

# The Busker of Buenos Aires

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# Prologue

Buenos Aires 1979

The prisoner fixed her gaze on a damp patch on the ceiling and recited the seventeen times table to herself. When she lost count, the woman quickly started again from the beginning. Before turning to arithmetic, Maria had been repeating the alphabet backwards but this had become too easy and could no longer distract her from the pain. The contractions were coming faster and faster but the detainee did not want to alert the guards. Not yet.

Captain Denario had assured her that the women all go to the ESMA, the Navy Mechanics School, to give birth. He even boasted to her that the facilities there were as good as the best maternity hospital in Buenos Aires. If the officer had been trying to reassure Maria, he was wasting his breath. She knew what went on within the ESMA. That was where her friend Tomas had been taken, when he ‘disappeared,’ on Christmas Eve 1976. The nineteen year old student was never seen nor heard of again. ‘He

has probably fled abroad,' the family were told at the local police station. 'Forget he ever existed.' Tomas' mother went as far as to petition the Ministry of the Interior in her desperation to find out what had happened to her son, only to be reprimanded for raising a subversive.

The plan, that Maria had formulated, was to stay silent for as long as she could, and remain where she was until very near to giving birth, thinking that if there was not enough time to reach the ESMA she might be taken to a civilian hospital instead. It was not a great plan, but it was all that she had.

Terrified of what might happen to her child, Maria continued to ascend the multiples of seventeen. The other women in the detention centre had warned her that their captors wanted a healthy baby, who could be adopted by some childless couple in the military. That was the reason she was not tortured as severely as the others. At first Maria did not believe them but then she saw women dragged back to their cells, after a visit to the upper floor, barely alive. Blood seeped from open wounds on their wrists and ankles, caused by the shackles that secured them to the metal table. All bore the burn marks where the cattle prod had been applied, and the next day their bodies would be covered in bruises, where the rubber hose had struck. Maria had been assured that the most painful wounds were where the marks could not be seen. 'We're not going to let you die,' the prisoners would be taunted, 'we know that is what you want.' A doctor was always on hand to suspend the torture session when someone was on the brink of death. Drugs would be

administered to revive the prisoners and the process would start all over again.

What information her tormentors were after was never clear. When Maria was questioned, it was always about people she did not know and places she had never heard of. She tried to explain that she cared nothing for politics. They either did not believe her, or more likely, they did not care. ‘Why were you out of the country? Why have you returned?’ Maria had given the same answers a hundred times and a hundred times she was told she was a liar.

An involuntary scream, when the contraction pains became too great, brought a slovenly guard to investigate. The sight of Maria in an advanced state of labour sent the man into a panic for he had personally been charged with keeping an eye on the woman in cell number 3. Instead of exercising that responsibility, he had been playing cards all afternoon with the other guards in a room at the end of the corridor.

Now fully alert, the negligent sentinel ran to the floor above taking two steps at a time. He had never been allowed past the door, at the top of the stairs, which suited him fine for he had no desire to witness what went on in those soundproofed rooms. The locked door was struck hard twice with his fist, but no more as he did not want to convey the alarm that he felt inside. To the young man's horror, it was Captain Denario himself who answered,

The officer kept his voice as even as he could manage. ‘The prisoner in cell three has gone into labour, Sir.’

‘Excellent! You know where to go?’

‘Yes Sir.’ The guard did not reveal that the birth was

imminent.

‘I will call ahead. You will be expected. Señora Solari will go with you. Take the girl down the service elevator and make sure she is unseen.’

‘Yes Sir.’

Maria was dragged to her feet, a blanket draped round her shoulders, then she was forced to walk the length of the corridor.

‘Hospital?’ she sighed.

‘Yes, hospital.’ the guard lied.

Maria was pushed to the back of a large, unlit goods elevator, and warned not to make a sound. When Señora Solari arrived, dressed in her nurse's uniform, she quickly pulled the grill door shut and pressed the button for the basement. Both guard and nurse stood in front of the prisoner, blocking her from view, as the legitimate business of a busy police station flashed past them on their descent. It did not occur to Maria to cry for help, she was too scared. She had recognised the voice of the woman now standing in front of her. It belonged to one of her torturers.

