



JIM MCGHEE

DO THE  
RIGHT  
THING

EVEN IF IT KILLS YOU



JIM MCGHEE

# Do the Right Thing

*Even if it Kills You*

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## Preface

**“Do The Right Thing”** shows the kind of trouble you can get yourself into when you go all public-spirited.

Lawyer James Ashton only moved to the South of France to escape the pressure of work in the courts of his native Glasgow in Scotland and to pursue his love of painting.

Unfortunately, he turns out to be a key witness to murder.

And much like his countryman, the title hero of the **DI Barney Mains Mysteries**, he can't shake off his damned sense of duty.

He's just got to do the right thing....

Hope you enjoy this short tale, which like the series is set in and around Nice on the French Riviera.

You can check out the series at the end or go straight to the [Amazon series page](#). It's also on Kindle Unlimited.

**And if you read and like any of the books... please take a moment to leave a rating and review.**

Thanks,

Jim McGhee

## Day One

**I**t's too hot to breathe and a hugely fat man sits slumped on a station bench in the shade, his chin sunk into his chest.

He's filling most of the bench and is so still that he might be dead. Squeezed into the spaces on either side of him are two grey canvas bags filled with shopping.

I decide to make sure he's awake in time for the train. But a lady guard across the tracks blows her whistle as it approaches, prompting the sleeping man to stir and then groggily look up and around.

I forget about him as I escape into the welcome cool of the train along with some tourists straight off the beach. I'm waiting for the doors to slide closed when I idly scan the platform, expecting to see an empty bench beneath the single palm tree. But he's still there, head down, fast asleep again.

I move half-heartedly towards the doorway, suspecting that I'm too late. I am.

The doors hiss together and a party of noisy American tourists clutch each other as we lurch forward, leaving *Fat Man* alone, a stranded whale on a concrete beach.

They're on their way back from Monaco, where they've apparently been caught up in some police drama or other and

they seem to want the whole train to know about it.

I try to tune them out and am thankfully distracted by the man sitting across from me, a local in a black tee-shirt who is flipping his phone closed and slipping it into his jeans. He's wiry, mid-thirties, dark, a hard-looking type with strikingly interwoven black tattoos cascading down his right arm to the wrist.

Judging by the sweat on his neck he must have boarded with me. He starts to tease the damp tee-shirt away from his chest. Then like some wandering magician, he suddenly whips out a black-lacquered stick and transforms it into the most elegant of Chinese hand fans, which he then starts expertly fluttering inches from his face, coquettishly like some tart.

Things are not always what they seem, I think, forcing myself to avoid eye contact or to give any hint of a smile, or to show the slightest interest in two bulging grey canvas bags of shopping at his feet.

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The city station is busy when we arrive and I lose sight of *Fan Man*, as I've called him.

I'm carried along in the flow of tourists who as usual have not the slightest awareness of the rucksacks on their backs and I accept the inevitable buffeting through the narrow straits of the underground corridor before then fighting my way out of a crowded concourse to finally emerge onto the marbled terrace outside.

The blinding sun is directly in my eyes and I soak up its revitalising energy, happy to be back on my home patch and free.



*Fan Man* is ten metres away, straight in front of me, waiting by the side of the taxi lane.

I curse to myself as he turns and catches me staring. Our eyes connect for what is probably only an instant. But in that moment I sense an appraising gaze.

I wrestle my thoughts away from him, start glancing this way and that, as if expecting to be met.

I'm aware that a big black car with tinted windows has pulled up beside him and I watch out of the corner of my eye as he leans in towards the opening front passenger window.

He speaks to someone inside. The door opens. He's passing something into the car. The two canvas bags. Of course.

An indistinct face appears and I imagine it briefly turning towards me before it vanishes behind the closing door. The window slides up and the impressive black Mercedes pulls away silently.

*Fan Man* is reaching into his hip pocket and I, like a fool, wave to some non-existent person in the middle distance then make a ridiculous face, silently mouthing something incomprehensible, before setting off like a man on a mission.

As I pass him, he is spreading his fan and raising it to his face.

