

NO MOTIVE. NO MERCY. NO REMORSE.

COULD

KILLING

LUKE DELANEY

COLD KILLING

LUKE DELANEY

wm

WILLIAM MORROW

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DEDICATION

There are so many people I could dedicate this book to, without whom my writing career would have been over before it even began, but I feel a shared dedication can somehow lose much of its power and I didn't want that as this particular dedication is so personal to me and indeed others who were also close to the man.

So I dedicate this first novel to my dad, Mike. For reasons of maintaining the anonymity of my family, friends, and myself, I cannot say too much, nor would he want me to. I could talk about his brilliance in his own field and the respect and admiration he held among his peers worldwide. I could talk about his meteoric rise from very humble beginnings to the very top of his difficult trade, but that's not really what I remember most about him.

What I remember most is his gentleness, kindness, incredible generosity, and painful honesty. He was the best moral compass a young man could have ever had, especially one with ambitions to join the police. While opportunities abounded, I was never even slightly tempted to indulge, the thought of letting not just myself but my parents down keeping me well and truly on the straight and narrow.

My dad taught me one thing above all others—that no matter how much we achieve in our chosen professions, no matter how much wealth and power we obtain, what is really important is to be a good man. Just be a good man. He was a very good man.

Sadly, Mike passed away three years ago, aged a very young seventy-two. Another victim to the great taker of men—cancer. The world has felt a poorer place ever since. He is much missed and much loved.

For Mike.

CONTENTS

Dedication

Prologue

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Epilogue

Announcement for The Keeper

About the Author

Credits

Copyright

About the Publisher

PROLOGUE

Saturday. I agreed to go to the park with the wife and children. They're over there on the grassy hill just along from the pond. They've fed themselves, fed the ducks, and now they're feeding their own. I have a firm belief that we're one normal happy family. And to be fair, as far as they're concerned, we are. I won't let the sight of them spoil my day. The sun is shining and I'm getting a bit of a tan. The memory of the latest visit is still fresh and satisfying. It keeps the smile on my face.

Look at all these people. Happy and relaxed. They've no idea I'm watching them. Watching a small child wander away from mothers too distracted by idle chat to notice. Then they realize the little darling has wandered too far and up goes that shrill shriek of an overprotective parent, followed by a leg slap for the child and more shrieking.

I am satisfied for the time being. The fun I had last week will keep me contented for a while, and everyone is safe today.

CHAPTER 1

Thursday

It was 3 A.M. and Detective Inspector Sean Corrigan drove through the dreary streets of New Cross, southeast London. He had been born and raised in nearby Dulwich, and for as long as he could remember, these streets had been a dangerous place. People could quickly become victims here, regardless of age, sex, or color. Life had little value.

But these worries were for other people, not Sean. They were for the people who had nine-to-five jobs in shops and offices. Those who arrived bleary eyed to work each morning, then scuttled home nervously every evening, only feeling safe once they'd bolted themselves behind closed doors.

Sean didn't fear the streets, having dealt with the worst they could throw at him. He was a detective inspector in charge of one of South London's Murder Investigation Teams, dedicated to dealing with violent death. The killers hunted their victims and Sean hunted the killers. He drove with the window down and doors unlocked.

He'd been asleep at home when Detective Sergeant Dave Donnelly called. There'd been a murder. A bad one. A young man beaten and stabbed to death in his own flat. One minute Sean was lying by his wife's side, the next he was driving to the place where a young man's life had been torn away.

The streets around the murder scene were eerily quiet. He was pleased to see that the uniformed officers had done their job properly and taped off a large cordon around the block the flat was in. He'd been to scenes before where the cordon started and stopped at the front door. How much evidence had been carried away from scenes on the soles of shoes? He didn't want to think about it.

There were two marked patrol cars alongside Donnelly's unmarked Ford. He always laughed at the murder scenes on television, with dozens of police cars parked outside, all with blue lights swirling away. Inside, dozens of detectives and forensics guys would be falling over each other. Reality was different. Entirely different.

Real crime scenes were all the more disturbing for their quietness—the violent death of the victim would leave the atmosphere shattered and brutalized. Sean could feel the horror closing in around him as he examined a scene. It was his job to discover the details of death, and over time he had grown hardened to it, but not immune. He knew that this scene would be no different.

He parked outside the taped-off cordon and climbed from the isolation of his car into the warping loneliness of the night, the stars of the clear sky and the streetlights removing all illusion of darkness. If he had been anyone else, doing any other job, he might have noticed how beautiful it was, but such

thoughts had no place here. He flashed his identification to the approaching uniformed officer and grunted his name. “DI Sean Corrigan, Serious Crime Group South. Where’s this flat?”

The uniformed officer was young. He seemed afraid of Sean. He must be new if a mere detective inspector scared him. “Number sixteen Tabard House, sir. It’s on the second floor, up the stairs and turn right. Or you could take the lift.”

“Thanks.”

Sean opened the boot of his car and cast a quick glance over the contents squeezed inside. Two large square plastic bins contained all he would need for an initial scene examination. Paper suits and slippers. Various sizes of plastic exhibit bags, paper bags for clothing, half a dozen boxes of plastic gloves, rolls of sticky labels, and of course a sledgehammer, a crowbar, and other tools. The boot of Sean’s car would be mirrored by detectives’ cars across the world.

He pulled on a forensic containment suit and headed toward the stairwell. The block was of a type common to this area of London. Low-rise tenements made from dark, oppressive, brown-gray brick that had been thrown up after the Second World War to house those bombed out of old slum areas. In their time they’d been a revelation—indoor toilets, running water, heating—but now only those trapped in poverty lived in them. They looked like prisons, and in a way that’s what they were.

The stairwell smelled of urine. The stench of humans living on top of one another was unmistakable. This was summer and the vents of the flats pumped out the smells from within. Sean almost gagged on it, the sight, sound, and smell of the tenement block reminding him all too vividly of his own childhood, living in a three-bedroom, public housing duplex with his mother, two brothers, two sisters, and his father—his father who would lead him away from the others, taking him to the upstairs bedroom where things would happen. His mother too frightened to intervene—thoughts reaching for a knife in the kitchen drawer swirling in her head, but fading away as her courage deserted her. But the curse of his childhood had left him with a rare and dark insightfulness—a capability to understand the motivations of those he hunted.

