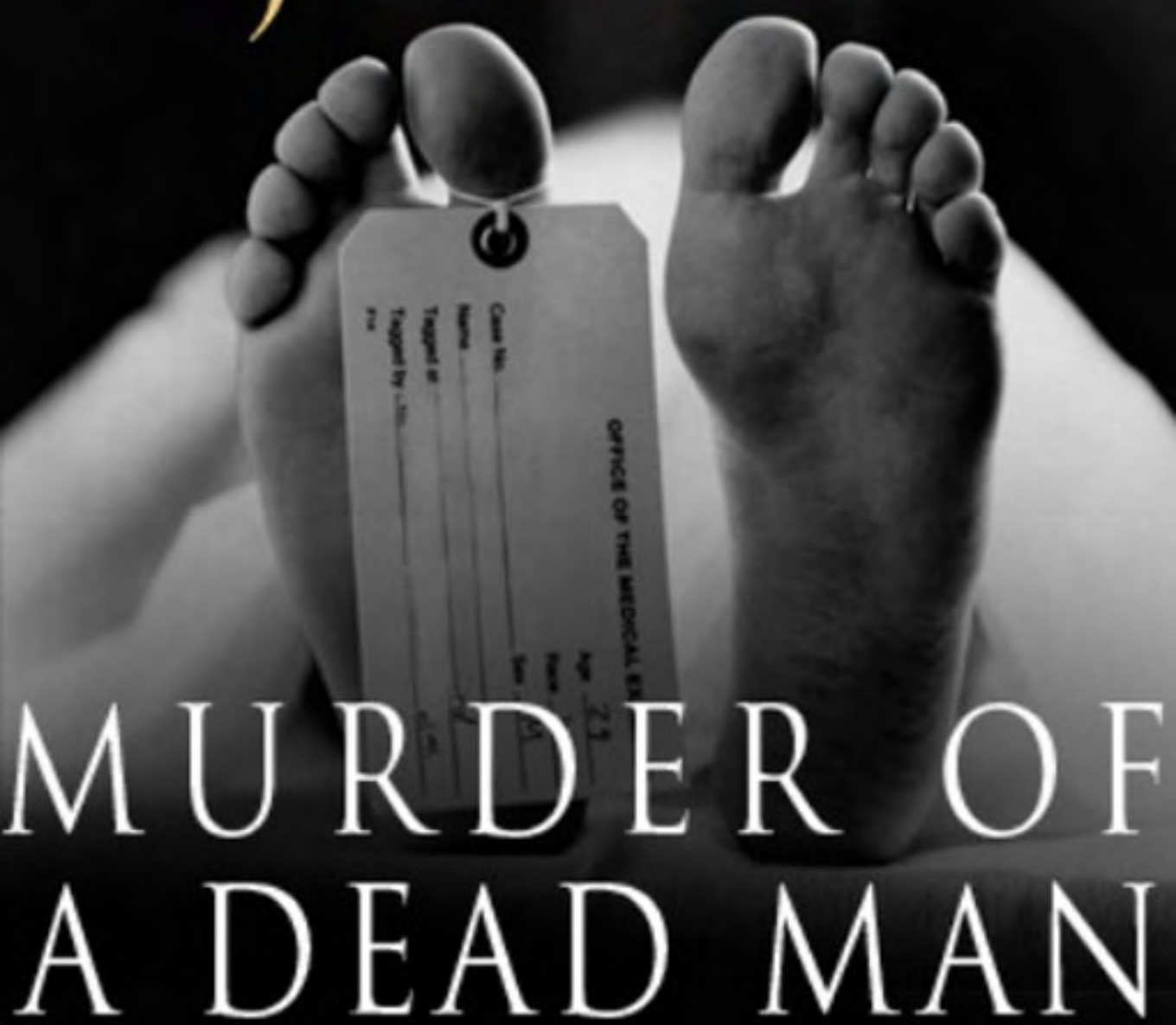


KATHERINE JOHN



MURDER OF A DEAD MAN

First published by Hodder Headline 1995

This edition revised and updated by the author

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published by Accent Press 2006

ISBN 1905170289

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publisher: Accent Press, PO Box 50, Pembroke Dock,
Pemb. SA72 6WY

Printed and bound in the UK
By Cox and Wyman Ltd, Reading

Cover design by Emma Barnes

The publisher acknowledges the financial support
of the Welsh Books Council

FOR ROSS MICHAEL WATKINS.

PROLOGUE

A chill hush pervaded the basement of the General Hospital. Someone standing close to the lift shaft or to the staircase leading down into the entrails of the building might hear the distant hum of the boiler that fed scalding water into the heating system. The boiler worked well; too well. The temperature on the wards rarely dropped to a tolerable level.

The muffled clanking of a trolley being wheeled into an elevator, followed by the remote clatter of equipment, reverberated through the stairwells, but the sounds only served to remind that the bustle of hospital life had no place down here. Even the corridors that led out from the brilliantly lit, white-tiled hall that covered three quarters of the floor area were deserted, stretching empty into blind, secretive corners.

When night fell, even seasoned staff accustomed to death's presence on the wards avoided the passages that led down to the steel double doors below ground level. Behind them were stowed the General's failures. The patients who'd succumbed despite the care, skill, and technological advances.

A young man with the unhealthy pallor of someone rarely exposed to the sun bent over a trolley. His hair fell forward, covering his face, his spectacles slipped, and his hands trembled as he concentrated on the task in hand. And while he worked, the powerful lamp set low overhead burned, stinging his eyes and searing his neck.

He paused and glanced nervously over his shoulder. Shaking his head at his foolishness, he flexed his rubber clad fingers before resuming his kneading of the stomach of the cadaver he was laying out. He had watched the procedure often, knowing his turn would come, but never thinking that it would come so soon. That Jim would call in sick tonight.

They usually spent the greater part of their night shift in the porters' station, drinking tea and scanning old copies of *Playboy*. But not tonight. It was only half past two but there had been three deaths already and two calls from the wards warning of more to come.

Clenching his fists, he pressed down hard. Air wafted from the corpse's open mouth. It lingered in the chill, bright air, a final sigh that made the attendant's blood run cold. He pushed down again trying not to look at the face or think of the man this had been. The tags attached to the wrist and ankles detailed a name and number, but he remembered only the age. Twenty-seven – born the same month and year as him. Even the casualty sister had been affected by the tragedy of such an early death.

Why hadn't he given a thought to his future when he had opted to read philosophy? If he'd studied accountancy or law he would be equipped for a profession. He wouldn't be here, in this ceramic and steel house of the dead. A repository where corpses were stowed, until the ceremonies were over and they could be forgotten.

He flinched when the telephone shrilled. Peeling off one rubber glove he left the corpse and picked up the receiver.

‘Mortuary!’

‘Ward Eleven. We need you immediately.’

‘Can’t you get a porter, I’m laying out.’

‘No porters available.’

‘A nurse.’

‘We’re short staffed. Down to two on the ward.’

‘I’m working single handed.’

‘We all have our problems. It’s an old lady in a four-bedded ward. People are awake. It’s upsetting them.’

‘I’ll be there.’

He replaced the receiver and returned to the corpse he was laying out. The body was flat, legs straight, arms parallel to the body. The eyes were closed, but not the mouth. He taped the jaw, and as he did so, looked at the face for the first time. The features were regular, even. The kind his girlfriend admired when she wanted to tease. The man had been tall, over six feet, with thick, dark hair. What wouldn’t he have given to have had hair like that? His had always been thin, and was now receding. He pulled off the second glove, tossed it into a bin and picked up a fresh pair from the box. There wasn’t anything so pressing that couldn’t wait the quarter of an hour it would take him to go to Ward Eleven.

The sheet he picked up rustled as he draped it over the corpse. It was silly of him to bother but he didn’t want to be faced with the uncovered body on his return. Dark hair, pale skin; so lifelike and so dead.

He pulled an empty trolley from a rank lined against the wall and wheeled it into the corridor. Regulations demanded that the mortuary be manned at all times, or else locked. He'd read his contract and signed it but it hadn't taken him long to discover working practices were very different from rule book ordinances. He had not forgotten the terms of his contract, simply learned to ignore them, as did the other attendants and porters. There was often no option since the place was understaffed. Besides, it would be a bind to have to dig his keys out of his pocket and lock the door when he would only to have to repeat the procedure on his return.

The nurse had said there were other patients awake, so he'd chosen one of the new American-style carts. The body was deposited in a box-like hollow and a lid dropped down to cover it. Then a sheet was placed over the box. Simple, but effective. A flat sheet didn't draw the curious stares a shrouded corpse attracted, but the box carts never fooled a patient who'd witnessed the disappearing act.

He recalled the nurse saying, "It's upsetting them." Upsetting who? The staff? The patients? Visitors? – Of course visitors. Ward Eleven always had relatives staying over. Sitting by the beds, pacing the corridors, waiting for the end to come. And it nearly always came during the hours of darkness. Or did it just seem that way?

He reached the lift, parked the trolley and pushed the button for the eighth floor. He didn't have to wait long. The elevator ran smoothly to the

seventh floor then shuddered violently, finally jerking to a halt on the eighth.

‘You took your time.’

‘I came as quickly as I could. I’m the only attendant on duty tonight.’

‘This way.’ The staff nurse marched ahead of him. He’d been right about the relatives. A woman stalked them, an anxious frown creasing her face.

‘Staff...’

‘I’ll be with you in a moment. Here.’ She pushed open the door to a small ward. The curtains were drawn around the bed nearest the door. He wheeled his trolley through the gap bumping into a student nurse who was dismantling a drip. She looked up, her eyes heavy from lack of sleep. He opened the box on the trolley.

‘She was a dear,’ the student whispered. ‘Never complained.’

As she helped him lift the emaciated, slack-jawed figure from the bed on to the trolley he made a decision. Tomorrow – he wouldn’t go to bed right away, he’d shower, change, take a walk to the Job Centre and look at the boards. If there was nothing there, he’d buy a paper and go through the situations vacant column. There had to be something better than this.

‘Thanks. I’ll take it from here.’ He reassembled the box, and straightened the sheet ensuring the folds hung down, obscuring most of the trolley. The staff nurse nodded to him as he returned to the lift. The woman he’d seen earlier turned her back as he passed. He saw the look on her face and wondered if

the extra the hospital had paid for the wagons had been worth it.

The lift was still on the eighth floor. There wasn't much call for movement between wards in the early hours. He pressed the button, opened the doors and wheeled in his load. The juddering was repeated as he descended into the basement. The door opened on to the deserted corridor.

He pushed the trolley towards the mortuary. Halting in front of the door, he looked around. He had no reason to do so. There had been no sound, nothing to alert him to the presence of anything untoward. Only a feeling of unease.

He took a deep breath. He was a grown man, a philosophy graduate. There was nothing to fear down here. As Jim had put it. "Our clients may not be happy with their lot, but you'll never know any different. You won't get a peep out of them."

He pushed the front end of the trolley through the doors. Then he froze.

The young man's corpse was sitting bolt upright on its trolley, facing him, the sheet draped in folds around the waist.

Jim had warned him that it could happen if all the air wasn't expressed from the stomach. But he was too horror-struck to wonder about the reason.

The torso facing him was white and finely muscled, with a mat of dark hair on the chest. But the porcelain gleam of the chest was in glaring contrast to the bloody, purple-blue pulp where the face had been. Only the eyes remained. The irises dark, the whites bleached, staring out above scraped

cheek bones. Below, teeth grinned in a lipless aperture.

He continued to gaze, mesmerised, registering stumps where the ears should have been, black holes between the eyes where the nose and nostrils had been torn away. The ragged hairline above the naked cranium. One word echoed through his mind as the scream finally tore from inside his throat. Flayed!

The face had been skinned as neatly and completely as his father had skinned the rabbits he'd shot on their farm back home. But why would anyone want to skin a dead man?

CHAPTER ONE

‘Two, four, six, eight, who do we want to date – turn – jump – hop – scotch –’ The young girl balanced on one leg before swooping down and retrieving a flat piece of marble from one of the squares painted on the surface of the playground. Placing it next to her foot she hopped, sending it skidding further down the geometric pattern of white on black tarmac.

‘It’s my turn after Hannah.’ A plump child elbowed her way aggressively to the front of the queue of girls.

‘No it’s not!’ The girl who had possession of the hop-scotch hovered, one foot in mid-air. ‘It’s Kelly’s.’

‘So there, Miss Bossy Boots.’ The girl who’d been elbowed aside reclaimed her place.

The children’s voices, eager, high pitched, carried across the school yard, out through the railings to an alleyway where a painfully thin man lurked, watching their game. His face was grimy with ingrained dirt, his chin black with stubble, his shoulder-length hair matted. A rusty black overcoat flapped at his knees, revealing ragged trousers stiff with grease. The only splash of colour was in his shoes, bright red baseball boots with luminous blue laces.

He shrugged his shoulders, easing the weight of the knapsack he was carrying. His eyes, keen, feverish, watched every move the young girl on the hop-scotch made. She was an attractive child. Tall

for a junior school pupil, slender, with none of the puppy fat that characterised her playmates. Her silver-blond hair was brushed away from her face and plaited into a ripple that extended to her waist. Her eyes were blue, a deep cornflower blue that shone like painted enamel in the drab surroundings of the school yard. She was easily the prettiest girl in the group. A swan in a sea of ugly ducklings. The grace and beauty of the woman yet to emerge could already be seen in her willowy figure.

‘Miss! A dirty old man is watching us.’

The voice was shrill, the speaker a small boy who sat apart from the others at the foot of the railings. A middle-aged woman wearing a grey woollen dress and a lumpy, home-knitted blue jacket dashed towards the gate from the other side of the yard. Games were abandoned as all the children within earshot turned and looked into the alley. The man ran off.

‘That’s my Daddy!’ Abandoning the precious stone that entitled her to first turn of every game, Hannah tossed her plait over her shoulder and darted out of the playground before the middle-aged woman could reach, let alone stop, her. She bolted across the narrow road without giving a thought to traffic. The squeal of brakes was followed by the muffled curses of a driver.

‘Daddy!’ Hannah screamed, but the man kept moving. ‘Please stop.’

He looked back. Tears had cleared grey-white gulleys down his cheeks.

‘Daddy! You’re not my daddy...’

The man broke into a run again, leaving the child sobbing on the pavement.

‘Come on, Hannah, there’s a good girl.’ The middle-aged woman reached her.

‘No!’ Hannah refused to take the woman’s hand. ‘I don’t want you. I want my daddy!’

‘Whoever it was is gone now. Come back into school.’

‘He looked like my daddy until he turned around. I thought he was –’

‘You can sit in Mrs Jones’s room. We’ll send for your aunt. You can go home early. Would you like that, Hannah?’ The woman led the child back through the school gates.

Another member of staff tapped the teacher’s arm and mouthed, ‘Police?’

The teacher shook her head. ‘Ring the bell and get the children inside. Then telephone Hannah’s aunt. If the headmaster and Miss Davies think it’s warranted, they’ll contact the police.’

‘Happy birthday, dear Trevor,’ Peter Collins sang to his colleague Trevor Joseph as Lyn Sullivan walked through the door of the darkened living room of Trevor’s house carrying a chocolate and cream gâteau ablaze with candles.

‘He’s not your “dear Trevor”, Peter, he’s mine,’ Lyn set the cake on the table in front of the crowd gathered around Trevor.

‘So he must be,’ Peter agreed. ‘No one’s given me a cake or a party since I was five years old.’

‘Difficult to organise when you spend every off-duty minute in that disgusting White Hart,’

Sergeant Anna Bradley, Peter's colleague and companion for the evening observed.

'How do you know it's disgusting? You've never set foot in the place.'

'I don't need to step inside. You only have to look at the outside.'

'Time to blow out the candles, Trevor.' The smile on Lyn's face was strained. After six months of living with Sergeant Trevor Joseph of the Serious Crimes Squad, the kindest thing she could think of saying to her friends and family, was that police officers were "different". And they were. In the hours they kept, their habits, their lifestyle, their sense of humour – especially their sense of humour – and whatever went for the force in general, went doubly so for Sergeant Peter Collins of the Drug Squad.

Trevor's closest friend could be difficult at the best of times, and it had been a while since she and Trevor had enjoyed the best of times. Four months to be precise, since a relationship, begun with so much promise, had deteriorated into grinding days of separate work schedules interspersed with solitary leisure times of missed opportunities. No matter which nursing shift she opted for, she invariably returned to an empty house. Whether she worked days, mornings, afternoons or nights, Trevor's hours on the Serious Crimes Squad rarely coincided with her own.

It had taken a mammoth amount of juggling at the psychiatric hospital where she worked as a staff nurse, endless liaison over the telephone with Trevor's immediate boss, Inspector Dan Evans and

his colleague Sergeant Anna Bradley, plus numerous semi-serious threats to Trevor before she'd felt confident enough to arrange this party. Even now she was waiting for the telephone to ring and summon half her guests away. So much so, she'd been unable to eat more than a mouthful of the buffet of cold salmon, cold sliced meats and salads she'd spent the last three days preparing.

She consoled herself with the thought that, once the candles were blown out, the drinking would begin in earnest. With luck Trevor would soon be too plastered to go out, even if he was called. The first evening he'd spent at home for over six weeks, and she'd been stupid enough to invite thirty other people.

'Blow out the candles, Trevor. You're wasting drinking time,' Peter grumbled.

Trevor took a deep breath and blew over the cake.

'I don't appreciate cream being blasted on to my best bib and tucker, mate, even by a birthday boy.' Andrew Murphy, who'd been a constable all his working life, flicked a fleck that had landed on his tweed jacket back in the direction of the cake.

'After some of the places that jacket's been, a blob of cream isn't going to make any difference, Andy. It might even disguise the blood and tooth marks.' Anna handed her plate to Lyn. 'Large piece please, with a double helping of cream.'

'How do you put up with her on your squad?' Peter asked Trevor who was cutting the cake into thick, uneven slices.

‘A better question might be, how does Anna puts up with Dan and Trevor?’ Lyn eased the slices on to plates and handed them around.

‘Three more promotions and I’ll be able to push any sergeant in this town into clerical duties,’ Anna smiled through a mouthful of chocolate and cream.

‘Five more promotions and I’ll be able to order all policewomen back to paperwork, housework, and bed work.’ Peter touched his glass to Trevor’s. ‘Here’s to an all male force.’

Anna looked Peter in the eye. ‘Just wait until I’m your super, Sergeant.’

‘I doubt there’s a man on the force who has the faintest notion what sexual equality means,’ Lyn gave Peter a withering look.

‘I give all my women every opportunity to take their turn on top, as you’ll soon find out, Anna.’ Peter wrapped his arm around her waist.

‘I take it your past conquests used the vantage point to watch for something better coming in through the door.’ Anna took his hand from her waist and dropped it.

Bored with Peter’s banter, Lyn took the empty cake plate into the kitchen. Every inch of work surface was littered with abandoned plates, screwed up paper napkins, half-chewed chicken wings, dirty glasses and knives and forks. She opened the bin and the dishwasher. After scraping the plates, she began to stack the crockery and cutlery into the machine. When it was full she switched it on and debated whether to wait until the load had finished, or wash the overflow by hand.

‘I apologise for my tactless colleagues.’ Trevor crept up behind her and kissed her neck. ‘You should have invited your brother and the nurses from the hospital.’

‘This house isn’t big enough for my friends as well as yours.’

‘Then you should have just invited yours.’

‘For your birthday?’

He turned her around. Her eyes were on a level with his. She was six foot, barely an inch below his own height. He kissed her on the mouth, thoroughly and slowly. Her irritation with Peter Collins, and the evening in general, dissipated as she recalled exactly why she’d moved in with Trevor eight months ago.

‘Thank you.’

‘For what?’ she asked.

‘My birthday party. And for being here, with me. But would you mind very much if I organised something for just the two of us on your birthday?’

‘If I could have been sure you would have made the effort to be here, I would have done just that this evening.’

‘Are you on duty this weekend?’

‘Of course. Don’t tell me you’re not?’

‘I was hoping we could go down to Cornwall.’

‘To your mother’s farm?’ Her dark eyes sparkled at the prospect. She’d never met his family. He’d told her about his mother, brother, sister-in-law, nieces and nephews and she’d spoken to them on the telephone, but all of Trevor’s protestations to the contrary had failed to reassure her that they approved of her living in his house.

‘I want to show you off.’

‘They might not like me.’

‘They’ll love you.’ He kissed her again. ‘And we’ll be able to visit all the secret dens I built when I was a boy.’

‘For an offer like that I’ll swap my shifts.’

He pulled her closer, until their bodies meshed. ‘We could go upstairs.’

‘Someone might notice.’

The kitchen door burst open, slamming painfully into Lyn’s spine. Peter pushed past.

‘We’re dying of thirst out there, mate, while you’re having it off with Florence Nightingale in here. Some bloody host you make.’

The drizzle-filled, saffron glow of the street lamps highlighted the filth that clung to the rusty black overcoat despite its sodden state. The trousers were more ragged than when Hannah and her teachers had seen them earlier. Oblivious to his state, the derelict clutched his bottle, staggered and fell to his knees as he entered the seaward end of Jubilee Street.

Coarse laughter echoed around the four storey terrace of superficially elegant houses. Daylight would have revealed rotting wood and peeling paint on the graceful eighteenth century facades; roofs dipping alarmingly in their centres, and more windows shored with wood than glass. But the drunk was in no state to look at his surroundings. He was only aware that he was in the vicinity of what he called “home”. The grand town houses built on the wealth of merchant shipping, were in the final throes of decay. The few still habitable had been

leased by the council to the churches and voluntary organisations who struggled to house the town's homeless.

The drunk's bottle rolled from his grasp. A man walked up behind him and retrieved it. The drunk looked up.

'Got change to spare, mate?'

'Have this one on me.' The stranger handed him a fresh bottle.

The drunk unscrewed the top and drank deeply. 'Good stuff,' was the only intelligible sound he uttered as the unaccustomed warmth of whisky flowed down his throat. 'You're a good mate. One of the best – bloody good –'

'Let's get you behind this hoarding and out of the worst of the rain.'

'Too bloody soft, that's your trouble. Haven't been on the road long enough. It's sheltered enough out here.' The tone had become contentious. The man who offered the bottle grew wary. He knew what men who lived on the streets were capable of.

'For you perhaps,' he said quietly. 'But you've half a bottle inside you.'

'You complaining I've taken too much of your booze?' The drunk tried and failed to focus as he handed the bottle back. He attempted to sit up, lost momentum and fell backwards, sprawling on the fouled pavement.

'I gave it to you because I want you to have it,' his companion explained. 'But we're in the open. You know what the others are like. One whiff of that bottle and it'll be gone.'

‘I’ll look after it.’ The voice slowed as the fuddled mind digested the gravity of the threat.

‘Up you get.’ A hand gripped the back of the dirty coat. The sharp sound of tearing cloth echoed around the street but the drunk managed to remain on his feet – just – and only with help. Tottering close to the man who had given him the bottle, he reeked of the fetid, sour filth he’d lived and slept in all winter.

‘One more step.’

The drunk fell headlong behind a hoarding advertising a lager that would, if the picture could be believed, attract young, voluptuous females. Rolling over he held up his arms.

‘More!’ he begged.

The whisky bottle again changed hands.

‘Good stuff –’ the bottle fell from his fingers. His companion watched it roll over the rough ground until it clattered to rest against a lump of concrete. The contents gurgled into a puddle, mixing with the rainwater.

The man looked up and down Jubilee Street. It was deserted, just as he’d hoped it would be. The hostels for the homeless closed their doors early. They had to because the demand for beds greatly exceeded the supply. Anyone who’d lived on the streets for any length of time knew there was nothing for them in Jubilee Street at this hour. Queues started forming at five o’clock. The Salvation Army and lay charity hostels were invariably full before six, the Catholic one, which was fighting a losing battle against lice and fleas, a little later. At eight the police came down and

moved the stragglers on. But despite the intermittent police presence, few wandered among its precincts after dark. And tonight was no exception.

The pavements shone dull, grey satin except where potholes had been filled with gleaming black puddles. Rain continued to fall, soft and silent. No footstep, no whine of a car engine disturbed the silence. Lights burned in the ground floor windows of the hostels, but no sound came from them.

The man stared dispassionately at the drunk lying at his feet. Eyes closed, legs spread wide apart, a snore ripped noisily from his throat. He was dead to the world. A smile creased his companion's face as he thought of the old adage.

He slung the bag he was carrying on to the ground. Opening it, he removed a plastic bottle of clear liquid, a tin gallon can and a hunting knife with a six inch hooked blade. Time to set to work.

Father Sam Mayberry, who'd been working late on the Catholic hostel's account books, heard the scream. A piercing, bestial cry of pure agony. It took him precious minutes to unbar the front door. The first thing he saw were the flames soaring behind the hoarding. As he ran closer, crying out for someone to call the fire-brigade, he saw the dark shape in the centre. It ceased screaming moments after he reached it.

When the telephone rang, it came almost as a relief. Lyn picked it up. She looked across the room to where Trevor was talking to Anna and Peter. He must have had a few, not to have even heard it.

‘Lyn, is Trevor there?’

She recognised the lilting tones of Trevor’s superior’s Welsh accent.

‘I’ll get him for you, Dan.’

‘I’m sorry, but –’

‘It’s all right,’ she interrupted the inspector. The first thing she’d learned as the live-in girlfriend of a police officer was that “but” meant cancelled plans. As one disgruntled wife had complained to her at the police ball, even funerals, marriages and births – especially births – came second to police emergencies.

‘I’m sorry, Lyn.’ Trevor slid his arms into the sleeves of his quilted anorak. Anna was already outside in the car the inspector had sent to pick them up.

‘Stop apologising. I expected it.’ Lyn stood back as the door to the living room opened.

‘But you’ve gone to all this trouble...’

‘Don’t worry, mate. We’ll enjoy ourselves without you.’ Peter stood in the doorway a drink in one hand, a cigar in the other.

‘I’ve no doubt you will.’

Peter picked up the sarcasm in Trevor’s voice but ignored it. He drew on his cigar as he retreated back into the noisy room, leaving a trail of acrid smoke in his wake.

‘I’ll be back as soon as I can.’ Trevor reached out intending to embrace Lyn, but she stepped into the kitchen away from him.

‘I won’t wait up.’ There was an edge to her voice he didn’t have time to soften.

‘See you.’ He opened the front door and strode down the garden path. The car was parked, blue light flashing at the bottom of the narrow driveway.

‘You took your bloody time,’ Anna said. ‘What’s the problem? Needed one more double brandy to convince yourself that it really is your birthday?’

Twenty minutes later, it wasn’t only Trevor who was wishing he’d had one more stiff drink. Dan Evans was waiting for them in the middle of Jubilee Street, police cars and fire engines parked either side of him. Behind him the forensic team was busy winding “scene of crime” tape around poles, cordoning off an area of waste ground and pavement the size of a football pitch. In the centre, behind a scorched hoarding, were the smouldering remains of a fire that had blanketed the street with the stench of burning flesh.

‘No more bloody water or foam. Please!’ Patrick O’Kelly, the pathologist from the General Hospital who was police pathologist on call, shouted to the firemen as he hoisted his leg over the tape.

‘Sorry about your party, Trevor.’ Dan stuffed a peppermint into his mouth as Trevor and Anna climbed out of the car.

‘So am I,’ Anna retorted.

‘You were enjoying it?’ Dan asked.

‘Glad someone was,’ Trevor said.

‘What we got?’ Anna shied away from the maudlin note in Trevor’s voice. There was nothing worse than a copper whose personal relationship was foundering. She recognised the symptoms

because it was a familiar scenario. Police work didn't make for happy marriages or long-term relationships. Her last one had disintegrated when her boyfriend had been interrupted once too often during the crucial stages of passion by the telephone at her bedside.

'We've a body, or what's left of one.' Dan indicated the smoking ashes that Patrick was peering at, as he pulled on his rubber gloves, boots and sterile white paper overall.

'Doesn't look like there's much left,' Trevor commented.

'Murder?' Anna asked.

'That's what Patrick is here to find out.' Dan led the way towards the tape barrier.

'Bring the tent up here before these ashes blow all over the docks,' Patrick shouted to his assistant who was heaving a heavy wooden box from the pathologist's car. 'Any witnesses?' he asked Dan, without looking up from the blackened mess.

'Sam Mayberry.'

'Father Sam Mayberry?' Trevor checked.

'He said he knew you.' Dan offered his peppermints to Anna and Trevor. 'He heard a cry. It took him a few minutes to unlock his door. By the time he crossed the street all he could see was a burning mass with a screaming blob in the middle – his words, not mine.'

'He saw no one else? Didn't hear anyone running away?' Trevor asked.

'No.' Dan looked towards the church hostel. Sam Mayberry, short, round and diminutive, was standing in the doorway talking to Captain

Arkwright who ran the Salvation Army shelter. ‘But I only spoke to him briefly. He might have something to add.’

‘Is there anything to indicate this could be murder?’ Trevor had worked with Patrick many times. During the initial stages of an investigation every word had to be dragged out of the man. The pathologist avoided making statements until he was one hundred percent certain of his facts; a trait that usually meant a slow start to investigations into “suspicious deaths”.

‘I can tell you that if he or she was alive when the fire started, he or she didn’t last long.’ Patrick rose to his feet and straightened his back. ‘And petrol was used.’

‘How do you know?’ Dan asked.

‘The smell.’ Patrick waved the forensic photographer forward. ‘Once the site’s been tented and photographed I’ll take a closer look. When the body’s ready for moving I might be able to tell you more.’

Anna groaned; her hopes of returning to the party dashed. ‘It’s going to be a long night.’

‘And that’s before you begin questioning the hostel inmates,’ Dan said.

Trevor didn’t say a word. He had been posted to the Serious Crimes Squad for eight months, four months longer than Anna, and he knew exactly how long a “long night” could be.

‘You didn’t hear, or see anything before the scream, Sam?’ Trevor asked.

‘As I told Inspector Evans,’ Father Sam Mayberry, who rarely used his title outside of church meetings, and never in the hostel, continued. ‘I was sitting in the office, trying to work out the accounts –’

‘The time?’ There was a nagging pain between Trevor’s eyes. The dry, metallic taste of hangover tainted his mouth. His stomach heaved at the smell that hung in the atmosphere despite another shower of rain. He wanted to be home and in bed with Lyn. But he licked his pencil and held it over his notebook.

‘A quarter past twelve. I looked at the clock in the hall. The door to the office was open.’ Sam’s gnome-like features crumpled with the effort of remembering. ‘There was a scream –’

‘And before then?’

‘Nothing out of the ordinary. Rain pattering...’

‘It was raining?’

‘Light but steady, like now. I got wet when I ran outside.’

The revelation warranted another scribble in the book.

‘I wasn’t even sure if the scream was human. I jumped up and ran to the door.’

‘What exactly did you see?’

‘As I told the inspector. A dark figure in the centre of a fireball. It looked like a cartoon shape of a man.’

‘Standing or sitting?’

Sam Mayberry frowned. ‘Possibly kneeling.’

‘Why kneeling?’ Anna asked.

‘Because the figure was too close to the ground to be standing upright and its arms were waving in the air, as if clawing at its face.’

‘At its face?’ Trevor looked up from his notebook.

‘It might have been the face or the back of the head. I can’t say which. The fire was so bright he was just a dark silhouette.’

‘And you noticed no one else in the street?’

‘I didn’t look,’ Sam answered in his soft Irish brogue. ‘I shouted for help. Afterwards I gave the poor soul the last rites.’

‘Thanks, Sam.’ Trevor stowed his notebook and pencil in the top pocket of his shirt. He’d carried them there even during his birthday party. Habit? Lyn would have said conditioning. ‘We’ll need a formal statement, but it can wait until morning. Looks like we’re going to be here all night. In the meantime if you remember anything else –’

‘I’ll call the station and ask to speak to you, or Inspector Evans or Peter.’

‘I don’t work with Peter any more, Sam. He’s still on the Drug Squad.’

‘Then you’ve been promoted?’

‘A sideways shift.’

‘Was the victim still screaming while you gave the last rites?’ Anna moved closer. The light from the street lamp fell on to her face. Harsh, unflattering, it threw her strong features into relief, emphasising the determined set of her jaw, the line of her Roman nose and her eyes, hooded, deep set, in her raw-boned skull.

‘Thankfully no, because by then quite a crowd had gathered. Captain Arkwright had come out and Tom Morris and half of their hostel inmates behind them. Everyone wanted to see what the commotion was about.’

‘Did you notice anyone there who shouldn’t have been?’ Unlike Trevor, Anna had no notebook to hand. Without asking, she reached into her colleague’s pocket and removed both book and pencil.

‘That depends on what you mean by “shouldn’t have been”.’

‘The population of Jubilee Street is, to say the least, fluid,’ Trevor explained.

‘The inmates vary from night to night. Especially in my hostel. We all have our regulars. Captain Arkwright caters for the ladies, Tom Morris the younger folk, I tend to get the old hands, but we all get casuals who stay only one night. Some are looking for work and when they don’t find it they move on, some, the lucky ones, have places to go to. A few disappear from Jubilee Street and are never seen again. I like to think that for them, especially the youngsters, one taste of the streets was enough to make them swallow their pride and return home.’

‘But there were people in the crowd you didn’t recognise?’ Anna persisted.

‘Of course, but none from my own hostel. I’ve only taken in regulars tonight. But I can’t speak for Tom Morris, or Captain Arkwright. They’re good people, and like me, they’re fighting a losing battle against the authorities to keep their shelters open.’

‘I read something about that,’ Anna said. ‘Isn’t the council trying to shut the hostels so they can redevelop this area?’

Sam nodded. ‘The church leases my building from the council, same as the Salvation Army. We pay a peppercorn rent, but they can close us down any time they chose. And as Tom is seconded directly from Social Services, which is run by the council, he’s even more vulnerable than us.’

‘Leaving the homeless with the doorways and the underpasses in the centre of town.’

‘No disrespect intended, Sergeant Bradley, but seeing as how your colleagues move them on from there, and the pier was pulled down a while back, it will leave them with nowhere,’ Sam shook his head. ‘They’ll end up dying from hypothermia. One hard winter will be all that’s needed to kill most of them.’

‘Perhaps that’s what the council wants.’ Anna returned Trevor’s notebook to him.

‘I refuse to believe that any man truly wishes another ill.’

‘The council’s not a man, Sam. It’s a hard, inhuman, faceless institution. I thought you’d have learnt that by now.’ Trevor pushed his notebook back into his pocket.

‘Patrick’s ready to move the body. We’ll give the boys a hand to push this crowd back, then start interviewing the hostel inmates.’ Dan’s massive six-foot-four frame loomed towards them.

‘Has Patrick found anything yet?’ Trevor asked, once they were out of Sam’s earshot.

‘The victim was human. Either doused with petrol, or had doused itself, prior to igniting. The

only recognisable bits are a boot with a foot inside, and a charred skull.'

They returned to where Patrick had prepared the remains for removal. A body shell and bag were laid out in front of the tent that had been pitched to protect the ashes from the wind. Patrick moved his gloved hand delicately among the warm embers, lifting each charred discovery carefully as though it was a precious object. He stared at one piece for a few moments then waved it in the air. 'Cheekbone.'

Trevor stared at the flattish dark bone. Threads of wormy flesh clung to its contours.

'It was resting against this.' Patrick pointed to a piece of dressed stone he'd swathed in plastic. 'The weight of the body must have pressed down on it, cutting off the oxygen. As you see it's barely singed.' He squinted at the piece of bone again, then took a pencil torch from his top pocket and shone it directly on to his find. 'There's something here that looks like knife marks slicing diagonally into the bone.'

'Are you saying what I think you're saying?' Dan queried.

'It could be that this portion of the face was cut off before the fire was set.' He took a plastic bag from his case and slipped the section of bone into it, holding it against the light. 'Whoever it was did a good job. Look at that stump on the side. It's clean cut, not burnt. The ear was taken off before the fire reached it.'

CHAPTER TWO

‘Didn’t you know what it would be like when you moved in with Trevor?’ Peter emptied the dregs from the glasses he’d hunted down in the living room into the sink.

‘Trevor warned me,’ Lyn conceded. ‘Perhaps I didn’t want to believe him.’

‘They say love is blind. I didn’t realise it was deaf as well.’ Peter pulled out the bin, hauled up the edges of the black bag inside and tied it into a knot.

‘How do you manage? With your girlfriends, I mean.’

Peter looked at her and kept the quip he’d been about to toss about “not managing” to himself. Despite her extremely desirable body; her long black hair and enormous dark eyes made her appear younger than her twenty-one years.

He’d noticed Lyn before Trevor had. Watched her as she’d worked as a nurse on the ward Trevor had landed himself in after he’d been injured, and reluctantly left her alone. Not because of Trevor, his friend had been too out of it to notice her at the time, but because of her age. She’d looked so clean and innocent – far too innocent to cope with the baggage a detective the wrong side of thirty carries around with him.

When he discovered she’d moved in with Trevor, he’d slapped his friend on the back and called him a “lucky bastard”; a degree of envy was permissible between friends. But he knew if he took one step closer to Lyn now, he’d run the risk of

starting something he wouldn't want to stop. And ruin his one good friendship. A friendship that had endured since he and Trevor had joined the force together as rookies.

'I don't have a girlfriend.' He lifted the bag out of the bin.

'Anna –'

'Anna and I fight in the station and, occasionally, in my flat, but not in my bed. The biggest things between us are our differences. You invited us both, we came.'

'There's nothing more to it than that?' She sounded disappointed.

'Only banter.' He opened the back door, deposited the bag in the dustbin, shut the lid and returned to the kitchen. He took his time over washing his hands, delaying the moment when he'd have to look at her again. He was policeman through and through. Conditioned to interrogate, question, detect criminal activity, and somewhere in the process of conditioning he had lost touch with his emotions. It was bad enough when they surfaced in the form of sympathy for a victim during a case, impossible when he tried to deal with them in his private life.

'You were married once.'

It was a statement, not a question, and he realised Trevor must have told her. 'It was a disaster.'

'Because you were never there for her when she needed you?'

'Because we wanted different things from life.'

‘If you were that different why did you marry her?’

‘Too much moonlight, too much booze. Why does anyone marry? For her, I think it was the nesting instinct. She wanted a home and with my salary taken into consideration she qualified for a larger mortgage and a better house.’

‘That’s a foul thing to say about someone you lived with.’

‘Foul maybe, but true.’ He looked at the clean, simple lines of the blue and white kitchen. Her taste was – is – horrendous,’ he corrected himself. He’d become so used to relegating his ex-wife to the past he occasionally had trouble remembering she was alive. ‘Fitted carpets with patterns that knock you in the eye. Fence to fence garden gnomes. Collections of knick-knacks that covered every inch of the house, even the kitchen worktops, and all inscribed with *A Present From Brighton* in gold ink.’

‘You’re joking?’

‘I’m not. Less than a year after taking my trip down the aisle I began drinking in the White Hart. I had to find another home. I simply couldn’t face all those gnomes every time I got pissed...’

‘Peter!’

‘In the end she found someone who understood her and the gnomes, so we split.’

‘Trevor told me you gave her the house.’

‘I couldn’t have lived with myself if I’d made the gnomes homeless. Not even a jumble sale would have taken them.’ He folded the fresh bag he was holding into the bin. ‘It’s a sad story,’ he said with a gravity he intended to be mocking, but didn’t quite

pull off. 'And in the force a common one. The super's wife left him.'

'I heard. And Dan Evans is a widower.'

'He joined as a widower,' he said.

'And Trevor lived with a girl for six years.'

He leaned back against the cupboards. So this was what she'd been building up to. He had no intention of telling her anything Trevor hadn't. Lyn was Trevor's business, not his. Just as Trevor's past was his own, and no one else's, unless Trevor chose to share it with them.

'He told me about her,' she sensed that Peter disapproved of her prying into Trevor's past. 'Her name was Mags and after she left him he couldn't even live in the flat they'd bought together.'

'He bought,' Peter corrected. 'Mags never contributed a penny. But then Trevor has always been a soft touch. Makes a point of paying all his ladies' bills.'

A deep blush spread over Lyn's face.

'Oh hell!' He opened a can of warm beer that was standing on the work surface and drank it. 'I didn't mean that in relation to you.' He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

'It's not money.' She stared at her reflection mirrored in the blackened glass of the window. 'I would love to hand over my share of the mortgage every month. It would give our relationship some permanency. As it is, I never see Trevor. I feel as though I'm in the way. As if I'm nothing more than an encumbrance.'

'You are important to him, Lyn. Probably the only thing that means anything in his life.' Peter

wanted to but didn't dare dry the tears that were falling from her eyes. 'And, I guarantee that while Trevor is living with you he'll never look at another woman.'

'How can you be so sure?' She wondered if he suspected the scenarios of "the other woman" she imagined every time Trevor stayed out all night.

'You came after four years of celibacy. You might not have realised it, being so much younger than him, but ardour isn't normal for a man of his advanced years, it's the result of living like a monk.'

'You're incorrigible.' Despite the derisive tone in her voice, her tears turned to smiles as she picked up the dishcloth and wiped down the work surfaces.

'He used to worship women from afar from time to time, but after Mags that's all it was. Admiration from a distance. He may have even spoken to one or two, but if he did, I swear it was only in the line of duty.'

'You're not as bad as I thought you were.'

'Tell me where the Hoover is and I'll clean up the living room and redeem myself even more.'

'It's three in the morning.'

'The wall between you and next door is solid, isn't it?'

'Yes, but...'

'I hate to see a mess, woman.' He opened the broom cupboard in the hall. 'I've found it.'

Ten minutes later Lyn and Peter's combined efforts had returned the house to pristine condition, and Peter was walking down the beach road to his flat. He'd unbent enough to peck Lyn on the cheek when he'd said goodbye, but only when the door

was open, and they were public enough to remove his temptation to grab her, and give her what Trevor should have – if he'd had any sense.

After Peter left, Lyn walked around the house switching off lights, checking doors, moving objects already set in their allotted places. Eventually she could find no more excuse to linger. Climbing the stairs she went into the master bedroom. The present she'd intended to give Trevor at bedtime was lying on his pillow, where she'd put it before laying out the buffet. She picked up the small box, plumped out the blue velvet ribbon that held the silver wrapping paper in place, and laid it on his bedside table. In the bathroom she stripped off the short black dress that left little to the imagination and stood under a hot shower for half an hour. She wouldn't have admitted it to Trevor, but she was spinning out time, hoping she'd still be awake when he returned.

When she finally slid beneath the duvet on the king size bed, she picked up a book from Trevor's side of the bed. It was a guide to the West Country. She realised that he must have bought it with the trip to his mother's farm in mind. Perhaps he was aware of the way she felt after all.

She tried to read but in the end sleep overtook her, and when the alarm went off at six-thirty, the first thing she saw on opening her eyes was the silver and blue package. She had spent yet another night alone.

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‘Is that the last one?’ Trevor asked Tom Morris, the social worker seconded from the council to the voluntary organisation that ran the hostel. He had been impressed by Tom’s gentle handling of the inmates and the respect he commanded from even the most difficult of them, despite his youth. No more than twenty-five or so, Tom was good looking and personable. Fond references to a wife had made Trevor wonder how well Mrs Morris coped with a husband, who, on his own admission, slept out six nights of every week. Judging by the smile on Morris’s face, better than Lyn.

He watched Morris run his finger down the list of names in a grease-stained ledger. ‘Twenty-seven.’

Trevor shuffled through the papers in front of him. ‘Twenty-seven,’ he reiterated.

‘Then that’s it.’

No one had expected to get anything from the inmates of the shelters other than their identities, but Dan had insisted that they take a hostel each and check everyone who’d slept the night in Jubilee Street, if only for elimination purposes, because Sam Mayberry had seen the fire before any of inmates had left their beds.

‘Glad to see Serious Crimes being thorough. Once these places open in the morning there’s no telling where the guests go.’ Superintendent Bill Mulcahy stood in the doorway of the dilapidated hall, a miserable expression souring his face that had its origins in more than the dismal surroundings. ‘Patrick’s waiting for us in the mortuary.’

‘I’ve finished, sir.’ Trevor looked at his watch. Seven-thirty. He would have liked to have gone home, seen Lyn, showered and changed, but he knew better than to ask Bill for the privilege.

‘Afterwards we’ll set up a case conference in the station.’

‘Sir.’ Trevor went to the door. He had a sudden craving for the brandy he’d left at home. He wondered if it was a sign of alcoholism. He’d never wanted a drink in the morning before. He knew it was morning because he followed Bill out of the lamp-lit hall into drizzle-filled grey light, but his body clock was still set to night. Deep velvet night; time to go to bed and cuddle Lyn.

‘I want everything in Zone A tagged and in the laboratory within the hour.’ Bill’s voice echoed across the taped area where white-suited, rubber-gloved and booted figures had switched off their torches to comb the ground in the dawn light. Trevor recognised Andrew Murphy and Chris Brooke among the searchers. Judging by the pained expressions on their faces they’d stayed at the party long enough to get hangovers.

‘Found this in Zone A, sir.’ Andrew held up a plastic bag that held a whisky bottle.

‘That’s an expensive brand to find down here,’ Trevor observed.

‘Probably thieved from one of the bottle banks for the smell.’ Bill walked away.

‘Zone A is within ten feet of the body?’ Trevor asked Andrew.

‘Yes, but we’ve been ordered to comb the ground as far as the waterfront.’

Trevor took a last look at the damp, chilled searchers as he climbed into the back of the car. Rank did hold some privileges. At least it was dry in the mortuary.

‘Don’t touch those,’ Patrick warned. ‘They’re waiting to go to forensics.’

‘What are they?’ Anna squinted at a blackened mess that looked like a clump of burned roots.

‘Hands. It’s a slim hope, but they might be able to lift prints from them.’

‘Off those?’ Bill studied the twig-like structures.

‘The skin is still attached in one or two places. You never know your luck. There may be an identifiable partial print.’

‘I’ll believe it when I see it.’ Bill turned from the specimens destined for the Forensic Laboratory to the slab where Patrick had laid out the remains of the incinerated corpse.

‘It’s laid toe to head, or as near as we could set it up, given what we have. The foot was intact in the boot. It’s bagged on the slab behind you,’ Patrick said to Dan. ‘The other foot was reduced to a few spoonfuls of ash. Pick it up,’ he encouraged Dan who was peering through the plastic. ‘It’s distinctive. I doubt many men wear red baseball boots with blue laces, even in Jubilee Street.’

‘Men?’ Bill questioned.

‘That’s not a woman’s foot.’ Patrick pointed to the long, thin, splay-toed foot at the bottom of the slab. Thickly covered in black hairs, its top was

seared by a brown scab. 'His sock is in the bag next to the boot.'

Trevor studied the foot and felt as though he was looking at an exhibit in an art gallery.

'Is this the sock?' Dan held up a bag containing a luminous green sock topped by a crust of blackened, blobbed rib.

'Melted nylon,' Patrick explained. 'One or two bits are attached to the ankle bone; also some rubber from the shoe has stuck to the sole of the foot.'

Anna looked from the slab to the tiled wall. She'd never liked post-mortems. As soon as news had got out about her transfer from Vice to Serious Crimes, Peter and Andrew had delighted in spinning her yarns of Patrick's idiosyncratic post-mortem habits. At the time she'd assumed they'd been exaggerating. Now she wasn't too sure.

'Did you remove the foot or was it severed?' Trevor asked.

'Severed by burning. We had fun trying to assemble him. After intense fire it's never easy trying to work out which bit is what, particularly if the body's found in a crouched position as this was. Leg bones badly charred, virtually no flesh or muscle left, pelvic bones burned, but enough left to determine a male even without the foot. Torso...'

Bill interrupted Patrick. 'It looks like a rack of ribs my wife once cremated over a barbecue.'

'Head, now that is interesting. The left-hand side has burned away, but not the right. The petrol was probably thrown in a haphazard fashion. Fire can be fickle. Petrol burns itself and whatever it comes into contact with, but it goes for the soaked

bits first, and when the body was doused by the firemen the flames hadn't reached one or two places. The foot, for instance.' Patrick picked it up.

'You said the body was crouched?' Dan prompted.

'One knee drawn to the chin, hands over the head which was face down, on the thighs.'

'Sam said something about him moving his hands up to his head.' Until that point Trevor had gazed at the remains with equanimity. But it suddenly struck him that a few short hours ago this had been a living, breathing man and anyone, himself included, was only a match and a can of petrol away from becoming just one more item in Patrick's overcrowded work schedule.

The pathologist indicated another bag on the slab next to those that held the hands and boot. 'Cloth – thick enough to be the remains of a coat. Wool and synthetic mix, black, can't tell you any more, but the forensic boys might be able to.'

'Thanks,' Dan said caustically. 'Just about every vagrant in Jubilee Street wears a black overcoat. It seems to be the stock item of the charity shop.'

'This is what I showed you on site.' Patrick picked up a bag that lay next to the brittle remnants of the skull.

'That the bit you said had knife marks?' Dan rummaged in his pocket, pulled out a bag of peppermints and offered them round. Patrick and Bill were the only ones to take any.

'Which makes me think our victim didn't kill himself. We've had suicides who've torched

themselves. There was a spate of them in the seventies and early eighties. We've even had a few who've mutilated themselves facially, but we've never had one who's done both.'

'There's a first time for everything,' Bill spoke with the air of a man who'd seen all life had to offer.

'If he did it to himself, where's the knife?' Patrick asked. 'Even if the handle burned we should have found the blade. The marks are here, here and here.'

Trevor, Bill, and Dan peered at the diagonal, gaping sloughs in the bone. Anna glanced at them from a distance. 'There's not much flesh adhering to this section, although it hasn't been as badly burned as the rest. It's my guess, that the flesh was scraped away before the fire started. I've X-rayed the cuts and I'd say they were probably made by a keen, honed, not serrated, hooked blade. Possibly a hunting knife.'

Dan gazed at the fragment and put it into the context of a face. It took him a few moments to make out the beginnings of an eye socket at the top edge of the cheekbone. 'Sam said the victim was screaming when he ran out into the street. Can you slice that much off a man's face without killing him?'

'Good lord yes. Cases have been recorded where men have lost their faces in accidents and not even realised for a few minutes what's happened to them. These injuries could have certainly prompted the screams your witness heard.'

'Would the injuries have killed him if the fire hadn't?'

‘Impossible to say. There’s virtually nothing left of the lungs. We’ve tried freezing and slicing the couple of slivers we found, but there’s not enough to tell if smoke was inhaled or not. All I can say is, I don’t think he could have lasted long in an inferno that intense. The end of the screaming was probably the end of the man.’

‘So we’ve a male, wearing red baseball boots with blue laces, black woollen coat – possibly vagrant –’

‘In that get-up in Jubilee Street, I’d say undoubtedly vagrant,’ Anna interrupted Dan in the hope of speeding things up.

‘All the homeless I know who hadn’t found a bed in one of the hostels would have moved on from Jubilee Street by that time of night.’

‘You an expert on down-and-outs?’ Anna regretted snapping at Trevor the instant the words were out of her mouth.

‘Not as much of an expert as Peter.’ Trevor was as exhausted as Anna but had learnt to keep his temper around his superiors.

‘Age?’ Dan asked Patrick.

‘From what is left of the skull between twenty-five and forty-five.’

‘You can’t bring it any closer than that?’

‘We may know more when I parcel up the teeth and what’s left of his jaw and send it to the dental pathologist. The boots are size ten, but his feet were eight and a half, and whoever owned the boots before him had stretched them. The big toe had broken through the canvas and the stitching on the side had split under the strain.’

‘Hair colour? Eyes?’ Dan pressed.

‘The hair on the upper part of the foot is very dark, almost black.’

‘You have washed it?’ Bill asked.

‘Yes.’ Patrick glowered over his glasses. He’d never learnt to appreciate police humour, preferring his own peculiar brand. ‘As for the eyes, I didn’t find one.’

‘Can we have a picture of the boot?’ Dan asked.

Patrick shouted for his assistant who handed over a selection of digital photographs he’d printed out. ‘I’ll send over my report as soon as it’s processed.’

‘Appreciate all you’ve done.’

‘Any time, as long as it’s not in the next four or five hours. I’m for bed.’ Patrick snapped off his gloves and tossed them into a bin.

‘You all look like hell, and I’m feeling generous,’ Bill conceded as they left the mortuary. ‘The most pressing thing is to get a fix on the identity of the victim, so I’ll pass the photographs on to the day shift. You can all go home, get a couple of hours sleep and meet back in the station for a briefing, say –’ he glanced at his watch. ‘It’s ten now. Five suit everyone?’

‘Why not?’ Anna replied. ‘Let’s turn day into night.’

‘When you’ve worked on Serious Crimes as long as I have, you’ll be grateful for sleeping time whenever it comes,’ Dan opened his car door.

Trevor walked through his front door and called out Lyn’s name, although he knew there was little

chance she'd be in. He went from room to room, looking for a note. There wasn't one. All evidence of the party had been cleared away apart from the leftover sausages, cold meats and salad in the fridge. He took a cold sausage and glared balefully at the salad. If the stuff was so good for you, why had so little of it been eaten?

Feeling guilty because he had left Lyn to tackle the mess on her own, he kicked off his shoes and climbed the stairs. If he'd lived alone he would have crashed out just as he was, clothes and all. Because he and Lyn shared the same bed, if not always at the same time, he showered first, although he was so tired he actually slept for a moment or two as he leant against the shower door. A minute later, damp and smelling of Lyn's cold cream soap he fell into bed and plunged into a deep unconsciousness that left no room for anything. Not even thoughts of faceless burning men – or Lyn.

'I'm coming!' Anna Bradley pulled the belt of her towelling robe tight around her waist and thundered down the stairs of her one up, one down starter home. She wrenched open the door to see Peter on her doorstep, his new BMW parked on the kerb behind him, a smile on his face.

'I thought you might need a chauffeur.'

She frowned, sleep still numbing her mind. 'Why? There's nothing wrong with my car –'

'It went in for a service yesterday morning. I picked you up from the garage, which is why Andrew gave you a lift to the party.'

‘Oh hell!’ Trevor’s birthday party felt as though it had taken place last year, rather than last night.

‘Super’s called a briefing,’ he reminded her.

‘It’s not due to start until five.’

‘It’s a quarter to.’

‘Blast!’ She turned her back and walked up the stairs.

‘Want me to make you coffee?’

‘And food. Food, I must have food. I’m starving.’

He shut the door behind him. Rounding the partition that screened off the entrance from the rest of the house, he stood, disgusted at the mess that faced him. He hadn’t helped Lyn clear up after the party out of any finer feelings than an overriding passion for order and cleanliness in all things domestic. As his wife had found out to her cost, he loathed clutter, and was paranoid about dirt. The state of Anna Bradley’s living room appalled him.

