

**THE IAN MACLEOD ACTION THRILLER SERIES**

**By Lloyd Tosoff**

**VOLUME I – POINT OF RETURN**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

July, 1998 Glasgow, Scotland

Holding a duffel bag to his chest, twenty-one year old Ian MacLeod crashed into the open door of a waiting taxi before falling onto the woman sitting in the back seat. Oblivious to the shocked young woman's futile attempt to free herself, MacLeod slammed the door shut before shouting at the cabbie.

"Drive!"

Contorting his body, MacLeod looked out the rear window trying to spot someone as the woman let out an ear-piercing scream.

"Get off me!" she shrieked.

MacLeod gripped the head rest in front of him and pulled himself up.

"I said drive," MacLeod yelled out before glancing over at the wide-eyed woman who had slid over to the other side of the seat. MacLeod motioned for her to stay calm by holding up both palms.

Not wanting the situation to escalate, the cab driver gave a resigned grimace and put the taxicab in gear before pulling into traffic on the busy street.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Just move it!" MacLeod shot back.

"She's going to Holiday Inn, few minutes up road," the cabbie uttered in broken English.

"Fine, I'll get off there," MacLeod replied.

Just moments before, the young woman had been celebrating her last night in Glasgow at O'Leary's Pub before her planned return to Brighton the next morning. As she pushed herself into the corner of the seat she noticed that the young man's brow was soaked in sweat.

"I won't hurt y' lass," MacLeod said looking over at the woman, winded.

He once again turned and looked through the rear window of the cab just in time to see a black, high performance, older model BMW gaining on them at high speed. MacLeod slammed his body onto the seat as the sound of the accelerating BMW grew louder. The woman clasped her hands as if saying a prayer as she recoiled away from MacLeod.

"Dear God," she screamed looking down at Ian in terror.

"Just stay calm," Ian urged from his prone position as the sound of the speeding BMW approached from behind.

A few seconds passed before MacLeod heard it overtake the cab at high speed. He pulled himself up and watched as the driver of the BMW narrowly missed a double decker bus as he darted in front of the cab before slamming on the brakes to avoid rear-ending another vehicle.

"Bloody idiot!" the cabbie yelled out as he stabbed the brakes and clenched his fist angrily at the reckless driver.

MacLeod remained low for a few more seconds until the sound of the speeding car was well in the distance. Sitting up he looked out the front window and watched as the car's tail lamps disappeared down the busy street. He glanced over at the wide-eyed woman. It was obvious she had construed that he knew the driver of the BMW.

"He's a friend, of sorts," MacLeod said, as he sat up straight attempting to compose himself.

The sound of honking horns could be heard in the distance.

“Uh, huh,” the woman said unconvincingly.

“It’s OK, we’re safe now, I think,” MacLeod said, becoming aware of how he must have scared the daylight out of both the cabbie and the young woman.

They pulled up in front of the Holiday Inn. The driver turned, placed his arm across the back of the seat and looked at MacLeod with his eyebrows raised. Ian pulled out a wad from his pocket and handed over more than enough cash to pay the fare.

“That should cover it,” Ian said as he glanced over at the woman whose cab he had commandeered.

Grabbing his bag and stepping out onto the pavement, Ian extended his hand to help the woman out of the cab. She raised her hands indicating that she wanted nothing to do with him. Getting out on her own she walked quickly towards the hotel portico.

“Wait,” MacLeod said as he followed a few steps behind.

Thoroughly shaken, she turned and looked around as if to regain her bearings. The fact that there were several people on the street as the cab pulled away seemed to settle her agitated state a little. She looked straight into MacLeod’s eyes.

“You’ve got your nerve. You hijack my cab and now you’re a stalker? Get away from me before I call the police,” she said angrily in a refined English accent.

People standing under the portico had taken notice of the ensuing conflict.

“I really do apologize,” MacLeod said doing his best to calm himself.

“Who are you?” the woman asked as the two of them stood a few feet apart.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I’m Ian MacLeod,” Ian said as he extended his hand.