DO THE RIGHT THING

## Day Two

**T**he story is big news online today. The death of a man on the platform of a busy railway station is rare enough; it becomes even more newsworthy when he's thought to have been dead for hours, ignored by hundreds of travellers who must have passed within inches of him as train after train stopped then moved on.

The station being unmanned, the gruesome discovery was only made when a lady passenger arriving home in the evening actually took the time to stop and ask the big man if he was alright.

They couldn't get the body moved until around midnight. The man was estimated to weigh in excess of 130 kilos, which meant that special lifting tackle had to be manoeuvred up narrow steps and along the platform. The corpse was ignominiously winched down to street level and carted off by truck to the police morgue for a postmortem.

I know that the forensic process is routine for cases of sudden death but so too is some sort of police statement to quell speculation, something like: *There are no suspicious circumstances.*

Instead, the report ends with an appeal for witnesses, particularly anyone who may have seen cases or bags which could

have been in the dead man's possession.

Surely someone else saw the bags. They must have seen *Fan Man* carrying them too. He stood out like a sore thumb. But a second reading of the story reveals no more.

Now I've always considered myself public-spirited, a responsible citizen of my adopted country. But after too many years serving the great unwashed of my native land, I came here to be anonymous for the first time, to observe, to feel time, to play at being an artist.

The last thing I want is to be dragged back into court to give evidence against some low-life who stole a couple of bags from some fat guy who just happened to end up dead.

But I know deep down that there's more to it than that, even as I close the lid on my laptop, and upon any thought of contacting the police.

## Day Three

**T**he trouble with years in the public eye, even as an admittedly small-time lawyer in the Glasgow courts, is that you always have to be seen to do the right thing, which means constantly looking over your shoulder.

And the trouble with doing anything for years is that it becomes who you are. It's not a matter of character; it's habit. And there's no escaping it.

Which is why today, two days after the death and with news updates seeming to say the police are no further forward, I am agonising over whether to contact them.

Once I start agonising it can go on for days - even though part of me knows that the ultimate decision has already been made.

I call the number at the foot of the report and am then transferred twice before finally getting through to a policeman on the case.

He's harassed and I realize that I must be one of dozens if not hundreds of people who've called in.

I downplay the importance of my information, trying to hide in the crowd. But this policeman is sharp. He slows down when I mention the bags, big grey canvas bags.

No-one else gave that description, he says in a tone I think

sounds strangely guarded, though it could just be down to his efforts to speak his best English.

I'm sure about that, I say, because I saw them again on the train home. I start to describe *Fan Man* but he stops me and asks me my full name and address.

I back off and say I'm happy to travel to his office but he says he's based in Monaco and insists on coming to see me.

I give him my address then hang up, feeling I've done the right thing but despising myself for my compulsion to do so.

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Inspector Claude Rainier - 'no relation to the Monaco Rainiers,' he parrots in what seems a well-worn introduction - is not what I expected. But then, maybe all senior police officers in Monaco wear Armani.

I give my contact details and explain my background and how I've come from Scotland to live here, learn the language and pursue my career as an artist, which sounds grander, even in my laboured French, than the reality.

He asks in English much better than my French what I was doing at the Villefranche station in the first place and I explain, having conceded defeat on the language front, that I regularly take the train from Nice to go swimming or just to sketch. The station is right at the beach, which is better than the stony ones in the city and less populated by tourists, I say.

'Having spent a couple of hours there I got up to the station for the one-thirty-seven home. That's when I saw the fat man on the bench.'

'And the bags?' he interrupts.

'Yes, and the bags. As I said, two big grey canvas ones.'

Ordinary shopping bags, stuffed full.'

He takes a small device from his jacket pocket and shows it to me briefly before placing it on the coffee table between us, saying, more as a statement than a question: 'You don't mind if I record?' He doesn't wait for an answer. 'But you didn't see inside the bags?'

'Inside? No. Well come to think of it, not at that time. But I did on the train...'

'First things first, Monsieur Ashton. When you got on the train, where was the large gentleman?'

I'm feeling a little self-conscious now that I know I'm being recorded, which is about as rational as feeling guilty when you spot a police car in the rear-view mirror.

'Still sitting. He was definitely alive at that time because he looked up when the guard's whistle went. I thought, if I thought anything, that he would get on behind me.'

