

Chapter 1

Birth and Rebirth

Saturday 31st December 1951

Glasgow

Scotland

A fleeting six years had passed since the end of WWII in Europe.

Glasgow's Barrowland Ballroom was one of the places to meet the opposite sex, but a New Year's Eve had a special significance. People felt happier, closer, and more likely to take that step that they wouldn't usually. Carol McLean thought that she might find herself taking that next step when she met Gordon Faulkner. Both were smitten at first sight.

Gordon was a handsome, fair-haired young man, a week away from his twenty-second birthday and when he set eyes on Carol, he felt he'd gotten an early gift.

Carol was a beauty, with naturally wavy chestnut hair that hung slightly beyond her bare shoulders. She stood five-foot-eight inches in her high heels which allowed Gordon and Carol to see eye-to-eye—physically at least.

To be heard over the big band music and chatter of the happy, dancing crowd, the pair moved close enough to talk in each other's ear.

"Are you old enough to be in here?" Gordon stepped back and raised an eyebrow. He wasn't interested in the truth—it was an empty, hopeful line that brought a beaming smile.

"I'm old enough to do whatever I want." Carol was a cocky teenager. Even, white teeth bit into a glossy red lip.

It was like the release of the tow-rope on a glider. Gordon's two best mates, and the girl who had arrived with Carol were all forgotten as the love-struck pair pushed into the crowd and struggled through the throng towards the bar. They only had eyes for each other, and both could sense flames of desire.

Three hours later, in the perimeter bushes of Glasgow Green, those flames were fanned as the young couple did what they wanted so badly. To be more accurate, they did what Gordon's hormones wanted—Carol was trying to impress. Any fears were dispelled by the young man's promise that he'd be careful. The impressionable girl was also excited at the thought of a guy venturing beyond roaming, sweaty, trembling hands.

Carol offered her honour.

Gordon honoured her offer.

While they kissed, groped, and went too far too quickly, I struggled for the first time, as one of the thousands of minuscule creatures aiming for a chance at life. There was a mass brawl deep in Gordon's reproductive organs, and I was eager to win my first fight and take an early swimming lesson.

My journey had begun.

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Gordon was enlightened several weeks later. His young girlfriend explained that while they'd been enjoying unbridled passion in the park, she hadn't quite reached her seventeenth birthday. Gordon remained nonplussed. Clever use of makeup and her attitude had successfully camouflaged her actual age. Of course, those aspects of their union were ably assisted by Gordon's lust and Carol's eagerness to get laid for the first time.

Gordon smiled and silently revelled in his conquest of a beautiful girl who was younger than he had first thought. While Gordon was smiling, Carol announced through silent tears that she was pregnant, and Gordon was the father.

Appropriately, the pair went for a walk in Glasgow Green to talk about the implications. Neither considered that their serious discussion commenced at the McLennan's Arch, only a few yards from where they'd consummated their relationship on New Year's Eve.

They'd continued to see each other regularly since that first night together. Carol was a little put out by Gordon working overtime most Friday evenings and some Saturdays. She was seventeen, naive and in love. Her boyfriend as she discovered, was selfish, and although he liked having his pretty girlfriend on his arm—he showed a preference for a few pints with the lads most weekends.

Gordon's parents, James and Sarah Faulkner were proud, hard-working, God-fearing, Catholics who had taught their children to emulate their values—or so they thought. They had another son who was almost twenty-one, plus two teenage daughters. Having daughters produced a bias during the proceedings. In a brief, but tearful meeting at the Faulkner family home, Gordon and Carol were given an ultimatum.

They were to marry before Carol's condition became apparent.

The proposed date for the nuptials—21st February 1952.

What was the other option?

They married, or I went into an orphanage from birth.

Great ... I was born from lust.

As my parents would learn in their life together, there was always going to be an issue to affect

their best intentions. The expectant couple couldn't merely plan a quickie wedding—my teenage mother was a Protestant. A mixed marriage was not about to happen while Mr and Mrs Faulkner Senior were still above ground.

And, so it was that Carol did some rapid and basic religious conversion training.