Crossing her arms with her head bowed as she peeked up at him from the corner of her eye, she shivered.

“Aw, you’re shakin’ lass,” Ian said as he unzipped his bag and pulled out a windbreaker, wrapping it around her shoulders.

“You and that lunatic scared me half to death I’ll have you know,” the tall lanky English woman remarked as she tried to regain her composure.

Ian ignored her remark, not wanting to elaborate further.

“Do y’ have a name?” Ian asked.

“Of course I do, it’s Judith,” she replied disdainfully.

MacLeod put his hands in his pockets and dropped his head shamefully.

“Judith, I’m so sorry but I’m askin’ y’ to believe me now. I’m in a wee bit o’ trouble and without gettin’ into the details I need to get myself out o’ Glasgow.”

“Are you a criminal? What did you do?” Judith asked.

“Nah, I’m as clean as a whistle but I found out some things about someone and they now want to—well never mind. I just need to get out of town, is all,” Ian replied.

“Why should I help you?” Judith asked, looking over at the hotel entrance.

MacLeod held his palms up and tried to drop his agitated tone of voice.

“Do I look like a bad guy Judith? I just graduated with honours from the University of Glasgow, soon to be a Chartered Accountant. I’m harmless and I need yer help. Here look,” MacLeod said as he pulled out his student ID card flashing it at Judith.

Judith looked at the photo on the card and then back at MacLeod. With her arms still crossed, she cocked her head back and squinted, studying him intently as Ian gave her an imploring look.

“Judith, I’ve no other option but to ask you to help me,” Ian pleaded.

“What in the world could I do to help?” Judith asked.

“Do you have a car?” Ian asked.

“Yes, I drove here,” Judith replied.

“Just take me as far as Carlisle and I’ll hop a bus from there. Public transportation out of Glasgow is not an option right now,” Ian said persuasively.

Judith looked away towards the street and after a few more moments she turned toward the hotel portico and waved at the valet.

“Excuse me,” Judith said.

The valet dashed over.

“Yes ma’am?”

MacLeod stood watching hopefully as Judith handed the valet her parking claim voucher.

“I’ll be checking out of room 521 immediately. I’d like my car,” Judith instructed.

“Right away,” the young man responded.

The valet dashed off as Judith turned to MacLeod.

“Let me pack and check out.”

“Certainly. I can’t tell y’ how much I appreciate this Judith,” Ian replied.

Looking intently, she studied the handsome young Scot seemingly still deliberating on her decision. Finally she turned and looked towards the hotel entry doors before looking back at Ian.

“I won’t be long,” Judith stated as she walked away.

There was a cunning look in her eye that disturbed Ian as he did not find the tall, thin woman dressed in a buttoned up white blouse and plaid skirt particularly attractive but given the life threatening situation he was facing he had no choice but to accept her help. As he stood under the portico with his bag over his shoulder Judith glanced at him once again before disappearing inside the hotel lobby.

## Chapter 2

### Eleven Years Later

In an opulent executive suite overlooking the English Channel, Ian MacLeod sat across from his boss Datatime Industries CEO, Lance Mills. The short, balding Mills had thin pasty lips and a ruddy complexion that reminded Ian of a troll from the fairy tales he read as a child.

When Mills called Ian into his office he knew it wasn't to commend him for the great work he was doing. On the contrary, there had been a long history of conflict between him and the man he reported to. Everyone in the office knew of the simmering dislike that had been growing between the overpowering Mills and the meek accountant he treated with complete disrespect. Although they would all laugh at Ian's vivid imagination as they shared stories about Mills in the lunch room, Ian's anger towards Mills was well-known among the staff at Datatime.

Mills' dark Armani suit bulged at the seams as the overweight executive leaned forward on the glass and stainless steel desk before picking up and handing Ian an envelope. Nervous, Ian opened it and took out a neatly folded letter reading the words on the subject line—Termination of Employment.

MacLeod looked up at Mills.

“But I've done nothing wrong. Ten years and this is what I get for my trouble?” MacLeod protested.