Maria was placed in the back seat of an unmarked car, Señora Solari by her side. Once the car was out on the street a flashing light was placed on the roof and the siren was activated. The guard then weaved his way through busy rush hour traffic. It was only now that the nurse realised how close Maria was to giving birth. What took her so long to spot the obvious? Señora Solari was not a real nurse

‘Hospital, hospital.’ Maria screamed. Her plea was ignored.

Three kilometres short of the naval base, the car pulled over to the side of the road, where Maria gave birth to a son, and a few minutes later, his little sister. Guard and 'nurse' were passive observers as nature took its course. There was nothing in the car to clamp and cut the umbilical cord. Even if the equipment had been available, no one in that car had any clue what to do with it. The guard made to use the car radio to summon an ambulance, but was overruled by Señora Solari.

When the unmarked police car reached the ESMA an hour later than expected, there were three occupants inside, the same as when it left the police station. This time however the occupants consisted of a guard, a heavily sedated mother and a newly born baby boy.

# Chapter 1

City of Mobile, Alabama (present day)

The singer on stage was keeping a running total of audience numbers in her head. When three men and one woman simultaneously drained their glasses and left, Cathy knew that exactly thirty-six people remained. Fifty-one had been present at the start of her set.

It was three weeks into a two month tour of colleges, clubs and bars spread across the southern states of America, a combination of solo gigs and opening spots for bigger acts, one last throw of the dice to prove she could still cut it. Cathy had to concede, it was not going well. The game plan had been to try out new material in front of a live audience, to find out which songs worked and which ones did not. What Cathy discovered was that none of them were working. On a good night her new compositions were met with indifference. On a bad night it was more like irritation nudging towards hostility. A few popular cover versions could always be thrown in to sweeten the pill, but being billed as a singer-songwriter, meant that option could only be used sparingly.

Tonight's gig was in 'Mac's Place,' a venue described



in its promotional material as a 'speakeasy.' Cathy had already played venues on the tour similarly tagged and concluded that if a bar had never undergone any renovations in its entire lifetime but put on live music, it would be dubbed a 'speakeasy.'

Mac's Place was in better condition than most and comprised three principal areas. The main bar at the front which had a large screen showing sports, the music room through the back and an open air patio to the side of the building. The patio was the busiest of the three on a hot September evening. Cathy faced some stiff competition. While she struggled to hold the attention of her audience, the manager hovered at the back, a pained expression distorting his chubby face. It was the kind of look that always preceded the, 'I know we agreed two hundred dollars, but...,' conversation. The time had come for Cathy to play her 'get out of jail free' card.

One by one, the phones were put away and the conversations petered out, as people started to listen. The reaction never varied. From San Diego to San Antonio, disaster had been avoided simply by reverting to the songs that had taken Cathy to the brink of stardom, back in the U.K. Songs that she was expressly forbidden from performing in public any more.

Twenty minutes later, the singer took her bow to loud applause. An encore was demanded and Cathy said she would do a cover of a recent big hit written by a fellow Scot and launched into 'Main Street.' People who had stopped just short of booing half an hour earlier, were joining in the chorus and saying things like, 'that's better than the original.' The running total of audience numbers

had risen to seventy four.

As the singer packed away her guitar, she could hear the crowd chatting admiringly about her performance. Cathy could take little joy from their remarks. The ploy she had used had a limited shelf life. The six 'original' songs, that had saved the day, would soon be released by other artists and available only as the occasional cover version, just like 'Main Street.'

The headline act's equipment was already in place and a somewhat peeved roadie appeared from the shadows to announce that the show would commence in fifteen minutes, failing to acknowledge the contribution already made by the support act. The deliberate omission brought a wry smile of satisfaction to the singer's face. At the bar Cathy ordered a beer and looked around for the manager, who was nowhere to be seen. Getting paid was always a battle of wits.

'Are you Kate Rydelle?' What looked like a college student had approached the singer, his excitement evident both on his face and in his voice. It was the first time on the tour, that anyone had identified her former persona and Cathy was a little alarmed.

