

Ponderings

Chapter One

“That doesn’t look right.” Said Bob Kerr to his trusted companion; a Jack Russell called Hector, who was of similar age if dog years were counted and just as lame. “A queer place to be doing fly-tipping. Dod will have a fit. He was tellin’ me they were weeks behind schedule when they were fishing you out of the ditch. We’ll just keep on walking, haven’t seen anything, nothing to do with us.” Hector appeared to hang on every word as they stuck to the dark, tree lined path around Seafield Pond. They didn’t need lights or torches; they’d walked this route for the past sixteen years. In the distance four shadowy figures were now getting back into a car with no lights on but the engine was still running, sounded a bit like a diesel. Gavin would have known what it was as he was in the trade. “About all he is good for Hector, that and his blessed computers. Not that’s there’s much in any of them. I’d like to know where I went wrong. She says I was too hard on the first two and not hard enough on the other pair.” For the first time since they’d left the house Hector appeared not to be listening, his heightened sense of smell catching new and more pungent scents, curiosity satisfied, he now trotted as quickly as he could to where the strangers car had been parked. Bob had no choice other than to follow him. “What are you seeing Hector?” It was a fairly stupid question as the dog was almost totally blind. “Don’t you go fallin’ in that ditch again. I’ll no be able to get you out until morning.” Bob pulled a small torch out of his jacket pocket,

which was purely for emergencies and pointed it towards the ground.

Sure enough he was in the middle of several foot prints. “They’re either awful wee blokes, or women with that size of foot Hector. Oi where are you headin’ now?” Bob had intended shining his torch down into the trench where the sewage pipes were to be laid, but he got no more than a glance as Hector decided he wanted home. “Aye we’ll get up the road before The Bowling Club Crew starts rollin’ out. Yer no as daft as you look.” The dog didn’t dignify the comment by looking back; instead he just kept on at his own pace towards home.

By eight o’clock the following morning Bob Kerr was standing over the ditch he’d seen the fly-tippers at, whilst a gracious labourer had once again gone into the pipe to coax Hector out with a chocolate biscuit; doggy treats hadn’t worked this time.

“I’m goin’ to take him to the vet; he’s too much trouble nowadays.” Lied Bob as he waited anxiously for his pal to be retrieved from the pipe. There was a little snarling, barking and a few choice words from the labourer before, both appeared from the pipe. However the labourer looked far more ashen faced than expected. “What’s wrong with you Son you look a bit shaken there? He can be a right aggressive wee bugger, you know what they say about grumpy old men, well he’s the canine equivalent.”

“Seen a ghost mate?” Asked Dod trying not to look concerned about the possibility of another delay in the contract.

“Closer than you might think Dod. You’d better call the police.” Said the labourer as he held onto the struggling Jack Russell and trying to stop himself from being sick.

“What now?” Asked Dod with a croak in his voice.

“There’s a body down there, weirdest thing I’ve ever seen. It’s a bloke, but he’s in women’s clothes.” Answered The Labourer whereupon he handed Bob, Hector ,wrapped in an old towel Bob had brought with him. Having been stuck down a hole filled with water and god knows what else, he seemed happy enough unlike the labourer, who was now throwing up.

“That’ll be one of those transistors. A lot of them going about.” Said Bob knowing this wasn’t quite the right term for them, but hoping that the gravity of the situation would hide his ignorance.

Bob was at least half a mile from his house and his running days were long gone. He spied the Site Agent’s office surely they must have a phone, he would ask them to make a call. He turned to the labourer. “Are you going to be ok? Does the office have a phone?” Asked Bob, the young man nodded twice and pointed to the office.

When Bob reached the portacabin, he knocked on the door, a middle aged man of about forty five appeared. “Can I help you?”