On 30th August 1952, and not as mature as the midwife would have liked, I was involved in my next major struggle—my birth. Our fledgeling family moved to a one-room apartment in a tenement in Glasgow's East End. The tiny domicile was referred to as a 'single end', which is hard to imagine until you've lived in one.

Some cynics think I blame my parents for overdoing the number of mouths they could feed. Love's young dream were only partly to blame. They were simply obeying the house rules of the Holy Catholic Church.

No bloody contraception.

To this day, I believe that my parents thought the 'rhythm method' meant having sex with musical accompaniment.

Once Gordon and Carol got a bit excited under the sheets, the rhythm, withdrawal, or any other method wasn't going to be the best contraceptive idea. It would have taken two teams of highly-trained horses to separate my parents when they got going.

What was the result?

By December 1956, I had two brothers and a sister.

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Thirteen Years Later

Monday 27th October 1969

Darlington

England

I made my way to the Waiting Room as instructed in my letter. A message, or more accurately, a command, was chalked on a blackboard.

‘ALL NEW RECRUITS FOR
11th SIGNAL REGIMENT
WAIT IN THIS AREA’

At that point, it became clear to me that the fantasy was over, and a different life awaited me—maybe. I swallowed hard, was biting my lower lip, and breathing like a bull through my nostrils.

The desire to catch the next train out of Darlington back to Glasgow was very real. I pulled out my shiny new leather wallet and looked at the contents. No—fleeing wasn’t an option.

I walked towards the various groups of young men loitering near the blackboard. Apprehensive didn’t cover it. I felt sick, and I was trembling. *Join the Professionals* had been the strap-line of all the publicity, and it had seemed like such a good idea only a few weeks previously.

Shit. It had still felt right at breakfast time.

I was seventeen, fresh-faced, five-foot-eight tall and weighed ten-stones when soaking wet. I had my short hair combed and neatly parted as usual, and my blue eyes were on stalks taking in my surroundings.

What the bloody hell was I doing?

It was like a POW escape in reverse. I had never been out of Scotland, and here I was in England for the first time, among a load of strangers. We were all waiting for transport to a place that was no doubt going to test most of us to the limits of our endurance. Like me, a few of the others wore suits and ties, but many wore jeans and leather jackets. I thought that was a bit cocky. Surely we should be smartly dressed. I was sure it said as much in my letter.

Some of the other recruits were in light-hearted conversation, but I couldn’t see any reason for laughter. They didn’t know it then, but they were enjoying their first experience of camaraderie. I tasted cigarette smoke in the greyish blue cloud that drifted over the area.

A few of the lads were leaning on the red brick station building or the black iron fence with its little golden tips. Other guys sat on their luggage. Most had their hands thrust into their trouser pockets, and a few of them had long hair. It struck me that maybe I was in the wrong place. There

were a lot of slovenly looking characters and a constant hubbub.

One lad, who looked about my age, was near the groups, but not a part of one. He stood astride a large brown suitcase. He had blond hair that hung to his shoulders, and sideburns that reached his chin. Okay, he had long hair, but he was wearing a smart jacket and trousers and didn't have his hands in his pockets. With an effort, I slid my suitcase along the last two feet and stood astride it, just as the blond and many others were doing.

"I suppose we're both here for the same reason." I tried to sound cheerful.

"We are—if *that* has anything to do with it." The blond stranger nodded towards the blackboard and half-turned to me, grinning.

"Jimmy Faulkner." I used my accepted name rather than my formal name; James, as I offered my right hand.

"Andy Munro. I'm pleased to meet you—Jimmy Faulkner."

We shook hands which felt both formal and friendly.

Both of us laughed. It was a short, nervous sound and I felt better—not much, but better. Our initial conversation was about the behaviour of the other recruits and the number of them who were smoking or lounging around.

Andy nodded towards the two men in military uniform. Neither of them were older than mid-twenties. One of them had a black clipboard with a pad attached. On the right sleeve of his dark green jumper was his badge of rank—two white chevrons with a neat, khaki border.

Did that make him a corporal, or a sergeant?

High on the left sleeve of his pullover was a green pen holder which held three pens.

"They talk to each other," Andy said, "but not to anybody else. I've been watching them for about twenty minutes."

