

Highland Sanction

A novel by
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I am grateful for the support of my wife Karen Tosoff, whose editing and belief in my work goes far beyond words. Thank you for being with me on this journey.

Chapter 1

Seven years after the highly sensationalized slaying of Glasgow mob boss Douglas McMurphy, a shadow of infamy remained cast over the life of his only begotten son. In spite of his quiet intelligence and an elite education that earned him an honors degree from the London School of Economics, Joseph McMurphy struggled to distance himself from the bloodstained legacy left in the wake of his father's death. The brutal reputation of the McMurphy name had become an inescapable part of Joseph's life no matter how he tried to establish himself as a legitimate businessman. Since gaining control over the construction firm acquired by his father in the spring of 2009, McMurphy had successfully led Edinburgh based Dundee Constructors to prominence as one of the largest construction and urban development organizations in the UK.

The young McMurphy was questioned by police immediately after his father became a wanted fugitive along with his partner Alistair Ascot, but never let on that he knew exactly where his father was in hiding. Both mobsters fled custody with the help of Strathclyde Detective Gerald Black just minutes after McMurphy and Ascot were arrested on racketeering charges in the late summer of 2009. Joseph never divulged his constant contact and communications with his mobster father as he orchestrated a scheme that would allow his father to continue running the mob in absentia. In the days following the escape of the two notorious gangsters, Joseph surreptitiously arranged for a task force of his top construction specialists to undertake the building of a sophisticated hi-tech underground hideout near the Highland town of Braemar, in Central Northern Scotland. The construction was completed in record time and all documentation pertaining to the project was destroyed leaving no trace of involvement by Dundee or its crews who knew nothing of its intended purpose. Immediately after completion of what would become known as the Highland bunker, his father and Alistair Ascot took refuge and continued running their extensive criminal empire from the secret location until Joe took the reins in late 2010 after both Ascot and his father were finally caught and killed just days apart.

The elder McMurphy's unsolved violent murder shocked law enforcement and criminal communities across Great Britain and rumors pointed to McMurphy's nemesis, London crime boss William Bray as being behind his killing. There was no doubt that Douglas McMurphy's relentless obsession for vengeance against Ian MacLeod for pilfering his money and making a fool of him had clouded his judgment and in the end had been the cause of the reckless mob boss' demise. The unfinished business of consummating his father's grudge remained as Joseph's legacy.

His father's grievance against MacLeod for cleverly stealing his money was now in the distant past and no longer the focus of reprisal for young McMurphy. However, in spite of having no evidence to prove there was a conspiracy to set his father up for the execution, he blamed MacLeod for the elder McMurphy's untimely and gruesome death. Frustrated by the fact that MacLeod had seemingly vanished into thin air, Joseph McMurphy was relentless in his dogged pursuit, convinced that one day his quarry would be found. He would often stand in front of his father's portrait promising himself and the former mobster that when the day came, he would do right by his father's memory and take revenge against MacLeod with his own hand.

During the years that followed the elder McMuphy's passing, Joseph rebuilt his father's criminal empire through ostensibly legal business enterprises and established himself as the new crime boss of the Glasgow mob. Round spectacle-like glasses, short hair and a boyish-looking face

gave Joseph McMurphy the appearance of a studious intellectual, far from what one would expect of the head of a violent crime syndicate. He was highly educated and clever, unlike his father who maintained his iron grip as a mob kingpin through brute force and violence. The younger McMurphy used his company, Dundee Constructors and its reputation across the UK to front the illegal activities of the new Glaswegian mob as he led it behind the scenes. After hearing about a supposed fictional exposé written about the Glasgow mob said to have revealed many secrets and damning details that only an insider could have known, McMurphy acquired a copy of the novel aptly titled “The Insider” written by an unknown author who went by the pen name, Liam Muir.

McMurphy had spent the past few evenings well into the wee hours of the morning reading beneath the light of a pendant lamp that hung from the high ceiling of the Glasgow penthouse he inherited from his father. Like all of the other original art that adorned the opulent suite it was a commissioned sculpture by radical New York artist Sergio Carducci. Made of shards of glass fused together and held in shape by twisted lengths of stainless steel welded into an art nouveau figure of a naked woman, it appeared as if her outstretched arms, out of proportion body and long legs were floating in mid-air. The almost eight foot long piece was connected to the ceiling with a short Plexiglas tube and it was lit up by over one hundred pin lights that illuminated the sculpted fixture. Shining down through the bottom of the feet was a single halogen light. Although he loved the figure he metaphorically called “mother,” McMurphy was always nervous that one day it would come crashing down and kill him as he sat on his favorite chair that overlooked the entire Southside of Glasgow.

As wind-driven rain from a passing storm fell hard against the floor to ceiling glass, McMurphy remained oblivious, gripped by what seemed more like the author’s autobiography than a fictional crime novel. McMurphy could not put the book down in spite of his mounting anger. Growing more and more agitated at the exposé and its disclosure of intimate details in the lives of a fictional Scottish mobster and his son, McMurphy tossed the hard cover novel across the room and stared out at the lights of Glasgow partially obscured by his own reflection in the expansive glass.

He picked up his mobile and found a photo of a pretty blond who posed nude in a selfie. He stared hungrily at the salacious image before dismissing it after noticing a text that had been sent to him hours earlier by his pseudo-girlfriend and executive assistant, Caroline who had no idea who he really was outside of his role as CEO of Dundee Constructors.

“What the fuck does she want?” McMurphy said out loud as he opened the text.

Caroline Burns

Hi sweetheart. Just a note to say goodnight and how much I loved dinner earlier. Wish you could have stayed after we made love. Sweet dreams. 

Today 2017-06-13 10:15 AM

“Right,” he scoffed as he closed the text and began typing a new one.