All too often the abused become the abusers as the darkness overtakes them, evil begetting evil—a terrible cycle of violence, virtually impossible to break—and so the demons of Sean’s past were too deeply assimilated in his being to ever be rid of. But Sean was different in that he could control his demons and his rage, using his shattered upbringing to allow him insights into the crimes he investigated that other cops could only dream of. He understood the killers, rapists, and arsonists—understood why they had to do what they did, could interpret their motivation—see what they saw, smell what they had smelled, feel what they had felt—their excitement, power, lust, revulsion, guilt, regret, *fear*. He could make leaps in investigations others struggled to understand, filling in the blanks with his unique imagination. Crime scenes came alive in his mind’s eye, playing in his head like movies. He was no psychic or clairvoyant; he was just a cop—but a cop with a broken past and a dangerous future, his skill at reading the ones he hunted born of his own dark, haunted past. Where better for a failed disciple of true evil to hide than among cops? Where better to turn his unique tools to good use than the police? He swallowed the bile rising in his throat and headed for the crime scene—the murder scene.

Sean stopped briefly to acknowledge another uniformed officer posted at the front door of the flat. The constable lifted the tape across the door and watched him duck inside. Sean looked down the corridor of the flat. It was bigger than it had seemed from the outside. DS Donnelly waited for him, his large frame filling the doorway, his mustache all but concealing the movement of his lips as he talked. Dave Donnelly, twenty-year-plus veteran of the Metropolitan Police and very much Sean’s old-school right-hand man. His anchor to the logical and practical course of an investigation and par-

time crutch to lean on. They'd had their run-ins and disagreements, but they understood each other—they trusted each other.

"Morning, gov'nor. Stick to the right of the hallway here. That's the route I've been taking in and out," Donnelly growled in his strange accent, a mix of Glaswegian and Cockney, his mustache twitching as he spoke.

"What've we got?" Sean asked matter-of-factly.

"No sign of forced entry. Security is good in the flat, so he probably let the killer in. All the damage to the victim seems to have been done in the living room. A real fucking mess in there. No signs of disturbance anywhere else. The living room is the last door on the right, down the corridor. Other than that we've got a kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a separate room for the toilet. From what I've seen, the victim kept things reasonably clean and tidy. Decent taste in furniture. There's a few photos of the victim around the place—as best I can tell, anyway. His injuries make it a wee bit difficult to be absolutely sure. There's plenty of them with him, shall we say, *embracing* other men."

"Gay?" Sean asked.

"Looks that way. It's early days, but there's definitely some decent hi-fi and TV stuff around the place, and I notice several of the photos have our boy in far-flung corners of the world. Must have cost a few pennies. We're not dealing with a complete loser here. He had a decent enough job, or he was a decent enough villain, although I don't get the feel this is a villain's home." Both men craned their heads around the hallway area, as if to confirm Donnelly's assessment so far. He continued, "And I've found a few letters all addressed to a Daniel Graydon. Nothing for anyone else."

"Well, Daniel Graydon," Sean asked, "what the hell happened to you? And why?"

"Shall we?" With an outstretched hand pointing along the corridor, Donnelly invited Sean to continue.

They moved from room to room, leaving the living room to the end. They trod carefully, moving around the edges so as not to disturb any invisible footprint indentations left in the carpets or minuscule but vital evidence: a strand of hair, a tiny drop of blood. Occasionally Sean would take a photograph with his small digital camera. He would keep the photographs for his personal use only, to remind himself of details he had seen, but also to put himself back at the scene anytime he needed to sense it again, to smell the odor of blood, to taste the sickly sweet flavor of death. To feel the killer's presence. He wished he could be alone in the flat, without the distraction of having to talk to anyone—to explain what he was seeing and feeling. It had been the same ever since he was a young cop, his ability to step into the shoes of the offender, be it a residential burglary or murder. Seeing the scene through the eyes of the offender. But only the more alarming scenes seemed to trigger this reaction. Walking around scenes of domestic murders or gangland stabbings he saw more than most other detectives, but felt more than they did. This scene already seemed different. He wished he were alone.

Sean felt uncomfortable in the flat. Like an intruder. As if he should be constantly apologizing for being there. He shook off the feeling and mentally absorbed everything. The cleanliness of the furniture and the floors. Were the dishes washed and put away? Had any food been left out? Did anything, no matter how small, seem somehow out of place? If the victim kept his clothing neatly folded away, then a shirt on the floor would alert Sean's curiosity. If the victim had lived in squalor, a freshly cleaned glass next to a sink full of dirty dishes would attract his eye. Indeed, Sean had already noted something amiss.

Sean and Donnelly came to the living room. The door was ajar, exactly how it had been found by the young constable. Donnelly moved inside. Sean followed.

There was a strong smell of blood—a lot of blood. It was a metallic smell. Like hot copper. Sean recalled the times he'd tasted his own blood. It always made him think that it tasted exactly like it smelled. At least this man had been killed recently. It was summer now—if the victim had been there for a few days the flat would have reeked. Flies would have filled the room, maggots infesting the body. He felt a jolt of guilt for being glad the man had just been killed.

Sean crouched next to the body, careful to avoid stepping in the pool of thick burgundy blood that had formed around the victim's head. He'd seen many murder victims. Some had almost no wounds to speak of, others had terrible injuries. This was a bad one. As bad as he'd seen.

“Jesus Christ. What the hell happened in this room?” Sean asked.

Donnelly looked around. The dining room table was overturned. Two of the chairs with it had been destroyed. The TV had been knocked from its stand. Pictures lay smashed on the floor. CDs were strewn around the room. The lights from the CD player blinked in green.

“Must have been a hell of a fight,” Donnelly said.

Sean stood up, unable to look away from the victim: a white male, about twenty years old, wearing a T-shirt that was 50 percent soaked in blood, and hipster jeans, also heavily soaked in blood. One sock remained on his right foot; the other was nowhere to be seen. He was lying on his back, the left leg bent under the right, with both arms stretched out in a crucifix position. There were no restraints of any kind in evidence. The left side of his face and head had been caved in. The victim's short hair allowed Sean to see two serious head wounds indicating horrific fractures to the skull. Both eyes were swollen almost completely shut and his nose was smashed, with congealed blood crusted around it. The mouth hadn't escaped punishment, the lips showing several deep cuts, with the jaw hanging dislocated. Sean wondered how many teeth would be missing. The right ear was nowhere to be seen. He hoped to God the man had died from the first blow to his head, but he doubted it.

