

FULL CIRCLE

a novel

by Lance Mason

CHAPTER ONE

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In the sky above Auckland International Airport, icy rain clouds hung in granite-gray ranks, marshaled like a villainous army. Inside the terminal building, striding behind his luggage trolley, a weedy, fastidious man in spectacles joined the first-class queue at the Air New Zealand check-in counter. He fingered his platinum cufflinks, then flicked a speck of lint from the sleeve of his chalk-stripe, navy blue suit. Once at the agent's station, he handed over his tickets and passport. The

woman checking him in spoke with the sharp vowels and wayward rs of a down-country New Zealander.

"Off back to America, sir?"

"Yes, that's right. NZ6, via Los Angeles."

"Did you enjoy your stay in our wee country?"

Indeed, he had enjoyed his visit, he said, and expected to return soon. They exchanged pleasantries as she processed his documents.

"Now, before we check your bags, sir, has anyone asked you to carry anything . . .?"

Across the departures hall, thirty feet away, sat a tall man with a rat's nest of brown hair and an ill-fitting, rumpled gray suit. He appeared to be scanning the front page of The Dominion, one of New Zealand's dailies.

Pocketing his documents, the Air New Zealand passenger turned and headed for the up escalator. He had an hour and a half before the first boarding call for NZ6 and he'd decided to spend the last of his New Zealand cash in the duty-free shops in the departure area upstairs. As he walked away from the counter, the man across the hall folded his newspaper, swept up a brown carry-on, and followed him. Lengthening his stride, the taller man closed the gap between them as they neared the escalator. Readjusting his pace, the stranger was now barely a yard

behind the passenger. As they rode up, the man in the gray suit glanced around idly. He slipped something onto his left ring finger, an almost absent-minded gesture.

As the smaller man stepped off the moving stairway onto the second floor, his pursuer raised his left hand and brought it down sharply against his mark's shoulder.

"G'day, Phillie, me old mate! 'Ow're ya goin'?"

The man in blue turned his head. "I'm sorry, but I think you've got the wrong--"

"Bloody hell, my apologies, mate! I thought you were a bloke I used to work with, eh."

"That's okay." Completely relaxed, the dapper traveler hadn't flinched at the greeting, the stranger's hand-slap having masked the jab from the poisoned barb.

"No, crikey, mate." The man with the wild hair was shaking his head. "I'm sorry. A fella can't go 'round smackin' innocent folk like that, can he?"

The passenger felt the floor melting under him. The garrulous stranger grew a second head.

"Say, mate, you okay?"

"No," said the shorter man, "I . . . it seems--"

"Here, let me get you to a seat, old son. Over here, away from the crowd." The taller man reached for the other's black briefcase. "I'll hold this for you, now."

"No, not . . . not my . . . I--" The Los Angeles-bound man's motor functions were collapsing, saliva spilling from his lips. The other man now acted as his companion, leading him off to a padded bench under a pair of wide, floor-to-ceiling windows, and helping him lie down. Bystanders turned away, not wanting to embarrass a man who seemed to have suddenly taken ill. As the man lost consciousness, his assailant slid what appeared to be a fountain pen under the sleeve of the chalk-stripe suit, emptying the contents of the disguised syringe into the victim's arm and fixing a tiny adhesive patch to the inside of his wrist. Muttering with apparent concern, the man in gray deftly lifted the unconscious man's passport, wallet, and boarding pass, dropped them unseen into his carry-on, then carefully took out a small, firm cushion and placed it under the clean-cut American's head. Patting him on the arm, the taller man picked up the black briefcase and walked away.

Riding down the escalator away from curious eyes, the man with the unkempt hair then strode out of the terminal under grim, turbulent skies. Crossing to a far corner of the parking lot, he climbed into the back of a solitary white van, removed the brown wig, and changed his jacket, tie, and shoes. Stripping the pilfered wallet of money,

IDs, and credit cards, he tossed it aside. He put the boarding pass into the black briefcase along with a passport from a small stack he had secreted in the van, all of which had been doctored weeks before. Twenty minutes before NZ6's scheduled departure, the tall man brushed his own short, black-dyed hair, put on a pair of spectacles, stepped out of the van with the brown carry-on and the stolen briefcase, and strolled back into the terminal. He rode the escalator up, checked that his "companion" lay undisturbed, the cushion still in place, and bought some chocolates and a book, slipping them into the carry-on. Then he rode back down to the ground floor.

