

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

*Lazarus Junction: Crossing the Divide. The Influence of Crime Procedural Tropes on the
Construction of Supernatural Urban Fantasy*

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by

Darren Lee Dobson, BA, MA Creative Writing (University of Hull)

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted elsewhere.

Lazarus Junction: Crossing the Divide. The Influence of Crime Procedural Tropes on the Construction of Supernatural Urban Fantasy.

For Glads

Lazarus Junction: Crossing the Divide. The Influence of Crime Procedural Tropes on the Construction of Supernatural Urban Fantasy.

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Abstract

This thesis considers the influence of crime procedural tropes in the writing of *Lazarus Junction: Crossing the Divide*. It considers the intrusion of the city, and examines how *Lazarus Junction* seeks to portray a world threatened by a malevolent force. It delves beneath the everyday façade, and in doing so brings the principal characters, author and reader face to face with the shadowed ghosts that lie beneath.

It observes the genre of Hull Noir and examines two of its core writers Robert Edric and David Mark both of whom tap into society's changing values and tolerances. It explores a historical personage in the shape of Harry Lazarus, his role in the late nineteenth century transmigrant business and how he became the genesis for the writing of this book.

This exegesis examines this writer's development throughout the writing this Ph.D. set against a world beset by a global pandemic. It observes the relationships between the principal characters, Detective Inspector Jack Kane, Detective Sergeant Ashleigh Young, and Police Constable Watson - both within their inner circle, and indeed the tensions brought about with extended colleagues within Hull's Police Divisional Head Quarters. It seeks to present Kingston Upon Hull as a principal character and explores the role grief and death have to play within the narrative instead of skirting around the subject.

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The exegesis concludes with an examination of tropes hidden in plain sight. A prime example being a culture of violence against woman in crime fiction and how *Lazarus Junction* ultimately rejects this philosophy. It seeks to resolve the narrative and explores the role Jack and his team have to play beyond the writing of this Ph.D.

Lazarus Junction

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Chapter 1

Jack sipped his coffee, lowered his cup and ran a hand around his wrist where the knife had penetrated his skin. The scar was visible if anyone cared to look. But who the hell would want to do that?

Costa in Hull's Paragon Interchange was busy, which wasn't surprising given that it was mid-December. Tinsel and paper decorations hung from the ceiling and walls, and if any other clues of the looming festive period were needed noise from some anaemic sounding boy-band, *Take Five*, or whatever they called themselves these days, filled the café. The smell of hot paninis and pastries was strong in here, but it was fading, sucked out by the quiet ventilation fan.

Jack glanced up at the speakers, his eyes following the cables to a power box beside his feet. A rendition of *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* blurted out. He really should spill his coffee on the damn thing accidentally of course, and do everyone a favour. Well nearly everyone, turning he caught sight of a couple holding hands. They were singing along to the chorus, eyes fixed on one another. There was just no helping some people.

Jack gulped down a mouthful of his drink and coughed as it burnt its way down.

Moments later the café door opened, spilling in cold air and a rich mixture of excitement that only came with a city in a jovial mood. A delivery man, clipboard tucked under one arm, negotiated a heavily laden handcart over the threshold. Brown cargo pants and jacket, he nodded to a Barista standing at the till and headed for the storeroom.

Now there was a man who knew the rules of invisibility. Unseen by most, Jack watched the man leave and caught a glimpse of himself reflected in the café door as it closed. Christ, he looked like shite, and felt it too.

Six months of sick leave wasn't suiting him. Six months since his fiancée's murder no one had been arrested. Detective Chief Inspector Docherty had headed-up the investigation, grasping at straws where there should have been concrete leads. The man was a liability. A walking disaster zone. It was no wonder they called him Inspector Clueless at Divisional Headquarters – behind his back at least. The thing is no one had asked how he had made it to DCI in the first place?

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Sarah's killer was still out there and there was no way Docherty was ever going to catch him.

'Useless piece of shit!'

Trying hard to keep his growl inaudible Jack closed his eyes.

Sarah is waiting for him, tears rolling down her cheeks as she tries to speak. 'It's okay. I'm here...' He tells her, his voice so weak it's almost inaudible as he presses both hands against the cut to her throat. Warm blood spills out through his fingers and onto the concrete floor.

Someone was here a moment ago, a man. He had –

Jack spins around. He opens his mouth to shout but no sound comes out. Whether it's his voice that fails him or the thickness of the despair choking away all sound he can't tell. Paragon Station is deserted. He wants to reach for his mobile, but he cannot move. Can only stare into Sarah's pale blue eyes as the light fades from them.

Anger writhed like snakes in his guts as he opens his eyes, and there he was in the café, still alive... still breathing. Why didn't he call for a taxi? And why the hell had he insisted on having one more drink in the bar before leaving the theatre?

Dr Van-Leeson, Humberside Police's Psychologist, had signed him off on the sick citing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A load of bollocks of course. He was grieving, plain and simple. Sketching was perhaps one of her better ideas. Not that he thought he was any good but it helped to hone his observational skills.

He dragged both hands over his tired face, reached into his overcoat pocket and took out his notebook and pencil. A woman had caught his attention. She was in her mid-twenties, small with shoulder length auburn hair, red jacket, torn jeans and trainers. She looked around the café nervously, stared out the window at people passing by, then she picked up her phone, put it to her ear and began talking.

Jack watched her for a while, took a deep breath and began to draw. He preferred to work from memory so kept his head down as he worked. What was the colour of the buttons on the woman's shirt? Was the fabric silk, or plain cloth?

'Anyone sitting here, mate?'

'What?' Jack noticed the man's clipped Essex accent before he looked up.

'The chair, anyone sitting there?'

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‘I’m busy.’ Jack lowered his pencil and glared at the man. He was about five-eight, thick set, wearing a baggy grey suit with flecks of grey colouring the ridiculous-looking beard he was growing.

‘I was just asking about the chair.’

‘Yeah, you’ve done that. Now piss off.’

Jack tapped his pencil against his notepad. He met the man’s eyes again and wondered how much more time he could spend on this – none if he was being honest. He looked towards the woman and noticed that she had started towards the door.

‘Oh, for the -’

Jack gulped down the last of his coffee. He pushed back his chair scraping the legs noisily on the tiled floor as he stood, notebook and pencil already shoved back into his coat pocket. ‘Here. Take it...’ He leaned forward, nose to nose with the man and gritted his teeth. ‘... take the fucking table.’

Outside, *Take Five*’s bland tones were drowned out by the clatter of suitcases against the lock-block paving slabs. Weak winter sunlight shone through the station’s high domed roof. Jack glanced at the clock overhanging the concourse. Ten-forty-five. He’d have to get a move on if he was to get to Divisional Headquarters before midday. Detective Chief Inspector John Docherty wasn’t known for his patience. Not that he didn’t want to get on the wrong side of the useless piece of shit. On the contrary, he’d happily break the man’s nose given half a chance. It was just that right now he needed to be cleared for active duty. Docherty was his boss which meant the decision was his for the making.

Jesus, what had he done to deserve this?

Jack turned up his collar and headed for the taxi rank. He was almost at the front of the station when there was a moment’s silence as if the city had held its breath. Noticing it, he turned and –

There was a brief cry of ‘Oh, God...’ and then screaming.

Goose pimples rushed up Jack’s arms and along his neck. A lump forming at the back of his throat as he began to run towards a crowd gathered on Platform One.

‘Police out of the way!’

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Jack pushed his way through the throng and caught sight of a woman lying on the platform floor. Red jacket, torn jeans and trainers. It was the same woman he had been sketching moments before.

Then he saw blood pooling onto the platform floor.

Time stopped. Or at least it felt as if it had, and then it came rushing back in a snow drift of memories.

‘Get the fuck out of my way.’

Jack disentangled himself from the gawpers and dropped to his knees beside the woman. He leaned forward and applied pressure to her throat, but he could see she had already lost far too much blood. Still, he had to try.

‘Help is on the way,’ he whispered in her ear and hoped someone had called for an ambulance instead of filming the incident on their mobile phones.

The woman looked at him, eyes wide and mouth moving but all that came out was a gurgled murmur.

‘It’s okay...’ Jack tried for a reassuring smile.

Tears glistened in the corner of the woman’s eyes. That was the first sign. A moment of realisation and then she was gone.

Jack held two fingers to her neck – the flesh already growing cold. No pulse. But he already knew that.

‘What happened?’ He said quietly and then with venom. ‘Who saw what fucking happened?’ Hands bloody as he reached out and squeezed an elderly woman’s arm and let go. ‘Someone...’ He shouted, looking around. ‘Anyone?’

No answer came and then Jack caught sight of a movement at the far end of the platform. He got to his feet, by the time he saw the man the crowd were all silent. No one said anything for a while and then someone shouted. ‘That’s him!’

Jack began to run, lungs burning as he pushed towards the end of the platform. He wasn’t officially back on the job yet, and almost definitely out of shape, but there was no way he was going to let the murdering bastard get away.

‘Police, stay where you are!’ The words came out of Jack’s mouth in short barks. The platform slippery under his feet where the weak winter sun had failed to thaw an overnight frost.

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He closed the gap to within twenty-feet and saw the man was wearing a full-length military style coat, gloves, he couldn't see what type, and a knife dripping blood in one hand.

'Drop the weapon!' Jack paused for a moment, gasping for air and started to walk.

The man didn't move. Not at first, at least, and then he smiled. Actually smiled. Purple patches framing pitch-dark eyes. From this close the discolouration on the man's face looked more like bruised skin, and it was everywhere. On his forehead, face and neck – every inch covered as if it were some elaborate tattoos.

Jack had seen it before.

'Drop the weapon and get on your knees.' Jack reached out a hand and moved closer. He knew he was taking a risk, but what else could he do – let the man get away?

'Do it now!' Jack took another step, his words drawing gasps of pain from his lungs.

The man smiled again. His gums bleeding, spilling lines of scarlet onto his lips. *Shit!* If this was strain two of the Pandemic, Jack wasn't aware of it. Unlike its originator, the more docile Covid-19, the new variant's ease of contagion - a sneeze, one droplet of blood, a drip of saliva inhaled - had taken on an almost mythical status. Catching this variant was a certain death sentence.

Behind came shouts. 'Transport police'

They'd be here in moments.

Jack put his hands into his pockets to take out a pair of latex gloves, realising he didn't have any. 'I said drop the fucking knife!'

The man's smile widened. More blood oozing from ruined gums.

Then it happened. Pain. Lots of it. Radiating up from the scar on his forearm and into his guts. Jack doubled over and clutched at his stomach. Body wrecked as if someone had torn a fist-size hole in the lining of his gut. 'Jesus...for fuck's sake!'

Feet pounded on the platform. Male voices shouted, loud and authoritative. 'You two. Stay where you are!'

Jack gritted his teeth and lifted his head. Purple patches and dark eyes staring back into his.

Another shout.

'Stay where you are!'

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A train roared into view, slowing a little as it approached the station. Its white and orange livery streaked with filth. The man took a step back. A bitter wind whipping at the hem of his coat. ‘Soon, Jack... soon!’

‘Argh...’ Jack pushed himself up, staggered for a moment and doubled over again. His final glimpse of the man was as he took another step. A screech of brakes and then was gone under the wheels of the approaching train.

‘Jesus, fucking Christ!’

Too late.

Jack glimpsed the Transport Police officers as they stepped up beside him and reached into his pocket for his warrant card. He didn’t need to look over the platform edge to see the dark-eyed man’s remains splattered along the tracks. Sarah’s killer was dead and that’s all that mattered.

The pain had eased in his guts. Jack took a long and slow breath, turned, and headed for the taxi-rank before anyone asked too many questions.

Chapter 2

‘What the fuck were you thinking?’

Jack stood on the wrong side of John Docherty’s desk and kept silent. He might have said he was waiting for the Chief Inspector’s anger to run dry. The truth was that the incident at Paragon Station had left him drained and in need of another caffeine fix.

‘Well -?’

‘Sir?’

‘What have you got to say for yourself?’

‘It might help if I knew what you were talking about?’

‘Don’t come the innocent with me, Kane. You were seen assaulting a woman at the train station....’ Docherty paused. ‘... an elderly woman for fuck’s sake.’ And then came that slow inevitable shake of his head. ‘This is going some even by your standards.’

Purple patches and dark eyes. Jack tried to get the image of the dead man out of his head but couldn’t. Whatever illness had inflicted him he looked the same the night he and Sarah were attacked. That wasn’t all, what had he meant by *Soon*, and how the fuck did he know his name?

‘Are you even listening to me?’

‘Sir...’ Jack focused his attention back on Docherty, keeping his tone insultingly simple. Too much to hope that his back to work welfare meeting might be a straightforward affair.

‘I ought to charge you with assault.’

‘Assault?’ Jack gave Docherty a look that would have withered a bigger man.

‘What do you think was going to happen? It’s all over *You-Book* for Christ’s sake. And on top of that I’ve got the press ringing the station asking for comments.’

‘Tube -’

‘What?’ Docherty scowled, his thinning eyebrows arching.

‘Social media... it’s called YouTube.’

‘I don’t give a monkey’s arse what it’s called. You’ve gone too far this time.’

‘I was -’ Jack stopped. No mention of the dark-eyed man. Surely, they’d -

‘You’re a fucking disgrace.’

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Jack resisted the urge to rub at the scar on his forearm. It burned like buggery since the incident at the train station. Just another thing he could do without. He let out a slow breath, clenching and unclenching his fist by his side. 'So, send me for counselling... or whatever it is Occupational Health recommend these days.'

'This isn't a joke.' Docherty growled.

He was in his late fifties. Tall and thin, with long slender fingers and a perpetually flushed bulbous nose indicative of someone who drank too much.

'Didn't say it was, sir. I was merely pointing out -'

'I don't care!' Docherty stood and tapped the side of his head a couple of times.

'You're beyond help, Kane. Wait here!'

No guesses as to where Docherty was heading. Jack gave in, rubbed at his scar, and raised two fingers at the door. 'Go fuck yourself... sir.'

'Come in. What can I do for you, John?'

Docherty stepped into Blanchard's office, closed the door, and approached his desk. The room was large with a floor to ceiling window that overlooked the back of the station and the concrete glory that used to be the old gas works. 'DI Kane, sir...'

'Is he back? Blanchard glanced expectantly at the door.

'He's waiting in my office, sir.' Docherty stood to attention; hands clasped tightly behind his back.

'Your office?'

'That's what I wanted to talk to you about, sir. We've had a complaint.'

'Complaint?' Blanchard nodded to the empty chair on the other side of his desk.

'About Kane?'

'Sir... several of them.' Docherty remained standing. He'd learnt not to trust the top brass, least so when they knew you wanted their job.

'He has only just returned from sick leave, hasn't he?'

'Sir. It's just that -' Docherty rocked slightly on his heels. Words bombarding with one another inside his head as he sought for maximum impact.

'Well?'

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Docherty took a deep breath and went for broke. ‘Kane assaulted an elderly woman at Paragon Station. We’ve got dozens of witnesses, and it’s posted all-over social media.’

Blanchard narrowed his eyes. He was silent for so long that Docherty thought he’d nodded off. And then he perked up. ‘Nothing you haven’t dealt with before, John.’

‘I can’t have Kane back on the team, sir. He was a liability even before he went off sick and I see no evidence to say he has changed.’

‘He has only recently lost his fiancée. I’m sure we can all cut him a little slack.’

Kane’s PTSD was a load of bollocks, and everyone knew it. Everyone but the Chief Super. Docherty resisted the urge to tell the Chief Super how naïve he has been. Fuck off might have been better, but there were standards to be maintained.

‘As far as I’m aware the doctor hasn’t cleared him for duty, sir.’ It was a long shot and then Docherty added. ‘We both know that might take some time.’

‘A formality, I’m sure.’ Blanchard scribbled something down and looked up. ‘I’ll have a word.’

The Chief Super wasn’t listening. Time to change tack. ‘I’ve had a number of officers complain about Kane’s attitude. He pushes anyone he works with to breaking point, and the guys in forensics won’t even answer the phone to him. You know as well as I do it takes a lot to aggravate those guys.’

Blanchard steepled his fingers under his chin, waited a moment before replying.

‘What do you suggest?’

‘Send him packing... sir. It’s not as if he hasn’t seen it coming.’

‘Come on John, you know as well as I do, we can’t do that. However, you look at it, Kane’s an experienced detective with plenty of solved cases under his belt.’

‘Sir, there’s no way I can -

Blanchard raised a hand. ‘There is a solution.’

‘Sir?’

There was a pause before Blanchard continued. ‘We’ll set him up in a department of his own.’

Own?

Docherty’s stomach churned at the Chief Super’s words. He knew when shit was being shovelled around – not quite going away. He could do with a stiff drink. Not that they

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allowed it in the station like they did in the old days. You can't even take a piss without telling someone where you were going. Fucking directives.

Blanchard leaned forward and there it was, the slightest of tells. The Chief Super glanced down briefly as if reading from a piece of paper before looking up again. Now Docherty knew he was being played, only his gut told him whoever was pulling the strings went way higher than Blanchard.

'John, you've said it yourself, you're short staffed in CID. The fire fatality on Baker Street. Arson, I believe? And what about the missing university student?' Blanchard's words came fast now as if warming to his role in whatever game he had been told to play. 'That's not to mention the surge in Covid hate crimes.'

'We're coping.' Docherty straightened his back and bristled. They hadn't given him an office on the third floor by chance. Rumour has it that Blanchard has put in for retirement and he has been ear-marked as a suitable successor. It wouldn't do his prospects any good if he were to show signs of weakness. Not now.

'That might be so, John, but you've got a good detective in Kane. We'll give him the hate crimes to investigate and assign him a DS and a uniformed officer. It'll take some of the pressure off you guys.'

To emphasize the point Blanchard picked up a remote, did something to his computer keyboard and the large flatscreen fixed to the wall lit up with a web-browser page displaying the news headlines for the Look North website. 'Three attacks on Whitefriargate – all Asian.' A click and the screen displayed the linked news article. 'They reckon some new variant is infecting the young, turning them violent.'

Another click and another website. 'This one's put the attacks down to the side-effects of vaccine rollout.' Another click. 'Russian infiltration and American pharmaceutical experimentation.'

Blanchard turned off the screen and laid the remote on his desk. 'We can't have the press picking up on this conspiracy bullshit and running with it. We've all seen the effects of the government's zero tolerance on vagrants. I for one don't want them using our city as a pilot for some other draconian power drive.'

'Sir, I -'

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Blanchard stood up before Docherty had time to finish. ‘I’m already under pressure to bring in a team from the MET. The whole station will be under scrutiny, John. No one will be spared. If there’s a chance Kane can make this work, then I’m all for it.’

The Chief Super had a point. Docherty suppressed a sigh. He didn’t want a bunch of southerners sticking their noses where they weren’t wanted.

‘Where are you going put him?’

‘The basement...’ Blanchard nodded slowly as if locating a distant memory. ‘There’s an office down there. It’s not much, but it’ll do.’

‘What about resources and funding?’

‘The department will come under the auspices of CID, administered by yourself. Kane will handle these so-called hate crimes and any other cases deserving special scrutiny.’

Special scrutiny? When did policing get so complicated? Once crime was black and white. Them and us. Now you had to have special names or all sorts of fucking acronyms for it.

‘Let me get this straight...’ Docherty resisted the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose ‘On top of everything else you want CID to provide support for Kane’s new department?’

‘I doubt it will come to that, John. Worst case scenario, you’ll be giving him an obliging response, and propose a budget that avoids earmarking any specific tasks.’

If there were any lingering doubts Blanchard’s ideas weren’t manufactured elsewhere, they were now quickly dispelled.

‘In fact,’ Blanchard sat down again and opened a desk drawer. ‘I have just the case for Kane to get started on.’ He brought out a file and handed it over. ‘Mike Trainer,’ he said, nodding slightly. ‘He’s been cautioned a number of times for trespass on Jewish burial sites. Might not come to anything but these sorts of low-key incidents have the potential of blowing up in our faces. See that it doesn’t, eh.’ It wasn’t a question.

The minute Docherty took the file the Chief Super’s office phone began to ring.

Blanchard glanced at it, eyes narrowing as he looked at the caller ID. ‘Sorry, John, I’ve got to take this.’

Meeting over... or so it seemed.

Docherty headed for the door, hearing a one-sided muffled conversation between the

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Chief Super and whoever the caller was. Kane might have been handed a department of his own, that didn't mean he couldn't make it clear who was really in charge.

Docherty had fucked up Sarah's murder investigation, that much was clear. It wasn't just the lack of resources, not being thorough enough, or re-checking sources, Jack got that. Every investigation threw up new challenges. True to form the DCI had handed responsibility to others and taken his eye off the ball. The term was *Ongoing*, although after a year it would drop into the *Cold Case* archive. Would have, if he hadn't have stumbled on Sarah's killer. Now the man was dead.

A whiteboard sat across from Docherty's desk displaying scribblings from a recent investigation. Jack got up, walked over, and tried to make sense of it.

It had all the hallmarks of Docherty's incompetence. Rubbed-out names, leads going nowhere, and too many loose ends. He had even failed to assign the investigation a name. Jack narrowed his eyes and squinted at the board. Either he was seeing things or there were markings beneath the surface that begged his attention. He had learnt over the years to go with his gut feelings.

'I've spoken to Superintendent Blanchard -'

Jack waited a moment before turning to see Docherty stood in the doorway. 'And?' He knew they were going to sack him. Might as well get it over with.

'How much do you know about Covid hate crimes?'

Jack shrugged. The question took him by surprise. 'No more than the usual.' True to say they didn't feature as much on the local or national news channels as they had early in the early days of the pandemic but that didn't mean they weren't still happening.

Docherty returned to his desk. 'Open it!' He handed Kane the file he was carrying.

Jack stared at it for a moment and then flicked through the pages. 'Mike Artemis, Trainer, academic and amateur archaeologist...'

'Intel suggests Trainer has been researching Jewish burial sites.'

'What's that got to do with Covid hate crimes?'

'While you were at home resting-up we've had a spate of attacks across the city. Verbal and physical abuse on people for not wearing face masks, illegal gatherings during

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lockdown, and attacks on anyone who looks remotely Chinese. The sort of things we in CID have little time to deal with.'

We?

Jack ignored the jibe and gave a small shrug. 'And you're showing this to me because...?'

'You're going to look into Trainer's movements. We need to keep a track of these nutjobs and that, Kane...' Somehow Docherty managed to make the name sound like some kind of insult. '.. is your new purpose in life.'

Jack looked at the file and then at Docherty. Now it sounded as if they weren't going to sack him. 'This is a job for a junior officer?'

'Don't push your luck, Kane. If it was up to me, you'd be out on your ear.'

The threat came as a half-hearted attack by Docherty's standards. That meant Blanchard had leaned on him.

A light knock on the door and a young WPC stepped into the office. 'The file you asked for, sir.' She handed Docherty a bundle of papers tied together with string. Her eyes briefly meeting Jack's before she left.

'Your fiancée, Sarah Hargreaves...' The file the WPC had given him lay open on Docherty's desk. '... dead and now we've got another woman lying in the morgue all because you had to go sticking your fucking nose in where it's not wanted.'

'I've already -'

Docherty's phone began to ring. He raised a hand as if swatting away an irritating fly before picking up the receiver. 'Yes? Right... and you're sure about that?' He hung up, waited a moment before turning his attention back to Kane. 'Tell me again, what were you doing at Paragon Station this morning?'

Another pause.

'No, don't answer that,' Docherty snarled. 'I've heard the gossip about you chasing shadows.'

'Shadows?'

'This so-called dark-eyed man of yours.'

'What about him?'

'Where is he now?'

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‘I thought that much might be obvious.’

‘Ah, yes, his conscience got the better of him, so he threw himself in front of a train. Very noble.’ A smirk crossed Docherty’s face before darkening into a scowl. ‘Only there was no dark-eyed man, never was. That was forensics on the phone just now and there’s no fucking sign of the man spread over the tracks. On top of that a detailed analysis of the train has also failed to show any sign of impact bigger than a fucking bird strike.’

‘I know what I saw.’ Jack balled his fists and stiffened.

‘Accept it, Kane...’ Docherty didn’t try to keep the sneer out of his voice as he jabbed a slender finger against an image of Sarah’s body laid out in the morgue. ‘Your fiancée is dead and you blame yourself. I get that. What I can’t allow is you interfering with an ongoing investigation, and now we’ve got another fucking murder to investigate.’

‘You think this is my fault?’ Jack gritted his teeth and leaned white-knuckled against the desk.

Docherty met him halfway. ‘You’re a fucking liability, Kane. Always was, always will be.’

Silence filled the room and then Jack glanced down, catching a glimpse of Sarah naked form. This wasn’t how he wanted to remember her. Not like this. Pain and anger rose inside as he took a deep breath and stepped back. Better to be a serving police officer than on the outside if he was going to find out what the fuck happened to the dark-eyed man.

‘Where are they sending me?’

‘What?’ The question clearly took Docherty by surprise.

‘The Covid Hate Crime Unit. Where are they sending me?’

A short pause and then the answer came.

‘The basement. I’ve been told there’s an office down there somewhere.’ Docherty waited a moment before continuing. ‘You’ll be assigned a Detective Sergeant and a probationary officer.’

‘When?’

‘With immediate effect. Now get the fuck out of my office.’

Jack turned and headed for the door. He braced himself for a departing shot and wasn’t disappointed. ‘And if I catch you interfering in my investigation again, I’ll have your head, you hear me!’

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Go fuck yourself!

Jack waited until he was on the other side of the door before taking out his mobile. He swiped the screen and selected the photograph app. A picture of Docherty's Incident Board appeared on the screen. The image wasn't all that clear, but it wasn't important. Most of the time they could be enhanced, bringing layered information to the fore.

He hoped Sarah's investigation was part of it, but he was too old to think it would be that simple. He paused a moment before dropping his mobile back into his pocket and headed for the basement.

Chapter 3

Jack descended into the depths of Divisional Headquarters. There was a time he'd dreamt of being in charge of his own department. Now, he wasn't so sure. Heading a team, no matter how small, brought responsibility.

The temperature had dropped and the light faded into a twilight as he approached the office. Down here the walls were made of thick concrete, the air cold and damp. The last time he had been anywhere like this was when he and Sarah had visited the tunnels beneath Edinburgh's Royal Mile. There was a semblance of sorts, none more than the gloom and the promise of an unseen threat lurking in the shadows.

He stood for a moment. It was quiet here, away from the bustle of the rest of the building. The door to the office was ajar, He eased it open and stepped inside.

'I was beginning to think you had got lost.' Detective Sergeant Ashleigh Young commented as she looked up from a desk piled with clutter.

'Chance would be a fine thing. Who's this...?' Jack nodded to a uniformed officer staring myopically at the screen of a laptop computer.

'PC Watson. He... we've...' Ash corrected herself. '... been sent down to help with this new department of yours.'

'Mine?' Jack glanced around the room. 'I'd have thought it more of a punishment. I don't know who you two have pissed off?'

'No one, not yet anyway.' Ash smiled, took out a cereal bar and took a bite. She chewed slowly, re-wrapped what was left of her snack and placed it on the table next to the open file she was reading.

'Gotcha!'

'Constable?' Jack glanced at Ash and then turned his attention to the young officer.

'Sorry, sir.' Watson looked up from his laptop, face reddening. 'It's just that I've been trying to get the computer terminals working.'

'I take it that you have?'

'Yes, sir.' A smile broke out on Watson's face.

Jack stared at the kid. When did the new recruits get so young, or was he just getting too old? Way back when he had been a fresh-faced probationary, Docherty had made his life

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miserable. Character building, he had called it. Felt more like bullying at the time and probably would be today.

‘Do we have internet?’

‘Soon as I’ve connected these Internet cables, sir.’ Watson’s face reflected in the glow of his laptop.

‘Right –’ Jack didn’t have the heart to say he didn’t have a clue what the kid was talking about. The sooner he had the tech up and running the better.

‘You could give me a hand with these while you’re waiting.’

Ash hefted a stack of files from the floor and let them fall onto her desk with a dull thud.

‘Covid Hate crimes?’ Jack asked after a moment’s pause, even though he knew the answer.

‘Seems so.’ Ash shrugged. ‘Docherty had them sent down. There’s a load more over there.’ She nodded to a similar pile stacked beside the door and set about finishing what was left of her cereal bar.

Still trying to make sense of it all Jack glanced around the room. The smell of something mouldy hung in the air. He had smelt it on his way down, only it was stronger in here. Metal lockers lined the walls, each one with a number, name tag and an assortment of dents. Some were plastered with headlines others with celebrity photos culled from newspapers – all dating back to the seventies judging by the look of them. Three desks made an ‘L’ island in the middle of the room surrounded by knee-high slatted benching. Heavy duty rails were hung with stab proof vests and high viz waistcoats – outdated stock that was probably worth thousands.

Jack slumped in a vacant chair, its springs squeaking in complaint. He still couldn’t understand why Ash had been transferred to this new unit but was grateful none the less. She had been one of the Millennium intakes who had been earmarked for a bright future. Though why she hadn’t made a DI by now he couldn’t quite figure out. Maybe it had something to do with her father who had been a DCI linked with the Saville fiasco.

Artemis, now there was an unusual name. Jack opened the file Docherty had given him and began sifting through the pages, neatly typed transcripts taken from witness statements. Maureen Gardner was the first. A nurse who worked at Castle Hill Hospital.

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She'd returned home after her night shift to see Trainer skulking around the Jewish cemetery on Hull's Hedon Road. There were others, Louise Balkman, a bus driver; Dennis Kaufman, a retired teacher, Sally Whitman, a single mum. A cross section of society. If this was all they had on Trainer then they were wasting their time.

'What's that you're reading?'

Jack looked up to see Ash standing over him. Her shoulder length auburn hair tucked behind her ears. 'Not sure yet, something... nothing.'

'I know that feeling.' Ash leaned against the edge of the desk and hesitated. 'You alright?' she said after a while.

'Fine.' Jack stretched the ache in his back and blinked away the glare from the overhead fluorescent light. Sleeping on the flooring of a narrow boat wasn't a good idea.

Ash softened her voice a little. 'It's just that -?'

And then the penny dropped.

Jack got to his feet, thumped a hand against the desk and began to pace the floor. 'What?' He stopped. 'You think I'm losing my mind?'

Ash raised her eyebrows. 'It's not like that.'

Of course, it wasn't. Jack glanced up at the grimy tiles on the ceiling and lowered his head with a heavy sigh. 'Sorry, I didn't mean to -'

'It's okay.' Ash pushed herself away from the desk and touched him gently on the arm. 'Things just take time.'

'So, I've been told.'

Ash gently squeezed his arm and returned to her desk. 'About this file of yours, revealing any useful secrets?'

'That depends on what you mean by useful. Mr Trainer for some reason has caught the attention of someone high up.'

'You think Trainer's got something to do with the hate crimes?'

Jack shrugged. 'That's what we need to figure out.'

'Internet's up and running.' Watson announced, unhooked his laptop and began neatly clearing things away.

Jack returned to his desk and switched on his computer. The picture wasn't brilliant, the screen jumping and flickering. 'Is this it then?'

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Watson fiddled with the computer and after a moment the screen settled down. ‘It might be a little slow until we get new equipment.’

New equipment? What it was to be young and naïve.

‘How do I access CCTV footage on this thing?’

‘Depends what you’re looking for, sir?’

‘Today’s footage from Paragon Station.’

‘Ah...’

‘Problem?’

‘It’s just that they are kept on a different server, sir.’

‘English Constable.’

‘The city’s CCTV cameras are operated from Festival House on Jameson Street. Our surveillance team have a direct link. They keep their backups stored on an independent device.’

‘Where’s that?’

‘Don’t know, sir.’

Great!

‘I can request access if you want?’

‘No!’ Jack rubbed at his tired eyes and leaned back. How long had it been since his last caffeine fix, four... five hours? Come to think of it he hadn’t eaten anything since five that morning, a cold slice of pizza from the night before. ‘What happens down here stays here, got it?’

‘Yes, sir.’

Ash had returned to her desk. She smiled and began sifting through her bundle of files.

‘There might be a way... sir,’ Watson said whilst tapping away at his laptop.

Afro Caribbean and standing over six-foot, he cuts an imposing figure. His hair an elaboration of tight curls, hands long and slender.

‘Go on.’ Interest piqued Jack stared at the kid and waited for him to elaborate. ‘Can you, do it?’ He tried to keep the irritation out of his voice.

‘Technically, I might be able to gain access to the footage using a

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proxy server....’ Watson stopped, as if realising what he had said and sought to clarify. ‘A bit like going in through the back door when no one’s looking.’

‘What are you waiting for?’

Jack knew he was taking advantage of the kid’s inexperience but better to be looking into a recent murder than digging through dead-end files Docherty had lumbered them with.

The chill in the room was getting worse. Jack leaned over and hit the radiator with his hand. It reminded him of when he and Sarah had spent their first week on their houseboat and happier times. They had planned to save up enough money to have the old girl rebuilt, starting from the leaking waterline upwards.

‘Come on you bugger!’

Jack hit the radiator again.

A couple of seconds past and then its cast-iron pipes gurgled. A brief flurry of warmth was short lived and once more the radiator chilled beneath his hand. Then, as if the two were connected, the fluorescent lighting above buzzed and flickered off and on.

‘Constable!’ Jack barked.

‘Sir?’

‘Are you going to be much longer?’

‘Can’t say, sir.’

Jack crossed the floor, squinted at the jargon scrolling like angry spiders on Watson’s laptop and headed for the door. ‘I’m going to get some air, give me a shout when you’re done.’

Outside, Jack leaned against the wall, feeling the cold against his back. How the fuck was he going to make this work? Wouldn’t be surprised if Docherty and the minions in CID had a sweepstake on how long it’d take for him to resign. The way things were working out, he wouldn’t have given himself a day... two at the most.

He pushed away from the wall, dug his hand into his trouser pocket and took out the semi-precious gemstone Sarah had given him. An artifact she’d found on Hessle Foreshore. She’d used resin to heal its fractures and dyed it green, their names inscribed on it.

Jack turned it over and over in his palm. He wasn’t entirely sure where the last few months had gone since Sarah’s passing. Time lost all meaning; each day was much the same

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as the last. The darkness had come and taken the one woman he had ever loved and now he was alone.

A low noise rumbled from the building above. Jack pocketed the gemstone and headed for the stairs. If someone high up wanted him down here then why not rattle a few cages.

The Major Incident Room the third floor of the station was open plan, the desks spread around the large room were unoccupied but for a familiar figure sitting at one. He looked up as the door banged shut.

‘Jack.’

‘Relax, sergeant.’

‘Actually...’ Osbourne hesitated. ‘It’s acting DI now.’

Osbourne a team leader? Jack tried to conjure up the image. Clive was a good detective. Hard working and meticulous. But a leader of men he wasn’t.

‘I’m leading the investigation into the dead woman at the station.’

‘Name?’

‘Molly Dullea.’ Osbourne stood, walked over to the Incident Board. ‘26-year-old college student. She lived alone in a rented flat on the Avenues.’

Jack followed the connections leading from a photograph of the dead woman. This was very much Clive’s work. Whereas Docherty’s had no order, Osbourne’s investigation flowed in a top-down sequence like a pyramid with the victim’s picture set at the top.

You had to get inside the head of the killer as much as their victims if you were to stand any chance of solving a murder. Jack got the impression Osbourne’s thinking wasn’t far-off, but there was missing something.

‘Soon, Jack... soon.’

At first, Jack thought the words were of an unbalanced mind. Now, he wasn’t so sure. The dark-eyed man at the station knew his name. This piece of information he wasn’t sharing with anyone.

‘What about Molly’s family and friends,’ Jack stepped closer to the board. ‘Has anyone spoken to them?’

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Osbourne turned and looked as if he was about to answer when footsteps sounded outside. Jack glanced back to see Docherty pass along the corridor. Had the DCI not been pre-occupied with a document he was reading he might have seen them both. Yet, he hadn't.

Jack didn't bother with niceties. He gave Osbourne a nod, turned and hurried out of the room.

Docherty was sitting at his desk when Jack stepped into his office.

'Haven't you heard of knocking?'

Jack paused, took a step back and tapped loudly on the door. 'I want something done about the lights and heating in the basement office.'

Docherty looked well groomed. His hair had been cut; beard trimmed. It gave him a look of a man ten-years his junior. 'I'm busy.'

'I can see that.' Jack put the emphasis on the noun, pausing for a moment before adding 'Sir.' He nodded at the document Docherty had been reading. 'Something important?'

'None of your fucking business.'

'Fair enough.'

Jack couldn't help but notice that Docherty looked away from him to a pressed uniform hanging behind the door.

'You still here?'

'Seems so.'

Jack stared at Docherty but didn't say anymore. It was an interview technique he had learned. It was meant to leave enough space for the other person to fill the silence.

'Well....' Docherty ran his long-fingered hand through his air. 'Out with it.'

'The basement office, it's freezing and the lights are faulty.'

Docherty looked like he was going to blow a gasket. He shook his head, let out a long breath and leaned forward. 'And you want me to do what?'

'You're acting administrator.'

'Who have you been talking to?'

Jack shrugged. No one was the answer, but he wasn't going to admit as much. He had read the looks between the lines. It was obvious Docherty was following Blanchard's orders,

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which always came with a certain degree of culpability even if he didn't have a clue what was going on.

Docherty opened his mouth as if he was going to shout and closed it again. 'You know the procedure,' he said. 'Fill in a maintenance request form and wait your turn.' He gave Jack what he no doubt thought was a patronising look. 'Understand?'

Jack resisted the urge to tell Docherty to fuck off.

Docherty's glare might have been enough to put the fear of God into junior officers, but Jack had his own agenda and wasn't going to be fobbed off so easily. 'I'm sure the interview panel will be keen to hear that you run a happy ship.'

'What?'

'The Superintendent's job.' Jack nodded at the application form, and then at the neatly pressed uniform.

'It's none of your fucking business.'

'Suit yourself,' Jack no longer cared. He turned and headed for the door.

'Where are you going?'

'The Chief Super's office.'

'Get back here!'

Jack turned. He hadn't been given any reassurances yet. 'The basement office?'

'I'll see what I can do.' The words came out of Docherty's mouth in a low growl. A long pause and then. 'The probationary officer?'

'Watson, what about him?'

'I don't want you filling his head with your nonsense!' It wasn't a question.

'Nonsense?'

'You know what I'm talking about.'

'No.' Jack shook his head. 'You're going to have to be more specific, sir?'

'The fucking dark-eyed man you saw at the station.'

And there it was the briefest of doubts in Docherty's voice.

'The kid's bright.' Jack shrugged. 'I'm sure he's capable of making up his own mind.'

'Cut the fucking sarcasm, Kane.' A nervous tick pulsed on the side of Docherty's temple. 'Watson stays in the office, you hear me. I don't want him in harm's way.

Understand?'

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Docherty's threat was more than subtle. Not only that, there was a desperation in his voice, or had it been his imagination? Jack waited a moment and answered with a question of his own. 'The lights and heating?'

'Like I said, I'll see what I can do.'

'Not good enough.'

'What?'

'I want it done before the end of the day.'

'You'd do well to remember who you're talking to, Kane.' Docherty glanced towards the door. 'Now get out!'

Ash was leaning over Watson's laptop when Jack stepped back into the basement office.

'Where have you been,' she said, looking up.

'To see his Lordship.'

'And?'

Jack shrugged even though no one was looking at him. 'You know how it is.' He walked over to Watson's desk. 'Something I ought to know about?'

'The city's surveillance cameras, sir,' Watson said.

'What about them?'

'I might have found a way in.'

The kid did something with the mouse and a login screen demanded a password. The keyboard clicked. Watson grinned.

Hull City Council logo appeared on the screen. Below it – *CCTV Operations Centre*.

'See if you can bring up this morning's footage of Paragon Station.'

Watson brought up an on-screen menu and selected three or four options in quick succession. The screen blanked and then displayed a frozen image of Paragon Station. The date stamp read: 08:30 am.

Tilting his head slightly Jack could see that they were looking along Platform One, as if their backs were turned towards the station concourse. 'Fast forward to ten o'clock?'

Watson did as he was told and let the image play.

'There!' Jack jabbed a finger at the screen.

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‘That looks like you, Jack.’ Ash leaned in closer. ‘Who’s that...’ Her words trailed off and then the penny dropped. ‘Shit! The man you were chasing.’ She met Jack’s eyes for a moment and turned back to the laptop.

‘What? You thought I was making it up?’

‘No, it’s just that –’

‘It doesn’t matter now.’ Jack sighed. He stared at the screen and watched as the scene played out. The CCTV cameras struggling to bring the station into focus. ‘See if you get a close-up of the man’s face.’

Watson switched cameras and zoomed in. He adjusted the pixelated image and enhanced the contrast. ‘That’s the best I can do, sir.’

Jack stared at the frozen image. There was the tiniest glimpse of the man’s dark eyes, not enough to get a positive ID.

The date stamp now read 10:34 am.

‘Let it play.’

Jack’s stomach turned as he watched the man step off the edge of the platform as a train approached the station. That’s when it hit home. The dark-eyed man hadn’t just brutally murdered another but had escaped.

‘Did he just -?’ Ash narrowed her eyes at the laptop screen.

‘Step off the platform in front of a train,’ Jack finished.

‘I thought forensics failed to find a body?’

‘Doesn’t mean he wasn’t there,’ Jack said, stepping back and stretching out his back.

‘Hold on a minute,’ Ash turned to face Jack. ‘You’ve got proof.’ She pointed at the laptop screen. ‘Right there, proof the man you were chasing.’

‘A grainy image of a man standing on the platform edge?’ Jack said. ‘You forgetting something.’

‘What’s that?’

‘We’ve got plenty of witnesses and no body. Which still makes me delusional.’

‘And a knife wielding killer still loose on the streets,’ Ash added.

‘Play the footage again, there must be something we’re missing.’

‘Sir, I –’

‘Just do it, Constable. I want to know where our man went.’

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Jack remained standing as Watson replayed the footage over and over, as if analysing a magician's sleight of hand to see where he had pulled the rabbit from.

'One more time.' Jack rubbed at his tired eyes. His brain was telling him what he was seeing didn't happen... couldn't have happened. Yet it did. '*Soon, Jack... Soon*'. Had this bastard been watching him? If so, how fucking long and why?

'You alright?'

'Fine.' Jack looked away and blinked away the glare of the laptop screen. He needed time to think, time to process the events of the last twenty-four hours.

Ash returned to her desk, unwrapped another cereal bar and took a bite.

Jack realised how much he had missed her company. 'Is there a rule to how many of those you can eat before you over do it, ten... twenty?'

'They're healthy.'

'Healthy?' Jack smiled. Like Sarah, Ash had the knack of lifting his mood. The whole thing about the station was badly screwed and he'd fucked up big time. Not only had he let the man get away he had allowed him to get inside his head, and for that there was no excuse. Whatever was left of his career, he'd hunt the bastard down and make him pay.

'Two murders. Same MO. Same location!' Ash said after a while.

'And?' Jack stared at her quizzically.

'Most people don't become killers overnight. There's some sort of trigger, or failed attempt prior to the main event. Chances are he has attacked before.'

'Go On.'

'If he has...' Ash hefted up a bundle of files. '... chances are it might be buried somewhere in these.'

Jack had to admit Ash had a point and was pissed he hadn't seen it himself. Perhaps he had been on sick leave too long? He gathered together the files Docherty had sent down and shared them out.

'What are we looking for?' Watson asked, taking his share and parking his laptop.

'Anything with the same MO. It doesn't necessarily have to be at Paragon Station, but before you do, send me a copy of the CCTV footage.'

'Sir.'

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Jack returned to his desk and started sifting through his bundle. As he did, images of beaten Asian men and woman stared back at him. Black eyes, broken noses and purple bruises. His heart ached at the sight of each of them. These so-called Covid hate crimes were not to be underestimated. He just couldn't understand why they hadn't been investigated. It was an angle he had to consider if he was to make any use of his time stuck in this pokey office.

With that in mind he switched on his computer, clicked on the video file Watson had sent him and started trawling through the hours of CCTV footage taken of Paragon Station just as CID had done after his fiancée's murder. Freeze frames of men, women and children. All of them interviewed in the hope someone had seen her killed – only they hadn't. Molly's attacker had used the same MO, Jack knew he wasn't here. He had jumped in front of a train.

He wasn't sure how much time had passed when he looked up to see both Ash and Watson quietly burrowing away through reams of paperwork. He glanced down at his wrist watch. Four-fifty. Shit! Where did the day go. He unhooked his coat from the back of his chair and stood up.

Ash looked up. 'Going somewhere?'

'The advantage of being the boss.' Jack gave tired smile. 'Is I don't have to answer all your questions.' He was at the door when he stopped and turned. 'Give it another ten minutes and get yourselves off.' He'd chip in more tomorrow, but first he had somewhere to be.

Chapter 4

The gates were locked when Jack got to Eastern Cemetery.

He grabbed the carrier bag from the passenger seat of his old Volvo and climbed over the perimeter wall.

It was minus two if he were to hazard a guess. The first row of headstones just visible in the glow of the orange street light. Beyond them everything was black and silent, just the rumble of traffic working its way along the A63.

Sarah's grave was on the far side of the cemetery. Jack followed the gravel path to the communal taps and stepped over the grass verge. There wasn't much light, he'd come here often over the past few months so he knew exactly where to go, could probably do it with his eyes closed.

'I've brought your favourite,' he said, taking a bunch of Freesias from the carrier bag and placing them into the metal vase. Next, he took out a six-pack of beer, opened the ring-pull and took a swig.

Sarah Hargreaves, Gone too Soon.

Eighteen months, three weeks, two days since he'd last heard her voice. The doctors said he'd been lucky to escape with his life. The attacker's knife had caught him a glancing blow. An inch in either direction and it might have been an entirely different outcome.

Jack took another drink and settled himself down on the empty carrier bag.

Since Sarah's death a downward spiral began. He spent weeks staring into space, that ushered in depression and thoughts of suicide. After that he stumbled from one day to another until time lost all meaning. How he'd survived, he wasn't sure. He had laughed and cried, shaken in shame and self-hatred, rocked back and forth on the cold bathroom floor in confusion – the impact of what had happened that night forever buried beneath his skin.

There was a time he never thought he was capable of killing another until the day Sarah died. Holding her in his arms as she breathed her last had brought on an anger and rage so feral his body twisted under the flare of it. That same rage had resurfaced when he saw the dark-eyed man at the station. Truth was he'd have gladly pushed him under the train.

'It's my birthday today,' Jack said, dropping the empty can and opening another. 'Of course, you knew that.'

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Sarah was an environmentalist. She created sculptures from driftwood she collected from the Humber Coastline and posted photographs online, encouraging others to make use of the plant's natural resources. It was because of her that he'd bought the houseboat and set his focus on living greener life. Now... well, he wasn't sure what he believed in anymore. The repair costs were spiralling out of control, it was getting more and more difficult to buy second-hand parts. Perhaps he'd be better off if he sold up and bought a flat in the town centre instead?

He drank his way through a second, then a third can of beer. 'I used to think this was all a dream, you know? And one day you'd walk in through the door.' He took a deep breath, his heart aching. 'Not so much now.'

Not since the evening he had taken her to Hull Theatre. He remembered the ambulance, the paramedics, but he couldn't remember if he told her that he loved her?

'Millie sends her love,' he said after a while. 'She doesn't say as much, but I can tell.' He paused. 'Grace too.'

He opened another can of beer, tears pricking his eyes as he looked up at the night sky. 'She tried to channel you last week. Sounds silly, I know. It's just that I really need to know you're alright?'

A noise.

Jack spun around fists clenched. 'Who's there?'

Nothing.

He was on his own which was just as well. No one to see him acting like a character from a low-budget Hammer Horror movie.

Rain started to fall.

He got to his feet, gathered together the empty cans, dropped them into the carrier bag and kissed a hand, tapping it to the top of the headstone. 'Best be on my way. Early start tomorrow, you know how it is.'

The drive to the marina was short and if he was careful, he'd get there without being stopped. He'd been on a course with the traffic cops and knew what they looked for; drivers going excessively slow or swerving across lanes. The roads were quiet. Still, he concentrated on

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keeping his speed a little under 30 mph as he headed over Myton Bridge, and from there took a short cut onto Humber Street.

Millie was waiting for him as he pulled up on the quay, tyres crunching on the loose stones. He and Sarah had bought the St. Lucia two years ago. The narrowboat didn't look like much, but it was theirs. Wooden steps led down into a narrow passage with four doors leading off it. There was a sitting room, bathroom, kitchen and a room with a double bed. All of it minimally furnished.

Jack headed straight for kitchen, taking care not to trip over Millie as she skulked around his legs. He'd forgotten about the boxes laid out on the floor and stumbled, arms reaching out to steady himself.

'Shit!'

He reached for the light switch and wished he had done before. It had taken him days to sort through Sarah's art stuff and get them ready for the charity shop. Only, he couldn't bring himself to part with them. The boxes nearest him were the smallest. The larger ones were stacked against the wall.

Inside were Sarah's creations, her pride and joy. All that energy and compassion. It was as if she had taken on all the ills of the world and locked them away inside gem stones and pottery. He was the polar opposite. Jack Kane the boring copper. God only knows what she saw in him.

Millie looked up at him and purred loudly. Jack reached down and stroked her mop of unruly fur. 'Let's get you something to eat, eh,' he said, groaning slightly as he stood up.

He searched the cupboards and found a tin of cat food and a half-empty bottle of wine. He emptied one into a dish and poured the other into a glass. 'There you go,' he said, placing Millie's food onto the floor and headed for the living-room.

A low noise filtered through from the generator and barely audible above it came the distant hum of the city. Jack pulled the curtains closed and slumped onto the settee. He resigned himself to a night of staring blankly into the gloom as he tried to marshal his thoughts.

He began to relax when his mobile vibrated beside him. Reaching out, picked it up and swiped the screen checking the caller ID.

'We need to talk.'

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Jack didn't need to ask who the caller was. Grace Edwards. Good friend to himself and Sarah.

'Everything alright?'

'Not on the phone.' Grace sounded breathless. Her soft highland accent catching as though she'd been running.

'I'll come over.' Jack leaned forward, drained what was left in his drink and shook his head, feeling the lager and wine mixing already. He put his glass down slowly and began to stand. And sat back down again. 'Give me ten minutes, I just need to –' He was about to say put Millie out when Grace spoke again.

'No!'

'Sorry?'

'You sound as if you've been drinking.'

'A couple of cans, I hardly call that drinking.'

'Sorry, Jack, I've lost one close friend already, I don't want to lose another. When you get to my age funerals come along all too often.'

Psychic, or not, Jack ignored Grace's protests. She had a habit of exaggerating. 'Where are you?'

'New Theatre. Listen, I'm on stage in a few minutes, I just wanted to...'

 Grace's voice trailed off, her words drowned out as Spandau Ballet's *True* blurred out in the background.

'Grace?'

'Got to go. We'll talk tomorrow. And Jack...'

'Yeah?'

'Many happy returns.'

Jack stared at the blank screen and then dropped his mobile onto the settee. Some birthday this is. He filled his glass, raised it high. 'Here's to you Jack Kane.' He downed it in one and closed his eyes. On balance he preferred his own company to anyone making a fuss.

He woke to flickering images playing across the TV screen. The remote controls were lying on the floor beside his feet. He must have switched it on before nodding off. No sign of Millie. He pulled himself up, stumbling slightly as he headed back into the kitchen.

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Millie was sitting beside her food bowl licking one foot with her tongue. Outside the rain was coming down harder, pinging off the narrowboat's glass roof. It wasn't a night to be on the streets. 'Okay, just this once.'

He had spent ten minutes setting up a bed for Millie, wandering from kitchen to engine room collecting old bedding and a litter tray she hadn't used since she was a kitten. He set it up outside his bedroom door. Impromptu, but it'd have to do.

It had been a long day and he was exhausted. Inside, he turned off the light, lay down and closed his eyes, thankful Millie wasn't outside.

Chapter 5

Mike Trainer stood in the burial chamber beneath Hull's Paragon Station. He'd always assumed the place was used as an air raid shelter during World War Two, but this was where his research had taken him. He'd sketched the faded symbols etched on the walls and asked around the academic community. No one knew anything about these strange hieroglyphs or where they had come from.

Night had fallen. The city above was shrouded in darkness. Wet and miserable rain slated the streets grey. Down here the two powerful arc lights he had set up at either end of the confined space shone brightly. There were two entrances to the tunnels beneath the station. Mike had ventured topside to check the hatch he had used was clear and returned to survey all he had done. He'd spent months shoring up the brick walls and erecting a wooden walkway and now his preparations were almost complete.

A mound of soil marked the centre of the chamber. The focal point of his life's work. Mike walked over, knelt down and placed a hand against the earth. The surface wasn't uniformly cold. There was a place, he judged, to be about halfway from top to base where the light didn't reach and the chill became so intense, he had to pull away.

Dried blood covered his hands. It had worn into the wrinkles and under his fingernails. Except for the mishap he had with the Stanley knife he couldn't recall cutting himself, but that had been two days ago.

A rumbling noise shook dust from the roof. Mike got to his feet, rubbed his palms down the side of his overalls and backed away from the mound of earth as if in some sort of reverence. He'd spent hours studying Hull Trains' timetables; he knew the arrival and departure times of every train. He'd been meticulous in his work and also noted the comings and goings of the station staff. The noise above marked the arrival of the 7:30 from London's Kings Cross and his cue to leave.

Hannah was expecting him. They'd been together for a year and she was preparing a meal in celebration. Between seven and eight, she'd told him, don't be late. Christ no, Hannah was the best thing that had happened to him, aside this discovery of course. She had stood by him when others had thrown scorn and ridiculed his research. There was no way he was going to let her down.

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He took his mobile from his overall pocket and swiped the screen. The signal was weak but strong enough to send a message: *On my way. See you soon. M xx.* He typed and pressed send.

His eyes scanned the chamber. Everything seemed to be in place except for a couple of broken floor boards laid at his feet. He carried them over to the entrance and stood them against the wall. Moments later he emerged through a manhole cover hidden away on the station concourse.

He felt a presence behind him, turned to see Platform Two had been cordoned off. A bored looking policeman paced up and down, arms tucked into his stab proof vest. Had someone been hurt? He'd seen a number of accidents in his time. Covid had kept people three meters apart and forced some to walk too close to the platform edge.

Head down, he gently eased the cover back into place and hurried towards the taxi rank. Seven-forty-five. He needed to be quick if he was to make it to Hannah's on time.

'Where to mate?'

'Pulman Street.'

Mike climbed into the back of a black cab parked up at the front of the station and glanced back, one hand holding onto the door handle as it pulled away. The stonework on the Royal Station Hotel was dirty like much of the city, the windowsills rotting and in need of care.

Nearly fifty years since the break-up of the fishing industry and council after council had failed to rejuvenate this once great city. Their priorities split between party-political lines. Red or blue, not that any of it mattered anymore.

Mike knew the city well, having grown up here. Like many towns surrounding it Hull looked and felt depressed, boarded up houses and drab fast-food bars but he knew the people were stronger than their situation suggested. Hardship bred resilience and here in Hull, his city, the most terminal of cases some might have suggested, it flowed through its arteries. The people of Hull were happy with their lot. A kind of we're okay attitude not found in many other places.

Exhaust fumes plumed in the cold air as the taxi slowed to a stop at the traffic lights on the corner Spring Bank and Park Street. They weren't far from Hannah's flat now. This

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time of night the journey from the town centre took a little over fifteen minutes. Quicker than walking.

‘Where are you from?’ Mike turned his gaze from the window and took in the driver’s ID badge. The man was dark skinned, with a full face. His square chin and heavy nose giving him the look of an ex-boxer.

‘Romania.’

‘You have family?’

The driver took a passport size photo from his pocket. ‘Wife and two girls... see.’ He held it up and smiled. ‘Soon they come here too.’

Mike stared at the picture. Hannah had come to the city a little over a year ago. They had met at the university where he’d taught History. A couple of drinks at a Christmas party and before he knew it, they were an item. Not that he was complaining. She was small and pretty and he was, well he was Odd Mike Trainer, as he was often called. Not that he cared. Not really. They could mock him all they want. He was the one on the verge of an academic breakthrough his peers had failed to discover.

‘Take a left here.’

The driver did as he was told, and headed down Spring Bank West.

Mike sat back, fished in his jacket pocket for his mobile and took out with it a packet of Marlborough. Hannah had replied to his earlier text with a little smiley face and a handful of kisses. He pocketed his mobile and tapped out a cigarette.

‘No smoke.’

‘Sorry?’ Mike pocketed his phone and met the driver’s glare in the rear-view mirror.

‘It’s the law.’ The driver pointed to a prohibited sign on the dashboard. ‘No smoke.’

Jesus. Mike put the packet away. Fucking nanny state. He’d had a couple earlier that morning and was gagging for a smoke. He continued to hold the driver’s gaze and fished around in his pocket.

‘Please, I want no trouble.’

Trouble?

He was only going to show the driver a picture of Hannah. The taxi lurched forward and a cold roiling mass rose in the pit of his stomach. Mike stared out of the window. Pulman

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Street was up ahead. He recognised the second-hand cycle shop wedged between a grubby laundrette and a Chinese Takeaway.

‘Here!’ Outside the rain was coming down heavily. Inside hate and loathing raged as if against some ancient injustice. ‘I said stop here!’

Cold steel brushes against callus fingers. He feels sick right down to his core. His breathing is ragged and every gasp hurts his throat. Images of pale flesh parted by a sharp knife. Blood welling up like black tar at the edge of the cut. These are not his memories, or maybe they are. He no longer knows what is real.

