

Chapter 1

Out and About

Thursday, 26th February 2004

Riddrie, Glasgow

Scotland

A flurry of snow lifted from the ground and blew between the solid gates of Her Majesty's Prison Barlinnie. The gates had been opened to allow the exit of a vehicle on a routine journey to the city. Temperatures were low across the country, so the courier driver tested his brakes gently before reaching the main road. There was no traction.

The white courier van with blacked-out windows appeared to be armoured but was a sheep in wolf's clothing. In the cab, protected by no more than toughened glass and the engine compartment sat the two-man crew, Barry Mane and Ned Atherton. The route was used by the men regularly and had been travelled many times over two years.

To Barry and Ned, the passengers were merely human cargo. One day it might be two or three prisoners on the way to begin their sentences, and on another day it could be a single prisoner being taken to court from a police station holding cell. It was routine.

Today there were two passengers. One was Martin Cameron, a high-security inmate. He sat silent, handcuffed in one of the five double seats in the box-body of the van. Prison Officer (PO) Brian Delaney was the other passenger. Being duty escort for the trip, Delaney sat in the designated seat at the rear, just inside the back doors.

The private courier had departed the gates of Barlinnie Prison with no fuss. There had been no gaggle of photographers running alongside, pressing lenses against the blacked-out windows. Likewise, there was no police escort—it was a straightforward, unpublicised trip for one man to make a brief court appearance.

After exiting the world-famous prison, the van turned left onto Cumbernauld Road and headed through the district of Riddrie towards the city centre. The journey would typically take around twenty minutes.

A regular competition was going on in the confines of the cab. Barry whistled as he drove while Ned tried to name the song and the singer. They had some good laughs, no matter who was in the rear section.

In the passenger section, Cameron gazed through the dark-tinted window. Skies were grey with cloud, but there were plenty of people around. Most pedestrians wore heavy coats, scarves and gloves. Delighted children were being pulled along on small sledges by their parents or friends. Millions of tiny white flakes floated on the breeze.

PO Delaney pulled out his notebook, and his lips curled as he looked at the timings he'd listed. He nodded to himself as he considered being back at the prison in time for lunch. He would enjoy the meal, knowing he was one step closer to early retirement with a healthy bank balance. He had his future mapped out. It was early days in HMP Barlinnie for the forty-year-old prison officer, but he had no intention of completing his four-year tour of duty.

PO Delaney had eyeballed Cameron in front of witnesses on more than one occasion. Colleagues and inmates alike had been impressed. Delaney had told Cameron he was merely another loud-mouthed gangster who had been caught. Cameron responded each time with a threat, which entertained the other inmates. The voicing of contempt openly between the two had been integral to a bigger picture.

Five minutes after setting off, the courier van approached a set of traffic lights near Alexandra Park. A large truck pulled out from the kerbside without any indication.

"For fuck's sake!" Barry slammed the brake pedal and pressed the horn. Both he and Ned forgot the tune they'd been discussing as they felt the van slide out of control towards the back of the heavy truck. Pedestrians and other road users turned at the sound of the prolonged noise from the courier van's horn.

Ned said, "I think he's got the point mate." The van skidded slowly onwards and halted a hair's breadth from the back of the truck. "Well done."

Both security men leant forward to look down at the tiny gap between their van and the truck.

Martin Cameron fell forward, but he didn't have to see what had happened. He took a long deep breath, lifted his feet up onto the bench, turned sideways and braced himself. Cameron was grateful for the absence of ankle chains as used in the American system. It would have meant his ankles tethered to the floor between his seat and the one in front. He glanced back at his escort, grinning.

"Stop! Stop!" Barry screamed and pressed the horn again. Due to the design of the van, the windows were sealed closed. The two men in the cab exchanged a glance, both with a furrowed brow. There was a loud metallic crunch as the eighteen-ton truck continued reversing against the front of the prison van.

Barry said, "He'll push us back into the other vehicles."

Pedestrians and drivers in the immediate area were looking around, trying to work out who was sounding the intermittent horn.

“Barry, we’re not fucking moving mate.” Ned looked out at a nearby streetlamp.

“What?”

“We should be moving backwards, but our van is standing still.”