The pool of blood by the victim's head was the only heavy saturation area other than his clothing. Elsewhere there were dozens of splash marks: on the walls, furniture, and carpet. Sean imagined the victim's head being whipped around by the ferocity of the blows, the blood from his wounds traveling in a fine spray through the air until it landed where it now remained. Once examined properly, the splash marks should provide a useful map of how the attack had developed.

The victim's body had not been spared. Sean wasn't about to start counting, but there must have been fifty to a hundred stab wounds. The legs, abdomen, chest, and arms had all been brutally attacked. Sean looked around for weapons, but could see none. He returned his gaze to the shattered body, trying to free his mind, to see what had happened to the young man now lying dead on his own floor. For the most fleeting of moments he saw a figure hunched over the dying man, something that resembled a screwdriver rather than a knife gripped in his hand, but the image was gone as quickly as it had arrived. Finally he managed to look away and speak.

“Who found the body?”

“That would be us,” Donnelly replied.

“How so?”

“Well, us via a concerned neighbor.”

“Is the neighbor a suspect?”

“No, no,” Donnelly dismissed the idea. “Some young bird from a few doors down, on her way home with her kebab and chips after a night of shagging and drinking.”

“Did she enter the flat?”

“No. She's not the hero type, by all accounts. She saw the door slightly open and decided we ought to know about it. If she'd been sober, she probably wouldn't have bothered.”

Sean nodded his agreement. Alcohol made some people conscientious citizens in the same way made others violent temporary psychopaths.

“Uniform sent a unit around to check it out and found our victim here,” Donnelly added.

“Did he trample the scene?”

“No, he’s a probationer straight out of Hendon and still scared enough to remember what he supposed to do. He kept to the edges, touched nothing.”

“Good,” Sean said automatically, his mind having already moved on, already growing heavy with possibilities. “Well, whoever did this is either very angry or very ill.”

“No doubt about that,” Donnelly agreed.

There was a pause, both men taking the chance to breathe deeply and steady themselves, clearing their minds, a necessary prelude before trying to think coldly and logically. Seeing this brutality would never be easy, would never be matter-of-fact.

“Okay. First guess is we’re looking at a domestic murder.”

“A lover’s tiff?” Donnelly asked.

Sean nodded. “Whoever did this probably took a fair old beating themselves,” he added. “A man fighting for his life can do a lot of damage.”

“I’ll check the local hospitals,” Donnelly volunteered. “See if anyone who looks like they’ve been in a real ding-dong has been admitted.”

“Check with the local police stations for the same and wake the rest of the team up. Let’s get everyone together at the station for an eight A.M. briefing. And we might as well see if we can get a pathologist to examine the body while it’s still in place.”

“That won’t be easy, guv.”

“I know, but try. See if Dr. Canning is available. He sometimes comes out if it’s a good one, and he’s the best.”

“I’ll do what I can, but no promises.”

Sean surveyed the scene. Most murders didn’t take long to solve. The most obvious suspect was usually the right suspect. The panicked nature of the crime provided an Aladdin’s cave of forensic evidence. Enough to get a conviction. In cases like this, detectives often had to do little more than wait for the laboratory to examine the exhibits from the scene and provide all the answers. But as Sean looked around something was already niggling away at his instincts.

Donnelly spoke again. “Seems straightforward?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty happy.” He let the statement linger.

“But . . . ?”

“The victim almost certainly knew his killer. No forced entry, so he’s let him in. A boyfriend is a fair bet. This smells like a domestic murder. A few too many drinks. A heated argument. A fight kicked off and gets nastier and nastier, both end up beaten to a pulp and one dies. A crime of passion that the killer had no time to prepare for. He’s lost it for a while, killed a friend. A lover. Now all he wants to do is run. Get away from this flat and be somewhere safe to think out his next move. But there’re a couple of things missing for me.”

“Such as?”

“They’ve probably been having a drink, but there are no glasses anywhere. Can you remember dealing with a domestic murder where alcohol wasn’t involved?”

“Maybe he cleaned the place up a bit?” Donnelly offered. “Washed the glasses and put them away.”

“Why would he bother cleaning a glass when his blood and fingerprints must be all over the place?”

after a struggle like this?"

"Panic?" Donnelly suggested. "Wasn't thinking straight. He cleaned up his glass, maybe started to clean up other stuff too before he realized he was wasting his time."

"Maybe."

Sean was thinking hard. The lack of signs of alcohol was a small point, but any experienced detective would have expected to find evidence of its use at a scene like this. An empty bottle of cider. A half-empty bottle of Scotch, or a champagne bottle to fuel the rage of the rich. But it was the image he was beginning to visualize that was plaguing him with doubt—the image his mind was piecing together using evidence that was missing as much as evidence that was present. The image of a figure crouching very deliberately over the victim. No frenzy, no rage, but evil in a human form.

"There's something else," he told Donnelly. "The killing obviously took place in the living room. We know he must have gone out the front door because everything else is locked up nice and tight. But the hallway is clean. Nothing. The carpet is light beige, yet there's no sign of a bloody footprint. And the door handle? Nothing. No blood. Nothing."

"So our killer beats and stabs the victim to death in a frenzied moment of rage and yet stops to clean his hands before opening any doors. After killing a man who may have been his lover, he's suddenly calm enough to take his shoes off and tiptoe out of the place. That doesn't make a lot of sense."

Donnelly joined in. "And if our boy did stop to clean himself up before leaving, then where did he get clean? He had two choices. The sink in the bathroom or the sink in the kitchen."

Sean continued for him. "We've seen both of them. Clean as a whistle. No signs of recent use. Not even a splash of water."

"Aye," Donnelly said. "But it's probably nothing. We're assuming too much. Maybe forensics will prove us wrong and find some blood in the hallway we can't see."

Sean wasn't convinced, but before he could reply the uniformed constable at the front door called into the flat. "Excuse me, sir, your lab team is here."