A woman's voice on the public address system chanted, "Last call for boarding NZ6 to Los Angeles. Will the following passengers please report to Gate Number Eight: Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Burger, Mr. Richard Henderson . . ."

The tall man walked into the arrivals area where he wouldn't be seen from the check-in desk. Five minutes passed.

"Last boarding call for Flight NZ6 to Los Angeles," the woman announced. "Last and final call."

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At 4:12 p.m., Auckland time, a 747 lifted off the tarmac with an explosive whine. At the same moment, a tall man

with trim black hair and tinted, horn-rim glasses, jogged up to the Air New Zealand check-in counter toting a black briefcase and brown carry-on.

"Oh my God! I'm awful sorry. I just missed my flight!"

The woman agent looked him up and down. "I'm afraid I wasn't here at check-in. Are you Mr. Henderson?"

"Yes, yes, I am." He rummaged around, first in the carry-on, then in the briefcase, grabbed the counterfeit passport, and pushed it across to her. She examined the name and photo and handed it back.

"Where were you, Mr. Henderson? We made the last call several times." She softened a little. Some of these Americans were hopeless travelers. "We held the flight as long as we could."

"I'm really sorry. There's been a mix-up at the lab on the Shore. I've been on the phone for almost two hours trying to fix it, but no go. I'm going to have to stay another day or two. I suppose my bags are on the plane?"

"No, sir. It's against security regulations to fly unaccompanied bags. We had to off-load them."

He wore a grimace of contrition. "I really am sorry. I feel terrible."

"We understand. Emergencies happen. May I see your boarding pass, please?" He held it out to her. "Very well, Mr. Henderson. Just step over there to Baggage Services and they'll help you reclaim your bags. You'll need to show your boarding pass and passport again."

The man in the glasses did as he was told and left the building with Richard Henderson's luggage, paying a last visit to the white van. Half an hour later, having re-packed some vital parts of Henderson's belongings with his own, he was at the Singapore Airlines desk checking himself and one large bag onto a flight to Singapore.

"Here you are, Mr. Henderson," said the coffee-colored gentleman behind the desk, "your passport and boarding card. Have a nice flight."

"Henderson" went back up the escalator and sat down in the departures area, picking a place within sight of his target, who was still unconscious on the bench under the windows. A few passers-by glanced over at the reclining figure, but it wasn't unusual to see a passenger dozing through a long lay-over. The tall man took the book and chocolates out of his carry-on and began reading and eating. After a time, he checked his watch; forty minutes had passed. He stood up with his belongings, checked

through immigration and security, and boarded Singapore Air Flight 286.

Twelve minutes later, the airliner began its take-off run. As it did, the man reached down into the carry-on and, his hands out of sight, switched batteries on a cellphone and raised its antenna. As 286 lifted off with a thumping shudder, he pressed the "send" button, a millisecond blip flashed on the pilot's instruments, and the abandoned van in the carpark below exploded black and golden against a purple and gray horizon. In the same instant, inside the terminal, a second blast decapitated the immobile traveler, spraying fragments of his skull and highly-prized brain into the Departures area crowd and blowing out the huge upstairs windows. Out on the ground, near the building's entrance, a Samoan mother, just arrived on a family visit and carrying her infant son, was skewered, shoulder to hip, by a four-foot saber of falling glass. The sword-like blade sliced through the child, as well, and they both died where they fell.

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The woman lay on her back and Detective Inspector Nigel Hawkins's fingertip drew slow circles around her naked,

bouncy nipple. She wore a satisfied smile, and so did Hawkins.

"I think you should quit the police, Baby," she said, her willowy arms stretching over her head. "I really do."

In a pig's bum, he thought. And he hated being called Baby--Sue had never called him that. Still, Hawkins kept his smile. "I thought you found it exciting, Julia. All the procedures and uniforms and soap opera jargon."

