just not memorable, and he knew it. There was nothing to set him apart from the crowd, nothing new or original, and of course he was now well past the age where he could launch a career as a pop star. His love was music nevertheless and it did provide his livelihood. He played guitar and sang in a wedding/function band which was mostly just Saturday nights and he taught guitar during the week. There was also the occasional gig, playing covers in pubs. At least he could say he was a professional musician, which suited him fine. No early rises, no clock to watch and no one to answer to.

Donny did still have ambition though, a burning ambition in fact, one that consumed most of his waking hours and one that cost him the few relationships he'd had. That ambition was to pen a classic song, preferably also a hit, but foremost a classic, one that would stand the test of time. To further this ambition Donny had embarked on a course of study, equal to any masters degree. He had amassed a collection of books on the subject that filled the shelves in his living room, *The Art of Songwriting*, *Ideas for Songwriting*, *Songwriters on Songwriting*, *The Secrets of the Beatles*, *The Songwriters Handbook*, *Beating Writers Block*, *Unlocking the Mystery of Songs*, *The Songwriters guide to Collaboration*. The list went on and on. There were rhyming dictionaries and books on popular phrases and

quotations. Books like *How Music Works*, *Understanding the Language of Music* and many others on music theory. Then there were the biographies, everything from *Life* by Keith Richards to Irving Berlin and Woody Guthrie, shelf after shelf, a dozen on Dylan alone. Added to these were the audio and video material, documentaries recorded from TV, interviews recorded from the radio, anything that might provide a clue to the secret of songwriting. All these resources were studied intently in a quest to uncover that elusive magic formula needed to construct a great song.

On top of this there were the numerous songwriting courses and workshops he had attended. Week long residential marathons where very earnest but mostly talentless posh kids would scribble away, either alone or in revolving collaborations, by day, then perform their creations in the evening to a collection of nodding heads too well brought up to offer any meaningful or constructive criticism.

When not actually in the process of writing songs, Donny passed his days recording demos when he could have taken on more students, and evenings were devoted to trying out new material at open mike sessions when he could have been chasing down more paid gigs. Songwriting was his passion, the one subject he knew more about than almost anybody else, which was why he could not get Cathy Riddle out of his head.

He made himself a cup of tea and checked his emails to see if any of the demos he had sent off recently had generated any interest. They had not.

When Donny headed to bed he couldn't sleep, for he knew something, that in all likelihood, no one else in the city's music community could know. Cathy Riddle played no part in the writing of those songs. She simply did not

possess the skills, or know how, to produce work of such quality. Donny understood the evolutionary process a songwriter goes through en route to penning that perfect song. He also knew Cathy. Her songs had not improved, musically or lyrically in all the time she had been coming to the Songwriters club. There was absolutely no chance she had worked out the elusive formula in the past four months, for that was the last time he had seen her perform and that was most definitely the old Cathy. What was really keeping him awake though was the knowledge that somewhere in the city, there might be an undiscovered talent, someone flying under the radar, someone better than himself he freely admitted, but who was it, and why oh why were they hiding behind Cathy Riddle.

Donny woke late on Wednesday morning. There was only one text message on his phone. It was from Colette and simply said ‘give me a call when you wake up’. He went through to the kitchen and put the kettle on to boil then scrolled down his contacts for Colette’s number.

‘Hi, it’s Donny. You OK?’ Colette sounded breathless.

‘Yeah I’m fine. I’m in the park. Been for a run.’

‘You got time to talk?’

‘Yeah I was about to stop anyway.’ Colette had completed five laps of a circuit within Kelvingrove Park, about six kilometres in total, something she did regularly, mornings if she was working the day shift, late afternoon when she was on nights.

‘You said to phone.’

‘Thought I would do a bit of research for you. It turned out to be dead easy, its all on her Facebook page.’

Donny didn't really do Facebook. He knew the need for self promotion in his line of work but also realised that with his infrequent posts, detailing his modest successes, he was in fact advertising to the world his lack of

progress. ‘What did you find out?’