'That was a stage name. I just use my real name now.'

'I didn't recognise you at first. You look different with the black hair but I know those songs man. I love those songs!' His last sentence was almost shouted and the young man's voice had risen an octave. He meant Dan's songs of course, the seven songs at the end of the set. An explanation would be necessary.

'The Kate Rydelle songs were actually written by someone who died forty years ago. I was just the person

who discovered them.'

'Oh! I didn't know that. I thought you had written them. They sound like you wrote them, especially 'Main Street.' Much better than Tom Gill's version.'

'Thank you so much.' Cathy was forcing herself to sound upbeat for the fan's benefit.

'I love the way you sing them, we all do.' The young man gestured towards his friends, looking on from the other side of the room 'There was a small piece about you on the radio here, after you won some award.'

'That was only at a local festival in Scotland. Best Newcomer it was.'

'That's still a big deal. If tonight had been advertised as a Kate Rydelle gig this place would have been full, for sure.'

'You're too kind.'

'Really looking forward to the album coming out.' The young man paused before continuing. 'I couldn't find the date anywhere, your website has disappeared. All your social media sites have disappeared!' There was an awkward silence as the young man waited for a response.

'There won't be a Kate Rydelle album. As I said, I'm concentrating on my own songs now.'

'That sucks! Sorry, I mean that's too bad. Your new songs are great, but, well I really like the old one's'

'Daniel Quick's, you mean'

'I can only think of them as yours.'

'I'm just glad people will get to hear Dan's music. That's all I ever wanted.' Cathy could have choked on the words. Without her, no one would have heard those songs.

The young fan lingered hoping for more information. When none was forthcoming, he stretched out his hand and said. ‘Anyway, I just wanted to say I loved your set.’ He returned to his friends, more than a little confused.

Others approached the singer, offering their congratulations on an ‘awesome’ set. Cathy thanked them all graciously, then set off in search of the manager to extract the agreed fee.

The singer stayed on to watch the headline act, a country blues quartet. The crowd had now swelled to double the number present for her support spot and they were lapping up the stomping bass and ear-piercing bottleneck guitar. Cathy found it all a bit formulaic and old hat. She left before the end, returning to the motel where a half empty bottle of bourbon was waiting.

The encounter with the young fan had been a strain, trying to explain the unexplainable. Cathy asked herself, what the hell was she doing on this stupid tour, for the prospects of starting over were slim, if not impossible. The answer was, what else could she do. Cathy poured herself a generous glass of the golden liquid and sat on the bed contemplating, one more time, what might have been if she had never encountered Mr Geordie McSwiggen or signed the contracts drawn up by his smug lawyer, Angus Johnston.

Cathy looked round her depressing motel room. It was clean enough with shiny new fittings, but totally lacking in any welcoming touches. No flowers, no pictures nor ornament of any description. Life on the road was hard to bear. In fact, life in general was becoming too much for

Cathy. She stared at the large holdall, containing her clothes. Hidden at the bottom was the .22 pistol, she had been persuaded was a necessary precaution when travelling alone. How easy it would be to put an end to her misery.

The dark thought was quickly expunged from Cathy's mind but it was not the first time it had happened. She rose, went into the bathroom and emptied the contents of her glass.

After a night that brought little sleep, Cathy checked out of the motel five minutes before the eleven o'clock deadline. Her guitar case and bags were loaded onto the back seat of the hired Toyota and the Sat Nav set for Montgomery, where a solo gig awaited. The singer started the engine and, with no enthusiasm whatsoever, exited the motel parking lot and headed north.

Waiting for the lights to change at the first intersection, Cathy heard something familiar, something very familiar. All it took was the first strum of the acoustic guitar and she knew exactly what was to follow. The oh-so familiar sound came from the open window of a blue Ford Fusion that had drawn level in the neighbouring lane. It was not a new sensation hearing a song that should have been hers, played on the radio. It was however more of a bombshell this time.

Memories came flooding back, her triumphant début at the Celtic Connections Festival, the award she had won and the record companies all vying for her signature.