I nodded and raised my eyebrows in acknowledgement but didn't offer an opinion.

Having sat awhile, some of the guys looked around impatiently. A couple of bright sparks thought it amusing to shout, mimicking the echoing call of a railway announcement.

"Only ten minutes until departure to Hell's Barracks." The jokers laughed. How quaint—in their nervous reaction to waiting, they'd given a nickname to the home of the recruit squadron. I'd read my letter loads of times and knew it was Helles with an 'e', but I didn't know how it should be pronounced.

I was confident that the two guys with stripes had made a mental note of the comedians. I had no desire to be a comedian, at least not until I'd survived the training. Humour, usually my companion, might be suppressed for some time to come.

Unless looking at him at the time, there was confusion as to the source of the voice. Many of us would later agree that it sounded as if it had boomed from three or four directions at once, amplified through a couple of loudspeakers. It was, of course, one of the two non-commissioned officers (NCOs).

“Listen up gentlemen!” The guy scowled at every breathing creature within his gaze. “I am Corporal Cameron.” He paused to glare at a small group of guys who were all smoking. “If you are going to Helleez Barracks, 11th Signal Regiment” He paused again. “I will be calling out your names.” Cpl Cameron turned to glare at the group who’d been amusing themselves with the name of the barracks.

Some of the regular rail passengers and staff were looking and listening—no doubt relieved to have nothing to do with the proceedings. A couple of them smiled. *Bastards*.

The NCO was aware he had the attention of every English-speaking person, and no doubt a few foreigners, within a hundred yards.

Cpl Cameron smirked before he continued. “When you hear your name, acknowledge by shouting, *here*. Pick up your baggage. Corporal Smith will direct you to the transport.”

On cue at the mention of his name, Cpl Smith stepped forward, head turning slowly, left to right and back again. The studs on his boots clicked on the concrete paving outside the station Waiting Room. The man stood for a moment, squinting as he glared at each group, and then at a few individuals.

Like his colleague’s, Cpl Smith’s eyes were almost obscured by the peak of his hat. He surveyed us from under the small, shiny, black surface. The man’s head was tilted back a little, so there was a tight crease of skin at the back of his neck pressed against his starched collar.

The ribbed, heavy-wool pullover fitted him snugly around the chest, and it had to be a large size pullover. His waist was narrow and pronounced by the broad shiny black belt with square silver buckle. The creases in his green denim trousers were sharper than the razor I’d used the day before for the first time. When I saw the shine of his boots, I stared for a moment. They had a reflection like a mirror.

Were they black glass toecaps?

My concerns were increasing with every minute.

Cpl Smith’s gaze melted the souls of the recruits who had continued to smile. The conversation had stopped among our band of hopefuls.

Cpl Cameron gave an imperceptible nod before continuing with his personal verbal barrage. “Under Corporal Smith’s direction, you will quietly make your way down through the tunnel and

out of the station. You will board one of the white buses.” He paused and glared for a moment at specific people. “There will be no smoking on the bus. Extinguish your cigarettes *before* you get aboard.”

I wondered if it was a personal affliction, or if all NCOs spoke in short, telegraphic sentences. Maybe it was just me, but it seemed hypocritical that we had to be quiet when the guy in charge had been causing resident pigeons to leave their roosts for the past five minutes.

An ominous silence crept over our attentive group, and whole cigarettes were crushed underfoot. I noted that Cpl Cameron, the NCO making all the noise, sounded like a fellow Glaswegian. I secretly hoped that being from Glasgow would count in my favour at some stage. If he weren't a fellow Glaswegian—sod it, I'd pretend my entire ancestry came from his hometown.

Cpl Cameron called out a surname, paused, and then called out the first name. If there was no response instantly, he called the name again, but louder. I figured this exercise did two things for any unfortunate soul who responded following the second call.

Firstly—it frightened the living daylights out of the named individual, thus making him answer louder when he became aware of his name being called. Secondly—the repetition meant the NCO would no doubt remember the name easily later. This was probably not a good thing.