'But he obviously didn't.'

'No. Just before the doors closed I noticed that he was fast asleep again. It was too late for me to wake him. Besides you never know. Maybe he had never planned to take the train and was just waiting for someone.'

'Quite. But tell me Monsieur, did you still see the bags beside him?'

'The bags? The bags,' I repeat, giving myself time to think back. 'Well they couldn't have been. Because the guy on the train had them. Assuming - oh I see, assuming they were the same bags. But what the hell? I don't know why you're so damned interested in a couple of bags of sodding shopping when a man has just died.'

'Please bear with me, Monsieur,' he says calmly.

I notice that his suit has actually seen better days, as indeed

might he. He may have been considered handsome once but the thickening jowls and greying stubble suddenly suggest the world-weariness of someone who has just about had enough. The suit could have been slept in and his patience is not patience but exhaustion.

‘So now you are on the train and Monsieur Charpente is, as you say, *sleeping on the bench*. Tell me what you saw next.’

‘Well, OK. But, shit, you’re not suggesting that this Monsieur Charpente might actually have died in the time between me seeing him raise his head and the closing of the train doors? Surely not.’

‘Please Monsieur Ashton. Just tell me what happened next.’

‘Okay. So Charpente’s on the bench, the doors have shut and the train starts to pull out.’

‘Now, your fellow passengers.’

‘Oh yes, I’ve got to tell you about *Fan Man*...’

‘Fan Man?’

‘The man with the fan. The guy opposite me. Looked a tough sort. Youngish, thin, black tee-shirt. Had this amazing tattoo or series of tattoos, black, jumbled up like you see on Maories except that there was something oriental about them, like long reptiles or dragons, all twisted and coiled together, running from under his tee-shirt to almost his wrist, the right wrist.’

I fill in as much detail as I can before he homes in again on the bags.

‘Yes, definitely the same bags,’ I say. ‘At least I can’t imagine there being two similar ones, both equally filled to overflowing. And I remember now. That’s right, they were filled right up and the tops were lying a little more open than when I saw them on the bench. I saw apples, red ones, lying on top. I’m sure the bags were full of apples.’



**‘But you only saw what was on top, Monsieur Ashton, so please only tell me what you actually saw. What else was there? You said he was *the man with the fan*.’**

**‘Oh yes. Bizarre. He looked like a real hardcase, but then he suddenly pulls out this fan, you know the Chinese or Japanese kind of thing, fancy design - yes, probably oriental too - and starts fanning his face with it. I almost laughed out loud. Hilarious. But apart from that, no, nothing else. Not until we got off. I saw him again.’**

**‘Just one moment, please. Was there anyone or anything else on the train who caught your attention?’**

**‘Not really no. Oh, just a bunch of American tourists. You could hear them the length of the train, which isn’t that unusual I suppose. I mean, lovely people and all that but they’re always so damn loud. And this lot were even worse than usual. Apparently there was some big incident in Monaco. Police everywhere, some sort of road block, sirens going... But, silly of me, you’ll know all about it, whatever it was. What was it anyway? Bank robbery? Someone hit the Casino?’**

**The policeman answers with a silencing hand. ‘Please. You saw this *Fan Man* again?’**

**‘Yes, as I said. When we got off in Nice. It was a real crush. Heaving with people. But just when I managed to get out to the front of the station I saw him again. And I tell you I wish I hadn’t. He’s spooky. Piercing blue eyes, cold, sort of lifeless. Don’t laugh but my first reaction was that they were like the eyes of a shark. Anyway I looked away, pretended to be meeting someone. Thankfully, this car arrived - big black Mercedes job, darkened glass. My ex-wife always used to automatically say *drug-dealers!*’**

**‘Why?’**

‘It was just a joke, like every fancy black car with dark windows is owned by drug-dealers or gun-runners or whatever. Anyway, *Fan Man* hands the two bags into someone in the passenger seat and the car drives off. And that’s it. I cross the road and walk home and never see him again.’

‘But you never contacted the police.’

‘Well, no. Why would I? I can just see the reaction: *‘Man with a fan steals apples – shock horror.’*

‘But then you did call us. Only today, two days later.’