Orange lights reflect off wet streets casting everything in a Hellish glow. The air inside the cab a heavy moist blanket against the gloom outside. His head reels and even the thrumming of the cab’s engine cannot drown out the voice inside his head.

Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.

Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.

He stares at the back of the driver’s head. Once hundreds of his kind had sailed into the city. Their arrival an injustice to those that worked and died of hunger on these very streets.

The seconds pass, how long he’s not sure. The driver stops the cab, pulls back the protective screen and reaches for the internal light.

More images of ruined flesh. He flicks open the knife, yanks the man’s head back and pulls the blade across his throat. Blood sprays like hot gas across the windscreen. The escaping air jabbering at him like the voices inside his head.

Breathless now, he lets the driver’s head loll forward and looks down. These are the hands that have sought vengeance, for all those who have called to him and his kind. He feels it now, flowing through him like a forgotten memory. They had tried to lock him up and now he is free.

He climbs out of the cab, closes the door and doesn’t look back.

Chapter 6

Hannah put the pan of cabbage to simmer, stepped into the living room and checked her watch. ‘Where are you?’ Over by the window she peered between the blinds. The world looked fragile. Rain soaked and gloomy. A taxi idled, at the end of the street just visible through the fogged-up windows. She shivered involuntarily and wrapped her hands around herself.

A buzzer sounded in the kitchen.

She stepped back from the window, pulled her mobile from the cardigan pocket and re-read the message Mike had sent her: *On my way. See you soon. M xx.* Had something happened?

The buzzer kept on ringing.

‘Coming... coming!’ She glanced out of the window again, thought she saw a darkened figure staring up at her, and hurried back into the kitchen. Moments later her unease slid sideways. Not disappearing but sinking into the corners of her mind where it could wait until she could give it her full attention. She had a meal to prepare and nothing was going to ruin it.

She turned down the temperature on the oven and eased open the door. The fan whirled as the heat hit her face. The Bigos was done. A crispy brown surface, hiding the sauerkraut and fresh cabbage that bubbled away beneath its surface just the way her mother had taught her.

The smell was intoxicating. She hoped it would never fade. She had made the dish a year ago on their first date. Mike had wolfed down his meal and listened intently as she talked about Lisewo, her hometown in Poland. He was kind and caring, and understood without judging. The rain could fall all night, she didn’t mind. Mike would be here soon. A candlelight super, followed by an early night. Smiling to herself she felt her face flush at the thought.

The heat from the baking dish was so hot she almost burnt herself as she took it from the oven to set it aside and closed the door. Taking a saucepan, she set it to heat and added butter, dried mushrooms, chopped onion, parsley, cream and finally a pinch of salt. With one eye on the door, she stirred until the sauce was thick and creamy and then set it onto simmer.

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Hannah Kowalski was her birth name. At school the other children called her bluebell because of the flower she wore in her hair. She was an only child. Her parents had moved to Lisewo from Warsaw when she was five. They lived on the village and had two neighbours. Both farmers, wheat, potato and cabbage. And one also had pigs.

Across the main street, they had one more neighbour. He had a small potato patch, chickens, one cow and a dog. Early in the morning she'd look out of her bedroom window and watch him set out on his bike to deliver eggs to the school; or sell potatoes to shoppers in the town square. Life was simple in Lisewo. Women cooked and kept home. Men worked the fields and tended to the cattle. Children hand-picked cabbage and played in the orchards. Hull is different. The city laughs and cries. People are strange, not like Lisewo, friendly but strange, and the air smells of sea-salt and cocoa.

Her back ached from standing all afternoon. She wiped her hands on her pinny, took a family album from the drawer and sat at the kitchen table. Sometimes it was hard to remember how things were before. Turning the pages, she smiled as she came to a photo of her parents' wedding. Pappa wore a white shirt, a blue russet coat and leather boots. He looked so handsome. His eyes sparkled. He was taller with his pride.

Mama wore traditional spódnik and watówka, both skirt and jacket brightly coloured in green and blue. Her apron and shawl white, decorated with lace and delicate embroidery. Other photos show men, women and children from the village. More of them lined up as Mama and Pappa left the church. Hannah kissed a hand and pressed it against the memories. There was so much happiness she could almost taste it.

A heavy click sounded in the hall. It was followed by the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. Mike was home.

'Where are you?'

'In the kitchen.'

The door opened he stood in the doorway. His clothes were soaking wet and bloody.

'You're bleeding!' Hannah got to her feet and rushed towards him.

Mike didn't say anything for a while and glanced down, rain dripping from his hair. 'I need to clean up,' he said slowly looking up again.

Hannah said nothing, hoping Mike would say what happened but he just stood there staring.

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‘Are you hurt?’ She reached up a hand to touch to his face but he pushed her away.

‘Please, Mike, this is not like you.’ Startled, Hannah stepped back and wiped a sleeve across her eyes. This was not the kind and gentle man she had fallen in love with. The man who had helped her when she came into the country.

‘I need to clean up,’ Mike said again, refocusing as if seeing her for the first time.

Hannah frowned. If he didn’t want to talk about it now, perhaps he will later.

‘Don’t be long.’ She touched him lightly on the arm, afraid he might push her away again.

‘Dinner will be ready soon.’ and then she stepped back, making way as he headed out of the kitchen.

The bathroom was like a sauna when Mike stepped out of the shower, dried himself and put on a clean set of clothes. His overalls were crumpled on the floor. He cleared a porthole in the condensation which had built up on the mirror and glanced down at the stains on the discarded clothes. The blood was not his. So, how had it got there?

He remembered climbing into the back of a cab at the station, glimpses of people on the streets, the driver’s ID badge. What else? He closed his eyes for the briefest of moments and found he was leaning over the sink with his head bowed. Something moved behind. Not able to put his finger on it he scanned the room, eyes settling on a patch of darkness deeper.

‘Mike, you, okay?’ Hannah rattled the bathroom door but he had locked it.

Barely able to breathe he stared deeper into the shadows. Nothing happened. The space now clearly taken up by a linen basket and a set of bathroom scales.

He turned back to the mirror and for a moment didn’t recognise the man staring back at him. He looked tired and gaunt. His eyes dark and sunken. His bruised skin taking on a purplish hue of raw liver.

A movement came again, glimpsed out of the corner of his eye. This time he didn’t turn. Seconds passed, something cold touched the back of his head, bringing with it unimaginable pain.

His mind is a whirl of confusion. Images of someone doing terrible things. A righteous fury he doesn’t understand. He leans over the sink and vomits. A cold sensation filling his empty stomach as he looks up.

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*Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.
Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.*

He doesn't understand the meaning of the words as they fill his head, only that he has heard them before. He retrieves the Stanley Knife he knows to be still in his overall pocket, slips back the bolt on the bathroom door and steps quietly along the hallway.

Hannah is standing at the cooker singing to herself. He moves closer and she turns. She is happy and smiles. 'It's Bigos. Sauerkraut and fresh cabbage stew,' she says.

More terrible memories, more fury. He looks down to see the knife in his hand and the voice speaks to him. 'Bagahi laca bachahe...Bagahi laca bachahe...' Over and over.

And then silence as he flicks open the knife and closes the kitchen door.

Chapter 7

Something was wrong.

Grace sucked on a Fisherman's Friend as she stepped out onto the stage at Hull's New Theatre. 'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen,' she said, pacing the floor until the applause had faded. 'I'm not one for long speeches so if it's alright with you we'll get straight on with tonight's demonstration.'

A faint murmur rose, barely audible against background sound of the rain outside.

'If I come to you,' Grace continued. 'I need to hear your voice, loud and clear. It helps spirit to communicate. Understand?'

Another faint murmur.

'Come on, people,' Grace said. 'You're going to have to do better than if you want your loved ones to come through.'

Four high powered spot lights sizzled off stage, bathing the audience in harsh white light. She nodded to the technician to turn them down and took a step forward. 'Well, what's it to be. Should I pack up and go home or are you going to lighten up?'

Moments later her cajoling was rewarded with stuttered laughter, accompanied with loud cheers and the occasional whoop and holler.

'That's more like it!'

Grace closed her eyes for a moment, feeling the warm glow of a spirit enter the top of her head and fill her entire being.

Discovering she could see and hear the dead in her mid-fifties wasn't a career change she had planned on. Before that she had been an investigative journalist. Top of her game and damn good at it. An exposé she wrote on an elite satanic cult based in the UK titled the axis running through her life. Her article didn't have the impact she hoped and some of the high-profile figures involved made sure she didn't work as a journalist again. That was twenty years ago and now she spends most of her time conversing with spirit. It was a service she offered to the general public, or privately to those willing to pay a nominal entry fee. Money wasn't the be-all and end-all. What mattered more was helping those who needed it.

'That's lovely, dear.' Grace ran the lozenge around the inside of her mouth and

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concentrated on the tune filling her head. No, not a tune. A nursery rhyme. ‘Stay with me.’ She hummed a few bars aloud. ‘That’s it, dear. I’ve got you.’

Pain filled her body and a tingling sensation ran down her spine as the spirit of a little girl drew closer. ‘I want to be down there somewhere.’ Grace pointed to the front row and almost immediately her gaze was drawn to a young woman dressed in faded jeans and woolly jumper. ‘Can you accept the spirit of a young girl, dear?’

The woman’s nod was almost imperceptible.

Grace clutched at her chest. ‘She’s telling me she passed with her heart.’

A look of horror crossed the young woman’s face. She turned to an older woman sitting beside her and began to sob. ‘Oh, God... oh, God.’

‘Come on, dear’ Grace stepped closer to the front of the stage and crouched down. It wasn’t right that a child should die so young. It just wasn’t right. ‘Jessica’s fine now,’ she said, lowering her voice as if it were just her, the woman and the spirit of the dead girl in the auditorium. ‘She’s come to let you know that she’s fine and that you’re not to be sad.’

The woman’s sobs grew louder and Grace looked towards her companion. Mother, Grandmother, Aunt, friend, the woman hugged the grieving woman and whispered something in her ear.

Slowly the young woman looked up, wiped tears from her eyes and nodded. ‘Thank you,’ she whispered.

‘I know it’s hard, dear,’ Grace said, addressing the young woman again, but you need to be strong for your little girl.’

Tears continued to stream down the woman’s face, her complexion pale and blotchy. Her whole demeanour spoke of a recent loss. This was as raw as grief got.

Grace caught the eye of the stagehand as he hurried down the aisle, microphone in hand, she gave a little shake of her head. Some readings needed a delicate touch. ‘Your little girl’s telling me to call her, Jess,’ she said, meeting the woman’s eyes.

The young woman took hold of her companion’s hand and forced a smile. ‘She likes... liked being called Jess.’ Her words staccato and punctuated with quiet sobs.

‘Who’s Penngy?’

‘A toy penguin, Jess’s favourite.’

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Grace closed her eyes and smiled as a golden light danced across her mind. There was just enough of an image to show the outline of a young girl, around three-years old and full of energy. Her smile was full of bliss as she whispered the words, she wanted her Mummy to hear. ‘Jess is saying you’re to be happy and to look after Penngy.’

‘Thank you.’ The woman sobbed and the aura surrounding her body warmed to an orange glow as if she had been holding her breath for weeks and her sobs were the deep exhalation she desperately needed.

Grace told the woman her daughter was only a breath away and that things will get easier over time. Simple platitudes. She had experienced her share of loss and knew in the short-term her words would do little to ease the woman’s pain. Stepping back, she took a sip of water, and focused her energies back on the spirit. Moments before a soft rustling had signalled the little girl’s departure.

A woman’s voice came through, terse and insistent in her ear. ‘Can anyone accept a Catherine? No, wait... Carol? Yes, definitely a Carol.’

Grace scanned the audience. Spirit tended to give her a direction of focus when their energy was strong. This one came as a tingling sensation in the pit of her stomach. ‘I want to be over there.’ She pointed to a row of seats at the back of the auditorium.

A man in his mid-to-late sixties raised a hand. He had thinning grey hair and might have been anyone’s elderly parent or grandfather. ‘Wait a minute...’ Grace held up a hand and concentrated on the voice in her ear. ‘Yes... right, I see.’ When she’d finished, she turned back to the elderly man and waited for a stagehand to hand him a microphone. ‘Carol was a keen gardener,’ she said, it wasn’t a question.

The man nodded.

‘Stand up, dear, and let me hear your voice.’

‘Yes... yes.’ The man did as he was told and looked nervously at those around him. ‘Carol loved her gardening,’

‘She’s showing me daffodils and sweet peas.

‘She won competitions with them,’ the man beamed.

More images came through. ‘Lavender and bluebells.’

‘Carol’s favourite.’

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‘Albert...’ Grace got a glimpse of a tall gentlemen with silver hair and a cane, then she was elsewhere. Her mind filled with images of people writhing in pain. And a face. Its eyes dark and staring.

She began to cough as her throat tightened.

‘Grace, are you alright?’

She glanced towards her manager standing in the wings and gave a little shake of her head as her peripheral vision began to darken.

‘What’s going on?’

Grace ignored her manager’s voice loud in her earpiece and turned her attention back to the audience. The collective power of hope was usually enough to see off a rogue spirit, only this time it was proving to be more difficult.

A cold sensation tore a hole in the pit of her stomach and her hands began to shake. She sensed others had seen it too and tried to smile. Whatever this dark energy was it seemed to be weighing up, as if getting a measure of her true worth.

Almost immediately her attention was drawn to a young woman sitting in the gods. She half-recognised her, she was but sure of it.

‘Michael, slayer of demons and vanquisher of Satan, protect this space and all those within,’ she mumbled, turning away from the audience. ‘Michael, slayer of demons and vanquisher of Satan...’ over and over.

‘You need to come off, Grace,’ her manager’s voice came again, loud and insistent.

She ignored him and once more turned back to the audience, noticing as she did a dark shape forming behind the young woman in the gods. Oh, Jesus! The thing that had attacked her had found a new target. Exhausted, Grace stumbled and reached a stool to sit onset placed there by one of the stagehands.

‘That’s it, I’m pulling the plug!’

‘I’m not done yet,’ Grace growled. ‘Albert... who’s Albert?’ she said, taking a deep breath as she turned her attention back to the elderly man.

‘Carol’s father,’ he said, and smiled awkwardly.

‘Alice is also coming through...’ Grace continued. ‘And Maureen.’ She focused on pure light of spirit coming through the top of her head, shielding herself against the dark

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energy from returning. Although deep down she knew it had found itself a new home. ‘She’s showing me a blond wig.’

The elderly man laughed and the tension in the theatre eased a little. ‘My mother. She wore it after her chemotherapy treatment.’

Grace nodded and caught sight of the young woman’s aura in the gods begin to darken. ‘Carol, sends her love and will always be with you,’ she said, bringing the reading to a close with the elderly man.

She had intended to end the demonstration there and then, but it seemed the spirit was going to have the last word. Steeling herself she turned her attention to a well-dressed man seated on the ground floor, stage right fire exit. She adjusted her focus and using all her experience placed the palm of her right hand against her chest and took a deep breath. It was a technique called ghost sucking and was only to be used as a last resort to rid herself of the residual negative energy left by a rogue spirit.

‘You, sir,’ she said, her tone almost accusing as she pointed at the man.

There are so many things the spirit wants to say to you, but there is so little time and energy. ‘I’ve got a young man here,’ she said. ‘Not a family member, but a close friend.’

The man didn’t respond.

‘I need to hear your voice, sir.’

Still no response.

Grace glared at the man. ‘Right, buster,’ she murmured and suddenly her head was filled with a flash of white. There was a moment of total darkness and then she heard a whimpering that may or may not have come from her own lips. Then came the gun-crack of fireworks going off around her as the stage appeared to shake underfoot. One moment bright and the next tarnished blood-red. Another flash and by the light she saw a man’s body torn to pieces.

The images were short lived, but clear enough. The man was clearly military and had seen action in some corner of the world. She should have known this by the way he held himself. ‘There was nothing you could have done.’ Rare as they were, the words were spoken through her directly by spirit.

The man kept his silence.

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Grace didn't care. She was going to get the message through whatever the cost. 'Understand that your friend is at peace.' She kept her tone straight, keeping with the message she was receiving. She was about to repeat what she had been told when she noticed the man looked as if he were frozen. His fingertips clasped to the side of his seat. He appeared to be broken in a dozen places.

It was then that Grace saw the man in a different light and chided herself for being judgemental. It was a flaw she should have learned from her journalist days. 'Your friend loves you dearly, but it's not your time to pass,' she said, lowering her tone. 'Understand?'

The man didn't reply, but Grace could see that he understood all too well. He released his grip on the chair, stood and left the auditorium, but not before pausing briefly at the door to give the slightest nod of his head

'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.' Grace waved a hand as if anointing her followers, only she wouldn't have been so crass. 'Spirit be with you all, and wherever you go travel safely.'

Ignoring her manager's protests, she stepped off stage, headed straight for her dressing room and locked the door. She knew what the press would say about her tomorrow: *Grace Edwards's Psychic Night of Disaster. Charlatan... Con-Artist.* Not that she gave a damn. Something terrible had entered this world and now she needed to track down the young woman seated in the gods before it was too late.

Chapter 8

‘Where are we going?’

‘You’ll see.’

Wearing a blue dress, black ankle boots and a denim jacket Ash followed newly promoted Detective Inspector Clive Osbourne out of Hull’s New Theatre and down the rain-soaked steps.

Illuminated by replica Victorian lights, Kingston Square was a hive of activity. People were milling around. Some were in groups. Others were huddled in corners, cigarettes and lighters cradled against the rain.

‘Come on!’ Osbourne glanced back. He was already a good twenty feet ahead, heading in the direction of Grimston Street.

‘Hold on.’ Ash paused, adjusted the straps on her bra and ran, closing the gap until they were shoulder to shoulder. She couldn’t deny the similarities between Osbourne’s boyhood enthusiasm and her father’s when he’d been promoted to DI. Come to think of it they’d have been about the same age.

‘What you waiting for?’ She pushed him aside and set off again, pulling further ahead. She didn’t have to ask where they were heading. In the dark and this side of town there was only one place open. A blue light over the door playing a lazy glow over the street.

‘What do you think?’

Ash shrugged. ‘I never had you down as one for psychic demonstrations if I’m honest.’

‘Not that.’ Clive nudged her gently, smiled and made show of looking around. ‘Isn’t she something?’

They were sitting in the Old Englishman Public House. Inside an open fire raged, reflecting flickering light off the optics. Ash had taken off her wet boots and jacket and laid them as close to the fire as she dare without drawing complaints of health and safety from the landlord.

She played the game and glanced around the empty bar, seeing nothing different from what she had seen before. Still, if this was her reward for spending a day cooped up in the basement office, she’d take it until something better came up. ‘Not bad.’

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‘Not bad?’ Clive nudged her again, a little harder this time. The play off the firelight made it difficult to see if he was smiling as he gulped down his beer. ‘I’ll have you know this is one of the city’s hidden gems.’

‘That’s pushing it a bit, don’t you think?’ Ash sipped her wine. ‘I’d have thought there might have been at least a couple of people in here,’ adding, ‘Aside from us that is.’

Clive was made to stand and Ash grabbed hold of his hand. ‘I was pulling your leg. Here’s just fine. Beside quiet is good.’

‘You mean it?’

‘Cross my heart.’ Ash did just that and drained her glass.

‘Another?’ Not waiting for a reply, Clive took their empty glasses and headed for the bar, exchanging conversation with the landlord who looked as if he’d come straight from playing an extra on a 1920s movie set

Ash watched them for a while and took out her mobile. The blank screen suggested there had been no messages. She dropped it back into her jacket pocket as Clive returned.

‘Here, get this down you.’

She studied the drink for a while and stared across at the newly promoted DI. ‘I really shouldn’t. I’ve got an early start in the morning.’

‘Come on. It’s not as if Kane’s watching your every move.’ Clive sipped his beer and glanced at his watch. ‘Besides, it’s only just gone nine.’

Ash had to admit he had a point, increasingly so as she sipped her wine. Her head ached from going over the Covid Hate Crimes and if she’d have stayed a second longer it would become a full-blown migraine.

‘When did you discover this place?’ She asked after a while.

‘About a year ago. Did you know Dickens drank here?’

‘Who?’ Ash yawned. The wine bypassing her empty stomach going to her head.

‘Charles Dickens.’

‘What about him?’

‘He drank here. Chances are he might have sat where you are right now.’

‘Really?’ Ash blinked hard and tried to show an interest.

‘There’s no corroborating evidence, as such,’ Clive went on. ‘He did visit the theatre in 1859 and if my memory serves me well again in 1860. Chances are he came here too.’ The

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expression on his face was the one he had worn as he entered the pub. A boyish enthusiasm Ash had been drawn to from the first time she set eyes on him.

‘How do you know all this stuff?’

‘A misspent youth... that and Google.’ Clive nodded to a picture of the Bard hung on the wall.

‘You bastard.’ Ash picked up a beer mat and threw it at him.

‘Every time.’ Ducking, Clive grinned, picked up their glasses and stood up. ‘Same again?’

Ash glanced at her watch. It was ten-thirty. Where had the night gone? ‘I really should be going?’

‘Coffee?’

‘Yours or mine?’

Clive gave her a look more old-fashioned than his years. ‘I wasn’t suggesting...’

‘Relax, Detective Inspector.’ Ash smiled. ‘I was pulling your leg.’ Although she wasn’t sure how much of that was true. Perhaps a little caffeine wasn’t such a bad idea.

‘Black... no sugar.’

‘Coming right up.’

Ash fished out her mobile again and swiped the screen. Still no messages. What was so important Jack couldn’t... no scrub that, wouldn’t tell her where he was going?

‘Black... no sugar.’

‘What!’ Ash looked up. ‘Right, yes.’ Smiled and took her coffee.

They talked for a while about anything but work. As things go, Clive was good company. And not bad looking either. Not the chiselled chin look, but he stood out in a crowd. Especially with his ridiculously black curly hair and boyish grin.

Not that her father would have approved. He gave her two pieces of advice on the day she graduated from Hendon Police Training Collage down in London; develop a thick skin, and never date one of your colleagues.

Strictly speaking, Clive didn’t fall into the latter, since she was now confined to the basement. She had done her best to ignore him and turn down his offers of a night out. Not a date, he had assured her, it’s two mates having a night drink. And now here they were. Sure,

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she wasn't sure they had anything at all, enjoyed his company, but wanted to take things slowly none the less.

Osbourne sipped his coffee and leaned forward. 'Can I ask you a question?'

'Depends on what it is?'

'Do you buy what Jack saw at the station?'

Ash held his gaze, unblinking. 'In general terms or is your question based on something more specific?'

'Word is Jack's...' Clive hesitated. '... you know.' He pointed his index finger at the side of his head and made small circling motion.

'Playing with a full deck?'

Ash clenched her teeth, waited a moment before continuing. 'I don't care what rumours are doing the rounds in CID, Jack is a good copper and I trust him.' Another pause. 'Who do you think killed his fiancée and Molly Dullea – the Phantom Slasher? Witnesses saw the killer on the station platform, two of them being Transport Police officers.'

'I get that,' Clive nodded. 'Only Jack's account of what happened doesn't add up.'

'How so?'

'The fact is no body was recovered. Or anything to suggest anything had been hit by a train.'

'Right?'

'You have to admit it all seems a bit strange. He must have –'

'What?'

Clive paused. Either he'd lost his bottle, or he didn't want to voice what his fellow detectives were saying in CID. 'Look, I didn't mean any harm.' He leaned forward and for a moment looked as if he might take hold of her hand.

Ash leaned back.

'I like Jack,' Clive said, something resembling a sheepish look crossing his face. 'If there's anything I can do to help.'

'Help?'

'You mean keep you informed of any developments?'

'You mean like a snitch. I'll have to run it past Jack first, see what he thinks.'

Clive gave her a look of utter horror. 'That's not funny, I was just –'

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‘Trying to help, yeah you already said.’

Although Clive wasn’t to blame for Docherty’s running feud with Jack, she was disappointed to think he might have taken stock in the groundless rumours. His concern wasn’t for Jack but himself. The newly promoted DI was afraid of sticking his colours to the wrong mast.

‘Listen, it’s been great, but I’ve got to go.’ Ash slipped on her boots, feeling the heat warm her feet. She took hold of her jacket and stood.

‘I’ll call for a cab.’ Clive reached for his mobile, thumbing the number as he did.

Ash nodded once. Her head hurt and for a moment the world swayed a little. ‘Fine, I need the loo anyway.’ The black coffee had done little to absorb the two glasses of wine she had had. Then again, they were on top of a couple more she had at the theatre.

When she returned Clive was standing by the door smiling at something on his mobile. ‘Taxi?’

‘What? Oh, right. It’ll be here in five minutes.’ Clive’s reaction to her question wasn’t what Ash had been expecting. Stepping closer she couldn’t quite see what was so interesting on his mobile.

Outside, sheltered under the canopy, Clive leaned closer and lowered his voice, although there was no one else to hear. ‘We are alright, aren’t we?’

Ash nodded. ‘Sure.’ She breathed in the cold night air and felt the world sway some more. She couldn’t recall ever getting in this state. Not that she was a big drinker or anything. Since her father’s suicide she had been guarded about the company she kept.

Headlights cut cross the pavement and Clive stepped forward. ‘Here we go.’

Ash followed and ducked under his arms as she climbed into the back of the taxi. Her headache had worsened and all she wanted to do was lie down.

‘Will you be alright?’

‘Fine. Get yourself off, I’m sure Docherty will expect to see you bright eyed and bushy tailed.’ She hadn’t been expecting it to be a dig, but had to admit it came out that way. Ah, well... thick skin and all that.

The engine revved and Clive started to close the door before hesitating.

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‘Something on your mind, Detective Inspector?’ Ash knew the stalling tactics when she saw them. She had seen them time and time again when interviewing suspects. Usually prior to revealing some piece of valuable information they had conveniently forgotten.

‘Can I see you again?’

And there it was.

‘Work’s always good.’ Ash smiled.

‘I’m serious. We could push the boat out and have fish and chips.’

‘Oh, big spender.’ She leaned forward to grab hold of the door handle when Clive leaned in. There was a moment’s hesitation then she pressed a finger to her lips and touched it to his cheek. ‘Goodnight, Clive.’

The drive across the rain-streaked city didn’t take long. Fifteen minutes. Traffic was always light at this time of night and as luck would have it the sequence of traffic lights were on their side.

Ash cleared away a little of the condensation built up on the window with the palm of her hand and caught a glimpse of Willerby roundabout. She was nearly home. They drove a little further and she leaned forward. ‘Here’s fine.’

The rain hadn’t let up. If anything, it come down heavier as she stepped out of the taxi. Clutching her house keys, she kept her head down and paddled across the pavement. On long summer days, she liked to take her time to enjoy the neatly cut lawns and flowers that fought for space in over-crowded borders. The houses this end of Hull were well built and had survived the bombings during the Second World War. Red-bricked and heavy duty they were built to last. Ash had inherited hers from her father and couldn’t imagine living anywhere else.

A tabby cat emerged from her garden its fur wet as it wrapped itself around her legs. ‘Not now, eh?’

She crouched down and scratched the top of its head. Aleksander wasn’t a stray. He belonged to Hannah Kowalski. The young Polish woman lived on the top floor of a converted house on Pulman Street. No 34, if she wasn’t mistaken. Ash had spoken to her once or twice and every day she would put out a bowl of milk, and everyday Alek would come running.

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‘I need to –’ Looking up, Ash saw the blue flashing lights off to her right. A cold feeling settled in her stomach and all thoughts of her headache were gone. Fumbling with her keys she let Alek inside, picked up her brolly and hurried towards Pulman Street on the opposite side of the dual carriageway.

‘You can’t go in there.’ A young WPC stood outside the blue and white crime-scene tape blocking access to no 34. She looked miserable, rainwater dripping off her cap and running down her waterproofs.

Ash showed her warrant card.

‘Sorry, ma’am.’ The WPC stood taller. Her back straight and head held high.

‘Tell me what you know, Constable?’

‘We got a call a little over an hour ago, ma’am. A member of the public heard screaming.’

Ash stared up at Hannah’s flat. Whilst the rest of the street looked dark, cold, and silent the immediate area outside no. 34 was lit up by arch lights. A tent covered access to the front door and another had been erected around what looked like a taxi. She nodded. ‘Both related?’

‘Yes, ma’am. Two persons reported. One in the car and the other in the house.’

Jesus. This wasn’t happening.

Ash shuddered but not through the cold. Lights blazed inside the house as forensic scientists and crime scene officers went from room to room. ‘Do you know who the victims are?’

‘Sorry, ma’am.’ The WPC shuffled from side to side. Her jaw clenched as if to stop her teeth from chattering. Any longer out here and hypothermia would probably set in.

‘No matter.’ Only, it did matter. Life mattered, People mattered. It was just that, she wasn’t ready for violent crime to rear its ugly head to someone she knew. ‘You said it was called in an hour ago?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘Do you know who by?’

The young WPC furrowed her brow.

‘Never mind.’ Ash handed the Constable a pair of gloves from her

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pocket. She would have given her an umbrella only whoever was in charge would have given the WPC a bollocking. It was part of a uniformed officer's job, standing outside in the pissing rain whilst everyone else was inside keeping warm and dry.

Speak of the devil. Ash looked back towards the house and saw DCI Docherty emerge. He was talking loudly into his mobile, his words indecipherable. What was clear was that someone had pissed him off and she wasn't going to hang around to find out who.

Chapter 9

Ash never slept well.

It wasn't that she suffered from insomnia, or was dogged by nightmares. It was that the act of closing her eyes and releasing control on her consciousness was something she wasn't suited to. Tonight, she was happy to sip her coffee and watch as the spectacle played out at No 34.

It gave her time to think, time to mull over the problem that had vexed her all evening. What was so important that Jack couldn't tell her where he was going? While she and Watson had been sifting through the Covid Hate Crime files, he'd spent all afternoon going over the CCTV footage from Paragon Station.

What was he hoping to find, she wasn't sure. Molly Dullea's killer had got away and that's all there was to it. Docherty and his team's job was to find him. Our place is in the basement investigating Covid hate crimes which until now had been assigned a crime number and logged on the crime data base. It was a national problem with police forces the length and breadth of the country struggling to find the manpower to keep up with government incentives to implement the new *so-called* normal. The homeless curfew being one of the most unpopular and difficult to police.

Ash's mind flashed back to the grainy image on Watson's computer. Suppose she had misconstrued what she had seen? Suppose she had seen what Jack wanted her to see? She would lose a good friend in a stroke. And yet how could she bear to remain silent. She couldn't bear to think of him suffering. More than that she couldn't bear to think of others laughing behind his back.

There was only one way to track down Jack's mysterious man and that was through good old-fashioned policing, one foot in front of the other, one piece of detail at a time, just the way her father had taught her. And if her worst fears were realised, she'd have no choice other than to challenge Jack or take it further. But not to Docherty. Never to Docherty.

Pulman Street was quiet but not sleeping. Curtains twitched and blue and orange dots trembled in windows. TVs were switched on everywhere as people watched the drama play out down their street.

Ash kept her own vigil.

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The back bedroom in her house was cold and she was glad of it. She had done little decorating since she moved in, preferring to concentrate on the kitchen and living room. She'd come up here and sit in the darkness. If only to escape the tangle of her bed. There was something about the dark interior which gave her comfort. It was a womb, of sorts. Often, she'd sit in the stillness, thinking of nothing. Or at least nothing she could put words to. These sojourns made her feel oddly connected to something she had no understanding of.

She'd been watching for some time when the last of the forensic team packed up and left No. 34. Behind them the lights had been turned off and the young WPC had been replaced by an older looking man. It was standard practice to keep a uniformed presence outside a murder scene until the place could be cleaned up. There were a lot of sick people out there who would love to gain access and take pictures in order to gain kudos for their social media profile. Ash swallowed a mouthful of cold coffee, put on her coat and sought an excuse for what she was about to do.

The uniformed officer looked much older close up. 'I thought you lot would be tucked up in your warm beds by now, ma'am.' His tone was blunt and condescending, tempered with a hint of professional courtesy. He clearly didn't think investigating crime was a job for a woman.

Ash showed her warrant card. 'Docherty has left his notebook inside the house. I've been sent to fetch it.' She tried not to blink as she held the older officer's gaze. The rain hadn't stopped and she had opted for her hooded mac instead of taking an umbrella into a crime scene.

'You're on his team?' The officer looked her up and down. 'How come I haven't seen you around then?'

Don't take the bait. Cool and calm just as her father had –

'Well?' The officer said again, a sneer in his voice.

Ash put her hands into her coat pocket and clenched her fists. She needed to get inside before he called the station to check out her story. Impersonating police officers had been a ruse used by certain member of the press to gain access to a murder scene. A front-page headline and they could make themselves a lot of money. She decided to go for broke herself and took out her mobile.

'What are you doing?' The PC eyed her suspiciously.

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‘Calling DCI Docherty, I’m sure he’d like to know why you’re stopping me from going inside.’ She held up the handset and held it out just as it began to ring, knowing it wouldn’t be answered since she had typed in her home landline.

Something resembling horror crossed the PC’s face as he stepped back. ‘There’s no need ma’am, just doing my job.’

Yeah, right. Job’s worth!

Ash ducked under the raised crime scene tape and headed down the garden path.

‘Five minutes and I’ll come and fetch you.’

She ignored the PC’s words, put on a pair of latex gloves and eased open the front door. The darkness that greeted her on the other side was eerily profound. She found the light switch, flicked it on, and after a moment’s hesitation followed the blue sheeting forensics had laid along the hall. Instinct and the smell of cooked food led her upstairs and straight into Hannah’s kitchen.

The cooker and surrounding appliances looked dated, second-hand probably. Leaning forward, Ash turned on the light and stepped inside, her feet sticking to something wet on the vinyl flooring. Her heart stopped when she felt it again. Slowly, she looked down, not moving, and breathed a sigh of relief. Not blood but a dollop of cat food knocked from Alek’s dish. Forensics had marked it off and now she had gone and trodden in it. Shit.

She took in the rest of the kitchen. Something didn’t feel quite right. It was as if the house was sick. The entire room had been searched and documented; detailed notes and photographs taken. Hannah’s body had already been removed from the property after a short visit by the pathologist. Which suggested the cause of death was never in any doubt.

Ash’s gaze moved here and there, over family portraits, pictures of green fields and orchards hung on one wall, worksurfaces littered with pots, pans, and offcuts of chopped vegetables. And finally, down to a pool of blood on the floor. It was fresh and had sprayed over the kitchen cabinets. Crouching down she placed a palm over the surface area. Her hand tingled as if something was trying to get inside. Something moved in the shadows. ‘Who’s there?’

No reply came.

‘I said who’s there?’

Silence.

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‘If someone’s playing tricks on me, you can go and –’

The wrongness of the place continued to make itself known. Taking a step closer the shadows revealed nothing more than an open pantry door, and beside it an old coat stand.

‘Jesus!’

The air turned bitterly cold. Her breath clouded in front of her eyes. Turning she followed the trajectory of the blood. What wasn’t she seeing?

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, heavy and fast. The kitchen door opened and a man dressed in a white boiler suit stepped inside.

‘What are you doing in here?’ The man said, his brow creased into a scowl.

Ash flashed her warrant card. ‘I’m –’

‘I don’t care who the fuck you are. This place is sealed off.’

The boiler suited man’s name was Robert McCormick, Chief Scientific Officer. Unapologetically misogynistic with as much neuro plasticity as an amoeba. Perhaps he was related to the uniformed officer standing outside?

‘Well?’

‘What?’

‘Out with it! Why are you contaminating my crime scene?’

Ash was about to remind the man that she was a DS but thought better of it. McCormick’s opinion carried a lot of weight and to the best of her knowledge the last person to have challenged him ended up being transferred out of the area.

Searching for something to say she fumbled in her pocket and had the presence of mind to pull out her notebook. ‘Docherty sent me to fetch this. If it was up to me, I’d have left it, but you know what the DCI’s like.’ She forced a smile.

McCormick scowl deepened. ‘Get out and don’t let me see you here unless you have a chaperone, preferable a rank no lower than a DI.’

Ash resisted the urge to call the man a prick as she pushed past him and headed down the stairs. Outside the rain cooled her cheeks as she lifted her head to the night sky and let out a silent scream. Fuck McCormick, something was amiss with the crime scene and now she’d probably never know.

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When she got back home, Aleksander was curled up in a tight ball under the kitchen table. His ears twitched as she knelt down and scratched the top of his head. Poor thing, she couldn't leave him here now that he was an orphan.

'Coming? Ash got to her feet, headed for the door and switched the light off. Alek stayed where he was. 'Suit yourself.' It was late and she needed some sleep. 'I'll see you in the morning.'

A hot shower and a mug of coffee offered little defence to the cold that had got into her bones. Aleksander made little whimpering noises as he slept downstairs, but at least he was safe. Which was more than could be said for Hannah. She was dead, her life taken from her and for what. A smackhead looking for something to steal so that he could get his next fix? An opportunist burglar – or something else? That niggling feeling still working away at the back of her head told her it was the latter. Why or who, she wasn't sure – but definitely the latter.

The night had settled down to its usual calmness. She sat up in bed, watching the lights twinkle outside the window. It was coming up for three-thirty in the morning, a little over two hours before she had to be up for work. She sighed, trying not to think of McCormick, the jumped-up little shit he was.

Her mobile buzzed on the bedside table and fell silent again. Junk email, probably, some deranged scammer in Amsterdam who thought she was going to give them her bank details because he said his mother was gravely ill. The unease she had felt in Hannah's flat was still there when she lay down and pulled the covers over her head.

She gave it one last nudge, thought of the young Polish woman as she closed her eyes and suddenly the answer was there. Where it had been all along.

Chapter 10

It was three in the morning by the time Mike got back to the Royal Station Hotel. The corridors were dark and quiet. Beneath his feet the carpet was scuffed and dull from years of use, but he found something earthy about it. It filled him with peace, and with it a sense of purpose.

He had checked in a week ago. The money he made from hosting ghost walks around the city covered the cost. Access to the station was also made easier since he was able to monitor movement on and off the platforms. So far, he'd managed to come and go unchallenged and he wished to keep it that way.

Room 201.

He unlocked the door, stepped inside and waited a moment as the door closed behind him with a satisfying click. It had been a long day and he needed to rest. With the lights off, he walked over to the window and peered down at the station below. A young couple walking along the concourse, their voices raised in laughter. Girl, boy... girl, girl... boy, boy, it was getting harder to tell these days.

When they were gone Mike pulled the curtains to and took off his coat, his eyes snagged on a walled-picture of a naked Christ on a cross. Blood oozed where thorns punctured his forehead and flowed through the creases of his perfectly contorted face. The sky was thunderous above the dying man and in a solitary ray of otherworldly light angels dressed in white and clutching harps waited to take their Lord back to his place in Heaven.

Had all that suffering been worth it? The man in the picture and a thousand others whom had died in his name? What was it about this agonising death that drew people to it? Mike wished he understood religion, he truly did. If only to feel a sense of belonging. But he couldn't. The world was a dark and terrible place filled with suffering and hatred, and deep down he knew there should be nothing else.

Something disturbed the air in the corner of the room. His mouth dried and his heart thumped as a face stripped of skin and muscle appeared. Its eyes were pitch black and lacked upper and lower lids. It moved a little and was gone. More laughter sounded on the station platform and then faded. Once more the room filled with silence.

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He was tired, had he been working too much? It wasn't surprising he was seeing things. After a moment, and with a calmness returning to his heart Mike glanced up at the bleeding man on the cross, shook his head and headed into the bathroom.

He splashed cold water on his face, tilted his head and examined a purple mark on side of his neck. There were others beneath his shirt collar, spreading out like poison through the narrow passage of his veins.

An infection? Whatever it was he needed a dose of antibiotics to kill the poison. He looked down at his hands and saw they were covered in blood. Dried blood that wasn't his. He looked back into the mirror. The apparition was back, standing close behind. Its mouth opened and closed. At first, he couldn't make out what it was saying and then suddenly the words became clear. *Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.*

Mike clenched his fists. His fingers were icy cold. There was no apparition. There never was. It was just his tired mind playing tricks on him. He closed his eyes for a moment and when he looked again it had gone.

He undressed. A hushed tread of his feet on the hotel carpet as he headed back into the room. He had just got into bed when he remembered something he needed to do. He picked up his mobile, dialled Hannah's number, waited and when she didn't answer tried again, hanging up on the third failed attempt. She was probably asleep. Tomorrow was a big day. His day, if it played out just as he had planned.

Tossing a pillow aside so that it landed at the end of the bed, he settled back and went to sleep.

Chapter 11

Jack woke.

The unwelcome touch of cold air on his exposed limbs. He pulled his arms and legs beneath the blanket and shivered.

Like any other night he'd dreamt of Sarah. She had appeared at the bedroom door, knelt down to stroke Millie before walking away. Her face was pale and there were tears in her eyes.

As always Jack never lingered. Was never allowed to stay or follow. Now morning had come. The air was cold and there was a smell of diesel in the air. He looked up to see Millie sitting at the end of the bed, staring back at him. 'You too, eh?'

Dressed in a t-shirt and boxers, he picked up his mobile, wrapped the blanket around himself and headed for the engine room. Millie followed purring loudly as she brushed up against his legs.

'You know the rules. Breakfast when I'm ready to make it.' Sighing, Jack nudged her aside, opened the door and stepped inside. It had been almost two in the morning when he finally got to sleep, and now here he was freezing his bollocks off at six in the morning.

The lights in the engine room were dead, the smell of diesel strong. Jack shuffled towards the engine, lifted the cowl and used the light function on his phone to look inside. He'd failed mechanics at school, but knew enough to see that the pistons had stopped, one mid push, the other mid-pull.

Built in '76, with its original two-stroke diesel engine, the *St. Lucia* was in need of a major overall. He'd have worked some surgery on her himself if he knew what to do. Money also entered the equation. A Detective Inspector's salary wasn't as much as it should have been post Covid. Central government were struggling to balance the books and public sector pay had taken a significant hit. There was also the Marina's extortionate mooring fees.

Jack shook his head - an engineer was out of the question until payday - so knelt down on the cold wooden floor and inspected the rest of the engine for himself. The pistons weren't the only problem as far as he could make out. The fuel line was leaking and there was a pool of diesel on the floor.

Great, just what he needed!

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Something needed to be done before the pair of them froze to death. His tool box was in its usual place, leaning over he pulled it closer and found a roll of duct tape inside. With his hands slowly turning blue he wrapped a thick length around the split fuel pipe and filled the engine with the spare jerrycan he kept for emergencies.

He looked across at Millie who had settled down on the floor to licking herself clean. 'Some help you are.'

Jack got to his feet, took hold of the starter chord and pulled.

Nothing happened.

He pulled again. 'Give me a break.' On the third pull the engine spluttered into life. Jack waited a moment; every drawn breath stung with the acrid smell of diesel as he reached for the light switch. A bright flicker and the room was aglow. Who needs an engineer?

'Come on,' he said, beckoning Millie as he headed for the door. 'Let's get out of here.'

In the kitchen he emptied Cornflakes into Millie's dish and made himself a black coffee. 'What?' he said as the little fur ball stared up at him. 'It's all we've got.' He shivered and reached for the radiator. Not quite warm, but getting there.

He glanced around at the boxes covering the kitchen floor. A couple of days ago, he came across a photo album. Pictures of the two of them together in Paris. She full of life and mischievous. He the sober copper. Buried amongst the smiles were pictures he couldn't remember having seen before. One showed Sarah on the beach at Spurn Point, collecting shells and pieces of drift wood from the beach. Another of her marching for Green Peace in central London with an editorial attached saying how world leaders had failed in their pledge to cut carbon emissions. Her short life captured in portraits. How could he get rid of any of this?

With his warmth slowly coming back Jack picked up his mobile and noticed Grace had tried calling him again last night, once at nine-thirty-three, and another two minutes later. There was also a text message from Ash, received an hour later. 'Call me!'

Jack dialled Ash's number, got the answer machine and hung up. Whatever she wanted it'd have to wait.

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He sipped his coffee and stared down at Millie who was eating noisily with her arse in the air. Seconds later his mobile vibrated. He swiped the screen to accept the call. 'I just tried calling you,' he said.

'I know.' Ash's reply was blunt and breathy.

'Are you alright? It sounds like you've been running?'

'I'm fine. Listen, there's been a murder... well, two.'

'Where?' Jack reached for his coat. He heard shouting in the background and what might have been the banging of cell doors and guessed Ash had dashed across the car park and entered Divisional through the Custody Suite. That'd explain her shortness of breath.

'Pulman Street.'

'Isn't that –'

'My opposite my house, yeah,' Ash said. 'I was out last night and when I got home saw the commotion. Anyway, I thought I'd give you the heads-up.'

Jack sensed a but coming.

'The thing is... ' Ash paused, and lowered her voice as if someone was close by. 'I went into the crime scene, and someone saw me.'

And there it was.

'Jesus, Ash.'

'I know, it's just that...' Another pause, more banging and shouting sounded in the background. 'I know... knew one of the victims.'

Millie had finished eating. Jack watched her for a while, his mind really elsewhere. 'Who?'

'You remember the Polish girl I told you about with the cat?'

'Hannah...'

'Kowalski.' Ash finished. 'She had her throat cut.'

A cold chill settled in Jack's stomach. He waited a moment before asking his next question. 'The other victim?'

'A taxi driver. His name was Nicolae Pavlov. A Romanian immigrant.'

'When?'

'Early yesterday evening.' Voices sounded in the background and Ash fell silent.

'You alright.'

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No answer.

‘Ash?’

‘I’ve got to go,’ Ash said after a while. ‘I’ll explain more when you get in. Oh, and Docherty was there last night. I saw him coming out of Hannah’s flat.’

‘Fuck Docherty. The other victim, how was he -?’

‘Same! Throat cut.’

Jesus, Jack pinched the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes for a moment. Three murders in a city the size of Hull and all with the same MO. What are the chances; pretty slim if he were to hazard a guess.

‘There’s something else.’

‘Go on.’

‘Word is that Hannah was dating someone called Trainer. I’ve done some digging and it’s the same Mike Trainer we’ve been asked to look into.’

Coincidence?

Jack didn’t believe in them. Two victims, one Polish the other Romanian. It had the potential of being a hate crime. He drained the last of his coffee and ran a hand over his bristled face. ‘Meet me in half an hour.’

‘Where?’

‘The mortuary.’

He hung up, showered, dressed and put Millie out.

‘What?’ As always, she gave him one of her reproachful looks. There were days when he could have sworn, she mimicked the same disapproving look Sarah gave him after working one too many hours. ‘I’ve got a long day and you’ve been in all night. Besides...’ Jack nodded towards the scrubland opposite the marina. ‘It’s time you learned to catch your own food.’

He locked the cabin door, patted down his coat pocket and after a second or two found his car keys. The air was cold and black ice glistened on the quayside. *One Polish the other Rumanian*, a thousand and one questions running through his head as he headed for his car.

It was true to say the majority of murder victims knew their attacker so it was reasonable to start their questioning with this Mike Trainer, even if it meant stepping on

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Docherty's toes. Not that Jack gave a shit. The DCI had asked him to look at Trainer's movements after all.

Chapter 12

Right of Anlaby Road, past the garage selling second-hand cars and down to the end of the road. Six-foot metal railings topped with razor wire stretched out from either side of an automatic gate. An intercom unit sat to the right of the gate, monitored by a security camera.

Jack pulled up beside it and pressed the button. The speaker crackled and someone said something unintelligible to him, so he waved up at the camera. A buzz and the gates rumbled open.

The Volvo scrapped over a speed bump as he drove into the compound. Hull's overflow mortuary was a newbuild situated at the back of the hospital's tower block. Designed to take Covid cases at the height of the Pandemic the old mortuary had reluctantly since been abandoned in favour of its more modern facilities.

Ash's silver Corsa was parked beside a dark-blue transit van sitting outside the mortuary's loading bay. There was no sign of activity which suggested business was quiet.

Jack pulled up as close to the door as he could get, stepped out into the rain and headed for the entrance. Ash was waiting for him when he pushed open the door and stepped into the foyer. A reception desk took up one corner of the entrance. A comfy looking sofa the other, beside it a glass table and rubber plant. The air smelt of citrus designed to take away the stench of death and decay, and to be fair it was doing a pretty good job.

Jack needed to talk to Ash before they got inside, but since she was here, he took her aside. 'Anyone know you're here?' he said, keeping his voice low so that the receptionist wouldn't hear him.

Ash shook her head. 'I figured you'd want to keep this quiet.'

'Good. Now let's see what the doc's got to say.'

'Inspector.'

Jack smiled at the young girl seated behind the desk. He didn't need to show his warrant card. He knew Lisa from the old mortuary. She had relocated from the old site along with other staff members.

'He's expecting you,' she said, buzzing them both through.

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Dr Michael Decker, city pathologist, busied himself with a tray of what looked like instruments of torture as they stepped into the business end of the mortuary and tapped on the observational room window.

Decker looked up, smiled and pressed the intercom button. 'Jack, and the delightful Miss Young, come in.'

An antiseptic smell filled the examination room, almost masking the odour of death. The air was cold, and beneath it came a strange mix of smells: a fragrance he had come to associate with the man leaning over a large dissecting table.

Dr Michael Decker was dressed in his cutting gear, pastel green scrubs with an apron over the top. His thinning grey hair hidden under the surgical cap. He looked up. 'Thought I'd see you sooner or later.'

Jack stepped closer to the table. Ash hesitated before doing the same. However much he tried not to think about it, he hated autopsy suits. The smell of antiseptic never quite masked the underlying stench. Death was tangible here, laid out and bare. These rooms were about weights and angles, polished metal surfaces, clip boards filled with facts on chemistry and biology. All of it cold and clinical. To think, it wasn't such a long time ago Sarah was laid out bare here. All of her thoughts, her emotions, her character, conspicuous by their absence.

'Hannah Kowalski,' Decker said with a sigh, looking down at the young woman on the table 'And over there,' he nodded to a second trolley where the body of a man was stitched up and ready to be put into cold storage. 'Is Mr. Nicolae Pavlov.'

'Two post mortems at this hour.' Jack glanced at the clock on the wall. It had just gone eight in the morning. 'That must be a record, who attended?'

'The investigating officer.'

'And who might that be?' Jack knew the answer but had to ask.

'Docherty, of course.' Decker took a deep breath and let it out slowly as he spoke the DCI's name. A tell-tale sign if ever there was one that the doc detested the man.

'Do I sense a hint of resentment, doc?' Jack would have smiled only he caught a look that well might have been anger in Decker's eyes.

'Too bloody right you do. I've been at it since two am.' Decker shook his head. 'Two bloody am. It's not as if I didn't have anywhere better to be.'

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Standing at six-six, and built like a mountain Decker peered down at the world. While physically intimidating there was no aura of menace about him. Quite the opposite. The ME was probably one of the kindest men Jack had come across and valued his frankness.

‘Where’s your assistant. Dr Pryce, isn’t it?’

‘Olivia.’ Decker shrugged. ‘Bad enough I was dragged here. Why make two people suffer.’

‘Fair enough. Still, couldn’t it have waited?’

‘You’d have thought so.’ Decker nodded to the dog-collar and a pair of heels sealed in an evidence bag beside the door. ‘Let’s just say Docherty left me with little choice.’

‘Vicars and Tarts?’ Ash cut in, eying the evidence before turning back to the doctor. ‘I thought Abba nights were more your thing, doc?’ She smiled as if trying to lighten the mood.

‘I too like diversity, my dear. Tuesdays are my disco nights.’ The ME smiled back but there was no humour in it. ‘You should try it.’

Ash smiled back. ‘Another time, perhaps.’

‘You don’t know what you’re missing, my dear. Although strictly speaking Abba’s music isn’t quite disco.’ He leaned forward and winked. ‘I won’t tell anyone if you don’t.’

Decker stifled a yawn with his gloved hand, stretched out his shoulders and turned his attention back to Hannah Kowalski. The young Polish Woman’s chest and abdomen were open. Her blood had succumbed to gravity and pooled along her back and the underside of her arms and legs, making her porcelain flesh dark purple and bruised where it touched the table.

‘What’s the story?’ Jack tried not to focus on the woman’s innermost secrets. Decker started closing her up. ‘She died from severe trauma brought on by blood loss.’ Pausing for a moment he indicated the laceration to Hannah’s throat and then nodded towards the second body. ‘Same with our friend over there. Same sharp instrument, I’d say. Best guess is that they died within an hour of each other.’

‘Time of death?’

‘Ah, Jack you always ask. Let me see.’ Decker narrowed his eyes as if working through some complex maths problem. ‘Sometime after eight pm and before ten.’

‘Why ten?’

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‘Because, my dear Jack, according to Docherty that’s when Mr Pavlov stopped answering his radio to the taxi office. That and the fact the time corresponds with the core temperature of both bodies when they were brought in.’

Two victims. Same location. Had Mr Pavlov inadvertently driven Hannah’s killer to her flat? Or was it a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time? ‘What do you reckon,’ Jack said after a while. ‘Some sort of hate crime?’

‘A reasonable assumption,’ Decker said, nodding slowly as he finished closing Hannah’s chest cavity and dropped the needle into a kidney shaped dish. ‘Both were foreign nationals. That’s not where the similarities end, mind.’

‘Go on.’

Decker crossed over to the storage unit and returned with a glass vase. ‘Because of this.’ He held it up to the light.

‘What is it?’

‘Traces of soil or dirt. I found it lodged inside the victims’ wounds.’

‘Both of them?’

Decker nodded. ‘I’ll have Olivia run them over to the labs as soon as she gets in, but I’m confident they’ll back up my hypothesis.’

‘Why soil?’ Ash asked.

‘Good question, my dear. I’m no detective but if we can get a report on the chemical compound, it might give you a clue as to who the killer might be... or at least where his weapon has been.’

A loud clatter filled the room as Decker carried his tray of instruments over to the sink.

‘Molly Dullea?’ Jack said, looking towards the cold storage units.

‘Sorry?’ Decker looked genuinely confused for a moment.

‘The woman killed at Paragon Station yesterday.’

‘Right yes, of course. You’ll have to excuse me.’ Decker took off his latex gloves, turned on the taps and started washing. ‘I’ll have to take another look. Given the same MO and with close time frame to our new guests I’d say it’s a safe bet chances are she may also have traces of soil lodged in her neck.’

‘Any idea on the choice of murder weapon?’

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‘That, my friend...’ Decker smiled grimly, pulling paper towels from the walled dispenser and drying his hands. ‘...was a retractable blade.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Let me show you.’ He walked over to the taxi driver’s body and pulled back the sheet, revealing a naked body covered in tattoos and a Y-shaped insertion cut from chest to groin. ‘Mr Nicolae Pavlov. Sounds Russian, but he’s most definitely Romanian. The wound to his neck goes deeper and then shallows out again, see...?’ He indicated a point mid-away across the taxi driver’s throat.

‘A slip... shaking hand?’

‘Come on Jack. Whoever the killer was he had a steady hand. You can tell by the way the cut runs equal distance from both ears. One clean movement. Swish...’ Decker mimicked the cutting of the victim’s throat. ‘Only the blade must have slipped further out during the act.’ He nodded towards Hannah’s body. ‘It’s less pronounced in the young lady, but there it is none the less.’

‘And Molly?’

‘I’ll let you know in due course, but if things pan out as I think they might then it looks odds on you might be looking for the same killer.’

Great! Less than forty-eight hours back in the job and already they had a potential serial killer loose in the city. What’s more he had allowed himself to get involved. ‘So, what are we looking for? A flick knife... pen knife?’

‘We are talking old school here, basic and easy to handle... something like a Stanley Knife,’ Decker said, covering Mr Pavlov and collecting his paperwork. ‘I’ll take another look at Miss Dullea as soon as I get this lot typed up.’ He held aloft the loose sheet bundle. ‘As soon as I get this lot typed up for Docherty, that is.’

He headed for the door, paused for a moment, and doubled back, ‘Nearly forgot.’ He rummaged around inside a steel filing cabinet and over an evidence bag.

Jack took it and stared at the mobile phone sealed inside.

‘It belonged to Miss Kowalski.’

‘How did it get here?’

Decker shrugged. ‘Docherty must have left it behind.’

‘Thanks, doc. Anything of the taxi driver?’

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‘Fraid not.’

‘This thing with Docherty,’ Jack said, pocketing the evidence bag.

‘What about it?’

‘I can lodge a complaint.’

‘Will anything come of it?’

‘Probably not.’

‘Thanks all the same, Jack.’ Decker gave a tired smile. ‘We both know it’ll only make matters worse. I’m just happy to keep my personal life private, besides you’ve only been back in the job five minutes.’

‘Fair point, but still –’ Jack nodded towards the other evidence bag beside the door.

‘Docherty’s attempt to intimidate me?’ He smiled. ‘Water off a duck’s back.’

Outside, Jack sat in the driver’s seat of his Volvo, Ash beside him. He said nothing for a while and stared out at the new housing estate opposite the Infirmary. For years it had been mothballed; now, post Covid, the concrete cancer was growing again, eating up the surrounding landscape.

‘What now?’ Ash asked, fidgeting as if she’d sat in something unpleasant.

‘Go back to Division and see what Watson can get from this.’ Jack handed her the evidence bag with Hannah’s mobile inside.

Ash hesitated for a moment before taking it. ‘Shouldn’t we hand this in to CID?’

‘And do Docherty’s job for him?’

‘Fair point.’

‘Get yourself off, and if anyone asks you haven’t seen me.’

Ash got out of the car without saying another word and Jack went back to staring out of the window. Not to witness their final examination felt like a betrayal. And yet he couldn’t help but believe he owed it to Molly, Hannah and Nicolae to find their killer.