“Sorry to appear so abrupt, but I need to use your phone, one of your labourers who was helping retrieve my dog from the trench, well apparently he has found more than that. He claims there’s a body down there, so I think it

would be wise to call the police.” Said Bob without as much as a breath between sentences or a flicker of emotion, confident again now that he had his dog back. The Site Agent stood still and said nothing, he didn’t know if this was a joke or, was this old man a complete lunatic? “I know its hard to believe, maybe you should have a look yourself before we call the police, I would go down but the old legs won’t take it, if I got in there I would never get out again and then your trench would be moonlighting as a graveyard with the first two customers free. If you think I am an old loony who has lost his marbles as well as his dog, show me the phone and I’ll call the police, they know me. I’m sure they’ll believe me. Better do it fast, we don’t want this place smelling any worse than it already does.”

The Site Agent regained his composure, although he continued to eye Bob with suspicion as he spoke. “Sorry it’s a lot to take in, the phone’s over there, I don’t know the number so maybe it’s better if you do it, being a local.”

“Hello! Is that Dunbar police station, this is Bob Kerr. Yes I’m fine Isabelle. You had better get yourselves down here to West Barns, to the site just down from the bowling club and across from the pond. One of the workers has found a body in the trench, while he was trying to get my dog out. No I’m not drunk and it’s not a joke. No I don’t know who it is, I haven’t been in there. Bob was rapidly running out of patience. “You could always ignore this call and maybe some old age pensioner or some kids mucking around might find the body tomorrow, the day after I made this call, that would look good in the papers. Twenty minutes, ok

then thanks.”

“Well Mr Muirhead, I think you had better check on the young man who found the body. Maybe you should bring him in and give him a whisky if you have any, if not some hot tea. I’ll go back and wait for the police arriving.” Bob loved being in control of the situation, it took him back to when he was building stone and ran a large squad of men.

The police eventually arrived, forty minutes later. Bob noticed it was young James Brunton and Sergeant Blackwell. Sergeant Blackwell, Bob didn’t have a lot of time for him, young Jamie on the other hand was keen and helped out with the mini rugby, he could have been a professional, but broke his leg before an important trial for Scotland’s U18s and never really took it seriously after that. Instead he concentrated on his career in the Police. Sergeant Blackwell on the other hand was from Glasgow originally and found this quiet backwater more to his liking than the gangs in his home city. It was a lot less hassle throwing his corpulent frame around, bullying youngsters and harassing old people, but not the ones who really caused all the trouble the drug dealers and the loan sharks, folk said he was in their pocket.

“Morning Mr Kerr, how are you?” It was young Jamie who spoke first.

“I’m ok Jamie, how’s yer Mum and Dad?”

“They’re.....”

“Listen, we’re no here to exchange pleasantries and pass the time of day. You better no be wasting our time Bob.”

“Yes I’ll bet you’re really busy, what is it today kids playing football in the street, or is your breakfast getting cold?” Muttered Bob to himself

“Mr Kerr can you show us where the labourer found the body please?” Asked Jamie.

“No problem Jamie, just follow me lad.” Answered Bob as they made their way up the grassy slope towards the trench. “This is it here Son.”

“Oi Bob, can you no see these stripes on my arm or, are you going blind like that old dug of yours, should have been put down ages ago. Direct your answers to me.”

“Listen maybe people in Glasgow appreciate that lack of respect you give locals, but your turn will come, people around here trust Jamie and even that old gossip Isabel Morrison, but you, well that’s a different story. There doesn’t seem to be a lot crimes being solved and the drug scene up the High Street is as bad as it has ever been. You can slag off me and my dog because we can’t defend ourselves physically, but mentally we are both more than a match for you, it wasnae you who found the body it was Hector.”

“What do I care what people in a shit hole like this think about me, five more years here and then I can retire.”

“That says it all, the sooner they promote somebody local the better and safer this place will be.”

“In there, if you want to be a hero Sergeant why don’t you go in and check it out?”

“PC Brunton go into that trench and check it out.”

Jamie and Bob just smiled at each other

“Before you go in Son, you had better put some overalls and gloves on, you don’t know what’s down there, Health and Safety and all that.”

“Good idea Mr Kerr, we don’t want anymore bodies piling up.”

“Just get on with it Constable.”

Jamie got dressed and went into the trench and came out a few minutes later, only slightly less shaken than the labourer. “It’s true Sergeant, there is a body down there, looks like an elderly Gentleman in his mid sixties.”

