It was a fantastic view.

Sumner before today hadn’t known that this building existed.

There were police stations and there were police stations.

There were the ones with the Dixon of Dock Green Blue streetlamps outside and there were the ones with revolving signs – what was the story with that? He should look it up sometime.

And then there were buildings like this is. Fifteen storeys, not a mark on it to say that it had anything to do with the police. No police cars in evidence.

An underground garage.

Dan had a secretary! She’s shown him in. She’d offered him coffee. She’d brought in a tray with a pot of the stuff. It was delicious, and milk (not in coffee) and biscuits (he was trying to stop himself at two).

But no Dan yet. But this was definitely his office. Pictures of the boy on the wall. Pictures of Dan, Fingal and Olga on the desk.

It was his office alright.

He’d been on gardening leave long enough now that he had a different plan for his day. He been planning on walking around north London. Maybe starting on Stanmore common – with a different view of London and then walking down towards Hampstead heath. He could see Highgate hill out of Dan’s window.   
  
It was a lovely day. His dress uniform chafed him at the neck. It had never fitted properly. That was a metaphor for something he thought.

Finally, in came Dan.

He got up, they shook hands. A weird, artificial thing for two very good friends to do. But were they still good friends? Well, we’ll see thought Sumner.

Dan gave the impression of a man who had a hundred things to do that day, and, even though it was eleven o’clock (twenty past actually, the appointment had been for eleven). Even though it was after eleven, he’d only, so far, managed to do two or three of the items on his list.

“Long and short of it, is I’ve got a job for you.”

“A job? But I’m still working on…”

“No, you’re not,” Chief Superintendent Dan Donne gave Sumner a warning look. “Not officially, and not even unofficially. I’ve seen you’re social media, you’re taking advantage of the nice weather and walk the tallest hills in London.”

Sumner nodded. He’d stopped working the Solomon Griffiths case, at least that was the impression he was trying to give to the outside world.

“And thanks for that,” said Ben, “It’s made this a lot easier.”

“Made what a lot easier?”

“I was at a chief constable’s conference last week.”

“Oh how the might have ascended,”

“Shut up – this is me fucking saving your bacon.”

“Right.”

“West Yorkshire.”

“Yes.”

“You’re familiar with it.”

“Depends what you mean.”  
“You were born there.”

“Yes.”

“And you grew up there.”  
“Yes.”

“Do you think you could be a policeman there.”

“Fuck! Seriously. That’s what you’re going to do? Rusticate me?”

“They’ve got a serial killer.”

“I haven’t read about it.”  
“They’ve kept it out of the papers.”  
“Why would they do that?”

“Because they’re fucking it up, and right now, they don’t feel that detailed scrutiny of their fuck ups is really going to help matters.”

“How many?”

“Three so far – that they know of, maybe a fourth. But they’re not all in West Yorkshire, they’re all over the north, one in Manchester, one in Nottinghamshire. That’s part of the fuck-up. They went undetected because they were with different forces.”

“What can I do?”  
“What you always do.”

“What I nearly always do. Solomon Griffiths.”

Dan cut him off with his most soon to be assistant commissioner Donne voice. “Solomon Griffiths has been dead 40 years. This chap’s last victim was last Tuesday.”

“How do we know it’s a chap?”

“We don’t. But whoever bought the vodka is a bloke.”

“What vodka?”

Now Dan looked at him and smiled and there was actually good humour around the eyes. Sumner could see the raw recruit that he’d befriended at Hendon.

“The victims all committed suicide by drinking vodka and pills.”

“But it’s not suicide?”

“Apparently not.”

“How do they know?”  
Dan shook his head. “I don’t know any of the details.” He knew Sumner was hooked, that’s all he wanted to do before he moved on to the rest of his day – which not likely to be filled with any more easy victories. “All I do all day is look at spreadsheets with highlighted overspend.”   
  
He paused. “And deal with disciplinary cases like you.”  
  
Dan pushed back in his high-backed chair and looked north towards Highgate.   
  
“I suggest you get on train to Leeds and find out.  
  
When you get there talk to detective sergeant Beverly Fletcher. She’s expecting you tomorrow at 9.”  
  
That was it. Sumner was dismissed. This was one of the most awkward aspects of having former friends who were know senior offices in the Met – well, that and the times when they tried to fire you.

Coming out of King’s Cross on the train that same afternoon, it was a blisteringly warm late April. Everything was in flower. But the clouds started to gather by the time they got to Grantham. And as the train finally wound its way across six or seven sets of points to come to rest at platform 12 of Leeds station, it was raining. He’d found a hotel near the station.   
  
He remembered catching trains from here when he was a teenager. Breathless catching the last train having seen bands at the student union. Fifty pence a pint! And a deal between the student union and the brewery that mean that the beer tasted like it had just come out of some magic beer fountain.

Even though he’d been brought up fifteen or so miles from Leeds, he didn’t know it that well. He knew the route from the university to the station. And the police station was halfway between the two.

He planned to check it out that evening, so he’d know exactly where to go in the morning. An appointment at 9? He would always be there, lurking in a café that was in view, if possible at 8.

Mary o’clock. People in his family called it. After his grandmother Mary, who would always insist on being at any appointment at least three hours before the appointed time.

But before that, he needed to check into his hotel. Which appeared to be directly inside the station. It took him a while to realis that it was actually directly under the station.

A left turn off of the “Dark Arches” a set of tunnels under the station. One of which carried a main road, but the hotel was several turns down side roads off of that road. Of course, down there the GPS on the phone didn’t work and he was left walking “blindly” – in modern terms - through sodium-lit tunnels. When he finally emerged into the daylight, he was hit by the smell. Because he smelled it first, and instantly knew what it was, before he saw it.

The canal. Canals in Yorkshire had black, black, water. And, if it were possible, they had an even darker stink. He didn’t know exactly what caused either the colour or the smell, his suspicion was coaldust – but maybe he was being naively optimistic that it was that wholesome. The area had in the past been surrounded by every kind of manufacturing, chemical factories, printers, breweries. He didn’t really understand how it could endure still, nearly half a century after any industrial activity in this part of town. But endure it did. The black oily water. The hellish stink.

His hotel was in an unaccountable patch of daylight, if it were in Brighton, you’d call in boutique. But this was a difficult to pull of in such a dark corner. In and amongst the tangled arches around and below the station. He inhaled deeply of an instant coffee he made himself with all the sachets in his tea and coffee making facilities. In fact, his room had a view of platform 12. The essential connection between Leeds and the outside world.

For a brief moment, he was surprised by a thought. He could just walk back to the station. He hadn’t unpacked anything yet. He could go back to London. And the relatively safety of only about half of the metropolitan police wishing him ill.

This thought shocked him. Was he really in danger here? Already?