"Well, I did say that--once. But now it's become such a bore. Mostly what you people do is tiresome and boring. Not at all dashing."

"No dash, eh?"

She wrinkled her nose. "None."

"I should quit?"

"Direttamente," she insisted, with a gay wave. "Ciao, polizia!"

He hated that, too--her putting on airs, speaking in tongues and such like, saying his work was boring. What bollix. But he wasn't prepared to call her on it, not yet. "Well, I'm sorry, Sweetheart"--Sweetheart? He'd never called Sue that--"but a cop's what I am. It's all I'm good at."

The woman stretched her hand deep under the sheets.

"Oh, you're good at so much more," she moaned, rolling her

eyes playfully toward the ceiling. Just then, Hawkins's cellphone bleated from its place on the night-table.

"Don't you answer that," she commanded, a sudden, hard edge to her voice.

Ignoring her, Hawkins reached for the ringing phone. She grabbed it first as it chirped away. "Come on, now," he said, "give me the phone. It'll be important. They wouldn't be ringing me on Sunday if--"

"I'm important! I'm damned important"--she was nearly shouting now--"and I won't have our time together messed about with this way." She held the phone away from him. It rang insistently.

"No one's trying to mess you about. If they're ringing on my day off, they'll have a bloody good reason."

The ringing stopped. "There then, the service picked it up," she said in spiteful delight.

Julia had been Hawkins's lover for the past--how long now?--five, six months, the woman he'd left his wife for, a move he'd grown to regret. "It's not on the service," he said, no longer smiling.

"What? You let them ring right through?" she demanded, growing angry again. "When you and I are together like this?"

"Look, I told you--"

She leapt up from the bed, snatched a champagne-colored wrap around her firm, alabaster shoulders. Her shape, with its muted angles and fine lengths of limb, was so--how to put it?--shapely, in contrast to his squat, mesomorphic slab of a body, all blunt flesh and muscle. She lit a cigarette, a habit Hawkins had always found unclean. "Your work's more important to you than I am," she said, her gaze swiveling to the window, the rain outside falling on St. Mary's Bay.

You bet your sweet arse it is, he thought. "Of course that's not true. I gave up my marriage for you." He scrubbed his palm over the steel-gray stubble of his haircut, the body language of a frustration he tried to make genuine.

"Did you?" she squealed, mocking the charade. She nodded emphatically, her blond hair flashing. "Did you, now?" Her face went blank. "Well that's more bullshit, Nigel, and you know it. You left Sue because you were bored rigid."

True, he thought.

"You wanted the adventure of being with me."

True again. "Look, they know not to call me unless it's urgent. Police work can't just be put on hold while we 'indulge our passions,' so to speak."

"So--to--speak," she said, dragging out the words, scoffing at him. "Well, it was on hold twenty minutes ago when you were fucking me, wasn't it." She dropped the phone on the bed, and it began ringing again. Hawkins, who was sitting up now, reached for it guardedly, and Julia glared blackly at him.

His words came in a clipped routine. "Hawkins here. Yeah, hello, Ted. Yeah, yeah. I was, uh, indisposed, mate. This isn't something that could wait?" As Ted Johns, Hawkins's District Commander, spoke, Hawkins felt his face tightening until his brow was a frozen corrugation. His mind retreated through a green miasma of his past to a Southeast Asian jungle. By the time Johns was finished, Hawkins's mouth was so dry that his tongue labored to shape his words. "Yeah, I'm at Shelley Beach Road. I'll be ready when McKegg gets here." He rang off and reached for his clothes.

"You're leaving?"

"McKegg's on his way." He was standing now, all five foot-six of him in his bare feet. "I can't give you any details--"

"I don't want any details." Her anger was multiplying on itself. "I don't give a shit about your details."

"No, I don't suppose you do."

"Nigel, if you go now, don't come back. If you can't even spend a Sunday afternoon alone with me, we're finished."

That again, he thought. Her brittle, carping extortion. He'd try to play along, as he had before. "Yes, Sweetheart, I know this is unfair. But this isn't something I can put off. You know I would if I could," he lied.

"What is it?" she whined, chipping at him with sarcasm. "Did one of our ghastly black bastards kill another ghastly black bastard today?"

