

THE
COLOR

OF
THE
SUN

David Almond

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CANDLEWICK PRESS

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For Julia

ONE

It's an ordinary summer day, the day that Jimmy Killen dies and comes to life again. It's the middle of the summer, when it sometimes seems like time stands still, when it seems there's nothing at all to do. Davie's in his bed, in the shadows behind his bedroom curtains when it all begins. The whole day lies before him, but he wants to stay there. He wants to be older so he could be with a lass or go drinking with the lads. He wants to be younger so he could run about yelling like a daft thing.

His mam calls up from down below.

“Davie! Get yourself out into the sun, lad!”

He peeps through the curtains. He's dazzled by the light. He can see nothing when he turns back to his

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room. He rubs his eyes till his sight returns and he sees it all anew.

“Davie!”

“Yes, Mam!”

He starts digging through some ancient toys. Animal masks have been hanging inside his wardrobe door for so long he’s nearly forgotten that they’re there at all. They’ve been gathering dust since he was four or five. A gorilla, a tiger, a horse, a fox. The fox was best. He’d pull it on and leap and screech to make his parents terrified. He does it again now, alone in his shady bedroom. He looks out through the fox eyes and raises his claws, and he snarls and imagines he’s slaughtering a coop full of chickens.

“Davie! What the heck you doing up there?”

He laughs and rips the mask off. He laughs again to see the plastic antlers dangling on the door as well. How could he have forgotten them? He sticks them on his head. He steps quietly through the room, looking out for predators. He rocks his head and shakes the antlers. He leaps and dances silently, and soon the antlers start to feel like proper antlers. The room feels like a forest. He starts to lose himself in the old game of being a boy who’s also a beast.

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He pauses. *Why am I doing all this?* he wonders.

Maybe it's time to get rid of things, time to chuck this childish stuff out.

Mam calls from down below again.

“Davie!”

“Aye!” he calls. “Coming, Mam!”

But he keeps on digging. He finds some ancient coloring pencils, from when he was maybe five or six. There's an old sketchbook as well, with a faded green cover and brittle pages. He opens it and comes upon things he hasn't seen for years: scrawled pictures of dark monsters and slithery snakes. Stick figures of his mam and dad, pictures of the house, a scribbly sketch of a lovely black-and-brown dog they used to have called Stew. A page full of pictures of himself. A picture of a baby with messy writing beside it: *Davie as a bayby*. A picture of an ancient man with a beard: *Davie wen he is old*. And here's the beginning of an ancient tale that starts and then gets nowhere past the first two sentences: *Wons ther was a boy calld Davie and he wonted an advencha. So he got sum sanwichts and he got his nife and set owt into the darknes*. The ends of the pencils are chewed and he chews them again, and he thinks how weird it is that he's probably tasting himself as he was all those years ago.

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“Davie!”

There’s an old gray haversack. His dad gave it to him a few years ago. Davie used to stride around the house with it on his back, marching and saluting and carrying an imaginary rifle on his shoulder. He puts the fox mask, the antlers, the pencils and the book into it. He slings it across his shoulders and goes down.

Mam’s in the red-hot kitchen. She’s been baking, making bara brith and lemon meringue pie, such lovely things. There’s a smell of lemon, raisins, warm yeasty dough. Davie salivates as he imagines the delicious food on his tongue.

She stands there with her arms folded. There’s drifts of white flour on her red-and-white apron. Dad’s favorite painting, of sunflowers, is shining bright on the wall behind her. Sunlight pours into the room.

“About time!” she says. “Now eat that breakfast and shift those bones.”

She guides him to a chair at the table. There’s a bowl of cornflakes and some toast and some orange juice. She hums a tune and spreads her arms and shifts her feet in a gentle dance. She smiles and sighs as he eats and drinks.

“Now get yourself out into the world,” she says.

“What world?”

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“The lovely world outside that door.”

He grins.

“I’ve been there before, Mam. I’ve seen it all before.”

She grins back at him.

“Aye,” she says. “But you haven’t been in it on this day, and you haven’t seen it in this light.”

“And what if there’s a mad axman on the loose out there?”

She taps her cheek and ponders for a moment.

“That’s a good point,” she says. Then she shrugs. “It’s just a risk you’ll have to take!”

She laughs at the haversack. She asks what’s inside and he tells her.