Chapter 13

The village of Swanland sat a little over six miles to the west of Hull city centre. With the window rolled down Jack breathed in a lung full of the fresh tang blowing in off the Humber. As he drove through the narrow streets it didn't look like much had changed since he was last here. A fruit and veg shop had opened up and the front of the school had a fresh coat of paint, but that was about all. Maybe it was because the people who lived here liked things to be just so.

Grace's house was a five-minute drive from the high street. A huge two-story Georgian build nestled in the foothills of the Yorkshire Wolds, high enough to give a panoramic view of Hull. Or would have if it wasn't still pissing it down. Jack followed the twists and turns leading away from the centre of the village; slowing down as he approached Grace's gated sprawl, he headed along the gravelled drive.

He stopped the car, killed the engine and took in the grounds, shivering slightly as cold flooded the car. A large garden stretched to a border of trees and one of those ride-on mowers. Ivy had grown high on the house's north facing wall and despite being winter the grass and surrounding pivot fences were neatly trimmed.

He grabbed his keys from the ignition, turned his collar up and made for the entrance. A quick ten-yard dash in such inclement conditions wasn't his idea of fun but he'd managed to avoid a good soaking. He rang the doorbell and when nothing happened looked up and waved at a security camera inside the porch. 'Open up,' he mouthed, wrapping his hands around himself to emphasize the point that it was freezing.

When he'd last spoken to Grace, she'd sounded upset, afraid even, and he wasn't sure what to make of it. A thin Glaswegian woman in her seventies she wasn't to be messed with. Come to think of it, he'd forgotten to call her back after noticing her missed calls earlier that morning.

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‘Come on!’

He drilled the doorbell with his thumb. He’d give her to the count of five and then –
A shadow fell on the other side of the door. Jack retracted his threat at the sound of bolts being drawn and the turning of a key.

The door opened and the woman in question eyed the outside world with suspicion. Her eyes darting around before finally settling on him. ‘You’d better come in,’ she said, her words coming out in thick chunks, suggesting he wasn’t in her good books right now.

Jack followed her along the entrance hall. Pale daylight drifted in through leaded windows, making the dark walls and mahogany floor look gloomier than they ought to be. After Sarah’s funeral Grace had entertained several of her family in this old place. They drank wine, ate food and spoke in hushed tones as was the way with wakes. Jack hadn’t joined them. He couldn’t face it and that was the truth. He got on well with Christian, Sarah’s brother, but that was about it. Grace was the closest friend he had left right now. She had helped him through his darkest days and he trusted her with his life.

Everything in the sitting room was just as he remembered it, TV, bookshelves, a large dust collector display cabinet. The edges of a table light softened against the oppressive gloom outside. The difference now was that everywhere he looked there were scatterings of books, photographs and bits of paper with handwritten notes. Grace headed straight for the drinks cabinet as they entered.

‘Drink?’

‘A bit early.’ Being frank with Grace was what Jack liked about her.

‘My house, my rules.’

Fair point.

Grace poured herself a large whisky, returned and lowered herself into a leather recliner. Placing a stack of files onto the floor, Jack cleared a space on the settee.

‘I tried calling you again last night.’

‘Yeah, about that –’

‘No matter.’ Grace’s normal pale complexion reddened as she tilted her head back, gulped and emptied her glass. She stared at the sparkling tumbler before adding. ‘It’s back.’

‘Who’s back?’

‘The Shade... well, one of them, and it’s here in the city.’

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Grace headed back to the drinks cabinet, this time returning with the bottle she had opened moments before.

Jack creased his forehead. 'Shade? Sorry I -?'

'It's why I called and all of this.' Grace indicated the chaos surrounding them. 'It's next to useless.'

Jack leaned forward, toppling a file as he did. It joined the others on the floor, spilling its innards so that it was hard to make out where it ended and others began. 'You're not making any sense,' His tone soft and even.

Grace met his stare, her eyes yellow and foggy suggesting the whisky bottle wasn't her first of the day despite the hour. She poured herself another glass and drank it slowly this time.

Her house. Her rules.

This wasn't like Grace. Okay, she enjoyed a drink like the next person, but she had always been level headed and rational.

'Where is it?'

'Where's what?'

'The Shade?'

'That's the thing, see.' Grace shook her head, soft light playing on her sallow cheeks. She let out a weary sigh and switched her attention to sifting through a pile of books at her feet. She picked up what looked like a photo album, groaning as her back clicked.

'What's that?' Jack nodded, knowing how stupid the question was before adding an apologetic smile. It only made him feel more stupid.

'Looks as if you haven't lost any of your detective prowess, Jack.' Grace smiled, although there was no humour in it as she crossed the floor and sat beside him. 'During my time as an Investigative Journalist,' she continued. 'I've collected notes on a lot of people. I've taken to hiding them away in little nooks and crannies.'

'You mentioned a Shade, where does that come in?'

'Have you heard of the *Ordo Templis Baphomet*?'

Jack shrugged. An image of a half-human, half-goat figure coming to mind.

'Baphomet, isn't that a demon?'

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‘Not quite, its representation has changed somewhat over the centuries.’ Grace opened the album and flipped absentmindedly through the pages. ‘Baphomet is an invented pagan gnostic idol or deity, depending on your point of view. Over the centuries it has come to symbolise a demon and worshipped by followers of the left-hand path’.

‘Left-hand path?’

‘It’s the use of black magic and Satanic symbolism.’

‘As in the wearing of sheep’s heads and human sacrifice? Surely that sort of thing exists only in horror movies and books.’

‘It’s rare, I give you that, but still it happens.’ Grace stopped midway through the album and turned it around, spreading the pages out between them. ‘Take a look.’

Jack ran his eyes over a display of passport size photographs. A mixture of men and women, ranging from, what early twenties to mid-eighties if his judgment was anything to go by.

Grace indicated the date and place hand-written at top right-hand corner of the page: *Edinburgh '67*. ‘What you’re looking at are members of the cult I was investigating at the time.’

Cult?

Jack looked more closely. Twenty plus years of being a detective had taught him a thing or two when looking at mugshots. Right now, his gut told him there was definitely something not quite right about the amassed a group in front of him.

‘What you’re looking at is a small selection I managed to capture up in Scotland,’ Grace continued. ‘There are others throughout the British Isles, indeed the world over. Most are from positions of authority, or service involving responsibility to the public; government ministers, judges, high ranking police officers, celebrities, you name it they were all there.’

Jack looked up and didn’t know quite what to say. ‘What did they get out of researching this sort of satanic rubbish?’ A little paranoia was to be expected given the circumstances.

‘Not rubbish, Jack, far from it. These people believed they could channel Hell’s demons in order to give them power and influence. As if they didn’t have enough already.’

‘Isn’t that a bit –’

‘Dangerous. Yes. Crazy? No. I’ve seen it with my own eyes.’

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‘Edinburgh ’67?’

Grace nodded. ‘I was working in London when I heard a rumour this sort of thing was going on.’ She hesitated for a moment and stared into the distance as if reading some impossible small text written on the far wall. ‘I travelled up and took a look see, you know, bag myself a career changing exposé.’

‘And did you?’

‘What?’

‘Expose it? With so many high-profile figures it must have been like shooting lame ducks in a barrel full of shit.’

‘Let’s just say things didn’t turn out as planned.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘The only way to infiltrate the sect like this was to create a false identity and put yourself forward as a member.’

‘Jesus, tell me you didn’t –’

Grace didn’t nod, not that she needed to. Jack knew she had stuck her journalistic nose into the business of a group of very powerful people. The drawn curtains undrawn, so to speak and that sort of thing tend not to end well. ‘What happened?’

‘Third picture from the right. ‘Grace picked up her glass, her shoulders slumped as she saw it was empty and set it back down again.

Jack cocked his head to one side, taking in the photograph of an elderly man, Simon Rutledge. ‘What about him?’ A chill settled around him as he ran his eyes over the others again. He had already committed most of the sick bastards to memory. He’d have taken a quick snap on his mobile if he thought he might have got away with it but not right now.

‘Simon,’ Grace confirmed, smiling as if to a memory she had until now forgotten. ‘A shrewd man,’ she said. ‘He knew what I was up to from the get-go.’

‘Did he blow your cover?’

Grace shook her head, her smile fading. ‘Not Simon. He was a good man. He didn’t say as much at the time, but I figured he wanted out. Only –’ She paused, her face drawn and looking all of her seventy years. ‘By the time I figured all of this out it was already too late.’

Jack opened his mouth to ask what had happened and closed it again, deciding instead to let Grace finish her story, time was drawing on and he wanted to get back to Divisional.

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‘Simon had been a member of the cult for a long time,’ Grace continued. ‘You could say we both wanted the same thing, to expose those involved and have the macabre circus closed down. One thing led to another and after a while, Simon and I started seeing one another.’

‘You mentioned A Shade,’ Jack said after a while, wanting to bring the conversation back on track.

Grace stared at him for a while, looking for a moment a little lost. ‘It was the first meeting of the winter months. As always, we had all gathered in the Land’s End pub on the corner of the Royal Mile in Edinburgh and made our way down to our meeting place in the cellar. I got the feeling that some of the other members were on to me and were biding their time. Stupid, really. I ought to have done something about it, only pride and sheer bloody-mindedness got the better of me.’

‘Go on?’

‘That meeting went ahead as normal. An order of proceedings was put forward by the Grand Master, robes were donned, ceremonial apparatus set up and each of us took our place around an inverted cross.’ Grace shook her head slightly. ‘I was right, only it was the Grand Master who was onto me. He took it upon himself and called me forward to act as the vessel for the calling.’

‘Calling as in demonic entity?’

‘I was young and stupid... so, so, stupid.’

‘You went ahead with the calling?’

‘What else could I do? There was no way out of the cellar and with the drunken racket going on upstairs I doubted if anyone upstairs would have heard me scream if I tried. I was about to take my place at the altar when Simon grabbed me by the arm and pulled me back.’

‘Could he do that?’

‘Every member has the right to put themselves forward in place of another, but only once. It’s written in the order’s teachings. There was nothing the Grand Master could do about it. Simon took my place and quickly went into a trance. Only, the entity that came through wasn’t what we were expecting.’

‘A Shade?’

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Grace's nod was almost imperceptible, her hands clasped tightly around the edge of the album. 'Simon was dragged kicking and screaming into the Gloomworld.'

'Hold on, Gloomworld?'

Jack had no reason to doubt Grace's story but there had to be an element of journalistic licence about it, hadn't there?

'Purgatory, Shadowlands, call it what you will,' Grace said, looking down at the album.

Jack followed her gaze. 'And Simon was taken there?'

'At least in the metaphysical. On the earth plane he was put in a mental hospital. His soul however perished in the Gloomworld.'

Grace stopped speaking, looked up and stared intently as if challenging him to pull her story apart.

Not a smart move. Jack was prepared to suspend disbelief a little longer. 'This Shade, where did it come from?'

'Shades... plural,' Grace replied. 'They're in the world. Outside the world – everywhere. Forces indifferent to human trivialities.'

'I thought demonic entities came from Hell.'

'Not all, some live on different planes to our own. Besides, Hell is nothing more than a subjective construct made up by the clergy to keep the masses in check. There's no end to a Shade's hunger. They feed on all the pent-up fear, anger and prejudice in humanity's soul. It hijacks the minds of the weak and vulnerable and bends them to its will.'

Jack saw the fear in Grace's eyes and wondered if she had seen this Gloomworld for herself. 'And you think a *Shade* is here in this city?'

'Not think, Jack. One is amongst us.'

'The same one from Edinburgh?'

'It's hard to tell.' Grace shook her head. 'I got the feeling this one has been lying dormant for many years somewhere in this city – biding its time and waiting.'

'What for?'

'I don't know.'

Despite himself Jack shivered. If anyone else had told him the same story he'd have laughed and called for a psychological assessment. Only he was sure Grace hadn't lost her

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mind and wasn't on anything stronger than Ibuprofen for her arthritis. 'What happened to the sect?'

'Some of the members may still be alive others not.' Grace touched a finger to Simon Rutledge's face, paused for a moment and closed the album. 'I used the confusion of that night to get away, sent my findings to the authorities and nothing happened.'

'Surely these people should have been prosecuted?'

'I was told I didn't have enough evidence to lead to prosecutions.'

'Bastards!' Jack knew a cover-up when he saw one.

'There are a lot of bad people out there who wouldn't think twice about taking the life of another, mainly for their own gains,' Grace spoke softly. 'Some, not many, but some, were drawn in by the order's trappings and lost their way.'

Jack knew Grace was talking about, Simon Rutledge. But what of the others? Was it too much of a stretch of the imagination that one of these evil bastards might come to Hull and had summoned a Shade?

'There's something else.'

'Go on.'

'I sensed the Shade last night.' Pausing, Grace hauled herself off the settee, crossed over to the drinks cabinet and returned with a bottle of something thick and yellow. She filled her glass, took a sip and picked up from where she left off. 'It attached itself to a woman in the balcony.'

'Is that normal... I mean can they do that?' Jack struggled with his words as much as he was with the concept of having a malevolent entity lose in the city.

Grace shrugged. 'It's here for a reason. Only, this is something new and different to what I experienced in Edinburgh. I may be jumping to conclusions but I'm fairly certain it's been looking for the woman it had attached itself to.'

'What will happen to her?'

'I can't say for certain but if the Shade has taken hold more often than not the signs can be ambiguous. The host might feel a pressure inside her head, tiredness, heavy limbs, that sort of thing. Over time the symptoms get worse and soon they tire of life and ache for a quick exit.'

'You mentioned the Gloomworld, where does that come into it.'

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‘That, Jack, is the final destination of all those taken by a Shade. When their bodies become too weak the Shade devours their soul and moves onto the next.’

‘Then we need to find this woman.’ Jack got to his feet and despite his scepticism found himself saying. ‘If what you are saying is real there might be something we can do to help her.’

‘Oh, this is very real. As for the woman if the shade has taken hold there’s very little, we can do to stop it from taking another.’

‘Where was the woman sitting?’ He took out his mobile phone and swiped the screen. ‘I’ll get someone to check with the ticket office and see if we can track her down.’

‘No need.’

‘What?’

Grace stood, put her hand on his shoulder and lowered him back onto the settee. ‘The woman I saw was Ash.’

Jack gave a hollow laugh and shook his head. ‘Can’t be.’

‘I have my own resources, Jack, and I’m pretty sure the woman I saw was Ash.’

‘She was –’ Jack began, and remembered Ash had told him she had been out last night. Shit!

‘You need to take this.’ Grace handed him a sealed envelope.

‘What is it?’

‘You’ll find out in good time, first you must decide whether to open it or not.’

‘I don’t understand?’ Jack shook his head, started to open the envelope when Grace stopped him.

‘No, not here.’

‘Why?’

‘Because...’ Grace took hold of his forearm, pulled up his shirt sleeve exposing the scar on his forearm. ‘This is a mark of a Shade. I wasn’t sure at first, but now I know you were infected the night Sarah was killed.’

‘Nonsense!’

Jack gave a low growl and pulled his arm free. Molly Dullea, Hannah Kowalski and Nicolae Pavlov were all dead because some sick fucker was going around the city slitting people’s throats. It had nothing to do with this so-called Shade. Whether the killer belonged

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to a satanic cult didn't matter, a murderer was out there somewhere, and it was his job to bring them to justice.

'I'll see you out.' Grace stood and walked him to the front door. 'I can't make you believe what I've told you Jack. Only remember you mustn't mention any of this to Ash, and if you do decide to open up the envelope there'll be no turning back, whether you find the answers you are looking for or not.'

Jack nodded, caught a glimpse of bruising on the side of Grace's neck but didn't say anything. It was obvious Grace wanted him gone. The door was closed before he was off the step. Back in his car he turned the envelope over in his hands, tempted to open it but couldn't stop thinking about Ash. Right now, he needed to get back to the station and make sure she was alright.

Chapter 14

Having stepped into the basement room, Jack took off his coat and headed over to Watson's desk. 'Any luck with Hannah's mobile?'

'Sir, I –' The PC looked up with surprise.

'Well?'

'Not, yet, it's password protected.'

'Can't you hack it?' Jack tried to sound as if he knew what he was talking about.

Truth was that he had heard it mentioned on a TV program.

'It'd be quicker if I used IT's decryption software.'

'Watson's right,' Ash emerged from beneath her desk where she had been rummaging. 'I've seen what those tech guys can do.' Her mobile pinged. Seated, she glanced down at it and smiled. Whoever the message was from she wasn't sharing.

Silence filled the room and Jack let it hang there before answering. 'I need to know the extent of Trainer's relationship with Hannah before Docherty finds out we've got her mobile. Chances are he's gone to ground if he's got anything to do with her death. Hannah's mobile might be the best chance we have of finding him.'

Jack glanced into his coffee mug, realising it was empty. When had he last had a caffeine fix, must have been when? Earlier that morning. Come to think of it he hadn't eaten anything either. His stomach growled but it would have to wait, there were more important things to think about right now. 'Ash take a look through the archives, see if there's any reported crimes using a Stanley Knife.'

'Already have.'

'And?'

'Nothing. You want me to look through the Covid files?'

It was worth a try. 'Yes, do that and when you're done look through Trainer's file again. I want to know everything there is between him and Hannah.'

With both Ash and Watson busy, Jack glanced up at the ceiling. It was odds-on Trainer was dating Hannah, but why would he kill her? There were traces of mud linking Hannah with the taxi driver. Damning evidence given that Trainer had been the last person to

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have taken a ride. That and the fact he had been dropped right outside of his girlfriend's flat. And what of Molly Dullea? Where did she come into it?

Shaking his head to fend off the fog of sleep, Jack glanced at his mobile, hoping to see a message from Decker about the tests he was running on Molly Dullea. Nothing. Chances were ME had fallen asleep at his desk having been up since the small hours courtesy of one DCI Docherty. Poor bastard.

Still, Jack was pretty confident his good friend would confirm all three victims were killed by the same person. All he needed was the lab rats to run tests and ascertain where the soil originated from and they'd have a clue as to the killer's movements. In the meantime, he was pinning his hopes on Ash and Watson. The kid more so, if he was honest, as a digital trace was pretty damning and hard to argue against during trial.

Jack dug the heel of his hands into his eyes and stared across at the bundle of Covid files. More had appeared since he had left the office as if a distant relation of the Tooth Fairy had dropped them off before heading upstairs to help Docherty pull one off. Every instinct in his body was telling him to take them back and shove them up DCI's arse. As temping as it was there had to be a better way of dealing with the prick of a man without getting booted off the force.

By late afternoon Jack's eyes blurred and his back ached. He had the annoying sensation of blood surging through his veins instead of caffeine. He stretched and looked around briefly, but Ash and Watson were not seeing him, which suggested they were still engrossed in their individual tasks.

Already he had gone through a dozen Covid files. What they all had in common was they required a massive number of a man-hours and had sparked a lot of media attention. Aside from the general public several of the cases had involved politicians and several well-known public figures. All cases had stranded in the narrow space between witness reports and where the leads had petered out. Jack had managed to sort them out into four categories:

The first and largest was abuse posted on social media. Facebook, Twitter amongst other media platforms had been used to mock or attack foreign nationals and anti-Covid conspiracy theorists. What amazed Jack the most was the level of contempt the attackers had for their victims and boldness in justifying their actions. It was only recently when a high-

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ranking judge was targeted that the police made any sort of effort to oust those posting the vile messages. Still, given limited resources many never went past the recording stage.

The next type were more complex in nature. It was sometimes difficult to pinpoint the motive, and there could be more than one victim. The attacks were cruder and with physical violence common. The injuries or cuts inflicted, it seemed, a trophy of the attacker's desire to cause harm. These were not lone attackers. What made these worse was that many had racial undertones and were driven by a self-righteous mob with a seemingly justifiable cause.

The third category was a mixture of online and the physical linked to kidnappings, rapes, arson, robberies, with near-deadly consequences for the victims, a certain number of financial crimes, and some political undertones. They were all cases the police had failed to solve, and as a whole the press had been kept in the dark. Jack was at a loss to decide whether these were Covid hate crimes at all or complex cases CID had shoved into the pile in the hope they just might go away or become someone else's problem?

And last but by no means least, the fourth category in which plausible motives were never found other than the perpetrators remained unknown. These were the most worrying of all.

Jack worked ceaselessly at compiling his list. And when he was finished, he pulled back his shirt sleeve and looked at the scar on his forearm. Had he really been infected by A Shade? Grace's words had taken him by surprise. No, revulsion. Then he remembered the pain he had felt at the train station, radiating up from the scar on his forearm and into his guts.

Soon, Jack, soon.

The words spoken to him by the dark-eyed man had been inside his head as well as outside. Seductive, luring... frightening, as if coming from someone or something much older and darker.

'Sir!'

Calm. No longer back at the train station Jack looked up to see Watson staring across at him. How could he have been so stupid as to let the man get away? Or maybe he hadn't.

'Sir!'

'What is it, Constable?' Jack blinked, eyes sore through the lack of sleep as he tried to focus on the kid.

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‘The password. I’ve cracked it.’

Unsteady for a moment Jack got to his feet and crossed the room, a twinge of burning agony once more running through his scar. There one minute, then gone. ‘Well, what was it?’ he said, holding onto the back of Watson’s chair for support.

‘Lazarus, sir.’

‘What the fuck does that mean?’

Watson shrugged. ‘That’s the whole point of passwords, sir. They don’t necessarily have to mean anything, unless you’re able to tap into the psyche of the person who set them in the first place.’

‘You trying to be funny, Constable?’

‘No, sir.’ Watson blushed.

A movement and Ash was standing beside him. Her touch soft as she nudged his elbow and smiled just the way Sarah had done.

Jack immediately focused on the alphanumeric characters scrolling up Watson’s laptop. They meant nothing to him. ‘What am I looking at?’ he said, softening his tone.

‘Hannah’s text, email and call logs, sir. They’re encrypted but I should be able to decipher them and have a hard copy in an hour or three.’

‘Can’t you do it any sooner?’

‘The hard bit’s done, sir. It’s just a matter of time now.’

‘When you’re done print me off a copy.’ Jack looked around the office and then realised they didn’t have a printer. The lack of resources was seriously beginning to piss him off. ‘Use CID’s if you have to. Only, make sure no one sees you.’

‘Sir.’

Jack glanced at his watch. It had already gone six-thirty. Where had the day gone? ‘Not now, Constable. Get yourself off home, it’ll still be here tomorrow. You too Ash. We’ll meet here at eight.’

Silence as the room emptied. Jack had been keeping an eye on Ash all afternoon and saw no signs of unusual behaviour. Perhaps he had been looking at it all wrong. Was it even inconceivable that Grace may have been mistaken?

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The city was riddled with folklore, perhaps the aging medium had got it from there and not her spirits, or whatever she called them. There was still the matter of the unopened envelope. Was it fair she had given it to him? Probably not.

Chapter 15

Jack stepped out of police HQ and into the winter air with more questions than he had answers. Dark eyes and purple veins. The man at the train station had both; Grace the latter. He wasn't sure until now that the bruise he had seen was on the side of her neck. She clearly wasn't well. Had she known it was there? Of course, she had.

Jack got into his car and drove out of the car park at the back of Divisional. Clough Road was rush-hour busy. He joined the slow-moving traffic and headed west. The sky was low. A gun-metal grey as the rain continued to fall. The gloom had set in and had embedded itself into the city's psyche. Chances where it wasn't leaving anytime soon.

'Bloody hell,' Jack cursed, catching a glimpse of roadworks a little way ahead. It wasn't the first time the council had decided to dig up the road and add to the already predictable chaos brought on by the sheer number of people heading home. Typical!

He waited for a gap in the oncoming traffic and swung his Volvo into a side street. Might as well use his time more constructively. He sat with the engine running, picked up the sealed envelope Grace had given him and opened it. There were two sheets of lined A4 paper inside. The first contained what looked like a list of printed instructions. The second handwritten notes, the letters smudged in places as if it the author had dabbed a little too much ink onto the end of a feathered quill. He didn't recognise any of it as being Grace's handwriting. The script was far too old and partly written in what appeared to be Latin.

Jesus, surely Grace wasn't expecting him to –

Jack turned both pages over hoping to find something there to say this was a sick joke. Only there wasn't. A shadow fell over the car and he looked up to see a man staring in through the window. The gawper didn't stay long when Jack showed his warrant card.

He turned his attention back to the printed instructions.

Dissect a dead cat?

All this talk of Shades and a Gloomworld. Grace was clearly troubled and on something stronger than whisky. And then he remembered she had said they'd be no turning back if he opened the envelope. She knew him well.

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He shook his head and stared at the bulging sky. Pandora's Box had been opened and he knew what he had to do.

The traffic had started to move just enough for him to re-join the queue. His mind must have been on the instructions because seconds later he was free from the snarl up and heading across town towards the A63. He gave another shake of his head. Complete madness that's what it was. Utter madness.

Half an hour later he pulled up alongside Hessle Foreshore and killed the engine. The car park was deserted but for a lone campervan parked some distance away. Grimacing as he wound down the window and getting a cold hard blast in the face he stared at the bleak landscape. It looked as if Armageddon had come to town and everyone was hibernating in the hope that it might save them from the impending doom.

There were less-hostile places he could have looked for a dead cat. Looking back through the instructions it had to be here. A place of heightened psychic energy. Where better than in the shadow of the Humber Bridge where the number of suicides had weakened the veil between this world and the next?

Bloody cold. Jack got out of his car and turned up his collar. He'd have brought a hat and scarf only he wasn't expecting to be here when he left for work earlier that day. Waterproofs and thermals might have been better. Head down, and feeling thoroughly miserable, pebbles crunched underfoot as he trudged along the pitch-dark foreshore. This wasn't how he remembered it from his childhood. Back then the sun always shone, there had been laughter, ice cream, games of skipping stones.

Now, it was a discarded landscape. His feet confirming it as plastic-bags tangled against his shoes. The wind blowing from the west bringing with it the acrid smell from the tannery, mixing with the sea salt air. What better way to spend the evening.

Up ahead amber lights reflected off the underside of Hull's iconic Humber Bridge. Head down Jack headed for the huge concrete structure.

Mental health was the hidden cost of the Covid pandemic. A ticking timebomb that had shown signs of going off. To his left the estuary swelled and splashed against the shore as if in some siren song, luring people to their deaths. Why anyone would want to end their lives here, then again reason didn't come into it. A short step into the void and then nothing. Truth be told, he had considered ending it all and joining Sarah only for Grace who'd stepped in.

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She had saved his life on more than one occasion: it was partly because of this that he was here.

Another hundred yards and the temperature had dropped so low it felt like a butcher's deep freeze. He dug his hands into his pockets and felt the smooth surface of the gemstone Sarah had given him. Christ, she'd never forgive him if she knew what he had planned, first he'd have to find a dead cat to work with.

The cold north wind whistled around the base of the north tower. Turning he caught sight of a wooden door propped up against the concrete base forming a triangle windbreaker. A druggie's den, probably. Somewhere they could shoot up undisturbed. He'd seen it time and time again as a probationary PC, little hidey-holes in run-down council estates and abandoned buildings. They say everyone dies alone, but no one said anything about being surrounded by needles, burnt out lighters and other drug paraphernalia.

A whiff of something foul on the other side of the makeshift shelter caught his senses. He stepped closer, covering his nose and mouth. Not a dead body, but a black and white cat its face gaunt and contorted as if its passing had been agony.

About bloody time. He was beginning to think there was a shortage of dead cats in the city. He scooped the feline into a plastic bag and headed back to his car. Next stop home and pizza, finished off with a bottle of something strong to take away the memory of the day.

An hour later he pulled up at the marina to find Millie waiting for him quayside. It was warmer inside. The cabin light welcomed him as he lowered the plastic bag to the floor and headed for the kitchen. The trudge across the foreshore had left his feet numb and cold.

The heat from the electric radiators hugged him as he took off his coat and kicked off his shoes. Millie was less welcoming.

'If it's food you want, you could have caught your own.'

He fetched the cat food from the cupboard and emptied it into a bowl before setting the kettle to boil.

Millie purred loudly and sniffed inquisitively at the plastic bag at his feet.

'Oh, no you don't.' Jack picked her up and let her down in front of her food. 'Stay here and don't move.'

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Storing the plastic bag in the broom cupboard, he showered and changed into dry clothes. Millie glowered at him when he returned. The smell of cat food mixing with that of the dead cat. ‘Jesus!’ Jack wrapped a hand around his mouth and nose and reached for a can of air freshener. It took the edge of the smell but failed to draw it out completely.

He checked his watch. Half-past eight. He was tired and oddly restless, trying to fit together the pieces of the jigsaw. There was also what Grace had told him earlier, coupled with what he was about to do. Food was out of the question so he opened a bottle of wine and downed two full glasses. Nothing made sense, but then it again it never had since Sarah’s passing.

He checked it over and everything he needed was in the *just-in-case* chest Sarah had insisted he kept in the engine room; first-aid box, battery-operated flashlight, rags and cleaning solution, Stanley knife, a tub of powdered milk and tinned food to last a week or two.

Right, first things first.

He flattened out the printed instructions Grace had given him and placed them out on top of his workbench beside the hand-written notes.

After a moment’s hesitation he set up the trestle table in the middle of the floor. Once this was done, he filled a bucket with hot water, found a pair of latex gloves and set about scrubbing. The directive had been clear about using surgical spirits or in his case, turpentine, to purify the working area.

Minutes later, after he had worked up a sweat, he dried the table and stood back to inspect his handiwork. Next, he opened the plastic bag he’d carried in from the broom cupboard and laid the dead cat on the table. Its neck was clearly broken, and clumps of black fur had been ripped from its back. And Christ did it stink.

Gagging Jack covered his nose and mouth and put on a face mask. It was his last one left over from the pandemic supplies. A glance at the clock on the wall. It was getting on for nine in the evening. Another sleepless night. He emptied a tin of air freshener: still the smell of death and decay lingered. Next time he saw Decker, he’d bum a spare box of face masks. Then again, he’d rather not explain why he needed them.

He rummaged around inside the *just-in-case* chest and took out a piece of chalk. Why Sarah had insisted he put it there he wasn’t sure. Gripping it between thumb and forefinger he

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drew a circle of protection around the table. The area had to be 3 meters in circumference with no breaks nor signs of a beginning or ending.

‘This had better be worth it?’ Jack said, as he stared at the circle for a while and drew a pentagram inside. He’d already worked out the back of the houseboat faced north and drew two of the points facing that direction

He then etched a triangle around the circle with the apex pointing north and wrote the words. *MIC...HA...EL*, Arch Angel and universal protector, at the three points.

There were a number of items listed he couldn’t find in the chest. Then he remembered the church candles, sea-salt and sage Sarah used in her work. Only the holy water might have been a problem and then he found a bottle of distilled water. Improvised, but they’d have to do.

He placed the candles at the five points of the pentagram, and tried not to breathe in the acrid smoke as he lit each one in a clockwise direction and sprinkled them with sage. Finally, when all this was done, he scattered salt around the foot of the door where the light filtered through. He didn’t try to understand why, only accepted that it kept out unwanted spirits.

No sooner had he finished than he heard Millie scratching at the kitchen door where he had locked her, better safe than sorry. The last thing he needed was her getting under his feet whilst preparing to enter the Gloomworld.

Christ, was he really doing this?

For a moment doubt took over and he imagined Sarah watching him. Disappointed. But then he remembered why he was here. A Shade had attached itself to Ash. The instructions had been clear, he needed to know where it had entered the city. Only then was there any chance of casting it back out again.

The air smelt of dead cat, layered with burning sage that pricked tears from the corner of his eyes and muddled his senses. Nausea rose from the pit of his stomach; he swallowed it back down again.

Finally, he washed his hands in turpentine, patted them dry and began reading from the hand-written notes.

‘In the name of St. Michael, slayer of demons and vanquisher of Satan, protect this

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space and all those within. In the name of St. Michael, slayer of demons and vanquisher of Satan...'

He repeated the incantation three times, sprinkled more sage onto the burning candles and concentrated on the words written in Latin, pronouncing each one slowly in the hope of getting them right:

'Qui effect protego, inubas serpentibus et ligamentum meis stirpique meae domum meam mixtisque, et deducet I ruunt ut i present servate innoxias potest momenta.'

His words echoed around the confined space and for a moment the sound of the outside world melted away:

'Qui effect protego, inubas serpentibus et ligamentum meis stirpique meae domum meam mixtisque, et deducet I ruunt ut i present servate innoxias potest momenta.'

Millie fell silent for a moment and then began her protests anew, hissing and scratching ferociously at the door. Jack tried to ignore her as he took a Stanley Knife from the chest. He extended the blade and placed it against the dead cat's right eye socket. The thin layer of skin offered little resistance as he applied pressure and began to cut; going in about an inch and half as he traced the bone structure. Too deep and the blade would sever the optic nerve, ruining the ritual.

Swallowing back the urge to vomit, Jack eased out the dissected eye. Blood trickled from the incision and bile rose from the back of his throat. He wanted to turn away, wanted to pack up and put an end to this nonsense. And yet, having been dragged into this deep, having scoured the foreshore for a dead cat, he wanted to see this through, wanted to know where in the city the Shade had entered. Not only that, Ash's life was in danger; no doubt others besides hers.

The room breathed, there was no other word for it. Jack repositioned the blade and cut out the dead cat's remaining eye. Held by nerve and sinew, he let both dangle against the

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sallow cheeks. Then, he pricked the tip of his right forefinger with the blade, clasped it with his free hand and squeezed seven drops of blood into each of the cat's empty sockets.

'Spirits of the night, I beseech thee ...'

He read from the final part of the incantation:

'... find favour with mine call and summons, on the seven winds I beg thee travel, and greet me in mine presence.'

'Spirits of the night, I beseech thee, find favour with mine call and summons, on the seven winds I beg thee travel, and greet me in mine presence.'

Spirits of the night, I beseech thee, find favour with mine call and summons, on the seven winds I beg thee travel, and greet me in thine presence.'

Over and over, until the words rolled into one.

'... and greet me in mine presence.'

Hours ago, the Gloomworld and Shades meant nothing to him, now here he was feeding his blood into the empty eye sockets of a dead cat. Jesus, if any one from Divisional saw him now, they'd have thought he'd lost his mind and wouldn't have been far wrong. Face screwed up in concentration he squeezed out the remaining droplets of blood from his finger and stood back.

Silence.

Millie had stopped her cries. A smell of sulphur filled the room, mixed with an underlying odour of rotting flesh. Jack stared down at the dead cat and saw, or thought he saw, tendrils reaching out towards him.

'What the -?'

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They coiled like snakes, impossible knots that wrapped themselves around his body, pulling him towards the eyeless sockets. He was trapped, his chest and breath constricted. His pulse raced and his heart beat like a drum inside his head, growing ever faster. He tried to pull away, but the entrails held him tight in their embrace.

Seconds passed, perhaps longer, and then the room began to spin. His skin turned cold as sweat trickled down his back. Again, he tried to break free, but his head felt light and his muscles weak.

A cold wind filled his lungs. Falling!

In that instant nothing existed, no room, no houseboat, no Millie. Only darkness as he tumbled into the gloom with no hope of escape, or anything to cushion his fall.

Jack blinked open his eyes and took a moment to steady himself. When he looked again, he was no longer in the engine room, but standing on the corner of Ferensway. Debenhams, House of Fraser, with the mottled outline of Paragon Station opposite. The gloom was like a living thing, covering the landscape in moving shadows. Behind he felt the invisible barrier between himself and the engine room weaken.

This was not his world, but a copy of it. The life of the place leached out of it until there was nothing left but shadows and memories gone sour. And there amongst this domestic wasteland the distant hum of the real city could be heard. The only thing missing was a sign saying: *Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter.*

Ahead he saw the dead cat stroll cross the road in front of him. It paused for a moment and turned, as if realising it was being watched. Its eyeless sockets scanning the landscape until it spotted him. Threat detected and understood.

Jack followed as it strode on. His limbs ached and it was getting harder to concentrate. If this was purgatory then they could keep it. He'd rather read about it from the comfort of his houseboat.

A shriek in the distance and for a moment something impossibly large swooped from the darkened sky. Despite himself Jack picked up his pace and got within twenty feet of the dead cat. Anywhere, to get away from whatever that thing was.

Then he realised where he was. Standing outside the arched entrance to Paragon Station. Only here the stone edifice was as dead as the city around him.

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He followed the cat through the concourse until it came to a stop on Platform Two. Cold hands reached up tugging at him, pulling at his clothes. His pace slowed as if he were walking through mud. More arms reached up, where they came from, he didn't know. He came to a stop, unable to move any further and then he heard it.

'Ah, Jack.'

The voice came from inside his head as if it were his own, only it wasn't. Fear took hold as he looked around. 'I know who you are?'

'And I you, Inspector.'

Flashes of distant lightning made a ghost train of the platform and for a moment Jack caught a glimpse of the hands pulling at him. They were part of the floor as if it were no longer solid.

'You see them, Inspector?'

'Who are they?' Jack kept his focus and tried to block out the stench of rotting flesh.

'They were once your people and now they are mine.'

'What is that supposed to mean?'

'I take them, Inspector, feed off their souls and then their flesh.'

More flashes of lightning and two fiery points of light burned in the gloom. 'Sarah, is she here?' Jack turned the words frozen of his lips as if he were afraid to ask the question.

'Perhaps, Inspector... perhaps.'

'Where? Show her to me!' He took another step, his movement slowed by the tugging of more hands.

'Help me, Jack... please, help me,' Sarah's voice sounded somewhere in the gloom.

Jack gritted his teeth and forced another step. 'I said show me!'

'She belongs to me, Inspector. As do you.'

The two fiery points of light intensified. Barely able to breathe, Jack dropped to his knees feeling the emptiness writhe inside as if weighing him up. 'Get the fuck out of my head!'

'The darkness is strong inside you, Inspector.'

'I said... get the fuck out!'

'Help me, Jack... help me!' Sarah's voice sounded again. Weighed down by the hands pulling at him there was no way he could get to her, even if he knew where she was.

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‘Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe,’ The Shade repeated over and over. Its words strangely hypnotic as they took deep root within his subconscious. ‘*Soon* your fight will be over, Inspector. You will give yourself to me and all that is yours will be mine.’

Jack laughed, a light sound that didn’t match the burning feeling washing through his scar. ‘No fucking chance,’ he snarled, gasping for air. He fumbled in his pocket, brought out the gemstone Sarah had given him and held it up. Another voice deep inside told him what to do next. He held it up and shouted. ‘Remember this,’ his voice hoarse and gravelly. ‘Remember giving it to me?’

The words were barely out of his mouth when light bright light shone from the end of the platform. A distant sound of a door opening. It clicked shut. A hollow pad of feet across wooden floorboards. And then silence.

The burning pressure in his lungs had gone and his head felt light again. He opened his eyes to see Millie sitting on his chest. Her nose wet against his cheeks as she licked his face.

Jack breathed in diesel fumes and coughed. He was lying on his back in the engine room. ‘How the Hell -?’

Millie purred loudly, said nothing and leapt onto the floor.

Jack coughed again and got to his feet, leaning against the engine room wall for support. The dead cat was still lying on the trestle table, its eyeless sockets staring at nothing.

He was back, but Sarah was still out there somewhere. Jack lifted Millie up and carried her into the bedroom. Her company was welcome right now, but he knew it was just a distraction from what he had left behind.

The boat rocked as he collapsed on the bed, his head filled with the Shade and the otherworldliness of the Gloomworld. He should call Grace and tell her what had happened but he knew she’d be asleep. His eyes closed and then darkness took hold, pulling him down.

Chapter 16

Jack woke with a pounding headache and for a moment all sense of place was lost to him. Every muscle in his body ached, even his eyes hurt. He stared up at a damp patch on the ceiling and listened as wind whistled through a crack in the kitchen window.

Millie was curled up at the end of the bed. Jack glanced up and wondered how much she remembered of last night? Not that there was much chance getting anything out of her. ‘Get off my bloody leg!’ He yanked it free. A slow numbing pain. He tried to work some circulation into his limb while Millie had settled on top of the other. ‘Jesus!’

Six-thirty. He glanced at his watch not once but twice, just in case he’d had been wrong the first time and rolled out of bed. Half-an-hour to get ready and make it across town for the early morning briefing.

He stumbled into the bathroom. In the mirror he looked fine, calm even. The pieces inside might be broken, but from the outside he looked like a carefully wrapped present that rattled if you shook it. Truth be told whatever Millie did, he wished she hadn’t. He’d rather have stayed in the Gloomworld with Sarah. That he could handle more than being alive.

Showered and dressed, he headed into the kitchen and emptied half a tin of cat food into Millie’s dish. ‘Eat up.’

Millie looked up at him, waited a moment then stuck her arse in the air as she ate.

Jack shook his head and checked his watch again. Ten minutes.

The smell of rotting flesh hit him as soon as he stepped into the engine room. The dead cat was still lying on the make-shift cutting table, curtains drawn, lights off. The cramped space had an eerie feeling about it, as if all the life had been sucked out of the place.

He put on a pair of latex gloves, wrapped the cat in a fresh black bin-liner, sprayed half-a-can of air freshener into the air and opened the window. He could have left the clean-up till later but the putrid smell would only get worst. Someone was bound to complain and he’d have Environmental Health Officials banging on his door. He really didn’t need that today.

He stood staring, his mind revisiting the otherworldly Hull he had visited last night. Was it really the Gloomworld? No matter how hard he looked he knew he wouldn’t find the

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answer written in the random pattern of turpentine spilt on the floor. That would have to wait until he saw Grace.

As with every other day the sky was as gun-metal grey and the wind was blowing from the north, sending the rain down in arctic sheets. Jack turned up his collar and carried the black bin-liner across the marina, making for the sluice gates. By the time he got there his face was freezing and his hands numb. Wiping rain from his brow, he knelt down, untied the knot on the bin-liner and emptied the dead cat into the water. 'Safe harbour,' he whispered as he shook her free.

When he got back Millie was curled up beside the radiator in the kitchen. 'Come on, up and at 'em.' He nudged her with his foot and got a glowered stare in return.

'There's no point looking at me like that, you've got a busy day catching mice, or whatever it is you do, and I need to be a work.'

Groaning as he knelt down Jack prized Millie away from the warmth and carried her to the door. No sooner had he turned to collect his car keys then his mobile began to ring. It was Ash.

'Jack, where are you?'

'Home. Problem?'

'You were meant to be here by eight, remember?'

'Yeah, well...' He wasn't going to tell her about the dead cat or the Gloomworld.

'Things to do. Give me –' He was about to give an ETA when Ash spoke again.

'Watson come across something you need to see.'

'What is it?'

'You'll see as soon as you get here.'

'I'll be there in fifteen,' Jack signed. 'Make that half an hour.'

'There's something else.' Ash spoke again, her voice taking on a cold edge.

'Go on.'

'Docherty's holding a team brief in an hour. Word is he's organising dawn-raids on known far-right fascists.'

'Jesus!' Jack groaned. Only this one wasn't caused by pain in his limbs. 'I'll be there in ten.'

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Operation *Fuck-up* was about to go into full flow. By the end of the day Docherty will have someone fitted up for the murders of Molly Dullea, Hannah Kowalski and Nicolae Pavlov.

Whoever killed Hannah must have known her. Stands to reason given the prepared meal and the lack of evidence of a break in. Ergo Trainer had to be the prime suspect. They needed to find him as soon as possible. As for the Romanian taxi driver Jack was warming to the theory that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

‘We go in quick and hard. Arrest the suspect, seal off the scene and get them back here as soon as possible.’

Jack stood outside the Major Incident Room and watched as DCI Docherty delivered his briefing. The room was a colourful collection of plain clothes and uniformed officers right up to the outgoing DCC. All eyes were focused on Docherty who looked as if he was in his element standing cock-sure in front of the Incident Board.

It was hard not to interrupt. Docherty’s shock and awe tactics were scribbled on a white board under the heading of Operation *Sledgehammer*. Not Operation *Fuck-up* as Jack thought it should have been called. Still, the end result would be the same. Some poor bastard would be going to prison for something they didn’t do.

A red marker pen underlined the important strategic points: kick down as many doors as possible, go in with extreme prejudice and haul as many low-life bullies as possible back to the station, scare the shit out of them until someone cops for the murders.

Even the DCC seemed impressed and that worried Jack.

‘In the meantime,’ Docherty continued. ‘I can’t emphasise enough how important it is that none of you speak to anyone about this case who isn’t already in this room. If you have the slightest concern that you might say something out of turn, then say nothing at all. Got it?’

A dull murmur rumbled around the room.

‘Off you go then,’ Docherty bellowed, hands clasped behind his back as if he were a Sergeant Major dismissing his troops. ‘And no fuckups,’ he repeated for those who were hard of thinking.

Jack stepped a little way down the corridor as the room emptied.

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Too late.

‘Come to see how to run a proper investigation, Kane?’

He turned to see Docherty standing behind him. The look on the DCI’s face one of utter contempt.

‘You should have come in instead of skulking out here in the corridor. I’m sure everyone would have been pleased to see you.’ The hardness in Docherty’s voice got a few laughs from both uniformed officers and CID as they filed past. ‘Speaking of which.’ Docherty made a show of scanning the corridor. ‘Where’s the rest of the Ghost Squad, out chasing shadows?’ And then he scowled. ‘Your place is in the basement and don’t forget that.’

‘Go fuck yourself,’ Jack mumbled, perhaps louder than he had intended.

‘What did you say?’

Heart thumping, Jack ignored the question. ‘I didn’t know you’d worked out a motive for the murders let alone a suspect.’ He suppressed a wry smile. ‘Sorry did I say suspect, I meant suspects.’

‘Motive? It’s clear the attacks were racially motivated,’ Docherty said through clenched teeth. ‘Some fucking loon thinks they can go around dishing out their own justice. Well, not on my fucking watch.’

Hypocritical bastard. Docherty was infamous for his casual racism. And not just to impressionable new recruits. Much of what he said was edged prejudice to become almost acceptable.

Jack stood an inch or two taller than Docherty and had ten years on him. An advantage perhaps in a fight. Still, it meant nothing when it came to rank. Breaking a senior officer’s nose was a sure-fire way to get yourself suspended and probably kicked off the force. Even if the offending appendage belonged to a fuckwhit like DCI Docherty.

‘Did anyone tell you you’re pissing up the wrong tree,’ Jack said, preferring to go with the unedited version of what was on his mind. Docherty had after all fucked up the investigation into his fiancée’s murder.

‘Don’t get fucking clever with me, Kane, and it’s sir to you.’

‘Respect has to be earned.’

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A thin vein pulsed on the side of Docherty's neck, his face turning dark red as if someone was strangling him. 'As soon as I get Blanchard's job you're out of here; hear me?' He stepped closer and dug a finger in Jack's chest. 'I'll personally make sure your reputation is so tarnished you'll not even get a job flipping burgers at MacDonalds.'

Jack balled his fists and transferred his weight from one foot onto the other. To hell with the consequences, he was ready to take a swing at Docherty when the door to the Major Incident Room opened and Superintendent Blanchard stepped out. All smiles and sparkling insignia.

'Discussing the murders?'

'Something like that, Steve,' Docherty said, turning to face the DCC. 'Kane was just on his way back to the basement.'

'Ah, yes, the dreaded Covid hate crimes. How's that going?'

'Fine, sir,' Jack lied, unclenched his fists and willed them to relax. It was harder said than done. 'I'm just following up a lead on the Stanley Knife murders.'

'Stanley Knife Murders,' Blanchard seemed to consider this for a moment. 'Yes,' he nodded and smiled. 'I like that.'

'We need to follow up leads wherever they lead,' Docherty quickly added, his eyes meeting Kane's. 'Still, I'm sure Operation Sledgehammer will cut the wheat from the chaff.'

'Good man.' Blanchard patted him lightly on the arm. 'Two senior officers working together is just the example we need to set the younger officers. God knows things haven't been easy with the cut back on departmental funding. Still, we are required to provide a high level of service.'

Fuck impressions. Jack couldn't help but notice Docherty's casual use of Blanchard's name. His first instinct had been to break Docherty's nose. Now he changed his mind and wanted to ruin his chances of promotion. Only he didn't have anything to give the DCC that made sense, not yet anyway.

'How's that team of yours shaping up, Jack?' Blanchard nodded in the general direction of the basement. 'Working well together, I hope?'

'Fine,' Jack blustered. 'We're doing just fine. Could do with maintenance taking a look at the radiators mind.'

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‘I’ll see what I can do.’ Blanchard nodded and headed along the corridor towards his office. ‘Stanley Knife Murders,’ he added, pausing for a moment as if considering a title for his memoirs.

Back to reality.

Again, Docherty dug a bony finger at Jack’s chest. ‘Remember what I said, Kane. As soon as my promotion is confirmed you’re out. Now get out of my sight and don’t let me see you up here again.’

Jack looked around. There was no one to see if he gave way to his primal instincts and punched Docherty. Then again there were CCTV cameras on every floor. No. Docherty was a bully and an arsehole. His sort always came up smelling of roses. Far better to choose the time and place of his own battles than be dragged into one of the DCI’s making.

Chapter 17

Jack stood outside the basement office and took a deep breath. It was cold and uninviting out here as it was upstairs. Bastard Docherty. Jesus, the man was a liability. How he got to become a DCI was anyone's guess. Come to think of it he should never have been allowed on the force in the first place. Then again things were different back then.

In the haze of rebounding anger Jack took another breath and pushed open the door. 'Got some good news for me, Constable? I could do with some good news right now.'

Watson looked up. 'Actually, sir. The text messages on Hannah's mobile –'

'What about them?'

'I think we might have something.'

Jack shrugged off his coat, threw it over the back of his chair and headed over to the kid's desk. 'Show me.'

Watson sat back as if inviting Jack to look at the screen. 'You can see where the software algorithm has tried to make sense of the data.'

Jack stared at the jumble of alphanumeric character and it stared back as if taunting a dyslexic. 'English, Constable.'

'It's a bit like doing a wordsearch, looking for associated words or phrases in a jumble of numbers and letters.'

Jack knew what a wordsearch was and that made him feel a little better, a little less old anyway if that was consolation for his lack of technological knowledge. 'What exactly am I looking at here?'

'There.' Watson pointed at the screen.

Jack peered closer at the screen noticing three repeating words. *Station and Burial*, a couple of lines and then *Found*. He knew this because Watson had also highlighted the text. 'What does it mean?'

'I wasn't sure at first and then I found this.' Watson tapped a number of keys on his keyboard and more alphanumeric characters appeared. These gave out more details than the other.

Jack started at them. It didn't take long before a sentence, or part of one at least, took shape. *Burial found ... Station*. 'You say this was sent in a text?'

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Watson nodded.

‘Do you know who sent it?’

‘Mike Trainer, sir.’

‘You sure?’

‘Absolutely. The tagged mobile number corresponds with Trainer’s.’

Watson wrote it down and handed it over.

True enough it matched with that on the screen.

At this point the door opened and Ash stepped inside, wiping her hands on a paper towel.

Engrossed in what Watson had found Jack hadn’t realised she was missing. ‘Where have you been?’

‘Loo.’ Ash nodded in the direction she had come. Wherever that was, presumably somewhere down the corridor. ‘There’s one down here?’

‘Ash shrugged. ‘Of sorts.’ Silent for a moment she took a cereal bar from her pocket and unwrapped it. ‘To be honest, I’d give it a miss if I were you. Then again...’ She smiled. ‘... you are a man.’

Jack ignored the taunt even though he knew Ash was joking. With any luck they might not be down here much longer. He turned back to the kid. ‘Can you get onto Trainer’s network provider and see where he sent the text from.’

Watson seemed to consider this for a while. ‘Might take a while.’

‘Thought you had deciphered the text.’

‘Only part of one, sir. There are many, many more. I need to do the same with them before I can ascertain who the network provider is.’

Jack pinched the bridge of his nose and turned away. ‘Then you’d better get to it, and Constable...’

‘Sir?’

‘As quick as you can, eh.’

The office was freezing. Air gathered in frozen particles and dissipated. Jack glanced at his watch, irritated he had wasted time listening to Docherty’s briefing. Not, only that, he cursed himself for not grabbing a coffee on his way down. He leaned against the radiator, waited a moment and then hit it with the flat of his hand. Bloody thing! The likelihood of the

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three of them freezing to death before maintenance showed up was looking increasingly likely.

‘Sir, you might want to see this.’

Jack groaned, pushed himself away and was surprised Watson had brought up a newspaper article. ‘The picture, where was this taken?’

‘Meaux Abbey. It’s a –’

‘Cistercian abbey founded by William le Gros, 1151 if memory serves me well.’

Watsons turned and stared, mouth hanging slightly open.

‘Don’t look so surprised, Constable. I might be a techno dinosaur, but I know my history. The abbey owned the land of Wyke, purchased from King Edward I way back in 1293 to establish the town of Kingston Upon Hull.’

‘Sorry, sir, I didn’t –’

‘No matter.’

The person in the photograph was Mike Trainer, a university lecturer from Hull. He was smiling to camera and had one hand wrapped around one of his students. It was close to being unacceptable. It had been a long time since Jack had been at university himself but he was sure they had rules about this sort of familiarity.

He waved Ash across. ‘Who does that look like?’

‘Hannah Kowalski?’

Confirmed, Jack stared at the image a while longer. Trainer wasn’t physically well built, nor would he have stood out in a crowd. What would any woman see in him? Jack thought back to Hannah lying in the morgue and could have only imagined the amount of pleasure Trainer got from knowing a woman as attractive as her had fallen for him. It seemed absurd that he would kill her.

‘Where did you get this, Constable?’

‘Hull Daily Mail, sir. Online edition.’

Watson scrolled down the screen and began to summarise the article. ‘Trainer lectured in History at the University. Seems there’s been an accusation against him by one of his students.’

This got Jack’s attention. ‘Go on.’

‘Doesn’t say much more, sir. Only that the police weren’t involved. I guess whatever happened was dealt with internally.’

Internally, my arse. Jack turned. ‘Ash, get onto the university. I want to know if there’s someone I can talk to about these allegations.’

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‘Already on it.’ Ash had her mobile in one hand, empty wrapper in the other. ‘You think Trainer’s got something to do with the Stanley Knife murders?’

‘Not sure. He’s certainly worth looking at. We’ve already got a strong link between him and Hannah Kowalski.’

‘Humberside Police.’ Ash raised a hand inviting silence. ‘I’ll hold....’

Jack’s own mobile vibrated in his pocket, he took it out and glanced at the screen before accepting the call. ‘Doc, what can I do for you?’

‘I’ve got something you might want to see.’

‘Right away?’ It was becoming a day of surprises.

‘I can always show it to Docherty,’ Decker said, a mocking tone in his voice as if that was ever going to happen.

‘On our way.’

Jack had planned to go through the CCTV footage of the train station again, but it could wait. Decker wouldn’t have called unless it was important.

Ash finished her call and hung up. ‘Professor Wheeler’s in a meeting. I’ve left a message for him to call me back.’

‘Wheeler?’

‘He’s our go-to guy if you want to know more about the allegations against Trainer.’

Jack’s mobile buzzed again. He glanced at the screen. A text message from Grace. She wanted to see him. Not at home, the message said, but somewhere he was familiar with. He had a couple of hours and noted down the exact location.

That done he grabbed his coat and headed for the door. ‘Ash with me.’

‘Where we going?’

Jack fished his car keys out of his pocket and shoved one arm into his coat. ‘Decker wants to see us.’

‘Sir?’

Jack turned; it took him time to realise Watson was still sitting there. There were still a few hours till shift end. ‘When you’re done with Trainer’s network provider see if you can do a little digging and get some background information; where he was born, school attended, family, you know the sort of thing?’

A nod.

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‘And Watson.’

‘Sir?’

‘Welcome to the team, the both of us.’

Chapter 18

‘Wanted to see us, doc?’

Decker was sitting in his office, huge hands tapping away at his computer. He turned, glared for a moment as if waiting for his eyes to refocus and smiled. ‘Jack, Ash, come in... come in. Please...’ He indicated an empty chair.

Jack was happy standing and waited for Ash to sit. The room was dry and considerably warmer than outside. The tips of his fingers tingled as his blood thawed. He looked around, still no sign of Decker’s assistant and the examination suite lights were turned off.

‘What’s so important that it couldn’t wait?’

Decker frowned; grey moons hung below his eyes as if he hadn’t slept since they were last here. ‘The lab results from the murder victims.’

‘What about them?’

‘Let’s just say I thought you might want to see them for yourselves.’

Decker looked around as if looking for something, took his glasses from his shirt pocket and put them on. ‘The biochemistry data from both victims are fascinating if not slightly alarming.’

‘In what way?’

Decker opened a file on his desk and flipped it around. ‘There, see?’ He pointed at a row column of figures.

Jack stared at the muddy facts and shrugged. ‘A little help, doc.’

‘Yes, sorry, of course. Olivia’s a dab-hand at these things, sometimes I forget I’m not talking to her. After your last visit, I ran more tests and it appears Ms Kowalski and Mr Pavlov’s internal organs were...’ Decker tapped at the printed figures. ‘... in an advanced stage of decay.’

Jack glanced at Ash who looked every bit as confused as he was. ‘You mean something else killed them?’

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‘Not as such.’ Decker glanced towards the darkened examination suite. ‘They both perished through severe blood loss, brought on by trauma to the throat, that much is clear. It’s just that I wouldn’t have expected to see advanced organ deterioration so soon after death.’

‘Any idea what might have caused it?’ Ash asked.

‘Other than the obvious dehydration of the organs.’ Decker shrugged. ‘Can’t say that I can.’

He turned the file to a set of photographs and laid them out on the desk. They showed limbs, waxy yellow skin, hands and feet. It wasn’t hard to tell which belonged to Hannah and Nicolae. They showed a close up of the victim’s faces. Both had that dark beeswax colour and texture, lips shut and swollen.