‘You can check for yourself but basically everything seems to have changed for Cathy, since two months ago. She has put up a video of herself at the Butterfly and Pig doing one of the songs she did last night. It has been viewed nine hundred and sixty four times and there are loads of comments. There is also a mention of a session on Celtic Music Radio, it was two weeks ago, but you can still listen to it on the internet. I haven’t tried that yet. Seems she has been to some other open mikes , again loads of favourable comments. Things like, ‘loved your songs’ and ‘hope you will be back next week,’ but everything started two months ago. Before that, nothing.’

‘OK thanks, I’ll check it out. Bye.’

The kettle had come to the boil but Donny ignored it, he had a better idea. He would quickly get washed and dressed, then take his laptop to Arturo's, a coffee shop and deli, adjacent to Hampden Park. There he could take advantage of its WIFI and the invigorating powers of its coffee.

There was indeed plenty of information to be found on Cathy's Facebook page. Donny could work out she had done seven or eight open mike sessions, had a demo played on BBC Radio Scotland and played that live session come interview on Celtic Music Radio. Each had generated favourable comments. There was also mention of a gig in the upstairs room of The Vale, a pub next to Queen Street station. Donny remembered this occasional music venue well. He had played at one of these nights, five pounds at the door with each of the three or four acts getting a cut. Everyone entering was asked who they had come to see, and that artist received two pounds out of the five. Colette and her friend Tom had come along to lend some support and Donny had paid them in. It was a good night, two bands and two singer songwriters and the place

was packed. After Donny had done his spot, sandwiched between the two bands, the promoter tapped him on the shoulder then dropped eight pound coins into his hands, an overall loss of two pounds. He wondered if Cathy would fare any better.

Another coffee was ordered, headphones connected to the laptop, then Cathy Riddle Celtic music radio was typed into Google.

Cathy had played the same three songs she did the night before plus one other, equally as good. In between songs she was asked the usual questions about what motivated her to write and the meaning of the lyrics. Cathy was vague in her reply but songwriters generally are, especially the good ones, they either don't want to reveal their secrets or they fear that if they analyse things too much, it might break the spell and their powers will vanish. When compared to the hundreds of interviews Donny had listened to, he had to admit Cathy's answers sounded much the same. There was also the dreaded question on how the career was going. This question always made Donny cringe any time some local hopeful got time on the radio. Upcoming gigs in minor venues were made to sound like a world tour and the meagre air play granted to their self produced CD was equated to cracking the daytime playlist on Radio 1.

Cathy in fact came across rather well, stating straight away that she did not have any gigs planned at the moment, and cleverly said that Celtic Music Radio was the first station to pick up on the demos she had sent out. This last comment perked up the presenter no end, and she took the opportunity to confirm the station's policy of promoting local talent, followed by a dig at the big boys for missing an opportunity. That section of the program was then wound up with gushing praise and an appeal to any promoters listening, to take note. 'Cathy Riddle, can't

wait to see her live in concert and remember you heard her first here on Celtic Music Radio 95FM.’ It was then straight into some fiddle tune, as Donny clicked the cross on the top corner of the screen.

Frustratingly, the interview gave no clues to the identity of the writer nor did further scrutiny of her Facebook page. The fact that Ms Riddle was pulling off the deception with ease only heightened Donny's curiosity.

There were no other avenues for Donny to explore, so he wasted half an hour surfing the football forums on the internet, finding mostly transfer speculation and abuse, or banter to put a positive spin on it, between rival fans. It was then back to his flat to tidy up, for this was a working day with four students due for lessons.

When Donny first placed an advert offering guitar lessons in the local newspaper he expected to be contacted by parents eager to give their offspring another of those opportunities that they themselves did not get. It turned out that those who contacted him were mostly adults, ages with himself and some considerably older. People in fact who did not get the opportunity when they were younger, but now had the time and the money to remedy the situation. They included two school teachers, a nurse, an accountant, a civil engineer, a couple of stay-at-home mums, a north sea oil worker and a number of early retirees. There was also a handful of older secondary school pupils and university students. Some liked to come as a group with a bottle of wine, where the lesson played second fiddle to the socialising. Most would linger long after their time was up to chat and all had become friends.