It was too small to hold the torn and grubby two-seater settee and matching chair she’d bought in a junk shop with the intention of re-upholstering. The scraps of carpet that could be seen, beneath the layers of newspapers, magazines and bulging plastic bags, appeared to be beige and in desperate need of a shampoo. Beer bottles, a half-empty bottle of whisky, three squashed diet coke cans, coats, towels and tea-towels were strewn over a folding table pushed into a corner next to two non-matching upright chairs. The brown and white Scandinavian-style curtains looked as though they hadn’t been washed in years and the windowsill, like the window, was covered by a layer of grime that

extended over two dead potted plants, assorted mummified insects and a dirty glass.

He walked over the newspapers to the kitchen area, tucked in the back corner behind a breakfast bar. The rubber soles of his shoes stuck to the vinyl as he stepped off the litter strewn carpet. A blind was drawn over a window above the sink. He tried to raise it and it fell into the stainless steel basin which was filled to the brim with cold, scummy water, plates and bowls.

The mess was worse than the living room. Plates, cups and glasses, their surfaces thick with congealing food and furry mould were piled on the galley counter. He gingerly opened the fridge. The light flicked on revealing a piece of hard yellow cheese delicately drawn with a map of blue mould and a bottle of greenish separated milk.

‘Coffee made?’ Anna was halfway down the stairs, pulling a sweater over her head.

‘I’ll buy you one to go in Macdonald’s.’ He shut the fridge.

‘Couldn’t find anything?’

‘I was afraid of catching something if I looked any longer.’

‘I suppose the place is a bit of a mess.’ Her tone was defiant, his reply honest.

‘I now know why you always want to go back to my place.’

‘I wanted to see how you lived before letting you in here, but your flat is sterile. It lacks character.’

‘At least it’s passed a health and safety inspection.’

‘So would my bedroom and bathroom.’

‘That an invitation?’ He studied her critically. The place might be a mess, but she wasn’t. Her short, blonde hair was brushed away from her face, wet and gleaming from the shower. Her black slacks and grey pullover were clean, fresh and newly pressed, and she smelt of magnolias; but despite her assurance he couldn’t help wondering if chaos reigned upstairs as well as down.

‘I suppose it is.’

He was surprised by her answer. Their four dates, two of them videos and take-aways in his flat, had been surprisingly chaste, especially for him. He hadn’t been able to quantify why until that moment. Anna had the same faults as his ex-wife, if anything magnified, and he’d been too mesmerised by her body to see them. But it was a magnificent body. Worth enduring a little squalor for.

‘How about right now?’ he suggested.

‘Why not? I’m sure the super won’t mind us missing the briefing.’

‘Cars break down all the time.’

‘Even new BMWs.’

‘Tyres blow out on BMWs same as Fords.’

‘Seeing as how you disapprove of my housekeeping, sure you wouldn’t prefer the blow out to happen outside your place? That way you could enjoy a tussle on guaranteed clean sheets’ There was a peculiar glint in her green eyes. He cursed softly under his breath. Was she or wasn’t she leading him on?

‘Bill’s waiting.’ He cut his losses. For the first time in his life he’d didn’t quite know where he was with a woman.

‘Excuses, excuses. That’s what I always get when I make a man an honest proposition. Seems to me that in spite of all your promises you’re terrified of a female getting on top of you, Peter. In more ways than one. Well, we going to this meeting, or not?’ She pulled her keys out of her shoulder bag, walked down the stairs and out through the door leaving him feeling like an adolescent who’d just failed an initiation rite.

‘Sam Mayberry identified the shoes,’ Bill informed Trevor and Dan. ‘They belonged to a vagrant known as Tony. And any minute now we’re going to get a good look at him.’

‘There are photographs?’ Dan dipped a plastic stick into a polystyrene cup of coffee.

‘Sam mentioned that a team from the local television station were poking around Jubilee Street last month. They filmed a documentary on the council’s plans for the re-development of the area. They interviewed Sam, Tom Morris and Captain Arkwright, and most of the vagrants who weren’t camera shy, including our Tony.’

‘You’ve the film they took?’ Dan made a wry face as he sipped the bitter brew.

‘Producer said the film wasn’t finished. I told him we weren’t critics, just needed to see whatever footage he took of Tony. Andrew’s picking him, the film and Sam up.’

‘What about Tom Morris and Captain Arkwright?’ Trevor asked.

‘They knew of this Tony. But Sam knew him better, which is why Sam is coming and they’re not. Good evening,’ Bill greeted Peter and Anna. ‘Nice of you to join us.’

‘Peter?’ Trevor raised an eyebrow.

‘Our victim was a junkie, hence the Drug Squad presence,’ Dan explained.

‘And every time Serious Crimes digs itself into a hole it can’t get out of, it requisitions my help.’ Peter smiled as he sat next to Anna.

CHAPTER THREE

‘That’s all there is. Fix, then oblivion. Drink or fix, sleep. Always looking for the next fix or drink. And living in hope that we’ll get it.’ The voice was educated, flat, diluted by futility. The speaker was tall, painfully thin and filthy. The pupils of his eyes were dilated. He glanced uneasily from side to side nervously searching – for the next drink? The next fix?

‘What happens when you haven’t the money to buy a drink or a fix, Tony?’ The voice was female, professional.

‘You go out and look. You have to walk around. Look –’

The camera panned down the filthy clothes that hung loosely on the emaciated body. A long, black overcoat, threadbare, torn and stained. A crumpled, horizontally-striped shirt that must have cost someone money before it had been pushed into a charity sack. Jeans, scabrous and broken. Feet in oversized red baseball boots with blue laces. The camera climbed again, focusing on a pair of skeletal, fidgety hands; the fingers encrusted with brown scum, the nails split and blackened. Someone out of camera sight handed over a cigarette. Clean hands passing swiftly over grimy ones, careful not to touch.

The lens followed the cigarette being carried to the man’s mouth. Cracked, dry lips opened to display the yellowed chipped edges of neglected teeth. The face contorted, and the eyes closed as

smoke was drawn deeply into lungs. The exhalation was slow, every moment of nicotine-stained sensation being savoured to the full.

‘A man who makes the most of every little pleasure.’ Nigel Valance, a freelance producer who worked occasionally for the local TV company, sat back in his chair.

‘A man who made the most of every little pleasure,’ Peter contradicted.

‘Quiet!’ Bill paused the remote until silence reigned in the room.

‘And tonight, Tony?’ The same female voice.

‘Tonight?’ No matter what angle the camera took, Tony’s eyes refused to meet the scrutinising gaze of the lens.

‘You went to the DSS this morning, for your payment,’ she said. ‘Do you have enough left for a bed in the shelter tonight?’

‘Bastards wouldn’t give me nothing. Said I had to wait.’ He gripped the glowing end of the cigarette tensely between the tips of his thumb and forefinger and swayed on his feet.

Trevor had spent enough working time in Jubilee Street to profile the man and a hundred like him. If it had been Tony’s day to go to the DSS the money would have been off-loaded on to the first off-licence prepared to serve him. That’s if he was on drink. The pupil dilation said otherwise, and there were enough cheap varieties of dope on offer down in the dock area to buy all the hostel “guests” a few hours of oblivion.

Judging by the state of him on film, he wouldn’t have even been awake if someone hadn’t shaken

him for the benefit of the rolling camera. Whoever had planned the documentary had needed a dossier to give an Oscar-winning performance of a man at the end of his rope and they'd settled on Tony because someone knew addicts. Catch a man sleeping after a trip and you've compliance. Wake him and he'll jump through hoops if he thinks it will finance his next fix. What had they offered? Money or dope? It wouldn't have taken much of either. Pity they hadn't filmed him when whatever he was on was wearing off. Another couple of hours and it would have been a different story. Watch the raving lunatic who'd kill his grandmother for a ticket to temporary oblivion.

Trevor looked along the table. Bill, Dan, Anna, Andrew, Sam Mayberry and the documentary maker, Nigel Valance, were watching the screen intently. But Peter caught his eye. The quick glance they exchanged was enough. Peter's thoughts were running along similar lines to his own. But Peter's patience was shorter.

'Do you really expect people to fall for this "poor lost soul" crap?'

'Pardon?' Nigel turned his pony-tailed head and looked at Peter through weak blue eyes rimmed by gold wire spectacles.

'You want the world to feel sorry for a junkie who's an hour off a downer when he'd be prepared to do anything or anyone to fund the next trip?'

'He told us it was drink.'

'And I'm Santa Claus.'

'That might explain...'

'What?' Bill paused the disc again.

‘What comes next? Father Mayberry and Constable Murphy described the man you were interested in and I put all the footage I could find of him on this disc.’

‘If there’s more to come let’s watch it,’ Bill hit the play button.

‘We were in Jubilee Street for two weeks...’

‘Quiet!’ Bill ordered, and all eyes focused on the screen again.

Another interview, this time with Captain Arkwright who eloquently pleaded for more understanding and financial support from the community. A longer one with Tom Morris who reiterated the message of the Salvation Army worker directly to the camera, but more forcibly. Even Peter was tempted to put his hand in his pocket.

‘He’s very attractive,’ Anna commented.

‘He’s married,’ Trevor warned.

‘With looks like that, who cares?’ Anna glanced slyly at Peter.

‘Doesn’t he simply exude sincerity? He was a treasure. An absolute gift to a documentary maker,’ Nigel enthused. ‘Blond hair and blue eyes are often photogenic, like yours, Anna...’

‘You two know one another?’ Peter interrupted.

‘We did,’ Nigel winked at Anna.

‘Years ago,’ Anna said in a tone that warned off both Nigel and Peter.

‘But Tom has more than just his looks,’ Nigel continued. ‘He’s wasted where he is. I told him to go for a career in advertising or presenting. His looks and sincerity could take him to the top.’

‘Possibly he appears sincere because he believes in what he’s doing,’ Peter suggested.

Cut to a queue forming outside the hostel. It was still light – mid-afternoon? A pan along the queue. Tony huddled into his black overcoat and bright red baseball boots stood between two men. One, who could have been any age between thirty and fifty, had dirty blond hair, a round face and cheerful, empty smile. The other was as tall and dark as Tony, but, unlike Tony, his eyes were heavy and dull in his lean face. Trevor wondered if it was lack of interest or – drug damage.

‘Know them, Sam?’ Bill asked the priest.

‘The dark one is Vince. We’ve learned to tread carefully with our guests, and that one in particular is very withdrawn.’

‘He still around?’ Dan reached into his pocket for his peppermints.

‘I didn’t see either of them last night, but that doesn’t mean anything. They’re regular casuals, if you know what I mean. They sleep with us when they can afford it and on the streets when they can’t. We sometimes go for days without seeing them.’

‘They a pair?’ Peter leaned forward on his elbows.

‘They’re usually together. The dark one is – not quite himself.’

‘Mental case?’ Peter diagnosed.

‘I believe they’ve both been discharged from Compton Castle.’

Trevor remained silent. He’d had first hand experience of Compton Castle, and some of his colleagues’ attitudes to his brief incarceration in a

psychiatric ward had been anything but supportive or understanding. It was the hush that descended when he walked into some of the station's offices that hurt the most.

The camera continued to roll along the queue, the same syrupy female voice droned in the background. A grey, foam-topped microphone came into focus in the centre of the screen. Out of shot, Nigel addressed Tony and the two men standing next to him.

'There are only beds for twenty-seven men in this hostel. Do you realise you're the fiftieth in line?'

'Of course he bloody realises!' Tony, no longer shambling and incoherent, but aggressive, high on something that had pumped him full of adrenaline, stepped close to the camera. 'What the fuck are you doing here? Haven't you the decency to leave us alone? Some of us have families. People who don't know how low we've sunk.' The camera swung alarmingly. A shot of ground speckled with spittle and dog mess was followed by a fuzzy blackout, then sky; beautifully clear blue sky adorned by white fluffy clouds that ended sharply in black nothingness.

'He smashed the camera,' Nigel said.

'Serves you right for playing with junkies,' Peter interjected.

'We were trying to make an honest social statement.'

'About what?' Peter demanded. 'The depths those forced to live on our streets have sunk to? Let's visit the dossers, they're more amusing than

monkeys and have the added spice of being more dangerous. And, watching this programme will make you feel superior to the common herd for an hour or two.'

'Curb it, Peter!' Bill warned.

'There's nothing worse than a bloody armchair do-gooder. Try doing it his way,' Peter pointed to Sam, 'then you might accomplish something.'

'We're raising consciousness –'

'By turning your audience into voyeurs? You and your kind make me sick.' Ignoring the "No Smoking" sign on the wall, Peter filched a cigar from the top pocket of his shirt, and rammed it between his lips.

Bill waited until he was sure that Peter had finished his outburst before taking his finger off the pause button. Shots of the interior of a hostel came into view, dark with shadows and poor lighting. Scenes of men undressing in a dismal corridor that led to a communal shower room were interspersed with frames of broken vinyl tiles badly laid on an uneven concrete floor. They were followed by lingering close-ups of black mould growing between cracked white wall tiles. Then the filthy showers themselves, the plug holes blocked by dirt.

'I didn't give you permission to film inside,' Sam protested. 'I explained that with so many men going through it's impossible to clean the showers while they're in use.'

'I should imagine it's impossible to keep a shower room of that age clean, full stop.' Anna said sympathetically. After the grubby clutter of her

living room, Peter wondered how her bathroom would fare in close-up.

Lines of half-naked men wearing cheap striped towels around their waists queued to hand over their clothes to volunteers. The camera followed the bundles as they were pushed through the enamel doors of large machines.

‘Since when have you started washing their clothes, Sam?’ Trevor asked.

‘I only wish we could. There isn’t time. Our customers generally only have what they’re standing up in. We’re always on the look-out for donations, but men’s clothing never comes into the charity shops in sufficient quantities for us to kit our clients out. Plenty of women’s and children’s, but never men’s.’

‘What are those if not washing machines?’ Dan asked.

‘Tumbler dryers. The heat kills the lice.’

‘Fried lice?’

‘Sergeant Collins!’ Bill glared at Peter’s unapologetic face.

‘Just adding some levity to the proceedings.’ The unlit cigar still dangled between Peter’s lips. He knew better than to antagonise Bill more than he already had by lighting it.

They continued to watch the screen. The picture panned out on the dilapidated buildings of Jubilee Street, marooned like abandoned ships in a sea of debris. Pan in on the new Marina, clean, white, gleaming concrete walkways, three and six storey red-brick buildings sporting shining UVPC windows. Neatly dressed, law-abiding citizens,

sitting outside pavement cafés, glasses of wine and lager, and seafood salads in front of them. People walking, chatting and generally not doing very much of anything. Girls wearing bright summer T-shirts and jeans, women in mini-skirts and straw hats, men showing off pale, hairy arms in short-sleeved shirts. Children licking ice cream cornets as they gazed in arcade windows. Music, a fade to credits –

‘That it?’ Bill fast forwarded the credits to the end.

‘That’s the rough. It has to be cut to half that length. I left some stuff on the cutting-room floor but nothing of any of the vagrants.’

‘Nothing?’ Peter looked sceptical.

‘Interviews with Father Mayberry, Captain Arkwright, Tom Morris and their staff,’ Andrew broke in. ‘I saw them.’

‘I brought along the out-takes in case you wanted them.’ Nigel held up a second disc.

‘We can keep both?’ Bill asked purely as a courtesy.

‘Permanently. They’re copies.’

‘Did you talk to Tony away from the cameras?’ Trevor questioned.

‘Only a few words. The film was my idea. I produced and directed it as well as doing some interviewing. But Tony didn’t say much more than you saw.’

‘What about the rest of the people who worked with you?’

‘The rest of us?’ Nigel laughed deprecatingly. ‘You mean the camera man, and Joanne who doubles as researcher and second interviewer.’

‘That’s it?’

‘The whole team. It’s average for a television station our size.’

‘You sure there’s nothing else you can tell us about Tony?’ Dan persisted.

‘Nothing,’ Nigel asserted. ‘We started filming that first interview the minute we saw him.’

‘When you woke him, you mean.’

‘How did –’ Nigel looked from Peter to Bill. ‘When he spotted the camera before that second interview he went berserk, as you saw.’

‘Did you see him again?’

‘Once or twice, but we went out of our way to avoid him.’

‘So you didn’t talk to him again?’

‘You kidding? The next time I saw him with the other two in an alley I ran.’

‘Did you give him anything after the first interview?’ Peter asked.

‘Like what?’

‘Money. A fix. Booze?’

‘We may have given him a couple of quid.’

‘May have?’

‘I can’t remember.’

‘Sure the quids didn’t come wrapped in little plastic packets?’

‘I’m not a drug dealer, Sergeant Collins,’ Nigel protested.

‘How did you know I was talking about drugs?’

‘It’s obvious – it’s –’

‘You gave him money. Nothing else?’ Trevor recalled the bottle. ‘No whisky?’

When Nigel didn’t reply, Sam turned on him.

‘Mr Valance! You promised, no drink,’ Sam reproached.

‘Constable Murphy will take your statement, Mr Valance,’ Bill wound up the proceedings. ‘Thank you for your time.’

‘If there’s anything else I can do, Superintendent.’ Nigel was reluctant to leave. He had an idea for a documentary on the local police force and was tempted to bring up the subject. He glanced at the faces around the table wondering if it was a good time.

‘We’ll call you if we need you again, Mr Valance,’ Bill replied. ‘As I’ll assume you’ll do if you remember anything else. No matter how trivial or insignificant. In a case like this we need every crumb of information we can get.’

‘Of course, Superintendent.’ Nigel walked out through the door that Andrew was holding open.

‘Well?’ Bill looked expectantly around the table.

‘Row between two dossers over a bottle?’ Anna suggested.

‘That might explain the knife injuries to the face, but not the petrol. That sounds premeditated to me.’ Peter pulled the cigar out of his mouth.

‘I agree,’ Trevor concurred. ‘Vagrants don’t carry petrol. My money’s on kids looking for sick kicks.’

‘Anyone ever taken to trying to drink it?’

‘Meths, but never petrol, to my knowledge,’ Sam Mayberry said.

‘If they’re gone enough they might siphon some out of a car,’ Anna suggested.

‘Most of the old hands carry knives,’ Peter pushed his chair back and propped his feet on the table. ‘I wish I had a fiver for every one Trevor and I have taken off them.’

‘You ever see Tony with one, Sam?’ Trevor asked.

Sam shook his head. ‘They know the rules. If they’re seen with a weapon inside the hostel they’re disarmed and shown the door. Permanently.’

‘Supposing it’s as Anna said,’ Dan reflected. ‘Tony had a bottle, another dosser wanted it. One of them pulled a knife, they fought –’

‘And the other dosser happened to be carrying a can of petrol?’ Trevor said.

‘Perhaps the knifing came first, the petrol later. Supposing Tony was killed in a brawl and the other man panicked when he realised Tony was dead. Then he got the petrol and used it to cover his tracks.’

‘Tony was still screaming when Sam ran out of the hostel,’ Trevor reminded him.

‘Some of our customers can be violent when provoked, especially in drink,’ Sam contributed, ‘but I can’t see many of them having the presence of mind to try to conceal what they’d done.’

‘Finding out what happened is our problem, Sam, and this is all pure conjecture.’ Bill rose to his feet. ‘Anything you can add to what’s already been said –’

‘I’ll be in touch,’ Sam promised.

‘Don’t forget to call us if we can be of any help either.’

‘Thank you, it’s good to know we can count on the force.’

‘The two men with Tony in that queue?’ Trevor asked as the priest went to the door. ‘Was Tony with them often?’

‘First time I’d seen him with them. Whenever he stayed in the hostel, he’d shower, have his clothes treated, eat his meal, throw himself on a bed, and sleep.’

‘Was he a regular?’

‘On and off. Couple of times a week for about a year, year and a half according to the book. I looked it up before I left.’

‘Thank you for taking the trouble.’

‘That reminds me,’ Sam produced a folded piece of paper from his trouser pocket. ‘I made a list of the dates he stayed with us. Thought you might find it useful.’

‘That’s saved someone a bit of leg work.’ Dan unfolded the paper and laid it on the table. ‘According to this he slept in your place two or three times a week for eighteen months, more often in winter than summer. Any idea where he went the other nights?’ Dan passed the sheet to Peter.

‘The same place those who can’t run to our seventy-five pence fee, and the overflow we fail to accommodate, go to every night of the week. Cardboard boxes and blankets on the beach, a shake-down in the underpasses or the multi-storeys. Your people should have a better idea than me.’

‘Only when we’re young and on the beat. When we start working from an office we forget about the streets,’ Peter said.

‘Thank you for coming down, Sam.’ Bill went to the door. ‘I’ll see you out.’

After Bill and Sam left, Dan picked up the remote and pressed play. Tony drew on his cigarette again, his eyes darting uneasily in their sockets.

‘I’d give a night’s drinking to know what ghosts were chasing that man.’ Making the most of Bill’s absence, Peter lit his cigar.

‘My money’s still on a row between dossers over drink.’ Anna moved sideways to avoid Peter’s cigar smoke.

‘Why?’ Dan asked.

‘Sam said the old hands carry knives. Look at Tony in that second interview. He’s just the type to keep one hidden in his boot. Someone turned it and used it on him.’

‘No knife was found,’ Trevor reminded her.

‘Perhaps the killer ran down to the dock and dropped it in the water. I think we should search it.’

‘Two hundred foot of quayside so filthy a diver can’t see his hand in front of his face?’ Peter flicked his ash on the floor. ‘Remember that woman who drove into it? We didn’t find her car until a year later, and that was after five teams went down.’

‘They weren’t looking for it that far out,’ Anna remonstrated.

‘Even so, there’s a hell of a difference between a car and a knife. And if we couldn’t find a car, what chance a knife?’

‘So what do you suggest we do?’ Dan looked to Peter.

‘I’m more inclined to agree with Trevor. It was probably kids high on something looking for sick kicks.’

‘Any news on that bottle of whisky?’ Trevor asked.

‘Not that I’ve heard,’ Dan answered.

Peter stared thoughtfully at the disc Nigel Valance had left. ‘Tony wouldn’t have needed much of an excuse to lash out. It could well have been a fight over nothing in particular. You saw what he was like on that film. He could have simply taken an exception to the colour of another man’s socks. He attacked, but his victim was stronger and possibly sober. Turned the knife on him, it went into Tony’s face, gouged his cheek, sliced off his ear, and made a bloody awful mess that caused the second man to panic. He looked around, saw a car, siphoned off petrol –’

‘For which he just happened to have a can and a tube?’ Dan smiled.

‘He could have been breaking into parked cars. Lot of charity workers like Sam carry spare cans in case of emergency.’

‘That’s right,’ Trevor concurred. ‘I ran out once down there, and Sam helped me out with a gallon.’

‘So our villain, whoever he is, tipped the petrol over Tony and tossed a match. Not bad considering you started with no evidence,’ Dan said sceptically.

‘Are we releasing that film, sir?’ Anna asked Dan. ‘There could be a witness out there.’

‘Too damned right.’ Peter ground the stub of his cigar beneath his shoe. ‘The murderer for one.’

‘We were too late for the early evening news, but we’ve booked a slot on the ten minute local at ten-thirty after the national news,’ Dan revealed.

‘Showing the film?’

‘Do you think the station would do anything else seeing as how it was made by one of their independent contractors?’ Dan said.

Bill returned and looked at Dan.

‘We’re sleeping on it for a couple of hours, sir.’ Dan rose stiffly to his feet. ‘If anything comes up after the film is shown on the news –’

‘We know,’ Peter said. ‘You’ll telephone us.’

‘Anna, Dan and Trevor will be telephoned, Peter. You’re on duty until midnight,’ Bill said.

‘What have I done to deserve it?’

‘Slept last night.’ Dan yawned and stretched. ‘See you in the morning.’

‘Can I beg a lift to my place?’ Anna asked Trevor.

‘Of course.’ He gave Peter a look of commiseration as he left.

In no hurry to go to his office, Peter poured himself another coffee from the jug that was standing on the hot-plate. He returned to his chair and forwarded the disc to Tony’s second scene.

“There are people out there who know us. Don’t want to see us like this...”

He scribbled a note on the back of Sam’s list. There had to be a way of finding out just who Tony was keeping his whereabouts from.

Trevor went to his desk and picked up the telephone. Dialling nine for an outside line he rang home. He allowed it to ring eight times. Nothing – Lyn had probably given up on him and gone out. That’s if she’d come home at all. He debated whether to stop off and pick up a take-away, then remembered the party leftovers in the fridge.

‘You eaten?’ he asked Anna as she climbed into his car.

‘No, and I’m bloody ravenous.’

‘Ravenous enough to eat cold left-over party food?’

‘Take me to it.’

The telephone stopped ringing just as Lyn had come to enough to roll to the edge of the bed and pick up the receiver. Cursing, she slammed it down and looked around. She was still dressed in her uniform. As soon as she’d reached the end of the street she’d known Trevor wouldn’t be home. There’d been no car in the drive, and when she’d opened the front door there were other unmistakeable signs of an empty house. No shoes kicked off in the hall, no coat thrown over the foot of the banisters. She’d checked the kitchen in case he’d been in and gone out again. But there were no dirty dishes on the work surface, and the dishwasher was full of clean dishes, just as she’d left it that morning. That’s when she’d climbed the stairs and lain on the bed – for a few minutes.

She rubbed her eyes and read the clock. Half past eight and she felt like hell. Tired, aching and hungry. She showered, and dressed for bed in silk pyjamas and dressing gown, the ones Trevor had given her for Christmas.

Perfumed, relaxed and comfortable, she went downstairs. Taking a clean plate from the dishwasher she foraged in the fridge, heaping liberal helpings of pasta and green and Mexican bean salad and coleslaw on to her plate. Healthy lot the police, she noted, realising that all the pork pies, gateau and crisps had gone. Two pieces of spiced chicken and half of a scotch egg completed her meal. She balked at the cold sausages and pasties. She couldn't stand the greasy taste, but Trevor could, that's if he came home while they were still edible.

There was half a bottle of Chardonnay with a cork rammed in the top in the fridge door. She picked it up and put it on a tray together with the food. Removing a glass from the top shelf of the dishwasher she carried her feast into the living room. Switching on the television she curled up on the sofa with the tray on her lap.

Flicking channels she settled for an old wartime black and white film. She'd seen it before, it had an unhappy ending. The hero died in a blazing plane, but it was preferable to the two channels of football and one of boxing she'd rejected. She was just about to take her first forkful of pasta when she heard the key in the door. Pushing the tray to one side she leaped to her feet, the smile dying on her lips when she saw Anna Bradley step into the hall ahead of Trevor.

‘I rang.’

She didn’t see the weariness, only the apologetic look on Trevor’s face as he brushed a comma of hair from his eyes.

‘I was sleeping. I didn’t get to the phone in time.’

‘If you two would rather be alone, I’ll call a taxi. I need a shower anyway.’

‘You can take one here,’ Lyn offered.

‘After we’ve eaten,’ Trevor said. ‘We’re both ravenous.’

‘I’ll get you something.’

‘The fridge is full. We’ll help ourselves.’

Lyn returned to the living room. The food on her plate tasted like sawdust and the film had lost what little attraction it had held.

‘You sure you don’t mind me barging in like this?’ Anna walked in carrying a plate heaped high with food.

‘Not at all,’ Lyn lied.

‘I know what it’s like not to have any time with the person you’re living with.’

Lyn felt like screaming, “Then why are you bloody well here?” but what she actually said was, ‘Have you finished for the day?’

‘Hopefully,’ Trevor answered as he laid his plate and the two beers he’d carried in for himself and Anna on the coffee table. Walking over to the sofa he pecked Lyn’s cheek, but sensing her mood he moved away to share the second sofa with Anna.

‘They’re putting photographs of the victim out after the ten o’clock news,’ Anna volunteered. ‘If

something comes of it we may have to go back to the station.'

Lyn looked across at Trevor. 'You working this weekend?'

'Not if I can help it.'

'This case –'

'Is probably one vagrant killing another. It's just a question of tracking down which one. With luck his clothes may be bloodstained.'

'Still?'

'They don't have anywhere to change them?' He picked up a forkful of salad and put it in his mouth, almost choking on the dry fronds of lettuce.

'News is about due,' Anna hinted.

Lyn switched channels. They ate mechanically through the horrors of Africa, the rowdy name-calling antics of MPs in Parliament, two celebrity deaths, including a film star. A clip of the film Lyn had been watching earlier came on the screen, and she realised why it had been repeated so soon after the last showing.

A woman walking alone on a beach. Planes flying overhead, dipping their wings. A superimposing of two ghostly figures embracing on the skyline,

"Darling, forever... "

Lyn knew Trevor was watching her. She looked away. The weatherman stood in front of a chart covered with arrows and lines. Cold, rain turning to snow on high ground, music, the local station cutting in.

"Murder, Jubilee Street... "

Lyn concentrated on her plate. The local news broadcast finished. An American detective series began. When the first advertisements flashed on to the screen the telephone rang.

Trevor picked up the receiver. 'We'll be right there.'

'You're going out again?' Lyn glared at him with accusing eyes.

'That was Peter.' He wasn't looking at Lyn, but Anna.

'They've more of a handle on the victim than "Tony?"' she guessed.

'He's been identified as one Anthony George, a solicitor from Crawley Woods.'

'A name and a place, we struck lucky.' She wiped her mouth with a paper napkin.

'Not quite. He died two years ago, in hospital. Of a heart attack.'

CHAPTER FOUR

‘Many calls come in after the broadcast?’ Trevor asked Constable Sarah Merchant as he passed by the switchboard on his way into the station.

She glanced at the notepad beside her. ‘Nine so far, one retired policeman, one doctor, seven general public.’

‘With different IDs?’

‘The same. It seems we have a mystery on our hands.’ Sarah had a soft spot for Trevor, who was more polite and considerate towards the constables than any of the other sergeants who worked out of the station, including Anna.

‘I’m sure it’s nothing Peter can’t handle. Thanks for the information.’ Trevor pushed the door that divided reception from the inner sanctum of offices and headed for the room he shared with Anna. She caught up with him at the door, two polystyrene cups in her hands, one of which she gave to him.

‘Thanks,’ Trevor walked into the office and saw Peter sitting behind his desk, the swivel chair tilted back to its limit, his feet propped dangerously near the in-tray. ‘Comfortable?’ Trevor asked.

‘Chair could be softer. Where’s my coffee?’ he asked Anna.

‘Get your own.’ Anna dumped her handbag and coffee on her desk. ‘Where’s the fire?’

‘No fire. Boss wants to sort out work schedules in the light of information received.’

‘Speak English.’ Anna sipped her coffee.

Peter picked up a paper from the desk. ‘Our victim is one Anthony George, solicitor. The casualty doctor who treated him telephoned in and identified him, as did two people who worked with him in his office, his mother’s cleaner, three of his friends and the retired policeman who investigated the mutilation of his face in the mortuary of the hospital where he died.’

‘Mutilation?’ Anna sat on her chair and began to rummage in her desk drawers.

Peter referred to the notes he’d made. ‘According to our informants there’s no doubt as to the victim’s identity. Anthony George, twenty-eight years old at the time of his death, two years ago from a heart attack during a game of squash. No doubt about the death either. It was verified by the doctor in casualty, and two others. His body was identified by his boss and the family solicitor due to the ill-health of his mother who was his closest living relative. Inspector Edwards who investigated the case at the time was most helpful.’

‘Our victim has to be a close relative.’ Ousted from his desk, Trevor sat on the edge of Anna’s.

‘Anthony George was an only child.’

‘A cousin, a look-alike. We’re all supposed to have a double somewhere,’ Trevor sipped the coffee Anna had given him.

‘So close, nine people phone in to tell us our victim is a dead man?’

‘Couldn’t this have waited until tomorrow?’ Anna grumbled.

‘Where’s your dedication, Anna?’ Peter pulled out the inevitable cigar.

‘Trevor, Anna. Thanks for coming in.’ Dan strode into the office, a wad of paper in his hand. ‘I asked the Crawley Woods station to forward us their files on the George case.’ Pushing the clutter, and Peter’s feet, from Trevor’s desk he spread out the sheets. ‘Anthony George’s face was removed from his corpse shortly after death.’

‘Removed?’ Anna looked at Peter. ‘You said it was mutilated?’

‘According to the pathologist’s report it was skinned,’ Dan read.

‘As in rabbit?’

‘There was no question of a suspicious death. Anthony George died in a casualty unit. After his death was certified his body was taken to the hospital mortuary. The attendant was halfway through laying it out when he was called away to pick up a corpse. Contrary to hospital regulations he didn’t lock the mortuary when he left. When he returned Anthony George was minus his face.’

‘Surely Tony and this Anthony George can’t be one and the same?’ Anna protested.

‘Obviously not.’ Dan continued to flick through the papers. ‘But there’s something else – something the super in the Crawley Woods station mentioned – a clipping from a newspaper.’

‘Giving a clairvoyant’s number?’

‘What would we do without your humour, Peter?’ Anna tossed her cup into the bin.

‘It’s a report on pioneering surgery. Face transplants for burns and accident victims.’

‘I’ve heard of partial transplants – that woman in Paris...’

Dan cut Anna short. ‘Apparently a complete face transplant can save years of surgery. A face from a compatible donor can, in theory, be grafted on in one. Ears, nose and all, which would cut down on the bone grafts and screw-in ears used for burn victims at present.’

‘Spare us the details.’

‘Squeamish, Anna?’ Peter needled.

‘I’ve just eaten.’

Trevor slid off Anna’s desk and paced to the window. ‘You think this Tony was wearing Anthony George’s face?’

‘It’s an interesting theory, and one the team holding the open file on the George face-theft case are considering,’ Dan said.

‘Science fiction,’ Peter scoffed.

‘Science fact, once articles like these are published. You can bet your last pound that before publication there’d been one or two cases where the technique had been tried and tested. Right, early start tomorrow.’ Dan looked to Trevor. ‘First thing in the morning you and I will visit Patrick to see if he’s come up with anything new on our victim, and also run this,’ he held up the report, ‘by him. Then we go to the police laboratory. Peter, you and Anna drive to Crawley Woods and interview as many of these informants as you can and, if you have time, check with the hospital Anthony George died in.’

‘After two years, what do you expect us to find?’ Peter asked.

‘You might be Drug Squad, but you’re experienced enough to know it when you see it.’

‘I thought I’d been drafted in to check out Tony’s drug pushing activities,’ Peter didn’t expect an answer to his complaint.

‘Will this warrant an overnight?’ Anna asked.

‘If you’ve leads to follow. Best pack a bag.’

‘Goody.’

‘This is work.’ Dan looked sternly from Anna to Peter.

‘I can’t speak for Anna but my intentions are strictly honourable,’ Peter protested. ‘Besides, by the time the force has finished with me I’m only good for sleeping.’

‘All sleeping time cancelled until this case is solved. Pick you up at eight tomorrow, Trevor?’

‘No one rang in from Jubilee Street?’ Trevor abandoned what was left of his coffee on the window-sill.

‘No one has a living room down there, let alone a television,’ Peter reminded.

‘There’s one last job you can do today, Trevor. Call on the retired policeman, Inspector Edwards. He lives on the marina, just across the road from your place.’

‘It’s midnight.’

‘He’s an ex-copper, he knows the score, he’s expecting you.’

‘Serves you right for leaving me to hold the fort all alone,’ Peter grinned.

‘Peter, you and Anna come with me to Jubilee Street. We’ll take a hostel each and interview the inmates who weren’t there last night.’

‘You weren’t joking about cancelling sleeping time were you, Inspector?’

‘The one thing you’ll learn, Anna, is that there are no jokes on Serious Crimes except the ones played by the punters on us.’ Dan shooed them out of the door.

Inspector Edwards lived on the third floor of a luxury block of flats facing the open sea. It was a five minute walk from Trevor’s house, and he was tempted to see Lyn first. Then he remembered Dan. The Inspector knew where he was going. If anything cropped up he was quite capable of phoning him and if he hadn’t spoken to Inspector Edwards there’d be hell to pay.

Turning the wheel left instead of right, he pulled up in the “Residents Only” parking bay of Grenville Court and cut his engine. He stepped out of his car, locked it and looked at the sea, and the renovated Victorian terrace that fronted it. His house was the third in the row. All the windows were shrouded in darkness. There was no point in rushing the interview. Lyn was in bed.

Pocketing his keys, he walked up to the foyer. The night porter had locked the internal doors, but he could see him, peaked cap pushed to the back of his head, sitting behind a desk reading the *Sun*. He pressed the buzzer. Without bothering to use the intercom, the porter rose from his chair and unlocked the door.

‘Sergeant Joseph?’

‘Yes.’

‘Mr Edwards is expecting you. Third floor, apartment seven.’

Trevor took the stairs. Six months ago he hadn’t been able to take a step unaided. He’d only discarded his walking stick three weeks ago, and he still missed it. Multiple fractures of the legs didn’t heal easily, but exercise was supposed to quicken the process. The door to the apartment opened seconds after he rang the bell.

‘Sergeant Joseph?’

‘Trevor. It’s good of you to see me at this hour, Inspector Edwards.’

‘Plain Mr will do now, Sergeant. But please, call me Ted. Come in.’

The ex-Inspector was a tall, spare, upright man. His living room was expensively furnished in a minimalist, masculine style. Deep grey carpeting, navy-blue drapes framing picture windows with sea and marina views, and four blue leather recliner chairs grouped around a glass coffee table. A television and DVD recorder were housed in a cabinet large enough to hold discs. There was nothing else. Not a single picture or photograph, nothing to give a hint as to the character of the owner.

Typical retired policeman, Trevor decided. Casualty of the force in the relationship stakes. Nothing to do, nowhere to go, no partner to love, just television to watch, and public-spirited telephone calls to make in the hope that he could be of use to his ex-colleagues. This man had lived for his work and now had a great hole in his life.

‘I remember only too well what it’s like, starting a new investigation. Would you like something to eat or drink?’ Ted offered. ‘Coffee? Tea? Or, if it’s the end of a long day, something stronger?’

‘Coffee would be fine, thank you.’

‘I made some sandwiches,’ Ted called back as he disappeared into the kitchen. ‘We don’t often use this place and when we do we tend to eat out, so I can’t offer you anything substantial.’

“We!” Trevor looked around again for evidence of a woman’s touch.

Ted reappeared with a tray of plates, knives, mustard, milk, sugar and two porcelain cups and saucers. He set it on the table, returned to the kitchen and brought in a cafetiere of coffee and the sandwiches.

‘This isn’t your home?’ Knowing what apartments on the marina cost, and what inspectors on the force earned, Trevor was surprised at the mention of another place.

‘My wife calls it our summer place, but after living on a farm all her life she can’t stand it here. To be truthful I think she prefers animals to people. We rent it out, and use it for house exchanges abroad. Now that I’ve retired we do a fair amount of travelling. My wife has handed over the management of her farm to her son, but she still breeds dogs and horses, so when we’re in the UK we tend to live in the country.’

“Her son” – a late second marriage?

‘But it’s useful during the sailing season.’

‘You have a yacht?’ Trevor was interested in Ted. He represented a rare glimpse of life after the force.

‘Racing dinghy. My interest, not my wife’s. But when she inherited this place from her father the two seemed to go together. He bought the apartment as an investment three months before he died and never set foot in the place. He would have hated it. Like my wife he was more a country than a water and concrete person.’

‘That’s one way of describing the marina.’ Trevor revised his initial impressions.

‘I’ve just had the boat overhauled in dry dock ready for the first race of the season and I wanted to see it put in the water myself. Stupid really. Chap who looks after it for me is more than capable. It was a long, cold day so I thought I’d have a few drinks,’ he opened the cabinet and pulled out a brandy bottle, ‘watch some TV and have an early night. Then I saw the news flash.’

‘You headed the team on the Anthony George case?’

‘Yes, not that we gave it all the manpower or attention it deserved. The George case came when we were already working on half-a-dozen top priorities. Like everyone else, I assumed whoever did it was a nut. One of the tabloids mentioned black magic and rumours started flying thick and fast. Then, about a year after it happened I saw a newspaper article.’

‘Inspector Evans had a faxed copy.’

‘Says something for the station I worked out of that it’s still in the file.’ He poured a generous

measure of brandy into his coffee and offered the bottle to Trevor who shook his head. 'I thought there might be something in it, but there was no programme of face transplants in the UK at the time. I spoke to a plastic surgeon in Harley Street. Top man, he agreed face transplants were feasible in theory, but you'd need to remove the donor face carefully. And keep it in exactly the right conditions until it could be used. I showed him photographs of Anthony George's corpse. He agreed it could have been a surgical removal, but it could also have been done by someone with knowledge of skinning animals. Without first-hand examination it was impossible to tell.'

'Was there a PM?'

'For the heart attack. But we didn't consider the possibility that the face had been surgically removed until I saw that article, and by then George had been cremated. The pathologist who saw the body said that the face had been removed with a sharp blade, possibly scalpel, possibly knife. I studied his report, but the case wasn't homicide and with three murder investigations on my hands, the theft of Anthony George's face didn't seem all that important at the time. I'm not apologising for relegating it to open file status. We were short-staffed, and orders came down from above to prioritise.'

'What about George's relatives?'

'There were none to speak of. His mother was terminally ill with cancer. Her doctor wouldn't allow us to interview her. She died not long after.'

'Girlfriend?'

‘His partner ran a pub around the corner from George’s office. He was distraught at the time but when I called in there just before I retired, there was another young fellow around.’

‘His name?’

Ted shook his head. ‘I can’t remember. But it will be in the file.’

‘What about an inheritance?’

‘If you’re thinking about someone going to all this trouble to impersonate him, forget it. I travelled down that road and ran into a stone wall. Anthony George was comfortably off. With insurance policies he left about two hundred thousand. It all went to the mother.’

‘And when the mother died?’

‘I checked on that too. She left half a million. It was divided equally between The British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research.’

‘No other beneficiaries?’

‘Her cook, maid and gardener received relatively small amounts, but nothing spectacular.’ Ted heaped three sandwiches on his plate and sat back in his chair. ‘It was eerie seeing that face again tonight.’

‘You’re that sure it was George?’

‘Absolutely,’ he replied with the confidence of a trained eye. ‘I studied that face for weeks after that article was published. I sifted through dozens of photographs of Anthony George – I was winding down to retirement and things were going at a slower pace then,’ he explained in answer to Trevor’s quizzical look. ‘I even pinned one photograph above my desk. Apart from the features,

the man in that video had the same mole high on the right cheek, the same scar below the bottom lip. It was in his passport as a distinguishing mark. Someone, I think it may have been his mother's solicitor, told me that he'd fallen and put his teeth through his lip as a child.'

'You really do know that face.' Trevor took a sandwich.

'If you'd stared at it as long as I had, Sergeant, you would too.'

'I have a feeling I may be going to do just that,' Trevor replied.

Trevor opened his front door at half past one. As Dan was picking him up in the morning, he left his car in the road so Lyn would be able to get hers out of the drive if she was on early shift. Lyn had emptied and restacked the dishwasher, the kitchen work surfaces had been cleaned, and the remains of the meal they had eaten earlier, cleared away.

Creeping up the stairs, he opened the bedroom door quietly. Moonlight shone through the French windows, throwing the shadows of the balcony's wrought iron scrollwork into the room. Lyn was lying on her side, the duvet pulled to her chin, her eyes closed. He picked up the alarm from his bedside table and carried it into the bathroom lest the noise of setting it disturb her. Too tired to shower, he stripped off his clothes, threw them into the linen basket and cleaned his teeth. Inching back the duvet he lay alongside Lyn, waiting for his body to warm to her temperature before daring to touch

her. But sleep overtook him before he summoned the courage to place his arm around her waist.

The alarm woke him. He fumbled for his clock only to realise the ringing had come from Lyn's side of the bed. He turned over and saw her back disappearing through the bathroom door. He went into the other bathroom. Since early morning shifts had created problems, he had kept a selection of his toiletries in there. He heard her splashing in the bath as he showered. Perhaps if he dressed quickly and made breakfast it would go some way towards appeasing her.

Five minutes later, dressed in light-coloured slacks and dark open-necked shirt he opened the fridge door. Nothing but party leftovers. He moved the cling-film back from a salad bowl. It would last today but no longer. He took out eggs, butter and coffee, scrambled the eggs, put bread in the toaster, and had it all ready, waiting on the table when she came downstairs.

'Breakfast?' he held his breath, hoping she'd smile.

'I haven't time.'

'It's only six-thirty.'

'I promised to pick one of the girls up. Her car broke down yesterday.'

'How about toast? It's already buttered.' He offered her the plate.

She took one. 'What time will you be home tonight?'

'I don't know.'

'Then you won't mind if I go to the cinema with the girls.'

‘No, I won’t mind. Lyn –’

‘Talk to you later. Must go.’ Leaving half the toast on the table she ran out through the door.

He looked at the breakfast he’d prepared, picked up the plates and scraped them into the bin. It wasn’t until he went upstairs to make the bed that he noticed the gift wrapped box on his bedside table. He left it where it was.

‘Where first?’ Anna asked Peter as she switched on the route finder in the car.

‘Crawley Woods station for a courtesy call,’ Peter suggested. ‘We’ll be operating in their territory.’

‘Dan gave us copies of their files last night.’

‘There are always things that aren’t in the files. Trevor got some of them last night from the chap who’d been in charge of the investigation.’

‘You telephoned Trevor?’

‘At seven.’

‘Disturbing the love birds.’

‘Lyn was already at work.’

‘I’ve a feeling that one’s about to fly the nest.’

‘That’s Trevor’s business, not ours.’

‘We’re all in the same boat. I’ve four long-term broken relationships. Word is you’ve been married...’

‘What’s this? Auntie Anna’s marriage guidance hour?’

‘Don’t you ever wish you were a civilian with a nice, normal job and a regular home life?’

‘Only when I’m sharing a car with a female sergeant who practises psychology for beginners.’

‘Go on Peter, admit it. You miss a woman in your life.’

‘Only sexually, and if you’re offering...’

‘I’m not offering anything at this hour.’

‘Pity, I know of a nice little lay-by.’

‘I outgrew car sex in my teens.’

‘A staid lady.’

‘Staid nothing...’

‘We’re here.’ He steered the car through a set of gates into a parking bay. ‘First stop files to check nothing was missed last night.’

‘I hate checking,’ she grumbled.

‘Then you should have stuck to housework, instead of joining the force,’ Peter retorted.

‘Just the people I want to see.’ Bill waylaid Dan and Trevor when they entered the station.

‘Not for long, I hope,’ Dan said. ‘We’re on our way to the mortuary.’

‘Aren’t we all,’ Bill quipped.

‘Not this week, I hope.’

‘Forensic reports came in.’ Bill waved a sheaf of paper at his office door and they followed him inside.

‘Did they get any prints off the hands?’ Trevor asked.

‘They’re working on them. Trying a new technique, but nothing useable has come of it so far. They did come up with a set of smudges and a beautiful set of clear prints from the bottle.’

‘Smudges as in gloves?’ Dan questioned.

‘As in gloves,’ Bill agreed. ‘Looks like it was handled by two people. The prints are being checked

through the computer now. They're also running the boot past manufacturers, but even if they track down the maker I've a feeling it's not going to be that useful. We've circulated the charity shops with a description in the hope that someone will remember selling them.'

'He could have picked them up directly from the hostel or a clothing skip.'

'I'm aware of that, Trevor,' Bill said irritably. 'I'm also aware that the press are having a field day.' He pushed a newspaper across his desk. The headlines were three inches high. "WHO CARES?" 'According to that, not the police. There's a graphic description of lingering death by burning, screams, and us not trying very hard.'

'Looks about par for the course to me.' Dan slid the paper back to Bill.

'Upstairs isn't happy.'

Trevor crossed his arms and leaned against the door. In his experience upstairs was never happy. And the pressure always came with the impossible cases. He'd never heard of an officer receiving a pat on the back for solving a case quickly, but they always got a kick in the rear for some reporter's vivid imagination.

'I'll get back to you after we've spoken to Patrick, Bill.' Dan went to the door.

'Where are Peter and Anna?'

'Checking out the phone ins on the victim's identity.'

'The dead man?' Mulcahy said. 'Surely you're not wasting time on that?'

'We've had no other positive I.D.'

‘It could be a relative,’ Trevor suggested.

‘Keep me informed.’

‘We will, sir.’ Dan led the way out.

‘I thought you’d be round this morning.’ Patrick delved into the abdominal cavity of the corpse laid out before him and snipped. Moments later he lifted out a liver.

‘Found anything else in our burn victim?’ Dan asked.

‘Alcohol in the bloodstream. There was enough left in the foot to test.’

‘High?’

‘Yes, but the reading we took can’t be taken as gospel. Some blood sugars turn to alcohol after death.’

‘Given that we found a whisky bottle nearby, was there enough to assume he was drunk?’

‘Double the drink-drive limit.’

‘Forensic found one set of prints and a few smudges on the whisky bottle.’

‘Someone wore gloves?’ Patrick looked up in interest.

‘Could be, if the bottle is connected to the case.’

‘I came across a couple of other things that might interest you.’ Patrick dumped the liver into a tray and handed it to his assistant. ‘Freeze, then slice for cross sections.’

‘Nice job,’ Dan commented.

‘Evidence in an industrial compensation case.’ Patrick pulled off his gloves, binned them, and put on a fresh pair before walking to the bank of

drawers against the far wall. He pulled out the one that held the charred remains of the victim. He picked up the piece of cheekbone with the shreds of flesh clinging to it, and another sliver which resembled a slice of dried bark. 'This is, or rather was, facial skin. We peeled it off the kneecap. Under the microscope we found a series of slashes running across it.'

'Like a skinning?' Trevor suggested.

'Not like a skinning at all. Some of these slashes can be matched with cuts in the skull. Whoever did this cut the face to ribbons. Even if the victim hadn't been burned, I think identification would have been pretty difficult.'

Dan looked up from the notes he was making. 'Anything else?'

'Some people are never satisfied.'

'Can we run something by you?'

'As long as it's in my office over coffee. I've been on my feet all night.'

'Nothing for me, thanks.' Trevor had been served Patrick's specimen beaker coffee before. No matter how many times Patrick and his assistants assured him that a few beakers were kept just for coffee, he couldn't bring himself to drink it.

'Dan?'

'Nothing for me either, thanks.'

'Just one,' Patrick called to his assistant before slumping in the chair behind his desk.

'You heard of face transplants?' Dan asked.

'Force keeping up with the latest plastic surgery developments?'

‘Only since our victim’s been identified as a dead man.’

‘That’s interesting.’

‘Did you notice any signs of surgery on the face?’

‘You saw what was left. I’ve showed you what I’ve got. I’m not a miracle worker.’

‘But face transplants are possible?’

‘Oh yes.’

‘In America?’

‘Here.’

‘London?’

‘Here,’ Patrick repeated. ‘In the Burns Unit.’

‘In the General?’

‘Area burns unit was re-located here two weeks ago. Don’t you read the papers? There was an official opening. Royalty...’

‘And they’ve carried out face transplants?’ Dan leaned towards Patrick.

‘I had a drink with the chap in charge the other night. Nice fellow. We talked procedures for harvesting material from donors. He wanted to know if I’d be interested in acting as standby physician to carry them out. He’s only done two so far, but from a physical point of view they’ve been spectacularly successful.’

‘He’s done them here?’

Patrick shook his head. ‘Private hospital, Germany. Both women. One born with malformations, the other a burns victim.’

‘And the press hasn’t reported them.’

‘Apart from a few general articles the press has been kept in the dark about the programme. I

mentioned both transplants were physically successful, mentally is another matter. Both recipients have had psychological problems in adapting to their new image.'

'I can understand that,' Trevor said. 'Must be quite a shock to look in the mirror and see another face.'

'You sure there's been no case of a male face transplant here?' Dan pressed.

'I didn't know anything except what had been printed in the press until last week. You'd be better off speaking to the chap in charge of the Burns Unit. It's easy to find. It cost forty million to build, and thirty-six of those went on the foyer.'

'What's his name?'

'Mark Addison. But he flew out to a conference in Key West this morning. His assistant should be around. Dr Randall.' He glanced at Trevor. 'She's familiar with the procedures involved. Before she came here she assisted the chap who pioneered them. The first operations were carried out in a leper colony in Africa. Good place to try out experimental medical techniques.'

'No one with money enough to sue when things go wrong.'

'You've got it in one, Trevor.'

CHAPTER FIVE

‘Mr Marks will see you now, Sergeant Collins, Sergeant Bradley.’ Miss Wilkinson, Brian Marks’s middle-aged secretary picked up their empty coffee cups from the impersonal cream and brown solicitor’s waiting room. ‘But he is giving you what is left of his lunch hour. He has an appointment with a client in fifteen minutes. If you had telephoned we could have arranged a more suitable time.’

‘Fifteen minutes will be more than sufficient,’ Anna interrupted, wary of Peter cutting in with something that would upset the woman.

Brian Marks was a tall, balding and surprisingly handsome man in his late sixties. He left his desk and ushered them to comfortable chairs set around a coffee table in front of a window overlooking a park. His office was high-ceilinged and oak-panelled and it housed an enormous desk as well as the coffee table and chairs and was lined with bookshelves that complemented the panelling. They held the usual selection of law books Anna expected to find in a solicitor’s office, plus a few on art that she hadn’t.

‘Coffee?’ he enquired.

‘Your secretary has already given us some, thank you.’

‘Did she tell you I can only give you fifteen minutes? Normally I’d be only too delighted to do whatever I can to assist the police, but I have an appointment I cannot postpone. However if you’d like to come back later . . .’

‘Hopefully that won’t be necessary.’ Peter flipped through the notes he’d made at the station. ‘You were Anthony George’s and his mother’s solicitor?’

‘I was.’ A frown darkened the bland, business-like expression. ‘Such a tragedy.’

‘In what way, Mr Marks?’

‘Anthony dying on the threshold of life. He had so much to look forward to. And then there was that terrible business in the hospital.’

‘You’re referring to the mutilation of his corpse in the mortuary?’

‘I am.’

‘How did his mother react to the news?’ Trevor had told Peter, when he’d telephoned him first thing, that the Inspector in charge of the case had never interviewed the mother, and he’d found no mention of her in the case notes at the local station.

‘She was never told, Sergeant. I was executor of both Mrs George’s and her husband’s wills. Mr George, Anthony’s father, predeceased her by twenty years. There were no relatives apart from Anthony, and as he was only ten when his father died, Mrs George turned to this firm for advice on personal matters as well as legal and financial affairs. When Anthony died I took it upon myself to identify his body, organise his funeral and, as executor of his will, settle his estate. I was ably and generously assisted by Anthony’s employer, who was aware of Mrs George’s ill health. She was in no state to attend to business matters or indeed lead the mourners at Anthony’s funeral.’

‘I understand she inherited the bulk of her son’s estate?’

‘All of it, Sergeant Collins. His father left him a substantial trust fund. By dint of judicial investment, we trebled it. The trust reverted to his mother on his death.’