Now Hawkins felt like smacking her. Her and her never-too-thin, never-too-rich social conceits that smoke-screened her blatant ignorance of the real world. Her and her delicate features that hid the coarseness beneath. Her and her upper-middle-class arrogance that typed those unlike her as beneath contempt. He spit his words at her. "I told you not to talk that shit in my presence. You can wallow around all you like in your poncey, racist cliques, but next time I hear you or your arrogant friends use that kind of remark, I'm going to bring down a couple of my Maori mates and we can all sit down and have a nice chat about it."

"You and your 'Maori mates?'" she barked with a feral sneer. "Isn't that huge of you! Listen to the man, he's a virtual tohunga. Well, hear this and hear it good, mate," she said, aiming a manicured nail at his battle-scarred face. "There isn't going to be a next time. I'm sick of this bullshit, I'm sick of cop cars coming to my house to get you--it makes me feel dirty--and I'm sick of you. Get your things, and get out."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure." Hawkins picked up his sports duffel and coat, and turned his broad-shouldered frame for the door. Before he reached it, he used his forearm to deflect a flying tea mug.

CHAPTER TWO

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As Hawkins stood in the rain in front of Julia's grand, white villa, waiting for his driver, Sergeant Alistair McKegg, a too familiar sense of fret settled over him. He was biting his fingernails, something he'd told himself was a professional habit, and thinking about the news from Ted Johns and about the lists he ought to be making. What did he need to remember, to keep in mind? What did he need to do later about Julia? Was there something he'd forget to think about at the airport?

Standing high on the hill off Shelley Beach Road, Hawkins might, under different circumstances, have enjoyed

the moment. He liked being up high. Had the sun been out, he would have reveled in the view over the Harbor Bridge to the North Shore, of the small marinas lining the Waitamata Harbor, of the scalpel-cut wakes of the racing yachts. If the sun had been out. Or if he hadn't just got tossed out of a once-lusty affair that had eroded into an emotional high-wire act and probably ended his 30-year marriage to Sue. Or if some bloody maniac hadn't just bombed the international airport. But it was what it was, all of it. And the view from the hill on this day was of a bruised and tattered sky, a sea like slate, and the gray-black diesel plume of the Bayswater ferry. An icy stream of rain ran down Hawkins's neck just as McKegg pulled around the corner from Jervois Road. That's one perk of seniority, he thought, not always having to drive to the crime scene.

Hawkins climbed into the cruiser and pulled a dog-eared notebook out of the pocket of his mackintosh. Absently gnawing the frayed stub of his right thumbnail (it still tasted of Julia), Hawkins noticed that the inside of the police car was heavy with the stale, layered smells of wet feet, wet floor mats, and whatever McKegg had had for lunch since he'd made sergeant a year ago--meat pies, fish and chips, rank coffee.

"You're getting wet, Hawkie. Your sheila throw you out?" McKegg saw that Hawkins didn't sparkle at the question, so he changed tacks. "When's this rain going to let up?" he said, spinning a U-turn back toward Jervois Road and the Auckland motorway, lights and siren churning.

As McKegg drove, Hawkins wrote in his notebook, making a list. In ten minutes they were in sight of Auckland International.

"Awesome, eh boss?," said McKegg. "Ever seen traffic like this before?"

In the clotted dark, fitful gusts tossed sheets of chilly rain through the lemony beams of a thousand snarled headlights. "Never, Sergeant. Who's supposed to be in charge of this mess?"

"It'll be Dragich. Here, he's just ahead." In sight of the airport now, McKegg steered out of the hopeless congestion and onto the left shoulder, behind another police cruiser. Hawkins jumped out--and felt another trickle of rain slide down his neck. He jogged to the front of the other car, where Detective Sergeant Dragich was bawling commands into a radiotelephone.

"Turn 'em back at Massey, Montgomerie, and Ihumatao Roads, and shut down all--What? Yeah, that's right: tell 'em Auckland International Terminal is closed until further

notice." Dragich looked across at Hawkins. "Hiya, Hawkie."

"G'day, Drags. What's the word?"