“Not a complete waste of time then, maybe you can have a go at solving a real Police case.” Bobs comments were directed towards Sergeant Blackwell

“Mr Kerr, can I see you for a minute.” Asked Jamie.

“Certainly Jamie.”

“Mr Kerr, when they bring the body up I want you to have a look at it before they put it into the van. There’s something about him, I sort of half recognised the face but it was too dark to tell and since he appears to be of a similar age to yourself, you maybe able to identify him.”

“Ok Jamie, better ask Sergeant Blackwell first, don’t want you getting into anymore trouble.”

As the coroner’s men were carrying the body towards the rear of the van. Jamie asked them to stop, so Bob could

have a look.

This time it was Bob's turn to be shocked, he looked at the face in disbelief and gasped, "Its Peter Thompson from East Linton, Peter Thompson you know he writes for the Envoy, Peter Thompson the Natureman."

"Well at least they'll have something decent to write about next week other than Domino Drives and prize winning vegetables." Said Sergeant Blackwell.

"It would be nice if you had some kind words to say about the recently departed." Said Bob as he began to walk away.

"Mr Kerr, hold up Bob." Called Jamie. "You'll need to make a full statement. I could pop round later today if that's all right?"

"Mr Kerr will have to do what everyone else has to. Either wait here or make his own way up to the Police Station." Said Sergeant Blackwell firmly. "This is looking like a suspicious death and we've not got time to chase up statements because members of the public are too lethargic to help us, but are quick enough to criticise us when we take too long to solve cases."

"Sorry Bob."

"Didnae worry about it son. Just mind and tell your folks I was asking after them. Good Dunbar folk, unlike some."

Chapter Two

“I thought you had a meeting today?” Asked Eva Kerr, Bob’s wife for more than forty long years, as she prepared the living room for the imminent arrival of her friends.

“I cannae be bothered. I’m going out with the dogs.” Said Bob searching for his tammy. “You know that bloody Inspector woman all but accused me of being senile. I’ve got a sharper brain now than she’ll ever have.”

“What did you expect her to think? You told her you saw what looked like a gang of wee people.” Eva had to swallow hard to stop herself from bursting into laughter. “Fly tipping.” Eva couldn’t stop herself from laughing now and tears started to run down her face.

“Aye yer awfy funny when you want to be. I saw them and their foot prints.” Said Bob as he stomped out of the house grabbing the Jack Russell’s lead from the kitchen bunker. Eva could still be heard laughing outside as Bob fastened the lead to Hector’s collar. This just made Bob all the more determined to prove what he saw was right enough. He may not be a match for that snippy Inspector Murdoch, but he was more than a match for Sergeant Blackwell. “No way Hector, I’ll get there before the pair of them, and her in there will be made to eat her words.” Added Bob as they reached the garden gate.

“Morning Bob. All right there Hector?” Asked Diane Wheaton from the houses behind Bob’s, as she stopped to clap Hector and dig for gossip.

“Hi Hen.” Said Bob with a sigh. It would be at least ten

minutes before he got away again. Diane always started with the pleasantries and slowly worked up to the body, that it was rumoured that Bob had found. “It wasnae me Hen, if it was anybody it was Hector, or the labourer that went to get him out of the ditch. Hopefully this time we’ll get round without finding anything more than a few rabbits and water hens.” Bob made to move off, but Diane blocked his path.

“I heard the body was wearing a dress.”

“You did? I cannae say I noticed. I just wanted to get away from there as soon as possible. At my age you don’t want to be hanging around dead people too much.” This time Bob sidestepped Diane and was onto the inside road before Diane could say anything more.

“Mind and keep him on his lead this time.” Called Diane.

“Aye.” Said Bob as he walked as quickly as his legs could carry him. From the front window of his house he could see that the Police had cordoned off the trench in which the body had been found. Yesterday the site had been crawling with Police and locals out for the gossip. Today however through the bare branches of the roadside trees there were only two uniformed officers sitting in their car. “That’s what’s wrong with them today. If they had to walk a beat then folk wouldn’t be so ready to condemn them. What do you say Hector?” Asked Bob, but Hector wasn’t interested in his master’s rantings, he just wanted to be let off his lead and sniff every blade of grass in the field.