‘The last time I saw anything like this was on –’

‘An Egyptian Mummy.’ Ash interrupted.

Decker nodded. A wry smile on his face which gave him the look of a man who was happy to be upstaged for once. ‘Indeed, there is one other thing.’

Jack waited, the doctor had already muddied the waters further, what was another surprise between friends.

‘Aside from the traces of soil in their wounds,’ Decker smiled. ‘And yes, the tests I ran on Molly Dullea showed the same.’ A pause. ‘Where was I...’ Decker sighed. ‘Oh, yes all three victims had large traces of salt in their bloodstreams.’

‘Is that normal?’

‘To some degree,’ Decker shrugged. ‘Salt is a vital part of body chemistry, playing a key role in many functions, from the quality of blood to transmission of nerve signals. The problem we have here is that the blood saturation was much higher than we expect to see.’

‘Meaning?’

‘That, Jack, is the sixty-four-million-dollar questions. Whatever happened to them did so post-mortem. I’ll be able to tell you more when the lab gets back to me with the Carbon-14 analysis.’

‘Carbon - what?’

Decker stared for a moment. ‘You know about Carbon-14 dating, right?’

Jack shook his head.

‘Ms Young?’

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Ash frowned, hesitated for a moment. ‘Something to do with radiation?’

Decker grinned. ‘If you ever get tired of being a detective my dear give me a call, we could do with a few more sharp people in this place.’

Jack stared at the pair and coughed.

Interrupted, Decker ignored Jack, instead focusing on Ash. ‘You’re not far wrong, my dear. Also known as radiocarbon dating, it’s a method of age determination that depends upon the decay to nitrogen. Carbon-14 is continually formed in nature by the interaction of neutrons with nitrogen-14 in the Earth’s atmosphere.’

‘The point - doc,’ Jack said. A clatter of something opening and then closing came from somewhere outside the building, he did his best to ignore it.

‘Once the organism dies...’ Decker let out a long slow breath as if explaining himself to a particularly slow student. ‘... it ceases to absorb carbon-14, so that the amount of the radiocarbon in its tissues steadily decreases. Carbon-14 has a half-life of $5,730 \pm 40$ year. Because carbon-14 decays at this constant rate, an estimate of the date at which an organism died can be made by measuring the amount of its residual radiocarbon.’

Jack got the gist of what Decker had said, he didn’t need to know about the weights and measure, still, each to their own. ‘You think this might have something to do with the organ decay?’

‘Sounds strange I know but it’s possible. The method is widely used by Pleistocene geologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and investigators in related fields.’

‘What about Molly?’

‘That’s another conundrum. Miss Dullea didn’t show signs of deterioration as the other two victims during her autopsy.’

‘And now?’

Decker hesitated for a moment as if he could hardly believe what he was about to say. ‘Advance stages of decay, beeswax colouring and swollen lips.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘You and me both, Jack.’

More pieces of the jigsaw to piece together. Jack glanced at the darkened examination suite and thought he saw movement inside. Dark eyes and purple veins. He said nothing and got to his feet.

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‘Going already?’

‘Duty calls.’

‘I’ll run the biochemistry tests again, see if I can get to the bottom of what’s going on.’ Decker turned to his computer screen and sighed. ‘In the mean time I’ve got this blasted report to write up for Docherty.’

There was a battle to be fought another day. Dr Michael Decker ME vs DCI John Docherty. Oh, joy! It never rains.

Outside, Jack climbed into the driver’s seat and glanced at Ash. He had kept Grace’s promise and not told her about the Shade. Still, he couldn’t help but notice the sparkle had gone from her eyes, and he’d noticed she’d not unwrapped a cereal bar since leaving the office.

‘Problem?’ She scowled at him.

‘No.’

‘Then why are you looking like that?’

‘Like what?’

‘Like I’m going to keel over and die or something.’ Ash’s mobile began to ring, but she ignored it.

‘Might be important.’

‘You can talk.’

‘Fair point. Still –’

‘Alright, alright.’ Ash mumbled something, took the call and hung up.

‘Professor Wheeler is free to see us.’

‘Best get over there and see what he remembers about Mike Trainer.’

Jack drove out of the carpark and caught a glimpse of Olivia in the rear-view mirror. Dressed in green scrubs she was searching through the rubbish bins at the back of the building. Strange thing for a pathology assistant to be doing, not that it was any of his business.

Chapter 19

‘Inspector Kane and...’ Professor Wheeler stood at his office door, a curious expression on his face as if he had forgotten something as he beckoned them both inside.

‘Detective Constable, Young.’

‘Yes, of course, you’re the young lady who called, please, take a seat.’ Wheeler indicated uncomfortable looking plastic chairs arranged in a semi-circle, no doubt placed there for tutorials.

Jack chose to remain standing and this time Ash followed suit.

Wheeler was, what, in his seventies.... possibly early eighties. He breathed loudly as he lowered himself into his chair. He had a healthy mop of silvery-grey hair, less could be said of his eyesight. He wore a pair of wire-rimmed glasses perched on the edge of his nose which he seemed to have great difficulty seeing through. Dressed in a cuffed shirt, black bow tie, tweed jacket and trousers, he looked every bit a professor of history, and comfortable amongst the clutter that littered his office.

‘My secretary tells me you’re interested in Mike Trainer?’ Wheeler smiled but the expression was tight.

‘I believe Mr Trainer worked in your department,’ Jack said.

‘Indeed.’ Wheeler nodded.

‘What can you tell us about Mr Trainer’s time here,’ Jack added, realising the professor wasn’t going to elaborate.

‘Strange fellow, he caused the department a lot of trouble, I can tell you.’

‘Trouble?’

‘And some, Inspector.’ Wheeler stared for a moment as if recalling a distant memory. He shoved his spectacles higher on his nose and glanced around his desk, as if looking for something. ‘Mike lectured on local history while he was here. I think most of the students turned up because they thought they’d get an easy ride to accruing credits towards their degrees. Most of them didn’t stick it out mind.’

‘Dull, was he?’ Ash cut in.

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‘Good heaven’s no.’ Wheeler shook his head. ‘Ah, there you are.’ He picked up a fountain pen from the clutter on his desk, stretched back in his chair and dropped it into his jacket pocket. ‘I’ve been looking for that damn thing since yesterday.’

‘Professor?’

‘Sorry?’

‘You said Mike Trainer’s lectures were anything but dull?’

‘Yes, of course. The stuff he was teaching, now how can I put this?’ Wheeler paused, shook his head as if trying to dislodge jammed fragments of memory and continued. ‘It was what you might say were on the fringes of academic theory, mythology, that sort of thing. Mike was very intense, confrontational some might say, when challenged by his students.’

‘Did he ever get aggressive?’

‘Not as I recall, Inspector. His teaching methods did frighten many of his students off, but never aggressive.’

Jack tried to square what Professor Wheeler had said with the image of Trainer in the article Watson had shown him. Average, wouldn’t stand out in a crowd. If there was any great intensity to Mike Trainer, he was keeping it well hidden.

‘You said Mr Trainer pushed the boundaries of academia, Professor,’ Ash said. ‘Was he involved in any unusual research projects?’

‘There was talk of him working on a private research project during his spare time.’ Wheeler patted his breast pocket as if to make sure his fountain pen was still there. ‘Rumour had it that he was close to unearthing something or other. Academics can be awful gossips, if not a little spiteful in nature.’

‘Do you know what it was?’ Jack cut in.

‘Not a clue, as I’ve already said Inspector, Mike was very private when it came to his research.’

‘Why did he leave?’

‘A confidential matter.’

‘Off the record.’ Ash added with a smile.

Wheeler rolled his shoulders. ‘It’s really not my place to say, but Mike’s leaving was all very amicable in the end. Still, I can’t say there weren’t those in the department who were only too happy to see him go.’

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‘You said Trainer was an expert on local history and mythology, which one did he lecture in mostly?’

‘That’ll be mythology. I do believe he started to veer towards the supernatural, ancient rituals... gods and demon, that sort of thing.’

‘Demons?’ Jack began and glanced at Ash.

‘I’m afraid so, Inspector,’ Wheeler sighed. ‘Mike started to neglect his academic responsibilities when he got mixed up with such nonsense’

‘Did he ever show an interest in Paragon Station?’

‘Mike showed interest in a lot of things, Inspector. Paragon Station, I don’t recall.’ Wheeler shook his head. ‘It was such a long time ago. I do remember he spent a lot of time reading up on books about Jewish history.’

‘Any idea why?’

‘Sorry, Inspector, no one knows what happened to him after he left the university. You never said what this was all about, has Mike got himself in trouble with some young lady?’

Jack didn’t answer the question. He was here to get information not to give it out. ‘Why do you say that, Professor? Have there been other incidences?’

A pause, then Wheeler coughed. ‘There was a young lady, a student, I believe. They spent a lot of time together and I dare say their relationship, whatever form it took, was one of the reasons the university was only too happy to see him go.’

Jack took out a photograph of Hannah Kowalski. ‘Is this the young lady?’

Wheeler stared at it for a while and slowly shook his head. ‘Sorry, Inspector, I can’t say one way or the other. I have taught so many students over the years, undergrad and postgrads, they all start to look the same after a while.’

‘No matter.’ Jack scribbled down his number and handed it to the Professor. ‘If you think of anything else, I’d be grateful if you give me a call.’

Back at Divisional, Ash went down to the basement office. Instead of following Jack headed for the canteen. He grabbed three cups of coffee and whatever passed as edible from the hotplate. He headed towards the backstairs to find Docherty waiting for him.

‘I was wondering when you might put in an appearance?’

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Jack pushed passed the DCI, happy to pretend he hadn't heard him.

Too late.

Docherty stood in front of him and blocked his path. 'I asked you a question, Kane.'

'It's been a busy day, sir.' Jack bit down on his words and glanced down at the pastries balanced on the tray he'd borrowed from the canteen. Breakfast was a long time ago and they'd only had black coffee since.

'And what have you got to show for it, eh?' Docherty's voice was typically unfriendly, but there was something else there. The DCI almost beamed, as if pleased with himself.

'Connections, mostly...' Jack shrugged. 'That and more questions.' Docherty was the last person he wanted to discuss his investigation with. He'd much rather be boiled alive.

'Let me guess, the mysterious phantom seen jumping under a train?' Docherty snorted. 'Next you'll be telling me you've seen the ghost of Jack the fucking Ripper haunting the Old Town.'

Bastard!

Jack pushed forward, half expecting Docherty to stop him. But he just stepped aside. Now he really knew something wasn't right.

'The Stanley Knife murders,' Docherty said.

Jack stopped mid-way on the stairs and turned, spilling coffee onto his hands. 'What about them?'

A ridiculous grin crossed Docherty's face. 'We've already got a suspect in custody.'

'Suspect?' Jack stopped himself from heading back. He had forgotten about Docherty's Operation *Sledgehammer* and the poor bastards caught in its net.

'It's only a matter of time before he confesses.'

Time? So, Docherty hadn't broken him yet.

'Where are you going?'

'To do my job.'

'You're wasting your fucking time!'

Jack headed for the basement ignoring Docherty's words as they echoed around the concrete stairwell. He wasn't the only one in the station who wanted to beat the shit out of

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DCI. Tempting though it was, he had Ash and Watson to think about. They were his team now. Whether Docherty got Blanchard's job or not, he had no intention of toing the line.

Chapter 20

Jack eased open the basement door with the tips of his fingers, stepped inside and pushed it to with his foot. He lowered the refreshments tray on to the nearest table – which happened to be Ash’s – she looked up.

‘Have you heard?’

‘About Docherty?’ Jack tried not to sigh. ‘I bumped into him on the way down.’

‘What do you think?’

‘About what?’

‘His arrest?’

‘He’s pissing in the wind.’

Ash picked up one of the drinks, stuck it under her nose and sniffed. ‘Jesus! what is this?’

‘Coffee. It’s all they had.’

Jack handed Watson one of the other drinks and passed around the croissants.

‘Thanks.’ The kid bit into his pastry, chewed for a while and swilled it down. No complaints there.

Jack took what was left and headed over to his desk. ‘Have you got a name for the poor bastard they’ve got in custody?’

‘Simon Speight.’ Ash pushed her croissant aside, rummaged around in her desk drawer and came out with a cereal bar. The thing looked like it had been run over by a lorry, didn’t stop her from eating it though.

‘Where did you get the info from?’ Jack settled back in his chair, sipped his own coffee and bit into his pastry. One was cold and weak, the other bland and rubbery.

‘I did some digging.’

‘What about Trainer, any news?’ Jack said, forcing down what might have passed as a continental breakfast two weeks ago.

Watson cleared his throat and wiped his mouth. ‘I’ve pieced together a couple of the text messages Trainer sent.’

‘And?’

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‘Looks like he might have been having an affair with one of his pupils. I’m guessing the university didn’t know and when they found out –’

‘Sacked him.’

The kid looked up and frowned. ‘You knew about it?’

Ash and I went to see his old boss at the university. ‘They didn’t say as much but it looks as if Hannah Kowalski was one of his students, anything else?’

‘A number of possibilities but it’d take time to put them together.’

‘Stick at it.’ Jack gave the kid an encouraging nod. Digging through someone’s personal messages wasn’t an easy job. Still, any bit of information was useful right now.

‘Why arrest Speight?’ Jack threw the question out to the room hoping someone might answer.’

‘Racial harassment, intimidation, stalking,’ Ash said, flipping through her notebook which suggested she had done more digging than she had let on.

‘Was he ever charged?’

‘One restraining order and a couple of cautions. That’s it.’

It didn’t add up. Jack stood up and crossed over to the Incident Board. Molly, Hannah, and Nicolae – all dead and Docherty was wasting time arresting petty crooks. Fucking idiot. ‘He didn’t do it.’

‘What?’

‘Speight didn’t do it.’ Jack turned. ‘I’ve come across his type before, he’s nothing more than a coward who gets off on threatening people. All bark and no balls.’

‘What about Docherty, should we tell him?’ Ash asked.

Jack shrugged. ‘Let him figure it out for himself.’

‘What if he doesn’t. What if –’

‘Speight goes to prison?’ Jack cut in. ‘No one’s going to lose any sleep if he does. His neighbours will probably throw a party and sleep a lot easier at night.’

‘Sir, you might want to see this,’ Watson said. A soft growl of tiredness to his voice.

‘What is it?’

‘The CCTV from Paragon Station. I thought I’d take another look to see if there’s a glitch in the system that might explain how the man you were chasing vanished.’

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Jack walked over and watched as Watson replayed the footage. ‘What exactly am I –’ He stared at the date stamp at the top of the screen. ‘This was taken the day after Molly’s murder.’

Watson nodded. ‘That’s not all.’ He changed cameras and a group of people stood frozen by the pause button.

‘Platform Two?’

‘Six-thirty, yesterday morning.’

‘Shit! Whoever the man was, he didn’t die under the train, unless we’re looking at his ghost.’

Watson clicked his mouse. The camera zoomed to the far end of the platform. ‘If you look closely... there.’ He pointed at the screen.

Jack leaned in. Nothing moved for a moment and then a dark figure came into view. He waved Ash over. ‘Male or female?’

‘Definitely male.’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘Gut feeling, that and the way he moves.’

Ash was right. There was a definite masculinity about the man’s gait.

‘Could be an engineer?’ Watson offered.

Jack shook his head. ‘No high viz jacket. Is there any footage showing his face?’

‘Sorry, sir, this is as good as it gets.’

‘What about the cameras outside the station?’

‘Already looked. There are images of people coming and going, but it’s hard to make out anything concrete.’

Jack watched as the man in the long military style coat disappeared from view.

‘Where did he go?’

‘Don’t know, sir. I’ve played the footage over and over and there’s no sign of him.’

‘Does he reappear?’

‘No, sir. The man does the same thing day after day.’

‘How far back have you looked?’

‘Every day for the last month.’

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‘And no one saw him?’ Jack asked himself the question. He watched the man walk the same steps over and over as Watson replayed the footage. There was little doubt in his mind that this was the same man he saw jump in front of a train, only he didn’t. He had found somewhere to hide, a concealed access hatch or whatever the railway terminology was for it.

‘Keep looking. There must be a clearer image of him somewhere.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Jack returned to his desk and slumped down into his chair. You can’t just vanish into thin air. Except that’s what the man had done. He glanced at his watch. Quarter past-six. Where had the afternoon gone. ‘Alright you two, knocking off time.’

‘Sir, I’ve –’

‘Home, Constable, the CCTV footage will still be here in the morning and so will the emails.’

‘But, what if –’

‘That’s an order, Constable.’

Jack stepped in to the corridor and felt the door click at his back. He waited until Ash and Watson were almost at the top of the stairs and locked up. For the first time he noticed someone had stuck an A4 piece of paper on the frame with *Ghost Squad* written on it. CID? Probably. Docherty had been the first to mention it after his *Operation Sledgehammer* briefing. As names go it wasn’t a bad one and if he was honest Jack liked it. What he took exception to was anyone taking the piss. Fuck them, fuck them all. He had lost so much in his life he sure as hell wasn’t going to lose this.

Not yet anyway.

Chapter 21

Darkness had fallen by the time Jack reached Hesse Foreshore.

He parked up, stepped out of his Volvo and checked the location he had written down. It was the right place. Between six and seven in the evening the place was a mecca for dog walkers and white-collar workers seeking fresh air after a day cooped up in their offices. No one was about right now. Jack braced himself against the cold, shoulders tensed, and fists clenched. The rain had done a better job than the pandemic could ever have done at keeping everyone indoors.

‘What do you see?’ Grace said as he approached. She was sitting on a bench high up on a hill overlooking the Humber Estuary.

‘Out there?’ Jack said and sat down beside her. The temperature had dropped well below zero and not for the first time that day his clothes were soaking wet. ‘Nothing.’

‘That’s because you’re not looking.’

‘For what...?’ Jack made a show of looking around. ‘It’s six o’clock on a winter’s night, there’s no one about and it’s Baltic. Am I missing anything?’

‘Darkness, Jack... the darkness.’

‘What about it?’

‘Don’t you see, it’s everywhere. Inside and out.’ Grace rested a hand on his arm and turned to face him.

‘Darkness...?’ Jack began, remembering Grace had told him he’d been infected by the Shade the night Sarah was murdered. He was hoping she had been joking but deep down he knew that wasn’t Grace’s way. She’d never mocked or poked fun at anyone.

‘It’s all energy,’ Grace squeezed his arm. ‘Light and dark, opposite sides of the spectrum. When I’m here reality feels distorted. It feels as if I’m being pulled between two worlds. You felt yourself in the Gloomworld, only it was a different sort of darkness... something more primal.’

Jack nodded.

‘Where did it take you... where did you come out?’

‘Opposite Paragon Station.’

‘Then that’s where the breach is.’

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‘They were there,’ Jack said quietly. ‘Sarah and all the others. I felt them. They were there in the station, only I couldn’t see them.’

‘Help me... please help me.’

‘Jack?’

He tensed, fists clenched ready to hit out and then he remembered where he was. Not in the Gloomworld with Sarah and the others, but with Grace. Beside him she pulled down the sleeves of her cardigan and for the first time he realised she wasn’t wearing a coat. He looked into her sunken eyes. ‘It spoke to me,’ he said after a while. ‘The Shade spoke to me.’

‘What did it say?’

‘Bagahi laca.... something, only it kept saying it over and over.’

Grace released her grip, closed her eyes for a moment and shook her head.

‘What does it mean?’

‘It’s form of repetition used by Shamans to conjure up demons.’

‘Sounds gibberish to me.’

‘It doesn’t have to make sense. The voice of a Shade exploits fear, anger and loss. Your three victims would have experienced these recently. The thing you saw, the fiery red eyes, was a manifestation of the Shade and if I’m not mistaken, it’s seeking a physical form.’

Fiery red eyes, how did –?

Jack opened his mouth to ask the question and closed it again. He knew better than to question how Grace knew things he hadn’t told her. She was psychic after all. ‘What happens if it succeeds?’

‘On Earth as in Heaven.’ Grace stared back out across the darkened waters of the Humber. ‘It will make our world into its new kingdom. A Gloomworld.’

‘Jesus...’ Jack felt his blood run cold. ‘Is that even possible?’

‘All things are possible, first the Shade needs a vessel someone strong enough to give it form in this world.’

You will give yourself to me...

The voice of the Shade in the Gloomworld was alien and at once hauntingly familiar. It was everywhere inside and outside his head. Could it really be him, was he the true vessel?

‘Simon Rutledge he was -?’

‘A vessel?’ Grace nodded. ‘Except he wasn’t strong enough.’

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‘And the others, Molly, Hannah, Nicolae?’ Unable to speak the name Jack didn’t mention Sarah. ‘What about them?’

‘Not as such. A Shade needs to feed. With each soul it takes it becomes darker... stronger. What is left of its victims is cast into the Gloomworld. A Shade becomes part of those it has taken, memories, voice, form... everything, all layered on top of each other. The darkness you have growing inside allowed you to hear them.’

Despite the cold Jack shivered at the thought of all those hands pulling at him.

I brought them here and now they are mine.

‘You have to stop it Jack before it’s too late.’

‘How?’

‘You said you came out at the front of Paragon Station?’

Jack nodded.

‘Then there has to be a doorway nearby.’

‘Doorway, as in -?’

‘You remember I told you the Shade might have been lying dormant somewhere beneath the city?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, it seems I was right. I found a passage in one of my books telling a story about a local man who said he was possessed by a demon and sealed in a chamber beneath the city.’

Jack shrugged. ‘Urban myth. The city’s full of them.’

‘Except this one’s true. Stories are memories that have been forgotten. Many have faded beneath the surface of history. Their true origin can be found if you know where to look. The cat you dissected acted as a guardian and took you to the true source of this particular story.’

‘The Shade?’

Grace nodded.

‘And this man they buried, was he still –’

‘Alive?’ Grace shook her head. ‘They killed him. Or thought they had until the Shade stepped inside and used his body headway until it was time to rise again.’

‘Do you know who or where?’

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‘Sorry, Jack, I don’t. But if you find this doorway you might also find a way to stop it.’

Utter madness - had to be. Jack shook his head. Eighteen months on sick leave and now what, he was growing into some kind of monster unless he found a way to kill a Shade. ‘What about your spirit friends, can’t you get them to help?’

‘My abilities are fading....’ Grace let out a long breath and pulled up her cardigan sleeve, revealing a scar not unlike his own. ‘A Shade also left its mark on me Jack, and now the darkness inside has woken.’

‘You can fight it – right?’ Jack tried to hide the doubt in his voice and failed.

‘I’ve had a long and happy life, Jack,’ Grace offered by way of an answer. ‘Some good, some not so. I hoped I’d have a few more years in me yet. Seems fate has other plans for me.’

‘Fuck fate. You can’t just give up.’

‘Who said anything about giving up?’ Grace smiled. ‘I’ve still got a little fight left in me yet.’

‘What I don’t get is why Hull... why now?’

‘Why anywhere? Humanities at a crossroads, Jack. Covid brought with it a negative energy and conflict. Skin colour, language, disability, sexuality, it’s become the focus of people’s anger and insecurities. And like the pandemic it has never really gone away. We are at war with ourselves, our sense of being. It’s this that has drawn the Shade from its hibernation.’

‘What the – ‘

Jack caught a glimpse of something dark move behind Grace’s eyes, stood and stepped back

‘You’ve no need to worry,’ Grace said. A faint trace of a smile ghosting her face. ‘I’m still in control. I just need a little more time to help you rid the city of this Shade.’

A little more time?

There was more than a nagging sense of unreality to tonight and Grace’s words were the worse. Was this what he faced? Knowing what it might do didn’t make it any easier; only the urge to protect those around him.

His mobile began to ring.

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‘You might want to get that.’

‘What about you?’

‘I’ll be fine.’ Grace reached out and squeezed his hand.

‘You sure?’

‘Of course, Now go! I’ll be in touch.’

‘Kane.’ Jack turned pressed his mobile close to his ear as he strode back to his car.

‘It’s Watson, sir.’

‘What is it, Constable.’

‘The messages...’

‘What about them?’

‘Paragon Station... found something...’

‘Who? Jack fished out his keys, the kid’s voice washed out in a sea of crackle.

‘Trainer, sir... Mike Trainer. He found –’

Jack gripped the phone tighter. ‘Where are you? Constable...?’

No answer came and the line went dead.

Jack climbed into his car and dialled Ash’s number.

‘You’ve reached Ash’s mobile, please leave a message...’

Beep.

‘Sodding hell!’

He hung up and flung his mobile onto the passenger seat. It bounced a little and then settled down quietly. There were so many thoughts going around Jack’s head he didn’t know where to start – which one to focus on first. Ash, Mike Trainer, and Grace. Well, for the time being none of the above. It was already past ten. A beer, hot shower and sleep was what he needed then perhaps in the morning the world will make sense again.

Chapter 22

Jack woke and stared at the glowing lights on the bedside clock. It was five-thirty. Two hours before daylight. There was little point trying to get back to sleep. He hadn't slept more than an hour or two.

Not so long ago, he'd have turned over and enjoyed the warmth of Sarah lying beside him. She slept on her side, mouth slightly open, breathing in slightly apnoeic gasps. Now, that world ceased to exist.

Something was niggling at the back of his mind. He rolled out of bed showered again, the second time in as many hours, he couldn't get rid of the chill in his bones. Millie lay in her basket when he returned to dress. She looked as if she hadn't moved all night. Outside the rain continued to fall. It was getting to the point where it was hard to remember a world that wasn't dark and washed out. Could the city really be in the grips of a Shade? The thought seemed absurd, but so had the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

He reached for his socks and caught a whiff of stale catnip as Millie fussed around him. Jack held his nose; the bitterness cloyed at his throat and made him cough. 'You really need a wash.' Millie headed for the open bedroom door, looked back at him and yawned.

'Yeah, you and me too. Breakfast?' he asked not expecting an answer.

In the kitchen Jack filled Millie's dish. 'That's the last,' he said. 'Unless you want to drop into the supermarket while I'm at work – No? Thought not, then it's back to hunting mice for you.'

Jack settled down to a bowl of Corn Flakes and a slice of toast. He hadn't felt hungry when he started and then his stomach reminded him that he hadn't eaten since lunch time yesterday: an anaemic looking pasty washed down with a mug of lukewarm coffee. He wasn't going to make the same mistake and decided to have a healthy breakfast to get him through the day.

He'd never imagined living on a houseboat, not before he met Sarah. He'd always pictured them as dark cramped spaces owned by travellers and those Yuppie types who had grown tired of life in the big city.

'It's not quite what I expected,' he remembered saying, it was a cold evening in October. Not the best time to view a houseboat that looked as if it been dragged up from the

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bottom of the Humber. The interior smelt damp, the walls bare and the floorboards rotten. Still, for Sarah it was love at first sight. Her eyes sparkling as she explored every nook and cranny. 'It needs a little work, but that's the best part. We can do it up together and it'll be ours.'

There wasn't much storage space and it had taken three round-trips to transfer their stuff from the flat on High Street. At the end of the day a lot of bric-a-brac remained. The walls and shelves were cluttered and what Sarah couldn't find space for she stored in the engine room.

Ours.

Jack didn't care what others thought of him at Divisional or said behind his back: Jack the Tinker, Captain Pugwash, Master Bates...Seaman Johnny, he'd heard them all. This was their dream. His and Sarah's. A long-term project to a simpler life.

He was still thinking about Sarah when Millie brushed up against his legs. 'What? Oh.' He checked his watch. Six o'clock. 'Come on, some of us have to work for a living.'

Millie bared her teeth and backed away.

'Come here you little –' Jack grappled with the not so-little furball and realised her eyes were fixed on the shadows in the corner of the room as if seeing something.

Had something moved?

Jack watched more closely and saw the outline of the ironing board. He picked Millie up and ruffled her fur. 'Some hunter you are, eh. Frightened of your own shadow.'

He'd yet to bag Sarah's possessions for the charity shops and there was still the issue with the engine's leaking fuel pipe. The patched-up job he did yesterday was still holding, for how long he wasn't sure. He needed call an engineer and soon.

The marina was known as little Venice to locals. A large number of shops and restaurants had gone out of business post-pandemic but this was in a wealthy enough part of town where many of the bistro-style cafes and boutiques remained open. As for the rest of the city, it'd take years before the green shoots of economic recovery would start to show results.

Grey concrete slabs glistened in the pre-dawn light as one of the country's once largest fishing ports geared up for the start of another day. Jack stood in the rain and watched it for a while. The cold air cooled his face and pricked at his eyes. Sarah was out there somewhere trapped. He heard and felt her last night. All he had to do was find the door into

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the Gloomworld and bring her home. If only it was as simple as that. Grace was his only hope. That and a miracle.

He headed for his car, placed his mobile on the passenger seat beside him and started the engine. Ash hadn't returned his call and there were no new messages from Grace. Watson had said something last night about Trainer finding something. Too early to say for sure if it had anything to do with the hidden doorway Grace had spoken of, still it was a good a place as any to start looking.

Chapter 23

Jack had intended to go straight down to the basement when he arrived at Divisional but a glance at the custody board showed Simon Speight's name written in white chalked lettering. The man Docherty had arrested for the Stanley Knife murders.

'Whatever you want the answer's no.'

'What makes you think I want something?'

'Because you always do.'

Fair point.

'Well?' Sergeant Maeve Chalmers glared down from the lofty height of her desk.

Transferred in from County Cork, Ireland, she had a reputation for straight talking. She didn't suffer fools gladly, and those who tried... well, the least said the better. '... out with it.'

'Simon Speight.'

'What about him?'

'I need five minutes.'

'No can do.'

'Three...'

'What part of no don't you understand, Inspector?'

'I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important, only –'

'What?'

'I've heard Docherty's going to charge Speight with the Stanley Knife murders.'

'If you have a problem take it up with Docherty. Now if there's nothing else some of us have work to do.'

'The thing is...' Jack stepped closer and lowered his voice. 'I don't think he did it.'

'Speight tell you that himself, did he?' Maeve tilted her head to one side and smiled.

'Thought not.'

'Five minutes and I'll be on my way.'

Maeve leaned forward and lowered her voice conspiratorially. 'If you must know I'm under strict instructions not to let anyone near Speight.'

'Docherty?'

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A nod.

Bastard!

‘It’s not like you, Maeve.’

‘What isn’t?’

‘Taking orders from Docherty.’

‘And you can stop that.’

‘Stop what?’

‘You know what I mean.’

Jack did, still there was no harm in trying. Sergeant Maeve Chalmers and DCI Docherty had been in the force as long as one another and rarely saw eye to eye. ‘I’m serious. Shit has the tendency to get everywhere when it hits the fan, and this one’s got Docherty’s incompetence written all over it.’

Maeve stared for a while, opened the Duty Roster and wrote something down. ‘Two minutes and not a second longer.’

‘Thanks.’

‘I mean it, Jack. Two minutes and not a second longer.’

Cell five was a standard eight-by-six concrete space. It stank of rotten cabbage, disinfectant and piss, the walls were covered in shit graffiti. Speight was lying on a yellow stained mattress with his face to the wall.

Jack kicked the bed. ‘On your feet!’

Speight didn’t move.

‘I said on your fucking feet.’ Jack slammed his foot harder against the bedframe.

‘Oh!’ Speight grunted, rolled over and glared. His head was bandaged and there was dried blood in his hair.

Jack looked the little man up and down: head shaven, love and hate tattooed on his knuckles, everything about him screamed local thug for hire, right down to the swastika on the side of his neck. The only thing that looked out of place was the man’s age and physique. He was, what, sixty... sixty-five and slight with it – probably weighed seven stone soaking wet. Not exactly poster boy material for the Motherland.

‘Who the fuck are you?’

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‘Inspector Kane. I want to ask you some questions.’

‘Go fuck yourself.’ Speight spoke like a man with a broken nose and a lung full of blood.

‘I want to know why you killed Hannah Kowalski?’

Speight laughed. ‘This some sort of trick? That copper who gave me a kicking sent you to get me to confess? Well, you can tell him to fuck off.’ He hawked a phlegm ball and spat it at Jack’s feet.

Nice!

Jack eyed the camera over the cell door. The red-eye wasn’t blinking, which meant it wasn’t working. Or someone had conveniently turned it off. He double gloved, stared at Speight for a while and grabbed him by the throat. ‘I asked you a question, did you kill Hannah Kowalski?’

Speight’s eyes bulged. He opened his mouth to say something and when no words came out shook his head.

‘Were you harassing her?’

Nothing so Jack squeezed harder. ‘Were you harassing Hannah Kowalski?’

A pause and Speight nodded, tears streaming down his cheeks.

‘I’ll, ask you again, did you kill her?’

Speight shook his head, at least tried to. Purple blotches covered his face and his arms went limp. He wasn’t struggling anymore.

Jack released his grip and shoved the little shit onto the floor. He cowered, rocked a few times and scurried away. Jack’s heart thumped and the scar on his forearm began to burn.

Footsteps sounded outside, then a voice.

‘What the fuck do you think you’re doing?’

Shit!

Jack turned to see Docherty standing at the cell door, his face flushed, hands trembling. ‘My job.’

‘And tell me, Inspector, does that involve beating up prisoners?’

Hypocritical bastard!

‘You have no right to be in here,’ Docherty growled, speckles of phlegm gathering at the corners of his mouth.

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More footsteps and Maeve appeared. ‘Problem Chief Inspector?’

‘Too fucking right there is.’ Docherty turned to face her. ‘I told you no one was allowed in to see Speight.’

‘So, you did.’

‘Then tell me, Sergeant, why is he here.’ Docherty pointed a finger at Jack.

‘He was helping me.’

‘What?’

‘I heard choking sounds and when I came to check Speight was on the floor struggling to breathe. Jack was tending to him while I went to fetch the Duty Doctor.’

‘What’s wrong with the panic alarm?’

‘Not working.’ Maeve made a show of pressing it. Nothing happened. She pressed it again and again. Still nothing. She then nodded at Speight. ‘Seems your man has made a miraculous recovery; wouldn’t you agree Jack?’

‘Looks fine to me.’

‘Good, all sorted then.’ Maeve fixed her eyes back on Docherty and smiled.

‘Anything else, I can do for you, Chief Inspector?’

Docherty opened and closed his mouth a few times before the words finally came out. ‘You haven’t heard the last of this both of you.’ And with that he pushed past Chalmers and scurried off.

Maeve waited a moment, hissed out a breath and leaned against the cell door. ‘You owe me, Jack Kane.’

‘He tried to kill me...’ Speight jabbed at Jack. ‘The bastard tried to kill me!’

‘Oh, shut up!’ Maeve slammed the cell door shut.

Jack followed her into the Custody Suite. Speight was still alive, there was that at least. Still, the little shit deserved everything coming his way. He was Docherty’s problem now, let him deal with him.

Chapter 24

‘You did what?’

‘I went to see Speight.’

‘Christ, Jack, talk about sticking your head in the lion’s mouth.’ Ash was sitting at her desk. She looked up from her computer, sighed and stretched. ‘What happened?’

‘Docherty, and before you say it, I know I shouldn’t have been there.’

‘Then why did you go?’

‘I wanted to see Speight for myself,’ Jack said.

‘For what he did to Hannah or because of the Stanley Knife murders?’

‘Both!’

Jack headed for his desk, sat and stared across at the Incident Board. The faces of Molly Dullea, Hannah Kowalski and Nicolae Pavlov all stared back. All that was missing was Sarah’s.

‘You alright?’

‘Fine.’ Jack blinked and looked up to see Ash was staring at him. Had he zoned out for a minute or two?

A tap-tap-tapping came from Watson’s desk but Jack wasn’t paying attention. His gut ached and his forearm burned. How far would he really have gone with Speight? He’d seen the darkness move behind Grace’s eyes. She had moved slowly as if struggling to keep it under control. There was only one outcome, or so he had been led to believe.

Go on say it, he told himself. Ask her. ‘Are you... okay?’

‘Fine.’ Ash seemed taken aback by the question. ‘Why shouldn’t I be?’

‘No reason, It’s just that –’

‘What?’

Jack lost his nerve and shook his head. ‘Nothing, forget I asked.’

‘Suit yourself.’

‘Gotcha!’

Both turned towards Watson, but it was Jack who spoke first. ‘Something wrong, Constable?’

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‘Fringe...’ Watson smiled, showing a chipped front tooth. His eyes bright but heavy through the lack of sleep. ‘That’s the key.’ He began tapping away on his keyboard again, paused and looked up beaming. ‘Trainer was involved with a number of fringe groups during his time at the university. He was doing research into some sort –’

‘Demonic possession.’

‘Sir?’ Watson sagged as if someone had let the air out of him.

Ash glared and Jack raised his hands in mock surrender. ‘Okay... okay.’ He headed over to Watson’s desk. ‘Show me what you’ve got, Constable.’

Watson highlighted a paragraph of text on his laptop. ‘HullPsychics, ConspiracyRUS, InsominioPara, that’s short for –’

A bunch of nut Jobs.

‘I know what it’s short for, Constable. What I want to know is what they’ve got to do with Mike Trainer?’

‘They’re all his cyber buddies.’ Watson said. ‘Well, when I say buddies, what I mean is they get together on chat forums and discuss anything from politics to more ethereal subjects.’

‘You mean as in abstract, arcane, abstruse, difficult to prove.’

‘Sir.’ Watson nodded his face pale reflected in the laptop screen.

‘How many of them are there?’

‘It’s hard to tell, sir. What I’ve shown you is just a sample. Trainer could have used pseudo names in a number of chat rooms and discussion forums, some academic, others not so.’

‘What about this lot?’ Jack pointed a finger at the screen. ‘What sort of things are they saying?’

‘Most are involved with one sort of conspiracy theory or another.’

‘You mean like UFOs and who killed JFK?’

‘Some of them are like that,’ Watson said and began tapping at his keyboard again.

‘Others are really far out. Take the Order of Nine Angles for example –’

‘Did you just say angles and not angels?’

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‘Sir. They are a satanic occult based here in this country. They practice black magic and satanic symbolism. Much of what they do as you say is archaic and dates back to Aleister Crowley’s time.’

Crowley; the infamous occultist. Jack shook his head remembering Professor Wheeler’s words. ‘*Supernatural, ancient rituals... gods and demons.*’

‘How did you find all this stuff?’

‘I ran an algorithm last night, sir...’ Watson shrugged as if it were the easiest thing in the world. ‘... picking out patterns of key words found in Trainer’s texts, starting with *Paragon Station*. There were other words as well such as *Chamber* and *Dybbuk* –’

Jack remembered Watson’s call. ‘I thought I told you to go home?’

‘I did.’ Watson’s face reddened. ‘I logged onto the police server remotely.’

Using his initiative. Not to mention plain stupid. ‘You know what’ll happen if you get caught, don’t you?’

‘Sir?’

Jack wasn’t sure the kid really did and told him anyway. ‘They’ll have you hung drawn and quartered and that’s even before your career’s got started. That’s not the worst of it. Professional Standards will have you on a charge of misuse of equipment in public office. Christ you could even go to prison.’

‘Yes, sir... sorry, sir.’

Jack sighed. ‘Just make sure you don’t get caught. This Dybbuk thing, tell me about it.’

‘It’s a malicious mythological demon from Jewish folklore said to hold the power to invade and possess a body. It leaves the host body once it has accomplished its goal, sometimes after being exorcised. I can show you a picture if you want?’

‘No need.’

So, there was Trainer’s obsession with Jewish history. Only the Dybbuk Watson mentioned sounded more like a Shade.

Watson cleared his throat. ‘There was something else, sir.’

There always was. ‘Go on.’

‘I can’t be entirely sure but it looks as if Trainer did most of his research on the Darknet.’

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‘Dark what?’

‘It’s part of the internet.’

‘Which part?’

‘The part that’s not open to public view. It’s often associated with illicit trading, guns, drugs, pornographic material, you know that sort of thing.’

‘Show me.’

‘I –’

‘Problem, Constable?’

‘It’s just that...’ Watson lowered his voice to a whisper and glanced towards the door, as if expecting someone to come through. ‘All darknets require specific software installed or network configurations made to access them, I’ll have to breach the firewall and install a customised browser to gain access.’

‘And?’

‘It’s not exactly... that is to say it’s frowned upon, sir.’

‘Neither was accessing the police server from your bedroom, Constable.’

A blush broke out over Watson’s face but he didn’t say anything.

‘Can you find out what Trainer was up to on this Darknet?’

Watson nodded. ‘Think so.’

Footsteps sounded somewhere above, a clanging of a cell door, and the echoes of a stray conversation perhaps. *Ghost Squad*. Fuck them. If they thought they were chasing ghosts then that’s just what they’d do. ‘Then get to it, Constable.’

‘Sir.’

Jack watched Watson work. There was an air of confidence in the kid. He was in his element and clearly had a talent for this sort of thing – whatever it was he was doing.

‘Bingo!’

Jack leaned forward. ‘What am I looking at?’

‘An encrypted code,’ Watson said. ‘It’s the reason why the darknet remains anonymous. Think of it as a black hole in the ether. Somewhere where whistle-blowers, journalists and news organisations can exchange communications whilst remaining nameless.’

Nameless. ‘And Trainer was hiding out there?’

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‘Looks like it, sir.’

Watson set to work again and brought up page after page of files. ‘Everything you could ever want to know about UFOs, alien abduction, the Bermuda Triangle, Satanism, telepathy, clairvoyance, ghosts, Loch Ness monster. All Trainer’s and that’s’ just a small part.’

Jack’s eyes scanned the text. None of it made sense. ‘Why hidden?’

‘Sir?’

‘If Trainer was onto something why keep it hidden?’

‘I was thinking the same.’ Ash’s reflection appeared in Watson’s laptop screen. Her face inches from Jack’s as she turned to face him. ‘It must have taken years to amass this amount of information. Why hide it. Surely, he’d want the world to know, especially his on-line chat-buddies?’

‘That’s the whole point.’ Watson shrugged. ‘The Darknet is where people want their work to remain anonymous. That’s odd.’

‘What is?’

Watson clicked on a file. ‘Erm!! Not quite sure.’

Ordo Templis Baphomet

Jack stared at the highlighted name on the screen but didn’t say anything.

‘Must have something to do with Satanism, or black magic.’ Watson tapped at his keyboard and began reading. ‘Its specific goal is the creation of a new human species and a civilization appropriate to the new type of human being.’

‘Jesus!’ Ash shook her head and backed away. ‘That’s some heavy shit.’

Jack knew exactly what she meant.

A Shade, the Gloomworld and Simon Rutledge back in ’67, seeing it here made it all the more real. ‘Is this what Trainer was researching?’

Watson nodded. ‘Guess so.’

There was no way of knowing how Trainer had found out about the *Ordo Templis Baphomet*. Only that it must have something to do with Paragon Station and the hidden doorway Grace had mentioned.

Watson looked up. ‘Want me to keep looking, sir?’

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‘Sorry?’ Jack blinked and tried to focus. His head fuzzy as he tried to make sense of what Watson had discovered.

‘Trainer’s research, you want me to keep looking through it?’

‘Yes, keep at it,’ Jack said quietly. ‘And Watson.’

‘Sir.’

‘Good work.’

Jack stared deep into Ash’s eyes as he met her gaze. ‘We need to track down Trainer. Get onto his friends, contacts from the university, anyone who might know where he might be. We have to assume he’s gone to ground and is hiding out somewhere.’

‘On it. What about you?’

Jack realised he hadn’t eaten since breakfast and his body craved coffee. He kicked the radiator and got a gurgled moan in response. ‘I’ll hunt down some coffees. Who knows I might get lucky and get the engineer Blanchard promised us,’ Truth be told he needed to get out and call Grace. And if he was lucky, he’d bump into Docherty and get a chance to vent some of the anger he felt welling inside.

Chapter 25

Grace's mobile was switched off and she wasn't answering her landline either so Jack headed up to the canteen in search of drinks.

He got as far as the third floor and paused to stare out of the window. The downpour hadn't let up and the sodium glow of the street lights gave the morning a jaundiced feel as if the city wasn't well. He rubbed at the burning sensation deep inside his scar. Trainer was out there somewhere. Had he discovered where the Shade was hiding out? If so, there was every chance he'd been possessed. Not by a Dybbuk but something far worse

Wet footprints led up to the canteen. Jack followed them in search of refreshments.

'There you are, I was hoping to bump into you.'

He looked up to see a man standing in front of him. Chief Superintendent Blanchard his face unreadable as he stared back.

'Sir.'

'Call me Steve, Jack.'

'I'd rather not, sir. If it's all the same to you?'

Blanchard smiled although the creases didn't go all the way to his eyes. 'You know what I like about you Jack?'

'No, sir.'

'You're not afraid to speak your mind.'

A compliment? Jack took it as one. 'Thank you, sir.'

'I assume you've heard the news?'

Jack had, some time ago as it was. 'About your retirement? Yes, sir.' A police station was the worse place to keep a secret. Once the Duty Sergeant got to know so did everyone else. 'Sorry to hear you're going.'

'Don't be, I've had a good innings. It hasn't been easy mind. There have been more downs than ups. Still, it was good while it lasted.'

An awkward silence filled the space between them.

Blanchard was in full battle dress, razor sharp creases with his hat tucked under one arm. Jack wasn't aware of any meeting, then again how would he know, tucked away in the basement?

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‘I remember when all this was fields,’ Blanchard said, epaulets sparkling under the artificial light as he turned towards the window. ‘Then again, we are talking of nigh on thirty years ago. Where does the time go?’

Jack kept his silence, unsure what to say. The canteen was only twenty feet away. He could slip away as Blanchard recollected the past, the coward in him tempted. Instead, he stood and listened.

‘At fourteen I started life at the fish factory on Glasgow Street, did I tell you that?’

Jack shook his head. ‘No, sir.’

‘Another time, maybe.’

Blanchard grinned, a lopsided smile. ‘When you get to my age the past always seems rosier than it actually was. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know I’ve been assured by Superintendent Kendrick that your departmental budget will be ringfenced against what ill winds might befall the station.’

Jack nodded and hoped this little pep-talk, or whatever it was didn’t go on too long.

‘You don’t need me to tell you everything’s in a constant flux.’

‘No, sir.’

‘The success of your department, or lack of it could have a bearing on how the police station is run in the future.’ Blanchard creased his face into a frown. ‘Clive told me you went to see Simon Speight?’ His words suddenly hard.

So, this was what it was all about. Docherty telling tales out of school. Not that Jack was at all surprised.

‘Yes, sir, I –’

‘Clive’s old school, Jack, and he doesn’t like anyone interfering with his investigation.’

Interfering? ‘With respect, sir, Speight might be a racist little shit but it doesn’t make him a killer.’

‘We’re all capable of unspeakable violence,’ Blanchard softened his tone. ‘What you need to understand about Docherty is that you can’t expect him to accept your theories like he’s been handed a cup of coffee.’

Theories? ‘Is this about the man at the train station, because if it is –’

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‘Don’t get me wrong,’ Blanchard continued. ‘I have an open mind but there are others in the station who are less so. You have my full backing. But, if your department’s going to work, you’ll have to communicate better with CID, pool intelligence and resources, you know that sort of thing.’

Throw his weight behind Docherty’s investigation? That was never going to happen. As for the suggestion he didn’t listen to Docherty that was rubbish. Of course, he listened. It was just that much of what the DCI said was a load of bollocks.

‘Collaboration works both ways, sir.’

Blanchard nodded, but Jack could see he wasn’t listening.

‘Good I’m glad we’ve had this little chat. I’ll make sure Kendrick is brought up-to-date with the good work you’re doing; in the mean-time see if you and Docherty can get your heads together and get me a result on these Stanley Knife murders. It’ll be good all round and have a positive result before I leave.’

Jack nodded eager to bring the conversation to a close and headed for the canteen. He didn’t give a shit what role politics had to play in who got the Chief Super’s job. What mattered more was that he needed a caffeine fix and he’d promised Ash and Watson drinks.

‘The usual?’ Jack reached the front of the queue and a tray was pushed in front of him.

He took the coffee but waved away the bacon sandwich. ‘Give me a tea and another coffee.’ He glanced down at the remaining dried-up food under the serving hatch and decided not to go there. Instead, he waited until the tattooed woman had finished making the drinks and turned away. Blanchard was anything but a pushover. So, why was he at pains to mention departmental backing? As for him and Docherty playing nice together, like that was ever going to happen.

Chapter 26

The noise of the police station quietened to a dull murmur as Jack took the back stairs to the basement. The concrete steps were cracked and grey in colour, damp patches on the walls forming patterned constellations. Moving shadows reminding him of what he had seen in the Gloomworld.

It wasn't until he was almost at the office door that he heard two voices coming from inside. One was PC Watson's and the other wasn't Ash's but DCI Docherty.

'If there's something you're not telling me, Constable?'

'No, sir.'

'Only if there is it will have serious consequences on the rest of your career – do you understand?' Docherty's voice was deep and guttural, exposing the cold intention beneath.

'Yes, sir.'

Jack edged closer to the door. Anger reeled inside. He adjusted his balance on the tray of drinks he was carrying and was about to step inside when Watson's voice sounded again.

'DI Kane asked me to go through the Covid Case files, sir.' His words accompanied by the clattering of fingers on a keyboard.

'Take these for example,' Watson continued. 'A report of an old lady who called the station to report a neighbour for having a party. Someone else got into a fight because they wouldn't wear a face mask. And then there's this black guy, hospitalised because someone blamed him for bringing the virus into the country. Isn't what we're doing important, sir? People are dying and the world's going mad.' More clattering of keys.

'I don't give a monkey's arse about the Covid cases or whether some fucker from Swazi Land has been attacked.' Docherty's voice rose. 'I want to know what Kane's up to!'

'Up to, sir?'

'You heard me. Up to! A woman gets her throat cut and Kane loses her killer. He then has the audacity to say her attacker jumped in front of a train. And here's the ball breaker...'

Docherty paused, his voice descending into a conspiracy gruff. 'There's no sign of a fucking body.'

'I wouldn't know about that, sir.'

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‘You think this is a joke, Constable?’

‘No joke, sir.’ The tapping of keys stopped and Jack reached for the door handle.

Watson’s voice stopped him. ‘With all due respect, sir, we’re not all here to...’

A snort. ‘I don’t give a shit what colour you are, Constable Kane is up to something and I want to know what it is?’

‘Up to something, sir? News to me.’

Jack could see Watson staring at the DCI, a quizzical look in his eyes.

‘Simon Speight, has Kane mentioned him?’

‘No, sir.’

A moment’s silence, broken by the sound of fingers moving across a keyboard in quick succession.

And then –

Docherty lowered his voice further which wasn’t a good sign. ‘I want a report on my desk first thing tomorrow detailing everything Kane’s said and done while you’ve been down here.’ A pause. ‘And, Constable...’

‘Sir?’

‘If I find out you’ve told Kane about our little chat, I’ll cut your balls off and make you eat them. Understand?’

‘Understood, sir.’

Bastard!

Footsteps sounded on the other side of the door.

Jack stood back, adjusted his grip on the tray and steadied himself. The door opened and Docherty scowled. ‘Kane, what the fuck are you doing down here?’

Jack eyes met the DCI’s. ‘I work down here. Remember?’

‘Don’t get fucking clever with me.’ A thin vein pulsed on the side of Docherty’s neck. ‘You’re up to something and when I find out I’ll have you kicked off the force so fast you’ll barely have time to breathe let alone fart.’

‘Sir, is that a threat?’

‘A promise. Now, get out of my way.’

Jack waited a moment, smirked and stepped aside. ‘Sir.’

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The smell of whisky on Docherty's breath was overpowering as he pushed past. A promise, who was he kidding? The useless piece of shit couldn't find his arse with his hands tied behind his back.

He kicked the office door open with his foot and stepped inside.

Watson was sitting at his desk, looking as if being accosted by Docherty was an everyday occurrence. 'You alright, sir?'

'Me, alright?' Jack almost laughed. 'I should be asking you.'

Watson looked a little embarrassed. 'I thought, that is to say you look as if you're going to give him a piece of your mind.'

Jack shook his head. 'Not right now, Constable. Although another run in with Docherty and I might just do that.' He looked around. 'Where's Ash?'

'DS Young went off to... ' Watson broke off and nodded in the general direction of the corridor.

Jack's guess was that he meant the loo. He didn't want to ask but asked anyway. 'How long was Docherty down here?'

Watson shrugged. 'Five... ten minutes. He turned up not long after I ran a PNC check on Mike Trainer.'

Coincidence. Not bloody likely. 'Did you find anything?'

The look on Watson's face was one of annoyance. 'Didn't get the chance, sir. I was kicked off the server as soon as I entered his name.'

So, that was their game, eh. Docherty had one of his goons in CID monitoring what we were up to. So, why all the questions?

Jack dished out the drinks. It was then that the door opened and Ash stepped inside, wringing her hands together as if trying to work loose her skin. 'Did I tell you not to use the loo down here, there's green stuff and slime all over -' She broke off seeing them both staring at her 'What?'

'Docherty,' Jack said.

'What about him?'

'Caught him giving Watson a hard-time while you were out.'

'Me, what about you?'

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Jack shrugged. 'Fair point.'

'What did he want?' Ash picked up her drink and sniffed. It must have past-muster because she didn't complain as she sat down. 'What did Docherty want?'

'Digging. He's probably frightened we're going to steal his glory and ruin his coronation.'

'Glory as in Simon Speight?'

Jack nodded. 'That's the one.' he sipped his coffee and turned towards his desk. The liquid hot as it warmed his insides. With Docherty it was always about the blame game. He cocked up investigation after investigation and got someone else take the blame. God only knows how he hadn't been sacked. Jack turned back to Watson. 'Did you get anything at all on Trainer?'

Watson nodded. 'I figured they'd not expect me to try so I ran a few checks whilst DCI Docherty was here.'

Under the DCI's nose, cunning little sod. Jack liked it. He crossed over to Watson's desk. 'What did you find?'

'No record of him being in trouble with the police. A university degree in History. Graduated, went straight into teaching. Before that three-years at Sir Leo Schultz Comprehensive on the Orchard Park Estate.'

Jack knew the place well. As with many high schools it had been knocked down to make way for a community hall. Social cohesion funded by private money. It spoke of a city ticking along, not quite perfect but not falling apart either.

Watson powered up his laptop and brought up the University of Hull Portal login. A few taps and he was in under the guise of A. Nom. Jack didn't ask how he did it and watched as he navigated the system from Student Records, to Academic History and from there to Personal Details.

'What am I looking at?' Jack said. He really ought to book himself in for a few hours IT training so he didn't have to rely on the kid as much.

'There.' Watson went back to the library section and pointed at the screen. 'Can you see it?'

Jack couldn't.

'Kingston Upon Hull Gateway to the Americas: Victorian Transmigration.'

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Now Jack saw it.

‘According to library archives,’ Watson continued. ‘Trainer had this book on permanent loan.’

‘Is that possible?’

‘It is if no one else requests it.’ Ash appeared at Jack’s shoulder, chewing on a cereal bar. ‘Or if there’s more than one copy.’

The title rang a bell, but for the life of him Jack couldn’t figure out where he had seen it. ‘Who wrote it?’

‘Dr Joan Simms.’ Watson began typing again and stopped. That’s odd –’

‘What is?’

‘According to Trainer’s research notes he went to a lot of trouble to reference some of the maps in Dr Simms’s book.’

Was this the key to where the Shade had been hiding out? Jack leaned in closer. ‘Show me. Trainer’s notes... show me!’

‘Can’t.’ Watson grunted, typing a little faster and finally stopped, ‘The directory listing’s there, but –’ Another grunt.

‘What?’

‘It’s hidden on the dark net.’

‘Perhaps he found what he was looking for on the maps’ Ash chipped in. ‘X marks the spot. Like in a treasure map?’

‘My thoughts too.’ Jack stretched out his aching back and straightened up. ‘We know he was researching transmigration, Professor Wheeler said so himself. We still need specifics.’

‘Sir?’ Watson pointed at his laptop.

‘What is it, Constable?’

‘Another one of those conspiracy forums.’

‘And this is important because?’

‘Trainer’s login account, sir.’

‘What was he doing there?’

‘Mostly lurking, logging in to see what others were up to, is my guess. The dark net is full of these sorts of things. The message boards are competitive, people promoting their own

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theories, others feeling threatened by a theory that proves theirs to be wrong. It's a breeding ground for paranoia and narcissism.'

'How much was Trainer involved?'

'A little... a lot. It's hard to tell. Users tend to change their login details in order to remain anonymous. When you get competition as fierce as this sometimes you make mistakes. A little tell, like in a game of Poker. I need to do some more digging but it looks as if Trainer used the pseudonym *Lazarus Junction*. The name appears in Dr Simms's book. Could be a coincidence.' Watson shrugged. 'Worth a try.'

Jack nodded. 'I want to hear as soon as you find anything.'

'Sir.'

'Hold on.' Ash nodded at Watson's laptop. 'If Trainer was researching transmigration, how does that square with dark net conspiracies?'

'Lazarus,' Watson said.

'Sorry.'

'Lazarus, of Bethany. The man Jesus raised from the dead.'

'I know who Lazarus was. What I want to know is what has it got to do with whatever Trainer was looking for?'

Watson shrugged. 'Not sure.'

'When was Trainer's last posting?'

'Five days ago, sir.'

The day before Hannah Kowalski and Nicolae Pavlov's murders. 'I want those maps, Constable.'

Jack headed back to his desk, switched on his computer and selected the video Watson had downloaded for him earlier that day. A click of the mouse and Paragon Station appeared on the screen. He watched as the man in the military style coat stepped in front of the approaching train.

There was still no clear view of the man's face. Jack played the footage again... over and over; still no sodding idea of how he could have vanished. Except that's exactly what had happened. One minute he was there the next, gone.

Bloody hell!

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This was getting him nowhere. He stretched out his back and got to his feet. ‘Ash, with me.’

‘Where are we going?’