‘There were no other bequests?’

‘We gave one or two items to his close friends as mementoes. There is a list in the file, but there was nothing of any great value.’

Peter referred to the notes he’d made at the local station. There was no mention of any bequests. ‘If it’s not too much trouble, I’d like to see that list.’

‘It may take Miss Wilkinson a little time to locate the file, but if you call back at the end of the day she should have it for you.’

‘I’d appreciate it. Can you confirm that Mrs George died shortly after her son?’

‘Less than two months later.’

‘And her estate?’

‘Was divided between the charities specified in her will. Both she and her husband’s wills were quite specific. They left their entire estates to each other, and in the event of their death everything reverted to their son, Anthony. They added a clause specifying two charities in the event of the demise of the entire family.’

‘And they were?’ Peter had them written down in his notebook, but he wanted to hear it from Marks.

‘Medical research charities, heart disease and cancer.’

‘They split everything between them?’

‘Apart from three separate bequests, each of twenty thousand pounds, which Mrs George made in a codicil dated the year before her death.’

‘The recipients?’

‘Her live-in cook and gardener, a married couple who had worked for the George family for over thirty years, and a daily cleaner who had worked for Mrs George’s mother for ten years before joining her.’ The solicitor gave Peter a look that might have intimidated a lesser man. ‘I answered all these questions two years ago when the police investigated the mutilation of Anthony George’s body. Has the case been re-opened?’

‘Not exactly.’

‘Then may I ask why you are here?’

‘You don’t watch much television, Mr Marks.’ Peter reached into his inside pocket and extracted a folder. He laid it on the table in front of the solicitor.

‘I don’t watch any television, Sergeant. Neither my eyes nor the programmes are what they used to be. I prefer listening to the radio.’ He picked up the folder and opened it. The colour drained from his face.

‘That man burned to death in a run-down dock area seventy miles from here two nights ago. He was a vagrant who, when he lived anywhere, lived in hostels. He was known to the people who manage the hostels as Tony,’ Peter continued. ‘When the video clip those stills were lifted from was shown on the news last night, nine people telephoned the hotline. All recognised the man in the video as Anthony George.’

‘That’s impossible. I identified Anthony George’s body myself. More than two years ago.’ The solicitor dropped the photographs on to the table and leaned back in his chair, pale-faced and trembling.

‘I understand his face was removed after death. Under the circumstances, could you have made a mistake?’

‘No, Sergeant. There is no possibility that I made a mistake. Anthony George had his first heart attack in the Squash Club. He was driven to the hospital by a friend, who, knowing of his mother’s condition, contacted me and Fraser Caldwell...’

‘Fraser Caldwell?’

‘I spoke of him earlier. He employed Anthony in his practice, Caldwell, Caldwell and Buckingham, Solicitors. Anthony died of a second heart attack in A and E before we arrived. We both formally identified Anthony before his body was removed to the mortuary.’

‘Then how do you explain this, Mr Marks?’

‘I can’t, other than to say that we are all supposed to have a double somewhere.’

‘One with the same mole on the cheek and the same scar below the bottom lip?’

‘I noticed,’ Marks remarked frigidly. ‘But one thing I do know, Sergeant,’ he closed the folder. ‘Is that Anthony George was dead when I last saw him.’

‘Then you do not identify this man as Anthony George?’

‘I agree whoever he is...’

‘Was,’ Anna corrected.

‘Bears an uncanny resemblance to him. But I also know that dead men are not in the habit of walking the streets.’

‘So you can offer no explanation for the marked similarity?’

‘None. Both Anthony and his mother are clients of mine...’

‘Were, Mr Marks,’ Peter corrected. ‘Surely you have closed their files by now.’

‘I administered the family affairs for many years. I watched Anthony grow up. It’s not easy to come to terms with the death of someone you knew as a child.’ He glanced at his watch. ‘I’m sorry, Sergeants, but I did mention another appointment.’ He left his chair and walked to the door.

‘So you did.’ Peter rose from his seat. ‘If you would like to keep those photographs, Mr Marks, you may.’

‘No, Sergeant, I do not wish to keep them. But thank you for offering.’

‘If you remember anything – anything at all...’

‘I have had two years to remember, sergeant. I hardly think I am going to come up with anything new now.’

‘He was in love with the mother.’

‘What?’ Peter slammed on the brakes as a car cut in front of him as he pulled out of the car park.

‘Brian Marks was in love with the mother,’ Anna declared. ‘Didn’t you notice his expression whenever he mentioned her name? It grew softer...’

‘You sound like an advert for washing up liquid.’

‘Take my word for it. There was something going on between that man and Mrs George.’

‘The day I accept a female’s intuition as hard evidence is the day I retire from the force.’

‘I may hold you to that.’

‘Try me.’

‘I intend to. Tonight if we stay over. Turn left up ahead for the hospital.’

Peter glanced at Anna out of the corner of his eye. She was different. The first woman he’d worked with who could be counted on to answer back.

Trevor stood in the foyer of the new burns unit and reflected that Patrick’s comments hadn’t been overstated. On a Saturday you couldn’t move in the town for community-spirited people collecting signatures in an attempt to keep the General’s A and E unit operational twenty-four hours a day. Six months ago as part of a cost-cutting exercise, the Health Authority had diverted all night emergencies eight miles, and a delaying network of small roads, out of town. As well as the petitions, collecting boxes were waved under every passing nose in an effort to raise money to buy vital equipment for the I.C.U. and premature baby unit. In the light of such life-threatening deficiencies it seemed obscene to spend money on marble tiles, chromed staircases, fountains and more potted plants than he’d seen outside of the Botanical Gardens.

‘Can I help you, sir?’

Even the receptionists were dressed in tailored uniforms of blue trimmed with silver to co-ordinate with their surroundings.

‘I’m here to see Dr Randall.’

‘Do you have an appointment?’

‘She is expecting me.’

‘Your name, sir?’

‘Sergeant Trevor Joseph.’ He flashed his identity card.

‘There is nothing booked for Dr Randall under that name.’

Trevor wondered what training hospital bureaucracy gave people to turn them into automatons. ‘Patrick O’Kelly made the appointment for me. He phoned through from the mortuary.’

‘Trevor, how are you? It’s good to see you again.’

It was a voice from his past, and one he’d never expected to hear again outside of his dreams. He turned his back on the reception desk and drank in her image. Five foot eight, slim, dark-haired, and very beautiful. The looks matched the voice. It was her. Only the name, Randall, was unfamiliar.

‘There’s no appointment booked for Sergeant Joseph, Doctor Randall,’ the receptionist said reproachfully.

‘There wouldn’t be, Mary. It’s just been made.’

‘We can’t be expected to run this department...’

‘There was no time to inform you, Mary.’ Polite, charming, and firm. Exactly as Trevor remembered. ‘If you’d come this way, Sergeant.’

At that moment Trevor would have followed her to the ends of the earth. He climbed the stairs behind her, admiring the long, black-stockinged legs, just as he'd done two years before. She hadn't cut her hair, or changed the style. She still wore it in a knot twisted low at the nape of her neck. Once, he had seen it loose and it had reached her waist.

'Coffee?' she showed him into an office, furnished like the foyer in a mixture of bleached white wood trimmed with chrome and marble tiles.

'Please.'

She pressed a button on the telephone on her desk and ordered coffee through the intercom. 'You're looking more human than the last time I saw you.'

'When was that?'

'On the beach, after you'd been thrown off the pier. None of us thought you'd make it.'

'There were times when I wondered if I would myself.' He took a deep breath, wishing for the first time in his life that he had one of Peter's cigars in his hands. 'Peter told me you went to Africa.'

'I did. I worked in a leper colony.'

He remembered Patrick's briefing. 'Then you're the assistant who carried out face transplants?'

'Partial ones,' she qualified. 'We started with ears, noses, and lips. I've only assisted at two full transplants. Come in,' she called in reply to a knock at the door. She cleared a space on her desk for the tray of coffee her secretary brought in.

'Hold all my calls for half an hour, Julie,' she ordered. 'Black with no sugar?'

‘You remember.’ He was barely aware of the secretary closing the door on them.

‘I remember a great deal about you, Sergeant Joseph. You made the most difficult time of my life just about bearable.’

‘You’ve married again?’

‘No,’ she smiled, her silver-grey eyes lighting up in amusement. ‘When I went to Africa, I reverted to my maiden name. The name Sherringham held too many memories, both personal and in the medical establishment. And you?’

‘Me?’ he asked in bewilderment, forgetting everything, including his reason for visiting the unit.

‘Are you here on business, or just looking up an old friend?’

He recalled the peculiar glint in Patrick’s eye when Dr Randall’s name had been mentioned. He must have worn his heart on his sleeve when he’d investigated the disappearance of Daisy Sherringham’s husband two years ago.

‘Business.’ But even as he launched into a brief description of the facts of the case and the possible, if far-fetched, theory of face transplant, he couldn’t stop looking at her and noting the changes. The tan on her face and hands, the loss of weight that had thrown her cheekbones into greater prominence, the appearance of the first fine lines around her eyes. There had been a time – and not that long ago – when all his wildest and most cherished dreams had been centred on Daisy Sherringham. And now she was actually in front of him he was gabbling out the facts of the current investigation like an idiot. It would be a miracle if she understood what he was

telling her. He wasn't even sure he understood it himself.

'This man's face was removed two years ago.'
Daisy stopped him mid-flow.

'Yes.'

'There was no one carrying out transplants in this country two years ago.'

'Are you sure?'

'Of course I can't be sure. But as far as I'm aware most of the pioneering work was carried out in America, and for legal reasons, Africa.'

'No one likely to sue in Africa?'

'That sounds like one of Peter Collins's remarks.'

'I still work with him occasionally.'

'On this case?'

Trevor nodded.

'The Americans – and the Europeans – have gone litigation crazy in the last few years. It's getting to the stage where doctors are afraid to treat patients in case they are sued at a later date for something that wasn't even taken into consideration at the time, and lepers, more than most, are generally prepared to take the risk of pioneering surgery.'

'How many transplants have been carried out in this unit?'

'None, but we have three possible recipients waiting for suitable donors.'

'Men or women?'

'Two men, one woman.'

'And two have already been carried out in London, both on women?'

‘Patrick told you. Mark has become quite friendly with him. There are other plastic surgeons operating in this country, but as far as I know none of them have transplanted a full face as yet, apart from Mark.’

‘You’re in touch with the other teams?’

‘Contrary to what the newspapers think, we co-operate with one another. Most doctors do when they’re practising techniques still in the experimental stage. That way our failures can become someone else’s successes, and vice versa.’

‘Could you give me the names of the other teams, and which hospitals they’re operating from?’

‘I can do better than that. If there’s nothing top secret about what you’ve just told me I can run the scenario by them and see if they come up with any ideas.’

‘Would you?’

‘For you, Trevor, anything.’ She looked away from him towards the window. The tide was out. The vast expanse of beach speckled with the miniature figures of lugworm diggers. ‘If you give me your telephone number I’ll get back to you.’

‘How long will it take you to get the information?’

‘That’s what I like about the police. You offer to do them a favour and they want it yesterday.’

‘We would like the information as soon as possible, but I thought perhaps you could give it to me over dinner.’

‘You’ve changed. Eighteen months ago it would have taken you eight weeks of acquaintanceship to make a proposal like that.’

‘Since I last knew you I’ve begun to live more like a person and less like a hermit.’

‘I don’t want to disrupt your life.’

‘You won’t be.’

‘In that case, why don’t we have dinner tomorrow night? If there’s any news I should have it by then.’

‘I’ll pick you up about eight.’

‘I’m in the same block of hospital flats I stayed in last time I worked here.’

‘I’ll be there.’ He shook her hand, only just resisting the temptation to hold it a fraction longer than necessary, before walking out through the door.

‘Look, Sergeant...’

‘I’m Peter, she’s Anna.’ Peter ground the stub of his cigar to dust in an ashtray. It was the tail end of a long and fruitless day. They’d got no joy at the hospital, not that he’d expected any after two years. The shift on which Anthony George’s face had been skinned had turned out to be the mortuary attendant’s last. The doctor who’d telephoned the hotline had tried to be helpful, but he’d only endorsed the statement he’d made two years ago. The George family GP had dropped a few hints which Anna had taken as verification of her suspicion of an affair between Mrs George and Brian Marks, a theory which apart from making Anna insufferable had done nothing to take their case further forward.

Anthony George’s friends had confirmed that the man on television had definitely been Anthony George, which hadn’t helped at all. And now they

were in their last port of call. The pub where Inspector Edwards had found Anthony George's boyfriend. An effeminate gay whom Peter had taken a dislike to on sight, and Anna had established instant rapport with.

Luke Davies snapped the folder shut and handed it back to Anna. 'All I can say is that whoever he is, he bears an uncanny resemblance to the Anthony I knew, and,' he glared defiantly at Peter, 'loved. But it can't be him.'

'Why?' Peter twirled the remainder of his beer around his pint glass and downed it. It was his second and he intended to have a third which would either mean Anna driving back, or staying over, and at that moment he didn't give a damn which.

'Because I drove Anthony to the hospital after he had his first heart attack. I sat in the waiting room while they tried to resuscitate him. And I held his hand when he died.'

'And it was definitely Anthony George?' Anna probed.

'No doubt about it.'

There was a young man in evidence, just as Ted Edwards had told Trevor. While he served drinks he glanced frequently in their direction, but his attention didn't stop Luke Davies from shedding tears over Tony's photograph.

'Then we have to accept that Anthony George is dead,' Peter agreed. With the doctor's, Mark's, Caldwell's and now Davies' assertion that they'd identified George's body, that fact had been established. 'But you are aware that someone removed his face afterwards?'

‘Sick bastards. If I’d got hold of whoever did it I would have killed them.’

‘Inspector Edwards said you knew Anthony George better than anyone?’

Luke nodded, as he motioned to the young man behind the bar to refill their glasses.

‘Have you any idea why anyone would want to impersonate him?’

‘Impersonate?’ Luke gazed blankly at Peter as the barman set a large gin and tonic before him and fresh pints in front of Anna and Peter.

‘You agreed the man in that video looks like Anthony George.’

‘From what was said on television last night, and what you’ve just told me, this Tony was a down-and-out who slept rough and in hostels.’

‘Yes.’

‘Funny kind of an impersonation that lands a man on the streets. Now if he’d tried to take over Anthony’s house and money I could have understood it. Anthony’s mother had a nice place, and a few bob, from what I understood.’

‘You got nothing after Anthony died?’ Peter probed for signs of resentment.

‘I got a great deal more than I deserved. Anthony lent me the money to buy this place. I gave him a full partnership in return for his cash, but it was a private arrangement. I wanted Anthony to draw up a legal contract, but he never did. Said we didn’t need one.’

‘And when he died?’

‘His solicitor, nice chap, elderly...’

‘Brian Marks,’ Anna supplied.

‘That’s him. I met him at the hospital. Afterwards... after the funeral that is, I went to see him. I told him about the arrangement, but he said as there was nothing documented about the loan in Anthony’s will or in his papers, I should forget about it. When I said I couldn’t do that, he suggested that I pay something to one of the charities named in Anthony’s mother’s will when I was on my feet.’

‘Generous of him.’

‘He insisted it was what Anthony would have wanted. Being a solicitor, Anthony must have realised what would happen in the event of his death. A few weeks later Mr Marks called in here. He brought some of Anthony’s private things from the house. Told me to take my pick. Drove round to see some of Anthony’s other friends too.’

‘What sort of things?’ Peter had the list Brian Marks had compiled, but there was no mention of any loan to Luke Davies on it.

‘His silver hairbrushes, a few paintings, modern art, nothing valuable, Anthony patronised the students at the art college and he had a good eye.’

As Davies’ description tallied with the list Marks had given him, Peter didn’t press any further. They sipped their drinks in silence for a while.

‘I’ve been thinking about that man in the film ever since I saw the news last night. Even if I hadn’t seen Anthony dead, there’s still no way I’d believe he was him.’

‘Why not?’

‘Anthony would have shot himself sooner than dress in the filthy rags that man was wearing. He

was fastidious and abhorred dirt of any kind. He wouldn't even use my bathroom unless I cleaned it first.'

'So, you don't think he would have survived Jubilee Street?'

'Jubilee Street?' Luke looked quizzically at Peter.

'The area where the down-and-out was murdered,' Anna told him.

'I don't know about Jubilee Street. But I do know he wouldn't walk behind the bar in case beer splashed on his clothes. Wouldn't even sleep in my bed until I'd showered twice to rid myself of the smell of alcohol and food.' He looked at their empty glasses. 'Another?'

'We've either got to drive back tonight, or find a room.'

'No one's driving anywhere,' Peter said flatly. 'We've both just drunk three pints.'

'I've a room I can let you have upstairs.'

'As long as you bill us for it. And the drinks, this trip's on expenses.'

'Glad to.'

'In that case, another round, barman.'

Both Peter and Anna were the worse for wear when they climbed the stairs of the pub that night. The only difference between them was in the way they held their beer. Peter was slow and deliberate in his speech and movement. Anna was slurring and swaying on her feet.

‘We should have asked him for two rooms as it’s going on expenses.’ Peter tried to insert the key into the lock and steady Anna at the same time.

‘I didn’t hear him say he had two.’

‘I don’t think you’ve heard anything that’s been said for the last half hour.’ Peter turned the key and kicked the door open.

‘I’ve been thinking about the case.’ Anna fell over Peter’s feet as she entered the room.

‘Wait until I’ve found the light switch.’

‘Very nice.’ she sank down on to the pink satin-covered king-sized bed.

Peter walked across to the second door in the room and opened it. The bathroom had a pale pink suite, gilt taps and green tiles. He glanced at the disposable toothbrushes, small tubes of toothpaste, and sample-sized bars of soap and decided he could live with it for one night.

‘Do you want first shower?’ He turned around. Anna had fallen asleep sideways on the bed.

‘Bloody women. Never can hold their booze.’ He stripped off her shoes. Her jacket was easy enough, her blouse and skirt complicated and difficult with buttons and hooks in unexpected places. Either women’s clothes had changed, or he was out of practice. He tried not to look as he peeled off her tights, but found it impossible. She had a stunning figure. He kicked himself for not noticing before. But then she was always wearing trousers, or long skirts. Not that she had any reason to, with her legs.

Resisting temptation, he stopped at her bra and pants. He turned down the bedclothes, rolled her to

the top of the bed and laid her beneath the sheets. The first time he'd been alone in a bedroom with a woman for months, and she was out cold.

Exhausted after a brain-storming session with Dan and Bill that had produced absolutely nothing, Trevor walked into his empty house. He closed the door behind him, more preoccupied by thoughts of Daisy Sherringham – Randall – he corrected himself, than corpses without faces.

His birthday cards were still on the window-sill in the living room. He took them down; hesitating as he picked up the one Lyn had sent him. A humorous card depicting pink and blue hippopotami wallowing in mud. What was he doing thinking of one woman, while living with another? He had no right asking Daisy out to dinner. It was the kind of behaviour he'd always criticised Peter and his other colleagues for. The "screw them all, anything goes as long as we're not found out" attitude that so many officers adopted as a defence mechanism against the trauma of broken relationships.

Until now he'd prided himself on being honest with the women in his life. Not that there'd been that many. Just two. Mags and Lyn. But he'd been the one to ask Lyn to move in with him after she'd seen him through his darkest months in hospital. She'd seen him at his lowest ebb and steered him professionally, caringly and later, lovingly, back to health. What right had he to forget their life together to chase rainbows? Because that's what Daisy was. The brightest rainbow that had ever sparkled over his horizon. He couldn't honestly say he'd ever

really known her. He'd never as much as held hands, let alone kissed her.

He went into the kitchen and opened the fridge. Seeing the party leftovers he opened the bin and shovelled the lot into it before stacking the dirty dishes in the dishwasher. He opened the door of the freezer. What was Lyn's favourite meal? She liked light, tasty snacks. Pate on toast – tuna and pasta salad – Chinese –

He found the menu card of the marina take-away and glanced at his watch. Ten-thirty. Even if Lyn had gone for a drink she'd be home in half an hour. He ordered a special for two to be ready in twenty minutes. Unimaginative but quick, then he laid the table in the dining room with candles and the best linen he could find.

At half past eleven the take-away was drying in the oven and he was two thirds of his way down a bottle of wine when her car pulled up in the drive.

'You're home.' She looked at him in surprise as she hung her coat away.

'I got a take-away, it should still be edible.'

'If I'd known I would have been here earlier.' There was an edge to her voice that reminded him she was usually the one who sat waiting for him to return.

'You ready to eat now?'

She looked at the table, the candles, the wine, and something snapped.

'I'm not hungry.'

'A drink then?'

'There's no need to open another bottle for me.'

‘Lyn, I’m sorry. I don’t like working these hours any more than you do. But I’m a copper. It’s what I do for a living. I thought you understood.’

‘I do – I –’ It would have been easy for her to take a step forward and fall into his arms, but pride held her back. ‘I’m tired, I’m going to bed. Don’t forget to turn the oven off before you come up.’

CHAPTER SIX

‘Good morning.’

Anna opened a bleary eye to see Peter, standing over her, damp from the shower, a towel wrapped around his waist and a tray of coffee in his hands.

‘I sent down for this. Thought you might need it.’

‘What time is it?’ she slurred, her tongue suddenly feeling too large for her mouth.

‘Eight. They’re going to expect us back in the station in a couple of hours.’

‘They can expect all they like.’

‘You, Sergeant, can’t take your drink.’

‘From what I remember, neither can you.’

‘It was me who undressed you.’

She lifted the bedclothes and looked down.

‘Enjoy necrophilia?’

‘No, which is why I stopped where I did.’ He took one of the continental, bowl-shaped cups and placed it on the bedside cabinet next to her.

Tucking the sheet under her arms she plumped up the pillows behind her head and sat up. ‘I hope you folded my clothes neatly.’

‘Neater than you would have, judging by the state of your house. Do you want breakfast up here or downstairs?’

‘I can’t face breakfast.’

‘I thought you were always hungry.’

‘Did we solve anything last night?’ she asked.

‘Only your craving for drink.’

‘What a waste of a day.’

‘And night.’

‘Speak for yourself, Peter. I slept. What did you do with my handbag?’

He looked around blankly.

‘You did bring it upstairs?’

He found it in the corner by the door and handed it to her.

‘Now I can dress.’ She opened it and extracted a clean set of underclothes, a pair of tights, toothpaste and a toothbrush.

‘Now I know why women have suitcase-size handbags.’

‘Did you check in with the station last night?’

‘No.’

‘Hadn’t you better before they report us missing?’ She stepped out of bed and he ran a practised eye over her slender, finely muscled figure.

‘I’d rather stay missing for another hour or two.’

‘You were the one who was in hurry.’

‘Not any more.’ He set his coffee cup on the bedside table.

‘I’ve changed my mind about breakfast. Order bacon and eggs. I’ll eat them downstairs in ten minutes.’

‘Happy birthday,’ Lyn joined Trevor in the kitchen. ‘It’s two days late, but it’s been in the bedroom.’

‘I saw it there, but I didn’t want to open it without you.’

‘I’m here now.’ Lyn looked around. Trevor hadn’t bothered to cook, but he had made coffee, so

she took a cup from the cupboard and helped herself.

‘Lyn...’

‘I have to be in work in half an hour.’

‘We need to talk.’

‘Not first thing in the morning.’

‘How many times, and in how many ways can I apologise for what I do, before you’ll accept that this is the way it has to be when I’m working on a case?’

‘It takes a bit of getting used to. The loneliness the broken dates... Wasn’t it today that we were supposed to go to the West Country?’

‘There’ll be other weekends.’

‘When, Trevor?’

He untied the ribbon from the box, removed the wrapping paper and lifted the lid. Nestling on a bed of cotton wool was a pocket watch. A silver antique. ‘What can I say?’

‘Open it.’

He pressed down on the top. It flew open. Engraved on the inside was

Trevor, thank you for the happiest six months of my life.

‘I only wish it were true,’ he said guiltily.

‘Will you be home tonight?’

‘No, there’s a doctor I have to interview. The only time we both had free was this evening. Perhaps tomorrow...’

‘Perhaps.’ She slammed the door on the way out.

* * *

‘We’ve had a positive ID on the prints on that bottle,’ Dan informed Trevor when he walked into the station. ‘They belong to a Philip Matthews. Army private who deserted after laying out a superior officer. He was cashiered from the service after serving time in the glasshouse, then embarked on a civvie career. Breaking and entering, fraudulent use of cheques and credit cards, and demanding money with menaces. Take a look. See if the same thing strikes you as struck me.’ He tossed the report to Trevor.

‘Height six one, medium build, ten stone, black hair, brown eyes... Apart from the mole and scar this could be Tony.’

‘Descriptions match,’ Dan agreed.

‘Have we a picture of Philip Matthews?’

‘Only the faxed one that was sent down the line with his record. It’s pinned to the back of the sheet.’

Trevor flipped over the sheets of waxy paper. The face that stared up at him, although blurred, was not Tony. It was older, the eyes further apart, the chin longer, the mouth not as wide. ‘Our killer?’

‘Possibly if that bottle had anything to do with the crime. But that would mean the victim wore gloves and Patrick made no mention of gloves.’

‘Could be they didn’t survive the fire.’

‘Could be. I’ve ordered mug shots of Philip Matthews. As soon as they arrive I want you to take them down Jubilee Street. Show them around. See if anyone remembers seeing him there.’

‘Peter and Anna come up with anything?’

‘Not even themselves.’

Trevor raised an eyebrow.

‘I can’t see Anna succumbing to Peter’s charms,’ Dan said.

‘Oh, I don’t know, he has his moments.’

‘If he’s having them on my squad’s time, I’ll make sure he won’t see his bed again until this villain’s caught.’

‘Want me to start down Jubilee Street now?’ Trevor held up the fax. ‘I can photocopy it; show it to Sam, Tom Morris and the Salvation Army captain.’

‘There’s nothing else that needs doing urgently. I’ll be here if you need me.’

‘You think we’ve reached a dead end?’

‘Unless you can see a turning point I can’t, yes.’

It was a dank, damp morning, and after the sun and brief promise of spring the day before, Trevor found the drive to the dock area depressing. Grey street followed grey street, the endless rows of terraces shining damply in the rain, each looking more decaying and derelict the closer he drew to Jubilee Street.

The surroundings matched his mood. He felt that Lyn’s move to distance herself just when Daisy had reappeared in his life was ominous. He wished he’d forced Lyn to listen to him. Told her about Daisy, talked to her about the case, tried to involve her. How had he handled similar situations with Mags? Looking back, he realised he hadn’t. She, like Lyn, had absented herself, mentally and physically, with increasing frequency, until the day Peter had taken him aside and told him what Mags

should have told him months before. That she was having an affair with another man.

He drew up outside Sam's hostel, picked up the photocopies of the fax from the passenger seat, stuffed them into the inside pocket of his anorak, and walked up to the battle-scarred front door.

'We're closed,' a voice proclaimed from inside before he reached the doorstep.

'Sergeant Trevor Joseph to see Sam Mayberry,' he called back.

He heard the sounds of feet shuffling down a passage being overtaken by swifter, surer steps. Bolts grated back on the inside of the door.

'Trevor, it's always good to see you.' Sam swung the door wide. 'Come in, come in,' he repeated as though he were the genial host of a pub. 'Into my office. One of the boys has just lit a fire there for me. Would you like some tea?'

'Tea would be good, thank you, Sam.' Trevor settled in one of the hand-me-down chairs that had been repaired with slabs of foam by a job creation scheme.

'Have you any news on the poor soul who died?' Sam asked as he sat opposite him.

'We're working on it, Sam.' Trevor thrust his hand into his pocket. 'I know this picture's blurred, but have you ever seen this man around the hostels?'

Sam picked up a pair of rimless spectacles from his desk, perched them on the end of his nose and squinted through the lenses. 'I've seen him queuing outside Tom Morris's hostel and if anyone knows anything about the man it will be Tom. Tom spends hours talking to his customers. He gave up a high-

ranking post in Social Services and took two years secondment on a lower salary to come down here.'

'He's an idealist.'

'He's a man who saw a need and tried to fulfil it.'

'How long has he been here?' Trevor asked, as a young priest carried in two cups of tea.

'Since Christmas. He visited Jubilee Street as one of a Social Services' working party who were looking at the council run hostel with a view to closing it. Ben Proctor who'd been running it had just retired. The official line in County Hall was that they could do without the place. Fortunately it wasn't Tom Morris's. He took one look at the queues for beds and asked for a transfer. The reason his place looks better than ours, inside that is, is Tom knows how to pressurise the local charity groups. He has friends who sit on the committees of voluntary bodies. In the four months since he's been here, he's managed to find the money to redecorate the place top to bottom, put in new showers, and new mattresses. Pity the television people didn't see fit to film the inside of his hostel instead of mine.'

'Wouldn't have had the same shock value,' Trevor observed.

'You're right. Tom does a good job. It's odd, but we all specialised, and not intentionally. Captain Arkwright caters for the ladies and young girls, God help them, they seem so much more vulnerable than the men. I get the drunks and the hopeless cases. Tom set out to make his place a halfway house for those who still have the drive to get back on their feet. And he's succeeded. Since January he's got six

young men on to training schemes and into bed-sits in the town.' Sam knocked the ashes from his pipe against the grate. 'That may not sound many to you, but for each man it's a triumph over odds that seemed impossibly stacked against them before Tom arrived.'

'I can imagine.' Trevor looked out of the window at two shambling figures who were wheeling a supermarket trolley towards the underpass that led into the town centre.

Sam finished his tea. 'Shall we go across the street and up a social level?'

Tom Morris's hostel smelled of fresh paint. The ceilings, walls and woodwork were covered in white emulsion and gloss. Inexpertly applied, thick white streaks and splashes had fallen on to the cracked quarry floor tiles; and the lines between gloss and emulsion wavered in places, shining walls and dulling doors.

Tom came down the stairs to greet them, casually dressed in a white cotton Arran sweater and brown trousers. He extended his hand, and Trevor shook it. He saw Trevor looking round.

'This place has been decorated with more enthusiasm than expertise, Sergeant. The local Rotary club supplied the materials and some of our younger inmates did the work.'

'I've been asking Tom when he's going to start on my place,' Sam chipped in.

'As soon as this place is straight.' Tom led the way up the stairs and past a room that had been turned into a make-shift café. 'Beginnings of a day centre,' he explained. 'It's no use giving a man

somewhere to sleep, only to turf him out into the cold all day long. It's no wonder so many turn to drink and drugs.'

'A day centre would be good,' Trevor agreed.

'We also try to persuade our regulars to improve their prospects by attending the free literacy and numeracy classes in the Y.M.C.A. Two even embarked on a computer course last week.'

'See what I mean about dedication?' Sam said as Tom led them into a cold, cluttered office.

Tom sat behind his desk and motioned them into the only other chairs in the room.

'Sam thought you might know this man?' Trevor handed the photocopy to Tom.

'I know the face. But he's not one of our regulars. I threw him out four –' Tom picked up a ledger from his desk and flicked through the pages '– five nights ago for hitting one of the lads. He slammed him against the wall. It's a wonder the boy wasn't seriously hurt. He was drunk as a lord at the time.'

'Can you remember his name?'

'The boys call him the General, but I couldn't tell you why, he signed in here as Philip Smith.'

'Did you know he was ex-army?' Trevor asked.

'No. You looking for him in connection with the burned body?'

'Just want to question him.' Trevor returned the photocopy to his pocket.

'Do you think he killed the poor man, Trevor?' Sam asked.

'We don't know, Sam.'

‘Should we warn our customers that he’s dangerous?’ Tom asked.

‘You said you’d thrown him out.’

‘I’ve banned him from the hostel, but they could bump into him on the streets.’

‘Just ask around, if you would,’ Trevor shivered and zipped up his coat. ‘Get word back to us if anyone sees him.’

‘I will, but shouldn’t I also warn them to stay away?’

‘Might be just as well.’ Trevor rose to his feet.

‘Can I offer you something before you go? Coffee, tea?’

‘Nothing, thank you. I must be going,’ Trevor refused politely.

‘I’ll have a cup of tea if I may, Tom.’ Sam smiled. ‘And a chat about free paint.’

Trevor left the hostel and walked across the street. A group of four young men and a girl were standing around his parked car looking in through the windows.

‘You’re a pig, aren’t you?’ The question came from a boy Trevor gauged to be about sixteen or seventeen. His head was shaved and covered in amateur tattoos. A swastika radiated from the crown of his skull, a dagger ornamented one cheek, a rampant dragon the other.

Trevor’s first instinct was to climb into his car and drive away. But with so few leads to follow, anything had to be worth a try.

‘Yes, and I’m investigating a murder that took place here three nights ago.’

‘Why?’ the girl was no older than the boy, but grubbier. Her grey mini-skirt was streaked with dirt, her blue anorak torn and grimy. Her bare legs were bruised and coated with layers of mud, her shoes broken and down at heel, and her hair, blonde, thin and greasy, tied back with a piece of string.

‘Because it’s my job,’ Trevor replied evenly.

‘No one gives a damn what happens down here,’ she asserted.

‘I do, and the people who run the hostels do.’ Trevor pulled out the fax photograph and the folder he kept the “Tony” photographs in. ‘Have you seen either of these men around?’

‘Naw.’ The boy with the shaved head turned his back and pulled a pack of cigarette papers out of his pocket.

‘You,’ Trevor pointed his finger at the girl, ‘just said no one gives a damn what happens down here. Have you thought it’s because people like you won’t allow anyone near enough to care?’

‘What’s it to you what happens to us?’

‘I’m looking for a killer who’s struck once in this street. If he isn’t caught one of you could be next.’

‘Just let anyone try anything with me, or any of my mates.’ A boy with purple hair produced a hunting knife. He removed it from its leather sheath and ran his fingers down the edge of the six-inch blade. Trevor tried to recall exactly what Patrick had said about the murder weapon. Had his first guess of kids out for sick kicks been right?

‘What you looking at?’ the boy demanded truculently of Trevor.

‘From what I saw laid out on the mortuary slab two days ago, you’re going to need a lot more than that,’ Trevor nodded at the knife, ‘if you come up against the villain who burnt the poor bastard to death behind that hoarding. A petrol-soaked, charred corpse is not a pretty sight. There wasn’t enough left to give us age, eye-colour, or build. I’ve seen more meat on a barbecue,’ he added, deliberately trying to provoke them.

‘What should we do if we run into him?’ the girl demanded.

‘Scream for help. But it might not come to that if we pick him up. Look at these photographs.’ Trevor risked handing them to her. ‘Have you seen either of them?’

The girl took them, stared at them and shook her head.

The boy with the bald head and swastika snatched them from her. ‘You expect us to recognise someone from this?’ He tossed the fax back to Trevor in disgust.

‘Try the other one. It’s a clearer print.’

The girl opened the folder. ‘I know him,’ she pointed to the photograph of Tony.

‘Yeah, we know him,’ the boy with the tattoos agreed. ‘He the killer then?’

‘We think he’s the victim.’

‘The one that got burned to death?’ The boy glanced at the waste ground. It was cleaner than it had been in years after the police search.

‘Yes.’ Trevor folded the fax photograph back into his pocket.

‘He’s not dead.’ The girl held up the photograph so the boy with the purple hair could look at it. ‘We saw him last night.’

‘Where?’ Trevor demanded.

The girl and boy exchanged glances.

‘In the underpass,’ the boy said quickly, too quickly.

Trevor sensed he was lying. ‘What time?’

‘Late, I suppose.’

‘Was he sleeping?’

‘Naw. Just walking through,’ the lad with the purple hair asserted.

‘That’s it, he walked through before –’

‘Before what?’ Trevor asked when the girl fell silent.

She clammed her mouth shut, at a signal from the boy with the shaved head.

‘Please, this could be important. Where did he go?’

‘If we tell you, you’ll take us in. We know your kind.’

‘I swear, whatever you’ve done, if it’s short of murder I’ll turn a blind eye.’

‘You’re only saying that because you want something we’ve got. You pigs are all the same. Once we’ve told you what you want to know, you’ll turn us in.’

‘Do you want me to put it in writing?’

‘Yeah, go on, give us a letter to say no copper can take us in.’

‘For what you’ve done up until now,’ Trevor qualified, patting his pockets in search of paper. He found a telephone bill he’d been meaning to pay all

week. Pulling it out of the envelope, he filched a pen from his top pocket.

‘That’s not legal,’ the boy with the tattoos contended. ‘You’re bloody mugs –’

‘It could be one of you next.’ Trevor spoke directly to the girl, hazarding a guess that the boy with the tattoos had a soft spot for her.

‘What if the man we saw is the murderer?’ the girl appealed to the boys.

‘What if we lose our squat?’

‘Is that all this is?’ Trevor asked. ‘You’re trying to protect a squat. Don’t you know the law? It would take us weeks to get you out if the place was empty when you moved in, providing that is, you didn’t break in.’

‘See, told you,’ the girl crowed.

‘Wherever it is, I promise no one from the force will go near it until someone else reports it.’

‘It’s the old factory by the port buildings.’ The girl blasted a defiant look at the boys.

‘And you’re sure you saw this man in there?’

‘Last night.’

‘Would you show me exactly where?’

The girl looked around.

‘You’re on your own, Dell. We don’t talk to pigs.’ The boys moved off.

‘Jason?’ she pleaded with the boy with the tattoos. ‘You know I can’t get in there by myself.’

He looked from her to Trevor. ‘You sure this guy is a murderer?’

‘He could well be,’ Trevor replied ambiguously.

‘I never thought I’d help a pig. Come on then, if you’re coming.’

Trevor looked wistfully at his car. It was a two minute drive to the port buildings, and a ten minute walk, but he couldn’t see either of the kids willingly climbing into it. Returning his keys to his pocket he followed them.

They walked quickly. Trevor found it difficult to keep up with them, particularly when the pavement ended in a patch of rough ground. Legs aching, he finally stood in front of the square multi-storey building. Once white, it was covered with green mildew and slime. All the windows were boarded over and the ground floor doors sported huge iron bars fastened with massive padlocks.

‘How do you get in here?’ Trevor asked.

‘Around here.’ The girl led the way over a carpet of broken glass and rubble to the side of the building. The sixty-foot wall was punctuated by a series of windows that ran symmetrically upwards from every floor except the ground. She stopped half way along and looked up.

‘Next one.’ The boy aligned his body in front of a narrow, boarded window on the first floor, then held out his hands.

Dell looked at him and glanced at the window above. In one swift, easy movement, she took his hands and climbed the length of his body on to his shoulders. He clasped his hands on her ankles as she balanced precariously and reached for the boarded window. She pulled at the bottom of the board. It swung outwards. Hooking her hands inside on to the window-sill, she swung herself off the boy’s

shoulders and upwards. Ducking her head she wriggled inside. Trevor held his breath until her feet disappeared beneath the board.

Moments later a knotted rope fell from above, one end secured inside the building.

‘You promise. No pigs around here evicting us?’

‘I’ll do all I can,’ Trevor assured the boy.

Ten sweating minutes later Trevor eased himself inside, tumbling over the window-sill into a black void.

‘Light a candle, Dell,’ came a disembodied voice from behind him.

‘I can’t find the bloody things, Jason.’

‘I’ll strike a match.’ A brief glare was followed by a small flickering flame that did little to dispel the gloom.

‘You’d better tell the landlord there’s no electricity,’ Trevor joked.

‘It’s got water,’ the girl retorted defensively. ‘Which is more than most squats I’ve been in.’

‘You want to see where that man was dossing.’ Taking the candle, Jason led the way across what seemed to be a vast hall, but without a chink of light coming in from the outside it was difficult to gauge the size of the place. He opened a door, and the rank, musty odour of rodent droppings wafted out to meet them.

‘Rats,’ the girl confirmed. ‘They usually run from the light.’

Jason walked ahead, holding the candle high, shielding its flame with his hand. As his eyes grew

accustomed to the darkness Trevor saw bundles of rags and piles of newspapers and cardboard boxes heaped along the sides of the corridor. There were plaques on some of the doors. WOMEN'S W.C. MEN'S W.C. MANAGER. GENERAL OFFICE. They turned a corner and were faced by an old fashioned iron lift cage sunk into the centre of a stair well. Jason paused at the foot of the stairs that led upwards.

'The higher you go, the fewer rats there are,' Dell assured Trevor as they began to climb. 'We live down there.' She pointed down the corridor on the next floor. 'And we saw him going in here.' She pushed open the first door on her right. Trevor held out his hand to Jason.

'You want the candle?'

'Only for a moment.'

Jason reluctantly gave it to him.

Trevor moved forward. The room was small with benches around the side and hooks on the wall. It had probably been a cloakroom. Trevor wondered how many years it had been since workers had hung their coats on the pegs. He had lived in the town for fifteen years and he couldn't remember the factory being operational. The air was cold, dank. He raised the candle and peered around. He spotted a bundle on a bench in the corner. He walked towards it, checking the floor as he went. It was dusty, but there were so many scuff marks in the dirt his wouldn't be noticed.

The bundle turned out be a sleeping bag. Next to it stood an empty tin, the baked bean wrapper still around it. Inside the tin was a stub of candle. Below

them was a small, battered suitcase. Trevor was tempted to spring the clasps with his penknife, but there were two witnesses standing behind him, and legally he had no right to look inside, or even be here. Not without a search warrant. And if there were prints on the case they might produce an answer to the riddle of Tony's identity – if he had a record.

‘Seen all you want?’ Jason's voice startled him.

‘For now.’

‘You'll be back, won't you?’ the girl insisted. ‘To arrest him.’

Trevor reflected that now that the kids knew what he looked like, it wouldn't be him who returned.

‘We'll be keeping an eye on the outside of the building in case he comes back to pick up his things. But you have my word. You won't be evicted, or bothered.’

‘Your word,’ Jason sneered.

Trevor returned the candle to Jason and removed the envelope from his pocket. ‘My name is Trevor, Sergeant Trevor Joseph.’ He wrote it on the back, scribbling the direct line number to his office in the station, his home telephone number and his mobile beneath it. Unzipping the inside pocket of his anorak he removed fifteen pounds, all the notes he was carrying. He pushed them into the envelope and handed it to the girl. ‘That's my telephone number. If you see that man again, or you need help, I promise I'll do all I can for you.’

The girl took the envelope and pushed it down the front of her sweater.

As Jason led the way out Trevor checked the door. There was no name plate, but it was the first one on the right at the top of the stairs on the third floor. He noted the number of steps, imprinting the directions from the cloakroom back to the room with the loose window board. Someone would need those directions tonight. He'd try to ensure that he kept his promise to the kids. And whatever time "Tony" returned there'd be a reception committee waiting, and with luck, they'd discover exactly who had been killed, and why.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Trevor rubbed his legs as he climbed out of his car. He'd landed awkwardly when he'd jumped the last foot from the rope the kids had used as an access into the old factory. Momentarily crippled and cursing soundly he'd stood back and watched Jason pull in the rope and jump the sixteen feet to the ground. There'd been a time; and not that long ago, he reflected regretfully, when he could have done the same and run a mile afterwards. Limping, he hobbled into the station.

'You all right, sir?' Sarah Merchant asked as he hobbled past her desk.

'Fine,' he grimaced, heading down the corridor towards his office. Peter had taken possession of his desk, yet again, Anna was behind hers, and Dan was standing in the doorway that opened into his office.

'We were considering putting out a missing persons report on you,' Peter commented.

'You were lost this morning.'

'Not as lost as I'd have liked to have been.' Peter had spent a fruitless ten minutes over breakfast trying to persuade Anna that an hour of passion in the pub would make their relationship blossom. She'd remained unconvinced and had insisted on driving back as soon as the coffee pot was empty. Leaving him exasperated and frustrated.

'Was the trip worth it?' Trevor looked from Peter's long face to Anna's.

'We didn't discover anything Inspector Edwards didn't two years ago.'

‘Except affirmation from Anthony George’s boyfriend...’

‘You met him?’ Trevor asked.

‘We did,’ Peter said. ‘He told us he bought his pub with a loan from Anthony George that George’s solicitor cancelled after his death.’

‘Very generous of him considering it was someone else’s money.’

‘There were no documents to substantiate the loan. The solicitor probably didn’t think that thirty thousand pounds figured largely in the scheme of things. Particularly when the two hundred thousand pounds Anthony left his mother was given to charity less than six months later, along with the half a million she left when she died.’ Anna crossed her arms on the desk and sank her chin on to them.

‘Did this solicitor have the right to distribute George’s money?’

‘Every right. He was the sole executor of the will. The boyfriend also said the Anthony he knew couldn’t be the Tony in our film because his Anthony would never have worn rags or slept in a hostel for the homeless. He was too fastidious to end up on skid row. Yes please,’ Anna said to Trevor when he went to the water cooler.

Peter watched Trevor hobble across the room. ‘You’re crippled again?’

‘In the line of duty.’

‘You’ve got something, haven’t you?’ Peter fished.

Trevor filled two paper cups with water, handed Anna one, pulled out a chair and lowered himself on to it. ‘I’ve found Tony.’

‘You’ve raided Patrick’s mortuary?’ Peter quipped.

‘No.’ Trevor smiled. ‘I met four kids who are squatting in the old factory down the docks.’

‘The weaving mill?’ Anna asked.

‘Is that what it used to be?’

‘Get to the point,’ Peter ordered irritably.

‘They said our man slept there last night.’

‘Kids, down-and-outs,’ Peter mocked. ‘And you believed them?’

‘It took me a while to get them to talk to me. And I wouldn’t have succeeded if one of them, a young girl, hadn’t been frightened by the murder. She’s young, no more than fifteen or sixteen, probably a runaway. They identified Tony from these.’ He tossed the file of photographs on to his desk. ‘Then they took me inside the squat...’

‘It’s open?’ Dan asked.

‘After a fashion.’ Trevor sipped his water.

‘I’ll get the boys to check it out.’

‘I gave them my word I’d turn a blind eye.’

‘You did what!’ Peter shook his head in disbelief.

‘This is a murder investigation, and we on Serious Crimes have to bend the rules from time to time. Not like you on the Drug Squad.’ Trevor lectured, tongue in cheek. Peter had bent the rules more times than any other copper on the local force.

‘Trevor’s right,’ Dan agreed. ‘We’d never get any information if we didn’t play ball with our narks.’

‘The kids showed me the room he’s dossing in. He left some stuff there. A suitcase, a sleeping bag...’

‘All ready for a stake-out,’ Dan said thoughtfully.

Trevor’s smile widened. ‘Unfortunately, the kids know me.’

‘Which leaves me,’ Peter complained.

‘Us,’ Anna corrected.

‘Women don’t go undercover in squats.’

‘Equality in all things,’ Anna gave Peter a radiant and insincere smile.

‘Did the kids say what time they expected this Tony, if it is him, back?’ Dan glanced at his watch.

‘It’s not a hotel you check into, although they do have running water,’ Trevor said.

‘You both have suitable clothes?’ Dan looked from Peter to Anna.

‘At home,’ Anna left her chair.

‘Pity there’s no time for you to grow stubble, Peter,’ Dan observed.

‘He looks disreputable enough the way he is,’ Anna joked.

‘I’m for lunch.’ Dan looked to the others.

‘I’ll go to the canteen with you,’ Trevor stretched his aching legs.

‘Back here in two hours?’

‘Give us time to eat as well as change,’ Peter protested.

‘An hour to transform yourselves and an hour for lunch,’ Dan said. ‘What more do you want? You don’t even have to shower.’

Peter looked at Anna. He was tempted to add an hour to the timetable for seduction, but decided against it. He was beginning to learn that every wisecrack he made at Anna's expense cost him in the long run.

'Eat first, transformation later?' Peter suggested as he drove away from the station.

'If it's anything in the nature of a last meal, there's an expensive but brilliant Italian place down the road.'

'Make it Chinese take-away and we can eat at my place.'

She looked at him coolly. 'As long as it is just eat.'

'What else could I possibly have in mind at this hour?'

'Don't tempt me to answer that. If you stop off at my place I'll pick up my things.'

'Do you really live here, or just keep it to impress gullible girls with your clean-living habits?' Anna asked Peter as she wandered around the clinically clean living room of Peter's flat. It was furnished, simply and severely in the standard Berber carpet, unimaginative three piece suite and coffee table, middle-market landlords call "furnishings". The curtains were gold plush. The view they framed over the sands and sea, spectacular. There wasn't an ornament on the mantelpiece, and only one picture to indicate Peter's taste. A macabre gold framed print of Breughel's Triumph of Death.

‘I live here, and you’re looking at the proof. My single decorative possession and the only thing my wife gave me that I liked,’ he said as she studied the print.

‘Was she trying to tell you something?’

‘All things come to an end, even lousy marriages. It gave me the strength to file for divorce.’

‘You must have loved her to marry her.’

‘I didn’t relish the idea of living alone, but she cured me of my fear of the dark.’

‘Are you never serious?’

‘What’s there to be serious about?’

‘Life?’ She walked into the kitchen which was a windowless alcove off the living room. The under cupboard lighting was bright enough to see that the cream worktop Peter was setting plates out on, sparkled. ‘Where do you keep your mess and dirt?’

‘I haven’t any. The lady who comes in twice a week to clean sees to that.’

‘I’d like her telephone number.’

‘You’d have to call a fumigation squad before Betty would set foot inside your house.’ He loaded a tray. Carrying it into the living room, he laid the table with a clean cloth and unpacked the bag they’d picked up at the Chinese. ‘Your chop suey, ma’am.’

‘I could get used to that.’

‘Chinese take-away?’

‘You calling me ma’am.’

‘You should be so lucky. I’ll make super before you do.’

‘What makes you so sure?’

‘Every selection committee knows men are cooler, calmer, less emotional and better managers than women.’

‘I’m a member of a minority group. And everyone knows a policy of positive discrimination operates in the force these days.’

‘Not on super selection committees.’

‘You should never do that.’ She changed the subject as he opened one of his foil containers.

‘What?’ he asked.

‘Order curry at a Chinese. It’s not one of their traditional dishes. The Indians do it better.’

‘It always tastes good to me.’

‘You’re the legendary cartoon copper, Peter. Temper worse than a two-year-old and a psyche to match. You live on slabs of grease and spices strong enough to blow your mind, think you’re hard, but underneath it all you’re boorish.’

‘I congratulate you on your insight.’ He refused to allow her to annoy him. ‘Have you always eaten rabbit food?’

‘Since I was old enough to make my own decisions.’

‘When was that? Last week?’

‘Cheap remark, Peter.’ She pushed her fork into her mess of vegetable and stirred it. ‘You been undercover around Jubilee Street before?’

‘Trevor and I have had the misfortune to itch many times. This your first foray?’

‘Undercover? No.’ She poured herself a glass of water from the bottle Peter had set on the table.

‘Where did you go last time?’

‘A pub. I went in as a barmaid when I was with Vice Squad.’

‘You were involved in the Dog and Whistle case?’ He looked at her sideways.

‘I was.’

‘Cracking piece of work, that.’

‘It earned me my sergeant’s stripes.’

‘Did it now?’ He shovelled the last of his curry down. ‘Want a beer?’

‘We’re on duty.’

‘As we’re going down Jubilee Street we should smell like the natives.’

‘I’d still prefer coffee.’

‘While it’s brewing I’ll change in the bedroom. You can use the bathroom.’

‘You’ve given up on me, haven’t you?’ She pushed her plate aside. Leaving the table she walked over to his chair. He rose warily to meet her. Wrapping her hands around his neck she looked up into his eyes. Disentangling her arms, he held her by the wrists and pushed her away.

‘I don’t like women who tease,’ he said thickly.

‘Who’s teasing?’ she murmured.

‘We’re on duty.’

‘Not for another –’ she looked at her watch. ‘Hour and a quarter.’ She thrust herself forward. His grip on her wrists relaxed as she meshed her body close to his. ‘Will that be long enough for you, Sergeant Collins?’

Peter whistled as he opened his wardrobe door and lifted out a black plastic sack. He rarely threw out his worn clothes. When he had to dress down to go

undercover he preferred wearing his own cast-offs. Tipping it out, he selected a pair of jeans with the back pocket hanging off and a hole in one knee. Pulling them on over a pair of black boxer shorts Anna had found amusing for some unaccountable reason; he viewed himself in the mirror on the wardrobe door. He put on a pair of faded cotton socks. He found a nightmare of a blue and purple patterned shirt his ex-wife had bought him, and a black cotton sweatshirt that had once been his favourite, but had been relegated to the rag-bag when holes had appeared in the neck as well as the elbows. He topped his outfit with a navy-blue anorak. It was faded but clean. The last time he'd come out from undercover he'd taken it to the dry-cleaners who had only agreed to deal with it after a fierce argument.

The finishing touch was a pair of broken trainers. The last thing he did was lift out the bottom drawer in his bedside cabinet. On the floor beneath it was a ten inch silver rod. He pressed a button set discreetly in the base and looked at the stiletto blade that shot out of the tip. Retracting it, he tucked the knife into the back of his sock and shoe. Ruffling his hair, he went into the kitchen and made coffee. Carrying the mugs to the bedroom he knocked on the bathroom door. Anna opened it and studied him.

'You look like a Hollywood version of a tramp.'

He almost dropped the mugs. She didn't look like a dosser; she was one, right down to the filth on her jeans. Her cropped blonde hair, no longer sleek, shining and well cut, stuck out in greasy tufts at

right angles to her head. Her face was pinched with exhaustion and grey, as though she hadn't washed in a month. The man's shirt she was wearing over a torn black vest had lost most of its buttons, and sported an enormous rent in the back.

'You look like a bag lady.'

'I used to be an actress.'

'You're kidding.'

'Three years in drama school and I have the papers to prove it. When I left, I was engaged as a chorus girl in a summer show in Blackpool. And that was it. My only time in the spotlight. After six months of sitting on my rear end waiting for something to turn up, I decided that season was all there was ever going to be, and having a gut feeling that there had to be a better future for me than starving on benefit, I went to police college.'

'After the bag lady, I'll elevate you to the romantic lead.'

'If you're playing as well I'd prefer soft porn.' She pushed him away as his hands wandered beneath her shirt. 'Down boy. You need a dirty face.' She picked up a make-up purse from the bathroom shelf.

'Will you take it off afterwards?' he asked as she shoved him into a chair and rubbed grey greasepaint on to his cheeks.

'If you're good.'

'I could get used to you being around, Anna.' He wanted to but didn't dare put it in stronger terms.

'One step at a time, Peter.'

'Does that mean you'll run another marathon with me tonight?'

Anna concentrated on smudging a dark line on his forehead. She knew already that what they had was good. But it was also new, and fragile. She didn't want to rush it. She wanted it to be right. To last. But if a week or two was all there was going to be, why shouldn't she take all he had to offer.

'Marathon or pentathlon?' she smiled as she zipped the bag.

'Got it?' Trevor asked Peter and Anna.

