

Copycat Ripper

Bryan Stark

Chapter 1

Detective Chief Inspector John Anderson walked across the grass and stood just inside the taped-off area, well away from the activity in the centre of the park. He was not pleased. Five minutes later Comben joined him. Anderson waited but his new Detective Sergeant said nothing.

Then Anderson raised his left hand so that the sleeve of his coat slipped easily over the thin disc of his watch and fell back down his arm. Black hands and black Arabic figures showed up well on the dulled-metal dial and showed it was a few minutes past six. He nodded in Comben's direction. The younger man raised his own hand but had to push his sleeve over the bulk that Anderson imagined was some sort of multi-functioning computer. The figures could have been read from a yard away but Anderson stooped and read off 06.04.

'Sorry sir,' said Comben.

Anderson didn't reply; he'd made his point. He did expect his sergeants to be quicker off the mark. He had no doubt that Comben slept sounder and longer than he did himself and it *was* true that the phone call from the station hadn't woken him: the first light of dawn creeping round his curtains had done that. But he *had* taken his time getting there: two – or was it three – cups of Lavazza, a shower and then he always took a little time deciding what to wear.

He felt the pang of an unhealed wound as he thought about his clothes and he was not quick enough to stop his mouth twitching into a grimace. Whenever he stood in front of his wardrobe, he still yearned to put on the suits that hung to the left – the pre-Comben clothes – but he never did. He had his old Detective Sergeant, Patricia Fielding, to thank for that and now, as a newly promoted Detective Inspector, she reminded him about it every time they met in the station. Not that she said anything – she wouldn't say anything – but her eyes were more expressive than words could ever be, as they examined the texture and shade of his suits.

Anderson dragged his mind away from the unpleasantness. He was in time to put his arm

out and restrain his sergeant as the man turned towards the centre of the park. 'Let the scene-of-crime officers do their job,' he said. 'This isn't a TV show and the fewer people tramping over the ground the better.'

Anderson turned away from the hubbub and looked behind him at the rows of houses across the street. There was no sign of movement: no early worker opening doors and glumly setting out; no sounds of cars being started up; milk bottles stood untouched on doorsteps. This was not working-class land and the occupants were not expected in their offices before ten, if they worked at all. It was the best street in the neighbourhood, overlooking Queen's Park; Anderson held no hope of anyone across there having seen anything over here. They had canvassed the street before, after they found the first body and nothing had come out of it. Still, they would have to do it again.

Anderson turned back and saw that the activity had died down, so he sent Comben across. The Detective Sergeant came back and told Anderson what he already knew from the phone call earlier: it was a second strangulation of a middle-aged woman and she had died elsewhere. The murderer had carried the body to the park, pushed it over the railings, climbed over himself and then dragged it across the grass. Only after he had been done all this, had he mutilated the corpse. However, this one was different and Anderson had to trek across to see.

The first had multiple stab wounds; this one had been partly eviscerated. A memory tugged at Anderson's mind but he didn't struggle to bring it to the surface. It would come soon enough.

As he leaned forward, the tails of his long coat struggled towards the corpse — not far, since he had fastened each button carefully before walking across, although it wasn't cold. He drew the coat back and, as he did so, he wondered what had happened to him. When was it that he became more worried about contaminating his coat than the tragedy that lay before him?

He looked up at the faces around him. No, he wasn't the only one. He was surrounded by

cool, unemotional expressions. Familiarity, that was what it was. Homicides hadn't yet reached American levels but they were getting there.

Clarissa looked again at the story she had been reading. This was the writer's second attempt. The first had contained a violent murder and this one did too but was more special. It contained details of a slashed throat and an abdomen sliced from top to bottom. She was sure that she knew where the idea had come from.

She walked into Mark's room. Sugden's book was easy to find on Mark's bookshelf: it looked forlorn and lonely with only two or three others to keep it company. She flicked over a few pages and there it was — Martha and now Poole with intestines hanging around all over the place. Her anonymous writer was basing his stories on Jack the Ripper and putting them into a modern setting. Well she supposed it was a legitimate strategy, although it wasn't a genre she favoured. Still, she was there to criticise quality not subject matter.

She didn't like being too critical of students' work, they were too easily discouraged but she judged that the gory descriptions had taken over in the second story and that the plot and the characterisation had become sketchy. So that was what she decided to write on the typescript. But had her distaste for the subject matter spilled over and influenced her critical judgement? She had a little struggle with herself and decided it hadn't.

As she wrote, she heard his footsteps on the path but she didn't get up. Then came the rattle of his key in the lock, the sound of the door slamming behind him and there he was. She could see him out of the corner of her eye, standing in the doorway of her study. But she didn't stir until he flung the newspaper on to her desk, which he did every evening. Then and only then did she jerk her head back in mock surprise.

'I'm home from work darling,' he said, 'what's for dinner?'

She looked up at him through her reading glasses. The outline of his face was blurred — another sign of ageing: needing two sets of glasses.

‘Work’, every evening he insisted on using that word, as though she didn’t know where he had been all day. Yes, he went out to work and she stayed at home, so apparently she must cook. It didn’t matter that she owned the house and paid for everything in it and that his money — hard-earned money she was sure he would say — paid solely for *his* amusements: entertainment that excluded *her*.

Was this the price for marrying a younger man? She took off her reading glasses and put her others on to get him into focus. The effort was worth it. She could see why she had to have him. It was part of her spree when she was best selling author of the year. She had decided to spend: the house, clothes, a divorce and then a beautiful new man to adorn the whole edifice. And there he was — blond hair, square shoulders and firm muscles, kept that way by adequate but not excessive exercise. Six foot two of male pulchritude without an unsightly bulge — it was a pity that he didn’t choose to use his body to please her.

During her first marriage, she had learnt the truth of the old saying that if you put a sixpence in a pot for every time you made love during the first year of a marriage and then took one out each time subsequently, it would take ten years to empty the pot. This time it applied equally to the number of evenings they spent together. She didn’t know who he was fucking but she was damn sure she wasn’t going to subsidise it for much longer.

She might not have published for a year — her last effort had been refused: she had wanted to do something better but her publisher did not agree — and she may now be occupied earning peanuts teaching others to write but she had no intention of becoming a dutiful housewife. Nor had she the inclination to keep her husband in the style to which he wished to become accustomed. Not that she couldn’t have, had she wanted. The royalties kept flooding in and she

could hardly keep pace spending them. That she supposed had been one of the motives for marrying. Rich men marry so that their spouses can spend, so she did too. Very feminist – or perhaps post-feminist – of her she imagined, but now she had changed her mind.

He smiled and left the room. She had not said a word.

Thank god for take-away. The number was top of her pre-programmed list; she pressed the button. This time she varied the order; very confusing for them but after a repetition or two, they got the message.

She glanced down at her desk. Black huge headlines had caught her eye. She couldn't read them but one of the words suggested something to her. Back came her reading glasses: **SECOND RIPPER VICTIM.** It caused her to read on. There was no doubt: a modern Jack was copying the Ripper of a century before and he had reached number two last night — *after* she had received the second story. She used her diary to check but it was as she had thought: *both* typescripts had reached her before the actual murders.

How the first real murder had escaped her she didn't know. It was true that she hardly ever glanced at the daily paper or the evening one Mark brought home but the radio must have been full of it.

She took the copy of the first story and the original of the second downstairs with the paper and handed them to Mark. He was sitting in an armchair a glass poised in his left hand; his head back on the rest as though the day had been almost too much.

'Chinese again, I suppose,' he said.

'Look at this,' she said, 'it's important.'

The doorbell rang and she left the room. She needed to find her handbag before going to the front door, and then it took a little time to fumble in her purse and add a tip. By the time she called Mark into the kitchen, he had had plenty of time to scan the pieces and absorb their

meaning.

‘You didn’t remember this the first time.’

Clarissa heard the reproach in his voice. Was he saying she was responsible in some way?

‘No, I thought nothing of it. Why should I?’

‘The police have been here. I mentioned it to you.’

‘Well, I don’t remember,’ she said.

‘It’s clear he’s the Ripper. You must ring the police immediately.’

‘I don’t know who he is.’

It was a surprising fact that John Anderson had got used to: the few difficult cases that came his way kept him on the ‘right’ side of Queen’s Park. Murder didn’t often take him to the ‘other side of the tracks’. In those areas, there were plenty of muggings and burglaries but few murders that needed solving. Violent deaths, when they occurred, mostly resulted in immediate arrests.

This side of the train station – an enclave of bourgeois occupation – was where the interesting deaths happened. This was where his special expertise was called for. But this case was different. The killings had not been carried out where the bodies had been found — in the park opposite where he was now standing. So, what big cat was bringing home dead trophies for which mummy owner? And would the pathway he was walking up lead him to the killer?

He recognised the woman who opened the door of one of the large and prestigious houses lining the park but was still surprised. He shouldn’t have been. Knowing the ways of advertising, he should have understood. Her novels dealt with very young people in love and very young people think that anyone over thirty is passed it. He hadn’t read Clarissa Downing but no one could pass a bookshop without seeing her image in the window. But it was an image of a woman a decade younger than the one who stood at her threshold. Then there was the

husband hovering behind her, obviously as young as she had been in the photo.

Inside their own living room, they sat together on the settee. Detective Sergeant Comben and Anderson himself sat opposite on chairs. But there was something wrong with the couple: a sort of magical force field kept them apart. The settee was a two-seater and even strangers find it difficult to sit down in comfort without touching each other. Clarissa and her husband managed it.

Anderson let her tell her story.

‘At first, I thought the writer shy. Many new members are and that was why I allow people, who want me to read something, to put them in a box one week and collect them the next. Those who wish to discuss their piece or read them out loud can do so but there’s no pressure on those who don’t.’

She had seemed so stiff between the front door and the living room but now, telling a story, she was animated. Anderson could see much more of the young woman who had written those early books. Her eyes glinted with enthusiasm; her limbs moved with welcoming, reaching movements. She lent forward in her eagerness. She was enjoying the drama.

Anderson supposed that it was the author in her. He must be careful to separate the truth from the fiction that might creep in to make a good story.

‘I got the first piece three weeks ago. Neither of the two stories were signed but one *was* collected.’

‘You couldn’t make up your mind who wrote it during the discussions that took place?’ asked Comben.

Anderson leaned back in his chair as he waited for her answer. He was happy to let Comben lead. While he did so, he compared the two young men: both were in their early thirties but the husband – Mark somebody – obviously paid attention to his appearance. The old-fashioned

word 'gigolo' slipped involuntarily into his mind when he looked at him. He had the same build as Comben but with blond hair compared to Comben's dark brown and his was a self-conscious handsomness, while Comben's was thoughtless.

Anderson had to stop himself falling into the natural prejudice of a man of his own age. Why shouldn't a rich woman in her forties take herself a young lover? Men did it all the time and no one thought it wrong.

Clarissa answered Comben's question. 'No, it wasn't possible. I wonder whether he was there at all.'

'He?' Anderson asked.

'Don't you think it must be a man?'

Anderson smiled at her answer. Her novels were firmly set in a more pleasant era than London was in the twentieth-first century. 'We mustn't jump to conclusions. The writer may not be the killer and anyway we can't eliminate half the population just yet.'

Comben waited for a while and then continued. 'Still he or she must have come to your classes some time to have left his stories and then collect one of them.'

Clarissa nodded but was silent.

'I must ask you why you didn't come forward before,' said Anderson. 'My officers knocked on your door soon after the first murder.'

'My wife never listens to me,' said Mark. 'I spoke to a policeman and mentioned it to Clarissa over a fortnight ago.'

So he does speak. Anderson scolded himself for being so ungenerous towards the man. Was it envy for his youth? Or was it jealousy? A woman of Clarissa's maturity should have an older man — forty-four would be a good age and it just happened to be his own.

'I'm sorry,' Clarissa said. 'Do you think the second murder's my fault?'

Anderson looked sternly at her and she leaned forward, as though pleading to be exonerated. He smiled and then let her off the hook. 'You mustn't blame yourself. Your information is useful but I don't think he's going to be that easy to find. As I said before, the writer may not even be the killer.'

'Is my wife in danger?' asked Mark. 'If so, can you protect her?'

'You look as though you can look after your wife,' said Comben.

'But I'm out at work all day,' Mark said.

So she makes him work. Anderson imagined that Clarissa Downing could well afford to keep her husband in luxury without that. 'How long have you been married?' he asked.

'Is that relevant?' Clarissa asked.

It gave him the opportunity to say what all TV detectives say but he left it to Comben.

'Everything's relevant in a murder investigation. We like to have the whole background. It's just routine.'

Clarissa was enjoying his visit, although calling Anderson's interrogation 'a visit' was stretching the meaning of the term. She hadn't felt inspected in that way for some time but there was no mistake: he was looking at her with a distinctly hungry gaze. She didn't imagine he had a loving wife at home. If he had a wife at all, theirs would be a very dull affair.

She allowed herself an expansiveness as she told her story. It was a good story, apart from the poor victims that was. She wondered whether Mark noticed her new found vibrancy, because she did feel it herself and Anderson's half smile encouraged it. After she stopped talking, she wondered whether she had made anything up. Had she been carried away into misleading them?

They rose and so did she, stretching herself to show off her best feature. It was as though she were a teenager again and delighted in her new-grown breasts and the way the boys looked at

them. Mark and the young sergeant looked through her but Anderson, she thought, gazed at her with a degree of admiration. She wondered whether he had read any of her books and if he liked them. But probably not: she was known as a woman's author.

She walked in front to the door and opened it for the policemen to leave. Up to then she had thought only of his interest in her; now she looked at him more carefully: forties, perhaps a year or two older than herself; greying hair receding in front but no sign of baldness behind; six foot tall at least and a pleasant straight back; a face that did not pretend to be beautiful but a demeanour that spoke of importance and even power.

She turned back to her husband once they had gone. He was beautiful but then what was it they say: power and money are sexy. Anderson reeked of power and she had the money.

'Making a play for him were you?'

Was it so obvious? But then Mark was a man who spent his life making plays for his livelihood. It was his profession. She should have realised that it was impossible to fool a professional.

'Mark,' she said, 'have you got a lover?'

'Yes my sweet, you.'

'If that's so, why haven't I noticed it?'

He came towards her and grasped her by the throat. One of his hands was enough to encompass her neck but it was a gentle grip and she felt no fear. It might have been Anderson's visit and his interest but she suddenly felt excited by this man. His sudden eagerness made her remember why she had wanted him and why she had bought him.

He drew her to him and kissed her on the lips. Her hip was pressed into his groin and she could feel his arousal. The stiffness sent messages that had been absent for months now and her lips pressed back.

He lifted her easily into his arms and carried her upstairs, kissing her all the time. She did not want him to stop. She felt as though she were reading one of her own novels and she was enjoying it. The phrase 'willing suspension of disbelief' came to her mind.

In his bedroom, he laid her down and undressed her. She drove all thought of professional expertise out of her mind, as he unzipped and removed her trousers and briefs. She lay passively except to raise her hips and then arch her back as he undid her bra. She wanted him and if the price was to forget the last year their life together and to sink into the plot, then so be it.

But she was not ready and was pleased that he knew it and used his tongue to moisten her labia so they parted when he pressed his tongue between them and moved around the entrance to her vagina. She opened for him and his tongue slipped inside. Then she breathed more fiercely as he used his fingers to thrust into and then twist inside her until she came.

She kept still as she heard him undress and then gave small yelps of delight when he nibbled at her breasts, while slipping his penis into her. His movements suited her own and increased in frequency and intensity as she was driven closer to her orgasm. She felt no worry that he would come too soon and disappoint her — he never had yet. Then she came and he was very still as she stretched her neck and arched her back.

As soon as she relaxed, he started again and she wondered whether this time he would come and it would be all over. There had been times when she had felt him become bored and make himself climax to get it over. But this time he was cooler and moved in and out of her with long slow movements that made her thrust at him violently. He controlled her with the weight of his hips and she shivered with anticipation each time he withdrew until he thrust in again. Then strange incoherent noises came from between her lips. She came yet again and he was still.

He paused for a few seconds and then turned her over and held her hips so that he could come into her vagina from behind. She waited for his own need to take over. This was how he

best enjoyed women and she knew he would gradually increase the frequency until he finished in a flurry that often ended suddenly with him gripping her to him, so that she could feel the tremor of his orgasm erupt into the fiercest of cries.

This time he was slow to come to his climax and she came once more before she heard his jubilant sounds. Afterwards he lay on top of her for a few seconds before releasing her and going to the bathroom. She was hoping – expecting – him to come back and they would lie together and perhaps she would be allowed to spend the night in his bed. But she heard him shower and then come back to dress. The fantasy was over.

He was going out. She didn't ask where. It hadn't exactly been discussed but it was clear between them. She was not to ask him what he did and he wouldn't ask her. Unfortunately, she had nothing to tell him anyway.

She stayed for a while in his bed after he left. His room was a masculine enclave in what was her feminine domain. The interior designer had used blacks, whites, and greys for the carpet, bedclothes and paintwork, with a small number of geometrical abstract paintings on the wall providing a few splashes of primary colours. It was the archetypal bachelor pad with one black leather Chesterfield for the preliminary seduction and nothing else soft except the bed. David, her interior designer, had tried harder in this room than the rest of the house and Clarissa had wondered whether it was a form of wish-fulfilment for him: did he fancy being seduced by Mark in this very room?

They had laughed about that together — it was a time when they did that sort of thing. But Mark had taken it further and wondered whether he should oblige, since David had put a great deal of effort into the place for them both. Clarissa hadn't taken him seriously at the time and they had ended by giggling at the thought and agreeing that the man was being well paid for what he did. There was no need to consider tipping him with sexual favours, which, Clarissa

accepted, would not have been welcome if provided by her.

Later she had thought it over. Had Mark slipped up? Paying a gay man with sex was not the sort of thought that Clarissa imagined passed through many heterosexual man's minds but perhaps that was the type of thing Mark had done in the past to get by. She had never probed into his past; clearly, he had no profession and the job he had now was low down in the office hierarchy. She had no idea what he had been driven to do before she had rescued him.

Anderson was in front, as they left Clarissa's house and walked out to the BMW. Before he unlocked the car, he walked around it once to make sure it was all right. He had felt that the neighbourhood was reasonably safe and had been confident about leaving it there but he still needed to check.

Comben watched him in silence and, when Anderson noticed his sergeant stroke the paintwork admiringly, he toyed with the idea of throwing the younger man the keys but he didn't. Comben had been in the passenger's seat on the way to Clarissa's and that's the way it stayed — Anderson couldn't bring himself to let the car fall into someone else's hands.

Instead he settled himself comfortably behind the wheel and watched as the young man sunk into the leather upholstery with a comforting wiggle that suggested he might one day want something of the sort for himself.

Anderson was pleased that Comben's admiration had been silent. After all, the car was part of his previous image; post-Fielding, he now felt uneasy about being judged by his possessions. The car though was in pewter-grey and could hardly be called ostentatious: a word that constantly came to his mind when he thought back to the finery he used to wear.