‘Paragon Station.’

Jack threw Watson the office key. ‘Lock the door when we’re gone and if anyone comes calling don’t answer it.’

Watson did as he was told, returned to his desk and inserted a memory stick in to his laptop’s USB port. It had been a long time since he had downloaded files from the Dark Net. Firewalls needed breaking and he had to be mindful of tracking Trainer’s changing IP address. All in a day’s work. He watched as the hour glass icon flipped over and over on the screen.

50 %.... 60.... 70... 80...85... 90... 95...

Beep.

Download Complete.

Watson scanned the flash drive and ran the hidden files through several filter programs and waited.

A grainy image of a map appeared on the screen, a two-inch pixelated square at a time. When it was complete, he took out his mobile, brought up Google Maps and began to cross reference each of the points marked in black. Some of the details remained encrypted, but there were enough definable points to work with.

A route took shape. It veered off in random directions. Squinting, Watson took a step back and asked himself the all-important question. ‘What was Mike Trainer looking for?’

And there it was.

Chapter 27

Should have called DI Kane.

Watson stood outside the Tiger's Lair on Hull's Anlaby Road, took a deep breath in and let it out slowly. There was still time. Wasn't there? He checked his watch: 7:15pm. A minute to make the call. Two to three to get a bollocking for not calling earlier. Fifteen... twenty minutes before Kane gets there. Perhaps not. The thing started in 15.

What the hell. There were still hours before he needed to turn in for the night. Then what? Tomorrow morning would bring the gym, a call from his mother and then work. Same old routine. This on the other hand could fast track him to DC, Detective Constable Watson.

The rain fell.

And fell.

Right. Here goes.

Head up, shoulders back and through the pub door. Look like you belong.

'You one of Trainer's people?'

Don't stammer.

Watson smiled at the large Jamaican woman blocking his way.

'Well, are you, or no?'

He nodded, not sure what he was agreeing to. 'Yes, I am.'

'Come... come.'

The dark-skinned woman flicked her head, turned and headed down the pub's entrance hall. Bypassing a crowded bar on one side and a small kitchen-cum-washing-area on the other.

Watson tried not to look, keeping his eyes fixed on the back of the Jamaican woman's head. Everything about her reminded him of his aunt Tilly from Trinidad. Her brisk manner, right down to her rosy cheeks and the way her body wobbled as she walked.

'In here.'

Watson stared at the woman. Tight curls, and dark chocolate brown eyes. Everything. He hesitated for a moment and stepped through a door marked Function Room.

Aunt Till's double didn't follow. She closed the door, but not before addressing the room. 'Front door gets locked at eleven. Make sure you're all out by then.'

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Don't look nervous... don't look nervous.

Watson's stomach tightened as he scanned the room. There must have been what twelve... fifteen people seated in tightly packed hard-backed plastic chairs. He didn't recognise any of them – except one.

'You're late.' This from a man standing at the front of the room.

'Yeah... right, sorry. I was –'

Trainer scowled at him. 'Sit down, we're about to begin.'

Watson did as he was told and let out a slow breath. All eyes were back on the speaker as he stepped onto a raised platform at the front of the room. 'Each one of you have been chosen to witness a remarkable shift in how we view the past, present and the future. Indeed, it will make you question how you see the world and your place in it.'

The knot in Watson's stomach tightened. The only part of the room he couldn't see was a door partly concealed behind by an olive-green curtain.

'What you are about to see is the first of its kind,' Trainer said, eyes dark and shining as he scanned his audience. 'So, I'm asking you all to hand over mobile phones and any other recording devices until the evening is over.'

Shit!

Watson took out his mobile, held it low and flipped open the screen. A single bar flickered on the top right-corner. Strong enough to send a text message.

A faint murmur filled the room as a wooden box was passed round. When it was his turn Watson, coughed, leaned forward and shoved his mobile into his sock.

'Your cooperation is appreciated.' Trainer took the proffered box, secured the lid and set it down at the corner of the room, out of reach but not out of sight. 'Now, if you follow me.'

This was it. The grand unveiling of Trainer's life's work.

Watson held back, eyes darting around the room as everyone shuffled forward. No back-up, one door in, one door out and a weak mobile signal. He wished he'd brought his extendable baton and pepper spray. Too late.

'Follow me.'

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Trainer stepped towards the partly concealed door, took out a key and pulled the curtain aside revealing stone steps leading down into the darkness. ‘Down you go. One at a time and make sure you hold onto the wall.’

‘Where does it go?’ This from a middle-aged man, sporting a red-bow tie.

Trainer scowled at him. ‘You can stay behind if you wish?’

The man teetered on the edge of the steps and looked down. ‘There could be anything down there,’ he muttered but went ahead anyway.

Watson went last. He peered down at the top of a man’s balding head descending into the darkness in front of him, then up at Trainer. Purple marks and dark eyes.

‘Well -?’

‘Right... yes.’

Watson took a deep breath, puffing out his cheeks and stepped into the darkness. Behind came the sound of a door being closed, and locked and then heavy footsteps. Voices came from below as well as grumbling and cussing in the void.

Watson moved slowly, mobile phone digging into his calf.

‘Keep moving.’ Trainer strode past him as if he knew every inch of the confined stairwell.

Watson followed and joined the rest of the gathering at the bottom of the stairs. Hot breath and sweaty bodies filled the space around him.

A flicker of light as Trainer lit a burning torch and took it from the wall. Going by the smell of sulphur and lime it was the real thing. Their host had clearly gone all out to create a dramatic atmosphere.

‘This way...’

Through another door and along a narrow tunnel. Tiny white flakes fell from the roof, flickering in the torchlight. The place looked as if it hadn’t been used in decades. Dried wood and bits of fallen masonry littered the floor. Something rumbled above and everything shook.

‘Through here.’

Heads down and hands tucked in tight they entered through a narrow arch.

A quick calculation placed them beneath Paragon Station, somewhere near the junction of Platform One – long since mothballed. Watson knew this because he had studied the maps Trainer had referenced from Dr Simms’s book.

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‘Ladies and Gentlemen...’

Trainer hooked his burning torch into a wall mounted sconce and flicked a switch.

‘I give you the resting place of Harry Lazarus.’

Watson shielded his eyes and looked away. Blinked and tried to refocus. They were standing in a chamber of sorts. Artificial lights lined the walls, wooden flooring underfoot. Trainer stood beside a raised mound of earth and grinned.

A moment’s hesitation and then everyone shuffled forward. Hushed murmurs echoing off the floor and walls as they edged closer to the centre of the cavern.

Watson held back, hands shaking as he typed out a text on his mobile and pressed send. The words flashing blue on the screen before disappearing into the ether.

What now?

He looked up to see Trainer staring back at him. More purple blotches and eyes so dark they were like two black holes.

Shit!

Trainer stepped forward and Watson backed away. The lights dimmed and the chamber filled with the smell of rotting flesh. Something moved. There was nothing there and then a dark form appeared beside Trainer.

Chapter 28

Jack stood on Platform Two at Hull's Paragon Station and looked around. At seven in the evening the place was quiet. A handful of people boarded the train heading to Scarborough. A few more passed through the concourse.

Ash stood beside him. She looked up, eyes scanning the walls. 'There...' She pointed. 'I think that's our camera.'

Jack followed her line of sight, taking in the CCTV unit fixed to the back of the waiting room and back along the platform. It wasn't hard to marry-up the angles with the image he'd seen on Watson's computer.

The building to his left was red-bricked. A single-story construct running the length of the platform. Not a grand testament to the station's Victorian era but functional and simple. There must have been eight doors, all painted green with keyed security pads. 'Go see if anyone's in.'

Ash headed for the first door and he stepped towards the platform edge and knelt down. The air smelt of damp wood, copper arsonate and diesel. Still no sign of where the man in the military style coat might have gone.

A train clattered in the distance, its wheels squeaking in shower of sparks as it approached. Jack stayed on his knees, hoping to recreate the moment the dark-eyed man had stepped off the platform. The heat of the engine was getting hotter now and the noise in his ears louder. Still nothing.

Two hands grabbed him from behind and pulled him back.

'What the hell do you think you were doing?'

Jack staggered back and looked up into Ash's frightened eyes. No point trying to explain himself until she tore a strip off him for being too close to the platform edge. He nodded towards the building and its eight keypad doors. 'I thought you were over there checking those.'

'I was and then I saw what you were doing. Jesus, Jack...' Ash wiping a sleeve across her eyes. 'Don't ever do that to me again.'

Jack got to his feet, ignoring the pain that shot through his knees and gently touched her arm. 'Just wanted to be sure.'

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‘Well, don’t.’

They headed towards the single-story building and Jack stopped. ‘Hold on.’

‘What is it?’

‘Take a look at the doors again, what do you see?’

Ash scanned the building. ‘Not sure.’

‘The one on the far right’s ajar.’

They headed over and Jack pushed the door open with his foot. ‘Police, anyone in here.’

No answer came so he stepped inside. Dust motes danced and the air was so dry it tickled the back of his throat. Racks of things and piles of stuff loomed in the semi-darkness.

Ash stepped beside him, her body odour sweet and alluring. ‘This I wasn’t expecting.’

‘You and me both.’

Jack took out his pocket torch and played it over the nearest rack. Metal things, plastic things, and things that were a combination of both – all sealed in plastic bags and labelled ‘*Obsolete*’. The room was big with racked shelving laid out in rows like an Amazon warehouse.

‘Engineering parts?’

Jack picked up a sealed chunk of metal that looked as if belonged to a piston and set it down again. Beside it was a replacement toilet seat. Two rows down an old ticket machine, complete with a roll of unused tickets. ‘This stuff must be worth a fortune.’

‘You’re not kidding.’ Ash stepped further into the room, her own torch light flickering this way and that.

One by one, Jack walked down the aisles, sweeping his torch left and right. A bank of switches on the wall next to what looked like an office. He lowered his torch, swept a hand down and clicked them all on.

Clunk... then *pinging and flickering* as fluorescent tubes warmed overhead

Something moved and skittered across the floor. The sound distorted by its own echoes before fading.

Jack switched off his torch. ‘Who’s here?’

No reply came.

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He stepped towards the office door and eased it open. A nod and Ash followed him inside.

The scuffling came again. Only louder.

Jack gripped his torch like a club and held it up. 'There's no way out, so you might as well show yourself.'

Scuff.... Scuff.

A pair of orange eyes flared in the fluorescent light. They were quickly followed by a second and then a third. Rats. Jack lowered his torch, stepped back and watched as the rodents scurried along the wall before disappearing from sight.

Ash gritted her teeth and shuddered. 'Bloody vermin... hate the things.'

Jack raised an eyebrow. 'Thought you liked them?'

Ash shuddered. 'They're not so bad in a cage, not running around the place.'

Voices sounded outside and the squealing of brakes as a train approached the station.

The office was twice the size of their poky room in the basement. A desk sat facing the door, complete with phone and computer. A metal filing cabinet, and a workbench lined with two-way radios; their green lights winking away. The place looked as if it had been left behind in the eighties. Punishment perhaps for any of the station staff who stepped out of line.

'Shouldn't we get a warrant?'

'What for?' Jack opened the desk drawer and rummaged around inside. 'We heard a cry for help.'

'With whiskers and sharp teeth.' Ash grinned. 'I'd like to see you explain that to the Chief Super.'

'Looking forward to that,' Jack grunted. 'Search the workbench.'

'What exactly are we looking for?'

Jack shrugged. 'Station maps, service plans. Anything that tells us where Molly's killer went.'

Turning he headed for the filing cabinet and opened each drawer in turn, starting from the top. At first, he came across invoices and work sheets. The kind you'd expect to see at an engineering works. Bloody hell!

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Truth be told he wasn't sure what he was looking for, but if he did find anything then maybe the Chief Super might turn a blind eye to the fact, they'd entered the building unauthorised. Or at least he could hope as much. Right now, his career wasn't an issue. He just wanted answers and instinct told him he'd find them somewhere here.

'This is pointless.' Ash picked up a two-way radio and held them up as if to emphasise the point.

Perhaps she was right. Jack nodded to the heavy lump on the desk that might have once passed as a computer. 'Take a look at that.'

Ash grunted something and headed over. A beep as she switched on the machine. 'Password protected.'

Jack took in the room, working methodically as he tried to work out what his gut was telling him; *desk, chair, computer... desk, chair, computer, cabinet... desk, chair, computer, filling* –

Scuff marks lined the floor where the filing cabinet stood. Someone had moved it. His heart thumped as he heaved it aside, revealing a large metal ring, surrounded by a door shaped outline cut out of the floorboards.

'Gotcha!'

Ash rushed over. 'What is it? Her breath warm against his skin as she peered over his shoulder.

'That, Sergeant...' Jack grinned. 'Is the entrance to Narnia, or we've found what we've been looking for.'

He pulled the metal ring and heaved the trapdoor open. The hinges moved freely and there was no sign of surface dust. Whoever had used it had done recently.

Jack held the door open. 'Well?'

'What do you mean?' A look of horror crossed Ash's face.

'After you.'

Chapter 29

Pain is everywhere.

Trainer stares at the kid with the dark skin. His head hurts and his vision is blurred. He sucks in a lung full of air. His body is weak and his soul impure. He's known this since the first signs something was changing inside.

He feels it now. The empty loneliness. The knotted fear in his stomach. The endless voice in his head. Bagahi laca bachahe. Over and over.

He can't remember how long he has been like this. Days... weeks... years? He can feel the dryness in his bones, each step more painful than the one before. He is dying, he knows this, and soon only the darkness will remain.

He takes out his Stanley Knife and extends the blade.

Behind, a woman screams.

He doesn't turn.

There is a futility to his existence and all those around him. Soon they will all die, and their deaths will feed the darkness inside just like all the rest.

Chapter 30

Jack felt the ground beneath his feet. Solid, but uneven. The musky scent of earth heavy in his lungs. ‘We’ll draw lots next time.’

‘Like that’s going to make a difference.’

‘Aint that the truth...’

‘What was that?’

‘Nothing.’ Jack shone his torch into the darkness and waited as Ash stepped beside him. ‘Watch out for the –’

‘Dirty vermin.’ Ash kicked out and something shrieked. ‘Next time remind me to bring my taser. Not that there’s going to be a next time. What’s that smell?’

‘Sewers. Probably.’

‘Great! I swear, Jack, I’m going to –’

‘Taser me to?’

Jack scanned the walls with his torch. They were in a tunnel with doors on either side. By his reckoning they were somewhere under Platform Two. ‘Victorian,’ he said, taking a step forward.

‘You’ve been down here before?’ Ash stood for a moment and then followed. Her voice heavy in the gloom.

Jack didn’t answer. He stepped aside and pushed open one of the doors. It jammed and he pushed harder. A dark figure loomed in the darkness. Hunched and squat. No, not a person. An extended footrest flashed in the torchlight, followed by two arms and a headrest.

‘What is it?’

‘A barber’s chair, late 1890s, if I’m not mistaken.’

‘How can you possibly know that?’

Bending down Jack picked up a thread-bare leather strap and the bones of what was once a cut throat razor. ‘I read about it somewhere.’ He tossed aside the items and headed for the next door. ‘A lavatory...and that over there, he pointed to another. ‘That’s a very old holding cell.’

‘Police?’

‘The Victorians were an industrious lot if not civilised.’

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‘Hear that?’ Ash looked off down the tunnel.

‘What?’

‘I could have sworn I heard –’

Jack’s phone vibrated in his pocket. He took it out. Text message: *With Trainer... need backup. Now!* Watson. The kid didn’t say where he was, and what the hell was he doing with Trainer?

‘There...’ Ash dug Jack in the arm. ‘Hear it?’

Jack did. A scream muffled in the darkness.

More screams sounded as he and Ash started to run, torch lights bobbing up and down in the darkness as they headed towards the cries.

They came to a bend and another door, smaller than the others. Jack stopped, took a deep breath and puffed his cheeks. ‘I think Watson’s in trouble.’

‘Open it!’ Ash hung back a little, as if afraid to get any closer.

‘Can’t, there’s no handle. Bloody hell...’ Jack put his shoulder to the door and pushed.

Nothing happened.

Lungs heavy, heart thumping, and mouth dry he tried again... and again... and again until his shoulder burned as if someone had poured liquid metal into his joints. ‘It won’t budge.’

The scream came again, followed by Watson’s voice but it was too muffled to work out what he was saying.

‘There...’ Jack nodded to a metal bar lying on the ground. ‘Pass it me!’

Raised voices sounded on the other side of the door, followed by more screaming, growing louder.

Jack jammed the bar between door frame and wall, steadied his feet and pulled. Dust fell from the ceiling, and still the door held fast. He gritted his teeth and heaved, muscles screaming for him to stop.

A crack.

‘Come on... come on...’ he growled.

After a short interval the crack grew bigger, and bigger until a chink of light appeared. One last heave and the door burst open.

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Jack dropped the bar and peered inside, his eyes taking a moment to adjust to the bright light. A smell of rotting flesh filled what appeared to be a chamber. Gasping for air, his stomach tightened and bile rose at the back of his throat. Professor Wheeler stood amongst a group of a people cowering against a wall.

His was the first face Jack recognised. The second was Mike Trainer, cheeks gaunt and gums bleeding. Watson took the middle ground, one hand held out. The stupid sod was trying to talk Trainer down. Not only that, the man he was trying to pacify was holding a Stanley knife.

Jack switched off the torch and stepped over the broken door. Ash followed him, she was about to say something but he lifted a hand to stop her. Trainer half-turned to face them.

‘Drop the knife, Mike,’ Jack said, keeping his tone light.

Trainer glared. Pitch black eyes and purple patches spreading through his veins like poisonous ivy.

‘I said drop the knife.’ Jack edged closer, reaching for his extendable baton, he then remembered he wasn’t wearing one. Hadn’t since he was in uniform. That was the problem with plain clothes. Detective Inspectors weren’t issued with anything to defend themselves with.

‘Last chance.’ Okay, when all else fails resort to bluffing. ‘Mike drop the knife, or –’

Trainer hissed, bared his teeth and bleeding gums. Whatever was making Trainer act this way didn’t have anything to do with Covid.

‘Look at me, Mike...’ Jack edged closer still. ‘I can help you but I need you to put the knife down first.’

Trainer spat blood. A moment’s pause and then he lunged for Watson. The kid barely had time to blink before his hands were forced behind his back and the Stanley knife pressed against his throat.

Deep breaths, Jack swallowed knots. ‘Let him go.’

‘Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.’

‘Let the kid go!’

Watson’s eyes bulged as Trainer tightened his hold, drawing a thin line of blood. A grin and then he pulled the blade all the way.

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Eyes wide Watson grabbed at his throat and fell to his knees.

‘Get them out,’ Jack barked at his DS. ‘Now!’

Ash hesitated for a moment and then rushed forward. She pulled Watson’s hands away from his throat and padded her scarf around the cut before dragging him back over the broken door and out through the tunnel. Hurried footsteps sounded behind as the others followed.

‘No one....’ Jack gritted his teeth. A burn growing deep inside his scar. It spread out through his veins. His muscles ached and every cell in his body screamed for release. ‘... attacks my officers.’

Trainer lashed out with the knife as Jack ran at him, a rugby tackle that sent them both crashing to the floor. They rolled across the chamber, punching, gouging, snarling into the wall where Wheeler and his cronies had stood. A rain of dust fell around them. A fist crashed into Jack’s jaw. And then Trainer lashed out again.

A grunt and then pain flashed. Jack pressed a hand against his stomach, coming away covered in blood.

Trainer scrambled to his feet and kicked out. Missed.

Jack didn’t. His foot connected with Trainer’s knee. Bone and gristle crunched as he went down flat, one leg bent at an awkward angle. The knife went clattering across the floor.

Jack scrambled on top of Trainer, balled his fist and slammed it into his nose. Blood splattered Jack’s cheeks. His fist went back, bright red oozing between his fingers. He hit Trainer again.... and again... and again, until his face was a mashed-up mess.

‘On your feet.’ Teeth bared, Jack cuffed Trainer and hauled him up. ‘I’m arresting you on suspicion of murder, attempted murder of a police officer, resisting arrest and anything else I can think of before we get back to the station. You do not have to say anything. But it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.’

The words sounded strange as he spoke them, but the CPS had insisted. Not that Trainer was getting off. He’d been at his girlfriend’s flat the night she was murdered, tried to kill one of his officers. Jack wasn’t a betting man but he’d give it good odds that DNA from the Stanley knife could be traced back to Nicolae Pavlov and Molly Dullea.

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All of that could wait. Right now, he needed to get to the surface to see how Watson was.

Chapter 31

Mike Trainer didn't move or register Jack's presence as he pushed open the door to Interview Room One and settled himself in one of the chairs. Watson was in hospital recovering. The cut to his throat wasn't life threatening but it would have lasting effects to his vocal cords.

A nod and the PC on looming duty left the room as Ash entered. She turned on the audio recorder and took the seat next to Jack.

The days of interview tape recorders were long gone. Now every word uttered was saved directly into the computer mainframe. Backups were on disc, and the files were stored and available for anyone with the correct clearance to access from the comfort of their own desk. Several parts of Clough Road nick were still without CCTV coverage, Interview Room One was one of them. The tech guys were doing their best but were at a loss as to what was causing the problem.

'Detective Inspector Jack Kane interviewing Mike Trainer.' Jack glanced up at the clock on the wall. 'It is now eleven pm, on the twenty-first of December, also present is –' He nodded at Ash.

'Detective Sergeant, Ashleigh Young.'

'I want it to be known that Mr Trainer has refused legal representation at this time and has been informed he has the right to change his mind while he is in custody.' Jack waited a moment before he spoke again. 'Do you understand the charges brought against you, Mr Trainer?'

'They didn't see him.' The voice, when it came, was barely a whisper.

Jack eyed Trainer carefully. It wasn't an admission of guilt but at least he'd spoken. None of the *No Comment* nonsense suspects relied upon as their only means of defence.

'See who, Mr Trainer?'

No response.

'Who didn't they see?'

Still nothing.

Trainer looked awful, shaking, sweating and gums bleeding. Arms wrapped around himself as his eyes darted from Jack to Ash to the door.

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Jack opened an A4 envelope, took out a photo and laid it out on the table. 'I'm showing Mr Trainer a post mortem photograph of one Molly Dullea.' Her lifeless body was laid out on a steel trolley with morgue's cold storage drawers visible behind. 'Do you recognise the woman in the photograph, Mr Trainer?'

Trainer kept his eyes fixed on the interview room door, as if expecting someone to enter.

'Mr Trainer.'

'Mmmm?'

'Do you recognise this woman?' Jack pushed the photograph across the table.

Trainer looked down but didn't answer.

'What about this one?'

Jack took out a picture of Nicolae Pavlov, face bloodied and slumped against the steering wheel of his Ford Mondeo, taxi badge hanging from the rear-view mirror.

Still Trainer didn't respond.

Time to bring out the big-guns.

Jack took out a photo of Hannah Kowalski, lifeless as she lay on a blood-soaked duvet in her two-bedroom flat.

'Oh God...' Trainer swallowed, Adam's apple bobbing like a fisherman's float.

'When did you last see Hannah, Mr Trainer?'

Trainer's eyes darted back to the door. 'They didn't see him.'

'Please answer the question, Mr Trainer. When was the last time you saw Hannah Kowalski?'

'You know what that means, don't you?' More staring and then Trainer's eyes met Jack's, dark and menacing. The purple patches looked even worse under the interview lights.

Jack sighed. 'No, Mr Trainer, but I'm sure you're going to tell us.'

'It means no one can.' Trainer smiled, he actually smiled as if suddenly everything made sense.

'Who can't be seen, Mr Trainer?' Ash's voice was soft and measured.

Silence and then Trainer grabbed at the table. 'It's here. Oh, God... Oh, God!'

Jack resisted the urge to turn. 'What's here?'

'No one can see it.'

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Jack shook his head and sighed. ‘What’s here, Mr Trainer?’

‘Oh, God... Oh, God!’

This wasn’t getting them anywhere.

Jack took out more photographs of Hannah’s body and dealt them across the table as if they were a deck of cards. ‘Here’s what I think happened, Mr Trainer. You killed Hannah, panicked and ran.’

‘No! I didn’t... I didn’t.’

‘Your DNA’s all over the crime scene, Mr Trainer.’

‘It wasn’t me!’

Jack gritted his teeth. ‘You killed Hannah Kowalski and now you’re going to prison for the rest of your life.’

‘No! No!’ Trainer put his hands to his ears and began shaking his head. ‘It wasn’t like that.’

‘Look at me, Mike...’ Ash lowered her voice again. ‘I need you to tell me what happened?’

‘I didn’t do anything. I swear I didn’t do anything.’ Tears streamed down Trainer’s face.

‘Shush...’ Ash reached out to reassure him. ‘I know this is difficult, but I need you to tell us everything that happened.’

‘No one can see it!’ Trainer’s eyes darted back to the door and stayed there.

This was getting them nowhere. Trainer was in no fit state to continue.

Jack suspended the interview and left the room with Ash. On their way out he got the PC on looming duty to call for the duty doctor before returning to babysit Trainer. There wasn’t much in the interview room he could use to harm himself. Still, it was better to be safe than sorry.

‘What do you think?’

Outside Jack walked over to the vending machine, put in his money and selected a drink, getting nothing. ‘About what?’

‘Trainer.’ Ash walked over and slapped the side panel with the flat of her hand. A mechanical whirl filled the corridor followed by a *chug... chug... chug* as the machine dispensed Jack’s coffee. ‘You think he doesn’t know that he, did it?’

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Jack sipped his coffee and shrugged. 'I wouldn't be surprised if he's faking it to get off on an insanity plea. Still, that's for the courts to decide. I want him charged and processed as soon as the doctor gives him the all clear.'

Heavy footsteps echoed down the corridor. 'Jack.'

'Maeve.'

'You called for the Doctor?'

Jack nodded. 'Interview Room One.'

Maeve opened the door, looked inside and closed it again. 'He's not staying here.'

'He'll be fine once the doctor's seen him.'

'No, Jack. The last time I saw anyone that sick they were dead. Doctor... hospital in that order.'

Great! Just what he needed, babysitting Trainer in A & E. Everyone knew they weren't admitting non-emergency patients, the new strain of Covid was rife in the hospital. Two, three hours sat in a hard plastic chair, for what? Only to be sent away again.

'Sergeant?'

Maeve turned as a well-dressed man strode down the corridor.

'Where am I going?'

'In here.'

Maeve shot Jack a glare and followed Doctor De'ath into Interview Room One. His large balding head sparkled under the florescent lights.

They emerged five minutes later. 'I've tended to Mr Trainer's bleeding gums and given him something to calm him down. Perhaps you should have a word with your detectives, Sergeant. It seems I'm needed here more than I am at my surgery.'

'My arse,' Maeve muttered and then more loudly. 'I'll show you out, Doctor.' Her smile became a scowl as she glanced back.

Jack headed back into Interview Room One, motioning for Ash to follow. Trainer was fidgeting as if someone had wired him up to the mains. His shirt was drenched with sweat and his eyes roamed the room, not settling on one thing for more than a moment.

'This won't take long.'

Jack sat back down and restarted the recording.

'Is... is she really dead?' Trainer's voice had a tremulous quiver.

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‘You’ve seen the photos Mr Trainer.’

‘Hannah...’ Trainer rubbed at his eyes. ‘Hannah and I were celebrating.’

‘What was the occasion?’

‘Sauerkraut and cabbage.’

Jack shot Ash a glance. ‘You were celebrating sauerkraut and cabbage?’

‘Bigos. Hannah was making her favourite Polish dish. It reminded her of home.’

Trainer’s bottom lip quivered and for a moment Jack thought he was going to dissolve into a flood of tears.

‘What happened?’

‘They didn’t see it.’

‘We’ve already been through this, Mr Trainer.’

Trainer hung his head, hands trembling on the table top. ‘I’ve been working on a research project.’ His voice cracked. He took a deep breath before continuing. ‘I tried to keep it a secret....’

He looked up, eyes wide and staring.

‘Go on, Mr Trainer.’

‘People need to know.’

‘Know what, Mr Trainer?’

‘Over a hundred and thirty years and I was the first to discover it.’

‘Discover what?’

‘The burial site.’ A tear ran down Trainer’s cheek. He wiped it away with the back of his hand. ‘No one believed me, see. Only I wouldn’t give up. They laughed at me and I didn’t give up.’

‘Is that why you lost your job at the university?’

Trainer’s eyes darkened. ‘You’re in it with them, aren’t you?’

‘With who, Mike?’ Jack tried not to sigh.

‘They couldn’t see it.’

Jack shook his head. They were going around in circles. ‘I want to know what you were doing under Paragon Station?’

‘It wasn’t me. I didn’t do it.’

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Trainer pushed against the table to stand, Jack leaned forward and forced him to sit back down again. ‘You’re going nowhere until you tell me exactly what happened to Molly, Nicolae and Hannah.

‘I didn’t do anything.’

‘I’ve heard enough.’ Jack stood. ‘Ash, do the honours.’

‘Michael Artemis Trainer, I’m charging you with the murders of Hannah Kowalski, Nicolae Pavlov, and the attempted murder of serving police officer Police Constable Watson. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court...’

Jack waited until Ash had finished what she was saying and terminated the interview.

‘I saw it. Please you have to believe me.’

Something dark flickered behind Trainer’s eyes.

Jack stood and tried to ignore it. ‘You’re going to spend a very long time in prison, Mr Trainer.’

‘No... no... no!’ Trainer sobbed, blood and snot dripping off his chin.

A knock on the door.

‘What?’

It opened and the PC on looming duty poked his head into the room. ‘Ambulance’s here, sir.’

‘He’s all yours.’ Jack gathered up the folder and left the room with Ash close behind.

One advantage about being a DI was that you could pass on the jobs you really didn’t want to do onto the lower ranks. Jack got PC looming, aka, Guthrie, and WPC Thwaite – who just happened to be passing – to accompany Trainer to the hospital. As fate would have it, they were also the biggest hairy-arsed coppers on duty.

‘Don’t let Trainer out of your sights and call me when he’s been assessed.’

‘Sir...’ Their muffled voices hiding a multitude of expletives as they cuffed the prisoner, led him out of the interview room and off to the waiting ambulance.

‘Time to go home.’

Ash stood outside in the corridor and shook her head. ‘What if Trainer is suffering from some sort of psychosis, don’t you think we ought to –’

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Jack glared. ‘Now, sergeant.’ And then a little softer. ‘There’s not much we can do until Trainer’s been assessed. Look, the likelihood is that he’ll spend the night at the hospital or be brought back here. My money’s on the latter. We’ll interview him again tomorrow. If we’re lucky we might even have the lab results back from the Stanley knife and add the murders of Molly Dullea and Nicolae Pavlov to his charge sheet. It’s late, go home, sergeant. get a takeaway, watch a bit of telly, maybe call that boyfriend of yours.’

Ash blushed.

‘I’ll see you back here tomorrow first thing, and yes, I’ll let you know if anything happens.’

It was still raining when Jack stepped out of the station. Maeve, *I’m not your bloody secretary*, cornered him on his way out with three messages from the boat engineers. It was too late to call them back so he shoved the handwritten notes into his pocket.

The night had turned bitterly cold. His breath hung about him like clouds as he headed for his car. He’d stop off at the supermarket on his way home and pick up a pizza and a couple of beers.

Millie would have to make do with leftovers. She’d been out all day; chances are she’d scrounged food from Tina and Mike who owned a large luxury cruiser on the next berth.

Chapter 32

Greater Manchester Police Headquarters on Boyer Street was a mirror image of Hull's Clough Road Operation Centre – Divisional to those who had migrated from the old Queen's Garden's station. An open glass panelled building with all the technological gadgetry no fucker knew what to do with. Clouds scattered low across the Pennines. It looked like it was going to snow. Docherty was pretty sure it was still pissing it down in Hull, it was when he came here three days ago.

A knock at the door. 'Sorry, am I –'

'Come in we're only just getting started.' The speaker's name was Chris Banks, a retired MI5 officer, counter terrorism expert and special advisor to the force.

A clunk as the conference room door closed. The late arrival made his way to the back of the room. 'You mind?' He pointed to an empty chair.

'Docherty shrugged. 'It's a free country.'

'The name's DCI Frazer... Frank.' He offered a hand.

Docherty took it, waited until the man had sat down and wrote *Tosser* in his notepad.

The ex-MI5 man had already been assigned the name *Fuck Witt*. Standing there droning on about anti-terrorism initiatives. 'On page 18, you'll see....' Banks pointed a laser pen at a large overhead screen, circling a pie chart. '... terrorism is a particular concern, especially in zones 'H' through to 'K.'

Docherty turned the page in the course notes in front of him, stared at it for a while and went back to scribbling in the margins in his notepad. It wasn't that Banks was boring, ok paint drying boring, but it was hard to get excited about home-grown terrorism when he had a murder investigation to solve.

'You'll also note that personal hate crimes are up in zone 'B and K.'

The conference room was packed, a dozen or so senior officers sitting there with their piles of briefing notes, printouts of power point slides, notebooks, glasses of water, cups of foul-tasting tea and even nastier coffee. Most of them trying to look interested and failing. Still Banks droned on...

'Page 19, through to 25 shows an increase in anti-social behaviour.'

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‘God give me strength.’ Docherty mumbled and turned to stare out of the window. It had started to snow, little flurries at first and then getting bigger.

‘Chief Inspector?’

Docherty turned and glowered. Everyone was staring at him. No idea what the question was.

‘We have similar problems in Surrey,’ Frazer butted in, voice thin and winey. ‘Attacks on Asians are of particular concern.’

Banks furrowed his brow and nodded. ‘The Covid pandemic cannot be entirely to blame. Attacks on foreign nationals have been on the rise for a number of years now. That is to say we shouldn’t get complacent and take our eyes off the ball, 9/11 for example...’

A click and Banks brought up yet another chart.

‘Fuck Witt.’ Docherty turned back towards the window, across the concrete car park and into the Pennines where car headlights oozed through the grimy evening.

Muffled voices and a flurry of footsteps. Someone nudged him. ‘We’re going for a drink, if you’re interested?’

Docherty rubbed at his eyes and glanced at his watch. Five-thirty, time to go home. At long last.

Frazer leaned in closer. ‘Well?’

‘What?’

‘Drinks. Might even pay a visit to a strip club.’ His tone took on a conspiratorial tone. ‘I know a good place in town. Might even...’ He tapped his nose.

‘Not for me...’ Docherty eyed Frazer. He knew his type. A little bribe here, a snort there. More they played the system and thought they were above the law. Only, someone was always watching and by the time they got caught there was nothing left of their life or career.

‘Suit yourself.’ Frazer shrugged. He patted Docherty on the shoulder, pausing for a moment to drop something into his pocket. ‘Just in case you change your mind.’

‘I won’t.’

Docherty waited until everyone had left the room, dug his hand into his shirt pocket and brought out a small plastic bag filled with a white powdery substance. Along the hall, down the stairwell Frazer and his new found friends could still be heard laughing and joking like a bunch of school kids set free for the summer holidays. Docherty waited until they had

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left the building, dropped the bag of incriminating evidence into his briefcase and headed for the carpark.

The Pennines loomed in the distance but they weren't any way near as picturesque in the sodding cold. Tucked inside his jacket pocket his mobile began to ring. Docherty took it out, put his briefcase on the front passenger seat and started the engine, cranking the heaters up to full, the air was gradually warming.

'Speak!'

'It's Clive, sir?'

'Any news from CPS?'

'We've got it...'

'Got what?'

A high-pitched buzz and crackling flooded the line.

Sodding hell. Docherty took his mobile away from his ear and gave it a shake, as if it was going to make a difference against atmospheric disturbance. 'Clive... you still...'

'The go ahead to charge Speight.'

Thank fuck for that. Docherty pinched the bridge of his nose and let out a long sigh. 'Anything else?'

'A couple more witnesses have come forward saying they saw Speight threatening Hannah Kowalski.'

'What about the taxi driver?'

'Looks like he might be a random kill. Wrong place at the wrong time.'

Better than nothing. 'Type it up. I want Speight in front of a judge before some smart-arsed lawyer talks him into copping for an insanity plea.'

'On it, sir.'

Docherty hung up.

Frazer and the others could sniff their way around the town centre. He needed to get back and oversee closing down Speight's investigation. More snow spiralled down, caught in his headlights. Traffic crawled along the Northern Orbital Road. He joined it and feathered the brake as his car's tyres skidded. The Pennines were tricky at the best of times. Tonight, they'd be a lot more treacherous. He could picture Speight cowering in his cell the little shit.

Chapter 33

Ash searched her handbag for a cereal bar. Nothing. ‘Urgh, why wasn’t there —’

‘You want to talk about it?’

No, she bloody well didn’t.

Ash took the proffered glass of wine from DI Osbourne... Clive as he returned from the bar.

‘It’s just that you seem a little pre-occupied.’

‘I’m fine!’ Okay so that came out a little harsher than she had intended. ‘Really.’ Ash tried for a smile whilst rummaging through her handbag, still nothing. The next time she agreed to have a drink after work she’d bloody-well make sure she stopped off at a Tesco Express.

They were sitting in The Green Bricks, opposite the Marina. The smell of stale beer and bar food was a welcome change to the stench of body odour in Interview Room One. She sipped her wine. Her breath caught as it warmed her throat.

‘Sorry, I wasn’t there when you came looking for me.’

Ash wasn’t. It gave her time to snoop a round a little. The Major Incident Room was a hive of activity. One detective was marking up new information on the incident board, while others manned the phones. She’d spotted photos of Hannah Kowalski and Nicolae Pavlov’s lifeless bodies pinned to the board. Simon Speight had top billing as the chief suspect in the now infamous Stanley Knife Murders. No Molly Dullea. Probably because Docherty knew her death blew a hole the size of the Humber in his murder investigation.

‘Did he make it back?’

‘Docherty?’

Ash nodded and took another sip from her drink.

‘Nah, he’s probably stuck on the Pennines somewhere. The Met Office have forecast heavy snow for the rest of the night.’

That explained the activity in the incident room. The sheep weren’t sure if their lord and master would make it back. Better to be safe than sorry where Docherty was concerned.

‘How’s it going with Speight?’

Osbourne shrugged. ‘Claims he didn’t do it.’

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No surprises there.

Ash's throat tightened as she thought of Mike Trainer. There was obviously more to him than a failed academic. All this talk about: *They didn't see it*. And why had Jack been cagy when she asked if he thought Trainer was suffering from some sort of psychosis?

Osbourne raised his glass and Ash clinked it.

'What are we celebrating?'

'I really shouldn't tell you this but the CPS have given the go ahead to charge Speight with the Stanley Knife murders. He's up in court tomorrow first thing.'

Ash's cheeks burned as she took another drink. Why did she get the feeling something was being kept from her?

'We could get a takeaway and go back to mine.' Osbourne shuffled in his seat, stared at her over the rim of his glass and smiled. 'If you've got nothing else planned, that is?'

Ash hadn't. Well, not really. Aside from spending another sleepless night staring out of her bedroom window at Hannah Kowalski's flat. It wasn't as if there was anything she could do. The property had been cleaned up and probably back on the market. As for what she thought she saw in Hannah's kitchen – well, it had been a long day and she was tired.

'There's this little place on the Avenues. We could stop off there.'

Ash wanted to, really wanted to. More than anything, she wanted to lie beside Clive and feel the warmth of his body next to hers. She ran her eyes over the newly promoted DI and felt her heart race. 'No.' Her voice hitched a little. 'I mean not tonight.' Truth was she wasn't ready for that level of commitment. Not yet, anyway. The last thing she needed now was complications. 'Another time, maybe?'

Osbourne gulped down a mouth full of beer and nodded. 'Sure, another time.' He smiled again, although this time there was less warmth in it.

Outside a siren wailed, cutting through the sound of the hammering rain. Another followed soon after. It was a long minute before it was quiet enough for either of them to speak.

Ash got there first. 'Is Docherty really going to charge Speight with the Stanley Knife murder?'

Osbourne shrugged. 'Depends on whether he makes it back from Manchester. People go missing crossing the Pennines all the time.'

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‘Not Docherty, he’s...’ Ash thought for a moment. ‘Indomitable.’

Osbourne nodded. ‘Indomitable, I like that.’ A pause. ‘Is it true you’ve got another suspect?’

‘Sorry?’ Ash pretended not to hear.

‘Word is Kane’s trying to pin it on the Polish Woman’s boyfriend.’

‘Hannah Kowalski.’ Ash gritted her teeth and scowled.

‘Sorry?’

‘The Polish woman. Her name is... was Hannah Kowalski. She came to Hull and should have been safe. Instead, she’s lying in the bloody morgue because some sick bastard thought it might be a good idea to cut her up.’

‘I didn’t –’

‘What?’

Ash gulped down her drink and handed over the empty glass. ‘I’ll have a whisky.’

‘You sure?’

‘What, you my mother now?’

‘Okay... okay.’ Osbourne finished his beer and stood. ‘Whiskey coming up.’

When he returned, he was carrying a tray with two large shots and a couple packets of crisps. He handed Ash the Cheese and Onion and took the Salt and Vinegar for himself.

‘What I said earlier, about Hannah, I really didn’t mean –’

‘Forget about it.’ Ash opened her crisp packet and took one out. Okay, so it wasn’t a cereal bar, but it’d do till she got home.

‘Makes a nice change.’

‘What does?’

Osbourne shrugged. ‘You and me being alone like this.’

Ash chased down the sharp edges of her potato snack with a mouthful of Whisky.

‘Docherty aside, do you really think Speight killed Hannah Kowalski and Nicolae Pavlov?’

‘Oh, no you don’t.’ Osbourne leaned closer. ‘I know what happens when we talk shop.’

Ash laughed. ‘Relax, Detective Inspector. I was pulling your leg.’ A blush and then. ‘We both know the Ghost Squad are right and CID are a –’

Osbourne placed a finger to her lips. ‘Now, now, Sergeant. Let’s talk about you.’

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It had gone one in the morning by the time they reached Spring Bank. Ash stood on her doorstep and rummaged in her handbag. ‘I know they’re here... somewhere.’

Osbourne watched and shivered. His clothes wet and getting wetter. Ash had wanted to walk the last mile or so and insisted the taxi dropped them off opposite Walton Street. An umbrella would have been good, but Ash seemed oblivious to the inclement conditions. The drink worked its magic and she talked about Mike Trainer’s interview. His purple veins, dark sunken eyes and lips so-chapped they bled. How he kept on staring at the interview door, blathering on about others not being able to see *it*. Whatever *it* was. Too much drink mixed with fresh air, no doubt

‘Pub...I saw them... in the pub... or was it the takeaway?’

‘We didn’t stop for a takeaway.’

‘Curry... you want a curry? There’s a –’ Ash wobbled and almost fell.

Osbourne reached out and took hold of her arm. ‘Steady on.’

‘What about Chips.... We can have chips.’

‘Not tonight.’

‘No chips.... No curry?’

Osbourne shook his head. ‘Afraid not.’

‘Spoil sport.’

‘Here, let me take a look.’

Ash made a half-hearted attempt at pushing him away and sagged onto the doorstep, eyes heavy. ‘No chips... no curry. What kind of –’ And then she fell silent.

Osbourne found the front door key and helped her into the hallway. The light switch was to the right. He flicked it on and sat her down on the stairs.

‘You alright?’

Ash opened her eyes and grinned. ‘Pizza... you want pizza?’

‘We need to get you upstairs.’

‘Smooth talker, you.’ Ash smiled and punched him on the arm, but there was little strength in it.

‘You’re going to have a sore head in the morning.’

‘Who said?’

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Osbourne grinned. 'Me and the last whisky you drank.'

He helped her to the top of the stairs, across the landing and into the first door on the right. He helped her off with her coat and shoes and sat on the bed, listening to the softness of her breathing as she rested her head on his shoulder. He wanted to hold her. More, he wanted to make love to her. But not like this... never like this.

'Come on, let's get you comfortable.'

He pulled back the duvet, laid her down and covered her over.

'You're a good man, Clive...'

His heart raced as she touched a hand to his face.

'A perfect gentleman.'

Osbourne smiled. 'I'll remind you of it some time.' He waited a moment and stepped towards the door. 'Get some sleep.' His voice so soft it was barely audible as he switched off the light.

Some coppers would have taken advantage and bragged about it back at the nick. He wasn't like that. Ash deserved better. Someone she could trust. He waited a moment, whispered a goodnight and dropped the latch as he left the house. His mind turning back to what Ash had said about Trainer during his interview, purple veins, dark eyes and bleeding gums. He took out his mobile and dialled the station.

'Custody.' The voice on the other end of the line sounded heavy and threatening.

'Josh, it's Osbourne. Any news on Trainer?'

A pause, and then Josh's voices boomed out again. 'He's here.'

'Where?'

'Outside in a van. The hospital won't treat him, but who gets the blame if anything happens to him in the cells, eh? Me, that's bloody who. Well, he can stay in the van until Doctor De'ath gets his sorry arse back here. I'm not taking the blame, for anyone.'

A door slammed in the background. It was accompanied by muffled shout. 'Got to go.' And then the line went dead.

Osbourne stared at his mobile for a while. Why not? He could say he was helping out.

Hands cold, he fumbled with the keypad on his mobile. 'Taxi for Osbourne... where from?' The woman on the other end of the line repeated the question. 'Right, yes... Spring Bank West to Clough Road.'

Chapter 34

Ash woke to darkness. For a moment she didn't know where she was and then the memories started coming back. The tunnels beneath Paragon Station, Trainer's dark sunken eyes and the walk home with Osbourne.

She smiled at the latter and was about to reach for the bedside lamp when she realised what had woken her. There had been a noise, just the slightest creak. Someone was downstairs. The house was uncarpeted and full of creaking floor boards that shifted and groaned as the temperature dropped. But she was used to those noises.

She sat motionless and listened, trying to ignore the beating of her own heart. It was like being wrapped in a shroud with nothing but the muffled sound of pounding rain and the blood rushing through her veins. The bedside clock was showing 4 am. Surely Clive had left by now? She reached for her mobile. Shit! The bloody thing was flat.

Okay, what now? Think Ash... think.

With the curtains closed there was scant light in the bedroom. The dark wallpaper didn't reflect much of the light that filtered through from the street. But there was enough for her to see a moving shadow as it crossed the gap beneath the door. This gave her an idea.

Another floorboard creaked. Holding her breath, she slid out of bed and crept barefooted across the floor. Silence. And then the footsteps started up again. She counted each one as they reached the top of the stairs and drew closer. One... Two... Three...

And there it was. A shadow filled the gap beneath the door.

Heart pounding and hands shaking she took a step back and waited.

Another creak. A swish of fabric.

And then –

Bang!

Ash kicked out hitting the intruder's head against the door frame as

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it opened. She followed it up with a second and a third until there was no resistance.

Silence, followed by deep rasping breaths.

Shit! Had she killed him?

She pulled the bedside lamp from the socket, held it like a club and stepped out onto the landing.

A dark outline of a man lay crumpled on the landing floor. He didn't move. She stepped close, knuckles white as she gripped the lamp tighter. A flicker of light and the swish of tyres against a wet surface as a car passed outside.

Ash took another step, and another. Still nothing. She nudged the crumpled mass with her foot and the figure rose. Dark eyes and purple patches.

Shit!

The man was big, over six foot and heavy set as he loomed over her.

'Police you're under arrest....' The words strangely subdued as she spoke them.

A smile. Or was that a grin? It was hard to see in the gloom and then the man lunged, grabbed by the throat and lifted her into the air.

Ash swung the lamplight. The blow connected with the side of the intruder's head, but still he held on. His hands powerful as they squeezed tighter and tighter.

'Let me....' Eyes wide, Ash thrashed and kicked. Anywhere and everywhere. '...go!'

When that didn't work, she spat into the man's face, found a bit of leverage and kicked him in the groin.

The intruder went down. A deep growl and then he was up again.

Ash scrambled back on all fours until her back was pressed up against the wall. The intruder followed fists clenched. A growl and then he struck the side of her head.

Hot saliva rose from the back of her throat. Pain was everywhere as she slumped onto her side. An echo of a memory stirred as another blow struck her head. A third hit her full in the face. Her vision blurred and her mouth tasted of burnt pennies.

The man leaned over her, but all she could make out were his black brogues and brown socks. Her heart ached and for the first time in years tears pricked her eyes. She knew this man – didn't she? The euphoria of the night gone as he picked her up and carried her down the stairs. A sudden flash of light and they were outside, the street lights blurred and distant. Another memory and then everything went black.

Chapter 35

When did it get hard to think?

He's driving. It's dark and the city lights streak past like tethered orbs. He doesn't know where he has been or where he's going. Only that he needs to get there soon.

The pressure inside is like a burning breeze and it's getting harder to concentrate. He opens the window. A wind blows in and touches his face like icy fingers. Good. Concentrate on that, ignore the pressure crushing from inside.

Time passes. How much he's not sure. He follows the road in a series of turns until he comes to a church. He slows and lowers his window. He knows... *knew* this place, didn't he? The cool breeze and the smell of seal-salt air invokes memories of people sitting around a table. Their voices hushed and alien as they ate. These people were strangers in this city, travellers in search of a new land.

The pressure grows inside his head and the image dissipates. He drives a little further and arrives at his destination. He knows this because he stops the car and gets out. Rain chatters on the tiled roofs surrounding him and the cobbled streets are wet and slippery.

He's aware of another noise. A voice. Deep inside. It's loud but doesn't drown out the words. *Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.*

He walks to the back of the car, opens the boot and knows what he must do.

Chapter 36

‘Alright... alright!’

Docherty woke with his arms pressed under his body. He moved slowly, clutching at air and then he grabbed his mobile.

‘Clive, it’s Steve.’

‘Sir.’ Docherty blinked and stared at the bedside clock. It was flashing 4 am.

‘Something happened?’

‘Mike Trainer’s...’ Chief Superintendent Steven Blanchard began. ‘He’s dead.’

Trainer? Kane’s collar. ‘When?’

‘Two hours ago. He was found unresponsive in his cell.’

Docherty sat up and dragged his free hand over his face. Fucking typical. On the day they should be closing down the Speight investigation. ‘What happened?’

‘The doctor’s with him now. We’ll know more later.’

‘Does Kane know?’

‘He would if I could get hold of him. The bloody idiots got his phone turned off.’

‘Leave it,’ Docherty said, and realised he’d over stepped the mark. ‘I’ll take care of it, sir.’

‘You know what this means?’

Docherty knew only too well. ‘Sir?’

‘The press are going to have a field day when they get hold of it. It’s going to be like Christopher Alder all over again. I want to know who saw Trainer last and what the fuck happened.’

‘Sir.’

Docherty waited a moment and hung up. People don’t just die in police custody. Kane must have had something to do with it, that much he was sure of.

He showered and put on a clean set of clothes. Maureen had left him six months ago and he’d got out of the habit of being quiet. Sobriety was also a thing of the past. He headed down to the living room and poured himself a double scotch. His ulcer flared and his breath hitched as he gulped it down. He poured another.

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Why Blanchard had called him wasn't clear. Perhaps the outgoing Chief Super wanted to give him a taster of what the job was like when shit hit the proverbial. Whatever his motive he planned to use it to his advantage.

He swallowed back the second glass and headed into the hall. A shoe, feminine by design, lay on its side under the stairs. Not one of Maureen's sensible lace-ups. This one was black with a two-inch heel. She hadn't come back for it as he thought she might have. There was no time for apologies, or recriminations, or so it seemed. Her mind was made up and any attempt at reconciliation would be like sticking a plaster over a gunshot wound.

He put on his overcoat, headed back into the living room and poured another drink. 'Maureen....' He said, raising his glass. 'I wish you luck and happiness.' He really did. It was the fucking Geography Teacher she was shackled up with he wanted to castrate.

Bladder bursting, he headed for the downstairs toilet, unzipped his trousers and let his shoulders sag as he pissed. With Trainer dead Professional Standards would have to be called in and Kane investigated. Perhaps he should feel pity for the man, but the concept was alien to him. Kane deserved everything that was coming his way.

His muscles relax as the flow turned into a trickle and then stopped. Glancing down he shook himself dry, zipped up and dug his hand into his overcoat pocket. Inside was a small plastic bag he'd taken from his briefcase. He held it up to the light. Must be, what? An ounce or two of cocaine.

He held it over the toilet and paused. Maybe getting rid of it wasn't such a great idea. When it came down to it policing was a matter of perspective. There was no doubt in his mind that Kane had something to do with Trainer's death. But what if Professional Standards didn't see it that way?

He dropped the bag back into his pocket and closed the toilet lid. Frazer's little gift was going to find a new owner. What's more there was no way it could be traced back to him.

Chapter 37

All's well that ends –

No, that wasn't going to work. Still, there was no point giving Watson a bollocking for going solo at the Tiger's Lair. He'd have done the same when he was the kid's age, especially if he thought lives were in danger. With any luck the stab wound to the kid's neck would serve as a reminder not to go playing the hero. They were a team – first and last.

'Go on, out you go.' Jack pulled into a parking space at the back of Division HQ. The only other sign of life was a black transit van with its engine running. 'Wait for me in the Custody Suite.'

Watson, to give him credit climbed out of the car without saying a word and headed across the car park, head stiff as if he thought the cut to his throat might make it fall off.

Jack watched him go. A memory sparked and he was back in uniform all those years ago. Divisional didn't exist back then. Hull's central police station was situated on Queen's Garden's and aptly named so. The tradesman's entrance was through an underground car park at the back of the station. Where did the time go – fifteen long years and he had lost so much.

Lucky for Watson the knife wound to his neck hadn't severed any major arteries. Sure, he'd not say much for a while and have a bit of a gruff voice but he'd live. Sarah hadn't been so lucky.

Jack got out of the car and followed Watson into the station. He was about to step inside when his mobile went off.

'Grace, I can't... you'll have to speak up.' He turned towards the door, keeping the worst of the weather at his back.

'Trainer, what about him?'

The line sounded washed out, as if rain had got into the electrics.

'Grace... ' Jack clasped his free hand to his ear. 'You still there?'

Nothing.

'Sod!'

Grace seldom called him when he was working, and when she did it usually meant life was going to get more complicated.

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He tried to call back but it went straight to her voice mail. He'd caught a few words Grace had said, something about Trainer being held in a cell and keeping him away from others. The rest was incoherent. Well, whatever it was it'd have to wait.

He dropped his mobile back into his pocket and stepped into the building.

'Where the Hell have you been?'

'Maeve, this really isn't...' Jack pointed in the direction of the basement and started to walk in the vain hope Maeve wouldn't challenge him further. No such luck.

'Oh, no you don't.'

Maeve turned towards a uniformed officer, gave him the slightest of nods and waited for him to walk away.

'Mike Trainer,' she said, turning back.

'What about him?'

'He's dead. That's what. Stone-cold bloody dead.'

'What?'

'You heard me. Trainer's dead.' Maeve glowered. Her words accusing.

'When?'

'Last night.'

'How?'

'If I had gone to medical school instead of working in this god-forsaken place, I might be able to tell you.' Maeve glowered some more. 'Instead, I'll leave that to the Medical Examiner, shall I?'

Jack knew better to answer, so he just stood there and took whatever was thrown at him. As an enemy Maeve was a formidable character, as a friend loyal to the bitter end.

'You didn't answer my question, where were you?'

'Last night?'

'Of course, bloody last night? We've been trying to call you ever since Trainer was found.'

'I -'

Jack broke off. Best not say he had one too many at the Sailmaker's and slept in. Only by half an hour. 'Phone's being playing up and I went to pick Watson up from the hospital first thing.' As excuses go it wasn't the best, but it'd have to do.

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‘I thought you were the Chief Investigative Officer. Your collar your responsibility?’

And so it begins, the blame game. Or SEP: *Someone Else’s Problem*, to be more precise. ‘Just because I’m the CIO doesn’t mean I’m responsible for Trainer’s death.’

‘No....?’ Maeve leaned forward and narrowed her eyes. ‘But it means you should bloody well make yourself available. Meaning if the little sod you arrested goes and snuffs it you should be contactable.’

‘It wasn’t as if Trainer meant to die.’ Jack wanted to say. Instead, he opted to side track Maeve, it never worked, but was worth a try. ‘Was that Docherty’s car I saw in the carpark?’

‘Oh, yes...’ Maeve grinned, something akin to a shark before it devours its prey. ‘Chief Superintendent Blanchard called his Lordship in to deal with the unfortunate turn of events. And here’s the best bit.’ The grin widened. ‘He’s looking for you.’

Great! Just when he thought things couldn’t get any worse. Best get the facts before Docherty caught up with him. ‘What happened at the hospital with Trainer?’

‘They sent him back, that’s what. No room at the Inn apparently.’

‘And?’

‘He was brought back here only Sergeant Henderson wouldn’t allow him back in the cells on account that he didn’t have the time or manpower to babysit a prisoner who clearly wasn’t well.’

God save us all.

Jack sighed and rubbed at his tired eyes. ‘Please don’t tell me -?’

‘Got it in one Sherlock. Sergeant shit-for-brains kept him in a sodding police van, in the sodding cold, where no sod could hear him if he called out for help.’

‘No checks?’

‘Oh, yes...’ Maeve flipped through the Custody Log. ‘Here we go...’ She cleared her throat and put on a gruff voice. ‘I took it upon myself to make sure Mike Trainer was checked on the hour every hour. At no point during the night were there any concerns raised about Mr Trainer’s wellbeing....’ And then she was back. ‘Sergeant Henderson’s words not mine.’

Took it upon myself... Once a sodding hour?

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Firstly, who the hell speaks like that and secondly *myself* meant Henderson got someone else to do the dirty work for him. Professional Standards were going to have a field day with this, not to mention the sodding press. It'd be like Christopher Alder all over again, and no guesses as to who was going to take the blame.