Peter studied the rough sketch Trevor had drawn. 'Right side of building as you face it from the front. Fifth window along second floor has loose boards. Climb up...'

'There's a rope tied to the radiator below the window-sill, but if you wait until the kids come along, they'll lower it.' Trevor looked out of the window at the rain teeming relentlessly down. 'On an evening like this, they won't hang around the streets.'

'The place under surveillance?'

'Bill has officers in the Port Offices. Chris Brooke is with the security guards at the dock gates. Andrew phoned in half an hour ago to say a couple of kids have gone inside, but they've pulled the rope up behind them. Neither he, nor Brooke has seen anyone answering the description of our man.'

Peter looked at the map for the last time and left it on Trevor's desk.

'Where do you go once you're inside, Anna?' Trevor prompted. She seemed distant and he wondered if she'd heard a word he'd said.

‘Walk straight across the room from the window. The door into the corridor is directly opposite. Once out of the door, turn left, walk along the passageway past the men’s, ladies’, and manager’s office until you come to a stairwell with an iron lift cage in the centre. Up one flight. First door on right.’

‘Good.’

‘I have a retentive memory,’ she explained.

‘It seemed like bloody miles to me,’ Trevor warned.

‘You’re crippled,’ Peter said.

‘Got torches?’ Trevor asked.

Anna pulled one out of an inside pocket stitched into her anorak and held it up.

‘Candles, matches?’

‘And this.’ Dan entered and laid a gun on the desk.

‘We’re dealing with a down-and-out,’ Peter protested.

‘A down-and-out, who may have already killed one person. It would look bad for the force if either of you were next. Trevor has told you that you have back up in the Port Authority buildings and the security booth at the entrance to the docks?’

‘Yes, sir,’ Anna replied.

‘Try to make contact every half hour. We won’t be able to watch you through those boarded up windows. Murphy, Brooke and myself are all the super could spare for something that may be nothing, but if you hit trouble we’ll radio for back-up.’

‘Sergeant Joseph’s night off to cuddle his lady love?’ Peter needled.

‘His night for interviewing doctors who carry out face transplants,’ Trevor replied.

‘In a nice warm office. Want to play swaps?’ Peter asked.

‘Not tonight.’ Trevor wondered what Peter would say if he’d known the interview would be in a restaurant not an office. And who the doctor was.

Rain lashed inland, harsh, penetrating and salty from the sea as Peter and Anna walked along the quayside towards the old factory. Dan had dropped them off at the gates at the sea end of the docks on the premise that no native of Jubilee Street would go near a security booth. Shivering, huddled in their respective anoraks, they kept their heads down and their hands in their pockets as they made their way towards the squat.

‘You imagining a cosy room with a glowing fire and a comfortable bed?’ Anna asked.

‘The first thing I learned in this line of work is to kill your imagination.’ Peter shuddered as a vicious gust of wind brought tears to his eyes.

‘A nice warm mug of spiced mulled wine, a blanket and...’

‘You’re a bloody sadist.’

‘I’ll show you just how much of one later, but work first,’ she said as the old factory loomed before them.

‘Let’s hope it’s a short shift.’ Peter realised that for the first time in months, if not years, he had something worth looking forward to at the end of his

day. 'See anyone?' he asked as they rounded the corner and out of the worst of the howling gale.

'Like who? Jack Frost?'

'Like anyone who'll see or hear me contacting Andrew Murphy.'

She glanced around the waste ground that surrounded the building. It was deserted. 'You're safe.'

Peter whispered into the receiver tucked into his pocket. Seconds later Andrew's voice crackled thinly back.

'Eighteen people in the building, no sign of our man.'

'Do we stay outside until he shows?' Anna huddled close to the wall.

'Do we hell? I'm not standing around here freezing my balls when you've promised me I'll need them later.'

They rounded the corner. The rope was exactly where Trevor said it would be. Peter eyed a young girl who was shinning up it.

'Nice legs,' he commented. 'Ladies first.'

Anna climbed the rope, quicker than the young girl. As soon as her legs vanished beneath the board he followed.

His arms were aching from the unaccustomed exertion by the time he'd finally hauled himself up to the windowsill. Anna had lit her stub of candle. He saw her face illuminated in its delicate glow, and behind her two more flickering lights.

'How did you find out about this place?' The voice was angry, challenging, the speaker the young girl whose legs Peter had admired.

‘Man told me and my boyfriend about it in the social. Bastards wouldn’t give us an emergency cheque when we came in today.’ Anna’s cockney twang was spot on.

‘In from where?’ a masculine voice demanded.

‘London. We thought we’d stay with my brother until we got on our feet. But his girlfriend’s moved back in with him and seeing as how we can’t stand one another there was nothing for it but to hitch back down here. This is my boyfriend, Eddie.’ She turned as Peter clambered into the room. ‘He comes from round here, so we thought we might be able to sort something out.’

‘Like what?’ the man sneered.

‘What’s it to you?’ Peter rose to his feet.

‘It’s everything to me. We don’t like strangers butting in on our squat.’ The man stepped threateningly towards them.

‘We heard this was an open squat.’ Peter looked around as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom. The room was empty apart from dust balls and two men and the girl. ‘It looks big enough to take all of us.’

‘Looks can be deceiving.’ The bruiser took another step forward.

Peter pulled out the flick-knife he’d pushed into his trainer and pressed the button. The blade shot out and the man retreated. ‘Mess with me,’ Peter snarled, ‘and I’ll mess with you. All we want is to be left alone to doss down for a night or two. If you’ve something to say about that, say it now.’

‘Just as long as you keep away from us.’

‘We will. We don’t like the way you smell.’

‘Say that again?’

‘You heard me.’ Peter slipped his arm around Anna. ‘Let’s find somewhere private, love.’

Trevor drove home, showered, shaved, and spent ten minutes flicking through the rails in his dressing room before changing into a pair of cream slacks and a cream silk shirt. Picking out a light grey silk tie and a lightweight grey jacket, he tried the effect. Deciding he liked it, he knotted the tie while agonising over the choice of restaurants the town had to offer. He didn’t want to take Daisy to any of the Indian or Chinese places where they’d be likely to run into someone from the force, or worse still the hospital. Relations between him and Lyn were strained enough, without the added problem of someone carrying gossip back to her. There was a good Greek restaurant – would Daisy like Greek food? A couple of Italian places, a Mexican place that was about as Mexican as an Italian western...

After slapping on a quarter of a bottle of his most expensive after-shave, he ran down the stairs. Lyn had left a copy of the local paper on the coffee table. He flicked through the pages searching for a feature on eating out. He found one, and in the corner an advertisement for a new Turkish restaurant. He checked the address, and discovered it was on the marina. Picking up his car keys, he left. He started his car then remembered he’d left his wallet in his work jacket. The telephone rang as he was closing the door for the second time.

‘Trevor?’ Lyn’s voice echoed down the line. ‘I was hoping you’d come home to change.’

‘I have and I’m on my way out,’ he hadn’t meant to sound curt.

‘I wanted to say I’m sorry about this morning. I’ll try to be more understanding about your hours. It’s just that...’

He glanced at his watch. ‘Can we talk about this tonight, Lyn? I’m running late.’

‘I’ll make us supper.’

‘I’m taking the doctor to dinner, so I won’t be eating, but how about we share a bottle of wine?’

‘Red or white?’

‘Red.’

‘I’ll have it open. Love you.’

‘Me too.’ He hung up the receiver. Yesterday he wouldn’t have wondered if he’d meant what he’d said. But then yesterday Daisy hadn’t walked back into his life.

‘How many people do you reckon sleep here?’ Anna asked Peter.

‘Your guess is as good as mine.’ Peter peered into the shadows beyond the range of his torch beam and past the guttering flames of candles burning inside open doors. Rags, papers and rubbish were strewn over the wooden floors and heaped high against doors. All it would take was one candle knocked sideways by a derelict in a drunken stupor for the whole place to go up. He wondered how strong the boards were that covered the windows. He hoped they’d be easy to knock out in an emergency.

‘There’s the stairwell,’ Anna said.

Peter shone the torch beam up and down. White graffiti was plastered over the dark brown and green paintwork on the walls.

Dee loves Richie. Anarchy for the masses and the inevitable, Fuck off pigs.

‘Think that’s meant for us?’ Peter whispered.

‘Not personally.’ She made an effort to sound braver than she felt. The eerie silent building with its hidden occupants unnerved her.

‘Up the stairs, and...’

‘First door on the right,’ she finished for him.

Peter led the way. Before they reached the top he put his hand inside his anorak and unbuttoned the shoulder holster. The knife was fine for scaring off thugs, although he was aware Dan and Bill would have a fit if they knew what he carried on his undercover assignments. But if the man they were after was the one who’d carved up and burned the victim in Jubilee Street, he was in a different league to the lad who’d challenged him downstairs.

He should have insisted on getting in some practice that afternoon. He hadn’t fired a gun in six months, and that had been on the range and he hadn’t scored well. Now both his own and Anna’s lives depended on it. His own he could cope with, but after the events of that afternoon he was worried about taking responsibility for hers. Suddenly their relationship wasn’t just professional any more. It was much, much more. Slipping the barrel half out of the holster, he walked up the last few stairs.

‘First door on the right.’ Anna swept her torch beam towards it, Peter pushed down her hand. Andrew hadn’t seen the man, but there could be

another entrance to the building. There was no flicker of candlelight at floor level. Peter put his hand to the door and thrust it open. The room yawned gaping and black before them.

‘What now?’ Anna shone her torch over the benches and coat hooks.

‘We wait.’

‘In here?’

‘Can you think of a better place?’ He looked behind the door. There was a pile of newspapers on the bench. He kicked them to the floor. Something scuttled out and ran across the room.

‘What the hell was that?’ Anna whispered urgently.

‘Big mouse or baby rat. Would ma’am care to be seated?’

She shone her torch below the bench behind the door. Only when she was certain nothing was there did she sit with her back to the bench and her hands clasped around her knees. Peter sat next to her.

‘Right, this is where we conserve energy and switch off our torch lights.

She reluctantly pushed down the button.

‘Here?’ He pushed something unyielding and metallic into her hands.

‘What’s this?’

‘A flask. Seeing as how you turned down my offer of beer I thought you might appreciate something stronger later. And as we all know, no down-and-out should be without his bottle.’

She lifted it to her lips. ‘No vagrant I know drinks best brandy.’

‘This one does. Right, silence, and if you get scared you can cuddle up close.’

‘I’m not scared,’ she asserted. ‘But I am bloody frozen.’

‘Give me your hand.’ She did and he blew on her fingers. ‘Damn Trevor for finding this place,’ Peter cursed. ‘If it had been me, he’d be here instead of us.’

‘Think of the opportunity for togetherness we’d be missing,’ she whispered.

‘I’d rather be together in your bed.’

‘So would I, but think of the pluses,’ she drew closer to him. ‘All the fantasising we can do while we wait, and act out later.’

CHAPTER EIGHT

‘He told you he wanted red wine.’

‘Yes.’ Lyn turned a miserable face to the sister who worked on her ward. ‘But a couple of months ago it was all so marvellous, and now...’

‘He’s busy working. You only see each other during the boring parts of the day when neither of you are at your best. The excitement’s gone, the glitter’s worn off and you’re wondering if there was anything between you other than lust.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Been there, seen it, done it, unfortunately with my ex who wasn’t as good-looking as Trevor, even in his prime. Your generation is luckier than mine. If we’d moved in together it would have given both sets of parents heart failure, so when lust struck we trailed to the altar. My marriage lasted only as long as the sex. What did that psychologist say in the lecture we went to the other night? The length of time sexual attraction lasts was set by nature to give cave-women the time they needed to bring a child to semi-independent status. Four years is average. We didn’t last that long.’

‘But at least you did get married. You had something...’

‘Incredibly messy and tangled to get out of,’ the sister broke in. ‘Be grateful you haven’t got to go to court or pay a solicitor to sort out your mistake. You don’t have a share in the house, do you?’

‘No. But I think there still is something between Trevor and me.’

‘Twenty-one to thirty-six – I make it fifteen years.’

‘Fourteen and a half,’ Lyn contradicted.

‘And that six months makes all the difference? Forget about it for one night. It’s Richard’s birthday, he might be a worm, but it’s a night out and everyone who’s off duty will be there.’

‘I don’t feel like it.’

‘You’d rather sit alone in Trevor’s house and mope, waiting for him to come home. That’s how resentments build up. Listen to Auntie.’

‘I won’t be good company.’

‘Who said anything about company? You’ll have your car and you’ll have to stay sober. That means whatever you put into the wine kitty is a plus and seeing as how you’re driving, you won’t mind taking me home.’

Trevor rang the doorbell of the hospital flat and Daisy opened it.

‘The traffic was dreadful,’ he apologised.

‘I’ve only just finished dressing.’

‘You look beautiful.’ Not given to paying compliments, he meant it. She was wearing a calf-length black skirt and black silk polo that made her pale skin glow. Her long hair was loose, brushed away from her face.

‘I like a man who knows how to flatter.’ She picked up a wool wrap and handbag and joined him in the corridor.

‘I wasn’t sure of your taste in food. I haven’t booked anywhere, but there’s a new Turkish restaurant on the marina.’

‘Turkish is fine. I’ve had a successful couple of days on your behalf.’ She opened her handbag and removed an envelope. ‘My secretary typed up the notes I made.’

‘You didn’t have to go to all that trouble.’

‘Yes, I did. You’ve never seen my handwriting.’

‘Doctor’s handwriting.’ He opened the car door for her. What would he have given to have had this happen eighteen months ago? Then he recalled eighteen months ago her husband had died and he’d been a physical wreck.

‘There are four surgeons working on transplant programmes,’ she said when they in the car. ‘That’s internationally. Three programmes are funded from America, one in Mexico, one in Los Angeles, one in New York – that’s the one that also operates in Africa...’

‘The one you were working on?’ he asked.

‘Before I came here. And, there’s the one I’m working on now.’

He stopped at traffic lights. ‘Is your boss British or American?’

‘British, but so are the consultants leading the New York and Los Angeles teams. You’d be surprised how much expertise we humble islanders bring to international medical programmes. I also discovered that the first documented face transplant took place in America twenty months ago.’

‘There was nothing before then?’

‘Nothing official. It might help if you told me a little about this case you’re working on. It is a case?’

‘It is.’ Since he’d met her again it had seemed more of an excuse than a case. He’d done nothing that afternoon except think about the evening that lay ahead.

‘Is it classified?’

‘What?’ he asked in confusion.

‘The case?’

‘We try to keep some aspects of every case out of the press. It gives us an edge.’

‘I’m not the press.’

‘You’re an expert witness.’ The lights of the marina loomed ahead and he turned into the right-hand lane that led away from the main road.

‘We looking for the Turkish Delight?’

‘Excruciating name, isn’t it?’

‘The first thing you learn as a doctor is to never judge the inside by the outside. The ugliest people often have the most beautiful kidneys and livers.’

‘That’s a disgusting thought.’

‘There’s a parking spot right outside the restaurant and that’s a good omen,’ she said.

‘Or everyone else has tried the place and they’re staying away,’ he suggested sardonically.

They left the car and he locked it. Staring up at the facade he realised the last time he had been in the place it had been a curry house. Inside, the changes were minimal. The benches in the booths were covered with Turkish tapestry as opposed to red damask. The pictures on the wall were enlarged Turkish miniatures of men wearing impossibly massive turbans, and dancing women who were uniformly bell-shaped and cross eyed. But on the plus side an appetising smell wafted from the

kitchens, and at thirty-five minutes past eight on a week night, it was quiet.

The black-suited waiter directed them to a table set in pride of place in the centre of the room, but Trevor was having none of it and they settled into a quiet booth behind a screen at the back.

‘You do realise you’ve ruined his advertising plans,’ Daisy whispered as the waiter left them with the wine list while he carried off her wrap.

‘I don’t think it’s a good idea to hold our discussion in the middle of a restaurant.’

‘Replacing tissue, re-building noses and ears, dovetailing eyebrows around eyes...’

‘Wine, sir?’

‘Red or white?’ Trevor asked Daisy.

‘A very dry white.’

Trevor chose the most expensive in the hope it would be the best. The food was easier. They opted for the speciality of the house. A mix of Turkish Meze, followed by Circassian Chicken, oriental rice and salads.

‘Dessert, sir?’

‘We’ll order that when we come to it,’ Trevor said brusquely, hoping the waiter would have sense enough to leave them alone.

When the wine came Trevor insisted on pouring it himself.

‘You ever eaten Turkish food before?’ Daisy asked.

‘No, have you?’

‘Only in Turkey.’

‘I might have known you’d been there.’

‘Tim took me there the year before we married.’

Her dead husband’s name was spoken easily, and he wondered if she’d come to terms with his death.

‘Your meze, madam, sir.’ The waiter pointed to them in turn. ‘Lady’s thigh meatballs, fried meat fingers, gardener’s meatballs, sardines in vine leaves.’

‘Sounds like a cannibal’s feast,’ Trevor looked at the large plate.

‘They look delicious,’ Daisy said, in an attempt to mollify the hurt expression on the waiter’s face.

‘What you said earlier, about no one carrying out a transplant officially before twenty months ago. How definite is that?’

‘It isn’t. There’s always a guinea pig and doctors prefer to experiment out of sight of the media. Adverse publicity can close down a research programme. First attempts inevitably run the greatest risk of failure. If the initial transplant turned out to be a disaster the surgeon concerned might have covered it up, although it wouldn’t be ethical to do so because we learn from one another’s mistakes.’

‘Pooling ideas?’

‘Through conferences. And there are potential problems with face transplants aside from the medical. Give someone a new face through plastic surgery and it’s generally accepted, even though it doesn’t match the old look. Give a man or woman a face that belonged to someone else and you can end

up with a full blown identity crisis that can devastate the recipient and both families concerned.'

'The personality can change?'

'Imagine your face is destroyed in a car crash. You wake up swathed in bandages like the invisible man. Eventually they come off and you look like Frankenstein. Then along comes a doctor offering a miracle. A new face. Not the old one remodelled, but someone else's. It can take four or five operations just to rebuild a nose if the cartilage is smashed or burnt away. With a transplant it goes on in one, along with the ears, lips, cheeks, and eyebrows.'

'And I look in the mirror and see someone else.'

'Someone with friends, family and a life. Everyone involved in the programme has agreed from the outset that we have to be completely honest with our patients. We try to keep the donor/recipient arrangement anonymous, but there is always a chance that the recipient will meet someone from the donor's past.'

'Could be hard on a widow or widower.'

'We tell the donor's relatives that if they should meet the recipient they should look carefully. What they will see is not an exact copy of their loved one's face. It can't be. I've yet to come across a case where there's been an exact match of skull size. And no matter how meticulously the tissues are grafted, there always seems to be a slight slip to one side or the other.'

'And if the donor has scars...'

‘They turn up on the recipient’s face. But there are also some things that never change.’

‘Such as?’

‘If the eyes are left intact, they remain, and everyone has something that’s uniquely their own that isn’t dependent on looks. A way of walking, of holding themselves, an inflection in the voice. We’ve learned to concentrate on mannerisms and the indefinable part of a person some call the soul. But early studies suggest that face transplant recipients will need more protracted and in-depth counselling than organ transplant recipients. I heard this morning that the Los Angeles team is working on a transplant for someone who not only lost their face but was blinded in a fire. Psychologically that may be easier. At least he’ll never see himself as someone else.’

‘Is this by nature of an experiment?’

‘Probably.’ She helped herself to a slice of Turkish bread. ‘But if doctors had never experimented, people would still be dying of appendicitis and gangrene, and that’s without heart, lungs, and liver transplants. I believe in what I do, Trevor. The first time I saw a leper smile with new lips we’d grafted on to his mouth, it seemed like a miracle.’

‘From his point of view it probably was.’

‘Can’t you tell me what this is all about?’

He pulled out the folder of photographs from his inside pocket. ‘This man,’ he extracted the pictures of Tony, ‘was photographed a month ago in Jubilee Street. But he died two years ago in a hospital seventy miles from here. No doubt about it.

His death was verified by two doctors. He was identified by people who knew him well.'

'And you're thinking face transplant instead of look-alike?'

'We're thinking face transplant because his face was skinned from his corpse in the mortuary. It was peeled off down to the bone less than an hour after he died. Was there anyone working on transplants in the UK two years ago?'

'As I said, not officially.'

'Was there anyone capable of carrying out the operation living here at the time?'

'I'd have to check. Those photographs are too distant and low quality to ascertain if that man has had a face transplant or not.' She handed the photographs back to him.

'You said there are British personnel working on the projects?'

'At least four, including two consultants.'

'We'd appreciate a list.'

'I'll get you one.'

The waiter, who'd been hovering at a distance, noticed they'd stopped eating and swooped down to remove their plates. Trevor wasn't hungry, but he was beginning to wish the meal would never end. When it did, he'd have to go home to Lyn. He was conscious of the debt he owed her. There had been some happy times. It was just that here, sitting opposite Daisy, it was difficult to remember them.

'What time is it?'

Anna's whisper echoing out of the darkness jolted Peter like an electric shock. He stretched his

cramped legs and leaned against the bench. He was aching all over, especially the shoulder where Anna had rested her head for the last hour. Pulling back the sleeve of his anorak he pressed the button on his watch to illuminate the face.

‘Ten to ten.’

‘It feels like we’ve been here for ever.’

A cackle of insane laughter echoed up the stairs from the floor below.

‘Welcome to the house of fun. One dose of crack and you too can join in the merrymaking.’

‘I’d rather not. God this place is bloody freezing.’

‘I thought women didn’t feel the cold.’

‘This one does.’

‘Ssh!’

She heard it the same time as Peter, a shuffle like carpet slippers skidding over a hardwood floor. The noise crept closer. Up the stairs. They both held their breath and tensed their bodies. A yellow glow shone beneath the door, a thin brilliant line that slashed through the darkness. They heard the sigh of slow, laboured breath. The door opened. After a moment it was flung back, slamming into the bench barely an inch from Anna’s head. She shrank back, hitting her spine. A hand closed over one of her clenched fists. Peter might be a bastard at times, but he also knew when to reassure.

Time hung suspended. Anna felt as though someone had pressed the pause button on the DVD she was playing in. Light streaked in through the open door, illuminating the suitcase, sleeping bag and bean tin opposite them. The panting continued

in short quick gasps. A black-booted foot came into view.

Anna's trained eye registered height – six foot two inches. Hair dark, curling, long and matted. Black overcoat, black trousers, light coloured knapsack slung over shoulder. The figure bent over the suitcase, unclipped the locks and removed a moth-eaten blanket. He straightened up, shook it out, spread it on the floor, then turned.

Peter was on his feet before Anna. Cramp had frozen her limbs during four hours of crouching in the biting cold, tomb-dark blackness.

The man stared at them. Even in the half light of the scuttering candle, Anna recognised him as Tony from the video.

Peter said. 'Anthony George?'

The man lunged forward. There was a blinding flash. A cry. Pain exploded on the crest of a crimson tide that flooded Anna's head. She heard the door slamming shut. Then there was only a sinking – and darkness.

'If you looked at the film of our man, would you be able to tell if he'd had a face transplant?' Trevor and Daisy had finished the second course. As neither of them had wanted dessert he had ordered another bottle of wine and Turkish coffee. The wine was going down slowly, and he couldn't help wondering if Daisy was as anxious to protract the evening as him, or if there was someone waiting for her, if not in her flat, then on the end of a telephone, someone special who meant as much to her as Tim Sherringham once had.

‘Obviously there are scars. They fade in time but they never entirely disappear. We try to hide them in the hairline, and below the neck line. How detailed are the shots of this man?’

‘Not very,’ he admitted. ‘There are only one or two close-ups.’

‘I’ll take a look.’

‘Thank you. I’ll give you a ring tomorrow and arrange it.’

The restaurant had filled up, which wasn’t surprising given that the food was excellent and so was the service, if too attentive for Trevor. A large raucous party was sitting at the centre table they’d rejected, the women shrieking with laughter, the men noisily demanding more wine and beer from the waiters.

Trevor debated whether or not to suggest moving on to a pub. Daisy might take it as a hint that the evening was at an end and ask to be taken back to the hospital. He didn’t want to lose whatever time they had left together, but neither did he want to stay in the noisy restaurant. The excuse of business was no longer valid as they’d long since exhausted the topic of face transplants, and the notes she’d given him detailed all the information he was likely to need.

He looked at her hand resting on the linen tablecloth close to his own. He would have liked to have closed his fingers over it, looked into her eyes and asked her how she really was, but something held him back. Fear of starting something he couldn’t finish? Or guilt over Lyn? He took the

bottle and poured the last of the wine into their glasses.

‘Would you like anything else?’

‘No thank you. It’s been a lovely evening, but I have to get back. I’m in theatre first thing tomorrow, and before you ask, it’s not a transplant.’

‘I’ll get the bill.’ He motioned to the waiter, then froze. Sitting with the boisterous party at the centre table were people he recognised as Compton Castle staff – and Lyn.

‘Someone you know?’ Daisy asked intuitively.

‘The girl I’m living with,’ he replied, making a swift decision that honesty was the only policy. ‘Would you like to meet her?’

‘Yes, I would.’

He handed his credit card to the waiter, and led Daisy towards the table.

‘Hello Lyn,’ he said quietly, pitching his voice below the hubbub.

‘Hello.’ The expression in her eyes told him she had seen him before he’d seen her.

‘Lyn, this is Dr Randall,’ he introduced Daisy. ‘She’s helping us with the case I’m working on.’

‘Pleased to meet you,’ Daisy extended her hand and Lyn took it. ‘Trevor told me you’re together. You’re a lucky lady.’

‘I think so.’ Some of the animosity faded from Lyn’s eyes.

A mobile phone rang.

‘Is that yours, Trevor, or mine?’ Daisy asked.

Lyn’s eyes narrowed again. “Trevor”. There was something about the doctor. Something familiar. Then she recalled the numerous sketches

Trevor had made during art therapy classes while he'd been a patient on her ward. A woman with long dark hair and an obscure face. A woman he had once told her he could have loved if there'd been time to develop a relationship.

'Mine, excuse me, I'll take this outside. Tell the waiter I won't be long.' Trevor was glad to leave the restaurant.

'Why don't you sit down and have a drink with us, Dr Randall,' Richard, who was sitting next to Lyn, shouted, too drunk to see anything beyond a new and attractive face.

'Thank you, but as soon as Trevor returns, I'll have to go.'

'Have you known Trevor long?' Lyn asked.

'We met about a year and a half ago when he was working on another case.'

'Before his accident?'

'Yes,' Daisy replied, disturbed by the signs of jealousy Lyn was exhibiting.

'You didn't visit him when he was in hospital.' It was statement not a question. Lyn would have remembered Daisy if she had.

'I've been out of the country.'

Lyn recalled the conversation she'd had with Trevor about the mysterious woman in his sketches.

"She isn't in the country. I couldn't get hold of her, even if I wanted to."

'You lost touch.'

'There was no reason for us to keep in contact.'

Trevor returned. After punching his pin number into the credit card machine he turned to Daisy. 'A

fire's broken out in a disused factory down the road. They've sent for ambulances.'

'I'll come with you.'

'You don't mind?'

'Not in an emergency.'

'I'm sorry, Lyn. This probably means another late night.'

Before Lyn had an opportunity to reply they were gone, leaving her to her vivid imaginings of the beautiful, elegant Dr Randall in bed with Trevor.

'Peter!' Unnerved by the silence in the room, Anna shouted as loud as she could. From below came the panic-stricken sounds of people and the acrid smell of smoke.

Cursing the darkness which was tinged with a red she sensed came from the blinding pain inside her own head; she steeled herself against the thoughts of rats and crawled over the floor on her hands and knees feeling for one of the torches. 'Peter!' She forced herself to remain calm, then remembered. She fumbled inside her anorak for the pouch she had sewn close to her armpit. It was there, she could feel the shape. 'Peter, damn you!' she shouted angrily. 'For Christ's sake why won't you answer me?'

It took an age and two broken fingernails for her to remove the torch she'd sewn into her coat. She switched it on and swept the room with its beam. The heap of rags, the suitcase and the blanket the man had shaken out and spread on the floor were lying in front of the wall opposite her.

She gripped the bench and rose unsteadily to her feet. The screams were growing louder, the smell of smoke stronger. She took a step forward and stumbled over something large and soft lying on the ground.

‘Peter!’ She fell to her knees and shook his shoulder. Her hand felt damp when she lifted it away. When she looked at it she saw that it was covered with something wet and sticky. Blood! She rolled him on his back. There was a bullet hole in the left shoulder of his anorak. Damn it, the man must have been armed. But then so was Peter, why hadn’t he got in first?

A siren screeched outside the boarded windows. She wondered if it was an ambulance or a police car, then smoke wafted into the room from under the door, eye-stinging, blinding and suffocating.

‘Peter!’ She sank to her knees and lifted his head on to her lap. His eyes remained obstinately closed. She laid her fingers over his mouth. She could feel his breath warmer than the air as it breezed over her fingers. He was alive. She went to the door and opened it in defiance of all advice and fire-drill procedure.

A voice shouted below her. Calm, commanding, Tom Morris’s voice. There was no time for her to wonder what he was doing in the building. A gust of scalding air forced her back, but not before she’d seen flames licking at the banister, dancing up the stairs towards her. She banged the door shut. Coughing and spluttering, she ran across the room and picked up the sleeping bag. Rolling it tightly she jammed it against the foot of the door.

She had to get a grip on herself. That mistake might have been her – and Peter's – last.

A crash followed by a scream echoed above the crackling of the flames. Smoke continued to seep into the room through the door frame. Head and heart pounding, she stood in the centre of the room and swept the torch beam around the walls. Peter groaned and she fought the instinct to go to him. It wasn't mothering he needed, but an escape route.

The beam picked up the glint of glass blacked by a wood panel behind it. It was high on the wall. A narrow window, no more than two foot wide. She ran towards it leaping up on a bench to get as close to it as she could. Taking off her shoe she pounded hard, wielding the sole like a hammer.

It took half a dozen knocks before a hail of glass splinters finally showered over her. No toughened glass in buildings this age, she reflected as she shook the larger pieces from her arms and shoulders. Picking up the blanket from the floor, she wrapped it around her arm and pounded on the wood. More glass splinters showered over her from the sides of the frame, but she kept hammering. Two lung-bursting, smoke-laden minutes later, she realised it was useless. Whatever had been used to fasten the wood in place on the outside was holding firm. How the hell had the kids Trevor had spoken to got into this building?

Stooping to the floor she took a deep breath of relatively clean air before resuming her study of the window, running the torch beam along the top and down the sides. She'd broken the small panes in the lower sash, but the top was holding firm. Climbing

on to the sill she gripped the centre bar ignoring the bite of broken glass into her fingers. Hoping and praying that the sash would take her weight, she levered herself up on it, swung back and kicked forward with all her might.

CHAPTER NINE

The skyline above the shining gabled roofs of the marina pubs, restaurants and apartments was tinged with a radiant glow, almost like that of a theatrical set. If it hadn't been for the acrid tang of smoke in the air, Trevor might have believed dawn was breaking eight hours early. But before he and Daisy had driven to the end of the street they saw flames shooting through the roof of the old factory in a brilliant display of sparking pyrotechnics.

'There won't be many, if any, casualties in a disused factory,' Daisy said as Trevor cursed the traffic that had ground to a standstill; clogged by sightseers who'd spilled out of the avenues that led into the dock quarter.

'It's a squat. And besides the homeless, two of my colleagues were in there when the station paged me.'

'Clearing the place?'

'Working undercover. We're going to have to get out here.' He halted his car behind a line of fire-engines, police cars and ambulances.

'You can't park here, sir.'

'It's all right. He's one of us, lad.'

Trevor recognised Andrew and ran towards him without bothering to lock his car. 'She's with me, she's a doctor,' he shouted when Chris Brooke tried to block Daisy's path to a clearing where a row of injured were being treated by paramedics. 'Where's Dan?'

‘With the super.’ Andrew pointed behind the old factory where a group of firemen and police were standing inside the “safety line”, watching the boarded windows blow out on the first floor. Nigel Valance crouched to the side of them, camera on shoulder as he panned the lens upwards to cover the burning building.

‘Bloody ghouls,’ Andrew cursed the journalists who were milling everywhere. ‘Valance was here before us, jamming his cameras and microphones into the faces of the casualties before the paramedics could even...’

The rest of Andrew’s sentence was drowned out by a blast of flame breaking through the roof. Trevor hobbled forward as fast as he could.

‘Peter?’ he asked breathlessly when he was within hailing distance of Dan.

‘No sign of him or Anna.’ Dan was devouring a tube of peppermints, pushing them blindly into his mouth as he scrutinised the building.

‘South side’s ready to go,’ a fireman shouted moments before flames burst simultaneously from three first floor windows.

‘What a shot,’ Valance screamed in excitement as he caught the action on film.

‘This isn’t a bloody spectator sport,’ a fireman shouted at Valance.

‘Just doing my job,’ Valance protested.

‘Do we know how it started?’ Trevor croaked, inhaling a gust of black smoke as Andrew dragged the cameraman back.

‘Andrew radioed that someone answering the description of our man was going in. Ten minutes

later we saw the first smoke, then people started screaming and jumping out of the windows...' Dan's voice tailed off as an axe blade hacked through one of the boarded ground floor windows. A spear of shimmering flame pierced the shattered wood. The stocky, spaceman-like silhouettes of two firemen in protective clothing and breathing apparatus emerged from the inferno. Both carried dead weight bundles over their shoulders.

Tom Morris ran to help them.

'That's it, Mr Morris, you've done more than enough for a civilian,' the leading fireman called out. 'Back with the paramedics, or we won't be able to guarantee your safety.'

'We've got to tell them about Peter and Anna,' Trevor insisted.

'We have, lad,' Bill's accent invariably reverted to its north country roots under stress. 'There are men in the building searching for him and Anna now.'

Trevor shrugged off his jacket. 'I'm going in. I know where to look...'

'The second floor's gone, Inspector.' A senior fireman, weighed down by equipment, pushed back his breathing mask as he waddled towards them. 'If your people are in there, we've no way of getting to them.'

'I have to go in.' Trevor pushed forward. All he could think of was Peter and Anna trapped in the blazing conflagration. If it hadn't been for him they would be safe in the station. It shouldn't have been them, it should have been him. He could have

avoided the kids who knew him, gone up to that cloakroom...

'Other side of the building, sir.' Chris Brooke raced up to them, his eyes gleaming with excitement and the reflected light of the flames. Dan and Bill led the way around the side. More sheltered than the back, the wind wasn't as fierce, and neither was the fire, but every second and third floor window was ablaze. A fire engine was parked close to the blazing facade. Its ladder, a man perched in the wire cage basket on the top, was moving slowly, infinitely slowly, and upwards. Trevor followed the line it was taking. Then he saw her. A slight figure poised on the sill of a corner window on the third floor, framed in the jagged edges of a shattered board, wreathed by the smoke pouring out of the room behind her.

'Anna,' Dan breathed.

'But not Peter,' Trevor said uneasily.

'Can't your people move any quicker?' the super barked at the fireman who'd come with them.

'We're doing all we can.' A troubled expression creased his face as he stared at the fireman in the basket.

The ladder swayed precariously as it rose to meet the great surges of heat escaping from the building. The fireman stood, poised, ready. He reached out to Anna, but she shook her head and clung to the shattered sides of the window frame.

'For Christ's sake, now what?' Bill cursed.

'She's frozen, traumatised,' the fireman muttered.

The fireman on the ladder leaned closer to Anna. Pushing his breathing apparatus over his nose

and mouth he unfastened the door of the cage and stepped on to the sill. Anna turned.

‘She can’t be going back inside!’ Trevor exclaimed in disbelief. ‘She has no protection, no oxygen...’

‘It has to be Peter,’ Bill snarled, furious at having to stand by and watch impotently as the fireman followed Anna.

‘If Peter is in there I’d have thought he would have been getting ready to jump by now,’ Dan said.

‘Probably getting used to the temperature in preparation for hell.’ Bill’s knuckles were as white as Dan’s and Trevor’s.

‘He’s hurt!’ Trevor shouted as the fireman emerged with Peter slung over his shoulder. The man looked at the basket on top of the ladder, judged the distance between it and the narrow sill and jumped.

The fireman laid Peter’s inert figure in the basket, and looked up at the window as Anna staggered out. Even from that distance they could see her coughing violently in an attempt to rid her lungs of the noxious fumes. The fireman motioned her forwards, but she turned back.

‘Now what the hell is the stupid woman doing?’ Trevor shouted as he stared upwards trying to determine whether Peter was dead or alive.

Anna re-emerged with a suitcase under her arm.

‘Luggage?’ Dan said as the fireman pulled her forward. She fell into the basket. The firemen wasted no time in fastening the side and giving the signal to retract the ladder.

Bill stepped back and fell over Valance who, with his camera running, had crept up behind them yet again. 'Get this bastard out of my sight,' he bellowed to Chris Brooke. 'Get an ambulance up here on the double and whatever medical help you can. I want those two in hospital as soon as they hit the ground. And you,' he glared at Dan and Trevor. 'Go with them. See if you can find out what happened here before he,' he jerked his head towards Valance, 'puts in his report. The last thing we need is upstairs finding out about this from the television news.'

'A few weeks and he'll be back to his usual, charming self,' Daisy stood outside the emergency room and pulled down the paper mask that covered her mouth. As she was on the staff of the General, the A and E department had welcomed her assistance. They had been stretched to breaking point by the influx of burned and injured brought in from the old factory. And not all were squatters. Two firemen were on the critical list, and one was dead. The body count stood at four, but both Dan and Trevor knew it would rise once the building was cool enough to be searched. And, given the speed with which the fire had spread, and the difficulty of getting out of the building – steeply. Which said something about the number of youngsters living rough in the town. Practically all of the civilian casualties brought in had been under twenty-five years of age.

‘What’s the extent of the damage?’ Trevor leaned against the wall. His legs were still aching after his acrobatics earlier.

‘He was shot but the bullet only grazed his shoulder, he’s lost blood, he’s suffering from smoke inhalation and he’s concussed and has a lump on his crown. Either he was hit or fell. No doubt the headache he’ll enjoy for the next couple of days will make him more irritable – but that’s your problem. Depending on how he goes overnight, he’ll most likely be discharged tomorrow.’

Dan wanted to know how the extremely attractive female doctor knew so much about Peter, and why she and Trevor were so friendly, but he set his curiosity aside. There were more important questions to ask.

‘And Anna?’

‘She’s in the room next door having her hands sewn back together. She’ll be out in a moment.’

‘Will you be keeping her in?’ Trevor asked.

‘No, but only because the wards are packed to capacity. We’ve had to send all non-urgent cases home. The administrator’s postponing routine operations for the next few days. We’ve admitted sixty-five patients in the last hour. Even for a hospital this size that’s some going.’

‘Can we see Peter?’ Trevor asked.

‘For a few minutes. He’s dozy from the anaesthetic and concussion. Don’t press him too hard. A porter will be along soon to take him up to the ward. I must go. There are more patients waiting.’

‘Thanks, Daisy.’

‘Any time. I enjoyed the meal but not the dessert. I prefer a less eventful life.

Trevor watched her walk away.

‘Nice lady,’ Dan said meaningfully.

‘Very.’ Trevor went into the cubicle. Peter was stretched out on a trolley, a blanket covering his legs, his face as white as the bandages wound around his arm and shoulder.

‘Seems I ended up here once before working for the Serious Crimes Squad, Inspector.’ The voice was husky, raw from smoke, but as cocky as ever.

‘Serious Crimes a bit strong for you perhaps, Peter?’ Dan smiled.

‘What happened?’ Trevor hovered at the foot of the trolley.

‘I didn’t expect him to have a gun.’

‘Sloppy work,’ Dan reprimanded. ‘You’d been issued with one, you should have used it.’

‘I thought I was tackling a down-and-out, not Al Capone. Did you get him?’

‘No,’ Dan admitted.

‘And you accuse me of sloppy work. Bloody hell, that means we have to keep looking.’

‘Did you see him?’ Trevor asked.

‘Yes and he’s our Tony all right. No doubt about it.’

‘Then our dead man isn’t dead,’ Dan sat on the nearest chair.

‘Which leaves us a problem with the corpse.’

‘The doctor,’ Peter gave Trevor a telling look, ‘told me I’ll be out of here tomorrow. I can be back in work the day after.’

‘If we’re desperate for manpower, we’ll find you a cushy number behind a desk answering the phone,’ Dan promised.

‘Thank you very much,’ Peter said caustically.

‘I’ll be round tomorrow to pick you up and take you home.’ Trevor hesitated in the doorway after Dan left.

‘Daisy told me you’d just finished dinner when you were called. How long has she been back?’

‘Not long. I only met her for the first time yesterday. She’s working on the face transplant programme.’

‘Never thought I’d see the day when you had two females on the go, Casanova.’

‘It was work, pure and simple.’

‘Where the female of the species is concerned nothing is ever pure or simple. Save the lies for the expense account clerks, and Lyn,’ Peter coughed.

‘Look...’

Peter held up his hand, ‘I don’t want to hear. It’s your life. I only wish I had your problems. It must be a hard choice to make. Youth and naïvety or sophistication and maturity. I wouldn’t know which to go for.’

‘If you’ve any sense, the blonde who saved your life.’

‘Daisy told me apart from her hands she’s fine. You seen her?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Did she carry me out?’

‘Out of a third floor window?’

‘I don’t remember anything.’

‘A fireman did the humping, but if she hadn’t battered the boards off one of those windows you’d both be barbecue.’

‘Tell her I want to see her,’

‘I will,’ Trevor suppressed a smile as he left the cubicle. It couldn’t be. Not hard-bitten Peter falling for a woman. It simply couldn’t be.

‘So that’s why you went back. You little darling.’

Trevor pulled back the curtains in the cubicle in time to see Dan lift Anna bodily out of a wheelchair and plant a kiss on her forehead.

‘There’s a sick man in emergency asking for you.’ Trevor was taken aback by the thickness of the bandages covering Anna’s hands and forearms.

‘They told me his injuries aren’t serious.’

‘Apart from a bang on the head and a flesh wound to his shoulder, he’s in one piece, thanks to you.’

‘Look what Anna got out.’ Dan held up the suitcase.

‘It belongs to our man?’

Anna nodded. ‘Peter and I watched him take a blanket out of it.’

‘Run it to the laboratory, Trevor.’

‘Aren’t you going to open it first?’

‘The lab boys can do that after they’ve checked for fingerprints. This man operates like a seasoned villain. With luck his prints will be on file somewhere.’

‘The outside has been handled by half the fire service and most of the staff in this place, so tell them it isn’t worth bothering with,’ Anna said.

‘I’ll phone ahead and warn them you’re on your way,’ Dan gestured to Trevor to get moving.

‘I’ll leave after I’ve said goodbye to Dr Randall,’ Trevor took the case.

‘Make it a quick goodbye,’ Dan called after him, making a mental note to ask Trevor about his relationship with the doctor in the morning.

‘Sorry our evening had to end this way.’

‘It was bad enough being married to a doctor. After tonight I believe a policeman would be worse.’ Daisy looked up from the notes she was making.

‘Dinner again next week?’ he asked.

‘You’re living with someone.’

‘Daisy...’

‘It doesn’t take a genius to work out you have problems there, Trevor. I’d rather not be part of them.’

‘And when they’re resolved?’

‘My advice to you is concentrate on resolving them, Trevor. I’ll send you the next lot of information I get.’

He looked around. The corridor was crowded with police, paramedics, firemen, and patients suffering varying degrees of burns, cuts, sprained ankles and smoke inhalation. ‘Sometime, Dr Randall, there will be a time and place for us.’

‘Perhaps.’ She put down the form she’d filled in and picked up another. ‘But it might not be in this lifetime.’

* * *

It was a thirty mile drive to the police laboratory from the hospital. Dan had phoned ahead and two men were waiting to take the suitcase from Trevor.

‘Top priority?’

‘Top priority,’ Trevor echoed, realising that his top priority at that moment was bed and sleep.

He finally reached his house at three in the morning. He opened the car door and looked down at the remains of his finery. His cream silk shirt and slacks were covered with black smuts, his shoes and socks sodden from the puddles made by the fire hoses, and he stank of smoke. So much for any romantic intentions.

He glanced up at the house. Something white moved on the balcony outside his bedroom. Lyn had waited up, tonight of all nights. He was tired, aching, and he had a foul headache. All he wanted was to stretch out and have a couple of hours sleep until he had to start all over again. What on earth had happened to sour the relationship between them to the extent that he was now reluctant to enter his own house and face her?

He had a sudden pang of regret for the peace and quiet of his bachelor flat. He had often been lonely, but perhaps loneliness was preferable to the trauma of sulks and arguments. He climbed out of the car, wincing as his muscles protested. He stretched his back, and locked the car before walking up the short drive. Shrugging his shoulders out of his jacket, he hung it over the banister in the hall. Kicking his sodden shoes into a corner he went

upstairs. The lights were on but Lyn was still on the balcony.

‘You’re going to be exhausted tomorrow,’ he warned her.

‘I’m not working, so I can have a lie in,’ she turned and faced him. The rain had stopped but the wind was still blowing in cold from the sea. She was white, frozen, but she appeared oblivious to discomfort.

‘I wish I had the day off so we could spend it together.’ He stripped off his tie.

‘Do you?’

‘Of course I do, it seems weeks since we spent any time with one another.’

‘Then why don’t you just take the day off?’

‘Because we’re in the middle of a case, we’re short-handed...’

‘The police are always short-handed,’ she snapped. ‘Let Peter and Anna take some of the load for a change.’

‘They can’t. They’re both in hospital.’

‘Are they all right?’ She came in from outside and closed the French doors.

‘They should be in a couple of days.’ He sank down on the bed and unbuttoned his shirt. ‘They were caught inside the factory down the docks when it went up. I suppose you heard about it.’

‘We heard the sirens. We couldn’t hear anything else in the restaurant at one stage.’ She noticed the state of his clothes. ‘My God...’

‘I’m fine under my clothes.’

‘Are Peter and Anna badly hurt?’

‘Peter has concussion, smoke inhalation, and a bullet wound that hit nothing vital.’

‘He was shot?’

Trevor nodded, conscious that he hadn’t told her anything that wouldn’t be in the press release tomorrow. Wasn’t it possible to stop being a policeman, even in the bedroom? ‘Anna cut her hands when she smashed a window to get them out of the building.’ He almost made a gibe about the male chauvinist being rescued by a mere woman. If it had been another evening, one early in their relationship, they might have laughed about it before rolling on the bed and making love. As it was he couldn’t even remember the last time he’d touched her.

‘That woman you were with?’

‘Dr Daisy Randall.’

‘Is she the one you told me about in Compton Castle? The one you were in love with?’

‘Nothing has ever happened between us.’

‘It’s obvious you wish it had and in some ways that’s even worse. If you’d had the sense to fuck her when you first met, you’d probably have forgotten about her by now.’

‘I doubt it,’ he replied with unintentional cruelty.

‘I’ll move out tomorrow.’

‘Lyn,’ he pleaded. ‘It’s late, and I’m tired. This is neither the time nor the place to start another row.’

‘If you love her, you’re free to try and get her back.’

‘I can’t get her back, because I never had her,’ he said vehemently. ‘She was the wife of a victim. It was a traumatic case for her and for me. You saw the state I was in at the end of it.’ He grimaced at the pain in his legs as he forced himself to rise, and take the steps he needed to stand beside her. ‘Lyn,’ he reached out and touched a strand of her hair. ‘I’m sorry. But it’s always difficult when we’re working flat out on a case. I tried to warn you.’

She looked up at him through tear stained eyes. He kissed off the tears before kissing her lips. She tasted of salt, brandy and toothpaste. It took five minutes of whispered endearments and caresses to evoke a response.

As he pulled her down on to the bed and began to undress her, he reflected that if men and women never had to talk to one another life would be uncomplicated. Making love to Lyn was much easier than making conversation. But after passion triumphed and they rolled naked between the sheets he remembered Daisy, and how easy conversation had always been with her.

Lost in a jumbled dream world of blazing fires and injured colleagues, Trevor reached for the telephone on his bedside table.

‘Don’t tell me you’re still in bed?’ Dan resounded down the line.

Trevor opened an eye and focused on the clock beside the telephone. Ten o’clock. ‘It was a hard night.’

‘I didn’t leave the hospital until two and I was in at seven.’

‘I’m not as robust as you, Dan.’

‘We’ve had the results back from the lab.’

‘And?’ Trevor sat up in bed, shuddering as a cold draught blew across his shoulders from the open bathroom window. He’d forgotten to close the connecting door in the night.

‘A complete and beautifully clear set of prints. They’re being run through the computer now. How soon can you get here?’

‘Twenty minutes.’

‘Make it ten.’

‘I have to shower.’

‘I won’t mind if you smell.’ Dan hung up.

‘Work?’ Lyn stirred beside him.

‘Afraid so, love.’ He leant over and kissed her.

‘I’ll be back as soon as I can.’

‘See you next week.’ Even half asleep she was capable of sarcasm.

Compromising on food, but not the shower, Trevor walked into the station fifteen, not ten minutes, after receiving Dan’s call.

‘Sergeant Collins telephoned,’ Sarah Merchant informed him. ‘He told me to tell you that they’ll probably discharge him after the doctors’ rounds at two o’clock.’

‘Do me a favour?’

‘For you, anything, Sergeant Joseph,’ she smiled.

‘Telephone the General at two and see if I can pick him up.’

She nodded as the telephone buzzed again.

When Trevor walked into the office he was amazed to see Anna sitting at her desk. 'You sure you should be here?'

'No. But as I can't do anything at home with these,' she held up her bandaged hands, 'I thought I may as well come in. I need someone to feed me, and with the aid of the intercom I can answer the telephone.'

As if to prove her point, the telephone buzzed and she pressed down on the button with her elbow.

Dan was fixing photographs to the board. He pointed to one. 'Philip Matthews, the face matches the prints on the whisky bottle and the general description is similar height and colouring to Tony. You can run the photograph and a full description to Patrick in the mortuary some time today to see if he can match him to our victim.'

'Peter said the man he saw in the factory yesterday was definitely Tony,' Trevor said.

'Looks like Philip Matthews was wearing Tony's boot,' Dan agreed.

'Anything from forensics on the victim's fingerprints?' Trevor asked.

'You saw those hands. Did you really expect anything?'

'I live in hope and bow to science.'

'You'd be better off bowing to leg work. That solves cases. But talking about hope, I've asked for Philip Matthews' dental records to see if Patrick can match them to the remaining teeth.'

'That jaw was pretty badly burnt.'

'Patrick said there might be enough there to facilitate a match. And thanks to Joan of Arc here,'

he smiled at Anna, 'we have this.' He handed Trevor a faxed report from the laboratory. 'They not only found prints inside the suitcase, they matched them. Now they've finished with it. Chris Brooke has gone over to fetch it. He should be back around eleven.'

'Adam Weaver...' Trevor frowned. 'Why should I know that name?'

'He was the actor who killed his wife.'

'I remember. He played a detective in a long running series...'

'And for a curtain call he murdered his wife in real life. The tabloids loved it.'

'Did he have a reason?' Trevor flicked over the first page of the fax.

'The best. She wanted to leave him because he was having an affair.' The telephone rang. 'Do you want me to get that?' Dan asked Anna, who was staring into space.

'No, I can manage,' she said hastily.

'It was an interesting case,' Dan commented as Trevor continued to read.

'He dismembered her body in the bath.'

'Weaver insisted he was in London when she was killed but couldn't come up with a single witness to substantiate his alibi.'

'Unusual for London,' Trevor commented.

'His defence sent people to ask questions in the off-licence Weaver claimed to have visited that night. They interrogated the porter who'd been on duty in his building, combed the streets looking for people who'd been in the area, put out an appeal in the press and on TV, and drew a complete blank.'

‘Some people never see anything beyond their noses, especially assistants in urban off-licences,’ Trevor said.

‘The pathologist who carried out the PM never established cause of death. Although he did go so far as to say it was probably strangulation.’

‘Because the upper horn of the thyroid cartilage on the right side of the neck was fractured,’ Trevor read. ‘And there was a blood clot around it which meant it couldn’t have happened after death.’

‘That’s the small bone in the neck that can only be broken when the neck is compressed?’ Dan asked.

‘I thought you’d read this?’ Trevor held up the report.

‘I only received it ten minutes ago.’

‘The jury saw fit to believe the prosecution. Adam Weaver was sentenced to life imprisonment three years ago,’ Trevor flicked over the last page.

‘And he escaped one year to the day later,’ Anna murmured after finishing her telephone conversation.

‘How come you know so much about this case, Anna?’ Trevor asked.

‘Would you believe I had a crush on Adam Weaver?’

‘A hardened policewoman like you?’ Dan said sceptically.

‘I was a girl before I was a hardened police officer.’ Anna didn’t say any more. She realised her explanation sounded ridiculous, but not as ridiculous as the truth. That she had met Adam Weaver in drama college. Had fallen head over heels in love

with him. That she had moved in with him the day he had asked her to. And taken an overdose the day he had left.

CHAPTER TEN

‘The suitcase, sir.’ Chris Brooke, fresh-faced, young, keen and wearily eager, carried the suitcase he’d picked up from the laboratory into Anna and Trevor’s office. He took an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Dan. ‘An inventory of the contents.’

‘Quick driving, Constable,’ Dan complimented him. ‘I’ve arranged for you to pick up these two original files.’ He handed Chris papers relating to Adam Weaver’s escape from prison.

‘Right away, sir.’

‘It makes me tired just to look at him,’ Anna said as he left the room.

‘With you and Peter laid up we could do with his energy,’ Dan said thoughtfully. ‘I’ll have a word with the super.’

‘As long as you keep him on a leash whenever he’s near me,’ Anna moaned.

‘You sure you don’t want to go home, Anna?’

‘I told you, there’s no one there to feed me.’

‘We can always tip baked beans into a bowl so you can lap them up, cat fashion.’ Trevor picked up the case and laid it on his desk. He sprung the locks, lifted the lid and stood back as the rancid smell of damp, dirty clothes wafted out.

‘If our man really is Adam Weaver, he’s not thinking any straighter than when he carved up his wife. There’s no point in locking a cardboard suitcase. All you need is a knife to cut through the

back.’ Dan slit open the envelope Chris had given him.

‘He certainly didn’t keep the crown jewels in here.’ Trevor lifted out a brown wool sweater. It was speckled with the fingerprint powder the forensic team had used on every hard surface inside the suitcase. The wool felt thick and greasy. He held it gingerly between his fingertips and looked around for somewhere to dump it.

‘Not on my desk,’ Anna leant protectively forward.

‘One sweater, brown wool.’ Dan ticked it off the list as Trevor dropped it to the floor.