The lights changed and the Ford started to move, the music now drowned out by the roar of the engine. Cathy

switched on the radio inside her own car and frantically searched for the station as she drove, finding it just as the instrumental break came in. Jake's high-pitched guitar solo still sounded fantastic even on the car's basic sound system. At the end of the chorus Cathy waited for the key change, she always loved that part. When the chorus came back in, all her familiar vocal inflections were there but the voice on the radio belonged to someone else.

The vocalist had copied Cathy's version note for note. When Cathy had taken a breath, she took a breath. When Cathy went into falsetto, she did the same. The backing track was most definitely the one her band had sweated blood over to get just right. The backing vocals, that Cathy recorded, had also been replaced by an exact copy of her own arrangement.

The Toyota drifted into the lane to her left, a horn honked before Cathy regained control. Somehow she managed to get the car out of the middle lane and parked at the side of the road. Cathy slumped against the steering wheel and cried and cried and cried. It had been a bitter blow, when 'Main Street' had been released, but at least Tom Gill had done his own arrangement and Cathy had the satisfaction of knowing her's was better.

When she had no more tears left, Cathy cleaned her face with a wet wipe, picked up her phone and found the number for the agent who had booked the tour. He was altogether too understanding when she told him she would have to cancel the remaining dates.

Cathy was angry this time. Very angry. That was her work, her arrangement, her intellectual property. They had no right doing that. She stared at the holdall on the

back seat but not as she had done the night before. This time her thoughts were not suicidal. It was time to drive to Florida and confront the man who had ruined her life.

Cathy scrolled through the tracks stored on her phone, there was only one song appropriate for the situation, the Chicks, 'Goodbye Earl'

As the Texas trio explained why 'Earl had to die' the Toyota performed a U-turn and headed south. The driver, of course, substituted the name Geordie as she belted out the chorus. Just like in the song, Geordie would be 'a missing person that nobody missed at all.'

## Chapter 2

One thirty was early for Angus Johnston to return to the office after lunch, but he had a three o'clock appointment with a prospective client and he had not yet read the notes sent over by the man's previous solicitor. Mrs Berry, who took all incoming calls, had new instructions. Since taking up her position twenty-five years ago, the secretary had been telling callers that the firm could not take on any new clients at the moment. Now the firm was happy to 'see if we can help.'

Mr Thomas Craig would be the firm of Johnston and McQuarry's first client of the new era, a simple case of assault. Angus read through the slender file, adding notes of his own in red ink as he went. The man was clearly guilty and the evidence was all against him, but he was insisting on pleading not guilty, just the kind of client the firm was now looking for. Angus knew the type, they hated to lose and didn't know when to give up. If he were to plead guilty and put on a show of remorse, he would almost certainly get off with a modest fine or a suspended sentence.

At three o'clock precisely, Mrs Berry knocked on the door and Thomas Craig was ushered in.



‘Please take a seat, Mr Craig. I have read through the notes but I would like to hear it in your own words.’ This would give Angus a chance to size up his client, with regards to him taking the stand, but more importantly he will be clocking up chargeable minutes.

‘It was nothing really, just a daft dispute between neighbours. I don't even know how it is going to court.’

‘Hardly nothing, Mr Craig. Your neighbour suffered a hairline fracture to his jaw.’

‘Aye, so he says.’

‘There is an X-ray to prove it.’

‘How do they know it was me that caused that? I saw him when he came back from the hospital, he didn't even have a plaster on it.’

‘Just tell me what happened from the beginning.’

‘Caught the snooty bastard putting rubbish in ma wheelie bin, that's what happened.’

‘And?’

‘So I gave him a wee dig, that's all.’

‘You hit him?’

‘It was nothing.’

‘Not exactly nothing.’

‘One punch. I told him, don't do it again, and that was that.’

‘Well, he should not have been on your property. That's something we can use.’

‘The bin was in the street. It was the day they get emptied.’ Angus exhaled slowly.

‘Someone called the police?’

‘Nosey bitch across the road.’

‘There is also CCTV evidence. It says here it comes

from a camera at number fourteen, but that's your address. Do they mean sixteen?'