Every couple of months, Donny would host a music night for his students and his musician friends in the back room of a bar on King Street. Donny was a good host and

organized proceedings, so that everyone felt comfortable. The chords to some well known standards would be distributed in advance, so those less confident could practice. The evening would kick off with Donny or one of the experienced musicians doing a couple of songs and the rest joining in, when they were ready. Everyone loved these nights. For the musicians, it was like a gig with a particularly appreciative audience and for the beginners, a taste of what it is like to be a performer. Everybody got to know each other and Donny became the epicentre of an expanding social network of like minded-people.

First up today was Kenny, the North Sea oil worker, who was completely different to any of Donny's other pupils. He worked two weeks on the rigs, followed by two weeks off. He would come twice each week when at home, and practice what he learned during any free time that he got back on the rigs. The truth was that Kenny was now just as good as Donny on the guitar but he liked coming for lessons. None of his friends were into music and the time he spent at Donny's was the only chance he got to play with another musician or to talk about music.

Kenny made good money on the rigs and had bought himself a vintage Gibson 330 electric guitar to supplement the Yamaha acoustic he had started on. The Gibson was an object of beauty and Kenny had confided in Donny that it cost him three thousand pounds from a guitar shop in the Trongate. Despite twenty years experience, the teacher had no idea that guitars existed at such a price, apart from very rare models, or one previously owned by someone famous. Donny was not at all sure if his pupil was telling the truth, so much so that he made a special trip to the city centre music store to check out Kenny's claim. To Donny's amazement it was true. There were numerous guitars costing that price and higher on display in locked cabinets, and an assistant

confirmed that they had no trouble selling them, many to people in the oil industry.

Kenny always came in the afternoon, evenings were for his mates. Five-a-sides then the pub, Ibrox to see Rangers then the pub, or just the pub. Donny doubted any of Kenny's mates knew he had learned the guitar. That was a different compartment of his life, like his work or his wife and daughter. It was hard keeping up with Kenny who was really past the stage where someone still took lessons, but Kenny did not have the time or the inclination to organise his own continuing development. Donny would scour the internet for tabs of guitar parts or learn them himself straight from the record, before teaching Kenny

The door bell rang at ten minutes to two. Donny knew it would be Kenny, he was always early.

'Aw right?'

'Hi Kenny, come in. How are you doing?'

'Don't ask. Went straight tae the Horse Shoe Bar fae the station yesterday. Ah had already tanned six cans on the train doon fae Aberdeen so ah had a bit o' a heid oan me when ah woke up this mornin'.'

'You OK for your lesson?'

'Aye, nae danger. Nipped intae the Clockwork fur a reviver afore ah came up.'

'Is that your Yamaha you've brought?'

'Aye, ma heid's no' up tae the electric the day.'

This scuppered Donny's plans somewhat. He had learned all the lead parts in 'The Sultans of Swing' for Kenny but you can't really bend the strings enough on an acoustic.

'We could do a bit of Django Reinhardt.'

'Whit?'

'Its gypsy guitar style.'

'Sure. Ah'll gee it a go.'

Django Reinhardt was Donny's standby for his better pupils if he had failed to prepare in advance or if he still had some time left at the end of a lesson. The gypsy guitarist only had three working fingers on his left hand after suffering burns in an accident so had to develop his own unique style. It was all about feel and rhythm and was great fun to play. Donny put Reinhardt's version of Sweet Georgia Brown on the CD player for Kenny to listen to, then looked out his well thumbed tab sheets before passing a very pleasant hour. It was Kenny that noticed the time.

'That's jist about three.'

'Oh right. Do you want to work on this or go back to the Dire Straits next time?'

'Up tae you.' That was the thing with Kenny he always left it up to Donny. He did not want to think too much. That was what he paid a teacher for.

'Better go back to the Sultans then.' Best keep Django in reserve was what Donny was thinking.

'Nae bother. See ye in Friday then?'

'Sure Kenny.'

Once Kenny had paid up, Donny saw his pupil to the door. There was time to check his emails and make a cup of tea before the next lesson, two sixth year pupils from Kingspark Secondary, who came together straight from school.