They both glanced into the wing mirrors. Another quarry truck immediately behind held the van in position.

The short bonnet of the courier van burst from its hinges and flew into the air, and at the same time, the heavy front doors buckled. A crunching sound could be heard at the rear as the second truck advanced.

“Lift your legs, Barry!” Ned did so himself and sat on his ankles on the large seat. He watched in frustration as his colleague tried in vain to lift his legs out from under the dashboard, but was unable.

“*No ... no ... no!*” Barry screamed before the interior of the vehicle bodywork began crushing the lower part of both legs. He slumped unconscious over the wheel.

The trucks crushed the courier from both front and rear for only a few seconds, but it was long enough. When the truck at the rear reversed away, the back doors of the van fell open, mangled, but continued to hang from their reinforced hinges.

Pedestrians and drivers were rushing forward to help.

Both truck drivers left their cabs and approached the crippled van. The truckers were wearing black heavy-duty overalls and ski-masks, but more worrying to any witnesses—both carrying sawn-off shotguns. The weapons would be low on accuracy, but high on threat, and damage.

Horrified passers-by stopped to watch, unable to help. One brave man ran to the aid of the courier crew but stopped when a shotgun turned towards him. Cold blue eyes stared at the Samaritan through the slits of the ski mask and the gunman’s weapon raised into the horizontal. The pedestrian backed off with his hands held up. He ran to a doorway and pulled out his phone to call for help.

Ned managed to reach the handset for the radio. He glanced at his unconscious colleague as he brought the microphone to his lips. A noise caught his attention, and he turned to find himself facing the business end of a shotgun. The gunman was shaking his head, and Ned dropped the handset. The disguised gunman nodded slowly.

The second truck driver had gone to the back and found the prison officer kneeling on the floor of the van, dazed with blood oozing from a head injury. The gunman pointed the shotgun at PO Delaney's face.

"Release him." The words were spoken with a Glasgow accent, muffled within the mask. Two words were sufficient.

PO Delaney knew what to expect. He lifted his large keychain and complied before jumping down from the back of the damaged van. He stood injured but unfazed beside his unchained prisoner. Delaney raised his hands and remained silent, confident he would survive.

From the line of stationary traffic behind the rear truck, three black motorbikes raced along and stopped at the rear offside of the immobilised van. None of the bikes had passengers, but all three riders had a spare helmet over their left forearm. Each bike had a leather jacket folded on top of the fuel tank.

"What the fu—" PO Delaney reeled as Cameron head-butted him, and then repeatedly punched him. The prison officer lowered his hands as he stumbled back against the van.

Cameron took the shotgun from the gunman beside him. "It's time to settle accounts, PO Delaney?" Cameron paused and watched the man's squinting eyes as his head rose up slowly, blood flowing from his nose. The prisoner sneered. "I've never been a big fan of loose ends."

"Hold on." Delaney extended his hands, palms upward. "You said as long as I—" but his words trailed away when Cameron's finger curled around the trigger. "We had a dea—" Delaney urinated when the other man slowly shook his head.

Cameron aimed the weapon at arm's length from the injured man's wide-eyed stare and squeezed the trigger. The murderer handed the gun back to the trucker and turned to the first motorbike. He accepted a leather jacket and helmet, which he donned before mounting the bike.

The gunman who'd been standing at the front of the van ran to the back, glanced down at the bloody mess that was the prison officer, donned a helmet and jacket, and jumped onto the back of the second motorbike.

The masked gunman who'd accepted the shotgun back from Cameron was still staring at the uniformed man with no face, crumpled on the ground. Cameron was known to be volatile, but to kill an unarmed man in such a callous way was extreme.

"Fuckin' hell," Peter Henderson muttered. He blinked several times and shook his head. It took all of his self-control not to puke inside his ski-mask. He realised the first two bikes had departed, and his ride was right alongside with engine revving.

The third rider raised his visor. “Come on!” Henderson rammed the shotgun inside his overalls before he grabbed and pulled on a jacket and helmet. He leapt aboard the bike.

The three motorbikes crossed the road and raced through Alexandra Park, frightening children who were playing on the light layer of snow.