‘But I only read the story yesterday. And okay, I might have phoned yesterday. It just didn’t seem that big a deal.’

‘That is what we have yet to decide, Monsieur Ashton,’ he says, rising and retrieving his recorder.

He doesn’t exactly say *don’t leave town*, but his firm handshake and direct look tell me that this is indeed about much more than he is saying – and that he is less than pleased that I never called them yesterday.

I hate it when a policeman says: *We’ll be in touch*.

I don’t want him to be in touch. I want rid of this. I’ve done my bit. Now I want to be back in my burrow.

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The Inspector has just left and I’m wondering what it’s all about. The image of him snuffing out questions on the robbery, or whatever it was, is still fresh in my mind.

I had been so occupied with the newspaper reports on Charpente’s death that I had never bothered to read anything else. Surely there must also be something about the Monaco incident.

My first search finds it. They had hit the famous jewellery

store of Legautiers. Police had virtually sealed off the Principality but the thieves appeared to have escaped with millions of euros worth of the finest pieces.

There are plenty of alternative reports but all are short on detail. They're majoring on dull pictures of road blocks and head shots of passers-by who provide breathless quotes of what they'd seen; so-called eyewitness statements which I know from experience are about as reliable as a weather forecast. Otherwise, reports are padded out with stock pictures of Hollywood celebs known to have shopped there in the past.

One English language story reads:

*Daring thieves held Legautiers staff at gunpoint before escaping with a massive haul of precious necklaces and rings worth an estimated 30 million Euros.*

*No-one was hurt in the robbery. The three men, all wearing ski masks, terrorised staff with shotguns before smashing glass display cases.*

*It is understood that security systems failed to activate and it was only when a party of American tourists tried to enter the shop and saw what was going on that the alarm was raised.*

*A police net was thrown around the Principality but, with no reports of any getaway vehicle, it is thought the three simply left by the front door and vanished on foot into the crowds of tourists.*

*The store – famed for its discretion on behalf of wealthy clients and until this week a byword for security – declined to comment.*

*Police refused to say whether they thought the haul was hidden locally or had been smuggled out. But it is understood that known criminals in Nice and Marseilles have been interviewed in the search for clues.*

*There's a picture of Inspector Rainier, no relation, holding forth to the Press outside the crime scene, but little more of*

import.

Alongside is a so-called *Factfile* which rejoices in the irony that Monaco has the world's biggest police force per head of population.

It occurs to me, now that I'm helping the police, that I must call Rainier back. I hadn't thought of it at the time but I could knock up a pretty accurate sketch of the tattooed man which could be invaluable in trying to track him down.

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One can speculate wildly around this, I tell myself, but the half-formed thought refuses to leave; that the last place I would look for 30 million Euros worth of diamonds would be in two big bags of apples carried onto a local train by a huge, sweaty man who looked like he might pass out in the heat at any minute. Someone so obvious as to be dismissed.

It had never occurred to me to question why a Monaco detective was put in charge of an apparently random death in a French railway station but it seems clear now that they must have known or suspected Charpente's role all along.

But if he had been, quite literally, *the bagman*, who was *Fan Man*? An opportunist thief or the next link in the chain?

One way or another, Charpente ended up dead and *Fan Man* passed on the bags to someone outside Nice station. Maybe a pre-arranged drop-off?

I'm spinning the roulette wheel of possibilities and waiting for the ball to stop on a number.

The best I can come up with, the one I want to believe, is that Charpente simply passed out and passed away, a fat man in the heat. And as for *Fan Man*: no professional gang would

use such an obvious oddball whom everyone could identify so easily. Conclusion: he must simply have been a petty thief who lifted a couple of bags and gave them to a pal with a car.

I like the theory. I like loose ends neatly tied together. It lets me get on with worrying about something else.

But I can't kid myself. No small-time opportunist thief would be met by a someone in a car like that, or pass on the bags the way he did, like he knew very well what was inside; like he knew that they contained not just apples but a whole lot of fruit of a much more tempting variety.

I start spinning the wheel again.

