

DAN LAUGHEY

CHLOE

LOST GIRL

CARL SANT MURDER MYSTERIES BOOK 1



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CONTENTS

MISSINGPEOPLE.ORG

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Next in the Series](#)

[About the Author](#)

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MISSINGPEOPLE.ORG

Chloe Lee

Age at disappearance: 20

Missing since: September 9

Missing from: Leeds, West Yorkshire

Chloe did not return to her student accommodation on the night of Saturday 12th September. She left all her property at her Belle Vue Road address. There are concerns for her welfare. Her mother, who has left the country for an extended holiday, lives at an address on Dufton Approach, Seacroft. Chloe is known to frequent the city centre as well as Leeds University. She is described as white, 5ft 11in tall with long black hair. When last seen she was wearing a light blue hooded top and black jeans slitted at the knees. She can call or text Missing People in confidence any time.

THE BUS ARRIVED FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE THE HOUR, HISSING TO A STOP, THICK breeze pulsing ahead of it. He turned his eyes away and noticed the silhouette of a woman against the moonlit ruins. She appeared agitated, waiting for someone. Lengthening his stride, gaze narrowed and shoulders hunched, he felt a rush of adrenalin as he loomed towards the frail figure.

What next? That's what I love most about this job, he told himself. Every day a different one, every investigation a new opportunity to demonstrate my adeptness at enforcing the law. I've made mistakes, true, but my record on paper is unblemished. It's only a matter of time before the men who matter sit up and take notice.

On closer inspection he saw that the woman was older than her phone voice had conveyed. Fifties? Late forties at best. Even so, her glowing make-up and the vibrancy in her eyes did much to hold back the years.

After what seemed like an eternity, she said, 'Dryden?'

He nodded. 'I'd say it's a pleasure, though from what you told me on the phone—'

'No time for niceties. Come with me.'

He followed her along the riverside to woods providing shelter from the rain. They found a fallen bark to sit on and she offered him a cigarette. Then she told her tale. He asked if she would mind if he used the voice recorder on his phone. She did mind very much, so reluctantly he settled for the Notes app. Dryden had two smartphones, a smartwatch and some smart sunglasses. His colleagues

nicknamed him Inspector Gadget. Irritating. But it didn't gall him. Gadget always solved the mystery. Eventually.

Forty minutes later the interview was over. They shook hands and went their separate ways, the woman deeper into the woods, Dryden back to the main road, her final words ringing in his ears.

'Can you be trusted?'

He hadn't answered at first; didn't know how to. Could he keep his word... and not say a word to anyone else? In the end he'd chosen no words. Just a simple nod.

He glanced at the luminous dual-dial on his Tag Heur – a gift from his other half. The next bus was due any moment. Quickening his long stride, he reached the road at the same time as the bus. It began screeching to a halt. He swiftly crossed the A65, got behind the three other customers waiting at the abbey. Hopped on the bus, flashed his return ticket at the weary driver, considered for a moment before chancing his arm on the top deck. It should be quiet up there, the other passengers settling for the seats below.

Climbing the stairs two at a time, he took a seat at the front, got out his iPhone X and read the few notes he'd managed in the shade of the woods. Best to fill in the gaps while things are still fresh in my mind, he thought. Seconds later came footsteps behind him, someone emerging from the top of the stairwell.

He stole a glance. The man was one of the passengers who'd got on the bus with him. Wearing black from head to foot, the nondescript coat and trousers reminded Dryden of his darkly clad boss. Someone wanting peace and quiet too, he guessed.

Back to the notes. Who? When? Where? And crucially, why? Why murder? And why the cover-up? He dug into his pockets for the Post-It she'd given him containing the all-important address, but he couldn't find it. Maybe he'd dropped it. Not to worry. It was permanently printed on his memory.

Then came more footsteps. Two pairs of them. Dryden glanced over his shoulder. A young man and woman were climbing the stairs. Hadn't they boarded the bus at the abbey too? He couldn't be sure, but it was puzzling-

stroke-annoying all the same. Why come up here when the bottom deck had seats aplenty?

Unperturbed at unwanted company, he began keying in names and descriptions, dates and times, all the while drawing on recall training he'd recently undertaken at police college. With so many details buzzing around his head, he swore he heard a swarm of bees close by. Then he looked out at the drizzly darkness, the copper and yellow leaves clinging to the trees. Wrong season, he told himself.

He directed his gaze back to his phone, deep in thought about something the woman had said. That she was related to the girl was undeniable; and anyway, why spell out the whereabouts of the evidence – indisputable evidence – if the whole saga was a hoax or a set-up or some wild conspiracy theory?

He came out of his daydream, wiping condensation off the bus window with his anorak sleeve and peering out of the semi-circle he'd crafted, though the view hardly improved through the mist and damp. He could see his mirror image smiling back, the chiselled curves of his strong jaw and strapping torso heightened by the dim light. Outside, in the murky beyond, there was nothing to be seen – but what the hell was going on behind him?

From the light cast by the ceiling beams Dryden caught the hazy reflection of someone standing up. It was the man in black. Then, from the other side of his vision, the couple were standing, postures frozen. Instinct getting the better of experience, he turned around in an abrupt movement lacking caution and composure.

The last thing Detective Sergeant Liam Dryden saw with both his eyes was the shining barrel of a semi-automatic pistol – pointed right at him. He never saw the bullet that shot out of the barrel, penetrated his right temple, then went through and out of his skull, shattering the misty windscreen behind him. He felt a terrible pain. His head was singing, whining, popping. His left eye went blind. He could hear his own scream. More shots were fired. Where from and by whom, his fading senses couldn't fathom.

He knew he was dying, knew he was going to die. It had happened so quickly, so inexplicably, he could barely swallow the reality of his doomed

condition. So this was what it felt like to stare into the face of Death. Like crashing a car you cannot control, time suspended, impalpable, lost. But he was no longer afraid to die. He was beyond fear; beyond hope.

Before the end; before his muscles packed in and his grip on life gave up entirely, one last gesture. The dynamite must be exposed. It was too hot to be buried with him. His phone had gone, but he still had a cloudy window to work on.

Resting his left arm on a handrail for leverage, Dryden gradually raised his right hand above his drooping head. Then he thought ‘brevity’ – and fingered a series of numbers on the misty glass, marking a course as clear as water.

He willed his body to carry on, commanded it not to fail. But try as he might to get those numbers etched for eternity, his ultimate number was up, his last ounce of energy sapping dry as he slumped to the floor.

To add insult to mortal injury, he died amid the echoes of an almighty boom.

‘YOU UNDERSTAND WHY YOU’RE HERE?’

The man shrugged and spoke in a deep drawl. ‘No skin off my back, though it’s starting to feel like *Groundhog Day*. Same routine, different day.’

Detective Inspector Carl Sant spat out his mangled toothpick and rubbed the tip of his rugged nose. ‘A bit young to remember that film, aren’t you?’

‘I watched it on the plane to Thailand last year. Nearly pissed myself laughing.’

‘Did you go with Chloe to Thailand?’

‘No, that was before Chloe.’ Jake Downing, nineteen-year-old package of toned muscle, gazed up at the unpainted ceiling of the interview room. ‘Might’ve been Emma. Or was it Emily?’

‘No shortage of girlfriends.’

Jake sat up. His eyes took on a mischievous gleam as they moved to Sant. ‘Eight. Ten if you count the ones I never, you know, got inside. Girls are like taxis.’ He grinned. ‘You ride one, move onto the next.’

‘I’m sure your mother would approve, Mr Downing.’

‘Each to his own, don’t you think? Some lads find the right girl on day one and stick with her through thin and thin. Not me. I’m too young for nonsense like that.’

‘So you and Chloe were never serious?’ asked the inspector, clamping a fresh toothpick between his incisors.

Jake replied by pushing up one shoulder, lazy.

‘Tell us about your... relationship,’ Sant said.

He glanced at the man sitting next to him. Detective Constable Brad Capstick watched Jake without blinking. A studious type, Capstick was forever adjusting his thick-rimmed NHS-style specs, though neither the frames nor lenses were subsidised by the National Health Service. He was fifteen years Sant’s junior and a damn sight better qualified, but a love of textbooks and grand ideas hadn’t exactly equipped him for CID work.

Jake’s expression became wry. ‘How can I put it? We weren’t shy with each other. Let’s just say I got to know Chloe well. *Very* well.’ He beamed pathetically. ‘She appreciated a man of experience.’

‘But you’re a little younger than Chloe,’ Capstick said, as if the boy needed another invitation to gloat.

‘In the biological sense, yes, but not the carnal.’

‘When was the last time you saw her?’ asked Sant, eager to move on.

Jake tapped the tips of his fingers on the table. ‘How many times have I been asked that question?’

Sant leant forward, arching his neck and widening his stare a fraction. ‘Are you going to make life easy for us, or do we make life difficult for you?’

‘Why you got beef, man?’

Capstick felt the steam coming off his colleague and stepped in. ‘You must understand, Jake, that whilst we’ve no wish to start a shouting match, we’re handling a missing person case of the utmost urgency.’ He breathed out. ‘Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.’

No-one had seen Chloe Lee for over seven weeks. To make matters worse, establishing when the university student had disappeared was proving tough. Usually a time, and sometimes a place, provided a vital marker in establishing a missing person’s whereabouts. But in Chloe’s case, detectives had neither. Students living in shared apartment blocks seldom clocked in like the rest of the human race, so when asked why they’d taken so long to contact the police, Chloe’s flatmates had offered blank expressions and weak excuses.

Chloe’s mother was also missing, though several sources – passport checks included – drew the same conclusion: Vanessa Lee was three months into a six-

month round-the-world tour. Vanessa's Facebook profile had been scarcely touched since her departure, although one recent post hinted at an interest in teaching English as a foreign language. A few photos of tropical forests and temples completed the picture. Perhaps six months was an underestimate.

Chloe's father was missing in another way. He'd left Vanessa when Chloe was twelve, then moved to York with his second family. He'd been interviewed by detectives already but not by Sant personally, which explained why a prearranged trip to York was pencilled in for the following evening.

'I'll make it easy for you,' said Jake, enunciating each word. 'The last time I saw Chloe was in July. The twenty-fourth to be precise. She came to a birthday party I was hosting at my digs. I saw her briefly. She left early. Simple. That's all there is to it.'

Capstick consulted the pocket-sized tablet he carried around with him. 'These digs you mention. Are you referring to the Moorland Avenue, Hyde Park address?'

'Correct. I don't live in Hyde Park now. Moved to Headingley. One notch up the social ladder.'

The constable wrote something on a page filled with his tiny scrawl. 'And was Chloe in good spirits at the party?'

Jake stared into space. 'As far as I recall. She was her usual, sober self. But as I said, I hardly saw her that night. We were... losing interest in each other.'

'So you split up after the party?'

'I'm not sure if we ever did split up. We'd had the odd argument or two, and needed to get away for a while. The summer break came at a good time.'

'So technically speaking, you and Chloe are still together?' probed Capstick.

The young man's eyes widened. 'How can we be together when she's not around?'

'But if Chloe came through this door now, you'd still assume you and her were a pair?'

'Suppose. Probably. Depends on Chloe...'

'And?'

'Well, you can't expect me to wait forever, gents. I've moved on—'

Sant stifled an urge to laugh. 'Enter girlfriend number eleven, Mr Downing.'
Jake didn't try hard to repress the smirk rising over his solid jawline.

Capstick glanced down at his tablet. 'Did you argue with Chloe the last time you saw her. At the party?'

No sooner had it appeared than the smirk was gone. The boy was ruffled. 'Can't remember... maybe, maybe not.'

Sant wasn't convinced. 'A simple yes or no if you don't mind.'

The teenager shuffled restlessly in his chair, his newfound nervousness not helped by the snoring of the duty solicitor by his side. He peered upwards in search of an answer and then said, 'Probably. We argued quite a lot, like all couples.'

Sant sensed the unease and jumped on it. He thrust his thick neck aloft, closing in on his target. The stark light from the swaying bulb overhead made the inspector's suit glow threateningly, though Jake was too busy admiring himself in the reflective glass to notice.

'What did you argue about? It must've been a proper bust-up, Mr Downing, because you haven't seen your girlfriend since.'

Jake stood up sharply, stirring the lawyer from his slumber. 'I don't have to take any more of this harassment. And what's more, it's about time I got myself proper legal representation instead of Mr Dozy here.'

The inspector rose to his feet in turn, the two of them squaring up like mismatched boxers. 'You don't have an iota of decency for the situation we're facing, do you Mr Downing? A young lass is missing. Feared dead. And all you care about is what you come out of this smelling like.'

'I'm not standing for this,' the youngster snapped. His initial coolness had long evaporated. 'I was invited to this cop shop for a conversation, not an interrogation. If you think I killed Chloe, arrest me; prosecute me. Go on! You haven't a shred of evidence.'

Capstick found himself refereeing, his arms opening like scissors to force the fighters apart. 'Let's just quieten down and sit down.' He turned to Jake, who was heading straight for the door. 'For the sake of Chloe, we need as much information as possible, so please – just a few more minutes.'

‘Only if you keep him on a leash,’ he said, jabbing his finger at Sant.

Capstick made a show of rebuking his partner. Then more questions were asked, principally by Capstick, but the interview came to an abrupt halt. Not because Jake Downing wanted out, but because Assistant Chief Constable Bill Gilligan wanted in. The chief officer signalled at Sant and Capstick through the thick-glazed window of the interview room, pointing a fat thumb in the direction of his office.

Urgency and despair haunted his tubby face.

* * *

‘IT’S DRYDEN. Bad news. Awful news.’

Gilligan was clearly flustered. Rarely did the Old Man – what others called him on account of his dated dress sense – drum up a conversation without a put-down remark for starters. His bushy eyebrows merged to form a thick underlining above his flushed cheeks. As the beer-bellied ACC perched on the end of his oversized desk, Sant noticed the bottle of Bell’s he kept hidden for a rainy day in the bottom drawer of his filing cabinet, a ‘small drop’ of which the Old Man took with his morning coffee. The bottle was almost empty – no coffee to be seen.

‘Holdsworth?’

Capstick replied: ‘She’s on call, sir.’

‘What’s wrong?’ said Sant, gnawing on another toothpick, his way of alleviating bouts of anxiety. Like the one about to surface. A humble device, for sure, but it had helped him to kick the habit, and kept him off those ghastly e-cigs for good measure.

Gilligan cleared his throat, half-closing his eyes and folding his arms. ‘I’ve never had to say this to colleagues before, Inspector, Constable, though I suppose there’s a first time for everything. To be injured in the call of duty is one thing – but to lose one’s own life on the beat is tragic.’

Capstick spoke first, gaping mouth in unison with sinking shoulders. ‘You mean... Liam is dead?’

Gilligan gave a short nod and turned away, his eyes wetting at the corners.

‘But he’s off duty, sir.’

‘So I believe.’

Splinter snapping between his front teeth, Sant uttered the first thought that came to him. ‘An accident? Or otherwise?’

Gilligan unfolded his arms. ‘That much we don’t know yet, but the circumstances appear fishy to say the least. The official line, for now, is that Dryden has been involved in some sort of road incident whilst on board a bus. But going on what I’ve heard, this is no ordinary crash. Not by any stretch of the imagination. We should be getting along to the crime scene, gentlemen, if you don’t mind?’

Sant nodded, trying desperately to digest what he’d just heard. Thoughts of missing people and cocky young men were rubbed away in an instant. An officer – a damned good one – was dead. All other tasks were withheld for now.

The inspector binned what was left of his toothpick and walked out of Gilligan’s office, out into the black horror of every policeman’s nightmare.

THROUGH A HAZE OF FLOODLIGHTS AND FLASH-PHOTOGRAPHY, SANT DUCKED under the police cordon and cast his eye over a scene the like of which he'd never witnessed before. Not even in his dreams.

The vanishing point was the doors of the bus, jammed at right angles into the side of the wine shop. The stench of stale wine rose from red puddles strewn with broken glass. The first bobbies arriving on the scene decided to call in the fire brigade. As Sant attached a mask to cover his nose and mouth from the dust, he could just make out the golden sparks flying off a firefighter's power-saw as it carved a colossal hole in the side of the bus.

His heart sank as he thought about what awaited him.

Half an hour later he sucked in all the air he could muster before crawling through that hole. The exterior of the bus looked bad enough, its bodywork battered and scorched by flames not long since extinguished. But the inside had to be worse. Much worse. He'd encountered the whole gamut of deadly road accidents during his stint as a traffic cop – the image of a biker's head severed from the neck still troubled him – but it was plain this was no accident.

Jagged steel bit into his palms, scraped his sides, as he slipped in. The shattered windows on both sides gave Sant the eerie feeling he was trapped in some kind of mechanical spider's labyrinth. The illusion was soon broken. Positioned under canvas tents designed to protect evidence was a scattering of bodies. He gently lifted one of the tarpaulin sheets and stared down at a young man, probably still a teenager. All the blood had leaked out of his head, giving

his battered face a blue hue. A gunshot wound was visible just above his left ear, chin pressed into his shoulder by neck vertebrae arching in the wrong direction.

Sant breathed out steadily and peered ahead of him. Another tent was at the front of the bus, presumably housing the dead driver. A scenes-of-crime officer guided him around the tents and up the stairs. The bus had come to a stop at an acute angle. The climb to the top deck was a challenge of coordination. He tried to avoid placing his hands anywhere where fingerprints might be traceable, then thought, how many dozens of people had coated this handrail with their arches and whorls?

He reached the top and threw a quick glance at the forensic team, grabbing air in front of him, shoe catching on a protruding rivet. The team was scouring every square inch around the front window and seating. Below their serious faces, Dryden's inert form lay in the foetal position. Unlike the bodies downstairs, Dryden's was uncovered and, very possibly, untouched. His eyes were wide open, their final gaze upwards to the heavens, the poor soul's knowing nod to his destiny.

Sant wasn't queasy by nature, but the musty atmosphere brought on a bout of dizziness he couldn't shake off. He muttered something to the officer who'd led him up the stairs, started to head back down. It was then that he noticed the splintered glass in front of Dryden.

While the rest of the window had been left to dry naturally, a small section of glass had been encased in plastic film in order to retain the moisture. Underneath this, Sant could make out a pair of numbers: 3 and 1. And then a gap of about three inches before another figure appeared. It looked like a 5. Unless it was an S.

3-1-5?

3-1-S?

A police photographer was busy snapping the rear of the vehicle. Sant waved her over and asked her to take some close-ups of the markings.

'Already got 'em, matey.'

Photographers cared little for status or ranking, going about their job largely oblivious of who they were talking to.

‘Take a few more, just to be on the safe side,’ urged Sant.

She shrugged in reluctant deference.

The lower deck contained four tents compared to the two he’d noted halfway along the upper. That made six fatalities, not including DS Dryden. Seven dead in total. A bloody massacre.

Home Office pathologist Dr Grant Wisdom was crouching inside one of the tents, inspecting shot wounds and crushed bones with a jeweller’s attention to detail. Sant felt a crumb of comfort at Wisdom’s presence. A man of few words, he was the best in the business. The inspector knew better than to disturb him during these critical moments of scientific scrutiny.

The lights inside the bus had malfunctioned on impact. What little yellow glow could be thrown on the crime scene from police-issue spotlights was no substitute for natural daylight. The answers would come later. Just one question would suffice for now.

‘Any survivors?’

Dr Wisdom snapped on a fresh pair of Latex gloves, replied without looking up from his gory task. ‘Two men. In ICU at LGI. They were lucky.’

‘Lucky?’

‘That’s what I said, Inspector. Lucky they weren’t shot.’

Sant left the morbid bus and took shelter from the rain in the back of a video van. Shut the twin doors. A shiver buzzed over his limbs, relaxing the tension in his gut. He found a cup of something warm, took a peek at his knock-off Rolex and closed his eyes, straining to concentrate on his preferred escape-route at moments of dread like these.

Meditation.

A simple art. True. But to others, this daily ritual was the subject of ridicule. Even Sant had dismissed the idea at first. An old friend who’d migrated to India to become a Buddhist monk had suggested it to him. *How to think right* – that had been the goal. Now meditation was integral to his ways of coping with the work-life balance. A balance he’d never get close to striking without those twin virtues... watchfulness and mindfulness.

* * *

WHEN SANT finally awoke from his cerebral trance and checked the time, he realised he'd snoozed for an hour – quite an achievement given the hubbub surrounding him. Blackbirds nearby tweeted the coming of dawn, wings thrusting them to the next patch of grass. Refreshed but frustrated, he felt those meditative powers had merely seduced him away from the harsh reality of a blood-soaked bus. All he could conjure up, for now, were questions.

What was Dryden doing on the bus? Where was he travelling to? Or from?

And why was he murdered? Why were the others murdered?

There was nothing to do but wait. Sit in a cold police van and await forensics, await the ballistic tests, await the pathology reports. It was these moments at the very beginning of a murder enquiry, with time so precious and the risk of error so high, when Sant became agitated beyond belief.

The comfort he sought in meditation often evaded him. So his other therapy was to eat his way out of the jitters. It was surefire, if unhealthy. He was a little overweight, but not out of shape. His height, all six and a half feet of him, kept away the middle-aged spread.

In his late teens he'd been an exceptional basketball player. If only he'd been born an American! Professional basketball didn't exactly constitute a feasible career in a country where the sport had next to no following. He gave up the idea – no money in it.

As well as being big, Sant was unnaturally dark. He had black hair. Lots of it. Regardless of his fortysomething years, not a grey hair or bare patch could be seen. His frequent intentions of growing a beard always succumbed to changes of mind, leaving his face invariably speckled with dark stubble. Tufts of black hair on his massively broad hands added a touch of werewolf to the inky hue.

The other feature that stood out was his nose. It had an acute kink in the middle where it had been broken and re-broken. Meeting above the nose, his thin black eyebrows curled at their ends like out-of-place moustaches.

His dress sense was equally dark. Apart from a whimsical affinity for white cotton socks, he always wore a black suit, black shirt, black tie and black

Grenson shoes, and in every season except the summer, a long black Mackintosh.

He hauled his burly frame out of the police van, shading his eyes from a gust that blew cold drizzle into his face. Slammed the doors shut. His stride was silent, observant, as he headed in the direction of the scenes-of-crime teams mulling around the disfigured bus. They looked like painters and decorators from a distance. It was only close up, breathing the air they breathed, that the picture changed. This was no exercise in decoration, but the undoing of destruction; the fine-tooth combing through irrevocable wreckage.

The Volvo B9TL Gemini-type double decker looked a shadow of its former self. The facelifted look of the front end was now crushed against the stone-fronted building. Over four metres high, ten metres in length and two and a half wide, it weighed twenty tonnes and contained a nine-litre engine capable of totting up two million miles. It could carry seventy-four seated and eleven standing passengers at any given time. Price tag: three hundred thousand pounds.

Graham Jones, a representative from FirstGroup, was doing his best to dodge a volley of questions from reporters skirting the cordon. He kept looking over at the battered shell of steel, the expensive write-off deepening lines around his mouth.

Sant signalled to him. ‘Which bus was this, Mr Jones?’

The man took a while to register Sant’s meaning, but then it came to him. ‘The number 33. From Otley. Last 33 of the night. The airport buses run later of course.’ He spoke slowly between deep intakes of breath, a blank disbelief haunting his crinkled brow.

‘What do you know about the driver?’

‘Name’s Brian Simpson. Experienced. Accident-free too. Checked my records just now.’

‘Was Simpson in good health?’

The man glanced down at the clipboard he was holding. ‘Should say so. Not a day off sick in four years.’

‘Of sound character?’

Another glance. ‘Nothing on file to say otherwise. You’re not suggesting...

he might be to blame for this?’

‘I’m not suggesting anything, Mr Jones. All I know is that your driver was shot dead with a gun fired by someone on board. The killer somehow managed to get off the bus before it crashed.’

Jones shook his head. ‘I can’t make it out. How someone’s done that and got out alive...’

Sant asked the bus rep to show him the door mechanism. Jones’s blank look shifted to the driver’s guard. A large tarpaulin concealed what was left of Simpson’s head. Though his eyes began to water, he nodded, placed his clipboard under an arm and led Sant over.

‘If I understand you correctly, only the driver can open the passenger doors?’

Distasteful view out of sight, Jones regained his poise and nodded again. ‘You see up here.’ He pointed to a couple of buttons. ‘Normally these switches would activate the doors, but they’re not much use following a major incident like this.’ He pressed them a few times. ‘The circuits have been shot to pieces.’

Sant noted the position of the switches in relation to the driver’s cabin and the seats further back. ‘You’d need to know where to look for these buttons, I guess.’

‘That’s correct. Ninety-nine per cent of passengers have no idea they exist, never mind where they’d find them.’

‘So it’s likely the gunman commanded the driver to open the doors before firing at him?’

‘I’d say so, yes. The driver guard panel is designed to protect our employees from assaults and stabbings, but it’s no defence against a bullet.’

‘And the doors don’t shut automatically once the bus is in motion?’

‘No, these old Geminis come as standard driver-operated doors.’

Sant tossed the information around in his puzzled head. ‘So it would’ve been possible, would it not, for someone to fire a gun at Simpson immediately after he’d opened the doors for them, and then jump out of the vehicle before it picked up speed on its descent towards these shops.’

Jones shook his head a little less vigorously than before. ‘I suppose that’s what happened, but I – can’t exactly picture it in my head.’

Sant nodded. 'Neither can I, though believe you me, the events leading up to most crimes stretch the bounds of credibility.'

'He must've stopped the bus.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, if I read the situation rightly, the gunman has fired at the passengers first. Not the driver. The advice we give to all our drivers is to stop their vehicles promptly in the event of violent behaviour.'

'And call the police?' Sant scratched his nose.

'Absolutely. They use a panic button. And if they carry a phone they can use that too, but I'm not sure—'

'I've already checked. No phone was found on Simpson. Is CCTV installed?'

The bus rep adjusted his stance, defence in his tone. 'Not in these older models, I'm afraid. The unions want cameras on all fleets to protect drivers, though as with every issue, there's a pay-off between benefits and costs incurred.'

'One last thing,' said Sant. 'Show me the last stop this bus passed through.'

Jones obliged, more than happy to get away from the ghastly chorus of press cameras flashing. He pointed to a temporary bus-stop sign. About a hundred yards up the slope, it sat atop a wobbly red pole held upright by sandbags. Sant thanked him. The wet breeze swept up Jones's sigh of relief as he headed to his car, head shaking like a top-heavy blancmange.

* * *

THE LIGHTS of a nearby bakery flickered in the distance, the prospect making Sant's stomach rumble with hunger. He was about to set off that way when Capstick approached looking like death warmed up.

'Get much rest?'

'Not a wink, sir.'

'Not a pretty sight, is it?'

Capstick gave a slight nod, swallowing hard, trying to banish all recent memories. He'd been as sick as a dog. Food was the last thing on his mind. They

decided to return to headquarters and grab a swift breakfast there, Capstick doing the usual honour of driving.

Back at the office, bacon butty in hand, Sant pointed to Dryden's bare desk a few feet across from his own. The emptiness lent an eerie feel to the room.

'We need to know what he was up to.' He ate as he spoke. 'He must've left some trace of where he was going and what he was doing. I say we start looking right here – in his drawers, files, computer, the lot.'

'I've made a start,' said Capstick. 'No sign of any notebook. He had a work phone, but I doubt we'll find it any time soon.'

Sant nodded. 'I checked with forensics. He didn't have it with him. At least, not after he'd been shot. But Dryden always carried a phone; was practically glued to it. Whoever killed him took his phone too. But why?'

'To stop him calling for help?'

Sant let out a stifled hoot. 'Would you know how to use a phone with a bullet in your brain? Put your thinking cap on, Capstick. The only logical reason the killer stole the phone was because it was in his interests to do so.'

'That's it!' Capstick cried out. 'Dryden was trying, before he was shot, to message something, some *evidence*, incriminating whoever then attacked him.'

'Well, no-one got a message from him, though you're right – the killer would take no chances on that front. But unless we find the phone in some far-flung gutter, there's not much to go on.'

The door flew open and in strode Detective Sergeant Amanda Holdsworth, her permed brown hair dishevelled by the wind. She'd heard the news – it was harder to avoid it – and her flustered face spoke a paradox of dejection and determination. A single mother in her early forties, she'd suffered a lot of heartache in recent years, one more slice of bad news acting more like a jolt than a shock to the system.

She deposited a large bag on her desk, leaned on the side of it, placed her hand on her chin. It was a familiar pose and Sant felt reassured whenever she adopted it. She was a clever detective and not afraid to show it.

'A penny for your thoughts, Holdsworth.'

She paused briefly before unleashing her stream of consciousness. 'Okay,

this is how I see it. Dryden gets on a bus, where and why we don't know. He's returning to town from somewhere. Why take the bus? Because he's gone to meet someone who doesn't wish to be identified. Someone he meets in secret. Dryden wasn't even supposed to be at work. Which makes the whole affair shifty if you ask me.'

Sant chewed his toothpick. 'Me and Capstick think his phone was taken by the killer.'

Holdsworth perched on her chair before swivelling ninety degrees towards Capstick and stretching out her stockinged legs. 'It makes sense. The killer shadowed Dryden, overheard his conversation with this mysterious informant, followed him back to the bus, got on board with him, and soon realised Dryden was using the phone to record what he'd heard.'

'Precisely,' Sant said, slapping a pint-sized hand on his chair arm. 'All we need to do is find the informant, who should lead us to a motive and a perp.'

Holdsworth leered, spreading her arms theatrically. 'You make it sound so easy, Carl.'

Capstick adjusted his specs. 'The key question is: who is the killer? And why did he kill practically everyone else on that bus as well as Dryden? That isn't so easy to explain. Maybe Dryden wasn't the target – just someone in the wrong place at the wrong time.'

'You're right to speculate,' said Sant. 'We can't assume anything hard and fast. But the main action kicked off on the upper deck of that bus. It must've been up there where the intended victim was fired at. Which makes the odds two-to-one against Dryden given we have three dead on the upper deck.' He fumbled with something in his pocket. 'The perp killed those three first and then made good his escape from the bus, though not before shooting dead anyone who could recognise him subsequently.'

'Including the driver,' added Holdsworth.

'Right. He had to confront the driver in order to get him to open the doors, which left poor Brian Simpson a no-brainer for a bullet in the head. He was doomed. So were the others. No-one would get out alive. Let's hope the two blokes in intensive care survive to tell the tale.'

‘Even if they do,’ said Capstick, ‘what chance have they of remembering what happened moments before they got a bullet for their troubles?’

‘Weren’t the survivors found to have no shot wounds?’ Holdsworth put in.

‘Right again,’ answered Sant. ‘Stick to the facts, Capstick. Facts are all we’ve got. Let’s not muck about with them.’ Capstick muttered an apology, his cheeks reddening, his eyes not registering Holdsworth’s suppressed laugh. ‘They were lucky to avoid the bullets according to Wisdom. Sadly, both suffered severe blows to the head. They were flung several yards down the bus on impact. The likelihood of recall is slim.’

‘Stranger things have happened,’ said Holdsworth. ‘The human brain is remarkably resilient.’

Sant nodded. ‘Right now, memories are the least of those men’s worries.’

‘Who’s leading the investigation?’

‘Haven’t a clue. We were his closest colleagues at the time of his death so don’t expect a free lunch any time soon.’

The pattering of hurried feet grew louder from the corridor outside.

‘The Old Man with his division of labour,’ muttered Holdsworth.

Right on cue, Gilligan’s head appeared at the door. ‘Inspector Sant, conference room in five. And be smart! Every news organisation and its dog are sniffing around out there.’

Sant was taken aback. ‘What about a briefing first?’

‘No time.’

‘But what am I supposed to say?’

‘Nothing. Leave the talking to Lister and Hardaker.’

No sooner was the Old Man there than he was gone.

‘Talk about a put-down,’ Holdsworth remarked, tapping a finger to her nose. ‘Clearly the big-wigs are looking after number one, Carl.’

‘At least they’ve invited me to the party, Holdsworth, but if they think they can keep me quiet they’ve got a shock coming their way.’

They swapped brief smiles as he grabbed his Sunday-best jacket and walked out, adjusting his black tie for the media circus ahead.

* * *

HE SAT at the end of a long table. At the other end was Gilligan, fiddling with a mic in the fashion of a fading rock star. Between Sant and Gilligan perched the men in charge: master of ceremonies Chief Constable Edward Lister and coordinating officer Superintendent Harry Hardaker. Sant could just about stomach Hardaker. Lister was a different matter.

Lanky Lister – as other officers liked to call him, though never to his face – arched his lofty skeleton, stuck out his veiny neck and signalled the start of proceedings with a wave of his bony hand. Then he summed up the events of the last ten hours, stressing that no names of any victims could be released until next of kin were contacted and identifications confirmed. All thoughts, understandably, were with the families. The only name he could release to the news hounds was the one they knew about already: Detective Sergeant Liam Dryden.

Sant had already sneaked a peek at a TV screen screaming the headline POLICE OFFICER KILLED IN BUS ATTACK. The ‘other victims’ got tagged onto the end of the news ticker. Ironical. One of the few occasions an officer demanded respect was on the occasion of their death.

Hardaker rounded things off with the usual call for information regarding the incident. He was a good speaker; better than Lister. Unlike most CID officers, Hardaker blossomed under the roving gaze of the public eye. The Chiefman, as Hardaker was nicknamed owing to his long red locks and pointed red beard, was a man going places fast.

Questions followed. As instructed, Sant said nothing and put on his best professional pose. Seen but not heard. It brought out the kid in him.

‘Have you found the murder weapon?’

‘Not yet,’ Hardaker declared. A neat response. Honest but not without hope. ‘Teams of officers are searching the crime scene as we speak.’

‘CCTV images?’

‘Likewise, they are being retrieved and examined as we speak.’

‘Has anyone been detained in connection with the incident?’

‘No,’ uttered Lister. Less hopeful, less assured.

‘Are the police looking for more than one gunman?’

Lister shifted in his chair, his head leaning awkwardly to one side. ‘Our investigations are ongoing as far as numbers go.’

‘Numbers? So two minimum?’

‘Well, er, as I was saying, investigations are—’

‘But how can *one* person kill others on a moving bus, including the driver, and get out before it crashes?’

Hardaker took over. ‘Detectives investigating the incident remain open-minded about whether they are dealing with one or a number of perpetrators. The situation is fluid and we will update you with developments as soon as they become apparent.’

‘Did the shootings take place inside or outside the bus?’

‘Inside,’ Hardaker replied.

‘Can you explain your evidence for this?’

‘Certainly. The hackle marks found in the smashed window glass were at right angles to the outside surface, indicating the bullets entered the windows from the inside.’

‘Was the bus in motion or stationary when the shootings occurred?’

‘We believe it was moving,’ said Hardaker, running the show now.

‘How can you be sure?’

‘Judging by the speed of the vehicle at impact with the shop buildings, it is likely the bus was moving.’

‘So how did the killer or killers manage to escape from a moving bus?’

Hardaker replied without hesitation. ‘It was probably moving slowly at that phase. The driver appears to have applied the brakes after hearing gunshots. The perpetrator or perpetrators would have had time to escape from the open doors before the bus began to pick up speed down the slope of the hill.’

Almost perfect, Sant thought.

‘The number of fatalities?’

This time Hardaker paused slightly.

‘Six,’ Lister said.

Hardaker glanced to his left. 'Seven, including DS Dryden.'

Lister blushed slightly and bit his lip.

'Injured?'

'Two,' said Lister. He got that right.

'How many of the fatalities are women?'

'Two.'

'Children?'

'None.'

'Were the bodies found on the lower or upper deck?'

Hardaker intervened again. 'Three on the upper, four on the lower.' He was good at maths; Lister not so hot.

'Did the killer start firing on the upper or lower deck?'

