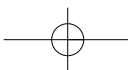
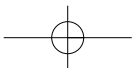
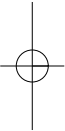
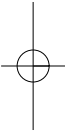
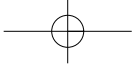


# prologue: contract





‘How long is it now that you’ve been killing for me, Carl?’

Carl Hudson had never met the man sitting across from him but he knew the type: trying to be provocative just to get a reaction. Hudson ignored the question, lifted a white cup and sipped at his espresso.

‘Don’t be shy, now, Carl,’ the man said. ‘You’re among friends here.’

He spread his arms out and smiled at his own joke because they were the only two people using the pavement tables of a nondescript coffee shop. The place had just opened for the morning trade and the baristas were still putting the last few tables in place outside.

It was a warm day in late August and the man sitting across from Hudson removed his suit jacket. The label inside flashed as he placed it over the back of his chair, disclosing that it was a very expensive piece of bespoke tailoring. He cinched up the cloth of one leg of his trousers and then crossed his legs, summer-weight wool brushing softly as he did so.

Hudson sipped again at his coffee and pushed his sunglasses up his nose with the index finger of his free hand. He looked at the other man and, taking in the details as his companion leaned back in his chair, decided that he needed to give him a name.

Tag Heuer watch.

Armani glasses.

GJ Moffat

Silk tie by Paul Smith.

'I need to call you something,' Hudson said, still ignoring the man's question. 'How do you feel about Paul?'

'Fine. Whatever.'

'I'll admit that I'm curious,' Hudson said. 'Why is it that you want to meet me now? What's so special about this job?'

'I like to study history,' Paul said, lighting a cigarette and drawing in a deep lungful of smoke. He picked a piece of tobacco from his tongue and flicked it on to the ground; smoke from the cigarette drifted up into the glare of the sun.

'I mean, you can learn a lot from history,' he said finally. 'Let me give you some examples by way of illustration, OK?'

Hudson was beginning to feel the heat of the sun on his shaved head and wasn't really in the mood for small talk. But he had to give Paul his place; he was the one who wrote the cheques – figuratively speaking.

'This is one you might know about, given your . . .'

Paul's eyes darted around as he searched for the right word, 'background.' He smiled, satisfied with the word he had come up with, and carried on with his train of thought. 'Did you know, for example, that the first use of a car bomb in the West was . . .'

He paused and looked at Hudson. 'Sorry, that was a bit crass, wasn't it? What is it that you soldier types call it?'

Hudson knew that he was being toyed with but he had to play the game. 'Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device,' he said matter-of-factly.

'God, it sounds so utterly banal when you say it like that, don't you think?' Paul asked.

Hudson took it for a rhetorical question and said nothing.

'Anyway,' Paul went on, running a hand through his thick grey hair. 'The first time one was used in the West was in 1920 in New York. Some Italian lunatic took a horse-drawn wagon loaded with explosives into the heart of the financial district in Manhattan and killed forty people. Terrible thing.'

Hudson wondered where this was going, but he could see that Paul was in full flow and that it would be a mistake to interrupt him at this point.

'But you've seen the results of one of those things up close, haven't you? Where was it – Iraq or Afghanistan or . . .?'

## Fallout

Hudson nodded, but said nothing.

‘But then al-Qaeda,’ Paul said, shaking his head. ‘I mean they really took it to new levels of ingenuity, you know. The American embassy in Beirut in eighty-three. And then look what they went and did on 9/11. The ultimate vehicle-borne device. They cost me a lot of money that year with the hit the stock market took.’

Hudson finished his coffee and wiped at the thin film of sweat beading on his forehead with a napkin. He got the feeling this part of the conversation was over.

‘Like I said,’ he started, ‘what’s so special about this job that you wanted to see me in person? Why not follow the usual lines of communication?’

What Hudson really meant to ask, but could not, was: what are you doing risking a meeting in public like this, you lunatic?

‘It’s . . .’ again with the dramatic pause, ‘delicate.’

‘How so?’

‘Well, maybe delicate isn’t quite the right word.’

*Get to the point.*

‘Have you ever killed a police officer?’

‘You know,’ Hudson said, ‘you were absolutely right. Delicate is not the correct word.’

He stood, pulled a ten-pound note from his pocket and put it under his empty cup. ‘The coffee’s on me,’ he told Paul. ‘Let’s not ever do this again, OK?’