## Day Four

**I** 'm up uncharacteristically early to check the online newspapers. I'm sipping my first coffee but freeze when I see the headline: Police Hunt the Man with the Dragon Tattoo.

My God! The police have told them what I said. I feel the room close in around me like a zoom shot in a Hitchcock movie. But they would never have released my name, I reason, hurriedly scanning the rest of the story.

There, six paragraphs down, I see it: *Foreigner James Ashton, a criminal lawyer of 15 Rue Metiers, Nice...*

Dazed, I force myself to quickly scan the rest of the text. I get little more than a mention as a potential witness - which is bad enough - but the next bit is positively scary.

It seems that *police sources* believe *The Man with the Dragon Tattoo* - some smart-arse sub-editor's play on the title of that famous book - could be one Dmitri Yashnokov, a Russian hitman who's as famous for his disguises as The Jackal.

Disguises, I tell myself, like tattoos and a fan. Diversions. Something to remember so that you forget the rest. Props used only once.

Police suspect the professional killer because the post-mortem revealed that Charpente suffered a massive heart

attack induced by unspecified substances injected into his neck –Yashnokov’s signature means of dispatch.

Inspector Rainier then gives an anodyne quote saying inquiries are continuing and that he has hopes of early arrests.

He appears to leave in up to the reporter to draw a connection between the Charpente murder and the apparently unrelated deaths of three men in a car explosion in the Nice suburb of Ariane.

I know how these things work and it’s clear from this report that the reporter is well-briefed and is sure enough of his facts to add that Charpente was indeed understood to have been the robbers’ courier.

Reeling from these revelations and the chilling realisation that I am now totally exposed, I move to pick up the phone. But it rings before I reach it. Then the doorbell goes. I answer the phone. It’s one of the nationals wanting to speak to me about the story. I tell him to fuck off and slam down the receiver.

I go to the door. Before I can bluster, Rainier is holding up both hands, whether in contrition or self-defence, I’m not sure.

‘Monsieur Ashton, I know, I know. You have every right. It was very wrong. Someone gave your name. It was not me and I am as angry as you. But please, I am here to help. Please can I come in?’

I give up. The damage is done. How much worse can it get? We resume our seats from yesterday and he begins.

The true story, off the record, he tells me, is that Charpente had a ticket to Marseilles but must have got off at Villefranche because he was feeling ill. He presumably planned to take another train and complete delivery of the diamonds.

And yes, the tattoos and fan were most likely props. Yash-

nokov's many disguises seemed to work because no-one had ever been able to give a description which was the slightest help towards tracking him down.

But why, I ask, would he want to kill Charpente, who was plainly harmless?

'Harmless or not, Charpente's days were numbered, just like the rest of the Legautiers gang,' he says, as if it's obvious. 'Ah, but you don't know... You see, the robbers thought they were simply hitting a big jewellers. In fact, strictly between ourselves, Legautiers is one of the Monaco money-laundering businesses for the Russian mafia.

'We think Yashnokov just happened to be in town on some other business for them. He was probably in the store when it was hit and must simply have followed the diamonds, saw them being handed over to Charpente and followed him onto the train. When Charpente got off, we assume that Yashnokov decided he couldn't risk waiting any longer and so took the initiative - and the bags - then called his friends in Nice to meet him off the train.

'And the three other deaths at Ariane?'

Nodding, he answers: 'Yes, we are sure. Local thieves who made a fatal mistake of ripping off the Russian mafia.'

I'm no innocent. I've heard some pretty gruesome tales involving seriously violent thugs in my court days in Glasgow. I defended some of them. But this is out of my league. I confess to Rainier that I'm worried about having been identified in the story. 'What if Yashnokov doesn't plan to stop at Charpente and the gang?' I ask, hearing the tremor in my own voice.

He shakes his head and says that while he understands my concern, it is misplaced.

'People like Yashnokov don't do civilians. It's a matter of



professional pride. No, once he has finished his business he will disappear into obscurity again. You are perfectly safe.'

The policeman seems to feel that he's done his duty and with a decisive nod, he rises to go. At the door, he somewhat shamefacedly offers a piece of advice. 'I should leave your phone off the hook and use your portable meantime,' he says. 'The press interest in you will soon die away.'