Keeping to the path as usual, Bob tried not to appear

overly interested on what the newly arrived CID Officers were up to.

“Alright Bob?” Asked Dod as he appeared from his hut. “Looks like they’re going to be at it a while.”

“Have they said anymore?” Asked Bob trying to identify the CID Officers.

“Nothing to me. The papers sent down a reporter and photographer, but were away as fast as they arrived. Would have been nice if they’d asked permission to come onto the site first.”

“Aye well, you should ask for a commission for the photos at least.”

“I might just do that. The bloody Health and Safety were sniffing about a while back. Said my fences weren’t up to scratch. Short of putting up machine gun turrets on it I don’t know what they want from me.”

Bob suddenly twigged that he hadn’t seen the night watchman. A local retired man by the name of Gerry March. Obviously he would have been on duty and like most nights he would have been doing his rounds. Not that he could have put up much of a struggle against hardened criminals, but he would have been able to report any wrong doings.

“So I take it Gerry’s out of a job now?” Asked Bob casually as he stepped away from Dod disinterestedly.

“No, he logged it, thinking it was just another courting couple. Said he was at the other end of the site when he

saw the car draw up.” Answered Dod not realising Bob’s intensions.

Bob was out regular as clockwork with Hector and knew where Gerry was most nights. During the warmer months Bob had walked to the bay and back again with Gerry. Now however Gerry only had to patrol to the far end of the seawall. A hellish cold place in the winter months. Only Bob had heard that Gerry didn’t always make it to the end of the wall on his rounds. Word had it that he’d gotten in tow with some merry widow from the caravan park.

“I was sayin’ Bob that the police have already spoken to him.” Said Dod loudly trying to snap Bob out of his private thoughts.

“I dare say. Well I had better be off. Speak to you later.” Said Bob as he all but marched Hector round the pond and back to the house. “Dinnae worry I’m no stayin’.” Said Bob as he unleashed Hector among Eva’s friends.

“Seen any wee people when you were out Bob?” Asked one of Eva’s friends, as the others tried to stifle their giggles.

“Very funny, but there’s more to this business than meets the eye. Wee people and all.” Bob didn’t wait for a reply as he headed out the kitchen door again.

The walk would have probably been too much for him, but he still grudged the petrol he used, to get to the top of the village. Bob didn’t consider himself to be tight, but his family did. “Hell mend them.” Said Bob as he got into his car. “When it’s gone, it’s gone.”

Chapter Three

“Didnae wake you did I?” Asked Bob as he waited to be invited into Gerry March’s house.

“No no come on in.” Lied Gerry as he unsteadily got out of the way. “So what brings you up to the cheap seats?”

“Cheap seats my backside. I’m no the one with a brand new Honda in the drive.” Said Bob noticing the way the cushions were laid out on the couch. “I thought you said I didnae wake you. I can come back ye ken.”

“Yer here now. Want a tea? I’ve got beer if you want one.”

“Tea please.” Bob didn’t wait to be asked to sit down. Sixty years of building stone had taken its toll on his legs. What was strange, his upper body was as strong as ever. “So what do you make of that body found in the pipe?”

“Question if it would have been found had Old Hector not fallen in.” Answered Gerry from the kitchen.

“You know who he was?”

“Aye, well I ken of him. Wrote nature articles for The Envoy. Cannae say I read it much, all fetes and court pages.” Gerry wasn’t daft, but, he would play Bob’s game and force him to ask the question, that he came here to ask, of what he was doing when the body was dumped. Only then would Gerry decide whether to tell the truth or stick to his report.

“Who else does the night shift with you?” Asked Bob pretending to take an interest in the model soldiers on the

mantelpiece.

“That would be Ted Barnes, but ye ken it was me that was on that night.”

“Right. And does he have a lady friend he visits when nobody’s looking as well?” Asked Bob still looking at the figures. It was a similar tactic he used when they played each other at dominoes.