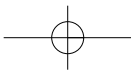
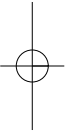
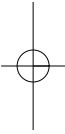
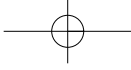
‘Five hundred thousand,’ Paul said.

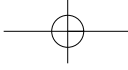
Hudson stared at him, wondering if he’d heard correctly.

‘Five. Hundred. Thousand,’ Paul repeated deliberately.

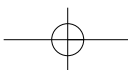
Ten times the biggest single fee Hudson had previously had from the man. He looked along the street and nodded at his back-up waiting in the car thirty yards away, indicating that he should sit tight for a bit longer. Then he sat back down.

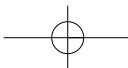
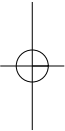
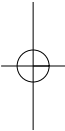
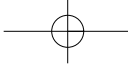
‘I thought that might get your attention,’ Paul said.





# part one: targets





# 1

Rebecca Irvine looked in the mirror and, for the first time in a while, was sort of pleased with what she saw. She'd been letting her hair grow for about a year now – since her husband, Tom, moved out of the house – and the previous blond dye job was gone, replaced with something closer to her natural shade of dark brown.

'Becky, come on. We don't want to be late,' her best friend, Hannah Fraser, shouted at her from the hall downstairs.

Irvine opened a drawer in her dressing-table and looked at the envelope from her lawyer that contained the final court order confirming her divorce from Tom. She felt as if she had lost a part of her life that she would never get back. Not that she regretted for a second the fact that the marriage had produced her son, Connor. But it was going to be tough holding down her job as a detective constable in Strathclyde Police's CID and trying to take care of her family.

Irvine picked up her mobile phone and scrolled through the contacts list until she found Logan Finch's number, her finger hesitating over the call button.

'You better not be calling *him*,' Hannah said, now leaning against the door of Irvine's bedroom. 'This is a girls-only night, you know.'

Irvine had not heard Hannah come up the stairs; she turned the phone over in her hand and looked sheepishly at her friend.

GJ Moffat

‘Sorry,’ she said. ‘But it’s still kind of new for us. I mean, we’ve only had five real dates. Plus, with all that Logan went through with Ellie, it’s just, you know . . .’

She stopped herself from saying any more.

Hannah only knew the official story: that Logan’s old girlfriend, Penny Grant, had been murdered and that her eleven-year-old daughter, Ellie, turned up in a state of shock three days later at Logan’s flat. Logan was Ellie’s father and so he’d taken her in and was doing the best he could to bring her up.

The real story was a little more complex and Irvine sometimes had to stop and remind herself that even those closest to her couldn’t ever know the truth.

Hannah sighed. ‘Look, just call him,’ she said. ‘I know you won’t be happy until you do.’

‘I was going to anyway,’ Irvine said.

She dialled Logan’s mobile number and put the phone to her ear. Ellie answered after a couple of rings.

‘Hi, Ellie.’ Irvine tried to sound cheerful. ‘Is Logan there?’

‘Hold on.’

Irvine was unsure how Ellie viewed this new stage in her relationship with Logan; couldn’t work out if the girl’s occasional bouts of sullen behaviour when she was round at his new flat in Shawlands was because of it or the fact that at thirteen Ellie was technically a teenager and supposed to act that way. Whatever the cause, Irvine was prepared to allow Ellie as much time as she needed to adjust after all that she had been through.

‘Hey, Becky,’ Logan said as he took the phone from Ellie. ‘What’s up?’

She heard the smile in his voice and couldn’t help but smile too. ‘Just checking in to see how you’re doing.’

Hannah rolled her eyes at Irvine and turned to go back downstairs.

‘I’m good,’ Logan said. ‘We’re just about to go into town to grab a pizza.’

‘OK, listen, I don’t want to hold you up and we’re heading out to the concert now anyway. I’ll give you a call later when I get home. If it’s not too late.’

‘It’s never too late,’ Logan told her. ‘Call me any time.’



## Fallout

They said goodbye and Irvine pressed the end button on her mobile, slipping the phone into her pocket and going down to join Hannah.

‘Hey, look,’ Hannah said, stopping Irvine before they left the house. ‘I do like to kid around, you know, but I think Logan’s good for you. You deserve better than Tom, that’s for sure.’

Irvine smiled and hugged her friend. ‘Thanks,’ she said. ‘And he is good, right?’

‘Seriously. And he’s kind of hot too, which always helps. Have you two, you know . . .’

Irvine didn’t answer the question.