The final pupil of the day was Diane, a social worker who was due at seven thirty. However she phoned to cancel at half five, rearranging to come the next day. Cancellations were an occupational hazard and a source of frustration, but Diane had freed up the evening for Donny, and he was secretly pleased.

Chapter 3

Seven months previously.

Stuart stared at the last of the five A4 size pages prepared for his perusal. The only sound in the room was the gentle hum of the air conditioning unit as it efficiently countered the August heatwave outside. On the opposite side of a clutter free desk, his accountant sat with his hands clasped and his mind on his next appointment, as his client tried to digest the information in front of him. The summary showed that in the last accounting period, royalties for Stuart's early work had slowed to a trickle. Even 'Over The Castle Wall', he was shocked to read, brought in less than five thousand dollars, the lowest since it was a number one record in nineteen seventy-nine. Everything, including co-writes, production and artist royalties amounted to one hundred and fifty two thousand dollars and thirty two cents. Fees for production and session work added another ninety three thousand. More than enough for most people Stuart realised and enough for himself at one time, but not now. It did not even cover his office expenses. From his inside pocket, he removed the most recent statements for his business and personal bank accounts, and passed them to the man opposite who appraised the documents keenly, making the occasional note. It was not a comfortable experience for the client.

'Income quarter of a million, expenditure one and a

quarter million. Result misery, as Mr Micawber might say.' The accountant stared blankly at Stuart, he did not laugh at the joke.

Stuart had in his working life performed on, written or produced over one hundred hit records and, although some royalties were still coming in, they were now no longer sufficient to cover current commitments. The meeting ended with polite small talk and a limp handshake.

The news was a bit of a blow certainly but not entirely unexpected. Royalties had fallen every year for the past ten and in recent years other earnings from music had begun to dry up. Stuart had not said anything to his wife, he did not know how. Despite his foreboding that this year the news would be particularly bad, he still said nothing. He and Heidi had been together for twenty years and money had never been a problem. Back then royalties were never less than a million and Stuart was still earning double that annually, as a producer and musician. Economise was not a word in his or Heidi's vocabulary. Now money worries were keeping him awake at night. It was not knowing how Heidi might react that terrified him. Then there were the kids to consider. They had only known good times, how could he take that away from them.

Stuart left the building and crossed Hollywood Boulevard, heading for the parking lot, noticing the Capital Records tower in the distance. It reminded him that what he needed was another hit, if that was the appropriate term these days. Easier said than done. He remembered the early days working in London when, if he saw someone dressed in an outlandish style he had never seen before, he would always talk to them and try to find out what music they were listening to. On occasion, he had even followed them to discover if there

was some hip new club he hadn't heard about. It could have been the start of the next shift in musical tastes. That's how it was done back then, find out what the kids wanted, then give it to them quick, before somebody else did. But that was then, he had no intention of chasing the latest fad these days, he would not know where to begin. There were a few irons still in the fire, he reassured himself. Some long shots perhaps but desperate times required desperate measures.

Stuart was tired, and once back in the car, he closed his eyes for a few moments. He hardly slept the night before, anticipating an awkward encounter with the accountant. It really is true, he was beginning to realize, that people are embarrassed to meet you, when you are down in this town. Tonight, sleep would be even harder to come by. He could take a pill of course, that was once his answer to most things but not any more. Heidi had embraced all things Californian, which meant Stuart had too. This meant healthy eating, plenty of exercise in the outdoors, moderate amounts of alcohol, wine excepted, and a predisposition for natural remedies. A book Stuart decided would be his natural remedy for insomnia, it was what always worked for him as a teenager back in Glasgow where he would read in bed till he eventually fell asleep. It worked then, why not now. There was a book store on Sunset just a mile from the house, he would call in on the way home.

Pleased that he had made a decision Stuart opened his eyes, started the engine and then exited the parking lot.