‘It doesn’t look as though he ever got around to doing his laundry.’ Seeing an empty plastic bag in the bin next to Anna’s desk, Trevor pulled it out and thrust it on his hand.

‘Four socks?’

‘Four socks,’ Trevor held them at arm’s length with his bagged hand and dropped them on top of the sweater.

‘Two pairs of underpants.’

‘This is getting sick,’ Anna turned her back on the grey rags Trevor lifted from the case.

‘What did you expect? Silk boxer shorts?’ Trevor discarded them on top of the growing pile of clothes.

‘Newspapers?’ Dan queried.

Trevor pulled out a yellowed, brittle bundle secured by an elastic band. He checked the date on the outside one. ‘This goes back two years.’ He opened it out and read the headlines.

ESCAPED KILLER ON THE RUN.

‘Weaver?’ Dan asked.

‘Who else?’ Trevor unrolled the others. They all carried the same story. He dropped the bundle on top of the clothes. There was little else in the case. Two tins of beans, one of sausages, a lethal-looking, rusty tin opener with a spiked end – a plastic bag that had once held bread but now contained half a bar of gelatinous soap, and an unsanitary piece of ragged towel.

‘Is that it?’ Trevor looked at Dan who’d been ticking the items off the list.

‘They found photographs in the lining.’

Trevor rummaged in the case.

‘Try inside,’ Anna suggested. ‘They may have replaced everything as they found it.’

Trevor found two photographs stuffed into the spine of the case. One was a studio portrait of a beautiful blonde wearing a beguiling smile and a plunging neckline. Anna knew who she was. She’d torn a similar photograph to shreds when she’d found it in Adam’s wallet before he’d walked out on her ten years ago. The other was of a child about six or seven years of age. She’d inherited her mother’s exquisite blonde hair, blue eyes, and captivating smile – only her smile was minus a few baby teeth.

‘Weaver’s family?’

‘Presumably the wife he killed and his daughter.’ Dan took the photographs from Trevor. ‘We’ll know more when we get the files. If we’re lucky we might find something that was missed at the time.’

‘And Adam Weaver?’ Anna asked.

'I have every man on the beat and every undercover officer on the force looking for him, or rather him with Tony George's face,' Dan replied.

'How did he escape from prison?'

'No one ever found out. Presumably he greased palms. The when is easier and could be significant. He disappeared from his cell in the early hours of the morning the day after Tony George died.'

'Good timing for a transplant operation using George's face,' Trevor agreed.

'What did your doctor friend say about the conditions required for face transplants?'

'They're similar to those that apply to organ transplants,' Trevor sat down behind his desk. 'The face has to be carefully removed, and there has to be a tissue match between donor and recipient.'

'Do we have medical details on George and Weaver?' Anna asked.

'They should be in their files.'

'If you give me whatever papers you have and a pencil with a blob of Blu-Tack on the end, I'll start looking.'

'Why the pencil?' Trevor asked.

'To turn the pages. I have no hands, only a mouth, remember.'

'You took your time getting here.' Peter was sitting, dressed and impatient in the day room of the ward when Trevor walked in. He was wearing the same clothes he had worn to go undercover, only now they were covered with soot and stank of smoke.

'Sarah telephoned at two. It's only twenty past.'

'You should have been here at ten past.'

‘I was, but the sister wanted to speak to me about you.’

‘Really?’ Peter raised his eyebrows. ‘Had a lot of complaints did she?’

‘A few.’

Peter held up the newspaper he’d bought that morning. ‘I see we’re painted as the villains of the town again. We do nothing when one vagrant is burned. Will we do anything when an entire squat-full go up in smoke?’

‘I don’t read the rags.’

‘I should have more sense.’ Peter tossed the paper into the bin on the way out.

‘How about I drive you back to my place?’ Trevor suggested as they took the lift to the ground floor.

‘Need a lodger to help pay the mortgage?’

‘The sister said you shouldn’t be left on your own. Your concussion needs watching.’

‘And you’d rather watch it than quarrel with Lyn?’ Peter guessed.

‘I’m trying to help.’

‘And I’m too street-wise to get caught up in an argument between you and your lady love. Take me to my flat. I’ll do a quick change then you can drive me to the office.’

Trevor looked at the bandage that bulged beneath Peter’s shirt and sweater, the sling on his right arm and the pained expression on his face. ‘You’re in no condition to work.’

‘You’d rather I died of boredom in my flat?’

‘We’re running an investigation, not a hospital. We’ve already got Anna demanding nursing care.’

‘She turned up this morning?’

‘By taxi. Her excuse is that with her hands bandaged she can’t feed herself. When I left, Dan was pushing a sandwich into her mouth.’

‘That’s one task I can take off your hands seeing as how I’ve still a hand left.’

‘What is going on between you and Anna?’ Trevor ventured.

‘Nothing that need concern you.’

‘I thought we were mates.’

‘This coming from the man who doesn’t drop a hint about spare females when he has them queuing for his favours.’

‘It’s not like that,’ Trevor protested.

‘It never was like anything between you and Daisy, if I remember rightly. You were content to worship her from afar.’

‘Last night was strictly business.’

‘Since when has dinner been business?’

‘This may come as a surprise to you, Peter, but some people can take a lady to dinner without tumbling in the sack with her afterwards.’ Trevor opened his car.

‘You must tell me how to manage it sometime.’

‘Didn’t you take Anna out to dinner when you booked an overnight?’ Trevor asked in an attempt to deflect Peter’s attention from his love-life.

‘Liquid dinner.’

‘And that’s different?’

‘Everything I do is different from what you do. I’m wiser, especially when it comes to women. But how about you give me an update on the case so I’ll know exactly where we are when we go in.’

Trevor took the file on Adam Weaver as soon as it came in and went into Dan's office to read it, out of sight of Peter and Anna. They were sitting side by side at Anna's desk checking on the findings of the inquiry that had investigated Adam Weaver's breakout from prison. Dan had been called into an emergency meeting with the super, hastily convened after the press reports on the fire in the old factory had appeared.

Leaving the connecting door open so he could hear any incoming telephone calls, Trevor propped his feet on a spare chair, opened the file and began to read. The Weaver murder case had received heavy press coverage at the time because of Adam's television connections, and whoever had investigated it had been meticulous in keeping press cuttings. There was a wad of them, liberally spattered with theatrical studio photographs. Adam Weaver had possessed the typical leading man's good looks. Tall, rugged, dark-haired and -eyed, he had been courted by Hollywood before tragedy and scandal had put paid to his career. The photographs of his wife matched the photograph they'd found in the suitcase and Trevor speculated on the mental state of a convicted killer who carried a photograph of his victim. The child's photograph they'd found in the suitcase matched the ones of Weaver's daughter in the press cuttings. Trevor made a note to check her whereabouts in case Adam/Tony made an attempt to contact her. He compared the ages in the file with the press cuttings. She was now nine and

he wondered if she'd been told anything about her father or the way her mother had died.

'If Weaver and Tony are one and the same, and with the fingerprint evidence I don't see how he can be anyone else, the key's in the transplant,' Peter shouted through the open door.

'Daisy looked into it. No official transplants were carried out in this country until eighteen months ago.'

'Then there has to have been an unofficial one,' Peter stated the obvious. 'Do you know how many doctors were around at the time of the theft of Tony's face who were capable of transplanting a face?'

'Daisy's compiling a list for me.'

'Call in on her on the way home and check if she's made any progress,' Dan ordered as he walked into the room.

'Nice meeting?' Peter asked.

'Isn't it always with upstairs and the super after they've seen more on the midday news broadcast from the local station than we've been able to tell them? And you'll be pleased to hear that a selection of Valance's shots is going out on the early evening nationwide network. I've seen them. You make an attractive heroine, Anna. And you, Peter, a very helpless victim.'

'We should have smashed Valance's camera when we had the chance,' Trevor muttered.

'Anything come of the meeting besides a dressing-down for the department, sir?' Anna enquired.

‘No. We viewed Valance’s footage and, from the way he’s edited it, I’ve no doubt he’ll be offering it to Hollywood next. And the Fire Service reported the seat of the blaze was on the central, second floor staircase.’

‘Cardboard boxes and newspapers,’ Anna recalled the pile of rubbish they’d passed on the way up to the cloakroom.

‘Hang about.’ Peter looked at Dan. ‘Central staircase?’

‘There were three on each floor. One set against each wall and one central.’

‘Anna and I went up by the one set against the right-hand wall as you look at the building.’

‘That’s the end you were hauled out of,’ Dan agreed.

‘How long after this Tony ran out on us did you smell smoke?’ Peter asked Anna.

‘Probably not more than five minutes.’

‘Wouldn’t it take longer than five minutes to set a fire?’ Peter demanded.

‘I have no idea, I’ve never had pyromaniac tendencies,’ Trevor said flatly.

‘What was set alight?’ Peter looked at Dan.

‘All the fire department could tell us was the blaze was hot enough to melt the ironwork on the staircase, so if it was set in rubbish...’

‘With petrol?’

Dan pursed his lips. ‘Could be,’ he mused, following Peter’s train of thought. ‘They’re still carrying out tests. I’ll mention the possibility.’

‘If Tony was responsible, and petrol was used, he must have a couple of containers stashed away

somewhere.' Trevor carried the file he'd been reading out of Dan's office and over to his desk.

'Why was the victim in Jubilee Street, Philip Matthews – or whoever he was – wearing clothes Tony had been seen in?' Peter asked no one in particular.

'Because Tony wanted to exchange one set of rags for another,' Anna suggested.

'Or because Tony – whoever he is – wanted people to think he was dead,' Trevor sat on the edge of his desk. 'Those boots were distinctive and he picked on Matthews because he was the same height and build as himself. Perhaps he hoped that we wouldn't look too closely at the death of a vagrant. Treat it as an open and shut case.'

'The question is, did Tony have time to set the fire between attacking us and leaving the building, because I certainly didn't smell smoke before,' Anna said.

Peter rubbed his aching arm. 'I was out cold, remember?'

'We could try asking the man,' Dan suggested.

'First we have to find him,' Trevor pointed out.

'Exactly, and that's just what the super wants – preferably before Valance gets hold of him, and puts him on a television chat show.'

'Which means we're all out on the streets tonight?'

'You, Trevor. But not you two,' Dan looked at Anna and Peter. 'Off home, the pair of you, right now. After a good night's rest you might be some use to me.'

'Nice to know you care, sir' Anna left her chair.

‘If you feel like you look, Anna, there’s no need for you to come in tomorrow,’ Dan conceded, wondering if he’d been too hard on her.

‘Where else would I go?’ Anna walked towards the door, her bandaged arms and hands stretched out in front of her.

‘What I’m trying to say is, although I appreciate your help, we can manage without you. I’ve succeeded in getting Andrew and Chris Brooke co-opted on to the team.’

‘Mr Keen and Eager,’ Anna groaned.

‘And Mr Over The Hill,’ Peter chimed in.

‘I wouldn’t let Andrew catch you saying that. Now that the original murder inquiry has expanded to take in arson and more victims...’

‘How many more?’ Trevor asked.

‘They found another five in the wreckage this morning.’

‘That’s nine with the ones last night.’

‘Ten,’ Dan corrected. ‘One died in the hospital this morning.’

‘That’s one way of clearing the streets.’

‘I don’t want to hear you saying that outside of these four walls, Peter,’ Dan warned.

‘It’s the truth. You know as well as I do no one gives a damn about homeless kids. Not even their parents. If they did, the poor sods would spend their nights tucked up in warm, dry beds at home, not dossing in squats.’

‘You’re talking about kids...’

‘Rejects who were going nowhere.’

‘Maybe not all of them, but now we’ll never know different, will we?’ Silence reigned. Dan

looked from Peter to Trevor. 'Trevor, call in on the doctor to see if she has any news on a possible surgeon, then back here for a briefing. We'll work the streets in pairs tonight, Andrew with me, Chris Brooke with you. All officers to report into Central Control every ten minutes. Every available man will be out tonight.'

'Then we'll expect to see Tony here tomorrow morning,' Peter declared as he opened the door for Anna.

After dropping Anna and Peter off outside Peter's flat, Trevor drove to the General Hospital. He parked in a bay marked RESIDENTS ONLY, entered the palatial foyer of the Burns Unit and asked at reception for Dr Randall.

'Dr Randall isn't in the building,' the girl manning the desk informed him stiffly.

'Is she home?'

'I really wouldn't know.'

He walked across the car park to the staff quarters of the hospital and climbed the stairs to Daisy's door. He rang the bell, and waited. Minutes ticked past. He rang it again, not expecting a reply. He had visited Daisy the last time she'd lived in one of the flats. They were tiny. There was no way it would take anyone this length of time to answer the door. Turning his back he began to walk away.

'Trevor.' She opened the door, her head and body swathed in towels.

'I'm sorry; I didn't mean to disturb you. I'll come back later.'

‘I know how busy you are, please, come in.’ She disappeared inside leaving the door ajar and he followed. ‘Give me a couple of minutes to put something on and I’ll be with you. Help yourself to a drink.’

She went into the bedroom and he looked around. A cream lace tablecloth covered a table, which if the legs were anything to go by was ripe for a jumble sale. A two-seater sofa and chairs had been transformed by Indian cotton throws. A bunch of daffodils stood in a cut glass vase on a side table, and next to it a silver tray held four glasses, a soda siphon and bottles of brandy and whisky. Trevor reached for the brandy and poured himself a small one.

‘I’ll have one of those too, please.’ Daisy stood in the doorway. She was wearing a black and silver Kaftan but a towel was still wrapped round her head.

‘I called in the hospital. They said you’d left for the day but I wondered if you’d come up with anything.’

‘I put calls in to all the surgeons working on the teams giving the dates you suggested last night. Two have already responded as negative, but the ones in the States haven’t got back to me yet. It could be the conference.’

‘The one your boss is attending?’

‘Yes.’ She took the glass he handed her and curled up on the sofa. ‘But I did manage to get through to him last night, and he mentioned there was a doctor practising in London two years ago who had worked on the initial research programme.’

It's possible he was in a position to carry one out. But if he did, it's not documented.'

'Does this doctor have a name?'

'Yes, but I'm not sure I should tell you. Not without conclusive evidence that he's involved, or at least until I can contact him to discuss it. It wouldn't be ethical.'

'Neither was the fire last night.'

'You think it was set by the man with the face transplant?'

'It could have been. The most I can say at the moment is that he's top of the suspect list. Truth be known, he's our only suspect.'

'Trevor...'

'Keep this to yourself but there's a possibility that the man walking around with Anthony George's face is an escaped prisoner who was convicted of murder.'

'How can you possibly know that?'

'Anna picked up a suitcase from the factory squat yesterday. Both she and Peter saw the man who resembles Anthony George handling it, but the only fingerprints inside the case are on file as belonging to a villain who broke out of prison two years ago.'

'Who's Anna?'

'You met her last night; she was having her hands sewn up.'

'The brave lady who saved Peter.'

'You look as though you disapprove.'

Daisy laughed. 'I don't wish Peter ill. After you were injured he was quite decent to me. In his way.'

‘I’ve never know Peter do anything other than in his way.’

She leaned against the back of the sofa and pulled the towel from her hair. Damp hair cascaded down her neck. The dry, astringent scent he remembered so well flooded into the atmosphere. It was very different from the light flowery perfume Lyn wore. ‘I don’t like the thought of a killer running loose on the streets.’

‘The key to tracking him down probably lies with the doctor who carried out the face transplant that transformed his appearance.’

‘Killer or not, it still wouldn’t be ethical for me to name a fellow doctor.’

‘No one need know it was you who told us.’

‘Can you give me until the morning?’

‘Time could be of the essence.’

‘I found out a year ago that time is always of the essence where the police are concerned. It means more to them than integrity, people or feelings.’

‘I’m trying to prevent a maniac from taking more innocent lives.’ Trevor finished the brandy and set the glass on the table next to the tray.

‘Would you like another?’

‘Yes, but I haven’t time.’

‘You’re on duty?’

‘All night, or until we find our man.’

‘I hope you do find him.’ She rose unsteadily to her feet. He reached out and touched her arm.

‘Are you all right?’ he asked in concern.

‘Perfectly, apart from drinking on an empty stomach.’

‘You haven’t eaten today?’

‘Not since last night. It’s been one of those days.’

‘You should take care of yourself,’ he said.

‘I’ve something ready to go in the microwave.’

‘I’m glad to hear it.’ He pulled her towards him.

‘Trevor...’

He silenced the protest she’d been about to make by placing his mouth over hers. She stiffened, as though she were about to push him away, then suddenly she began to kiss him back.

‘I’ve wondered what that would be like for a long time,’ he confessed when they drew away from one another.

‘And?’ her eyes glittered.

‘I’d like to take it a step further.’

‘You’re forgetting you’re spoken for.’

He remembered Lyn and work. ‘I’ll be back and we’ll talk about it then.’

‘Richard Marks.’

‘Who?’

‘The name of the surgeon capable of carrying out the operation who was in London two years ago is Richard Marks.’

Marks... Marks – he tried to think where he had heard the name, but he was incapable of thinking about anything except Daisy.

‘If you give me until tomorrow I’ll see if I can find out anything more about him.’

‘No one will be doing anything before tomorrow.’ He went to the door.

‘This is marvellous, I never thought you’d be home this early. I’ve prepared dinner. It will only take half

an hour to cook.’ Lyn stood in the hall and watched Trevor take off his jacket.

‘I’m sorry. I have to go out again as soon as I’ve changed.’

‘With her?’

‘Don’t be ridiculous. Bill’s posted every available man on the force on the streets tonight to look for...’

‘Don’t lie, Trevor. Please don’t lie,’ she whispered. ‘You stink of her perfume. I could smell it yesterday in the restaurant. Her lipstick is all over your mouth...’

Trevor glanced in the mirror. There was no lipstick. Then he remembered there wouldn’t have been. Daisy had just come out of the bath. But that one glance was enough to damn him.

‘Thought you hadn’t wiped it all off?’ she taunted.

‘I have to go,’ he said brusquely.

‘And so do I. Right now.’

‘Lyn, please.’ He raced up the stairs after her but she locked herself into the bathroom. He looked at the clock. There was no time to reason with her. Not if he wanted to make Bill’s briefing. He opened his wardrobe door and pulled out his oldest pair of jeans. Dressing down was a problem for him. After he’d been discharged from hospital he’d thrown out most of his old clothes. Eventually he found a shirt with a tear in it, and an old pair of trainers. A coat was going to be a problem. He’d just have to freeze. He looked around; he really didn’t have any more excuse to linger. Just Lyn.

He hammered on the bathroom door with his closed fist.

‘Lyn, please. I have to go out. If you’d open the door you could see what I’m dressed like. It’s work, I swear it.’

Not a sound came from the room. He debated whether or not to put his shoulder to the door and decided against it. It would have to wait until morning. Slamming the door behind him he walked down the stairs and out of the house.

Even if Lyn had opened the door, he wouldn’t have known what to say to her. She’d been right all along. He was totally besotted with Daisy, and he was finding it increasingly difficult to see anything beyond her, or think of anything except the castles he was building in the air dreaming of his future – with her.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

‘We’re not going to find Tony hanging around the hostels,’ Trevor commented when he and Chris met up with the Dan and Andrew as they parked their respective cars outside the port offices.

‘It’s worth checking with the inmates to see if any of them have seen him since yesterday. With the fire closing what was probably the largest squat in town; the homeless will be looking for another place. If we find it before our man, we may catch him trying to move in.’

‘I’ve a feeling he won’t be running with the pack.’ Andrew stamped his feet in an effort to warm himself. The advent of spring was evident in the buds on the trees, and the bulbs pushing up in the flowerbeds in the roundabout at the entrance to the docks. But the night air still bore the dead, chill hallmark of winter.

‘Andrew and I will take the hostels.’ Dan glanced at his watch. ‘The doors will be closing on them about now. The super has a squad checking the underpasses and the multi-storey car parks. Think of anywhere else, lad?’

‘Me, sir?’ Chris asked, amazed at being consulted by a superior officer.

‘You were on the beat last week. Sergeant Joseph and I haven’t been out there in years.’

‘It’s like you said, sir, the car parks, the underpasses. Some of them used to go in the old pub down the bottom end of High Street.’

‘The Drunken Sailor?’ Trevor asked.

‘That’s the one.’

‘The owner’s boarded it up, pending a redevelopment application.’ Andrew’s foot stamping became more energetic.

‘The old factory was boarded up,’ Dan reached into his pocket for his peppermints. ‘On that basis every abandoned and boarded building in town is worth checking. Trevor, you and Chris take everything west of High Street. We’ll take the east side after we’ve checked the hostels. Contact with H.Q. every ten minutes giving position, progress and names of any officers you’ve met and compared notes with.’

Trevor went back to his car and picked up his anorak. To hell with freezing. He glanced at Chris as he zipped it against the biting wind. The boy looked more like a scared teenager than an officer of the law in his jeans and leather jacket. He gave him an encouraging nod as they walked down the deserted quayside that marked the beginning of the marina. Chris looked at the berthed yachts.

‘There’s dozens of hiding places there, sir,’ he shouted above the ringing of the masts.

‘Owners pay marina security to check their vessels every day. And a place like that would be too open for our man. He’d be seen the minute he made a move to get food or water. Whatever else he is, he’s not stupid. He knows we’re looking for him.’

The pubs and wine bars on the marina were crowded. A couple of women swung the door wide as they came out of one of the more popular establishments, and Trevor caught a glimpse of men

standing at the bar drinking pints and watching the news on a TV. Too early for the night revellers, they were probably office workers who'd stopped for a pint on their way home. He turned his collar up against the cold which was peppered with water stings carried on the inshore breeze and tried not to think about Lyn and the way they'd parted. Tomorrow, somehow or other he'd make time to sit down and talk to her. Settle the problems between them once and for all.

'We're not likely to find him here are we, sir?' Chris enquired hesitantly.

Trevor looked around. Lost in thoughts of the argument he'd had with Lyn, he'd headed blindly for the golden waterfront mile of the marina where property prices were highest. The most expensive and exclusive nightclubs, pubs and restaurants were just ahead, and although one or two of the more public spirited proprietors had two bins in their back yards, one for rubbish and one for edible scraps for the vagrants, the homeless were not encouraged to linger.

'It's worth checking the back of these buildings,' he replied in a face-saving exercise. 'That will take us to the edge of town, then we'll systematically comb the side streets that lead into High Street.' He turned the corner and entered an alley that ran parallel to the waterfront. He didn't need the torch he carried. All the pubs and restaurants had security lights that flashed on before they reached striking distance of the back yards.

'So, this is what it feels like to be in the spotlight,' Trevor said as they walked past the back

of the sixth restaurant. The chef looked out of his kitchen window as they passed before continuing to chop vegetables on a board slung over a sink. A light flashed on up ahead, too far for either of them to have set it off. Startled, both Brooke and Trevor stepped into the shadows only to see a cat scurrying towards them.

‘No vagrant with any sense in his head would come here before morning.’ Trevor walked on. ‘And then only for a quick scavenge.’

‘I’ve seen them, sir. They generally come around six or seven, pick up one or two of the parcels the cooks leave for them, then scarper.’

‘You’ve walked this beat?’

‘Walked most of them in the town, sir.’

‘You ever seen the man we’re after?’

‘Not that I remember, sir.’

‘That’s the problem with this job. You only have time to register the villains.’

At the end of the alley they stopped and looked towards the network of narrow terraces that fringed the oldest quarter of the town.

‘If you were homeless and your squat burned down, Chris, where would you head?’

‘Probably for one of the farms on the outskirts, sir.’

‘You’d soon be noticed and sent packing.’

‘There are one or two derelict places, sir. I’ve been looking at them with a view to doing one up.’

‘Fancy yourself as a farmer?’

‘Only in retirement.’

‘Good God, how old are you, nineteen, twenty? And you’re making plans for retirement?’

Retirement was something Trevor only thought of in passing and never in depth. Probably because he didn't have a clue as to what he'd do with his time if he didn't have to go into the station.

'You can cycle for miles outside town and not see a soul.'

'Then you'd better get a list of all the uninhabited places tomorrow from the estate agents so we can search them.'

'Yes, sir.' Chris's voice had lost some of its enthusiasm.

'Didn't they tell you that ninety percent of detective work is boring, repetitive leg work? There are times when I look back on my time on the beat with nostalgia. Then, no two days were ever the same.'

They checked streets, alleys and yards. They peered into narrow, walled-in back gardens. They joined the beat constables and searched multi-storey car parks. They saw more vagrants than they would have given the town credit for. The most sheltered floors of the multi-storeys furthest from the town centre, and consequently the least used, looked more like an African shanty town than a suburban car park. Trevor took one side of the square while Brooke and a beat constable took the other. They peered into cardboard boxes, unravelled bundles of rags, shook sleeping bodies awake, shone torches into comatose faces, but none bore any resemblance to the one they sought, and although they flashed photographs of "Tony" at the more lucid vagrants,

none would admit to seeing him at all, let alone recently.

It was three in the morning, when footsore, weary and chilled to the bone, Trevor and Chris finally made it to High Street.

‘Where to now, sir?’ Chris wondered if they were going to work through the night without a break.

‘Check out the underpass, and hopefully meet up with the Inspector.’

‘Which end do you want to enter?’ The underpass in High Street had as many legs as a spider. It was built at a crossroads, and sunk below a high walled roundabout. Twelve feet below the wall the planners had drawn up a detailed blueprint for a sunken garden which the council had meticulously copied right down to the stone nymph in the centre of the flowerbeds, but the area had long since degenerated into a dumping ground for tin cans, rubbish and dog mess. The spider’s arms that led out from the centre to the feeder roads had originally been tiled in pastel colours which had soon become hidden beneath layers of graffiti, and the tunnels themselves stank of urine and worse. Each street sported two entrances, one with steps, one with a ramp. Linking all of them was a circular walkway. The areas sheltered by the ramps, the steps and, in fine weather, the central open area, were the ones most prized by the homeless. Like the hostel, spaces had to be claimed early, but not too early. The police kept the area clear until the cinemas and pubs closed. As Trevor and Chris walked down the ramp

closest to the High Street end they heard a soft hubbub of voices.

‘Officers, you look frozen, can I interest you in a cup of soup?’ Standing behind a make-shift barrow stand and surrounded by a group of teenagers, Tom Morris and Captain Arkwright had set up a soup kitchen.

‘What kind of soup?’ Chris asked the Salvation Army officer, who managed to look young and attractive despite her uniform.

‘Tinned vegetable. One of the manufacturers has kindly donated catering packs to our project.’

Trevor reached into his pocket as he watched a young girl hold a steaming polystyrene cup to the mouth of a toothless old man who was shaking with cold. He pulled out a couple of pound coins.

‘We’ll have two.’

‘It’s not for sale,’ Captain Arkwright protested.

‘Call it a donation.’

As the girl dropped the coins into a collecting box, Tom ladled the soup into cups and handed them over.

‘We’re trying to do our bit to help.’ Tom pointed to a photograph of “Tony” that he’d pasted on the side of the barrow.

‘That the Inspector’s idea, or yours?’ Trevor asked.

‘Bit of both. Thought it might save time. We’ve pinned them up in all the hostels too. After the terrible events of yesterday it’s the least we can do.’ He handed his ladle over to one of the teenagers and he, Trevor and Chris walked down one of the

tunnels. Trevor and Chris were using their cups to warm their hands.

‘I saw you outside the factory yesterday,’ Trevor said.

‘Captain Arkwright and myself were in there when it went up.’

‘You shinned up that rope?’

‘No, although I heard about it. Late yesterday afternoon someone snapped through one of the steel padlocks on a ground floor door. Captain Arkwright heard about it and we thought it would be a good idea to go in and see if we could help any of the youngsters. We got more than we bargained for.’

‘Have you talked to anyone about this?’

‘I spoke to Constable Murphy in the hospital last night. But I didn’t see anything useful. One minute I was talking to a couple of young lads who’d made their way down from Scotland in the hope of finding work, the next the air was full of smoke and screaming.’

‘I saw you helping people.’

‘Not out of the building, Sergeant. Only away from it. The firemen rescued those who were trapped, and I led them to the paramedics. Captain Arkwright, not me, was the real heroine. She went up to the second floor to help the people who were trapped. If it hadn’t been for her the death toll would have been much higher.’

‘I had no idea.’ Trevor resolved to talk to Dan to see if he thought it was worth putting all the statements that had been taken after the fire on to a computer to get an overview of who had been in the building when the blaze had started.

‘I was sorry to hear that two of your sergeants were injured,’ Tom commiserated.

‘Given time, they’ll both be fine. Do you do this kind of thing often?’ Trevor nodded back in the direction of the soup wagon.

‘Captain Arkwright and I try to make sure that someone goes out with the cart every night in winter, and a couple of times a week in summer.’

‘Your helpers?’

‘Most of them are either young Salvationists from the citadel, or Christians from the local Evangelical church. They’ve put in a lot of effort. Raising the money for the wagon, begging manufacturers and the chamber of commerce for donations of food, it wasn’t easy. Most of the town’s retailers believed that vandalism would escalate if we attracted the homeless into the centre of town late at night. I don’t think they realise just how many are already here. And, even after the retailers had been won over, the customers were sceptical of our motives. I think they expected us to give out bible tracts along with the food.’

‘You’ve forgotten to mention the police.’

‘We’ve never had any hassle from the bobbies on the beat, only assistance. I think that’s fair comment, Constable Brooke, don’t you?’

Trevor looked at Chris. ‘You’ve worked this area too?’

‘Once or twice.’

‘Inspector Evans was here half an hour ago. He checked everyone then.’

‘In that case there’s no point in us doing it again. Needless to say you’ve seen no sign of our man?’

‘If I do, you’ll be the first to know.’

‘Then we’ll move on. There are a few more places we need to look at before dawn.’ They turned and began to walk back in the direction of the cart. As an afterthought, Trevor asked, ‘you haven’t seen a girl with a couple of boys have you? One with purple hair and one with a bald head with a swastika tattooed on it.’

‘Have they done anything?’

‘Nothing I know about. But they could have been in that factory when it went up yesterday. I was too concerned about my colleagues last night to ask about them in the hospital, and I haven’t seen them since.’

‘They were in the building, but they got out,’ Tom said. ‘If you want to talk to them, they’re around the corner.’

‘I will have a word with them.’

‘Sergeant,’ Tom warned. ‘Tread easy. It’s taken us a long time to get them to come near us.’

‘I only want to talk to them.’ As they rounded the corner, Trevor recognised the small group of teenagers huddled on the ground as the same one he had encountered in Jubilee Street the day before. They each had a blanket, thick grey, old army issue that the volunteers had been handing out. Trevor walked up to them and crouched down beside the girl.

‘You got a bloody nerve coming near us after what you did to our squat.’

‘You all right?’ Trevor asked in concern.

‘Fine in this bloody freezing hole,’ the boy with the bald head retorted angrily. ‘And before you ask, no we haven’t seen that bloody man you’re after. And that’s the last time you talk us into helping the fucking pigs.’

‘We think the man we’re looking for might have set the factory on fire. And, if we hadn’t been watching the building a lot more people might have been hurt.’

‘Ten are dead.’ The girl looked at him with dark, accusing eyes.

‘I know, and I’m really sorry, but with that number of people and all those candles it was bound to happen sooner or later.’

‘Burn in there. Freeze out here, what’s the bloody difference? We’ll all end up dead now that, thanks to you, we’ve nowhere to go.’

‘That’s what I wanted a word with you about.’

‘You going to let us move into your place then?’ the boy with the purple hair demanded belligerently.

‘No, but I know an agency where you can rent bed-sits without a deposit.’

‘Oh yeah. Where’s that then? Never Never Land?’

Trevor handed the girl a piece of paper with an address on it. ‘Go and see that lady in the morning. Mention my name. She’s expecting you and she will help. All of you. I’ve seen the bed-sits. They’re not up to much, but they’re a start. You can stay together if you want.’

‘Why you doing this?’ the girl asked suspiciously.

‘Like the man said, I could be the reason your squat burned down.’

‘As you said, it was bound to happen sooner or later. That’s not the first squat we’ve lost.’

‘I was down on my luck once.’

‘You’re a pig.’

‘Even pigs can be down on their luck. You have any trouble with money, you telephone me. You still got my number?’

‘Yes.’ The girl flashed a defiant look at the boys.

‘Ring me after you move in. And if you need anything, contact Father Sam down the hostel or me.’

‘Pig?’ Jason called after him as he moved away.

‘What?’ Trevor turned around.

‘You’re not as bad as most of your kind. If we see that man, we’ll let you know.’

‘Thanks,’ Trevor smiled as he returned to Chris.

‘Nice place,’ Trevor commented as he dropped Chris off outside the gates of an expensive suburban mansion.

‘My parents,’ Chris explained. ‘I’m saving for a place of my own.’

‘I wouldn’t be in a hurry to leave this if I were you.’

‘It’s theirs, not mine.’

Trevor revved the engine and drove the half a mile to his own house. There were no lights on and none of the curtains were drawn. Fighting a sinking

feeling he walked up the path and let himself in. A crushing silence greeted him. He closed the door, went into the living room and switched on the light. Everything was in its place. It was the same in the kitchen and dining room. Leaving his coat and shoes at the foot of the stairs he raced up them. The bed had been re-made with clean linen. He opened the door between the bedroom and dressing room. His clothes were hanging as he'd left them, but the left-hand rail where Lyn had hung hers was empty.

The bathroom shelf where she had kept her cosmetics and perfume was bare and wiped clean. There never had been anything else of hers on display. Perhaps that had been part of the problem. Nothing in the house had ever belonged to Lyn or been chosen by her, other than her own personal possessions.

Tony remembered someone in his past telling him that people could get used to anything, given time. Experience had taught him it wasn't true. He'd never grown accustomed to living on the streets. He was constantly waiting to move on to better times and better places. It was as though he were playing a role in a long-running series. He had been given the part of a vagrant, and at first he'd treated the situation as if he were researching a role. He immersed himself in the character of a down-and-out, ready to play it to the absolute hilt. He'd frozen in winter, baked during a heat wave, and, apart from the odd shower when he'd slept in a hostel, he hadn't washed. He was verminous, his hair was so thickly matted a comb would never run through it

again unless it was cut, and he stank. He knew he stank because he'd seen people recoil from him in the streets, but he could no longer smell the stench. He lived minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, waiting for the man in charge of this particular production to shout "cut" so he could go back to his old, clean, comfortable way of life.

In the meantime he survived as best he could. He learned to cope with invisibility. If he put out a cardboard tray, with *Homeless Please Help* written on it, people passed as though he wasn't there. If he slept in a doorway or the underpass, the only ones who saw him were the police when they moved him on. But suddenly everything had changed, and not into the bright cosy world he'd been waiting for. Now, he felt as though he could never be invisible enough again.

He entered a small, narrow cul-de-sac. It was residential, well away from the usual haunts of the homeless, but he dare not risk going to those places. Because, if found, he'd be finished. It was cold, he was hungry, but he couldn't go to the DHSS and ask for money, because his picture was plastered all over the local newspaper stands with the headline printed above it.

ARMED AND DANGEROUS. SHOULD NOT BE APPROACHED BY ANY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC.

He stepped back into the shadows and looked around. There were lights on in most of the houses, but one or two were in darkness. Would it be easy to get into them? Would they be empty? And if they were, would they yield enough food and warm

clothes to set him up for another day or two? He crept along, careful to keep his back hunched below the line of the garden walls. Once or twice he stopped and peered cautiously over the brickwork. Darkness was no guarantee that a house would be empty. The occupants could be sitting in a front room, lights off, television on.

The curtains were open in one house and he saw a woman washing dishes at a sink in front of the window facing him. The house next door was in darkness – empty – or were the occupants in another room? He shuddered. How long had it been since he'd eaten? There'd been nothing yesterday and just beans cold from the tin the day before. Strange, he didn't feel hungry, only thirsty. Terribly thirsty. Even if someone was home, they weren't sitting close to the back of the house and there might be an outside tap. Lots of houses had outside taps for garden hoses.

He pressed down on the latch of the door set into the back wall. The click sounded alarmingly loud. He paused, poised ready to run. A dog barked further down the street – then there was silence. He stepped on to a garden path. Shutting the door behind him he crouched low and stole closer to the house. The only light came from the glint of the full moon on the windows. He inched stealthily forward, alert for the slightest sound.

A cloud drifted across the moon. When it sailed past he saw that the kitchen window was closed but not latched. He took out his penknife and slid it beneath the plastic frame. He didn't have to exert much pressure for it to swing out towards him. The

window-sill was bare. He paused again until his ears hurt from the strain of listening. A clock ticked from the room within, music blared out from a television next door. A voice echoed from the end of the street.

Heaving himself up on his hands he tried to haul himself inside. He was so weak it took an eternity. His arms wouldn't bear his weight, but by scraping his knee against the wall and gaining footholds he finally crouched on the sill. Losing his balance he fell into a sink. There was a shattering, tearing noise and the surface he was perched on gave way. He jumped down and turned his ankle. Wincing in pain he looked around. Even in the moonlight he could see that this was no modern kitchen. The sink he'd almost wrenched off the wall was stainless steel, with a dent in the draining board. Probably one he'd just made. He hobbled to a fridge and opened the door. The light illuminated a small piece of cheese carefully wrapped in grease-proof paper, a jar of jam, half a pint of milk and a tub of low fat margarine. Beset by a pang of guilt he closed the door. It looked and felt like the house of someone trying to survive on little money. A pensioner?

He opened a dresser. It contained half a loaf of bread, cut side down on a breadboard, glasses and plates. Taking a glass he filled it with water from the tap and drank deeply. After three thirsty refills he risked leaving the kitchen. A passage led to a cramped living room crammed with heavy, old fashioned furniture. On a sofa covered by a woollen blanket, was a cat. He scooped up the animal, intending to move it to a chair. It hissed and spat at

him before running off. Draping the blanket around his shoulders, he left by the back door.

Further down the street he found a garage with a broken door. The place was cold, draughty, and stank of oil. But, huddled in a corner with the blanket wrapped around his shoulders, he slept warmer than the night before.

‘Could I speak to Sergeant Trevor Joseph please?’

‘Speaking.’

Dan and Peter exchanged glances. Trevor had been acting like a snake with back trouble since he’d put an appearance in the office at nine, earlier than necessary after a night spent combing the streets.

‘Trevor, it’s Daisy.’

‘Hello there.’

As Trevor’s tone changed, Peter lifted his eyebrows at Anna.

‘Have you done anything about that information I gave you yesterday?’

‘No.’

‘I’ve found some old records that might be of interest to you.’

‘Where?’

‘In notes in our files. All the projects carry information on the early transplants. Remember what I told you about exchange of information? The first transplant was carried out on a male patient in his late twenties. The donor was twenty-eight. Does that tie in with your case?’

‘It could do. What are the dates?’

‘There are none, and what’s even more unusual, no photographs. All files should carry detailed shots

of the patient before and after the transplant has taken place.'

'Was the surgeon Marks?'

'Yes.'

'These files, they're in your office?'

'Yes.'

'I'll be with you in ten minutes.'

'You mentioned Marks?' Peter questioned Trevor.

'Daisy told me last night that the only person capable of carrying out a transplant in the country two years ago was a surgeon called Laurence Marks.'

'And you didn't tell us!'

'I only found out late last night before we went looking for Tony.'

'You bloody fool,' Peter said angrily. 'He could be a relative of Brian Marks.'

'Of course. The solicitor. I knew I'd heard the name before.'

'You're turning sloppy in your old age,' Peter said.

'We've only lost twelve hours.'

'I could have interviewed him last night.'

'He's in America.'

'All the more reason to set to work on it sooner, rather than later.'

'You're going to get more information from Dr Randall now?' Dan asked.

'I am.'

'Peter, go with him,' Dan ordered curtly. 'And telephone in with all the information Dr Randall has on this Laurence Marks as soon as you get it.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

‘Files on all twenty eight transplants that have been carried out abroad.’ Daisy heaped the files on her desk, before tossing a file that was thinner than any of the others on the summit of the pile. ‘The telephone number and address of Laurence Marks’s current project in the States is in this one.’

Trevor picked it up and opened it.

‘Would you like coffee?’

‘Please,’ Trevor murmured, already engrossed in the file.

‘Coffee would be fine.’ Peter smiled at her.

‘I’ll ask my secretary to bring it. You can use this office. I have ward rounds.’

‘I’m sorry, we’ve been keeping you,’ Trevor apologised.

‘If you have any questions I should be through in an hour and a half.’

Peter picked up one of the other files after Daisy left. He grimaced at the photograph pinned to the first sheet, the face of a corpse being peeled away from the skull. The second was no better. It was a badly burned face being prepared for surgery.

‘Real bedtime story stuff this. I think I’d rather have the grown up version.’

Trevor looked up quizzically.

‘The one without pictures,’ Peter explained.

‘I wish this one had pictures,’ Trevor complained. ‘All I have is a list of dimensions. Centimetres from eyebrow to eye, from tip of nose to chin.’

‘Sounds like Patrick’s province.’

‘Until we find Tony we have nothing to compare these with.’

‘We have enough photographs of Weaver to paper the station.’

‘Colouring of skin – dark,’ Trevor read out. ‘Weaver’s skin was light.’

‘Presumably you can graft a darker shade of skin on top of a face that was originally lighter, but then it would show at the join. I wonder if they have stitches around the neck like Boris Karloff in Frankenstein?’

‘Can’t you be serious for five minutes?’ Trevor snapped.

‘When Tony turns up it will be easy to check him out. I can see it now. “Excuse me, sir, would you mind removing your tie and unbuttoning your collar so we can look for a stitch-line?”’

‘Have you thought through the implications of this case?’ Trevor sat in Daisy’s chair as her secretary carried in a tray of coffee and biscuits.

‘Thank you, darling.’ Peter winked at the girl and eyed her legs as she left the room. ‘What implications?’ he asked after the girl had closed the door. ‘You mean if you fancy someone’s face you’ll...’

‘I mean for terrorists and criminals.’

‘Criminals as in Anthony Weaver?’

‘Exactly.’

‘We caught up with Weaver because of his fingerprints.’

‘And if they transplant those next?’

‘You’re a real bloody pessimist, aren’t you?’ Peter pulled out his pen and notebook. ‘Name of doctor, Laurence Marks, right?’

‘Yes.’

Trevor pushed the piece of paper with Laurence’s USA address and telephone number towards Peter.

‘What else you got?’

Trevor continued to scan the file. ‘The transplant was carried out two days after the face was lifted from the donor.’

‘How do you store a face until you need it? Next to the beef burgers in the freezer?’

‘We’ll check with Daisy.’

‘Anything on the recipient?’

‘Only that his face was removed after anaesthetic was administered.’

‘Nothing on its condition?’

‘No.’

‘What I can’t understand is why a man like Adam Weaver would want to change his appearance? With his looks he could have pulled any bird he wanted.’

‘In jail? Aren’t you forgetting he was a convicted murderer serving a life sentence with a judge’s recommendation of a minimum thirty years? That can seem like a long time to someone who’s twenty-eight going on twenty-nine.’

‘New face in exchange for a new life.’ Peter heaped three sugars into his coffee. ‘He didn’t get far if that was his intention. Jubilee Street isn’t the kind of new life anyone in their right mind would want for themselves.’

‘Something must have gone wrong.’

‘Very wrong,’ Peter echoed. ‘I wonder what it was.’ He picked up the telephone, ‘I’ll pass Marks’s telephone number on to Dan.’

‘Have you got through to America?’ Peter asked as he and Trevor walked in through the door of the incident room.

‘Yes, but not to Laurence Marks.’

‘I’m not surprised. If I was Marks I’d keep my head down for a while.’

‘Why?’ Dan asked Peter. ‘We’ve no evidence to link him with the mutilation of Anthony George.’

‘Only the transplant notes.’

‘Nothing in them says he knew where the face he used came from.’ Dan replaced the telephone receiver. ‘All I’m getting is “Mr Marks is in conference, and won’t be available for some time.” And the “some time” doesn’t include a date.’

‘You really do expect him to talk to you, don’t you?’ Peter asked Dan.

‘I expect some degree of co-operation from an intelligent man – yes.’

‘Someone’s going to have to go over there,’ Bill predicted.

‘Me, please. Want to come?’ Peter asked Anna.

‘Not this time, Peter.’ Bill turned to Dan. ‘You have a current passport?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Get Sarah Merchant to book tickets for you. When you find Marks, offer immunity, whatever it takes, but get the truth out of him. Preferably one that will stand up in court. Once we know exactly

who and what we're looking for, we might be in a position to clear up this mess.'

'It would be a step in the right direction,' Peter agreed with mock innocence.

'What other leads are being followed?' Bill barked.

'Adam Weaver has a daughter, Hannah. She's living here,' Anna indicated the file on Weaver that Trevor had put in front of her when he'd left for the hospital.

'Here, as in this town?'

'Yes, sir. On Cowslip road, she's living with her mother's sister, a Blanche Davies. The aunt is twenty seven, single and a social worker.'

'If you're up to it, you and Trevor can go round there tonight. Check if the father's tried to get in touch.'

'Why not me?'

'Because I've something else in mind for you, Peter,' Bill smiled coldly. 'In the Inspector's absence you can co-ordinate the on-going search for Tony. Day and night. I'll give you all the men I can spare.'

'We can't search and tag off every area in a town this size.'

'No but we can search and move on.'

'And if he moves in behind us?'

'Stop being bloody awkward, Peter. Given enough men you can herd the vagrants into the underpass in the centre of town and interrogate them. They live in places we don't know about. If our man is still in the area, one of them may have seen him.'

‘And if they have, do you really think they’re going to want to tell us about it?’

‘With your powers of persuasion, Peter. It should be a piece of cake.’

‘I telephoned Blanche Davies. She doesn’t get home until six o’clock. The girl is picked up from school by a neighbour who sits with her until the aunt gets home. I told her we’d be there around eight. Thought it would be best to let them have tea and settle down before we go in.’

‘Good thinking,’ Trevor replied absently, his mind half on the case and half on Lyn. For the first time in six months it didn’t matter what time he got off shift. He’d been wrong, it wasn’t better to go back to an empty house. Even the prospect of Lyn angry was better than no Lyn at all.

Trevor and Anna drove up Cowslip Road and saw a gleaming grey Mercedes, complete with capped and uniformed chauffeur, parked outside Blanche Davies’ house. It looked ludicrous outside the semi, which was small even by the standards of the estate. The tiny front garden sported a neat square of turf surrounded by a border of sprouting bulbs.

‘Social workers must get better pay than us,’ Anna observed looking at the car.

‘I doubt that’s hers.’ Trevor eyed the chauffeur, filing a description into his mind.

Before Trevor had time to switch off the engine, the front door opened and a man came out of the house.

‘That’s Marks.’ Anna cried.

‘The solicitor?’

‘I’ve never seen a photograph of the surgeon.’

‘I wonder why he’s such a long way from home,’ Trevor mused.

‘Do you want me to ask?’

‘We’re not here to question him. Whatever his reasons we’ll find them out in our own good time. Nice cashmere coat,’ Trevor observed. A few months ago he wouldn’t have known cashmere from worsted. Just one more thing he had to be grateful to Lyn for.

An attractive blonde walked into the doorway.

Anna caught her breath. ‘She’s the spitting image of her sister.’

Brian Marks held out his hand and the woman took it. The solicitor leant forward and kissed her on the cheek.

‘Very friendly.’

‘Come on, Trevor, given the age difference, friendship is all it is,’ Anna scoffed.

‘Age difference doesn’t stop some men.’

‘You’re forgetting I’ve talked to Marks. A gap of forty years would bother someone of the old school type like him,’ Anna slid down in her seat, as the solicitor walked to his car, although she needn’t have bothered. Looking neither left nor right, Brian Marks climbed into the back seat. Moments later the Mercedes slid away from the kerb.

Trevor looked at Anna. ‘Shall we knock the door?’

‘Miss Blanche Davies?’ Anna asked as the blonde opened the door to them. Trevor stood back. When he had seen Blanche Davies from a distance

he had thought her pretty. Close-up he could see that she was beautiful. Head-turningly beautiful, with the kind of looks that had enabled her sister to embark on a theatrical career.

‘You must be Sergeant Bradley.’ She looked from Anna to Trevor.

‘I am, and this is Sergeant Trevor Joseph.’

‘Please come in.’ She opened the door wide. A girl from the same astonishingly beautiful mould as Blanche was sitting at a table in the living room. Both Anna and Trevor recognised Adam Weaver’s daughter from the photographs in the suitcase, but if they hadn’t seen them, they would have taken her for Blanche Davies’ daughter. The resemblance was remarkable.

‘This is my niece, Hannah,’ Blanche ushered them towards a small, wooden-framed three piece suite. ‘Have you finished your homework, Hannah?’

‘Yes, Auntie.’

‘These police officers have come to discuss a case with me.’

‘Can I go upstairs and watch television?’

‘Yes, and afterwards we’ll have that game of chess I promised you.’

The girl packed her school books into a small rucksack and Trevor had a sudden pang of nostalgia for a family life he hadn’t experienced since he’d left home. He wondered what a daughter of his and Lyn would look like, should they ever be lucky enough to have one. She would be dark of course, with brown eyes. Both he and Lyn had brown eyes, although his hair wasn’t as dark as hers. It was most peculiar, while he’d been living with Lyn all he had

been able to think about was Daisy. Now that Lyn had left him all he could think about was her.

‘Pretty girl,’ Anna complimented after Hannah left the room.

‘I have difficulty remembering she’s not mine.’

‘How long has she lived with you?’

‘Two and a half years.’

Trevor recalled that two and a half years ago Laura Weaver’s hacked and dismembered body had been discovered by a postman, whose curiosity had driven him to follow a trail of blood from the front door of the Weaver’s cottage.

‘Would you like coffee?’

‘No thank you, we’ve just eaten,’ Anna refused for both of them.

Blanche removed a tray of coffee cups and uneaten biscuits from the table and carried it through to the kitchen. When she returned she sat opposite them in an armchair. ‘You said on the telephone it was something to do with my brother-in-law.’

‘Have you heard from him since he escaped from prison?’ Trevor asked.

‘No, Sergeant.’ She crossed her legs. ‘And that has surprised me.’

‘Why?’

‘Whatever faults he had, and there were quite a few, Adam was a devoted father. And I have to concede that as far as I could tell, he was also a devoted husband.’

‘But he did kill your sister?’

Blanche looked Trevor straight in the eye. ‘That’s what the jury decided. Although if you had

asked me beforehand, I would have said Adam was incapable of killing a mouse, let alone a human being.'

'Are you saying that you don't think he killed your sister?'

She thought carefully before she answered. 'What I'm saying is that from what I saw, Adam and Laura's relationship was no better, and no worse, than any other married couple's, particularly when you consider the nature of their profession. If anything, Laura was the more highly-strung and volatile of the two. When the police knocked on my door to tell me that they suspected Adam of killing her, I found it hard to believe. Later when I heard how Laura had died, I found it impossible. I always thought of Adam as a singularly gentle person, but then of course like most actors he could be charming when he chose to be. Utterly charming,' she murmured. 'And like most actors, including my sister, it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between the real person and the role-playing. But for all of that, the Adam I knew could not have killed any living thing,' she stressed, 'certainly not in the way described in court.'

'It must have been a difficult time for you, and Hannah,' Anna sympathised.

'It wasn't just Laura's murder and the trial. My father died of a heart attack a month before Laura. My mother was terminally ill with cancer at the time. She died shortly after the trial finished, and my brother who had to identify Laura's body, had a nervous breakdown.'

'Leaving you to cope?'

‘Someone had to. There was Hannah,’ Blanche said simply.

‘Where was Hannah when it happened?’

‘Staying with a school friend. It was the friend’s birthday party and she’d been invited to spend the night.’

Trevor tried to remember the Weaver family’s movements on the night Laura had been murdered. Laura Weaver had been killed in their country cottage, and Adam had claimed that he’d visited an off-licence and slept at their London flat, but he’d been unable to produce a single witness to substantiate his alibi. And he’d admitted that he and his wife were having problems and they’d quarrelled earlier that day.

‘Did your sister tell you that her marriage was rocky?’ Anna asked.

‘As I told the police at the time, Laura didn’t confide in me. I knew little more than what appeared in the gossip columns. My sister had been successful in her own right, and the theatrical world is a social one. She and Adam went to lots of parties. The chances are that, if Hannah hadn’t been staying over at a friend’s that night, she would have been left in the London flat with her nanny. Hannah often only saw her parents at weekends.’

‘I remember Laura being a hostess on a game show.’

‘If you recall that much, Sergeant Bradley, you must also remember that her name was linked with that of the show’s presenter.’

‘Just as Adam Weaver’s was linked with that of his co-star.’

‘That rumour was started by a journalist, who needed a story,’ Blanche said dismissively.

‘Did your niece come to live with you straight after the murder?’

‘The day after. The police took Adam into custody to help with their enquiries so I went up to London to fetch her.’ Blanche opened a cigarette box on the coffee table at her side. Taking one, she offered the box around. When the others declined she apologised. ‘I know I shouldn’t, but since the murder I succumb now and again. Laura and I weren’t close, but we shared a lot of things – including our childhood.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Anna said. ‘We must be bringing back painful memories.’

‘You are,’ Blanche replied honestly. ‘Where are all these questions leading?’

‘We have reason to believe that your brother-in-law may be living in this area.’

Blanche stared at Trevor. ‘So that’s why you asked if he’s contacted us?’

‘His fingerprints were identified inside a suitcase found in the town yesterday. Are you absolutely sure he hasn’t tried to contact you or his daughter?’

‘I’d know if Adam came anywhere near us, Sergeant.’

Anna glanced at Trevor, and he knew what she was thinking. Just how much should Blanche Davies be told about Adam Weaver’s change in appearance?

‘We don’t think Adam Weaver looks like he did two years ago,’ he said carefully.

‘Adam was an actor.’ Blanche flicked her cigarette into the ashtray. ‘I went to see him in *The Merchant of Venice* at the Theatre Royal in Bristol four years ago. The first act was over before I realised he was playing Shylock.’

‘I don’t mean a theatrical disguise.’ Trevor pulled the Tony photographs from his pocket, and handed them to Blanche. ‘We think this is what he looks like now.’

‘But that’s impossible. The mouth is entirely different, the nose...’ she looked up. ‘You think he’s had plastic surgery?’

‘Sort of,’ Trevor prevaricated.

‘This looks nothing like him. Nothing at all.’ She thumbed through the prints, before pausing at the full-length one of Tony taken from the video film. ‘You really think this man could be Adam?’

‘I know it’s hard to believe, but yes.’

‘It’s not just the face, it’s the body. This man is so thin.’

‘Would you mind if we showed Hannah these photographs?’ Anna asked.

Blanche drew on her cigarette and thought for a moment before answering. ‘Would she have to be told why?’

‘Not if you didn’t want us to tell her.’