Silence filled the Custody Suite, or as silent as it was ever going to be and then Maeve let out a deep sigh, letting her shoulders sag a little. 'We'll just have to muddle through the best we can.'

No complaints there. There was one question no one had asked yet. 'What time was Trainer last seen alive?'

Maeve seemed to think about it for a moment and flipped back through the Custody Log. 'One this morning.' A pause as she turned the page. 'PC Hamilton checked on him.'

'And no one else saw him after that?'

Maeve shook her head. 'Not according to Henderson's report.'

'What about CCTV?'

'The IT guys have got it. The bloody thing is still playing up, has been since yesterday afternoon. You know what the worst thing is?'

Jack shook his head. 'Go on.'

'Hamilton's only been in the job twelve months. The kid's got potential, I dare say he'll be fed through the blender by Professional Standards and come out the other end with a bloody career-ending smoothie.'

Maeve was right. Sergeant Henderson had connections with the top brass and they were hardly going to blame one of their own. Someone had to be seen to be accountable, which usually meant one of the lower ranks.

'Hamilton didn't register anything untoward?'

'Not as far as I can see and I've been through last night's log a dozen times. And before you ask, Hamilton's report tallies with Sergeant, shit-for-brains Henderson.'

Great. One dead prisoner. A young PC probably going to lose his job and Sergeant Henderson saunters away from the car crash unscathed. All hail, Humberside Police and its great and wonderful masters.

'Where's Trainer now?'

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‘They’ve only just taken his body to the morgue. I’m surprised you didn’t see them on your way in.’

Well, that explained the black transit he’d seen in the car park.

Jack looked left and right again.

‘Lost something?’

‘PC Watson, did you see him come through here?’

Chapter 38

Watson stood to attention in front of Docherty's desk. The cut to his throat stung and everywhere ached after spending twelve hours in A&E and a further six on the Acute Assessment ward. He had been lucky – or so the doctors had told him. An inch deeper and the cut would have severed his Carotid Artery. Then it would have been lights out – permanently. Still enough damage had been done to his vocal cords that he'd be talking in a whisper for a while.

'Tell me, Constable, what were you doing at Paragon Station last night?'

'I...' Watson moved his mouth but it was difficult to get the words out.

'Did Kane know you were there?'

'No, sir.' God, it hurt to speak.

Silence as Docherty got to his feet and crossed to the other side of his desk. 'You expect me to believe that?'

Watson nodded, the DCI's breath warm on his neck and smelling of whisky.

'So, tell me, Constable, where were DI Kane and Sergeant Young?'

Watson chose not to answer, shrugging instead, on the grounds it might implicate his colleagues. That and because he wasn't sure if he was up to talking.

A long silence as Docherty stepped back and began pacing the room like a shark circling its prey. 'We've had this conversation before, Constable. Remember?'

Watson nodded.

'In the basement, I believe?'

Another nod, this time very... very slowly.

'Where is my report?'

'Sir?'

'The one I asked you write on DI Kane's investigation into the Stanley Knife murders.'

'I –'

More warm breath on in his ear and Watson grimaced.

'A man has died in custody, Constable. Do you know what that means?'

Watson did, but it was better all-round if he said nothing.

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‘You’ll be investigated by Professional Standards and from where I’m standing it doesn’t look very good.’

‘Jack wouldn’t –’ Watson swallowed. His legs grew heavier and the room began to spin. Perhaps he should have gone straight home instead of coming back to the station.

‘Mr Docherty, sir.’ A young WPC knocked once and eased the office door open.

‘What is it?’

‘DCI Grainger from Professional Standards to see you, sir.’

‘Give me a minute.’ The corners of Docherty’s mouth twitched as he returned to his chair and eyed Watson with a predatory glee. ‘Last chance, I want that report on Kane, you hear me, you hear me?’

‘Sir.’

‘Off you go then... and Constable?’

Watson stopped at the door and turned, resisting the urge to check the gauze bandaged to his neck wasn’t bleeding.

‘Loyalty is everything in this job.’

‘Sir.’

Out in the corridor Watson slumped against the wall and sagged. His hands were shaking and the pain was like an angry rat gnawing away at his throat. Was it worth it, going into the Tiger’s Lair alone? You bet it was. He wasn’t anyone’s sidekick, or lapdog, certainly not Docherty’s.

He smiled at that and pushed himself up. He was on the inside now, one of Kane’s team and everyone else could go swivel. With that he held up his middle finger and aimed it at Docherty’s door. ‘Yes, sir... no, sir... right you are, sir.’

And then he let out a slow breath, turned and headed for the basement. Finger still in the air. ‘Go fuck yourself... sir.’

Chapter 39

Jack strode out of the custody suite and took the stairs two at a time as he headed for the Major Incident Room. Every work station was manned. Pieces of paper were being passed around and phones rang: rumbling trills that filled the room. It might have been early in the morning but CID was buzzing. Then again, he hadn't expected anything less from Docherty's team in the throes of closing down on an investigation. Speight's court hearing was imminent and no one was taking any chances. Any fuck up with the paperwork right now wouldn't be a career enhancing move.

A great huge digital display dominated the front of the room. One of those state-of-the-art digital Ops Board unlike the analogue one they had in the basement. Still, there was a lot to be said for the old methods and how it encourages the brain cells to work that little bit harder. Now, he thought about it last time he was here they had a large non-digital board. Perhaps Docherty's promotional prospects were already starting to pay off?

Jack stared at the screen, part of his mind pursuing Docherty's train of thought as he tried to join up the links between Hannah Kowalski and Simon Speight. There were a number of other suspects, their faces staring back at him from the screen. DNA was highlighted in red. Another line of enquiry suggested the forensics IT department had Speight's phone and had yielded positive contact with the victim.

Jack backed off a couple of paces and still he couldn't make sense of the muddle.

Forget it, he didn't have time for this. DI Osbourne's desk was empty and the lights to Docherty's office were turned off. A WPC had told him she'd seen Docherty with Watson but wasn't sure where they went.

'Bastard.' Docherty probably had the young kid holed up somewhere less conspicuous for a grilling. Electric wires and thumb screws, no doubt.

Well, he'll soon put a stop to that. Jack turned and as he did Blanchard came walking down the corridor and there was no place to hide. 'Sir.' Watson's plight temporarily forgotten.

'Don't sir me, Kane.' Blanchard narrowed his eyes as he approached. 'Your so-called Stanley Knife killer is dead and you're up here doing what exactly?' His voice had an edge to it, and Jack could smell tobacco on the Chief Super's breath. Which was a surprise since he

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had made a big deal about giving up months before. A pre-retirement health kick promoted and monitored by Mrs Blanchard, no doubt.

‘I was –’

‘What?’ Blanchard gritted his teeth. ‘Our first death in custody for thirty years and now I’ve got IPCC breathing down my neck.’

‘Sir, I –’

‘Save it. Someone’s responsible for Trainer’s death and I want to know who.’

Jack nodded. So did he.

He liked Blanchard. The chief super had been patient with him after Sarah’s death and been instrumental in backing Commissioner Kendrick’s decision to set up the basement office, aka, *The Ghost Squad*.

‘Am I right in saying Docherty’s charged Simon Speight with the Stanley Knife murders.’

It wasn’t a question but Jack nodded anyway. ‘So, I’ve heard.’

‘Then the investigation is closed. I want you and your team to stay in the basement until everyone has been interviewed by IPCC.’

‘Sir, with all due respect –’

‘Now, Jack!’

Great! That’s all he needed. Sent to his room waiting for the Rubber Shoes to come calling.

Jack’s mobile rang... and rang... and rang.

Blanchard stared at him. ‘Well, are you going to answer that?’

Jack took it out and turned. ‘Kane.’ His voice half choked.

Silence.

‘Hello!’

Still nothing.

Whoever had called him had hung up. Jack stared at the blank screen then at Blanchard

‘Well?’

Jack shrugged. ‘Hung up.’

‘I meant what I said, office now. All three of you.’

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Jack didn't reply. He waited until the Chief Super was out of sight, pulled out his mobile again and hit the speed dial button. Deaths in custody weren't unheard of, but they were rare. Plausible deniability wasn't going to work here. Not in a post Covid climate where the public's confidence in policing was at an all-time low. As far as they were concerned the force was riddled with bent coppers willing to take a bribe in order to turn a blind eye to illegal gatherings, especially those arranged by the rich and famous.

A click and the line was picked up.

'Watson?'

'Sir.'

'Where are you?'

A pause. 'Err... the basement, sir.'

'Someone said you were...' Jack let out a long breath. 'Never mind, stay where you are I'll be right down.'

He hung up and called Ash.

'Sorry I'm not available to take your call right now. Please leave a message and I'll get back to as soon as I can.'

Jack ended the call, typed a quick text message and pocketed his mobile. The Shade was still out there somewhere and they needed to find it before it killed again.

Chapter 40

Jack pushed into the basement office. Watson was slumped in his chair, staring myopically at his laptop. Behind him the radiator gurgled and pinged, still the place was as cold as a butcher's freezer.

'Where was Ash?'

Jack checked his watch. A couple of minutes to ten. Nearly three hours late. Which wasn't like her.

Watson turned and shrugged.

'I thought I told you to stay put?'

'Sir, I...'

'Never mind.' Jack flung his coat over the back of his chair and sat down with a sigh. The sleepless nights were getting worse and there was no end to the work he needed to do on the houseboat.

'Go on,' he said, staring across at Watson. 'What did Docherty want?'

A shrug.

'He must have wanted something.'

Watson opened his mouth and closed it again, his face creased in pain. 'Station. He... he wanted to know what we were doing there.' His voice a hoarse whisper.

'We?' Jack almost laughed. 'Anything else?'

'Nothing, sir.'

Jack eyed the kid. He'd seen that expression of guilt before. There was little doubt in his mind that Docherty was up to his usual tricks: concealed threats mixed with a shit load of blather designed to put the willies up any probationary.

Still, if Watson didn't want to talk there was little point forcing him. He'd come clean when the time was right.

Jack turned towards the incident board and Hannah Kowalski stared back. So did Molly Dullea and Nicola Pavlov. All except Sarah Hargreaves. Jack still hadn't pinned her picture to the board not wanting to believe her life had been given so cheaply. After so long it still didn't feel real. Now... now, his gut was telling him Ash was missing and not just late for work. He got to his feet and hit the radiator again. The result was always the same, a

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moment's silence and then a clatter of pipes. Followed by a gurgled murmur. The room turned colder.

'Bloody thing.'

'Sir.'

'What is it?'

'You wanted background information on the Romanian Taxi Driver.'

'And?'

Watson prised himself away from his computer, took out his notebook and flipped it open.

'Any time soon, Constable.'

'Nicolae Pavlov came to the UK ten years ago. He was granted citizenship two years later and had worked as a taxi driver ever since.'

'Family?'

'Wife and two children. Both in Romania. Mr Pavlov told his colleagues he'd saved enough money to fly them both over this summer.'

'Ten years, what took him so long?'

'Immigration.' Watson swallowed, determined not give into the pain. 'I guess.'

Poor bastard. Jack felt a cold twinge in his stomach as he turned to the man's picture pinned to the incident board. No one deserved to die that way. 'Has anyone been in touch with his family to deliver the death message?'

Watson turned back to his computer and tapped away on his keyboard. 'CID contacted the British Embassy.'

Jack shook his head. Getting a visit from a grey-suited official to tell you your husband had been murdered wasn't ideal, but it was better than nothing he guessed. There was no way the Chief Superintendent was going to green light a flight to Poland for a police officer and someone from the victim support team. Not a chance in Hell.

He closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again the dead were still there staring back at him. Cold dead fingers clawing away at his insides as if all their deaths were his fault.

He turned away from the Incident Board. A beer, and a good night's sleep. That's what he needed. Except it wasn't possible at ten in the morning.

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‘You want me to give them a call, sir?’ Watson croaked.

‘Who?’

‘The British Embassy.’

‘No’

Jack thought of Professor Wheeler and his cronies holed up under Paragon Station by Mike Trainer. ‘Hold on...’

‘Sir?’

‘What was it you said the other day something about Hull being a Gateway to the Americas?’

‘Yes, sir. Back in the late 1800s Hull was a popular route for migrants travelling from Europe to America and Canada. Farmers mainly. Mike Trainer referenced a paper on it written by Dr Simms: *Transmigration and those it left behind.*’

‘Remind me, what else did Trainer study?’

Again, Watson tapped away on his laptop. ‘UFOs, who killed JFK and other conspiracy theories.’

‘Professor Wheeler mentioned something about Trainer’s research into Harry Lazarus and some ancient force.’ Jack turned back to the Ops Board. What if Trainer had found what he was looking for? ‘You were there in the tunnel.’

‘Sir.’

‘Did Trainer say who was buried there?’

‘It’s a bit of a blur, sir. There was something now I think about it.’

‘Go on.’

‘Not long after we got into the chamber Trainer started acting strange, babbling on: *Bagahi laca... something.* It was hard to make out. The thing is...’ Watson raised a hand to his neck and grimaced. ‘I’ve heard of this sort of thing before.’

‘Where?’

‘My mum, sir.’ Watson fixed his gaze into the middle distance and smiled sadly. ‘My birth mum, that is. She told me stories of a witchcraft when she was a young girl living in the Indies. She told me that a witch or Sukwia is an evil woman who possesses the power to shed her skin at night and fly through the air. They entered the rooms of her victims and sucked their blood. A Sukwia caused illness or death and was known in the old country to practise

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sorcery or obeh, which she said involved reciting incantations over the fingernail chippings of the intended victims.'

'Your mum, what happened to her?'

'Some folktales are harder to shake off than others. She believed a Sukwia had followed her from the Indies and was found sitting in the centre of a protective sigil she'd drawn in Trinity Church. The doctors diagnosed Dementia. I was five at the time and never saw her again.'

'I'm sorry.'

Watson blushed, although it wasn't clear if it was because he had become the centre of attention or because he had talked of his family for the first time. 'It was a long time ago.'

Jack wondered how much of this mother's rantings Watson believed. Most kids his age struggled to imagine a world before they were born, or that one would continue to exist after their passing.

'Tell me'

'Sir?'

'Where did the name Watson come from?'

'My step-mum was a big fan of Sherlock. Dr Watson was her favourite character.'

Coincidence? Perhaps

'Trainer's so-called unveiling was by invite only; how did you get in?'

'I waited until the last moment and talked my way in. It's all about being confident and looking as if you belong. It was a trick we tried in my university days when we wanted to crash music festivals. Usually, the staff are too busy to give a damn.'

Pathology and Crime Scene forensics would take a while to come through, but given the apparent age of the bones found in the burial chamber, Jack was in little doubt they belonged to Harry Lazarus. How and why the Shade had come to be there was something he'd have to talk to Grace about. The pit of his stomach turned cold when he thought of the Gloomworld. An ancient evil capable of possessing the living and feeding off their souls. He wouldn't have believed it possible if he hadn't seen it for himself.

Jack picked up a marker pen, wrote Harry Lazarus on the board followed by a question mark. 'I want to know everything about him. Who he was, where he lived and how he came to be buried beneath the station?'

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Watson's eyes twinkled. 'I'll search the university archives.' He scribbled something in his notebook, turned to his laptop and got to work.

Jack admired the kid's enthusiasm which would either make him a good copper one day, or get him into a lot of trouble. 'Stay here and make sure no one knows that you're looking.'

It wasn't until he was out in the corridor that Jack let out a deep sigh he'd been holding inside. It was only a matter of time before IPCC came looking for him, might as well get it over with. A bit like sticking your head in a lion's mouth when it wasn't expecting it. What the hell! With any luck he might... just might walk away in one piece. Yeah, right, as if that was going to happen. With no viable CCTV footage IPCC were bound to have him down as chief suspect of Mike Trainer.

Chapter 41

Interview Room One was stuffy and airless. There were no windows. Just a vent high up near the ceiling that was meant to pump fresh air but didn't. A plain white-top table sat squarely in the middle, cigarette burns marking the Formica. A plastic chair had been bolted to the floor, just too far away for its occupant to lean his elbows comfortably on the table. Jack had tried several times and now slumped back his arms folded across his chest. It felt odd to be on the other side of the desk.

The man sitting opposite had given his name as DI Chapman. He was dressed in a tight-fitting grey suit that showed he spent a fair bit of time at the gym or hanging around one while he pumped himself full of steroids. His superior, Detective Superintendent Grainger, had left the room to take an urgent call. Jack knew them both from his time at Priory Police Station. Which meant that the IPPC had kept the investigation into Trainer's death at a local level.

Nicknamed the Ghost Squad he'd expected ridicule and hostility, maybe a bit of good cop, bad cop routine. But all this time waiting around was taking it a bit far. The sooner Dr Decker finalised Mike Trainer's autopsy they'd have a lot of time to apologise to him. Still, it didn't answer the question of who'd entered Trainer's cell prior to his death.

Jack glanced at his watch. 'Is this going to take long?' He was beginning to regret giving himself up to be interviewed when he could have been checking on Ash's whereabouts. He'd muted his mobile but kept it where he could see it. No one had called or texted in the time he'd been here.

'It takes as long as it takes.' DI Chapman glared.

Tosser.

Jack's eyes were drawn to Superintendent Grainger as he stepped back into the room. He was carrying a tray with two mugs of tea and a packet of digestive biscuits. Setting the whole lot on the table before handing one to Chapman and taking the other for himself.

'You do know it's policy to give a suspect food and drink?' Jack said.

Grainger sipped his drink and shrugged. 'Better report me to Police Standards then?'

Jack nodded, his mobile buzzed and began to vibrate on the table. He glanced at the screen. Watson was calling him. Both Chapman and Grainger stared at it. Whatever the kid

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wanted it would have to wait. Right now, he needed to convince Messrs Chapman and Grainger that he hadn't killed Mike Trainer. 'Shouldn't I have a solicitor present?'

'Not unless you've done something wrong,' Grainger said, his expression hard to read. 'This is an initial interview. If we need to ask further questions you can have whoever you want sitting in; tea lady, solicitor, union rep, minister of your chosen denomination, I don't give a shit.'

Grainger opened his briefcase and brought out a typed statement. 'Here's how it works,' he said, interlocking his fingers over the document as if to conceal its contents. 'We'll ask you a shed-load of questions, you answer truthfully, everyone's happy.' A pause to emphasise the point and then he leaned back, withdrawing his hands. 'The sooner we get to the bottom of what happened to Mr Trainer the sooner we can all go home.'

'Amen to that.' Jack smiled, but there was no humour in it.

'You arrested Mike Trainer in connection with the murders of... ' Grainger glanced down eyes flickering as he read from the document laid out in front of him. 'Hannah Kowalski and Nicolae Pavlov?'

'He was helping us with our enquiries.'

'How did that play out?' This from Chapman.

Jack met the DI's gaze and turned his attention back to Grainger. 'You've read my report. Mr Trainer was agitated. At no point did he show signs of being a danger to himself or others.' That was part true, at least.

'Uncooperative and incoherent. Mr Trainer had dark sunken eyes and purple patches on his neck and face.' Grainger nodded at the document in front of him. 'Are these your words, Inspector?'

'Yes.'

A pause. A scowl and then Grainger leaned forward. 'I'm not medically trained, but what I've read sounds indicative of drug abuse, wouldn't you say?'

Jack shook his head. 'We did a piss test when he was brought in and it came back clear.'

'Was a test carried out for Covid, Types 3 and 4 which are particularly virulent.'

Ah. Jack cleared his throat and fiddled with his suit jacket: known in the profession as playing for time.

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‘It was a simple enough question, Inspector. Was a test for Covid done on Mike Trainer?’

‘Not as such –’

‘I see.’ Grainger cut in and scribbled something down in his notebook.

They say the devil was in the detail. Jack tried not to swallow too hard. ‘Look, Trainer was brought in, processed and interviewed. Maeve, that is to say Sergeant Chalmers sent for the Duty Doctor after –’

‘After what?’ Grainger leaned further forward again.

‘After I terminated the interview for a comfort break.’

‘And for whose comfort might that have been, Inspector?’

Jack didn’t answer that. He just scowled back at Grainger.

Another pause and then Grainger continued.

‘It says here, Dr De’ath called for an ambulance after he’d examined Mr Trainer.’

Jack nodded.

‘Let me get this straight.’ Grainger met Jack’s eyes, and kept them there. ‘A man is arrested, brought in to the station, starts showing signs of distress, possible infection, and no one sees fit to call the doctor before you and your colleague DS Young needed a comfort break?’

‘It wasn’t like that and you know it,’ Jack growled, fists gritted clenched under the table.

‘Then tell me Detective Inspector how it was.’

‘Trainer was coherent to begin with and as soon as he started to show signs of becoming confused and agitated the interview was suspended and a doctor called.’

‘Straight away?’

‘Yes,’ Jack lied. He’d also forgotten to mention he and Ash had gone back into the interview room after De’ath had left the station.

Grainger wrote something down as Chapman took up the poisonous chalice.

‘I’m led to believe,’ Chapman said, reading from his own notes. ‘That you were heard saying that Trainer was faking it.’

Back-stabbing sneaky bastard. The PC on looming duty must have listened in on his conversation with Ash.

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Deny it, deny everything. 'Whoever said that was clearly mistaken.'

'Mmmm.' More scribbling down, this time by Chapman.

And then Grainger was back. 'Do you understand the gravity of the situation you find yourself in, Inspector?'

Of course, he bloody well did. 'That's why I thought it important to come forward to answer any question you may have.' Okay, that might have sounded a little bit sickly but fuck them.

'If found guilty you could be kicked off the force. Worse still charged with misconduct in public office.' Grainger let the words hang in the air for a moment before continuing. 'So, while the cooperation of you and your colleagues is appreciated, it's important that we get to the bottom of what happened.'

Jack couldn't argue with that, apart from the cooperation bit. The station turned into Dodge City whenever the Rubber Heels were in town. It was surprising how many officers had called in sick or took overdue holidays.

'Take us through what happened when Trainer was brought back from the hospital?'

Jack shrugged. 'I wasn't here. I was –' Don't say at the pub... don't say pub. 'At home. It seemed pointless hanging around whilst Mr Trainer was at the hospital. Sergeant Young and I went home with strict instructions to be called when they had news of Trainer's condition.'

'That'd be...' Chapman flipped through the report, coming to a stop halfway through. 'PC Guthrie and WPC Thwaite. They escorted Mr Trainer to Accident and Emergency?'

Jack nodded.

'When were you told Mr Trainer had been brought back to the station?'

Jack cringed. There was no way of getting out of this one. 'Earlier this morning.'

'What time earlier?'

'Just before nine when I got here.'

Chapman frowned. 'It says here attempts were made to contact you soon after Mr Trainer was found unresponsive in the back of a police van.'

'Must have been a problem with my mobile.'

'Really?' Another frown. This one deeper than the last with a touch of cynicisms thrown in for good measure.

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Typical, no mention of why Trainer was kept in a police van instead of a cell. That nugget of information will come later when Duty Sergeant shit-for-brains gets dragged in for an ass-kicking. Assuming the top brass don't intervene, that is.

'As a senior officer you'll agree it was your responsibility to make sure Mr Trainer was well enough to be detained?'

'Wherever you think this is going, you've got it all wrong.'

'Except you didn't,' Grainger continued. 'Perhaps you went into his cell and decided to take revenge on Mr Trainer for his attack on your colleague, DC Watson'

'That's nonsense and you know it.'

'That's what the board are going to say, Inspector.'

'Board?'

'With no witness or viable CCTV footage, you've got no means to prove you didn't mean for Mr Trainer to come to harm.'

'What?'

'You heard me, Inspector.' A smile, not unlike a shark circling a bleeding seal. 'In the meantime, we have no choice but to accelerate this up to board level.'

Jack closed his eyes, shook his head, and when he opened them again the nightmare hadn't gone away.

Grainger leaned back in his chair and relaxed his facial expression. 'I understand you've been under a lot of stress recently with the death of your fiancée.'

Patronising bastard!

Jack gritted his teeth, nightmare or no there was no way he was putting up with this. 'I think we're done here,' he said and left the room.

Outside he paused at the coffee machine, hit it with the palm of his hand and leant his head against the glass display. Who the fuck do they think they are pinning Trainer's death on him? Okay, he should have followed up and checked up on him sooner. Someone else did... only it wasn't him.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. Pausing for a moment he took it out and swiped the screen. A text message from Watson, too much to take in a one glance. Something to do with Harry Lazarus.

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He put the message to one side for a moment and dialled Ash's number. Still no answer. Shit! An icy chill settled in the pit his stomach. Something was very wrong. Jack's heart thudded like a blowout on a motorway as he typed a hasty reply to Watson and was already in motion as he pressed send.

Chapter 42

The houses on Spring Bank West were a single row of terrace houses. The occasional bank of solar panels setting one house apart from the others. Jack pulled up outside No. 58, tried Ash's mobile again and when he didn't get an answer strode down the garden path.

A block of light shone out across the path where the front door had been forced open. The frame was splintered with traces of blood on the handle.

Oh, Jesus.

Jack rushed forward, put on a pair of nitrile gloves and eased the door open. Slow and steady. There was no way he was going to contaminate a possible crime scene. Especially if Ash's life depended on it.

'Ash?'

He waited for a moment, listening and when no answer came stepped over the loose wood chippings and into the hall. The air smelt oddly sweet and tangy with pine essence coming from the air freshener sitting on top of a bureau beside the door.

'Ash, it's Jack.'

A noise came from upstairs. Not a reply but a high pitched *Bzzzz* that sounded as if it were stuck on a repetitive loop.

'Ash?'

Jack took the stairs one at a time. Glancing up at the landing and then down at his feet. It'd be a while before Crime Scene Investigators got here and put in a common walkway. He'd just have to make do and make sure he didn't compromise any potential evidence.

The high pitch *Bzzzz* continued above. Over and over.

Photos lining the stairs showed a chubby little girl playing with a dog. The same girl posing for a school photograph. Then getting older, slimmer, looking more like Ash. And finally, one with her father as she graduated from police training college. Shoulders back, chest out and a big cheesy grin that stretched from ear to ear.

Pausing for a moment, Jack stepped onto the landing. Light seeped out from a door to his right. That Bzzzzing sound again, only much louder.

'Ash?'

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Bzzzz... Bzzzz

‘You in there?’

Bzzzz... Bzzzz.... Bzzzz

‘Ash?’

She wasn’t there. The bedsheets were crumpled on the floor. Her mobile lying on the bedside table where the radio clock was buzzing away to itself. Jack turned it off. He stood there for a while and breathed in her scent. Unwanted thoughts began to fill his head so he pulled himself away and headed for the door.

A silver cufflink glistened on the floor. He stared at it for a long second before bending down and picking it up. A miniature deck of cards. He’d seen one like it before only he couldn’t remember where.

Outside he filled his lungs with cold air. A dozen or so scenarios racing through his mind as he headed back to his car. He’d parked on a side street where there were no cameras and if anyone did see him, then at least they might not see his face clearly.

He reached for the door handle when his mobile began to ring. PC Watson.

‘Constable?’

‘Sir, it’s DI Osbourne... he’s gone missing.’

‘How long?’

‘Not sure, IPCC are looking for him only no one’s seen him since last night.’

‘Where last night?’ Jack tried to keep his tone level even though the implications of Osbourne’s disappearance were alarming.

‘Sergeant Henderson spoke to him last night in the Custody Suite.’

Osbourne? Couldn’t be. Surely –

‘Any news on the CCTV footage?’

‘The tech guys are still working on it, sir. You want me to take a look.’

Jack considered it for a moment. ‘Yes, do that. Only don’t let anyone see what you’re doing. I need Osbourne’s address, and Watson...’

‘Sir.’

‘If anyone asks you haven’t seen or spoken to me.’

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He hung up before the kid had a chance to ask. Okay, so Watson deserved to know what was going on. But not right now. He'd tell him when he got back to the station, first he needed to head over to see what the newly promoted DI had to say for himself.

He climbed into his car, started the engine and joined the steady stream of traffic heading down Spring Bank. Ash was still alive. He had to cling to that. More than ever, he needed to be professional and focused right now. He couldn't afford to let his emotions get the better of him. Guilt, fear, anger. Once let loose, any one of them would cloud his judgement, dragging him down like a pack of hungry animals.

Chapter 43

DI Osbourne lived in a swanky apartment overlooking the river Hull. The building had been an abandoned warehouse until a decade ago when the council decided to clean the Old Town and invest in smart residential blocks.

Jack got out of his car, rain pinging around him like sharpened knives. A hundred years ago High Street would have been a lively and noisy place, filled with merchants, sailors, and prostitutes. Now it was almost deserted. Here, the property values and the clientele were on the higher end of the professional spectrum. Not the place you'd expect a newly promoted DI to be living. So how was it Osbourne could afford such a place?

The building had a keypad entry system. Jack pressed the button for flat 21.

No response.

He pressed it again.

Still nothing.

'Come on!'

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

A CCTV camera tracked his movements as he rattled the door. The front panels were brushed glass making it difficult to see inside and the bloody thing was locked. The last button on the right had a *Caretaker* label attached to it. Jack jabbed at it and waited. There was no point trying avoid detection. If IPCC wanted him picked up, he'd have been pulled off the streets by now.

'What do you want?'

About bloody time.

Jack leaned closer to the speaker. 'I'm trying to get hold of Clive Osbourne, Apartment 21.'

'Who are you?' The man on the other end sounded Geordie with a hint of Scottish Burr. Drowsy as if he'd been sleeping.

'Police.' Jack waved his warrant card in front of the security camera. 'DS Osbourne's a colleague of mine.'

'He's not in.'

'I'd like to see for myself.'

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‘There’s nothing to see. Mr. Osbourne went out last night. Aint seen him since.’

Jack gritted his teeth and glared up at the camera, nostrils flaring. ‘Open the bloody door.’ He didn’t have time for this shit. Ash’s life was in danger and he really needed to speak to Osbourne.

The seconds passed and a blurred shape appeared on the other side of the frosted glass, getting closer. It was accompanied by the sound of someone grumbling away to themselves. Jack peered through the glass. ‘Come on... come on.’

A buzz and the door opened, revealing an old man dressed in a blue boilersuit, grey cardigan and trainers. ‘Show me that warrant card again.’

Jack gritted his teeth and did as he was asked. There was no point arguing. If the caretaker refused to let him there was no way he was going to get a warrant to search Osbourne’s flat.

A long silence as the old man stared at the warrant card and stepped aside, leaving just enough room for Jack to squeeze past. ‘You’re wasting your time.’

‘I’ll be the judge of that.’

‘Suit yourself. This way.’

Jack followed the caretaker into a lift and up to the second floor. ‘I could have been a copper myself.’ The old man grimaced, pressing a hand against the small of his back. ‘Crumbling spine, see. Doctors signed me off on the sick back when...’

Jack ignored the old man’s grumblings and stepped out of the lift as it reached the second floor.

‘I can’t let you in,’ the caretaker said, bringing up the rear as Jack strode down the corridor to flat 21. ‘I’m taking a risk letting you up here. I could lose my job if anyone finds out.’

Since the outbreak of the Pandemic people didn’t retire anymore, couldn’t afford to with the economy the way it was. When they say a job for life, they really meant it. You hung onto what you had, for as long as you could or until the old heart gave out. The caretaker was one of the unfortunate bastards, crumbling spine and all. Jack’s best guess was that he was somewhere in his seventies.

Jack knocked on Osbourne’s door.

No answer.

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And again. 'Clive, you in there?'

Still no answer.

Jack took out his credit card, jammed it between lock and frame, and pushed. A soft click echoed and the door opened. So much for modern security. The lights came on automatically and the air conditioning fan whirled as he stepped inside.

'Clive, it's Jack.'

'Eh, you can't go in there.'

Jack ignored the caretaker and stepped through into a large living area. 'You in here, Clive.'

Silence apart from the whirling of the extractor fan.

A large floor to ceiling window overlooked the Humber Estuary. Nice on a clear day, less so now it was pissing it down.

'I ought to call the –'

'Police,' Jack finished, turning back to the old man. 'Already here – remember.'

He spun round, head filled with a thousand and one different scenarios as he took in the flat.

'You said you saw Osbourne leave last night.'

'That's right.'

What time?'

'It was a little after ten. I know because I was called up to repair a faulty light switch across the landing.'

'Did he say where he was going?'

'Osbourne?' The caretaker laughed. A deep wheezing sounded as if he was struggling for air. 'The residents don't say and I don't ask. Better that way.'

Thanks for nothing.

Jack headed through into the bedroom, the bathroom and then through into the kitchen. They had nothing except to emphasise how classy the apartment was. That and how Osbourne probably had OCD. Everything had its place. Neat and tidy. Even his socks and underwear drawers were colour coded. He walked over to the kitchen table and started sifting through the unopened letters he found there.

'Hey, don't you need a search warrant?'

Jack glared at the old man. 'It's in the post.'

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Nothing. He dropped the letters back onto the table and headed over to a large American style fridge freezer. A picture of the newly promoted DI and Ash was stuck to the door. Taken in a beer garden. They were locked in a passionate embrace, Osbourne's right arm held out as he took a selfie. Yeah, they were clearly a couple and looked to have been seeing each other for some time.

'Have you seen this woman?' Jack took the picture and held it up in front of the caretaker.

The old man squinted, put on his glasses and leaned a bit closer. 'She might have been here a month or two ago, but not recently.'

'Are you sure?'

The caretaker nodded. 'Pretty sure.'

Jack pocketed the picture and took out his mobile. A missed call from Watson.

'I'll see myself out.'

'Yeah, you do that and leave me to lock up,' the caretaker wheezed.

Jack waved a hand in the air, but didn't turn as he hurried towards the stairs. Mobile phone in hand as he took them two at a time. 'Watson, what is it?'

'DS Osbourne, sir.'

'What about him?'

'Rumour has it that he met up with Ash... DS Young last night.'

Jesus! Jack lengthened his stride, almost tripping as he came to the turning on the second-floor landing. He didn't like the way this was heading. Not one bit. 'Has Osbourne turned up for work yet?'

'Don't think so, sir. You want me to check?'

'No time. I need to know where we can access the city's CCTV footage.'

'Everything?'

'Just the bits we need.'

Jack wrote down the address and told Watson to meet him there. This was one assignment where he was going to need the kid's technological knowhow.

'And Watson.'

A sigh. 'I'm not to tell anyone.'

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The kid was learning. ‘See you in twenty, make that half an hour.’ Jack ended the call and bounded down the remaining stairs, out into the pouring rain and back to his car.

A couple of operators sat at the central back of controls, fiddling with controls that operated the City of Hull’s CCTV cameras.

‘We’re a little short staffed today.’ The man’s name was Robert Staithes, Area Control Manager. He was middle-aged, short and podgy, and put Jack in mind of the character Ricky Gervais played in *The Office*. Jeremy... something. Except this wasn’t some cheesy sitcom. This was real life, with real people.

‘Not that there’s much going on in the middle of the afternoon.’ Staithes’ chins wobbled as he spoke. ‘Mainly beggars harassing old folk for money. The great-unwashed, eh?’ A smile showed the man’s lack of dental hygiene.

Jack glared at Staithes. ‘Can we get on?’

‘Quite right.’ Another smile, a little more uncertain than the last. The man was clearly used to playing the fool. Only today his audience weren’t as easy to impress as his colleagues.

The city’s CCTV Operational Centre was situated on the top floor of Festival House, on Jameson Street. A Police Liaison Officer was assigned to the place but fortunately she had called in sick today, which suited Jack just fine.

He pointed to one of the screens. It showed the junction between High Street and Bishop Lane, the most likely route Osbourne would have taken when he left his apartment last night. The time stamp at the bottom of the screen flashed 10 p.m..... 10:05... 10:15 and there was Osbourne. He stepped out of his apartment building at precisely 10:20 before disappearing from view.

The camera moved, showing boarded-up shops, an estate agent, more shops and what looked like a bank but could just have been a pub. Osbourne appeared again, a definite spring in his step as he turned onto Princes Dock Street, heading south towards –

‘The marina.’ Watson glared at the screen, excited as a little puppy as he fidgeted in his seat. ‘He’s heading towards the marina.’

Jack stared myopically at the screen. The newly promoted DI was on foot which meant he wasn’t going far.

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The camera operator followed him over Murdoch's Connection and onto the other side of Castle Street. From there he turned left and right adjacent to the marina.

The operator clicked a button and the screen went blank.

'Where did he go?'

'Damn bloody thing,' The operator tapped the side of the screen she was sitting in front of and then suddenly Osbourne was back again, heading into Green Bricks.

Sodding Hell! He and Ash had met up barely a five-minute walk away from his houseboat. Which meant he might have passed them last night as he headed home from the Sailmakers Arms. That would go down well when Messrs Chapman and Grainger found out.

'Can you fast forward it. I want to see where he goes afterwards.'

Staithe's nodded and the operator switched cameras until he had a view of pub door.

'Was your target meeting anyone?'

Target meaning, DI Osbourne. Jack met Staithe's gaze and nodded. 'We think so.' It was standard procedure not to give a serving officer's name to members of the public when under investigation. That and to protect their privacy.

Jack turned back to the screen. 'Can this thing go any faster?'

'We need to be sure that we check everyone coming and going, Inspector. We wouldn't want to miss your man.' Staithe's shook his head, probably realised who he was talking to and tried to cover it up with one of his non-celebrity smiles, chins and all.

'How long?' Jack blinked and stared at the screen. He'd go crazy if he had to stare at these things for a living.

A flicker of what might have been static and there was Osbourne, standing at the door with cigarette in his hand. No sign of Ash.

The camera operator froze the screen and Jack peered closer. And there she was, Detective Sergeant Ashleigh Young, looking a little worse for drink. The pair of them waited in the doorway until a taxi pulled up and climbed in. 'I want to know where that car goes.'

'Already on it.' getting into the role now, the operator switched cameras, tracking the taxi through the city centre, past Hull Royal Infirmary and onto Spring Bank West. It stopped opposite Walton Street and the pair of them got out.

'Have you got anything covering No. 58, opposite Pulman Street.'

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The operator did. It showed the pair of them going inside and Osbourne leaving fifteen minutes later alone. He was seen talking on his mobile, which tied in with his call to the station, and got into the back of another cab. It didn't make sense. If Osbourne wasn't Ash's abductor, then who was?

The operator tracked the taxi down Beverley Road where it took a left turn towards Divisional HQ. 'Watson, get on the phone and ask what time he left.'

Silence as he waited. 'Sorry, sir. A different night shift and no one seems to know.'

Bloody hell. Jack stepped away from the screen. It had to be Osbourne; the cufflink and that sweet smelling scene of that aftershave of his, all made sense. He turned back to the screen. 'Go back to the house on Spring Bank West.'

Staithe's glanced at his watch, making a show of it. 'Is this going to take long, Inspector. Only some of us —'

'Just do it.'

Staithe's nodded and the CCTV operator did as she was told.

'Fast forward and keep an eye on the road outside the house.'

Everyone did, including Staithe's. The time stamp ticked on... and on... and on; 3 am, 4 and then 4:30.

'There!' Jack pointed at the screen as a car slowed.

The operator paused the image.

'Back a little. A little more. Stop!'

Watson leaned the same time as Jack did. 'Looks like a Ford Mondeo to me, sir.'

'Let it play, slowly.'

The car idled outside Ash's house, lights bright distorting the image a little. A man got out, approached Ash's house and returned ten minutes later, bundled something into the back seat and drove off. 'That's him... that's our man.' Jack leaned forward and patted the operator on the back. 'Follow it.'

The operator leaned closer, naming the streets as the Mondeo jumped from camera to camera. 'Spring Bank... Coltman Street... left over Park Street Bridge.' He manipulated his tracking pad as the screen faded to static. A pained smile on his face. 'Sorry.'

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‘We’ve got a number of cameras down that side of Hull,’ Staithes offered.’ No smile or chin wobble this time. ‘Our engineers are working on them as we speak. Should be back up and running in a week or two, if you want to come back then?’

No, he bloody well didn’t. Jack glowered at Staithes. ‘What’s the problem?’

‘Bird droppings, Inspector. Cut backs as they are we’re down to one clean-up team working the city.’

‘What about other cameras?’

‘We have a few new ones going online, but it might take a while. A bit late for you guys.’

Jack leaned closer and Staithes recoiled. ‘Well, isn’t that just bloody peachy.’

A cough.

Jack spun round and glared at Watson. ‘What?’

‘There might be something we can try.’

‘Which is?’

Watson glanced at Staithes and then turned his attention to the camera operator.

‘Where do you store the footage?’

A shrug. ‘Mostly in the Cloud, but we do keep in-house copies on hard drive.’

‘Can you send me a copy?’

The operator glanced at Staithes and then nodded. ‘Sure. How do you want it? Memory stick, email, DVD or SVHS, take your pick.’

‘Email’s fine.’ Watson scribbled something down onto a piece of paper and handed it to the operator.

‘I’ll show you out.’ Staithes was on his feet before Jack could say another word and hurried them out of the door.

Outside Jack breathed in a lung full of air and growled. ‘Argh...’ He turned to Watson and nodded up at the building. ‘Why did you ask for the footage?’

Watson shrugged. ‘There’s a chance I might be able to clean them up. The image might be a bit vague but might help.’

‘You can do that?’

‘I can try.’

A pause and then Jack took out his mobile.

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‘Jack, where the fuck are you?’

‘Maeve, no time to explain. I need you to do me a favour.’

‘Not this time. IPCC are crawling all over the place and I’ve got officers dropping like flies. They’d rather be off than get pulled into your pile of shit.’

Jack bit his tongue. He was in it right up to his neck, but technically everything that was going on wasn’t his own doing. ‘I know it’s bad at the moment, but I’ll sort it, promise.’

‘You’d better or trust me when I say you’ll lose what few friends you have left.’

‘Trust me. I just need you to get a car to take Watson back to the station and make sure Messrs Chapman and Grainger stay away from him. That goes for Docherty and anyone on his team.’

‘That’ll be everyone at the station then.’

‘Sorry, I wouldn’t ask if it -’

A sigh. ‘Wasn’t important. Yeah, I’ve heard it all before.’

‘Thanks Maeve.’ Jack hung up and put a hand on Watson’s shoulder. ‘When you get back lock the basement door and call me as soon as you get anything.’

‘Sir.’

A police siren wailed in the distance, getting closer. Jack waited until Watson was inside and headed back to his Volvo. Osbourne’s car was out there somewhere. If anyone could find it Watson could. In the meantime, he was going to need some extra help.

Chapter 44

Jack stood in Grace's living room with his back to the fire, steam rising into the air. With Upper Throng Road flooded this end of Swanland he'd parked up outside the church and walked a mile or so, his clothes wet and soggy against his skin.

'Here drink this.' Grace handed him a tumbler filled with something that looked suspiciously like whisky.

'Can't I'm -'

'On duty, blah... blah.' Grace shook her head. 'A little hot toddy won't do any harm. Come.' She shoved a heap of paperwork away and patted the sofa. 'Sit yourself.'

Jack took the proffered glass and did as he was told. Arguing with Grace was pointless. There wasn't much difference in temperament between Sarah and Grace. There were times he thought them to be sisters, separated by birth and geography. One Irish. The other Scottish. Both do as I say, not as I do.

'Better?'

Jack sipped his drink, feeling the peaty aroma mixed with what smelt like honey warm his insides.

Grace gulped back her own drink. Silence for a moment and then she spoke. 'I'm not going to be around forever Jack.'

'Nonsense.' Jack shook his head and gave a little laugh.

'No, hear me out.' Grace settled back. A frown creasing her forehead. 'Dark times are upon us and you need to be prepared.'

'Is this about the Shade?'

Grace nodded, refilled her glass and offered the bottle to Jack. 'No? Suit yourself. The thing is, I've helped a lot of people, put them in touch with their loved ones on the other side of the veil. Not that I'm complaining. It's been a good life. Deep down I've always been an investigative journalist at heart.'

Jack glanced around the room at the assortment of books scattered about the place. He opened his mouth to say something and closed it again. Besides it was rude to interrupt.

'You're the only one I've talked to about the *Ordo Templis Baphomet*.'

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‘Actually -’ Jack began. ‘I sort of get it. Not saying I believe but the thing I saw in the Gloomworld couldn’t have existed unless it was...’ he trailed off, unable to find a suitable word.

‘Not of this place,’ Grace offered.

‘Sort of. The thing is, I’m here because Ash is missing, but I’m guessing you already knew that.’

This time Grace’s nod was almost imperceptible. ‘And you think DI Osbourne has taken her?’

‘Yes... no...’ Jack sighed. ‘I don’t know. I need to find Ash.’

‘Of course, you do dear.’ Grace reached out and gently squeezed his arm.

‘I was kind of hoping you might, you know...’ Jack nodded. ‘... ask your Spirit friends for help.’

‘Friends. Strange choice of words. You remember the darkness I told you about?’

Jack did, more than that he had seen it move behind Grace’s eyes.

‘Well, it’s getting stronger. It has severed what little contact I have with the spirit realm. Oh, don’t get me wrong I still see outlines, but it’s not quite the same.’

‘What about this lot.’ Jack took in the scattering of books; geography, astronomy, astrology, religion, even the history of Satanism. Some were so old he couldn’t distinguish the titles. There were folders too with hand written labels. New York, Moscow, China, the Middle East, and the largest had United Kingdom printed on it. At the centre of them, all sat the album with Simon Rutledge and others, Edinburgh ’67.

‘Nothing so easy to see than a monster in our midst but the core of our society is slowly rotting away. What you see here is a man’s attempt to give logic to it. Only there isn’t any to be had. A Shade is brought into being by the dark actions of man. It grows over millennia, moving from host to host.’

‘Until?’

‘Mostly they die out like a virus. The world is full of them, only...’ Her eyes met Jack’s. ‘This one is different... stronger. Trainer and all those that went before him were temporary vessels. A way to survive over millennia and now it has come to Hull because it senses the presence of its true host.’

You will give yourself to me and all that is yours will be mine.

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Shit!

Jack picked up his tumbler, disappointed to see that it was empty. 'Where does Ash fit into all of this?'

'I'm not sure. Tell me more about this interview with Mike Trainer.'

Jack did, leaving nothing out.

'If Mr Trainer was as lucid as you say he was then it seems he had the presence of mind to fight back, for a while at least.'

'Is that possible?'

'Normally I'd say no. I've seen strong willed men put up a fight only to be found wanting on their second breath.'

'Your friend, Simon?'

'Aye.' Grace gave a little laugh of fondness. 'And let me tell you he was as strong as they come. This DI Osbourne, he's the one I saw Ash with at the theatre?'

Jack nodded. 'Why him?'

'Why anyone? Your colleague is a victim in this as much as anyone else. He'll have no control of his actions. I dare say he might even be lucid enough to know what's happening to him.'

Jack clenched his fists; they were cold and the scar on his forearm burned. Whether it was from the heat of the open fire, or talk of the Shade he wasn't sure.

'I need to know what to do when I catch up with this Shade?'

'You can't just kill it, Jack. Point a gun and it'll make you turn it on yourself. Try and stab it and you'll drive the blade through your own heart.'

'It doesn't stop me from trying.'

'You're not listening Jack. A Shade isn't something you can kill, scare off or arrest. This thing is something else, indistinct and ill formed. It seeks only vengeance'

'If there's something you're not telling me I need to know.'

Grace glanced anxiously at the surrounding books. 'You're not going to like it, but there is only one possible way.'

'Which is?'

'You need to kill Osbourne.'

'What?' A chill settled in the pit of Jack's stomach.

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‘If the host were to die and without physical contact with another, the Shade also dies. That’s why I needed you to isolate Trainer in the cells.’ Grace said nothing for a while, just staring into the distance as if trying to hear something. She shook her head. ‘I need more time to figure out how this works.’ Her eyes migrated back to the books. ‘The answer’s here somewhere.’

Jack got to his feet. He’d seen a lot of bad things in his career that made him doubt his own humanity, but this... taking a life of another, and a colleague at that, took it to a whole new level. Kill Osbourne to rid the world of the Shade. What sort of person would that make him?

Grace brushed his arm as she showed him to the door. ‘Be careful, Jack,’ she said, ‘most of all don’t do anything until I find what I’m looking for.’ She studied his face as she spoke and Jack nodded.

Outside he turned up his collar and headed through the rain back to his car. He should hate Grace for what she had suggested, but didn’t. Maybe killing Osbourne was the only way. He hoped it wasn’t.

Chapter 45

Dark fields and hedgerows skittered past the Volvo as Jack sped down the A63 heading back into Hull. Four-fifteen in the afternoon and already it was getting dark. He pulled into a layby and ordered coffee from one of those mobile snack bars.

He had intended to head back to the station but something stopped him. Not sure what it was he put his drink on the dashboard and called the basement. ‘Any news on the CCTV footage, Constable?’

‘Ah, sir. I was about to call you.’

Jack was about to say *you were* when Watson’s voice sounded again. ‘The thing is we’ve been looking at this all wrong.’

‘Slow down, Constable. What have we been looking at wrong?’

‘Staithes was right. You can’t clean up what isn’t there. Bird shit is a bugger to see through.’

Jack stared at the heat coming from his polystyrene cup. ‘Is this going somewhere, Constable?’

‘Yes, sir. That is to say I’ve found DI Osbourne’s car.’

Jack sat up, almost toppling over his cup. ‘You have... where?’

‘In the station carpark.’

Hidden in plain sight. Jesus. Jack shook his head.

‘The thing is, Osbourne signed out a pool car.’

‘Last night.’

‘Of course, last night. What time?’

‘Not sure, hold on....’

A *tap, tapping* of keys filled the line.

‘Constable?’

‘A little after one, sir.’

Which meant his never left the station. ‘Where’s the pool car now?’

‘Hasn’t been returned yet, sir.’

‘Then track it down. Osbourne still has to have it.’

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‘Already done that, sir.’ More tapping of keys. ‘The car headed towards the Old Town.’

‘You sure?’

‘Yes, sir. The new fleet of pool cars are fitted with tracking devices just in case they’re stolen.’

Yeah, or a serving police officer is hijacked, Jack didn’t say. ‘Can you tell me where it’s parked?’

‘Ah -’

‘Problem, Constable?’

‘The tracker was turned off some way down Ferensway.’

So bloody close.

Jack shook his head. ‘Keep looking. It has to be somewhere.’

A pause and then. ‘I take it you haven’t heard, sir?’

‘Heard what?’

‘They’ve suspended Sergeant Chalmers.’

‘When?’

‘Yesterday. Word is they’re bringing her in for questioning and DCI Docherty’s sitting in on the interview.’

Bastard!

Jack’s stomach tightened. Maeve wasn’t to blame for Trainer’s death; not that it would stop Messrs Watson and Grainger feeding her through the career blender.

‘Where are we with Professor Wheeler?’

Silence filled the line as if the question had taken Watson by surprise and then. ‘On the surface the Professor’s credentials hold up; school records. Hull University, a stint at Manchester Tech. Nothing out of the ordinary.’

‘I’m sensing a but, Constable?’

‘Only, something’s been bugging me, sir.’

‘Always trust your gut feelings, Constable.’

‘It’s just that professor was working on a book.’

‘Nothing unusual in that for an academic.’

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‘It wasn’t the book as such, but the title: *Late Nineteenth Century Transmigration.*

The Hidden Secrets.’

‘Wasn’t that -’

‘The same book Trainer was looking into.’

Jack knew there was something dodgy about Professor Wheeler. His interest in Trainer’s work went deeper than professional jealousy. It also raised another question. If Wheeler knew so much about Trainer’s work, did he also know about the Shade? It wasn’t inconceivable that he didn’t, but right now Jack wasn’t buying into that hypothesis.

South Park Golf Club looked like a cross between a secondary school and a council office: a red-bricked construct, two stories high with green-tinted PVC windows.

Jack had called the university and tracked the Professor to here. He pulled into a parking space close to the only two other vehicles. One was a black Jag. Light from the building cut across its bonnet, highlighting her angular beauty. The other a glistening four-by-four that looked as if off-road driving was a concept in the brochure and not to be taken literally.

He killed the engine and climbed out into the pouring rain, feeling his mobile vibrate in his pocket. He tensed himself for the inevitable bad news as he took it out and shielded the screen. ‘Chapman and Grainger looking for you... something to do with drugs. Best not come in.’

Drugs?

Jack wondered how they had come to that conclusion? The most he’d taken had been a dose of Night Nurse and a couple of Paracetamol to fend off a particularly bad cold. If it hadn’t been for Watson’s message he might have walked right into the ambush. He pocketed his mobile. Best not reply and drop Watson deeper into the quagmire.

South Park reception area was everything you’d expect a golf club to look like. A long wooden counter. Vending machines, photos on the wall of famous celebrities who may or may not have visited the place. And a glass cabinet filled with trophies.

Bland Christmas music sounded from the other side of a door marked: *Office. Staff Only.*

Jack rang the bell and skimmed through the Visitors’ Book. As it turned out a

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wet Saturday afternoon wasn't the best time to be playing golf. The only name there was Professor Wheeler's.

'Can I help you?'

Jack looked up to see a woman looming over him. She was, what? Mid-fifties, tall, with moon shaped spectacles, knitted cardigan and a scowl reminiscent of his old headmistress.

'I'm here to see Professor Wheeler.'

'I'm afraid he's not to be disturbed.'

Jack took out his warrant card. 'Tell him DI Kane would like a word.'

The woman scowled, turned and headed across the green carpeted floor to a room at the far end of reception adorned with a gold gilded sign: *Members' Lounge*.

When she emerged, her face had reddened. Lips tight and brow furrowed as if she had stepped into something unpleasant. She marched across the floor, head back and shoulders straight as if she were modelling for a finishing school for girls, or whatever you called them. 'This way.'

Jack followed, trying not to feel as if he'd been summoned for doing something wrong. When they reached the lounge, she held the door open, waited a moment and pulled it to, not following as Jack stepped inside.

Professor Wheeler was sitting in a high-backed leather chair, eyes fixed on the large floor to ceiling window that looked out onto the golf course. 'Inspector.' He nodded to a nearby chair and put on a pair of wire-rimmed glasses 'You wanted to talk to me?'

Jack sat down. The smell of expensive air freshener trying to disguise something sharp and coppery. Wheeler was hunched, an oxygen mask pressed to his mouth. There was a line going into his arm attached to a drip. The bag half-empty and yellow looking. This wasn't the Professor he'd seen at the university or in the tunnels beneath Paragon Station.

'Don't mind this.' Wheeler nodded at the apparatus. 'Cancer,' he said. His face twisted as a rattled cough shook his body. 'I prefer to have my treatment in familiar surroundings. Magnificent, wouldn't you say?' He nodded to the gloom outside the window.

Jack was at a loss as to what he could see. 'I don't play myself.'

'More's the pity.' Wheeler coughed and shook again. 'I'm guessing you haven't come here to talk golf.'

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‘I have a few more questions about Mike Trainer.’

‘I thought we already discussed this at the university?’

‘Humour me.’

‘As you wish, Inspector.’ Wheeler shrugged; eyes still fixed on the window.

‘How long have you been a member of the *Ordo Templis Baphomet*?’

‘I thought this was about Trainer?’

‘We’re getting there.’

Wheeler had put on a reasonable front to deflect the question but Jack could have sworn he saw a flicker of horror cross the professor’s face.

‘Did Mr Trainer find out what you were up to. Is that why you had him dismissed from his post at the university?’

‘Up to?’ Wheeler turned eyes sharp as he met Jack’s. For all his years he had a persona of someone much younger. ‘It appears your imagination has run away with you, Inspector.’

‘Answer the question, Professor, please.’

‘Trainer wasn’t of sound mind, Inspector. It’s one thing looking for the truth, quite another being able to comprehend what you’ve discovered.’

‘And you Professor.’ Jack nodded at the apparatus. ‘What truths have you discovered?’

‘I admit this is a temporary inconvenience, Inspector. It says nothing about the strength of my mind.’

‘What about the university, did they know about your extracurricular activities?’

Wheeler took a deep breath and wheezed before answering. ‘I’m a private man, Inspector. Besides, a university isn’t a place to go around voicing your views, let alone criticizing colleagues without proof. You leave yourself open to criticism. Not to mention the horrendous paperwork it entails.’

‘Was Mr Trainer blackmailing you?’

Another laugh. ‘Indeed not. The poor feller could barely put his socks on in the morning.’

‘Yet you employed him.’

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‘Not I, Inspector. The university. They got it into their heads that they are an equal opportunity employer. The word got around Trainer had taken up with one of his students. Hardly professional conduct.’

‘Hannah Kowalski?’

Wheeler nodded. ‘She may have completed her studies if Mike hadn’t led her astray.’

Not that she was a problem anymore. Jack pictured her lying in the morgue and felt her cold dead fingers clawing away at his insides, demanding answers. ‘Have you heard of Lazarus Junction?’

‘Can’t say I have.’

‘What about, *Late Nineteenth Century Transmigration. The Hidden Secrets.*’

Wheeler shook his head.

Jack eyed the professor more closely seeing a glimmer of recognition. ‘What about Trainer, did he ever mention them?’

‘Sorry, Inspector. As I’ve said before, Trainer’s research was nothing more than half-truths and hearsay. I’ve seen more accomplished work from a first-year undergraduate. All this talk of the supernatural had clearly clouded the man’s judgement.’

‘Then why accept Mr Trainer’s invitation?’

‘The so-called *Grand Unveiling?*’ The Professor scoffed. ‘Morbid curiosity, Inspector, nothing more.’

Strange choice of words. ‘Do you know who’s buried there under Paragon Station?’

The Professor shook his head. ‘Can’t say I do.’

The door opened and the receptionist, cum headmistress, cum nurse entered carrying a syringe and a small glass bottle. ‘It’s time, Professor.’