Sean shouted a reply. "Coming out."

He and Donnelly walked from the flat carefully, keeping to the route they'd used on entering. They walked to the edge of the taped-off cordon where they knew Detective Sergeant Andy Roddis would be waiting with his team of specially trained detectives and scene examiners.

DS Roddis saw Sean and Donnelly approach. He observed their forensics suits but was not impressed. "I take it you two have already been trampling all over my scene." He was right to be annoyed. The book said no one into the house except the scene examination team. "Next time I'm going to seize your clothing as exhibits."

Sean needed Roddis on his side.

"Sorry, Andy," he said. "We haven't touched a thing. Promise."

"I hear you have a dead male for me in flat number sixteen. Yes?" Roddis still sounded irritated.

"I'm afraid so," said Donnelly.

Roddis turned to Sean. "Anything special you want from us?"

"No. Our money's on a domestic, so stick to the basics. You can keep the expensive toys locked away."

"Very well," Roddis replied. "Blood, fibers, prints, hair, and semen it is."

Donnelly and Sean were already walking away. Sean called over his shoulder, "I'm briefing my team at eight A.M. Try to get me a preliminary report before then."

"I might be able to phone something through to you. Will that do?"

“Fine,” said Sean. Right now he would take anything offered.

It was shortly before 8 A.M. and Sean sat alone in his bleak, functional office in the Peckham police station, surrounded by the same cheap wooden furniture that adorned each and every police building across London. The office was just about big enough to house two four-foot battered oblong desks and an extra two uncomfortable chairs for the frequent visitors. Two ancient-looking computers sat, one on each desk, enabling him to view different inquiries at the same time, and the harsh fluorescent lights above painted everything a dull yellow. How he envied those TV detectives with their leather swivel chairs, banks of all-seeing, all-dancing computers, and most of all the Jasper Conran reading lamps slung low over shining glass desks. Reality was mundane and functional.

Sean thought about the victim. What sort of person had he been? Was he loved? Would he be missed? He would find out soon enough. The phone rang and made him jump.

“DI Corrigan.” He rarely wasted words on the phone. Years of speaking into radios had trimmed his speech.

“Mr. Corrigan, it’s DS Roddis. You wanted an update for your briefing?” Roddis didn’t recognize any ranks above his own, but his powerful position meant he was never challenged by his seniors. He decided the forensic resources assigned to each case, and it was he who knew the right people at the right laboratories across the southeast who could get the job done. Everybody, regardless of rank, respected his monopoly.

“Thanks for calling. What’ve you got for me?”

“Well, it’s early days.”

Sean knew the lab team would have done little more than get organized. “I appreciate that, but I like whatever you’ve got.”

“Very well. We’ve had a cursory look around. The entry and exit point is surprisingly clean, given the nature of the attack. And the hallway was clean too. Perhaps we’ll find something when we get better lighting and some UV lamps. Other than that, nothing definite yet. The blood spray marks on the walls and furniture have me a little confused.”

“Confused?” Sean asked.

“Having seen the victim’s wounds, I’m pretty sure the blow to the head all but killed him, and certainly knocked him down. I have a blood spray pattern on a wall that would be consistent with a blow to his head with a heavy object.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“If the victim was prostrate when the other injuries were inflicted, then I would only expect to find small, localized sprays, but I’ve got numerous others, over the carpet, broken furniture, up the walls. They’re not consistent with his wounds.”

“Then he must have other wounds we haven’t seen yet,” Sean suggested. “Or maybe the blood from the attacker?”

“Possibly.” Roddis sounded unconvinced. “No obvious murder weapon yet,” he continued, “but we will probably turn up when we get into the search properly.”

“Anything else?” Sean asked, in hope more than expectation.

“There’s plenty of documentation: address books, diaries, bank books, and so on. It shouldn’t be too hard to confirm the victim’s identity. That’s it so far.”

Sean may not have particularly liked Roddis, but he valued his professionalism. “Thanks. It’ll be

help in the briefing. Might keep the team awake.” He hung up.

Reclining in his chair, Sean stared at the lukewarm cup of coffee on his desk. What would it mean if the splash patterns didn't match the wounds on the victim? Had the killer been badly injured himself and the blood sprays came from his wounds? He doubted it, especially if Roddis was right about the victim being all but taken out with the first blow to the head. And if he was knocked down with the first blow, then what the hell were the other injuries about? The answers would come, he reassured himself. Wait for the full forensic examination of the scene, the postmortem of the victim. The answers would come. They always did.

He stood and looked out of his window down at the station parking lot. He saw DS Sally Jones outside furiously smoking a cigarette, laughing and joking with a couple of girls from the typing pool.

He watched her, admiring her. A five-foot-three bundle of energy. He thought she had a good pair of legs, but she carried too much weight up top for his taste. He tried to remember if he had ever seen her fair hair not tied back in a ponytail.

He loved her ability to connect with people. She could talk to anyone and make them feel that she was their best friend in the world, and so Sean sometimes used her to do the things he would find impossible to do well. Speaking with grieving parents. Telling a husband his wife had been raped and murdered in their own home. Sean had watched in awe as Sally told people unthinkable things and then half an hour later she would be laughing and joking, puffing on a cigarette, chatting with whoever was close enough. She was tough. Tougher than he would ever be. He smiled as he watched her.

Sean wondered why she was still alone. He couldn't imagine doing this job and then going home to an empty house. Sally told him she was clearly too much for any man to handle. He had often tried to sense some sorrow in her. Some loneliness. He never could.

He checked the time. She was going to be late for the briefing. He could call out the window and warn her, but he decided it would be more fun to leave it.

He walked the short distance along the busy, brightly lit corridor: doors on both sides; old and new posters pinned and stuck to the walls, uniformly ignored by passersby all too single-mindedly trying to get to wherever they were going to stop and take notice of someone else's appeals for assistance. He reached the briefing room and entered. His team continued to chatter away among themselves. A couple of them, including Donnelly, mouthed a greeting. He nodded back.

The team was relatively small. Two detective sergeants—Sally and Donnelly—and ten detective constables. Sean sat in his usual chair at the head of a rectangular wooden table, the cheapest money could buy. He dropped his mobile phone and notebook in front of him and looked around, making sure everyone was there. He nodded to Donnelly, who understood the cue. They'd been working with each other long enough to be able to communicate without the need for words.