The ride was short and Comben contented himself with little nods and murmurs of agreement, as he listened to Anderson's speculations. There wasn't much time for a thorough

dialogue but still Anderson was disappointed: it looked as though Comben had not been blessed with a great imagination. He himself would be providing the theorising in this case but that might be a relief: Fielding had had a lot to say for herself and sometimes it was better to have a quiet helper.

Comben lived alone in a small flat across the tracks and Anderson had to drive back close to the infamous park to get home. He parked the car in a rented garage – a safer alternative to the car park five floors below his apartment – and then let himself in through the main front door of his block before taking the lift to the top floor.

It was not yet eleven — too early for bed and he had eaten before driving to Clarissa's. Anderson liked to keep his calorie intake controlled: he was too old to eat every time he felt a little bored, so he poured himself an Armagnac and slid on to his leather Chesterfield. Then he loosened his tie and took off his jacket leaving it folded neatly on the floor. His shoes he unlaced so they came off without straining the stitching. Stretched full length along the sofa, he allowed himself to think over the events of the day.

There was still not enough information to concoct a theory for the murders. He would have to endure a great deal more legwork – and maybe a death or two more – before closing the case. Two Cs occupied his mind instead: Clarissa and Comben. Just at this moment, Clive Comben was not looking like detective material; still he had passed all the exams and had been recommended. Anderson wouldn't jump to conclusions but neither did he like running a detective school and right now that was what he was doing.

Clarissa was a more pleasant subject for his reflections. Good figure, pleasant face, rich and intelligent — it was a perfect specification if he was ever to think about settling down again. He was not a once-bitten-twice-shy sort of man and it had been years now since Gabriella had found someone more to her liking.

His thoughts kept him going until midnight, when he roused himself for his bedtime ritual. First the shower, then the interdental toothbrushing as recommended by his dentist and finally the exercises advised by his osteopath to prevent any breakdown due to his incipient back problem. John Anderson was not about to let his body deteriorate for lack of necessary maintenance.

Then he remembered it was Wednesday and, before getting into bed, he made ready his dirty clothes for his 'daily' who washed on Thursdays.

Chapter 2

The next morning Comben was at the station first — Anderson was pleased that the man could take a hint. Then the sergeant spoilt it by coming into Anderson's office and sitting on the edge of his desk. Anderson motioned him to sit lower, on a chair in front of the desk. He did so without acknowledging his mistake.

Outside the incident room was quiet. That's the way Anderson liked it: the men – and women – were out and busy, only the odd operator clicked away on their computer keyboard. Comben recapped aloud for them both.

'The bodies were found arranged in the centre of the park — a large open field fringed by trees. There was plenty of cover elsewhere but the murderer chose open ground. Two mornings now the park keeper has phoned at first light. The park is always locked at night: the bodies would need to be carried over metal railings each time.'

'You have to be making a point to do all that and Clarissa Downing is right: it really does have to be a man,' said Anderson. 'The fence is of a traditional metal design and is seven foot high. It would have to be an unusually strong woman to get a body over that fence.'

'And we've cleared everyone who had keys to the park gates,' said Comben.

'So what have we got?'

‘We haven’t located either of the two places where the women were killed.’

Anderson nodded.

‘It’s not unusual for killers to display their victims in special ways; it’s not unusual for them to copy famous murderers and it’s not unusual for them to move the bodies.’ Comben stopped.

‘And now we have the stories.’

‘But no author. He didn’t sign in for the class and, as far as Clarissa Downing is concerned, he remained entirely invisible.’

‘Fingerprints?’

‘Lots on the typescripts — Clarissa Downing’s and her husband’s and an unknown set,’ said Comben.

‘Why ... why Mark what-ever-his-name-is? Why *his* prints?’

‘He read the stories before phoning the station.’

Anderson nodded. He really must stop himself — there was no reason at all to suspect the husband except that he didn’t like him. ‘And the unknown ones are presumably the writer’s.’

‘We have to find him first to confirm that,’ said Comben.

‘We will find him though,’ said Anderson.

‘*If* he is the killer, he wants to be found and he will be found,’ said Comben.

‘But not before he’s killed as many as the real Jack the Ripper.’

Comben continued. ‘Left to himself, he’ll keep on. But he’s left too many clues to stay free long.’

‘Where’s the list?’ Anderson asked.

Comben handed him two sheets of paper. The writing class had a large and changeable membership.

‘What night do they meet?’ asked Anderson.

Comben looked at his watch. Anderson wondered if the man had mistaken his question but the face of his watch showed the day of the week and the date as well as the time. He soon had his answer.

‘Tonight sir, eight this evening.’

‘We’ll join them,’ Anderson said.

The library was closed but a room was opened especially for the group each week. Like most public buildings, it was too hot. Anderson felt a tinge of annoyance: he was paying for all this extra heat and it was making him sweat. It made it difficult to pull up the knees of his trousers as he sat and his collar was sticking to his neck. He thought of taking off his jacket as he saw Comben do but decided not to. His shirt would soon show signs of wetness under his arms and maybe even on its front; he preferred to hide the signs of his discomfort.

They sat on the periphery of the group. Some latecomers did the same, while a few bunched themselves around the table, their eager faces leaning forward trying to capture their heroine’s attention. By narrowing his eyes and so blurring their faces, Anderson was able to visualise them as infants with hands raised in urgent supplication. He imagined that this was how it always was: six or so frantic to read, who formed the core of the group.

He glanced at the attendance sheet he had removed from the table, and then he passed the sheet to someone on his left who had deliberately shifted his chair outside the harsh light that glared from above the table. The man passed the sheet on without signing his name.

He could see now how Clarissa would not know who came and went. She was totally taken up by those few who clamoured around her. There were two young men in their twenties and four youngish women. Certainly, these few showed no need or inclination to communicate with those outside this inner grouping. As the evening went on, the circle of talk became narrower

until only Clarissa and two or three others felt capable of opening their mouths. Some on the periphery, who, Anderson imagined, may have come for the first time to see how the Writers' Circle worked had already left. Only the most brash could survive the competition.

They would not find their author that evening but they might collect some leads from questioning Clarissa's regulars — obligingly she ended the session early and told those who had stayed to the end what the police wanted. Comben and Anderson interviewed each separately. At the end of an hour, they had a good idea of what the man looked like but no indication of where he lived. They did not expect to get more from those who had left early and whose names the constable outside had been told to collect.

'The blonde girl seemed clearer about him than the rest,' said Anderson.

'If we can trust her memory,' said Comben.

Anderson nodded and followed Comben outside to allow the caretaker to lock the library for the night. They both noticed the husband across the street. He got out of his car, crossed over and kissed Clarissa on the cheek. He came to walk his wife to her car — just in case, he said. Anderson noticed that he could spare no glance at all for the young blonde. There were not many men who would refuse to look at her, even though their wife might be next to them. Amanda was her name and she did take an interest in Mark but then turned away, as though she had dismissed him from her mind but Anderson imagined that Mark was not so easily ignored by women as all that.

Amanda sat at the end of the long table furthest away from Clarissa. Dave and Pete struggled with themselves but eventually, after standing around and leaning on chairs, they sat at Clarissa's end of the table. Their four satellites followed them — four older women in their thirties: maybe married, possibly divorced, at least one a single mother. She hadn't taken much notice of them.

During the time she had attended the group, she hadn't noticed any developments. Dave and Pete accepted their bitch-like devotion but Amanda imagined they thought of the women as 'passed it'. She hoped she would have better judgement when she was as old as the women were.

This was Amanda's sixth visit and at first both Dave and Pete had tried to persuade her to cluster with them around their star, Clarissa Downing. Then Pete had given way to Dave — had they discussed it and come to an agreement? Apparently, he was allowed to have first shot at her but his need to suck up to Clarissa constantly got in his way. His invitations to stay behind and drink with them in the bar downstairs never seemed very urgent, not that Amanda would have accepted anyway.

Clarissa, of course, had no eyes for anyone but Pete but managed to keep a look of sophisticated amusement on her face rather than reveal the appetite that Amanda could see she felt for the young man. Amanda felt her lips curl in distaste.

It was not very long into the session before Amanda noticed a change in Clarissa. She was effusively pouring out praise as usual and Dave and Pete were lapping it up but her eyes strayed from time to time. Amanda followed her gaze. Two new members had crept in and were sitting just outside the bright circle of light cast by the hanging lamp above the table. One was older, as old as Clarissa, the other much younger and very well built.

It wasn't until near the end of the session that Clarissa revealed who they were and why they were there. Amanda knew immediately whom they were seeking. Jewish, yes, he looked Jewish and when she described him she couldn't help thinking that she was mapping a stereotype. Was she being accurate, or had she given the man such cursory glances, that she was making it all up?

The older man questioned her, as though he were filling in a passport application form for the man: age? height? build? distinguishing features? She answered just as succinctly: hair, dark brown, usually too long and uncombed; clothes, jeans with holes, sweatshirt, probably the same

one each time. But 'no', she didn't know his name or where he lived and 'no', it was not unusual for visitors not to sign in.

The street was usually deserted by the time Felicity got home. But this time, after she'd parked her car under a lamppost and got out, she saw a figure walking away from her. Was it Amanda's man? She was secretive about him and he always left before Felicity came home but that night she was early; it had been a slack night at the club.

She stood for a while bathed by the light above her but he didn't look round. There was something familiar about him but she couldn't say what. Inside the flat, she could see a light under Amanda's door. She went in. Amanda was in bed.

'You didn't quite catch us,' she said smiling, 'but next time knock. He's very shy.'

'Married I suppose.'

'Wouldn't you know it. But they don't sleep together.'

'That's what they all say.'

'But this time it's true.'

'So, why can't I see him?'

'He doesn't want any witnesses until he walks out.'

'And when will that be?'

'Soon.'

'That's what they all say.'

'Felicity.'

Felicity caught the sudden serious tone in her voice and turned back from the door. 'Yes.'

'I might be moving very soon; will you be able to manage?'

'I'll manage and I wish you luck but you know what they say don't you?' Amanda smiled,

Felicity knew she knew what was coming. 'They never leave.'

'Not this time,' Amanda said.

Felicity smiled.

'The police came to the group tonight.'

'About the murders?'

'They think it's one of the men who came there sometimes,' said Amanda.

'And did dear Clarissa tell them all they wanted to know?'

'I don't think she remembered him at all. She's always too busy with her favourites.'

Felicity remembered that. It was one of the reasons she stopped going. 'And were you able to tell them anything?'

'Not much,' Amanda said but she was already turning on to her side and Felicity switched off the light and shut her door.

Chapter 3

It was at least half an hour before he was due at Clarissa's house when Anderson walked through the park gates heading towards Kingswood Avenue. He was early and took his time. The pathways and central field were deserted although the sun shone brightly and the temperature had not dropped to winter levels. There were no children on the swings or toddlers chasing balls, so clearly the locals felt differently about the park now that it had been turned into a mortuary.

The leaves on the trees hadn't changed colour yet but the summer flowers in the corner garden had all been dug up and had not yet been replaced. Anderson wondered whether they would be or whether the park authorities shared the general distaste for the place and would shrink from decorating a double murder scene.

In daylight the house looked more impressive than at night. It overlooked the trees and greenery of the park and its condition was better than most of the adjacent properties and no one could say *they* were neglected. The front gate was wooden and not one of those modern wrought iron anachronisms, the front path was paved in brick and the pot plants and shrubs healthy but well trimmed, while the street door was ill-fitting enough to be original. No expense had been spared to produce a good initial impression.

Clarissa opened the door herself, said nothing but smiled and turned rapidly. As she walked down the hall, her low-heeled shoes made clacking noises on the ceramic-tiled floor. Anderson wondered whether the tiles were the originals. Those outside – on either side of the door – were too perfect to have been there for a hundred years but they were from the right period. Anderson could see that a great deal of time and effort had been made to restore the house to its original Victorian state. Anaglypta wallpaper under a rail in the hall and the wall above covered with a variety of framed prints and objects completed the feeling of old-fashioned clutter. He preferred a cleaner modern look. Still, he thought it right that, if one bought an old house, it should be

decorated in character.

At the entrance to the sitting room she stopped. 'Here or in my study?'

'Why don't you show me your lair, where it all happens?'

She walked back passed him and Anderson moved slowly so that she had to squeeze passed him to reach the door. Then he walked after her and through the open door into her office. There was only one chair and, apart from the computer on her desk, nothing else cluttered up its surface.

'Why don't you sit down and I'll perch on the desk,' she said.

He did so and slid the office chair back so that she had enough room for her legs to dangle diagonally across the corner of the desk. Then she crossed her legs and one of her slippers fell to the floor. Anderson picked it up and held her right foot as he put the shoe back on.

'Too small,' he said.

'For what?'

'The murderer, he left shoe prints.'

She smiled. 'So what can I do for you?'

'Can you explain exactly how typescripts find their way from the library on to your desk,' he said.

She was very precise and looked into the distance and swung her leg as she thought and described the process, if you could call it that. Quite simply Clarissa carried the box to her car and then carried it into her office to be read the next day. She made something of a meal of the telling and it gave Anderson the opportunity to look around him. The walls were fitted with glass fronted bookshelves, packed, as might have been expected in an author's study, with books of all sizes. The colour of the wood and the mouldings looked as though they might have come from the library of a much larger Victorian house. And maybe they did. Anderson knew it was

common for old furniture including built-in units to be re-cycled.

What struck Anderson was the lack of any sign of work in progress. There were no papers on the desk and he was sure that Clarissa had not been at her keyboard when he knocked. Although he had dawdled, he had still been early, so, if she had been working, the screen would still be alive. ‘So there would be no occasion when you would read them the same night?’ he asked.

‘No, the next day would be my first opportunity.’

‘And do you sometimes leave the box in the hallway?’

‘I might do but normally I bring the box and my briefcase into my study after every class.’

‘But there would be no opportunity for someone to add to the box between the library and your home.’

‘No.’

‘And you’re clear that the writer does not appear on this list.’

Anderson handed her the typed list, which she read through slowly and apparently thoroughly.

‘I can visualise each one of them and their work. I’m sure he never signed himself in. But that’s not unusual. There’s no charge and often no secretary. I remember a number of shadowy figures who stayed out at the edge. They seldom spoke and, if they handed in pieces, it was very rarely.’

Anderson understood: Clarissa paid so much attention to those few sitting round the table that she had no time for anyone else. ‘We have a suspect. He’s described as young – in his twenties – thin, always dressed in torn jeans and a sweater that had seen better days, never opens his mouth and disappears quickly once the session finishes. Does that jog your memory?’

Clarissa thought for a while. As she did so, she swung her foot again and her slipper fell

once more to the floor. This time before Anderson put it back on her foot he squeezed her ankle. She looked at him and Anderson wondered whether he would be told off for stepping over the mark. She looked like the sort of woman used to giving reprimands. She said nothing.

‘Are you and your husband happy together?’ he asked.

‘Is that one of those routine questions that you feel you must ask in a murder enquiry?’ she said.

‘Are you going to answer it?’ It wasn’t entirely clear even to Anderson where the question fitted into his investigation but then he wouldn’t have minded if Clarissa realised it didn’t. He would, though, like to know the answer.

‘No but I’ll tell you something much more interesting. The man you describe, I’ve seen him outside this house. Once I thought he was going to speak to me but he didn’t. I wasn’t frightened but neither did I recognise him. It’s only now that I see it must have been him.’

‘Do you think he lives around here?’

‘He could come from anywhere within the borough.’

‘Looking at the addresses on your membership list it seems as if everyone is within walking distance of the library.’

She had no more to tell him but still Anderson lingered. She hadn’t yet told him about her husband. Her silence told him she wasn’t prepared to do that yet, so he left.

Clarissa wondered why she hadn’t told Anderson about her marriage, because she would, if he asked again. She had reached that point when covering up made no more sense. She supposed every bad marriage goes through a process that ends finally with one or other giving up hope. And it is then that the couple is almost proud to announce that it is all over. ‘Proud’, perhaps not quite that, perhaps ‘brazen’: a sort of brazen admission that the supposed loving couple hate each

other and that all those public displays – Mark picking her up from the library for instance – were quite meaningless and only carried out to maintain the public face that hides the rot beneath.

But there was another reason for her reticence. To imagine that Anderson ought to know every personal detail of her life suggested that she was part of these murders – that Mark might be involved – and that the connection was not simply accidental: via a weird student. And this she certainly did not believe. So, to announce her unhappiness too early, would be tantamount to an accusation. Infidelity was the sole source of her complaint against her husband — not murder.

But she would tell Anderson quite soon. If Mark had strayed and she was certain he had, she would dismiss him. After that, Anderson might very well suit her. He was sensibly the right age. But more than that she would feel comfortable in his arms and with his body between her legs. She had enjoyed the caress of his hand on her ankle. It was sweetly chaste, almost antediluvian in its modesty but it had made her heart beat just that bit faster all the same.

And maybe he had money too: she would feel more at ease if that problem were removed. She had thought it emancipated of her to buy a man. Now it didn't feel so good.

The suits were a good sign: a change from two days before and they looked expensive. There was none of that gaping at the neck or flying away behind the waist at the back and the lapels stayed flat even when he sat. Then there was his watch, his tie, his shoes and his shirt: discrete, a touch conservative and tasteful, nothing brash. The message was clear: this man had nothing to prove. He was no cock-bird fluttering around to attract the female. He seemed to know that a woman of perception and taste would have no difficulty in seeing the attraction and she was certainly that sort of woman and she did feel it.

Yes, he spent a great deal – but discreetly – on his appearance and she imagined that he thought as much about what went underneath as on top.

Comben couldn't imagine that Amanda Clayden would have anything more to tell them and hadn't hurried himself. It was evening before he got around to visiting but it was not Amanda who opened the door. The girl on the threshold was only two inches or so shorter than himself, dark hair, good figure. Just the right size, Comben thought to himself. But whom was he kidding? His size was anything from five foot two upwards. He hung out his warrant card.

'Detective Sergeant Comben,' he said, 'is Amanda Clayden in?'

The woman was dressed to go out in a gown that finished well above her knees but a neckline that was tight underneath her chin. The material clung around her making the most of her waist, hips and breasts. Comben wondered whether it was one of those dresses 'cut on the bias' he had watched fashion-models parade up and down in on TV fashion shows — figure hugging with their nipples sticking out. Comben could see *this* girl wasn't wearing a bra either.

'She's not in,' the woman said.

'Can I ask who you are,' said Comben.

'Felicity Galloway,' she said.

'Would it be possible for me to come inside and ask you a few questions,' said Comben.

'I *am* on my way out,' she said.

'It is important,' he said.

She turned abruptly and walked down the hall. Her dress was cut down to the waist at the back — he had been right: she wasn't wearing a bra. Unless, of course, it was an example of some miracle of cantilevered construction. Comben followed her into the sitting room. She sat down and crossed her legs. Comben stood and gazed. It was a good sight: those legs.

'I hope you're not going to be long; I have to get to work.'

It was nine o'clock in the evening. He wondered what kind of work started at that time and needed the sort of dress she was wearing but he said nothing. Instead, he looked at her with an

eyebrow raised. Anderson did this and often produced a stream of new information. He thought he might as well try it too.

‘I work in a club. A gambling club.’