“Those old things!” she says. “Didn’t you use to love them!”

She smiles as she gazes back into the past for a moment.

Then she puts a little package into his hand. It’s a piece of warm bara brith, wrapped in waxed paper.

“There’s butter on it,” she says. “And there’s a slice of Cheshire cheese with it. Won’t it be delicious? Put it in the bottom of your sack so you won’t be tempted to eat it too soon.”

He does that.

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She puts her hands around his head and plants a kiss at the top of his skull. She blows away the floury dust that she leaves there. She spreads her hand across his back and gently guides him to the door.

“Go on,” she says. “There’ll be time enough for sitting about when you get to be as old as me.”

“I’ll never get as old as that!”

“I’m glad to hear it,” she whispers.

She kisses him again.

“Now, my Davie, out you go. Don’t hurry back. The day is long, the world is wide, you’re young and free.”

And out he goes, to start his wandering.

TWO

Should I go up, he wonders, *or should I go down?* He tosses a coin. Down. He doesn't walk far, just to the heart of this little town, the place he's lived since he was born, the place where everything is so familiar.

He sits on the gray pavement opposite the houses on Ethel Terrace, with his back against the wall of the Columba Club. It's clean enough. No dog muck, no cigarette butts, just some dust and slivers of slate that must've come down from cracks in the roof. Nothing seems to move. His mood declines. He gets that feeling that he sometimes gets these days, that he hates this dead-end place, where nothing seems to happen, nothing seems to change. Sometimes he just wants to walk out of it and keep on walking and leave it all behind. But he knows he's too young to do that yet, and anyway

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today it's like he's got no energy. Like there's nothing in the world he wants to do.

So he just sits there, in the dust.

For a moment he thinks about Elizabeth McErlane. He met her in the square yesterday evening. She wanted him to go down to Holly Hill Park with her, but he held back. She asked if he was daft. She said most lads would be with her like a shot if she asked them to Holly Hill Park.

“You're like a wet weekend,” she said. “It's like you're on the point of tears even when a lass is making eyes at you.”

He knows she's got a point, but you'd think she'd try to sympathize. She's not the one who lost her dad just a few weeks back. How would she feel about that?

He moves his thoughts away from her. If he's honest, he's not too bothered. He's still more interested in playing football than in being with lasses. He does try, like lots of the lads do, and sometimes he loves it, like lots of the lads do, but kissing's never as sweet as making a perfect diving header or curving the ball into an imaginary net. He has to admit that Elizabeth's very bonny, though, and she does bring about some pretty amazing dreams.

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He's in full sunlight. The wall at his back is already warming up. There's hardly a soul in sight. Not a breath of wind. There's somebody singing somewhere far away, and somebody playing a fiddle. As Davie listens, he takes out the sketchbook and pencils. He starts to draw what he can see: the dark roadway, the gray pavements, the steel fences and stone walls of Ethel Terrace. It's all so colorless, all so static, all so empty, all so drab. A crow flaps over him and lands on the roof of Ethel Terrace. He draws it, that beautiful streamlined jet-black shape. It stays a few short moments, then it caws and up it goes, black silhouette flying over him, rising into the endless blue. He draws its flight as a black line fading as it stretches to the page's edge. Then closes his eyes and lifts his arms and stretches them out wide at his side. He laughs at himself. Sees himself as Jesus hanging on the cross in agony in church. Then changes what he sees and feels, and has the better feeling, the old feeling he's had since he was small, that his arms are wings. He stretches them wide, becomes a bird, rising from this dry and dusty place, soaring away into the sunlit distance.

"Flying far?" says someone.

Davie comes back to earth and opens his eyes. It's

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Wilf Pew from Wellington Street, standing just a few feet away.

“Flying far, I said,” says Wilf.

Wilf’s got his long gray coat on even in this heat. He always wears the thing. Maybe he thinks it’ll hide the fact that he’s got a false leg. Doesn’t work. Everybody knows and nobody’s bothered. Why should they be?

“Cat got your tongue?” says Wilf.

“No,” says Davie.

“Good.”

Wilf takes a tube of fruit gummies out of his pocket and holds it out. There’s gray fluff on the orange one that’s at the top of the tube.

“No, thanks,” says Davie.

Wilf shakes his head in disappointment.

“You young’ns,” he says. “You should never turn down a gift, you know. What the hell’s become of you all?”