'We cannot confirm that information at present.' A textbook response from the Chiefman.

'Any evidence of a terrorist attack? Islamist extremists, maybe?'

The Chiefman kept his cool admirably. 'We're not ruling anything in or out. Needless to say, the Ministry of Defence is in close touch with us.'

A flurry of further questions went by before the whole technological operation began winding down. Journalists from the big news firms had what they wanted; enough copy to see them through the next few hours. Wires were being unplugged, laptops shut. As the conference drew to a close and Lister wiped a bead of sweat from his brow, a last hand went up. The young face attached to it wasn't familiar to Sant.

'Was Sergeant Dryden on duty?' the woman asked.

Good question. No-one had thought of it. The other reporters cast glances her way as they packed away the tools of their trade.

'No, he wasn't.' Hardaker sounded less comfortable. Heads were looking up again.

'So if he wasn't on duty, was his presence on the bus just a coincidence?' the woman probed. She had a feminine yet firm voice.

'All lines of enquiry are being pursued.'

The reporter wasn't convinced enough to quit. 'So there's a chance he was

deliberately targeted?’

Hardaker rolled his eyes in Lister’s direction. Nothing was forthcoming. An uncomfortable pause later, he mumbled: ‘That is – a possibility.’

‘But assuming DS Dryden wasn’t in uniform, and assuming he was the killer’s main target, surely the killer knew his victim prior to the killing. Knew he was a police officer.’

Hardaker was regretting not tying up the conference sooner. ‘That may be the case.’ He stood up to leave.

‘All things considered, are we dealing with a police assassination?’

A ripple of excitement ensued at the sucker punch. ASSASSINATION. What a word! The whole place was buzzing with its sheer sibilance. Reporters dived under and over each other, frantically plugging wires back in. Keyboards started tapping again, the microphones humming their appreciation.

Recovering his composure just in time, Hardaker announced: ‘The enquiry is at an early stage and, as I said, we are ruling out nothing. We will, of course, provide updates at regular intervals.’

The young reporter still wasn’t finished. The London hacks had had their say. Now it was her turn. Her voice was carrying nicely. She had a captive audience. All routes pointed her way.

‘Is there a connection between the bus killings and any other serious crimes presently being investigated?’

Sant couldn’t believe his ears. This was exactly the conundrum he needed to unpick, except he hadn’t thrust his mind that far forward. And now this quick-witted journalist was doing the mental work for him. *Other serious crimes?* Which crimes did she mean? Talk about alarm bells; shivers down spines.

Sant looked across at Hardaker. His eyes were wider than a runway. Was the Chiefman thinking what he was thinking? Maybe this young hack was thinking the same thoughts too. She might be telepathic. She might be a genius for all Sant knew.

Lister just shook his head, scratched his ear and made a grunting noise. Then he affected a very loud cough before pronouncing the usual rehearsed denouement. ‘We cannot rule out a connection. What we can do, however, is

follow every lead until whoever committed this horrendous crime is brought to justice.'

Pleased with himself, Lister gave a final wave of his bony hand and left with command in his pace, Gilligan and Hardaker trailing behind. Sant was in less of a hurry. He wanted a word with mind-reader extraordinaire. But as he peered over towards where the woman had been sitting, all he saw was an empty seat.

She wasn't a mind reader after all.

SHE KNEW THE DANGERS. NOW THERE WAS NO WAY BACK.

Years, decades had passed, and there was no telling how long it would last. She'd been content enough before now, living her secretive existence, looking over her shoulder. But the time had come to play her hand.

The uncertainty lay in deciding which cards to lay down first...

The advice she'd been given on who to talk to and what to say was good. But how to broach the topic had been more knotty. Perhaps the anniversary had spurred her on. Wasn't it ironic that things should take a turn on that date, on Halloween of all days, when the living pay their respects to the dead?

She wasn't even superstitious. Yesterday.

All she was sure about was this: he was the right man for the job. She didn't know much about him beyond the recommendation, though it was enough to convince. He was young and eager to do well, not young enough for age to count against him. And he'd expressed a deep passion for upholding the law, no matter what.

He was also a diplomat, prepared to negotiate for the sake of putting people at ease. Most officers steered away from malpractice by complying with a strict code of conduct. Only the most gifted treated the code as a mild inconvenience and favoured their own intuition above all else.

She couldn't be sure whether the policeman was really gifted or just competent. In fact, she decided, pinching the dimple on her chin, she couldn't be sure of anything.

Maybe he'd do nothing. Maybe he was privately laughing at the absurdity of what she'd told him. Or maybe he would pass the information to the wrong people; to those she hated and feared the most.

Lying in bed, safe in the anonymity of her two-bed flat on the eighth floor of her dreary council block, she couldn't help worrying about the night before. It had been a long trek back, the exercise relieving the stress, though the walk had not been free of adventure. Had she been followed? Her eyes moved to the filthy windows across the room, black with the soft glow of daybreak smeared above the blinds. She squirmed her head back onto the pillow and pulled the sheet under her chin.

She looked left at the bedside table. A gift from the girl she loved the most. A retro clock. Nearly ten. It always brought a smile to her face when she recalled those words – *so you can wake up early and walk me to school*. They were always late, regardless. Their best excuse? The burial of a guinea pig. The others were equally as dubious.

Memories. Never forgotten...

The sun peeped under the blinds, smears of orange sharpening to creeping yellow rays. She always felt guilty about lying in. But then, what was there to get up for these days? She had no job. Didn't want one. Last year she'd joined the gym (not that she needed to lose weight, her BMI judging her borderline underweight). She had hoped to find discipline and motivation there. Her New Year's resolution to do thrice weekly workouts was soon abandoned.

Rubbing a lock of hair between her fingers, she held it up, mouth turning down. It needed dyeing again. She let out a breath, pulled the sheet off. Seeing her legs always improved a sour mood. One foot glided up the opposite calf, low purr coming from her throat. She knew the effect they had on young men. On those who gave her *the look*.

Being free and single was her ultimate lot, all the same. Life hadn't treated her well on the relationship front. She'd married young – her greatest mistake. Eight years of misery living with a violent man who expected her to attend to his every need. The only positive from the sorry affair was not getting pregnant.

Reflecting on one's past is a sign of too much time on one's hands. So

preached the agony aunt in the magazine she'd read the night before.

She got up, made tea and toast, turned on the telly.

The usual morning routine.

In many ways her life felt like a football match. A game of two halves. The first half amounted to something like a career, though no job for life had blessed her lucky stars. The only jobs she looked back at with pride had culminated in the unspeakable horror; the half-time dressing down after a losing strategy.

And, crucially, no whistleblowing.

The second half, thus far, amounted to much the same without a future.

She didn't mind the tedium. Life was less complicated now. Her girl was a grown-up, more or less independent for the time being, and that lifted some of the worry.

What truly bothered her, as she burnt her lip on boiling hot tea, was a lingering desire to face up to the unspeakable – that something she'd once witnessed and tried to forget. Had been advised to forget. Forever.

It was like a rash that wouldn't go away. She'd failed to pluck up the courage to do anything about it. Until now. The rash was feeling less sore this morning. She'd been persuaded to act. And despite the worries plaguing her, she was feeling good. A little better than before.

She took a large bite of toast and washed it down with the last of her tea. It had been a late night and the round trip through the woods had caught her out by surprise. Perhaps re-joining the gym wasn't such a bad idea. And yet those first steps towards revealing the secrets, the facts, the evidence she'd pent up inside for so long, had given her a new lease of energy.

Things were looking up. She dared herself to believe it... and could not.

* * *

COUNTLESS TV CREWS armed with tripods and windjammers formed a semi-circle around the blue and white cordon as Sant attempted to ghost through. One plucky reporter almost dragged him back under the cordon. He growled a curse, gave a firm shove and kept moving. Police and press helicopters glared down on

the onlookers, giant mutated dragonflies with a nose for trouble. Contrary to the opinions of the Keep Sunday Special campaign, few people went to work on the Sabbath – and here was evidence to prove it.

Capstick had already drawn up an inventory of items found in the pockets of the deceased with the help of a few white coats. He read from the list as Sant struggled to hear him over the sound of sawing and drilling. The bus was proving a monster to shift.

‘First, the driver. It turns out Mr Simpson did twelve months at Her Majesty’s pleasure for armed robbery.’

‘How long ago?’

Capstick consulted his tablet. ‘Mid-eighties.’

Sant scratched his neck with satisfaction. ‘And there’s me thinking bus drivers were the salt of the earth. Good work, Capstick.’

A graduate fast-tracked up the pay scale on the strength of his report-writing skills, DC Capstick made up in cleverness what he lacked in courage. Sant knew his weaknesses. Capstick was considered ‘soft’. He dreaded confronting anyone remotely criminal, preferred desk-work or studying his criminology books to dealing with the real thing. Sant had overheard the words ‘coward’ and ‘Capstick’ uttered in the same sentence on more than the odd occasion.

Since joining up with Missing Persons in the summer, however, things had changed. Those hair-raising encounters Capstick feared the most were getting more frequent. And less pleasant.

Sant was breaking him in.

‘Who else, Capstick?’

The detective constable hitched up his glasses. ‘Identities are coming through on the two young passengers seated towards the middle of the upper deck. Behind Dryden, that is. The male deceased was called Callum Willis. He was nineteen. Here’s his driver’s licence – passed his test six months ago.’

Sant cupped his massive hands to shield the photocard from the sunlight. The man in the photo was smiling. A true smile. The smile of a young man looking forward to a life on the road. A life he’d never live.

‘What do we know about him?’

‘Not a lot, sir.’

‘Parents informed?’

‘The mother, yes. The father is estranged.’

Long-lost dads. Sant stumbled upon them all the time.

‘And this was found on the female passenger sat next to Callum. A gym card for Kate Andrews, also aged nineteen. Callum and Kate were travelling together and my guess is they were more than just friends. Her parents were only informed an hour ago. It’s a bit early to ask them, you know, but they’ve agreed to speak to us as soon as they deem fit. Perhaps you’d be willing?’

Speaking to grieving relatives was the worst. Sant nodded. He was no novice where grief was concerned.

‘What’s been found on Dryden?’

‘No details as yet.’

‘And the other passengers?’

‘Ditto. We’re expecting an update by midday.’

Sant massaged his forehead with the thumb and fingers of his right hand. ‘Do a bit more chasing, Capstick. Talk to officers who’ve helped out Dryden of late. Uniforms especially.’

Capstick nodded and pointed towards the bus, one side of which was being hacked at by firefighters in a futile attempt to dislodge the chassis from fallen masonry. ‘I assume you’ve seen the numbers, sir.’

‘Numbers?’

‘Found on the window next to Dryden.’

Sant cursed his failing memory. ‘I’ll take another look.’

‘3-1-5 seems to be the consensus. Should we go public and see if anyone out there knows what they refer to?’

‘I’d rather keep them under wraps right now. They probably mean more to the perps than anyone else.’

‘Perps? More than one?’

‘Highly likely,’ shouted Sant, raising his voice above the din of a chopper circling overhead. ‘The whole episode feels orchestrated. The only thing out of place is the mess left behind. Ask yourself this, Capstick: was the bus really

supposed to crash?’

‘Answers on a postcard.’

‘Or the forensic report if we’re lucky.’ Capstick made to leave but Sant called him back as the helicopter coasted away. ‘By the way, once we’re back at HQ, fill me in on progress with the Chloe Lee case.’

‘What progress, sir?’

The inspector extracted a new toothpick from the inside pocket of his black raincoat. ‘I know it’s hardly high on our things-to-do list. But in the wise words of Old Man Gilligan, we must maintain momentum no matter how overcome we are with work, not least what’s happened here.’

Capstick looked at his boss. ‘See a connection?’

Sant bit hard at the toothpick before replying: ‘Dryden was working on the same cases as us. That might mean something.’

‘You mean, this could be some kind of reprisal?’

‘Stranger things have happened.’

He left his partner to mull things over and caught a glimpse of Hardaker decked out in full forensic gear entering the bus, the hackers moving off to take a break. He put on some overalls of his own and followed the Chiefman up the stairs to the top deck. Veins standing up from hands gripping the rail relaxed when he saw Dryden’s blood-soaked body was no longer there.

‘You move fast, Chiefman.’ Hardaker, kneeling by the window, paused his scrutiny of the enigmatic numbers to look up and nod. ‘Don’t get your hands dirty. The next news briefing is on the hour.’

Hardaker held up his white gloved fingers. ‘No chance of cross-contamination here.’

Sant and Hardaker had joined CID at the same time. They were the same age, height and blood group, and were both native Yorkshiremen. They could have been twins.

Both had been outstanding recruits, but in the last ten years their fortunes had taken different turns. Superintendent Hardaker had continued to please the Chief Officers Team with his diplomacy and public-facing proficiency. Sant, an awkward son of a bitch, was thought to be doing extremely well to have

achieved his lesser rank.

‘What do you make of these numbers, Carl?’

Sant bent forward for a closer look. ‘I’m stumped, Chiefman. What do the prints say?’

‘As expected, there’s a match with Dryden’s. What we’ll never know is how far the poor devil got with his last remarks before the lights went out.’

Sant pointed to the marking furthest right. ‘5? Or an S?’

The red-bearded officer squinted at it. ‘Probably a 5, though we’ll need more analysis. What do you say to the phone number theory?’

‘Already ran a check.’ Hardaker looked up, lips parting. The inspector rubbed his disjointed nose and smiled. ‘According to BT’s database, the directory is full of landline numbers beginning 3-1. But only ninety-two begin 3-1-5. I’ve got civvies trawling through those numbers as we speak.’

‘Excellent work. Let me know your findings A-SAP and I’ll report to Lister.’

Sant shuffled on his feet. ‘So I take it you’re heading up this investigation and Lister is “overseeing”.’

Hardaker stifled a laugh. ‘Don’t mock the chief constable, Carl. This isn’t the time for cheap shots. We’ve a mass murder to deal with. Let’s keep it professional. Agreed?’

Sant didn’t reply. He ambled to the back of the bus, passing technicians in masks dusting black powder onto upholstery, hunting for fingerprints. A blonde woman nearly his height was placing scraps of fabric in a plastic jar. He eased by, ignoring his body’s response to her warmth and scent. Peering out of the rear window, up the hill down which the bus had careered, he got a letterbox view of stubborn rows of red-brick terraces rising up tree-topped slopes against the raw grain of the land. To his left, light industrial estates and long-gone industrial wastelands were shielded from everyday life by shrubbery and grassy mounds. To his right, search teams were taking apart bins in the hope of unveiling murder weapons and anything else that might constitute a clue.

Over the crest of the hill protruded the partially ruined tower of Kirkstall Abbey, monument to ancient Leeds. Somehow, despite all the years and all the shifting ways of life, the abbey was still standing – most of it intact. No other

city in England could boast a medieval monastery as well preserved as this one. Could Dryden have met his snitch there? It seemed a likely place to hang out. Impossible to miss, secluded enough not to draw attention.

Sant retraced his steps to the front of the bus, glanced again at Dryden's lonely numbers, then left.

* * *

THE POLICE CANTEEN WAS HEAVING, the din of chatter constant, the main topic of conversation a dead man among the rank and file. The concerned looks of officers sat at other tables made small talk with Holdsworth impossible. She and Sant ate boxed chow mein, too entwined with Dryden to close the shutters on his dreadful fate.

'What about Dryden's desk?' he asked. 'Anything revealing?'

'Nothing we've been party to since forensics took over,' said Holdsworth as she twisted her fork around a mouthful of noodles, 'though it appears he was still occupied with a couple of hangovers from his uniformed sergeant days.'

'A dedicated man,' Sant said. 'Most folk work to live. He lived to work.'

'But that was stupid of him, wasn't it?' She glanced over her shoulder to warn off prying eyes. 'Working when he wasn't supposed to; chasing some dodgy lead without telling us.'

Sant spooned sugar in his tea. 'That's how some detectives do their business. It's an addiction. Dryden wanted the world and still some. His next promotion was on his mind twenty-four seven.'

'Except some of the time he was looking back, not forward.' She reached for the expensive handbag perched on the chair next to her. Pulled out a plastic folder. 'I found some notes under his desk relating to two incidents. Why he kept tabs on them is not clear.'

'Go on.'

'The first was an armed robbery at a jeweller's, but I've tracked the latest updates and there's a watertight prosecution under way.'

'Must've done a good job,' said Sant, thumbing his empty box to one side.

‘True, but the same can’t be said of the other case. I can’t get my head around it, Carl. It appears he brought in a young man for possession of a screwdriver – going equipped for breaking and entering. The man gave his name as Owen Madeley but had no ID on him and was told to report back to Bridewell.’

‘No show?’

‘Not as yet.’

‘Don’t hold your breath.’

Holdsworth belched shamelessly before lowering her voice and drawing closer. ‘But there’s something odd here. You see, Dryden’s notes make it clear no officer on duty that night could identify him. So no previous, unlike most youths carrying screwdrivers round town.’

Sant thought hard. ‘Maybe he’s good at disguises.’

‘What’s really strange, though, is the screwdriver. It was a cheap affair, bought by this Madeley character from a pound shop in town. I’ve seen the thing. It’s still with the duty sarge at Bridewell. The man signed a disclaimer allowing us to confiscate it.’

He chewed that one over. ‘A pointed object, regardless of its value, is capable of doing damage.’

‘Not when it’s still wrapped in its packaging.’

Sant had no argument this time.

Holdsworth craned her head even closer to him, her spicy breath on his face. ‘And here lays the mystery. How do you know if someone’s carrying a screwdriver in its packaging?’

He caught her drift. ‘If you’ve seen him buy it.’

‘Absolutely. It seems Dryden shadowed Madeley to the pound shop, waited for him to purchase the screwdriver, and hey presto, nabbed him.’

‘You’re on to something, Holdsworth. Dryden was tailing the man, maybe suspecting him of something, and found an excuse for an arrest on whatever grounds he could.’

‘But what’s even more bizarre,’ she continued, ‘is that screwdrivers are not defined by law as bladed articles – anyone, kids included, can buy a screwdriver.’

Of course, they can be classed as offensive weapons where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion, but Madeley had only just purchased the thing. Had a receipt to prove it.'

Sant nodded. 'Sounds like an abuse of stop and search. The only screwdrivers I've confiscated were adapted in some way; bent or sharpened.'

'And this was neither. It was fresh out of the shop! We're talking about such a petty matter. Most PCs wouldn't even issue a caution, never mind a high-flying sarge like Dryden. I mean, how can we convict the ringleaders if we waste time on the artful dodgers?'

'Or Owen Madeleys.'

'Exactly,' she said, discarding the remains of her lunch. 'Dryden wanted Madeley badly. May've even set him up. All he'd have to do was collar the kid, hand him the quid to buy the screwdriver while feeding him some crap about checking the store complies with trading laws, and the result? Double-crossed Madeley – the poor pet – finds himself facing a criminal charge.'

Sant looked puzzled. 'Didn't you say screwdriver sales were *not* restricted by law?'

'Yes, but wide-eyed Madeley would be none the wiser.'

'I'm not convinced, Holdsworth. It all feels a bit contrived, and surely the charge was refused?'

'Categorically. No real proof, no charge. The duty sarge overturned Dryden on the spot.'

'Leaving the high-flying detective red faced,' Sant added, getting up to leave. 'It's a line worth pursuing, but keep searching through Dryden's stuff. His computer foremost.'

'Computer's out. Someone's taken it away.'

'On whose orders?' barked the inspector, a fresh surge of anger brewing around the chow mein.

'Hardaker's of course. His desk and all his belongings are gone too.' Holdsworth returned Sant's glare. 'Don't blame me. Hardaker's command overrides yours, Carl. I don't like it either, but orders are orders and I'm not risking my job to save your face with the Chiefman.'

Huddling around the nearest table, a group of young officers were held captive by her rising voice. Sant knew that nothing good ever came from making a scene. He took his cue and left Holdsworth to suffer the lingering gazes.

She made to leave. Hiding a grin behind a mask of madness, she took one long look at the onlookers and bawled: 'Can't you lot keep your noses out?'

* * *

HE SAT at his desk meditating over the bus murders as the afternoon wore on. Praying for a break in the forensic searches. Not a lot more could be done until Dr Wisdom delivered his preliminary report.

He sat up, chair creaking. Looked at his workstation, the phone next to it, and was angry all over again.

There was no jealousy regarding Hardaker. The ginger nut was a fine detective with a proven track record, comparable to his own. And besides, this wasn't the first time Sant found himself firmly beneath the Chiefman in the pecking order.

But this case was different; involved the murder of a sergeant under *his* watch, ploughing the same furrow in the field of death. Over the last few months he and Dryden had got on well. Sant would never forget them sharing a pint of the black stuff and, later, Dryden introducing his wife as they both swayed and laughed like morons in her charming presence. Christ, he knew the man better than Hardaker or anyone else pulling the strings.

And still, no-one had asked his opinion.

The questions kept coming, the absence of answers an increasing weight, a terrible throbbing pressure.

What was he doing on the bus? Why would someone want to kill him? And what about the other passengers and the driver? Why them too?

Was this the work of a random gunman, a serial killer? Or was Dryden the target and the others simply unlucky bystanders?

Sant knew the bulk of the answers would be packaged together, boxed and locked out of sight. He rubbed his nose, stared across his office. The key lay in

discovering what Dryden was investigating.

What the hell had the man got involved in?

Sant was not naïve; he knew officers who sometimes worked on the sly without informing their colleagues. He was not immune to lone-wolf syndrome himself.

But Dryden had been a rookie when it came to missing persons cases, and certainly had never worked a serious one. Why risk his blossoming career laying a wild-card punt on tenuous intelligence? Unless, of course, the source was too good to ignore.

As Sant lapsed into meditation, weighing up the visions and sounds pelting his mind, he became conscious of a buzzing noise doing battle with his inner self – his desk phone. He reached for the handset, his rigid arm outstretched like a robot.

‘Hello, is that you Carl? Hello?’

‘Speaking?’

‘It’s your mother, you silly billy!’

He shook himself out of his trance and grunted an acknowledgement, propping the handset several inches from his ear. She hailed from that generation who shouted, didn’t speak, down the line.

‘Are you taking good care of yourself? Keeping out of harm’s way?’

Now that he was a middle-aged divorcee Sant’s mother constantly worried about him. In defiance of logic, she worried more these days than ever before. He suspected his break-up with Elizabeth had tipped the scales.

‘No need to fret about me,’ he mumbled, leaning more on his elbow to rub his nose again.

‘I’ll be the judge of that. Now I appreciate you’re busy, but don’t forget your tea. Six o’clock sharp! I’ve cooked your fave. Braising steak with creamy mash.’ Not his favourite dish any more, he vaguely remembered liking it many years ago. ‘And homemade treacle sponge pudding for afters,’ she bellowed.

He let the silence grow, choosing his next words. He closed his eyes. ‘That’s wonderful of you, but something’s come up.’

‘Surely not, Carl. I’ve got it all ready for you!’

‘Put it to one side and I’ll eat as soon—’

‘But—’

‘Turn on the telly, mum, and you’ll see why I don’t have time.’

He rang off and looked at his reflection in the monitor, face tight, showing his feelings. His stare went to a photo of his boys sellotaped in the corner. The pressure lifted somewhat, smile creasing his cheek. It was a sample of a school portrait. He loved it but had forgotten to order a print. His two sons were nestled shoulder to shoulder, heads leaning together, their fresh-faced dimples prominent despite the minuteness of the image.

Guilt faded the smile. Like their grandmother he was a constant worrier. Worried about them all the time. How they might mix with the wrong crowd and he wouldn’t be there to protect them. Seeing his kids every day, picking them up from school, reading a bedtime story to them – precious moments his paternal soul yearned for.

By comparison, separating from his wife had been painless, and brought to mind John Wesley’s famous saying: *I did not forsake her, I did not dismiss her, I will not recall her.*

He’d asked Elizabeth to relent for the sake of Tom and Sam, but she’d made up her mind. They must split up; they had no future together; enough was enough.

So they did split up. And he was the one to leave.

The only place for him to go had been his parents’ home. He spent four claustrophobic months there, caring for his sick father while keeping as much distance as possible between him and his uptight mother, but when he couldn’t stand the child treatment any longer, he upped sticks and left.

The custody agreement allowed him to see his sons once a week. They came to the city for a sleepover at his apartment every other Saturday night. The rest of the time, without them, he fought the sense of loss. He wanted to be a good father, yet couldn’t shake off that depressing note of failure ringing in his ears every time he thought of them.

He cleared his throat, blinking. Returned to the file doing battle with the other paperwork on his crowded desk. His face inched closer to the photo of

Chloe on the front page. She was staring back at him, a haunting look of innocence. She was tall – close to six feet – and her long slender figure served her well. Bright, serious eyes were as black as her hair, shining locks framing a slightly upturned nose with an elegant silver nose ring. Sant cared little for piercings, but on Chloe the jewel appeared seamless, rounding out the vitality of her face without flaw. He had no doubt she'd attract attention wherever she went.

This same photo had been published by newspapers and media outlets, not to mention social media of all persuasions. Sant and his colleagues had started to sift through countless tip-offs supplied by a willing but dizzy-headed public, almost all of which only served to waste valuable time.

The complexity of the case was further compounded by human rights and data protection laws which made the task of locating a missing adult much harder than a minor. If adults wished to be lost and to stay lost, well now, it was their human right – no matter how much human sadness and worry and police legwork their enduring absence prolonged.

One of the few clues to cling onto was Chloe's phone. Its signal had been tracked, via base-station data, to a McDonald's a stone's throw from London King's Cross station. The Met police had been alerted to the possibility Chloe was residing somewhere in London. But Sant was doubtful. Any sensible assailant wanting to throw the investigation off track might well take a trip to the capital in order to safely dispose of Chloe's fingerprint-free phone at a fittingly unremarkable location, before hopping on the next train north.

His thoughts returned to Dryden. How had he, Sant, approached the job all those years ago? He remembered an immense feeling of inferiority; of being a minnow in a pool full of sharks. And yet that same inferiority complex had driven him to go the extra mile and show the sharks what he was capable of. Often ambition had kicked him in the face, making him the butt of everyone's jokes, but now and then he'd land on a discovery or tie up a fruitful lead, and the buzz it gave off would make his day – even his week.

Surely Dryden craved that same deep desire to succeed; to not be sneered at by high-ranking types counting the stars on their shoulder insignia. In which case, Sant realised, the obvious investigation for Dryden to showcase his talents

was the Chloe Lee one. Equally important cases had come their way since the summer months, but Sant knew that nothing captured an officer's imagination – or a news editor's thirst for sagas – like a missing girl.

A little girl lost. The eternal song of innocence.

A call came through. Hardaker.

The Chiefman kept it short and sweet. 'Interview suite in five, Carl. The Andrewses are ready.'

* * *

THE HUSBAND OFFERED a limp hand to Sant and Hardaker before guiding his unsteady wife to the designated 'comfort couch'. Mr Andrews had that numb look, as if all the people he met were cardboard cut-outs; reconstructions of an imagined tale. Mrs Andrews, in marked contrast, was extremely tearful, the make-up she'd splashed on earlier diluted by sorrow.

'We're very sorry for your loss,' Hardaker began.

'Who did it?' Mr Andrews spoke abruptly, his voice shaking in tandem with his knees.

Hardaker inhaled sharply. 'The honest answer is we don't know. We are searching high and low, believe me.'

'Why did it have to be Kate?' Mrs Andrews wept. Her husband held her close, though he didn't look comfortable with the outpouring of emotion or where to put his arms. He settled for a hand on her shoulder.

Hardaker paced himself, calming his vocals in tune with the trauma-counselling training he'd recently passed with flying colours. 'I have a few questions, if you don't mind.'

'Go ahead,' Mr Andrews said coolly.

Sant peered across at Mrs Andrews. She seemed far from ready for questioning. Hardaker wasn't waiting for a second opinion though.

'Your daughter was travelling with a friend called Callum Willis. Does that name mean anything?'

Sant detected a slight grimace on both parents' faces.

Mrs Andrews wiped away more tears. 'Callum was Kate's boyfriend.'

'Had they been together long?'

Mr Andrews cut in. 'Not really. How is this relevant?'

The Chiefman gave a template response. 'It's a routine query. We don't believe your daughter or her boyfriend had anything to do with the incident. They were hostages to fortune, in the wrong place at the wrong time. We just have to keep an open mind.'

'Fair enough,' said Mr Andrews half-heartedly.

'Do you know Callum's mother?'

Mrs Andrews lifted her head and choked a barely audible response. 'I've met the woman on occasions, but we're not close.'

'And his father?'

'We've never met him. Callum's mum and dad broke up a long time ago.'

Hardaker scribbled a few random notes. Sant knew the Chiefman was buying time, preparing for the more awkward questions.

'Has Kate got into any sort of trouble recently, at home or elsewhere?'

Mr Andrews, who'd been part-leaning on his wife in a sort of disinclined embrace, sat up straight. 'I'm not sure what you mean by *trouble*. Let me make this clear. My wife and I brought up Kate with a firm emphasis on discipline and maturity of behaviour. We have every reason to believe she did us proud. Her friends, regrettably, let the side down, but Kate was turning into a fine, fully-fledged adult... until a greater authority chose to take her away.'

Hardaker went for softly-softly. 'I understand, Mr Andrews, and I'm not questioning your daughter's upbringing. It's just we need all the background you can provide so we can follow every avenue of enquiry.'

The frown on Mr Andrews' face lifted a fraction.

Then silence. Sant looked over at Hardaker. For once, the Chiefman was hesitating over what to say next. The inspector chose that moment for an impromptu request.

'Can you tell us where Kate and her boyfriend were travelling to?'

Mr Andrews shrugged and turned to his wife, who was clearly in no fit state to answer. Reluctantly, he replied: 'The clubs in town, I should imagine. We did

urge them not to party all night, but what can you do? Sometimes you feel you're hampering their social life.'

'And where were they travelling *from*?'

'Sorry?'

Sant reached for something in his inside pocket before kneeling and spreading out a map of Leeds bus routes over the bare coffee table in front of him. 'This was the route taken by Kate and Callum. It's odd, don't you think, that they would be travelling in this direction.' He traced the 33 bus route with a ballpoint pen. 'The way I understand it, your daughter still lives with you in Gipton, which is over here to the north and east of the city.' He marked a cross on the map. 'And Callum lives close by with his mother here' – penning another cross adjacent to the first one – 'in Crossgates. Which means neither Kate nor Callum were journeying from their normal places of residence.'

Mrs Andrews bent forward and stared at the map, brushing wet strands of hair from her face before speaking. 'Kate had no friends living in that area of Leeds. Not any we knew of, anyway.'

Mr Andrews nodded coldly in agreement.

'So Kate didn't tell you where she was going or who she was visiting yesterday evening?' asked Hardaker.

Mrs Andrews turned to face her questioners. 'The truth is we'd not seen her for a few days. She said she was staying with friends.'

'A few days? Can you give us a precise figure?'

Mr Andrews was trying his best to avoid eye contact. 'Two, three, four at most.'

'It must've been last Sunday,' Mrs Andrews added. She turned to her husband. 'You wanted her to attend church with you but she'd... made other plans.'

Mr Andrews licked his lips and looked up, tears welling up in spite of his best efforts.

'Last Sunday was a week ago,' said Sant. 'Did she often spend a week away from home?'

'Not if we could help it,' Mr Andrews muttered. 'But you can't keep your

children on a leash indefinitely, try as you might.'

'Did you phone her while she was gone?'

'I texted her,' said Mrs Andrews, 'and she said she was fine. Told me she'd be... back home soon.' Those last few words rose in crescendo as the sobs took over.

Hardaker gestured that it was time for a break, but Sant had something on his mind that couldn't wait.

'We won't keep you any longer. One final question – and we'd rather this remain confidential.'

'Of course,' said Mr Andrews.

'Did your daughter know Chloe Lee?'

Hardaker turned on the spot, his eyes fixed on Sant, uncertain of where this line of questioning was heading.

'You mean the lost girl?' asked Mr Andrews.

'I do. No doubt you've seen the news.'

'Yes, but I don't see where Kate fits in. She never talked about it. I'm sure she didn't know the girl.'

Sant nodded and allowed Hardaker to bring the interview to a close. No need to probe further. Something peculiar about the way Mrs Andrews had reacted to the name told the inspector that a connection between her daughter and Chloe Lee, however tenuous, existed beyond doubt.

SHE SANG ALL THE TIME. IT WAS A WONDER THE RADIO IN THE KITCHENETTE still worked after sustaining daily hits of soapy water from her singing.

A bit of a music buff, she kept pace with the top songs and artists in the charts. Pub music quizzes were her speciality, though she couldn't enter a pub these days. Too small, too social. Large public gatherings where no-one cared to know you – they were her sole domain.

Halfway through the chorus of A-ha's 'Take On Me' she thought she heard a knock on the door. Lowered the volume and listened. Heard nothing and twisted the volume knob, belting out a high note, shaking her shoulders, suds plopping onto the old radio.

The knocking came again. No mistaking it this time.

'Postman – parcel for you!'

She'd ordered nothing. Suspicions darted around her head. Was he really a postman? Spinning away from the sink, she grabbed a towel off the stove, wiped her hands while looking towards the door. Squared her shoulders, fast thinking, pinching her brow.

'Thank you, leave it outside the door please.'

A slight pause before: 'It needs signing for, madam.'

A pang of guilt warmed her. If this was a genuine postman, with a genuine parcel, it would be daft not to open up. She walked closer, stopped, hand hovering over the safety chain. It was shiny new, wood and paint behind it marred from the last time...

Her hand fell to her side. She found herself stepping back. 'I can't come to the door right now. Pass it through the letterbox.'

Another pause, this time a little longer. She thought she could hear whispering. Suddenly the man coughed a response: 'No problem, madam. Here it is.'

Keeping her right hand as far from the flap as possible, she reached out and grabbed the electronic pad. It looked genuine enough. Didn't most couriers use these devices nowadays? She scrawled her name, replaced the pen, extended fingertips to the flap. Swiftly deposited the pad into a grip like a mouth clasp shut.

'Thank you, madam. I'll place the parcel right outside your door. Don't forget it's here. Lots of unscrupulous types round these parts.'

'Thank you. I won't forget.'

She put an ear to the door and heard footsteps fading down the corridor. Then she realised she was sweating. Trying to shrug off the uncertainty, she scorned herself for imagining wolf-like eyes watching her every move.

Yet try as she might, she couldn't convince herself all was normal that afternoon.

Sunday afternoon!

What kind of postman worked a Sunday afternoon shift?

Answer: a shifty postman. She didn't like this. Not one bit.

She wouldn't open that door, not for love or money.

She got the vac out instead and went back to her trusty companion: the telly. The news was on, the voices muffled by the whistling Hoover. She glimpsed images of buildings and streets she recognised. She put down the Hoover and turned up the volume; saw the same buildings and streets she'd passed yesterday. Then came helicopter shots looking down on a double-decker bus, or what was left of it, crushed into a tangled array of shop-fronts like a giant cigarette stub.

BUS TRAGEDY was the caption. The words rolled across the screen: *Seven Dead in Bus Attack Including Police Officer*. She began to panic. Was this some sick coincidence?

It couldn't be him... Could it?

A still of the dead officer's face flashed up, wearing the proud grin of the new recruit who sacrifices everything – peace of mind, well-being, liberty – for the spotless uniform they adorn.

This was the man she'd confided in less than twenty-four hours ago.

Her eyes glued to the TV, the pictures of the disaster zoomed out as live feed of a press conference took centre screen. A detective with a red beard was telling reporters the investigation was in its early stages and no details could be made public at this time. Anyone with information was urged to contact the police.

The information they sought... she had it. She didn't need to speculate. She knew the details. The crucial *detail*.