‘Where’s that.’

‘In the West End.’

Comben raised his eyebrows again but this time nothing happened. ‘How long have you known Amanda?’ he asked.

‘Only since I moved in about six months ago. Blonde and brunette,’ she said touching her hair, ‘we thought we were Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell.’

Comben remembered the films but only just. Was she some sort of film buff? ‘Where did you meet?’ he asked.

She leaned her head to the side as if querying his right to question her. Comben was patient and waited. She did answer. ‘I joined Clarissa Downing’s group for one or two sessions then I got fed up. We both needed to move, so we got this together. Is that all right by you?’

He nodded, another of Anderson’s ploys.

‘I suppose you’re on the Ripper case,’ she said.

He didn’t answer directly. ‘Have you anything to tell me?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she said and shook her head.

He continued to gaze at the woman. If Anderson could do it with Clarissa Downing, he felt that a Detective-Sergeant could do the same with Felicity Galloway. And he reckoned he had the best of the bargain.

‘If you’ve finished, I must go.’

He offered his hand to help her to her feet. But she refused to take it.

‘I’m not in my dotage yet,’ she said and stood up.

He followed her into the hall and she took a fur coat from a hook and slipped her arms inside before he could help. 'I hope it's fake,' he said. Not that he cared but she might be the sort of woman who did. He had met animal lovers before and you had to be careful to say the right thing.

'It is,' she said, 'I can't afford the real thing.'

'That's not what I meant,' he said.

She smiled. 'I know,' she said.

They walked outside to her car, which was parked immediately in front of the house. She got in. He lent down and she opened her window.

'I might need to speak to you again,' he said.

She turned to him and smiled. 'Next time come at about noon. I'm just getting up then.'

He watched her drive off.

Chapter 4

Julian sat just inside the park railings, propped up against a tree facing South. He had a book open in his lap but seldom glanced down. There was a stretch of grass ten yards or so to his right separating him from the path that formed the boundary of the main field, where the bodies had been found. To his left and down the hill in front of him was Clarissa's house. There were no trees or bushes between him and the front door, so it was in clear view.

He stayed there all day. At first, he wore a sweater but it was still September and became warm from eleven in the morning. At noon he stripped off his sweater but left his shirt on for the rest of the day. There were a few young men and women dotted around him in the afternoon who stripped down to shorts and tops or swimsuits and the odd topless girl sunbathed discreetly behind a tree. No one stayed very long in the centre of the field.

The day after his vigil, Julian was sitting in the same place before eight in the morning. Clarissa's husband left the house to go to work soon after. The cleaner was due to arrive at about nine and Clarissa would be in bed until then. As soon as Mark walked off down the road and around the corner, Julian left the park and walked down the hill to Clarissa's front gate. A number of people walked past him on their way to the station and work but did not turn their heads.

Now that Mark had left, the front door was secured only with a Yale type lock. When Julian reached the door, he bent down as a postman would — as though to put something into her letterbox. Then he pushed a credit card hard between the door and its jam. The door was as old as the house, so the fit in the frame was not perfect. The door eased open quietly and he stepped inside. He closed the door carefully behind him with only the slightest of clicks. In the hall, there was a table and on the table, a box. After one or two minutes shuffling, he found his piece. He left the pages on the table and looked up at the staircase in front of him.

Three times he paused on the way up when a stair tread creaked but there was no sound from above. At the top, he walked along the landing towards the front of the house. Her bedroom was the large one — front left from outside. He stood in front of the door and his hand touched the handle, then he lent forward and pressed his ear against a panel. There was no sound.

Downstairs he picked up his typescript and was at the street door when he turned back and walked through the first door on his right. It was a detached house with rooms on either side of the hallway but the one he was now in was the smallest — it was her study. She could often be seen from outside sitting at her desk and looking out on to the park.

On her desk, there was a pad; the first page was blank. He picked up a pen but put it down again without writing anything. A moment later he had joined the throng hurrying to the station. But, before he reached the corner, he turned back on himself and walked home.

Back home he spread his typescript over his desk. The margins were full of inked notes — many more than on his first piece. He started to turn over the pages but, before reaching the end of the story, he gave up, walked over to the window and opened it wide. He took several deep breaths and then lay down on his bed. His sleep was agitated and then he rolled off the bed on to the floor.

He woke later at twilight with an arm pinned underneath him. He stirred and then hauled himself up and propped himself against the bed. His left arm hung uselessly by his side until he massaged it. After a while he exercised it by bending it and swinging it up and down.

He sat for a while still on the floor then he glanced towards the open window. Howling sirens outside drew him to the window, where he blinked every second or so as the twirling beam from a police car struck his eyes. Then the noise stopped but the bright flicker of blue light continued to flash across the back wall of his room. He stood watching until it was quite dark. A continuous flow of men and women ebbed and flowed in and out of a house a few doors down the street on the opposite side of the road. Throughout the time he stood at the window, there had been no ambulance arriving only uniformed officers and plain-clothes detectives in police cars.

Then, without switching on a light, he dressed in a short waist-length coat over his shirt and jeans below, put some money in his pocket and left.

Julian arrived at his parents' house on the eve of *Yom Kippur*. His mother shepherded him to the table and his father's eyes sparkled. Later they went to the synagogue together. Julian followed his father exactly: he wore his *kippah* as soon as they left the house; he clutched his *talloth* around him and murmured before they entered the synagogue; and he stood and sat and prayed quietly in tune with the rest of the congregation. They attended services three times: before and after and for most of the day during *Yom Kippur*.

Later, at home, they broke their fast as a family. The first time Julian had joined them for the event since leaving for university. It wasn't until much later that his parents allowed themselves to ask their son about his life. Inevitably his father asked him to come back and live in their home. After they had gone to bed, he left without disturbing them.

Back in his flat, the next morning Julian started the third story. It took him no more than two days to complete it and print it out. He used Sugden and named the victim Annie. Then he sat and read and re-read and reprinted the piece all day. Piles of paper built up around his desk. He pushed the paper into the only grate with a patent chimney but did not set it alight.

When it was dark, he made the ten-minute journey to and then from the Downing house and placed the new piece in her letterbox. He was away for less than half an hour and, when he got back, he burnt the scrap paper in the grate. Then he played some Mozart on his CD player and lay on his bed. He was not interrupted, as he had so often been, by the woman across the hall, complaining about the volume level of his system.

The next day after he had delivered his story Julian phoned. A man's voice answered. He asked for Clarissa and there was silence. He spoke his name and the man told him the police needed to speak to him about the murders. He rang off.

As soon as he had put the phone down, he gathered up a few things and put them in a bag. Then he went to the window and looked out. Opposite there was some movement in a flat that had been empty for some time.

The flat was one of four forming a modern block purpose-built on a spare plot between Victorian houses. The space had been created by German bombs during the war. The squat brick building was dwarfed by substantial properties on either side, many divided as Julian's was. It had been built at a time when accommodation of any sort was in short supply. Aesthetics had played little part in the building programme then.

While Julian stood there, a young woman walked out of the kitchen into her living room and towards the window. He recognised her as one of the group who went to Clarissa's evenings.

He was never going to be a DIY man and so Amanda decided to fix her own things. And there it was: a new rack of kitchen knives. She promised herself that she would make use of them. It would be a preparation for when he freed himself and was with her always. She stood back to appreciate her work, much as if it were an Impressionist painting that needed to be viewed from a distance to allow the eye to assemble each brush stroke into a recognisable image. It had been an absorbing hour's work and she allowed herself a minute of deep concentrated delight.

Just when she knew he was there she couldn't tell but her body told her to swivel round and stop its absurd admiration. She was sure she had shut the door but there he was, his body firmly set against her only method of escape. There wasn't any doubt in her mind: this was the man the police wanted to question and his presence in her flat was not good news.

To scream or not to scream: Amanda really didn't know. Creating some sort of 'fuss' was advised but he looked nervous and she didn't want to startle him into doing something foolish. Her hand went to her neck and she was pleased that she was wearing a high-necked sweatshirt and a pair of baggy cloth trousers underneath - hardly a sexual come-on. But this man killed; did it really matter what happened first?

He spoke with no preamble, his voice wavering nervously. The outline of his body appeared to shimmer. Amanda wondered which one of them was shivering uncontrollably.

'I'm not guilty,' he said.

She understood and she believed him. She really believed him but was that wishful thinking? Was that what happened in these cases: the victim is lulled by a false sense of peace making it easy for the murderer to strike?

‘So why don’t you give yourself up to the police?’ she asked.

‘*They* won’t believe me. I wrote those stories and they came true.’

‘You haven’t got an alibi?’

‘No, sometimes I have fits and when I wake I remember nothing.’

Amanda felt less reassured now. It was one thing to believe in the man’s denial but another to do so when he had blackouts or whatever they were. She wondered whether she could persuade him to come away from the door.

‘Sit down,’ she said and at the same time walked out of the kitchen into the living room — away from the knives. At the threshold, she paused: the knives would soon be out of reach. Should she go back? But, no, it was impossible: she could never sink a blade into human flesh. She continued walking into the room and sat in the chair nearest the door with her back to him. For a few moments she was rigid with fear wondering whether he would attack her from behind but he walked passed her and sat opposite on the settee. Her little gamble had worked. He was beginning to trust her and now she was nearer the door than he was.

‘So what do you think happened?’ she asked and then sat back and waited for his answer. She tried to give the impression that they were having a normal friendly conversation. She would take her time. She didn’t want him to become suspicious. She could only get to the door if she took him by surprise. At some time she would stand up and offer him coffee, if he stayed in his place she could make it to the door.

‘I don’t think it could have been me. God has forgiven me.’

The contradiction in this didn’t seem to strike him at all. If God had forgiven him, then he must have done something. ‘What do you mean?’ she asked.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ he said. ‘I did nothing. But the stories: they are to blame.’

‘Would you like some coffee?’ she asked.

He hardly seemed to understand what she said. His head lolled and his eyes were cast down. Amanda got to her feet: not fast but not too slow. She hoped it seemed casual. Then she turned away from him and took a step towards the kitchen before dashing to the door.

His agility was impressive and she would have enjoyed the sight of his leap on other occasions. She had hardly got the door open before he was upon her. At first, she felt she might be stronger: he was slim and hardly much taller than herself. She imagined she was heavier but the difference between male and female impressed itself as he forced her aside. Then he caught her hand, twisted her so that her back was against his chest and placed his hand over her mouth.

‘I’m not going to harm you,’ he said as he pushed the door closed with his back.

Once again, Amanda wondered whether all murderers say something like that before they attack their victims but she was still thinking and that was good: all the authorities said it was important.

‘I’ll take my hand away if you promise not to scream,’ he said.

She nodded vigorously and he took his hand from her mouth but kept her tight against him with his other arm. She breathed deeply but kept quiet, nor did she struggle. He let her go and she sat where he had before, while he took her place. Now he was nearer the door.

The entry-phone buzzed. Julian sat up straighter and his body quivered with new tension. Amanda’s prayed that the caller would be persistent. The buzzer sounded again.

‘They’re not going away,’ she said. ‘My car’s outside. Whoever they are, they know I’m home.’ There was no car and Amanda hadn’t felt the need for one until then – she wished now that she had. Then, a third buzz sent a ripple of relaxation and relief along her body. It was true: they were not leaving.

Then it was all over. Julian covered the distance between his seat and the door as quickly then he had done before. Then he was gone. She looked out of the window on to the street and

saw him hurry away. She heard her visitor climb the stairs and there she was. Felicity, her saviour, stood at the open door.

‘Who was that rushing out?’ she asked.

Amanda rushed into her arms and sobbed on her shoulder.

Chapter 5

The phone on Anderson’s desktop *rang*. The sound was in sharp contrast to the buzz of the phones outside. He preferred the old-fashioned sound that came from solid black phones that didn’t move when the handset was picked up. He answered the call.

‘I’ve had a letter.’

There was no need to ask who it was. Clarissa’s voice was soft, clear, and melodious.

‘From whom?’

‘From Julian with a new story.’

Anderson heard the urgency in her voice; this was no ordinary letter. ‘What does the letter say?’

‘I’m scared. He threatens to kill me.’

‘Are you at home?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is your husband there?’

‘No, he’s at work.’

‘Stay where you are. I’ll be right over.’

He took Comben. It took them less than five minutes to walk round to Clarissa’s house. The letter was in her hand when she opened the door. Comben put on a pair of rubber gloves before taking the single sheet of paper and placing into a bag. Then they all stood in the hall

while Anderson and Comben read the note through the transparent plastic. The letter threatened to cut her throat and spread her intestines over her body.

Anderson put his arm around Clarissa's waist and shepherded her into the sitting room. They sat on the settee together. He was turned towards her with his hand on her shoulder. He could feel that she was still trembling.

Comben was in a chair opposite them. 'Shall I call your husband?' he asked.

Clarissa shook her head.

Anderson ignored Comben's interruption. 'Does the story contain a description similar to the letter?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said, 'and I looked at Sugden's book on Jack the Ripper: it was a description of how Annie Chapman was found. But there's something else.'

Anderson waited.

'The typescript of the second story has disappeared. I don't know when but he must have been inside the house to get it.'

'Let's not worry too much about that now. The first thing is to keep you safe. I want you to stay somewhere away from here.'

'Can't you protect me here?'

'It would be better if no one knew where you were.'

'We'll have to let Mr Turney know, sir,' said Comben.

They both looked at the sergeant and then Clarissa turned back to Anderson. 'No one,' she said, 'you really mean no one.'

He nodded, 'no one,' he confirmed. It was as though Comben had never spoken and there was no need to elaborate. They both knew that it was to apply to Mark Turney as well as everyone else. As they spoke, Anderson could feel Comben's disapproving eyes burn into his

neck. Was it his prejudice against the husband that made him take such drastic action? When he turned to face his sergeant, he could see in the man's face that Comben certainly thought so.

There was nothing more to say and Anderson offered to drive her to the safe place. She accepted. The three of them walked back to the station. Comben carried a small suitcase she had packed before they left.

In the car, Clarissa waited until they were out of sight of the station before speaking.

'Nice car,' she said. 'Is it your own?'

'Yes,' he said, 'It's very reliable.'

'And that's the reason you bought it.'

Anderson turned and smiled shyly. 'I could have bought a cheaper one and I probably would now.' He didn't say why 'now' was be different and Clarissa didn't ask him.

Clarissa stretched her hand out, touched his shoulder, and then ran her fingers around his collar. One finger touched his neck. Anderson immediately felt a shiver spread over his neck that made him tense his shoulders. He wondered at her recovery. Had she been as frightened as she'd made out?

'You still spend money on your clothes, though. This suit fits too well to be off the peg.'

'Does that worry you?' asked Anderson.

'I wouldn't've married Mark if it worried me. I like men who take an interest in their appearance.'

Anderson pulled up at the kerb outside a small parade of shops. He turned towards her. She showed no inclination to get out. 'I'll carry your case upstairs and see you settled,' he said.

'Will you have time for a coffee?' she asked. 'There will be coffee there won't there?'

He smiled and got out. Upstairs she found a carton of real coffee in the fridge. 'I expect you only drink real coffee,' she said. 'Was this your doing?' she asked holding up the box.

‘I suppose it might have been but it’s probably quite old,’ Anderson said.

There had been a time when refusing instant coffee was regarded as a symptom of homosexuality or worse, as revealing an undue regard for food and drink. Anderson remembered suffering for it then but now real coffee was almost standard. She boiled the kettle and then used the cafetière that Anderson had also provided to make the coffee. He wondered just how long ago it had been since he had been on duty at the flat. The taste of the coffee told him that it had been some years.

‘I’ll get you some more of this,’ he said, holding up the coffee carton.

‘So you think I’m going to be here long enough to need it, do you?’

‘I can’t believe that it will be more than a few days and you won’t be entirely isolated,’ he said gesturing towards the phone. ‘Will you call your husband?’ he asked. ‘My sergeant seems to be worried about him.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘and I don’t think it was him he was worried about.’

Anderson ignored the implication of her remark. ‘You don’t have to tell him where you are. You could just tell him you’re safe.’

‘You said I should tell no one, so that’s what I will do. I left him a note.’

‘So why won’t you phone him?’

‘It’s personal.’

Anderson took the hint. ‘And the letter? Does he know about that?’

‘He will do when he reads my own note.’

‘What did you write?’

‘I told him about the threat to kill me but that I’m in good hands, so not to worry about me.’

Anderson was pleased. ‘The writer,’ he said, ‘our suspect. Were you very scathing about his last piece?’ he asked.

'I can't quite remember everything I wrote but it *would* disappoint him.'

'It must have been for him to want to kill you. Maybe it will stop him from writing any more.'

'Do you think that would stop the killings?'

'Probably not,' he said.

'So how long do you think I should stay here?'

'I don't know but try to be patient. If there's anything you want from home, I'll arrange to fetch it.'

'And will I be protected?'

'I'll have someone here twenty-four hours a day and a man outside as well.'

'And who's going to keep me company tonight?'

Anderson didn't answer immediately but Clarissa's gaze followed him around the room as he paced from one side to the other. The question made up his mind. He looked at her. 'I am,' he said.

'Isn't that an unusual sort of duty for a Detective Chief Inspector? What will your wife think?'

'You're a special person and I haven't got a wife.'

A buzz from Anderson's mobile stopped Clarissa from having to answer - if she had intended to. It was Comben: something had happened. He waited until a uniformed officer came and then he apologised and said he would be back.

He drove to Amanda's new flat and met Comben outside, who told him the story of Julian's intrusion. Inside Amanda was huddled in the comfort of Felicity's arms. Anderson imagined that she probably had been there ever since Julian had left. From time to time, their bodies shook a little as though Amanda was shuddering at the memory of her ordeal but no real damage

seemed to have been done. Was that because Felicity had interrupted him or had Julian really meant to do no harm?

He let Comben ask his questions and fill in the details while he inspected the couple. They stood very still as Comben spoke to them. It was as if their two intertwined figures were sculptured in marble but painted, as classical statues originally were. Anderson smiled: he was admiring them as though they were exhibits in an art gallery.

Then he noticed the angle of Comben's head and his eyes were drawn downwards. Felicity's short skirt made it difficult to do otherwise. She was not a woman to hide her best features with too much material.

The two women showed each other off to advantage: blonde and brunette, matched for height but with radically different eye colours and complexions. Amanda's skin was very pale, the sort that burns within five minutes of exposure to the sun and there were just the odd sign or two of powder or foundation covering the remains of teenage spots on her cheek. She was wearing loose trousers with a top that would have hidden her waist, except that the light from behind her in the kitchen shone through the lacy material and exposed the curves underneath. Anderson thought she might be a natural blonde, just as Felicity's olive complexion made her dark brown hair appear entirely natural. He hadn't seen Felicity before but imagined that she would not appear so stunning alone.

Anderson turned away and walked to the window. He was too old for all of this. He needed a woman of an appropriate maturity these days.

He brought his mind back to the reason he was there - Julian. But there was something else: why this, why the new flat? Where had the money come from? Amanda had spent some hundreds on furnishing the living room, where they were, and he could see there had been recent improvements to the kitchen. Then there was the location: fifty or so yards down the road from

where the first woman had been murdered. Was it a coincidence? And how did Julian know where she lived? Had he seen her by chance or was there some other explanation? He turned away from the window. 'Why did you leave your old flat?' he asked.