MM

Party time. The coke is cut and waiting on my bedside table. 🍷

Today 2017-06-13 3:04 AM

He pressed send and waited for a reply. A moment later McMurphy’s mobile dinged and a return text message appeared on the screen.

Candy Cane

You woke me up Mr. McMurphy. I waited for your call all evening before I went to bed. You said you would call after you got home from dinner with your lass. Let me throw on some clothes and do my makeup and I’ll be on my way in a wee jiffy. C u soon. 😊👉👈

Today 2017-06-13 3:05 AM

He put down the mobile and sighed as he continued to stare out at the city his father had handed over to him when he died.

“She’ll be beggin’ for it once I get her stoned up,” McMurphy said wolfishly as he licked his thin lips.

After a few moments he got up from the soft leather of the designer chair he had been sitting in for several hours and walked over to where he had flung the book onto the Brazilian hardwood. Looking down at his solid gold Rolex, he noted that it was 3:07AM before bending down and picking up the novel, studying its cover carefully. The author’s name—Liam Muir—was a common one in the UK that brought back hundreds of hits when McMurphy searched the internet, but none of them could be connected to a writer with any history as a published author.

It troubled McMurphy that the passage that had made him so angry could have been based on real events that he had himself been part of. Young McMurphy was obsessed with remaining under the radar and felt violated at the similarities between one of the main characters and himself. Thumbing through the pages, McMurphy opened the book to the page he had left off at and re-read the passage once again, convinced that it could not have been conjured up solely by the author’s imagination.

“The most feared mobster in the history of British crime, Bud MacMaster sent his only son Jimmy in to mop up after the murder of Clifton Maxwell, the CEO of a well-known Edinburgh firm, Highland-Atlantic Constructors. The boyish looking and entitled MacMaster had been spoiled by his gangland father and hadn’t a clue about the nuances of the business world. In spite of the credentials earned at the London School of Economics the 25-year-old youngster could do no more than pretend he was in control of the highly thought of company he supposedly now led. His father had illegally acquired control over Highland-Atlantic through threat and coercion and ultimately wanted his son in the driver’s seat to manipulate the siphoning of millions through money laundering and backdoor schemes.

CEO Clifton Maxwell had recently been caught diverting money into his own retirement fund from the proceeds of an under-the-table partnership he had with MacMaster. Using a non-existent corporate entity that collected billings for work that was never done as well as by falsifying the cost records with the help of a crooked bookkeeper, Maxwell had stashed away several million pounds of MacMaster’s money believing he would never be caught. When a clever forensic accountant was hired by the elder mobster to audit the cost records for one of Highland-Atlantic’s projects being used to launder mob money, his ruse was exposed and the stolen money secured in one of the mob’s many Swiss bank accounts. Once notified by the auditor that the money had been found and was safe in the Swiss account set up for the project, the elder MacMaster assumed his money would be returned to him. In retaliation for his betrayal, Clifton Maxwell was murdered on the deserted Edinburgh waterfront in classic gangland signature, his throat cut from ear to ear. However the real beneficiary of Clifton Maxwell’s indiscretion and betrayal was MacMaster’s auditor who absconded with the funds through a shrewd banking sleight of hand, enraging the elder MacMaster. After catching Maxwell red-handed the auditor, along with millions in embezzled funds, vanished, never to be seen or heard from again.

The blood spilled by Bud MacMaster’s brutal hand allowed him to put Jimmy in the driver’s seat and gave the untried and untested youngster a leg up that he could never have realized without the influence of his criminal father. Young Jimmy had landed in the CEO’s shoes that soon saw him running a big company without any experience and without any idea of the construction business.

Everyone around him knew that he was the entitled son of a ruthless mob boss and the power that had fallen into his soft little hands gave the young MacMaster’s passive aggressive and narcissistic personality all the excuse needed to lord over everyone around him. With no awareness of his flawed life and undiagnosed psychopathy, the immature MacMaster fell into sex and cocaine addictions that would soon destroy any sense of normalcy he once had. As he sank deeper into his aberrations he was driven to terrible and unspeakable acts by the evil of his malignant Jekyll and Hyde personality. Jimmy MacMaster was a dangerous depraved deviant with no hope of ever being a normal member of society. He was destined to live out his days in a darkened hellacious existence until he would no doubt meet a poetically just end. He knew deep down he would die in a final act of violence such as he was all too willing to sanction but never carry out by his own hand. He bore no resemblance to a real man. Jimmy MacMaster was a coward.”

McMurphy slammed the book shut with a loud slap.

“Jeezus Christ, he’s painted me as a fucking sicko,” McMurphy uttered out loud as he held the book in his hand.

Picking up his mobile he punched in a speed dial. The line rang several times.

“Come on Mac, pick up,” McMurphy said impatiently.

Finally, the ringing ended and there was a momentary silence as McMurphy waited for his right hand man to say something.

“It’s late,” a groggy voice with a thick Glaswegian brogue answered.

“MacIntyre, it’s me. I’m looking at the book you recommended and you’re right, someone knows too much. There’s only one person alive other than me who could have known that kind of inside information. It has to be Ian MacLeod,” McMurphy stated.

“Do y’ think MacLeod wrote it?” MacIntyre replied with a yawn.

“Could very well be. The story is a dead ringer for what he did to shame my father’s reputation. He made a fool out of him,” McMurphy continued.

“Can we talk tomorrow? I’m half asleep Joe,” MacIntyre said with a yawn.

“Hold on,” McMurphy said as he opened the book and turned to the inside page listing copyright information and publishing credits.

McMurphy read the name of the publisher: Banyon Tree Books, London, UK.

“Find out from the publisher, Banyon Tree, who the literary agent is. That should lead us to the true identity of this Liam Muir.