This was murder.

And who was next?

She put a hand to her forehead and caught her reflection on the screen. Her arm shot out, fumbled on the wall behind her, slapped the light switch off.

* * *

DARKNESS WAS DESCENDING FAST as Sant grabbed two sausage rolls from a convenience store. No substitute for his mother's steak, but needs must. He ate on the move as he walked back to the office, still pondering the imponderables; the sheer incredulity of it all.

And then he remembered. The bus shootings had taken such a grip on his thoughts that he'd forgotten everything he'd arranged before the shit hit the fan.

The calendar on his phone showed he was due to visit Darren Lee half an hour ago. He was late. Very late. He wanted Capstick with him too, but got no response to his call.

The choice was simple: go alone or rearrange.

He tossed a coin. Heads meant go.

Forty minutes later, after negotiating the sluggish A64 shopper exodus, he parked his tired Ford Fiesta outside Darren Lee's York residence. The council estate looked well-to-do, many of the properties privately owned and several sporting SOLD signs.

The semi seemed fine from a distance, but as he approached the driveway he was greeted by a volley of howling. A weather-worn BEWARE OF DOG sticker was peeling off the side of an overflowing wheelie bin. Creases spread from his eyes, mouth turning up.

Bring relevant supplies. Sant's Rule Number One. He returned to the boot of his car, took out a plastic bag full of juicy bones and hurled the lot, bag and all, over the fence. The barking stopped dead.

He walked through the heavy oak gate and knocked on the door. The wait was longer than usual. He sensed someone inside, moving around, frantic. Eventually the door opened.

'Mr Lee?'

'If it's about the loan, I've spoken to—'

Sant raised his hand. 'I'm a detective, not a loan shark. We had an appointment. I'm Detective Inspector Sant. It's about your daughter. Chloe. May I come in?'

The house was like a jumble sale. Clothes, empty boxes and toys lay strewn over the floor and furniture. Sant followed the occupant to a side kitchen, an ounce freer of space than elsewhere.

Lee was a beanpole of a man, tall, unhealthily thin, with stringy blond hair clinging to either side of his mounting baldness. The stench of tobacco on his breath and the acutely wrinkled face added years to his appearance. On paper he'd just turned forty, but strangers would age him ten years minimum.

'Tea or coffee?'

Sant peered over a sink that hadn't seen cleaning fluid for a decade or two. 'No thanks. Water's good.'

Lee grabbed a glass from the clutter next to the sink and started rinsing it, elbowing a pile of plates en route to the tap. The soles of his shoes stuck to the floor with every step.

'It's a mystery,' he said, 'her going off like that. Sums Chloe up, I suppose.' Sant affected a puzzled look. 'You see, Chloe always wanted to be different. An individual. But she's got her head screwed on. She isn't ditzzy like some lasses. She's single-minded. A smart cookie. Teachers praised her no end.'

The inspector stared at the glass he'd been offered, decided to just hold it until he left.

'You've got a nice place here, Mr Lee.'

He looked at Sant for a moment, unblinking. 'Scrubs up well enough,' he remarked, straining tea into rusty-coloured china.

'Rest of the family at home?'

'Wife and kids are away.'

'Somewhere warm and sunny?'

Lee snorted. 'If you count Selby as warm and sunny, then yes. They're staying with the out-laws.' He paused as if searching for an excuse. 'Made themselves scarce while me and a mate do a spot of DIY. What's that fancy term they talk of on the TV?'

'Property development?'

'Aye, that's the thing.'

Sant couldn't see much development from where he was standing. It was time to cut to the jugular.

'Why did you split up from Chloe's mother?'

'That's a bit personal. Besides, we parted ways years ago.'

'It would be helpful to know all the same.'

Lee planted his meagre butt on a stool. 'Well, I suppose it happened the way of most couples no longer suited to each other.'

'It's my understanding, Mr Lee, that *you* left *her*.' It was a stab in the dark, but it paid off.

'Fair comment. Though don't think Vanessa was the innocent, faithful loving wife.'

'She had affairs too?'

Lee gulped some tea and wiped his mouth with his free hand. 'She had her share of male friends. But I suppose I'd be a hypocrite if *I* accused *her* of playing around.'

'Chloe must've taken the break-up badly.'

Lee twisted his lips and looked at the ceiling. 'You'd think so, wouldn't you, and I was fretful she'd go off the rails. Why? Because I nurtured that child. As

soon as I returned from Bosnia, that is. I missed the first six months of her life – regretted it ever since.’ His gaze watered, rolled down to the furniture. ‘But seven years ago, when I left her mother, well, I guess we saw it coming.’

‘So Chloe wasn’t especially upset?’

‘A tear or two. Or perhaps that’s wishful thinking on my part.’ Lee laughed at himself and then went serious again. ‘Vanessa cried. But then she cried all the time. The effects of post-natal depression, the doctor said. Chloe, well now, she’s different altogether. She rarely cries. Chip off the old block.’

‘Did you see much of your daughter after the separation?’

‘Once a week. Where possible. But I’d other mouths to feed. A new wife and baby for starters. And building work was picking up. The boom years had arrived.’

Sant felt a mixture of bitterness and empathy for the man facing him. Sant had been forced out of his own marriage; Lee had had a choice, and chose to leave. But Sant could still relate to that guilt and sorrow haunting any right-minded adult exiting the sacred theatre of family life.

‘You mentioned Bosnia, Mr Lee.’

Lee spat out the rest of his tea and briskly rinsed the bottom of the mug. ‘Stationed there for two years, Inspector. Served in the Gulf too – still suffer from Gulf War Syndrome.’ He swiped a finger along his jaw. ‘Headaches. Depression. Back problems. But I don’t talk much about my time in the army. The things I saw out there...’

Sant let the silence dwell. The soldiers he knew never spoke of their fighting days. Fond memories of camaraderie and football in the desert scarcely compensated for the horrors of combat. He swallowed his empathy and got back to business.

‘Did Chloe and her mother get on well?’

‘Most of the time.’ He swiped at his jaw again. ‘Though they had a few bust-ups. Whereas me and Chloe never came to blows.’

‘By bust-ups, you mean physical confrontation?’

Lee nodded. ‘I remember one occasion when all hell broke loose, mostly down to Vanessa’s hot-headedness. Like two bears in a pit they were. As it

transpired, Chloe said her goodbyes, packed a bag, and went off to stay with a neighbour.'

'A neighbour?'

'Aye, a nice bird. She lived on her own – a stone's throw from our house.'

'How old was Chloe when this happened?'

Lee leaned on the kitchen worktop and coughed a reply. 'Must've been ten, eleven.'

'And how long was she away from home?'

'Not long. But that was just the first time. Chloe struck up quite a bond with that woman. You couldn't get her to come back on occasions.'

Sant arched his dark eyebrows. 'Were you ever suspicious about this neighbour?'

'Vanessa was, at first. I wasn't. But soon enough we got invited over there. And then Vanessa got to know her. Felt the woman would do Chloe some good. You know, educate her a bit. You see, this neighbour lived on her own. No hubby. No kids. But she was clever. Won the pub quiz whenever she turned out. And I guess we felt she might impart some of that knowledge on Chloe. Free tuition on the side, if you like. And the payoffs went both ways 'cos Chloe proved good company for her. I suppose everybody needs a companion.'

'Plenty of lonely people out there,' Sant nodded, directing his glass at Darren Lee's murky kitchen window.

'I never could understand that.' He looked at the glass, the window. 'I call them loners, but apparently it's the norm to be a loner these days.'

Sant was faintly amused by Lee's take on people like himself. After all, he'd been a loner for the best part of two years and counting. But he didn't feel isolated. There were lonely spells, yes, but the upsides of going it alone explained why so many walked that path.

'Does this woman still live in the same house?'

'No, she left about the same time I left. Seems silly, I know, but Chloe was more upset at the neighbour leaving than me.'

'You have a name?'

Lee shook his head. 'I can't recall asking her – or she offering it.'

‘What about other people Chloe was close to? Friends, relatives, folks she saw regularly. Like Jake Downing?’

‘Who?’

‘A former boyfriend.’

Lee shook his head again, a little too nonchalantly for Sant’s liking.

‘The names Kate Andrews and Callum Willis mean anything to you?’

‘Can’t say they do. I’m out of touch when it comes to Chloe’s social life. Vanessa would know.’

‘But she’s halfway around the world,’ said Sant, looking pointedly at the man facing him. He detected a slight wince on that wrinkled face.

Lee drew in breath. ‘Just like my ex to take off on the spur of the moment.’

‘She didn’t tell you?’

‘Why would she?’ He laughed. ‘Unless she was after some spending money.’

‘Does she often ask for money?’

‘Not these days, thank God. She’s finally realised what a divorce is. A severance. Once and for all.’

Sant handed over the glass of water and made to leave. Then turned back. ‘One last thing. Have you any idea where Chloe may have run off to?’

‘No idea,’ Lee answered, no hesitation. He kicked a box aside to make way for his departing visitor. ‘She’s made off before. Even when she was little. Don’t bet against her turning up soon.’

Sant was taken aback by the overconfident parting shot, but he chose not to dampen the man’s optimism. His daughter may have fled from home for a day or two once upon a time. But on this occasion it was almost two months since anyone had last seen her. When someone’s gone for that long, they seldom come back.

No, Chloe was out there on her own, a young woman in need of someone to watch over her.

* * *

BY THE TIME he returned to Elland Road HQ the station clock showed it was

nearing eleven. Sant trudged into his office and saw Holdsworth attaching an A3 of incomprehensible data to a flipchart.

‘The results of the phone number search,’ she explained. ‘I’ve had this sent down from Hardaker. It’s a list cross-referenced by bill-payer and what we know about them. It turns out that not one of the ninety-two Leeds households with a landline starting 3-1-5 has anything relevant on our files. Nor is there a known connection between any of them and Dryden or the other bus fatalities.’

Sant and Capstick were both thinking the same thing: how all these numbers and codes translated into Holdsworth’s Plain English.

‘It defies the laws of probability,’ Capstick piped up. ‘For ninety-two people and their co-habiting relations not to have so much as a driving conviction against their names is remarkable.’

Holdsworth aimed a pointed look at her colleague. ‘If you’d listened a little closer, Detective Constable Capstick, I uttered the word *relevant*. Non-relevant offences, like speeding, don’t get factored in.’

‘So what was the worst offence traced back to these ninety-two pillars of society?’ Capstick took a certain delight in quirky stats.

Holdsworth looked down her list. ‘Theft of a phone booth. One of those old telephone boxes – red and made of cast iron. Worth a fortune overseas.’

‘I’d like to see someone attempt to smuggle one of those out of the country.’

Sant interrupted. ‘How does the informant theory stack up in all this? Was Dryden trying to reveal the number of his snitch?’

‘Maybe,’ said Holdsworth, ‘in which case the poor soul made a mistake with his numbers, or the sequence, or we’ve missed something.’

‘Or a combination of all three,’ Capstick said, ‘leaving us with a maze of permutations not worth contemplating.’

‘How so?’ asked Holdsworth.

‘Simple mathematics, Detective Sergeant Holdsworth.’

Holdsworth stuck out her tongue. ‘For the record, Brad, I sailed through O Level Maths, thank you very much.’

Sant interrupted again, faintly annoyed at the banter. ‘Permutations or otherwise, those numbers are vital. There’s definitely something about the 3-1-5

we've yet to register.'

Silence hung over the room for a while, the tension in Sant's voice chiming like a warning bell. Holdsworth and Capstick smirked at each other. *Best to let him speak next.*

'What do we know about the ticketing receipts for the bus, Capstick?'

Capstick grabbed his tablet and tapped a few keys. 'No full details as yet. The young couple sitting behind Dryden on the top deck had student passes, so no tickets were issued for them.'

'And Dryden?'

Capstick scrolled down the screen. 'No ticket was found on DS Dryden.'

Holdsworth frowned. 'That's strange. Surely he needed one to travel.'

'Unless he abused his position.'

Sant sighed. 'It's possible. Anyone prepared to do the job outside of working hours may feel he has a right to live above the law. Then again, if he wished to remain incognito, the last thing on his mind would be a free bus ride.'

Capstick turned back to his screen. 'Data coming through from the bus vault tells us the last ticket issued was at 23.33. Thirty-three minutes passed eleven in old speak.'

Sant crossed his arms. 'I can read the 24-hour clock, you know.'

'No offence, sir. Anyway, the exact time when the bus crashed hasn't been established. All we know for certain is that the first call received by emergency services was at 11.36pm. Which means the last paying passenger boarded the bus no more than three minutes prior to the crash.'

Sant turned over an egg timer in his head. 'A couple of miles of travelling time at most.'

'And before that,' continued Capstick, 'a total of nine tickets were issued between the start and end of the journey: at 23.09, 23.09, 23.09, 23.12, 23.14, 23.14, 23.16, 23.18 and 23.19. Four people have already contacted police confirming they bought tickets at those times, though only two retained them. Receipts for the other two tickets have since been retrieved from the bottom deck – both issued at 23.14.'

Holdsworth breathed deeply. 'I bet those passengers are thanking Heaven

they got off that bus before...' She clenched her perfectly straight teeth.

'Were any of the deceased carrying tickets?' Sant asked.

'Only one confirmed so far,' said Capstick. 'Robert Cameron, a middle-aged man travelling on his own. His ticket was issued at 23.19. That's all the info we have for now. Forensics say the situation is fluid.'

Sant scowled. 'Fluid? It's gunked up! That sort of information should be signed and delivered promptly. It's going on twenty-four hours.'

'Well, it is a Sunday, sir. Took a while to get a full quota of officers.'

'What's next?' Holdsworth asked.

'A tour of the bus stops,' said Sant. 'Coats on. It's time to explore.'

* * *

CAPSTICK TOOK the A660 to Otley, Holdsworth occupying the front passenger seat and Sant rattling around in the back. Map and satnav at the ready, they tracked the 33 route from the Otley terminus towards Leeds, pausing at every bus stop in simulation of a stop-start bus ride.

At intervals scenes-of-crime officers could be seen inspecting CCTV cameras. Others equipped with sniffer dogs and metal detectors were combing every inch of ground as Capstick's Fiat Punto coasted by. Industrial vacuums like gigantic pythons were being plunged down street drains on the off chance they might slurp up vital evidence.

The murder weapon, for sure, represented the biggest prize. Although Sant harboured no real hope of finding the firearm – he doubted they were dealing with a novice assassin – there was always a chance the gunman panicked and ditched it.

Any hitman worth his salt knew leaving the tool of his trade behind was suicidal. Whether fingerprints were detectable or not, each gun had its own ballistics; a unique set of markings on the bullet casings it fired. No matter whose black market it passed through, identifying it was easy. DNA traces – the minutest were needed – ticked the right boxes too.

Sant's vision panned across the horizon. On the hilltop, runway lights at

Leeds-Bradford Airport looked like luminous bullet holes puncturing a dinosaur's spine. Sant pondered the eventualities. The five stops located on the A65 in Horsforth were less than two hundred yards apart along a busy stretch of the town lined with pubs and restaurants – always lively on a Saturday night. He drummed a thumb on his leg. It was an unlikely area for Dryden to meet with anyone in secret.

More probable were the six bus stops beyond, on the approach to Kirkstall Abbey. The gap between them extended to four hundred yards in places. Fewer people used these stops. No obtrusive street lighting either. Ideal territory for muggers and informants alike.

The two stops closest to Kirkstall Abbey were at the centre of Sant's radar. It was this stretch of the A65 that afforded real potential for diversionary tactics. Giant ash trees lined both sides of the road, 1950s bungalows giving way to a protected belt of surrounding parkland, shrubbery and woods.

A popular family retreat by day, the fifty acres that made up the abbey grounds were practically deserted at night. Occasionally a travelling fair brought an injection of night-time economy, but no fair had used the site since September. That rules out the raging fair-ground operator, Sant mused.

Capstick pulled his Punto onto the verge of the road before it veered around the abbey. Saw the ROAD CLOSED sign and parked. They got out and gazed back up the road, the goalposts at either end of a rugby pitch forming points of a triangle with the Vesper Gate pub. Sant could have murdered a pint of ale, but he kept his hankerings to himself.

He broke off from the others and vaulted the stone wall bordering the abbey, sand sticking to his palms, landing soft. He could see where he was walking courtesy of a full moon that smiled down in sympathy, casting an eerie silhouette on the ancient façade. Large iron gates barred unwanted visitors. Signs warned them off: NO BALL GAMES... NO BICYCLES. The ruined millstone tower at the far end of the monastery had, over centuries of erosion, peeled in half like a thunderstruck tree. Only half of it remained, miraculously surviving a dozen or more battles and fires over those bloody years. The brittle structure resembled a protruding index finger pointing skyward, crooked, defiant.

The greatest act of defiance had been resistance to King Henry the Eighth's Dissolution of the abbeys and nunneries back in 1540. On splitting from the Catholic Church after Rome refused him a second marriage, Henry named himself Supreme Head of the Church of England and forbade Catholicism. And all other dissenting faiths. Abbeys like Kirkstall were plundered for their gold and land, and sold to wealthy families loyal to king and country. Many monasteries were torched in the Dissolution, but an anti-Royalist faction – ultimately defeated – defended Kirkstall Abbey from attack by the King's men, preventing it from being razed to the ground.

Sant passed by the remains of the Abbey Guest House, used by Cistercian monks on their pilgrimages across what was once called Elmet and much later the West Riding of Yorkshire. It was difficult to believe these crumbled ruins were almost nine hundred years old, like the rest of the original structure. Gothic was not the word. English Gothic described a nineteenth-century architectural revival. This place prefigured Early Gothic: it was Gothic before Gothic began.

He turned back towards the main road. A mock-Tudor Edwardian house stood at the summit of a hill overlooking everything. An upstairs window was lighted and Sant imagined it offering an ideal view of the events of the previous night. But if he was warm and these medieval ruins really were the backdrop for the secret rendezvous, then it would be terrible for Dryden and his informant to stand around in the open, no more than a hundred yards from traffic and passers-by, lighted windows beyond.

Sant followed his nose and crossed over damp grass in the direction of the river. An overgrown bowling green and bricked-up paddling pool told a bygone story of better days for the park adjoining the abbey. Smashed beer bottles and the stench of urine spoke volumes about its present use. Not that he blamed the teen posse responsible for this mess. Where else could the kids of today spend their spare time without forking out a small fortune on what the profiteers deemed appropriate entertainment?

As the River Aire came into view, wending its way towards the city, he looked to his right and noticed a disused track leading into woods and down to the riverside. He stepped along the path cautiously, wary of uprooted tree trunks

and metal poles and slabs of stone planted in the ground like discarded memorials for the dead. No more than fifty yards along was a muddy clearing that sloped downwards and brought the path out onto the verge of the riverbank. Head down, Sant wished he'd carried his torch as he watched the barely visible verge, grey-black against the blackness of the river. One wrong step and he'd be soaked. The waters here were so still they seemed not to flow at all, as if the whole tributary was holding out against its sluggish descent towards post-industrial smut.

He walked a little further, slipping in the mud before the blackness gave way to milky moonlight poking through drooping branches. He came to a halt, perched on the jagged end of a fallen trunk to catch his breath. Behind him, a steep bank rose ten metres high, flanked by a thick wall of oaks. An ideal hiding place for sure. Merely a couple of football pitches from the abbey grounds and the main road, this secret belt of undergrowth felt a million miles from civilisation.

The quietness was uncanny. This city – this Roman hill fort carved from dense woods and sloping dales – really did sleep.

No good trying to search for clues in the dark, Sant told himself. He'd request a team at the break of day. Brushing dirt from his hands, he wondered if he could authorise such a request. For a moment he was unsettled by the doubt. Then he relaxed. Hardaker would give his approval.

He got up and retraced his steps. Instead of rejoining the main road, he continued along the riverside and passed the main wings of the monastery. Followed the dismantled Abbey Light Railway to the eastern outskirts that culminated in the white stone cross of Kirkstall Cenotaph, commemorating the men of the parish who'd perished in the Great War. Here the river was no wider than a moorland beck and even more out of place amidst the office buildings and industrial units surrounding it.

A short walk from the bridge over the river stood a Victorian drinking fountain. Sant shone his torch on the inscription engraved in broken stone: DRINK AND BE GRATEFUL. In 1849 the water supply was contaminated with cholera, killing two thousand Leeds folk. In 1865 the city authorities erected the

fountain with the assurance that only clean water would gush from its lion-headed iron tap. Forty years later a near-fatal stomach bug was attributed to this supposed source of liquid purity. The powers that be hushed up the affair, the local Bobbies accepting generous backhanders from notable dignitaries as payment for banging a few heads together. DRINK AND KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED would have been a more apt epitaph, Sant reckoned.

He crossed over Bridge Street and rounded the corner by the junction of Abbey Road and Commercial Road. This was where the real action was, and would remain for days to come. A dreadful spectacle, it was illuminated better than a Premier League stadium. Efforts to move the bus without destroying evidence were slowly succeeding. Sant shook his head, squinting. After all the cutting it no longer resembled a bus; looked more like a colossal toast rack.

Tempted as he was to duck under the cordon and find out the latest from Dr Wisdom, he decided to wait till morning. Besides, from where he was standing he could see Hardaker handing out instructions to murder-squad detectives, some of whom he knew well. He was meant to be with them now, obeying Hardaker's every command and delegating duties down the ranks to Capstick and Holdsworth. The urge to join in was a strange, empty one.

Sant told himself that it should be him, not Hardaker, orchestrating this gig. But for the sake of his colleagues, the public out there, and Dryden and family foremost, he'd stomach Hardaker and Gilligan and Lister. No matter how hard it grated him to do so.

Exhaustion left him without emotion. A uniform gave him a lift home. He fumbled his keys around in the worn lock of his front door and didn't even bother to turn on the apartment lights, making a beeline for bed before the idea of a beer became a good one.

SHE HAD NEVER BEEN MORE TERRIFIED.

Her bedside clock told her it was four a.m. She'd tossed and turned all night, not a wink of sleep. Maybe that wasn't such a bad thing. What nightmares would greet her if her brain switched off a moment too long?

Murder. She had murder on her mind. That policeman had been targeted. Assassinated. That meant...

A plume of flame blinded her, bullet exploding from the gun, knocking her over into numb blackness.

They were coming for her.

Wiping her forehead, she stilled her gasps and looked over to the phone. Considered calling the police. How could she even begin to explain what she knew? The risks far outweighed the benefits. She trusted no-one.

Had anyone followed her on that lonely walk home? Her stare went through the wall, head shaking. They could have struck her down there and then. Her shoulders heaved. A feeling, a sureness, wiped away all the moisture from her eyes.

They knew where she lived.

They'd been waiting, toying with her. Monitoring her every move. And now they could pick her off. Easy prey.

She had to move. *Fast*. No time to collect her things. Just get out. Lose herself in the crowd.

She grabbed all the loose money she could find, dashed to the bedside table

and knocked the lamp over, hand hovering over a clutter of personal items. She watched her shaking hands, mouth open. Grabbed the keys and left.

Walked out of her flat – and fell. Hard. Landed with a thud. The agony took her breath away as she pressed hands to ribs. It felt like being impaled by a brass poker. She'd forgotten about the parcel, was looking at it, thinking... My ribs. Bruised or cracked? It hurt like hell. She tried to get up, stumbled, fell again.

She inhaled deeply, stretched her legs out and used her feet to rein in the parcel. At first she couldn't budge it. Christ, it could've been full of bricks for all she knew. A glance at the address label stopped her breathing once more.

The name on the box. The name no-one was supposed to know.

Her real name!

She gawped and came up for air. Hit herself, hoping this... a bad dream? The punch to the cheek landed home.

She scanned the corridor, aware of the eight floors of her dingy council block she had to descend, and saw no-one. Nothing felt out of order. She took another gulp of oxygen and tried to get to her feet, but the pain pulsed down her ribcage as she tried to twist it straight. She'd done some damage. Permanent damage. This was bad. It would be three hours before the neighbours got up. Shouting for help would be madness.

Throat tight with a sob, her watery gaze drifted to the parcel by her feet. What on earth was inside and who had sent it? Only a handful of people alive knew her by that name.

Tension, vibrating her entire frame a moment before, eased from her face, hands. Could the sender be her precious girl, the most special person she'd had the pleasure to care for? Did Chloe send this? If so, she'd spent a queen's ransom on the courier service. Sunday paid double if not triple.

Why the urgency? Welled tears broke and ran, face taut in thought. She suspected what the parcel contained. Knew the importance of it. But why send it now? This was the evidence she revealed to that poor policeman. She'd even written down the address where he could find it. It was meant for his eyes. Or the eyes of someone equally trustworthy. Someone with the power to bring down the infrastructure under which they served.

She'd promised the evidence to him. Sergeant Dryden... he would never receive it.

Sprawled on the floor, she tried and failed to lift the hefty weight. Shuffled it closer, inch by inch, until at last she could pick at the seams with her trembling fingers. It took her several minutes to prise away the tape and staples, hampered as she was by the soreness of her ribs, sheer determination keeping her going, desperate to get at what was inside. Its value would be worthless to the unknowing and unaffected, but to those who'd fought against corruption and discrimination in the highest ranks of society, what lay inside was immense, awesome, priceless.

One final tug of the cardboard casing and she'd be in. She ripped across the upper flaps and wrenched them apart, gripped the rim of the box with both hands outstretched and tipped it slowly towards her.

Peeped inside. And then she let go.

Her instincts were right. She should have trusted them. The optimist inside her had been fooled.

'Again!' She looked at her fist, thoughts of self-harm recurring.

The box was full of bricks.

At that moment she registered something in the corner of her eye. She turned and looked up at a man wearing black gloves and a broad smile. But she only saw the gloves as they came down level with her neck, grabbed hold of her, then tightened their merciless grip.

* * *

SANT WOKE EARLY, shaved, showered, and took coffee with a bowl of fibre-rich bran flakes followed by a healthy dose of cholesterol – four scrambled eggs on thickly buttered toast. As far as he was concerned, with breakfast, the bigger the better. He liked to take his time in the morning, spending a good hour filling his stomach with protein, calcium, carbohydrates. And caffeine. Not necessarily in that order.

He felt a sense of urgency as he walked through the living room. His daily

tabloid lay on the doormat. He glanced at the front-page headline – DEATH BUS MYSTERY – and cursed. The Sunday editions having gone to print before the bus shootings, Monday's papers were making the best of a delayed response to the big news of the weekend. Wiping cereal crumbs from his mouth, Sant tossed the paper on the couch and went to dress.

He grabbed the keys to his Fiesta and started out on the inner ring road towards HQ. Then he changed his mind, thinking about the interview with Mrs Andrews and the way she'd reacted to Chloe's name. A twitch of the eyelid. Scratch of the nose. Instinct told him Mrs Andrews was aware her ill-fated daughter had known Chloe and, for some reason or other, she wasn't keen to advertise the fact. If proven, this backed Sant's theory: the bus murders and Chloe's disappearance were interwoven.

He dug out the phone in his trouser pocket and called his partner.

'Where are you?'

'HQ, sir. Where are you? Hardaker's called an urgent briefing on the bus murders.'

Sant cursed his bad timing. Should he turn around and go back? He drummed on the steering wheel, decided to stick with his plans. Hardaker would understand the logic. Following a lead that might connect two high-profile investigations surely justified his absence. Anyway, Holdsworth could fill him in on the Chiefman's briefing.

'Meet me at Chloe's mother's address before the hour.'

'But Hardaker's—'

'Never mind him, Capstick. Get your skates on.'

Sant and Capstick had visited Dufton Approach several times already to consult forensic officers scouring Vanessa Lee's home. Chloe's uncle was staying there. He raised no objections so a search warrant was quickly granted. No unusual traces of blood or hair or skin or anything else were laid bare. Nothing linked the property to Chloe's case, and there was no evidence of any type of crime. Sant favoured a belt-and-braces attitude, though, for peace of mind if nothing else.

A plaque depicting WELCOME TO SEACROFT was attached to a lump of

rock, oddly out of place amidst the pebbledash exteriors of the tower blocks. He shuddered, overcome with trepidation. Seacroft had been his first beat. Although deeper rooted in history than any visitor might imagine, modern Seacroft had been built mid century to accommodate the poor folk of Leeds coaxed out of their inner-city slums; back-to-back terraced houses literally crumbling to the ground.

Instead of cramped rooms and outside privies, the working classes flooding into council estates like Seacroft could now enjoy the splendour of bathrooms, kitchens at the back, gardens, hedges and nearby parks. ‘Breathe fresh air’ – ‘grow your own veg’ – ‘go for healthy walks with your community’ – such was the paternalism espoused by the architects of an upwardly-mobile socialist sensibility.

A failure of idealism, Sant supposed. The Seacroft of the twenty-first century was anything but upwardly mobile. Beneath the orderly veneer of tree-lined greenery bubbled a festering underworld of drugs, violence and prostitution. ‘Needle Paradise’ was Seacroft’s other name owing to the heroin and the cocaine. The socialist dream turned out to be exactly that: a mere dream; a blueprint not for a future, but for a drug-induced fantasy.

Chloe’s paternal home was situated on one of the nicer roads lined with 1930s brick builds, but even so, the other side of the street painted a scene of boarded-up concrete prefabs coated in graffiti and vandalism. The smell of glue, vomit and dope struck a chord with the inspector, evoking memories of bleak nights chasing dealers down smoky ginnels, police dogs in tow.

He met Capstick’s Punto as it stopped by the roadside, got in to shield himself from stiff November gales.

‘What’s the score, sir?’

Sant shivered, his body regulating to the warmth of the car. ‘I went to Darren Lee’s place last night. Turns out his memory is brighter than his hospitality. He recalls how Chloe became close to a neighbour. Even stayed nights at her house from time to time.’

‘She still lives here?’

Sant shook his head. ‘Moved away about seven years ago according to Lee.’

‘Maybe someone remembers her.’

‘Let’s find out, shall we?’

The first door they knocked on, two doors down from Vanessa Lee’s, was answered by an impossibly old woman offering them sausages she was half-way through frying. The inviting aroma made Sant’s stomach growl, but a second breakfast was out of the question. For a split second he visualised the woman as the type of experienced hand a young Chloe could have grown fond of, but reality hit home when the old dear confirmed she’d only lived in her current abode for a year. The previous occupants of the house, she confided in a whisper, leaning towards them, were two men on intimate terms with each other; *very* intimate terms.

That explains the homophobic paintwork decorating the garden wall, Sant presumed.

They knocked on a few more properties before coming to a house six doors down. It looked promising. Until the occupant opened up.

‘And who are you?’ barked a woman of twentysomething going on forty, fag in hand. ‘Can’t ya see I got me hands full wi’ bleedin’ kids?’

‘We won’t bother you for long,’ Capstick reassured her, showing off his badge. ‘Can we come in?’

She dropped the rest of her fag on the doorstep and crushed it with her socked foot. Without a word or even a gesture she let them in. They stepped straight into a bland rectangular space doubling as a toy room and flat-screen entertainment palace. Two girls were toddling around with bits of chocolate bar in their hands and hair. One of them offered the rest of her choc delight to Capstick, who declined politely and asked, ‘Do you have coffee?’

The little girl put a hand to her mouth and laughed, shook her head.

The woman’s face was worn, whittled out of Jurassic stone with fossil marks to prove it. The dyed blonde hair was dry and frizzy, matching the rest of her embattled features. Any natural charm contained therein had been assaulted by a truck load of cheap makeover products.

‘What can I do ya for?’

‘We’d like to know about the person who lived here before you,’ Capstick

said, looking down at the kids.

The woman fixed a deep scowl of distrust. 'How should I know? Achally, come to think of it, I do know who ya mean, so wot's in it for me if I tell ya?'

The sweet moment with the chocolate offer passed into one of bubbling anger. Sant said, 'If you tell us, then it'll be smiles all round and we won't pester you again.'

'And if I choose not ta?'

Sant looked at his watch. 'No bother, we'll consult the council records. A waste of our time, but so be it. Oh, and my Inland Revenue friends will keep a close eye on your benefit claims, cash jobs, that sort of thing.'

The woman made a faint choking sound before clasping a new fag between her chapped lips and putting a lighter to it. 'Don't go fretnin' me, Mr Detective. I say wot I want, when I want. But seen as we're on speaking terms, I say this. I neva achally met 'er. She weren't 'ere when't council first showed me round. But I were told it were a woman wot used to live 'ere and she were on 'er own.'

'Who told you?'

'Who ya think? People – wot have lived 'ere longer than me.'

'Do you know the woman who lives at number 23?' Capstick asked, pointing his thumb at her door.

'Ya mean her wi' daughter wot's run away?'

Sant nodded. 'Her name's Vanessa Lee. Daughter's called Chloe. You may've seen her picture on the news.'

'Well, I hope ya find her,' she whispered, as if fearing being overheard at number 23. 'Quite liked 'er. Even came round a while back.'

Two pairs of ears pricked up. 'When did she visit, Mrs-?'

'Rhodes, and it's Miss.' She took a long drag but no smoke came out, a hidden orifice somewhere acting as a release valve. 'Not long since. Summatime'

Sant thought hard. 'Did she have anyone with her? A friend called Kate?'

Capstick looked at his boss with a flicker of surprise.

'Nope,' came the instant reply.

'What was the purpose of her visit?' asked Capstick, blotting sweaty palms

on his pants.

‘Just to say hello, be friendly s’pose. Funnily nuff, she were asking after the woman wot lived ‘ere, like you are now. Cunt stop goin’ on ‘bout how charming she were.’

Sant felt the hairs standing on his head. They were getting somewhere. This morning’s change of course was a gamble paying off. ‘So it was a social visit?’

‘Well, I made ‘er a cuppa if that’s wot ya mean, but to be honest I were so busy wi’ babies and washing and wot-not, I cunt exactly spare the time of day. Now don’t get me wrong. I never speak ill of the... missing, but I’d be lyin’ if I didn’t tell ya I thought she overstayed ‘er welcome.’

‘Chloe you mean?’

‘Who else? She even asked me, and I thought this a bit cheeky; she even asked if she could wander round a bit, ya know, fa old time’s sake.’

Sant was intrigued. ‘Did she talk to you about this woman?’

Miss Rhodes took another slow easy drag before tapping ash onto a saucer by her feet. ‘Not to me face, no, but there must’ve been someut funny wi’ their relationship. I mean, it were like this girl had come obsessed wi’ wot had gone on ‘ere in t’past. Let’s face it, it’s not right or proper is it? A young girl, and that’s all she were, sleeping over wi’ a single woman least three times ‘er friggin’ age. Very strange.’

‘Did Chloe tell you she’d slept here?’

‘No, but gossip on t’sreet says she stayed ‘ere weeks on end. And the way she started goin’ on, it were like this woman were a long lost lover no less. And to think whatever muckiness they were up to ‘appened ‘tween these four walls. Makes me shudder.’

Sant was startled and unconvinced at the same time. Nothing pointed to Chloe having had sexual relations with this mystery woman – or any other. By all accounts she was as straight as a die. But then again, sexuality wasn’t engraved on anyone’s personal stone in the same way that age and sex were.

‘I take it you didn’t allow Chloe the freedom to roam around your lovely home?’ asked Capstick, stifling the sarcasm for all he was worth.

The smoke seeped from the corners of her mouth in a show of distaste.

‘Certainly not. You gotta keep ya eyes wide open. Dodgy characters everywhere these days. ‘Sides I got expensive stuff in this house... computers, jewelree, designer jeans.’ She paused as if remembering something. ‘Now I come to think o’ it, I got awflee suspicious when she went t’loo.’

‘Why was that, Miss Rhodes?’

She stubbed out the fag in the saucer. ‘Let’s just say, she took an awflee long time about it. Five minutes at least.’

‘Your toilet is upstairs?’