Comben stopped his writing and turned. Anderson could see he had irritated the man. He clearly didn't like being interrupted.

'We weren't getting on,' said Amanda looking at Felicity.

As if to reinforce the message, Felicity let her arm drop and Amanda straightened and moved a little away from her support.

It *was* possible. People can remain friends but not enjoy living together. But there was still the money. 'I'm surprised you can afford this without sharing,' Anderson said, looking around him.

'I *do* work,' Amanda answered.

Anderson raised his eyebrows.

'I may be an out-of-work actor but I don't scrounge on the state. I do promotions and in the summer I work with children on play schemes and I'm a film extra.'

Anderson ignored her explanation. 'How do you think Julian found you?' Anderson asked.

Amanda looked at the others and then shrugged her shoulders. 'How am I supposed to know how that madman found me?' It was clear that she thought Anderson a fool for asking her such an idiotic question.

Later, looking out of the bay window of Julian's flat, Anderson had no need to wonder how the man had spotted Amanda. He looked over and through Amanda's living room window and saw that Felicity was still there. He turned back to the room. The place hadn't taken much finding. They had intended to start in that street and work outwards. Anderson had mobilised fifty

officers and told the Commander it might take several days. There was disappointment all round when the expected over-time didn't materialise.

A short search of the flat revealed some more typescripts of short stories but, more importantly, it showed that Julian hadn't packed any clothes, so they waited awhile. A cup on the table half full of coffee, suggested he had rushed out. Anderson imagined he had seen Amanda for the first time and had run over to her.

After an hour, it was clear that he wouldn't be back. There had been too many police in the street earlier for that. With hindsight, it would have been better not to have had the search but then he was not to know the man had been so close.

'Have you spoken to the rest of the tenants?' Anderson asked.

'All but the woman across the hall,' said Comben. 'She's out.'

'What sort of woman is she?' he asked.

'The other tenants say she is a pensioner, very quiet,' Comben answered.

'When was the last time she was seen?' Anderson asked.

Anderson could see a spark light up behind Comben's eyes. The man said nothing but turned and went out of the flat. Anderson heard him knock on the door opposite and the one downstairs. When he came back, the spark had burst into flames.

'Nobody has seen her for over a week,' he said.

The sturdiness of the property was not reflected in the strength of the front doors put in during its conversion into flats. There was no need for any specialised equipment - Comben's foot was enough. They had to go in but it wasn't necessary. The smell and the bloodstains on the hall carpet made it clear enough. They had the body, now they knew where the second victim had died.

Anderson wondered to himself what had made him so lucky that week: both murder sites

and the murderer's home all found in the same street. The case had practically solved itself. They had bodies, they had fingerprints and they had Julian's appointment card for the psychiatric wing of the local hospital. All they needed was the man himself and then they could close the file.

One small hurdle appeared once they got back to the station. There were no prints matching Julian's on the threatening letter to Clarissa but there were on the short-story typescripts.

'He was careful,' said Comben.

'He wasn't careful with the typescripts,' said Anderson.

'They were different,' said Comben.

'Why?' Anderson asked. Comben shrugged his shoulders.

Later Anderson went to the safe flat and relieved the officer on duty. The constable was surprised but happy to get home early; Anderson could see he had expected to stay all night. The flat had one bedroom and no other bed: the officer on duty was expected to stay awake throughout the night and Anderson was to be relieved at eight the next morning.

Anderson told Clarissa about Julian, then they talked until midnight before Clarissa went to her room. By that time, Anderson thought he knew enough about writing as he would ever need and he supposed Clarissa felt the same way about police work.

Before settling down, Anderson looked out of the window and checked that there was another man on duty outside. He was taking Clarissa Downing's safety very seriously indeed.

He had one of her books with him and lay on the sofa to read it. The situation reminded him of his junior days, when such duties routinely came his way. He switched off the main light in the room and read by a reading lamp set on a table next to the settee. He noticed that the light he could see under Clarissa's door stayed on for some minutes before she turned it off. Then an

hour or so later it came on again and stayed on. He was not surprised that she had difficulty in sleeping.

At about three in the morning Clarissa came out of her room. She had on a pair of very modest satin pyjamas, buttoned up to the neck. Anderson made room with his feet and she sat at the opposite end of the settee. He could see she had no slippers on. 'Your feet will get cold,' he said and then he pulled her feet towards him and under his legs.

She nodded and they looked at each other for some seconds. Then she drew her legs back, knelt and leant her body towards him.

'Will you hug me,' she said. 'I feel frightened.'

He stretched out his arms and she lowered herself on top of him. 'There's no need to be worried,' he said. 'We will protect you.'

'But for how long,' she said. 'I don't want to land up in the park cut into pieces once you've forgotten me.'

He put his arms around her and squeezed her to him. She rested her head on his shoulder and he could feel her breath on his neck. He moved his hands up and down her spine. Her whole weight was resting on him and he could feel her breasts flattened against his chest. He became excited and tried to move his legs to hide his stiffness but, as soon as he opened his legs, she slid her thigh between them and pressed against him.

'You're not happy with your husband, are you?' he asked.

She lifted her head and smiled at him. 'Is it that obvious?' she said.

He said nothing but felt as gauche as a schoolboy: he was out of practice. 'No,' he said. 'I meant something different.'

She held herself away from him for a few moments. 'If you think this is because I'm simply randy, I'll leave you alone.'

‘I hope it isn’t,’ he said.

‘Mark is a good lover even when his heart isn’t in it. I married a professional. I’m not “gasping” for it.’

‘I’m no professional,’ he said and then pulled her towards him and kissed her on the mouth.

She pulled away from him. ‘If we’re found out, will you get into trouble?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ he answered but again kissed her hard on the mouth. This time she pressed back and they took their time before drawing apart.

‘I’d feel a lot safer if you were with me in my room,’ she said. ‘Isn’t making me feel secure one of your duties?’

She got off him and walked into her bedroom. He left the lamp on and followed her. She unbuttoned her top and took it off while facing away from him. Then she slipped out of her pyjama trousers and turned towards him. Anderson could sense her need for appreciation. He came forward to her and leant down to kiss her breasts.

‘You’ve a fine figure,’ he said.

‘So have you,’ she answered. ‘Do you exercise?’

‘Do you?’ he asked.

She watched him strip. He did look as though he exercised. She wondered whether the police force required their older officers to keep fit. He looked a little embarrassed under her gaze but, since she had stood naked in front of him first, she felt she had a right to look. She could see he was proud of his body, as she was of hers. She imagined that he, like herself, thought he looked younger than he was.

Once he had stripped and stood naked in front of her, she moved towards him and looked pointedly at his erect penis. Then she grasped it with her hand and felt a shiver in herself that

echoed itself in his body and face. She leant forward until the tips of her nipples just touched his chest and then kissed him on the neck. Her head rested comfortably under his chin and she had to tilt her head to kiss him.

They stood opposite each other and moved their hands over the other's body. Clarissa's nipples remained just touching his chest, while his penis gently moved against her mound. At first, Clarissa thought he was self-conscious of their nakedness but she could see him relax after a few minutes of caressing her side and then her buttocks and breasts. She kept her hands on his chest and massaged him up to his shoulders while he explored her.

Then he put two fingers into her mouth and she sucked them. His penis pushed harder against her and she parted her legs and held it down so that it was underneath her and rested between her labia. He moved against her and as she became more excited his penis slid comfortably along her now moist labia. She grasped hold of it and moved its exposed head around the entrance to her vagina.

He broke away from her and turned towards his jacket. She had wondered whether he had come prepared or was he one of those men who always carried condoms - just in case.

When he turned back, they closed again and then, giving way to his pressure, he was suddenly inside her. Then they stood very still, pressed against each other. He ran his fingers along her lips and then they kissed mouth to mouth. She pushed her tongue inside him and he pushed back into her so that he was inside her mouth and her vagina at the same time. She liked that.

Then he grasped her underneath her thighs and lifted her up. She linked her feet behind his back and he walked them both over to the bed. She was surprised that he moved so easily. Mark could pick her up with no apparent effort but Anderson was a much slimmer man. Then he tilted her on to the bed but remained upright and ran his hand lightly over her nipples while thrusting

into her. They were tight together allowing very little movement of his penis inside her. She wondered whether he did that to prevent himself coming too quickly.

She leant her head back and relaxed her arms and legs so that her feet touched the floor. He grasped her hips and started to move in and out of her with longer thrusts. Then he lightly touched her above his penis stimulating her clitoris. She abandoned herself to the sensations and her open mouth expressed her pleasure. Then she came and arched her back and he stopped while she climaxed and then relaxed before he moved again.

She came once more in that position before he came out of her and moved her fully on to the bed; then he laid himself over her body and placed himself into her again. This time he kept his weight on his arms and moved long and slow, brushing her nipples with his lips and then pushing his tongue into her mouth. Finally, his pace and the force of his thrusts increased until he came with a sharp stifled cry. Afterwards, he moved again more tentatively and she could feel the shiver of his effort but it was sufficient and she came again.

They rolled over on their side together and after a moment or two, when he had fallen out of her, she turned and lay with her back against his chest.

She knew that making love to someone new always made her feel good and she supposed it would be the same with him. Was that all it was, a cheap thrill? Was that why he had put himself at risk and why he had been the first to guard her at night? Surely not, it must be more than that; but it was too early to ask. Instead she said something else.

‘There’s something I should tell you about Mark.’ she said.

‘What?’

‘He has a mistress.’

‘You’re sure about that,’ he said.

‘He disappears every night and comes back in the early hours of the morning, so I’m damn

sure,' she said.

Chapter 6

Next day at the station, Anderson could sense that there was an atmosphere. A few more faces than usual looked up when he walked across the incident room and the chatter was livelier than the day before. At first Anderson thought they knew something that he didn't. That they'd struck lucky - that the case was about to break but back in his office with Comben sitting in front of him, he knew that wasn't it. He wanted to slap away the half smirk on Comben's face; instead he kept his lips tight wondered how they had slipped up.

Secrets were not easy to keep in the force - after all he *was* running a team of detectives. There were two ways they might have got caught out. First, his relief might have come earlier than expected in the morning and left quietly when he saw what was happening or maybe the officer outside had popped in for a hot drink during the night and heard them. On the other hand his taking on the job of guard duty was not very sensible. His motivation was pretty obvious. Whatever it was, he hadn't been careful enough.

There was only one thing to do and he did it: get on with the job. He wanted to get Comben out of there and away from him. 'See if you can get anything more from Amanda what's-her-name and then see if Mrs Downing needs anything. I'll visit Mark Turney to tell him what's happened to his wife.' Both men could see that was an unfortunate phrase and the half became a full smirk on Comben's face. It was not a good start to the day.

The two men parted in silence. Anderson wondered how long it would take for those above to find out. And if they did, would they do anything? It was hardly a capital offence. Still there was no point in worrying: he had a murder case to solve.

Later that day, he drove to the park and waited across the street in his car until Mark came home from work. Then he followed Turney up his front path. Mark turned and Anderson could see that he was not surprised to see him. Why should he be? Clarissa had been spirited away

and he had been promised information that he hadn't yet got. A visit from the police was the most likely of events. Anderson knew what to expect from him and was not disappointed.

'Where's my wife?' he asked.

Anderson motioned to him to unlock the door. The man neither said anything further nor did he open his front door.

'Shall we go inside,' said Anderson.

Mark let them both in and then walked ahead to the kitchen. He sat down and hung one shoulder of his jacket over the seat back so that the other draped itself half way down on the other side. Turney had wide shoulders and he didn't seem to mind creasing the jacket. One fell forward revealing a label Anderson recognised. It wasn't his own style, since he went in for tailored suits while Turney's was unstructured but Mark was younger and Anderson had to accept that he knew how to dress his age. Anderson wondered where the money came from. Did Clarissa give him a dress allowance?

Anderson hitched up his wool trousers and sat upright across the table. Mark lounged and allowed his cotton 'chinos' to fall into natural folds. Anderson thought back a few years and imagined that, then, Mark would have been considered scruffy. But now the carefully chosen shades of blue that co-ordinated his outfit from mid-blue jacket through his lighter shirt and darker trousers down to his deep blue suede sporty shoes produced anything but that effect. He was smart but at ease with himself. Anderson felt himself to be stuffy, stuck in an age when only suits were considered smart and ties were essential. 'I can't tell you where she is,' he said.

'Why not? Do you think she's in danger from me?'

'No, but where security is concerned, the less people who know, the better.'

'Can't she phone me?'

Clarissa had refused to do this. Anderson wondered whether to tell him. Then he decided.

‘She doesn’t want to. It’s something between the two of you. Nothing to do with the case.’

‘Will you take a letter to her?’

Anderson nodded and Turney got up and walked out of the kitchen into another room to write his note. Anderson watched him move. He was about the same height as himself but broader in the chest. His tee shirt showed off his upper musculature and arms, while his loose trousers hid his legs but Anderson imagined they were equally well proportioned. A few years back he would have fancied his chances but now it would be sensible to leave any physical stuff to Comben, where Turney was concerned - if it ever came to that. He didn’t yet resemble those TV detectives who were too fat or too old or unfit through drink to chase criminals or take them on physically but it was coming.

As he waited, he wondered why he was thinking like this. He had no evidence to suspect Turney: it was purely personal prejudice. His judgement was becoming clouded and it had to stop, he couldn’t do a good job this way.

A few minutes later Turney came back with his note sealed in an envelope.

‘When will she get it?’

‘I’ll make sure it gets to her tonight.’

‘Will you take it yourself?’

‘Probably not, one of the relief officers can do that.’

Anderson had the note in his hand as he climbed the steps to the safe flat. Anderson would have preferred it to be a busier district and it had been at one time. Now half the shops were boarded up and, at night, there was little activity.

It was odd, as he climbed a distinct itchy fuzzy or tingly feeling pervaded his legs and then travelled upwards. He felt like a teenager again going to see his girl. This time the ‘girl’ was a

woman in her forties and not fifteen or twenty years younger as they had been since Gabriella had walked out on him. Was he growing up at last? Was adulthood beckoning? Anderson thought it was about time and his legs sprung him upwards.

Clarissa was bored. Anderson could see that in the languid way she looked up from her new laptop on the table in front of her. There wasn't a glimmer of life in her eyes. Clearly, the changing personnel were making little impression on her. The succession of young uniforms was not in the least attractive. Clarissa was grown up: she was looking for a mature man. Or was all that simply wishful thinking?

Gratifyingly her eyes did light when she recognised him. He sent Tompkins out for tea and told him to leave his gun. The young man was doubtful but Anderson told him he had taken the firearm course. The constable acquiesced, although Anderson could see that the man felt naked without his weapon.

Anderson walked across the room and Clarissa stood up but stayed behind the small table, brought especially from her house so she could work. There really was no immediate future in it, since he couldn't stay and anyway Tompkins would be back far too soon but he still lent across and kissed her. She didn't respond but kept very still without leaning in to him. It was a small reprimand but Anderson felt he had been slapped across the face - had he blushed? He kissed her again on the mouth and this time she pressed back and opened her mouth. He had been forgiven.

'Where have you been?' she asked.

'Trying to solve two murders,' he said.

'And have you?'

'Maybe.'

She moved away from the table and sat on the settee. He sat next to her.

‘Have you caught him?’

‘Who?’

‘Whatever his name is - Julian?’

‘No, but we know where he lives or lived.’

‘So I’m still in danger?’

‘Until we catch him, yes. Are you bored?’

‘I have my work.’

‘But you’re still bored.’

‘I wouldn’t be if you came around more often.’

‘I can’t do that.’

‘And when I go home?’

Anderson was close to her and she had turned towards him and lent over so that he could feel her body - her breasts - next to his chest. It was a good feeling but he had to ask. ‘Are you and Mark very unhappy together?’

‘I already told you he has another woman.’

‘That doesn’t mean that you’re unhappy with him.’

‘It does in my world.’

‘And I came along at a convenient time,’ Anderson said.

‘Yes, good isn’t it,’ she said, ‘aren’t you happy about that?’

Anderson smiled. He couldn’t believe he had said that. What was next: ‘do you really love me?’ This was too adolescent; where was his new found maturity? ‘Does Mark inherit if you die?’ he asked.

Clarissa hesitated before answering. Her frown told Anderson that she didn’t like the implication of his question. ‘You don’t really believe this has anything to do with Mark and

myself do you?’ she asked.

‘We have to cover everything,’ he said.

‘You mean, “it’s just routine” don’t you.’

‘But he does,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she said.

‘Has Mark money of his own?’

‘Not a lot. I make him work.’

‘Where did you meet?’

‘At a party given by an acquaintance. I’m often asked and used to accept. It was flattering to be lionised.’

‘And you were single.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘but I was quite soon afterwards. And you?’

‘Divorced,’ he said.

‘I always did think Mark made a play for me because of my money. At the time, it didn’t seem to matter.’ She waited for his reaction. ‘Are you scandalised? It’s the sort of thing men do all the time. Look at the number of old rich men with young *adoring* wives.’

Anderson *was* scandalised but he wasn’t going to say so. His new found maturity meant he didn’t like to see old men with teenage brides either. He got up. ‘I must go,’ he said.

She stood as well and they kissed. This time it was simple.

‘You will release me as soon as you can won’t you?’ she asked.

‘But no sooner,’ he said, ‘I don’t want another corpse on my hands.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘I can’t see you as a necrophiliac.’

Tompkins was waiting outside the door when Anderson opened it. He could have hoped for less tact on the part of junior officers.

Chapter 7

Comben was at the station before him the next morning and, when the sergeant came into the office, he sat down in a chair without being asked. Anderson was pleased that the new boy's education was progressing. He wasn't so pleased when Comben fluttered a piece of paper in front of his boss. There was an air of triumph in the younger man's words when he announced that Turney had no criminal record. Anderson was very sorry indeed that he had been indiscreet. 'Did you locate the Simanoviczs?' he asked.

'We have an address in North London. Shall we get the locals to visit?'

'No, let's go ourselves. It will give us an idea of who we're after.'

They took Anderson's car but he let Comben drive. It was a hard decision, he had stood for a full minute next to the driver's door before tossing the keys to the younger man and walking round to the passenger's side - he was continuing to grow up.

The journey was tedious, as cross-town journeys in London always were but Comben looked pleased with himself when they arrived. Anderson's was a little tense and his right foot ached from pressing where the brake should have been.

The couple was older than he expected. Julian was thirty but Mrs Simanovicz must have been in her seventies; had that been the problem with their son? They thought him innocent, of course, didn't every parent? But they had to admit to his peculiarity. Schizophrenia? Well yes, they had heard the term used about Julian but it didn't mean he was mad or violent.

Mr. was retired and Mrs. had never worked since they had been married. She was Mr.'s second wife and had worked for him in his factory. Mr. had been a widower with no children. Julian had come along late in life; he had been the son he had always wanted who would take over the family business.