A train arrived at the nearby platform while the roll-call was underway. On top of everything else we then had the sound of the public address information, which unlike the NCO's voice, *did* issue from several speakers around the waiting area.

The NCO was equal to things as pathetic as a train and, a twenty-speaker, railway station PA system. Cpl Cameron accepted the puny challenge with confidence and continued to call out names.

As I registered the ferocity with which the man could enunciate a name, it never occurred to me that he was calling us in alphabetical order. Fear does that. I stood transfixed, pondering my reasons for being there and became aware of my name echoing around the platform. *Shit*.

“Faulkner ... James.” Cpl Cameron surveyed the faces as he did when he repeated himself.

“*Heeeuuurrr!*” I responded in alarm, and it was the loudest anyone had answered thus far. A few of my fellow recruits turned to stare, their eyes opening wide and brows rising. A couple of the bastards sniggered. Even a few of the civilian rail passengers smiled.

My battle-cry had betrayed my broad Glasgow accent because I'd replied so sharply and with such gusto.

Cpl Cameron briefly looked up from his clipboard, in my direction. He narrowed his eyes, probably as he thought a real movie bad-ass might do, and nodded to himself. “Franklin ... Kevin.”

I was in the shit already, and I hadn't left the railway station yet. I made my way through the

tunnel and out to the white buses, hardly aware of the weight of my suitcase. I could still feel the eyes of the NCO on me as I passed him.

Why had I signed up for this?

I was trying to remember when I had last felt so apprehensive. The closest I got was the thought of walking past one of the bullies at primary school when it was home time.

Cpl Smith stood between the station exit and the back of the third white bus.

Was he directing us to the right bus, or ensuring we didn't try and do a runner?

A short while later, my new acquaintance Andy boarded the bus grinning, and sat beside me. He told me that as he walked past Cpl Cameron, the NCO had eyed him up and down. On exiting the station, Cpl Smith had given Andy the once-over. My new friend thought it was because he'd been standing beside me.

I nodded toward his long, lustrous golden hair. "You don't think it could have anything to do with your hair and sideburns?"

"Well, I suppose it might have been." He laughed. "I reckoned since my hair was getting cut here anyway, I might as well save the money a barber would cost back home."

"Whatever their reasons for looking at you—they've noted both of us now."

We both laughed. It was a nervous, but contagious sound and some of our fellow passengers turned to look at us. We laughed again—louder.

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The small convoy of three, white Army buses took us out of Darlington as we headed for the A1-South. We travelled along the dual-carriageway, and it seemed like no time before we exited onto the A6136 Catterick.

I registered the two words below within a red oblong border—Catterick Garrison.

This was to be a road sign some of us would regularly see throughout our careers—if we survived the training and courses ahead of us.

Following what felt like a very short half-hour journey from the railway station, we arrived at Helles Barracks and parked outside the accommodation block. I was to find out later that our accommodation was in a building referred to as a Sandhurst block—the standard, two-storey design found in many British military barracks.

Another NCO made an appearance when we 'de-bussed' from the transport. This guy was wearing a similar smart outfit to the two we'd met at Darlington Railway Station. There were no introductions as he ushered us through a pair of swing doors with a multi-coloured sign above.

The sign had a band of light blue marking the top portion and a band of dark green marking the

bottom portion. Between the two broad areas of colour was a narrow band of dark blue. In white lettering across the centre, it read, '7 Troop'.

When the swing doors closed behind us, and we were gathered along the corridor with our various baggage, the NCO looked at those individuals who thought it was time for a chat—it was a look sufficient to shut them up.

"I am Corporal Flanagan, gentlemen." Cpl Flanagan spoke in short sentences, just like Cpl Cameron, hardly taking a breath between each snippet of information. Emphasis was given to certain words within each brief statement, and when he did this, he picked an individual to address. It was as if he believed certain people needed to know the importance more than others.

"This will be your accommodation during your training. It is your Troop Lines. You are now members of Seven Troop. Find yourself a bed-space. Leave your baggage in your bed-space. Come back out to this corridor. Line up in front of this wall, facing this way, one step away from the wall." He paused. "Move!"

As he spoke, and eye-balled different people, Cpl Flanagan had made gestures with his hands that would have made his instructions clear to a visiting alien.