Ten minutes later Stuart's beautifully restored sixty-nine Mercedes convertible turned into the car park of Tower Records, the book shop was just across the road. Inside the shop he spotted a table with a sign saying New Releases. Stuart went over and started picking up books at random to check out the reviews on the back cover. If it

did not have a review he put it back. One particular title caught his eye. 'The Morelli Murders'. It was the name Morelli that attracted him. Morelli's Ice Cream was one of his earliest memories. The shop sat at the bottom of the tenement that he lived in as a child. Stuart picked up the book, there were no reviews but he started to read it anyway. At the end of the second page he decided to buy.

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It was past nine on Thursday morning before Colette returned home from her night shift at the Royal Infirmary. It was easy to find a parking place, which was the one advantage to working nights. Colette manoeuvred her Land Rover into a double space beneath her front windows. The station wagon conversion was not the most suitable car for the crowded streets of Glasgow's West End, where a resident's permit did not guarantee that any spaces would be big enough to accommodate the seven seater. The vehicle was even less suited to the car parks at the Royal Infirmary, but it was not purchased with the city in mind. Eleven thousand pounds for a vehicle entering its thirteenth year with more than one hundred thousand miles on the clock would seem like madness to most urbanites, but Colette was not a typical city dweller. Much as she loved living in the city, she also liked the outdoor life. Wild camping in the Cairngorms, mountain biking in the woods outside Peebles or walking the hills of Argyleshire where her family owned a cottage, five hundred metres up a steep dirt track, high above Loch Craignish. It was during these weekend pursuits that the Land Rover proved its worth. Replacement front seats, an upgraded heater and a new stereo system, complete with iPod connection, ensured none of the motoring comforts were sacrificed.

Colette was exhausted as she climbed the stairs to her first floor apartment which overlooked Kelvingrove Park with views to Glasgow University in the west and Park Terrace, sitting high above the rising slopes of the park to the north. It was the junior doctor believed an excellent place to live, a quiet and peaceful retreat yet within easy reach of all the restaurants, bar and shops that the West End had to offer.

Once inside, Colette headed straight for the bedroom. It had been a hectic night in the Coronary Care Unit with two emergency admissions, one of which had to be taken down for surgery at 4.30am and had not returned to the ward, before the end of the shift. Before getting into bed Colette checked her texts and emails. There was nothing that couldn't wait.

The previous afternoon, Colette had listened to Cathy's radio session. Though she did not possess Donny's obsession, writing songs and performing them remained her principle activity outside of work and she had come to appreciate just how difficult it was to compose a great song. Having studied Cathy's broadcast, Colette had no hesitation in concluding that she had heard some very good songs, perhaps even great songs. She also agreed with Donny that it was extremely unlikely that Cathy was the writer, at least not on her own. Colette had sent a text to her friend telling him she was now every bit as curious as he was.

For Colette, there was a number of advantageous possibilities in unmasking the mystery writer. First she could suggest a co-write, see if some of that magic might rub off on her own songs. Second was the chance to ask him or her to write something exclusively for herself. Thirdly, the writer might be persuaded to grant permission for Colette to record the songs already out

there. Donny had explained the copyright laws and she knew the writer retained the right to nominate, who released the first commercially available rendition of a song. Once released, anyone could cover it of course, as long as they paid the royalties to the writer, but the first person to record a song was always accorded the status of the original artist.

Yes, finding the mystery writer, Colette realised, could be very much to her advantage. It would be exactly the same for Donny of course but Colette knew her friend would never have thought of that, which perfectly illustrated the quality that endeared him to her so much, but also the one that frustrated her the most.

Colette emerged from her bedroom at few minutes past past four with daylight already fading. She had been noticing that the long winter nights were receding as she did her regular circuit of the park in the mornings and was able to at least catch a glimmer of daylight, when she finished the day shift at the start of the week. This afternoon however looked bleak, a heavy sky threatened snow and when she viewed the park from her sitting room window, it was devoid of people. Even the ever resilient dog walkers were conspicuous by their absence. It would not put Colette off however, her daily run was a ritual that was missed only under exceptional circumstances.

It was almost twenty hours since she had eaten anything substantial, so Colette went into the kitchen to pour some fruit juice and microwave a bowl of porridge, a proper meal would be prepared after her run. While she ate she checked her iPhone.