"Flushing the whole fucking place out fast as we can. You need to get in?" Hawkins nodded. Dragich hustled Hawkins back to McKegg's car then stepped into the roadway, halting two lanes of traffic. Hawkins climbed back into the front seat and the multifarious aromas of McKegg's history, the sergeant hit the gas, and they maneuvered through the open spaces into the airport itself. The radio squawked, and Hawkins picked it up. It was his boss, Superintendent Ted Johns, District Commander of New Zealand Police for South Auckland.

"Meet me in front of International Departures, Hawkie. I'm trying to give you guys breathing space around the crime scene. Until we're secured, all flights are rerouted through the domestic terminal. The Minister's flying up from Wellington with the Commissioner."

So that grandstanding bastard the Honorable Iain Satterthwaite was coming back to Auckland, thought Hawkins, and bringing the underwhelming Commissioner Cookson with him. He recalled a crack made about the current Minister of Police by a hard-case sergeant from Rotorua--that Satterthwaite was that much of a prick, he wouldn't be

happy if you hung him with a new rope. "Any chance of a second bombing, Ted?"

"Button it, Hawkie. You'll be in another shit storm before you know it. I don't need the added aggravation right now."

"I'll try to be a good boy, District Superintendent Johns," said Hawkins with mock sincerity.

Approaching the international terminal, McKegg wheeled them around the circular access road and even Hawkins was stunned by the milling mass of blue uniforms. We can really pull the numbers when we need them, Hawkins thought. From the corner of his eye, he saw the burnt-out shell of a rental van two hundred yards off in the car park being scoured by a forensics team. McKegg stopped in front of Arrivals/Departures and Hawkins looked to his right, spotting Ted Johns. Hawkins's boss, still on the radio, was sitting in the passenger seat of his command car with the door open, one foot inside and the other sticking out on the pavement. The Bomb Squad and their dogs were moving off, having checked the terminal for any more explosives. They seemed to be ribbing each other, joking about their job. Mad as cut snakes, the lot of them, thought Hawkins. You couldn't pay me enough to do their job.

Then, as he looked up to his left, what he saw squeezed any mounting confidence out of Nigel Hawkins. A ragged, ugly hole, six feet across, gaped at him from the tinted glass wall of the terminal's second floor. And below it, scattered on the access road, were hundreds of dagger-like shards of glass around a rumpled, sky-blue drape sheet. Two stains had leaked through the sheet, rusty red patches that Hawkins recognized as blood. More blood ran in a dark, glistening stream from beneath the sheet, between the blades of glass, and across the gray, greasy asphalt.

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The scene commander had been thorough. The blast perimeter was taped off in yellow, as were any nearby doorways, passages, the now-frozen escalators--every place where evidence had to be kept undisturbed. Hawkins got out of the car and walked heavily across the road to his right, trying to steer the whole scene into his field of view, trying to get into his criminal's mind-set. But the wanton belligerence of the act kept throwing up images of mayhem and death.

"Hello, Nigel. Thank you for coming down." Ted Johns had walked over from his car and stood next to Hawkins under the terminal's cantilevered rain canopy. He was thin

and straight and a head taller than the densely-built Hawkins. Seen from behind, they made a comical sight.

"I'm hoping your skills and experience will help us out."

The DC was an Old World gent, always polite, always complimentary, and absolutely proper to those under him.

It ought to have seemed obsequious, but it never did.

"Anything you need, or anybody, just call out. I think we can expect to pull out all the stops on this one."

"Yeah, Ted, thanks. What's the overall picture?"

"Massive shock and dozens injured, mostly treatable. They're being looked after."

"Dead?"

"These two"--Johns tipped his head toward the blue, blood-stained drape--"a mother and child. And one adult male up on the Departures level."

Hawkins's business was murder. He knew it well. It was usually a private affair--a family member popping the cork, gang retribution at a drug house, an old grudge boiling over. These he understood, could almost accept, as the uncontained anger of misfits and displaced souls. They required the law--him--to step in and bring justice to bear. Still, these crimes were part of society's pattern. But this one was different. This was a premeditated public crime, in a crowded public place, bringing physical and

emotional maiming to innocent people--and killing some. Bombs did that. Too random. Too indiscriminate. And that made it personal for Hawkins. It bit into a piece of his insides. Not that he was a holy boy-in-blue, Chamber-of-Commerce hero. Only that, from his years in the army and the police, he'd come to adopt a certain defender's instinct. All killers were bad news, corrupt human beings, but, to Hawkins, bombers were more twisted than the rest.