He holds the orange gummy up to the sun, then puts it into his mouth, chews and grins.

“Blimmin’ lovely!” he says. “Absolutely blimmin’ lovely!”

He wipes his lips with the back of his hand.

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“Anyway,” he says. “Enough of that. So what’s the plan?”

“The plan?”

“Aye, the plan. What you up to? Where you going? How you gonna make yer mark?”

Davie sighs, sits there, says nothing.

“Look at ye,” says Wilf. “Sitting there with yer face trippin’ ye.”

He leans over toward the boy and widens his eyes.

“It might never happen, ye knaa,” says Wilf.

Davie groans. Why do blokes say things like that? What are you supposed to say to things as daft as that?

Then Wilf frowns and bends down and bangs himself hard on the thigh of what must be his false leg.

“Damn thing!” he says. “Be better off without the silly thing. Wouldn’t I?”

Davie says nothing.

“The answer is I would!” Wilf snaps. “One day I’ll rip it off and fling it aside and I’ll be free!”

Then he starts to limp away and he kind of shimmers in the heat, but he pauses and turns back for a moment.

“I knaa you’ve had some bother,” he says. “But there’s many a body worse off than you!”

He opens his coat wide and shows his legs.

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“This is a world of wonder!” he yells. “And some folk stroll through it with their eyes down to the dirt like it’s all nowt but a great big bore!”

He heads off, but he turns back yet again.

“Look around you!” he says. “You should be running around dancing and singing your head off at the glory of it all!”

He digs in his pocket and takes out the gummies and flings one of the sweets toward Davie. It bounces on the pavement and comes to rest against Davie’s leg.

“Eat it up!” says Wilf. “It’ll diy ye good!”

Then he twirls on his false leg and the long gray coat swirls around him. He flinches and groans in what must be pain, then giggles at himself and turns his face to the sky and sings a weird, wordless, joyful song.

He yells back one final thing.

“There’ll come a time when you have to leave this wondrous place, you know!”

Then at last he’s gone.

Davie picks the gummy up. It’s yellow. He rubs the dust and fluff off it. Wilf Pew. When Davie was a boy he was scared of the bloke, who was always limping back and forward through the town. But Davie’s mam told him that Wilf was harmless. She said that one

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summer he walked all the way to Edinburgh and back just to prove that he could do it. *He's a bold, brave man*, she used to say. And he'd had his dose of tragedy. *Tragedy?* Davie asked. *Aye, the story is he had a lovely lass once and he was about to marry her, and she went and died, too young.*

Davie licks the gummy. He eats it. As it dissolves deliciously on his tongue, he shuts his eyes and lets the sun shine down on him. What a summer it's turning out to be. He hears some kids laughing in the park. He sees bonny Elizabeth wandering inside him. He sees his dad sitting on the sofa at home all shrunken and knackered and gasping for breath. He sees other things he doesn't want to see. Why do they keep on appearing like this? Why can't he turn his mind away from them? What is it about the mind that keeps moving from picture to picture, even to ones that are horrible to see?

Then there's something hot and slobbery on his hands. The tongue of a big dog, licking him. Davie gasps. For a moment he thinks it's the black-and-brown dog called Stew, but of course it's not. Yes, it's black and brown, but the pattern's really different, and this dog's far bigger, and it's gasping and grunting, and its tongue is horrible and hot and wet. He tries to shove

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it off, but it won't budge, so he stands up and shoves it with his foot. It snarls and bares its teeth and looks like it's going to go for him, but in the end it packs in and slopes off.

Davie doesn't know whether to sit down again or to wander a bit more. He thinks about tossing a coin, but he doesn't. He looks about and tries to find something colorful to draw, then suddenly somebody else appears right beside him. It's his mate, Gosh Todd. He stands sideways in front of Davie and looks up and down the street like somebody might be watching or listening. Then he leans in close and whispers, "I seen a body, Davie."

"Eh?"

"A *body*."

"What kind of body?"

"A dead one, Davie. Do you want to see?"

THREE

“It’s in the rubble,” says Gosh. “Where they’re pulling down the old church hall.”

He looks Davie in the eye like he’s waiting for him to say something, but Davie doesn’t know what to say.

“Are you sure it was dead?” he says at last.

“Aye. I seen the knife.”

“The knife?”