“All right, people, listen up. The gov'nor wants to speak and we've got a lot to get through, so let's park our arses and crack on.” The murmuring faded as the team began to sit and concentrate on Sean.

Detective Constable Zukov spoke. “D'you want me to grab DS Jones, boss? I think she's having a smoke in the yard.”

“No. Don't bother,” Sean told him. “She'll be here soon enough.”

The room fell silent, Sean looking at Donnelly with a slight grin on his face. They both turned toward the briefing room door just as DS Sally Jones came bursting in. There was a low hum of stifled laughter.

“Shit. Sorry I'm late, gov'.” The hum of low laughter grew. Sally swatted Zukov across the head as she walked past. He threw his hands up in protest. “I told you to come and get me, Paulo.” The constable didn't answer, but the smile on his face said everything.

Sean joined in. "Afternoon, Sally. Thanks for joining us."

"It's a pleasure, sir."

"As I'm sure you've all worked out, we've picked up another murder." Some of the team groaned.

Sally spoke up. "We're only in summer and already we've had sixteen murders on this team alone. Eight still need preparing for court. Who's going to put those court presentations together if we're constantly being dumped on?" There was a rumble of approval around the room.

"No point in moaning," Sean told them. "All the other teams are just as busy as we are, so we go with this one. As you're all no doubt aware, we don't have a live investigation running, so we're the obvious choice."

Sean was prepared for the grumbling. Police officers always grumbled. They were either moaning about being too busy or they were moaning about not earning enough overtime. It was a fact of life with police.

He continued. "Okay, this is the job. What we know so far is that our victim was beaten and stabbed to death. At this time we believe the victim is Daniel Graydon, the occupier of the flat where we're pretty certain the crime took place. But his facial injuries are severe, so visual identification has yet to be confirmed. We are treating the flat as our primary crime scene. Dave and I have already had a look around and it's not pretty. The victim would appear to have been hit on the head with a heavy object, and that may well have been the critical injury, although we'll have to wait for the autopsy to confirm that. The stab wounds are numerous and spread across a wide area. This was a vicious, brutal attack.

"It is suspected the victim may be gay, and the early theory is that it was probably a domestic. If that's the case, then the killer himself could be hurt. We're already checking the hospitals and custodial suites on the off chance he was picked up for something else after fleeing the scene. I don't want this to get complicated, so let's keep it simple. A nice, neat, join-the-dots investigation will do me fine."

Sean looked toward Sally.

"Sally, I want you to pick four guys and start on door-to-door immediately. That time of night someone was beaten to death, someone must have heard or seen something. The rest of you, hang fire. The lab team is looking at the victim's personal stuff, so we'll have a long list of people to trace and chat with soon enough. I don't expect it to be long before we have a decent idea who our prime suspect is.

"Dave. You go office manager on this one." Donnelly nodded acknowledgment. "The rest of you check with Dave at least three times a day for your assignments. And remember," Sean added, "the first few hours are the most important, so let's eat on the hoof and worry about sleep when the killer gets banged up downstairs."

There were nods of approval as the group began to break up. Sean could sense their optimism, their trust in his leadership, his judgment. He hadn't failed them yet.

He prayed this case would be no different.

It was almost 1 P.M. and Sean had spent the morning on the phone. He'd told the same story a dozen times. To his superintendent, the Intelligence Unit, the gay and lesbian liaison officer, the local uniformed duty officer, the community safety inspector. He was sick of telling. Sally and Donnelly had returned for their meeting and sat in his office. Sally had brought coffee and sandwiches, which Sean ate without tasting. It was the first thing he had eaten since the phone call from Donnelly earlier that morning, so he was happy just to get something into his stomach.

Between bites they talked, all of them aware they hadn't a moment to waste on a proper lunch. The first days of a murder inquiry were always the same—so much to get through and so little time. Forensic evidence degraded, witnesses' memories faded, CCTV tapes would be recorded over. Time was Sean's enemy now.

"Anything from the door-to-door, Sally?" he asked. "Give me good news only."

"Nothing," she replied. "I've still got guys down there knocking on doors, but so far all we're being told is that Graydon kept himself to himself. No noisy parties. No fights. No problems. Nothing. Everybody says he was a nice kid. As for last night, nobody saw or heard a thing. Another quiet night in South London."

"That can't be right," Sean argued. "A man gets beaten to death within a few feet of what, for other flats, and no one heard it?"

"That's what we're being told."

Sean sighed and turned toward Donnelly. "Dave?"

"Aye. We've managed to make copies of his diary, address book, and what have you. I've got a couple of the lads going through that now. Expect to be informed about next of kin pretty soon. No boyfriend yet, though. No one name coming up over and over. I'll be sending the troops out to track friends and associates as and when we have their details. Oh, and the coroner's officer has been on the blower. The body's been moved from the scene and taken to Guy's Hospital. Postmortem's at four p.m. today."

Sean's mind flashed with the images of previous postmortems he'd attended as he pushed what was left of his sandwich to one side.

"Who's doing it?"

"You've got your wish there, boss. It's Dr. Canning. Anything more from the forensics team at the scene?"

"Not yet. Roddis doesn't reckon they'll be finished until about this time tomorrow, then as usual everything gets sent to the lab and we wait."

A young detective from Sean's team appeared at the door holding a small piece of paper pinched between his fingers. "I think I've found an address for the parents." The three detectives continued to look at him.

"I'll take that, thanks," Sally told him. The young detective handed her the note and backed away from the door.

Sean knew his responsibilities. "I'll come too. Shit, this is gonna be fun. Dave, I'll see you back here at about three thirty. You can take me to the postmortem."

"I'll be here," Donnelly assured him.

Sean tugged his jacket on and headed for the door, Sally in pursuit. "And remember," he told Donnelly, "if anyone asks, this is a straightforward domestic murder. No need to get anyone excited."

"Having doubts?" Donnelly managed to ask before Sean was gone.

"No," Sean answered, not entirely truthfully. For a second he was back in the flat, back at the scene of the slaughter, watching the killer moving around Graydon's prostrate form, but he saw no panic or fury in his actions, no jealousy or rage, only a coldness—a sense of satisfaction.