Families, who’d been out for a stroll and stopped to watch the incident, had to leap aside in fear as the bikes roared and skidded across the park and a section of the golf course. All three machines pulled onto Provan Road before heading north towards the multiple junctions of the motorway.

The lead bike turned north-east on the M80, fifteen minutes after the escape. The second headed west on the M8, and the third went east on the M8. Once they’d separated from each other, the bikes blended into the regular traffic. Individually, they were normal.

Less than an hour after leaving the prison gates on his way to court, Martin Cameron was in the back of a red Range Rover changing into regular clothes. The man who had been riding the lead motorbike was now driving the car, bald head and scarred face uncovered.

Norrie Simpson was a big man with a gravelly voice. “I’ve got a couple of cigars in the glove-box if you’d like one Mr Cameron.”

“Now, that would be nice Norrie,” Cameron said. “I hope they’re Cuban.”

“They are.” Simpson reached a container from the glove box and handed it back between the large front seats.

“Thank you.” Cameron opened the wallet to find cigars and lighter.

“Do you want me to stop somewhere and let you get into the front?”

“No Norrie,” Cameron said, as he relaxed and lit the Cuban. “All in good time my friend.” The thick end of the cigar glowed as Cameron drew the air through the hand-picked leaves.

“You carried out a fuckin’ brutal execution back there, Mr Cameron.”

“Aye, it was, wasn’t it?” Cameron said and grinned. “It was the first of many, Norrie—the first of fucking many.” He took a long pull on the cigar and filled the car with acrid bluish-grey smoke.

Simpson used the rear-view to check his passenger’s expression. He knew a nutcase when he saw one. There was one in the mirror every time he looked. Now there was one in his rear-view. He switched on the fan and drove on in silence, dimples appearing on his ruddy, scarred cheeks.

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BTL Enterprises

Glasgow

Scotland

Phil McKenzie stood at the large office window, gazing across the River Clyde at the south side of his hometown. The office suite on the top floor of a modern glass and steel block was at the junction of Bothwell Street and Douglas Street.

On the television in the large office, the morning news team handed over to a local outside broadcast unit.

'Good morning. I'm Sandra McVicar reporting for Glasgow Today, your local TV news programme.' The dark-haired twenty-eight-year-old glanced over her right shoulder as her camera operator panned across the scene of destruction. Police officers were controlling traffic, and copious ribbons of blue and white police incident tape fluttered in the breeze. What had been a flurry of snow had increased to a steady, heavy fall.

Phil, aka Hawk, turned from the window, sipped his coffee and stepped forward to check the background activity during the bulletin. Seated opposite each other across the large square table in the office were Annabel Strong and Rachel Donoghue. All three BTL associates watched the screen in silence. Annabel was making notes on a pad.

The reporter continued, but while her tone was sympathetic, her eyes sparkled.

'According to eye-witnesses, the escape was completed in less than five minutes.' Sandra was working hard at sounding officious, but she was wide-eyed and breathless as she relayed her report. *'The two large trucks used to crush the prison van had been carrying loads of concrete and other rubble.'* The camera focused on the front truck and then panned back to a large white tarpaulin, which shielded the white van. Apart from the escape, the stationary vehicles had caused traffic chaos.

'As yet,' Sandra continued as she turned back to the lens. *'There is no confirmation about the condition of the security vehicle crew or the prison officer; we believe there is at least one fatality.'* The reporter pursed her lips and winced when a siren sounded close to her. An ambulance departed the scene with blue lights flashing and sirens blaring. Sandra took a breath and inclined her head towards the camera. She blinked as snowflakes landed on her lashes.

'There has been no official confirmation of the escaped prisoner's identity, but sources suggest Martin Cameron, the gangland enforcer, was due in court today. He was already serving a lengthy prison term and was expected to see it extended.'

By the time the reporter had handed back to the newsroom, Phil had reduced the volume to a whisper. He dropped the remote onto the large central table.

"At least one fatality," he said. "I'll be bloody amazed if either of those two guys survived the shunt by an eighteen-tonner." He looked across the table. "Rachel, what's being said online?"

The thirty-year-old anticipated questions and already had her laptop powered up. “The most recent report suggests apart from the two trucks; three motorbikes were also used. According to an eye-witness, the bikes arrived after the trucks crushed the van. The truck drivers were both wearing ski-masks and carrying sawn-off shotguns. An onlooker said all three bikers were carrying spare helmets and jackets.”