'*Naw*. It's mine. One of the lasses handed it over. The fly bastards made out it was me that got assaulted, and she thought she was helping.'

'Where were you at this time?'

'I had to go to my work. I didn't think the police would be involved.'

'And your wife?'

'Still in bed.'

'So the police interviewed your daughter without you or your wife being present?'

'Can they no dae that?'

'Not if she is a minor. What age is your daughter?'

'Twenty-three.' Angus allowed his pen to drop onto the desk.

'Any younger children in the house, at the time of the police interview?'

'My other daughter, Hannah.'

'How old is she?'

'Twenty-two. How?'

'It doesn't matter. I see that your neighbour's name is Alexander McLellan. Well that will give the Sheriff a laugh, he is bound to mention it.' Mr Craig shifted uneasily in his seat. 'It always helps if we can lighten the mood in court. It's the same name as the Procurator Fiscal, you see.'

'He is the Procurator Fiscal.'

'You live next door to the Procurator Fiscal? The top man in the prosecution service.'

'Aye.'

‘And you punched him?’

‘Allegedly.’

‘Quite.’ Angus was tempted to show the moron to the door there and then, but Mr Craig was that prized beast in the Criminal Justice System. A cash customer.’

‘I won't lie to you, Mr Craig, the advice of your previous solicitor was sound. A guilty plea with mitigation is the prudent course of action.’

‘No way. He provoked me. It's my bin. He had no right to put his stinking rubbish in it.’

‘Right. I think you will find that the bins are actually the property of the council. Was his rubbish stinking?’ The lawyer was clutching at straws, but maybe there was a possible angle after all. ‘It says here it was your recycle bin that was used. That could be construed as provocative in these environmentally conscious times.’

‘It was just a figure of speech. It was only cardboard he put in the bin, but he did it because he knew it would annoy me. It's because I sometimes park my van outside his house.’

‘Has he complained about your van?’

‘He doesn't need to. All the neighbours hate it. They think it brings the tone of the street down.’

‘Have they said that to you?’

‘No, but I can tell.’

‘Mr Craig, you are a bathroom fitter. Is that correct?’ Angus had spotted a possible angle.

‘Aye.’

‘Do you have premises or is your business address also your home address?’

‘I don't need a showroom or anything. I get my

customers through facebook.’

‘Yes, I had a look at the facebook page. And you use your address on publicity material, invoices and the like.’

‘Sure.’

‘And it is on the side of the van shown in the picture?’

‘A posh address is good for business, but what has that got to do with anything?’

‘Nothing Mr Craig, just trying to get a complete picture. I think I can help you. I have a few ideas, some technical matters, points of law, that sort of thing. It may mean extra days for research and of course, a trial can drag on with the possibility of postponements or appeals, which can add greatly to the cost, I'm afraid. Mrs Berry will explain the fees to you. Perhaps the fixed rate would suit you best.’

‘Do you think we can win?’

‘I am confident we can avoid a conviction.’

‘Is there anything else you need to know, Mr Johnston.’

‘Let me look into a few things and I will be in touch. I'll let Mrs Berry know you are coming down.’

When the new client left the room, Angus called his secretary, and told her to make sure Mr Craig opted for the fixed price package. Mrs Berry was also asked to get hold of whoever was handling the case at the Fiscal's office.

Three minutes later, Depute Procurator Fiscal Ian Wilson was on the line. ‘Ian, I won't take up too much of your time. Did my secretary say what it is about?’ . . . . . ‘Terrible business. I could scarcely believe my ears, when he told me it was *the* Sandy McLellan he had hit. I do hope there was no lasting damage.’ . . . . . ‘A hairline

fracture. Well I will tell you right now, I won't be taking the case, unless he changes his mind and pleads guilty. The man is an idiot.' On the other end of the line the depute Procurator Fiscal was not at all sure what to make of Angus' candour, for he was well aware of Mr Johnston's reputation. 'There is something I feel I must tell you. It has come to my attention that Mr Craig's home address is also his business address and as you know the issue of the van is central in this case. Now, you can check Mr Craig's 'Elite Bathrooms' facebook page for yourself, but his home address can be seen very clearly in a picture of his van. Now, that is the picture the media will nab if this goes to court.' Angus waited till the significance of the information sunk in. 'Even if I can persuade my client to plead guilty, an assault on a Procurator Fiscal is bound to attract publicity. It is up to you, of course, but I wonder if it is all worth it. If poor Sandy's address was to be revealed to the public, he would need to move and I know what an upheaval that can be for the family. I'll leave that with you. I just wanted to give you a heads-up.'