It was probably more to do with nerves than choice, but we all departed at speed to locate a bed-space in a room nearest to us. I'd been one of the first people to enter the corridor, so I was close to the far end. Like a magnet, the light from the big window in there drew me forward.

As I'd passed a couple of other doors on the way along the corridor, I'd noted that most of the rooms were kitted out for four men.

At a glance, I could see that each of us would have a metal wardrobe-style locker, an open-fronted, metal, bedside locker, and a bed—metal framed, of course. All of the furnishings were a glorious Admiralty Grey. Even the bedside mats were grey. To be fair, the colour of the furnishings probably matched my pallor—and new outlook.

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I found myself in Room 119 at the distant end of the corridor. My roommates were Andy Munro, Mick Martin, and Ken Jackson.

We paraded ourselves in the corridor. It was to be the first of many such parades. All fifty-four of us stood along the length of the corridor, shoulder to shoulder, one step away from the wall, with our toecaps right up to the line of the third tile from the wall. We were sent off in nominated groups to collect bedding, have a haircut, or collect uniform and equipment.

The Bedding Store and Clothing Store were located only yards apart in one large, long building with 'Quartermaster's Stores' on a sign above the clearly marked 'Entrance' door. Once again the

main sign was made up of the ubiquitous three-colour background and white lettering.

There was little time for anything other than a nod between members of the various rooms because there was an NCO at every turn. There seemed to be about a dozen of them, but there were only three. *Three too many*, I was beginning to think.

The first two NCOs were the pair we met at the station, and the third was the hyper-active Cpl Flanagan, who'd met us when the buses parked. From the moment we set eyes on him, he made his presence felt by constantly keeping people on the move. He directed various groups on the route to the Barber Shop, the Cookhouse (dining hall), the Bedding Store and the Clothing Store.

I figured that at some point Cpl Flanagan had been advised, 'Shout a lot, and if you want to frighten recruits, pick one and shout louder at him.'

As had been the case since our meeting, Andy and I found each other's company useful. We found humour in the way that we never seemed to stop moving. It also served to make us feel a bit more confident as we went through the rigours of the first day. In our opinion there seemed to be nothing to choose between the three NCOs. They all appeared to be total 'Army Barmy' bloody nutcases.

The recruits of our intake had travelled from all over the country. We had signed up to join the Royal Corps of Signals. Regiments like the infantry, guards, or cavalry tended to recruit from a local area, hence names like the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, Durham Light Infantry, Welsh Guards, and so on.

I knew Andy was from Nottingham, and after brief introductions found out the big guy Mick, was from Penzance, and Ken who was slightly built like me, was from Leeds. Our intake also had recruits from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Liverpool, Southampton, Cardiff, London and many other places. Never having been out of Scotland, I was new to the terminology for the regions. My brain was also continually assaulted by new accents.

I was from Scotland, so I was a 'Jock'. Irish guys were 'Paddies', and the Welsh were 'Taffs', which was simple enough. It was the regions of England which blew me away as I discovered Brummies, Scousers, Geordies, Yorkies, Cockneys, West Country Yokels, and a few more besides.

There were three recruits from Liverpool. The youngest of these was a seventeen-year-old who introduced himself simply as 'Scouse'. He was either very proud of his city or had an issue with his name—Steven Harris. The lad seemed to wear a permanent scowl.

Scouse Harris was slightly built and not particularly tall. He was unremarkable except for his acne-covered face and his exaggerated Liverpool accent. He sounded like he constantly had a mouthful of phlegm. I'd never heard a Scouse accent before, and out of all the Liverpool lads, only

his voice grated on me.

I noted several occasions, Cpl Cameron giving Harris a sideways glance. Interesting.

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Forever burned into my memory will be the initial issue of uniform and equipment. In attendance, there was one of the omnipresent NCOs. It seemed one of those guys would appear every time you thought you could relax for a minute.

How did they do that?

From the Sandhurst block to the Clothing Store was two hundred yards. The door to the store opened, and a large group of us were ushered in and told to form a straight line facing the counter.