“Okay,” Phil said. “Three bikes in use and there were no pillion riders when they arrived. It would suggest they knew there was only one prisoner in the van, or they were only interested in one. The first bike was to get him away, and the other two were to get the truck drivers away.” He turned to his partner, both in life and work. “What’s your assessment, Annabel?”

“I believe it was Cameron, and I don’t think we’re going to see him for a long time. If he can organise this from inside Barlinnie Prison, then he’ll be out of the country within a few hours.” Before being a member of the BTL Enterprises team, Annabel had worked for both MI5 and MI6.

She was a capable operative and regarding logical thinking was rarely far from the mark. At thirty-nine, she had seen and done things that would cause revulsion for many people. She was the most confident and competent woman Phil had ever met, and with her striking features and curvaceous figure—one of the most attractive.

Rachel said, “Breaking online news, Boss.” She met Phil’s gaze. “Three motorbikes have been discovered in locations across Glasgow. They’re miles apart, and all torched when abandoned. There are no signs of helmets or weapons.”

Annabel nodded. “The weapons will end up in a breaker’s yard, and the helmets will be burned in a private location to ensure there is no trace of DNA from the linings.”

Rachel said, “The entire team were wearing gloves and ski masks.” She shook her head. “As we expected, both trucks and all three bikes were stolen in the last twenty-four hours, so the police have little to go on.”

“Okay,” Phil said. “Rachel, I’d like you to put out some feelers regarding the vehicles. You know the right people.” He paused as he considered missing links. “Didn’t Cameron’s wife stay on in their bungalow when he was sent down?”

“She did at first,” Annabel said. “If you remember, after Cameron’s trial and incarceration in ’96, his wife stayed in the house a short time. She headed to their villa in Spain.”

“The house was on the outskirts of Kirkintilloch wasn’t it?” Phil asked.

“Yes,” Annabel said. “We know Mrs Cameron left, but she returned a couple of times to prepare the bungalow for sale.”

Rachel was making notes on a pad and listening carefully.

Phil said, "Would either of you expect Cameron to turn up in Spain?"

"No," Rachel said. "I reckon the wife will be aware of the escape plan, so she might already be on the move." She looked from Phil to Annabel. "You know, so they can meet up somewhere else."

Annabel nodded. "Sound theory, but she might also be primed to do absolutely nothing and deny all knowledge. They'll expect the British police to get officers over to Spain with a possible reunion in mind." She paused. "Of course as we know, it can take days before the official wheels are in motion."

"Good thinking," Phil agreed. "I think we'll try to get a step ahead of the authorities on this one. We'll trace the wife and then keep tabs on her movements."

"Sounds good," Annabel said. "We're not working on anything major right now,"

Rachel said, "Unfortunately we don't have any assets in Spain?"

"Are you volunteering?" Phil grinned.

"Well I've got a passport, I can read a map, and I know a few useful phrases."

Phil turned to Annabel, who smiled and nodded. He looked back to Rachel. "You've got half an hour to impress me with what you can find out about the Camerons in Spain, and then we'll make a decision on how best to continue."

Annabel said, "Would you like me to deal with Cameron's recent prison visitors so Rachel can concentrate on the Spanish connections?"

"Yes, please." Phil raised an eyebrow. "Before going anywhere else, Rachel, I'd like you to work your contacts on the street. We don't need immediate answers on the vehicle thefts, but a few discreet enquiries will get the ball rolling."

Rachel had specific people in mind regarding the stolen vehicles, so there was no pressure there. The keys on her laptop were clacking away as she brought up all she could on Martin and Lorraine Cameron relating to Spain.

Annabel said, "I'll fix us all a fresh coffee." She winked at Phil and looked back over her shoulder at her protégé.

Phil returned to stand at the panoramic window. "I know you'll come back, Cameron, but where would you go right now?" He stared across the river. "Who would you take into your confidence?"

Rachel looked up, and her lips parted to respond, but Annabel raised a hand, half-closed her eyes and shook her head. Annabel understood Phil's methods. In certain situations, he liked to voice his thoughts as if playing them back to himself for effect.