‘No fancy downstairs loos round ‘ere, luvie.’

‘Did you go up and check on her?’

She spat out a bit of tobacco. ‘That I did, though I kick meself for not doin’ it sooner. There I were, walking up the stairs, and next thing I know she’s hurryin’ past me on ‘er way down. I says “what’s up with ya?” and she muttered ‘bout a migraine, felt sick she said, and that were the last I saw of ‘er. So there’s me thinkin’ she’s been nosing round for stuff to steal, but I know exactly wot I got up there, in cupboards and wot-not, and am certain she left wi’ nowt.’

Capstick dried his moist palms on his shirt sleeves. ‘You think she was searching for something?’

‘Sure of it.’

‘Mind if we take a look around?’ Sant asked.

Miss Rhodes clearly did mind, but she gave silent consent before lifting the younger of her two girls and sniffing at her nappy. Result positive – a new nappy at the ready.

Nothing out of the ordinary struck Sant and Capstick as they inspected the upstairs rooms. The house was as plain as they came. No elaborate furnishings here. When all else looked normal, so Sant had learnt from experience, two options remained: the cellar and the loft. And since this property had no cellar, the loft was the only option.

Unfortunately, Miss Rhodes didn’t own a step ladder since she had no use for the storage space. Indeed, she’d never set eyes on the loft; didn’t know it existed.

But it did. A boarded loft. Not in use now, but the fact that it was boarded meant past tenants had stored things up there.

A kitchen stool was placed below the cubby-hole and Capstick volunteered his services. He was adept at pull-ups and with the help of a peg-up from Sant, accompanied by the familiar break-a-leg quip, he managed to wriggle his upper body up and over the threshold. He crawled with his arms to a more secure position and searched for a light switch; a non-existent light switch as it turned out. Sant returned to his car, grabbed a torch from the glove box and choked his way back up the stairs through a cloud of fresh nicotine.

Torch in hand and other hand over nose to shield dust, Capstick scanned the space from top to bottom with a faint but sufficient beam.

‘Nothing here,’ he called down.

‘Certain?’

‘As the day is long.’

‘Anything been removed up there?’

‘Not sure how I’d know about that, sir.’

‘Check for track-marks.’

Capstick swept the torchlight in a circular motion and saw nothing at first, but as his eyes got more accustomed to the beam, he settled on a small slab of flooring distinctly less dust-laden than the rest. ‘There’s a bare patch right over in the far corner. Not very big.’

‘Measure it,’ Sant said, hurling up a tape-measure.

Capstick shuffled forward on his stomach and let his knees do the work. It was no good trying to stand – the roof beams were too low-slung.

‘Twenty centimetres long... twelve across.’

‘What’s that in inches, Capstick? I’m an imperial man.’

‘A little less than eight inches long... and four and a half across, sir.’

Capstick crawled backwards to the opening, slithered down the hole, and then dropped the rest of the way to the landing.

‘Wot the ‘ell ya doin’?’ came a pleasant voice from below.

‘Any idea what might’ve occupied that space?’

Capstick shook his head. ‘Could be anything. A small box or tin. A book maybe.’

‘Interesting. We may need to return here.’

They thanked Miss Rhodes for her cooperation and made haste, Sant surveying the overgrown garden strewn with loose bricks and a car tyre as they scurried away. He felt like a hound sniffing for clues, his senses in full swing – and no amount of second-hand smoke could dull those senses.

He felt good. Capstick looked chipper too. They were making headway, that much was certain, though where they were heading the inspector couldn't decide.

* * *

'SUPERINTENDENT HARDAKER HAS INSTRUCTED me to update you two on progress,' announced Holdsworth with a flourish of a flipchart. She pinned up a computer-generated sketch indicating the positions of the dead passengers on each deck of the bus. The deceased were represented by a letter to mark their final resting place.

'Starting with the upper deck,' began Holdsworth, 'letter A refers to DS Dryden.'

'We know all about him,' Capstick said.

'I'm being systematic, Brad. No corner cutting.' Capstick raised a palm towards her. She nodded. 'William Dryden, twenty-eight years young. Joined the force five years ago and made rapid promotion through the ranks. We know how ambitious Liam was. Married. No children... a small blessing.'

Sant felt the impact of Holdsworth's words. His single worst fear in the event of a premature death. Dying didn't necessarily freak him out – meditation brought peace of mind on that front – but the prospect of leaving behind two fatherless boys... that did.

Holdsworth continued: 'Why Dryden was on the bus remains inconclusive. That's the official line from Hardaker. And yet here's the strangest thing.' She lifted a pair of reading glasses to her self-tanned face and consulted the report she was holding. 'Forensic officers were unable to retrieve any item of significance from Dryden's person.'

'His pockets were empty,' Sant said.

‘But how could that be?’ Holdsworth removed her glasses.

Sant sucked his toothpick. ‘The likelihood is his pockets were emptied. Post-mortem. No-one in their right mind goes travelling at night without cash or cards. And we’ve already drawn the conclusion that Dryden’s missing phone was stolen by his killer.’

‘Which means his killer took his other belongings,’ added Holdsworth.

‘Correct. No bus ticket was found on him either. Right, Capstick?’

‘Yes, sir.’

Holdsworth cross-referenced the report to make certain and nodded towards a perplexed Capstick.

‘But why would the killer go to the trouble of emptying Dryden’s pockets, even taking his ticket?’

‘For the same reason he took his phone,’ said Sant. ‘We’re dealing with a professional, intent on leaving no trace. Ensuring nothing Dryden was carrying could provide a clue to what he was doing on that bus, where he’d come from and where he was going.’

‘A trained assassin.’ Wrinkles appeared above Holdsworth’s wide eyes.

Sant nodded. ‘This was no off-the-cuff killing. At any rate, Dryden’s wasn’t. But one thing does puzzle me: the sheer scale of the bloodbath. Dryden was killed in cold blood, but why choose a moving bus as a location for murder? Why not bide one’s time and wait till the journey was over and a darkened street presented itself? Killing sprees are not the stuff of a rational-minded assassin.’

‘I suppose once he started he couldn’t stop,’ said Holdsworth. ‘Leave nothing to chance, no witnesses.’

‘Unless we’re wrong and we’ve got a random madman on our hands,’ Capstick put in.

Holdsworth returned to the sketch and pointed a pencil midway along the upper deck at the letters B and C. ‘Sitting directly behind Dryden, in the seats just beyond the stairwell recess, were Kate Andrews and Callum Willis. The recess is about three metres across. So although the young couple were directly behind Dryden, in practice this amounts to a distance of three and a half metres.

‘We know a lot about Kate from her parents’ testimony. To recap, she was

nineteen, single, a hairdresser living with mum and dad at Coldcotes Walk. Her boyfriend Callum was also nineteen and single, living at Maryfield Avenue. A trainee builder. Lived with his mother. His father flew the nest years ago. Interestingly, Kate and Callum were the only passengers residing in north-east Leeds. The rest lived off the 33 route, as you'd expect of anyone travelling on that bus.'

'That figures,' said Capstick.

'What figures?'

Sant followed Capstick's lead, lowering his voice a fraction. 'Don't quote me on this, Holdsworth, but my detective's nose leads me to think that Kate Andrews and her boyfriend were mates of Chloe Lee, when Chloe lived in Seacroft with her mother. The fact that Kate and Callum lived within walking distance of Chloe is intriguing.'

'And coincidences like that are rarely just coincidences.' Capstick nodded to Holdsworth.

'Indeed,' Holdsworth said. 'I'll keep that under my hat for now. But whether or not they knew Chloe doesn't explain why Kate and Callum were on the 33 bus.'

'Kate's parents were equally bemused,' said Sant, 'but Mrs Andrews is hiding something. I'm sure of it. Now's not the time to probe, though. I'll leave her to grieve for now. Anything in the young couple's pockets?'

'Four pounds and twenty pence in Kate's jacket. A debit card. Nothing else.'

'No phone?'

Holdsworth checked the report. 'Right.'

'Everyone carries a phone these days,' said Capstick.

Sant tapped the kink in his nose. 'It may've been stolen. If the gunman suspected Kate of being involved...'

'In what way?'

'Maybe Kate was Dryden's snitch,' Holdsworth thought out loud.

'It's possible. What about Callum?'

'He was carrying a phone,' said Holdsworth, 'but the preliminary check revealed no stand-out messages or images. Twelve pounds and fifty pence in

loose change. Both Callum and Kate had student passes on them.'

'Who's next?'

Holdsworth pointed to a D at the front of the lower deck. 'The driver. Brian Simpson, forty-nine, married. Lived at Pembroke Road in Pudsey. Served time for armed robbery when he was nineteen, but since then his record's clean. Worked on the buses for eleven years. Fish-fryer before that.'

'It's worth looking into that armed robbery. Capstick, you're good at digging into the archives.'

'I'll do my best, though Hardaker's passed on an order already. The other stumbling block is thirty years – it's a long time. I doubt we've got anything on file. Armed robberies are only filed for ten.'

'That only applies to paper records,' said Holdsworth. 'Electronic files are removed ad hoc. In practice, lots of backed up information is never deleted.'

Sant nodded. 'Ever since the Yorkshire Ripper debacle our force has become so paranoid about storing data that we bend over backwards to save it all.'

Holdsworth replaced her reading glasses. 'According to the report, no money was missing from Simpson's vault. His takings were meagre anyway – thirty-nine pounds and forty pence excluding the float. Clearly Saturday night buses aren't as crowded as they were when I was a spring chicken.'

'Too many joyriders these days,' commented Sant.

'No phone was found on Simpson. Only his wallet and First employee card. The bus company says he used another driver's phone to call the head office before setting out from Otley. He told his boss he was likely to exceed the regular ten-hour shift. Takes a while to complete the return leg back to Leeds.'

Capstick folded his arms and gasped. 'Ten hours is a long time to sit behind a wheel.'

'Not continuously,' Holdsworth said. 'The maximum stint is five and a half. After that, the driver must take a thirty-minute break. Then he can go on driving for another four and a half hours. But if exceeding the ten-hour limit, the driver must phone in and confirm that he consents to a little bending of the rules.'

'That's the company protecting their own back,' remarked Sant.

'I bet no-one's paid overtime either,' Capstick put in.

Holdsworth turned back to the sketch. 'We're left with the other three deceased and the two survivors, all located in lower-deck seats to the middle and rear. Furthest forward' – she pointed to an E – 'was sixty-two year old Sue Wilkinson. The ticket found in her possession was issued at 23.09, which makes her one of three passengers boarding the bus at its point of departure. The other two have been traced; they got off at a pub in Guiseley and left their receipts on the bus – the two retrieved by forensics. Oh, and Wilkinson's identification was only confirmed three hours ago.'

'Why?'

Holdsworth fingered the report. 'Bullet wounds. Half her head was missing.'

Capstick swallowed hard, trying to hold down the contents of his stomach. Squeamish moments like this made him regret his line of work.

'Who ID-ed her?' Sant asked.

'Her husband. It was awkward, and not just because of the injuries she sustained. Sue Wilkinson lived with her husband in Middleton, North Yorkshire, in a millionaire's mansion. With gardens that need to be seen to be believed.'

'Well off then.'

'You can say that again, Brad.'

'Well off then.'

Her look narrowed in his direction. 'Anyway, it's awkward because, as far as Anthony Wilkinson was concerned, his wife was eating out with friends in Skipton. So why, you might ask, was she riding on a Leeds-bound bus?'

Sant knew the answer. 'A bit on the side.'

Holdsworth nodded. 'Mrs Wilkinson was on the way to meet a secret lover and dance the night away. Her phone tells us all there is to know. We've even located the secret lover – a nightclub owner who's married with children. They met on the club scene eighteen years ago.'

'Young at heart.'

'That's a hell of a long time to have an affair,' Capstick said, shifting his moral compass into gear. 'Surely the hubby twigged it somewhere along the line.'

'Apparently not,' said Holdsworth. 'The man's inconsolable.'

‘Who’s F?’ pointed Sant.

‘Seventeen year-old Joshua Smith from Model Avenue, Armley. His cousin had to ID him as no closer relatives could be traced. Spent nine months in Wetherby’s juvenile prison over assault charges. Also convicted for driving without a licence. There’s a long list of criminal-damage offences too. Oh, and he was carrying a ticket issued at 23.16. And cannabis – a hefty supply.’

‘Dealer?’

‘More than likely.’ Holdsworth pointed to the letter G. ‘Two rows back from Smith was Robert Cameron. Fifty-three. Divorced with one daughter. Scot by birth, known alcoholic, two drink-driving offences to his name. Lived at Hill Crescent in Rawdon with his elderly father. Mother died last year.’

‘Happy days,’ muttered Capstick, trying to lighten the mood. No smiles were reciprocated.

‘His wallet contained eight pounds in cash as well as bank cards, store cards and a passport-sized photo of his daughter as a young girl. She’s now twenty-five. Training to be a solicitor.’

‘Good luck to her,’ Sant said.

‘Also found in Cameron’s pockets was a ticket issued at 23.19 – the penultimate receipt from Simpson’s vault. The last ticket was issued at 23.33 but the corresponding receipt hasn’t been found.’

‘Odd,’ said Capstick.

Sant gnawed at his toothpick. ‘Not necessarily. My bet is the missing ticket belongs to one of two people.’

‘Dryden or Dryden’s killer,’ suggested Holdsworth.

Sant nodded. ‘Given the late hour and the fact he lives nowhere near the Kirkstall area, Dryden was likely on the return leg of his journey. So his ticket would have been issued to him earlier that night, on the first bus he boarded; the one that took him to Kirkstall. That is, if he didn’t abuse his authority and avoid paying altogether.’

‘A mystery that will remain so.’

‘True enough. But let’s say the 23.33 ticket wasn’t Dryden’s. And it wasn’t anyone else’s. Everyone on that bus had a ticket we’ve accounted for. And since

there was only a matter of a minute or so between the last ticket being issued and the bus crashing, we can assume no passenger got on the bus, paid for a ticket, and got off again immediately – except the one who perpetrated this bloody mess and escaped at the last conceivable moment.’

Holdsworth nodded. ‘And as only one ticket was issued at 23.33, that means we’re only dealing with one perp.’

‘Probably, unless his accomplice was already on the bus.’

‘But how could an accomplice know which bus to be on?’ Capstick asked.

‘Good question. How about the survivors, Holdsworth?’

She pointed at the H and J on the sketch. ‘H is David Dixon, forty-seven, lives on Oxford Avenue in Guiseley. Antique dealer by trade. Mother by his side.’

‘An ordinary citizen!’ said Capstick. ‘What a refreshing change!’

‘Dixon was sitting next to J – Paul Fitzgerald. Forty-one, living at the same Guiseley address. Both their tickets were issued at 23.14 and found on Dixon. They wore identical wedding rings, had a joint bank account. They were partners, I figured, so I checked the marriage registry. They tied the knot five months ago.’

‘What condition are they in?’

Holdsworth shook her head. ‘It’s not looking good for Dixon. He’s still in intensive and the life-support is all that’s propping him up. Better news on Fitzgerald. He’s been transferred to the high-dependency unit at LGI, one notch down in severity. Doctors don’t move patients from ICU unless they’re sure of a happy ending.’

‘Good news at last,’ said Capstick. ‘We need his testimony a-sap.’

‘Not any time soon,’ added Holdsworth. ‘Initial comments from the surgeon suggest he won’t be fully conscious for seventy-two hours and won’t speak intelligibly for days after that.’

‘Well, once he’s ready and able,’ Sant said, ‘we’ll be waiting by the man’s side. Is that everything, Holdsworth?’

She turned over a document. ‘The passengers purchasing the tickets at 23.12 and 23.18 have been traced. Both retained their receipts.’

‘Good work, Holdsworth. You’re no substitute for Hardaker, but you’re a damn sight better looking. I’ll recommend promotion right away.’

She grimaced. ‘A poisoned chalice if ever one existed.’ Then she turned and stared meaningfully at Sant. ‘Carl, you tread carefully. The vibe I’m getting isn’t good. You’d be wise to touch base with Hardaker and Gilligan sooner rather than later. They’re pissed off with you, Carl.’

‘Let them stay pissed off,’ Sant replied. But deep down he knew Holdsworth was right, so the inspector-cum-wanted-man sauntered off to face his superiors.

WAKING. SLEEPING. WAKING. SLEEPING. WAKING. OR JUST DREAMING OF waking? Dreaming of what?

She was wanted.

A wanted woman.

She knew she'd been drugged, her arms and legs tied with thick rope. The only blessing was her clothes. They were intact.

She felt no pain. Only panic.

She was lying on a thin rug in an ordinary living room of an ordinary house. The midday sun streamed through the laced curtains, scattering pins of light around the walls like pieces of an unfinished jigsaw. She rolled on her side and came face to face with a navy blue sofa. Perhaps her kidnapper had laid her out on the sofa, and then she'd rolled off and landed on the floor without waking.

She could hear the sound of cooking in the kitchen. A kettle came to the boil and the unmistakeable smell of fried bacon streamed through the open door.

Merry bleeding Christmas.

She tugged at her shackles for a wishful moment, but sensing no give in the rope, she gave up. She must conserve energy. She needed all the willpower she could muster.

A few minutes later a man walked in with a mug of coffee and a bacon sandwich.

'Brought you some breakfast, luvvie. I'll untie your hands. Eat up quick. We've things to discuss.'

She didn't feel hungry but drank the coffee to awaken her senses. Whatever they'd forced down her throat had gone straight to her head. She was falling asleep again when the man's cold hands slipped under her armpits, lifting her to her feet. She was guided onto the sofa and a second man wedged a cushion to prop her up.

'Know who we are?'

She could make a decent guess, but shook her head.

The second man towered over her: 'I'm John and he's Jim. We'd make a good double-act, but Jim's about as funny as a kick in the teeth. No, we don't do comedy. Or variety. We're headhunters – and not the sort who offer six-figure salaries.'

Jim laughed out loud. 'Works every time, Johnny lad. Every time.'

John scowled at Jim and returned a hard gaze the way of his prey. 'You see, we are headhunters in the old sense. We hunt for heads. Usually the heads of men, but just for you, luvvie, we'll make an exception.'

'Let's call ourselves cunt-hunters from now on, Johnny.'

More laughter.

The tip of John's nose went white. 'Shut the fuck up, Jim!' He stared down at her. 'I apologise for my colleague. Jim's a loose cannon at the best of times.'

John steered Jim to the other side of the room and exchanged heated words. Jim slumped his shoulders. They wore the same nondescript uniform, only without a company name or logo. John returned, dropping down beside the woman on the sofa and wrapping his brawny arm around her.

'Let me explain our plan, honey,' he whispered in her ear. 'We don't know your name, we don't know anything about you, we just get paid for bringing you in. Understand?'

She nodded indifferently.

'Our client has asked us to treat you well, do you no harm, make you feel at home.' He gestured with a sweeping arm, body radiating domesticity and odour in one fell swoop. 'In eight hours from now we hand you over to our client. You won't see us again after that. We'll be a figment of... what's it called, Jim?'

'Your imagination, Johnny.'

‘Precisely. But we have a proposition. You see, unless we dislike the thugs—sorry, people we are paid to capture, we always give them the opportunity to escape. At the right price. Understand?’

She didn’t garner much hope, but asked anyway. ‘How much?’

‘You a wealthy woman, Mrs—?’

She didn’t offer a name. ‘What do *you* think?’

John scratched his bold head. ‘Umm, that’s sure been bugging me and Jim. You see, we know where you live, and let’s face it, those flats aren’t up to much. Even if you own one, it can’t be worth twenty grand. And if you really are minted, why live in a grubby council block anyway?’ The question went unanswered. ‘You’ve also got no car or anything valuable, so unless you’re cash-rich or a secret lottery winner, we reckon you’re virtually broke.’

Jim stifled another laugh. ‘I’ve got a good name for her, Johnny. Skint Bint. Like it?’

John gave Jim another stern look and drew closer to his frail quarry. ‘This is the strange part. Normally we deal with the higher end. Bankers, lawyers, stockbrokers, etcetera. Some client or other wants payback, wants to frighten them senseless. And in return for our professional services we receive a few grand, say five thousand reddiees.’ He patted the bulging wallet in his trouser pocket. ‘But let me explain how we negotiate in the victim’s favour. Consider, say, the unfortunate banker who’s about to lose all his teeth. If said banker can find, say, eight thou before our client turns up, we let him go. Usually. Of course, such an affair fucks off our client, so the necessary down payment has to account for some future loss of business. Understand?’

She nodded again. It was clear where all this was heading.

‘So here you are, and excuse my French, but to us you’re no more than a jobless woman living in a council flat, though no bad-looking chick for your age. And here we are, Jim and I, hit-men par excellent, being paid no less than fifteen – I repeat – fifteen thou, not hundred, fifteen thousand sterling for your capture.’ He was showing off now. ‘Tell me why that should be.’

She showed no surprise. No fear. Those beasts had hunted her down for a long time and now she was about to face them. These two idiots could have

charged whatever they liked for their client's services. No price was too high for her head.

There was a long silence before John got up and circled the room. 'We didn't think you'd say much, honey. And guess what? We're not bothered. Me and Jim, we're not nosy people. Isn't that right, Jim?'

Jim needed no invitation. 'We're cocky lads, Johnny. Know what I mean, luvvie?' He massaged his crotch and panted like a randy dog.

'We don't care what happens to you or anyone else for that matter. We've got a business to run, simple as that.' Then John stared at her meaningfully. 'And whilst we're talking business, if you can cross our spotless palms with twenty grand cash before close of play today, we'll let you go.'

She grinned drily and shook her head.

Silence again. Then she was sleeping. Waking. Sleeping. Waking.

The man was slapping her face. Her feet were cold. The man was tickling her feet. He thrust his pale face into hers. 'Okay, honey. Me and Jim are feeling generous on this sunny autumn afternoon. Our final offer is eighteen. Eighteen grand and you're a free... woman.'

She shook her head again.

'Seventeen thousand, five hundred.'

Sleeping. Waking.

Her mouth was dry but she choked out the words: 'I don't have that much.'

'Seventeen and not a penny less.'

Sleeping. Waking.

John stared at her for a while and sighed. 'We didn't think so either. Hard luck, honey. We wish you the best. And one last thing – have another glass of water. On the house, if you catch our drift. It'll help you sleep.'

Jim handed her the water. Without a moment's hesitation she gulped it down before relapsing into torpor.

* * *

SANT, en route to Hardaker's office, was struck by Gilligan as he passed by. The

Old Man faced Sant, tucked in part of his shirt. Sant refolded his cuffs and endured a tone of accusation to learn that Hardaker was busy coordinating matters at the Abbey Road crime scene.

Gilligan was the bane of his life. They'd known each other for twenty years, ever since Sant had made the move to CID, and not once could he recall a word of gratitude directed his way.

The ACC was the least competent of five West Yorkshire Police assistant chief constables. He was overweight for his physique, yet short enough to be thrown around, belly filled with a sense of his own self-importance. It went with a high-pitched voice that did nothing to help Gilligan stamp his own brand of authority on the minions beneath him.

To compensate for his squeal, Gilligan took great care with his dress sense and all-round presentation. This was not to say his attire was smart. What Gilligan considered fit for a man of his rank, everyone else interpreted as a screwed-up foray into vintage clothing. Bowler hat, bootlace tie, Edwardian-style suit. Cheesecloth shirt and corduroys for social occasions. V-neck ski jumpers were winter favourites. Indeed, the Old Man's wardrobe was the subject of much amusement and speculation. Not even charity shops sold the sort of outmoded gear he favoured.

Gilligan was also partial to a dram or two of whisky with his lunch – a worse-kept secret the department found hilarious, and yet another reason to belittle his authority.

The Old Man's performance was driven by an overriding sense of duty to his boss, Chief Constable Edward Lister – the ultimate mover and shaker. Humble and obedient in the presence of his boss, Gilligan was a self-interested bastard in the presence of everyone else.

Fortunately for Sant, the Old Man was too busy pleasing Lister to bother too much with the riffraff below. Unfortunately for Sant, Dryden's murder was reverberating so loudly through the senior ranks that Gilligan felt compelled to offload as much flak as he could get away with, on any officer who deserved it. The Old Man respected Hardaker enough not to shit on him. But not Sant.

'Inspector!' Gilligan barked as he shoved the man under his charge securely

into his outsized office. Sant averted his eyes from the empty chair Gilligan was signalling towards. 'I need an update on your missing person investigation for the Chief Officers Team. Ordinarily I would ask for this in report form, but urgent matters call for urgent actions.'

Sant was actually quite pleased at the loss of tedious paperwork. He talked the Old Man through developments in the Chloe Lee case, friends and acquaintances interviewed, and what he'd found out from her father. The only significant detail he omitted was the Seacroft neighbour lead. He'd keep that to himself for now.

After he finished Gilligan leant close to Sant. Breath minty-flossed. The rest of him reeked of whisky.

'As for the murder of our esteemed colleague Sergeant Dryden,' he murmured as if imparting secret intelligence, 'I know it's early days and you're just one of a team of detectives smoking out the monstrous architect of this heinous crime, but it's vital you relay to me everything that comes up on a regular basis. And by regular, Inspector, I mean daily – for the foreseeable future.'

Sant combed fingers through his black hair, glanced around. 'Isn't Hardaker my immediate port of call as coordinating officer?'

'He's the man in charge on the ground, Inspector, but I'm the ultimate sounding box. As far as you're concerned,' he went on, jabbing a finger in Sant's chest and puffing out his pale cheeks, 'I'm where the food chain ends and the next one begins. Do I make myself plain?'

Very plain. Sant made to leave, in pursuit of fresh air.

'Before you get back to work, Inspector, one more matter. This may sound implausible and no doubt difficult for your limited imagination to grasp.' Gilligan hitched his corduroys over the bulk of his sagging belly. 'I've been made aware of a possible link between Dryden's killing and the disappearance of Chloe Lee. Are you party to such a link?'

Sant looked at the vacant chair and sagged a little.

What was Gilligan up to? How in God's name did he know? Sant didn't underestimate the Old Man's propensity for effective detective work, but no way

could he have bundled two cases in the same breath without someone tipping him off. Sant was sure of it. The only colleagues he'd revealed his suspicions to were Capstick and Holdsworth, neither of whom would go out of their way to tell Gilligan what he'd told them. They held the same low opinion of the Old Man as he did.

‘Inspector? Did you hear me?’

Sant snapped out of his musings and composed himself. ‘It’s news to me. Who suggested a link?’

‘None of your business. As it happens, there’s no evidence to prove your missing person’s anything to do with that godforsaken bus, so we’ll leave speculation for another day.’

The initial shock over, Sant felt like persisting a little. ‘If there is information, no matter how tenuous, I should have it without delay.’

Gilligan shuffled a few papers on his immaculate desk. ‘Thought about visiting an audiologist, Inspector?’

‘What?’

‘An audiologist!’ the Old Man wailed, flecks of spit landing on Sant’s neck. ‘Might be worth a visit, Inspector, to check if you’re hard of hearing, ‘cos what I just said was spoken in simple words even you should understand. Stop wasting my time! You have an urgent appointment with Dr Wisdom. He has the preliminary report for the shootings.’ Gilligan stabbed a finger at his watch. ‘You are over an hour late and I have a press conference in ten. And guess what, Inspector? I don’t need you – you can leave.’

‘Hope you get a speaking part this time,’ was Sant’s parting shot. He made a beeline for the door, half expecting to be called back for this latest show of insolence, but the Old Man made no attempt.

Only too glad to be rid of me, Sant reflected. Then he grinned. Get rid of *me*?

* * *

‘YOU TOOK YOUR TIME,’ Dr Grant Wisdom remarked in his measured Welsh accent, delivered at walking pace and no quicker. ‘I reported to your esteemed

cop pals a good meal ago.'

Sant held up his hand. 'I got side-tracked, but in a good way.'

Wisdom snorted. 'Must've been good if it was worth missing what I've got to tell. See these bags?' He tugged gently at sagging skin beneath bloodshot eyes. 'What credit does an overworked pathologist receive? Nothing but take-home pay, and that's not much to write home about. All the glory goes to you plainclothes with your fancy badges and media appearances.'

Sant grinned. 'Not me. I'm barred from the limelight on the Old Man's orders. What do you have for me, Grant?'

'What do I always have for you?'

'Dead people?'

'Cadavers, my dear boy. Use the right terminology.'

Sant wasn't especially keen on 'dear boy', but since the white-haired Wisdom was a dozen years his senior, he let it pass.

The morgue was much smaller than it should have been owing to austerity cuts that forced a late alteration to the new Elland Road Police Station HQ. Sant rubbed a spot under his chin and nearly spat at the thought of bureaucracy.

A miniscule lab or compulsory redundancies?

That was the blunt choice CC Lister had put to the one-thousand officers, seven-hundred staff and three-hundred community support officers under his command.

Sant followed Wisdom into a whitewashed side-room. His assistant lifted the plastic sheet concealing Dryden's body, laid as it was across a portable bed. Wisdom placed a pair of pince-nez-style glasses halfway up his long nose and read from an orange autopsy card, composed, assertive.

'Male. White. Age: 28. Time of death certified at 11.47pm Saturday – a little over thirty-six hours ago. The subject suffered fatal trauma to the sphenoid, the crash causing his head to impact with an interior handrail. A crushing blow.'

Wisdom's assistant replaced the sheet over what was left of Dryden's head.

'What about the bullet wounds?'

Wisdom adjusted his glasses before referring back to the card. 'Two of them, both fatal. Wound A was caused by a projectile fired from a distance of three to

four metres, travelling through the rear of the skull and coming to rest in the left frontal portion of the skull cavity.

‘We can safely assume Wound B was the second shot fired at the victim. A contact wound just below the mouth. The bullet was fired upwards, probably intended to enter under the chin. There’s a strong likelihood Dryden was still conscious at that stage and may’ve instinctively tried to dodge out of the way. This second bullet caused fracturing to the upper jaw and incisors before travelling through the brain and coming to rest three centimetres above the meningeal artery.’

Sant folded his hands in front of him. ‘So he died instantly.’

‘It was not instant.’ Wisdom extracted another card from the inside pocket of his long white cloak. ‘Paramedics arrived on the scene at 11.40pm and Dryden was pronounced dead seven minutes later.’

‘Who identified him?’

Wisdom thought for a second. ‘Initially a fellow officer – name escapes me. Not long after his wife arrived and confirmed the ID.’

Poor woman. Sant wondered where Claire Dryden was now, and whether she was receiving counselling. He’d only met her once, in much happier circumstances, and now he felt a mounting urge to see her again. There was something he’d noticed on first impression – something sad and lonely and hostile to outside curiosity – that had endeared her to him. He couldn’t put his finger on what it was.

He never relished intruding on relatives so soon after the loss of their loved ones, but now was not the time to dwell on his conscience. He made up his mind. He’d visit Claire as soon as he was done with Wisdom. Putting off the meeting would only make the anticipation of it gnaw away at him.

Sant put his thoughts to one side and tried to replay the shootings in his head. ‘So the gunman fired twice. Made certain Dryden stood no chance.’

‘Exactly,’ Wisdom said. ‘Wound A was more than sufficient to end Dryden’s life. Wound B effectively crossed a “T” when all that was needed was an “I”.’

‘What’s your take on it being an assassination?’

Wisdom removed his glasses, lodging them into his breast pocket. ‘I don’t

usually comment on theories. Scientific facts are my line of work. But given how close to home this feels... Dryden was murdered. The killer was ruthless, knew what he was doing.'

'What about the other victims? Same bullets?'

Wisdom nodded. 'Ballistics at the National Firearms Centre have ascertained that the projectiles located in Dryden's skull are consistent with those found on the driver and the other passengers. They're all Remington nine-millimetre and the external markings are identical. It's the same bullets shot from the same semi-automatic handgun, no question.'

'Any idea what the murder weapon is?'

'Still waiting for the NFC to report back, but strictly off the record, it was probably a Glock, because a Glock 17 has a seventeen-round magazine – no other handgun has that sort of capacity – and at least twelve spent cartridge cases have been accounted for. Glocks are popular with the military, the police, and more to the point, professional hit-men, because a lot of rounds can be fired quickly and accurately without the need to change the magazine. They're also in plentiful supply on the black market. Hundreds were brought back as battlefield souvenirs after the Gulf War. You can pick one up for a couple of grand if you know where to look.'

They walked in single file along a narrow corridor. Wisdom signalled Sant into one of numerous breakout rooms marked out by windowless doors. The tiny room served as his office, where they loomed over a comb-bound report. The sketch covering the entirety of Wisdom's miniature desk was identical to the one Holdsworth had used in her summing up of the bus victims earlier that morning, except this version was so scribbled over with red lines it bore a striking resemblance to the *Mr. Men* character Mr. Messy.

'What's the most puzzling aspect of this entire affair, my boy?'

Sant responded automatically. 'Why choose a bus to carry out a mass shooting spree?'

'Exactly. And the explanation?'

'The gunman panicked.'

'Indeed. Something occurred that triggered a bout of panic. Our perp was

almost certainly shadowing someone. Probably Dryden. But either the sergeant or another passenger recognised him.'

'And threatened to blow his cover.'

'Exactly. What we will never know is the precise playing out of these cat-and-mouse shenanigans. By the same token, those traces of the past are never entirely obliterated.'

Sant looked thoughtfully at the pathologist. 'Meaning?'

Wisdom circled Mr. Messy with the palm of his hand as if performing a magic trick. 'The positions of the bodies on the upper deck are misleading. They assume a static situation. The scene of crime, after the event it must be stressed, appears to tell a story of innocent passengers quietly going about their journey until, that is, they have the misfortune of encountering a raving lunatic with a fully loaded handgun.'

'You're suggesting a non-static situation?'

'Without a doubt. Nothing else explains the choice of murder weapon and location.'

'The gun... the bus.'

He pointed at Sant. 'Our perp was cornered – and he knew it.'

'Someone confronted the killer?'

'Almost certainly.'

Sant pinched his rugged nose. 'Surely not Dryden. He was at the front of the bus, oblivious to what was happening behind him. He was caught unawares. So why rush in to kill a defenceless cop in front of the other passengers?'

Wisdom brushed back his white hair. 'You're right in everything you say, except we have to assume we're dealing with an experienced gunman and not some lout whose training in firearms derives from shoot 'em up video games. When we think of the absence of a clear motive or network of established relationships between the perp and any of his victims, this crime had to be premeditated. He planned his attack carefully. Yet he was forced to act sooner than he wished. Plan B was forced upon him before Plan A could be executed.'

Sant felt the hairs tingling on the back of his neck. 'So what was Plan A?'

'Gunning down seven people on a moving bus it was not. The likelihood is

the perp wanted to shadow a passenger, probably Dryden, for longer than actually materialised.’ Wisdom patted the laminated cover of his report. ‘My guess is he planned to follow Dryden off the bus before confronting him at gunpoint down some quiet alley away from passers-by. To force information out of him – before, possibly, taking Dryden’s life.’

Wisdom’s version of events was chiming with Sant’s own.

‘The gunman must’ve been confident Dryden was oblivious to being shadowed.’

‘Indeed.’

Sant followed Wisdom’s line of thinking to its natural end. ‘Which means another passenger suspected trouble and forced the killer’s hand.’

‘Precisely.’

‘All of this is plausible. What traces of the past support it?’

Wisdom pointed again at the sketch of the upper deck. ‘The wounds to the head of the young male victim, sat next to his girlfriend, are peculiar.’

‘You mean Callum Willis?’

‘It’s to do with the angle at which the two bullets penetrated his brain. Assuming the assailant was himself located on the top deck. The angle of the bullet wounds inflicted on the young female passenger, as well as the first bullet to hit Dryden, indicate a projectile trajectory that accords to the victims being seated at moment of entry.’

‘But Callum wasn’t sitting?’