“Aye. The one that killed him. There was blood and everything, Davie.”

Davie tries cursing and swearing to see if that feels like the right kind of thing to say.

“Whose body was it?” says Davie.

“I can’t be sure,” says Gosh. “I seen it and I nearly jumped out me skin and didn’t dare get too close. But I think it was Jimmy Killen.”

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“Eh? Why would it be Jimmy Killen?”

“He had them tight jeans on that he wears. And that green checky Levi’s shirt.”

Davie tries cursing and swearing again.

“Jimmy Killen,” he whispers.

“Aye. And if it was Jimmy Killen then I reckon the killer was Zorro Craig.”

Gosh nods and grins and widens his eyes.

“Aye,” he goes on. “Zorro Craig. It’s obvious when you think about it, isn’t it? Who else could it be? It’s how it was all bound to turn out.”

“Was it?”

“Aye. You know how they went on. You know how they hated each other, like all the Craigs hate all the Killens and all the Killens hate all the Craigs.”

“I thought that was over and done with.”

“Mebbe it’s not that easy. And them two, they were the worst of the lot of them, weren’t they? They were like bliddy beasts.”

Gosh is right about the Killens and the Craigs. It’s been going on for years, ever since Davie’s dad was a kid. His dad never understood it. Davie never understands it. How could two families get into such a state about each other? Why did they not get fed up with hating

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each other? But could it really come to *this? Murder?* Could Zorro Craig really be a murderer? Aye, he was mental. But *this?*

“Anyway,” says Gosh, “I run down to the police station and I tell the sergeant there. He says am I sure I’m not just seeing things. Like he thinks that nowt like that could happen in a place like this, or like he thinks somebody like Gosh Todd would say anything to get folk stirred up on a sleepy sunny morning. But in the end he knows he has to take a look, ’specially when he realizes the Craigs and Killens might be involved, so he goes with me and that’s that. He gets the doctor and the priest. They telt me to tell nobody but now I’ve telt you. Do you wanna come and see?”

Davie hesitates.

“Howay,” says Gosh. “It was just half an hour ago. Mebbe it’ll still be there.”

Davie hesitates. What would it be like to see a body? And to see a body that had been murdered? And Zorro Craig? Everybody knew he was a monster. But would he *kill?*

“Howay,” says Gosh. “It’s not every day you get a chance like this.”

Gosh looks at the pencils and the book.

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“And you’ve got to admit it’s a bit more interesting than coloring in.”

Davie shrugs. He has to go, he has to see. He puts the pencils and the book into his sack, puts the sack on his back, and off they go.

Of course, lots of folk have heard by now that something’s going on down there. As they head across the square and down High Street, there’s lots of people doing the same. They’re frowning and whispering and shrugging.

One of Davie’s neighbors, a woman called Mrs. Keen from number six who used to be a teacher, stops him as he and Gosh hurry by.

“What’s going on, Davie?” she asks in a trembly voice.

Gosh knocks Davie with his elbow, telling him to tell her *nawt*.

“I don’t know,” Davie tells her. “Maybe it’s just *nawt*.”

She clicks her tongue.

“Don’t say *nawt*, Davie,” she says. “It’s so coarse. The word is *nothing*.”

“Sorry, Mrs. Keen,” says Davie. “I know that.”

And they walk on.

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The old school hall's through some gates just past the church. It's been getting demolished for the past month or so. *Good riddance to it*, thinks Davie. Some of the most boring times of his life have happened in there. Prayer meetings and hymn practices and talks about the body and the soul and whether it's a sin to think too much about girls. Unhappy, boring blokes in black telling kids to lift their souls up to the Lord and to tiptoe past the chasms that lead to Hell. God, how he hated all that stuff. Get rid of it all. Cart it away.

There's a fire engine parked up on High Street. There's a couple of police cars. There's an ambulance inside the gates. There's a massive policeman, PC Poole, standing by the gates telling people to keep back. Folk are talking in hushed voices. Nobody knows anything, but something must have got out because there's whispering about death and murder and mayhem. Davie sees some kids he knows. Shona Doonan's there, in a bright red dress. She's from a family of singers and musicians, the Doonans. They sang some of Davie's dad's favorite songs in the Columba Club after the funeral. "Waters of Tyne." "Felton Lonnen." "Bonny at Morn." Maybe it was her that he heard singing. She waves at him.