Comben fidgeted as they sat in plush brocade covered armchairs and listened to the old

couple show their bemusement at what had happened. They knew little that could help the investigation. They had seen Julian at Yom Kippur the week before but he had left suddenly and they hadn't heard from him since. 'Yes' they did keep him. They didn't like to think of him sponging on the state while they had money.

Anderson looked around him. Twenty years ago there had been ample money and the curtains, upholstery, mirrors and carpet showed it. They were too ornate for Anderson's taste and would have been two decades before but they did cost money. They seem to have spent nothing since then but the place was clean and tidy and the couple had not expected visitors.

Anderson could almost feel Comben discomfort when he accepted the offer of tea. Comben obviously didn't think there was much to gain from the couple and wanted to get away. Anderson was sorry he had brought him; it might have been better to have left him in Kilburn. Julian might have been found *there* by now.

Once prodded Mr Simanovicz was happy to tell them how it had been when Julian had first been born and then how, later, he had taken him to his work as a small boy and showed him the business. The father had trained as a Master Cutter and at that time, was responsible for cutting patterns for samples and then laying out the cloth when the orders came in. He would cut hundreds of identical pieces of garments for the machinists upstairs to make up and pass on to the pressers.

'Yes', Julian had enjoyed the factory. He had listened while his father explained the intricacies of laying patters out to make the best use of the cloth and the extra profit made by skilful cutting. 'No, he didn't understand everything, of course not' but Simanovicz thought he respected his father's trade. 'And the factory?' 'Closed, empty, a ruin waiting for demolition.' 'Far away?' 'No', he had walked to work. He had never been one of those who had wanted to escape from Stoke Newington by moving to Edgware or Stanmore.

Outside Anderson wondered whether Comben had been listening at all or whether he had fallen asleep with his eyes open.

‘Back to Kilburn,’ he said, ‘we might just beat the traffic if we start now.’

‘No,’ said Anderson. ‘Let’s have a look at the factory.’

It was in a cul-de-sac off one of those main north-south highways that were lined with shops in various states of prosperity or bankruptcy. North London had never yet reached the same standard of affluence as the more central Islington or the suburbs to the West. There were always as many shops in the process of closing down, as there were opening up. This allowed charity shops on short leases to flourish along the High Street by recycling clothes from the rich to the poor. But it meant that the factory site had not yet reached a value sufficient to encourage a speculator to tear it down and build something new - certainly not housing now that the government had pulled the plug on public provision.

Mr Simanovicz was right: the building was derelict. Windows were missing and had been boarded up at the front and notices plastered all over warning of the danger of imminent collapse. Anderson wondered whether old man Simanovicz dared to look at what the place had become and, if he did, how he felt to see the building he had spent most of his working life in look as it did now. But then he might have detested the place. Maybe he would like to tear it down brick by brick himself.

They found where Julian had got in round the back. A padlock was only loosely hooked over eyelets. It had rusted and Julian had used a lever to break it but he could only loop it back to simulate security when he went out. Anderson knew it had to be Julian before they went inside and saw the nest. He had created it from scraps of cloth left behind by his own father. Bits and pieces - rags - that jumbled together made a decent enough mattress. Comben went back outside and replaced the padlock. Then they waited. When Julian came, Comben followed

him in. Anderson thought his sergeant looked annoyed that his boss had been right again.

When he saw Anderson, Julian froze like a frightened deer and turned to run but, seeing Comben, he relaxed and waited patiently as Comben handcuffed him. Anderson drove both of them to the local police station.

‘We’re not going back to Kilburn, sir?’ asked Comben.

‘No,’ said Anderson.

They were allowed an interview room. There was no fuss. It was unusual but the superintendent accepted that Anderson had his reasons. In Kilburn by some mysterious means, the press would have gathered at the station even before the three arrived - but not here.

The three seated themselves around a table. Anderson sat almost at one end to form a triangle, as though this was a social occasion - a chat between equals. Comben made the necessary noises into the tape recorder and then they waited. Anderson was sure that Julian would want to tell them everything.

‘Mrs Curry, I saw it all,’ Julian said.

Anderson raised his eyebrows. Comben fiddled with a pencil.

‘A tunnel, they were in a tunnel with a door at the end. He was this side of the door and then when she opened the door he went through.’

‘Was this a dream. Do you often dream about tunnels?’ Anderson was acting the therapist. At one time, it had been his career choice. Later in life, he imagined he would have done very well at it. He would give Julian the benefit of his expertise - well not expertise exactly, more intuitive empathy.

‘I don’t think it was a dream but the figures were odd - distorted. I couldn’t recognise her face.’

‘So how did you know it was Mrs Curry?’ asked Comben.

It was too direct a question for Anderson’s liking but he had no quarrel with Comben. He hadn’t told him to stay silent and two differing styles might work well.

‘I knew the door.’

‘But the door was at the end of a tunnel. How could you recognise it?’

‘I just knew.’

There was a pause that Anderson thought might lengthen into a complete hiatus. He prompted the young man. ‘Go on, there must be more.’

‘There were noises and then the door opened. The man came out. He looked at me.’

‘So you saw his face?’ asked Comben.

‘Yes, he had an enormous nose and it got larger as he came closer to me.’

‘How far apart were you?’ asked Comben.

‘His nose almost touched mine. His face was huge.’

‘So you must be able to recognise him. Do you know who he was?’

‘No, I don’t know. He was not like anyone I have ever seen.’

‘And then?’ asked Anderson.

‘He went back and carried her out. She was limp. I heard a car.’

‘Was she dead?’

‘I think so. He was big and carried her downstairs into the boot of his car. Then he drove off.’

‘Do you have car, Julian?’

‘No.’

‘Do you drive?’

‘No.’

Anderson wondered whether Comben was as worried about these answers as he was. The two murders took place at least quarter of a mile from the park. The murderer needed a vehicle.

‘Then I saw him in the park.’

‘How did you get there?’ Comben asked.

‘I ran.’

‘How did you know where to go?’ Anderson asked.

‘I just did.’

‘Go on,’ said Anderson.

‘He was already in the centre of the field. He did something, I don’t know what. Then he climbed over the fence.’

‘Where did he go then?’

‘I don’t remember. I was scared. I didn’t follow.’

Anderson charged him but left him at Stoke Newington. There was to be no news release. The capture and arrest were Anderson and Comben’s secrets.

Back at the Simanoviczs, Anderson asked about the car in the driveway. Comben had noticed that it had no tax disc. ‘We don’t use it,’ they said. Mrs. had never driven while Mr. felt he was too old to be safe.

‘So why not sell it?’ asked Comben.

‘We thought Julian might want it,’ said Mr Simanovicz.

‘Does he drive?’ asked Comben.

‘He had lessons and even passed his test but he never drove afterwards.’

At the station, Julian denied he could drive. It had been years ago since he took his test and he hadn’t driven since.

Anderson allowed Comben to lead this time.

‘Why did you kill those women?’ he asked.

Julian surprised them. ‘Did I?’ he asked.

It seemed as if he genuinely wanted them to tell him.

‘Don’t you know?’ continued Comben.

‘I wrote the stories. Did I kill them as well? I don’t remember.’

‘Do you know how they were killed?’ asked Anderson.

‘She was cut open. I saw the knife. He left it in the flat and then came back for it.’

‘I suppose you still couldn’t see him clearly,’ said Comben.

‘The tunnel.’

‘Yes, the tunnel.’

Anderson could hear the exasperation in Comben’s voice. If Julian were guilty they would never do anything more than put him in hospital. But was he? They needed a psychiatrist. They could get no further without knowing whether he was sane or mad.

The car had to be close, so he parked it immediately outside. There was a risk but at three in the morning, it was worth taking. He had her keys and let himself in through the front door and then into her flat. She was no longer rigid. The house was quiet and he rolled her gently into the carpet he had brought. Then he opened the flat door, walked across to the door opposite, no light showed.

It took one minute to carry the body downstairs and place it in the boot. He had left that open and propped the street door wide to make it possible. Upstairs again he closed the door to her flat.

In the centre of the park, he unrolled the carpet. A few minutes later he climbed the metal fence easily but left the carpet behind. Then he crossed the road and went into one of the houses.

Anderson read the transcript. Julian knew so much but then, if he had done it, so very little. He had filled in some of the details of how the murderer dealt with the second body but seemed to know little about how she was killed or what had been inflicted on the body in the park. And yet he had spoken as if he *were* the murderer. All that about taking a chance with the car and how did he know that the body had passed through the rigor mortis phase, before it was wrapped up in the carpet?

‘So, doctor,’ he asked, ‘did he do it? And, if so, is he mad?’

Stephens smiled. It was the smile of someone used to having responsibility thrust on to his shoulders. But Anderson could see he was as used to shedding that burden as receiving it.

‘He is not legally mad in my opinion but I dare say the defence could find someone who would say he was.’ He stopped.

Anderson waited for him to go on. He didn’t. ‘Did he do it?’

‘Hypnotism can only tell you so much. Maybe he is narrating a dream, maybe he saw something, or maybe he is assuaging his guilt by imagining a third person. Of course, that person could be himself or rather another part of him he does not want to accept. He has blackouts - you know that don’t you.’

Anderson nodded.

‘How does it all fit in with what he told us?’ asked Comben.

‘Strangely, his evidence to you seems more like a dream than the story he revealed to me. I simply don’t know. You’ll have to solve this one on your own.’

‘Did he say who “the murderer” was? Did he recognise him?’ Anderson was asking a great deal but he had to ask.

Stephens shook his head. Then they all smiled and shook hands. That was the end of that.

They had enough to arrest Julian but, in Anderson's opinion, not enough to convict. He had said nothing about the injuries to the bodies and seemed unclear how the two women were killed. In fact all he had said - in the interview or under hypnosis - could have been gleaned from the newspapers, or at least constructed from their stories with a bit of imagination.

'Are we taking him back, sir?' asked Comben.

'No,' he said, 'and I don't want a word of this to get out. Is that clear.'

'Yes, sir.'

Anderson could see the man was offended, so he attempted to smooth his feathers. 'We've had far too many leaks lately from the station. I don't want one this time.'

'Before my time, sir.'

Comben was right. He could hardly be blamed for what had gone on before he got there. 'All right, I understand. Just don't say anything to anyone.'

Comben nodded with less enthusiasm than Anderson could have wished. He was, of course, breaking with convention. He couldn't get his forensic team working on Julian unless they had him to examine. But then what could they link him to? There were no traces of the killer at the murder sites or at the park. Anderson imagined he had been covered from head to foot with something impermeable. And that was another thing: Julian was hardly the right sort of person to go to that trouble. The killer didn't want to be caught and was clever enough to take precautions. Julian Simanovicz didn't even *know* whether he was responsible. He hadn't even known what day it was, when they questioned him.

It was about seven in the evening when they got back from Stoke Newington. Comben had left his car at the station and, after Anderson drove off, he sat in the driving seat for a while. Then, instead of going home, he drove the short distance to Felicity's flat and parked his car outside.

There was no light inside, so he waited. Before long he saw car headlights; the car slowed and parked behind him - it was her. Comben opened his own door first and walked round to the pavement so that she could see him clearly under a lamppost. She got out and came to him.

‘Is this a professional call?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘are you going to send me away?’

She placed a hand on his shoulder. He was close enough for her to bend her elbow. ‘I didn’t think I had the right to do that. I wouldn’t want you to accuse me of impeding police enquiries.’ Then she smiled and opened the street door. They climbed the stairs in silence and, inside the flat, he followed her down the hall into the sitting room. She stopped, turned and stood in front of him. He came close but she didn’t back away. Then she turned away from him and sat down.

He looked around him, searching in his mind for a beginning. ‘The number’s unusual for a second floor flat, “one”,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘but that’s the only unusual feature, otherwise it’s a very ordinary flat.’

‘Much like mine,’ he said, ‘can you afford it now that Amanda has left?’

She turned and smiled. ‘Is that what you came for?’ she asked, ‘to find out whether I’m solvent.’

Comben didn’t answer and cursed himself for being such a blockhead. It was impossible now to think up any thing clever and he had almost decided to go but he didn’t. ‘Nice dress,’ he said.

‘It’s my uniform,’ she said.

It was not the same dress as the last he had seen her in. This time the plunge was at the front while the back was high - right up to the neck. He wondered how the punters could concentrate on their cards when she lent forward but that, he supposed, was the point. He knew

how they felt and it stopped his retreat dead in its tracks.

‘Would you like a drink or aren’t you allowed to.’

‘I’m not exactly on duty,’ he said.

‘So, should you be paying social calls on witnesses?’ she asked.

‘No,’ he said.

She handed him a scotch and they sat down together on the settee. She fidgeted as though uncomfortable in her dress.

‘Do you mind if I get out of this. It’s not very relaxing,’ she said.

Comben smiled and watched as she walked towards her bedroom. When she got to the door, she turned and smiled. Comben got up and walked after her. ‘Do you need a hand with the zip?’ he asked.

She said nothing but stood still as he unzipped her dress at the back. Then she stepped out of it and Comben slipped his hands around her midriff. She shivered a little as she tossed the dress on to a chair. Comben kept a loose grip on her waist as she did so and then kissed her on her neck. She kicked her shoes off, stepped forward and stripped off her tights. For a moment, he stood transfixed by the beauty of her back and neck and legs.

In the corner of his eye, he saw Felicity look at him in the long freestanding mirror across the room. Then she turned to him and waited. He let his eyes run up and down her body. Her hair was caught up in a chignon to reveal her slim neck and her breasts seemed larger than when they were encased in the strapless bra she had thrown aside. He moved closer to hug her and kiss her firmly on the lips. His penis pressed against her mound and suddenly he needed to break away. He did not want to seem like an over-eager teenager and come before he was inside her.

‘Why don’t you slip under the covers while I undress,’ he said.

She obeyed but first he watched as she removed the clips that kept her hair up and tossed

her head, letting the tresses fall to her shoulder. Then he undressed, while she watched him with her head propped up on a pillow. He glimpsed himself in the long mirror - all that exercise now seemed worthwhile. He was proud of his body and, although he worked out, he was careful to avoid looking as though he meant to enter a Mr. World competition. His erect penis escaped prematurely through the slit in his pants but he carefully placed it back inside, before walking over and lying next to her. Then he twisted to reach the light switches on the wall behind and switched off the central bulb.

‘You’re not cold are you?’ he asked.

She shook her head.

He drew aside the duvet and knelt in front of her. He kissed her breasts and then her mouth. She bent her knees as he did this and slipped off her briefs. Then, while he knelt in front of her she drew down his pants and grasped his penis. He slipped his pants over his feet as she did so.

She moved both hands over the stem of his penis moving the skin over the firmness beneath. Then she placed her hands underneath and squeezed him gently. He could feel the tremor of his own excitement as if he was outside himself and wondered whether she had gone too far. Then she brought his penis towards her and ran the tip between her labia, which were now moist and allowed him to slide up and over her clitoris. An exquisite thrill ran up his penis and caused him to breathe faster and deeper. He was pleased that she also sounded excited but he needed to keep control. He lent back and to the side towards the bedside cabinet to her left. Inside he was pleased to see a packet of condoms. He took one out and then allowed her to take it from him and slide over his penis. Then she slid down the bed while pushing his penis inside of her.

He lent forward on to his forearms and pushed up high inside her; again, sounds of excitement escaped from her lips. Then he rested his hips and belly on her and took up her rhythm - smoothing out the irregular tremors that ran through her body as he moved.

He could feel the tension enveloping him as he fought against his rising excitement. But reluctantly and inevitably, he was caught up in his own tempo. When he heard high small shrieks of pleasure, he allowed his thrusts to become faster and more violent and then came with a deep roar of satisfaction. He collapsed on to her and tried to struggle free but she hugged him to her. Finally, when he imagined that his weight had squeezed all the air from her chest, she relaxed her grip and he rolled over with her, so that now her lighter body rested on him.

They stayed locked together until he felt himself shrink from her, then she raised herself and smiled at him and they kissed. He extricated himself, went to the bathroom, then, back in bed, lay on his back, and clasped her to him. She bent her knee so that it rested on his limp penis.

‘I hope you came. I thought you did,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I did.’

He smiled but said nothing. There seemed nothing else to say. Then, he felt her breathing become shallower and more regular as she dozed off. He gently moved her on to her back and then slid the duvet down and to the side to look at her lying naked and relaxed.

Her hair lay untidily over her face and lifted with her breath. He swept it away from her mouth. He allowed his eyes to gaze lazily along her body and then his hand followed, touching her gently: down her neck; over her shoulder; up and down her breasts; then over her belly; finally skirting round the raised triangle of public hair and on to her thigh. From his angle, the mound between her legs stood up above the crease between belly and leg. He placed his hand on it.

He did not want to wake her but he became aware that her breathing rhythm had changed and, when he looked up at her, he saw she was looking at him with a smile on her face. He too smiled - shamefacedly, as if he had been caught out doing something naughty.

She turned on to her side, held his hand and pressed his finger into her as she parted her legs.

'Finger fuck me,' she said, 'but keep your eyes on mine.'

He moved one finger and then two inside her and watched as her eyes blinked but only closed completely when she came to a climax with a deep intake of breath, which she let out slowly. Then she opened her eyes and looked down at his groin.

'I see your ready again,' she said looking at his penis.

He turned away from her towards the drawer but she stopped him, clambered over him, and placed her hands on his shoulders. Then she bent and massaged his penis between her breasts. This time he was more in control and knew that he would not come too soon; he lay there, closed his eyes, and enjoyed the sensations streaming up his body.

He opened his eyes again when she lent back to reached over to the drawer and take out a condom, which she rolled on to his penis with both hands. Then she turned around and lent forward, so that she could place his penis at the entrance to her vagina. She moved the tip of it around and then slid it inside her while pushing back towards him.

The position was awkward for him and he had to prop himself up while she moved and brought herself to a climax. He was entirely passive as her buttocks thrust backwards and then slid forwards, pulling his penis uncomfortably. But he enjoyed her rising excitement and the sight of his penis inside her, between her cheeks with her anus above.

She climaxed once more but the position prevented him from coming. Then she turned and faced him kneeling in front of him and again she pushed him inside her. This time she moved on him quickly and violently bringing him to his own orgasm.

They rested in each other's arms for a few minutes before walking together to the bathroom where they showered together. Comben was beginning to feel awkward. It hadn't turned out as he had imagined it would. It had been too good and he didn't want to spoil it. He wanted it to continue and yet he knew that what he had to do might ruin everything. But it had to be done.

Anderson thought him a fool and he had been intimidated. He needed something to take back to his boss.

Back in the bedroom, he put his pants on as she slipped into bed. Then he sat on the edge of the bed before putting anything else on. ‘Do you know who Amanda’s boyfriend is?’ he asked. He tried to be casual but it didn’t work.

Felicity sat up and frowned. ‘Is that why you’re here, to question me about Amanda?’ she asked.

‘You know that’s not true,’ he said. ‘If it was as good for you as it was for me, you *know* that’s not true.’

She paused before answering. ‘I don’t know. She won’t tell me. I suppose he’s married.’

Comben rested his hand on her thigh. She didn’t move it away. It was a good sign. ‘You’re not lying to me are you?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she said. ‘Why should I? Anyway what does it matter who Amanda’s man is, I thought Julian’s the one you want?’