Wisdom nodded. ‘The angles of the wounds to Callum Willis’s head are less acute. In fact, the bullet wedged in his brain came to rest in a slightly upright position. The victim was tall – six feet and two inches – which means he must have been standing when he was shot.’

‘Why would he stand?’ And then Sant knew the answer. ‘He was intervening – Callum was warning Dryden to expect the worse.’

‘Either that or he intended to walk to the front of the bus and warn him in a more discreet fashion, but the assailant clearly anticipated the move and stopped him in his tracks.’

‘Which explains the panic theory nicely.’

‘Correct, my boy. It’s the only explanation for why the murders took place how and where they did.’

Sant mulled over this new information. ‘So let’s imagine Callum had no connection to Dryden or the gunman; that he and his girlfriend were just random passengers.’

‘No need to kill them.’

‘But how did the gunman suspect a connection between the young couple and his quarry?’

Wisdom smiled. ‘That’s for me to speculate and you to find out. Which throws up a further question: who was tailing whom?’

Sant took a betting-shop pencil from his shirt pocket and jabbed it at Mr. Messy. ‘The logical answer is that Dryden was being shadowed by his assassin at the same time as Callum Willis and Kate Andrews were shadowing him, or Dryden, or both. Which means the four of them – Dryden, Callum, Kate and the killer – all got on at the same bus stop and followed each other to the upper deck?’

‘Bravo!’ cried Wisdom, momentarily losing his measured composure. ‘Your next task, my boy, is to identify the right bus stop and have my hard-nosed team of forensics search for clues in its vicinity.’

‘I think we can narrow that one down, Grant.’

‘Come again?’

‘The panic theory,’ the inspector explained. ‘If your version of events is accurate, things must’ve unfolded quickly; in a matter of seconds. Four passengers hop on the bus at the same time, all climbing the stairwell to the top deck, and Dryden apart, the other three – all of whom are shadowing him – become suspicious of each other, triggering the gunman into action long before his planned attack.’

Wisdom gave a thumbs-up sign. ‘It makes sense. Plan B may have been the last resort, but forced into it, the assailant would act sooner rather than later.’

‘Which means our focus should be on the bus stops near the crash site. A single ticket was issued by the driver at 23.33. It wasn’t issued to Callum or Kate as they had student passes. And my bet is it wasn’t Dryden’s either.’

‘The 23.33 passenger’s your man, my boy.’

‘My thoughts exactly.’

‘Let’s hope he retained his ticket,’ the pathologist added with a titter.

‘Not much chance of that, but we’re closing in. Can I suggest, Grant, you focus your technicians in the search area around Kirkstall Abbey?’

‘Ah, but I only receive orders from Gilligan and Hardaker these days,’ grinned Wisdom.

Sant returned the grin, not a trace of annoyance at Wisdom’s gibe etched on his face. Quite the opposite; he was smiling wider than he’d smiled for some time.

WEEPING WIDOWS ARE NEVER A SIGHT TO BEHOLD, BUT AS HE STARED INTO THE penetrating blue eyes of Claire Dryden, made sapphire blue by teardrops of grief, he couldn't take his mind off the physical charm confronting him. Her perfect oval face, pale skin and shoulder-length blonde hair gave the woman an eerily symmetrical quality, like a sculpture carved from marble by precision tools.

Sant offered his condolences, noting a half-empty bottle of vodka and several empty cans of Diet Coke on the kitchen Formica. 'We're trying to get to the bottom of Liam's death,' he said. 'Did your husband talk to you about the cases he'd worked on lately?'

'Only after they were solved,' she said, wiping more tears away. 'He was a professional in that sense. Sometimes I would ask, but he'd never let on. I've always been a nosy parker, not that it got me anywhere.'

'How about the last few weeks? Did you notice anything different about Liam?'

'What do you mean?'

Sant knew he had to tread carefully. 'It could be any detail, big or small. Perhaps he changed his routine in some way, or his mood changed?'

Claire Dryden fidgeted. Her left hand did its best to smother a ball of Kleenex.

'Something changed a month or two ago,' she said after a long silence. 'It's not a subject I find easy, you know, to talk about.'

Another lengthy silence. Sant waited and finally intervened. 'I appreciate

how difficult this is for you, Mrs Dryden.'

'Please, just call me Claire.' A couple of tears fell from her sapphires as she looked at him; through him. 'No need for formalities among friends.'

Unsure at first... he made up his mind. Moving slowly towards her, touching and then holding her, he stroked her wet hair as the tears flowed. Several grief-stricken minutes passed before the sobs softened and he slowly released his clasp.

'Claire, you knew your husband better than anyone—'

'But that's just it. I'm not sure if I did know him. I certainly didn't understand him, not after...'

More silence.

'Go on.'

'As I was saying, a couple of months ago our sex life took a turn for the... well' – she laughed – 'worse or better, depending on one's point of view.'

'More or less sex?' he asked tentatively, never one to dwell on private matters.

'More. Much more! All the bloody time!'

Taken aback by her bluntness, at the same time Sant felt grateful for the leeway to probe further.

'Changing routines?'

'Absolutely. Not to beat about the bush, our normal routine was to make love once a week. Twice on special occasions. And that was fine as far as I was concerned. For me, it's not about... the sensuality. A hug and a kiss are just as satisfying.'

'I understand,' he said. The woman's forthrightness pleased and troubled him at the same time.

'I doubt you understand. You're a man.' This was followed by another uncomfortable silence which Sant held back the urge to break. 'It was late summer,' she went on eventually. 'Liam, all of a sudden, took on a new lease of life. We had that hot spell, yes, but I doubt if the seasonal warmth suddenly transformed his libido. I mean, he wanted satisfaction every time we got in bed.'

'Intercourse?' Claire nodded. 'New positions?'

‘Absolutely. He wanted to experiment, and not always in bed either. We tried it in the shower, on the stairs, the Formica. He even... at one stage he even wanted to make love out of the window.’

Claire laughed, hiccupped and then broke into another tearful fit, Sant using the time in-between to let her words sink in. They didn’t sink far. He poured water from the kitchen tap into a vodka-scented glass and offered it to her.

‘Sorry, Claire, can you explain–’

She snapped at him. ‘What is there to explain? He wanted me to hang out of the window, for Christ’s sake!’ He took cover as she hurled the glass of water at the far wall, shattering it into a million pieces. ‘He wanted to grab a hold of my legs and bang me while I dangled out of the bedroom window, clinging on for dear life! Do I make myself clear?’ He stood and stared into her beautiful blue eyes. The pause could stretch as long as it needed. He was expecting more sobs but Claire composed herself, keeping back any tears she might have left to cry. ‘I refused point-blank. I mean, it wasn’t exactly safe sex.’

The double-meaning didn’t register on either of their faces.

‘Was Liam angry when you said no?’

She went to sweep up the broken glass but he held her arm; told her he’d get the officer on front-door duty to clean up.

‘He was a bit annoyed,’ she snuffled. ‘Actually, now I recall, we did... do it out of the window eventually. I insisted on a downstairs room of course.’ She laughed a little more. ‘He enjoyed it. For me it wasn’t pleasant. We didn’t try that method again. I made sure of it.’

‘What caused him to experiment?’

‘Perhaps it was a new thrill for him. I don’t know. Perhaps you can fathom it out, being a male of the species. What drives a man sexually?’

Sant took Claire’s question rhetorically, intended or not. ‘Did he go in for – how shall I say – bondage?’

‘I’m not sure if *bondage* is the word for it. Handcuffs and blindfolds, now and again. Nothing hard core.’

Surely handcuffs counted as bondage, Sant thought, but he was in no mood to judge a woman who’d just suffered the ultimate loss.

Now for the most awkward question.

‘I’d rather not ask this, Claire, but I’m duty-bound. Did your husband ever hurt you – physically?’

She shook her head emphatically. ‘Not really. He frightened me at times, I’ll confess that, and he liked it when I expressed fear. But he did love me, always, to the end. There was never any abuse.’

‘But sometimes – you found his sexual habits unpleasant?’

‘That’s right. It was him getting the satisfaction most of the time. Lately we were making love ten times a week, but I’d only feel satisfied here and there, which was fine by me. I was hardly a frustrated lover if that’s what you think.’

Sant didn’t think that, but he did wonder about the imbalance in sexual gratification. She started to well up once more, those moist sapphires directed straight at him. He moved close to her again and placed his hand on her shoulder, wary not to invade personal space. But then she drew tight to him and rested her face in his chest. She jerked upwards to his neck and pressed her nose and then her lips against his shaven skin. He could feel an erection coming on, willed his emotions not to take over. Hard though it was to refuse Claire’s warmth, he kissed her compassionately on the forehead and gently pulled away.

A uniform came and swept up the shards of glass strewn across the kitchen floor. A million pieces of finest crystal, one for every personalised truth swimming around Sant’s confused head.

* * *

AFTER SPEAKING to an expert in sex-offender profiling – and being told that the change in Dryden’s sexual behaviour could be explained by the introduction of a new and exciting love object in his otherwise steady-going marital life – the rest of the afternoon passed remarkably uneventfully for Sant.

He joined the rank and file of Leeds District CID crowded into a squash court in Kirkstall Leisure Centre, within shouting distance of the Abbey Road crime scene. The squash court served as an ideal makeshift murder room as it was walled throughout in thick glass. Not much chance of the press and their

stray microphones picking up anything intelligible therein. Besides, the whole of the building was closed to the media and the public, inciting a small army of disgruntled leisure members to demand a refund on next month's direct debit.

Despite their isolation from the outside world, Hardaker communicated instructions to the detectives at his beck and call in low-key fashion. No stirring address or call to arms. That wasn't the superintendent's style. CC Lister, on the other hand, had nothing but self-declared talent as an orator, and as for ACC Gilligan's squeal, that was even harsher to the ear. Given a choice, Sant would rather listen to Hardaker's softly spoken tones every time.

The instructions over, Sant took the effort to go and see the Chiefman one on one. It was time to put in an appearance.

'How's progress, Carl?' Hardaker's tone was calm but insistent.

Sant looked from left to right, conscious of colleagues watching on. 'Slow, but steady,' he said. He filled Hardaker in on his interview with Claire Dryden, leaving out the bit about the erection.

'I want regular updates in my role as your coordinating officer. Things are critical right now. The assistant chief constable is putting the heat on me.'

To put the heat on me, thought Sant. 'Don't worry, Chiefman. I'll keep you informed.'

Hardaker checked that Sant had his right work number. He did. That was met with an approving nod. Sant might even receive a Christmas card at this rate.

Languishing outside the leisure centre and taking up much of the car-park space was the battered bus, surrounded in police tape. TV cameras and photographers were circling the vehicle, debating the best angles to take shots.

Sant spoke a while with a group of journalists he knew from local TV and newspapers. They didn't push him too hard so he tried to meet their demands for an exclusive. On more than a few occasions he'd leaked some juicy titbits their way, though only in situations where making public certain facts, or planting a few falsities, would assist in solving a crime.

He asked them if they knew the young reporter who'd unleashed those searching questions at the news conference. Her astonishing performance, pontificating about other criminal cases and their potential link to an

assassination-style slaying of Dryden, had more than a flavour of premonition to it. Sadly, no-one could place her or the news organisation she represented. Sant would try and track her down all the same.

Kate Andrews's mother was even higher on his radar, but Sant decided it was too soon to revisit the grieving mother. It was less than twenty-four hours since he and Hardaker had interviewed the distraught Mrs Andrews and her husband, and leaving the family in peace was the right thing to do. He would wait a couple of days, but no longer. Mrs Andrews's reaction at interview suggested Kate and Chloe had known each other. If so, she was hiding something about the two girls' relationship. He needed to know what – fast.

Sant hadn't forgotten, either, what Holdsworth had said about Dryden's bizarre behaviour in his days as a uniformed sergeant: namely, arresting a young man for possession of a screwdriver still in its original packaging. Who and where was the unfortunate Owen Madeley? Was Madeley in some way linked to Chloe? And was he merely innocent prey for Dryden's rash shadowing exploits, or did Dryden have good reason to keep tabs on him? This mysterious Madeley could be Jake Downing in disguise for all Sant knew.

He was chewing on a new toothpick, pondering this internal universe of overlapping interconnections, when his phone rang. He guessed it must be Hardaker checking up on him, but it was an even less welcome caller: his ex.

Elizabeth was calling.

'Don't, whatever you do, forget your appointment this evening.'

'Hello to you too,' Sant replied.

'I'm serious, Carl. I'm already peeved off with you for not showing up to Sam's birthday get-together the other day. You promised to take Sam and Tom bowling to make amends. The least you can do is keep to your word.'

He was tempted to peeve her off even more by explaining how the small issue of a bus massacre was proving a stumbling block, but diplomacy got the better of temptation. In truth, he was officially off duty in two hours – had booked the time off for the express purpose of making it up with Sam – and would be with his sons tonight come hell or high water.

'I'll be there as soon as—'

‘Not good enough. Can we pin down a mutually agreed time, please?’

A mutually agreed time was agreed (by Elizabeth) and she promptly rang off without a ‘thank you’ or a ‘see you soon’ or anything approaching a civilised end to a phone conversation.

Not long after that, Holdsworth called to give him a name matching the council-housing records for the tenancy of 11 Dufton Approach during the years 2004-08. Susan Smith. Chloe’s one-time neighbour and friend. Sant cursed the name: Verity Vargas or Penelope Perfect would’ve been so much easier to track down.

He returned to HQ and his office, and found Capstick busy analysing a leather-bound book with its spine irreparably frayed.

‘A Gutenberg edition, Capstick?’

‘Sorry?’

‘Of the bible or whatever that there antique volume comprises.’

Capstick chuckled and showed him the front cover. ‘*An Illustrated Guide to Graphology*. I’m using it strictly off the record. The term ‘graphology’ won’t be leaked to the Crown Prosecution Service, rest assured.’

Sant smirked. ‘Now that would be amusing. So tell me, graphologist extraordinaire, what you’ve uncovered or decrypted or whatever the right term is.’

‘First let me show you what forensics sent over.’

Sant stood with bated breath as Capstick fixed his laptop to a loose cable, fiddled with a projector attached to the ceiling, then pressed a few keys and without effort executed the task of bringing up an image on a retractable screen.

‘Top marks to the techno-geek.’

‘Why didn’t I expect a full-blown compliment, sir?’

‘You know my thoughts on technology, Capstick. The best technology ever invented was the human brain. Ask Dr Wisdom. Sadly, it’s cell phones over grey cells these days.’

Capstick adjusted his thick-rimmed specs and moved his left index finger across a close-up shot of the numbers marked on the bus window. ‘3-1... and then we’re left with this.’

‘Probably a 5,’ Sant said. ‘Though I wouldn’t discount an S.’

‘Or neither?’

Sant looked curiously at his colleague. ‘Enlighten me.’

‘Well, wherever you have two numbers, you’d expect to find another – in this case, a 5. However, what we have here,’ Capstick declared with gusto, ‘is a psychological trick of the eye; an optical illusion. You see, the shape looks odd on closer inspection.’ He clicked a few times and zoomed in on the figure furthest to the right. ‘If you imagine the way a number 5 is normally penned, the upper half should be linear – two lines more or less at right angles – whereas the lower half is curved. My reference book here accounts for variable angles and curves formed by different pen movements. But with this figure here’ – he pointed decisively – ‘there’s evidence, albeit faint, of curves, not lines, to the upper and lower halves.’

Sant gazed at the image and nodded. ‘We’re dealing with an S. And that leaves 3-1-S. Ordnance survey coordinates?’

‘That wouldn’t be my guess, nor is the last figure an S.’

‘What else could it be?’ said Sant, flummoxed.

His partner took the cap off a red marker-pen and used it to transform the ‘S’. ‘I suggest Dryden was halfway through an 8, sir.’

Sant stood staring at Capstick’s work, his expression unaltered. ‘It’s a possibility, I grant you that. And your handwriting bible backs you up?’

‘That’s right. You see, most people write the first half of an 8 in a different way to how they begin an S. The curvature in the middle region of the figure is usually less pronounced – in some styles it’s almost a straight line – and the upper curve is usually broader than the lower one, so most people’s eights turn out to have a slightly larger circle above than below.’

‘I didn’t realise graphology could be this interesting.’

The detective constable was in his element now. ‘The next stage of any forensic document examination, which is modern-day speak for handwriting analysis, requires cross-referencing multiple sources of writing from the same hand.’

‘You’ve got samples of Dryden’s writing?’

Capstick produced Dryden's Rolodex. 'Right here, sir. Several phone numbers containing the number eight, jotted down by Dryden, showing an orthodox style; a less pronounced middle-region curve and the upper circle larger than the lower.'

'Nice work, partner, only there's a problem with your analysis.'

'What?'

'Dryden didn't handwrite these numbers – he used the tip of his finger.'

Capstick's smile faded a little. 'Maybe the same principles apply to, you know, finger writing.'

'You were right the first time, Capstick. This analysis of yours goes nowhere beyond these four walls. If the CPS get wind of it we'll be struck off for life.'

The young detective let out a long sigh. 'Well, it was worth an hour of police time, surely.'

'I don't doubt it, and don't look so downbeat. For what it's worth I think you're right. And if you are right, that gives us 3-1-8.'

Capstick perked up. 'Shall I run another BT database search?'

'Worth a try, though I'm not convinced a phone number was what Dryden had in mind. We're missing something else about these numbers. Something vital. And once we land on it, this whole chaotic business might make sense. 3-1-8 – any new ideas?'

'No yet, sir, but I don't mind wasting another hour of police time thinking it over.'

'Be my guest,' grinned Sant. 'And now I must waste some valuable time of my own. I've got a bowling game to win.'

And with a short nod and a reassuring thumbs-up, he left Capstick alone with his projected image and his red marker pen and his obscene publication on the pseudoscience of graphology.

* * *

HE RUSHED HOME, snacked on crisps, and got ready for the journey to pick up his sons. Before leaving he reached down for the newspaper on his doormat and

unfolded it. The DEATH BUS MYSTERY headline he'd caught a glimpse of in the morning came with the by-line 7 SHOT DEAD IN HALLOWEEN HORROR. It caught him off-guard. The Halloween theme had passed him by. Perhaps the late hour of the incident explained why the date had failed to register. After all, the timing of the bus crash – 11.36pm – left only twenty-four minutes until the sanctuary of All Souls Day. Or perhaps the fact he hated the idea of celebrating evil and witchcraft had blinded Sant to the significance of the day. People dressing up in Jack the Ripper and Charles Manson costumes? Now that was a step too far.

The darkness had already begun its descent as he drove to his ex's. On bleak winter days, indeed, no descent into darkness was discernible. The day itself never bothered to appear, and all that was left was different shades of night.

Pitch blackness had set in by the time he picked up Tom and Sam at 6pm as promised. They lived with their mother and her well off parents in the affluent spa town of Harrogate, some fifteen miles north of Leeds. Sant had to admit that his ex-wife had chosen a fine place to bring up their children. The schools in the area were excellent – no need to fork out fortunes on private education – and the air smelt fresher than it did in the city.

The folks weren't in when he called, but he didn't dwell on niceties and instead gave Elizabeth a cursory wave before speeding off with Tom and Sam. The two boys sat in the back playing games on their Kindles. They preferred to sit together, so they would say, though their dad suspected his ex of warning them against sitting in the front passenger seat on account of her irrational fear that the airbag in his Fiesta might be faulty. In fact he'd recently gone out of his way to have the device tested especially for her peace of mind, but since Elizabeth hadn't brought up the topic, he let it lie.

Sant's Fiesta afforded an amusing spectacle for passing motorists and pedestrians. For a man who measured six and a half feet, minus his shoes, he couldn't have chosen a tinier car. Indeed, he had to duck his head to prevent it from pressing against the roof, his posture a diagonal slant. When he'd bought the car from a second-hand dealer – after turning a blind eye to the illegal immigrant employed by the dealer – Sant had been in two minds about whether

to opt for the sunroof edition. And now, for obvious reasons, he wished he had.

The bowling alley was full to the brim despite it being a Monday. They waited for half an hour before a polite young woman, getting the eye from Tom, signalled elegantly towards a free lane.

Not bad taste Tommy, thought his dad, but he kept his thoughts to himself. There were lines of decency that fathers should never cross.

The game that ensued amounted to nothing less than a humiliation for dad. He couldn't disguise the fact he was hopeless at ten-pin. 'Wait till I play you at crown-green bowls' was the only comeback he could conjure up. Arm-muscle wasn't the issue – Sant had more than enough in that department. Little Sam, on the other hand, was weedy and needed the aid of a ramp, yet he still toppled more pins than his big strong dad. What Sant couldn't master was the art of direction. He could bowl the ball harder than anyone, but pinging it in a straight line proved impossible. It would spray everywhere, missing the skittles by miles.

'Dad, you're throwing it too hard.' Sam motioned.

The rolling thunder of resin over maple wood distracted Sant.

'You're meant to throw it hard,' he retorted. 'That's what they do on TV.'

'But dad – they're good players on TV.'

'Okay, don't rub it in.'

Getting redder in the face with every wayward effort, he arrived at his final throw staring at a very round figure on the electronic scoreboard – 0. By now the two boys were in hysterics. But good things come to those who wait, and no sooner had Sant let fly with his final ball than it thundered straight down the middle, destroying the ten skittles lying in its wake.

'Strike!' he cried, drawing the whole alley's attention to his celebrations. Tom and Sam curled up on their bench, praying nobody would recognise them. 'What did I tell you, lads?' he beamed, exchanging random high-fives with a group of strangers in the next lane. 'Practice makes perfect.'

'I would place the emphasis on *practice*,' was Tom's riposte.

'Touché!'

'By the way, dad, you get another go.'

'Oh really?' Sant pretended he didn't play ten-pin often enough to know the

rules. ‘A chance for another strike.’ But it wasn’t to be, and he tried his best to laugh off his final score – a ‘perfect 10’.

The scoreboard told the ultimate truth. Little Sam hadn’t fared much better. Tom was streets ahead:

SAM 31

DAD 10

TOM 88

‘I told you I’d win,’ Tom boasted. ‘And the winner should choose where we eat. Nandos – how about it, dad?’

‘No, it’s my birthday do!’ Sam protested. ‘I want pizza!’

‘You’ve already had your birthday, Sammy. That was last week, and we had pizza then.’

‘Yeah, but this is my second party ‘cos dad couldn’t go to my first.’

‘No-one has two birthday parties.’

‘I do.’

‘Don’t.’

‘Do!’

And so the brotherly banter went on. But dad wasn’t annoyed; wasn’t even ready to intervene if things got physical. Because dad wasn’t listening. Dad was planted to the spot, brain working overtime. Something in his line of vision reminded him of the morning paper.

‘Dad! Dad, aren’t I right?’

‘No, I’m the winner so I decide. Isn’t that right, dad?’

There was a brief respite before Sant broke out of his daze. ‘Sorry, lads, but maybe we should skip food this time.’

Tom and Sam groaned.

‘But we’re starving.’

‘And you promised.’

‘I did promise, lads, but I’ve got to get back to work. Something’s just come up.’

Tom looked curiously at his dad’s fixation with the scoreboard. ‘What’s the big deal with the scores?’

Sant spoke a robotic response. ‘The num-bers.’

‘Numbers?’

‘That’s right, Tommy. The big deal’s the numbers, not the scores.’

SHE CAME OUT OF A SLUMBER SEVERAL TIMES DEEPER THAN THE LAST. TO HER surprise she could move her arms and legs freely. She was lying on a single bed in what looked like a private ward, with hospital-issue bed-sheets thrown in. The walls around her were a brilliant white, peppered in places with oak-framed prints of famous paintings. A wilting aspidistra flanked one corner of the venetian-blinded room.

‘Good evening, Sheila.’

Could it be evening already? She must have been out cold for six hours. But it was the sound of her name – her real name – that threw her most. The voice, well-spoken and polite, found an identity in a man wearing a red baseball cap. Straining to get a better look at him, the dazzling of a desk lamp obscured her view.

‘Sheila Morrison, is it not?’ he purred.

The woman sat in silence, knees knocking as her body began to tighten.

‘Sheila Morrison. This is your life. Born the 12th of August 1962 in London. Daughter of Patrick and Joanna Morrison. Attended boarding school in leafy Surrey, excelling in all your subjects. After which you read PPE at Cambridge, achieving first class honours. At the age of twenty-one you had the world at your feet, but you weren’t interested in the world, were you? You chose a humbler path instead. Is that not so?’

Silence.

‘You became an undercover reporter; an *in-vest-i-ga-tive journalist*. Tut tut.’

The man swivelled his cap back to front. 'No need to play ball just yet, Sheila. We've plenty of time to get to know each other, and my revered associate is keen to make a start. All in due course, so I told him.'

He started pushing a serving trolley equipped with refreshments towards her.

'Please, help yourself. More high tea than evening dinner, but you'll relish the sandwiches. The scones are most agreeable too.'

She stayed in bed, saying nothing, watching Baseball Cap removing the cling-film from a plastic tray of snacks.

'I'll leave you in peace for now. Eat up and get some rest. Take time to think things over. You will obey our every command, otherwise we will exterminate you.' He pointed up at an art-nouveau wall clock. 'At five tomorrow morning I shall call. That gives you seven hours to eat, sleep, shower and take a change of clothes. The bathroom is through the rear door and the wardrobe has a selection of appropriate garments. Be sure to be ready for us.'

Baseball Cap offered the briefest of smiles before closing the door behind him and giving the handle a sharp tug.

So that was that.

She was a prisoner. In truth, she'd been a prisoner for a long time; only now the walls were literally closing in on her.

She wasn't thirsty; wasn't hungry; didn't need to wash. But she was exhausted. The heavy sedative would take several hours yet to shake off.

She closed her eyes, prayed for the girl she loved, and dropped asleep in an instant.

* * *

HE FLUNG himself through the door of his office and was delighted to see Capstick and Holdsworth at their desks.

'Halloween!' His colleagues looked up in bewilderment. 'He was marking out a date. I'm sure of it. Bring up Dryden's numbers on the screen.'

Capstick said nothing, tapped a few keys, projector humming as it warmed up, and then the image appeared.

‘Look!’ Sant cried. ‘3-1-8! The first two numbers mean the last day of the month – the 31st.’

Capstick pressed his specs against the bridge of his nose. ‘Yes, but the eight would indicate the eighth month of the year, which is August, not October.’

‘Possibly, Capstick, and possibly not.’

‘What else could it mean?’

Holdsworth chewed the end of her pencil before answering: ‘If my shorthand training is worth its salt, the eight may indicate the first number of a particular year, not month.’

‘My thoughts exactly!’

‘I don’t understand.’ Capstick faced her.

‘You’re clearly not blessed with old skool note-taking technique, Brad. If you need to take down a date in a hurry,’ Holdsworth mimed writing on a tablet, ‘the shorthand method is to record the day and year only. The month, if forgotten, is retrievable as one of only twelve possibilities. Whereas there are as many as thirty-one possible days and even more potential years.’

‘And if Dryden was using the same shorthand,’ added Sant, ‘it follows he was marking down a much older date.’

Capstick thought this through carefully. ‘You mean, the thirty-first of a month, during some year of the 1980s?’

‘You took the words right out of my mouth, Capstick.’

‘Meat Loaf, sir.’

‘Meat Loaf’s song was a seventies hit,’ Holdsworth asserted. ‘But why a date in the eighties?’

‘That’s the question a little delving into the archives may answer.’ Sant spoke with zeal. ‘You’ll both be keen to get started.’

Holdsworth pointed to her watch. ‘A bit late now, Carl. Can it wait till morning?’

‘Anything better to do?’ he muttered, absorbed with the task.

She reddened. ‘Well, as a matter of fact, yes. Me and Brad were just on our way out for a spot of downtime. And if *you* can mix business with pleasure, then we can too.’

‘Can’t it wait? We’re at a crucial stage in this investigation for heaven’s sake.’

Stood, grabbed her coat. Heels clicking with intent. ‘Brad and I will be back as soon as we’ve fed and watered ourselves. And rested, since we’ve had none in the last forty-eight hours. Oh, and maybe we’ll have a bit of fun along the way. It’s no fun working with a moody boots like you.’

The inspector’s wide-eyed look at his colleagues was helpless.

Capstick wore a look of sympathy as he put on his leather jacket. ‘Sorry to disappoint, sir, but we do have a prior engagement.’

Sant took a deep breath and shrugged. ‘Okay, I understand. Don’t mind me. Go and enjoy yourselves.’

‘See you in the morning, sir.’

Holdsworth offered no farewell. The damage had already been done as far as she was concerned.

Alone in the office, he got set for his meditation ritual, tension in the limbs easing as he sank into his chair with a long, slow exhale. Breathing in the stuffy litter of papers strewn over his desk, he channelled his focus on the whirring of air from the ceiling grills.

So Capstick and Holdsworth were growing friendlier by degrees, and it struck Sant that he’d been blind to the chemistry between his closest colleagues. Now he came to think of it, yes – there was definitely a mutual affection.

Why hadn’t he cottoned on earlier? He supposed the age gap would probably rule out a serious relationship. Holdsworth was ten years older than Capstick. Then again, some blokes preferred a woman of experience. Maybe Capstick was that type of bloke.

Capstick and Holdsworth... seeing each other outside working hours. The revelation brought home another truth. Deep down, if he was being honest with himself, he knew little or nothing about his colleagues’ lives. Not that he wasn’t interested; rather, his interest was detached. Living on his own brought with it a phase of life in which he’d blanked out any potential friendship or intimacy with others.

Perhaps the aging process was ostracising him. Unlike Holdsworth, who

looked good for her age and took everything in stride, Sant was reminded by the second of his ticking body clock, and as each day passed the second half of his life turned bleaker than he cared to admit. There was nothing else to it.

He, Carl Sant, fortysomething fast approaching the big five-o, was a miserable loner.

Gradually releasing himself from his reflective state, he worked his brain back in time. The date, the numbers, the scores. Thank heavens for Tom and Sam. Their scores and his pathetic total may have gone some way to unlocking Dryden's last-stand enigma.

He pondered his next move. The obvious thing was to do the job rejected by his lovebird colleagues: search the files stored in the basement archives. But he wasn't a great lover of dust and, instead, had another idea.

If the date Dryden had fingered on the bus window was so important, it stood to reason that some major incident could have occurred then. An incident that may have found its way into the news...

And if the date referred to a 31st of the month in the 1980s, he thought, running a finger along the side of his nose... I can get hold of a newspaper archive and search through each possible month and year.

It seemed an impossible task. He didn't even know where to start. No doubt most news was stored online these days, but at this late hour it would take time to find a tech savvy person willing to show him the ropes. And, besides, news stories from that decade were distinctly historical by today's standards and untouched by internet archiving.

He looked up, finger paused.

Recalled a recent visit to the university. In connection with Chloe's disappearance. He'd picked up a few leaflets from an information desk, one of which detailed the holdings of the library and showed the location of backdated newspapers stored on microfiche.

The information in his head told Sant it was a fruitless undertaking. It also told him it was worth a shot.

* * *

INCONVENIENTLY, it turned out, Leeds University's Brotherton Library had opening times – and closing ones. No sooner had he arrived than an accomplished voice on the tannoy announced the closure of the library in one hour. Hardly enough time to get through the microfiche. Sant needed assistance, and judging by the deserted enquiries desk, none was forthcoming.

'Bugger,' he said to himself, glaring at another 'Microfilm Store' sign, now hating the Brotherton's design that had him walking around in circles.

Why build a goddamn circular library?

Eventually he gave up hope and followed the 'Way Out' signs, culminating in a few more aimless circles. The optimist in him appreciated the exercise. The rest of him continued to curse the place and its pretentious polished décor.

He was climbing spiral stairs on his way to the exit when his instincts burned a flash of danger: an object falling from above. He tried to dodge out of the way, arms covering his head, but only succeeded in crossing paths with a hardback that crashed on top of him. The blow knocked him sideways onto his knees. Books poured down. Volumes of learned knowledge were tumbling over the edifice like bricks crumbling off a wall, hammering on the stone steps below. He was still recovering from the shock, his forehead and neck coated in sweat, when someone came rushing into his vision.

'Oh, so sorry. You okay?'

The voice was Dorothy's from *The Wizard of Oz*.

'I'll live,' he croaked.

'How silly of me,' the woman went on. 'There I was, holding a pile in one hand and my phone in the other, and what do you know? The damn things slithered out of my grasp and took flight. Here, let me help you up.'

She held out her slender arm like a handle and Sant was impressed at how much of his weight she could withstand. He hauled himself up and brushed off the white dust-marks on the knees of his black trousers.

'You sure you're okay?' Her probing green eyes swept over him.

'Don't worry. I'm used to people hurling things at me.'

She brushed the dust off his sleeve. 'How so?'

'I'm a policeman.'

The woman laughed. 'Now you're kidding me. What's a policeman doing in a library? Arresting borrowers for fines overdue?'

Sant smiled. 'Actually, I came here to do some newspaper research, but I've left it a bit late. Umm, I didn't catch your name.'

'I didn't offer it,' she replied. 'But since you ask, I'm Mia.'

She offered her hand to him and he accepted, though the force of her conviction made him somewhat reluctant to dwell further. He enjoyed talking to strangers – and sometimes felt more comfortable with people he didn't know than those he did – but this encounter felt all wrong. It was strangely familiar. Yet there was nothing familiar about a clout to the head from Dorothy's flying book.

'I'm Carl. Nice to have met you.'

He tore his gaze away and climbed the stairs, overcome by an inexplicable urge to look back at the woman. Staring down at her petite frame he called out a question.

'Do you know where I can find the microfilm store?'

She smiled up at him. 'I know this library inside out.'

'Do you work here?'

'Do I look like I work here?'

He shrugged. 'I was just asking.'

'I'm a student, actually.'

'You don't look like a student.'

'Nor you a policeman,' she countered with a grin. 'Follow me, Officer Carl.'

Mia led him back down the stone stairs and into the circular room he'd already paraded around. The stairwell had been poorly lit and only now could he make out the woman's appearance.

On closer inspection he realised he was wrong. She did look like a student. She was no longer especially young, but she was youthful in face and manner. Her tight-fitting jeans with patches of cloth sewn on were nice to look at. Over a salmon t-shirt hung a long woolly cardigan, white with black dots that looked like full-stops harping for sentences. Burgundy Doc Martens with thin wool socks heightened the curve of her ankles.

It didn't take long for Mia to locate a blue door that served as the entrance to the storeroom. 'You know what you're looking for?'

Sant hesitated. He wanted to appear intelligent – an adept library user – but he couldn't hide the fact he was a novice; a man lost in a world of books and archives and storerooms he knew nothing about.

'Well, yes, let me see. I think I can manage.' He opened the door and strode forward with an air of confidence into... pitch black darkness. Before he could think of an excuse the door slammed shut.

What the hell? There must be a light switch somewhere.

He put his hands out in front of him and tried to trace along the nearest shelf, back to the door. He knocked over a case of microfilm. Crash! A common theme was emerging.

His crunching steps over the film echoed his dark mood. He paced the void, trying not to bump into more shelves and boxes. He would just have to wait for someone to discover him.

The arrogance! As if I knew fuck-all about academic territory!

The door opened behind him, letting in a stream of brightness. Mia reached for the light cord and every nook and cranny of the storeroom was bathed in glorious light.

'Carl?'

'Over here.' He blinked, shoved his hands in his pockets.

'Why didn't you turn on the lights?'

'I was... meditating.'

'Pardon?'

He stepped towards her. 'Actually, I couldn't find the cord.'

Mia fixed him a baffled look before bringing her hand to her mouth. She burst into laughter, uncontrollable, wicked glee. It was infectious. Sant went from mortified to tears of hilarity in seconds.

For the second time in a matter of minutes Mia helped him to his feet. She took her arm in his and they strolled out of the storeroom, the laughter unabating as they wiped tears from their eyes.