The lawyer put down the phone and sat back in his chair, rather pleased with himself. It was like old times, him finding a way of avoiding a conviction for a client, who was guilty as sin. The pleasure, however, was muted. Angus knew he got lucky this time. Two hours work and enough in fees to cover a sizable chunk of this month's wage bill. He would not be so lucky again. Mr Craig will be a one-off.

When Mrs Berry and the other employees went home

at five o'clock, Angus remained in his office. At a quarter past six, the call he had been waiting for came through. The routine tasks asked of the lawyer were not urgent and could easily have been left till the morning, but Angus decided to deal with them straight away and give himself a day off. There had been a lot of days off lately.

While a light rain trickled down the the outside of the window, Angus carefully checked, then rechecked the figures he had copied onto a laptop computer. The slender device, one of a matching pair, was the exclusive preserve for all matters relating to the man who, until this afternoon, was his only client. When the lawyer was satisfied that there were no mistakes, he shut down the machine and closed the lid. The contents were all encrypted and password protected but if that layer of security was somehow to be breached, any cyber intruder would encounter a system of recording information, decipherable by only two men. A method conceived in the pre-computer age.

The lawyer took the document he had been copying from, lit the corner, then dropped the burning paper into a metal bin sitting to the side of his desk. The laptop was then locked away in the safe. Angus returned to his desk to prepare a note for his secretary, listing instructions for the following day, tasks that would occupy Mrs Berry until her mid morning tea-break but no longer.

Angus rose with the note in his hand, flicked the switch on the desk lamp, before picking up a briefcase, empty, save for an unused pay as you go phone and that day's edition of the Herald. The broadsheet had only been retained because the crossword remained unfinished.

After crossing the room in semi-darkness, Angus locked the door, turned the lights on in the stairwell and made his way down to the ground floor. His eyes avoided the portrait of his grandfather hanging on the wall at the half landing. Angus had put all his eggs in one basket and the folly of such a strategy would have been self-evident to the elder Mr Johnston.

For nearly thirty years, Angus had advised and represented the crime cartel headed up by Geordie McSwiggen, an association that proved beneficial to all concerned. A combination of criminal cunning and legal acumen had made everyone rich and kept Geordie and his principle partners, Ricky Mullen, Johnboy Collins and Andy Falkner, safely beyond the reach of the authorities. Events however had taken an unfortunate turn.

At the foot of the stairs, the lawyer paused for a moment to look around, noting the unused rooms as he did so. The building was far too big. In his father's and grandfather's day it had housed a large and diverse legal practice, though not a particularly profitable one. The more lucrative direction taken, when Angus assumed control, necessitated no partners and minimum employees. The revered nameplate, prestigious address and the spacious accommodation impressed his new clients as well as nourishing his own ego. Angus could afford such an indulgence then, but not any longer. He checked that the front door was securely locked, then went into Mrs Berry's office, placing the note on top of the secretary's desk. He then set the alarm before making his way to the basement garage.

It was the previous December when Geordie revealed

his plan to retire. His solicitor could not fault the logic of the client's intention, crime was a dangerous occupation and getting out in one piece, with your wealth intact, was a feat few managed to achieve. Angus was assured that business would continue much as before and that the services of the gang's solicitor would be as vital as ever. What could go wrong?

Once the CCTV monitor confirmed there were no vehicles or people outside, the roller shutters rose and an eighteen month old black Lexus with tinted windows crept into West Regent Lane. It was the first time, in almost twenty years, that Angus had not changed his car with the new Spring registration plates. February had been the first time he had visited a petrol station this side of the millennium. Since his association with Geordie McSwiggen began, his car had been picked up every Thursday morning courtesy of Haghill Motors, the epicentre of gangster's empire, and returned later in the day, washed, valeted and with a full tank. Most of the perks that Angus once enjoyed had now ceased. There were still a couple of restaurants where a reservation was not necessary but the maitre d' would no longer whisper in his ear that it was on Mr McSwiggen's tab.