He waves shyly back. He looks up at the church

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that's just a short walk away from here. He blinks, and he sees his dad's coffin being carried in. He sees it being carried out. He sees the funeral cars, all the people dressed in black. He sees himself holding his mam's arm. He sees her holding him.

"Howay, man, Davie."

Gosh grabs Davie's arm. He guides him through the crowd to PC Poole, who holds his hand out like he's ordering traffic to stop. Gosh stoops under the hand, then stands on tiptoe and whispers to the policeman like he whispered to Davie.

"I'm the one that found the body," he says.

Poole narrows his eyes.

"I'm the one that telt the sergeant about it," Gosh says. "It's Jimmy Killen, isn't it?"

Poole says nowt. The crowd's getting bigger. They're pressing at the gate.

The policeman's getting cross.

"Hold your horses!" he snaps at the crowd.

"I'm right, aren't I?" says Gosh.

Davie and Gosh peer past the policeman. Gosh tells Davie that the ambulance is hiding the spot where the body is. Davie leans sideways trying to see, but he can't. All he sees is rubble, no body.

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“I think I know who might of done it,” says Gosh. Poole narrows his eyes again.

“Done what?” he says.

“Committed the murder,” says Gosh. “It is a murder, isn’t it?”

Poole says nowt.

“It is,” says Gosh. “And I know who done it. Me mate does and all.”

Poole looks at Davie. He can feel he’s blushing.

“Aye,” says Gosh. “So mebbe you should let us through so we can have a word with the sergeant.”

Poole looks uncertain.

“Keep back, will you?” he says to the crowd. “Show a bit of order and respect.”

“You should,” says Gosh. “The killer could be miles away already.”

“Every minute counts,” says Davie.

He catches his breath. He hadn’t expected to say anything at all, but he finds he’s very pleased with himself.

Gosh is too.

“What Davie says is right,” he says.

“What if he’s already tracking down his next victim?” says Davie.

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“What if he’s already killed again?” says Gosh.

The policeman glances back toward where the invisible sergeant is.

“OK,” he tells the two lads. “Go through.”

They walk past the ambulance. There’s a driver at the wheel reading the *Daily Mirror* and smoking a cigarette, dead calm, like a murder happens every day in these parts. There’s a lass sitting beside him who must be a nurse. Behind the ambulance there’s the sergeant and old Dr. Drummond and daft Father Noone. Davie sees most of the body now: legs in jeans, black winklepicker boots, a green checky Levi’s shirt. Davie’s seen Jimmy walking round wearing that. He’d love one just like it for himself. He starts wondering what’ll happen to the shirt now that Jimmy’s dead. There’s a splash of blood on it, bright red against the green. Davie wonders if the bloodstains will wash off. The priest’s kneeling there as well. He’s bobbing back and forward as he prays, and between the bobs Davie sees the face. Yes, definitely Jimmy Killen. The priest’s got a little crucifix in his hand, and he’s pressing it on Jimmy’s brow and muttering something low and gentle.

Davie stares. He’s never seen anybody dead before. His mam said he could go to see his dad in the chapel

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of rest if he wanted to, but he couldn't do it. Jimmy just looks like he did in life, not much different at all.

"It's you," says the sergeant to Gosh.

"Aye," says Gosh. "And this is me mate, Davie."

"What's he got to do with it all?"

"He knows who the killer is."

The doctor and sergeant both goggle at Davie.

Davie can't look at them because now he can see the knife, lying on the rubble next to Jimmy's chest. There's blood on it, on the blade and the handle.

"I telt you," says Gosh.

The priest doesn't stop muttering. His lips are close to Jimmy's ear.

"So who's the killer?" says the doctor.

"Zorro Craig," Davie finds himself saying.

"Zorro *Craig!*" says the doctor.

"How do you know *that?*" says the sarge.

Davie stares at Jimmy's face again. It's pale and still. It's like Jimmy's just asleep.

The sarge asks Davie again.

"Gosh told me," says Davie.

"And how do *you* know?" says the sarge.

"'Cos Jimmy's a Killen and Zorro is a Craig. They're

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a bunch of animals and they've always been at war, haven't they? And them two were the worst of all."

"But we cannot jump to—" starts the sarge.

"I heard him saying it when he was six years old," says Gosh. "'Aa'm ganna kill ye, Killen.'"