Donnelly's voice snapped him back. "You all right, guv'nor?"

"Sorry, yes I'm fine. Just find me the boyfriend—whoever he is. Find him and you've found our prime suspect."

"I'll do my best."

"I know you will," Sean told him as he watched him stride back into the main office.

CHAPTER 2

I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent with the little queer. I made it look like a domestic murder. I've heard fights between people like him can get nasty, so I had a bit of fun with the idea.

He was easy enough to dispatch. These people live dangerous lives. They make perfect victims. So I hunted among them, looking for someone, and I found him.

I had already decided to spend the evening stalking the patrons of a Vauxhall nightclub, Utopia. What a ridiculous name. More like Hell, if you ask me. I told my wife I was going out of town on business, packed some spare clothes, toiletries, the usual things for a night away, and booked a hotel room in Victoria. I could hardly turn up at home in the early hours. That would arouse suspicions. I couldn't have that. Everything at home needed to appear . . . normal.

I also packed a paper painter's suit that I bought at Homebase, several pairs of surgical gloves—readily available from all sorts of shops—a shower cap, and some plastic bags to cover my feet. A little noisy, but effective. And last but not least a syringe. All fitted neatly into a small knapsack.

Avoiding the CCTV cameras that swamped the area, I watched the entrance to the club from the shadows of the railway bridge as the sound of the trains reverberated through the archways.

I had already spied my target entering the club earlier that evening. The excitement made my testicles tighten. Yes, he was truly worthy of my special attentions. This wasn't the first time I had seen him. I had watched him a couple of weeks earlier, watched him whore himself inside the club to whoever could match his price. I had been searching for the perfect victim, knowing the police would only check CCTV from the night he died or, if they were especially diligent, maybe the week before.

I had stood in the midst of the heaving throng of stinking, foul humanity, bodies brushing past my own, tainting my being with their diseased imperfection, while at the same time inflaming my already excited, heightened senses. I so wanted to reach out and take each and every one of them by the throat, crushing trachea after trachea as the dead began to pile at my feet. I fought hard to control the surging strength within, then terror gripped me, terror like I have never felt in my entire life. Terror that the real me was revealing itself, that all those around me could see me changing in front of their very eyes, my skin glowing a brilliant red, bright white light spilling from my eyes and ears, vomiting from my mouth. Heavy drops of sweat had snaked down my back, guided by my swelling, cramping back muscles. Somehow I had managed to move my legs, pushing through a crowd of squabbling worshippers until I reached the bar and stared into the giant mirror hanging behind it. Relief washed over me, slowing my heart and cooling my sweat as I could see I hadn't changed, hadn't betrayed myself.

Now the time for watching was over. It was time for my prize, my release, my relief. All was

place. All was as it needed to be. At last I saw him leaving the club. He was shouting good-byes, but seemed to be alone. He walked casually under the railway bridge, heading toward Vauxhall Bridge. I moved quickly and silently to the other side of the railway bridge and waited for him. As he neared, I stepped out. He saw me, but didn't look scared. He returned my smile as I spoke to him.

"Excuse me."

"Yes," he replied, still smiling, stepping closer to the streetlight to better see me. "Is there something I can do for . . . you," he said, recognition spreading across his face. "We really must stop meeting like this." Yes, I'd been with him before. A risk, but a calculated one. A little more than a week ago, inside the nightclub, I'd introduced myself without speaking, making sure he saw my smiling face just long enough so he'd recognize it again. Later I met him outside. I paid him what he asked, all in advance, and we went back to his flat where I defiled myself inside him and even allowed him to defile the inside of me. The sex wasn't important, or even pleasurable—that wasn't the point of being with him. I wanted to feel him while he was alive, to understand he wasn't merely an inanimate thing, but a real live person. I couldn't be with him like that the night I dispatched him in case I left the faintest trace of semen or saliva on his body. Being with him a week or so before would give any such evidence time to degrade and die. And of course we practiced safe sex: he to protect himself from the Gay Plague and I to protect myself from detection. I'd shaved away my pubic hair so none could be left at the scene and wore a full-faced rubber mask that also covered my head, stopping any head hairs from being left either, as well as rubber gloves to eliminate the risk of leaving fingerprints—all of which the little queer thought was simply part of the fun. But the fun, the real fun, was yet to come, and I had more than a week to fantasize about the events that lay ahead.

The days had passed painfully slowly, testing my patience and control to the limit, but the memories of the night I had been with him and the thought of things to come carried me through, and before I knew it he was standing in front of me, his small, straight white teeth glistening in the streetlights, his oval-shaped head too large for his scrawny neck, perched on slim, narrow shoulders. His hair was blond and straight, shoulder-length, styled to make him look like a surfer, but his skin was pale and his body weak. The most athletic thing he had ever done was drop to his knees. His t-shirt was too tight and short, revealing his flat stomach, disappearing into hipster designer jeans worn to provoke the sexual urges of his peers.

I told him I needed to be with him again. I lied that I had been inside the club and had seen him dancing, that I had been too nervous to approach him then, but now I really wanted him. We talked some more crap then he said, "You know I'm not cheap. If you want to be with me again it'll cost."

He suggested we go to my place, so I told him my boyfriend would be there, but he started rambling on about not taking people back to his flat and how last time had been an exception, until I pulled another two fifties from my wallet and thrust them into his hand. He smiled.

We went to my car, fixed with false plates, and drove to his shithole in southeast London where I was sure not to park too close to his block. Telling him I didn't want to take the risk of being seen walking to his flat with him, I suggested that he go ahead and leave the door unlocked.

I waited a couple of minutes, then, as the street was empty, no one staring from windows, I walked to the flat. The block was old, cold, and smelled of piss, but he had been a good boy and left the door unlocked. I quietly entered and flicked the lock on. He appeared around the corner at the end of the corridor, from what I knew was the living room. He spoke.

"Was that you locking the door?"

"Yes," I replied. "Can't be too careful these days."

"Afraid someone's going to burst in on us and spoil the party?"

“Something like that.”

~~The excitement was unbearable. My stomach was so cramped with anticipation I could hardly breathe. Inside, my mind was screaming, but I was still wearing my nervous smile as I walked into the living room.~~

The whore knelt by his CD player. I told him I wanted to clean up a little and headed for the bathroom down the hallway.