Ted Johns looked down at a sheaf of papers in his hand. "The mother and baby boy had just flown in from Apia on a family visit. Most of the whanau were here to meet them. Half dozen relatives are in the hospital now, and the closest kin have been notified about the deaths."

"The one upstairs, anyone get to him before he died? Did he see anything, say anything?"

Johns gave Hawkins a long, narrow look, then blinked. "It's best if you go upstairs, Hawkie."

As if ignoring Johns, Hawkins continued to survey the activity around him. St. John's people were attending to most of the injured. The others were being guided away by airport staff and police. Some ambulances were already headed to Middlemore and Auckland Hospitals. The rain had eased off. Hawkins looked back at his boss. "Any idea what this is all about, Ted?"

Johns gave him a disappointed scowl and shook his head. "Detective Sergeant Bryant's up on the second level. He's the officer in charge of the other body?"

Hawkins shuffled back across the road, kicked his legs over the yellow tape, took one more look at the yawning hole above him, and walked into the terminal building. It was quiet, and his nose was hit with the acrid smell of combustion. He started up the escalator and, as he rose, the heads and shoulders of police personnel came into view above him. They were clustered around something on the floor and a forensics man was photographing it, weaving between their feet. Hawkins felt a tug on his attention and he looked outside, through the glass wall of the building, to a bird's-eye view of the chalk marks and drying blood on the street. He brought his gaze back, his eyes now leveling with the second-floor carpet. He could see the object on the floor. It was a body with no head. The collar and shoulders of the blue, chalk-stripe suit were ripped and split around where the head and neck belonged, and blood had simply splashed out from the hole in the upper torso and onto the floor. The photographer stepped and crouched and stepped, his camera clicking and whirring as he went.

Hawkins felt himself staring at, but not thinking about, the man without a head. Sometimes lately it seemed that his mind was not his own. Then whatever he was thinking slipped away. He saw DS Ken Bryant standing at the edge of the gathering. Bryant looked at Hawkins and winked. As Hawkins walked over, he heard another forensics man dictating notes: "Based on the impact of the explosive charge and the potential for collateral damage, the corpse, below the neck, is remarkably . . ."

Bryant swung his head toward the knot of police gathered around the body. "There's where the poor bugger landed. It looks like the blast lifted what's left of him off the seats and dropped it there. DOA, wouldn't you say, Hawkie?"

Hawkins wondered whether Bryant's tasteless humor made him the best choice for O/C-body. "Do we know who he is-- or was?"

"No papers on him. No tickets, wallet, passport. Nothing. And he was alone, from all we can tell."

"And the injured? How did they fare?"

Bryant nodded. "Most of the other injuries are medically manageable, but a lot of shock and shattered lives."

A piece of Hawkins was back in the steamy, whispering jungle, cut off from support and control. "Yeah. Not too many Kiwis see this sort of thing. So this bloke seems like a target, maybe, as well as a victim?"

"Well, that's your patch, Hawkie, but it looks that way. A witness who did see him before and after the explosion says he was asleep on the seats yonder for quite a spell, more than an hour."

"Is the witness still here?"

"Smitty's interviewing him now." Bryant nodded toward the newsagent's shop. "How's the wrist, by the way?"

"Good as gold, Sergeant." Subject closed. Strength and fitness were of non-stop interest to cops, but Hawkins had talked about his injury until he was sick of it. Ancient history--some lumbering thug who thought he could handle this short, quiet-looking cop had found himself on the business end of a pile-driving left hook that redesigned his face and gave him permanent double vision. Only Hawkins had broken his own wrist delivering the punch. It had taken a year of rest, rehab, and weight work to come right, and Hawkins had only recently reclaimed his title as police gym bench-press champion of South Auckland.