‘Then how would you explain your reason for showing them to her?’

‘That we’re looking for the man. That we’re hoping she might have seen him.’

‘She’s a bright child.’

‘You said yourself he looks nothing like Adam Weaver.’

Blanche stubbed her cigarette in the ashtray before going to the foot of the stairs and calling her niece.

‘Haven’t you done enough bloody damage?’ Peter hissed as he bumped into Valance in the doorway of Tom Morris’s hostel.

‘The public have a right to know the facts.’

‘The public don’t give a bloody damn about facts. You’re a ghoul, pandering to ghouls, Valance. The lowest life-form on earth...’

‘Come in, officers,’ Tom Morris stood above them on the stairs. He stepped back to make room for Peter and Andrew to pass.

Valance continued out through the front door.

‘You get a lot of trouble with him?’ Peter asked.

‘Nigel? No, all I have to do is steer him towards one or two of our more vociferous and aggressive clients.’

‘I’ll remember that technique the next time I bump into him.’

‘He won’t be hanging around here much longer,’ Tom showed them into his office. ‘The dead are dead, and the injured out of sight in hospital. There’s nothing left to hold the media’s interest, although we do have one thing to thank the press for. Since the national coverage of the fire, donations of cash and food have flooded in.’

‘I hope you’re making the most of them.’

‘We are,’ Tom answered. ‘Everyone who works here is only too aware how short the public’s memory can be when it comes to deserving causes.’

‘We called in to see if you’d heard any more about our man?’

‘If we had, we would have contacted you. Have you tried Sam Mayberry?’

‘We’ve tried everyone including Captain Arkwright.’

‘Not likely to find him there.’

‘Unless he’s wearing drag,’ Peter suggested facetiously.

‘I hear some of the squatters from that factory have moved into a derelict pub down the bottom end of High Street,’ Tom closed the blinds on the window.

‘We checked the place last night. In fact we combed the whole bloody town last night,’ Andrew grumbled.

‘And we’ll be doing the same tonight,’ Peter echoed. ‘Can we run through the places your soup kitchen covers, Tom? It might save us some leg-work if we leave a radio with your people again.’

‘As Constable Murphy saw last night, we cover the underpass, the multi-storeys, the docks – and that’s it. We avoid the squats, as we can’t condone law-breaking. All the volunteers have seen the photographs. We have one on our barrow. Tell us what more we can do, and we’ll do it.’

Hannah, hands behind her back, stared at the photograph, bit her bottom lip to stop it from trembling, and nodded.

‘You’re sure, Hannah?’ Blanche asked.

‘That’s the man,’ Hannah whispered. ‘The man who was outside my school. The one Miss Phillips telephoned you about. Who is he?’

‘Just a man who’s been sleeping on the streets,’ Anna answered.

‘Has he done anything wrong?’

‘We can’t be sure, not yet,’ Anna answered. ‘But we want to talk to him about a fire in a building.’

‘He lit it?’

‘Perhaps not, but we do know he was in the building and he might have seen the person who did.’

Hannah dropped the photograph on to the table. ‘Then he is just a dirty old man?’

They all picked up on the disappointment in her voice.

‘I’m afraid it looks like it, Hannah.’ Blanche Davies’ voice was unsteady as she reached for another cigarette. ‘You can go back upstairs, we won’t be much longer.’

‘Can I get myself a glass of milk?’

‘Of course, darling.’

She skipped off into the kitchen leaving all three adults conscious that she was still within earshot.

Trevor picked up the lighter next to the cigarette box and lit Blanche’s cigarette for her.

‘I should have remembered, I’m sorry. I never connected the incident to Adam,’ Blanche said after they’d heard the kitchen door close. ‘Hannah’s headmistress telephoned me at work last week. She said a vagrant had been seen outside the playground

watching the children. When someone noticed him, Hannah ran out of the playground. She thought it was her father –' her voice tailed off.

'Why would Hannah have thought that? Anna asked. You just said yourself that this man looks nothing like Adam Weaver'

'She followed his back, when he turned and Hannah saw his face she stopped running after him.'

'Were the local police given his description?' Trevor dropped the lighter on to the table.

'The officer who interviewed Hannah and the teachers said there wasn't much he could do other than keep an eye out for the vagrant and ask him what he was doing.'

'Did you get the name of the policeman?'

'He told me, but I can't remember. The headmistress will have it. It's Cowslip Primary School.'

'You said Hannah believed this man was her father until he turned around?' Anna asked.

'I assumed it was wishful thinking. I told you, Adam was a good father. Hannah misses him. The mind can play curious tricks.' She looked Trevor squarely in the eye. 'You're absolutely sure this is Adam?'

'He has his fingerprints.'

'What happens now?' Blanche asked.

'We have his description; we keep looking until we find him.'

'Did we see Brian Marks leaving here just as we arrived?' Trevor asked.

'Yes,' Blanche answered, surprised at the abrupt change of subject.

‘May I ask what he was doing here?’

‘He’s our family solicitor. He handled Laura’s estate after the – accident.’ She nodded towards the kitchen to remind Trevor that Hannah was still nearby. ‘Laura engaged him because her cottage was only four miles from his office.’

‘Was that the cottage where –’

‘Where the accident happened,’ Blanche interrupted when Hannah returned to the living room with her glass of milk and a plate of toast, which explained the time she’d taken. ‘Be with you soon, darling.’

Blanche waited until Hannah’s bedroom door closed. ‘His firm also handled my brother-in-law’s defence. I’ve always found Mr Marks to be a man of the highest integrity.’

‘I’m not questioning his integrity, Miss Davies,’ Trevor said.

‘But you seem to know him?’

‘In connection with another case,’ Anna interposed.

‘I don’t know what I would have done without him after Laura died. He settled all the business, paid all the bills, even the ones for the funeral. And he handled the sale of the cottage and the London flat as well as Adam’s defence. In fact I’ve now put my own estate in his hands, and made his firm executors of Hannah’s affairs. My sister left Hannah far better provided for than I would have given her credit for. One day Hannah is going to be quite a wealthy lady.’

‘Your sister took out insurance policies?’ Trevor asked.

‘Yes. It amazed me when Mr Marks told me about them. It seemed out of character for Laura, but she’d taken out a substantial lump-sum insurance policy payable on her death, as well as an annuity which more than covers Hannah’s living expenses – and that will continue until Hannah finishes full-time education. Mr Marks has taken an almost fatherly interest in Hannah. He calls in to see us quite regularly. Yet it’s strange –’

‘What?’

‘He never met Laura. One of his partners drew up her will. But his firm did organise Adam’s defence. As I said, my brother-in-law is an intelligent man and can be delightful company when he wants to be. Perhaps he charmed Brian Marks into taking care of Hannah for him.’

‘Perhaps.’ Trevor rose from his seat. ‘Thank you very much for your time, Miss Davies.’

‘Thank you for coming. It’s odd, but you’ve put my mind at rest. I was worried when I heard that a tramp had been watching the school-yard. I know it sounds strange, with Adam being convicted of murdering my sister, but I find it reassuring to think that it might have been him watching Hannah, and not some dirty old man.’

‘Anything strike you as peculiar, Trevor?’ Anna asked, as they sat in his car at a set of traffic lights.

‘Nothing in particular.’ He wondered if her hands were giving her trouble. She had seemed preoccupied since the fire.

‘Brian Marks took a paternal interest in Anthony George, and visited Mrs George regularly

in her home. Now he's doing the same with Blanche Davies and Hannah.'

'He's an old-fashioned family solicitor.'

'Maybe,' Anna conceded. 'But, Adam Weaver's a convicted murderer. He killed Blanche Davies' sister, and she's looking after his daughter, so you'd think she'd be petrified at the thought of him coming near them. Instead she seemed to welcome the idea of Adam Weaver getting in touch with them.'

'She also said he could be charming. Perhaps he charmed her too. They say most psychopaths are intelligent, endearing souls.'

She wanted to shout that whatever else Adam Weaver might be he wasn't a psychopath, but she managed to contain herself. If she revealed her past relationship with the actor, she'd risk being taken off the case. And she wanted a chance to prove herself as good a detective as the men she worked with.

'Blanche Davies certainly seems to be taken with Adam Weaver,' Trevor drove off as the lights changed. 'Let's hope she won't have to pay for her infatuation.'

'You heard her; she doesn't believe Weaver killed her sister,' Anna reminded him.

'He's been tried, convicted and sentenced. That's good enough for me. I'll ask the super to give her and the child round-the-clock protection, just in case.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Trevor drove from Blanche Davies' house into the centre of town. He left the car on yellow lines and he and Anna walked down one of the ramps into the underpass. Tom Morris's evangelists were manning the soup kitchen, but there was no sign of Tom.

'They have a rota,' Peter explained when they finally tracked him and a shivering, blue-faced Andrew down.

'No sign of Tony?' Trevor didn't know why he was even asking.

'If I was him I'd be half way to the Caribbean on a banana boat. At least it would be warmer than this,' Peter replied.

Anna held up her bandaged hands and shook her head at one of the youngsters who offered her soup.

'How's the hands, Sarge?' Andrew asked.

'They've promised me they'll be almost serviceable after one more dressing in out-patients.'

'I think it's time all sick people were put to bed so they can put in a full day tomorrow. Come on, Sergeant.' Trevor laid a hand on Anna's shoulder. 'You too, Peter. Eight suit tomorrow morning?'

'Great, a lie in.' Peter said sarcastically.

'Lift?'

Peter nodded. 'Supper for two at my place,' he whispered to Anna.

'I'm tired. Perhaps tomorrow.' After talking to Blanche Davies all she wanted was her own bed, and time to think about her present – and her past.

Trevor led the way back to his car. They passed a narrow lane between a furniture store and a burger bar. At the far end, the pale outline of a skip shimmered in the darkness. The sea of glistening black bags that filled it heaved slightly as Trevor unlocked the doors. A dark head peered cautiously over the edge. Feverish brown eyes focused on Anna, watching as she and Peter climbed into Trevor's car. The engine turned, there was a puff of smoke from the exhaust and the car drove away.

Ten minutes later Andrew emerged from the underpass with Chris. The head burrowed underneath the bags again. They smelled, but only of food. It was a small price to pay for security and warmth on a cold night.

When dawn broke, the town centre was deserted. The soup kitchen had long since packed up. The volunteers were sleeping in their soft, comfortable beds. The town's homeless, huddled in rags, newspapers and cardboard boxes, were beginning to crawl out of the sheltered corners they had found. A milk float rattled around the roundabout, the clinking of bottles diminishing with distance until silence reigned once more.

Before the fingers of chilly light reached the lane, the bags in the skip shifted. A man emerged from the billowing mass. Dropping over the side he landed lightly on the soles of his feet. He ran into the shadows that fringed the wall of the furniture

shop before moving cautiously on to the main street. Pulling up the collar of a denim shirt he'd scavenged from the clothing skip, he put his head down and walked towards the YMCA.

The rooms on the top floors of the building were rented to students. They used the showers and bathrooms on that floor, which meant he could slip into the one on the ground floor and lock the door. He read the clock as he passed the church tower. Three and a half hours. That was all he had to wait.

The caretaker unlocked the door to the bleak hall that housed the Job Club at eight-thirty. The first members weren't due in until nine, but the keen ones came in early. Hugh Thomas had sent his C.V. to thirty-six different firms in a fortnight. Something was going to break – and soon – he knew it. He opened the door, stood and stared.

'Hey, you're not in the club!' he shouted at the filthy individual who was standing at a table flicking through the telephone directory. The man looked up. Hugh registered sunken cheeks covered in stubble, dark eyes, trembling hands, and the stink of sweat and unwashed clothes.

'Sorry, mate, just looking for someone's number. Didn't mean no harm.' The man moved towards him. Repelled, Hugh retreated. The man barged through the door into the corridor, knocking over the next arrival.

'Hey, didn't that look like...'

The interloper didn't wait to hear any more. He had to find somewhere to hole up. Thanks to the directory he had somewhere to go at nightfall, but

not sooner lest he be seen. Where? Since the fire the police were everywhere, checking and double-checking every empty building. Thoughts whirled round his mind like dead leaves in an autumn wind. He was no longer capable of reasoning, only feeling. Cold – hunger – exhaustion – paralysed his mind. He couldn't recall being this wretched before. Not even the first night he had been forced to sleep on a street.

A police car hurtled around the corner, siren blaring. Behind the YMCA were rows of terraces, including the house he had broken into the night before. Covering the same ground twice was risky, but if he stayed it would only be a matter of time before he was picked up. One or two of those houses had to be empty. Some people had day jobs.

He walked down the first back alley he came to. A woman dressed in a tailored suit was hanging washing on a line. Men's trousers, shirts, towels, a pullover. When she finished she called a dog into the house. He heard her lock the back door. After five minutes he risked taking a closer look. Seeing no movement he jumped over the wall. The dog began to bark, hurling itself against the patio doors. He froze, waiting and watching, but no one came. He'd struck lucky. There was a shed and a greenhouse. The shed was locked, the greenhouse wasn't, and there were reed screens inside the glass to shade the plants from the sun. He went inside, closed the door and lowered the blinds.

A gravel path ran down the centre of the greenhouse. The stones pressed into his skin as he lay on them, but he was so tired it didn't matter.

Discomfort would wake him in a few hours. The woman had obviously gone to work. He hoped it was a full-time, not part-time, job. Two or three hours. That's all he needed. The weather was good, the washing would dry. He'd noticed an outside tap. He would clean up, change, and head out of town. But not now. Now all he needed was sleep.

'Dan called yet?' Anna asked as she walked into the office. Peter and Trevor were sitting at opposite ends of Trevor's desk, poring over the night shift's reports.

'He's probably only just landed and New York is four hours behind us,' Trevor answered.

'You can't believe a bloody word a junkie says,' Peter said flatly, continuing an argument that had been raging between him and Trevor.

'What's this?' Anna sat at her desk and attempted to flex her bandaged fingers.

'We have a spaced-out junkie who thinks he saw Tony sleeping in a skip at the back of the burger bar last night.'

'Was the area searched?'

'From one end to the other. Twice,' Peter asserted.

'Inside the skip?'

'I don't know,' he admitted.

'If you were a beat constable would you climb up to your neck in half-eaten chips and burgers to check out a skip for a suspect?' Trevor asked.

'If it had to be done.'

'It's a pity not all beat constables are as conscientious as you, Peter.'

‘I tell you that guy wasn’t compos mentis.’

‘I’m the senior, permanent sergeant assigned to this squad, and with Dan away that makes me officer in charge. We empty the skip and search it.’

‘He was probably never there,’ Peter replied.

‘It’s not as if we’re inundated with leads crying out to be followed.’

‘And now you’ve elected yourself, Bwana, you don’t intend to dirty your hands doing the actual work.’

‘Someone has to wait here for the Inspector’s call.’

‘So it’s my job?’

‘Seeing as how you want it, Peter,’ Trevor smiled.

‘Something tells me I’m going to get it, whether I want it or not. Give me two constables,’ Peter held up his bandaged arm, ‘and I’ll do the supervising.’

‘Sadist.’

‘Sir,’ Andrew knocked on the door and walked in with Chris. ‘Our man was seen in a job club in the YMCA this morning, before nine.’

Trevor glanced at the clock on the wall. Half past nine.

‘You sure?’ Peter demanded.

‘No doubt about it, a job club member...’ Andrew consulted his notebook, ‘Hugh Thomas, walked into the club early and saw him reading the telephone directory.’

‘And you didn’t get him?’ Trevor groaned.

‘They didn’t phone us until after he’d gone.’

‘I’ll ask the super to put more men into that area.’

‘The town’s crawling with men.’

‘Then it will crawl some more.’

‘Did this Hugh Thomas see what name Tony was looking up?’ Anna asked.

‘Unfortunately our man closed the book before he left,’ Chris leaned on the back of a chair. ‘But Mr Thomas did say that it looked as though he was going through the names near the beginning of the book.’

‘The beginning —’ Trevor looked at Anna. ‘Davies?’ he suggested.

‘You have asked the super to give Blanche and Hannah round the clock protection?’ she asked.

‘Yes.’ Trevor reached for the telephone on his desk. ‘But I’ll up the cover to two men. Just in case.’

‘I know my rights, Inspector Evans. I don’t have to speak to you.’

‘No, you don’t, Dr Marks, but...’

‘Mr Marks, I’m a surgeon. You are a British policeman, and I am now a permanent resident of the United States of America. Events in the UK don’t concern me.’

Dan shifted on the leather lobby chair in an attempt to get comfortable. Marks had been uncooperative from the outset. It had taken the threat of publicity to get the man to meet him in the foyer of the hotel that the conference was being held in. And a journey of over fourteen hours via two airports and a courtesy call to a New York police station had taken its toll, even before he’d met the surgeon with his neatly manicured hands,

impeccably trimmed beard and moustache, and immaculately tailored Saville Row suit.

‘Mr Marks,’ Dan summoned the last of his patience. ‘Last week I was investigating a murder. A man was soaked in petrol and set alight. He was still screaming when he was found in the centre of a fireball minutes later. Have you any idea what it must be like to burn alive, Mr Marks?’

‘No, Inspector. But I fail to see what interest this brutal crime can hold for me.’

‘That was the first murder, Mr Marks. I began by investigating one. Now I am investigating eleven. Ten more people burnt to death when a derelict building was deliberately set ablaze. One of the victims was a fireman.’

‘So, you’re looking for an arsonist who has been at work in Britain in the past few weeks, when I’ve been here.’

‘This is the man we’re looking for, Mr Marks.’ Dan produced a photograph of Tony. ‘I see from the expression on your face that you know who he is.’

‘You’re seeing something that isn’t there, Inspector.’

‘Were you aware that he was a convicted murderer when you operated on him? Did he agree to be your guinea pig? Did you promise him a new face, and a ticket to a new life? Did you offer him anything else, Mr Marks? Money? A job? Before you dumped him on skid row?’

‘You have evidence to substantiate this line of questioning, Inspector? Because if you don’t, you’ll be hearing from my lawyer.’

Dan opened his briefcase and pulled out a file. It was a photocopy of the one Daisy had found in the hospital giving the medical details of a face transplant carried out on a twenty-eight-year-old male.

‘There’s no date on this. Or any indication of who the surgeon was.’ Marks barely glanced at the papers before handing them back to Dan.

‘Look at the end of the document, not the beginning.’

Marks turned over the pages. A name and date was scrawled at the bottom of the last one. ‘But that isn’t my writing – it could have been added to the document at any time.’

‘But you agree the document originated with you?’

‘I don’t have to listen to this.’ Laurence Marks left his chair.

‘No, you don’t, Mr Marks. But there is sufficient evidence in these papers for the authorities to apply for your extradition.’

‘On what charge?’

‘Perverting the course of justice. That’s a serious offence in a murder inquiry with eleven dead and thirty injured. All I’m asking for is an hour or two of your time. Your conference has finished for the day. I promise you, any information you give me relevant to the face transplant you carried out on this man,’ he tapped the photograph of Tony, ‘will remain confidential.’

Laurence Marks hesitated. ‘Are you promising me immunity from prosecution?’

‘Only from charges relating to the actual transplant. Not the subsequent or prior events.’

‘And the harvesting of the face?’

Dan had already stretched his authority beyond its limits. ‘Not the harvesting.’

Laurence Marks invited Dan to his suite. The air-conditioning kept the atmosphere at a comfortable temperature; the double-glazing effectively shut out the noise from the street; the beige and blue decor neither pleased nor displeased. They could have been in a five star hotel in any city in the world.

‘Drink?’ Marks went to the bar.

‘No thank you.’

‘Take a seat.’ Marks poured himself a large bourbon. ‘You can begin by telling me exactly how you think I can help you.’

‘Perhaps it would be better, Mr Marks, if I began by telling you what we know. We know you operated on a healthy young man, removing his face and transplanting the face of Anthony George who had recently died of natural causes. We also know there was no medical reason for the surgery, and shortly afterwards your guinea pig patient was living rough on the streets.’

‘You say there was no medical reason for the transplant, Inspector. What if I told you the operation was pioneering, successful and has proved of incalculable benefit to the development of the face-transplant programme and the well-being of subsequent patients?’

‘My approval or disapproval is immaterial, Mr Marks. Who approached you to carry out this particular face transplant – and why?’

‘If I told you, I would be in breach of patient/doctor confidentiality.’

‘We have established that you were working in the hospital where Anthony George died. And you were on duty the night the face was removed from his corpse.’

‘I may have been on duty at the hospital that night, but I wasn’t the only surgeon on the premises capable of carrying out that procedure.’

‘You were the only consultant plastic surgeon on duty that night. We have sworn statements from every member of staff in that hospital, detailing their whereabouts at the time Anthony George’s face was removed. Even two years later, we should be able to establish that you had the opportunity.’

Marks carried his glass over to a chair, and sat down. ‘So did others.’

‘A scandal could affect your career and the transplant programme,’ Dan warned.

‘You’d risk sabotaging, perhaps even ending, a programme vital to the rehabilitation of damaged people, to carry out a personal witch hunt against me?’

‘I will do whatever is necessary to remove a murderer from the streets,’ Dan replied.

‘If I tell you what I know, will you give me your word that you won’t contact the press about our programme?’

‘I can guarantee that.’

‘The operation was performed in a private clinic. I rented the room and the theatre facilities and engaged an anaesthetist and a nurse to look after my subject.’

Dan winced at the use of the word “subject”.
‘And the recipient?’

‘If I knew his name, I’ve forgotten it.’

Dan produced the folder of photographs. He removed a studio shot of Adam Weaver, taken when he’d been working on the detective series. ‘Was this the man?’

‘It was.’

‘You’re certain?’

‘Absolutely, I studied that face before grafting on the new one.’

‘There was nothing wrong with it?’

‘No.’

‘Didn’t you ask why a man with perfect facial features should want a transplant?’

‘I knew he was a convicted killer serving a life sentence. He’d put his name forward as a subject prepared to assist in medical research.’

Dan had heard of medical research programmes being carried out in prisons. The testing of new antibiotics and cures for the common cold. But there was a world of difference between those programmes and what Marks had done to Weaver. ‘Did you discuss the nature of the surgery with your subject beforehand?’

‘It wasn’t necessary. I required a guinea pig. The man had volunteered.’

‘You said his name wasn’t important, yet you knew he was serving a life sentence?’

‘His face had been splashed across the front pages of the newspapers; he was appealing against his sentence.’

‘Did you speak to Adam Weaver’s solicitor?’

‘Adam Weaver?’

‘Your subject.’ Dan’s patience was wearing thin.

‘No.’ Mark’s reply was too quick, too finite.

‘Because there was no mention in the press of an appeal, but if there was to have been one, his solicitor would have known about it, and,’ Dan raised his eyes to Marks’s. ‘Weaver’s solicitor has the same surname as you.’

Laurence Marks drained his glass and walked over to the bar. ‘Brian Marks is my uncle. I was living in his house when I did the transplant.’

‘And Brian Marks was both Anthony George’s and Adam Weaver’s solicitor.’

‘I did not discuss the transplant programme with my uncle.’

Dan remained sceptically silent.

‘I needed a donor and I needed a subject. I was in touch with the prison authorities. My subject had signed a medical release form stating that he wished to participate in research programmes. The donor face was available. If I hadn’t taken it that night it would have been cremated a few days later. Anthony George was carrying a donor card. I checked with the casualty sister.’

‘A card that has no validity unless it is endorsed by next-of-kin,’ Dan said.

‘Research was at a crucial stage. Subjects were in short supply. A major project was in danger of

losing its funding, and it wasn't as though anyone was damaged.'

'Except possibly your subject, Mr Marks.'

'A convicted killer, Inspector Evans.'

'Want coffee? I'll hold it for you,' Trevor said to Anna.

'It's time to call a taxi.' Anna held up her hands. 'I have to go to the hospital. My dressings need changing.'

'Take the rest of the afternoon off.'

'I intend to. It was bloody agony the last time they did it. In fact it's bloody agony all the time. I don't think I've slept through a night since it happened.'

'Could be because you're sleeping with Peter.'

Knowing Trevor was fishing for gossip, Anna smiled. 'I am not. And in case you haven't noticed, the man's a pussycat in my hands.'

'You've pulled his claws?'

'And he hasn't even noticed. Do you know what sounds irresistible? A couple of tranquillisers, a good video, a bottle of wine, and fish and chips.' She grinned at him 'They promised to free my thumbs today, so I should be able to grip without getting my bandages filthy.'

'Grip what? Peter's neck?'

'Hopefully, with plastic bags over my hands, a bath sponge.'

Trevor left his desk. 'I'll run you to the hospital.'

'There's no need. The taxi service is good.'

‘After a morning spent in this place, I’m ready for a break.’

‘Did you discuss this first transplant with anyone, Mr Marks?’

‘Like who?’

‘Your colleagues? Your uncle?’

‘Not everyone forgets what they’ve already said, Inspector. I told you my uncle knew nothing of this; but my colleagues knew of my success. I delivered a report to the firm sponsoring the programme and medical representatives from rival programmes, and I took care to see that my work was properly documented, and photographed.’

‘There were no photographs in the file we saw in the burns unit in England.’

‘There wouldn’t have been. Given the press coverage the guinea pig had received, I insisted on concealing both the subject’s and the donor’s identities. Only the sponsors were given full photographic evidence.’

‘And your sponsors were satisfied with that?’

‘I’d accomplished what no other surgeon in my field had. I’d proved that a face transplant could be carried out with minimal scarring, and many people have had cause to be grateful to my trail-blazing since,’ he added smugly.

‘You say the procedure was fully documented, did that include release forms giving both the subject’s and the donor’s permissions?’

‘The documents included copies of Anthony George’s donor card, and the subject’s medical release forms.’

‘For that specific surgery?’

‘For general medical research.’

‘You removed the donor face?’

Marks remained silent.

Dan tried another tack. ‘Where was it kept until the transplant took place?’

‘In ideal conditions in the clinic until I was ready to use it. I admit I transported it there myself.’

‘Then you carried out the transplant. And afterwards?’

‘Afterwards?’

‘Post-surgical treatment?’ Dan pressed him.

‘I kept the subject tranquillised to minimise damage from inadvertent movements during the healing process. I saw him daily for a week after the operation and on a twice-weekly basis for three weeks after that. By then the man had made a full recovery. I then left the country.’

‘And the man?’

‘I never saw him again.’

‘You didn’t arrange for him to be returned to prison?’

‘I can’t be expected to keep tabs on my ex-patients.’

‘Not even a guinea pig of such importance?’

‘The last time I saw my patient was a month after the transplant. I then left the UK to take up the position of director of a transplant programme here in the States that had been offered to me by the programme sponsors.’

‘You didn’t monitor your subject’s long-term reaction to your pioneering surgical techniques?’ Dan asked.

‘At the risk of repeating myself, I followed his case for a month, no longer.’

‘Dr Randall, who works on a similar programme to yours, told one of my colleagues that patients frequently develop problems of adjustment after a face transplant.’

‘I would say inevitably, rather than frequently.’

‘Yet knowing this, you didn’t arrange for your guinea pig to receive post-operative psychological evaluation?’

‘I carried out the procedure on an experimental basis, on a volunteer.’

‘Who, in your opinion, had no rights?’

‘Convicted murderers have few rights in the eyes of the law.’

‘Did you prescribe any drugs for him?’

‘The usual. Painkillers, tranquillisers...’

‘Enough to turn him into a junkie?’

‘I resent the inference, Inspector.’

‘This man,’ Dan held up the photograph of Tony again, ‘was filmed by a television crew less than a month ago. He was showing signs of substance abuse.’

‘You can hardly blame me for the state of a patient two years after my last professional appointment with him.’

‘When you left the country, did you arrange for your patient to receive any further treatment at all?’

‘The surgery was successful, the subject made a full physical recovery.’

‘And that was it. The end of your involvement?’

‘I have told you all I know, Inspector. This interview is at an end. I have retained the original donor card and medical research consent forms. Should you try to prosecute me, I will counter-sue.’

‘Let’s see if I understand what you’ve just told me,’ Dan said slowly. ‘You arranged for a perfectly healthy man to be spirited out of prison, peeled off his face and transplanted a dead man’s face on to his skull for no reason other than you wanted to see if it could be done?’

‘I was certain it could, and the surgery’s success vindicated my belief.’

‘And like Frankenstein, you created a monster? Possibly one that murders.’

‘You gave your word. Immunity in exchange for information.’

‘So I did, Mr Marks. But I didn’t give my word that I wouldn’t file on a charge of aiding and abetting a prisoner to escape.’

‘Dan here. Adam Weaver is wearing Anthony George’s face. I’ve had confirmation from the surgeon who carried out the operation.’

‘He talked to you?’ Peter said in surprise.

‘Eventually. Pull out all the stops to bring Weaver in.’

‘We’ve been trying,’ Peter answered irritably.

‘I’ll be back with you tomorrow.’ The line went dead.

Peter looked at Bill. ‘That was the inspector; our man is definitely Adam Weaver.’

‘I thought we knew that before Dan went to America?’

‘Now we have full confirmation.’

‘What did he say about the Marks connection?’
Bill asked.

‘Nothing, but he’ll be back tomorrow.’

‘Then you’d better have Adam Weaver ready and waiting for him in a cell, hadn’t you?’ the superintendent muttered darkly.

After dropping Anna off, Trevor considered what he should do next. Conscience told him he should return to the station to check if Dan had telephoned from the States or see if Peter had found anything in the skip, but he felt too restless to sit behind a desk. He could go down Jubilee Street and talk to Tom Morris, Sam Mayberry or Captain Arkwright, but there was no reason to suppose that they’d have anything new to report. He could even take an hour out, as there was no one to shout at him, not that Dan ever really shouted.

He glanced at his watch; a quarter to twelve. There were only two places Lyn was likely to be at this hour: the hospital or her parents’ home. He could offer to buy her an early lunch, take her somewhere cosy, find a quiet table, talk reconciliation – he considered it. Even if he managed to persuade her to move back in with him, nothing would change. Depending on what was waiting for him at the station, he’d be spending that evening either waiting for Dan’s return, or out combing the streets for Tony again, in the hope of preventing the lunatic from killing someone else. Taking Lyn out to lunch wouldn’t solve anything. If

anything, it would only create a whole new set of problems.

He gazed at the towering pillars of the new burns unit behind A and E. He could offer to buy Daisy lunch instead...

Daisy had become a drug he couldn't get out of his system. But she'd only ask him about Lyn. She didn't want to complicate things. So nothing in his life was resolved. Nothing at all, he reflected, as he reached for the ignition.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

‘Dan phoned.’ Peter greeted Trevor when he walked into the office carrying a brown paper bag. ‘He confirmed Adam Weaver is wearing Anthony George’s face.’

‘Good.’ Trevor dumped his food on Anna’s desk. He sat behind it and opened the bag.

‘Little woman isn’t going to like you eating junk food,’ Peter taunted.

‘The little woman isn’t around to object,’ Trevor retorted unthinkingly.

‘You let her go?’ Peter unwrapped the fish and chips he’d sent out for.

‘It wasn’t a question of letting her go. She just went.’

‘What did you do to make her?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing to try and keep her either, by the look of you. You’re a bloody idiot, Trevor. Don’t you realise that girl was the best thing that ever happened to you?’

‘Best thing? To go home every night to nagging. For the first time in eight months my life is peaceful. I can walk into my own house without anyone asking me where I’ve been, what I’ve been doing, and how late I’m going to work tomorrow.’

‘She’s concerned about you.’

‘Can this be the same man who told me six months ago police officers should live alone?’

‘I was talking about myself.’

‘Great advice you give, Peter, especially when you consider you’re as good as living with Anna.’

‘I am not, and anyway that’s none of your business.’

‘Neither is Lyn yours.’ Trevor took out the carton of orange juice he’d bought and ripped off the plastic top.

‘It’s Daisy, isn’t it?’

‘Lyn was jealous of Daisy,’ Trevor admitted.

‘So, when is the doctor moving in with you?’

‘She’s not. She doesn’t want to get involved in a break-up between Lyn and myself.’

‘But you did ask her to move in?’

‘Lyn only moved out yesterday.’

‘But you think you’re in love with Daisy, not Lyn?’

Trevor tore open the paper bag and spread it out on the desk. He opened a polystyrene carton, took out a chicken burger and bit into it.

‘Well?’ Peter demanded.

‘I don’t know,’ Trevor answered irritably.

‘What about Lyn? Doesn’t she deserve something from you after all the months you’ve lived together?’

‘I’ve just told you my private life is none of your damned business.’

Peter shook his head. ‘The trouble with you, Trevor, is you don’t know when you’re well off.’

The light was beginning to fade when Tony woke. Something had disturbed his sleep – what? Heart pounding, he lay still, tensing his body in readiness to flee – or fight. Grit burnt into his shoulders and

the backs of his thighs through his jeans and shirt. Children were playing close by – how close? He parted the blinds with his fingers and peered through the gap. Wherever the children were, they weren't in this garden.

Clambering to his knees he slid back the greenhouse door. It grated with a rasping he was certain could be heard at the end of the street. Cold air rushed in dispersing the damp, musty smell of wet earth and potting compost. The wall between the garden he was in and next door was barely four foot high. He slithered out, crawling like a commando over a concrete path. He cried out involuntarily as something sharp and heavy landed on his back. A cat shot over his head and up a fence post.

He closed his eyes and lay flat, hoping no one had heard his cry. Minutes stole past. He opened his eyes and rolled over. Washing still flapped on the line above him. He eyed a pair of men's jeans, a checked shirt and a pullover. They looked too wide for him, but beggars couldn't be choosers. Still kneeling, he reached up and tugged. The pegs that held the jeans snapped on the third pull. The shirt and pullover were easier.

He retreated back into the greenhouse and changed quickly, bundling his filthy clothes under his arm. He couldn't leave them. If the theft from the line was reported the police might guess it was him. Possibly they would prime sniffer dogs, as his character in the series had done when investigating a burglary. He looked around to check that he hadn't left anything and saw a pair of garden shears. He

picked them up, opened the blades and ran his fingers along the edges. Pulling his long hair to the side of his head he hacked at it. He tucked the matted severed mane into his bundle of clothes and pushed the shoulder-length remains inside his collar. As an afterthought he rolled the shears into his bundle.

He left the greenhouse, looked at the outside tap and decided against washing. The children's voices were still drifting over the wall. The sooner he left this place behind him the better.

Trevor handed the pages of a report Dan had faxed from New York to Peter.

'The inspector was thorough.' Peter scanned the pages.

'Did you expect him to be anything else?'

'No.' Peter handed the last page back to Trevor.

'Our next stop is Brian Marks.'

While Trevor dialled an outside line, Peter ate his fish and chips and thought about Anna. All available personnel were scheduled to search the town again that night for Tony. The prospect of another wasted night on the streets made him angry. Sometimes it seemed as though he had wasted his life peering into the seamier side of life. He was tempted to plead sickness, pick up Anna and take her somewhere special. Wine and dine her, and at the end of the evening ask her to move in with him. It had been a long time since a woman had excited him the way she did, and although sex was a motivating factor, with Anna it was only a part of their relationship. They were friends as well as

lovers. Something that had never happened to him with a woman before. He actually enjoyed talking to her.

On the down side he also knew she'd be hell to live with for someone with his habits. But he wasn't too old to change. Not when the prize was someone like her, he reflected, remembering just how good the lunch-hour spent between the sheets had been.

'Peter?'

Trevor replaced the telephone receiver. 'He's away until next week.'

'Who?' Peter asked.

'Brian Marks. His secretary has pencilled us in for eight-thirty next Thursday morning. That's the day she's expecting him back, and the only time free in his diary.'

'We need a warrant?'

'I'll check with Dan when he gets back tomorrow to see how he wants to play it.'

'Did the secretary say where Marks was?'

'She doesn't know. All he told her is that he's away on private and urgent business, and can't be contacted.'

'How convenient for him.'

'But not for us,' Trevor mused.

The taxi that had taken Anna from the outpatients' clinic deposited her outside her front door at three in the afternoon. She paid the driver, stuck the key in her door and after some painful manipulation of her bandaged thumbs, succeeded in turning it in the lock. She dropped her coat, bag and keys on the floor and slammed the door behind her.

Staring at the mess in her living room, she decided Peter had been right. It was disgusting. Too lethargic to attempt to clear it, she climbed the stairs and went into the bathroom. Wincing, she turned on the tap with her bandaged hand, and managed, by dint of holding her toothbrush between her forefinger and thumb, to clean her teeth. Switching off the water she went into her bedroom. The only room in the house she'd actually finished decorating. The brass bed-head gleamed with the lacquer she'd applied so it wouldn't need polishing. The Tiffany lamp on the bedside table was dull bronze, the bedspread and matching curtains old gold lace. Making a mental note to invite Peter up, so he wouldn't think she was a complete slob, she moved a pile of clothes from the bed on to a chair and switched on the television she'd hung on a bracket in the corner of the room.

Picking up the remote, she lay on the bed and flicked through the channels. Two were horse racing; one was a bad – very bad American soap. Turning the sound down, she lay back on the pillows and watched the set wobble as a young man with an improbable hairstyle knocked on a plywood front door. She didn't see much more. The combination of the painkillers they'd fed her in the hospital and exhaustion proved too much. The soap opera gave way to a news bulletin, which in its turn was supplanted by a cartoon. She continued to sleep through them all.

'You wanted a list of break-ins, sir,' Chris dropped a list on Trevor's desk.

Trevor pushed aside his uneaten chips. He stared at the sheet. ‘Seventy-two?’

‘Slightly above average for a Friday night in town, sir.’

Trevor looked across at Peter who, lump of fish in hand, was studying his own copy.

‘Fingerprint squad been out on all of these?’ Peter mumbled through a full mouth.

‘They’re trying to get around them, sir.’

‘We can discount some.’ Peter picked up a pencil, and crossed off the first half a dozen. ‘Our man wouldn’t be interested in antiques, furniture, paintings, or silverware.’

‘What about the videos and televisions?’ Chris suggested. ‘He’s been living on the streets for a couple of years. He could have made connections.’

‘No fence I know is going to risk taking goods off a murder suspect with the publicity we’ve got out on him, I doubt there’s anyone in town who doesn’t know who he is. What we’re looking for is a break-in with food, money, and possibly clothes, taken,’ Peter said.

‘And that restricts it to...’

‘Just five,’ Peter interrupted Chris.

‘Six,’ Trevor corrected. ‘Nasturtium Drive.’

‘He’d stick out like a sore thumb up there.’

‘I would have said he’d stick out like a sore thumb anywhere, but he seems to be evading us very nicely at the moment,’ Trevor wrapped the remains of his meal in the brown paper and dumped it in the bin.

‘Nasturtium Drive – freezer emptied, approximately two hundred pounds worth of food,’ Peter

read. 'I can't see our man staggering around with a sack of frozen food.'

'He could have carried it to a new squat. Three bottles of whisky have gone...'

'But no clothes, no blankets. We know he left everything behind in that factory.'

'OK drop it, let's move on.'

Uncertain whether he was expected to stay or not, Chris Brooke waited while the sergeants worked their way down the list.

'This is more like it, pork pies and cans of beer,' Peter commented.

'From a student hall?'

'He'd fit in.'

'None of the students I've seen are as filthy as our Tony.' Trevor stabbed the paper with his pencil. 'Balaclava Street.'

'Sink damaged, blanket taken, a glass found near the sink – you ordered the glass to be printed?' Peter demanded of Chris.

'I don't think they've got to it yet, sir.'

'See that they do, right away.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Even if he was in Balaclava Street last night, he could be anywhere by now, and we haven't a clue where to start looking,' Trevor said after Chris left.

Peter lifted his anorak from a peg on the back of the door. 'Let's take a run down Jubilee Street and talk to Sam and Tom Morris.'

'Why? They won't have any news, and both of them are sick of the sight of us.'

‘Tactics, Trevor. After a couple of hours with them we’ll deserve a meal break before kicking off the search in the streets,’ he said, still planning a romantic dinner with Anna. ‘And tonight we’ll tour in a car. I bloody froze last night.’

‘And so life goes on,’ Trevor left his chair.

‘As we need to be alert for Dan’s return tomorrow, I suggest a twelve o’clock curfew, but only for the sergeants.’

‘And if Bill finds out?’

‘He can scream all he likes. I need my beauty sleep.’

‘I have to make a call before we go. I’ll use Dan’s office.’

Trevor closed the door behind him, sat in the inspector’s chair, pulled his diary from his pocket, checked a number and dialled. It rang six times and he hesitated at each ring. It would be easy to drop the receiver before it was answered. Much easier than searching for words to convey his confused emotions.

‘Hi.’

Trevor recognised Lyn’s brother’s voice. He wondered why he wasn’t in his office, then he remembered it was Saturday. The weekend was just one more thing he tended to forget about when he was immersed in a case.

‘Simon, it’s Trevor Joseph.’

‘I was wondering when you were going to ring.’

Was it animosity that made his voice brusque, or was he in a hurry?

‘Can I speak to Lyn please?’

'I'll get her.' There was a clunk as the receiver was laid on a hard surface. Trevor could hear voices in the distance. Faint, but not so faint that he couldn't detect an argument. Then Simon shouted, 'He's your boyfriend. You bloody well tell him.'

'Lyn speaking.' Her voice was sharp. Not a good way to begin a reconciliation.

'Are you all right?'

'Perfectly well, thank you. Why shouldn't I be?'

'Can we meet somewhere? Have dinner perhaps?'

'You're not working tonight?'

'I am, but I can take a couple of hours off.'

'Let me know when you can spare a whole night.' She slammed the telephone down. He held the empty receiver until it began to buzz. Hanging up, he pulled out his book again and dialled the number for the local hospital. He had to go through two switchboards and three secretaries before he finally reached Daisy.

'It's Trevor. I wondered if you'd like dinner tonight. Just dinner. I'll have to work afterwards.'

'You're involved...'

'Lyn left me yesterday.'

'And you're phoning me today?'

'Just dinner. Conversation, nothing more.'

He sensed her hesitation as he willed her to give him the answer he wanted.

'I won't finish here until half past seven.'

'I'll pick you up in the foyer.'

'I won't have had time to change,' she pointed out.

‘We don’t have to go anywhere smart. What about the pub around the corner?’

‘Not there,’ she said quickly.

Trevor racked his brains trying to think of a place where they weren’t likely to run into anyone they knew.

‘What about the Turkish restaurant?’

‘No, the Chinese.’

Most of the force ate in the Chinese, but he’d rather put up with their comments, and eat with Daisy, than eat alone. ‘See you at half past seven.’ He hung up before she had a chance to rethink her decision.

The telephone woke Anna. She opened her eyes, reached out and grimaced in pain as her hand closed painfully around it. A quiz show was playing on the television. A row of earnest young men sat opposite a row of earnest-faced young women watching a presenter pull questions out of a rotating drum.

‘Hello,’ her voice was hoarse from sleep. She could hear breathing, slow, steady, the faint hum of traffic. ‘Hello?’ she repeated, wondering if she’d picked up a pervert.

‘Anna...’

The voice was faint, but she recognised it. ‘Adam?’

‘I need help.’

‘Half the local force is out searching for you. You have to give yourself up.’

‘Not yet, Anna. I’m innocent. I swear it. I can prove it. You have to believe me.’

‘I believe you.’ She meant it.

‘I haven’t anywhere to go.’

‘Come here.’

‘You won’t tell anyone?’

‘I promise. We’ll talk; decide what to do.’

‘I saw you with the police last night.’ His voice was growing fainter.

She almost said, “I am the police,” then she remembered the time they had spent together, the way he had made her feel. How she had dreamed of this very thing happening night after lonely night. Of him coming to her, needing her. ‘Where are you?’

‘You live in Mitre Gardens.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Do you live alone?’

‘Yes.’ She wanted to say there hadn’t been anyone after him.

‘I’ll come to you. If any one is there I’ll know, and I won’t come in.’

The line went dead. Anna continued to hold the receiver. She knew what she should do. Contact Trevor, in Dan’s absence, and contact him immediately. But the familiar voice had worked its charm. Could it be possible that she still felt something for Adam? He said he hadn’t done anything. She’d believed him. What evidence – hard concrete evidence – had she seen to prove his guilt? The least she could do, after everything they had once been to one another, was listen.

‘What time do you have to return to work?’ Daisy asked Trevor after the waiter had taken their order.

‘When I get there. With the luck we’ve been having, it will probably turn into an all-nighter.’

‘Still looking for your arsonist?’

‘Even if he isn’t the one who set fire to the man in Jubilee Street, he’s a murderer now, with eleven dead...’

‘Twelve,’ Daisy corrected him grimly. ‘Another one died this afternoon in the burns unit. I’m sorry, I thought you would have known.’

‘After the initial flurry no one bothers to tell the investigating coppers anything, and we’re too damned busy to read the papers, except when upstairs sends down copies marked for our attention because some reporter has decided it’s open season on the police. Was the victim young?’

‘Fifteen-year-old runaway. A boy. One of his friends told us his real name so at least his parents were at his bedside.’

‘Some comfort.’

‘Trevor, not even you can blame yourself for this.’

‘If I hadn’t gone in there that morning, none of it would have happened.’

‘Maybe not that night but certainly another. All the firemen agreed the old factory was a disaster waiting to happen.’

‘I’ve seen a lot of those around. Not all of them go up.’

‘Those people had nothing and nowhere to go. You were looking for a murderer...’

‘And succeeded in turning him into a mass murderer.’

‘I thought you were too sensitive for this job two years ago, now I know you are.’

He looked into her grey eyes. They glittered like crystal in the light of the lamp that burned on the table. ‘You never told me.’

‘I’d just given you the brush-off. You probably wouldn’t remember.’

‘I was stretched out in A and E, battered and bruised after a dealer had run his car into me. You were the junior doctor on duty. I asked you for a date, and you said “Thank you, but I have more man in my life than I can handle right now, Sergeant Joseph.”’

‘You do remember.’

The waiter brought their meals. Sweet and sour pork for him, prawn fried rice for her.

‘I remember everything about you,’ he murmured huskily.

She looked at him. ‘Eat up.’

‘Why? So I can get back to work early?’

‘No, so we can have coffee in my flat. Anyone who’s carried a torch as long as you have, Trevor, deserves something.’

‘Throw the dog a bone?’

‘You always have talked too much.’

Anna checked her bedroom and bathroom and went downstairs. She straightened the throws on the old sofa and chair. Slipping plastic bags over the bandages on her hands she tried to clear the kitchen, but after she smashed three plates she gave it up as a bad job. The curtains downstairs were open. Usually she closed them as soon as dusk fell so the

neighbours couldn't see the mess, but tonight she left them open. Anyone looking in from the outside could see right through the living space from the front to the back. Adam would be able to check for himself that she was alone.

Switching off the main light she lit an Indian oil lamp in the corner. On the rare occasions when she had a free evening and spent it at home she stayed in her bedroom. That's why she'd set up her TV and DVD in there. She even ate her meals upstairs, although she was careful to take her dirty dishes into the kitchen. It was easy to put up with the chaos of downstairs, when she only walked through it on her way in or out of the kitchen. The phone rang again and she jumped.

'Hello, gorgeous. Did they treat you very badly in the hospital?'

'Peter.'

'Expecting the bogeyman? Fancy coming out to dinner? I'll feed you with my own fair hands.'

'Thanks, but they really pulled me about this afternoon. My hands hurt like hell.'

'Then I'll bring around a take-away and a bottle of wine. What would you like, Indian or Chinese? White or red?'

'Can we make it another night?' she softened her refusal. 'I've taken painkillers and a sleeping tablet. I'm already in bed.'

'I have a couple of hours before we go out on the night shift, I could come and warm you some milk and clear that mess downstairs.'

'I feel like throwing up and that's one thing I'd rather do in private.'

‘Fine.’ There was an edge to his voice.

‘Maybe tomorrow, Peter. I really do feel lousy tonight.’

‘Whatever you say.’

‘Peter?’

He’d already hung up.

It wasn’t easy to walk through the town without being noticed. Particularly for someone as dirty as he was. But his shorter hair and clean clothes had given him new confidence. Head up, he walked briskly down a side-street behind a crowd of students. Despite his ill-fitting clothes and beard he didn’t look different enough to warrant a second glance. The police were searching for a man with black clothes and long, matted hair. Someone furtive, in hiding. Not a confident, scruffy student.

For the first time he was grateful for the time he’d spent on the streets. He knew the town as well as he knew the studios he’d once worked in. It was four miles to Anna’s house. But he dare not risk hitching, and he didn’t possess a penny piece so he had no option except to walk. Strange, a week locked up in the factory followed by a couple of days on the run had cured all craving for drink and the pills he had exchanged most of his giros for as soon as he had cashed them.

The students turned into a pub. He followed them, went to the gents and looked in the mirror. His face was filthy, thick with ingrained dirt. He placed a grimy hand beneath the soap dispenser and pressed half a dozen times. He used all the soap and half the paper towels in the holder before he was

satisfied. A man opened the door and walked in, staring at him as he made his way to a cubicle.

He ducked out quickly, back into the street. A woman with a Doberman on a lead walked out of a house. The dog snarled. She began to apologise. He smiled and walked on. The smile felt peculiar, alien. He wondered if it was the first time he had tried to smile with this face. He slowed his steps and glanced back. The woman was walking on in the opposite direction. Soon, if Anna had kept her word, he'd be safe. For a time.

'Home.' Daisy shut the door of her flat and tossed her keys and handbag on to a chair. 'Do you really want tea or coffee?' she asked as she faced Trevor.

He shook his head. He felt as shy, awkward and embarrassed as he had done as a teenager when he'd taken a girl out for the first time. He wanted Daisy, had fantasised about her for what seemed like for ever, but had always envisaged meeting her again in glowing, sunset tinted, romantic scenarios. Never a businesslike, clinical atmosphere like this one. 'We don't have to do this.'

She shrugged her arms out of her coat, dropped it on top of her keys and walked towards him. Two steps and her arms were around his neck.

Reaching up she ran her fingers down the side of his face, from his temple to his jaw. He locked his arms around her waist and pulled her close. Bending his head he brushed his lips tenderly over hers. His touch was so brief, so light, she couldn't be sure afterwards that their lips had actually met.

‘I’m here, I’m real, and I don’t break,’ she whispered.

‘After all this time, I’m having trouble believing it.’

Lifting her face to his she kissed him with a fervour that bruised his mouth and took his breath away. Taking his hand she led him through the door towards the bedroom.

‘Daisy...’

‘No words, Trevor. If we start talking we’ll never stop. And you have to leave soon.’

‘Only for tonight. Neither of us are going anywhere. We’ve all the time in the world.’

She walked ahead of him into the bedroom, kicked off her shoes and unzipped her skirt. ‘I just hope that after all that waiting I live up to your expectations.’

His mouth went dry as he watched her unbutton her blouse. He wanted to tell her he loved her, had loved her since the first moment he’d seen her. He tried, but after she slipped out of the last of her clothes she laid her finger over his mouth.

Lights burned at regular intervals in the windows of the houses. Tony tried to check the numbers, and failed. The houses were small, yet most had names. Then he found two consecutive numbers halfway down. Odds were one side of the street, evens the other. He crossed the road. His broken shoes soaked up rainwater from a puddle that had collected in a patch of sunken tarmac. Stepping back into the shadows of a garage he glanced up and down.

She must have been watching for him. The front door opened before he knocked. He stepped swiftly inside and waited just inside the door while she drew the curtains at both the front and the back of the house.

‘Anna, I’m sorry. But I had nowhere else to go.’

She’d tried to prepare herself, but none of her imaginings had prepared her for the reality. The voice was Adam’s. The stance, even the walk, was his. He was thinner than she remembered, and that she could cope with. But not the face. Even in the subdued light of the oil-lamp, it was so very different. She turned aside, hoping to spare him her shocked reaction.

‘I left the curtains open so you’d know there was no one here except me. You must be cold, so why don’t you go up and have a bath?’

‘You haven’t changed, Anna. I see you’re still as domesticated as ever.’ He looked around the room.

‘Yes,’ she agreed, remembering more than she wanted to. ‘I must have been hell to live with.’

‘No more than me.’

Those eyes, those startlingly dark eyes. She would have known them anywhere. ‘Are you hungry?’

‘It’s so long since I’ve eaten I can’t be sure.’

‘I’ll send out for whatever you like. Chinese, a pizza...’

‘Same old Anna, always knows where to buy, never how to make.’

‘The bathroom’s on the left at the top of the stairs. There’s a clean robe and towels laid out.’

‘And I thought I looked presentable.’

‘You don’t smell presentable,’ she answered bluntly. ‘Well? What’s it to be?... Food?’ she said in response to his blank look.

‘Whatever you have in your cupboard.’

‘Nothing.’

‘In that case whatever you want. You won’t tell anyone I’m here?’

‘Not until we’ve talked. Go on, go upstairs.’

He turned and she leaned against the wall and took a deep breath. The telephone faced her. She knew what she should do. Pick it up, telephone the station and ask to be put through to Bill. She walked across to her wall, read the numbers that were written on her reminder board, memorised the number of the local pizza house, and dialled.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Trevor lay next to Daisy in the small bed and listened to the whine of ambulance sirens heading for A and E. A door slammed further down the corridor and footsteps echoed past. He raised his arm and glanced at his watch.

‘You have to go?’

He turned his head on the pillow and faced Daisy. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘So am I.’

‘I wanted it to be wonderful – special – between us.’

‘You wanted too much, Trevor. I’m an ordinary woman and, at the moment a rather tired one. Hardly the dream person you built me into.’

‘I love you, Daisy. I always have, I...’

‘No, Trevor,’ she laid her finger across his lips again to silence him. ‘You were in love with the idea of me. You don’t know me. But you do know Lyn, no – let me finish,’ she said when he tried to interrupt her. ‘You’re an honest and decent man. You wouldn’t have asked her to move into your house unless you were in love with her.’

‘She helped me, she was my nurse. I was grateful to her.’

‘You didn’t love her?’ she asked in surprise.

‘I thought I did at the time,’ he admitted.

‘And you don’t now?’

‘I’m not sure what I think any more.’

‘And your uncertainty set in when the honeymoon period ended and boring, mundane day-to-day living began?’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because I used to shout at Tim every time he failed to organise his free time to coincide with mine. Because I know how foul it is to love someone, really love someone the way that girl loves you, and not be able to see them for more than a few minutes from one week to the next. You couldn’t make love to me because you feel guilty about her. And that means you still feel something for her. I was a fool to drag you back here, and a bigger fool to suggest climbing into bed. I should have made my own way back from that restaurant.’

He sat up and swung his legs out from the tangle of sheets. Running his hands through his hair he turned to look at her. ‘It’s not your fault. It’s mine. I’ve made a right bloody mess of things.’

‘Perhaps if we try laughing about it we can at least salvage our friendship.’

He smiled. ‘I was right. You’re a very special lady. Whoever gets you is going to be a lucky man.’