I took my bag with me, and quickly, if somewhat awkwardly, pulled on the suit, the shower cap, rubber gloves, and finally the plastic bags over my shoes. I looked in the mirror, filling my lungs with air drawn in hard through my nose. I was ready.

Fully prepared, I returned to the living room. He turned and saw me dressed and resplendent. He started to giggle, covering his mouth as if to stop himself.

He spoke to me. “Is this how we’re going to get our kicks tonight then?”

They were the last words he spoke, although he may have said “please” a little later. By then the blood bubbling up into his mouth made it just a gargle.

With a smooth, swift, practiced hand I grabbed an iron statue of a naked Indian he kept on his side table and I used it to smash his skull, not hitting him hard enough to kill him straightaway, merely to render him semiconscious and virtually paralyzed. He had been on his knees when I hit him, which was good—less distance to fall meant less noise when he hit the floor.

I watched him for a while, standing over him like the victor in a prizefight, watching his chest rise and fall with each painful, strained breath, the blood initially spurting from the wound in his head then slowing to a steady flow as his heart grew too weak to pump it at the pressure his body required to stay alive. Every few seconds his right leg would twitch like a dying bird.

It wouldn’t have been as I had dreamed if he hadn’t been at least partly conscious when I went for him with an ice pick I found in his drinks cabinet. I needed him to be alive as I cut him. I needed to see him try to stop me each time I pushed the ice pick into his dying body: not stabbing frenziedly, but placing it deliberately against his pale skin. Now and then he would reach up and pitifully try to defend himself from the torture. I told him not to be a naughty boy and continued with my work. It was a shame his brain hemorrhaging had caused his eyes to turn red, as I had wanted to contrast his blue eyes against the pale bloodied skin. Next time I’d do better.

His perforated body almost began to disgust me, to make me want to flee from the scene, but I couldn’t stop yet. Not until all was as close as it could be to how I had seen it in my mind the first time I knew I would be visiting him. When he finally died, a slow, quiet hiss of air escaping from his lips and the breaches in his chest wall told me that my fun had come to an end. I put on a clean pair of surgical gloves and took the three hundred pounds in cash I had given him earlier from his pants pocket. I really didn’t want to leave that behind. I carefully and quietly broke apart some furniture and generally arranged the room as if a violent struggle had occurred. Next I used the syringe I’d brought to draw blood from his mouth and sprayed it about the room: on the walls, over the furniture, on the carpet, making spray patterns to suggest a violent struggle had taken place. Then I moved to the corner of the room I had left clean. I removed my protective layers and put them inside a plastic bag and put that bag inside another plastic bag and repeated this twice more. I ensured that each plastic bag was tied securely and finally put the bundle in my knapsack. I put new plastic bags on my feet, not wanting to take the chance that I might step on a spot of blood—that sort of evidence can be difficult to explain. I put on another clean pair of rubber surgical gloves and left the living room. I would burn a portion of it in my garden the following evening, the safest way to dispose of such incriminating items. To burn them in a public place risked attracting attention, while burial would leave them at the mercy

inquisitive animals.

~~I moved quietly to the front door. I took the plastic bags off my shoes and looked through the peephole. Nobody about. Just to be sure, I listened at the door, careful not to let my ear press against it and possibly leave a mark, like a fingerprint, which I hear can happen.~~

When I was totally happy, I slipped out of the flat, leaving the front door open so as not to make any more noise than necessary. The statue of the Indian and the ice pick I threw in the Thames as they headed north to my hotel. The thought of the police wasting hours searching for weapons that wouldn't help their investigation in the slightest pleased me.

When I reached my hotel I slipped in through the side door next to the bar, generally used only as a fire exit. I knew it could open from the outside and had no CCTV camera trained on it. I already had the key card for my room, having checked in earlier that day. I took a long shower, keeping the water as hot as I could bear, scrubbing skin, nails, and hair vigorously with a nailbrush until my entire body felt like it had been burned by flames. I had removed the plug cover to allow any items washed from my body to flow easily into London's sewage system. After the shower I took a long steaming bath and scrubbed myself again. Once dry I lay naked on the bed and drank two bottles of water, at peace now. Satisfied. Soon sleep came and I dreamed the same beautiful dream over and over.

CHAPTER 3

Thursday, late afternoon

Sean and Donnelly walked along the corridors of Guy's Hospital, heading for the mortuary. They were accompanied by Detective Constable Sam Muir, who would be acting as exhibits officer—taking responsibility for any objects the pathologist found on or in the body during the postmortem. Sean wondered if he would bump into his wife, Kate, one of the all too few doctors attending to the never-ending flow of patients through the Accident and Emergency Department—the sick and injured from the surrounding areas of Southwark, Bermondsey, and beyond. Some of London's poorest and most forgotten, living in public housing projects where violence and crime were seldom far away, all of their degradation and suffering going unnoticed and unseen by the swarms of tourists wandering around Tower Bridge and Tooley Street. If only they knew how close they were to some of London's most dangerous territory.

His mind returned to the victim's parents. He and Sally had called at the small town house in Putney. A desirable neighborhood on the whole, but boisterous on weekend evenings. Sally had done most of the talking.

Daniel had been their only child. The mother was devastated and didn't care who saw her fall to the floor screaming. Her despair was a physical pain. When she could speak, all she could say was the name of her son.

The father was stunned. He didn't know whether to help his wife or collapse himself. He ended up doing neither. Sean took him into the living room. Sally stayed with the mother.

They knew their son was gay. It had bothered the father at first, but he had grown to accept it. What else could he do other than push the boy away? And he would never do that. He said his son worked as a nightclub manager. He wasn't sure where, but Daniel had been doing well for himself and had no money problems, unlike other young people.

He hadn't met any of his son's friends. Daniel hadn't kept in touch with his old school friends. He came home quite often, almost every Sunday, for lunch. If he had a boyfriend then neither he nor his wife knew about it. Their son had said he wasn't interested in anything like that. They hadn't pressed him.

The father had asked what they were to do now. His wife would be finished. She lived for the boy, not him. He knew it and didn't mind—but with the boy gone?