He is gone only a few minutes when, trying to take it all in, I remember that I had thought to give him a sketch of the killer. Regardless of Rainier's assurances, the sooner the police catch Yashnokov, the safer I will feel. I'm good at portraits, so while most people might have been thrown by his disguise, I can even now visualise his face a lot more clearly than I would like.

I shiver as I put the finishing touches to the eyes, which tells me that I've captured the man all too well. I leave a message for the policeman saying he can pick up this first true likeness of his elusive hitman whenever he likes.

## Day Five

**I**t's another gloriously sunny day and I'm in Place Garibaldi. The odd zing of a mosquito around me is of no consequence as I lounge at my stall, one of many which occupy the square on either side of the tram lines.

It has become the highlight of my week, whether I sell a painting or not. It's enough to be amongst real artists, to discuss our work, to build friendships. It's my new life. And on a day like this, I know that everything is going to be all right.

There's a fair number of shoppers today, weaving randomly between the stalls on their way to or from the cafes and restaurants around the square.

The buzz of countless conversations is amplified by the surrounding flat-faced old apartment buildings, their windows ennobled by balconies of clever trompe l'oeil fakery.

Some English tourists linger at the stall next to mine where the lovely Agnes is trying to close a sale on a small watercolour. I'll ask her for a coffee later. I have hopes there. I'm always rewarded with a freckled smile when I jokingly call her Saint Agnes, after the breathtakingly beautiful mountain village near the border.

An elderly tourist couple are homing in on my own small

table of offerings. If they stop to speak I will pretend to be French. It's better that way. I learned early on that speaking my native tongue to visitors just gets me caught up in telling the same old story of how I ended up here, which usually leads to them asking about my former life.

Deep down, people really don't like lawyers. The instinctive assumption is that we're overpaid parasites who get fat on the misfortune of others.

Just as people these days assume that most policemen can be bought.

Thankfully they pass me by and I play at feeling insulted before laughing inwardly at myself. Who could feel anything but happy on such a day?

Of course every Scotsman knows that moments like these have to be paid for and fate now proves the point as I feel the sharp sting of a mosquito on my neck. I raise my hand to brush it off, suspecting that I'm too late.

I am.

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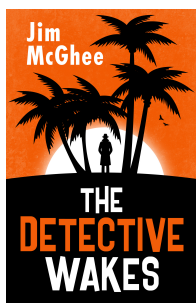
## Also by Jim McGhee

This short story is set on the French Riviera between Nice and Villefranche-sur-Mer, the main locations for the **DI Barney Mains** series of mystery novels by the same author.

The books – *The Detective Wakes*, *The Major Minor Murders*, *A Killer Legacy* and *The Paradise Killer* will be found on Amazon.

Read all about them at [www.jimmcghee.net](http://www.jimmcghee.net) or catch up with Jim McGhee on social media where he's known as @bigbarney-mains

Thanks for reading!



### **The DI Barney Mains Thriller Series**

Detective Inspector Barney Mains has for years been stuck behind a desk in a dismal corner of Edinburgh Police HQ, a victim of his own determination to do everything by the book.

But in [\*The Detective Wakes\*](#), he's stirred to action when he's sent to the South of France in connection with a missing British celebrity. He's only there to fly the flag but Barney simply can't resist the urge to do some real police work again. And suddenly, he's in the middle of a shocking conspiracy which will lead to murder and force him to question the very system he's defended all his life.

Then, in [\*The Major Minor Murders\*](#), his dream of a simple life outside the police is shattered when his criminal brother is accused of murder, a case which leads back to the South of France, in winter this time, into the orbit of corruption and death amongst the super-rich.

Book three - [\*A Killer Legacy\*](#) - presents Barney with an impossible task. In a South of France which is being torn apart by anti-British protests and wildfires, he must carry out the dying wishes of a killer.

Book four - [\*The Paradise Killer\*](#) - starts with a very odd murder. The body is bizarrely posed in an exclusive shopping street. As Nice boils in a never-ending heatwave, Barney has a very bad feeling that the killing isn't over.

There's much more about the series - plus free samples of the books at <https://www.jimmcghee.net>

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