Sant was reminded of Holdsworth wanting *a bit of fun* on her night out with

Capstick. She'd been right. He'd forgotten what fun was. It was worth all the gold in Oz.

'Well, so much for research,' he sighed. 'Next time I'll stay off the yellow brick road and phone a friend.' His shoulders rose and fell. 'One who knows about libraries.'

'You have a friend in me,' said Mia. 'What are you looking for anyway?'

A minute later Mia located a filing cabinet marked *Yorkshire Post*, nowhere near the storeroom it turned out, and picked out cases containing reels from 1980 to 1989. Reels for *The Times* and *The Guardian* were also there, but Sant passed these ones over. After all, if Dryden was marking out the date of a crime in Leeds or the wider Yorkshire region, it would definitely feature in the *Yorkshire Post*. But not necessarily in the national press.

They found the microfiche readers and Mia showed him how to fix the reel of tape onto the spool and then thread the tape through the machine. The first time he tried, the reel turned out to be upside down and he didn't fancy the idea of standing – and reading – on his head. After that, he got the knack and worked out the right buttons to press in order to speed up the microfiche as it shrieked through the mechanism, the smell of plastic growing stronger as the internal bulb heated.

Speed, or lack of it, was the only hindrance. Because he was searching for the last day of the month, he had to wind through the whole of the tape to find the newspaper issue for that date. He fiddled with the knob, trying to give it some throttle like a motorcyclist. Once he'd found the end date, the whole of the film needed to be re-wound before he could pack away that reel and begin on the next.

Sant was enjoying himself by now, relaying the news of his youth to the young stranger beside him, reflecting on how the world had changed since the days of citizen-band radios and *Crossroads* on TV. He flitted through reports of CND marches in London, IRA bombings, the miners' strike in Yorkshire, computers crashing at the stock exchange, and, by 1989, the Berlin Wall crumbling as a new Hungarian Republic hailed the end of communism.

Some things hadn't changed though: poverty and unemployment, celebrity

sex scandals, footballers having affairs and Prince Charles slating British architects.

‘Can I ask at all what you’re researching?’ Mia asked.

‘Top secret. I could get you clearance, but that would mean becoming my partner. You’d be stuck with me.’

‘Nonsense.’ She slapped his hand playfully. ‘How can it be top secret when you’re searching for it in a library?’

His lips pushed out. ‘Okay, I’ll let you in on it as long as you swear not to tell anyone.’

‘I swear to Elizabeth the Second and all who serve under Her,’ she declared with a military salute. It reminded him of his ex – an unpleasant feeling that thankfully faded fast.

‘You’re a monarchist?’

‘Only when it pays to be one,’ she chuckled.

‘Well, here’s the secret. I don’t know what I’m looking for, but I know roughly where to look.’

‘Now you’re talking in riddles, partner.’

‘I know it sounds absurd, but it’s true. Someone has provided me with an approximate range of dates, and I’m looking for serious offences reported on those dates.’

Her green eyes wondered to the microfiche cases. ‘Local crimes reported in the 1980s?’

‘Full marks,’ he said, stopping himself from saying Dorothy.

‘Did this *someone* give you specific dates?’

‘The 31st of the month, but I don’t know which month.’

‘And you’re planning to go through all newspapers dated the 31st?’

He nodded. ‘A tall order, I know.’

‘It’s also a flawed order. You are a detective?’ He nodded again. ‘Then if you don’t mind my saying, I think your detection could do with some amateur input.’

He crossed his arms. ‘I’m doing something wrong?’

‘Eureka! Think about the speed of newsprint. Take today, for example. Let’s say a murder occurred in Leeds ten hours ago. When would you expect to read

about it?’

‘Tomorrow?’

‘Precisely.’

He slapped his head theatrically. ‘I should be looking for the first of each month.’ He turned to her. ‘I have to admit I’d be lost without you.’

‘Can I offer some further advice?’ She didn’t wait for an answer. ‘There are one hundred and twenty months in a decade, which means one hundred and twenty firsts of each month. But guess what? You can narrow down possible dates by half.’

Sant looked bemused. ‘How so?’

‘Only focus on February, April, June, August, September and November.’

‘Why those months?’

‘Because those are the only ones that follow a month containing thirty-one days.’

‘Ever thought of joining CID?’

An hour and a half past – Mia scanning the local news headlines for sixty *Yorkshire Post* issues as Sant took down notes – before they were done. He looked over his jottings. Only a handful of stories were serious enough to warrant attention:

August 1980 (reporting events of previous day)... on-going trial of couple alleged to have murdered two of their children; police and social workers accuse them of inventing “adoption story” about giving the children to a foster family.

Nov 82... PC Reginald Walton seriously injured following missile attack during Leeds United’s home fixture against Newcastle United; referee stopped the game; Elland Road facing closure for second time in recent years.

Also Nov 82... solicitors representing six police officers acquitted of drugs charges file complaints to the Chief Constable of Humberside,

claiming undercover investigation was flawed.

Oct 83... hunt intensifies for Hartlepool man Larry Hart accused of murdering family of three in their Sheffield home a week ago; detectives examine telephone call Hart made to the Yorkshire Post for clues as to his whereabouts.

Suddenly alarm bells started ringing:

Nov 84... detectives searching for two men, one believed to have shot dead Sergeant George Gray outside Leeds Parish Church yesterday.

And exactly a year later:

Nov 85... THE IRISH CONNECTION – on the anniversary of Gray's murder the Yorkshire Post can reveal it may take 12 months to extradite Tom Kelly, the man wanted for questioning over the murder; Kelly has engaged the services of a top Irish criminal lawyer in attempt to block extradition; the Irishman lived in the Stoney Rock area of Leeds until six years ago and still has connections in the city.

The Irish extradition case didn't seem a likely contender, but the murder to which it was connected certainly did. If so, there was deep, dark irony in Dryden investigating the killing of a policeman and getting himself killed as a result.

Sant skimmed through his notes for the later years but nothing stood out like the Gray murder. On the 1st of September 1988 two men were due to appear in court after the discovery of a naked sixteen-year-old girl by the side of the M1, but this story was not related to events of the 31st of August.

The same front page had a story about a fishing boat that had been found at sea and towed back to Bridlington harbour, the two-man crew still missing. Could these men have had anything to do with what Dryden's informant told him?

Unlikely, Sant thought. For one thing, Bridlington wasn't exactly close to Leeds.

The other relevant newspaper issues hinted at nothing of local interest, though on the global front he couldn't help glancing over the November '89 headline hailing the first ever superpower summit between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and US President George Bush, to take place on two warships in the Mediterranean Sea. Times were changing on the political front, the New World Order unfolding fast.

It was only after they'd finished their decade-long news binge that Sant glanced at his watch and realised how late it was.

'One thirty. We've overstayed our welcome.'

'No worries,' said Mia. 'I know the security. It's amazing what a smile can achieve.'

He gave her a broad grin. 'I wouldn't doubt you.' And then he went a little further – not certain of where, but certain he wished it. 'Any chance we can... hook up again?'

'Why not?'

Why not indeed, he thought. 'How does dinner tomorrow sound?'

She looked startled but gave a little nod. 'Okay, it's a date.'

They exchanged numbers and left in the manner they'd met, with a handshake. He felt the pleasant warmth of her tiny palm. He could have held that hand for a while longer, though it hardly seemed appropriate.

He didn't know her. She didn't know him. But he left determined to put that right. Mia, he told himself, was a woman he could get to know well.

THE MAN WEARING RAY-BANS TOWERED OVER HER, A VULTURE SURVEYING ITS prey. The expensive sunglasses didn't keep her from recognising the low-down scum he was. Standing alongside him was the ever-present Baseball Cap, licking his lips and leering at her.

Good cop, bad cop.

The trembling she expected at this moment never came. A calm smouldering shone on her skin as she traced a finger over her brow to move a single hair, jaw set. Now that they were facing her – their sneers and empty sentiments – she felt a loathing for these men. Men without hearts, men without consciences, men full of hate who deserved hate in return.

She sensed the helpers were there too, prowling in the wings. She felt no anger at them. Wasn't even afraid of them. They were just hit-men making a living. They worked to live. Unlike their employers, who lived to carry out their vile work – and got others to clear up their mess.

She'd been moved to an expansive room, this one whitewashed too, on what looked like the top floor of a barn conversion. The pong of manure reinforced her impressions. The place was barely furnished. A garden hose and a few odd items of flat-packed furniture.

Whether it was a living room or bedroom she couldn't tell. The dressing mirror and chest of drawers stood incongruous with the square coffee table and makeshift mantelpiece enclosing a gaping hole meant for a gas fire. At the centre of the room, under a naked light bulb hanging from a worn flex, were a high

lean-back mauve chair and two smaller wooden chairs, one a hard-back Chippendale repro more suited to dining. Alongside these was a half moon console table, probably designed for a hallway. Half-opened venetian blinds let thin rays of sunlight break in from below, casting a patterned shadow over the tatty floorboards.

Ray-Bans aimed a spindly finger at the hard-back chair. 'Sit her there,' he called to Jim. 'If she struggles, rough her up a bit, yeah?' He showed a gap between his index finger and thumb. 'Just a little bit.'

He turned to her. No smile. No frown. Just the stone cold gaze of control.

'Take her clothes.' His face darkened, turning from his men to stare at her again. 'Resist if you like. I know I'll like it – my associate here will take a hammer to your toes.' He pointed to a grinning John. 'We have urgent matters to resolve. Don't fuck us around, sweetheart.'

He exchanged nods with the two hit-men and left the room, Baseball Cap ambling in close proximity.

Jim got to work. He pushed her forward, firmly but without aggression, and clasped her shoulders and guided her into the chair. Grasping her neck he exerted enough pressure to hold her down before lifting a pen-knife from his jacket pocket and slitting the rope around her wrists. He pocketed the knife immediately before placing his right arm beneath her chin and pulling her upright.

For a split second, with her hands momentarily free and the blood working its way back into her lower arms, she felt the urge to attack her captors. But her feet were still tied with the same thick rope, and when she pictured herself boxing free... she hung her head. With a rapid twisting of her wrist and binding of spare rope, the other man – John – pinned her arms back and fettered her to the back of the chair. In panic, she tried to place all her weight on her feet and lift the chair over her back, but it was heavy and she was glued to it.

John grabbed her by the throat and held a flick-knife on the surface of her skin. 'Remember what the gentleman said, love. Struggle and you get hurt. I might use the hammer or I might use the knife. Understand?'

'Leave it out,' came Jim's response from behind her.

John stilled, her heavy breaths loud in the moment.

‘What the fuck did you say, Jim?’

‘I said, leave off. She’s got a bad time coming without you making it worse for her.’

Still holding the flick-knife to her throat, John turned his gaze on Jim: ‘If you ever question my actions again, cunt, I will stab you where the sun don’t shine. Comprehend?’

No reply from Jim, though she sensed a muffled sigh.

John removed the knife and she let her arms relax. No point in wasting energy. All she could do was sit there and hope for a way out, a taste of possible freedom.

Fear bottled in her gut rushed into her throat as she felt the blade of the flick-knife running down her spine. It slit her blouse clean through. She felt cold air as the two halves tumbled to the floor. Next her trousers were slit at both legs right up to the waist, evoking a memory of her youth when she’d broken her leg and the surgeon had cut up her favourite jeans on the operating table. To her amazement, she looked down at her exposed thighs and saw no blood.

The man had a steady hand at least.

The chill was enveloping her flesh, bra, knickers and shoes – the only things left. But she felt no more vulnerable without clothes than with them. She’d reached the very pit of fear. However sinister these men became, her final hours couldn’t possibly be ghastlier than they already were.

* * *

HE DREAMT of months and years and buses painted with threes and fives and eights. He woke, went back to sleep, and dreamt of news headlines and dead policemen and police killers. He woke again, prayed for a good dream, and instead got concentric circles of library maps and microfiche reels and oval-faced women with sapphire eyes, one of whom looked like a student and kept nuzzling his wet neck while scholarly works rained down from above.

He got up, made haste wolfing down tea and toast, then called Capstick.

‘Something to get your teeth into, partner.’

‘Hopefully not that steak I had last night.’

‘Tough, was it?’

‘More fat than flesh.’

‘That’s how I like them.’ Sant plucked a toothpick out of a plastic container, bit hard on it. ‘You know that archive you’ve been working on?’

Capstick coughed down the line. ‘The one coated in three inches of dust, sir?’

‘That’s the one. Find out all you can about a police murder in Leeds on the 31st of October 1984.’

‘What’s the story?’

‘I’ll explain later. Don’t forget your dust mask.’

‘Wouldn’t dream of it, sir.’

He picked up the morning paper and saw the image of the ‘Death Bus’, a massive wreck in the leisure centre car park alongside shots of Lister and Hardaker speaking to the press. Chief Constable Lister was quoted as saying he had complete confidence in Hardaker and wouldn’t involve himself directly in the investigation. No Gilligan anywhere: a rebuff maybe? Was Lister keeping the eccentric Old Man away from the glare of the public eye?

Don’t blame him, Sant thought.

He pointed his Fiesta towards HQ. But not for long. It was time for another move.

Chloe Lee...

Anything related to Chloe was tied up with Dryden and the bus killings in his mind’s eye. Gilligan remained sceptical. But someone a little more convinced about the Chloe-Dryden link had tipped off the Old Man. Who? Sant was confident Holdsworth and Capstick weren’t the blabbers.

He scratched at his chin. Jake Downing came to mind. It was something he’d said in interview: *couples argue all the time*. Jake and Chloe had argued, often and loudly, though just *that* made them a couple. After he’d asked Holdsworth to call Jake and arrange a further round of questioning, they found out that the young man was away in London visiting relatives and wasn’t due back until

tomorrow evening.

London... he scratched again. Chloe's phone had been discovered near King's Cross station. Could she be with Jake's relatives down there, dead or alive?

Sant preferred to wait for a face-to-face interview with Downing rather than talk over the phone. The art of interrogation was far more effective when up close and personal. And interviewing someone – anyone – was an exercise in visual as much as verbal communication. He doubted the usefulness of those criminology textbooks Capstick was so fond of, but the body language stuff he found fascinating.

Gripping the wheel, he grinned at the thought of textbooks, November morning blustery beyond his reflection on the windscreen, another trip to the university his chosen destination. Not the library – he'd wait for Mia's help on all matters microfiche – but Chloe's academic department. He'd been there before. As soon as the missing person case was passed on to him. But Chloe's tutors had been attending a conference on Histories of Suffering in Modern Europe.

Where's the attraction in that? Sant mused.

A sprawl of Victorian and sci-fi Brutalist architecture built on a moor: that much described the main Leeds University campus. Historically, the site was renowned for great battles against the Establishments of the time. At the height of the English Civil War, Parliamentarians had gathered here before overcoming the Royalists and occupying the city. It was here that Suffragettes had fought for women's rights, miners had gathered to demand higher wages and better working conditions... These days, fracking and trident exercised the collective consciousness.

Owing to an unpleasant experience involving a brick and his forehead, Sant was no fan of protests and the people they attracted, but he was a keen advocate of free speech and holding the powerful to account. As he entered the art-deco Parkinson Building at the top end of the campus, he felt a deep respect for the intellectual mind. Here stood, in statue form, the unsung heroes of the past: great men – and a few women – who'd put their blessed grey cells to use by inventing

things, solving dilemmas, challenging the orthodox fallacies of their day.

If only he'd buckled down at school. Sant shook his head. His school had only offered ways of learning to get out and find work.

He weaved his way along corridors, harassing students at intervals to ask for directions, and at last he came to the School of History and Politics. The woman at the reception desk, 'Debbie' according to the badge pinned on her suit jacket, looked colder than the corridors he'd just walked down. He showed her his ID.

'Oh, have you come about the missing student?'

'Did you' – he corrected himself just in time – 'do you know Chloe Lee?' He pushed back one side of his jacket, hand on waist, the other on the desk.

'Not to any extent, Mr Sant.' Her eyes narrowed when his fingers started tapping. 'We exchanged greetings – that was all. Besides, she was often in a rush.'

He waited for her to continue but she didn't. 'A rush?'

'Quite so. She was frequently late for classes.'

'Did she explain why?'

Debbie shook her head. 'Is there anyone in particular you'd like to see, Mr Sant?'

He thought for a moment and then asked: 'Who'd be the best tutor to speak to, Debs?'

'Let me see.' Her mouth puckered at the informal address. She tapped her keyboard with touch-type ease, Sant all the time craning his neck for a peep at her screen, shoulder surfer extraordinaire. 'Her Head of School is here. He's busy right now.'

'You'd better make him un-busy.'

Five minutes and an incomprehensible phone call later, she gave him directions to the second floor, Room SSPS245. It sounded like a rocket launcher. He took the lift and then followed signs along more cold corridors before discovering a faux wood door with the polished brass nameplate NEIL ROTHWELL PROFESSOR OF MODERN POLITICAL HISTORY fixed to it. Below the name and title were the words HEAD OF SCHOOL. Clearly a big cheese.

He knocked.

No response.

He knocked again, a little louder.

Still nothing.

He knocked once more, much louder, then pushed down the door handle and walked in.

Professor Rothwell – donning Beats as he whistled to a jazz number on his top-of-the-range laptop – caught Sant in the corner of his eye and waved him in. He threw off the headphones and made a series of strange arm gestures that Sant took to mean he was welcome.

He was a thin man whose age was impossible to place. His tatty blazer and brown corduroys spoke of middle-aged inertia, but his shock of dishevelled fair hair gave him an oddly juvenile character. Maybe he'd donned the same new-romantic hairstyle for a few decades, and at last the style was trendy again. The illusion of youth was supplemented by an acute drooping upper left eyelid not unlike Thom Yorke's of Radiohead fame.

'Good afternoon, Inspector.' He spoke with a Cornish twang. 'Can I trouble you for a drink?'

Sant declined the offer. 'I've come about Chloe Lee. I believe you're one of her tutors.'

Rothwell hesitated before replying. 'I have been Chloe's dissertation tutor since September. But under the circumstances, I have not seen her as yet. Such an intelligent girl' – he admonished himself – 'intelligent woman. I'm not allowed to call my students *girls* any more. It's politically incorrect.'

'Know her well, Professor?'

'Please, call me Neil. Hierarchies are so stifling, don't you think?' Sant didn't think much of hierarchies either, but this was hardly the time for a philosophical debate on the matter. The professor ruffled his abundant hair. 'Let me see. I took tutorials with Chloe and her peers every week in their second year, though in the second semester – January to May – tutorials were voluntary. They could come and go as they pleased.'

'Did Chloe attend?'

Rothwell shook his head. ‘Only my weaker students attend the voluntary tutorials. Chloe doesn’t come close to weak. In fact, she is an outstanding student more than capable of entering graduate school.’

‘Graduate school?’

The professor laughed. ‘Sorry, Inspector – I forget that you are not familiar with university lingo. Graduate schools are for postgraduates; for those students who have excelled as undergraduates and continue on, beyond their degree, to Masters’ programmes and PhDs.’

‘And you think Chloe has a PhD in her?’

‘Oh, hell I. Chloe was producing postgraduate-quality work the moment she started here.’

‘Has she expressed interest in an academic career?’

Rothwell inhaled deeply. ‘Not to myself, but I understand so.’

Sant was puzzled. ‘How can you understand if she hasn’t mentioned it?’

Rothwell twitched his drooping eyelid and fiddled with his headphones. ‘Umm... well, a colleague of mine – her personal tutor – may have discussed career options... though perhaps I am mistaken.’

‘Your colleague’s name?’

Sant noticed how the professor had gone from laid-back to defensive.

‘Now look here, Inspector, it would be remiss of me to disclose any personal details without–’

‘All I want is a name. I’m not issuing an arrest warrant.’

‘Of course not,’ Rothwell said with a nervous titter. He stared into Sant’s eyes as if aiming for distraction, but the inspector didn’t flinch. ‘His name is Anthony Gordon, Tony to those who know him.’ He closed his shiny laptop dejectedly, placing the headphones carefully on top. ‘And I would urge you to proceed with caution. Tony possesses a brilliant mind, but he lacks certain... sensibilities. He has Asperger’s –high functioning. But at times he becomes a little... charged up. Let’s just say we do not always see eye to eye.’

‘Is Tony around?’

‘I expect so, though I do not clock my staff in and out.’ Sant got the impression Rothwell was being evasive again. It took a while, but eventually the

message hit home. 'I can check if you like.'

Head back, hands deep in pockets, Sant's voice was a breeze. 'If it's not too much trouble.'

Rothwell led him down more corridors to a door with a list of names on it, none of which were engraved in brass. Dr Anthony Gordon's was among them. The professor swiped the card on his lanyard across a scanner before pushing open the door to a dingy office containing eight desks crammed together in open-plan chaos.

The room was empty with the exception of one hard-working soul and the fan keeping him cool.

'Can I borrow you for a few moments, Tony?' called Rothwell, not even bothering to enter the stuffy room. 'Detective Inspector Sant wishes to see you.'

Tony said nothing but stood up obligingly.

'Why don't I talk to Tony here?' Sant pointed to empty chairs.

'Umm, fine,' said Rothwell, who saw fit to show his visitor into the room, orchestrate the handshake and sit back, arms spread-eagled, hands gripping the locks of his fair hair.

Sant stared at the sitting Rothwell. 'Alone, if you don't mind.'

It seemed an eternity before message number two got through. At last the professor strolled out, another bout of nervous laughter trailing behind him like a long-forgotten child.

* * *

TONY GORDON WAS average height and average weight, though the head above his thin neck and shoulders seemed disproportionately big. He was almost bald on top and his eyes a striking blue. An arresting face with sharp features, Sant placed him in his late twenties. Any older and he was employing the right stylist.

'I believe this young woman is a student of yours.'

He passed a photograph to Tony.

The young man took one look and let out a sigh. 'Chloe. I assumed she was the reason you're here.' He spoke with Received Pronunciation, pitch-perfect. 'It

feels so bizarre that she could just disappear. Every day of each week I'm expecting to see her.'

'A regular attender?'

Tony froze for a moment in confusion before nodding.

'I take it Chloe was – is a sensible student?'

Tony blinked his blue eyes and stared up at the ceiling. 'She's incredibly mature for her age. I tell her, and all my students, where not to go in this city – the streets and parks and people to avoid. Chloe is the last person I'd imagine getting into trouble.' He hesitated before saying: 'She even carries a rape alarm.'

This was news to Sant. 'You noticed it on her?'

'Yes, it's fastened to her purse. Her accommodation is a ten-minute walk from here, and on dark evenings she'd make a point of returning home before daylight faded.'

'Did she tell you where she lived?'

'I know where she lives, Inspector. I've walked Chloe back to her place several times, especially on dark nights. Safety in numbers is what I preach.'

'How responsible of you.' Sant hoped he didn't sound patronising. 'But wasn't that a diversion for you?'

'Not in the least. I live not far from the student population of Leeds. My house is within walking distance of here.'

'What did you and Chloe talk about?'

The young man pulled out a pen lodged behind his earlobe. 'Oh, all sorts of things, mostly history-related as you can imagine. We share an interest in modern political history.' He reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a diary. 'You may be in luck. You see, Asperger Syndrome affects people in different ways, and one of the techniques I deploy to reflect on interactions with others is to write down my thoughts on a daily basis.'

Sant peered over Tony's shoulder. 'You're a prolific writer.'

'You bet. One day I hope to publish my diaries in ten thousand volumes,' he joked. 'But seriously, this process is important to me. It helps me to manage my relationships with others. My condition means I have to think all the time about *saying the right thing*. Sometimes I say the wrong thing, or respond in the wrong

way, so writing everything down helps me to improve my social skills. Predictability and structure are vital to me, and the routine of writing helps me to cope.'

'If you don't mind spilling secrets, what was the last thing you wrote about Chloe?'

Tony flicked through a few pages before finding what he was looking for. 'Here we are: dated the 21st of May.' He calculated in his head. 'Over five months ago.'

'The last time you saw her?'

'I think so. I haven't seen her since the summer vacation, that's for sure.' Then he read the entry for that date: "'Late afternoon – Chloe came to see me about doing a PhD. She asked me about psychological studies of fascism; seems fascinated with the language of dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, though she wants to focus on contemporary rather than historical fascist movements. I warned her about the dangers of an oral-history approach. Interviewing skinhead racists could pose serious ethical problems. She laughed at that. Then we shared the coffee from my flask and I walked her home".'

He paused, poignant. 'That was the last time I saw her.'

Sant nodded. 'Did Chloe mention a period of history she wanted to study?'

'Not that I can recall. Late twentieth century I would suggest, after the fall of Nazi Germany and Italy. Do you think her research has anything to do with her current predicament, Inspector?'

Sant looked down at his shoes, brushed at his jacket. Blinking up at Tony. 'Well, we need to consider all possibilities, and I'm certainly interested in what motivated Chloe; what she spent her days doing before she went missing.'

Tony replaced pen to earlobe. 'I can check her student file if you like. Find out what essays and presentations she's completed on fascist politics.'

'Very helpful of you. How about I visit again later today?'

'We can meet in the refectory for dinner,' Tony said.

'Fine by me. And keep that diary safe. I may ask you to consult it again.'

'Sure thing. And I will read through my entries for the last year or so. See what else I wrote about Chloe.' He yawned. 'Excuse me, Inspector. I've been

hard at work this morning on a monograph about British politics during the Thatcher years. My publisher will have a fit if I fail to get the typescript delivered by the end of the week.'

Sant wanted to ask what a monograph was, but thought better of it. Instead he arranged a time for dinner, made a note of Tony's number in case he was running late, and then set to the orienteering task of finding his way out.

As he was passing the unchangeable Debbie at reception, he remembered a question he'd forgotten and asked her if a student called Owen Madeley was enrolled in the School of History and Politics. She clicked her mouse but no record of that name appeared anywhere on her system, which meant Madeley wasn't a student of any description. For good measure he asked her to search for Jake Downing, and got what he'd expected: Downing was in his second year of a five-year architecture degree.

Be that as it may, he won't be building my future paradise, Sant vowed.

* * *

A STUBBLE-FACED Capstick emerged from the archives bleary-eyed and covered in dust, like a walking snowman on acid.

'Auditioning for the next Harry Potter movie, Capstick?'

'Not much chance of that, sir. The last instalment was years ago.'

'Always time for a sequel. Get on to J. R. Rowling and tell her you're game.'

'It's J. K., sir.'

Sant waved his arm. 'J. K., J. R. – what difference does it make?'

'Quite a lot. J. R. was shot—'

'Yes, so I recall. I always did have a soft spot for *Dynasty*.'

'*Dallas*.'

'I meant *Dallas*.' His lips twisted. 'Wasn't *Dallas* before your time?'

'The repeats are on YouTube.'

'The wonders of technology. A pity we don't have all our police records digitised yet. What's the story with the files?'

Capstick, carrying a red ring-binder that had seen better days, was trying but

failing to conceal the excitement on his face. ‘These are the ones we’re after.’

They sat down at a sawdust-scented desk. Capstick carefully opened the ring-binder, partly to avoid throwing more dust around and partly for dramatic effect. Then he began to read.

“Events of Wednesday the 31st of October 1984 in chronological order: at 8.35am a 999 call from a member of the public informed police of two men interfering with a yellow Ford Cortina parked directly opposite Leeds Parish Church.’

‘I bought an old Cortina for two-hundred quid once,’ Sant said.

Capstick screwed up his eyes at his boss before continuing. “Police Constable Frank Tanner, driving a police van in the vicinity, took the call and drove to the scene”.’

‘Was anyone with Tanner?’

‘No record of anyone.’

‘Go on.’

“PC Tanner left his vehicle on arriving at the scene and approached the two men, one of whom – he realised too late – possessed a firearm”.’

‘What time was this?’

Capstick scanned the page. ‘8.43am.’

‘Eight minutes from emergency call to police presence – a bit sluggish,’ remarked Sant, ‘but then again, suspected car theft hardly counts as a top priority.’

‘Give him credit though,’ said Capstick. ‘He wasn’t the only officer called to the scene, but he got there first.’

‘What happened next?’

“At 8.45am PC Tanner was shot in the stomach by the man possessing the firearm”.’

‘Do we know why he was shot?’

‘Sadly not, but I’ll come to that shortly, sir.’ Sant gave a sharp nod. ‘About the same time that PC Tanner was shot, Sergeant Gray entered the fray. He’d been dealing with a minor incident at a nearby pub, answered a radio call for assistance, arrived on foot moments later.’

‘He was shot too.’

‘Fatally – at closer range than PC Tanner. Ballistics tests indicated ten feet. An eyewitness saw Gray after he’d been shot. He was slumped over a wall, motionless. Tanner was lying on the road in a pool of blood. Here are the photographs.’

He passed a plastic wallet to Sant and was impressed by his partner’s cool indifference to the bloodbath before him.

‘Did they catch the killer?’

‘Not for a very long time,’ Capstick sighed. ‘They nearly got him on the day in question, but somehow he escaped.’

Sant extracted a toothpick from his inside pocket and comforted himself chewing on it. ‘What do we know about the chase?’

‘A tale of frustration by all accounts. First to give chase was a community constable called PC Jack Patel.’

‘Indian?’

‘Malaysian, actually. He left the force and returned to Malaysia not long after the shootings, complaining of homesickness. There couldn’t have been many Asians in the force back then.’

Sant nodded. ‘There were a few Indians when I signed up in ’85. Not many. And even fewer black people. Times have changed.’ He examined the toothpick. ‘We’re not exactly flooded with applications from ethnic minorities even now, though, are we?’

Capstick went on: ‘Anyway, it seems this PC Patel was following Gray at a distance – Gray may have seen him and signalled for help – and as soon as Patel realised his colleagues had been shot, he ran after the two men, who by now had legged it from the crime scene.’

‘They both got away?’

‘Yes. The accomplice too. They split up almost as soon as they took flight. Patel decided to pursue the gunman. The report states: “He chased the assailant through the Garden of Rest into Duke Street, along Russell Street, into Brick Street, across York Street and finally into the Quarry Hill area. The assailant fired at Patel several times but missed. It’s thought the accomplice climbed up

the embankment and followed the railway line east”.’

‘So Patel lost the gunman in Quarry Hill?’

‘Not quite – the report continues: “He tracked him into Marsh Lane where the assailant headed towards the Woodpecker pub at the junction with York Road. He then climbed a fence in the pub car park and dropped down into an alleyway at the back of Shannon Street”. Quite an audacious move, considering the drop was twenty feet or so.’

Sant scratched his head. ‘He injure himself in the process?’

‘Very likely, which explains his next move.’

‘Hijack a car,’ the inspector said as he bit down on the toothpick.

‘A van.’

‘Near enough.’

‘His first attempt failed. He tried to stop a Volkswagen and was almost run over.’

‘If only!’

‘It was second-time lucky – he targeted a blue Transit van that had stopped for petrol at the filling station on Shannon Street. According to the file, “the assailant wrenched open the Transit door, ordered the driver out at gunpoint, and then drove off at 8.55am”.’

‘And that was the end of that.’

Capstick shook his head. ‘You see, by this time it was approaching 9.00am, the phone wires were going crazy and a small army of officers were on the chase. Three policemen actually ran up Shannon Street at that exact moment and saw the tail-end of the incident at the filling station. They managed to get hold of another van and sped off after the Transit, giving chase for half a mile before they lost it in traffic.’

‘Hadn’t the call gone out for roadblocks?’

Capstick scanned the file with his finger. ‘At 8.58am,’ he noted, ‘and specialist firearms officers equipped with rifles were deployed. Just when they thought they had him surrounded, he foiled them.’

‘A clever criminal.’

‘He had some nerve. The man whose van he stole was a maintenance man of

some sort. You know, blue overalls, hard hat, protective gloves, all of which were left in the back of the van. So the gunman abandons the Transit as soon as he can, puts on all the attire, and strolls around disguised as a maintenance worker.'

Sant bit on his toothpick. 'You've got to admire the man's guts.'

'It even appears he spent forty minutes in the grounds of Victoria Primary School pretending to measure up some building project authorised by the local authority.'

'What did our master of disguise do next?'

'I'll quote from the report: "Investigators believe that at around 9.53am that morning, the assailant took refuge behind a garage on Torre Road. He discarded his overalls and safety helmet – they were found a few hours later – and was next seen about twenty minutes later walking along Rigton Drive near the Ebor pub. Then, about 10.45am, a woman was seen by a passer-by on the same road giving directions to a man who walked with a distinct limp".'

'Caused by a twenty-foot fall?'

'That's what police suspected. By 11am the search was centred entirely on Torre Road and Rigton Drive. Then a red herring cropped up. More than twenty officers wearing flak jackets, armed with rifles and a loud hailer, cordoned off and surrounded a house they believed the gunman was hiding in. It was a false alarm – the house was unoccupied with the exception of a very frightened black kitten.'

Sant meditated for a few moments. 'Probably an omen.'

'I didn't think you were superstitious, sir.'

'Only on Halloween, Capstick.'

'This was Halloween.'

'Exactly, and our bus massacre fell on Halloween, too.'

Capstick turned to his partner. 'Significant?'

'The short answer is: I don't know.'

He took the ring-binder from Capstick and browsed the report himself, shaking his head now and again. What a mess. Several glaring mistakes stood out. The initial response was weak. Why PC Tanner had been radioed when he

was on his own and clearly vulnerable was a mystery. True, the 999 call hadn't appeared to present a danger, but that was never an excuse for cutting corners.

Cutting aptly summed up those times. The mid-1980s saw major spending cuts, austerity, high unemployment. Sant recalled how hard it had been to land a job on the beat. Ironically, he had the miners' strike to thank for helping him get a foot in the door. The Thatcher government couldn't have it both ways, cutting police numbers to save money whilst talking tough about law and order in the face of raging miners and their families. So after a year of assessing how far the miners would go to test her patience, Mrs Thatcher dug deep into her skin-tight pockets and invested in officers. Thankfully, the strike had ended before Sant took up post. He never fancied a quarrel with decent men from humble backgrounds like his own.

Perhaps Tony Gordon's book on the Thatcher years would analyse her policies on policing. He wondered. He'd read elsewhere that Mrs Thatcher had financed a tougher approach to all kinds of disorder, including riot police and armed officers. But rumours about her plans for a national police force akin to a militarised state appeared farfetched.

'You said the gunman was eventually caught?'

'Not so much caught as killed, sir.'

'By an officer?'

'He shot himself.'

'Suicide?'

'Not according to the records, though the whole affair sounds fishy to me. See what you make of this: a few years later, in 1987, he was involved in a gang attempting an armed robbery of a supermarket in Stockton-on-Tees. He was the getaway driver, but he panicked when two uniforms approached in a marked vehicle. He had a sawn-off shotgun with him, which he used to force the officers out of their van. Then he took off but didn't get far before a second marked van collided into him. Somehow he accidentally shot himself in the midriff when the police rammed his van into a wall.'

'Did he die instantly?'

'Not quite. He was immediately handcuffed and escorted to Stockton-on-

Tees police station. He was described by officers as “walking wounded”, not in a life-threatening condition. Their judgement was way off the mark – the man died in custody shortly afterwards, the self-inflicted gunshot wound causing massive internal bleeding.’

Sant grimaced, rubbed the hair on his neck. ‘He might’ve survived if they’d taken him to casualty rather than the nick.’

‘Not according to the pathologist’s report. A Dr Machell recorded how the bleeding caused by the wound was too severe – he had half an hour max. Even if admitted to hospital immediately, Machell reckoned the man would’ve died of his injuries.’

‘Tell that to his relatives,’ Sant smirked, his toothpick mangled to shreds. ‘What was his name?’

‘Martin Humphreys; nicknamed *the mechanic* because of the cars and vans he stole for getaway vehicles.’