Hawkins followed Bryant's look and saw Detective Sergeant Smith taking a report from a six-foot-six, stoop-

shouldered man of fifty in a smart camel blazer and rep tie. The man watched Hawkins approach.

"Mr. McLaren," said Smith, "this is Detective Inspector Nigel Hawkins. Inspector, this is Mr. Andrew McLaren. Mr. McLaren is a dental surgeon."

McLaren's eyes, narrow and sharp, shifted from Smith to Hawkins. He noticed that Hawkins's powerful build made him appear even shorter than he was. Then he corrected Smith. "Oral surgeon, Sergeant. Strictly speaking, oral and maxillofacial surgeon. How do you do, Inspector?" McLaren extended his hand, looking down at Hawkins as if from a great height, and then tilted his head toward the body. "Quite a violent act."

Hawkins shook McLaren's hand as Smith continued. "Mr. McLaren helped direct emergency care for the injured, Nigel."

"Lucky for everyone you were here, Mr. McLaren. Or is it 'Doctor?'"

"'Mister' is correct--a British custom, Inspector." He glanced down at his shoes and came up smiling. "Yes, well, I was here to see a friend off to Singapore. We're due to give a paper up there at the end of the week. As for the injuries here, a good part of my work is in trauma."

"Have you ever seen anything like this?" Hawkins nodded toward the body.

McLaren pursed his lips and shook his head. "The wound location is a little lower than what I normally see, Inspector."

Hawkins felt surrounded by questionable humor. "What did you see here, Mr. McLaren?"

"I was standing here by the newsagent talking to Derek, my colleague--he was to my left--when I noticed a rapid movement to my right at the top of the escalator. As two men were getting off, one slapped the other on the back or shoulder, and I glanced over. They seemed to be old friends. I looked away briefly, and when I looked back, the taller chap was helping this poor sod over to those seats. He seemed to have taken ill."

"So this chap," said Hawkins, pointing to the body, "wasn't alone when you first saw him?"

"No, not at first." With Smith's assistance, McLaren continued his story, detail by detail. Hawkins, watching and listening to the witness, inscribed the two men's movements into his own mental panorama of events. "At that point," said McLaren, "the other chap put a pillow or something under his head and went down the escalator. We assumed he was going for help."

"You say he put something under this man's head?" asked Hawkins, locking eyes with McLaren, who's composure seemed to weaken then, even as Hawkins's focus tightened another notch. "Don't upset your self, sir. We're just theorizing at this point." Hawkins glanced over to the burned, twisted seats by the window, then back to McLaren. "And that's the last you saw of this man," said Hawkins, indicating the corpse, "lying unconscious on the seats? Until now?"

McLaren paused and blinked, then shook his head. "No, Inspector. Derek's flight out to Singapore didn't go until six. So from three-fifteen until about four-thirty, we discussed our paper in the pub upstairs. Then we came down again to check Derek in. At four-thirty, this gent was still out. We nearly went over to investigate."

Hawkins glanced down at the body and back at the witness. "Lucky for you you didn't, Mr. McLaren," he said. Still, Hawkins was after the missing piece. "The other man, the friend who helped him? Did you see him return with help, or did you see him again at all, here or anywhere else in the airport?"

"I don't believe I saw him again," said McLaren. "Not that I recall."

Hawkins turned to Smith. "Get on that for us, will you, Smitty? You got the description. Find him if he's still around." Hawkins looked back to McLaren. "Anything else you could tell us, sir?"

McLaren looked out through the ruptured glass wall. "Derek's plane was just about to lift off. Maybe it had." He didn't continue.

"And the bomb went off?" Hawkins asked, but got no reply. "May I call on you again if I need to?" McLaren was a good witness--steady, experienced, detailed.

"Yes. Your Sergeant Smith has all my information." McLaren took three or four steps and then turned back to Hawkins. "Detective Inspector, could this man have missed his flight? They were calling for a missing passenger on the four o'clock flight to Los Angeles."

Hawkins stared right through McLaren, as if momentarily frozen. "Thank you," he said, already feeling the weight of the case, "I'll look into it." Then Hawkins's cell phone rang and he answered it. More bad news had just arrived.