He wanted to know who would do this to his boy—who would do this to them? Why? Sean had no

answers.

As the three detectives entered the mortuary they could see Dr. Simon Canning preparing for the postmortem. A body lay covered with a green sheet on what Sean knew would be a cold, metal operating table. Water continually ran under the body to an exit drain as the pathologist did his work so that the whole thing resembled a large, shallow stainless-steel bathtub.

Some detectives could detach themselves from the ugly reality of postmortems, bury themselves in the science and art of the procedure. Unfortunately, Sean was not one of those detectives. For days to come images of his own postmortem would blend with the memories of his shattered childhood. Meanwhile Dr. Simon Canning was busy arranging his tools—bright, shiny metal instruments for torturing the dead.

“Afternoon, Detectives.”

“Doctor. Good to see you again,” Sean replied.

“I doubt that,” said the pathologist. Canning was pleasant enough, but businesslike and succinct. “I hope you don’t mind, Inspector. I’ve started without you. I was just having a bit of a cleanup before continuing. Right then, shall we get on with it?”

The doctor pulled back the sheet covering the body with one quick movement of his arm. Sean almost expected him to say, “*Voilà!*” like a waiter lifting the lid off a silver platter.

The hair on the back and side of the head was matted with blood—it looked sticky. Sean could clearly see the gashes in the side of the head and the small stab marks all over the naked body.

“Seventy-seven,” Canning told him.

Sean realized he was being spoken to. He glanced up at the doctor. “Sorry?”

“Separate stab wounds. Seventy-seven in total. None in the back of the body. All in the front. Made by some form of stiletto knife, or an ice pick, but it’s the first blow to the head that killed him. Eventually.”

Dr. Canning pointed to the head wound. Sean forced himself to lean closer to the body. “One can see the ear is missing. Not cut off, but more a case of the victim being hit so hard that whatever he was hit with crushed the skull and still had enough energy to tear the ear away as the swing of the object carried through.”

“Nice” was all Sean said.

“And the victim was on his knees when the first blow was struck,” the doctor continued. “We can see the cut to the scalp is angled downward, not upward. The killer swung low, not high.”

“Or he was hit from behind?” Sean offered.

“No,” Canning told him. “He fell backward, not forward. Look at the stains from the flow of blood. They run to the back of the head, not toward the face.”

He looked at the detectives, making sure they were concentrating on what he was saying and not what they were seeing. He had their attention.

“But that’s all straightforward. The interesting thing is the angle of the stab wounds. Bearing in mind of course that our friend here has wounds from his ankles to his throat, I can be almost positive the victim was already prostrate on the floor when he was stabbed. That in itself isn’t unusual.” The doctor paused to catch his breath before continuing his lecture. “The interesting bit is this—most of the stab wounds are at the wrong angle of entry. You see?”

“I’m not quite with you, Doctor.”

“It’s like this.” Canning looked around for a prop. He found a pair of scissors. “First, I know the killer is probably right-handed. The angle of the stab wounds tells me that, as does the fact the victim was hit on the left side of his head. Now, imagine I’m the killer. The victim can play himself. In order

to stab somebody from head to toe, the killer would have to be at the side of the body. Not on top, as you would first imagine. If he sat astride the body then it would have been difficult to reach around and stab the thighs, the shins.” The doctor twisted his body back toward the victim’s feet so as to give a practical demonstration. His point was well made.

“Also, the entire body has puncture wounds. There isn’t a large enough unmolested area to suggest the killer was sitting astride the victim.”

“So the killer was kneeling on the side of the victim when he stabbed him. That doesn’t help me,” Sean told him.

Canning continued. “What I’m saying is that the killer didn’t crouch down next to the victim and stab away as we would expect in most frenzied crimes of passion. This killer moved around the body, stabbing at different areas. There’s no doubt about it. It’s as if the killer didn’t want to be uncomfortable. He didn’t want to overstretch, almost as if he was placing ritual stab wounds, something of that nature. It’s a strange one.

“If you ask me, I’d say this was probably not a frenzied attack. These stab wounds are deliberately placed. Controlled. The killer took his time.”

Sean felt a coldness grip his body and mind as he flashed back to the image he’d had of the killer’s careful, machinelike actions as he stabbed the victim to death. He ran a hand slowly through his short brown hair. He could deny many things, but he couldn’t deny his instincts. His gut told him things were going to become difficult. Complicated. The domestic theory was beginning to leak, and in all likelihood they weren’t looking for a scared lover anymore. There would be no tearful suspect surrendering to custody because he couldn’t deal with the guilt. They were now after something else. Sean was sure of it. He exhaled deeply, his mind swirling with questions.

“We need to get back to the office. Are you finished here, Doctor?”

“Almost. One last thing.” He pointed to the victim’s wrists. “It’s very faint, but it’s there. On both wrists.”

Sean looked closely. He could see some discoloration of the victim’s skin. Thin bands of slightly darker tissue. Canning continued his analysis.

“They’re old bruises. Probably caused by ligatures. He was tied with something. I’ll have a look under ultraviolet; that’ll show up any other old injuries. I’ll check the entire body. All my findings will be in the final report.”

“Fine,” Sean said, the sense of urgency clear in his voice.

“Please, Inspector. Don’t let me hold you up. I’ll keep you informed.”

Donnelly spoke. “D’you want me to sack looking for a boyfriend, boss?”

Sean shook his head. “No. Let’s check it out as a matter of course. The boyfriend could still be the killer. Young Daniel here may have hooked up with some freak and not even known it. No forced entry to the flat, remember?” Sean said it, but he didn’t believe it. Besides, if there was a boyfriend around, he had a right to know about Daniel. They needed to find him anyway.

“We’d better get back and break the good news.”

“You gonna tell the superintendent about this, boss?” asked Donnelly.

“I don’t have much choice.” He glanced at his watch. “It’s getting late. I wouldn’t want to spoil his night. Better to tell him tomorrow—after that it looks like the circus will be coming to town. You don’t be one of the clowns.”

“And the rest of the team?”

“They’ve got more than enough to be getting on with for tonight. Sort out a briefing for tomorrow morning. I’ll put them in the picture then.”

Sean and Donnelly made for the exit. Sean needed the fresh air. They walked through the swing doors and were gone.

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