‘Is there any explanation as to why Humphreys wasn’t given immediate medical aid after shooting himself?’

Capstick consulted the relevant appendix in the ring-binder. ‘A Chief Inspector Richard Padgett reported that the wound – just below the man’s heart – was very small and emitted little external blood flow, which explains why officers didn’t even discover it until they removed his jumper at the police station. He was also wearing a red t-shirt underneath that camouflaged the wound.’

‘Reads like a tall story to me. This Humphreys would’ve been in severe pain, short of breath, physically weak. Surely someone noticed.’

‘There’s no record of his physical state. Chief Inspector Padgett believed the bullet from the shotgun had discharged very close to his body, with a contact wound not ruled out. ’

‘Foul play?’

‘None I’ve found, sir.’

‘So how did they prove Humphreys killed Sergeant Gray?’

‘According to the report, the murder weapon used on Gray was found on Humphreys, though no description or photograph of the weapon is included in

this file – unless I’ve missed something.’

Sant stroked the kink in his nose. ‘It’s a good job the man was scum enough not to have others looking out for him. Anyone remotely decent would’ve had backers queuing up to cry police brutality and file law suits any which way.’

‘Maybe he’d run out of mates,’ said Capstick.

‘He could’ve had friends in the criminal underworld, but it wasn’t in their interests to come out of hiding just to administer a small dose of justice.’

‘Once a criminal, always a criminal.’

‘Is that what your textbooks say?’

Capstick shrugged. ‘It’s the nature versus nurture debate.’

‘A debate we don’t have time for now, partner, but I look forward to it.’

Capstick looked meaningfully at his boss. ‘Is this 1984 case connected to Dryden’s murder?’

‘Possibly. Chloe’s disappearance too, though we’ve no evidence other than Dryden’s half-finished numbers. But fresh juice might seep from old fruit.’

‘Meaning more archive work.’

Sant nodded. ‘Dig out more on the Gray murder: the major enquiries and leads, dealings with other forces, prison officers, lawyers, border officials, the press...’

Capstick started jotting, gave up and returned to his dusty enclave.

WAKING. SLEEPING. WAKING. WAKING.

Good cop, bad cop.

Cannon and Ball.

Baseball Cap and Ray-Bans were back, the former carrying a tray containing a steaming cafetiere and a plateful of assorted biscuits which he placed on the half moon table by the chairs. Ray-Bans, meantime, had placed two unsavoury objects on the coffee table by the rear wall. Even from her chained predicament at the centre of the room, there was no mistaking what they were: a Taser and a horse whip.

Baseball Cap poured the coffee into three cups. He added two sugars to one cup before passing it to Ray-Bans. The second was his own; the last intended for her.

‘Sugar? I’m afraid we’re out of cream and sweetener.’

She shook her head.

Ray-Bans drained his cup in one go before flinging it aimlessly at the wall, shards of porcelain scattering everywhere.

‘Tie her ankles, man!’

Hit-man Jim obliged, though the mumbling sound coming from deep in his throat hinted at a reluctance to obey. Perhaps the man had a heart after all, or perhaps his patience was wearing thin at being spoken to like a slave. Either way, she soon found her ankles bound to the front legs of her chair with a flex of cord. The knots left no play for movement in her lower legs – she was now

literally attached to wood. These four men were not taking any chances, nor prisoners lightly. The legs of the chair were too wide apart to allow her to rock back and forth, not that rocking would do any good.

Ray-Bans signalled to the two hit-men and they left the room. Now it was two against one. Her chances of escape had just doubled, but when you start off with no chance, a doubling of the odds makes nil difference. Ray-Bans poured a second coffee, took a biscuit and carefully sat down in the lean-to chair like a king testing his throne. Baseball Cap lifted a panel of the Venetian blind to check the coast was clear before refilling his cup and joining his crony.

‘Let’s get down to business, shall we?’ Ray-Bans began. ‘We’ll skip the introductions. We know who you are, and we reckon you know who we are. The only difficulty has been finding you, but now you’re with us, so let’s get this over and done with.’

Baseball Cap picked up her untouched coffee. ‘Sure you won’t have a drink?’

She looked at him in disdain. ‘Kind of difficult, wouldn’t you say?’

He smiled apologetically. An empty apology. ‘Please, let me assist.’

He held out the cup to her lips. She drank deep, filling her mouth with as much of the lukewarm liquid as she could physically manage, before craning her neck muscles and gobbling the lot over her server.

Ray-Bans found the scene mildly amusing. ‘You look like you’ve wet yourself.’

Baseball Cap, busy drying the wet patch on the crotch of his chinos with a handkerchief, didn’t see the funny side at all.

‘You’re lucky my associate has a steady temperament, Sheila Morrison.’ Then he stared at his prey. ‘My dear woman, for more years than I care to recall we’ve been searching for you. There have been dossiers, reported sightings, surveillance operations – all designed to smoke you out.’ He swallowed a biscuit whole and picked up another. ‘Which makes this a momentous day; very momentous.’ Baseball Cap started whooping to mark the occasion. ‘But what you must understand, Sheila, is we have no interest whatsoever in you personally. All that we want is something you’ve got.’

The woman eyed Ray-Bans, her expression unflinching.

‘The film, Sheila.’

Still no reaction.

‘We know you’ve got it and if you don’t tell us where it is, you will be sorry.’

The silence hung over the room.

Ray-Bans swallowed another biscuit and drowned it in the rest of his coffee. Then he turned to her, the muscles in his face stiffening as he clenched his teeth. ‘I’m waiting for an answer, Sheila, and I won’t wait much longer. Where is the video?’

‘Fuck... you!’

Baseball Cap took a packet of Cuban cigars from his pocket, drew one out for his companion and offered him a light. Ray-Bans took a small puff, mildly irritated by the freshness of the tobacco, before striding across the room and pocketing his whip. He carried it back to his throne, rested the slender weapon on the arm of his chair, and took another puff from the cigar. The smoke seeped out of his hairy nostrils.

He returned his gaze, weighing her up soothingly, almost caressingly, before grasping the whip and striking it true and hard.

The outcome was bewildering.

Her body bent double as she let out a silent scream, her tormented face fixed vaguely at a vanishing point in the encroaching distance. She craved for distance but couldn’t find it. The world was closing in on her, episodes from her past, people she’d known, places she’d seen, all tangling in her consciousness, forming blurry nothing.

The whip struck again, this time a little higher.

Her neck felt like it was ripping itself from her torso as strings and knots of muscle and vein tightened instantly, blood slowing in a mock show of self-defence. Then her body wilted and sweat poured from her head and shoulders. She tried to utter something, but her voice-box was drained with the effort of trying. Numbness overcame her as her vision drowned in redness and blackness.

Strike three, across both hips.

Now the sweat dripped off her naked chest and splashed on the bleeding scars below. She couldn't cry because the agony was too unfathomable for the tear glands to make sense of it. She thought she was choking, but no sound came from her throat, or if it did, she couldn't hear it.

Two minutes – or perhaps two hours – later she felt a tickling sensation and her eyes half-opened to the hazy sight of someone brushing the end of a whip over her ankles. Her toes, as far as she could tell, were still attached to her feet, protected as they were by her shoes, but twitching them was proving impossible.

Ray-Bans arched his considerable frame over her. 'Let's try again, Sheila. Four little words from me and one answer required of you. Where – is – the – video?'

Perspiration still falling from her forehead and chin, she managed a barely audible cough, but hearing herself make any sound at all only confirmed the bad news... she was not yet dead.

Ray-Bans took a long puff on his cigar and smacked the whip across the table a couple of times as if it were a wand that needed warming up. Some sick man's idea of a wand, she thought.

She could think? Worse luck.

'You have no intention of talking, it would seem. A word of warning, my dear. We're not here to play silly buggers. This is no game to us and don't think we're punishing you for the thrill of it.' He refilled his coffee and sucked on his cigar. 'No, my dear. We mean business and will do whatever it takes to transact that business. So what's it to be, Sheila? More torture, violence, blood? Or will you behave sensibly and tell us what we need to know?'

The silence, if nothing else, had given her vocal chords a chance to recover, though it felt like a kidney was stuck in her larynx. Inhaling what she could of the air around her, she blurted out what she longed to be her last words.

'I will tell you nothing, you fucking scumbag, and I will tell your whipping boy here even less.'

More silence. Her eyes were so blood-shot by now that she couldn't see in front of her, nor could she see the sudden flick of a wrist as the whip struck again, this time still higher than before.

Silent scream after silent scream ensued, the force of sheer abhorrence thundering into her chest, back, calves. This time she was sure the call of death had chimed, some Authority's open arms bidding her to depart this dreadful void and enter another realm; a glorious realm where the sun shines bright and the birds always sing.

But the sad truth dawned on her, hours afterwards as she stirred from delirium.

No open arms. No sunshine. No birdsong.

She was still breathing.

* * *

THE EARLY-AFTERNOON CALL from Dr Wisdom came as a welcome break from dense reading matter. Fascinating though the Sergeant Gray murder report was, Sant could only read non-stop for an hour before his head started spinning and his eye muscles packed in. Then he'd feel like dozing, though by no means could he afford a siesta in his line of work.

He met Wisdom and Hardaker at the Kirkstall Abbey gates before the three men followed a forensic technician across the park and through woods to a small clearing of fallen branches littered with crimson leaves. Something had been found; something or nothing.

A couple of orange crime-scene cones numbered 1 and 2 marked the spot. Wisdom requested a plastic evidence bag from the technician and showed it to the detectives stood either side of him. Inside the bag was a thin scrap of pink paper, probably torn from a Post-It, smudged with ink.

'An address,' Wisdom explained. 'Found right by the trunk of this tree.'

The warm air seeping out of Hardaker's mouth made steam as it mixed with the outdoor chill. 'An interesting find, Grant. Is it discernible?'

Wisdom put on his pince-nez specs. 'Partly, but the rain has taken its toll. One of my men had a go at deciphering the writing, but we'll need specialist expertise before making an appraisal.'

'What's your reading?' asked Hardaker, stroking his beard impatiently. 'And

why call me *and* DI Sant here?’

Wisdom ignored Hardaker’s edginess. ‘To be frank, it was Carl’s estimation of the probable stops where DS Dryden boarded the bus that led us to search this area of ground, so my professional judgement tended towards him.’ Sant looked as pleased as punch. ‘Anyway, we can’t make out all the details. I’ll read out what we’ve got. There’s a number followed by the word Dotton or Dutton. The next word is indecipherable. Then there’s a word below Dotton or Dutton which we think is Seacroft. Below that–’

‘11 Dufton Approach, Seacroft,’ interrupted Sant.

Wisdom stared again at the scrap of paper in the evidence bag. ‘I believe you’ve hit the bullseye, my boy.’

The Chiefman gawked at Sant with a mixture of astonishment and irritation. ‘Is the address connected to your missing-person case?’

‘It’s the address of Chloe Lee’s former neighbour.’

‘I understand this neighbour of hers was a close friend of the family,’ said the Chiefman, keying the address into his phone.

Sant inspected the evidence bag as he spoke. ‘A close friend of Chloe’s, that’s for sure. We’ve traced her through council-housing records and the name Susan Smith matches the relevant dates of tenancy, though that name may prove to be a blind alley.’

‘How do you mean?’ Hardaker enquired with puzzlement.

‘Well, if we assume the woman was Dryden’s informant who he arranged to meet – at this concealed spot – on the night he was killed, then the name she’s using now is unlikely to be the same one she used as a council tenant all those years ago. Most people with something to hide, or reveal, use false names to cover their backs. Besides, Susan Smith’s as common as muck. There must be hundreds of Susan Smiths in Leeds.’

‘What makes you think this Susan Smith was an informant?’

‘Your guess is as good as mine.’

Hardaker still looked confused. ‘But assuming Susan Smith – or whatever her name is now – wrote out this scrap of paper and intended it for Dryden, why give him her former address?’

‘She must’ve been storing something there for Dryden to retrieve,’ and then he described his recent visit to 11 Dufton Approach and the bare patch of flooring Capstick had discovered in the loft.

‘I don’t recall you informing me or Gilligan of this.’

‘Maybe I did, maybe I didn’t. It was only yesterday.’

Hardaker tugged at his beard and raised his voice a couple of decibels. ‘You’re neglecting my instructions, Carl. I require regular updates on any development to do with this incident, no matter how loosely connected it may appear. Do I make myself clear?’

‘Yes Sergeant Major,’ whispered Sant under his breath – a whisper just loud enough to be heard. Wisdom, standing directly behind the superintendent, performed a playful slitting of the throat.

Hardaker reached for his phone and requested an immediate search warrant be issued for the Dufton Approach residence. Then he made another call to request deployment of an additional team of scenes-of-crime officers to the same address. After that, he stared coldly at Sant before marching off with renewed purpose.

The cross-examination over, Sant trampled over dead leaves on the way back to his car, calling out greetings to the search party and quickening his steps as the adrenalin pulsed through his veins. The Chloe-Dryden link was no longer a probability in his mind; it was a growing certainty.

* * *

CAPSTICK HAD DONE a good job on the archives. Though by no means ancient history, 1984 felt a world away from the information superhighway evolving a decade later.

Sant read through the procedures and strategies used by Millgarth CID during the crucial first forty-eight hours after the fatal shooting of Gray and attempted murder of PC Tanner. He noted how HOLMES (the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System) was being rolled out for the first time by West Yorkshire Police. If only the database had been up-and-running a few years

earlier, the hunt for Peter Sutcliffe – the infamous Yorkshire Ripper – would surely have come to a swifter end. As it was, Sutcliffe managed to elude detectives for too many years at the expense of too many victims.

The wonders of graphic design were being rolled out, too, back in 1984. A computer-based picture generated by the BBC's £80,000 Computer Video Fit technology was used to transpose CCTV images of gunmen involved in local crimes onto eyewitness accounts of the Gray/Tanner shootings.

It wasn't through lack of trying that the gunman and his accomplice hadn't been found. About two hundred officers were taken off picket-line duty at Allerton Bywater Colliery to join the search, so even striking miners took second place to the pursuit of a police killer. Much energy had been spent combing through the waste-ground close to the crime scene, opposite Leeds Parish Church, in search of the murder weapon or anything else that might identify the two men, but nothing of note was discovered.

The yellow Ford Cortina had also been thoroughly searched, but there was no evidence that the men had broken into the vehicle – or even touched it. The likelihood was both men had worn gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints, though eyewitness-to-the-incident PC Patel couldn't be certain of this detail.

Supported by a team of eighty detectives, the man charged with heading up the investigation, Detective Chief Inspector Keith Lotherton, was a highly competent murder-squad detective who'd overseen more than fifty murder enquiries. The man at the top, Chief Constable Alec Waterford, declined to take charge of the case, declaring complete confidence in DCI Lotherton. Sant was reminded of yesterday's article on the bus murders in his morning paper. Hadn't CC Lister passed the buck onto Hardarker with practically the same public show of confidence in his coordinating officer? In which case, history was repeating itself, unless – and this was more likely – chief constables possessed a bible of stock phrases passed on by predecessors, thus compelling them to recycle rather than reinvent their esteemed occupational wheels.

Sant broke out of his musings and returned to the files. Lotherton was of the opinion that the two men had designs on stealing the Cortina and using it to commit crimes locally, including armed robberies to fund drug dealing.

Lotherton had been right in his first instinct about the armed robbery link, Sant realised with hindsight, though every unsolved robbery spanning a four-year period back to 1980 received what turned out to be fruitless scrutiny. Even a building society hold-up in the far-flung seaside town of Morecambe was briefly tied to the investigation.

Once it was clear that both men had evaded the police chase, Lotherton released descriptions of them to the media together with an artist's impression of the gunman based on the wounded PC Tanner's shaky powers of recall. The gunman was white, in his early forties, five feet ten inches tall, stocky build. Capstick had noted for Sant's benefit that this identikit was subsequently used to identify Humphreys as Gray's killer – along with possession of the same firearm used in the 1984 shootings – in the aftermath of the botched armed robbery at Stockton-on-Tees two and a half years later.

Humphreys was also known to favour a checked flat cap – he earned the nickname 'Andy Capp' because of it – and the discovery of a cap matching this description near the ring-road roundabout in Moortown (a likely getaway route) was made public the day after the Gray murder. The theory of the limp, built on the assumption that a twenty-foot fall would cause damage to the gunman's feet and legs, was offered to the press by Lotherton too.

Humphreys accomplice, later named as Alfred Shaw, was described as white, aged about forty, five feet eleven inches tall, thin build with dark brown hair, full beard, sideburns and moustache. He was wearing green overalls and a dark donkey jacket. Following the 1987 identification of Humphreys and verdict of death by misadventure, Shaw was questioned and later charged with involvement in the Gray/Tanner shootings. During the Leeds Crown Court trial it was proven that Shaw didn't use a gun at any stage during the 1984 murder/attempted murder, so he was cleared of the most serious charges brought against him. But he was found guilty of conspiring with Humphreys to commit armed robberies as well as possessing a firearm and failing to disclose information on the Gray/Tanner shootings – to which he was declared a witness (not a perpetrator).

To add intrigue to the whole affair, Shaw was released early from prison after

an appeal prompted by a legal technicality; that he wasn't provided with adequate access to a solicitor during his initial interrogation by West Yorkshire Police. In other words, his admission of guilt had been forced out of him under duress. No doubt to appease Shaw and his lawyer, the police agreed to supply the man with a new identity and a new home away from Yorkshire – a privilege only usually enjoyed by witnesses who break those thick walls of silence and stand shoulder to shoulder with the Crown Prosecution Service against their former underworld comrades.

Sant pressed fingers on his temples, face sagging. What did this Shaw ruling on police blunders say about the alleged police-killer Humphreys? Mistreatment and death? Was Humphreys really the man who'd killed Gray? Possession of a murder weapon and an identikit match hardly warranted fool-proof evidence against Humphreys. Was his death a convenient closing of the dreadful events of Halloween 1984?

What was odd about Lotherton's approach as the senior investigator, Sant noted, was his bold move on day two of the investigation to pursue a divide-and-rule strategy. He read through an official press release issued by Lotherton:

The shootings of Sergeant Gray and PC Tanner were carried out by the first man, and as far as we can tell the second man is in no way party to the shooting incident. I would urge the second man to consider very carefully his legal position. It is quite apparent that he was with the first man – they were acting together in the attempted theft of a car – but he does not appear to have been involved in the shooting of the two officers. I would urge this second man, or indeed any person who may be related to him, to come forward and assist the police in finding the person responsible for the shooting.

At later press briefings, Lotherton had even replaced *second man* and *accomplice* with the less loaded term *companion*. Reading between the lines, Sant imagined this was a desperate move from a desperate detective. No criminal in his right mind, whether killer or *companion*, would turn himself in

after such an appalling crime. It was simply unthinkable, and Lotherton's approach did nothing to foster a feeling of trustworthiness either. For *any person who may be related to him*, read: any fellow crook prepared to grass up his mate.

Another strange press statement from Lotherton suggested that Gray's killer may have been recognised by Gray in connection with a previous crime and was trying to elude certain arrest. The murder was therefore impulsive rather than premeditated. But if that were the case, why had the gunman shot Tanner first? Had *both* officers recognised him?

Tanner's testimony – hazy though it was – presented the best chance of identifying the two men, but the unfortunate policeman was still recovering from a massive flesh wound to the stomach and would remain in intensive care in St James's Hospital for a good while yet. At least he'd entertained some distinguished visitors – the Tory MP for Pudsey, the Home Secretary and the Chief Constable no less. Once he was well enough, Tanner did his best to provide a full description of his attacker, but it was clear from the files that Tanner's testimony had been treated like dog shit: most of it judged *unfit for purpose* in the event of a criminal trial.

Sant wondered if Frank Tanner was still alive. All that was filed on him was retirement documentation – he'd quit as an officer with less than five years of service to his name soon after recovering from the gunshot wound – and a note stating he'd become a civilian clerk at Millgarth police station. Not for long, Sant assumed, as no employment records dating beyond his officer retirement had been kept, nor a forwarding address, nor an employer reference of any kind.

Tanner was thirty-nine years old in 1984. He'd be well over seventy now. Most people lived into their seventies these days, although most people never suffered a bullet to the stomach. Still, the odds were in his favour. Sant called Holdsworth and asked her to process a computer search for Tanner.

The inspector buried his head in the Gray murder file again. Lotherton's next move, on day three, was to publicly declare that ballistics tests had identified the type of gun used: *Forensic tests are being carried out to link the bullets with bullets used in other offences*, he told a press conference. It then took a further three days before the murder weapon was made public. Meantime, Lotherton's

frustration at the silence which greeted his public call for the accomplice to come forward was evident: *I hope this second man will take stock of the possible consequences of his not reporting vital information.* Not even close to a golden handshake.

It was not until the 5th of November that details of the firearm were released. The gun that killed Gray was an old-type .38 Browning silver revolver with a six-to-eight inch barrel – longer than normal, probably adapted from a replica – and a lanyard ring attached to its butt. The forensic report on the bullets was more revealing. They turned out to be .38 special wadcutter bullets designed exclusively for target shooting, so the gun was probably stolen from someone who used it purely for recreation. No distinct rifling impressions were left on the bullets – only fine scratch lines. They'd been fired from a crudely bored out barrel.

Lotherton appealed to the gun's supplier, who he described as *an underworld armourer*, to come forward. Another desperate measure hinting at just how little information the detectives had to go on.

The gun was not found and neither were the two men – until, that is, the Stockton-on-Tees caper of 1987, and then by accident rather than design. A reward of £10,000, rising to £25,000 thanks to donations from the rich and famous, was offered for information leading to the conviction of Gray's killer. The generous bounty attracted a whole flood of callers retelling all manner of tales in the hope of landing the lottery. But nothing materialised. Clearly £25,000, no small sum in the mid-eighties, wasn't enough to loosen tongues in the underworld.

It was around the 8th of November that the investigation was scaled back in Leeds and widened to the rest of the country. West Yorkshire detectives travelled to Manchester on that day to interview two suspects involved in an armed robbery. But their alibis for the morning of the 31st of October were watertight; they'd been collecting their dole money in Salford. Whilst reading this part of the file Sant came across a familiar name: Lister. Detective Sergeant Edward Lister, as he was titled back then, had led the team investigating the armed robbers in Manchester. Sant wondered to what extent Lister's accomplishments

in this high-profile case counted towards the man's prodigious rise. Would the chief constable be sitting where he was today – at the pinnacle of his profession – without the Gray murder enquiry to his name?

The next section of the file detailed liaisons with New Scotland Yard over a pair of escaped prisoners. The breakout had occurred in early October at Harrow police station. A couple of Harrow-based officers were suspected of taking backhanders in return for an open door, but no prosecutions were brought to bear. The two escapees had a track record of armed robbery and were known to have connections in West Yorkshire, but there was nothing to suggest they'd been in Leeds at the time of Gray's murder. Around Christmas time, to rub salt in the wounds, murder squad detectives received a postcard from Spain. The two convicts, enjoying the sun-soaked beaches of Benidorm, wrote to make it clear to police they had *nothing to do with the murder of the Leeds policeman*.

Another Spanish lead that went cold ended with a peculiar twist. In early December it emerged that a woman who had fallen to her death from the ninth-floor balcony of her Tenerife hotel was wanted for interview as a possible witness in the Gray/Tanner shootings. Ms Valerie Clark, who lived with her boyfriend in Moortown, was placed on the list of witnesses after detectives discovered her Colt Lancer parked opposite the parish church on the same morning as the shootings. A week later she jetted off on her holidays and never returned home. Her boyfriend, Mr William Dickinson, said he was certain Ms Clark wouldn't have been able to help police with their enquiries. A verdict of suicide was subsequently determined by the Spanish coroner.

When the new-fangled HOLMES database of intelligence containing more than 40,000 interviews, 7,000 vehicle checks, 2,500 statements and 11,800 suspects had been exhausted, the investigation went international, focusing mainly on the Irish Republic. Sant was reminded of the IRISH CONNECTION headline he'd discovered with Mia during the microfiche search. With the huge advantage of hindsight, Sant could see how that lead had turned out to be a disastrous red herring. No doubt the stigma accompanying the Irish back then – the IRA, the Guinness family kidnapping, the hunger strikes – had fuelled unfounded fears that Gray and Tanner had been victims of a terrorist atrocity.

The truth, as it turned out, kicked Lotherton hard in the face. Police killer Humphreys was none other than a Yorkshireman familiar to the local police and underworld alike, with no links whatsoever to other countries or paramilitary organisations. Had Lotherton taken his eye off the ball? A classic case of information overkill? It certainly looked that way.

Thoughts of news headlines and microfiche reminded Sant to check his watch. Seven thirty pm. He had to meet Mia on the steps of the university's Parkinson Building at eight thirty, before their date. The last thing he wanted was to miss dinner with her. With only an hour to get to the university's refectory and meet with Dr Tony Gordon, he'd be hard-pushed.

Such is my lot, he smiled ruefully. The hectic lot of a harried detective untangling a web of murders a generation apart.

THE REFECTORY WAS MUCH BIGGER THAN HE'D IMAGINED. ONCE A FAMOUS ROCK concert venue hosting bands like The Who and Led Zeppelin, it was now an all-singing, all-dancing, self-service canteen. The wood-panelled walls and elegant balcony were steeped in the history of debating societies and avant-garde art, but the only lasting constant, Sant reflected, was the insatiable appetite for food. Since he was eating out with Mia later, he settled for a mug of tea and a fruity flapjack.

He paid and then began scanning the crowd for Mia's face. He shook himself and redirected his misguided thoughts back to Tony. Dr Gordon took some finding – Sant must have glanced over fifty tables before striking lucky – and when he finally did, it was clear from Tony's empty dinner plate that he'd already eaten.

'Spag bol with tonnes of ketchup and garlic bread.' He said this in perfectly pronounced Queen's English despite the colloquial parlance. 'Delicious. You should try it, Inspector.'

Sant made his excuses and got down to business. 'Let's suppose Chloe was researching news reports from the 1980s,' he said, biting into his crumbling flapjack. 'Where would she look?'

The historian put chin in hand and squinted. 'Reports of what exactly?'

'I'm not entirely sure, to tell you the truth.' Sant stared back to cover the lie.

Tony thumbed the pencil behind his earlobe. 'Depending on how far back she was searching, I reckon Chloe would use Nexis and save her findings as

email requests.'

He went on to explain that Nexis was a public record of newspapers from all over the world. Researching the 1980s with Nexis, however, was limited; most records only went back thirty years. Only a handful of newspapers stored older data. Sant actually knew about Nexis, but allowed Tony to elaborate before giving assurances he would check Chloe's university email account for Nexis messages.

'Is Chloe interested in your research on the Thatcher years?' Sant asked.

'I'd like to think she is,' Tony replied. 'She did read a journal article I wrote on race relations in Britain. I noted it in my diary – the one I showed you this morning.'

'So your research on Thatcher struck a chord with her interest in fascist dictators?'

Tony laughed. 'Now you put it like that, I suppose the answer is yes. You see, the early eighties was a period of transition in race relations, mostly for the better. For much of the 1970s, especially the two elections of 1974, the National Front made progress at the polls, not winning seats in parliament fortunately, but at times coming quite close and definitely winning sympathy from working-class whites.'

Sant began to feel strangely dislocated; inadequate even. Here was a man some twenty years his junior who knew more about the history of times he'd never lived through than someone who had.

'So what went wrong for the NF?' he asked. 'Or should I say, when did the white working class – I'd count myself among them – start seeing sense and stop voting for fascists?'

'The general elections of 1979 and 1983 were catastrophic for the far right,' Tony explained. 'You see, Margaret Thatcher stole the NF's thunder, and many of those voters tempted by the far right in the 1970s moved over to the less extreme, but still radical, right-wing politics of Thatcherism.'

Sant, though not a political beast by nature, still felt he knew enough to cast a sceptical eye over Tony's interpretation. 'Thatcher was politically right-wing, I'd agree, but a mouthpiece for racism and hatred?'

Tony smiled knowingly. ‘She wasn’t overtly racist – no British prime minister could afford to be – but she rubbed shoulders with Norman Tebbit, Harvey Proctor and other Monday Club hardliners, and shared some of Enoch Powell’s views on tighter immigration controls.’

Sant sipped his sugary tea. ‘Didn’t Powell call for the repatriation of immigrants?’

‘He did, but on a voluntary basis. Forced repatriation was what the NF demanded, but Powell refused to go that far.’

‘And Thatcher wasn’t as extreme as Powell on race,’ remarked Sant, ‘so I guess that made her a moderate racist. Would that be fair?’

‘Her supporters would deny the “racism” tag, yet critics rightly point to a television interview she gave in 1978. With millions of viewers at her beck and call, she denounced the National Front for being extremist thugs, only to go on and say she was worried that Britain could become swamped with people of a different culture. The press and a good deal of the public loved her for it, and her election victory the following year was no doubt owing to her tough stance on immigration, but to play the race card was a cheap shot. And don’t forget the patriotism and xenophobia she whipped up during the Falklands War.’

Sant swallowed the rest of his flapjack. ‘It doesn’t take an expert to conclude that she won a second term in office off the back of that victory against Argentina.’

‘Exactly. And the 1983 General Election victory saw Thatcher increasing her share of the vote. At the same time, the nationalists disappeared over the political horizon.’

‘Which meant time for change?’

Tony nodded. ‘Things were changing fast around this time. With the National Front falling apart and factions splitting off, eventually the key players divided into two camps. There was the old brigade represented by former leading figures in the NF. Most of these men were university-educated southerners keen to hold the balance of power in the face of threats from young upstarts. Those upstarts from the rival camp were remnants of the other fascist organisation that made its presence known in the seventies – the British

Movement.’

Sant recognised the name immediately and said the first thing that came into his head. ‘Football hooligans.’

‘Some of them, though not all hooligans were fascists.’

True, Sant thought. His experience of patrolling football grounds in the late eighties had taught him that most of the violence was not as organised or orchestrated as newspapers or TV documentaries pretended.

‘Anyway,’ continued Tony, ‘the British Movement was mostly working-class fascists from the north – there were branches in Manchester, Newcastle, certainly Leeds – people who had nothing in common with the London-centric crew who’d governed the NF for the previous decade.’

‘What happened to the Movement?’

‘It dissolved in 1983, but many of its members kept going, setting up local groups with a host of different names, and then, by the early nineties, some of the big cheeses in the Movement set up a new organisation called Combat 18.’

Sant knew it well. ‘A fair share of its members hailed from Leeds.’

‘I’ve researched this,’ Tony nodded, ‘and by my reckoning more than one thousand Combat 18 members were active in West Yorkshire in the mid-1990s.’

‘And some of them tore apart Lansdowne Road during the England-Ireland football match. What year was that?’

‘1995.’

‘You certainly know your dates.’

Tony smiled his appreciation. ‘I wouldn’t be much good as a political historian otherwise. But as I was saying, the early eighties brought major change. Essentially the NF, despite the wishes of its middle-class leaders, became more militant for a while, setting up Instant Response Groups and seeking connections with right-wing terrorist networks abroad, especially mafia leaders in Italy. Political Soldiers – that’s what they called themselves. The older faction, who preferred marches and demonstrations, broke off to form their own party – what they called the New National Front – later to be re-named the British National Party.’

‘If the BNP was more moderate than its predecessors,’ Sant motioned in

bewilderment, 'that goes to show how bad things were back then.'

'Right, Inspector. Whereas the BNP preferred peaceful campaigning, IRG militants spent their time training for military-style combat. The Notting Hill Carnival in London as well as the Chapeltown Carnival here in Leeds were targeted by the NF's militants – luckily nothing too serious happened.'

'Trouble flared at Notting Hill every year, I recall.'

'True, but far worse could've happened. I mean, there were genuine bomb plots and plans for mass shootings.'

'So what else was happening with the fascists at this time?'

Tony stifled a yawn and scratched his bald brow in one motion. 'Well, the two major threats to the country's stability in the eighties were IRA attacks on mainland Britain and the miners' strike.'

'I remember them well, though at least the miners were fighting for a worthy cause; their livelihoods.'

Tony wagged his finger purposefully. 'That's what made things interesting for the NF and later the BNP. You see, the IRA situation was a no-brainer for the fascists. Almost all of them, with the exception of the odd catholic among rank and file, were pro-Ulster, anti-IRA. They were united in their support for the loyal Britons of the Orange State fighting a treacherous rebellion. In fact, fascist magazines of the time like *Spearhead* and *Bulldog* were carrying posters urging fascists over here to cross the Irish Sea and join the UDA.'

'The Ulster Defence Association.' Another blast from Sant's past.

'It's also likely,' Tony continued, 'that in return for their help with the recruitment of soldiers over there, the UDA and other paramilitary groups supplied militant nationalists over here with guns, bomb-making equipment, drugs and all manner of niceties.'

'Where does the miners' strike feature in all this?'

'It threw a spanner in the works. Hatred of the IRA brought unity, but the miners' strike divided opinion among British nationalists. The enemy within, as Thatcher called the miners, was no enemy to working-class fascists in the north of England or in Wales. On the contrary, many of these people – the more militant NF as well as the dying embers of the Movement – respected the

striking miners, sang songs in support of them at football matches, and labelled working miners as scabs for crossing picket lines.'

'But the old and respectable face of the NF saw things differently?'

'Right. The old guard's anti-communist politics had no time for workshy miners and even less time for the mineworkers' union. You see, far right ideologies are inherently antagonistic to trade unions. On the contrary, the far right stands for elitism and protects the ruling interests against all forms of indiscipline amongst the working classes. Don't be kidded by fascists who call their parties "national socialist movements" – socialists they will never become.'

Sant drained the last of his tea. 'So for the far right, the miners' strike turned out to be a battle of wits between political principles and working-class solidarity.'

The young man yawned again before nodding. 'I couldn't have put it better myself.'

'They'll be no more midnight oil to burn if you're not careful.'

Tony repressed a laugh. 'Excuse my yawning. Yes, it's another late one for me tonight. I'm aiming to wrap up the conclusion to my monograph, but guaranteed, between then and now I'll find a hundred other citations to reference, footnotes to add.'

Sant rounded things off by asking Tony if he'd ever heard of Chloe's ex-boyfriend Jake Downing, but the name didn't register. Neither did the name Owen Madeley, the enigmatic screwdriver carrier seemingly unrelated to everything but Dryden's one-time naïve shadowing of a suspect.

As he was thanking Tony on their way out of the refectory, Sant caught a glance of the retreating back of Neil Rothwell, locks of fair hair flowing over his ears. Had the professor been snooping on his conversation with Tony? Rothwell was unmistakably a control freak if he spent overtime spying on his own colleagues. Such eccentric behaviour needed an explanation – urgently.

Nothing was more urgent now, though, than Sant's date with Mia.

* * *

IT WAS ALMOST TEN PM. That made him ninety minutes late for his dinner date. He phoned to apologise but, to his surprise, Mia didn't seem put out at all.

'I've been working on your behalf, Carl,' she said, 'crunching the microfiche. How about you meet me in the library again, same place as before, and don't get lost in the storeroom this time.' Her laughter trailed off as the line went dead.

Sant felt relief at her lenience with him. Time management had never been his strength. And he needed Mia to cut him some extra slack right now, for before joining her at the microfiche readers he felt the urge to log into a workstation in a quiet corner of the library – far away from snooping professors – using Chloe's username and password, as supplied to CID by the university on the day she was reported missing. A flood of emails appeared on the screen, all but the most recent ones having been read by investigating officers.

He ran the search-term 'Nexis' and got eight-six hits. Chloe had been busy scouring the news database, that much was certain. However, no reports were dated before the nineties apart from two in 1988 and 1989 from *The Times* and *The Guardian*, about how the country's police forces were rolling out initiatives to improve their relationship with Britain's "coloured communities" (the Macpherson report on institutional racism in the Met would set out more far-reaching reforms ten years later). It wasn't much, but it was enough to convince Sant that Chloe's Nexis research was exploring 1980s policing and race relations. Could this research have anything to do with her disappearance?