Geordie's carefully planned new order lasted less than two weeks ending with one of the three remaining partners shot dead and another fleeing abroad. When Ricky Mullen assumed control of the cartel's operations, his first executive decision was to dispense with the services of Johnston and McQuarry Solicitors. The timing could hardly have been worse for the lawyer, coming soon after an expensive divorce. Angus had come to



lament his largesse in the settlement, for the golden goose was no longer laying.

The Lexus turned left onto West Campbell Street then took the first right, heading east. Angus would make a circuit of the city centre and only when he was satisfied, that he was not being followed, would he head for home. The one time consigliere consoled himself with the thought that it could have been worse, much worse, had his client's new venture been a success. If that had been the case, the lawyer's services would now be redundant. In such a scenario the protection Angus still enjoyed would have been withdrawn.

Angus was incredulous when Geordie informed him that he intended to forge a new career for himself in the music industry. His son had stumbled upon a sure-fire moneymaking opportunity, the beauty of the venture being that it was, more or less, legal. Not only was Geordie willing to finance this scheme, he was eager to be an active player, seeing opportunities his son could not. However as the great bard said, *'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men. Gang aft a-gley.'*

The Lexus exited the city centre via the Jamaica Street bridge over the river Clyde, before recrossing by the Kingston bridge and heading for his flat in the west end. Home for the time being was one of Geordie's rental properties in a modern development, on the banks of the river, chosen as his temporary abode because it came with secure car parking underneath the building. The possibility of an attempt on his life had to be taken seriously. With Geordie no longer in control and living across the Atlantic, his confidante and adviser felt very

vulnerable in his home city.

## Chapter 3

The Chicks Na Na Na Na chorus no longer boomed inside Cathy's head. The sound track to her revenge fantasy had lost its allure. Sixteen hours on the road is a long time to be left alone with your thoughts and Cathy had succumbed to reality. Long before the Toyota passed the 'Welcome to Miami' sign, the singer knew that murder was no longer on the cards. The man may deserve such a fate and it was unlikely anyone would mourn his demise but the simple truth was, she did not have the stomach for it. Instead of killing Geordie, Cathy had formulated a very reasonable proposition to put to her former backer. Cathy needed her name back, that was the most important thing. If she could not release the songs that she had discovered and perfected, at least she could have the name that the public know.

As Kate Rydelle maybe she still had a chance, as Cathy Riddle she definitely had none. She would abandon her own compositions and find others to write for her. That was close to what happened before but this time there would be no lies, no underhand dealing, everything fair and above board.

Cathy was actually excited about her new plan. She

would relinquish any and all claims to royalties or payments that she was clearly entitled to. It was obvious that it was her arrangements being used on the new recordings, no one could dispute that. All Cathy would ask in return was the right to use the name Kate Rydelle, a name Geordie was wily enough to register as a trade mark. If she could speak to him alone without his odious girlfriend being present, Cathy thought there was a possibility he would agree. It made business sense after all and Geordie liked to think of himself as a businessman. Getting him alone was the key.

It took a further forty minutes for the Sat Nav to guide Cathy to the Miami Beach address. As anticipated, there were two cars sitting in the driveway, Cathy would have to bide her time. She spent the rest of the morning and most of the afternoon alternating between watching the boats coming and going from the marina and checking the house, waiting for the white convertible sitting next to Geordie's Mercedes to leave. It was late afternoon before Cathy could approach the house. As she pressed the doorbell, she was confident of persuading Geordie to accept her proposal.

That faith soon evaporated.

'Can I help you?' The query grunted in broad Glaswegian was less a question than a challenge.

'Don't you recognise me?'

'Oh it's you. Did your American fancy man throw you out?' Cathy ignored the reference to her new manager and showed no emotion. The inference, that the relationship was other than strictly professional, however had struck a nerve. 'If you're thinking you can come back,

forget it.' Geordie's dismissive, sneering tone was no more than had been expected but added to the previous slight, Cathy was once more seriously angry.

