**19Don’t Look Now 3 (1407 words)**

The bells go down as we take our first bite of lunch. It’s always at mealtimes. I curse loudly as we head for the pole drop. First down into the appliance bay, I climb into the driver’s seat of the water-tender ladder. The 110v charging plug flies out from the side of the vehicle the instant I turn the key. Mick, our sub-officer, tears the info sheet from the teleprinter, as the rest of the crew scramble aboard struggling to change into their fire kit. I switch on the blues as Mick jumps into the cab. The station doors open automatically and we’re first away.

‘RTC. Junction of Thomas Lewis Way and St Denys Road. Persons trapped.’

I floor the throttle and swing the heavy Volvo to the right as Mick hits the wailers. I check the road and pull off the forecourt. Thankfully it’s not too busy. I check my mirrors and see the water tender right behind us, blues and headlamps flashing.

‘HX from 54 Whiskey Lima. Mobile to RTC at junction of Thomas Lewis Way and St Denys Road.’

‘Roger, 54 Whisky Lima. HX out.’

I hear 54 Whisky Tango book mobile too. Engine screaming, I accelerate through the lights at the Charlotte Place junction, as Mick blows the bull-horn repeatedly. Traffic pulls over allowing us past. Children at the bus stop wave, but there’s not time to wave back. The lights are in our favour at Onslow Road as we power round the right-hand bend. I’m keeping a constant watch for cars pulling out and pedestrians. It can sometimes be quite crowded here, requiring the utmost concentration. Today we’re lucky, the road is virtually empty. I accelerate down the hill, through red lights at Mount Pleasant Road then up the other side. The lights onto Thomas Lewis Way are green, cars pulled over to the left as we fly through doing over fifty. The water tender is still right behind us. Mick changes the tone on the wailers, then works overtime on the bull-horn, as we approach the next two sets of lights. All is clear, we’re through.

I can see the RTC ahead. It doesn’t look good. From what I can see it looks as though a car and a motorcycle have hit each other in the middle of the junction. It’s a traffic light-controlled junction, so one of them hasn’t given way. The front of the car is raised up, sitting on top of the motorcycle. I can just make out the forks and front wheel sticking out from under the car. I guess the rider is also under there somewhere, but I can’t see from this angle. I pull up next to a police traffic car, blocking part of the junction. Tactically, it’s the best place for us to deal with the incident. The water tender squeals to a halt alongside.

’HX from 54 Whisky Lima and 54 Whisky Tango. In attendance at Thomas Lewis Way.’

Control now know both appliances are here.

‘Bike and a car. Lifting gear, cutting gear and wedges. Run a hose out too. Let’s go!’

Mick issues orders and the rest of the guys get to work instantly. We’ve practised this often enough, so it’s second nature. I relax slightly knowing that my job for the moment is done. I engage the PTO and hear the pump kick in. The guys are already running out a hose and carrying foam extinguishers just in case. I grab my fire-kit from the right-hand front locker, quickly changing. Should the vehicles catch fire, my job is to operate the pump. I open the pump bay shutter and check the pump. I fit a by-pass hose allowing water to recirculate through the tank. I also ensure the high-pressure hose-reels are charged, then bring the revs up. Should the guys need it, they have forty psi. I hang my two-way radio in the pump bay and nod to my mate working in the pump bay of the water tender.

‘Looks nasty. I hope they’re all okay.’

Not sure if he’s heard me over the noise of the screaming pump, I peer from behind the pump bay towards the scene of the RTC. Both crews swarm round the car. Three police vehicles are parked across the road and a couple of ambulances have arrived. A policeman is talking to a couple of young girls who look no more than eighteen or nineteen. Stoney faced, he’s preparing a breathalyser. One of the girls, a blonde who looks sick and ashen, is also being treated by a paramedic. I guess they were in the car. I hope the biker is okay, but it’s not looking good. Paramedics are now treating someone on the ground near the car.

I notice our Station Officer approaching, a grim look on his face.

‘Can you come over to my car a minute? There’s something I need to talk to you about.’

‘What’s up, Guv?’

I frown, questioningly. This is highly unusual. Why is the governor taking me off the pump in the middle of a job? What’s wrong? One of my mates comes over to take my place at the pump. He won’t look at me. What the hell is going on? I turn to look at the scene of the RTC.

‘Don’t look now, mate.’

The governor grabs my arm. Instinctively I break free and run to the wrecked car. My mates have extricated the motorcycle and rider from under the car. Paramedics work feverishly on the rider. I spot long dark hair and at first it doesn’t register, but I recognise the bike instantly. The purple dragon paint job she was so proud of is now badly scratched and distorted. I spot her bag lying forlornly in the road, temporarily forgotten. Terror grips me as I desperately try to see more. Strong hands hold me, steering me away, not allowing me closer. I feel numb, but my mates all know what’s best and try to advise me. I’ve given exactly the same advice at numerous incidents myself, but this time I don’t hear it. Feeling faint, I suddenly throw up against the side of our pump. I’m handed a bottle of water. Now she’s been freed, their job is done and they gather round me offering support. They all knew her bike well.

‘Get this down you mate. You’ll soon feel better.’

‘She’s okay mate, she’s really okay. You got us here in time.’

‘She’s in safe hands, buddy. Let the medics work their magic. They think they’ll be able to save her leg.’

‘Good job she had her leathers and bike boots on mate. She’s gonna be fine.’

Dazed, I don’t take in any of their words. The governor sits me in his car, chatting inanely about anything and everything. He tries to take my mind off the horror lying a mere twenty yards away, making sure I’m not alone. More importantly, he’s ensuring I stay away from the scene. My mates stand by the governor’s car, wringing their hands but also offering words of encouragement. I don’t know who’s at fault and nor do I really care. The police will sort all that out later. All that matters now, is that she’s okay.

Her short life flashes before me. Her birth, her first day at school, her first boyfriend, her first bike, her first job. My only daughter will be just twenty-two next week.

‘Dad!’

We all look round at the sound of a female voice. I jump out of the governor’s car, clumsily running towards her. Slightly dazed she staggers across the road into my outstretched arms. I hug her tightly, never wanting to let go. My colleagues stare. Like me, they aren’t sure what’s going on. She’s limping slightly. What the hell was she doing all the way over there?

‘You’re okay now, love. What the hell happened?’ I ask, my voice cracking, silent tears streaming down my face.

‘Oh! Dad, it was awful. I just woke up in that ditch on the other side of the road. The blonde driving the car went right through red lights. She didn’t even see us. There was this awful bang. I was giving Kayla a lift to work. Have you seen Kayla?’

More urgent now. ‘Where is she…? Dad, where’s Kayla…? Dad…?’

She looks around with wild fearful eyes. None of my colleagues are able to meet her eyes.

‘Don’t look now, love…’