Comben shook his head, stood up and reached for his shirt.

‘You’re leaving,’ she said. ‘Is it because you think I’m lying?’

‘No, it will look suspicious if I’m not at home and someone calls.’

‘Anderson?’

Comben nodded.

‘Aren’t policemen allowed a private life?’

Comben smiled. Anderson was allowed one but a junior officer? He couldn’t take the chance. ‘It will be better after we’ve caught the murderer,’ he said. He waited for her reply and wondered whether she would respond to the implication that there would be an ‘after’.

‘Do you think Julian did it?’

He let it go. A fuck was a fuck, it didn't mean there had to be something else. *'I do but Anderson has his reasons for thinking otherwise. I don't think they're good reasons.'*

'Come to the club tomorrow night,' she said, *'come and see what I do. You might find out something useful.'*

'Will I?' he said.

'Only if Julian is not the murderer.'

'Do you know something that might help?'

'Why don't you wait and see.'

Chapter 8

Detective Inspector Patricia Fielding was bored. The screen in front of her flickered and a new series of paragraphs stared at her. Were they different to the last lot? She really didn't know; after a while – a very short while – the English text on display looked like a foreign language. She could pronounce it to herself but the meaning escaped her. It was like reading a book before going to sleep at night and the next day needing to start at the same place again. This she had experienced a lot recently. Promotion had cost her a great deal of time and effort; other things had taken a back seat. So, alone in bed each night, there was no more amusing way of getting tired.

She hadn't imagined that promotion would be like this. She had worked with John Anderson for five years and she thought he rated her. How else had she got where she was? Why else had Anderson recommended her, if she couldn't do the job?

She had never thought him petty — petty enough to have got her stuck in front of a screen all day. But it simply had to be down to him. 'John Anderson is a bastard'; she repeated these words to herself as if they were a mantra – every hour on the hour – or, at least, when she remembered. Unfortunately, they didn't give her the calm a mantra was supposed to.

If it hadn't been for those few foolish words, she would be out there, where she had proved herself. Had he fancied her and was that why he was so vindictive? She wondered what she would have done if he had asked, which he never had. He was almost ten years older than she was and wasn't exactly handsome. But then men didn't have to be. He was too fussy for her liking and his ex-wife had left him, so there might be something there. Still, policemen's marriages were always breaking up; it was the job, so maybe it hadn't been his fault. She still couldn't answer her own question, though: 'would she or wouldn't she?' But then she would probably never have to decide.

The new job — she tried to think of its good points. The best aspect of all came to her mind first: it was temporary. It was preparation for higher things, so the Super said. Just what those higher things were he didn't specify. Then there were the occasional courses — naturally: there were always courses. And then there was this: FBI-speak scrolling down her screen endlessly for what seemed hours — psychological profiles, sociological analyses all struggling to explain why they did it, what sort of people they were but never how to catch them.

Serial killers, had they invented them over there and exported them to over here? The cases were so diverse she wondered whether they were a special category at all. The one in front of her on the screen for example, according to the FBI, this one latched on to other killers, copied their technique and added an extra corpse. The real killers, always eager to own up to their guilt and brazenly proud of their work, *had* to be believed. Three such murderers, now serving life sentences, said they didn't do the extra one and one had been caught before the copycat murder had been committed.

Fielding thought that, if he existed at all, this particular mother's little treasure lacked imagination. He travelled to where there had been publicity about a series of murders and then added one. Sometimes the press had been too lazy to prise out of the police the exact circumstances of the original crimes, so he had improvised. The last line of the report though, was the one that led her to fax the States. They thought he had come to Britain, or, to be precise — if the Americans knew how to be precise in this case — to England.

After lunch, she looked at the answering fax. Agent Jim Stevens was interested in her enquiry. Why didn't they communicate by E-mail or a Chat programme? She had the facility didn't she? She certainly did. What were all those courses for if she didn't know how to use a computer?

The messages flicked backwards and forwards. It was the nearest thing to a conversation

with Jim that she could have apart from the telephone and much cheaper — the finance department would be pleased about that. Jim understood her scepticism. If he hadn't been to four States and examined the evidence in detail, so would he be. But he had and he was convinced. There was one man and he had gone to England and, yes, he did know the difference between England, Britain and the United Kingdom.

She was beginning to like Jim. She was about to ask him whether he had a wife and how old he was, when he did so first. She invited him over to find out for himself. He said he'd like to. The case was his pigeon and he hated to let it go. If he could get permission, he would come and help but that was unlikely: he had enough in his own patch to be getting on with. She wondered whether this was how E-mail romances got started — hadn't there been a film about that? She could see herself inventing the long blonde hair and the 36/22/36 figure she had wanted as a teenager. But what happened when you had to meet and found that your partner was a fifty-year-old fat balding dentist?

Jim suggested she get in touch with the Heathrow police. They hadn't seemed keen to follow up his lead and they hadn't come up with much but she should know what they did find out. He did, though, know someone over there who would want to co-operate.

National calls she could make; they didn't make an unnecessary dent in the budget, so she phoned Sheffield. Detective Inspector Mark Wright knew all about Jim Stevens. He suggested she came up and talked to him. Officially his own case had been closed by orders from above but he hadn't been satisfied. Why didn't she get all the details on her screen before coming? She said she would and that she would travel north as soon as possible but first she needed to go to Hounslow.

She set the computer to work and left the office. She felt like a truant and slunk out as though trying to avoid the prefects. Kilburn to Heathrow Central was best done by Tube. She

left her car at the station and, not for the first time, wondered whether keeping a car in London was worthwhile. Then, squeezed into a corner by an embarrassed man anxious to turn sideways, she re-convicted her of the superiority of the motor car. As long she could breath, she would drive.

As she suspected, Hounslow hadn't done much. They *had* checked every male American landing at Heathrow on the right day and they had a list of hundreds. He probably wouldn't have had time to get a false passport so, at some time, the names might be useful. But, since the FBI had no name and only the vaguest of descriptions given by one fortunate escapee, until he was caught the list was one for the filing cabinet.

It was rumoured that the Northern Line was the worst but Fielding made the Bakerloo a close second and the Piccadilly not far behind. By the time her ordeal by confinement was over and she arrived back at Queen's Park, it was home time. She left the car at the station yard and walked home up the hill and across towards the Kilburn High Road. At one time, the houses there had been the residences of families with servants. Nowadays single people like herself occupied the servants' quarters. Living high up on the fourth floor gave her exercise each day and it was warm, cosy, and quiet — it was home.

Inside her own front door there was another set of stairs leading to a small landing from which her kitchen, living room and a bedroom opened. She hung up her coat on a hook. It was six and the heating had come on, so it would soon be warm. Out there, September had turned chilly as the sun went down.

At six, she settled down in front of the television with a glass of wine from a box she kept in the fridge. She felt it was her duty to keep up with events, although the news seldom interested her. The different items, so similar from year to year, had no power to keep her mind occupied. There were times, after she had been listening to her grandfather's stories of the War, that she

blessed the normality of murder and rape. After the slaughter of millions, what else could be considered serious?

The weatherman came and went and, although she knew all that had happened that day in the skies, tomorrow's forecast escaped her. It was always the way. Why couldn't they give the forecast first when people are paying attention? She knew it would never happen. Who on this earth would give up their chance of extending their star billing for as long as possible? And the weather girls and boys certainly stretched it out these days.

A microwave meal, a look at *The Bill* on the box and then early to bed. She wanted to be in the station early the next day to see whether the computer had been working hard. And so she was, at six in the morning.

Her machine looked calm and composed sitting on her office desk but she felt it was quivering with excitement. She woke it up and there they were — pages of answers. She had been right: its programmes had been bursting with anticipation. She printed the info out and read solidly for an hour.

There had been five multiple murderers caught in Britain over the previous two years but only three were of interest. Each one of those cases displayed the telltale signs: a number of murders and an extra one denied by a killer who had been happy to admit to the rest.

The forces concerned had been variable in their thoroughness but in the end, all three final murders had been put down to the original killer and the cases closed. On each of these three occasions, the last murder in the series was similar to the others but also had distinct differences. She wondered why no one had noticed the pattern but then she remembered: Mark Wright had but hadn't been allowed to follow it up. She was the only officer in the country specially assigned to make such connections.

She needed to interview the case officers concerned and she had to tackle Anderson. She

wouldn't want him to accuse her of hiding something that might help.

It was mid-morning before she left for Sheffield; it seemed easier to get to than Hounslow: ten minutes to Euston a short walk to St Pancras and a seat all the way to Yorkshire even though she was in 2nd class. On the way she read through her print-outs again. She hoped Mark Wright had more to offer; she needed something else when she presented herself to Anderson.

There was still half an hour to go when she had had enough and she sat back to contemplate the paper that covered the table in front of her. Luckily the carriage was empty but it would be a security risk when at busier times. First class would be better, did Anderson travel first class or was that reserved for superintendents and commissioners? She must look at the rulebook someday; perhaps she was selling herself short.

DI Wright picked her up at the station and took her back to his office. It looked the same as hers in London: she supposed police stations were all built using a pattern book like housing estates used to be and probably still were. Still he did have an office to himself while she shared hers.

Mark Wright *was* helpful and *was* very keen to get her interested. It made her wary, was he one of those men who get fixated and can't let go even when the evidence is against them? She spent the whole afternoon looking at photos and reading descriptions. The local force had been thorough. They had learnt from the modern Ripper murders. In Sheffield these days things were done by the book. The original interviews had been gone over a number of times. Detective Inspector Mark Wright was convinced they had another murderer on their hands and that he was among those already questioned.

'What makes you think the last one isn't down to Walton?' Fielding asked.

'He won't admit to it and the timing's wrong.'

'Timing?'

‘He never murdered two prostitutes in one night and he would have had to be quick doing the first and then driving to the second — too quick. No, this one was someone different.’

‘Walton’s been co-operative?’

‘We’ve interviewed him three times in prison. He’s given us every detail about the other murders but not this one.’

Only three men amongst those questioned measured up to the description Stevens had given Wright. Tall men, muscular men in their twenties but not body builders. Fielding was puzzled. It seemed too detailed. Stevens hadn’t said anything about any witness having had a close look at the man. ‘I thought no one had seen the man clearly?’ she asked. ‘You seem to know exactly what he looks like.’

‘So, you don’t know why Jim Stevens is so keen on catching this man?’

Fielding did not know but she wasn’t about to slip into Wright’s sense of certainty. ‘If he exists,’ she said. ‘The evidence seems very shaky to me. I’m not yet convinced that there is one man who’s doing all this.’

‘Stevens is absolutely sure and he’s convinced me. He believes the man is his twin.’

Fielding waited. What did he mean?

‘Everywhere Stevens has been, people thought *he* was the man they were looking for. The man looks just like he does.’

‘A lot of people probably look like he does.’

‘Maybe so but, the way he tells it, as soon as they saw him, they were amazed at the likeness. The woman attacked near the airport thought they’d brought him in as a suspect.’

Wright showed her a photo of Stevens. Tall heavily built with close-cropped hair and an open wide face. No, there were not a lot like him around but then he wasn’t *around* was he. Would he ever make the flight across? Fielding brought her mind back to the case. ‘And that’s

another thing,' she said, 'just because he attacked a woman near an airport, it doesn't mean he took a plane.'

'Well, they haven't heard from him since that day and the woman saw him get in a car and head towards the airport car park. Later they found an abandoned hire car rented from the last place he'd been seen.'

'Or *possible* been seen,' Fielding was not going to fall headlong into Stevens's obsession and she was beginning to feel unhappy about Mark Wright. She could see how Stevens could be affected by his experiences but it shouldn't affect Wright's judgement. And she certainly wasn't allowing it to influence her. She needed to keep a clear mind on this, especially if she was going to convince Anderson.

'He could have flown to a dozen countries apart from Britain,' she said.

'Stevens thinks that it's unlikely that he speaks anything but English – American English – so Heathrow was his best guess.'

Fielding knew that the local police at Heathrow had been unimpressed. They had enough to do policing illegal immigrants; so they had done the minimum they needed to do and left it at that. She knew why. The Americans couldn't prove to them that their information applied to one man. The person who caught the plane – if he caught it – might not be the same one who killed in Virginia or California or Maine. He might not have killed at all. The only witness had been attacked in the dark, which is why she could give no clear description, and it was only surmised that he had been the man identified in the FBI profile. They only had Stevens's peculiar experience to picture the man.

Fielding tried to be sympathetic to Stevens's theory but it was difficult.

'I can see you still feel doubtful,' Mark Wright said. 'But Stevens is an experienced agent. I believe he's on to something.'

She nodded. 'Do you know anything more about the three you've picked out?'

'Officially, no. Unofficially, yes.'

Fielding put her head on one side.

'The case is closed – officially Walton did them all – but from time to time I try to find out what they're all doing. It's not easy.'

'Harassment' that was the word they all dreaded. If a case was closed then those who had been questioned should be left alone. 'No fingerprints then?' Fielding asked.

'We never had any to match, so I obeyed orders and blew them away.'

Fielding looked again at her three photos.

Walton went to his desk and came back with a small notebook. 'Two are married and living locally. Both have had kids since the murder. They're at the bottom of my list.'

'And the third?'

'The man with the American accent. He's gone, no trace.'

'It doesn't say anything about an accent down here.'

Walton looked at the record. 'No, it doesn't but I remember him. It wasn't much of an accent but he came from America. I'm sure about that.'

But was she as sure? Fielding knew how easy it was to get a fixed idea and then interpret everything to fit in with it. 'Did he show you his passport?'

'No, it never came up,' he said.

Fielding wondered whether this was all but looking up at Wright's face, she saw it was clear there was something else.

'Did Stevens send you the papers about the man they caught in New York?' Wright asked.

Fielding nodded. It didn't stop Wright going over the case.

'He confessed to six murders but wouldn't admit to the attack that failed. It was the same

pattern as the one identified in three other States. It's the same pattern as three cases over here.'

Fielding wondered how she would put all this down on paper. It looked thin even to her and she *wanted* it to be true. 'Isn't it all down to their so-called psychological profiling. Isn't that really why they think he exists?'

'It started that way, yes. In each case a series of murders was put down to one killer and then there was a final one that almost but didn't quite fit the pattern. They believe Veronica Symonds – she's the attack victim in New York – was lucky.'

'You think the identification of Stevens's "twin" makes his theory plausible?'

'Yes I do,' Wright said.

He couldn't have been more firm. Fielding imagined he was good giving evidence in court.

'You haven't told me yet why you're interested in all of this,' he said.

'No I haven't,' she said. 'I will when I can.'

On the way back to London, she had time to think it over. It was a pity that Anderson had the 'Ripper' case and it was a pity that the connection she was trying to make with it was so vague. Copying a murderer from a century ago and adding to his score was hardly going to fool anyone. But he might be an opportunist and flexible enough to ply his trade in a variety of ways.

She had to try to convince Anderson that she was on to something. What use was her work with records and patterns of crime if she couldn't apply them? The Super would surely see the point and, if Anderson agreed, she had a good chance of getting her way and joining the investigation. If she succeeded, it would get her out of her office and on to a case — and that was what counted. And there was a bonus: she would be working with Anderson again.

She would keep Jim Stevens and his ideas under wraps. He was too eager, too keen and he had made the case too personal — *and* he was American. No, she didn't think he would go down

well with Anderson or the Super.

A short report in writing to pave the way was the right way to do it. And she would make sure that it was on Anderson's desk before he came in the next day. The rest of the printouts she would bundle into a file and she would carry it into Anderson's office when summoned. There was nothing like a large pack of papers to impress. And anyway, their sheer size would be intimidating. Anderson wouldn't want to plough through so much paper, so he wouldn't become aware of the thinness of her evidence.

It had gone quiet and it wasn't simply the lack of noise in his office that made Anderson think that. Comben sat silently opposite him, the desk between. There was no point in going over again what they had and what they didn't have. Julian was their best bet but Anderson didn't want to end the investigation yet. Outside the office was silent but they were all there — waiting. Anderson wondered whether there had been a leak but maybe they were all waiting for the next one. Two murders were not enough; it didn't fit any sort of pattern. There had to be more and maybe that was what he was waiting for too. Forensics certainly had given them nothing to go on for the first two.

Anderson picked up the single sheet of paper that lay in his in-tray. It was from Fielding. He wondered whether she was enjoying her assignment. Promotion it might have been but Anderson imagined she would still prefer to be out there not stuck in an office. Responsibility for information processing and the hours in front of a computer screen that meant would not, Anderson thought, be her choice of job. Still she could hope for more active service in the years that followed and it *was* more money.

The paper drew attention to a pattern. It was the sort of analysis pioneered in the States and used to track serial killers there. Anderson had only the slightest familiarity with the process and

he had gleaned that from American detective novels. Still anything was worth following up right then.

Anderson picked up his phone and summoned Fielding to him. Before she came, he dismissed Comben.

Fielding came into his office with an exaggerated air of confidence. Anderson knew her: her manner betrayed her discomfort. But was it the case or was it personal? He hadn't thought he had made too much of it – in public at least. But maybe he was giving off signals that he didn't know about. He *had* been hurt; he had to accept that. It *had* been an insult and it was still there lying between them. Anderson wondered whether she thought he had been instrumental in confining her to a desk because of it. He hadn't thought of *that* before.

'Is it of interest to you?' she asked pointing at the sheet of paper in his hand.

'We've nothing else. Until we catch the writer, that is,' Anderson said.

'There are three areas in this country that show up crimes that could be linked to the American data,' she said.

'So what are you saying?' He wasn't prepared to give her too much just yet. Was that professional or personal? There he was, back again scratching old wounds; he really must sort the thing out once and for all. He didn't want it interfering with his work or hers.

'It could be that their serial killer came over here and has been practising his trade around the country.'

'And how does this...,' Anderson waved her single sheet of paper much as Chamberlain had done sixty years before, 'tell us that.'

'It's not a usual pattern. The man's an opportunist. He adapts his technique to the exigencies of the moment.'

'So in this case, he *just* found out about Jack the Ripper and decided to add one of his own.'

Or maybe he happened to know about the stories and decided to copy them. Unless you think Julian's the American, of course.' This time he didn't even try to keep the disbelief out of his voice.

'It's a thought,' she said.

'Have you any real proof that all this American stuff refers to one man?'

'The FBI think so.'

'Have you any real proof he is in England — if he exists.' Anderson was trying — but not trying too hard — to keep the inflection out of his voice. He didn't believe in long shots and all this psychological profiling was one big long shot. And the odds would be even longer if Fielding couldn't be sure the stuff was relevant to England.

'I didn't think you wanted it all but I have more.' She produced a bulging file and placed it on the desk in front of her.

'And what does all that say?' Anderson asked.

'It's a lot of evidence — not conclusive — but it seems to show that there is *a* man. His description rang bells in at least three places where murders of the type we're considering took place.'

'In England?'

'Yes, a lot of it's hearsay but reasonably reliable. Do you want to read this stuff?' Fielding pushed the file towards him.