“I wondered when you were going to get round to asking that.”

“No before you served up the tea, seems to be a shortage of biscuits though.”

“I’ve only got digestives, can’t be doing with all those fancy chocolate affairs.”

“That would be fine. So are you going to tell me what you were doing when you should have been walking the fences?” Bob considered adding an or else scenario, but, decided to keep that safe for now.

Gerry’s face moved slowly from a fixed false smile normally reserved for nosy neighbours and kids retrieving their footballs from his garden; to a proper grin. “You’ve listened to the village gossip and think I have a woman friend.” Said Gerry now sitting opposite Bob. “I’d be so lucky.”

“So who are they?” Asked Bob hoping his train of thought wasn’t about to run out of steam.

“My son and daughter in law.” Sighed Gerry automatically looking down at the carpet shamefully. He

knew what questions and accusations would come next. True a lot of it was of his own making, Sinful bragging.

“Is that right? Taking a break is he.” Asked Bob wholly thrown by this unexpected piece of information. “I thought he would be at The Hilton. Or maybe he’s here incognito?”

“Very funny, but no from where I’m sitting. Bloody show promised him the world. The laddie staked every thing he had including his career and house on it. Two years on and all he’s left with are a couple of T shirts and a boxful of cds.” Said Gerry reaching for his cigarettes.

Bob was stunned. His sons had tinkered with the music world, but neither made it passed the village hall or local pubs. In fact if memory served Gavin never made it passed the village hall. At least Stan could knock out a tune. Gavin was more of a want to be. Thankfully he put all those years of expensive car magazines to good use with his wee showroom. “That’s what happens when you take your feet off the ground. It isn’t always there when you have to come back down, but that’s no so good about you laddie.”

“I should have been walking the fences, but he’s taken all this failure awfy hard. In years gone by they might have locked him away, but now a days it’s all day centres and support workers.”

“What are you no tellin’ me Gerry?” I ken there’s something you’re holding back. Yer eyes twitch like when you’re holdin’ the double-blank...” Bob had long since given up cigarettes and had been deeply disappointed when all his children turned out to be smokers of varying degrees.

Today Gerry's smoke smelled particularly vile, but that nicotine monster which Bob had wrestled into submission all those years ago was now starting to fight back.

"Look Bob, very few folk ken he's here and that's the way I want it to stay. I bought the caravan and help out where I can which isn't much on my pension and wages." Said Gerry filling the small living room with smoke from his aging lungs.

"Aye at our age it should be them looking at us no the other way around. I've done it for all of mine at one stage or another and what thanks do you get none. No that I go lookin' for it either."

"True, no that I begrudge him it."

"So who recognised him or saw him?" Asked Bob and allowed Gerry time to answer as he took a mouthful of tea. Bob didn't have the heart to say that he took nothing in it, the milk and sugar was a bonus in his eyes. It was Eva's idea to get their weight down.

"That guy Thompson. He was at the pond looking for some sort of bird, and I'm no altogether sure it was the feathered type either."

"Guess work or fact?" Asked Bob beginning to feel restless having sat so long.

"He spotted my laddie out walking with his wife. Next thing they knew he was across wanting an interview. Gave them some saga about how he was a proper journalist and his job was on the line. My laddie's wife told him where to go and took my laddie back to their caravan. The laddie was

in an awfy state. That's why I wasn't walking the fence when I was supposed to be." Gerry stubbed out his cigarette and reached for the packet again. "So what's your interest? It's no like you to be a nosy parker."

"I saw the car and the folk that dumped the body. Folk think I'm off my head because I said it was a load of wee folk, or women." Answered Bob slowly getting to his feet. "So you dinnae think your laddie or his lass had anything to do with it?"

"If I did I wouldnae tell you would I?"

"I dare say."

"Meet me tonight at the usual spot and I'll take you to meet the laddie. You'll see he's not fit for anything. As for his wife, she cannae go to the toilet, bar he's at the door waiting for her."

"I'll do that. Don't mind if Hector comes along?"

"The laddie likes dogs."

"Just hope Hector likes him."