The doctor and the sergeant stare at Gosh in wonder.

"You heard it and all, didn't you, Davie?" says Gosh.

"Aye," mutters Davie. "We were all pretty mental back then."

"Aye, but it . . . intensified," says Gosh. "I heard him just last week in Holly Hill Park. Last Tuesday, it was. 'Ye'll get what's comin,' he says. 'Killen, aa'm ganna send ye to yer grave.'"

"Bliddy hell," says the sarge. "And why would he say something like that last Tuesday?"

"Dunno," says Gosh. "It's what enemies do. I think this time it was something about a lass."

"About a lass?" says the sarge.

"Aye," says Gosh. "It's usually lasses, isn't it? Like in ancient times."

"*What?*" says the sarge. "Which lass?"

Gosh shrugs.

"Dunno," he says.

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He turns to Davie.

“Do *you* know?” he says.

“*Me?*” says Davie.

“I think they both had lots of lasses,” says Gosh.

“But mebbe this time it was doomed love.”

Davie looks at Gosh. *What the hell’s he on about?*

The doctor mutters something.

“Eh?” says the sarge.

“I said the human condition is a vessel of great mystery,” says the doctor.

“You’re right there, doc,” says the sarge.

The priest stops his muttering. He presses his thumb onto Jimmy’s brow. He says, “Amen.”

He stands up and looks like he’s come out of some dream. There’s gray plaster dust all over his black clothes.

“I have done what I can,” he says. “I’m sure the lad’s sins will be forgiven.” He says the same thing that he said about Davie’s dad. “I’m sure God will have prepared a place for him.”

For Jimmy Killen? Davie wants to say, but he doesn’t.

He looks at the air above the body like he expects to see Jimmy’s soul floating there, like he expects to

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see it rising from the demolition site and into the wide clear sky.

The sarge takes a little black notebook and pencil out of his pocket. He opens the book and starts to write, then stops. He frowns.

“This is all happening a bit too quick for me,” he says.

Tears are gathering in his eyes. His lips are trembling.

“I wish it wasn’t happening at all,” he says.

“Strange events can take place anywhere, sergeant,” Davie finds himself saying.

“And who knows what can fester in the human heart?” says Gosh.

Davie stares at him. Where the hell did Gosh learn to say something like that?

The priest steps off the rubble and some of it slips, and Jimmy’s body lurches sideways. The sergeant gasps in horror. For a moment Davie expects everything, Jimmy’s body, rubble and all, to collapse into the dark, dingy cellars that he knows exist just below. But it doesn’t. Everything settles into place again.

The sergeant blows his breath out.

He looks just like a little boy dressed up in policemen’s clothes.

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“Top brass from Newcastle are on their way,” he says.

He takes his helmet off and sweat trickles down from his forehead.

“They’ll know what to do,” he says.

“They’ll probably want to talk to you, lad,” he says to Gosh. “And mebbe to you as well,” he says to Davie.

Davie looks toward the crowd at the gates. They’re dying to get in to see. He waves at Shona again and she waves back. She’s really bonny. He’d never properly noticed before.

There’s a siren somewhere in the distance.

“That must be them,” says the sarge. “Thank God for that.”

“What do we do about Jimmy?” says Davie.

“That’s not for you to think about,” says the sarge. “He can’t be moved, not till there’s instructions from the top.”

The sun’s shining bright on Jimmy Killen. It’s getting hotter. How soon till a body starts to rot, till it starts to stink? Davie looks past the church and over the rooftops toward the hills at the top of town. It’s all a bit stupid. It’s like the whole town’s come to look at a poor body

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lying in the dust. He's bored with it already. He wants to get away. He wants to be free. He's thinking of wandering up that way, going up to the top and over the top and carrying on into the sunlit distance all alone. Maybe that's the way that Zorro Craig went after he killed Jimmy, if he did kill Jimmy. It'd make sense. There's so much space over there, so many places to run and hide. Places you could hide forever if you really wanted to. That's where Davie will head for.

The doctor's holding Gosh's face and looking into his eyes.

"How are you feeling, young man?" he says.

Gosh shrugs.

"Champion," he says.

"Do you need me?" says Davie to the sarge.

"Need you?"

"To give evidence or anything?"

"Anyone who knew the lad will be questioned, I expect."

"Can I go?"