She was silent as he stared into her eyes. He knew what she wanted. She wanted to follow it up out there and he *could* ask her to do this. Upstairs would release her temporarily on his recommendation. But maybe it wasn't simply wishful thinking on her part, maybe she really did have something. Her intuition — if one was allowed to use that phrase about a policewoman these days — had always been good. Anderson waved the papers away and then he was silent. He

decided to trust her.

‘I’m sorry if I hurt you,’ she said.

‘Hurt me when?’ he said. He had been quick to answer — too quick. He was angry for betraying himself. But still, he was pleased that she had said something. It was enough that she had acknowledged what she had done. There was no need for anything further.

Fielding relaxed back into the seat. She was a fine woman: not beautiful but she had a small lithe body and she was intelligent — to Anderson that meant a lot in a woman. But she was still his subordinate — *it* could never happen. But, when they worked together, he had wanted it to. And that was what made it painful. He tried to fight the memory off but her few words had brought back the moment.

It was the day her promotion was announced officially, although he had known about it a week before. It had been polite of the Super to do this. It was his own strong recommendation that had made her promotion possible, so the Super’s consideration made sense. If she had failed it would have been as much a black mark against himself as against Fielding, perhaps even more so. She was young to be considered for promotion from Sergeant to Inspector; her time would have come again. But those above would have looked askance at his own judgement should she have given a bad performance.

She came back to the station in triumph and Anderson came of his office with a broad smile on his face to congratulate her. She came towards him with elation in her eyes and then she ignored his outstretched hand and hugged him to her. He felt her warm breath on his neck and the softness of her breasts through her shirt. Then she drew back and ran her hands down the sleeves of his suit.

‘You’ll have to be careful,’ she said ‘I might overtake you in the promotion stakes and then

you'll have to take orders from a woman.'

He smiled. It was a weak joke and it did irritate him. He had never thought of himself as sexist and reckoned he could take orders from a woman as easily as from a man. But it would still have been all right if she had stopped there. She didn't; she fingered his lapel and his tie and then his shirt.

'I suppose bright ties are acceptable these days,' she said, 'but greens and blues that rivalled peacocks are hardly the colours for a man approaching middle-age who wishes to be taken seriously.'

He had felt a flush come to his face. She had spoken quietly and it was possible that no one else heard but he could never know. No one would dare mention it to him. Fielding saw immediately that she had made a mistake. But it was too late: the words had escaped with the full force of their spontaneity. And she couldn't apologise with everyone gathered around.

Nowadays sober grey and dark blue suits had taken the place of those other brighter cloths and hung on the right of his wardrobe.

It had occurred to him many times that she could have apologised later – in private – but then his own reaction and the immediate changes in his wardrobe must have made it difficult. He had always supposed she had taken the decision to say nothing because she thought it the best thing to do for both of them. Her change of mind, he supposed, meant that she blamed him for her office job. Why else would she speak now?

'Nice suit,' she said.

He smiled. She had made the nearest to an apology that he wanted or needed. It was probably two words too many. What counted was that she knew it had hurt. 'So why don't you follow this up,' he said.

‘You mean join the team?’

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘And my present work?’

‘If you prefer to get on with that ...’ he didn’t finish.

‘You’ll have a word with the Super then,’ she said.

He nodded and a smile broke out over her face. He smiled back.

Later that day Fielding found herself in one of those country towns where the agricultural show is the event of the year and murders take place elsewhere. She drove under a small arch and then up the main street, which looked as though it had stopped growing sometime in the nineteenth century. She parked and went inside a teashop that sold toasted teacakes and at eleven in the morning was full of matronly figures with white hair. Fielding wondered where the poor working people lived.

Later at the local nick, Inspector Carstairs was not happy to see her. She felt like an alien in a foreign land rather than a fellow police officer; he gave her the impression that he had declared Ludlow independent of the rest of the UK some time ago. He was old to be an inspector still; clearly he was near to retirement and didn’t want his last years marred by the activities of criminals. Still she understood; her presence reminded him of recent unpleasantness. In his mind, murder was an intrusion from the outside and murderers were invaders to be thrown back at the beachhead. He thought it impossible that the culprit – who must have been an ‘outsider’ – was still in the town. He seemed to have forgotten that this was the second murder in one year — an unprecedented statistic. To him the ‘incident’ was an aberration best forgotten together with the well-publicised rapes that had recently occurred in his patch.

More photos, more descriptions but no American accent. One of the photos, though, looked

too similar to the picture she had of Stevens to be ignored. Carstairs seemed more than pleased to tell her that the man had moved on. He had been a visitor. Fielding imagined that this constituted an adequate explanation for whatever the man was guilty of in Carstairs's mind.

She took a tour around the castle before she left but had to cut it short. Fulsome praise for the local lord was one thing but pints of sickly adulation could pall on even the most ardent royalist and Fielding was not one of those.

She hadn't got much but, on the way back South, she felt good. Back on the team — that was what she liked. And Anderson? Well maybe — but this she wasn't sure of yet — maybe he had forgiven her. But then she could have been mistaken about him; she couldn't believe he had been so mean-minded as to keep her behind a desk. They had worked together for five years and she had never seen that side of him. And he'd never treated her like a bimbo and never never said anything out of line. Not that she would have been upset. He was impressive and she liked impressive men. Mark Wright now, there was a man she could tolerate but he lived three hundred miles north of Kilburn.

Still, realistically it couldn't be called a successful investigation yet. The pattern was there if one wanted to look. The man tagged along after others: he read about a murder and then decided he would do one too — no great originality there. Sheffield one year, Ludlow the next, Watford the year after and then Kilburn?

Watford was better than Ludlow. There *was* an American and he had made a friend. They drank together hunted together — women not foxes — and gambled together. They were as near friends as made no difference in the male world. They had swapped tips at the local gym and lifted hods of bricks at the many building sites in expanding Watford. Fielding visited.

Kevin was sweaty and his singlet showed off some of his gleaming muscles. The foreman tapped him on the shoulder and pointed in Fielding's direction. She imagined they would want

her off the site fast. There hadn't been any whistles – they all seemed to know she was police – but there were plenty of eyes which should have been looking one way and which were pointing another.

Kevin Walker strode across. The smile on his face was, Fielding imagined, a permanency where women were concerned. She supposed it was winning. Still, she did need him, so she smiled back and was pleased she had put on a skirt. Kevin tried to make her more pleased by moving his eyes up from her feet to her breasts — there they stuck.

‘What do you want, love?’ he asked.

Fielding decided to ignore the ‘love’. It was, after all, said in a northern accent. ‘I want to know about Tony Adams?’ she asked.

‘The brief story now or do you want to wait until later for the full version?’ he asked.

‘Is there so much to tell?’

‘Depends how interested you are.’

Fielding wondered who was supposed to be interested in whom. ‘Very interested,’ she said.

‘After work?’

‘I can't wait that long,’ she said.

‘I'm taking a half-day — personal business. But I don't mind spending an hour with you.’

‘It won't take that long.’

‘It does with me,’ he said.

Fielding found it hard but she kept smiling. Later they met at his flat. Kevin made it clear why he was there and when she had to leave.

‘You don't mind do you,’ he said, ‘but she mightn't understand.’

‘Have I time to sit down?’ she asked.

Kevin waved his arms around the room.

Fielding was surprised at the place. It was clean tidy, well furnished — it was comfortable.

Kevin noticed her survey.

‘We don’t all live like pigs,’ he said.

‘We?’

‘Working stiffs, this is my home I have a cleaner and I’m proud of the place.’

Fielding nodded. She could imagine herself being entertained in such a flat. He was right; she hadn’t expected this. ‘And Tony Adams?’

‘He was a drifter. And that wasn’t his real name.’

‘You know that?’

‘He picked up a paper one day and saw the name.’

Fielding knew who he meant: Arsenal and England centre back. She wasn’t one of those women who took no interest in the national sport. ‘Where did he come from?’

‘America, he tried to hide the accent but it came through. He obviously didn’t want anyone to know, so I never said anything to him.’

So that was how Kevin got his Americanisms. ‘So where is he now?’

‘In London chatting up rich women.’

‘You’re in touch?’

‘No, that’s what he said he would do and I suppose he did.’

Fielding lent back in her chair. She gave every sign that she might become a permanency. She even allowed her skirt to ride up and show some inner thigh. Kevin noticed it. She was pleased; she wouldn’t have wanted her efforts to fall flat. Then Kevin started to look at his watch. She could see he was torn between keeping her chatting and seeing what would happen and clearing the place before the next one arrived.

‘So what else do you want to know?’

He had decided: a bird in the bed was worth two on the couch. He would be looking at his watch next. ‘Tell me how you know what he was going to do?’

Kevin struggled a little. Fielding could see it on his face. Was this a male thing: covering up. Did he have to get rid of his scruples about giving away a fellow man’s secrets before talking? Finally Fielding saw that the struggle was over — she had won.

‘We went up to town to gamble. At the Sporting Club, I’m a member.’

Fielding nodded.

‘Tony saw what was going on. Y’know young guys with old birds.’

‘And the opposite?’

‘Well yeah, that’s normal but this was different. I wouldn’t do it myself but Tony had a go. He scored a couple of times.’

‘Only twice?’

‘He said it wasn’t worth the effort, they expected too much and anyway it wasn’t where the real money was. The Sporting is not that sort of place — well they wouldn’t let *me* in if it was.’

Fielding was beginning to like him. ‘So Tony went upmarket.’

Kevin nodded enthusiastically. ‘He could do it too. I saw him once on his way into town before he moved. He didn’t see me. He was smart, real smart, classy clothes and I bet he finally beat the accent.’

‘What’s the matter with an American accent?’

‘Nothing but Tony was secretive. I guess I thought he’d been inside.’

‘And Patricia Rathbone?’

The smile vanished from Kevin’s face. He looked miserable. Fielding didn’t imagine he could fake it that well.

‘I had nothing to do with that.’

‘You were both questioned.’

‘I knew her elder sister. We went out. The four of us met up sometimes.’

‘The papers put it down to Goulding. He’s the guy who murdered Suzie Lampart.’

‘I know who he is. I don’t know why the police bothered with us, if he did it.’

‘They had their reasons,’ she said. Kevin lifted his chin as though he were a whinnying horse. Fielding knew what that meant: he didn’t think much of the police. ‘I’m going to visit the Rathbone family are there any messages?’

‘No, I haven’t seen them since Lesley went to London. I haven’t heard from her or from them.’

‘So they lost two daughters.’

‘And none of it was my fault,’ he said.

By the time she left, Kevin seemed to have forgotten about the time. He looked genuinely unhappy. Still, she was sure he would perk up when the time came.

It was a short walk to the Rathbone’s and she left her car in Kevin’s road. The semi looked as though they were still in mourning. The front garden was a mass of weeds compared to the neat paving or grass of the neighbours’. All curtains were drawn and she had to ring the bell several times before hearing anything happen inside.

A man answered. He opened the door a fraction as though ready to slam it shut at the slightest provocation. Fielding imagined the place must have been besieged by the press. But six months later?

‘Yes,’ he said.

Patricia had been in her early twenties and her father would have been fifty-five at the most. This man looked sixty-five she wondered whether it was the right house. ‘Mr Rathbone?’

He nodded.

She showed her police badge. He put his nose up close.

‘Kilburn? That’s a long way from here.’

‘Can I ask you a few questions?’

His weary face dropped further. Fielding knew what was coming.

‘I’ve told all I know a thousand times before to you lot. What good did it do?’

‘Please.’

It was as though she had said ‘open sesame’ he smiled or so she supposed, it wasn’t easy to tell. There was no sign of anyone else inside and they sat opposite each other in the lounge.

‘My wife’s upstairs,’ he said, ‘she seldom comes down these days.’

She had seen it before but each time it shocked. The corpse was terrible the first few times, then you became acclimatised to dead flesh. It was the dead living that had the power to continually upset. The parents or maybe the husband or wife – seldom the children, occasionally a brother or sister – it was as though life had been sucked away, as if only the husk remained.

‘I’ve just spoken to Kevin,’ she said.

Mr Rathbone let his face fall and his eyes survey the carpet. ‘We blame him, well Mrs Rathbone does.’

‘Why?’

‘Don’t get me wrong, we don’t think he killed her but he did leave them together.’

‘Them?’

‘The other guy, the American.’

‘There was no evidence against him.’

Rathbone continued as if she hadn’t spoken. ‘Lesley felt so too.’

Fielding nodded. ‘Where is she?’

‘She went up to London. She couldn’t stand it here after ...’

His voice tailed away. Fielding could see he couldn't yet spell it out even to himself. 'Have you an address?'

'No, she keeps on moving. I think she wants to cut herself off — to forget.'

'How do you know she's in London?'

'We get cards. Birthday cards, Christmas cards that sort of thing.'

'And the postmark?'

'London, different postal districts but always in London.'

There was a photo on the mantelpiece — two young women. 'Are they your daughters?' she asked, pointing at the photo.

'Yes,' he said.

'Have you a copy?'

'I have one of Lesley. Would that do? I can't give you that one.'

Fielding nodded and he went out of the room, returning a few minutes later with a snapshot. He sat down as she got up to leave. She wondered whether he would even notice but he did and looked up sharply.

'Do you know anything?' he asked. 'I'd like him caught.'

Fielding shook her head. 'We'll let you know if anything turns up,' she said.

He got up and they walked to the front door together.

'It's not her case you're working on is it?'

'No,' she said and walked away. She looked back as she reached the pavement but he had already closed the front door. She didn't imagine he had been too disappointed by her remark. It looked as though he had given up hope long before.

Kevin was outside when she came back to collect her car. She waited for him to speak.

'I didn't tell you everything before,' he said.

She nodded.

‘I was in touch with Lesley Rathbone. I told her where she might find Tony Adams.’

‘Do you know where she lives?’

‘No, she moved not long ago and she hasn’t been in touch since.’

‘So, where do you think I might find Lesley or Tony?’

‘You ought to start at Whistlers, it’s a posh club in Mayfair. Tony said that was the place for him. Old birds with lots of their dead husbands’ money.’

‘And do you think Lesley found him?’

‘No, I don’t think she has yet; she’d tell me if she had. But she does work there. That’s where you’ll find her.’

‘Maybe Tony moved on.’

‘Could be.’

Back in Kilburn, she still couldn’t shake off the pall of unhappiness. Maybe she should have insisted on speaking to Mrs Rathbone but she was please she hadn’t. The job could take just so much out of you and she had had enough for that day.

Chapter 9

Another day spent at Stoke Newington got Anderson no further. If Simanovicz were the one, he would never go to prison; though a secure hospital for the rest of his life was no picnic either. It would be an easy conviction and he would chalk up another success. Then everyone could go home and start living again. But it didn't add up and it wasn't because he didn't want Clarissa to go home. He supposed that was what Comben thought: he was dragging his feet because of her.

Driving back home that evening Anderson picked at it but soon realised it wouldn't work. There was something there but it was like a name that wouldn't come to the surface. He would leave it a while to simmer peacefully. At home, a dry sherry settled him down but he was hungry and he couldn't think before eating.

He took off his jacket and put on the plain blue apron he used always when in front of the stove. His refrigerator was well-stocked but it was one of the days he had chosen to eat vegetables only – for his health. So he peeled and chopped a variety of fresh and canned vegetables on the chopping board that fitted the drainer on his sink and added Quorn. Then he heated up some sesame oil in the wok that always hung to the left of the hob and added his ingredients. The cooking was over ten times quicker than the preparation. The eating was slower; he took his time with chopsticks and a bowl. Soon he felt capable of using his judgement sensibly but waited until he had cleaned up and loaded the dishwasher. Then he lay on his sofa and let his mind run over the whole thing.

Julian Simanovicz was guilty unless someone had set him up. His short stories and the murders that mimicked them could not be explained otherwise. And, if there was someone framing Julian, then it had to be Mark Turney. The problem was whether he could trust his judgement. He was sleeping with the man's wife and that gave him an excellent reason for not liking the man. It gave him an even better reason for wanting him to be guilty. But where was

the evidence?

He phoned Fielding at home; she might have something. The Simanovicz situation had allowed him to forget Fielding's long shot but a bulls-eye on her part would come in handy right then. There was no answer and there was none from her mobile. Well, he could understand that. There were times when it was necessary to be unavailable and he hadn't thought Fielding essential to the investigation. She wasn't supposed to be on call. He could wait until morning but he needed to know what if anything she had found before taking the next step. Julian could not be kept isolated for much longer without being brought back to Kilburn.

Fielding had been offered drinks twice and she hadn't been there more than fifteen minutes but the drinks had a bill attached to them that she would prefer not to pay. The men didn't mind; they found the next young female without jewellery and expensive watches — signals that they were not yet the property of a man as rich as themselves. It was the sort of commerce that Kevin had made clear happened at the Sporting Club and she was beginning to wonder whether all gambling clubs were the same. Men and women went to such places for reasons other than gambling and she was very definitely pleased that she was *not* in the market.

Fielding had felt herself dressed well enough. Not *haute couture* of course but her dress was a copy and not cheap *and* she couldn't claim the price back off expenses. At first, she had wondered why she had looked like goods on sale, until she understood about the diamonds. The thought occurred to her that she ought to accept one of those drink invitations just to pay for the dress but then the thought of those flabby bodies and scented clothes — bedclothes — made her shudder.

She wandered around the tables. The professionals — both men and women — were easy to spot. They were always alert for the faintest sign that they had been noticed and they never

gambled — with their own money that was. The real customers were in deep concentration. Little balls or cards it didn't make much difference. Each table had a cluster of bulky men and scrawny women who threw chips worth hundreds on to the table with the same gusto as she had seen children buy 'instants'. Many of the clients looked middle eastern and appeared to be throwing barrels of oil on to the table, so little did they seem to care when they lost. And then there was the evening-suited staff, who oversaw the tables and settled disputes or simply eased themselves around, trying not to get in the way of the customers throwing their money away.

It had been a successful evening. The manager quickly recognised Tony Adams from her description and she had another name: Toby Langdale. The management had not been pleased when he had disappeared with one of their best customers. His sort was an asset but not when their clients never came back. The staff was encouraged to speak to her about Tony or was it Toby. Not that it would help much. He would, she was sure, look different now and have a new name. Even the new blond hair would be brown or black or red and the English accent would be perfect.

But why had he left the scene? He had been a popular figure and his exploits had been part of the service. Young men were an attraction for the richer widows and Toby had been a big draw. The manager didn't exactly say so but she gathered that for him, like herself, there had been no entrance fee. He had moved on and up from the pastures of the Sporting in Park Lane to the greener ones of Mayfair — a bit like Monopoly. But from here, there was nowhere else to go, so where did he go?

There was no point in talking to the customers, first she would have been thrown out and secondly no woman would want to speak about her gigolo. If she had been looking for a woman, it would have been different.

She could have left after an hour or so before, since she had got as much as she imagined

she could. But it had taken a great deal of persuasion for the management to let her in and she didn't want to waste the experience. She wouldn't be back, so she would see how the rich played. It would be educational and the place *was* impressive. It was set in a nineteenth century mansion – chandeliers and all – the staff was in evening dress, the customers wore ties and the real clients had money — lots of it. Chips of various hues and sizes sloshed around the table with careless energy. Fielding couldn't imagine she would see so much money change hands so rapidly ever again.