Jack noticed puncture marks on Wheeler’s liver-spotted skin. ‘Have you heard of a Shade’

‘Indeed not.’ Wheeler shook his head and laughed. ‘Is this one of Trainer’s insane ramblings?’

Liar.

Jack noticed a small nerve twitching on the Professor’s sunken face at the mention of the name.

‘Professor, I really must insist.’

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‘Yes of course, Sandra. The Inspector was just leaving.’

Outside the cool air did nothing to soothe Jack’s anger. Wheeler and Trainer. One rich and privileged, the other a comprehensive pupil, struggling to be accepted in the world of academia. Wheeler was lying, that much was clear. He’d followed Trainer’s research into Lazarus Junction, whatever the Hell that was. He’d even been there for the unveiling. It seemed inconceivable that he didn’t know about the Shade.

Hannah Kowalski, Nicolae Pavlov and Molly Dullea. They all demanded answers. He pulled out his mobile and dialled the station. ‘I need Professor Wheeler’s medical records,’ he said and hung up before Watson had time to answer.

He was convinced the Professor was a member of the *Ordo Templis Baphomet*. To what extent he was unsure, if there was an extent at all. If Grace’s recollection was anything to go by once you were in there was little chance of getting out.

Chapter 46

Jack waited for the fresh coffee to bubble through the machine Sarah had bought him. With Messrs Grainger and Chapman after him and all this nonsense about drugs he could hardly go back to Divisional. Sure, there were a few people he needed to talk to but getting back in unseen would be impossible. Sooner or later, they'd know he was missing and come looking for him. and there was only one place they'd come looking first. Here.

He glanced out of the window. No sign of headlights. He doubted they'd turn up full lights and music. Still, he knew he didn't have all that long to get himself together and get out.

He poured a mug of coffee, took a sip and headed out on deck. Caffeine, rain and a bracing wind. There was no better way to clear the head.

Dark smudges of purple and black filled the horizon. The swelling of the Humber rocked the boat; there was no sign of any one about, which was just as well. How much of this did the people of Hull think was out of the ordinary? Not many he guessed.

Millie brushed up against his legs. Her wide eyes looking up at him. Jack took another sip of his coffee, knelt down and ruffled her fur. 'When did life get so complicated, eh?'. Millie peered up at him and said nothing. Typical.

Jack straightened up just as his mobile began to ring. He pulled it from his pocket and checked the caller ID. Watson. With any luck he'd have some good news for once.

'Where are you, sir?' The now familiar hoarse voice spoke quietly as if afraid of being overheard.

Jack hesitated before answering. 'Why?'

'They know about Ash.'

Jack didn't need to ask who *they* were.

'Docherty thinks you're responsible,' Watson continued.

No surprises there. 'How did they find out?'

'A neighbour called it in, said they saw someone suspicious going into the house first thing this morning. A patrol car was sent... ' Watson broke off for a moment and let out a strained cough. 'They found Ash's mobile at the house. Apparently, you were the last to call her.'

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Shit!

As circumstantial evidence goes, Jack had to admit things weren't looking good for him.

'Docherty's got a team heading to your place right now, sir. I thought you ought to know.'

'Thanks, Constable.' Jack tossed what was left of his coffee overboard and was about to head inside when Watson spoke again.

'There's something else, sir.'

'Best make it quick.'

'A mobile PNC van picked up the pool car Osbourne was driving last night.'

Finally, something positive. 'Where was he heading?'

'South bound along Ferensway.'

'What time?'

'Twelve-thirty, sir.'

Jack did a quick mental calculation. That would have placed Osbourne outside Ash's house fifteen minutes earlier. The time-line fitted. 'Do you know where he was heading?'

'I can do better than that, sir. His mobile came online about the same time and I was then able to use the time and date to triangulate his location.'

Jack didn't ask why this wasn't done sooner or what the fuck triangulate meant. He guessed there'd be a reasonable answer. 'Where is he now?'

'Last known location was Trinity Market.'

'Was?'

'His mobile signal died.'

'Fuck!'

'Lazarus Junction.'

'What about it?'

'Dr Simms used the name to reference the spot where Harry Lazarus was buried under Paragon Station. *Transmigration and those it left behind*. Trainer referenced it a number of times and credits the name to Lazarus Hotel on Posterngate.'

'Trinity Market?'

'Yes, sir.'

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‘Good enough.’

‘What about Professor Wheeler?’

‘Lung cancer. By all accounts he should have been dead months ago. Something’s keeping him alive.’

You bet it was. Only now he needed more.

Jack grabbed his coat and locked the cabin door. ‘Watch your back, Docherty will be on the warpath, and Watson...’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Thanks.’

Jack hung up and dialled Wheeler’s number.

‘This is harassment, Inspector.’

‘You want what you’re looking for?’

‘I don’t know what -’

‘Cut the bullshit. I know where the Shade is.’ He gave the Professor the address and told him to meet him there before ending the call.

Chapter 47

Posterngate was the last place Jack imagined Osbourne would have been heading. Wheeler was waiting for him when he got out of his car and strode across the slick cobbled streets. Rain making everything look yellow streaked as if infected.

The professor looked fragile standing in the shadow of the doorway, tucked away out of the beam of the street lights. He had his hands tucked in his pockets. Strands of white hair dancing in the cold breeze. He might have looked fragile, but Jack knew better.

‘You didn’t waste any time.’

Wheeler narrowed his eyes but didn’t bite. He looked up at the darkened building. ‘You’re sure it’s inside?’

‘Only one way to find out.’

Lazarus Hotel had stood since the late-nineteenth century. Its grand Georgian windows now sealed shut once looked out onto Hull Minister and a plethora of pubs and town apartments. The air tasted of cocoa and sea-salt, smoke from the oil refineries and the pungent smell from the tannery on Bankside.

Jack made a beeline for the door, put a shoulder to the frame and pushed. A chink of light appeared around the edges. He pushed again. More light. More shoving and the door hung open an inch or two, letting out the grimy smell of mildew and rotting wood. One final push and it swung open, creaking and groaning on ancient hinges. The scent of decay got thicker as he stepped over the threshold.

Dark in here. Not surprising, given that it was after six on a winter’s evening. Jack tried the light switch: *on and off, on and off*. Nothing. Should have brought a torch. Well, it was too late for that. He’d have to improvise, dug out his mobile and activated the torch App. Not great, but it would have to do.

Jack glanced back at Wheeler. ‘Keep your eyes peeled and your mouth shut.’

No response.

Suit yourself.

A wide sweep of light brought into view boxes, tables, chairs, and an array of other odds-and-ends as if the hallway had been used as a dumping ground for whoever owned the building.

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A gust of wind blew in from the street, setting the door swinging, as if the ghosts of the past were trying to escape.

‘Keep moving.’

Jack headed towards the staircase at the end of the hall and looked up. The thing was old. Really old. The steps rotten and warped as they reached up into the darkness. This wasn’t going to be easy. Not that it ever was.

Wheeler reached out with a liver-spotted hand and shook the banister, setting the whole thing wobbling. Face pale as he glanced at Jack. Probably thinking how he was going to climb the thing without falling to his death. Well, sod him, he wanted the Shade he was bloody well going to have to make the effort.

Jack tested his weight on the bottom step, it creaked, and groaned and sagged a little. Then another, one at a time until he was halfway up the first flight. Wheeler grunted and moaned as he followed.

Another couple of steps and they were on the first-floor landing. So far so –

‘Hear that?’

Wheeler shook his head.

‘Sounded like -’

A loud bang echoed like a gunshot in the rafters as dozens of pigeons took flight, making for the gaps in the roof tiles. Jesus! Jack looked up, teeth chattering as a wave of cold ran through him.

He climbed the final two steps to the first floor. Light dancing off the floor and walls as he turned, taking in his surroundings. There were two rooms, small, no windows. Doors hanging off at jaunty angles to reveal bare innards and skeleton remains where the floorboards used to be.

Two more flights to go. ‘Suppose we’d better -’ Jack jerked his head upwards, not waiting for Wheeler’s reply as he continued his ascent.

Smart move Jack, coming here in the cold and the dark when the building was falling to pieces. It wasn’t as if backup was on its way. No, that would have been the obvious thing to do. Only he didn’t have time to call it in, let alone wait while the powers-that-be carried out a full risk assessment, followed by strategy planning, resource allocation and whatever bugging around they could think of while lives were in danger.

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Sod that. Osbourne had to have Ash holed up somewhere inside.

Rain water dripped, the building creaked and groaned, the rhythm like an artificial breath. Jack bypassed the hollow shell of the second floor and headed for the summit. Wheeler panting and wheezing a few steps behind.

The place was huge. It didn't take a genius to work out this was where the Scandinavian farmers ate and drank with their families. A large communal space. Empty now with two adjoining rooms. One left. One right. The larger of the two had been used as a kitchen - possibly. The other, a WC, or perhaps a storeroom? It was hard to make out.

'What now?' Wheeler stepped into his line of sight and glared.

'Make yourself useful.' Jack nodded. 'Scout around, see what you can find.'

Wheeler was silent.

Jack frowned. 'Something wrong?' The floorboards creaked and groaned as he headed over to where the professor was standing. 'What's -'

The old man was staring at a door on the far side of the room, barely visible in the gloom. Jack stared at it for a moment seeing a faint chink of light under the door frame. He walked over, careful not to disturb more of the creaking floorboards, and listened. A man's voice come from inside, repeating the same words over and over. *Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.* His tone deep and rasping drowning out the sound of a woman sobbing. Almost.

Ash, had to be.

Jack turned towards the professor. 'You sure you know what to do?'

A grunt. 'Whatever the Shade has done to your friend, I'll put right.'

'Yeah, well, just make sure you do.'

'Ready?' Jack took a deep breath, heart thumping in his ears as he burst through the door. He barely had time, two... three seconds max, to register the outline of DI Osbourne and Detective Sergeant Young.

Silence and then -

Thwack!

Pain exploded.

Jack's legs buckled and he went down, something warm and sticky trickling down the back of his head. 'What the -?' His words slurred as he lifted his head.

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A cufflink glistened in the gloom. Wheeler standing over him. A stupid grin on his face and a gun in his hand, the butt slick with blood. His blood. The bastard had played him all along and he'd fallen for it.

'Osbourne belongs to me, Inspector.'

Nausea erupted and the room began to spin. Deep breaths. Deep breaths.

Thwack!

Then the lights went out.

Pain. Lots of it. The world strobed into life between heavy eyelids. Jack frowned, still alive, duct tape covered his mouth, pulling at his cheeks and lips. His hands were tied behind his back with what felt like cable ties. No sign of Osbourne or Professor Wheeler. Great! This wasn't good.

Darkness, no windows or other light source. No idea of how long he had been out cold, deep breaths through his nose. He wriggled and rolled until he was kneeling on something that was prickly and smelt of cattle. Straw and lots of it.

Reaching down he touched something warm. Hands. Two of them, fingers interlocked as if begging. Jack turned, almost toppling over again.

Ash was lying on her side. Duct tape covering her mouth. Both her hands and legs tied. She didn't move or make a sound. Oh, Jesus, please don't let her be dead. Please don't let her be dead. Please don't let her be dead.

Jack shuffled closer, turned and reached out until he was able to place two fingers against the side of her neck. There was a pulse, weak and irregular, but a pulse none the less. She was alive. Ash was fucking alive! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Jack sagged a little, breathing heavily. Still had to get out of here.

Another breath, deep and long as he sucked air in through his nostrils, rolled into a tight ball and worked his hands down his back, over his bottom, thighs, calves and then over his feet until they were in front of his body. Well, that was something anyway.

Next the duct tape, he yanked it free, spat blood and growled through gritted teeth. Jesus, that bloody hurt. Two down. Now he had to figure out how to cut the cable ties and get Ash free.

Footsteps sounded outside the door, getting closer. Wheeler or Osbourne. Maybe both. Jack tucked his arms under himself and rolled onto his side, feigning unconsciousness.

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The door opened. Someone ducked inside, hunched low and then stood. Not Wheeler or Osbourne but Watson.

Jack sat up. 'Quick. Over here!'

The kid blinked and looked around for a moment.

'Right now, Constable.'

Finally, he seemed to come to his senses and rushed over. 'Sir, Professor Wheeler -'

'Never mind that.' Jack motioned to the cable ties. 'Get me out of these things.'

Watson took a pen knife from his pocket and cut through the thick plastic. A snap and his hands were free. Another and then his legs.

'They're outside.'

'What?'

Jack rubbed the circulation back into his wrists and ankles.

'Osbourne and the professor. They're outside. I think the old man's trying to perform an incantation.'

The room rotated as Jack scrawled towards the door and peered out. Watson was right. Wheeler had chalked a pentagram on the third-floor landing and had Osbourne kneeling inside. Blindfolded with his hands and feet tied. The gun lying by the Professor's side. The old fool was reciting a verse from a book open at his feet.

Okay, how are we going to do this? Watson had managed to sneak in. But now their numbers had increased and one of them was barely conscious. Chances are they were going to be seen. One of them had to take up the rear and clear the way for the other two and Jack ought to be the one to do it.

Wheeler's voice grew louder. Eyes closed, palms upwards as he rocked back and forth. 'Bagahi laca bachahe... Bagahi laca bachahe... Bagahi laca bachahe.' They were the same words Jack had heard in the Gloomworld.

'Take Ash, I'll follow behind.'

Watson hesitated.

'Now, Constable.'

Watson nodded, put Ash's arm around his neck and walked her forward. Her body limp, legs dangling by his side.

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Jack breathed in and got to his feet. ‘Whatever happens, I want you to get Ash to safety. Ready?’

Watson nodded.

‘On my mark, one... two -’

A loud bang roared outside, echoing around the rafters and lime washed walls, roaring and bouncing until it finally faded away.

Jack covered his ears and fell to his knees. The wound to his head stinging as he caught it with his hand. He stood, looked towards Watson and Ash then stumbled back as the door burst open.

Osbourne stepped inside and threw Wheeler’s body to the floor; mouth open, eyes wide with a single gunshot wound to his forehead. Osbourne then took a step forward. He was only six feet away but might have well been a million miles as he pushed Ash to the floor, grabbed hold of Watson and produced a Stanley knife.

‘It doesn’t have to be like this.’ Jack got to his feet and held out a hand.

Nothing happened. No threat. No warning. Nothing until Osbourne pulled the blade across the kid’s throat and tossed him aside like a discarded sack of meat.

‘No! No! No!’ Jack rushed forward and took hold of Watson, cradling him in his arms as he tried in vain to stem the flow of blood oozing from his throat.

Impassive, Osbourne dropped Wheeler’s gun at Jack’s feet. ‘Kill me!’ A command not a question.

‘Go fuck yourself!’

‘Kill me!’

Jack shook his head and Osbourn turned towards Ash, knife at the ready.

‘Alright... alright.’ Jack picked up the gun and levelled it at Osbourne’s head. One shot from this distance and it’d blow a hole clean through. Surely the Shade wouldn’t be able to survive that?

A deep breath. Jack steadied himself. Sweat trickling down his brow as he curled a finger around the trigger.

A popping sound split the air in a bright flash. Jack shielded his eyes and when he looked again Grace was standing in front of him.

‘This isn’t how it ends,’ she said. A bright glow burning behind her eyes.

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Jack lowered the gun and she took it from him. Turning she then stepped towards Watson, placed a hand to his throat and whispered something in his ear. Whatever she did and said was nothing short of miraculous. The kid opened his eyes. He took a lung full of air, gasped and settled back breathing softly.

Grace then stepped towards Osbourne and placed a hand against his chest. 'Leave this body and leave this place.'

Osbourne raised the knife.

'Leave now!' More forcefully.

A shake of the head and he stepped forward.

'Then we go together.'

Grace knelt down and touched the floor. It was as if a flame had spontaneously erupted out of her hands and then the straw began to smoulder. Whisps of smoke swirling around one another as they spiralled towards the roof. Then a *whoomph* as it ignited.

Jack clambered across the floor, throat burning as he took hold of Ash's arm and shook. 'Wake up! Wake up!'

No reply.

'For God's sake wake up.'

Ash groaned and opened her eyes. 'Can you walk?'

A nod. 'Think so.'

'Good. We need to get out of here. Follow me and stay low. Can you do that?'

Another nod.

Jack made his way back across the floor, glancing back to make sure Ash was following. He put a hand on the side of Watson's neck. There was a pulse. Weak but it was there. He hoisted the kid onto his shoulders, legs buckling as they took his weight, and staggered out of the room and across the landing.

Everything was ablaze. The heat unbearable as flames danced towards the top of the staircase. There was still time. He glanced back. Osbourne was just standing there. Eyes blank as if someone had switched him off. 'Come on, get out of there, you bloody idiot,' he yelled. And where the Hell was Grace?

Ash nudged him. 'We need...' A cough. '... to get out...' Another, deep and rattling. '... before it's... too late.'

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The heat warped and blistered the steps. The air in the building solid with smoke, bitter, dark greasy smoke that reeked of burning straw.

Jack led the way down, pausing on the second and first landings to draw breath and adjust Watson's weight on his shoulders. There weren't many options, make it to the ground floor or die trying.

'Anyone there?'

A long tunnel with a bright light at the end. Jack staggered through the entrance hall, out through the door, and stumbled out onto wet cobbled streets. A man shone a light in his face. Watson lay on the ground, eyes closed, dead to the world but still breathing, Ash beside him. 'Are you alright?'

'Ambulance,' Jack wheezed. 'Call an ambulance.'

'Already on the way, mate.' The man nodded towards the building. 'Anyone else inside?'

Jack glanced up. Osbourne was still in there. Grace too but he wasn't sure if he had imagined her. Bright eyes and magical healing powers. Who the hell was going to believe him anyway?

A crowd had gathered on the other side of the road, mobile phones in hand as they videoed the inferno. Jack took Ash's hand and squeezed. 'Look after Watson.' Got to his feet and staggered back into the building.

'Oi, you can't go in there, you'll get yourself killed.'

No kidding.

The smoke was so thick now there wasn't even a glimmer of light to guide the way. Jack made it to the first, and then the second-floor landings, feeling his way as he palmed the red-hot walls. Sweat trickled down his back. Every sharp intake of breath as if he'd swallowed broken glass.

He called out to Osbourne once, twice and then dropped to his knees as he reached the top of the building. 'Answer me, god damn you!'

A loud crack and a section of the roof gave way, crashing down and taking most of staircase with it.

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Sirens wailed outside. Great. Now the cavalry was here there was no way they were going to enter the building even when persons were reported. The place was too old and crumbling to risk more lives.

Jack crawled across the floor, feeling with one hand in front of him he caught the side and then the top of a foot, Osbourne, gasping and wheezing, his skin blistering, he took hold of his shoulders, and dragged him towards the brick fireplace on the far side of the landing.

Osbourne groaned, his breathing weak and laboured as he lay in the tight space. Jack joined him and pulled a piece of wood over the opening.

Tired... very... very tired now. He stuck his hands into his pocket, pulled out the gemstone Sarah had given him and toppled sideways until his head was resting against Osbourne. A long sigh and then he closed his eyes. He'd tried. At least he had tried.

Chapter 48

Jack surfaced from the depths of darkness and squinted through heavy eyelids.

It didn't take long to work out he was in a hospital. The smell of antiseptic disinfectant was a dead giveaway as much as anything. The room was small. The blinds partially drawn, quivering in the air that whistled through open air vents. Rain crackled against the window, machinery beeped and Jack groaned.

His throat was sore and everything hurt. His tongue tasted of burnt pennies and swallowing was agony. Movement wasn't impossible, just inadvisable. After a couple of moments and with great effort, he lifted his head and tried to assess his injuries. His hands were bandaged and sore. Nothing was broken as far as he could see. Arms and legs still intact. So, all good there, wasn't it?

Someone cleared their throat beside him and he turned to see Chief Superintendent Blanchard sitting upright in one of the visitor's chairs.

'Welcome back.' Blanchard's voice was soft and low. Not his usual boom.

If he'd been through Hell, the Chief Super looked as if he been there twice. Face pale and drawn with tea-stained bags under his eyes.

'How...?' Jack coughed, dribbling black phlegm down his cheeks.

'I'll get the nurse.'

'No...Water.'

Blanchard took a tissue, wiped the dribble from Jack's face and held a glass of water to his lips.

Cool and soothing. Jack sipped. Not too much or he'd be sick. 'How long have I -?'

'A couple of days.' Blanchard straightened his uniform and sat back down again.

'What... happened?' Jack whispered his throat sore as if he'd been shouting.

'You ran into a burning building to rescue DI Osbourne. You were lucky the fire brigade got there when they did otherwise -' Blanchard broke off and swallowed, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. There was something about those tired eyes that said he wasn't well. 'It's always too damn warm in these places.'

'One of your turns?'

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‘Turns?’ Blanchard smiled. ‘You make me sound like a stage act.’

‘If the shoe fits.’

Jack gritted his teeth, pushed himself up and began coughing. ‘The fire. How did I -?’

‘Get out? The fire brigade went in through the adjoining building. No, 45, I believe. It was just as well you had the presence of mind to crawl into the fireplace. Anywhere else and you’d have both died.’

Yeah, as if he didn’t feel dead right now.

‘The others?’

‘Watson and Osbourne are in Intensive Care. By all accounts they’re both lucky to be alive.’

‘Ash is she -?’

Blanchard nodded. ‘Smoke inhalation, aside from cuts and bruises. They are keeping an eye on her, but I dare say she’ll pull through.’

Jack watched Blanchard and waited.

‘Professor Wheeler didn’t make it. We’ve informed the university and they are contacting his family out in New Zealand.’

No mention of Grace. Had he imagined her being there. The fire behind her eyes and how she had brought Watson back from the dead?

Blanchard leaned in low and cleared his throat. ‘The way I see it,’ he said, voice low and conspiratorial. ‘Osbourne became obsessed with Sergeant Young and held her captive. He overpowered you and attacked Watson with a knife when you went to rescue her. And then he set fire to the building.’

‘It wasn’t like that, sir.’

‘Then how was it? Demonic possession, an elderly woman miraculously appearing to save the day?’ Blanchard must have seen the confused look on Jack’s face and added. ‘Doctors said you’d been delirious when they brought you in, not surprising given the toxic fumes you’ve inhaled.’

‘What about Professional Standards... an investigation?’

‘There won’t be one. I’m just pointing out how it might look to those of us that weren’t there.’

‘So, what now?’

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‘I’ll be overseeing the enquiry. A serving police officer tries to kill three of his colleagues. There might even be evidence linking Osbourne to Mike Trainer’s death. CCTV footage shows he was the last one to see him alive.’

Coincidence? Jack didn’t think so. There had to be a connection between the CCTV going down and the Shade. He didn’t blame Blanchard. How else was he going to explain what happened to his superiors? Still, it hardly seemed fair that Osbourne was being made a scapegoat. Surely, he was a victim as much as anyone else?

‘What about your retirement?’ Jack wheezed.

‘I’ve agreed to remain in post until a suitable successor can be found.’

‘I thought Docherty was -’

Blanchard shook his head. ‘Seems there was a mix-up with the DNA taken from Hannah Kowalski’s flat. Not enough evidence to risk tax payers’ money on a trial. Speight won’t get away scot-free, mind. We’re charging him with stalking and harassment. Given his history I dare say he’ll go down for a few years.’

The room exploded into light and noise as the door opened and a nurse walked in. Blanchard turned and nodded. ‘I think that’s my cue to leave. Take as long as you need, Jack. Your department will still be there when you’re ready.’ He smiled and in it there was a look that told Jack the Chief Super was happy to let things be, and if he had any sense at all, he’d do the same.

The question about Osbourne wasn’t going to go away that easily, though. He’d survived and was in the hospital. It stood to reason that the Shade was close by too. ‘*We’ll go together.*’ Grace’s words coming back to him as the nurse turned up the pain relief on his drip. Warmth spreading through his body. Very much alive.

Jack closed his eyes and let the darkness swallow him again.

Chapter 49

Jack followed the signs to Intensive Care. When he'd woken, he had found a set of clothes folded in the bedside cabinet: A pair of trousers, a size too big, white shirt, jacket and a pair of ugly shoes that dug into his ankles. Still, beats pyjamas and a dressing gown

His own clothes would have been bagged and tagged as evidence. Long gone as far as he was concerned. Not that he ever wanted them back, or anything that served as a reminder of Lazarus Hotel.

He wobbles a bit, stumbles but doesn't fall. A deep sigh. The sooner he gets out of this place the better. Not that the doctors and nursing didn't make him comfortable. There was only so much shepherd's pie and cauliflower cheese you can eat.

A bang sounded nearby. Jack stopped, muscles aching and his heart pounding inside his head. Blue and yellow flames race towards his feet. He closes his eyes and when he looks again the corridor is silent. He is safe. Alone. PTSD. He had heard of it, but never guessed it'd be so real.

The walking stick they had given him was one of those metal poles with a sticky out handle and a hook your hand fitted into. It made a *clink... scuff* sound as he shuffled further along the corridor.

'We'll go together.'

Again, Grace's words came back to him as he shuffled along a corridor painted institutional grey, the only colouring coming from posters promoting *Wellbeing and Supporting your NHS*.

ICU was a mass of bleeping and flashing lights. Watson lay on his back surrounded by machines that monitored his vital signs. His neck heavily bandaged.

Jack slumped into a visitors' chair and stretched out his aching legs. Watson's family hadn't yet arrived from Jamaica so Jack made his own little journey every day. What else was he going to do until they let him out of this place?

'I had a visit from the Chief Super,' he said. 'Word is they're keeping our department for the time being. There's even talk of extra funding for IT equipment.'

Watson didn't reply. Nor did he show any signs of life. Just the rhythmic rising and falling of his chest. Dead to the world. His body had shut down. A way of dealing with the

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trauma. Not that Jack blamed him. It's not every day you get your throat cut by one of your own – even if he was possessed by an ancient entity. There was the incident in the tunnels beneath Paragon Station. Jack figured the kid deserved a bit of a lie down and watched him breathe for a while.

Osbourne lay on the other side of the room. He too was surrounded by life-saving machinery. Unlike Watson there was no outward sign of physical damage. His injuries had been internal. Lungs and heart. There was also an anomaly on his brain scan, but the doctors hadn't figured that one out yet.

Jack turned and watched the newly promoted DI for a while. He should have stayed away from Trainer. Instead, the bloody fool wanted to impress Ash and now the chances are his soul is trapped in the Gloomworld with all the others.

'Sir?'

Jack turned. Lights flashed sending his head spinning. Maybe he'd taken too many of the painkillers because Watson's mouth had moved and his eyes were open. He was actually awake.

'Professor Wheeler...?'

'A little help, please.' Jack looked towards the work station but all the nurses were busy with an elderly woman brought in.

'Sir...' Watson's eyes darted around the room like startled fish.

'It's okay, you're in hospital.'

'Wheeler. I checked on him like you said.'

'We'll talk about it later,' Jack smiled.

Watson closed his eyes, groaned a little and opened them again. 'I tried your mobile, wanted to let you know.' His voice barely a whisper.

'You did good.'

'Mistake.'

'What was?'

'Wheeler's NHS and NI numbers all tallied. He was born in 1819.'

Well, that explained a lot. Jack shook his head. Odds on the Professor owed his longevity to A Shade. If not their Shade, then another. He probably got Mike Trainer to dig up Harry Lazarus. Only, how did he know a Shade was hiding out there?

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That's why Watson had turned up at Lazarus Hotel. Bloody idiot. Not that Jack blamed him. The kid was clever and ambitious. He'd go far, as long as he didn't get himself killed first.

Jack leaned in and lowered his voice. 'Listen, if you're going to make a Detective Constable, we're going to have to have a word about being a team player.'

Watson smiled, opened and closed his mouth a few times but no sound came out. And then he was gone. Eyes closed as he fell into a drug-induced sleep.

Jack signed himself out of hospital a day later and decided to walk home. The rhythm of his feet on the pavement helped him to think. His mouth still tasted of hot pennies and his legs ached with every step, not that he was complaining. He was out in the fresh air. No more shepherd's pie and cauliflower cheese. He'd still visit Watson, of course. But right now, he just wanted to go home.

Afternoon had turned to dusk and the world was dark and rainy. Jack sheltered under the umbrella one of the nurses had lent him and headed down Anlaby road, stopping for a moment as he passed the Tiger's Lair and wondered if he ought to get onto the licensing authority and get the place closed down.

He shuffled from time to time as his gait was a little unsteady. But at least he didn't need that bloody walking stick the hospital had loaned him. Memory was also a bit of a problem. Trying to recall the fire at Lazarus Hotel was like tuning a black and white TV, blurred and a little bit wobbly. Another symptom of PTSD he had been told. That too would get better in time, or so he hoped.

Next stop the Royal Station Hotel. Jack sat on the stone step at the front of the building and rested. The adrenalin that had propelled him this far was leaching out like a leaking mug of tea.

The marina was less than a mile away. He breathed in cold air, coughed and set off again. Millie had been taken in by a neighbour, still he was eager to get back and see the little fur ball. He managed another hundred yards when his mobile vibrated in his pocket. Stopping again he leaned against a brick wall and accepted the call.

'Ash, that you...' of course it was. 'Where are you?'

'I was about to ask you the same question.'

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Jack shrugged even though he knew Ash couldn't see him. 'Getting some air and stretching my legs. What about you?'

'I'm with Decker.' As if to emphasise the point running water and what might have been a power drill sounded in the background.

'Tell me he's not cutting some poor sod's cranium off while I'm talking to you?'

Ash ignored his attempt at a little dark humour. 'I need to know where you are, Jack? I called the hospital and they said you'd left.'

'Something wrong?'

'Just answer the bloody question.'

Jack smiled. It felt good to hear Ash raise her voice. 'Making my way home, why?'

'It's Grace.'

'What about her?'

'Not on the phone, I... we need to see you.'

'I'm not in the mood for games. Just tell me what's going on.'

'Jack, she's -'

A pause and then Decker came on the line. 'Dead, Jack... Grace is dead.'

The words made Jack's world spin. 'She can't be. I -'

'You need to listen Jack,' Decker again, 'and tell me where you are?'

Jack lowered his mobile and stared at the screen. His lungs burned and it was getting harder to think. Grace was gone. A cry of rage turned to a shriek of agony as he took a couple of steps and stumbled. He reached out, but it was already too late. His strength went from his legs and he hit the floor.

'Jack, you there?'

Chapter 50

Jack put a hand to his forehead coming away bloody.

‘You really should have that checked at the hospital.’

‘I’m fine.’ Jack grabbed hold of the door frame in Decker’s office and wobbled a little.

‘Sure, you are.’ Decker pulled up a chair and sat Jack down. ‘Do you know how many people I get in here because they ignored the signs of concussion?’ he said, dabbing away at the wound to Jack’s head with an antiseptic cotton pad.

‘How many?’

‘It was a rhetorical question. Now hold still.’

Jack sat motionless for a while and got to his feet. ‘I need to know about Grace. How did she -’ He broke off, afraid that if he said it, she would really be dead.

‘Heart attack. A neighbour found her and dialled 999.’

‘When?’

‘Does it matter?’

‘It matters to me.’ A growl crept into Jack’s voice and he instantly regretted it.

Decker sighed. ‘Between midday and six pm.’

‘Not possible.’

‘Sorry?’

‘I saw her at the Lazarus Hotel hours after she was meant to be dead.’

Decker shook his head. ‘Now, I’m sure you have concussion.’

‘I saw her, she was -’ What, bringing Watson back from the dead? Like that didn’t sound crazy.

Ash walked over and squeezed his hand. ‘You want to say goodbye, might be better that way?’

Jack nodded to say that he did even though every instinct in his body was telling him Grace wasn’t dead.

Out in the corridor he followed Ash and Decker into the examination suite where Grace lay. Her body covered over with a white sheet. Movement behind him as the doc returned to his office.

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Jack walked over to the trolley and pulled the sheet from Grace's face. The fog of morphine and painkillers telling him that she was sleeping. Then he took hold of her hand, feeling the cold chill his bones. Struggling to understand, he leaned forward and kissed her forehead. Not sleeping but dead.

Chapter 51

The gates to Eastern Cemetery were padlocked.

Jack climbed over the perimeter wall and headed to Sarah's grave. 'Sorry, it's been a while,' he said, tears pricking his eyes as he kissed a hand to the top of the headstone.

'The thing is,' He looked up and glowered at the night sky. Rain dripping from his brow. 'There's something I have to do.' Fuck, this was difficult. 'What I'm trying to say is that I don't know where it will take me and I might not see you for a while.' He took a deep breath, dragged a hand over his face. 'I love you, Sarah Hargreaves. Always will,' he said softly.

And with that he turned and walked away. With Grace gone he now knew what he must do.

Chapter 52

‘Inspector, I wasn’t expecting to see you so soon.

Jack pushed through the doors into ICU and approached the nurses’ station. ‘I thought I’d drop in and see young Watson.’

‘Let me see.’ The nurse checked her clipboard and smiled. She was small. A little over five-foot with kind eyes. ‘Should be okay, don’t keep him long, mind. He needs to rest.’

Jack nodded to say that he wouldn’t and headed over to Watson’s bed. When he got there the kid was sleeping, he noticed Osbourne had been moved to a private room. ‘Keep fighting,’ he said and headed over to Osbourne’s room. No one was looking so he stepped inside and wedged a chair under the door.

Osbourne’s face was bandaged and most of his hair had fallen out. His skin a sea of purple in a mass of scar tissue.

Jack looked down at the newly promoted DI. Machinery continued to beep and whirr. Only, what was inside wasn’t human anymore. Jack switched it off, picked up a pillow and pressed it against Osbourne’s ruined face. Chances are someone would come running. He didn’t care anymore. The chair would hold them off so that he could finish what Grace had started.

Detective Inspector Clive Osbourne lay still for a moment and then began thrashing, arms and legs everywhere.

A loud bang on the door. ‘What’s going on in there?’

Jack leaned his weight into the pillow, holding on as Osbourne grabbed hold of his hands. ‘Die you bastard!’

More banging. ‘Open this door now.’

Jack pushed harder. ‘This is for Hannah,’ he said, teeth gritted. ‘Nicolae, Trainer and all the others. Most of all this is for Sarah and Grace.’

‘Open this door now!’

Nearly there. Osbourne’s arms weakened. Breathing muffled and laboured against the underside of the pillow. A few more seconds.

‘Enough!’

Jack glanced over his shoulder. ‘You’re...’

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‘Dead’ Grace nodded.

No bright lights this time like there had been at Lazarus Hotel. One minute nothing and there she was. Jack grunted, pressing the pillow harder.

‘You need to stop, Jack.’

More thumping outside. Heavier and louder than before.

‘You were right, Osbourne has to die.’ Jack said.

Grace smiled sadly. ‘Only you’re not the one to do it, Jack. The city and its people need you here. Others like the Shade will come and they need you here to protect them.’

Osbourne stopped struggling and sagged. Jack let go of the pillow. Silence and then a deep guttural growl filled the room. Osbourne opened his eyes, dark and sunken, and smiled.

Grace walked over. The fire back in her eyes as she pinned Osbourne to the bed, and in a parody of a sexual act leaned over and sucked the air breath from his lungs. A Shade jumps from host to host; with its final breath she had taken it away.

The ECG flatlined. Osbourne slumped. Eyes wide and glaring.

‘Security. Open up!’

Jack put the pillow back to where he had got it. Osbourne was dead and Grace was gone. The rest he knew would come down to wild speculation. The hardest part was proving it. He checked Osbourne wasn’t breathing, switched on the machine and removed the chair.

The door burst open and a team of medics dressed in blue scrubs rushed in. Jack stepped aside and let them work. ‘He just stopped breathing,’ he said, surprised his voice was even. ‘I was coming to get help but the door jammed.’

Chapter 53

‘I hope you’ve got an explanation?’

‘For what?’

Not for the first time Jack sat in Interview Room One. The last time he was here it had been with Messrs Grainger and Chapman from Professional Standards. Now straight from what they were calling a crime scene DCI Docherty was asking the questions. Years of practice set him aside from the other two men. His voice was agitated and anger filled his eyes.

‘Don’t get fucking clever with me, Kane. You know what I’m talking about.’

‘Haven’t a clue, sir.’

‘Locking yourself in Osbourne’s room and switching off his life support. Lucky, the crash team got in when they did.’

‘Osbourne was alive?’ Jack tried to process what he had just heard. Alive. Osbourne. He was fucking alive. Things had happened so fast he hadn’t bothered to hang around as the medics worked on the newly promoted DI. There was a lot of pointing and shouting, after that everything was a blur, until now.

We go together.

Grace’s words weren’t meant for the host but the Shade and she had found a way.

‘Heard you didn’t get the Chief Super’s job, sir,’ Jack said, after a while.

Docherty leaned forward. ‘That’s got nothing to do with you, Kane.’ His voice a low growl.

‘Still, the Chief Super has the full confidence in the so-called Ghost Squad.’ Jack met his stare and enjoyed the look of unease as it spread across his face.

‘I ought to charge you with attempted murder.’

‘What’s keeping you?’ Jack sat back and folded his arms. The interview a real sense of Deja Vu about it. As far as he knew the cameras were disconnected. The voice recorder was switched off and there was no sign of Professional Standards.

‘Who were you talking to?’

‘What?’

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‘At the hospital. You were heard talking to someone while they were trying to batter down the door.’

Jack shrugged. ‘I don’t know what you mean, sir.’

‘Someone was in there with you.’

Another shrug. ‘Myself and Osbourne. I didn’t see anyone else.’

‘You don’t get away with it that easily. Someone was there and I intend to prove it.’

‘You do that, sir.’

‘Oh, I will, I’ll have every inch of that fucking hospital swabbed for prints and when I find out who it was, I’ll -’

‘What?’ Jack cut in. The DCI had nothing and he knew it. He could search all he liked and wouldn’t find any trace of Grace there.

‘Get out of my sight,’ Docherty snarled.

Jack headed for the door and paused. ‘Maeve, what’s going to happen to her?’

‘Someone’s got to be held to account for Trainer’s death. Might as well be her.’

‘What?’

‘There’ll be a full investigation and right now it isn’t looking good for her.’

Jack stepped out into the corridor and banged his head against the wall. ‘Shit! Shit! Shit!’ When people like Docherty lost a battle, they’d re-group and come again... and again with whatever weapon were at hand. Right now, the weapon of choice was Sergeant Maeve Chalmers.

Chapter 54

Jack had meant to go home. Instead, he headed straight for the basement. No one had been back since Watson left for Lazarus Hotel over a week ago. Ash was on sick leave, so she hadn't been here either.

The lights were turned off and the radiator clicked loudly, belting out cold air as if in acknowledgement of his arrival.

Watson's laptop was nowhere in sight. Jack opened the filing cabinet and found it under a pile of paper work labelled Audit. Good thinking.

He picked it up and stood for a moment, taking everything in. He and his team had survived. At what price he wasn't sure. Only time would tell. For now, all there was to do was turn off the lights and head off home. Until Monday at least. He had some bonding to do with Millie. That and an engineer from the boat yard had offered to come round and take a look at the boat's engine. With any luck this time next summer he'd have the old-girl seaworthy again.

One last thing.

He walked over to the Incident Board, rubbed it clean and took down the pictures; Hannah Kowalski, Nicolae Pavlov, Molly Dullea and Mike Trainer. One at a time and placed them into an envelope, sealed it and wrote *Solved*: Perhaps now they can be at peace.

The light flickered and strobed as he turned it off. Locked the door and headed back up the stairs.

Chapter 55

Warm air caresses his skin like a whispered kiss, keeping him safe. He remembers a woman. Her lips pressed against his, as if she was trying to take part of him away. Something else, from another time, another life. Dark with hollows for eyes. It moves inside and speaks to him. *Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe. Bagahi laca bachahe.* The same words over and over.

He should warn them, tell them it's still here, only he cannot move, cannot speak. A darkness fills his mind and the sadness he feels is overpowering. He knows there's nothing he can do to stop it. It moves again, edging closer to the surface.

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Lazarus Junction: An Exegesis

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Introduction

‘One deals with grim and gritty reality, the other with flights of fancy ... but the literary worlds of crime and fantasy cross over perhaps more than most people think... given that most crime novels are about death, presumably going one step further into matters more spiritual isn't a stretch for readers.’¹

Ben Aaronovitch, Clive Barker, Sergei Lukyanenko, Jim Butcher, James Oswald are among the most celebrated authors who have written supernatural novels. Their works include: *Rivers of London*, *Weaveworld*, *Night Watch*, *Dresden Files*. In writing *Lazarus Junction: Crossing the Divide*, which explores the dark psyche of Kingston Upon Hull, a city relatively unexplored in the genre of urban fantasy, I have studied these and other contemporary fantasy works.

Paul Cornell provides a useful analogy to explain the links between the two genres.

I think in crime fiction, death is an absolute ending, the trapdoor out of the story. The supernatural thus serves as a sort of basement to crime, where all the dead go to, and there's a stairway leading back up.²

Aided by my enthusiasm for the genre this study examines the variations between crime and the supernatural in modern urban fantasy. *Lazarus Junction* takes this a step further and delves into the genre of Hull Noir – the darker cousin of crime fiction. It takes on the

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/24/may/15/crime-fantasy-literature-crimefest-bristol-literary-genres>
[Accessed 10/01/2018]

² <https://www.theguardian.com/books/24/may/15/crime-fantasy-literature-crimefest-bristol-literary-genres>
[Accessed 10/01/2018].

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murky depths of the supernatural, death and demonic intervention. Overall, the central theme that runs through the narrative is how the city manifests itself as a central character. *Lazarus Junction* offers an innovative approach in that it explores the late nineteenth century transmigrant business. A subject matter relatively unexplored in Hull Noir at the time of writing this book.

When a supernatural breach occurs who is there to police the unpoliceable? This is one of the questions I posed in my novel *Lazarus Junction*. This book is my first attempt at writing a full-length novel about what happens when the supernatural clashes with reality as we know it. I have had several failed attempts at starting this book, it wasn't until I researched similar works and came across *Nightshades* by, Melissa F. Olsen and how she tackled the subject of vampires running amok in Chicago. Her challenge mirrored my own as she questioned the implications of a supernatural breach:

How would the government respond? The legal system? How would law enforcement officials investigate a crime in which all the suspects are off the grid and have superpowers?³

Lazarus, although biblical in reference, refers to Harry Lazarus a historical personage known for his work in helping Scandinavian transmigrants cross the city enroute to the Americas towards the end of the nineteenth century. Dr Nicholas J. Evans, a Senior Lecturer in diaspora history at the Department of History, Hull University states:

Those arriving via Humber Dock increasingly remained onboard ship until shortly before the time their train was due to depart.... Although these were only small measures, they helped to alleviate some of the risks posed both to the migrants and to the inhabitants of Hull alike – by preventing the emigrants from coming into contact

³ <https://www.tor.com/author/melissa-f-olsen> [accessed 25/06/2019]

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with unscrupulous racketeers who preyed on travel weary migrants and halting the spread of disease between the emigrants and the inhabitants of Hull.⁴

History tells us Harry Lazarus was an honest man who gave shelter and safe passage across the city for transmigrants who had a pre-paid ticket to his lodging house on Hull's Posterngate: *Harry Lazarus Hotel*. He and his family set themselves above more unscrupulous landlords in the area and continued to operate their lodging house until the flow of transmigrants dried up at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The genesis of *Lazarus Junction* can be traced back to Harry's life and the work he did with transmigrants. Indeed, the title of the novel marks Harry's place in history coupled with a reference in context of railway terms where lines converge or diverge and one terminates – a reference to transmigrants starting a new life, and later on in the book where the real and the *Otherworldly* interact.

In his *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), John Clute notes: 'UFs [urban fantasies] are normally texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly about a real city.'⁵

Clute goes on to add: 'It has been created not just as a backdrop but as an environment.' (1997:975).

Conjuring up imagined worlds is imperative in allowing the reader to be confronted and accept the unfamiliar. As in crime fiction where the original urban setting remains intact, there must be a violation for the otherworldly to emerge. The world building aspect of urban fantasy evolves over time into a world that combines the real with what is imagined.

⁴ Dr N. J. Evans, *The Voyage: Migration from Northern Europe to America via Port of Hull, 1848 – 1914*, (1999), Available online: <http://Norwayheritage.com/articles> [accessed 3/03/2018]

⁵ J. Clute, *Urban Fantasy: The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 975-6.

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I open by analysing the critical definition of this breach offered by Tzvetan Todorov as well as Eric Rabkin and Avril Horner. I study the way Clive Barker, Jim Butcher, Sergei Lukyanenko, and Paul Cornell explore this world-building model, how *Lazarus Junction* compares to these texts and aims to build on them. This comparison leads to a personal formation of my approach to writing supernatural urban fantasy, and details my novel's journey as it seeks to find its place within Hull Noir scene.

John Connolly explains, when introducing his Charlie Parker novel - a private detective whose cases increasingly take on shades of the supernatural:

When people speak of the elements of mystery fiction, they often bring up character, or plot - and they should certainly mention those two in that order, for plot comes out of character: the less enlightened reader or critic may dismiss mystery fiction as essentially plot-driven, but all good fiction is character-driven.⁶

Connolly went on to explain why landscape or location plays just as crucial a role:

Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles, or James Lee Burke's Louisiana, or Ross Macdonald's Santa Teresa, which is a fictionalized version of Santa Barbara. Even Agatha Christie's invented English villages are careful constructs, confined environments that function like hothouses allowing all kinds of nasty emotions to germinate.

There are two landscapes at work in the mystery novel. The first is essentially psychological, an exploration by the detective of human motivation. But that journey involves moving through a second landscape, a physical one, and when the physical landscape complements the psychological one, a kind of resonance is achieved.⁷

At the outset of writing *Lazarus Junction*, the city manifests itself as a character called the Shade. I offer this from a rejected draft: 'Shade waved a hand and the water rose

⁶ J. Connolly, *A Charlie Parker Novel: The Wrath of Angels*. Available online, <https://scribd.com/book/the-wrath-of-angels> [accessed on 02/01/2020]

⁷ J. Connolly, *A Charlie Parker Novel*. <https://scribd.com>, [accessed 02/01/2018]

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into a curtain of fire. “I am not a God or a Devil. Good or Evil. I just am, and I exist to readdress the balance”⁸.

This was part of a process to show a physical manifestation of the city’s psyche as it emerged through the story. It’s important to note that the novel I set out to write has changed since I began this Ph.D. Its transformation so complete that it has crossed genres from crime fiction to urban fantasy. My final draft, far from being an antithesis, marks ongoing research into the essence of the city in the genre I am attempting to infiltrate. The Shade has since come to represent a malevolent force awakened beneath the city streets, whereas the city’s psyche is depicted through a more textual representation through the bringing together of crime procedural and the supernatural.

Indeed, during the writing of this book the world has been ravaged by the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Such has been the devastation on people’s lives - as Cholera, typhoid and Smallpox were for the transmigrants and the inhabitants during Harry Lazarus’ era - it was impossible to ignore this historical episode as it played out across the globe in recent times. By setting *Lazarus Junction* in the near-future, I hope the ramifications brought about by Coronavirus, both real and imagined, provide a backdrop for my own personal variation on the genre of Hull Noir.

I conclude by bringing together the works I have studied and my examination of tropes across both crime fiction and urban fantasy, the narrative choices I have made and ultimately the question of how Jack Kane and his team will continue to police the unpoliceable?

⁸ Early draft manuscript, author’s own archive.

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Representing the City in Crime Fiction.

However much this exegesis is a study of urban fantasy, in this section I will start by taking a look at how the city is represented in successful crime fiction. I do this because this is the place from where I began writing my own novel, *Lazarus Junction*. Here, I will focus on four key texts: *Knots and Crosses* by Ian Rankin, *Natural Causes* by James Oswald, *Swan Song* by Robert Edric, and *Dark Winter* by David Mark. These novels are set in Edinburgh and Hull – comparable cities whose settings have been influential in this writer’s development and are central to this exegesis.

Crime is usually distinguished from mainstream fiction and other genres such as science fiction or historical fiction, but boundaries can be, and indeed, are blurred. The genre's flexibility is perhaps one reason for its wide and enduring appeal and means different things to different people at different times.⁹

It is perhaps true to say that we are all bound by the fascination of human behaviour, and indeed gripped by events real, or imagined, which could occur to every one of us. However dark and bitter a successful crime novel the city plays a prominent part in bringing the story to life. A writer’s ability to create images is integral to an effective novel. The vivid imagery transports readers to new worlds where the fictionalised city becomes more than a backdrop in a story but takes on a life of its own as if it were a character.

⁹ https://findmeanauthor.com/crime_fiction.htm [accessed 22/01/2018]

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Malcah Efron explores this further in her narrative article, '*Fictional Murders in Real "Mean Streets": Detective Narratives and Authentic Urban Geographies*'. She begins with exploring Raymond Chandler's notion of realism in crime fiction:

Chandler's essay focuses not on the streets themselves but on the language used to describe these streets. He notes that his model Dashiell Hammett 'put these people down on paper as they were, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes'... he summarizes the superiority of the hard-boiled detective in that '[h]e talks as the man of his age talks because it belongs to the world, he lives in.'¹⁰

Chandler defines realistic presentation, particularly in the detective novel through close attention to language rather than setting. Efron argues that: 'Contemporary detective fiction writers gravitate toward Chandler's notion of the streets rather than his notion of the language.' (Efron, 2009). This approach suggests a generic shift to 'incorporating topographic descriptions of real city settings.'¹¹ This in itself implies that the narrative in which they appear is a real story, so that the reader will start to suspend disbelief.

Rebus, the central character in Ian Rankin's novels, owes a lot to the clichés of Chandler's 'hard-boiled' detective:

'Do you drink?'
'Teetotal is my middle name.'
The Major grunted his satisfaction.
'Trouble is.' Rebus went on, 'my first name's Not-at-all.'¹²

¹⁰ Malcah Efron. *Journal of Narrative Theory. Narrating Cities*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2009, pp 330-346.

¹¹ Efron. *Journal of Narrative Theory*, p.331.

¹² Ian Rankin. *Black and Blue*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 1997, p.210.

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Worn down by the harshness of life and the violence he often faces Rebus' cynicism echoes that of Chandler's Philip Marlowe. Rankin's Edinburgh also brings to mind the 'mean streets' of Chandler's L.A. The city of the hard-boiled is typically an urban city world perverted by evil and crime:

It was everywhere, crime. It was the life-force and the blood and the balls of life: to cheat, to edge; to take that body-swerve at authority, to kill. The higher up you climbed into crime, the more subtly you began to move back towards legitimacy, until a handful of lawyers only could crack open your system, and they were always affordable, always on hand to be bribed.¹³

Moreover, Rankin's Edinburgh is a paradox. Here, the reader experiences the city as seen by tourists:

Such a beautiful place, and prosperous. So little crime. They thought to be dangerous a city had to look dangerous. London, Manchester, Liverpool – these places were dangerous in their eyes. Not Edinburgh, not this sleepy walking-tour with its monuments and museums.¹⁴

And beneath this superficial view of the Scottish capital streets haunted by reproachful ghosts, hundreds of years of layered history – dark and menacing echoes of the past:

Edinburgh's an easy beat, his colleagues from the west coast would say. Try Partick [area of Glasgow] for a night and tell me that it's not. But Rebus knew different. He knew that Edinburgh was all appearances, which made the crime less easy to spot, but no less evident. Edinburgh was a schizophrenic city, the place of Jekyll and Hyde sure enough, the city of Deacon Brodie, of fur coats and no knickers (as they said in the west).¹⁵

Rankin refers to Edinburgh as 'a city of fur coats and no knickers' drawing the reader's attention to the fake and showy representation of the city. This juxtaposition of

¹³ Ian Rankin. *Knots and Crosses*. London: Orion Publishing Group, Kindle Edition, 2016, p.39.

¹⁴ Ian Rankin. *Death is Not the End*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p.349.

¹⁵ Rankin. *Knots and Crosses*, p.193.

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what is seen and what is hidden is a fundamental characteristic of the city of the hard-boiled. It's important to point out that the search for the truth behind a glossy surface is characteristic of a lot of detective novels and therefore should be seen as a more universal feature of detective fiction as a whole.

In *Knots and Crosses* Rankin steps out of mere human characterisation to inject life into the city. Such awareness is a challenge as the city lacks the means of any sensory organs in the muscles and joints, we humans have: '...ghosts in the alleyways and on the twisted stairways of the Old Town tenements.'¹⁶

The adjective 'twisted' gives the reader more information about the noun it describes, but in its action words, '... ghosts in the cobbled alleys and on the twisted stairways' that brings life to the inanimate, and indeed the city. Further on in the chapter Rankin goes on to describe Rebus's journey home: '...it was morning now and any Godfearing spirit would be tucked up in bed, as he, John Rebus, flesh and blood, would be soon.'¹⁷

The Old Town tenements are mentioned nine times in the novel. The Georgian architecture and surrounding streets similarly woven into the story; 'freezing cold'; 'walls, wet with fungus'; 'the morning dark and silent. Every detail adds substance to the city as if to flesh and pump blood through the very streets.

Whereas Rankin might have chosen any other place to fictionalize his crime fiction he chose this place, in the heart of the city he loves. Edinburgh is his city. Oxford had 'Morse' (a code). So, Edinburgh would have 'Rebus' (a puzzle).

¹⁶ Ian Rankin, *Knots and Crosses* (London: Orion Publishing Group, Kindle Edition, 2016), p.40

¹⁷ Rankin, *Knots and Crosses*, p.40

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James Oswald's Crime Dagger nominated book, *Natural Causes*, sets Edinburgh in a different mood. Written in real-time *Knots and Crosses* begins in April. There are twenty references to rain, and eighteen to the cold: all portraying a 'numbing' coldness that clings to the city as if a second skin. There is little reprieve as summer approaches. 'The two policemen, their feet numb despite thermal socks and the fact that it was the beginning of summer, shuffled one foot to the other.'¹⁸

Oswald's Edinburgh is hot and stagnant. 'McClellan scuffed his shoe on the stained carpet tiles and leant against the single radiator. It was belting out heat even though outside the sun was baking the streets.'¹⁹ Comparable to *Knots and Crosses* the mood portrayed here is one of severity. The heat 'baking' and 'cloying'.

It's true to say crime isn't restricted to the winter months. The oppressive heat described in *Natural Causes*, far from being problematic, very much suits the mood of the novel, and should be valued as much as Rankin's dark, and gritty coldness. This said, Oswald's emphasis on linking the present with the past exploits the possibility of the city: '... now the streets were full of basement restaurants, boutique shops, health clubs and expensive apartments. Times changed, but the city always adapted.'²⁰ Oswald goes on to write about Princes Street and the outer districts:

It was a short walk from the station down to Inverleith and the Colonies. The sun had disappeared behind the buildings and the exhaust haze somewhere in the north-west, but it was still light. Proper darkness wouldn't come for another couple of hours at least at this time of year. They'd pay for it in the winter, of course.²¹

¹⁸ Rankin. *Knots and Crosses*, p.186.

¹⁹ James Oswald. *Natural Causes*. London: Penguin Books, Kindle Edition, 2012, p.29

²⁰ Oswald. *Natural Causes*. London: Penguin Books, Kindle Edition, 2012, p.99.

²¹ Oswald. *Natural Causes*, p.210.

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Such imagery speaks of a ‘proper’ darkness which, as if by degrees, is drawing closer. Indeed, despite the ‘exhaust haze’ of the balmy summer months, winter would return and with it the cold and darkness portrayed in Rankin’s Edinburgh. The ‘cold quick’ and ‘unforgiving’ as once more it reclaims the city for its own.

At this juncture it’s important to note that Oswald’s *Natural Causes* was originally written as an urban fantasy novel. However, the book failed to sell. Oswald rewrote, reducing the story to its core – a crime procedural novel. Yet, at the heart of the reworked text Oswald left echoes of the supernatural - implied elements of unreality preserved against that which is perceived as ‘real’. Here the fundamental theory ‘less is more’ seems to hold true. In section two I will explore this further as part of my representation of the city in the urban fantasy genre.

There are parts of *Knots and Crosses* where the streets are portrayed with a near-cartographic accuracy (15 references) as if a street atlas, resulting in a tourist’s Rebus-like tour of Edinburgh. The fact that the street names are removable suggests that they function not as a necessary component of the narrative, but rather as superfluous details. In his novel *Swan Song*, Robert Edric takes the reader through the streets of Hull, and then delves beneath the surface to establish authenticity:

New foundations were laid between English Street and Albert Dock, and during these excavations an underground room had been uncovered, with its brick ceiling intact. The workmen had stopped work and lowered the ladder into the space to investigate. And having descended into the darkness, they found there, covered by tarpaulins and the plaster that had collapsed a long time ago, twelve well-preserved corpses. Seven adults and five children.²²

²² Robert Edric. *Swan Song*. London: Transworld Publishing, Kindle Edition, 2009, p.13.

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Chandler's 'Mean Streets' may bring clarity and form to the characters in a story. Or, indeed, a topographical approach direct, the most meticulous of readers, through the street. It's here, looking 'over the city', that offers a glimpse of the 'untended' fires of the city's psyche, which if brought to bear suits the mood of any crime novel. Only the embers will never die:

Waiting until she had gone, I went to the window and looked over the city beneath me. From where I stood, I could trace all the major roads and lines of light leading back into the centre, where the glow intensified, and where the clear and simple pattern of the suburbs was lost, and where the confusion of lights looked like nothing more than the dying embers of a giant, untended fire ²³

It's perhaps true to say that Hull and Edinburgh are cities of drama; of rich culture and heritage. Edinburgh boasts Sir Walter Scott, Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, the infamous Burke and Hare, to the more contemporary writer Irvine Welsh – all of whom have made the city their home. Hull's celebrated role of honour belongs to William Wilberforce, Amy Johnson, Peter Dinsdale, (serial arsonist known as 'Bruce Lee'), and Andrew Motion, (to name a few). Here the wind blows cold from the North Sea as it does across the Firth of Forth.