‘No he isn’t,’ she replied soberly. ‘Everything I have, everything I am, I’ve invested in my career. There’s nothing left for a private life.’

‘One thing I’ve learned the hard way is that a career isn’t enough of an excuse for living.’ He reached for his trousers.

‘It’s had to be for me since Tim died. I don’t feel sorrow or joy, not even for the patients. Only professional satisfaction when an operation is a success. I never talk to another man, let alone go out

with one, without thinking of Tim. Even when I was with you tonight in the restaurant, I watched every move you made, studied the way you ate, your conversation, the way you comb your hair – contrasting everything with Tim, and the way he used to do the same things.’

‘Just as I’ve done with every woman I’ve spent time with since I met you.’

‘And now?’

‘Now?’ He looked at her in confusion.

‘Have we succeeded in finally laying this ghost from your past to rest?’

He left the bed and pulled on his shirt. ‘It was a comforting ghost. It gave me something to cling to, something to hope for. A reason to go on when I felt low.’

‘Go and see your Lyn, Trevor. She’ll give you a better reason. One made of flesh and blood, not wishful thinking.’

‘Where the hell have you been?’ Peter demanded when Trevor pulled up outside the Catholic hostel in Jubilee Street.

‘Checking out leads.’

‘You’ve lipstick on your face.’

Trevor looked in the rear view mirror of his car and rubbed his cheek. ‘Any sign of our man?’ he asked in an attempt to divert Peter’s attention.

‘None. Andrew and Chris are fed-up to the back teeth...’

‘Aren’t we all?’

‘Apparently not you. Which one did you lay? The doctor or the nurse?’

Ignoring Peter's question, Trevor left his car. 'There has to be somewhere else we can search.'

'Wherever the bastard is hiding would be a good start, but you tell me where that is. He could be in any bloody street in town. If he saw someone leave their home in an airport bus he could be holed up with all mod cons. Food, fridge, freezer, heating, television...'

'Sooner or later he's going to have to come out.'

'For what?' Peter demanded.

'To vacate the place when the people come back.' Trevor locked his car.

'I suppose we could interview Sam's guests.'

'Again?' Trevor made a face.

'Let's start with Tom Morris's place for a change.' Peter fell into step alongside Trevor as he crossed the street. 'Tell Uncle Peter all. You make it up with Florence Nightingale, or not?'

Trevor filched a cigar from Peter's top pocket. 'Haven't seen her.'

'Then you've finally succeeded in bedding the delectable Daisy?'

'Mind your own damn business.' Trevor walked towards the council hostel.

'She's way out of your class,' Peter needled him. 'Women like her marry into money or their own kind. Tim Sherringham qualified on both counts. You haven't the one and you certainly aren't the other.' He pulled a lighter out of his pocket and lit the cigar in Trevor's mouth. 'You're even more of a bloody fool than I took you for. You've

exchanged the domestic bliss every man dreams of for a quick roll in the hay.'

'What I do is my own affair.'

'Not when it affects your moods and I have to work with you. You shouldn't be allowed out without a keeper. There's no way this thing with Daisy can last. You've turned her into a goddess instead of a flesh and blood woman. Once the sex wears off, always supposing you can bring yourself to do anything carnal to her in the first place, there'll be nothing left. Lyn Sullivan picked you up when you were in pieces, glued you back together and when she understandably buggered off because you failed to spare her ten minutes in as many days, you didn't even bother to go after her.'

'Damn it all! We're in the middle of a case,' Trevor shouted, furious with Peter for coming so close to the truth.

'That's the bloody trouble with us, Trevor. We're always in the middle of a fucking case.'

'More pizza?' Anna sat next to Adam on her bed, and looked at the television set flickering silently in the corner. They were waiting for the late evening news.

'No, thanks.' Adam wiped his hands on a paper napkin and leaned against the headboard. He kicked his feet up on to the bed. Despite the bath and shower afterwards, his legs were still grey with ingrained dirt. The clothes he'd stolen from the washing line were whirring around in the machine downstairs with a double dose of powder liberally laced with disinfectant. He felt that Anna would

have pushed him in alongside them if it had been possible.

‘I couldn’t eat another bite.’ He dumped the last crust on his plate and looked around the bedroom. ‘I take back what I said about this place. This is quite civilised.’

‘If it is, the civilisation only extends as far as the bathroom and bedroom.’ Anna closed the pizza box, and carried it and the dirty plates downstairs. She returned with two cans of cold lager. She handed one and a glass to Adam.

He raised his eyebrows. ‘We always used to drink out of the cans.’

‘I’ve grown up.’ She sat at the foot of the bed and faced him. ‘We have to talk. Do you know what I do for a living now?’

‘Let me guess. You’re a reporter?’

‘Try again.’

‘You were hanging around with the police last night.’

‘You were close enough to see us?’

‘Us? You’re with the police? Shit!’

‘I was fed-up with always being broke. Not all actors get as lucky as you.’

‘Lucky!’

‘You had your own series.’

‘Oh yes, I had it all, didn’t I?’ he countered bitterly. ‘Fame, fortune, a beautiful child, a sexy wife...’

‘Did you kill her?’ Anna interrupted. He stared at her through dark eyes flecked with gold. Eyes she remembered so well.

‘No, Anna,’ he spoke resolutely, telling her what she wanted to hear. ‘I didn’t kill Laura.’

‘The jury convicted you.’

‘Because someone set up the evidence to point my way. I was the fall guy.’

‘You had no alibi.’

‘I wasn’t anywhere near that cottage when it happened. I was in London, drunk and alone for most of the evening, in the flat. If I’d known I was going to need an alibi I’d have provided myself with one. Gone somewhere other than an off-licence where the assistant was more interested in the book he was reading than the customers he was serving.’ He smiled grimly. ‘Come on, Anna, give me credit for some intelligence. If I’d wanted to kill Laura I would have planned it better.’

She considered what he’d said. It made sense – unless it was as the prosecution had successfully argued. A premeditated crime, made to look as though it was committed in a murderous moment of insanity. The doubt remained, gnawing at the back of her mind.

‘Laura was having an affair,’ he added.

‘I read the transcript of your trial. Who was he?’

‘I wish I knew. She taunted me with all the sordid details except his name.’

‘You must have had your suspicions. There was gossip about that game show host she worked with...’

He laughed mirthlessly. ‘Seb? I introduced him to his boyfriend.’

Anna forced herself to meet his gaze, hoping she still knew him well enough to tell if he was lying. 'Did she start an affair in retaliation for your own exploits?'

'How well you know me,' he said acidly, 'even after all these years.'

'I do know that when we lived together, only one of us was faithful.'

'I've never made a secret of the fact that I consider monogamy a swine of an institution to impose on a healthy male.'

'This is one situation your naïve, boyish charm won't get you out of, Adam. But then you always were too good-looking for your own good.'

'Not any more,' he retorted savagely.

'So you were both having affairs,' she attempted to draw the full story from him.

'Yes. But you have no idea what it was like after I started filming that series. It all came so quickly, so easily. One minute I was broke, living with Laura and the baby in a grotty rented flat, the next I had everything I'd ever dreamed of and more. Champagne, caviar, vintage cognac, women throwing themselves at me wherever I went. I won't deny I loved every minute of it, but then there was Laura,' he looked into her eyes. 'I should never have left you, Anna.'

His reply grated on her, like a speech from a bad soap opera. 'I was an actress too, Adam. I can see through a hollow performance.'

'The bottom line. After my career took off it went bad. Very bad. The only thing we had in

common was the desire to torment one another, and Hannah.'

'Your daughter.'

'Have you seen her?'

'Yes.'

'How is she?'

For the first time Anna sensed real anguish. 'Remarkably sane and well-adjusted considering what she's been through. Blanche told us that she still talks about you. She saw you watching her in the playground.'

'I tried to keep out of sight, but one of the kids spotted me.'

'They thought you were a dirty old man.'

'That's understandable given what I was wearing.'

'How did you escape from prison?'

'You have no idea what it's like in there...'

'I have every idea,' she said, irritated by his self-pity. 'I've toured enough of them.'

'You've walked down the corridors. Seen the spy holes the warders use to watch every move the prisoners make. You have no dignity – no privacy. I couldn't piss without someone watching me, Anna. Can you imagine what that's like? Or how the cells reek after hundreds of men are locked up for hours on end like animals.'

'I told you I've been in them.'

'For a couple of hours,' he sneered. 'But all the time you breathed in the stink of sweat and urine, you knew that, any time you wanted, you could go outside into clean air. It's not the same, Anna. A tour can't tell you what it's like to be locked up for

hours, days, weeks on end, with only a cellmate to talk to. A cellmate you can't even choose. And, as if all that wasn't bad enough, you have to put up with an endless parade of shrinks trying to get inside your head.'

'Who helped you escape?'

'I don't know.' He left the bed and walked to the curtained window. 'Do you have a cigarette?'

'I don't smoke. You must have seen someone unlock your cell door?'

He opened his can of beer. 'One night after lock-up, not quite a year into my sentence, a warder came and took me out of my cell. I asked him where we were going, and he said solitary. I asked him what I'd done, and he said the governor would explain in the morning. There wasn't a morning. Not one that I can remember, and crazy as that sounds, I swear it's God's own truth.'

'So one of the warders let you out? Who was he?'

'I don't remember a name. He was just one of the screws. I looked at my watch; it was early in the morning. One-two o'clock, somewhere around that time.'

'How long were you in solitary?'

'I'm not sure. A doctor came to see me just after the screw left. At least I think he was a doctor. He was wearing a white coat.'

'The prison doctor?'

'If he was, I hadn't seen him before. He reminded me that I'd volunteered to take part in a research programme and asked if I'd had second thoughts. I told him I hadn't.'

‘What kind of research programme?’

‘Medical. Colds, drug testing, that sort of thing. One of the old lags suggested I volunteer. He said it would gain me brownie points with the screws, and better and extra food. I thought ‘why not?’ I had nothing else to do with my time.’

‘The doctor?’ she prompted.

‘Gave me an injection. Told me it was influenza. Influenza my arse. Whatever it was, it knocked me for six. I remember my eyelids being too heavy to open. Feeling too sick to move. My legs and arms lying like dead weights on the mattress.’

‘You were moved out of the cell?’

‘Between that injection and the streets, everything’s hazy. There was a room, a white room with tiled walls and lots of shining chrome on the walls. It could have been a room in the prison, it could have been anywhere. I don’t know how I got there. I was lying in a bed, there were more injections. Once I thought I was strapped down, but I can’t be sure whether that was real, or I dreamed it.’

‘You must remember something more.’

‘Do you think I haven’t tried?’ he shouted. He turned to the wall and she glimpsed tears trickling down his face. ‘Oh God, Anna, I’m sorry. I know you’re trying to help. It’s just that I’ve had two years with nothing better to do than go over this, and I know no more now than I did when it was happening.’

She waited for him to continue.

‘There are a few images, and some must have been real,’ he said when he had regained control. ‘Bandages covering all of my face, even my eyes. People removing them and swabbing my skin. Now,’ he touched his face with his fingertips, ‘I know they were real. The others I can’t be too sure of. Like the straps, I don’t know if they were there or not. There was a middle-aged woman with dark hair dressed in a white overall. She washed me, changed my sheets, but she never spoke. Not once, although I tried to speak to her. Whenever I did, she gave me an injection. There were other people wearing surgical masks, and more injections – lots of injections. They were definitely real. The pin pricks were visible for months afterwards.’

‘Afterwards?’

‘When I was on the streets.’

‘How did you get there?’

‘One morning I woke up in a car park. I had the clothes I stood up in, and a blanket, that was it.’

‘No money?’

‘A hundred pounds in an envelope, marked *Tony*. It soon went.’

‘Nothing more?’

‘Nothing, except a new face. I freaked out the first time I saw myself in a mirror. I wondered if I was going mad. If I’d dreamed my entire life.’

‘The car park you were left in?’

‘It was on the outskirts of London. When I calmed down, I went to a library, looked through the newspapers and read about my supposed escape from prison. Then, I decided to make for this town, because Hannah and Blanche were here. I had to

find out if I was Adam Weaver. If my memories were real. At that time I was prepared to believe almost anything. I couldn't even be sure I was sane.'

'It's a long way from London to here.'

'I hitched a ride. The lorry driver who picked me up had been down on his luck once. He dropped me off at the docks. When the money ran out there was only one place to go, Jubilee Street. You know the rest.'

'I only wish I did.'

'Life on the streets isn't interesting.'

'Look at it from my point of view. The team I'm working with has been assigned a murder case. One that wouldn't warrant a paragraph in a newspaper if it hadn't been for the brutal way the victim was killed. Then we find ourselves looking at photographs of the victim, a man who died of natural causes two years before our murder took place. Then we discover the man we originally thought was the victim is still alive, and what we have is...'

'How did you find out it wasn't me who died?'

'Someone saw you after the murder. How did you get the victim to swap clothes with you?'

'Favours come cheap down Jubilee Street. At the right time of day, a bottle of cider will buy a man's soul.'

'Why did you do it?'

'Because the kids and teachers in Hannah's school had seen me. I knew they'd remember the red baseball boots and I didn't want to be picked up as a paedophile and have my fingerprints taken, only for the police to discover who I was.'

‘Would that have been so terrible?’

‘I’d rather die than go back inside.’

‘Is that why you shot a policeman?’ She raised her eyes to his. ‘I was there when you tried to kill him, Adam.’

‘You’ve got that wrong, Anna. He shot at me.’

‘His gun was never fired. Adam, I saw you...’

‘I’ve never had a gun, Anna. Where in hell would a man living on skid row find one? Look,’ he pulled back the sleeve of the towelling robe he was wearing so she could examine the wound on his arm. It was infected, running with pus. ‘He shot me.’

She’d seen gunshot wounds before, and there was no mistaking the injury. She’d seen Peter’s gun but he hadn’t fired it. There hadn’t been time for him to pull it out of his shoulder holster.

‘Let’s forget about the shots for a moment,’ she said, unable to make sense of what Adam was telling her. ‘The fire was deliberately started in that building.’

‘Not by me. It was already burning when I ran down the stairs.’

‘Eleven people died as a result of that blaze. And the injured are still in hospital.’

‘It wasn’t set by me, Anna.’ He looked at her earnestly. ‘You do believe me, don’t you?’

‘If you were innocent, why did you run?’

‘Because someone was shooting at me.’ He returned to the bed and sat on the edge. ‘Because even half a life in Jubilee Street is better than none. Because I’m terrified of being locked up again. Because I want to find Laura’s killer.’

‘You know who killed her?’

‘I know he must live somewhere close by. Laura was forever driving here to leave Hannah with her sister – and once, when Hannah was taken suddenly ill – she returned to Blanche’s within half an hour. I know because Hannah told me.’

‘That’s all you have to go on?’

‘Someone must have seen them together. When I first arrived here, I tried hanging round the nightclubs, asking questions, but after a while no one would talk to me.’

‘I’m not surprised if you behaved like you did on that video.’

‘What video?’

‘You don’t remember a television crew filming you in Jubilee Street?’

‘Oh my God!’

‘You were stoned out of your mind.’

‘Red wine and amphetamines.’

‘Remind me not to try it.’

‘Anna, I’ve put all that behind me. I’m not a junkie. I admit I popped the odd pill when I could afford them but I never injected. You need the occasional high when you hit bottom. But I was never stupid. Anna, you’re all I’ve got. You know me. We lived together...’

‘I don’t need reminding,’ she broke in.

‘I’m a womaniser. I’ve been a drunk and worst of all I’ve been a bastard to you and all the other women who were foolish enough to tell me they loved me. But I could never murder anyone. Look at me,’ he pleaded. ‘Look into my eyes and tell me if

you think the man you're looking at could kill anyone, much less the mother of his child.'

She looked away, her emotions in turmoil. Once, it seemed a very long time ago, she had loved Adam Weaver. Perhaps enough for a small part of her to always love him. And, even wearing a dead man's face, he was still Adam. She could hear it in his voice, his rich, resonant voice – see it in the way he moved his hands – sense it in the depths of his eyes when he looked at her.

'Anna,' he took her hand in his. 'I know I'm asking a lot, but if you allow me to stay here for a day or two, it will give me the time I need to find Laura's murderer.'

'How can you do that with your face on the front page of every newspaper?'

'It's been there for days. No one has caught me yet.'

'If you give yourself up, I'll try to get Laura's case reopened. I have influence. I'm with the Serious Crimes Squad.'

'No, Anna,' he shook his head. 'Don't you see this is my last chance? I can't – I won't – go back to gaol. I'll kill myself first.'

Her initial reaction was to dismiss his threat as theatrical ravings, but something in his eyes stopped her. If he had moved any closer or tried to seduce her by using the same old techniques he had employed to silence her ranting about other women when they had been together, she would have picked up the telephone and dialled the station. But seeing him sitting on the end of her bed, clutching her hand

like a child, lost, alone and broken, made her believe in him as nothing else could have.

‘I’ve only one bedroom and one bed. And you’re looking at it. But I’ve an extra duvet. If we roll it up and put it down the middle we can both sleep on this. I’m on early shift in the morning. I’ll see what I can find out. We’ll talk again tomorrow night.’

‘Anna...’

‘Don’t thank me. Not yet, Adam. I may have to arrest you yet.’

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

‘Jet lag?’ Peter asked Dan as he stifled a yawn.

‘Sheer bloody exhaustion.’

‘Now, that’s something I do know about.’

‘And something you’re going to know a good deal more about. You get my e-mail?’

‘Yes,’ Trevor replied.

‘Interviewed Brian Marks?’

‘Can’t,’ Peter replied. ‘He’s away until the beginning of next week.’

‘Where is he?’

‘Secretary didn’t know.’

‘And you call yourself a detective? He must have left a number in case of emergency.’

‘He didn’t and he lives alone. His secretary checked with his housekeeper. He’s locked up his house and given the help a fortnight’s paid holiday.’

‘Get on to the local force. Get a search warrant. There has to be an address in the house.’

‘Do you expect a man like Marks to leave anything lying around?’ Trevor enquired.

‘We have to be seen to be doing something other than sitting on our arses.’ Dan looked at Anna who was nursing her damaged hands. ‘I’ve a job for you. I’ve checked with the super and you can have Sarah Merchant to assist.’

‘The girl on the switch board?’

‘She’s a whiz with computers and the sooner we computerise all the information we have on this case the better. Concentrate on Adam Weaver. I want the name and address of every friend, relative,

acquaintance, plus any and every hole he could bolt to, available at the touch of a finger. The man has to be somewhere, and the way he's evading us it's my guess someone is shielding him.'

'Little green men in a spaceship?'

'Was that intended to be a serious contribution, Peter?' Dan asked.

'You're beginning to sound like the super,' Peter grumbled. 'We've searched every inch of this town from one end to the other.'

'Then search it again,' Dan said.

'Have a heart. I've spent more time in Jubilee Street than I have in my own bed this week. We've checked dossers, we've checked burglaries...'

'And?'

'He broke into a terraced house in Balaclava Street the night before last, took a blanket and drank a glass of water.'

'Then he's still out there. Trevor, track down Brian Marks. Peter, check out pushers. If that video was anything to go by, Adam Weaver has a habit that needs feeding. Tonight we all go out again. Except you, Anna.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Peter wondered if Anna was sicker than she was letting on. Normally she would never have allowed herself to be pushed to the sidelines of a case.

'Something has to break soon.' Dan reached for his peppermints.

'Sir,' Anna ventured. 'Shouldn't we pull the records on the murder of Weaver's wife?'

Peter groaned. 'We're investigating a convicted killer on the run, the murder of Philip Matthews,

arson with eleven related deaths, a solicitor who might be crooked and a suspect doctor. Why in hell do you want to dig up what's over and done with?'

'Any reasoning behind your suggestion?' Dan asked Anna.

'Weaver always said he was innocent. What if he was?'

'Come on,' Peter scoffed. 'He had his trial.'

'And was convicted on circumstantial evidence.'

'Circumstantial traces of his blood were found in that bathroom,' Peter replied.

'It was his bathroom; he had a cut on his hand.'

'Sustained when he chopped up his wife?'

'Sustained on set a week before Laura Weaver was murdered,' Anna said.

'How come you know so much, Anna?' Dan looked at her thoughtfully.

'I went through newspaper cuttings for background on Weaver,' she lied. 'Something Blanche Davies said set me thinking.' Anna paused, sifting the information Blanche had volunteered from the story Adam had told her the night before. 'She said her sister didn't confide in her. Adam Weaver said at his trial that his wife was having an affair.'

'You think the lover could have killed her?' Dan asked.

'It's a possibility.'

'Why would any man kill his bit on the side?' Peter asked.

'Jealousy – anger – perhaps she told him it was over. It has to be worth looking at.'

‘No innocent man would escape from gaol and undergo something as drastic as a face change,’ Peter argued. ‘Weaver’s life was wrecked. He went from being a rich, successful actor, with a family, to a penniless nobody in Jubilee Street. If he’d been innocent he would have stayed in prison and written letters to the newspapers and his MP – gone on hunger strike – asked his solicitor to lodge an appeal.’

‘He did all that, except the hunger strike, but his efforts weren’t reported. He could have escaped in order to find the real killer.’

‘That’s one hell of a jump,’ Peter looked at her. ‘First he’s innocent, and now he’s playing Sherlock Holmes.’

‘What if the real killer knows Tony is Adam Weaver?’ Anna proposed uncertainly.

‘How would he?’ Trevor frowned. ‘It took us long enough to find out.’

‘What if he had something to do with Adam Weaver’s face transplant?’

‘Philip Matthews died, not Adam Weaver,’ Trevor pointed out.

‘He died wearing Tony’s clothes,’ Anna recalled.

‘Even if Weaver’s wife was killed by someone else and that someone is now after Weaver, which I don’t believe,’ Peter said flatly, ‘I can’t see how the killer would know Weaver was Tony. But if he did, why did he set fire to the wrong man in Jubilee Street?’

‘He went by the clothes. It was dark...’

‘Close up, Matthews was nothing like Tony. And he must have seen him. There are lights in Jubilee Street,’ Trevor reminded her.

‘Adam Weaver shot me and set fire to the factory. Even if he didn’t murder his wife, he’s a killer now.’ Peter lifted his feet on to the desk. ‘The man’s a psychopath.’

‘You’re probably right.’ Anna went to the door. Peter was pig-headed, abrasive and chauvinistic but he made sense. Just as Adam had the night before.

Peter picked out a pale grey leather jacket from his wardrobe. He slipped it over the black silk shirt he was wearing and walked into his living room.

‘What do you think?’ he asked Trevor. ‘Prosperous dealer?’

‘Mafia hood,’ Trevor retorted. ‘No one wears black shirt, trousers and tie any more.’

‘You obviously don’t look at the Sunday colour supplements.’

‘Not with a view to wearing what they advocate.’

‘Aren’t you looking forward to our night on the town?’ Peter switched off the light. ‘Station first for the briefing, then we start. The clubs or the pubs?’

‘The clubs,’ Trevor buttoned his jacket.

‘That suit was never wonderful but a pressing might have lessened the dog-eared look.’

‘It’s the new, lived-in crumpled style.’

‘Play second fiddle to my lead. No one’s going to believe a dealer in a suit that cheap.’ Peter couldn’t resist one last glance in the mirror before walking out of the door. ‘You know something,

Trevor. You make a more convincing down-and-out than you do prosperous villain. Rags suit you better.'

'You all right?' Sarah asked Anna as they sat side by side in front of a computer that rose like an island in a sea of multi-coloured files.

'Not really,' Anna tried to pick up one of the files with her wrists.

'Now we've collected all the information, I can carry on just as well without you,' Sarah said. 'Inputting data is a one-man job.'

'You sure?'

'Absolutely. Want me to check if there's a car free to take you home?'

'Please.' Anna sat back as Sarah picked up the internal telephone. 'My idea of heaven at this moment is to stick plastic bags over these,' she held up her bandaged hands, 'have a hot shower, and crawl between the sheets before carrying on with this lot,' she indicated a second pile of files at her feet.

'That sounds like a recipe for sleep, not work.'

Peter stuck his head around the door. Anna stared at his well-groomed hair and wide boy outfit, Sarah wolf whistled.

'This is nothing,' he winked. 'Wait until you see Trevor. He's wearing a suit and tie.'

'No shirt?'

'That too. You rang for a lift for the invalid?'

'I can get a taxi,' Anna protested.

Peter wondered if it was his imagination or if Anna was trying to avoid him. He tried to think of

something he might have done to upset her. 'We're going your way.'

'It's all right...'

'For once, do as you're told.' Peter scooped the files at her feet into his arms. 'These going with you?'

'Yes, but...'

'No buts, into my car.'

'I've got your coat.' Trevor was in the doorway. Merchant sniffed.

'You two should have got together. Your colognes fight dreadfully.'

'Only Trevor's,' Peter said. 'He has no taste. Anna, do I have to carry you out?'

Anna allowed Trevor to drape her coat over her shoulders. She'd warned Adam to stay out of sight. She hoped he'd have the sense to do just that until she came to a decision about the case – and him.

'How about inviting us in for a cup of coffee?'

'Mine is the house you're afraid of catching the plague in, remember?' Anna pushed down the door handle with her elbow.

'We're prepared to risk it, aren't we, Trevor?'

'I really am tired...'

'You can't stop me from carrying your files to the door.'

'I can manage.'

'Just as far as the door, for Christ's sake.'

Trevor stayed in the car. Peter didn't even make it as far as the doorstep. Anna unlocked the door and blocked Peter's path. He dumped the files on her forearms and turned on his heel.

‘What have you done to the lady?’ Trevor enquired as he returned to the car.

‘Nothing much, as yet.’

‘Perhaps it’s the “yet” she’s wary of.’

‘When this case is over, she’ll have good reason to be wary,’ Peter muttered.

‘She could have a lover holed up in there,’ Trevor teased. ‘Some officers have private lives.’

‘And some make a total balls-up of them, even when they’re lucky enough to find an ideal partner,’ Peter bit back viciously.

Trevor had almost forgotten about nightclubs. The close, fetid darkness with its animal lair smell of sweat, cheap perfume and stale beer; deafening music that extinguished thought along with conversation; raucous female groups wearing fixed smiles; men, drunk, predatory, circling, looking to get laid before morning.

‘See anyone?’ Peter shouted in Trevor’s ear.

‘You’re Drugs Squad, not me. I haven’t been in a club in over a year.’

Peter fought his way to the bar and ordered two pints. He handed Trevor his and surveyed the scene.

‘Over there.’

Peter glanced in the direction of Trevor’s nod. Hands passed discreetly one over the other, thumbs tucked in. Concealing small packets? Or rolls of notes? Holding his glass above the heads of the crowd, Peter fought his way towards the short, thin, rat-faced man Trevor had been watching. ‘Bentley?’

The man backed away. ‘I’m clean, I’m...’

‘What’s this?’ Trevor’s hand closed over Bentley’s first.

‘I don’t know. I swear it. Man gave it to me...’

‘Not so loud, Bentley,’ Peter cautioned. ‘You’re disturbing these good people. Let’s take a walk outside.’

‘I’m clean, Sergeant...’

‘Either you come quietly, or we book you for dealing,’ Peter threatened.

Trevor squeezed Bentley’s fist.

‘I’m coming,’ he squealed.

Peter clamped his hand on Bentley’s shoulder. ‘To the door. Three mates having a chat. No problem. Understand?’

When they reached the pavement Peter unlocked the car and opened the doors. Trevor pushed Bentley on to the back seat and followed. Peter sat in the driver’s seat.

Peter leaned over the back of his seat, thrust his hand into the inside pocket of Bentley’s jacket, and pulled out half a dozen small plastic bags. He switched on the interior light. ‘This what I think it is?’ he asked Bentley.

‘Why guess, when the lab will tell us?’ Trevor squeezed Bentley’s hand again. He yelped and dropped a roll of bank notes.

‘There has to be five hundred quid here,’ Trevor guessed.

‘I want my lawyer.’ Bentley yelped.

‘What do you think he’s going to do for you? Here are the goods,’ Peter tucked the plastic envelopes back into Bentley’s pocket, ‘and here’s the price.’ He opened Bentley’s hand and placed the

roll of notes on his palm. 'It's the station for you, lad.'

'I'm not telling you anything. You can do what you like to me. I won't say a word.'

'Who's asking you questions?' Peter turned to face the road.

'You're booking me?'

'We may put a few words out on the street before you're able to arrange bail.'

'What kind of words?' Bentley was sweating despite the cool night air.

'The names of those you've shopped. And there'll be all the raids we'll arrange, as a result of information received. We've been watching you, son,' Peter lied. 'We know your suppliers, your customers...'

'They'll kill me.' Bentley was shaking so much the car began to rock.

'Possibly,' Peter agreed.

'If you know my supplier you know more than me,' Bentley gibbered. 'I swear on my mother's life I never see anyone. I picked this up same place I always do.'

'From the dustbin at the back of the club.'

'If you know that, then you must know I put the money there at the end of the night. I've never seen no one, please...'

Peter thrust a photograph of Tony under Bentley's nose. 'This man has to be getting his stuff from somewhere.'

'Not from me. I swear it... I've never seen him...'

‘You’re a bloody liar. His picture’s in all the papers. On the television...’

‘I never said I hadn’t seen his picture, only him.’

‘The man is a killer.’ Trevor tried to speed up the interview. ‘And the man who sells him his next fix could end up like the poor bastards in the abandoned factory.’

‘He did that?’

‘Where’ve you been living, Bentley?’ Trevor said wearily.

Peter switched on the ignition.

‘I haven’t seen him. But I’ll ask around...’ Bentley panicked as Peter pulled away from the kerb. ‘Where you taking me?’

‘You didn’t come up with the goods,’ Peter slammed the car into gear. ‘So we’ll read you your rights in the station and ask you to empty your pockets.’

‘Please...’ Bentley begged.

Peter slammed on the brakes. ‘You know the street workers. You put the word out. If you come up with our man we’ll forget tonight.’

Bentley opened the door and ran.

Anna walked through her living room into the kitchen area. She’d left the curtains drawn that morning, and Adam hadn’t opened them, but he had cleaned up. The floor was clear; there was a smell of soap, disinfectant, and something appetising. She opened the oven door and saw a casserole bubbling. Closing it, she dropped her shoulder bag on to the table and went upstairs. The bed was made, the

furniture dusted, but there was no sign of Adam. She tried the bathroom door. It was locked. She knocked quietly.

‘Adam?’

When there was no answer, she said, ‘I’m alone.’

‘I heard voices.’

‘A colleague brought me home. I can’t drive with these hands.’

‘I heard him. He didn’t seem to want to go.’

‘We work together. He’s concerned about me.’

He opened the door.

‘I wasn’t sure you’d be here when I got back.’

‘I nearly ran,’ he admitted. ‘Last night I felt I could trust you. After you left this morning I wasn’t sure. I thought you might bring someone back with you. I thought –’

‘You thought I’d return with a posse to arrest you.’

‘Yes.’

‘That’s what logic tells me I should do.’

‘You haven’t told anyone I’m here?’

‘No, but it will cost me my job if anyone finds out you’ve been here. You wouldn’t believe the time, money and manpower that’s being poured into the search for you. I’ve sat in that station all day, hearing people talk about you – hazarding guesses as to where you are...’

‘I’m grateful, Anna.’ He laid his hand on her shoulder. Standing close to him on the landing, listening to his voice, the years tumbled away. It was as if he’d never left her.

‘Adam, we have to talk,’ she pleaded.

‘I’ve made a casserole with some beef I found in your freezer.’

‘I saw it in the oven.’

‘I came across a few bottles of wine when I cleaned under the stairs. There was a Rioja. Did you remember that it used to be my favourite?’ He stroked the side of her cheek and stepped back into the bedroom.

‘I remember a great deal too much,’ she answered before walking away from him.

Trevor and Peter went from backstreet dealers to the clubs, the pubs, the twenty-four hour corner shops that had more on offer than the sweets and tobacco on the counter.

‘If we were awarded brownie points for busting small-time dealers, we could be everyone’s blue-eyed boys tomorrow,’ Peter said as they left a boarded-up shop on the fringe of a council estate.

‘All units – all units –’

Trevor picked up the radio transmitter from the dash.

‘We’re on special duties,’ Peter complained.

‘The call was all units.’

‘Knife fight in casualty at the General.’

Trevor replied, ‘We’re on our way.’

‘I’d forgotten it was Friday night.’

‘Saturday,’ Trevor corrected as Peter pressed his foot on the accelerator.

Anna checked the curtains were closed tightly, before sitting opposite Adam at the table. She watched him ladle casserole on to two plates.

‘Can we go over Laura’s murder again?’ she asked.

‘Did you know that I was having an affair with her when we were living together?’

‘Yes.’ She looked at the plate he set in front of her. ‘No reminiscing, Adam. Stick to the facts.’ She was angry with him for trying to make love to her, but she was angrier with herself for being tempted.

‘I married Laura because she was pregnant with Hannah.’

‘The days of shotguns held to bridegrooms’ heads are long over.’

‘I was besotted, not with Laura, but with the thought of becoming a father. I thought Laura was carrying a son in my image.’

‘But you had a daughter.’

‘I wasn’t disappointed. Not once I’d seen her. And Laura got what she wanted.’ He picked up his fork and stabbed at a sliver of beef on his plate. ‘She set out to catch me, and she did with the oldest trick in the book. But she wanted my success more than me. I think she hoped some of it would rub off on her. But I was never happy with her. Not in the same way I had been with you,’ he said softly.

‘And half a dozen others.’

‘Success made me a desirable commodity, socially, financially, sexually – I lost my head. When Laura told me she was pregnant it came as a shock, but after all the partying the prospect of a family life and kids seemed attractive. We married. I bought the cottage and the lease of a flat in London. I was working long hours, but there were compensations. Laura never knew how many hours

filming were stretched to accommodate a willing fan or actress.'

'So you weren't faithful to her either?'

'I can't remember being faithful to anyone, except perhaps you.'

'Cut the bullshit,' Anna snapped.

'I mean in the early days when we were both broke. You need money to be unfaithful; even if it's only bus fare.'

She laughed, in spite of the pain.

'I knew I was neglecting Laura and Hannah. I'd almost finished filming that last series, and told Laura that I wanted to spend the summer in the cottage; perhaps subconsciously I was hoping to salvage what was left of our marriage. I suspected she was having an affair. There were a lot of wrong numbers. Callers hanging up as soon as I answered the phone. And Laura was wearing good jewellery that I'd never seen before. She wasn't the sort to buy pieces herself. Fake yes, but not the real thing. She had taken to spending weekends at her sister's. I'd ring up and Blanche and Hannah would be alone.' He pushed his plate aside.

'You didn't confront her because you were playing around too?'

'Yes,' he sat back in his chair. 'It was a Wednesday. We were due to go down to the cottage at the weekend. I'd finished filming at midday, and the costume fittings for the next series had been put off until Thursday and Friday. I turned up at the flat to find Laura packing. She told me she was going to the cottage. I was furious because Hannah had a couple of days left at school. She wanted Laura and

me to see her in the end of term concert that Friday. I suspected that Laura was leaving because she wanted to screw her lover. We argued. I'd had a couple of drinks to celebrate the end of the series – to cut a long story short, I hit her.'

'Hard?'

'Hard enough. She stormed out, telling me I'd never see her again as long as I lived. She also said she'd fight to get custody of Hannah, and given my record of drinking and violence she'd get her. That was the last time I saw Laura alive.'

'You didn't follow her?'

'I told you, I'd been drinking, certainly too much to drive.'

'The police found mud on your car.'

'I've never cleaned a car in my life. You know that.'

'Mud, in London?'

'We'd spent all week filming on Wimbledon Common. It could have been from there.'

'You didn't go anywhere near the cottage?'

'I had no reason to. I didn't believe Laura had gone there after our argument. I assumed she'd go to his place, wherever it was. If you've read the files on the case you know the police didn't find a shred of evidence in that cottage to prove I'd been there that night. They couldn't even match the mud on my car to the mud around the cottage.'

'You'd played a detective for close on six years. You had enough knowledge and sense to wear gloves – over-boots –'

'If I did, where were they when the police searched the flat and my car?'

‘Bottom of a lake, a pond, a river.’

‘You don’t want to believe me.’ He poured out the wine with an unsteady hand.

‘Damn it all, Adam, I do want to believe you. That’s why I’m sitting here, asking you questions instead of phoning my super.’ Using the heel of her palm she pushed her wine glass towards him. He filled it. ‘But you did leave the flat that night?’ she continued.

‘After Laura left, I lay on the bed and slept. I woke in the dark, then I telephoned Hannah to wish her goodnight.’

‘Where was she?’ Anna already knew from the files, but she wanted him to tell her.

‘With a friend from school. It was a special occasion; a birthday.’

‘And after you phoned?’

‘I showered, and changed. But you know that already. The prosecution lengthened my trial by two days by concentrating on the importance of my changing clothes.’

‘You changed because they were covered in mud?’

‘From Wimbledon Common,’ he replied. ‘I had a hangover from the afternoon’s drinking and I decided to go for the hair of the dog. All I could find in the flat was half a bottle of wine. I wanted something stronger, so I walked to the off-licence.’

‘No one saw you go out?’

‘The porter, he testified at the trial.’

‘But he couldn’t put a time on when you left, and he didn’t see you return.’

‘And I was convicted on the deficient memory of a geriatric.’

‘You were convicted on the evidence put forward by the prosecution.’

‘All circumstantial.’

‘How far was the off-licence?’ she questioned.

‘Ten minutes.’

‘And you saw no one?’

‘Of course I did. There were people around. It wasn’t that late.’

‘But not one of them could recall seeing an actor who was a household name.’

‘I can’t explain that, other than to say it was dark. The weather was foul. I’d turned up the collar of my coat. I was carrying an umbrella.’

‘TV personalities complain that they can’t step out of doors without being mobbed.’

‘For once I wasn’t.’ His voice was brittle with irritation. ‘I bought a bottle of whisky.’

‘What brand?’

‘How in hell should I remember?’

‘Because it’s important.’

‘It wasn’t at the time, because I didn’t know I was going to be charged with killing my wife.’

‘The assistant didn’t remember seeing you.’

‘No, but I was able to testify that he’d had his nose glued to a book.’

‘But you couldn’t say what that book was.’

‘Because it was opened out flat on the counter. He took my money, gave me my whisky and change...’

‘But no receipt.’ Anna had studied the files thoroughly. ‘And it was company policy to give all customers receipts.’

‘Maybe I dropped it.’ He felt as though she had placed him in the dock again.

‘There were no receipts found in the rubbish swept from the floor of the shop that night. None in the flat, in your car...’

‘But a half-full bottle of whisky with a price tag bearing the name of the off-licence was found on my coffee table.’

‘A bottle which could have been bought at any time.’ She played devil’s advocate. ‘You were seen leaving the flat. No one remembers seeing your car in the garage of the flats that night...’

‘No one remembers not seeing it. Half the people who lived in that apartment block were dead from the neck up. They’d do anything not to get involved in a scandal.’

‘No one saw you walking to the off-licence. The assistant didn’t remember serving you. No one saw you walking back,’ she continued mercilessly.

‘I watched television. I told the police what I saw.’

‘A four-year-old film. You could have seen it in the cinema or on video...’

‘I’ve been through all this a hundred times.’ He sank his head down on his arms.

‘You have no idea who Laura went to meet that night?’ she asked, when the silence grew too much to bear.

‘Do you think I’d have gone to prison if I had?’ he mumbled miserably.

‘You must have had some idea who her friends were.’

‘She claimed she spent time with Blanche. She had lunch with friends in London now and again, but the police checked everyone I knew. They were all in her address book. Laura was offered very little work after Hannah was born. The naïve young girl roles she’d been landed with dried up as she grew older.’

‘On what little you’ve told me we stand no chance of finding Laura’s murderer.’

‘I have to try!’ He crashed his fist down on the table, sending the crockery rattling. ‘If I don’t, I’ll be sent back to prison, and I’d go mad. I wouldn’t last there a week. I’d kill myself! I’d kill myself.’ His voice dropped to a whisper.

Such was Adam’s emotional intensity, Anna believed him capable of anything at that moment – even murder. He’d admitted that he’d hit Laura – had he gone further –?

She thought guiltily of her colleagues, the resources being expended on the search for Adam. If any of them ever found out she’d sheltered him, it wouldn’t just be her job on the line. She’d end up in a cell. As she pushed her empty glass back towards him she made a note to check the maximum penalty for harbouring a felon.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Trevor and Peter weren't the first police officers to reach the General Hospital. Andrew Murphy and Chris Brooke were already there, dealing with a fracas in reception.

'A domestic, sir,' Chris shouted to Trevor above a sea of heads, as he handcuffed a fair-haired, stocky man with blood streaming from a cut above his eye.

'No wife of mine is sleeping around. Not while I've breath in my body,' the man roared.

A woman with a bruised mouth and a bloody gap where her front teeth should have been screamed at him from Andrew's restraining arms. 'I divorced you six months ago, you bastard.'

'Happy families,' Peter grumbled. 'Why can't they beat up one another off my shift?'

'The wife's boyfriend is in theatre.' A sister bustled in with a tray of plasters, sutures and scissors.

'Three of them did this?' Trevor looked at the upturned chairs and puddles of blood.

Two paramedics crashed along the corridor behind them wheeling a trolley.

'You know what Saturday nights are like here. Couldn't you have taken this one up the road?' the sister pleaded.

The paramedic took the sister to one side and began relating as much of the case history as he knew in an urgent, low-pitched whisper. After

glancing down at the elderly man, the sister called for a nurse to escort them into a treatment room.

‘Do you want us to take this lot down the station and charge them, as soon as they’re bandaged up, Sarge?’

‘Please,’ Peter answered Chris. He turned to Trevor. Glad to leave the chaos they headed for the door. Halfway along Trevor realised Peter was no longer with him. Looking back, he saw his partner standing in the entrance to the treatment room that the elderly man had been taken into.

‘It’s Marks,’ Peter told him.

‘Brian Marks, the solicitor?’ Trevor asked.

‘Yes,’ Peter looked up. ‘Where did that sister go?’

Anna had drunk too much. The one bottle of wine had become three. She’d barely touched the casserole Adam had cooked and the alcohol, mixed with the painkillers she’d taken to see herself through the day, had muddled her senses to the point where she was no longer capable of evaluating anything Adam said to her.

The room swam around her as his exquisite voice droned on softly. She was conscious of its soothing resonance, the contrived poetic harmony, but she could no longer decipher the meaning behind his words. All evening they’d talked, but she was more confused than when she’d left the station that afternoon.

The trained detective in her knew that Adam hadn’t given her a single fact to support his innocence. His alibi for the night of his wife’s death

sounded no better now than it had done two years ago. His explanation for changing clothes with the army deserter, who'd subsequently burnt to death, was risible. If the red boots had worried him that much, why hadn't he dumped them and salvaged another pair from a charity clothing skip? And she'd seen him in the factory before the fire with her own eyes. Just as she'd seen him when Peter had been shot

Peter was right. Adam had received his day in court and been convicted. And since his escape from prison he'd wrought death and destruction on everyone and everything he'd touched. Why was she sitting here, listening to him when she should be on the phone to the super?

Was it because of an old love that should have died years ago? Or was there an innocence in Adam that she sensed against all logic?

'Do you realise that I'm committing a crime?' she interrupted harshly. 'It's called harbouring a felon. I could go to prison, lose my job...'

'As a cop?'

She detected the sneer. 'I'm a good officer,' she said in a slurred voice. 'Going undercover is not that different from acting. It's taken me a long time, but I've found something I'm good at. My work is everything. I've built a life around it. Not much of one by your old standards,' she gazed defiantly around her shabby living room, 'but it's all I've got. If I could see a way to help you prove your innocence, I'd say stay here and I'll help you. But from what you've told me, I can't see any point.'

‘Blanche might have some idea who Laura was having an affair with,’ he continued unrelentingly.

‘She’s already told us she didn’t. It’s not that I don’t believe you, Adam. It’s more like I can’t. I’m not the same person you used to know. I’m police officer first now, Anna second.’

‘You’re not that different.’ He dumped the used plates on the draining board and turned to face her. She rose from her chair and moved towards him.

Wrapping his arms around her shoulders, he bent his head and kissed her gently. His lips – Anthony George’s lips, grazed her own. She closed her eyes so she didn’t have to look at his face. It was too familiar – too dangerous. She pushed him away.

‘I’m sorry, Anna. I hurt you once and I’m hurting you again. I have no right to ask anything of you. I’d better get going, but, before I do, I want you to know that whatever happens, I won’t reveal to anyone that I was here, or that you helped me.’

‘Where will you go? No, don’t tell me.’

This time she was the one who kissed him. The kiss led to another – and another. Slowly they climbed the stairs. She felt too tired, too muddled by a heady mixture of wine and emotion to think clearly.

Tomorrow – she would think in the morning. Things always seemed better in the morning. One night couldn’t make any difference to the police search, and for the first time in years, Adam was entirely hers. She had the night and she had him. For now, she would shut out everything else except that.

‘You sure that was Brian Marks?’

'I interviewed him.' Peter paced the length of the side room the sister had shown them into. The door opened and a young woman walked in wearing a doctor's coat.

'You waiting for news of Mr Brian Marks?'

'Yes.'

'Relatives?'

'Police.' Peter pulled out his ID.

'I'm the houseman. If Mr Marks has a family they should be contacted.'

'He hasn't a family in the UK,' Peter said. 'What's wrong with him?'

'Paracetamol overdose.'

'Serious?'

'Fatal. But for the moment Mr Marks is lucid. He told us he booked into a hotel room three days ago, and swallowed an entire bottle of forty tablets. He's surprised to be still alive, and frankly so are we. But as the drug has been in his bloodstream for more than forty-eight hours, the damage to his organs is irreversible. There's little we can do except make him comfortable and wait for the inevitable.'

'How long?' Peter asked.

'Any time. He obviously knew what he was doing. And, in my experience, if someone is serious about suicide, they generally succeed. He wouldn't be here now if it hadn't been for the efforts of a persistent chambermaid who opened his door with a master key.'

'Is he capable of answering questions?'

'For the moment, yes.'

'Can we talk to him?'

‘Only if he wants to talk to you. We’re going to move him up to a ward shortly. But with such massive internal damage, his condition could deteriorate at any moment.’

The young doctor ushered Trevor and Peter into the cubicle where Brian Marks was lying on the trolley he’d been brought in on. His skin was waxy and he was trembling. His eyes, dull and glazed, remained unfocused although he turned towards them.

‘Is there anyone we can send for, Mr Marks?’ Trevor asked.

‘No one. I live quite alone...’ his voice faded to a whisper.

‘What about your nephew in America?’ Peter suggested.

‘It will be over before he could get here.’

‘We could telephone him.’

‘No.’ Brian Marks’s reply was final.

‘We’ve been looking for you,’ Peter said. ‘One of our colleagues went to the States to interview your nephew, Laurence Marks, in connection with a case involving murder and arson. As a result of that interview, we have reason to believe that both the murder and the arson attack were carried out by one Adam Weaver, who was represented by your firm when he was charged and convicted of murdering his wife. We now also know, that courtesy of your nephew’s surgical skill, Weaver is wearing the face of one Anthony George, now deceased and also an ex-client of yours. Would you like to tell us what you know about these crimes and Adam Weaver’s

current whereabouts? However if you do so, I have to caution you that anything you say...

‘It’s too late for a caution.’ Brian Marks closed his eyes. If it hadn’t been for the slight movement of the blanket covering his chest, Trevor would have believed him already dead.

‘Would you please tell us, sir, why you arranged for Adam Weaver to receive another man’s face in a transplant operation?’ Peter pressed.

‘I didn’t. Laurence did. He told me about it afterwards. By then it was too late.’

‘Too late?’ Peter moved closer to the trolley so he wouldn’t miss a word.

‘Laurence thought I’d be pleased. That I’d take Weaver to Emma...’

‘Who’s Emma?’ Peter interrupted.

‘Anthony George’s mother. Laurence knew I loved her. But she was already...’ his voice tailed off as his eyelids flickered.

‘Dead?’ Trevor prompted.

The old man moved his head slightly. ‘I told Laurence he was mad. He could never have fooled a mother about her own child.’ Marks’s voice was growing frailer, feebler by the second.

‘Did you arrange Adam Weaver’s escape from prison?’

‘No. I didn’t know anything about it until it was all over. *Fait accompli*. Laurence –’ the old man’s eyes clouded with death. ‘He would never have admitted it, but he was afraid the transplant wouldn’t take. I blame myself for not going to the police when Laurence first offered me Anthony George. Lazarus returning from the dead to comfort

his dying mother...' a bubble of bloody froth burst on the old man's lips. 'It was preposterous...' Brian Marks gripped the sleeve of Trevor's coat. 'I thought no one would believe me. And Laurence wouldn't tell me what he'd done with Adam Weaver afterwards.'

'Did you know that Adam Weaver was wearing Anthony George's face when I interviewed you in your office?' Peter demanded.

'I suspected Laurence had killed him. I had no idea he had set him free...' Marks's voice was so low, Peter and Trevor had to bend their heads to hear what he was saying. 'I didn't think he'd kill again, but I should have known...' the old man's eyes closed again.

'What should you have known?' Peter urged.

'I saw the photographs of what he'd done to his wife. All those people dead and I'm to blame because I kept silent.' Brian Marks's grip on Trevor's coat tightened. He sat up suddenly; his eyes no longer dull, but burning feverishly. 'He swore he was innocent in court and I believed him. There are plenty of innocent people in our prisons. We all know that.'

'More than is generally realised,' Trevor agreed in an attempt to soothe the old man as he lowered him gently back on to the trolley.

'Adam Weaver said he would do anything to get out of prison and prove his innocence. And he did, didn't he? He exchanged his face for a dead man's. He said – he said –' The effort proved too much, Marks sank down on the trolley, his hand swung heavily at the side. A nurse, who'd been

hovering nearby, stepped closer. She picked up his hand and laid it on his chest.

‘We’re moving him to the ward now.’

‘Can we stay with him?’ Trevor asked.

‘I’ll check with the doctor, but you’ll be wasting your time.’ She blotted the bubble of frothy blood from Marks’s lips with a tissue. ‘The end is very close. I doubt he’ll come around again.’

Anna opened her eyes and sensed something was wrong. She stretched out her hand to find the other half of the mattress empty and cold. Had Adam gone without saying goodbye? Heart pounding, she slid out of the bed, switched on the light and checked the clock. Half past three in the morning.

Slipping on her dressing gown and holding it closed with her bandaged thumb she checked the bathroom. It was empty. Shivering, uncertain whether she wanted Adam to be in the house or not, she went downstairs. The curtains were closed and the light was switched on.

Adam was sitting at the table, his back towards her, a pen in his hand and a pad of notepaper in front of him. He turned, and she gasped. He’d cropped his hair to within half an inch of his scalp, with her nail scissors, judging by the unevenness of the cut. He’d bleached the remains with the peroxide she used on her own hair. He’d applied a tan make-up to give his face colour and painted a credible scar down his left cheek, using a mixture of clear and red nail varnish. An actors’ trick they’d been taught in college.

‘I tried not to wake you. I’ve taken five pounds from your purse. I left an IOU. I’ve no idea when I’ll be able to pay you back.’

‘Don’t worry about it.’ She’d noticed her sharpest kitchen knife lying on the table next to him. It was the one she used for slicing frozen food. He picked it up and she shrank instinctively towards the door.

‘I made toast. Do you want some?’

Walking backwards, she shook her head as she crashed her spine painfully into the newel post at the bottom of the stairs.

He gestured to the note-pad. ‘I’m writing a letter to Hannah.’ He turned back towards her, his hand closed lightly around the knife. ‘You’ll post it for me?’

‘Of course.’ She began to retreat up the stairs.

‘Anna...’

‘I have to go to the bathroom.’ She turned and raced up the last few steps; diving into the room, she closed and bolted the door. Sitting on the edge of the bath she stared at the flimsy bolt, wondering how long it would hold if Adam Weaver applied his shoulder to the door. Not long at all.

‘Damn Brian Marks for pegging out before telling us the whole story,’ Peter complained, as he and Trevor stepped out of the entrance to the casualty department.

‘I don’t think there was much more. I doubt he saw Weaver after he left prison.’

‘You’re probably right. But where does that leave us now?’

‘Where we were this morning. Nothing’s changed except we know a little more.’

‘Like?’

‘Like the guilt an old man carried around with him for keeping his mouth shut.’

‘Has it occurred to you that Philip Matthews and those kids who fried in that old factory might still be alive if Brian Marks had come to us when he found out what his nephew had done to Weaver?’

‘Yes. But the thought doesn’t bring us any closer to finding him.’

‘No, but it does bring us nearer to Blanche Davies.’

‘You reckon she knows something?’

‘She knew Brian Marks fairly well.’

Trevor glanced at his watch. ‘It’s four in the morning. We can hardly go banging on her door at this hour. I’m for bed, even it is only for an hour or two. Want to come back for a nightcap? If you have one too many, the spare bed is made up.’

‘I wish I could say I’ve somewhere better to go to but, seeing as I haven’t, thanks.’

‘You two look as though you’ve had a night on the tiles,’ Dan commented, when Trevor and Peter strolled into the office bleary-eyed at nine o’clock.

‘A night in the hospital more like. We found Brian Marks,’ Peter sat behind Trevor’s desk.

‘What was he doing there?’

‘Being a patient – attempted suicide.’

‘Why didn’t you contact me?’ Dan walked around Anna’s desk, where Sarah was working on the computer.

‘There wasn’t time. He very inconsiderately died soon after we found him.’

‘Then it wasn’t attempted suicide. It was successful,’ Dan countered.

‘He was still alive when we first saw him.’

‘It was paracetamol poisoning,’ Trevor interrupted. Peter in a pedantic mood was more than even he could take. ‘But we did talk to him and he corroborated everything Laurence Marks told you about transplanting Anthony George’s face on to Adam Weaver. He blamed himself for not coming to us sooner.’

‘As well he might,’ Dan declared.

‘But none of that gives us a day off from playing “Hunt the Weaver”,’ Peter moaned.

‘I’ve every available man looking, and I see no reason why you two shouldn’t join them,’ Dan helped himself to water from the cooler. ‘Either of you heard from Anna?’

‘No, why?’ Peter looked at him in concern.

‘She isn’t answering her landline or mobile. Could she be staying with friends?’

‘No one I know anything about,’ Peter answered.

‘I’ll send a car round there.’ Dan picked up the phone.

‘Don’t bother with a car. Trevor and I will call in on our way to see Blanche Davies.’ Peter rose from his chair.

‘Haven’t you and Anna already interviewed her?’

‘That was before Brian Marks died.’

‘Marks was her solicitor too, wasn’t he?’

‘And very good friend,’ Peter confirmed.