If the answer was yes, then the same subject-matter was surely tied to Dryden's murder as well as the killing of Gray over thirty years earlier, which meant that the woman ostensibly doubling as Dryden's informant and Chloe's ex-neighbour – the mysterious Susan Smith – was the only possible centre to this maze of interconnected crimes. Who was she? If I knew the answer to that, Sant told himself, then the road to solving all these crimes would shine forth as bright as a diamond.

Suddenly a bizarre thought struck him. If Chloe was still alive – a prospect looking less certain with each passing day – could she have been Dryden's shadowy informant on that fateful night, furnishing him with her former

neighbour Susan Smith's address? The address she'd written on a scrap of paper that Dryden had accidentally dropped and which was now safely concealed in an evidence bag? It was a long shot, but it couldn't be ruled out. Perhaps Dryden was playing the maverick detective, hiding from his colleagues the whereabouts of the missing Chloe. Or perhaps Dryden had no idea who his informant was and didn't live long enough to tell the tale; only long enough to etch a shorthand date on a misty window pane.

31 8... 4?

His brain cells doing somersaults, he logged out of Chloe's account, shutting down and unplugging the workstation for good measure, and then went in search of Mia. She was trawling through the November 1984 *Yorkshire Post* reel when he found her. He glared at the microfiche reader and saw images of a funeral cortege led by two horses and a lone drummer. Crowds of people flocked both sides of the road as the hearse, flanked by six uniformed sergeants and a drill instructor, made its way from Millgarth police station to the same church outside which the deceased had fallen just days earlier. Nine black Mercedes limousines, one for each of this cat's lives, trailed in their wake.

The coffin was draped with the blue ceremonial flag of West Yorkshire Police, on top of which lay a small mountain of floral tributes, a white crucifix of carnations. Just visible at the very pinnacle sat Sergeant Gray's helmet. Behind the pall bearers came the family of the unfortunate policeman tracked by never-ending files of officers – five hundred uniforms called off picket-line duty.

'If you didn't know whose wake it was, you'd think it fit for a king,' Mia commented.

'A military funeral no less,' he agreed.

'And the rector gave him a military send-off. Remembrance Sunday was only two days after, and with that in mind, the powers-that-be chose to add Gray's name to the list of war dead.' Sant wondered who those powers-that-be were. 'According to the rector,' she went on, 'Gray had fought valiantly in the war against crime. Chief Constable Waterford, who read the lesson, cursed his fellow officer's bad luck at stumbling upon the face of evil.'

Sant had come across those clichés so many times before, he'd become

desensitised to the fears they roused in others.

Mia spoke in hushed tones, heightening the tension of the events she was recounting. ‘There’s a quote from the rector’s sermon here – “George Gray’s death was absolutely selfless. He would know that the firearm had been used, while he himself was unarmed. What tremendous courage to care for his injured colleague by diverting the venom of the attacker to himself. Such absolute bravery must surely compare with the heroism of many of those who were killed in the great wars of this century” – and the rector goes on to talk about how, during his twenty loyal years of police service, Gray fought for a society free of tyranny. He prayed that the violence in society would end so children – at this point he nodded towards Gray’s son and daughter in the congregation – could enjoy a better future filled with peace and security.’

Sant focused the microfiche reader’s lens on a sad photograph of Gray’s widow wearing a black hat and charcoal-grey suit, mourning a husband and father lost forever. The image was captioned: “Victoria Gray hugs her children as the congregation sings ‘Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer’.” She was doing her best to comfort them while dabbing at the tears running down her cheeks.

Behind Victoria Gray sat Sally Tanner. Her husband had pleaded with doctors to let him out of hospital so he could attend the funeral of his “shift Sarge” who he described as a “good bloke” as well as an inspirational supervisory sergeant. But Detective Chief Inspector Lotherton had echoed the medical advice: “He is not fit enough sadly.”

Also in attendance were the Lord Lieutenant of West Yorkshire, the High Sheriff of Yorkshire, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Leeds, and Chief Constables of forces around the country including North Yorkshire, Humberside and Cumbria. The Lord Mayor called for the immediate return of the death penalty for police killers. The Secretary of the West Yorkshire Police Federation was more restrained, calling for tighter controls on firearms but dismissing the idea of routinely arming officers.

Mia turned the knob of the reader clockwise and the spool of film wound down a couple of pages, settling on an image of a group of uniformed mourners.

Sant immediately picked out familiar faces in the crowd; the young, eager, wrinkle-free faces of Gilligan and Lister side by side. Whereas Gilligan's head was bowed, Lister was practically facing the snapping photographer, his deep-set eyes appearing to protrude towards the spotlight like questioning eyes, querying the good intentions of the press and their prying cameras.

Pictured elsewhere were the leading lights of Leeds CID past and present. The hard men of the dark sixties and even darker seventies; men who'd done war service and had the scars to prove it; men who'd handled the M62 coach bombing, the Black Panther murders, the Rowntree killing spree; men still reeling from the five-year hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper.

Some discharged from service, others heading that way.

Sant spotted retired Assistant Chief Constable Timothy Pitman among them, still bearing the burden of public condemnation following the Ripper fiasco. *Pitman's the man for the job!* That's what they used to say. They stopped saying it once the Ripper had ruined his reputation.

Standing next to Pitman were his one-time right-hand man, Detective Chief Superintendent Alf Farrar, and the man who'd replaced him, Assistant Chief Constable Trevor Branwell. Branwell was untainted by the past – unlike his peers. He was chosen by CC Waterford to head up the internal enquiry into the Ripper investigation – and had come out smelling of roses. Not content to let it be, in the 1990s he'd visited Sutcliffe in prison and made him confess to further attacks on women long suspected to fit the Ripper series; his *modus operandi*.

There was no sign in any of the photos of Waterford's predecessor, former Chief Constable Ronald Gregory. Sant knew why. Gregory had disgraced himself in 1983 by selling his Ripper memoirs to a national newspaper for a five-figure fee. Swiftly ostracised by the force, he never attained the knighthood he'd desperately hoped for.

On the same page of the newspaper was a short report on the Manchester armed robbery connection which tallied with what Sant had read in the Gray murder file earlier that day. Sergeant Lister was mentioned by name as the detective leading this line of enquiry and was quoted as saying there was strong evidence to link the investigation into the police shootings with plots to raid post

offices, banks and building societies. If only he'd ignored Lotherton's instinct and focused his energies closer to home, Lister might have solved the case and caught the perps a lot sooner. Who knows? Lister could have attained the heady heights of West Yorkshire Police's chief officer in record time if he'd steered clear of the pot-shots taken by Lotherton and co.

Mia suddenly laughed out loud, making Sant jump. 'Journalists dream up the daftest theories. It says here: "A *Yorkshire Post* reporter witnessed detectives mingling with the crowds, scanning the faces of everyone around – in case the killer or his accomplice, out of morbid curiosity, had returned to the scene of the crime".'

'You'd better believe it,' said Sant.

'Never!'

'It happens more often than you'd believe. Last year a man was interviewed by TV reporters after an elderly neighbour of his was stabbed to death. He talked so much the reporters made their excuses and hurried away. Five hours later he was arrested and charged with murder.'

'My word! Was he guilty?'

'As sin. They got a DNA match on the knife – the case against him was indisputable.'

'But why talk openly about a murder you've committed?'

'It must be psychological,' he said after pausing for thought. 'Some murderers, for some reason, go out of their way to draw attention to themselves.'

'How weird. But then, I should possess a working knowledge of the criminal mind.'

Sant looked anxious as well as confused. 'How come?'

Mia laughed. 'Don't worry. I'm not a psychopath. I'm a psychology student.'

'PhD?'

'That's what I'm working towards.'

'I'd better be careful what I say from now on.'

She wiped at his sleeve. 'I'm not a shrink, though I find psychoanalysis intriguing.'

'Anything unusual you've *analysed* in the news reports?' he asked.

‘I’ve noted the key twists and turns, but it’s less than likely there’s anything here not to be found in your top-secret files.’

‘Try me.’

Mia’s list covered a two-week period following Gray’s murder. Sant began ticking off each item, mentally tallying it with information from Capstick and the police archives. By the time he’d checked the last item, only one was left unticked.

‘A possible opening?’ she probed.

‘Possible but not probable,’ was his response. ‘I’ll consult my archives expert, who loves a daily covering of dust. Can you print this story?’

‘Certainly, though it’ll cost you ten pence.’

‘I’ve got a better offer,’ said Sant. ‘A very late dinner.’

‘Dinner at one in the morning?’

‘The best time to eat curry.’

‘Okay,’ she said. ‘I’d like that.’

WANTING TO SLEEP. INCAPABLE OF SLEEP.

Good cop, bad cop.

Role reversal.

Ray-Bans snoozed while Baseball Cap did the talking, his eyes half-hidden above the curved red brim of his cap. Lean and mean, he wore a constant grin of sardonic amusement.

He reached for the wallet in the pocket of his coffee-brown sports jacket and plucked out a passport-sized photo.

‘Recognise her?’

He dangled the image a few inches from her nose. By now it was difficult to see anything, even close up, though she didn’t need to look to know who it would be. She tried shaking her head, but the searing pain in her neck rendered her paralysed from the shoulders up.

‘No need to answer, Sheila. We’re not stupid. Give up pretending and tell us where she is.’

They hadn’t found her. At least that was something to cling on to. Something precious. And for a blissful moment spent basking in a silence that lingered like the last gasp of oxygen in the tank, she felt a delightful concoction of relief and hope.

Hope for Chloe; not for herself.

Baseball Cap began circling her, hands in trouser pockets. He had a funny way of walking that took some of the gloss off his air of supremacy. She thought

of Monty Python and the Ministry of Silly Walks, and that made her giggle. A stifled giggle, that became a distinct snort. She could scarcely believe her own nervous system.

‘I won’t ask you what you find so funny about being tied to a chair and beaten senseless. Perhaps you like it that way. Many women do.’

He stopped in mid-walk directly behind her so that she was unable to see what he held in his hand. Then he whispered his toxic breath in her ear.

‘You like agony, Sheila, don’t you? You fantasise about violence. These things stimulate your dull senses. Each time someone hits you or chokes you or stamps on you, the next time you want it a bit more. And harder. Much harder. Well, Sheila, whatever your needs, I’m happy to oblige.’

He adjusted the Taser to its highest ‘fired’ setting before thrusting the stun gun into her right armpit and letting fifty thousand volts go to work. She began to quiver violently and would have ripped her own arms and legs off had they not been fixed down to the heavy chair. Ten seconds later he released the charge. She coughed up bile and began breathing again.

By now Baseball Cap was sat in his favourite chair, waving the Taser around like a remote control, she the device at his mercy.

‘How did that feel?’ She didn’t speak, she couldn’t speak. ‘You don’t need to express gratitude to me; I understand perfectly what a thrill it gave you. Look again at the girl in the photograph. Where is she? Tell me immediately or I will electrocute you again.’

He patted the Taser, his pet attack dog.

She was still coming up for breath, her head throbbing like no headache she’d suffered before. Her whole body was burning yet felt as rigid as a block of ice. Her tortured spasms gradually softened to something like contractions.

Baseball Cap decided to play for time a little longer.

‘Since you’re not cooperating, Sheila, let me refresh your memory. The girl in the photo is Chloe Lee. She’s a close friend of yours. You used to live next to her.’

In any normal state she’d have found it impossible to conceal surprise at the man’s intimate knowledge of her past – a past spent hiding from the likes of him

and his loathsome companion. But so battered and drained was she that nothing could betray her inner emotions any longer.

‘You were her guardian for much of her childhood. You grew to like her, to love her. Having no children of your own it was only natural to seek out a surrogate. Besides, her parents were woeful role models. If it wasn’t for your caring outlook, Sheila, a girl of Chloe’s maladjusted upbringing would have never considered a university education, let alone achieved the necessary academic credentials to attain it.’ He stabbed a finger at the photograph on the coffee table. ‘We are lucky people, are we not, to have encountered such a clever girl? And who was the source of her cleverness? The answer, without doubt, is you.’

Keeping one eye on the scene before him and the other on his Seiko watch, Ray-Bans shuffled uncomfortably in his lean-to throne. He didn’t want to lower the pathos, but if this woman wasn’t for turning, then flogging a dead horse meant valuable time going to waste. Besides, he wasn’t young any more and needed his forty winks, the entertainment before him proving a maddening distraction.

‘You taught her a great deal,’ Baseball Cap continued, ‘much of it useful, for sure, but some of your teachings were less advisable. You told her about your old journalist friend. You recommended him to her, or maybe her to him.’ Then he pointed to Ray-Bans. ‘And you told her how once upon a time you witnessed something terrible which, you said, involved my good friend here.’ Ray-Bans shuffled some more. ‘Something to do with the kind of people my good friend mixed with; heroic people that your lot liked to harass and victimise. This so-called terrible act you witnessed – and filmed for posterity! – was so disturbing to your flawed vision of a multicultural society that you couldn’t tell anyone else about it without jeopardising your very existence...’

He pushed in close to her, then screamed: ‘Is that not so?’

She stared blankly at Chloe’s picture, unable to quell the inner liquid glazing her bloodshot eyes.

‘You told no-one about this shocking experience except, many years later, the girl in the photo; the girl who lived on your street. And that was your great

mistake, Sheila. Maybe Chloe asked too many questions; maybe she was a little too curious, like Alice in Wonderland; or maybe you let your secret slip out one night, after too many glasses of wine, and from there it was a down-hill journey to where you are now, desperately trying to put the brakes on an unstoppable train.'

Baseball Cap's speech was as carefully rehearsed as a West End play. He knew everything. And what he didn't he'd probably guess right.

'You're the cause of your own downfall. You could have carried on living in peace, but now you've spoilt it all, or more to the point, darling Chloe has spoilt it for you. She told us everything. We've been hunting for you. And now we've found you, we will find her. So you see, there's really no escape.' He paused. 'My partner and I are prepared to come to an agreement. You'll agree. Or you will die a very painful death.'

He lifted his cap and placed his face as close to hers as possible without touching skin.

'Chloe's loose tongue has landed you in the mess you're in. You can save your life by answering one very simple question. Where is Chloe, Sheila?'

She threw another blank stare.

'We won't harm her. We only want back what rightly belongs to us. We know you've shown her the video, and whether she has it or not, we must find her and – how shall I put it – correct her interpretation of past events. A corrupt seed that you planted in her brain.'

Baseball Cap tapped his fingers lightly on the photograph in front of him, as if by doing so he might conjure up the girl's location, but no voodoo inspiration came his way.

'Are you ready to speak?'

He eyeballed the woman in front of him, Taser clenched in his grip.

All she gave back was silence.

* * *

SANT WOKE up with a sore head. The curry had been great but he'd washed it

down with one too many bottles of lager. Mia had disliked the beer and reverted to water with her chicken bhuna. Good for her, he reflected. As well as talking about the Gray news reports, they'd shared their favourite music and movies, and then shared a taxi back, Mia getting out first at her student flat. They were fast becoming good friends and Sant blessed his luck at having found someone with whom he could enjoy the time of day – or night.

He rushed out of his city-centre apartment – how he needed a big breakfast to replace vitamin loss – and headed straight to HQ and Capstick. He also needed to touch base with Hardaker on the bus murders and explain how Dryden's numbers appeared to be shorthand for a date. Halloween 1984. The day another Leeds policeman had been shot down.

Capstick wasn't there when he arrived at the office, but Holdsworth was.

'He's down in the basement,' she said. 'You've got him hooked on dusty files and broken tapes.'

'Great,' said Sant. 'How are you and Capstick getting on?'

Holdsworth looked up from her paperwork. 'Very well, thanks for asking. We're having loads of... fun.'

'And don't let me stop you.'

'Don't worry. We won't. And by the way, I've had no luck yet searching for an ex-PC called Frank Tanner, but I've got a new lead on Dryden – though I'm still chasing the details so don't hold your breath. And as for the Chloe Lee case, Jake Downing is returning from London later today, so I'll hook up with Brad and draft up more awkward questions for the cocky lad.'

'Good work, Holdsworth. I'll be back once I've finished with your boyfriend.'

He winked and left hastily.

His partner was less dust-ridden than before, the white covering on his NHS specs resembling fine snow rather than a blizzard.

'I've got something for you to chase up, Capstick.'

'Certainly, sir.'

Sant showed him the *Yorkshire Post* report Mia had copied. 'Dated the 3rd of November 1984, referring to an incident on the evening of the 2nd, two days

after Gray's murder. Firearms officers surrounded a block of semi-detached council houses converted into flats on Stanks Lane South and arrested a man at gunpoint in connection with an armed raid at a nearby property.'

'Where's the connection with Gray?'

Sant pointed to the report. 'It's not clear there is one – a senior West Yorkshire police source is quoted as saying: "There are no early indications that these are the men involved in Sergeant Gray's murder, but we're keeping our options open".'

'Seems like a connection was trying to be made.'

'Hoping to be made, Capstick, in which case there should be something in the files about the incident.'

'There's nothing, sir.'

'Are you sure?'

'Certain.'

Sant looked bemused. 'Do the honours again, Capstick, just in case you've missed a trick in that dust storm.'

Capstick nodded reluctantly and ventured back into the ether of the archive room.

Sant sat on the ancient desk and read the news report carefully. Stanks Lane South cut through Swarcliffe and Seacroft, not far from Chloe's mother's home as well as the former home of her elusive neighbour. A local resident had told the *Yorkshire Post*: "Six police cars sped into the road. Two police cars blocked the road near my house and another two were pulled across the lane further up. Four policemen then crouched behind one car, their rifles and pistols trained on the flats."

Another witness, an elderly resident, had said: "The police with guns seemed to be everywhere. I was terrified. They said they were looking for stolen property. I could see across to the next flat and I saw they were searching the loft."

The report continued: "Police confirmed that a man had been taken away from the flat. Officers were searching the grounds by torchlight and were later seen removing items from the flat in black plastic bags."

So officers had been searching for stolen property after an armed burglary. It seemed like the man arrested had been grassed on by a snitch, probably in return for kinder treatment at the hands of a seething police force. These were desperate times for police and criminals alike. The underworld would be under scrutiny for many months to come. Known troublemakers would be put under surveillance, any excuse for an arrest granted.

Perhaps all this pressure brought to bear on the lawless fraternity had cast doubts over who to trust, and forced a few confessions in return for lighter sentences. But all these leads and tip-offs had proven false, meaningless, insufficient in the hunt for a police killer.

Midway through Sant's meditations a dust-coated Capstick entered his consciousness and broke its peace.

‘Definitely no record of the Stanks Lane South raid, sir.’

‘Certain?’

Capstick frowned. ‘You’re not going to suggest I triple check—’

‘Wouldn’t dream of it, Capstick. And besides,’ he grinned, ‘I suspect you’re right. Chase up the finer facts with your good friend Holdsworth, and don’t let go too easily. I think we’re onto something.’

But Sant didn’t think it at all; he knew it.

* * *

THE JERKY HANDS on the dial of his imitation Rolex told him it was half past ten; time to call on Mrs Andrews and her husband. He drove the short distance from HQ to their Gipton address, calling Holdsworth on the way to explain why her new lead on Dryden would have to be put on hold.

Much like its neighbour Seacroft, the garden-city council estate of Gipton had sprung up mid century to accommodate the hordes of working-class folk – Irish Catholics in particular – forced to relocate from inner-city slums. A few die-hard residents held firm and refused to leave until the bulldozers roared their disapproval. But even they had to admit that their new homes, with their accompanying greenery and newly-tarmacked roads, looked a damn sight better

than the squalor to which they were accustomed.

Sant had grown up on a street like the Andrews's. Much of this north-east segment of the city was a product of the once-held, flawed ambition to make Leeds Britain's first 'Motorway City', the inner-ring road its pulsing heart. The magnates of Leeds fixated on the language of transportation and technology as they tried to right the wrongs of their forefathers, most of whom let the city go to waste and did nothing to alleviate poverty – in stark contrast to the philanthropic industrialists of nearby Bradford and Halifax. Sadly, the honourable objectives behind a 'New Leeds', a 'Motorway-City Leeds', had proven unworkable – and the envisaged garden suburbs of Gipton and Seacroft were no less riddled with problems than the Victorian slums they'd replaced.

He parked his car outside a boarded-up newsagent's, sidestepped a sea of broken glass littering the road, and took a deep breath before approaching the front door of the Coldcotes Walk house.

To his surprise, the door started to open before he'd even knocked. But it took some time to fully open because it needed lifting as well as pulling, its hinges jolted by some kind of violent attack from the outside. An unwelcome visitor, Sant suspected.

At last, the head of Mrs Andrews appeared around the door frame. She hesitated a moment, as if weighing up the intentions of her caller, before releasing the safety chain and allowing him in.

He was shown into a small lounge with mock ceiling beams before being motioned towards a sofa which he literally sank into, its springs shot to pieces through years of wear and tear.

'I'm sorry to bother you again,' he began.

'It's no bother at all,' she replied, perching on a buffet.

'Is your husband at home?'

Mrs Andrews fidgeted with her wedding ring and spoke softly, as if afraid of being overheard. 'No – I mean yes – I mean, he's here but not in the house.' She hesitated before pointing: 'The garden.'

'I see.'

'Pruning the creepers. I'll call him—'

‘Not just yet.’ Sant gestured for her to stay seated. She nodded a reluctant consent. ‘Your daughter Kate knew Chloe Lee, didn’t she?’ She nodded again. ‘Tell me about their friendship.’

Mrs Andrews blew into a hankie, drying her teary eyes at the same time. ‘I can tell you what I know,’ she snivelled, ‘but do I have to go through it again?’

‘Again?’

‘Yes. Don’t you policemen talk to each other?’

Resisting the urge to bite on a fresh toothpick, he kept calm and sidestepped the awkward cross-questioning. ‘Which colleague of mine spoke to you, Mrs Andrews?’

She looked up at the ceiling. ‘Oh, let me think... my memory’s terrible.’ She shook her head before a flicker of recollection crossed her tired face. ‘An Irish name.’

‘Gilligan?’

‘Yes, that’s him.’

Sant fixed his eyes on a school portrait of Kate hanging on the wall. She was staring unsmilingly at him, a picture of sincerity lost to the world, her right to justice under threat from paranoid policemen panicking about what to do next. He joined up the dots in his head as he gazed at the girl: so it seemed Hardaker had read the same signals in that first interview with Mrs Andrews and relayed his suspicions to Old Man Gilligan, who for some reason had chosen to visit Mrs Andrews rather than let Hardaker take over the reins. Talk about unorthodox.

‘I’m afraid I’ve not had chance to liaise with Assistant Chief Constable Gilligan,’ he lied.

Mrs Andrews looked unconvinced, but answered the inferred request anyway. ‘They weren’t close friends. They’d only known each other for a year or so. I think they first met in some bar or club.’

‘Did Kate and Chloe go out in town often?’

She blew into the hankie again.

‘Once a fortnight – and always clubbing. I mean, they dressed in the same outfits; got on like a house on fire. Until the fall out.’

‘Fall out?’

‘Well, what do girls fall out over?’

‘Boys?’

Mrs Andrews nodded. And then Sant tried his luck again.

‘Callum Willis?’

‘What it was, Kate and Callum had been going steady for years – they first became close in the second year of high school.’

Sant made a rough calculation in his head. ‘Six years ago.’

‘They were a rare breed these days; first loves still in love. Not many people know this – my husband included – but they got engaged a few weeks back. A quiet celebration is what they called it. I was so happy for them.’ She paused to look at the portrait of her daughter. ‘Such a terrible waste.’

‘Your husband didn’t approve of their relationship?’

Mrs Andrews squinted nervously towards the rear of the house. ‘Don’t tell him I said this, Inspector, but he hated Callum; looked down on him. It was as if Callum was not worthy of being Kate’s boyfriend. The arguments we’ve had... well, I won’t bore you with them. Having said that, if my husband knew what I know, he’d murder the poor lad.’

She stopped short, realising the futility of her remarks, and bit into the hankie she was gripping.

‘I take it Chloe enters the picture somewhere?’

Mrs Andrews nodded. ‘At first Kate wouldn’t talk about it – she was so upset I couldn’t get a word in edgeways. Basically, Callum had a fling with Chloe. Kate locked herself in her bedroom for ages, crying her eyes out and refusing to speak to Callum, but at last they made up.’

‘Were you happy about that?’

She was thrown by the question. ‘Of course. Callum even apologised to my face, which was a nice touch. He told me the wedding was still on. Not that they were getting married for a couple of years. No need to rush out and buy a hat just yet.’

Then the tears emerged in full force, Mrs Andrews spreading her hankie over her face like a shield combating the horrors of the here and now.

Sant kept silent for a minute before continuing. ‘Did your daughter know

Chloe's ex-boyfriend; a young man called Jake Downing?' She shook her head. 'And am I right in assuming Chloe didn't grace your doorstep again?'

'I don't know; I really don't. I reckoned at first Kate had erased Chloe from her memory, but I was wrong; they'd become friendly again. I overheard a phone call only a few days back. Kate was talking to someone; arranging to meet them somewhere. And I'm sure she said something like, "Okay Chloe, see you soon." I was going to ask her about it but she shot off to see Callum and I forgot after that.' And then Mrs Andrews became transfixed. 'You don't think Chloe met my daughter and Callum on that bus and murdered them out of revenge for getting back together, do you?'

He didn't think so but his reply was interrupted by a creaking sound. Mr Andrews appeared at the door to the kitchenette, shrugging his shoulders and removing his mud-stained gardening gloves like the journeyman pro.

'I see my wife has taken the liberty to fill you in on our daughter's unhealthy acquaintances,' he remarked without a greeting.

Sant began to speak, only for his words to be drowned out with vitriol.

'Let me tell you, Inspector, that if this useless waste of space here would've kept me informed about our daughter's piss-poor attempt at a boyfriend, not to mention her other so-called friends, I would've put an instant stop to these shenanigans!'

Mrs Andrews started sobbing hopelessly, leaving Sant the reluctant referee in a family dispute he'd witnessed too often before. Fight, bicker, hate, fight some more.

'Discipline!' piped up Mr Andrews. 'That's what society needs more of. Look at the teachers, for crying out loud. They can't lay a finger on their pupils, so all they do is throw the morons in a classroom and ask them to colour in pretty pictures of farm animals while they watch movies on their phones. It's a disgrace. The way I brought up my girl, Inspector, was to learn right from wrong. She was a good lass – always was – until a few parasites interfered and turned my Kate rotten, Callum Willis the chief culprit among them.'

What happened next took Sant by surprise as Mrs Andrews stirred from her grief and turned scarlet with anger, hurling her soaking hankie at her husband.

‘Go to hell!’ she screamed. ‘Hell’s where you belong! If you think my own flesh and blood couldn’t fend for herself, then you knew nothing about that girl. Call yourself a father? You’re good for nothing!’

Sant was ready to step in and fend off blows, but as it turned out, no incident of domestic violence was imminent. Instead, Mr Andrews bowed his head like a beaten boxer and replaced his battered gloves before sluggishly retreating to his green-fingers haven.

Sant took Mr Andrews’s exit as a cue for his own, thanking Mrs Andrews before hurrying out of the warped front door. He wasn’t so much hurrying from the scene as trying to collect his thoughts as quickly as he could. What he’d heard had confirmed his suspicions; that Kate and Callum had been on that bus by arrangement with Chloe. There was no hard evidence to prove the arrangement, but if Mrs Andrews was right about the call she’d eavesdropped on, one more knot had just been tied in the string linking the bus killings to Chloe’s disappearance.

What troubled Sant most, however, was Gilligan’s interfering ways. There was no querying the Old Man’s right to interview Mrs Andrews about the death of her daughter in connection with Dryden and the other bus victims, but to follow the Chloe line of questioning without consulting him first was a stab in the back, if not an actual breach of protocol. Something about Gilligan stunk, and it wasn’t his old-fashioned attire.

Sant was reminded of Holdsworth’s words of warning – he’d have to *tread carefully from now on*. Replace *tread* with *tiptoe*.

SLEEPING. SLEEPING. SLEEPING.

Waking.

Wanting to die. Incapable of death.

Having conceded defeat on the first photograph, Baseball Cap reached again into the pocket of his jacket, extracted a second photo and placed it alongside the image of Chloe.

‘Recognise him?’ he said.

She peered down at a man in uniform, his face youthful and lean. The glossy black-and-white finish to the print dated it seventies or early eighties. The policeman in the picture would be much older now. Over thirty years older, she judged.

But age didn’t lie. She knew who the officer was – and why these men wanted him. His name was Tanner. Frank Tanner. At least, that was his name in 1984. A good cop. And what is more, a witness, like her, to wicked men like her captors.

Here was a witness they’d failed to take care of. A witness who’d evaded, by hook or by crook, the net that ensnares.

Since, however, she felt little sentiment towards him compared with the girl in the other print, she betrayed her innermost pangs and managed, despite the throbbing pain, to shake her head.

‘You’re lying to me, Sheila.’

Silence.

‘Don’t deny you know this man. You’ve known him for a long time.’ He waddled around the room. ‘Unless I’m mistaken, and several dicky birds tell me I’m not, you’ve been in touch with this former officer of the law very recently.’

Thoughts wormed through patches of fertile soil in the woman’s shattered mind before she cottoned on. Chloe had discovered the whereabouts of this ex-policeman, anticipating future events like the true genius she’d proven to be, and now these men were searching for him – and her – out of fear the twain should meet and conspire against them.

The woman didn’t try to suppress the Cheshire-cat grin spreading across her bleeding face. Chloe was ahead of the game; that realisation alone gave comfort. Chloe had found her man, and protected him from certain recrimination at the hands of Ray-Bans and Baseball Cap.

Ironically, that same protection wasn’t afforded to herself. The torture she was suffering bore the prickly truth that her dear Chloe was prepared to put anyone at risk, including her closest guardian, family and friends, in the pursuit of justice.

But there was no bitterness; no bad taste in the captive’s mouth. Chloe was a true heroine. She’d betrayed no-one and cared for nothing but the ultimate truth. She’d been well trained and was executing her mission to perfection. That was the hope anyway; the ideal good-news-story that might emerge out of this hateful affair.

Just maybe.

The voice snapped out, killing her thoughts.

‘Where is this man, Sheila?’

This time she couldn’t be bothered to shake her head or move any part of her body to gratify the piece of shit blocking her line of vision. Let him suffer more blank responses. She would tell him zilch.

Baseball Cap stooped and poked his nose in her face. ‘I won’t ask you again.’

Silence. Wonderful silence.

She let it linger as long as she could bear.

Ray-Bans had clearly had enough. 'Leave her to me,' he called to his sidekick as he rose from his throne and paced across the room before thrusting his red-wine face in hers.

'It's like this. You won't tell us where Tanner is. Fine. But you *will* tell us where the girl is.' His spindly finger jabbed at Chloe's photo.

Play the silence once more, she begged herself.

'I will count to five,' Ray-Bans announced in strangled tones. 'One – two – three...'

Her hand shot up like a rocket.

Ray-Bans, pleased, said, 'Say it.'

No longer able to bear her muted part in this dreary performance, with one almighty intake of scorched breath she forced out words in the hope, not the certainty, they would be heard.

'Go – fuck – your – boy – friend – and – then – go – fuck – your – self.'

Baseball Cap looked on with admiration as his companion's face turned from red wine to purple rage in the blink of an eye. His sunglasses had even come off. How dare this witch humiliate them?

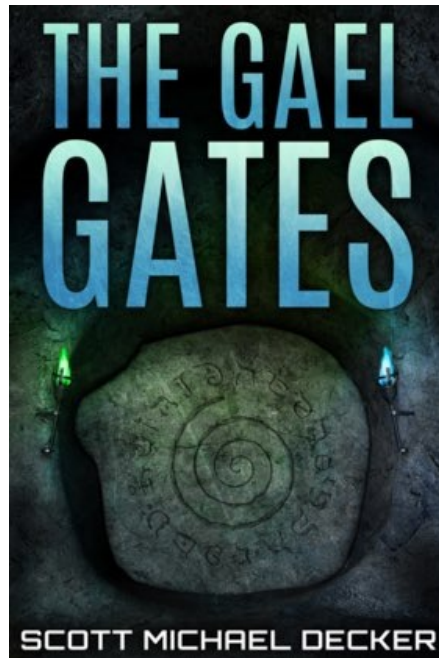
With a smooth motion the younger man grabbed her by the throat, lifting her chair over, and now standing astride her, his right foot firmly crushing her rib cage, he wedged the Taser between her thighs and pulled the trigger. Her lower half twisted and threshed helplessly as he gradually guided the stun gun upwards. Then he tilted it ninety degrees before shoving it up her, blood streaming in all directions like some macabre reconstruction of a baby being born.

The baby cried, cried, cried some more, cried herself silly in her cradle of tangled wood and rope.

At last, the crying stopped.

This was no gift of life to the world; just the glorious, signed and sealed, gift of death.

Next in the Series:
Chloe - Never Forget
(Carl Sant Murder Mysteries Book 2)



An off-duty detective gunned down. A dead woman. A missing student. And now, a former policeman in search of his past. Dead or alive, something connects these people, and it's up to D.I. Carl Sant to discover what it is.

A series of cold-case inquiries leads D.I. Sant and his colleagues to investigate a botched assassination plot dating back to the 1980s. The deeper they dig, the more secrets are revealed, including shocking connections to the infamous National Front.

Meanwhile, the memory of former P.C. Tanner, survivor of the assassination, is recovering. Sant must find Tanner and figure out who is behind it all, before his superiors lose their rag and more lives are lost.

[Chloe - Never Forget](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dan Laughey is a crime writer. First and foremost. In-between times, he's a lecturer at Leeds Beckett University where he teaches a course called 'Youth, Crime and Culture' among other things. He has written several books on the subject including *Music and Youth Culture*, based on his PhD in Sociology at Salford University. He also holds a BA in English from Manchester Metropolitan University and an MA in Communications Studies from the University of Leeds.

Before entering academia he enjoyed a brief career in public relations, became a secondary school teacher, barman, waiter, trader, door-to-door salesman, car park attendant, film extra and convenience-store manager (not necessarily in that order).

Dan was born in Otley and bred in Ilkley, West Yorkshire, a hop and a skip away from the Leeds setting of his *Chloe* mystery novels featuring DI Carl Sant. He now lives in the Leeds suburb of Guiseley and shares his time between England and Thailand, where his in-laws live. His wife and two sons keep him occupied when he's not lecturing or writing, and all three are technologically savvier than him.

Dan's crime writing was purely academic to begin with. He's written about media violence and tackled the age-old concern about television and video games influencing patterns of antisocial behaviour in society. After years of research and theoretical scrutiny, he still hasn't cracked that particular nut!

He's also written about the role of CCTV and surveillance in today's Big Brother world, the sometimes fraught relationship between rap music and juvenile crime, football hooliganism, and the sociocultural legacy of Britain's most notorious serial killer – the Yorkshire Ripper.

All in all, his work has been translated into four languages (French, Hebrew, Korean and Turkish) and published in India as well as Europe and North America. He's presented guest lectures at international conferences in Amsterdam, London, Dublin, Montreal and Bangkok, and has appeared on BBC Radio and ITV News in addition to providing expert commentary for *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Yorkshire Post* and *Yorkshire Evening Post*.

Dan's hobbies include hunting for treasure at car boot sales, watching football and playing the occasional (bad) round of golf. He also enjoys running and gambling on the horses (no connection between the two) and can't get enough of his wife's Thai cuisine.

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To learn more about Dan Laughey, visit his [author page on Next Chapter's website](#).