The counter was a considerable length, which allowed for equipment issue to large groups of individuals in one session. In true military style, the long and broad surface was already prepared with fifteen sets of kit.

When it comes to, 'Here's one I prepared earlier,' the children's TV presenters have nothing on the military.

While the Clothing Store NCO went to his shelves to fetch pairs of boots of particular sizes, it allowed two assistants to inspect the sizing of shirts, jackets, and trousers. For those unlucky enough to have anything other than average height and shape, this meant exchanging kit until they were kitted out with the best fit. Our first issue of hats was done rapidly by one NCO at the end of the line. We became the product of a human assembly line.

During the first short session in the Sandhurst block, a small, but important piece of administration was organised. The issue of a Service Number to every recruit took place. For the remainder of our careers, we would retain our service number. Rank might change, and even name, but a soldier's number remained constant. Once learned—never forgotten.

Like most of the other lads, I had difficulty trying to remember my eight-figure number, so I kept it on a piece of paper in my pocket. I had become a small cog in a very large mechanism. I was now 24165999 Signalmán Faulkner, J. We were to learn that in the Royal Signals, like so many other arms of the military, the rank of Private did not exist. We would have a rank, indicating the Corps to which we belonged. Hence, our equivalent rank to Private was Signalmán.

As seen in various movies on the subject, we made our way back to the accommodation, dropping our new kit all over the place. It was more like a scene from a television game show. At this stage, there were a lot of young men wondering if they had made the right decision after all.

I was one of them.

I deposited the pile of clothing and equipment in the general area of my bed-space and started

to worry about the coming weeks.

Would I survive for eight weeks?

Andy and I went to the Barber Shop with a crowd of other guys. We had been rounded up by one of the NCOs and found ourselves in a rapidly moving queue. As might be expected, the barber was known as Sweeney Todd. He ran a small but efficient establishment.

I was alarmed that the time taken for the average haircut was less than two minutes. When I left school, I had gone to work in an office environment. I had never grown my hair long, so it was already short and tidy, but I still had to have it cut. Back in those days, my average time to have my haircut was about ten minutes with a civilian barber. Sweeney took one minute with me.

Andy sat in the chair, and his reflection betrayed his emotions as the barber wrapped the white apron around the victim to protect his clothes.

Sweeney lifted his electric clippers. “What’s to go first, son—the sideburns, or the hair?” He was grinning at his victim’s reflection. I noticed that Sweeney limped as he moved around the chair, and I wondered if a customer had inflicted his injury. If he weren’t careful, he’d be having some facial treatment—and not in a good way.

There was no reply from the red-faced and sullen blond, but the barber’s comment produced a chorus of laughter from the waiting line of nervous recruits. I watched my new friend’s expression in the mirror and could see that this was not a subject to treat lightly.

We were under enough pressure already and needed support not bloody humiliation—by a civilian.

Yes, I thought to myself, we’re going to be soldiers, and you’re just a civilian barber—with a limp. I’d remind my new friend Andy later, and it might cheer him up.

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After two hours of activity, all fifty-four of us now known as 7 Troop, found ourselves standing in the main corridor, our backs a few inches from the wall, feet together, arms akimbo, facing front—mouths shut, eyes and ears wide open.

Cpl Cameron paced up and down the line talking, occasionally stopping to look menacingly into the eyes of an individual. The other two NCOs were standing at either end of the line as if they were there to prevent any escape attempts. I got the impression from the atmosphere created by the NCOs, there might be a couple of attempts later that night. Cpl Cameron briefed us on our many areas of responsibility.

We hadn’t reached the end of the first day, and there seemed to be a never-ending list of tasks. A lot of them would eat considerably into what might have jokingly been referred to as free time. We

had our bed-spaces and lockers to lay out and get up to standard, and our immaculate rooms had to be cleaned and polished.

Surely there would be cleaners?

Apart from those things, we had the communal areas of the troop lines to clean and polish, plus check around the areas outside of the block for any pieces of litter, however tiny. There was a fair amount of uniform issued, and it would all require ironing. I wondered how we were going to fit in actual military training.