‘Don’t get side-tracked. Upstairs is complaining about the cost of this investigation. If we don’t come up with Weaver in the next twenty-four hours, they’re cutting our manpower.’

‘There’s a chance that Blanche Davies might think of someone from Weaver’s past who may be sheltering him,’ Trevor said hopefully.

‘I haven’t come up with a single lead that hasn’t already been checked out clear.’ Sarah pressed a button on the computer, and set the printer spewing out paper.

Trevor picked up the first sheet. ‘If Weaver had a friend to fall back on, you think he would have gone to them in the first place, rather than rough it on the streets.’

‘I feel sorry for Weaver in a way,’ Sarah said absently, as she tapped into a search programme. ‘He was a good-looking fellow. It must have been a shock when the bandages came off and he saw an ordinary face staring back at him.’

‘You’re still not entirely convinced that Weaver is our killer, are you, Trevor?’ Dan dropped the file he’d been studying on to Trevor’s desk.

‘I don’t think the facts add up.’

‘Why the hell are you trying to complicate an open-and-shut case?’ Peter demanded irritably. ‘You’re as bad as Anna.’

‘Just trying to get at the truth.’

‘Don’t. It confuses the investigation and makes for more work. Let’s look for Weaver, find him, charge him, and get back to normal.’

‘What’s your idea of normal, Peter?’ Dan smiled.

‘Unfortunately for me, it’s the celibate life of a monk,’ he replied, winking at Sarah.

‘Monks don’t tend to drink as much as you.’

‘I didn’t say which religion I followed. Come on, Trevor. Anna’s first then Blanche Davies.’

‘Her curtains are closed,’ Trevor observed as he drew up outside Anna’s house.

‘That doesn’t mean anything. She often keeps them closed so the neighbours can’t see the mess in her living room.’

‘Then you have ventured into the lady’s den.’

‘Once.’

Trevor winced as Peter banged the passenger door shut. He watched him walk to the front door and ring the bell. Peter pressed it six times, each time more impatiently, but to no avail. Eventually Trevor switched on the ignition and touched the button to lower his window.

‘Like the inspector said, she could be away.’

‘Without telling anyone at the station?’ Peter walked along the front of the house and tried peering through the curtains, but there were no gaps. He returned to the front door, and checked it was locked. ‘I’m going around the back.’

‘I’ll come with you.’ Trevor raised the window and locked the car, before following Peter around the house. He found him staring at a bloody handprint on the glass panel of the back door. Trevor glanced down. Red footprints ran in a cartoon trail up the garden path. A pair of bloody garden shears

lay discarded in the middle of the lawn. The prints ended abruptly before a four-foot fence that marked the boundary between Anna's small garden and the woods behind.

Peter pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket. Wrapping it around his fingers he depressed the handle of the back door. It opened and swung inwards.

'Anna!' It was the first time Trevor had heard fear in Peter's voice.

She was lying face down on the vinyl floor, wedged between a row of kitchen units and the table. Her right arm was folded beneath her head. The black hilt of a carving knife protruded from the crook of her elbow. Her short blonde hair was stained crimson, soaked by the blood that had formed puddles on the brown and white chequer pattern.

Peter backed out through the door. Trevor could hear him vomiting into the drain as he crouched to lay his fingers on Anna's neck – where a pulse would have throbbed, if she'd been alive.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

‘Weaver’s fingerprints are all over this place, Superintendent,’ the forensic scientist who greeted Bill Mulcahy when he parked outside Anna’s house looked like a pantomime snowman in his white hooded suit, mask, gloves and boots. ‘We found them in the living room, the bathroom, the bedroom. Even under the stairs.’

‘Anything else?’ Mulcahy demanded.

‘Semen stains on the sheets on her bed. We’ll have DNA for you later.’ The man pushed a box of bagged items, including bedding, into the back of his van.

‘The bastard raped her!’ Excluded from the crime area by the forensic team, Peter leaned against Trevor’s car. Trevor had wanted to drive Peter back to the office but Peter categorically refused to leave. The atmosphere was electric. Every officer was trying to treat the crime scene like any other, and all of them – including the forensic team – were failing. Anna had been that rare officer, a woman universally liked by her male as well as female colleagues.

‘There’s nothing either of us can do here, Peter,’ Trevor said. ‘Why don’t we let the forensic boys get on with what they have to do? We’ll find out more when they put their report in.’

If Peter heard him he made no sign of it.

Patrick walked out of the back door. The police photographer followed and headed down the garden. A series of flashes illuminated the wooden fence

and concrete posts and lightened the gloom of the grey, overcast morning. Patrick removed his gloves and handed them to his assistant who was moving back the screens that had been erected around the door.

‘I know about the semen stains, but I won’t be drawn on a possible rape until I’ve done a full PM on her in the mortuary.’

‘Her! She had a name,’ Peter shouted.

‘Everyone’s doing all they can,’ Trevor laid a sympathetic hand on Peter’s shoulder. Dan walked around from the back garden on to the paving in front of the house. His enormous figure was covered by a flimsy, flapping paper overall, his hands and feet were swathed in plastic gloves and overshoes. A paper hat, similar to the token headgear worn by catering workers, covered what was left of his hair. He looked ridiculous, but no one smiled.

‘There’s a trail of bloody footprints leading out of the back door and up the garden,’ Dan joined Bill, Trevor and Peter. ‘We found bloodstained shears on the back lawn. Forensic has bagged them. It’s possible he dropped them before climbing over the fence and into the woods. ‘I’ve sent for the dogs.’

‘You think he’s still there?’ Bill asked.

‘If he is, the dogs will find him. He won’t be able to go far without being noticed. Judging by the prints he’s left, he’s soaked in blood.’ Dan looked at Peter. ‘Why don’t you go back to the station?’ he suggested. ‘You could co-ordinate the search for Weaver. The sooner we find him...’

Peter's hand trembled as he gripped a cigar in his top pocket. 'Anna wasn't just a colleague. She meant something to me. Do you understand what I'm saying?' His voice rose as he crushed the cigar to dust. 'I cared for her. I've more right to be here than the rest of you.'

'No matter how close you were, if you were Joe public, you wouldn't be allowed anywhere near this house right now. You know that. Dan's right. We need to pick up Weaver. Before he kills someone else.' Trevor opened his car door. 'Let's go and co-ordinate that search.'

Peter turned on Trevor. 'You can sit on your arse in the bloody station if you want to. I'm not Joe public to be fobbed off with platitudes and parked in a waiting room. I'm a copper. And I'm going to do what coppers are trained to do. I'm going out with those dogs and I'm going to catch that bastard and...'

'Peter, you're not helping us, Anna, or doing yourself any favours,' Bill interrupted testily.

Peter turned his back on them. Placing his hands on the bonnet of the car he stared at his distorted reflection in the paintwork. 'I want to see her.'

'I don't think that's a good idea,' Dan broke in.

'Wait until we get her back to the mortuary,' Bill said.

'So Patrick can clean her up, and lay her out all peaceful and smiling? No! I want to see her the way she is. I want to see – and remember.'

'Shouldn't you telephone her family?' Trevor interrupted, in the hope of distracting Peter.

‘Who? Her sister in Canada? Her brother in South Africa?’

‘We’ll go back to my place, you can use my phone,’ Trevor offered, deliberately ignoring Peter’s sarcasm.

‘I want to see her again, and I want to see her now! Exactly as she is.’

Dan nodded to Patrick. The pathologist returned to the house. Trevor accompanied Peter. Anna’s house was a hive of activity. Paper-suited and masked figures were crawling over every inch of the living room, but their activity stopped short several feet away from the broken figure that lay on the floor between the table and the door.

‘I wouldn’t, if I were you,’ Patrick laid a restraining hand on Peter’s arm.

‘I want to see what he did to her, so I can remind the bastard when I catch up with him.’ Peter stepped through the doorway.

‘No further. Not without overalls.’ Patrick blocked Peter’s path. Trevor took just one look before retreating. Anna’s face was unrecognisable – hardly human. He closed his eyes but the image intruded. Jagged strips of skin lying over deep, blood-soaked gouges running horizontally from forehead to chin. One ear, severed, marooned in a sticky pool of blood at the side of the head, the carving knife embedded in the face; its blade buried in the socket where her eye had been.

Peter stumbled. He would have fallen on Anna’s body if Patrick hadn’t held him upright.

‘Take him away,’ Patrick ordered Trevor.

Everything was red. The grass around him. The damp turf he lay on. Even the mist that covered his eyes and clung to his lashes. All steeped in blood. He inadvertently smeared it over everything he touched. It was sticky, wet. He screwed his eyes shut and shuddered, saw again the great gaping wounds. Relived her screams –

He had to find water. Running water where he could scrub away the gore. But he knew he would never feel clean again. He'd crawled through the fringes of undergrowth bordering the woodlands behind Anna's house. He'd kept on crawling, through the darkness, through the false dawn and the real one. He had no idea of the time. It was day because it was light but it could be morning or afternoon. The atmosphere was misty, grey – dawn or dusk?

Every rustle in the undergrowth sent his pulse-rate soaring. Every animal screech sent his hands protectively to his head. The mist that concealed him was pregnant with unknown danger. God alone knew what evils lurked within the distant shadows.

He had to keep running. But he couldn't venture into town looking the way he did. And he hurt – all over. He tried to lift his right arm, but it wouldn't move. He looked down to see it hanging uselessly at his side. His shirt dripped blood. Hers – or his. He could see a lump where the bone had snapped above the elbow. The pain was excruciating. He bit at the torn sleeve, tearing the cloth further with his teeth. Freeing a strip, he tried

to bind the arm to his chest, but the cloth was slippery... he fell into darkness.

He couldn't lose his grip. Not now. He had to find water and another washing line of men's clothes that he could steal. And afterwards?

Back to the streets, to running, hiding – staying one step ahead. Until Anna's murderer or the police caught up with him. For the first time he hoped it would be the police. At least then he might have a chance of living. But maybe not if they saw him the way he looked now. Not if they thought that he had killed one of their own.

Trevor drove Peter to his own house. He couldn't bear the thought of facing the sympathy of their colleagues at the station and he was afraid what condolences might do to Peter in his fragile state. They both needed a drink and a pub would be too public. He poured out a couple of stiff brandies. Leaving Peter alone in the living room he went into the kitchen, phoned through to the station, spoke to Sarah Merchant and told her where they could be found. Cutting her short, he hung up and joined Peter.

Peter finished his brandy in a single swallow. 'We should be out there looking.'

'With what the super put out on the streets this morning, our absence isn't going to make any difference.' Trevor knew Peter wasn't thinking straight. Soon, very soon, either Bill or Dan would take him off the case. Standard procedure with any officer who was emotionally involved with a victim, especially a murder victim.

‘I can’t just sit here and get plastered,’ Peter tossed back the second brandy Trevor poured for him.

Trevor didn’t answer; he simply refilled both their glasses, sat and prepared to listen.

Sarah Merchant was still inputting information on the computer when Dan Evans and Bill Mulcahy returned to the office. She took one look at their faces and went out to get coffee.

‘If there is anything I can do to help, sir, I’d be glad to do it,’ she said when she returned with a loaded tray. ‘And if it’s a question of unpaid overtime, I don’t mind.’

‘You could attend the case conference this evening at eight o’clock,’ Bill answered. ‘We should have some results in from Patrick and the forensic teams by then that might be useful for cross-referencing.’

‘Come up with anything on the computer as yet?’ Dan asked.

‘I’m still inputting information, sir, but Sergeant Bradley and I went through it all yesterday. Neither of us could find a close contact of Adam Weaver’s that we haven’t already checked out.’

‘Well, we know where he was last night...’

‘Early hours of this morning,’ Bill said as they entered Dan’s inner office. ‘Didn’t you see Anna’s watch? The glass was smashed. The hands stopped at five o’clock. He picked the lock on the back door...’

‘Forensic team did say they weren’t too sure about that.’

‘It was open, wasn’t it?’ Bill demanded. ‘Isn’t that enough evidence? The rest of the house was sealed tighter than a drum.’

‘It looks like he might have come in that way.’ Dan trod carefully, his own emotions in turmoil.

‘Weaver broke in, made a noise, she came downstairs to check, and he attacked.’

‘Let’s wait until we talk to Patrick and the forensic boys. This is one investigation I don’t want to predict.’

‘And one post-mortem I never thought I’d have to witness.’ Bill slammed his fist into the desk.

‘Do you want me to do that?’ Dan asked. ‘She was my sergeant.’

‘You sure you can cope?’

‘I’ll ring Patrick and ask what time he’s doing it.’

‘I’ll co-ordinate the search for Weaver. If you’ve time before the PM I’d appreciate you taking Peter officially off the case.’

‘Completely?’

‘I don’t want him any closer than Sarah Merchant’s computer. And that’s an order.’

Head down against the wind, Adam Weaver jogged along the narrow street of terrace houses. The black track suit he’d pulled off a line was damp. It clung to his limbs. And he was still blue and shivering after his icy plunge into a foul, farm-polluted stream.

He’d left the woods and found himself closer to the centre of town than he’d thought. He knew the area and the short-cuts it offered, including the alley

that led down to the bottom end of High Street – the decaying end. There was a floor-level window that opened into the men’s toilets in the old cinema.

He’d watched the police check out the cinema building two nights ago from the safety of a skip. He’d seen workmen board it up after it had been searched, and later he’d watched a couple of homeless kids prise a board off with claw-hammers, hinging it so it would stand a quick glance. Just like the one that had given them access into the old factory. A squat was risky. But he had to get off the streets, and he had nowhere else to go.

His blood ran even colder as a police car drove slowly alongside him. The window whirred softly downwards. A uniformed man hailed him.

‘We’d appreciate your assistance, sir.’

He had no choice. He stopped running, placed his hands on his knees, and kept his head down low as though he were out of breath.

‘Have you seen this man?’ The officer flashed a photograph of Tony taken from the video.

He took it from the officer’s hands and held it for a few seconds before shaking his head.

‘I’ve not seen him,’ he lilted in a credible Irish accent. It always had been one of his best.

‘If you do...’

‘I’ve seen the posters with the telephone number. I’ll get in touch.’

‘Thank you, sir.’

The car sped past and Adam began to breathe again. A few more yards. There was a room at the back of the cinema few knew about. He’d kipped there for a couple of nights last winter before the

owners had cleared the place out the first time. It had been the projection booth. It might have been his imagination, but it seemed warmer than the rat-infested auditorium. And what he craved most at that moment was warmth. Dry warmth and a deep sleep that would enable him to forget what the murdering bastard had done to Anna.

‘We were going to see Blanche Davies.’ Despite the brandies he’d swallowed, Peter appeared stone-cold sober.

‘We’ve both been drinking,’ Trevor dipped into his third brandy.

‘I’ll drive if you’re drunk.’

‘Peter, it can wait.’

‘No, it damn well can’t.’ Peter was out of his chair before Trevor had time to put down his glass. Cursing, Trevor followed him to the front door. Peter had picked up his keys and was turning over the engine of his car. Trevor slammed the door shut, flicked up the collar of his jacket as protection against the onset of rain and climbed into the passenger seat.

Blanche Davies’ house was warm and fragrant with the cooking odours associated with a traditional English Sunday lunch. The smell coming so soon after the sight of Anna’s hacked body and a surfeit of brandy made Trevor’s stomach heave and his head swim.

Blanche opened the door. ‘Sergeant Joseph.’

‘And Sergeant Peter Collins.’ Peter showed her his identity card.

‘I wasn’t expecting you.’

‘May we come in for a few minutes?’ Trevor asked.

Blanche opened the door and led them into the living room which was more cluttered than the last time Trevor had seen it. The supplements of one of the up-market Sunday papers were scattered over the floor, the children’s comic section uppermost. ‘Hannah?’ Blanche interrupted her niece’s reading. ‘Would you please check the meat and potatoes for me?’

The child looked at Trevor and Peter before leaving the room. Blanche closed the door behind her. ‘How can I help you?’ she asked Trevor.

‘I’m afraid we have some bad news for you, Miss Davies,’ Trevor broke in, taking the responsibility away from Peter.

‘Bad news? About Adam? You’ve found him?’ She sank down on to the sofa.

‘Not Adam Weaver. We’re here about your solicitor, Brian Marks. He died in the early hours of this morning in the General Hospital.’

‘Died? He seemed so fit... .’

‘It was suicide,’ Peter broke in abruptly. ‘He took an overdose of Paracetamol.’

‘Mr Marks killed himself?’ she murmured in a shocked whisper.

‘I’m afraid so,’ Trevor confirmed.

‘But why? Was he ill... ?’

‘Guilt!’

Trevor gave Peter a cautionary look. ‘Brian Marks knew who arranged your brother-in-law’s escape from prison.’

‘Surely if he’d known that he would have gone to the authorities?’

‘He didn’t.’ Trevor countered. ‘Brian Marks also knew that Adam Weaver received another man’s face in a transplant operation carried out shortly after his escape.’

‘A transplant? Are you saying Adam has another man’s face? That photograph – it didn’t look like Adam, but,’ Blanche appealed to Trevor. ‘You and Sergeant Bradley said something about plastic surgery...’

‘We said something like plastic surgery.’ Trevor noticed the muscles knotting on the back of Peter’s hands at the mention of Anna’s name.

‘The newspaper reports I’ve been reading?’ Blanche asked. ‘Was it Adam who murdered that poor man down at the docks?’

‘We would like to question him about that – and the arson attack at the old factory,’ Trevor replied.

‘It’s just that Adam – I found it hard to believe he killed Laura, but this...’

‘Have you or your niece seen this man,’ Peter produced the dog-eared photograph of Tony from his inside pocket, ‘since he was seen loitering outside Hannah’s school?’

Blanche shook her head.

‘Did Brian Marks ever talk to you about your brother-in-law?’ Peter asked.

‘Of course he did, during the trial.’

‘Not during the trial, afterwards?’ Peter persevered. ‘Did he ever mention Adam Weaver’s name after he escaped?’

‘Not that I can recall, other than to ask what I’d do if Adam tried to contact Hannah.’

‘And what would you do?’

She looked Peter in the eye. ‘I’d contact the police. For Hannah and Adam’s sake.’

‘Adam’s sake?’ Trevor repeated.

‘I don’t know whether he’s guilty or innocent. But I abhor violence. I couldn’t live with the thought that I had contributed in any way to someone’s death. And I wouldn’t take that risk by trying to shield Adam.’

‘Then you do think he’s capable of carrying out these crimes?’ Peter homed in on every scrap of information.

‘I don’t know,’ she cried. ‘I don’t know anything for certain about Adam, not any more.’

‘Brian Marks never mentioned your brother-in-law after the trial, other than to ask what you’d do if he contacted you?’ Trevor persisted.

‘No.’

‘And you had no further contact with your brother-in-law. You didn’t visit him in gaol?’

‘No. But I wrote to him, and after Adam was convicted Mr Marks passed on some letters that Adam had written – one to me and one to Hannah.’

‘What did the letters say?’

‘Personal things. In mine there were things he wanted me to tell Hannah about him and Laura while she was growing up. And that he was sorry that I’d been left to pick up the pieces.’

‘Did he claim he was innocent?’ Trevor asked.

‘Not in that letter, but he’d protested his innocence all along.’

‘Did he mention any names? Any friends you might go to if you were in trouble?’

Blanche shook her head as she pulled a handkerchief from her pocket.

‘Is there anyone you can think of who might shelter him?’

‘Don’t you think I would have told you by now if there was?’

‘What was in Hannah’s letter?’ Peter asked.

‘It hasn’t been opened yet. Adam didn’t want her to read it until she was eighteen, but I’m sure there’s nothing in it that will help you find him – oh God!’ The tears that had been hovering close to the surface since they had told her about Brian Marks’s death finally began to fall. ‘I’m sorry. It’s just that I’m going to miss Mr Marks,’ she apologised.

‘I’m sure there’ll be someone else in his solicitors’ firm who’ll be able to pick up where he left off.’ Trevor felt unequal to dealing with Blanche Davies’ grief as well as his own.

‘You don’t understand, it’s not just his firm. He was much more to us than our solicitor.’

‘Auntie Blanche?’ Hannah stood in the doorway, looking very small and alone. ‘I heard you crying,’ she explained, giving Trevor a reproachful glare.

‘Hannah, come here.’ Blanche held out her arms.

‘It’s Daddy, isn’t it?’ The child backed away and rammed a first into her mouth.

‘No, Hannah, it’s not Daddy. It’s Uncle Marks. He died last night.’

‘He was old, wasn’t he?’ the child said practically.

‘Yes.’ Blanche valiantly attempted a smile. ‘He was old.’

‘Well, if he was good, he’ll go to heaven.’ Hannah turned to Trevor. ‘Have you come to talk to me about that man outside the school?’

‘No, Hannah, not unless you’ve seen him again?’

‘I haven’t.’

Trevor looked down at the floor. The last time he’d been in this room, he had been with Anna. Peter wasn’t the only one who was going to miss her. Life was so fragile, so bloody unfair. One minute you were a living, breathing entity going about your business, trying to enjoy yourself as best you could. Then, wham – nothing! Unable to stand still a moment longer he went to the door. ‘Sorry to have to bring you bad news, Miss Davies.’

Tight-lipped, Blanche nodded.

The child went to Blanche and caught her hand. ‘Shall I telephone Uncle Nigel?’

‘Uncle Nigel?’ Peter looked to Blanche, but it was Hannah who continued.

‘He’s our best friend.’

Peter looked at Blanche above the child’s head. ‘Who is Uncle Nigel?’

‘You heard Hannah, a friend,’ Blanche said testily. ‘A very old friend.’

‘Of the family?’ Trevor asked.

‘He was in school with Laura, and college after that.’

Trevor could have kicked himself. Blanche Davies was a stunning woman – one who looked remarkably like her sister. Why hadn't he thought of checking out her men friends to see if there was any connection between them and Laura Weaver's mysterious boyfriend?

'What does he do?'

'He's a freelance film director.'

'Nigel Valance?'

'You know him?' Blanche asked Peter in surprise.

'We have to go.' Peter opened the front door, leaving Trevor to apologise for their intrusion and say their goodbyes.

'Valance was filming down in Jubilee Street for days before that down-and-out was torched,' Peter began as soon as Blanche had closed the door on them. 'He met a number of vagrants when he was making that documentary.'

'He was filming the fire in the old factory before any of the emergency services got there. I saw him there with his camera.'

'Then he could be connected?'

'All we have are a series of coincidences.'

'I gave up believing in those a long time ago,' Peter said as they reached the car. 'Weaver escapes from prison, then goes missing. He disappears into the one world where newcomers don't have to explain themselves. Two years later he re-surfaces here. He can't resist going to see his child, but she talks – she tells this Uncle Nigel...'

'But Hannah said the man's face wasn't her father's.'

‘Valance would know Weaver was an actor. That he could change his appearance.’

‘So much his own child doesn’t recognise him?’ Trevor asked sceptically. ‘What do you want to do?’

‘Radio in – put out a warrant on him.’

‘We haven’t enough evidence.’

‘Ask for a car to watch this place. We’ll use the excuse that Weaver’s likely to turn up any minute. We’ll brief the driver on Valance.’

‘Are you accepting the possibility that Weaver might be innocent?’ Trevor asked.

‘Possibly of killing his wife. But not Anna.’

‘Peter, it doesn’t add up.’

‘Nothing bloody well adds up. It hasn’t since this case started. If we drive past the television centre on our way to the station we’ll pick up Valance’s home address. A couple of hours of hard work and some luck. That’s all we need to bury Weaver, and if need be, Valance alongside him. I always knew there was something perverted about the little shit.’

Trevor eyed Peter warily as he pulled his keys from his pocket. He wondered if Peter had handed back the gun he’d been issued before going into the factory, or if he meant to bury Weaver and Valance – literally.

Tom Morris sat next to a youngster hunched over a bowl of cornflakes in the hostel. ‘Have the squatters who were burned out of the old factory found somewhere to move on to?’

‘Nowhere I’ve heard about.’ The boy carried on crunching.

‘You sure?’

‘I don’t know, do I? If we didn’t have to pay for this place more of us would come here. It’s hard to find what you lot charge for a night’s kip.’

‘Not if you lay off the drink and the drugs.’

‘I’d like to see you try it, Mr Morris. See how far you’d get out there without something extra to keep you warm at night.’

‘Mr Morris?’ A young boy shuffled in front of their table.

‘Yes,’ Tom answered impatiently.

‘Can I have a word with you, sir, in private? It’s important.’

‘Wait outside my office, and I’ll see you there.’

Tom was surprised to find the boy still waiting when he finally climbed the stairs a quarter of an hour later.

‘Come in.’ He checked his watch. He was going to be late for lunch with his wife and her parents if he stopped off to shower and change. Something he did routinely every time he left the hostel.

‘I saw him, Mr Morris, and I didn’t know who to tell. I can’t go to the coppers, because I shouldn’t have been there. But it’s cold at nights...’

‘Who did you see?’ Tom interrupted the boy’s rambling.

‘That man the police are after. The one whose pictures are everywhere. He looked a bit different, but I remember him when he was dossing down here. I’d recognise him anywhere – even with blond

hair. He was climbing into the old cinema. Looked like he'd hurt his arm. He fell down twice.'

'The old cinema's boarded up.'

'Jason hooked a board open like he did in the factory.'

'When did you see him, Bobby?'

'Just now. I was going to save my doss money by sleeping in the cinema tonight. But I won't now. I was in the factory when it went up, and I don't want to get caught twice. But there are others in that cinema, Mr Morris, sir. They should be warned. I didn't know what to do, then I thought of you. Everyone says he's the one who burned that man and set fire to the factory. If he torches the cinema, he'll kill everyone inside. But I can't go to the police. They'll put me back in care...'

'Don't worry, Bobby. You won't have to tell them anything.' Tom picked up the telephone. 'Run along. No one's going to know that you've spoken to me. I won't mention your name.'

'You'll say you saw him, sir?'

'Yes, Bobby. I'll say I saw him.'

CHAPTER NINETEEN

‘It fits,’ Peter argued.

‘You’ve a hell of a lot of suppositions there,’ Dan pointed out.

‘Nigel Valance is a friend of Blanche Davies. He was in school and college with Laura Weaver. What does that tell you? Laura Weaver was having an affair with him, right?’

‘I’ll go that far as a possibility, but to jump from there to Valance killing Laura...’

‘You were the one who believed Weaver was innocent, Trevor,’ Peter reminded him.

‘All I said was that the evidence didn’t add up.’

‘Nigel Valance is Blanche’s friend,’ Peter continued. ‘From the way she talked about him, a good friend. He visits her and Hannah. Supposing Hannah mentioned the man outside her school and said the man looked like her father...’

‘From the back,’ Trevor interposed.

‘Don’t you see? If Weaver changed clothes with Matthews, the same description would have fitted both. Tall, dark, thin, wearing red baseball boots. Matthews could have been killed by Valance in mistake for Weaver.’

‘Two questions, Peter.’ Dan stared at the photographs on the board. ‘First, how did Valance know about Weaver’s face transplant, when we’ve only just found out about it?’

‘Weaver evaded capture for two years after his prison escape. Valance would have guessed that

Weaver had changed his appearance. Weaver was an actor...'

'Tony looks nothing like Weaver.'

Peter thought for a moment. 'It@s possible Marks told him. Marks knew about the transplant, he was also concerned for Blanche Davies and the child. Who better to confide his secret to than Blanche's boyfriend, a man in a position to protect them?'

'Now you're into maybes as well as suppositions,' Trevor protested.

'Valance and Blanche are obviously an item.' Peter was too calm and rational for Dan's liking, for a man who'd just seen his girlfriend's knifed and battered body. Dan was waiting for the full flood of emotion to burst, after the eruptions at Anna's house.

'If you want to find someone prepared to put their all into protecting a woman and child, who better to approach than the man who's knocking off the woman?' Peter went on.

'He was certainly hanging around during the fire at the factory, and from what we know, was practically the first on the scene.'

'It's beginning to fit for you too, Trevor?'

'The second question,' Dan said, 'is, if Valance is our villain, why are Weaver's fingerprints all over Anna's house?'

'Weaver's a man at the end of his tether. He broke in...' Peter struggled to keep his voice steady. '... Anna recognised him. He went berserk.'

'So we have two killers on the loose?' Dan suggested.

‘It’s happened before.’

‘I wish we had Weaver in custody,’ Dan said vehemently. ‘Guilty or innocent, he’s the only one who can help us clear up this mess.’

‘Poor bastard if he is innocent,’ Trevor murmured.

‘Peter, chivvy Sarah, see if she can come up with a list of people who were in drama college with Laura and Adam Weaver, and also the actors they worked with afterwards,’ Dan wanted to keep Peter busy. ‘Trevor, put out a “pick up on sight” on Valance. Assistance with enquiries will do until we have sufficient evidence for a warrant. When he’s brought in, the super and I will question him. And you two,’ he looked sternly at Peter and Trevor, ‘will stay on the other side of the door. And that’s an order.’

‘Files from Sergeant Bradley’s house.’ Chris Brooke dumped a pile on the desk that had been Anna’s, and was now Sarah’s. ‘They’ve been passed on by forensics.’ He glanced at Peter who was slumped on a chair reading the computer printouts as they spewed from the machine. ‘I – we – all the boys, sir. We’re very sorry about Sergeant Bradley.’

Peter continued to thumb through the printouts. If he’d heard Brooke’s condolences, he made no acknowledgement of them. ‘Any news on Valance?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Tell them to look harder.’

‘Sir.’ Chris left.

‘That drama college phoned back yet?’ Peter asked Sarah.

‘You know they haven’t. You’re sitting right next to the phone,’ Sarah retorted.

It was the sort of thing Anna might have said. Hurting more than he would have believed possible, Peter picked up one of the files Chris had left on the desk. A file Anna had looked at only yesterday. When he flicked it open, newspaper cuttings and lists spilled out.

‘Anna was evaluating the information collected by the team who investigated Weaver’s escape from prison,’ Sarah explained when she saw him looking at the cuttings.

‘They, like us, must have been looking for holes he might have bolted to.’ Peter picked up a sheaf of yellowing pages clipped from a stage magazine.

“Student play attracts interest of film-maker”, was the headline that had grabbed his attention. Above it was a photograph of a group of young people in seventeenth-century costume. The girls wore long, lace-trimmed dresses with plunging necklines, the men knee-breeches, flowing shirts and thigh-length embroidered waistcoats. He studied the faces and picked out Adam Weaver.

He was centre-stage, holding the hand of the leading lady who had supposedly attracted the film-maker’s attention. Relegated to the second row, behind him, Peter recognised Laura Weaver’s pert and pretty face, framed by an elaborate wig festooned with ringlets. Nigel Valance was at the end of the last row, dressed in the rough apron of a blacksmith. He stared long and hard at the features of the girl next to him. There was no mistake. Anna

Bradley smiled at him from beneath a maid's white mob cap.

He remembered her transformation when they had gone undercover into the factory.

"I was an actress. I have a college certificate to prove it. A season in a chorus..."

He tossed the photograph to Trevor. 'End of the back row. Anna took care to keep the connection between herself and Weaver away from the computer.' Hands shaking, he picked up a typewritten sheet that proved to be a list of names copied from the drama college's student register.

'Anna knew Weaver?' Trevor said after studying the photograph.

'Looks like it,' Peter snapped.

'I had no idea.'

'She took care to see none of us did.' Peter scanned down the list of names. As it was alphabetical it didn't take him long to find the ones he wanted. Anna's name came first, Laura Davies' second, and Adam Weaver's halfway down the list. And close to the bottom was Valance, Nigel. Four people tied together by murder, ten years on.

'No wonder she wouldn't let any of us near her house for the last couple of days,' Peter snarled.

'You can't think she was sheltering Weaver?'

'What else could it be? The only wonder is we were too bloody stupid to see it. Forensic said his fingerprints were all over the place. The bedroom, the bathroom, the living room, under the stairs – semen stains on the sheet. How many murdering rapists would stay in a house long enough to leave their fingerprints everywhere, and then rape a

woman upstairs on her bed before dragging her downstairs into her kitchen to kill her?’

‘He’s here.’ Andrew Murphy stuck his head around the door of the incident room where Trevor was sifting through papers.

‘Valance?’

‘In room two. The super’s in there with Dan now. All the man’s done since we cautioned him is squeal for his lawyer.’

Trevor dropped the file he was holding, and joined Andrew in the corridor. ‘Have you told Peter?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Tell him I’ll see him in the viewing box.’

Andrew hadn’t exaggerated Valance’s hysteria. He was sitting, purple-faced and seething with indignation, across the table from Bill Mulcahy who was outwardly relaxed. Two officers stood inside the room in front of the closed door.

‘Solicitor arrived?’ Andrew joined Trevor in the viewing room.

‘No.’ Trevor glanced over his shoulder as Peter walked in with Chris. Time dragged on. The colour drained from Valance’s face as anger was replaced by fear, but no one in the interview room, or the viewing box, said a word.

Eventually a short, tubby man wearing a creased suit bustled into the interview room.

‘Sorry I took so long to get here,’ he apologised.

‘Turn the sound up,’ Peter barked.

Trevor leant forward and did as Peter asked.

The solicitor sat at the table, between the super and Valance. He looked up when Dan cautioned Valance before asking him about the arson attack on the old factory.

Loudly protesting his innocence, Valance rose from his chair and went to the door. His solicitor urged him to return to his seat. Dan repeated his question, but the commotion Valance was making drowned him out. Waving his arms, Valance demanded to know why they were even asking him about the fire. It took the combined efforts of Dan, the two officers and the solicitor to return Valance to his chair.

Trevor watched Peter grip the pen he had laid on the table in front of him. He ran his fingers from the bottom to the top, turned the pen over and repeated the performance – again – and again – and again. And all the while, Dan continued to grill Valance. About the fire in the factory – the speed at which he'd appeared on the scene – and his relationship with Blanche Davies and her niece. Suddenly and remarkably composed after his earlier outburst, Valance fielded every question.

'Damned actors,' Trevor swore. 'It's impossible to know when they're telling the truth and when they're lying through their teeth.'

Bill interrupted Dan, faced Nigel Valance and hinted that he might have had an ulterior, possibly perverted, motive for continuing his friendship with Blanche Davies and her niece after Laura's murder.

If Bill had hoped to provoke an emotional response, he succeeded. Nigel Valance's self-control

cracked, and he reverted to the raving, screaming lunatic he had been when Dan had first began to question him. Another ten minutes was wasted while they attempted to calm him. A tray of tea and biscuits was brought in and Nigel returned to his seat at the table next to his solicitor, opposite Dan and Bill.

Bill shuffled his papers and produced the college photograph Peter had found in Anna's files, and pushed it across the table. 'You studied drama alongside Adam Weaver and Laura Davies.'

'I've never denied it.'

'A simple yes or no will suffice, Mr Valance.'

'You had an affair with Laura Weaver?' Dan picked up the questioning.

He looked at his solicitor. 'Do I have to answer that?'

'You don't have to answer anything you don't want to, Mr Valance.'

'But if you don't answer us, Mr Valance, you leave us to draw our own conclusions,' Dan said.

'So I had an affair with Laura Weaver,' he said angrily. 'So what? Her husband was sleeping with half of London, and Laura wanted to get her own back. I wasn't the only one she was bonking on the side.'

'Are you saying Laura Weaver had other lovers besides yourself?'

Peter leaned forward in his chair, his hands closing around his pen.

'Dozens who didn't matter to her, and one who did. She threw me over for him, but he didn't want her. I tried to tell her, but she wouldn't listen. He

was happily married before she came on the scene. He saw her as a passing diversion – nothing more.’

‘Do you know this other man’s name?’

‘Yes. She used to tell me everything. It was all a big game to her. If Adam Weaver slept with twelve girls in a week, she’d want thirteen men. And I was happy to be one of the crowd until he came along and she became infatuated with him. It made no difference that he only wanted a fling. She became obsessed by him. Probably because he was the only man who ever tried to leave her. When he told her he wanted to break it off, she began telephoning him at all hours of the day and night. At home, in work – it made no difference that his wife was the jealous sort – or that she was ruining his career. If anything it added spice to her obsession.’ Valance shook a cigarette out of a packet and pushed it between his lips.

‘His name?’ Dan lit Nigel’s cigarette with a lighter he took from his pocket.

‘Tom Morris. She met him through her sister, Blanche. He and Blanche were both social workers. That was one of his attractions. Unlike the rest of us, he did a serious job, infinitely more worthwhile than entertaining the masses. The first time Laura saw him, he’d just returned from his honeymoon. But as I said, she saw every man as fair game. She wanted him, and she got him – for a while. But when she fell in love with him, I think they both got more than they bargained for.’

‘What exactly do you mean by that, Mr Valance?’ Bill asked.

‘Two weeks before Laura died she told me it was over between us. That she couldn’t carry on living the same empty life she had been. Morris had shown her that there was more to life than drink, parties and casual sex. He was the first man she’d ever really loved. Enough to give up all other men, her career, Adam, even her daughter, if need be. She told me she’d persuaded Tom to leave his wife and go away with her, but the next thing I heard, she was dead.’

‘You weren’t a witness at Adam Weaver’s trial.’

‘I don’t know what happened the night she was murdered. I did wonder if she told Adam about Tom and he lost control. Their fights were legendary, even in college. I’ve seen both of them wearing shades to hide the black eyes they’d given one another.’

In the viewing booth, Andrew said, ‘Which lady killer are you going to put your money on? Weaver, Morris or Valance?’

‘Perhaps Morris decided he wanted to stay married to his wife,’ Chris suggested. ‘And perhaps the mistress threatened to tell the wife the full story.’

‘Morris was in Jubilee Street the night Matthews was murdered and in the old factory the night it burnt down.’ Trevor looked around for Peter, but the door to the viewing booth was swinging on its hinges. He’d left.

Peter drove into Jubilee Street at twice the speed limit. Slamming on the brakes, he screeched to a

halt, abandoning his car a foot from the kerb. He flung open the door and jumped out without retrieving the keys from the ignition. Trevor, who'd raced after him to the station car park, extracted them before climbing out after him. Having used the radio and locked the doors, he pocketed them. He was determined to stop Peter from driving again that day.

He followed Peter into the hostel, and saw him banging on Morris's office door.

'He's not in,' a volunteer called down from the landing above.

'Do you know where he went?' Trevor asked.

'No idea. But he always takes Sunday afternoon off.'

Peter looked at Trevor.

'I put out his description on the radio, but Sarah said Dan got in before us. It's already gone out to all cars and beat constables.'

'I'll kill the bastard. So help me God, I'll...' Peter kicked the front door on his way out.

'We can't be sure it was him. Let's call on Sam Mayberry. He might know where Tom Morris spends his Sunday afternoons. If we find Tom we'll take him in and let Dan question him.' Trevor decided that the best course for both him and Peter was to keep busy until Anna's killer – whoever he was – was safely in custody. But he dreaded the aftermath when there'd be nothing left for either him or Peter to do.

'Trevor, Peter, it's good to see you. Any progress on your missing man?' Sam Mayberry stopped them in

the street. He was loaded with plastic carrier bags containing donations of food from the local church congregation.

‘We think we’re getting close, Sam,’ Trevor answered.

‘You’re here. You’re not there.’

Trevor turned to the tall, gangling youth with yellow hair and missing front teeth who’d been walking along behind Sam.

‘You’re coppers, aren’t you?’

‘Yes,’ Peter snapped.

‘I thought you’d be with Mr Morris.’

‘Why should we be with him?’ Peter demanded.

‘Because – it’s a secret,’ the youth took a step away from them.

‘You can tell us your secret, lad. It will be safe with us,’ Peter urged.

‘You’ll arrest me. You’ll lock me up,’ the boy gibbered.

‘I promise, we won’t.’

‘Tell the sergeants what you know, Bobby,’ Sam reassured him. ‘Then we’ll make ourselves a slap-up meal. I’ve everything we need in here.’ He held up a carrier bag.

‘You promise I won’t go to gaol?’

‘We promise,’ Trevor assured him.

‘I saw him. The one everyone’s looking for.’

‘This man?’ Peter pulled the photograph of Tony from his pocket.

‘Yeah, that’s him. Only he doesn’t look like that any more. His hair is short and yellow. And he’s hurt bad. There’s blood on his face and all down his arm.’

‘Where did you see him?’ Trevor cut in.

‘I told Mr Morris to tell you because I shouldn’t have been there. That’s why he said he’d tell you for me.’

‘Where shouldn’t you have been?’ Peter’s temper was breaking.

The boy began to blubber.

‘Bobby, you have to tell the officers what you know.’ Mayberry dropped one of the bags, and put an arm around the boy.

‘The old cinema.’

‘The one at the bottom end of High Street?’ Trevor had already opened his car door.

‘How did you get in there?’ Peter shouted over his shoulder as he ran towards Trevor’s car.

‘There’s a window. It looks boarded up but it isn’t. Toilet window at the back.’

‘I’m sure Tom Morris would have phoned the station if it was important...’

Sam was speaking to the rear end of Trevor’s car as it sped up the street.

Trevor picked up the radio receiver.

‘Don’t request back-up!’

‘Why not? If he’s in there...’

‘He might not be. That kid’s not sixteen ounces.’

‘This is one time we should play by the book for all our sakes. Anna was my friend too. We owe it to her to see that this thing is dealt with properly, leaving no legal loopholes for a defence team to use.’

‘And the bastard who turned her into mincemeat?’

‘I want to make sure that when we get him to court, he won’t walk free. And he will if we make a balls-up now.’

‘That’s supposing he reaches court,’ Peter muttered.

Most of the buildings in Park Street were pre-first world war. More than half were boarded up. Two pubs still had their doors open but they allowed bikers to ride in on their machines. A warehouse belonging to a retail chain that had moved out of the town years before stood shuttered and closed next to the grimy, ornate art-deco facade of the old cinema. Two uniformed officers had responded to Trevor’s call for assistance and were waiting for them in the alleyway.

Trevor left his car and studied the back of the grey brick building. ‘There’s a window around here that’s been prised open.’

‘Shouldn’t we wait for a warrant, sir?’ one of the constables suggested.

Peter gave him a withering look. ‘How long you been out of college, boy?’

‘Six weeks.’

‘Any more questions like that and you’ll be back there.’

Peter walked up to a row of three small windows set close together. He took a penknife from his back pocket and, slipping the blade beneath the first panel, levered upwards. It remained obstinately

fixed. But when he tried the second, it swung up easily.

Trevor turned and saw that the rookies had been joined by Chris. 'Wait here until either Sergeant Collins or I calls you.' He turned to the rookies, 'You two guard the entrances to this alley, one either end. The slightest sign of trouble, radio for help.'

'Yes, sir.' They ran to their posts.

Trevor peered under the board. 'We're going to need torches.'

'And a gun,' Peter added.

'Chris, radio the station and ask for torches and armed personnel. Peter, there's no point in going in until we have weapons,' Trevor shouted as Peter swung back the panel and started heaving himself up on his good arm.

'If Weaver is in there, and Morris has gone after him, Weaver's as good as dead, and with him gone we may never know the bloody truth.' Peter disappeared behind the board, leaving Trevor no option but to follow.

It was as dark in the old cinema as it had been inside the abandoned factory.

'Bloody hopeless,' Peter growled, walking straight into a stinking urinal as the board swung back after Trevor had entered.

'Torches, sir.' Chris opened the board and handed in two heavy-duty models.

'Where did you get them?' Trevor switched one on.

‘Sent one of the lads to borrow them from a garage around the corner.’

Peter took the other, switched it on and stepped forward again, splashing through the foul-smelling mess on the floor. ‘They could have found a better bloody way in.’

Trevor swung his torch beam around until he found a door. He pushed it and it opened to reveal pitch-black, musty smelling air. As he swept the beam from side to side, torchlight glinted back at him from the glass panel of a booth that had once dispensed tickets and sweets. Beyond the booth, a corridor opened into a narrow hallway, ending in doors at either end.

By tacit agreement Peter took the right-hand door, Trevor the left. They emerged simultaneously into a vast auditorium. Blackness closed in on them, crushing, absolute and silent. The patter of tiny feet indicated the presence of rats. Pointing their torches down they stepped forward in unison. One step at a time, they shone their lights along the rows of seats, waiting until their beams met in the centre. Then they turned their backs and scanned along the side rows until the light hit the far walls. Slowly and torturously, they covered every inch of what was left of the original seats. The torch light illuminated piles of rubbish, food cartons black with mould and chewed by rodents, broken springs sprouting from mouldering crimson velour upholstery.

Finally they reached the front row. Below the tattered gold silk curtain that once rose and fell in front of the screen, the platform was heaped high with empty food tins, old newspapers and cardboard

boxes. Keeping their torches trained low, they played their lights around the front area. Doors stood either side of the wide curtains. They were both heading towards the right-hand one when Trevor halted in his tracks.

‘See that?’

A light flickered in the back of the hall.

‘The projection booth,’ Peter whispered, as they sped back up the aisle.

They could smell the petrol before they reached the projection room. Trevor put a shoulder to the door. It wasn’t locked and it burst open, pitching him forward. As the torch rolled from his hand, its beam settled on Tom Morris, who was standing, petrol can in hand. Adam Weaver lay at his feet, gagged and bound. His elbows were tied together at his back, his wrists, knees and ankles trussed like a turkey’s.

Momentarily fazed, Morris appeared disorientated, but only for as long as it took him to register Trevor’s presence. He pulled a gun from the inside pocket of his coat, and fired.

Trevor cried out and slumped to the floor alongside Weaver. Peter switched off his torch and ducked behind the door. He peered cautiously around it.

Trevor’s torch lay on the floor of the booth, as did the light Morris had been using. They illuminated Weaver’s feet, encased in a pair of shabby trainers, and the back of Trevor’s head lying very still. Peter blinked, now was not the time to worry about Trevor. He had to think of Morris – and himself.

Morris's hands and arms slithered into view as he crept forward on his stomach. He was heading for the door and the passage where Peter crouched. He was holding something in one hand. Peter recognised the gleaming silver mechanism of a cigarette lighter, as Morris flicked it on and edged the flame towards Weaver's petrol-soaked body.

Peter saw Weaver's eyes grow wide in terror. Aiming carefully, he hurled the only thing he was holding. His torch. It caught Morris's hand, and the lighter flew backwards out of his fingers, landing on a pile of rubbish in a corner. The flame flickered for a few seconds, but it was long enough to set the papers and rags alight.

'Tom!' Peter shouted. 'Drop your gun.'

'Make me!' Morris shouted.

'It's over,' Peter yelled, conscious of the flames licking ever closer to Adam and Trevor. 'We know you killed Laura Weaver.'

'She had it coming. She was going to tell my wife. I couldn't let her...'

Adam Weaver suddenly threw his weight sideways, propelling both Trevor and himself into the far corner, as far from the rapidly spreading fire as was possible in the confined space.

Morris's gun flashed a second time. Peter threw himself back, out of the doorway. The bullet plucked at his sleeve.

'Brooke?' Peter shouted, hoping the constable could hear him. 'Send up reinforcements.'

'You won't arrest me. I know this place inside out,' Morris spat. 'I had a life, a good life...'

‘Bought at the expense of Laura’s and of the poor bastard you burned alive in Jubilee Street.’ Peter tried to distract Morris and draw him out of the booth. Weaver and Trevor were in there behind him. Weaver had moved himself and Trevor once. If he had the strength to move again...

‘When Blanche told me Hannah had seen a down-and-out she thought was her father, I knew Adam had come back. I had to kill him. I had work, important work, and a wife who loved me. I couldn’t give that up, not for someone like Adam and not for a tramp like Laura . . .’

‘You killed her because she was a tramp?’ Peter inched nearer to see how close the flames were to Trevor and Weaver.

‘She was going to tell my wife. And afterwards, when I thought it was finished, Weaver escaped from prison. Then Brian Marks warned me Weaver looked different. He knew I was a friend of Banche’s. A trustworthy, happily married friend. Not a boyfriend she would get tired of, like Nigel. I promised Brian Marks I’d take care of her, and Hannah. And I tried. I thought I’d killed Adam down on the docks. Only it was someone else. I didn’t even succeed in smoking him out of that factory, and all those other people died,’ Morris sat between Peter and Trevor, his back to the door, his gun cradled in his lap, watching the flames lick closer to Trevor and Adam. ‘They didn’t deserve to die. But it wasn’t my fault, it was his.’ He pointed his gun at Adam. ‘It was his fault Laura was neurotic. He married her but he didn’t love her.

That's why she wouldn't leave me alone even when I told her it was finished...'

'And Anna?' Peter demanded.

'Anna?'

'The woman who was sheltering Adam,' Peter answered.

'I have a good network. Better than the police's. One of my boys saw Adam Weaver going in there. They tell me everything. Stupid bitch got in the way when I went after Adam. He stood back and let her take what I meant for him.'

'Her face was cut to ribbons.'

'She flung herself between us – hurled herself on the knife...'

Peter didn't believe a word of it but the flames were at Trevor's heels. Desperate, he kicked the door wide. The draught of air fanned the fire. Smoke billowed out into the corridor. Morris pointed his gun at Peter and fired – again – and again. Peter flung himself to the floor. Once the bullets had stopped flying and the gun had clicked empty he moved swiftly. Adam Weaver lay in the corner huddled close to Trevor, who still hadn't moved.

Morris picked up a burning rag and flung it into Weaver's face before darting out the door. Peter heard the click of a magazine being loaded into the gun. Adam screamed.

Peter rolled out of Morris's path. Heaving himself to his feet, he plunged into the smoke-filled inferno of the projection booth.

Petrol burnt blue over Weaver's face, blistering his skin, as Peter stripped off his coat and thrust it over the bound man's blazing head to smother the

flames. Grabbing Trevor's legs he hauled him into the corridor. Feet thundered down a passage behind him.

'He's got a gun!,' Peter yelled as Dan hurtled into view. Morris's gun flashed in the auditorium. Dan whirled around and fired at the flash. There was a scream followed by the sound of crackling flames.

'Call an ambulance!' Peter yanked Adam out of the projection room. He pulled his coat away from the man's face. Adam's skin and hair was a brittle, blackened mess. Even the gag Tom had wound around his mouth was burnt through.

Peter pulled the flick knife from his sock and cut through the ropes binding Weaver's arms and feet. 'It's all right, mate,' he murmured to Trevor's inert body. 'Help's on the way.'

EPILOGUE

It was raining. The grey-stone crematorium glistened darkly as the mourners, heads bent, filed slowly out through the exit. Peter paused to view the sodden wreaths laid in the square that bore Anna Bradley's name and dates. His own cushion of white carnations and red roses already looked weather-beaten, and the ink on the card had run beneath its plastic slip, making his message indecipherable. It was just as well. He didn't want anyone to read his personal goodbye to Anna.

'I'm sorry, Peter.' Lyn Sullivan walked towards him, soberly dressed in a long, dark, hooded cape. She held out her hand. 'I'm really sorry,' she repeated. 'I know how much Anna meant to you. And to everyone else on the force.'

He turned his anguished face to hers. His cheeks were damp, but she couldn't tell whether it was from rain, or tears. Lyn faltered, searching for something to say that would ease his pain. She couldn't think of anything, and, impotent in the presence of his intense grief, she moved on.

Trevor was thanking the vicar for his sympathetic handling of the service. She waited for him to finish. He shook the vicar's hand then walked over and joined her.

'I went to the station when I heard that one of the sergeants had been killed, and another injured,' she said

'I know. Sarah Merchant told me you'd been in.'

‘You were hurt?’

‘Not badly.’

‘Trevor...’

‘It’s not Daisy. It never was,’ he interrupted.

‘I know. She came to see me. Told me what a lucky girl I was.’

‘A lot of people would disagree with her on that.’ He smiled grimly.

‘Not me,’ Lyn murmured.

‘Just as well Daisy’s working in this town.’ He needed to switch their conversation to the commonplace. He couldn’t deal with emotion – not with Peter standing only a few feet away. ‘Adam Weaver’s face is going to need rebuilding again.’

‘At least his name is clear and he has his daughter back.’

‘When I last saw him he seemed happy with that much.’

She braced herself for rejection. ‘Trevor, couldn’t we try again?’

‘I don’t think that would be a good idea. It’s not that I don’t want to.’ He shrugged his shoulders in the black uniform coat he’d taken out of mothballs for the occasion. ‘But I’d make plans with you, make you a lot of promises I’d keep only as long as it took for the next investigation to get under way. You were right, Lyn. Police officers shouldn’t have girlfriends or wives when they’ve already made a commitment to the job. There’s no time left for a personal life.’

‘But this case is over,’ she pleaded stubbornly. ‘You’ve caught your killer. Anna can rest in peace. We’d have a little time.’

‘Probably not much before another case breaks.’

‘Enough for me to show you how sorry I am.’

He thrust his hands into his pockets. ‘Lyn, do yourself a favour. Walk away now. Before I say yes, and ask you to move back in with me.’

‘If there’s a chance, I’m not going anywhere.’

‘Can’t you see what this is doing to me?’ he begged. ‘I’m not that strong, and it’s not me that will be hurt – it’s you. Peter has been switched to the Serious Crimes Squad. He’s going to need someone around; I’ve asked him to move in with me.’

‘I could live with both of you.’

‘No.’

‘Have you asked him to live with you to keep me at bay?’

‘Maybe to keep all personal emotions at bay.’ He looked at Peter. Better never to feel anything for another person again than suffer what Peter was going through over Anna.

Dan walked up.

‘We’re going to the Black Lion for the wake. Would you like to join us, Lyn?’

She shook her head, biting her lips to hold back the tears. Daisy appeared at Dan’s side and held out her hand. Trevor took it first. When he released it, she offered it to Lyn.

‘You look frozen, Lyn,’ she said. ‘Why don’t you take her home now, Trevor?’

‘Peter...’

‘You can’t possibly know what Peter is going through, or what he needs right now. But I do. I’ve

been there, remember. Leave him to me.' Daisy left them and went to Peter. Wrapping her arm around his shoulders, she turned back. 'If you're going to the pub, we'll see you there,' she called to Trevor and Lyn as she and Peter walked on together.

'Conspiracy?' Trevor asked Lyn.

'Not one I know about.'

'I'm sorry...'

She slipped her hand into his. 'No more recriminations.'

They watched Daisy and Peter join the other mourners in the car park. Within minutes they were lost to sight among the crowd of uniformed officers, who'd closed ranks to shut out the civilians.

'You were right, Trevor,' Lyn admitted. 'I didn't understand. Not until today. Coppers are different and they've every right to be when just wearing a uniform makes them such easy targets.'

He turned to face her. 'Want to go to the pub, then?'

'Yes, please.'

'And afterwards, you go home?'

'Yes, I'll go home with you,' she said, deliberately misunderstanding him. 'I know this isn't the time or the place. But we have to make plans. For our baby.'

He stared at her in disbelief. 'Lyn...?'

'But try to book a day off for the birth. I think I can learn to forgive you almost anything. But that's one thing I don't want to go through alone.'