"Go?" says Gosh. "Where you bliddy going?"

"Nowhere," Davie tells him. "Just wandering."

"*Wandering?* But, Davie, man."

Davie shrugs. He knows Gosh won't want to

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come with him. He'll want to stay here where the excitement is.

"Mebbe I'll catch up with Zorro Craig," says Davie. "Mebbe I'll hunt him down and bring him back to justice."

The sergeant grunts.

"Don't you think of that," he says. "That's a job for the professionals, lad."

The doctor catches Davie's arm as he turns away.

"And you?" he says. "Are you champion as well, young man?"

Davie doesn't answer. He's known this kind and ancient doctor for as long as he can remember. He can recall the feeling of his fingers as he tapped Davie's chest, the coldness of the stethoscope above his heart, the gentle tap on his cheek, the gentle voice that told his mam she had herself a fine, strong little lad. And he can recall the day of his dad's death. The doctor stood in the living room with his black bag in his hand and murmured to Davie's mam that he was so sorry, that there was nothing anybody could have done. Then he opened the door to step out, and Davie saw black-clad Father Noone coming along the street, already heading toward his home.

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“Are you?” says the doctor again.

“Aye,” Davie says. “I’m champion, Dr. Drummond, thanks.”

He walks off.

“Don’t put yourself in harm’s way,” says the doctor.

Davie keeps on walking. It’s like he’s being lifted out of himself, like he’s coming to life.

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As he passes PC Poole and twists his way through the crowd, folk keep trying to get the answers from him.

“Is it true?” some of them say.

“Is what true?”

“That there’s a body? That there’s been a murder?”

Davie says he can’t say nowt.

They name some names and one or two of them even name Jimmy Killen, but Davie’s face doesn’t flicker.

“A murder!” someone gasps. “Here, in Little Felling!”

“The telly’ll be here. All the papers!”

“It happens, even in places like this.”

“Why shouldn’t it happen here? The world is a strange and wicked place.”

Davie keeps on moving.

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“Is it true?” they keep on asking.

“The world is weird,” Davie says. “And who knows what festers in the human heart?”

He passes close to Shona. She touches his arm and comes in close.

Her red dress is bright as fire in the sunlight.

“Did you see it?” she says.

“See what?”

“The body, Davie! You did, didn’t you?”

“Aye,” he answers.

“What was it like? Was it scary? Could you look upon it?”

She’s got such a sweet and lovely voice, like she’s singing even when she’s talking, even when she’s asking about things like this.

“Was it you singing?” he asks her.

“When?”

“Just this morning. Just a little while ago.”

“I’m always singing, Davie.”

She shrugs.

“So it could have been,” she says.

His mind goes back to the Columba Club, after the funeral, when the guests were leaving. He’d asked her how the hell she could sing so well.

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She'd shrugged and smiled.

"It just pours out of me, Davie," she said. "It just pours out of all of us, the way that songs pour out of birds."

She touched his arm.

"I'm so sorry about your dad," she said.

He'd thanked her for that.

"It could pour out of anyone," she said as he turned back to his mam. "It could pour out of you, Davie, if you found a way to let it."

She's so lovely. Her blue eyes are so bright. He tells her the body was strange, that it was amazing, that it seemed to be only sleeping, still alive. She listens, and he imagines staying here with her, watching everything along with her, then walking away from this place with her at dusk, holding her hand, going far into the distance, filled with excitement, but he tells himself he must keep moving.

"I've got to go, Shona," he says.

"I could come with you," she says softly. "If you'd like me to."

He almost says yes, but he says no.

"I'm not even sure where I'm going," he says.

"Ah, well. Mebbe we'll see each other when you get back."

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“Aye. I hope so.”

He walks away.

Mrs. Keen’s there, hovering. She’s on tiptoes and her eyes are wide and scared and excited.

“What is the truth, Davie?” she says as he passes by.

Davie shrugs.

“I can’t say nowt, Mrs. Keen.”

She’s about to say something back, but suddenly there’s screaming and sobbing, and here’s Jimmy Killen’s mother with a policewoman coming down High Street.

“Jimmy!” she sobs as the policewoman guides her toward the crowd and toward her dead son beyond.

“Jimmy! My little Jimmy!”

So that’s it. The truth is out.