“MacLeod, you're a bungler. I've no time for bunglers. Security is waiting for you, so be a man about this will you and go clean out your desk. Your days at Datatime are over,” Mills said coldly.

“But—,” MacLeod tried to interject.

“What part of *you’re fired* don’t you get?” Mills said, interrupting Ian and pointing to the door.

As Ian got up from his chair he caught a glimpse of a porn site on Mills’ computer. With his head bowed shamefully, Ian walked to the door and opened it before stopping and turning towards Mills.

“You’ll regret this Lance, you really will,” MacLeod stated.

Without so much as raising his head, Mills waved his right hand dismissively at MacLeod before sitting down.

“Get out MacLeod. We’re done.”

Mills’ secretary Lucille, an older woman who always wore frumpy button to the collar wool dresses and a bun in her graying hair, overheard the exchange. She looked up at Ian with a dismayed expression as he passed by her desk and walked down the hallway. Lucy stopped typing as she watched him disappear into his office where a security officer stood guard at the door.

An hour later Ian walked towards the entrance to his flat at Brougham Manor when a court’s Sheriff shoved a document in his face. Ian took it and looked up at the officer.

“You’ve been served sir,” the Sheriff stated before turning and walking away.

MacLeod tore open the envelope as he continued down the walkway pulling out the official looking document. He stopped and stared at it for a moment. It read, “Court Order for Increased Spousal Maintenance.”

“Ah, fer crissake Judith!” Ian exclaimed angrily.

Throwing up his hands, he flung the document into the air, not watching as it landed on the pavement a few feet away.

A neighbor, who was coming up the walk, picked it up and took a look, before handing it to Ian with a laugh as he walked by.

“In shit with the ex, again MacLeod?” the tall skinny man said sarcastically.

MacLeod waited until the man had his back to him before giving him the finger.

“Stunned bugger,” Ian said under his breath.

Ian walked upstairs to his flat and looked around at his depressing surroundings. Walking into his tiny kitchen he opened a can of soup and pulled out a few slices of bread to make a sandwich. Searching his tiny refrigerator for butter all he found was some moldy cheese and a jar of mayonnaise past its due date. He tossed the cheese in the garbage bin and settled on the soup along with the two slices of plain bread.

After eating the Spartan dinner Ian turned on the BBC news but found it hard to concentrate on anything but the disturbing day’s events. Overwrought, Ian decided to go for a run on the sea walk that ran the length of the Brighton shoreline. He made his way down to Kings Road and began running west towards the sunset. As the sun’s warm rays cut through the chill coming off the English Channel, Ian looked toward the sails of a sloop making its way back to the harbor a mile or so behind him. He stopped for a few minutes and watched as the sun slowly sank below the horizon until all that was left was a cobalt sky and the backlit silhouettes of a few broken clouds. The smell of the sea air revitalized Ian as he stood and took in the sound of the crashing surf.

Worried about the financial pressures of the alimony he now faced without a source of income and given the crushing debt Judith and he had accumulated during almost a decade of marriage, Ian felt hopeless. As he turned and looked across the water towards France, he wondered how much longer he could survive under the weight of his problem and his money hungry ex-wife.

Scanning the horizon Ian fantasized about jumping a freighter bound for southern climes until a blast of wind on his face brought him back to reality and he started the trek back home.

As dusk settled over the cold, choppy waters of the Atlantic, Ian wished he had worn more than the thin Spandex pullover and jogging shorts he threw on before leaving his flat. He crossed his arms in an attempt to protect himself against the chilly breeze, noting that the only people out on the walk this late were probably tourists on their way to gamble or dine at Palace Pier. Passing an attractive woman dressed in jogging tights Ian stopped and looked back at her shapely silhouette against the fading light as night fell over Brighton.

It was past ten before Ian returned to his flat. Feeling empty and depressed, Ian decided to go to bed. As he lay on his back looking up at the ceiling and listening to the sea breeze rustling the leaves of the giant elm outside the window, Ian sighed.

“What next?” Ian said out loud.

Exhausted from the day’s events the defeated accountant finally drifted off to sleep.