And yet, situated at the end of a railway line, Hull is an insular community. A city that once bore slave and cotton ships; its people welcoming to newcomers yet eyes them suspiciously as if their presence was threatening. Half a decade has passed since trawlers last berthed in St. Andrew's dock. The city and outer districts had the stuffing knocked out of them during WW2 - and despite all of this it continues to thrive.

²³ Edric. *Swan Song*, p.507.

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David Mark taps into this rich history in his dark and gritty police procedural novel, *Dark Winter*: ‘Holy Trinity Square. A fortnight before Christmas. The air smells of snow. Tastes of it. That metallic tang; a sensation at the back of the throat. Cold and menthol. Coppery, perhaps.’²⁴

The central character is DS Aector McAvoy. He is the first on the scene when a young girl is murdered in Hull Minster. A good man among the lazy and corrupt he portrays elements of Chandler’s hard-boiled detective. Aector sees the connection between the girl’s murder and others in the city. A killer is playing God, and he must find a way to stop the deadly game. Set in winter Chapter One opens with a bleak view of the city:

McAvoy breathes deeply. Fills himself up with it. This chilly, complicated Yorkshire air, laced with the salt and spray of the coast; the smoke of the oil refineries; the burned cocoa of the chocolate factory; the pungency of the animal feed unloaded from the super-container at the docks this morning; the cigarettes and fried food of a people in decline, and a city on its arse.²⁵

Mark seems to have chosen a protagonist new to the city. A Western Highlander McAvoy comes from a family of crofters. He has lived in Hull for five years. His opinion of the city far from flattering: ‘A city on the bones of its arse’²⁶ It’s perhaps here, casting McAvoy in the pivotal role, that Mark invites the reader to explore the city with the detective. There are topographical details in the book. Yet, there are times when Mark goes beyond this to evoke the city’s psyche seeping in to fill the ‘void’ left by the characters as they leave the

²⁴ David Mark, *Dark Winter*. New York: Mulholland Books, Kindle Edition, 2012, p.3.

²⁵ Mark, *Dark Winter*, p.118.

²⁶ Mark, *Dark Winter*, p1008.

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stage: ‘An icy gust of wind and a smattering of street noise to enter the room to fill the void left by his departure.’²⁷

Significant in locality and trade little is made of the Humber Estuary in *Dark Winter*. Its presence more shadow than as substance, existing on the periphery of the story. And yet Mark draws attention to Immingham docks: ‘This was Grimsby’s premier shopping street; a bustling community of independent traders made prosperous by the fish market and docks. No longer. It’s a dead street, all plywood and graffiti. To-let signs and metal shutters.’²⁸ And why when Hull has such a rich tapestry of mystery lurking beneath the surface?

Much of Hull’s Old Town and docks have changed over the years. And yet, echoes of the past remain; in the empty warehouses that hug the river bank; beneath the narrow streets, and cobbled alleyways which once bore the weight of immigrants and pirates alike. The more the city is beaten down the more it thrives. For this writer the psyche of the city offers a fruitful mix of the old and the new; as barren a landscape in a hard-boiled detective novel, to the rich and wealthy that’s as much paradoxical as Rebus’ Edinburgh.

What I’ve learned from Rankin, Oswald and Edric is to embrace the changes that have happened to the city, whilst remaining true and echoing the past. Many of the ‘mean-streets’ remain unchanged but as any good character development comes through a juxtaposition of what is seen and what is hidden is a fundamental characteristic of the city of the hard-boiled. We see it here with Hull’s fraught past ‘Second World War’ and the briefest of glimpses into people’s lives ‘*Curtains twitched*’ as the story delves beneath the surface:

The rain hadn’t let up. If anything, it come down heavier as she stepped out of the taxi. Clutching her house keys, she kept her head down and paddled across the

²⁷ Mark, *Dark Winter*. p.217

²⁸ Mark, *Dark Winter*. p.188

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pavement. On long summer days, she liked to take her time to enjoy the neatly cut lawns and flowers that fought for space in over-crowded borders. The houses this end of Hull were well built and had survived the bombings during the Second World War. [...] Pulman Street was quiet but not sleeping. Curtains twitched and blue and orange dots trembled in windows. TVs were switched on everywhere as people watched the drama play out down their street. Ash kept her own vigil.²⁹

It's important to point out that Jack is very much archetypical of Chandler's theory on the hard-boiled detective. His language severe and without censor as he struggles to cope with the recent death of his fiancé. 'Dr Van-Leeson, Humberside Police's Psychologist, had signed him off on the sick citing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A load of bollocks of course. He was grieving, plain and simple.' (p.2)

Over the course of writing this novel Jack's character has grown, his cynicism for life evident after the death of his fiancée. He is an obsessive, but principled. He sets out to do the right thing but as with Chandler's Marlow is prepared to go against the grain to get what he wants.

²⁹ Early draft manuscript, author's archive.

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Representing the City in Urban Fantasy.

Throughout the writing of *Lazarus Junction* there has been a real sense of undoing reality, picking at a narrative thread, and then putting it back together with that of the *Otherworldly* woven into the intricate fabric of reality.

The question that posed itself was how to rise to such a challenge with Hull at its centre? My preferred option was to revisit one of my favoured texts. Stevenson's novella, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Stevenson's novella is set mainly in London, with some streets being part of the Soho area. Comparative with the genesis of *Lazarus Junction* the time period is late Victorian England, and the time of Stevenson writing his Gothic masterpiece (1886), Harry Lazarus would have been offering shelter to transmigrants entering the city of Hull. Indeed, Hull's High Street was so dangerous it was reportedly known as Ripper Street (source unknown). As with *Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens (1843) the London Stevenson knew:

...which with Paris, remained a central site for the modern UF mode, both being venues so irradiated with story and mystery that tales set there often have an air of the fantastic without in fact invoking the impossible.³⁰

Liverpool, Moscow, Chicago, are other cities well-trodden in the modern urban fantasy genre with the likes of Clive Barker, Sergei Lukyanenko, and Jim Butcher.

It's perhaps true to say that to be designated urban fantasy: a place must itself be an ingredient in the cauldron of story; it must, in other words, embody a set of stories

³⁰ Sf-encyclopedia.co.uk/encyclopaedia of fantasy, 1997, [accessed 12/12/2019]

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which somehow contain an element of the fantastic. Indeed, it could be argued that a true city could almost be defined as a cauldron of story, a melting pot where different kinds of worlds meet.³¹

Hull is such a city. It may look ragged around the edges, and there are certain estates looking broken and derelict where you'd be forgiven for wondering why you never hear an air raid siren. Its precise nature remains mainly unexplored. Its present-day polar winds, and restlessness of the past offering a fertile niche waiting to be wrought and written into the urban fantasy genre.

Conjuring up imagined worlds is imperative in allowing the reader to suspend disbelief and in doing so accept the impossible within what we view as our reality. As in crime fiction where the original urban setting remains intact, there must be a violation for the *Otherworldly* to emerge.

Tzvetan Todorov identified the violation, or intrusion, as a 'hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.'³²

Eric Rabkin describes it as a forced reversal in the ground rules of a narrative, determined by those ground rules, 'when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted.'³³ Rabkin does address Todorov's 'hesitation,' explaining that the surprise of a character 'caught in a fantastic occurrence' signals the 'recognition scene'³⁴, the initial experience of the reality of the supernatural. Both definitions are adequate in addressing the violation of the other.

³¹ Source unknown.

³² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975, p.25.

³³ Eric Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton: Princeton, 1976, pp. 12-15.

³⁴ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, p. 17.

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If a breach occurs, the characters or narrator of the story experiences emotions of astonishment, surprise, fear, awe and disbelief. Or, referring back to Todorov and Rabkin, hesitation or recognition. Avril Horner defines the gothic as mainly concerned with ‘boundaries and their instabilities’.³⁵ In the case of the ‘breach’, these boundaries would constitute a natural/supernatural or the real/unreal. Horner goes on to explain that the gothic text deliberately exploits the ‘fear of the Other and promotes a good versus evil environment that can be resolved only through ‘the clear re-establishment of acceptable boundaries.’³⁶ However, for the fantastic mode to manifest in the gothic, the fear of the Other must turn into actual intrusion. Some form of the supernatural must invade the established mimetic world model.

Clive Barker’s *Weaveworld* begins in Liverpool; a tale of raptures and otherworldly beings hidden in the weave of a magical carpet. The theme that runs through the story is memory. ‘That which is imagined can never be lost.’³⁷ The meditation on memory belonging to Barker’s recollection of his childhood (age 6). He presents Liverpool as an urban fantasy setting with his introduction of Calhoun Mooney:

He is twenty-six and has worked for five years at an insurance firm in the city centre. It’s a job he takes no pleasure in, but escape from the city he’s lived in all his life seems more unlikely than ever since the death of his mother, all of which may account for the weary expression on his well-made face.³⁸

³⁵ Avril Horner and: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.1.

³⁶ Avril Horner,2005.

³⁷ Clive Barker, *Weaveworld*. London: HarperCollins, 1987, p.1.

³⁸ Barker, *Weaveworld*. p.6.

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The fantastical takes wings when, standing on a wall in a yard on Rue Street, Cal has his first glimpse of the miraculous. ‘Impossible as it seemed the carpet was coming to life. A landscape – or rather a confusion of landscape thrown together in a fabulous disarray - was emerging from the warp and weft.’³⁹

Weaveworld marked a considerable departure from the grotesque horror fiction Barker has come to be known by. There were plenty of critics ready to snipe at the change in genre, claiming that his work was too dark for such a genre and he was better off staying on the horror shelves. Although Barker doubts the accuracy of memory, what matters to him as a writer is the emotions they inspire. There is magic and a fantastical world, but the story begins in reality - a dark and gritty Liverpool. It’s here, perhaps, that my own fascination with the genre began. Unlike the Gothic where the threat of a breach remains throughout the narrative. In modern urban fantasy the violation occurs before the opening, meaning it is explained in retrospect as Barker does in *Weaveworld*.

But staging isn’t enough. The visceral and cerebral are important in urban fantasy. An example is shown here, taken from a rejected draft. ‘Wind blew through a broken window in the attic, straw shifted like sand dunes on the floor. Jack took his first faltering step at the top of the stairs and looked around’⁴⁰. Through action the wind does most of the work. Though the prose is not over busy the space is physically activated – a personification of the elemental force as if it spoke. Through this setting can go from being one of the most lifeless to one of the lively functional ingredients in the story.

³⁹ Barker, *Weaveworld*. p.22.

⁴⁰ Early draft manuscript, author’s own archive.

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Termed as a 'pre-narrative' or 'retrospective' the supernatural in much of modern urban fantasy has already been experienced and become integral into the laws of reality: 'My name is Harry Blackstone Copperfield Dresden. Conjure of it by your own risk. I am a wizard. I work out of an office in midtown Chicago.'⁴¹ Magic doesn't belong in present-day midtown Chicago. But in Jim Butcher's *Storm Front* the breach has occurred before the opening of the text. When Harry says that he is a practising magician the reader is expected to believe him.

Sergei Lukyanenko's *Night Watch* (Moscow) marks the relationship between two covert organisations, *Night Watch*, and *Day Watch*, as told through its narrator Anton Gorodetsky, a fifth-level magician who, despite his magical abilities, shows his human frailties by carrying a pistol with silver bullets for protection from vampires and werewolves.

Both Lukyanenko and Barker's worlds contain internal kingdoms within the real city which operate 'microcosms' and 'parodies of the larger reality': 'which were often physically interconnected, by tunnels and secret passages, within the larger world.'⁴²

Triggers are often used to evoke supernatural abilities. In *Storm Front* Harry Dresden has the ability to soulgaze: When a practising wizard and a being with a soul look each other in the eyes it gives the other a window into their soul, which can't be faked. It doesn't relay specific information, but it does give one a vague impression on whether they're trustworthy or not, or if they've been psychically harmed: 'When I look into someone's eyes, into their soul, their innermost being...'⁴³ Here Harry describes his soulgaze with antagonist

⁴¹ Jim Butcher, *Storm Front*. London, Orbit Books, 2005, p.2.

⁴² <https://sf-encyclopedia.com>, accessed 23/06/2004.

⁴³ Butcher, *Storm front*, p.32.

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Gentleman Johnny. 'It was a dry and cool place, Inside Gentleman Johnny Marcone. Except for one dim corner. There hidden away from his everyday thoughts, there lurked a secret shame.'⁴⁴ Later on in the novel Gentleman Johnny's 'secret shame' turns out to be a shooting incident in which he left a little girl disabled.

In *Night Watch*, Anton enters the hidden world of the Twilight (or *Gloom* in other translations) by stepping into his own shadow: 'Quickening my stride, I broke through the grey silhouette into the Twilight. The colours of the world dimmed and the cars on the avenue slowed...'⁴⁵

Lazarus Junction is a contemplation on the city. It also tells of the supernatural, death and demonic intervention. But the central theme that runs through the tale is how the city manifests itself as a central character in the tale. This, for example, of our protagonist, DI Jack Kane, walks through Hull's Paragon Interchange (a combined bus and train hub). As in the opening paragraph in *Dark Winter* the reader is invited to take in the sights and sounds of the city. 'Jack turned up his collar and headed for the taxi rank. He was almost at the front of the station when there was a moment's silence as if the city had held its breath. Noticing it, he turned [...]' (p.3)

Inspired by both Lukyanenko and Butcher's internal worlds *Lazarus Junction* takes this further and attempts to create its own shadowed parody of the larger reality. A place Jack can only enter through ritual and the dissection of a dead cat's eyes. This microcosm world-build takes root in this novel. However, it creates a metaphysical door that can be explored in

⁴⁴ Butcher, *Storm Front*, p.31

⁴⁵ Sergei Lukyanenko. *Night Watch*. London: Random House, 2007, p.304

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future novels as Jack develops his ability to enter the *Gloomworld* and through which other malevolent forces can enter the city:

The gloom was like a living thing, covering the landscape in moving shadows. Behind he felt the invisible barrier between himself and the engine room weaken. [...] The only thing missing was a sign saying: *Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter.* (p. 91)

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Recalling History in Urban Fantasy

Place matters. It solidifies the world the reader enters by anchoring them to the characters. That's why I write about Hull. It's where I grew up. The place I've lived longer than anywhere else. It's a city much maligned, fractured; riddled with dereliction, addiction, poverty, and unemployment. Yet it's full of hope, friendly, quirky, unique, underestimated, and emerging.

At its centre Paragon Interchange played a pivotal role in the writing of *Lazarus Junction*. It's here where I set in place a supernatural breach that would place the city at the centre of a battle between good and evil. My intention is to lead the reader beneath the everyday façade, and in doing so bring them face to face with the shadowed ghosts that lie beneath. It's true to say that in an early draft of my novel I delivered both geography and sociology in a Wikipedia-like entry. At best it was mildly interesting but lacked personal insight to captivate the reader. Indeed, the facts may have been familiar in describing cities up and down the country where transport hubs (each with their familiar rooms and cafes) are filled with the local populace and migrants alike; their highstreets bland concrete melting pots, made rotten with the banality of everyday life.

History is a far more independent condition. It informs on a more intimate level, both natural and artificial, each corner and niche of the city having its own peculiar vagaries. M. Christine Boyer has observed that the fantastic imagination and the archaeological frame of mind come together in the creation of urban fantasy. Her remarks refer to visual art rather

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than literature, but they apply equally to the latter: ‘Fantasy holds an essential role in any “analogous city” view.’⁴⁶

Boyer observes: ‘Fantasy is the mediator between an archaeologist’s mind bent on exploring the roots and remnants of antiquity and a creative imagination that quotes and remembers only arbitrary and unrelated fragments and traces.’⁴⁷

She goes on to say:

Urban fantasy has been particularly influenced by this archaeological find, often adopting the palimpsestic model of the city as a paradigm for its fictional cityscapes. The genre frequently creates a fantastic metropolis whose history is inscribed in successive layers beneath the present-day veneer. In these narratives, the fantastic city’s subterranean history poses a constant danger to the integrity of the present, as its underground layers harbour supernatural forces threatening to erupt onto the surface.⁴⁸

Lazarus Junction is defined by its details of the city, but also what lies beneath. Here Jack and Ash enter the tunnels beneath Paragon Station where they seek to uncover the grave of Harry Lazarus, and in doing so delve beneath the surface of layered history to what had gone before:

Through another door and along a narrow tunnel. Tiny white flakes fell from the roof, flickering in the torchlight. The place looked as if it hadn’t been used in decades. Dried wood and bits of fallen masonry littered the floor. Something rumbled above and everything shook. (p.146)

Michel Foucault argues:

There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the

⁴⁶ Boyer, M.C., *The City of Collective Memory; Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. London: MIT Press, 1994.

⁴⁷ Boyer, M.C. *The City of Collective Memory*.

⁴⁸ Boyer, M.C. *The City of Collective Memory*.

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condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse.⁴⁹

Yet the true ‘horizon of archaeology’, according to Foucault (2005:117), consists of ‘a comparative analysis’ that ‘does not have a unifying, but a diversifying, effect.’

Ian McGuire’s *The North Water* begins by illuminating the harshness of Victorian life in Hull, whilst Clive Barker’s *Neverwhere* representation of London, involves turning a blind eye to the city’s downtrodden; allowing them to plunge into an under-city termed ‘London Below’.⁵⁰

The world he enters contains pockets of London history in its raw form: ‘tiny spurs of old-time’ that have escaped the sterilization of ‘London Above’ to assume concrete dimensions on the underside. (Gaiman 2000: 79)

London Below is replete with the dangers of displaced history reconstituted as fantastical myth, featuring hungry vampires, genocidal angels, and deadly pea-soups. But it is also a place where history diversifies and comes alive, vibrantly contrasting with the ossified exhibitions above it. As Richard descends into the under-city, he discovers a cityscape of medieval marketplaces, feudal courts, ancient paintings, primordial labyrinths, and Victorian-mannered gentleman with a taste for torture. For all his mounting terror of this strange and menacing underworld, Richard concedes that walking through London Below ‘Was like walking through history.’ (Gaiman 2000:169)

⁴⁹ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: New York: Routledge, 2005

⁵⁰ Gaiman. N., *Neverwhere*, London: Headline Publishing, 2000, p,79

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This subterranean world represents a broader strain of London history. The malevolent Croup and Vandemar, immortal terrors that assume peculiar airs of Victorian gentility, choose to base their operations ‘in the cellar of a Victorian hospital, closed ten years earlier because of National Health Service budget cutbacks’⁵¹.

Lazarus Junction gives equal regard to Platform One on Hull’s Paragon Station. The tunnels beneath converge on the cellar underneath the adjoining Tiger’s Lair Public House - forming a dysfunctional ingress subsidiary to the present-day station – unused since the transmigrants entered the city at the end of the nineteenth century. As in *Neverwhere* this ‘forgotten place’ forms a disjointed space made strange by the same temporal-limbo that hangs over Harry Lazarus Hotel on Posterngate.

From the moment he lapses through history and comes into contact with the people of ‘London Below’, Richard disappears from the sight and memory of London Above. Jessica does not recognise him, and forgets she ever had a fiancé. Richard’s best friend Gary treats him as a stranger, and even trains, taxis, and ATM machines fail to register his existence:

‘You can’t go back to your old home or your old job or your old life.’, London Below’s Marquis de Carabas explains, ‘None of those things exist. Up there, *you* don’t exist.’⁵²

The worst part of Richard’s erasure from collective history and individual memory is that he too begins to doubt the validity of his existence. He undergoes a trial where he suffers from visions of people from ‘London Above’, who claim that he has hallucinated all his experiences in ‘London Below’ and urge him to take his own life, to ‘END IT ALL’ and

⁵¹ Gaiman, *NeverWhere*, p. 71

⁵² Gaiman, *NeverWhere*, p. 126.

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‘PUT YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR MISERY’⁵³. Significantly, he is saved from self-destruction by the touch of a bead from Door’s necklace - material evidence of the history of this forgotten girl revives his sense of his own reality and self-worth.

Jack is not so lucky. Touched by a demonic entity in an early draft he is faced with a growing darkness which threatens to overwhelm him. As the story unfolds his options become clear; give in and face death and eternal torment in the *Gloomworld*; or embrace the malevolent force and exploit its existence for his own ends. In a rejected earlier draft, he chooses the latter but the illusion of triumph was absolute. This was only the beginning. The breach already opened there was more to come:

With the darkness rising inside him, Jack felt the pressure on his stomach and hips as if the darkness was exploding inside him. A restlessness in his chest and throat as if part of him was fading. But he was too committed to give in. No sooner had it faded he looked up and stared at his team. He wasn’t sure how things would work out from here, only that the words he was about to speak were pivotal to the rest of his life and everything in it. ‘We continue to fight, whatever comes our way.’ His voice held no trace of warmth, perhaps even humanity. ‘No guarantees.’⁵⁴

Jack’s character grows in strength throughout the writing of this book and in doing so fights against the darkness growing inside. He refuses to accept that this is his fate. He may have lost his fiancée to the Shade but comes to realise others depend upon him as does the city in its fight against the *Otherworldly*:

‘Soon your fight will be over, Inspector. You will give yourself to me and all that is yours will be mine.’

Jack laughed, a light sound that didn’t match the burning feeling washing through his scar. ‘No fucking chance,’ he snarled, gasping for air. He fumbled in his pocket,

⁵³ Gaiman, *NeverWhere*, p. 250.

⁵⁴ Early draft manuscript, author’s own archive.

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brought out the gemstone Sarah had given him and held it up. Another voice deep inside told him what to do next. He held it up and shouted. ‘Remember this,’ his voice hoarse and gravelly. ‘Remember giving it to me...?’

The words were barely out of his mouth when light bright light shone from the end of the platform. A distant sound of a door opening. It clicked shut. A hollow pad of feet across wooden floorboards. And then silence.⁵⁵

Only the world, indeed a city, is much bigger and more mysterious than any one person’s horizon. Major errors in history often lead to the suspension of disbelief and confusion and in the pages of the book. I was not writing a historical novel but aiming to break into the genre of Hull Noir. Still, there was need for supportable reference to link the present-day with Victorian Hull and the transmigration business. In an interview he gave to *Historia Magazine* (October 2017) McGuire set out the importance of his fiction and historical research:

Because no one knows what it was actually like to work on an Arctic whaling ship, once you’ve done the research, you know as much about the facts as anyone can, and you are free to use your imagination to fill in the gaps. Writing about the present may be easier in some ways—because it’s all around you—but for me the present offers less room for manoeuvre...⁵⁶

Much of McGuire’s *The North Water* is set on the whaling ship, *Volunteer*. Yet, he is utterly convincing in his detailed knowledge of Victorian Hull. It both sells the location and the social deprivation that would have been rife at the height of transmigration period (1870 – 1880). Sluggish in parts the novel also has elements of the supernatural in the way the harpooner, Henry Drax, is portrayed as an evil and dispassionate character: ‘He doesn’t plan

⁵⁵ Earlier draft manuscript, author’s own archive.

⁵⁶ http://www.historiamag.com/historia-interviews-ian-mcguire_date accessed: 20/02/ 2019.

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these things. He acts, and each action remains separate and complete in itself: ‘...the fucking, the killing, the shitting. They could come in any order at all. No one is superior to the rest.’⁵⁷

His image made the more mysterious through the view of fellow harpooner, Webster:

That Drax is Satan taken on a fleshly form,’ he says. ‘He int human like you or me, he just looks that way when he chooses to.

‘Henry Drax is not the Devil,’ Otto tells him patiently, as if correcting an elementary confusion. ‘He’s a tormented spirit. I’ve seen him in my dreams. I’ve spoken to him many times.’⁵⁸

Like McGuire it was necessary that any reference to Hull’s past I depicted was plausible, realistic and, if necessary, verifiable, even if the characters and the incidents were fictive. I thought about how best to communicate narrative and historical plausibility in the novel, but as a by-product, some kind of assurance from the author that they were equipped to tell the tale, through needing to convey authenticity and mindful of working with the connection between Paragon Station, the transmigrant business and Harry Lazarus Hotel.

Frozen in time, the bare rooms of a Victorian lodging house in Hull's Old Town tell a remarkable story. Untouched for the best part of a century, they once provided temporary shelter for thousands of migrants arriving in the city in the hope of a better life.⁵⁹

This text appeared in the *Hull Daily Mail*, as part of the city’s regeneration in preparation for the City of Culture (2017) and took on a vital significance. Curiosity piqued, I visited the local History Museum and trawled through academic search engines to discover more of this lodging house and its historical place in the city. The name that came to the fore repeatedly was the keeper of the lodging house, Harry Lazarus. But why should anyone care?

⁵⁷ McGuire, Ian, *The North Water*. London: Scribner, 2017, p. 139.

⁵⁸ *The North Water*, p. 242.

⁵⁹ <http://www.briefreport.co.uk/news/inside-harry-lazarus-hotel-in-hull> [accessed: 13/04/2019]

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It all happened to other people, a long time ago. The people involved are long dead. There was a moment of doubt, but far from being problematic I took a half-step back from my writing and began setting Harry as the main antagonist in my story. Clive Barker's meditation on memory in *Weaveworld* has a modicum of semblance to the story I was aiming to tell, and for that purpose I set about separating fact from fiction, binding each together in such a way as not as to sour the known details:

32 -33 Posterngate Hull was known as Harry Lazarus Hotel during the 1870s and 1880s, when it was used to feed European transmigrants on their way to America and Canada. It was one of the many emigrant lodging houses licenced by the Town Council but is the only one in Hull to have survived. The building is owned by Trinity House and its interior largely unchanged, with the numbers remaining on some of the doors. Harry Lazarus himself was born about 1834 Altona in Germany, and a man of his name is buried in a Jewish cemetery at Delhi Street in 1906.⁶⁰

I was given a rare tour of Lazarus Hotel by Mike Outram.⁶¹ Astonishingly much of the building's interior remains intact. A narrow corridor ran from the cobbled street entrance; past a shuttered room, now used for storage; to what remained of the Chippendale staircase at the far end. The walls whitewashed (the standard measure containing anti-bacterial agents), became steadily darker as I climbed the stairs. Room after room was bereft of furniture, walls marked with scraps of graffiti and faded numbers on the Victorian doors. The floorboards creaked underfoot. Rain dripped from above, finding open pours from roof to ceiling. I murmured a soft welcome to the birds in the roof as I reached the attic space on the third floor. The air was stagnant and the floor covered in straw. The view out of the window was of the

⁶⁰ <http://www.jewishgen.org/JCR-UK/Community/Hullcomm>, [accessed: 28/02/2019]

⁶¹ Trinity House caretaker, (date: Tuesday 27th March 2017)

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Old Town and the northern façade of Hull Minster. All impressive in their own rights, but none struck me as much as Harry Lazarus Hotel.

The past had tightened around me. Here was a building little known, yet it served as a surviving testimony to the past. A synthesis of the historical and the imagined. As a writer I sensed Harry's presence and his placing in my novel, and in doing so I felt an obligation to treat him fairly, to co-opt aspects of historical records against lesser-known parts of his life. The former was verified through an interview with Dr Nicholas J. Evans, senior lecturer in diaspora History/ Permanent member of the Wilberforce Institute. The meeting led me deeper into Harry's world, made more pungent with the plight of the transmigrants and the harshness of Victorian life in Hull. Rather than reconfiguring the narrative this set-in place the challenge of finding a plausible fiction to fill the gaps in Harry's life.

Jewish by birth Harry moved to Hull in the mid-nineteenth century. The transmigrant business was widespread – many Scandinavian farmers heading for the Americas and Canada. Seizing the opportunity Harry set himself up as the keeper of the lodging house which came to bear his name. After the death of his first wife, Harry married a Scandinavian woman. Although records are sparse my meeting with Dr Evans opened up the possibility that Harry's marriage to a non-Jew had seen him alienated from the Jewish community and the synagogues in the city. As the 1880s drew to a close the end of the transmigrant business saw the closure of Lazarus Hotel. Harry set up a tailoring business in the Old Town and died at the turn of the twentieth century. There is a record of a Harry Lazarus buried in the Jewish cemetery on Delhi Street, off Hull's Hedon Road, although doubt remains as to whether this is the same person. Indeed, stories suggest that Harry may have continued to be isolated until his death and buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in the city.

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Through my own exploration of Harry's life, it became clear that historical research isn't necessarily an irreproachable window on which to view the past. Whilst there were other lodging houses in the town centre (licensed and otherwise), many were of ill-repute. Crime and disease were rife in the city. Still, the transmigrants who stayed at Harry's lodging house left with life and limb intact. Speculation continues to blight the latter part of Harry's life. What remains clear is that he was a humanitarian and had chosen the care of others at the expense of his own wealth and spiritual needs.

Lacking comparative urban fantasy texts, I returned to Brian Lumley's *Necroscope* – an early source of reference at the start of my Ph.D. on which to orientate the fictive resurrection of Harry Lazarus.

The key protagonist in *Necroscope* is Harry Keogh. The dead can talk only to Harry at first, but eventually, they can 'deadspeak'⁶² (an evolution of his dead mother's medium abilities) to each other. Harry is also able to teleport anywhere in the world via the Möbius continuum, which he learned from August Ferdinand Mobius (1790 – 1884). By employing advanced equations learned through his dead tutor and his intuitive mathematical mind, Harry is able to conjure up a door in space and enter the Möbius continuum, he can then create another door to exit. There is no time in the continuum so teleportation is instant. Harry is also able to open a past or future time door and observe what may be, but he cannot appear there physically. Here Harry takes his first step into the Mobius Continuum:

Strange equations suddenly flashed on the screen of his mind. Doors opened where no doors should be. His metaphysical mind reached out and grasped the physical world, eager to bend it to his will. He could hear the felled plain-clothes man screaming his rage and pain, could see the taller one reaching into his overcoat and drawing out an ugly, short-barrelled weapon. But printed over this picture of the real world, the doors

⁶² Lumley, B., *Necroscope*. London: HarperCollins, 1993, p. 272-3

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in the Mobius space-time dimension were within reach, their dark thresholds seeming to beckon.... Printed over Mobius' headstone, a door floated out of nowhere. That was appropriate, Harry thought – and he made a headlong dive.⁶³

Lumley's fictive recreation of August Mobius was gratifying to see. He doesn't take on a physical form. Sill, Harry is able to create a bond which transcends the physical and sets in place the working of the supernatural that refigures itself as Harry becomes more perceptive to its existence. There is an underlying comparability here to darkness that besets Jack and his ability to journey into the *Gloomworld* in *Lazarus Junction*:

Then he realised where he was. Stood outside the arched entrance to Paragon Station. Only here the stone edifice was as dead as the city around him. He followed the cat through the concourse until it came to a stop on Platform Two. Cold hands reached up tugging at him, pulling at his clothes. (p. 91)

The transmigrant business, and the lodging house on Hull's Posterngate illuminate a small part of the city's past. Where *Lazarus Junction* makes us aware of Harry Lazarus as a historical personage, this is a work of urban fantasy of which a generous measure is fictive. There was no reason to be overwhelmed by historical facts that would mimic a city breached by the supernatural.

⁶³ Lumley, B., *Necroscope*, 1993, p. 272-73.

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Good vs Evil

As a writer of Hull Noir there is undeniable pleasure to be taken from exposing the secrets of your native city. Hull is no different and for this writer the mysteries it holds informed my writing of *Lazarus Junction*. While there are sizeable gaps in my knowledge of my home town researching such imponderables gave vent to my imagination where the better part of human nature battles with the forces of despair and discord. Good vs evil is a universal condition. An eternal fight. The problem is that such forces, whatever guise they chose to take, tend not to play well.

After the bombing of the Prudential Building on Hull's Queen Victoria Square (8th May 1941) it has become local knowledge: 'that the bodies were kept buried on the spot, under quick lime, as those that survived the bombing, died due to drowning from the use of fire hoses.'⁶⁴

Over the years, people and local businesses have reported paranormal activity. The truth turned out to be more mundane. The removal and classification of documents from the City Archive Centre on Lowgate revealed a confidential report by City engineer and surveyor William Morris, in which he stated that 16 people had perished, their bodies removed prior to the Prudential Tower being demolished. Ghostly activity debunked? You might think so. However, over time the retelling of such tales adds to their attraction, highlighting the aberrant mystery until they become rooted in the city's psyche.

I had spent the better part of my informative years interested in such stories while reading a wide range of supernatural and paranormal books, both fiction and non-fiction. I

⁶⁴ <https://www.paranorm-hull.webs.com>, accessed 01/10/2022.

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had a particular passion for private detective stories where the chief protagonist fought and killed demonic forces in some rain-soaked city. Although I didn't know it at the time my reading served as a displacement from the city I had grown up in, and in doing so set me on a long journey that would see me become a writer of such tales. The road ahead was a struggle. Being dyslexic, I saw the world as if through a distorted mirror. Words would not come easily to me. Yet, I persevered, my imagination not hampered by the tricks my brain often played on me. I was gripped in the undertow of this strange Otherness and the desire to seek out more. Dr Steve Taylor offers a useful distinction between good and evil:

'Good' and 'evil' are relative – one person's 'good' is another person's 'evil'. They are also flexible - people can be a combination of 'good' and 'bad' qualities, and some people who behave cruelly and brutally can be rehabilitated and eventually display 'good' qualities such as empathy and kindness.⁶⁵

He goes to explain the dangers of 'over-simplification': 'Groups believe that they are fighting a just cause against an 'evil' enemy and that once the 'evil' people have been killed, peace and goodness will reign supreme. Of course, human nature is infinitely more complex than this.'⁶⁶

Immacolata in Clive Barker's *Weaveworld* plays on such complexities. Dubbed the Incantatrix:

Immacolata is a cold, ruthless sorceress exiled by her own race for practising evil magic and desiring too much power. Already exceptionally gifted by the standards of the Seerkind, Immacolata is also a possessor/avatar of the Menstruum - a subtle, powerful and seemingly sentient form of rapture that manifests only in women and differently with each individual.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Taylor, Dr S. 'The Real Meaning of 'Good' and 'Evil': www.psychologytoday.com, (accessed 23rd March 2018)

⁶⁶ Taylor, Dr S. 'The Real Meaning of 'Good and 'Evil'.

⁶⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org>, accessed 25th March 2018

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Betrayed, humiliated and killed by her former partner, Shadwell, Immacolata joins with the ethereal skirts of the two dead sisters she murdered in the womb. Driven by revenge and hatred for her own kind Immacolata's ruthlessness is all too clear throughout the book. Yet Barker shadows her story with acts of compassion – however brief. Here she reaches out to protagonist Suzanna Parish after discovering they were both sisters of the Menstruum:

'A gift of rapture can't be lent,' said Immacolata, 'Only given, and given in perpetuity. Did your grandmother teach you nothing? It's time you learned, sister. I'll give you these lessons.'⁶⁸

Dr Taylor's theory on the misconception of 'good' and 'evil' is played out here, as in context Immacolata appears to show signs of empathy. Such irony is not lost on Barker's readers as he leads them to accept Immacolata's condition as she reaches out to those seen as champions of 'good'. Suzanna sees this for herself when she enters the Temple of The Holy Shrine and looking the Incantatrix in the eye sees not an enemy but '... a woman possessed by the same torrent that ran in her own veins. A woman twisted and full of anguish but for all that more like her than not.'⁶⁹

Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is better known for the theme of good vs evil. But it isn't at all that simple. Dr Jekyll is hardly the kind of TV doctor with a megawatt we'd like think he is. He creates Mr. Hyde so he can have both the respectable lifestyle he's become accustomed to and a total degenerate in his off hours.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Barker, *Weaveworld*. (kindle edition) p. 347.

⁶⁹ Barker, *Weaveworld*. (kindle edition), p. 103.

⁷⁰ <https://www.schmoop.com/study-guards/literature/jekyll-and-hyde>, accessed, June 2020

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He likes being Mr. Hyde. He loves being bad. Ultimately, he loves badness so much that Mr. Hyde takes over. This isn't exactly surprising - Mr. Hyde clearly represents the person that Dr Jekyll wishes he could be all the time if he lived in a world without consequences.⁷¹ Stevenson goes as far to have Dr. Jekyll confess to his tendencies toward pleasure in the book:

If each, I told myself, could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and secure on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found pleasure.⁷²

The novella is easily viewed as an allegory about the good and evil that exist in all men. Set in Soho, London, 1886 the book's setting plays a big part in the story. Here were many servants, and a discrepancy between the rich and the poor. There was also luxury living, religious allusions and repression. The social setup lets Dr. Jekyll become more caring towards others and tells us why Stevenson chose such a place to unleash the horrors of Mr. Hyde:

He would be aware of the great field of lamps of a nocturnal city; then of the figure of a man walking swiftly; then of a child running from the doctor's; and then these met, and that human Juggernaut trod the child down and passed on regardless of her screams.⁷³

Choosing London over Edinburgh draws the reader's attention to this shadowy metropolis, highlighting the social barrier between rich and poor set in a time of the industrial revolution. While the book is not a political manifesto it is in my view symbolic of the socio-

⁷¹ <https://schmoop.com/study-guards/literature/jekyll-and-hyde>, accessed June 2020.

⁷² Stevenson, R. L., *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Kindle Edition, p. 43.

⁷³ Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. (kindle edition), p. 7.

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economical battle between good and evil – those with, and those without. Echoes of this can be found in Rankin’s juxtaposition between Edinburgh’s tourist trappings, and the darker side of tenement building and ‘piss-soaked’ alleyways, where drugs and murder are common place.

Stevenson’s setting is both literal and metaphorical. A contrasting play between light and dark sets the mood of the book. As with the oppressive rain in Rankin’s *Rebus* and the Heat in Oswald’s *McClellan* series, weather patterns of London play a big part in Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde*. Gothic in nature there is an unseen threat enhanced by firelight, gas lamps and the sound of horses’ hoofs on cobbled streets. Above all an ominous fog rolls in when ‘evil’ is afoot. Such metrological descriptions bring in both action and personality to the city as they serve to personify the contrasting sides of Dr. Jekyll – both light and dark. ‘Although a fog rolled over the city in the small hours, the early part of the night was cloudless, and the lane, which the maid’s window overlooked, was brilliantly lit by the full moon.’⁷⁴

In my own writing I became more aware of the model Stevenson had set in his book and the successful parameters he placed on his setting. In drawing on Harry Lazarus’ memories of Victorian Hull I adopted a similar approach as I sought to elaborate my own setting, and in doing so emphasizing the contrasting mood between light and dark / good and evil. In this edited version DI Osbourne is driving through the city. As with Mr Hyde the demonic entity which has taken root grows ever more powerful and remembers Hull’s Posterngate as it used to be during the Victorian era. It’s important to note here that the Shade’s memories here are of time before it was trapped inside Harry Lazarus and buried

⁷⁴ *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, (kindle) p. 14.

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beneath Paragon Station. It absorbs the essence of all those it possesses, and is able to recall their memories through the medium of its current victim.

Time passes. How much he's not sure. He follows the road in a series of turns until he comes to a church. He slows and lowers his window. He knows... *knew* this place, didn't he? The cool breeze and the smell of seal-salt air invokes memories of people sat around a table. Their voices hushed and alien as they ate. These people were strangers in this city, travellers in search of a new land. (p. 174)

A comparative inner battle between good and evil can be found In Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files*. Magician, Harry Copperfield Dresden, is plagued by his own subconscious. His 'double' as he comes to call it, shows up occasionally in dreams, or when Dresden is unconscious. Although, unlike Mr. Hyde, Dresden's 'double' commentary isn't always dark. He is strongly rooted in the magician's instincts and often points out to Dresden what should do on the few instances he appears. Here Dresden encounters his inner self for the first time:

'Me. Myself. Only better groomed, dressed in a mantled duster of black leather... my double's pants and boots and shirt were all black as well ... His eyes were set deep, overshadowed by sever brows, and glittering with dark intelligence. His hair was neatly cut, and the short beard he wore emphasized the long lines of his face, the high cheekbones, the straight slash of his mouth, and the angular strength of his jaw.'⁷⁵

The cheek-by-jowl the interaction between Dresden and his 'double' is played out throughout much of the series. However, the approximation to evil comes from the shadow of the fallen angel Lasciel. Also known as The Temptress, The Seducer and Webweaver.

⁷⁵ Butcher, J., *Full Moon*. London: Orbit, 2001, p. 196

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Implanted in his mind she can manifest herself as an illusion that requires some concentration to see through. ‘She could look like anything she chose, but her most common form was of a tall, athletic blonde wearing Greek-style tunic that fell almost to her knee.’⁷⁶

Like Dr. Jekyll, Lash taps into Dresden’s repressed desires and temps him with heightened magical abilities. When he succumbs and seeks her help, she gifts him with the ability to produce ‘hellfire’ – a formidable force that sweeps his enemies aside. In an earlier version of *Lazarus Junction*, I created Lilith as a physical representation of Lash. She’s both manipulative and seductive in bending those she possesses to her will. Lilith has since been written out of the book but her core evil remains in the Shade:

Jack stared into Lilith’s dark eyes and caught a whiff of her expensive fragrance. It might have been intoxicating but so was cyanide.

‘I want Harry Lazarus, Jack and you’re the man to get him for me... or whatever name he goes by these days.’

‘What if I refuse?’

Lilith leaned closer. Her dark eyes never leaving his. ‘I’ll play with your friend.’

‘Ash...? Leave her out of this.’

‘Then do as you’re told.’

Jack said nothing as he reached for the door handle.

Lilith trailed her hand over his leg as he stepped out of the car. ‘Tomorrow, Inspector, after visiting hours. I’ll be waiting [...]’ (p. 200)

To help me get a better handle on Lilith’s impulsive nature of acting without fear of consequence I focused on the deprived actions of harpooner, Drax, in Ian McGuire’s Drax in *The North Water*: ‘Tonight, he will kill, but the killing is not the topmost in his mind. The thirst is much deeper than the rage. The rage is fast and sharp, but the thirst is lengthy. The

⁷⁶ Butcher, J., *Proven Guilty*. London: Orbit, 2007, p. 19

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rage always has an ending, a blood-soaked finale, but the thirst is bottomless and without limits.’⁷⁷

Like Dresden Jack struggles with the darkness that threatens to take him over. Tainted by a malevolent force given to him by the he either he gives in and lets it overcome him, as if letting go is the only control he has left. Or he finds a way to harness the energy for a greater good. He does this when he re-enters the fire that rages through Lazarus Hotel in an attempt to save his colleague DI Osbourne:

Jack crawled across the floor, feeling with one hand in front of him he caught the side and then the top of a foot. Osbourne. Gasping and wheezing, his skin blistering, he took hold of his shoulders, and dragged him towards the brick fireplace on the far side of the landing...

Tired... very... very tired now.

He stuck his hands into his pocket, pulled out the gemstone Sarah had given him and toppled sideways until his head was resting against Osbourne. A long sigh and then he closed his eyes. He’d tried. At least he had tried. (p. 232)

⁷⁷ McGuire, *The North Water*, p. 307.

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Structure, Plot, and Clichés.

The idea behind *Lazarus Junction* came to me back in 2006. I had intended to write a fantasy novel, exploring a world hidden beneath Hull's Trinity Market. The story had elements of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* at its core: its chief protagonist journeying into a subterranean fantasy world that mimicked the world above. Other comparative works included Paul Cornell's, *Shadow Police*, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series, and Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* – individually and as a whole each exploring aspects of the storied city I wished to unlock. Over the years my own novel went through various incarnations. Yet, much as I tried the narrative structure evaded me. At the expense of what I had written I found myself started over and over until in my frustration, I put the book aside certain that the time wasn't right for its telling.

I picked up the novel again at the start of my Ph.D. and read it afresh. And in the rereading, I found a number of genre clichés had crept into my work which gave me writing a tired predictability. The narrative was sluggish and clogged with too many chronological external scenes, stifling any all hope of internal conflict in my invented characters. Frustrated, I cast around for other story ideas. But the original idea wouldn't rest. I believed at the time, and continue to do so, that Hull is relatively unexplored in the genre of urban fantasy. Yet, there was considerable planning needed if I was to unlock the city's psyche and bring it to the page.

In an attempt to find a way forward I began to remodel my work on Ian Rankin's Edinburgh: a city I have visited many times and have since developed a connection with. In thrall of the 'Athens of the North' I followed the crowds, looked up admiringly at the city

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architecture, and then listened recounted tales of Burke and Hare; of witches and executions, cannibalism and hauntings. Yet, it was only when I began to explore the parts of the city where Rebus spent many years pursuing serial killers and gangsters, drug-traffickers and people-traffickers through the tight alleys of the Old Town and the broad streets of the New Town, exposing corruption and generally laying bare the underbelly that this great city, did the city start to open itself up to me. The experience not only left me with a deep impression of Rankin's books and his misanthropic hero, but certain that I had little in the way of true knowledge needed to unlock the secrets my home city and genre I wished to infiltrate.

Despite this, I still sensed there were links here and there in my own work, rare moments of judgement, that if brought to the fore might unlock the narrative and build some semblance of cohesion between my story and the city I was exploring. Aided by supervision meetings I further embraced the true nature of my book.

This marked the turning point for me and before long the practicalities of research began to inform the creative process and the creative informed my research. Ideas began to grind against one another, and in my newfound impetus I set a goal of finishing the first draft by the end of my third year.

As my reading became more informed fresh novels presented themselves to me as models. These were Sergei Lukyanenko's *Night Watch* series, Brian Lumley's *Necroscope*, Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* (re-read with a different mindset), Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, and Clive Barker's *Weaveworld*. I had was also reading James Oswald's Inspector McClean's series at the time and took guidance from his comprehensive use of police procedure, whilst trying to unlock the traces of supernatural elements evident in his work.

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Adopting Oswald's painstaking police procedure as a backbone for my own work the narrative arc of my book began to come together, lending itself to some coherence as story developed. It was at this time that I also started to have some success in supervision meetings and felt that I had a better grip of the fictional world which opens out into the supernatural but tries to keep earthed in reality.

Throughout this process I was aware of the genre clichés which had crept tried into my work and sought to sniff them out. In creating Jack, I tried to steer away from the genre cliched protagonist as someone who is superior to everyone around him and seemingly invincible to the malevolent forces he battles. Although I set off on a wide arc over time Jack's personality developed with real flaws. He was becoming a man whose nature held some balance and differentiation between the human world and the supernatural. The war between good and evil was an old one, but for Jack the conflict was new and he needed to see it that way. His struggle with his own inner darkness is representative of the rot and disorder he faces on a daily basis. While there was no getting away from the fact that Jack had taken on supernatural abilities after the murder of his fiancée there were those around him who thought he was unbalanced:

'Accept it, Kane...' Docherty didn't try to keep the sneer out of his voice as he jabbed a slender finger against an image of Sarah's body laid out in the morgue. 'Your fiancée is dead and you blame yourself. I get that. What I can't allow is you interfering with an ongoing investigation, and now we've got another fucking murder to investigate.'

'You think this is my fault?' Jack gritted his teeth and leaned white-knuckled against the desk.

Docherty met him halfway. 'You're a fucking liability, Kane. Always was, always will be.' (p. 14)

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Knowing his actions would further rile DCI Docherty, Jack sought solace in his friend and colleague Ashleigh Young. His actions might have drawn ridicule from others in Ash they brought only an air of understanding. Aware of the genre restrictions when it comes to bestowing supernatural powers, I tried create contradicting forces between what Jack sees and hears and what Ash senses of the spirit world: The shock of finding her father's naked body hanging in the attic of his house had unlocked some inherent ability in her. This is offered from a rejected draft of *Lazarus Junction*:

Ash stared down at the woman's body lying on the platform floor and felt a tingle in her spine. It hit her hard. A second followed. A sure sign of spirit energies. Although she couldn't see them, she knew they were there, and if she was in the mood, she saw shimmering shades of dark in the air. She moved closer to where Jack was kneeling and bending down whispered in his ear. 'I think your date's dead.'⁷⁸

Ash's father's death has since been edited out. However, her extra-sensory perception becomes more subjective leaving the reader to decide ask themselves *did-she-didn't-she?*

Ash's gaze moved here and there, over family portraits, pictures of green fields and orchards hung on one wall, worksurfaces littered with pots, pans, and offcuts of chopped vegetables. And finally, down to a pool of blood on the floor. It was fresh and had sprayed over the kitchen cabinets Crouching down she placed a palm over the surface area. Her hand tingled as if something was trying to get inside. Something moved in the shadows. 'Whose there?' (p. 56)

As a matter of definition Ash's abilities are to be explored further in the next book. It's also important to note that they are modelled Ash's abilities on Clive Barker's *The Scarlet Gospels* in which private detective Harry D'Amour is able to sense the souls of the dead:

⁷⁸ Earlier draft manuscript, author's own archive.

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Harry had been in the in the company of phantoms often enough to know what tiny signs to look for: a certain strangeness in the way the shadows moved; sometimes a low-velocity hum; sometimes the simple silence of nearby animals.⁷⁹

From the outset I was drawn towards a love affair between Jack and Ash. However, as the story developed, I came to realise that such an action would only bring cliched consequences of instant love to the storyline which rarely symbolizes real interaction. And even if it did, the opportunity to create tension and interest between them over time would be lost.

A more standoffish approach was need. The approach I adopted was to have Jack reject any feelings he has for Ash. This gives him no comfort and only adds to the aching loss he feels inside. To illustrate the conflicting emotions, I offer this example in which Jack searches Ash's flat after her disappearance:

She wasn't there. The bedsheets were crumbled on the floor. Her mobile lying on the bedside table where the radio clock was buzzing away to itself. Jack turned it off. He stood there for a while and breathed in her scent. Unwanted thoughts began to fill his head so he pulled himself away and headed for the door. Ash was gone and someone had taken her? (p.199).

In using Harry Lazarus as a historical character, I was determined to honour the historical facts whilst using his death as genesis for the malevolent force that is to be set free on the streets of Hull. The likes of which I'm sure would have won me scathing attacks from his surviving descendants, not to mention justifiable accusation of oversimplifying the battle

⁷⁹ Barker, C., *The Secret Gospels*. London: Pan Books, 2015, p. 62.

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between good and evil. No. It was clear that this approach wasn't going to work, both from an ethical and creative angle. A new way forward was needed if my novel was to achieve its goals.

The challenge which presented itself was twofold: How to honour the facts of a much-admired historical personage, whilst bringing about the manifestation of a demonic entity from Harry Lazarus's era to the present-day. The answer presented itself in the contagious virus depicted in Benjamin Percy's *The Dark Net*. The evil forces in his book which possess the good people in Oregon, USA, come in two forms: '... small demons which take over and that cause a man to plough a lorry through a busy crowd, or a school shooting...' But when a big, strong demon comes along, '...it can possess not only a person, but a nation.'⁸⁰

Percy draws the reader's attention to such evils with reference to historical events such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. Using this as a starting point I found a way forward by focusing on the anger and prejudices felt towards the immigrants coming into the city towards the end of the nineteenth century. Driven by prejudice for the transmigrants Harry takes into his boarding house a group of men get into a struggle with him on the darkened streets of Hull. The ring leader, possessed by the malevolent force which brought them together, pulls out a knife and as he stabs Harry he utters '*Bagahi laca bachahe.*' Over and over – a phrase made up by the author, meaning revenge and used as an incantation to call upon the Shade throughout the narrative.

After the evil deed the men are compelled by the greater evil to bury Harry's body in the tunnels beneath the station. This serves as a way-point, a line of travel from where the

⁸⁰ Percy, Benjamin, *The Dark Net*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017, p. 82

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transmigrants left the city. The energies running through the area act as a conduit to preserve the demonic entity until it is summoned out of the ground and into the present-day historian, Mike Trainer.

In presenting partial images of Victorian Hull provided me with the opportunity to stay as close to the historical facts that formed the genesis of this book. And in doing so bring to life a little part of history when Harry Lazarus walked the streets:

Jack scanned the walls with his torch. They were in a tunnel with doors on either side. By his reckoning they were somewhere under Platform Two. ‘Victorian,’ he said, taking a step forward.

‘You’ve been down here before?’ Ash took a step forward. Her voice heavy in the gloom.

Jack didn’t answer. He stepped aside and pushed open one of the doors. It jammed and he pushed harder. A dark figure loomed in the darkness. Hunched and squat. No, not a person. An extended footrest flashed in the torchlight, followed by two arms and a headrest... Bending down Jack picked up a threat-bare leather strap and the bones of what was once a cut throat razor. (p,153)

It’s here under the streets of Hull and with the mention of the *cut throat razor* that Jack, Ash and Watson, aka, the *Ghost Squad* begin the sequel to this book.

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Conclusion

In this exegesis I have taken a look at five tropes: *Representing the City in Crime Fiction through to an examination of Structure, Plot and Cliches*. Needless say this exegesis is not exhaustive and many more deserve scrutiny: *The Alcoholic Cop*, *Argument/Tension with Superior Officers*, *Forensic Labs*, to name a few.

There are also hidden in plain sight and at the forefront of popular culture. A prime example of this is violence against women in crime fiction. One particular trope is referred to as ‘fridging’, which comes from the *Woman in Refrigerators*.

The concept originated from the *Green Lantern comic* when character Alexandra DeWitt (girlfriend of the main character, Kyle Rayner) was murdered and her body stowed inside a refrigerator. The meaning of ‘fridging’ has now widened to encompass violence against women as a plot device to motivate the male protagonist. It is a cliched type of storytelling with negative connotations because it’s seen as a devaluing the life of that female character i.e., they are more plot device than person.⁸¹

Crime fiction has a fraught relationship with death in which the antagonist (usually male) rape and kill their victims (usually female) in as many imagined ways as the author can conjure up.

Ultimately, *Lazarus Junction* rejects this philosophy by challenging the tropes of rape and mass murder in supernatural thrillers through the developing story of Mike and Hannah. This from an early draft of my novel:

‘Please, you’re scaring me.’

⁸¹ [Crime Fiction Tropes in the #MeToo Era – Alyssa Mackay | Writer. \(date accessed: 18.10.2022\)](#)

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Mike kept his eyes fixed on Hannah. The aching need to do as he was told stronger than ever as he drew the blade across her throat. Bloody sprayed out across he dining room table and up the walls. Hannah's boy twitched. Her eyes wide with fear. *One... two... three.* And then she stopped. Silent. Mike wiped the blade against his coat, sat down and ate the meal Hannah had prepared for him. Sauerkraut and cabbage. Her native Polish dish.⁸²

There's no denying murders are committed in crime fiction, any of which are gruesome acts of evil taken with the intention of ending another person's life. As *Lazarus Junction* and indeed the writer developed, I took it upon myself to pull back from such gruesome detail and be more subjective when writing a murder scene. Here is an edited version of the scene shown above:

Hannah is standing at the cooker singing to herself. He moves closer and she turns. She is happy and smiles. 'It's Bigos. Sauerkraut and fresh cabbage stew,' she says. More terrible memories, more fury. He looks down to see the knife in his hand and the voice speaks to him 'Bagahi laca bachahe...Bagahi laca bachahe...' Over and over. And then silence as he flicks open the knife and closes the kitchen door. (p.41)

It's important to note, this scene goes against the past third-person narrative running throughout my book. Writing in the present tense and very much through the eyes of Mike Trainer I hope to bring my reader closer to the narrative and in doing so very much part of the scene as it's played out. I use this technique sparingly throughout the book. In doing so hope to create a sense of unease and dread that's both immediate and compelling as the Shade moves from one victim to another. Overall, using multi-character third-person point of view my aim is my preferred technique and creative choice that serves to achieve a cinematic feel

⁸² Early draft manuscript, author's own archive.

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to the narrative. Creating a strong connection with my characters so that the reader aside from learning their motivations knows their stories continue even when they are off scene.

Hannah epitomises those that have fallen victim to the Shade. Each and everyone has a story to tell rather than been nothing more than a plot device, or cliché. Whilst their appearance may be brief it was important that she and all the others are be remembered throughout the story and remain pivotal to Jack and his team's investigation. Here's a little more about Hannah:

Hannah Kowalski was her birth name. At school the other children called her bluebell because of the flower she wore in her hair. She was an only child. Her parents had moved to Lisewo from Warsaw when she was five. They lived on the village and had two neighbours. Both farmers, wheat, potato and cabbage. And one also had pigs [...]
Hull is different. The city laughs and cries. People are strange, no like Lisewo, friendly but strange, and the air smells sea-salt and cocoa. (p.39)

Hull Noir is a genre characterised by cynicism, fatalism, and moral ambiguity.

Lazarus Junction taps into society's changing values and tolerances. During this study I have examined two core writers in the genre Robert Edric and David Mark both of whom tap into society's changing values and tolerances.

Edric takes the reader through the streets of Hull and then delves beneath the surface to establish authenticity – similar to Ian Rankin's Edinburgh.

David Mark taps into the rich history in his dark and gritty police procedural novel, *Dark Winter*. The central character being new to the city.

My contribution to the is explore late nineteenth century transmigrant business, and in doing so offer an innovative approach to the genre. Bringing with it Mark's gritty realism and Edric's exploration beneath the surface. Overall, the central character that runs through the

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narrative is how the city manifests itself, whilst delving into the murky depths of the supernatural, death and demonic intervention.

There is no resolution for Jack and his team. Only the realisation that for them policing has changed forever. They too, must also adapt and change if they are to take on supernatural elements that threaten the city and the wider populace.

The final chapter belongs to DI Osbourne as he lay unconscious in a hospital bed:

He should warn them, tell them it's still here, only he cannot move, cannot speak. A darkness fills his mind and the sadness he feels is neither here nor there. It moves again, speaks to him and he knows what he must do. It is *Its* will. (p. 248)

There is no resolution for newly promoted DI Clive Osbourne. His fate is sealed, he must become the beginning for the next book.

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