There were three messages to deal with, one from her mother inviting her for dinner on Sunday, one from Donny saying to get in touch when she got the chance and one from the drummer of rhythm and blues band, the

Dexies, confirming the pick up time for Saturday's gig, though on this occasion they would be billed as Heart of Glass, a Blondie tribute act, fronted by Colette.

The idea of doing the tribute thing occurred to her after she had heard at work that a young psychiatrist from Edinburgh was doing a Debbie Harry act, and had even been featured on TV. As a tribute act was already a case of plagiarism, Colette had no qualms about copying her idea. As it turned out, there were nearly as many Blondie tributes as Elvis impersonators, but a call to an agent confirmed there was still plenty of work to go round, as long as you looked the part, he added. Colette did look the part. A blonde wig, some black eye make-up and a short black and white striped dress and she was transformed. The songs were easy for her to sing, and Debbie Harry's mannerisms, simple to mimic. All she needed was a band.

An ad was placed on Gumtree for musicians and Alec, drummer and organiser of the Dexies, responded saying he had a full band ready to go. They would back her on tribute nights while continuing to do their own thing the rest of the time. It seemed the ideal solution, so Colette agreed to meet up. The guys in Dexies she observed could easily pass for the musicians in Blondie, but that would be as the members of Blondie might look today not as they looked in their seventies heyday. Alec however pointed out that everyone would be looking at her. The agent had suggested as much, so Colette agreed to join the guys, reducing the average age of the band by eight years in the process.

A text would suffice for Alec and the same for her mother, but she decided to call Donny.

'Hi Donny. It's me. Anything to report?' Donny had not been letting the grass grow under his feet.

'I have transcribed the lyrics to the four songs so I can

examine them for clues. I put the titles Cathy had used into Google, to see if anything came up. It didn't. Nor has alternative titles or quotes from the lyrics, so I think we can eliminate the possibility of the songs being stolen from some obscure source.'

'But that's just the lyrics, there is also the melody. Cathy could have taken that from another song.'

'True, but how can I search for a tune if I don't have a title.'

'I have an app on my iphone.'

'How do you mean?'

'You just play a section of a song and it comes up with its name.'

'No. That only works for commercial recordings.'

'Still worth a try.'

'You would be wasting your time. Anyway, Cathy has been busy in the past twenty-four hours. According to her Facebook, she has declined a gig at the Vale. There has been some further radio play for her demo, seems like just local stuff from the comments. However, the most interesting thing is Cathy has announced she will be appearing on the Danny Kyle stage at Celtic Connections.'

Celtic Connections is Glasgow's midwinter festival of Scottish traditional music and anything, no matter how loosely, connected to it. Hence the name. The Danny Kyle stage is a program of free concerts, billed as a showcase for emerging talent. It is always well attended and can be a great launching pad for an artist, because of the publicity it can generate. Spots are much coveted but difficult to get and it has been known for musicians from as far away as North America to travel at their own expense, to perform for twenty minutes, unpaid, so they can put 'appeared at Celtic Connection' on the CV, such is the international reputation of the festival.

‘When is she on?’

‘Tonight. I am just about to leave. Do you want to meet me?’

‘I can't. I need to get some practice in for that gig on Saturday. I'll call you later to hear how it went.’

It was Cathy rather than Saturday's gig that was on Colette's mind as she ran her usual circuit of the park as darkness descended. The tribute nights were great fun and the best paid work she got as a musician, but it was only a couple of gigs a month and would never lead to anything better. Hooking up with a really good songwriter, on the other hand, could be the passport to that elusive recording contract. The problem was someone seemed to have got in there first and had at least a two month start. She would never say it out loud but Colette shared Donny's opinion that Cathy Riddle was an unlikely choice by someone as the vehicle in which to deliver their creations to the world. She was not the greatest singer around, not the prettiest, not the youngest and she lacked stage presence. Cathy's recent successes were down to the quality of the songs alone, Colette reasoned, not anything else. However, a buzz was certainly building, a momentum that could soon be unstoppable. Time was short if this fledgeling phenomenon was to be halted. The question for Colette was how?