'I'm not asking to come back.' Cathy was now replicating Geordie's mien. Making the assumption that she was there to beg him to take her back had ignited a fire in her belly. The singer's blood was fast approaching boiling point

'So what is it you want then?'

'Nothing.' It was a stupid thing to say, obviously she wanted something or she wouldn't be there. Cathy had played her cards badly and now Geordie had the upper hand. Same as always.

'Then why are you here?'

Again it was not really a question. This time it was a declaration of victory. Geordie had won. In his world, every encounter had to have a winner and even more importantly, a loser.

Suddenly the gun was in Cathy's hand and her arm was rising towards her target. Cathy was not in command of her actions. What was unfolding was never intended, it just happened and there was no turning back. A line had been crossed. Putting the gun down was not an option.

Momentum was now dictating events. Geordie had been quick to react, instinctively moving to push the weapon to his right, as his body lurched to the left.

I'm not a murderer was the thought uppermost in Cathy's head. Not a killer but not a fool either. If she failed to pull the trigger now, it would be her that would die. Cathy forced her arms upwards and to her left towards Geordie's shoulder, but the instant his right hand made contact with hers, Cathy discharged the weapon.

The impact of the bullet and the recoil from the gun sent the pair reeling in opposite directions. As Cathy staggered backwards, another two shots were fired, each out with her control. When Cathy regained her balance, she could see the body of her former financial backer slumped motionless against an overly ornate coat stand. A white ladies jacket had fallen on top of him, covering his head and upper body.

Cathy stood rooted to the spot, the gun still in her hand, too frightened to check if the man was alive or dead. After a few seconds, she forced herself to approach the body. There had been no movement and no sound. Cathy gingerly lifted the bottom of the jacket a few inches, revealing a blood stained shirt. With her heart threatening to burst out of her chest, Cathy continued to lift the jacket. To her relief the bullet hole was not in the middle of the chest as she had feared but neither was it in the shoulder as she had hoped, it was somewhere in-between. When Geordie let out a groan, Cathy sprang back in shock dropping the gun in the process. He was still alive and Cathy was thankful for that. She was NOT a murderer, not yet anyway.

Cathy, once more, approached the body. Lifting the jacket as high as Geordie's neck, she could see the full extent of his injuries. The bullet hole was away from his heart. If he got to a hospital quickly, he would live.

'BASTARD!' The injured man grabbed Cathy's right wrist with his left hand and tried to pull her down but the pain was too much and he had to release his grip. Cathy stumbled back and fell.

When Geordie pulled the jacket away, the evil that

resided inside the career criminal was plain to see on his face.

‘BASTARD!’

Cathy could not meet his manic gaze. She picked herself up and ran from the house leaving the front door open as she fled.

Running flat out down the middle of the road, the only thing that mattered in that moment was putting distance between herself and the horror of what had happened. At the corner, a hundred yards or so along the road, Cathy stopped and looked back in the direction of the house. She could see no one. If any neighbours had heard the shot, they had not come out to investigate. Perhaps no one was home at five in the afternoon. Part of her wanted to go back and help. Part of her was too scared. Her brain was starting to function once more and Cathy tried to assess the situation. Geordie would survive, but only if he got help fast.

Cathy retrieved the phone from the pocket of her jeans and tapped in 911. She would say there had been an accident, give the address, and hang up. The few seconds it took to make a connection seemed like an age. Three rings and still no answer.

While Cathy waited for a response, a car approached, a car she recognised at once, after all she had been keeping watch on it for most of the day. Now the white convertible was retracing its route. If it was returning home, the left indicator would go on any second and the car would slow down and make the turn. It would be back in the drive next to the Mercedes in less than thirty seconds.

‘911. What's your emergency?’

Kathy said nothing, as she prayed for the left indicator to be activated.

‘Caller, what's your emergency?’

Again Cathy said nothing. The left indicator flashed and the convertible slowed down, waited for a pickup truck to pass, then made the turn. Cathy immediately ended the call.