And now here’s the top brass from Newcastle, big blokes in black uniforms, squashed into a little blue police car with a blue light flashing on its roof.

Davie heads up High Street past all the shops. Everybody else is streaming down. Shopkeepers are gathering together in their doorways, gossiping. Jack Hall the newsagent is clambering about in his front window, putting stuff in a rack: American cop magazines, murder mysteries, Batman comics. Joe

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Wiffen's writing in white on his window: BROWN ALE
AND MCEWAN'S EXPORT AT NOCKDOWN PRICES ASK INSIDE.

Already some of the shops are shut and the owners are heading to the murder scene.

Davie's suddenly hungry. Luckily, Molly Myers hasn't closed the pork shop doors.

Davie goes inside and buys a pork pie.

"You been down there, son?" Molly asks.

"Aye," says Davie.

"What's the info? Any clues?"

He may as well tell her now.

"Jimmy Killen's been killed," he says.

"Jimmy *Killen*?"

"Aye. He's been knifed, Mrs. Myers."

"Hell's teeth. Who by?"

He can't tell her that. He bites into the pork pie. It's delicious, the way the meat and the jelly around it mix with the pastry, the way it clags together in his mouth.

"I dunno," he says.

He takes another bite. He checks his change and tries to buy another pie, but Molly says he can have it for nowt. She holds it out to Davie and bows her head like it's an offering.

"That's for the info," she says. "Jimmy Killen, eh?"

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“Aye.”

“I know how crazy that lot get. But *this*?”

She shakes her head.

“What’s the world coming to?” she says.

Davie shakes his head.

“Dunno,” he says. “It’s all a mystery, Mrs. Myers.”

She smiles.

“It is that,” she answers.

As Davie turns away she asks him.

“Where you going?”

“I’m not sure, Mrs. Myers.”

“Is it safe?”

“Safe?”

“Is it safe to be wandering off when there’s a murderer in town?”

“But he could be anywhere, Mrs. Myers.” He looks to the back of the shop, where the massive meat fridge is.

“He could be hiding in your meat fridge, Mrs. Myers.”

She gasps and her eyes widen in shock.

“In me meat fridge?”

He can see she’s trembling.

“Shall I have a look?” he says.

“Aye. Take this knife, though, eh?”

She puts a long butcher’s knife into his hand. He goes

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to the fridge door. He knows the murderer probably won't be in there, but he feels his heart thudding. Mrs. Myers is gasping. His hand trembles as he reaches for the handle. He doesn't know whether to ease it open dead slowly so that the murderer suspects nothing or to yank it open suddenly in order to terrify him. And he doesn't know what he'll do if he does find the killer in there. Will he go wild and attack Zorro with the knife? Will he turn around and run out of the shop howling? Will he just stand there and scream in terror? In the end he slowly inches the door open. He raises the knife in preparation but then he lowers it again. Nothing. The fridge is big enough for one or two murderers to be hiding in it. But all that's inside is a single dead skinned pig hanging from a hook.

"Nothing," he says to Mrs. Myers.

"Nothing," she sighs. "Oh, thank you, son."

She puts her hand out for the knife. For a moment he wonders if he should borrow it, and keep it in his sack, in case he needs it during the day. But she takes it from him.

"You be careful as you go on," she says.

"I will be, Mrs. Myers."

He goes out again with the two pies in his hand. He

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finds himself thinking about the dead pig in the fridge and the dead pig in the pies. Once, in the church hall, he was with a group of kids talking with a visiting priest about animals and souls. Patricia Knott asked if animals had souls the way that people do. She said she was sure her cat had a soul. The cat was called George. She said she could see the soul shining through George's eyes. She said it looked almost human. The priest glared. He said that Patricia was wrong. He told her she must not think in that way. It was heresy. Beasts are not spiritual beings. They are lesser than humans. Only human beings have souls, with all the blessings and the perils that this brings. Only human beings are made in the image of God.

When they left the church hall, Patricia groaned.

"What a load of bollix," she said.

Davie looks at the inside of the pie. The meat's dull gray and pink with bits of white in it. Fat, he supposes. The jelly's like glue. He takes another bite. If the pig did have a soul, where would the soul be now? *Is there a heaven for pigs?* he wonders. And if there is, do they run free and wild in it like ancient boars did in ancient forests? Or do they just lie about and sing to God like dead humans are supposed to do? He stops himself.