Good news came in the form of an ironing demonstration. A show of hands in the corridor showed only a couple of lads had ever used a steam iron. I was not one of them. Where I came from, a steam iron was used to settle domestic disagreements.

Apart from that, it seemed there would be plenty of food, and it would be provided three times a day—if we managed to get to the cookhouse on time.

My first day served to tell me that we had food, shelter, warm clothing, companionship, guardians, and leisure facilities. I wondered absently how many hours there would be in a military day, and how as recruits, we'd be expected to fill them. Our first day changed to evening and thoughts of the morrow occupied my mind.

No matter how well organised any of us were, our first night in training had a similar list of priorities. Get kit prepared for the next morning, unpack as much as possible and sleep. We were all tired, so a few of us made the mistake of leaving some tidying until morning.

For some reason on that first night, everybody in our four-man room wore their issued blue and white striped pyjamas. We all wished each other good night, and as I confirmed later, we all lay there awake in silence for a long time, each of us deep in thought. I heard one of the other guys sobbing in the middle of the night. I prayed to my God that I would survive basic training.

I lay there wondering if any of the others felt like I did—I might have made a big mistake. I couldn't sleep, and my thoughts drifted back to the start of my day.

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At home, I had trembled as I took my clothes off the coat hangers and got dressed. I didn't tremble because I was cold. I was mentally somewhere between fear and excitement. It was just as well at that point I didn't know how my first day would unfold.

I wasn't to know for example, that as the day continued, the fear would increase, and the excitement would diminish. The change would occur rapidly in both cases.

My mother had insisted she accompany me to Central Station in Glasgow. We both knew that there would be tears. As shy and retiring as I was, none of them would be mine. During the forty-

five-minute journey to the city, she talked incessantly, saying how it would be so organised, and how the recruits would be guided and helped.

I sat in silence, thinking, how the hell would you know?

I'd watched as we passed familiar places. I had taken in these sights for nearly two years on my daily bus journey to and from Glasgow. Two years of office work was enough—it wasn't for me. I just had to succeed in this military career. My future—my life depended on this gamble.

Neither of my parents thought I would survive the basic training. I have to give my mother credit—at least she didn't say it out loud. When I look back, I do owe a lot to my dear, departed dad.

Thank you, dad. Thank you for ensuring I started my new career in the right mindset—with no confidence, but a burning desire to succeed, just so that I could prove you bloody wrong.

I hugged my mother and got onto the 9 am train bound for London King's Cross. I looked at her from the carriage and for the first time saw her as an attractive young woman. She stood there, tears streaming from her heavily made-up eyes, unchecked. Her chestnut hair was shining, and her pastel green suit was immaculate. As were her white handbag, white gloves and white stilettos.

To the casual observer, it would have been hard to believe that she was thirty-three years old, the mother of four and wife of a hardened drinker. She looked much younger, standing there sobbing, bidding farewell to her seventeen-year-old. Her eldest.

I stared out of the window, and it wasn't until we clattered south across Jamaica Street Bridge that I turned to look at the person sitting opposite me in the carriage. It was a young woman in her mid-twenties.

She had long dark hair and a beautiful face, but my teenage eyes were unable to hold back from taking in the well-filled white blouse and the expanse of thigh seen when she crossed her lovely legs. The mini-skirt was a relatively new concept, and the tiny red garment she wore did a marvellous job as a fashion statement.

I was aware of swallowing hard before I looked up at her face again. She arched her right eyebrow and dimples appeared on both of her cheeks. She uncrossed and re-crossed her legs. The view drew my gaze, and she knew it.

Did I see a glimpse of white in there?

My underwear was uncomfortable for a lot of the journey, and I went to the area between carriages more than once to adjust myself. My silent travelling companion was as pretty as a couple of the girls in the office in which I'd worked.

The young woman sat there, smiling serenely as she gazed at the passing countryside.

Occasionally we met each other's gaze in the reflection of the large window, but neither of us spoke.

I stood to lift my suitcase down from the luggage rack as we pulled into Darlington Station.

"Good luck." The girl gave me a beaming smile and a wink.

I gave her a weak smile, looked her up and down again to memorise her for my dreams, and then left the train.

My erection was fading by the time I stepped onto the platform.