A tall figure caught her eye across the room. Young in his thirties but somehow not alert enough to be one of the professionals. There *were* young men with money who gambled but this one's attention didn't seem to be focussed on the cards. From the back, Fielding could see from the angle of his neck that his eyes were on the dealer more than the table, especially when she leant forwards and showed off a great deal of her assets. The players were too interested in the cards to notice her most of the time. Occasionally they deigned to look up but inevitably, they decided they were more hungry for cards than flesh and very quickly looked down again at the table.

She circled. Was it a jealous boyfriend? If this was so, she was surprised. She couldn't imagine the management would allow anything to spoil the vicarious enjoyment of its clientele and pretty girls showing off their breasts seemed part of the package they were selling. She walked round the table behind the dealer to get a better look.

It was a surprise but Fielding kept calm. She didn't want to blow Comben's cover if he was on a job. He looked better dressed than usual. Fielding wondered whether he had hired the suit for the occasion. But what really interested her was the coincidence. She didn't believe in coincidences; no police officer did. Unravelling coincidences was their job. Two colleagues who were on the same case, meeting in the same place, was a double coincidence. If he were

working, it would explain how Clive got in. But it didn't explain why he was looking at the girl so intensely. Was she that beautiful that he had forgotten his mission?

She walked back round the table to have a good look at her. Clive's eyes never left the girl. Fielding wondered whether he was expecting a nipple or two to appear and hadn't wanted to miss it. She was tall, two inches more than her own five foot eight. Very dark-haired, very good figure, very nimble hands but then that went with the job. Fielding took the photo out of her pocket just to make sure but it wasn't necessary: the girl was Lesley Rathbone. She must have just come on duty since Fielding hadn't seen her before.

She touched Clive's back and he turned quickly. Then she walked away into a quiet corner and waited for him.

'What are you doing here?' she asked.

'It's a private matter,' he answered.

'Don't you think it's peculiar that we should both be here together?'

Comben nodded.

'I'm looking for my man,' she said.

'The American.'

'Yes, it looks as though this was one of his haunts. He picked up women for money.'

'So you're sure he exists?'

'The staff is good at recognising their guests. They know who's on the make and who's there to play. My man stood out — Toby Langdale.'

Comben shook his head as if she had expected him to recognise the name.

'You could ask your girlfriend.'

'Girlfriend?'

'I don't think you would be allowed to stare if she wasn't.'

Comben stared at her for a few seconds before speaking. 'Okay detective,' he said, 'I will but will you do me a favour?'

Fielding nodded.

'Don't tell Anderson I was here.'

Fielding lifted her head. She couldn't do that if it was anything to do with the case. It was up to Comben to persuade her that it wasn't. She looked at him quizzically and waited.

'Felicity's nothing to do with the case. She's Amanda Clayden's friend,' he said nodding in the dealer's direction.

'Too many coincidences,' she said, 'you can't keep this a secret. Your friend's real name is Lesley Rathbone. She's the sister of Patricia who was murdered last year in Watford. My American might have killed her. Still, look at it this way, Anderson's in no position to make a fuss.'

Comben looked at her. She smiled. 'Clarissa Downing — I'd've thought he might go for someone younger; he always used to. He's not quite the upright copper he pretends to be is he?'

'Who else knows?' asked Comben.

'Just about the whole station I suppose. But that's not going to help you,' she said.

Comben nodded. She knew that he had got the point. Anderson had a reputation — he had proved himself, so a bit of scandal might wash off. But a new Detective Sergeant, well that was different. Was she worth it to him? Fielding wondered what conclusion the young man would come to.

'So, what's the story about Felicity?'

'Well, there's no proof but a number of people think my American murdered her sister. She's probably down in London looking for him.'

They stood for a while and then Felicity was relieved from her duties and came across to

them.

‘I’ve got half an hour break,’ she said, ‘Anthony, the assistant manager, says both of you might want to question me.’

Fielding was impressed. She was giving a very good show of not knowing Comben and in providing him with a respectable reason for being there.

‘I’ve been questioning everyone about a man,’ said Fielding. She reeled off the description and waited.

‘I’ve heard about him but I’ve only been working here six months. He was before my time.’

Fielding knew that. She said nothing.

Comben seemed surprised. ‘You’ve heard about him?’ he asked and raised his eyebrows Anderson fashion.

‘He was very successful. He pretended to have some sort of English pedigree but his clients didn’t seem to care about that. He never used his own money at the table.’

‘You know that?’ asked Fielding.

‘We girls have sharp eyes behind the tables. The women didn’t want to give him too much, he might walk off, so they tended to slip a few chips at a time into his hand.’

‘So, what made him retire. It sounded like he was quite a success,’ said Fielding.

‘Why don’t you talk to Gaby,’ Felicity said pointing at the woman who had relieved her. ‘She’s finished when I get back on.’

Felicity went to the rest room. Fielding admired the rear view and the slow languid walk. She didn’t imagine Clive would think twice about risking his career. ‘She’s very discreet,’ she said, ‘you might get away with it but it’s a risk.’

Comben looked cross but said nothing.

Gaby came across when Felicity took over her position. The same slow walk — Fielding

just knew they had been practising for hours.

‘You want to know about Toby,’ Gaby said, looking at Comben.

Fielding had spoken to her earlier and kept silent. She could see Clive trying very hard to keep his eyes on Gaby’s face. Truthfully, though, there was no competition between the two croupiers. Gaby’s was all uplift; Felicity had the real thing and plenty of it. A slight nod by Comben and Gaby was off — a real talker. Not that she had much to tell them that they wanted to know. Yes, he had been around for a few months and then he disappeared.

As she talked, Fielding wondered just what Gaby and the others were at the club for. Was it totally legitimate? She imagined it was against the rules but still a clever girl could make a great deal more than her salary after work — on her own time. Maybe she would say more if Comben were not around. It wasn’t simply the matter of gender; there was Felicity and loyalty, if she got Gaby away from under ‘the boyfriend’s’ eyes, something might happen. She was pleased, very pleased, that she hadn’t gone home earlier. ‘I’m going,’ she said to Comben, ‘are you waiting for Felicity?’

Comben looked uncomfortable. Gaby was still standing with them and it looked as though he had wanted to pretend she didn’t know about his connection with Felicity. Well, it was too late now and Comben would have had to be a simpleton to believe it hadn’t been too late before. Didn’t they know that women talk? Fielding wondered just how much self-deception men could handle. She thought back to Anderson and his ‘young-man’ suits — obviously a great deal.

‘No, I’ve found out all I needed. I’ll drive back now. I suppose you’ve got your own car?’

Fielding nodded and stood still waiting for him to go. Gaby stayed on. She was obviously enjoying the pantomime and Clive’s discomfort. Eventually Comben managed to drag himself away without even a glance in Felicity’s direction.

Fielding turned to Gaby and waited. Gaby fidgeted silently but Fielding knew something

would emerge.

‘What?’ the girl said.

Fielding gave her a small prod, she was sure it wouldn’t need more. ‘There’s something more isn’t there?’ she asked. ‘Something you didn’t tell me earlier.’

Gaby looked around nervously towards the table Felicity was standing behind.

‘I shouldn’t really,’ she said, ‘but you are the police and I don’t want to get in trouble.’

Fielding nodded encouragingly.

‘It’s about Felicity and Toby. She might have told you this anyway and it is true that she never saw him here but she does know what happened to him, because I told her. He married some rich author who doesn’t approve of gambling. But then I suppose he wasn’t here for that was he? She’s quite famous; her name’s Clarissa Downing.’

‘How do you know that?’

‘One of the punters told me. She was invited to the wedding. And what’s more Toby had changed his name to Mark.’

‘And you told Felicity all this.’

‘Oh yes, she knew all about the wedding.’

‘So when you discussed what to tell the police, you weren’t supposed to tell me this?’

‘Well, it was for Clive’s benefit. She didn’t want him to feel he was doing something wrong in dating her.’

‘So hiding evidence was supposed to make that better.’

Gaby smiled wryly. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘I hope I don’t get into trouble.’

Fielding didn’t smile back. She wouldn’t be in trouble of course but she was damned if she’d tell the girl that. It looked as though Clive Comben was in deeper than he knew.

Chapter 10

Where were Comben and Fielding?

Anderson was nervy. It was always the same when the book said one thing and he felt another. He went over the whole thing yet again: the case against Julian would probably get the lad locked up for life somewhere. But was he guilty? The interviews with Julian had been unsatisfactory and the psychologist had been no help. He couldn't keep the man locked up at another station indefinitely. He would have to bring him back and the press would have to know. Still he would like to hang on until he saw Comben and Fielding. Then the other occupant of his desk, the telephone, rang and, very soon, he knew it was decision time.

As soon as he got into the Super's office, before he had time to accept the seat offered, the Super spoke.

'I've got something to say to you,' he said, 'and it's serious.'

Anderson took his time settling himself in leather tub chair in front of the desk. He knew what Kearney was going to say and he prepared himself. He didn't believe that his indiscretion with Clarissa had affected his handling of the case, so there was no need for the Super to interfere. He would want to get that across.

'Now you're not going to like this but it's for your own good.'

Anderson nodded. Married with two teenage children and a wife ten years his junior: what did Kearney know about 'his own good'?

'There's not much that goes on at the station I don't hear about and you weren't exactly discreet.'

Anderson nodded again.

'John,' the Super said, leaning forward and placing his elbows gingerly on his desk, 'we go

back a long way. I feel that I can say things to you I can't to other officers.'

Anderson stiffened. Had he come down to this: a contemporary talking to him like a 'Dutch uncle'.

'You know how sorry Diana and I were when you and Gabriella split up.'

'She walked out on me,' Anderson said.

'You put too much into the job, John. There are other things in life.'

Anderson was silent. How long was this going on? He could walk out; Kearney wouldn't complain, since this was hardly police business. And then Kearney said something that kept him there rigid in his chair.

'Look, you mustn't take this the wrong way but your judgement of women: it's not good. I haven't said anything before but I can tell you now that you're over it. Daphne and I had a bet the night you got married to Gabriella: I won. It couldn't last; you two wanted different things.'

So, was he 'over it'? His wedding day, Kearney's words brought it all back; it was as though he had bitten into one of Proust's Madeleines that had the power of inducing instant recall. But it wasn't the early fumbblings of their honeymoon nights that came back to him but that last evening the day before she left and the divorce deposition.

The deposition, Anderson didn't want to go over that again even in his mind. He looked up at Kearney and wondered just how long his reverie had lasted. He nodded again. Kearney looked relieved that he was paying attention. Anderson imagined he wouldn't mention Gabriella again.

'I don't want to hear any more about this, John. You understand me don't you?'

Anderson understood. The Super couldn't care less about his sex life; he simply didn't want to hear about it.

Comben was in his office when he got back to it. 'So you've finally arrived,' Anderson said.

'I was out late on the job last night,' Comben said. 'Did you tell the Super about Simanovicz?'

'No.'

'Good.'

Anderson looked up at him. He had imagined Comben would be pleased if he had told the Super. He thought Comben believed that the case had been over as soon as they caught Julian.

'Fielding might have something to tell us,' Comben said.

Anderson waited.

'She's got some information on the American.'

'Anything definite.'

'I think so. Isn't she in yet?'

They had left the club at the same time, so Fielding didn't think it was too early when she rang the doorbell the next morning. Lesley did. Fielding could tell by the length of time she took to open the door and then by the smallness of the crack through which she peered. Still, pleasing Lesley was not the purpose of her visit. If the girl had been more open the night before, there would have been no need to worry her in the morning. And clearly, Comben wasn't there either. Warm pyjamas buttoned up to the neck spoke of a cold flat not a passionate night. Fielding was pleased about that; she didn't want to get the young man into trouble but, if he was in the way, so be it.

Lesley had to be very young: under twenty-five. Even without makeup the girl's skin looked smooth and taut and there were no signs of the late night before. Fielding hadn't used cosmetics until she was thirty but these days, nearing thirty-five, she used some discreet shading to the eyes and a modicum of face foundation. It created the right sort of illusion, which was that

she had no time for cosmetics but without the inevitable result of such a decision — blotchy skin with fine lines and bags under the eyes after a late night. Still it all came off at night whether she was alone or not and she imagined Lesley did the same but with more confidence than dim lights in the bedroom provided for Fielding herself.

Fielding followed the woman into her sitting room and they sat opposite each other. Fielding lent back into the cushion behind her and waited. The girl knew what it was about, Fielding had told her the night before that they must talk and she must know by now that Fielding knew she knew about Toby – now Mark – and Clarissa Downing.

‘It’s worse than you think,’ Lesley said.

Fielding raised her eyebrows — worse meant better in her line of work.

‘I know who Mark Turney really is.’

‘So do I,’ said Fielding. ‘I also know who you *really* are. What I want to know is why you didn’t tell me about him.’

‘So you know that my sister Patricia was murdered by Mark when he called himself Tony Adams.’

‘There was no evidence.’

‘So your lot in Watford said, that’s why I couldn’t see the point of telling *you* about Mark Turney.’

‘So what are you doing here?’

‘Keeping my eyes on him. He’ll make a mistake and I want to be there.’

‘If we’d known about him, we’d have been able to keep our eyes open rather better than you.’

Lesley smiled but without joy. ‘He murdered before killing my sister. You knew all about that but it didn’t help did it?’

‘What makes you think that?’ Fielding asked.

‘Not all policemen are tight-lipped. I know all about Sheffield.’

So Mark Wright had done a little more than he had owned up to. Still she couldn’t blame him. ‘I don’t see how telling us could do any harm.’

‘You’d question him over these murders and he would be warned. If he took off, I might not find him again.’

‘How did you find him this time?’

‘Kevin knew the sort of place I’d find him in. I suppose he told you.’

‘You know I spoke to Kevin Walker?’

‘We keep in touch.’

‘So, that’s why you started work at the club. You thought Mark would still go there.’

‘No, I knew he’d moved on as he had from other clubs. Anyway, I didn’t want him to know I was around. But it’s good money and the girls there could tell me what happened to him.’

‘So his marriage was lucky for you.’

‘Yes, now he’s stuck and I can keep tabs on him.’

‘Amanda?’

‘I met her at Clarissa Downing’s writers’ class. I left when we started to live together. I knew I could find out about Mark and Clarissa through Amanda.’

‘Is Mark her man?’

Lesley stiffened as though the idea was not only new but also repulsive. Fielding could see that the idea had never occurred to her.

‘I know she must have someone and that he’s married but I think she would have told me if it was Mark.’

‘Why? He would have every reason to ask Amanda not to tell *you* about him.’

‘No,’ Lesley said, ‘I don’t believe this. Mark has never seen me and I have never used my real name.’

‘Still, she hasn’t told you who she’s living with *has* she? Will you ask her now? She may tell *you* but not the police.’ Lesley was silent and Fielding let her stew a little. ‘You don’t see your parents much,’ she said.

Lesley looked up, startled as though she had forgotten Fielding was there. ‘I was never close.’

‘But you were close to your sister.’

‘Oh yes, we used to go around together a lot. I introduced her to Mark.’

So that was it: guilt. Fielding knew that a little guilt went a long way. She knew that Lesley would find out for her what she wanted to know. She merely had to wait. ‘You won’t keep me in the dark again will you?’ she said and then stood. Lesley said nothing and followed her to the front door. Her expression hadn’t changed since the spectre of Mark Turney making love to Amanda Clayden had crossed her mind. The force had failed her as she had failed her sister and Fielding felt the strength of her resentment.

Mark woke and the silence surprised him until he remembered where he was. There was always some traffic passing outside his bedroom window at home but here there was none. It was dark but Amanda had bought opaque linings for the curtains, so it might be light outside. He glanced across to his bedside table but he hadn’t yet bought his digital alarm clock from home, so he switched on his lamp and looked at his watch. He was late for work; it had been one of those nights — tossing and turning. There was one good thing about being on bad terms with Clarissa: he’d had a bed to himself each night, which he hadn’t got with Amanda.

Amanda stayed sleeping while he showered and made coffee and then let himself out of the

flat. Marrying a rich woman, sleeping with a young mistress they were supposed to be fun things and he had worked hard for them. But both women habitually slept on while he went to work: that was no fun.

He let himself out of the flat and walked to the corner of the avenue towards the Underground station. It had been an important street for him and he wondered whether Anderson appreciated his thoughtfulness. Both murder sites and the supposed murderer in the same short stretch of road — hadn't that make it easy for Mr Plod?

As he reached the corner, two cars came down the hill. Visibility was bad because of cars parked right up to the corner of the road and the drivers slowed to walking pace before turning into the avenue. He had a good view of both of the women drivers as they passed him. He recognised Lesley immediately. He stopped at the corner to see where she was going and saw her slow outside the flat; then she drove on, clearly looking for a space to park. The second car overtook her as she slowed for a second time. It was very early in the morning for Lesley to be making a friendly visit. Croupiers work into the early hours and rise late. What could possibly have brought her there so early?

His heart and his quivering limbs told him something bad had happened but he controlled them. He reminded himself not to panic; it hadn't helped in the past. There was at least one good thing: on foot, he was inconspicuous. Lesley certainly would not have noticed him since she had concentrated on avoiding parked cars and looking ahead for possible traffic and that widened his options.

He remembered his feelings when he had first seen her that night outside Amanda's old flat. It had to have been Kevin and he might have to kill the bastard – *afterwards* he might just do that.

He had moved Amanda out soon after the night he had spotted Lesley. It was a pity he couldn't have managed it before but it probably didn't matter. It was inconceivable that it was

all a coincidence: Lesley must have tracked him down. Amanda had never said anything and he had begun to assume that she had done as she was asked and not told anyone about him — even her flatmate. But maybe it was Lesley who had been quiet; perhaps she didn't want to alarm Amanda. It was obviously good for her if Amanda kept tabs on him, then Lesley would have him in her sights too. Although just what the skinny bitch could do he really couldn't think. Let them all imagine what they liked. They had nothing to pin on him.

But now Amanda was about to discover something about him she wouldn't like. Did it matter? Afterwards, though, if he stuck to his plan, would it matter then? Should he cut his losses and run? It wasn't a good thought. He had put effort and planning into the whole thing. To leave without a pay-off — that was unthinkable. He had run in the past but that had been because he had acted on impulse — it had merely been a fun thing to do at the time. He hadn't expected to get anything from it. Now it was different.

He walked back down the road and let himself in through the front door — quietly. Upstairs he could hear the two of them talking. Their raised voices meant they hadn't heard him come in from the street. He climbed the stairs and opened the door to the flat. They both turned their heads. 'Hello Lesley,' he said, 'I haven't seen you for some time. What a coincidence.'

'It's not a coincidence,' said Amanda, 'she's been trailing you for months, calling herself Felicity Galloway. Did you know she was my flatmate?'

Mark was pleased with the tone of Amanda's voice. It looked like she was sticking up for him. 'No I didn't,' he said to Amanda and then he turned towards Lesley. 'You know Lesley,' he said calmly, 'you'd do better to forget about me and get on with your own life. I didn't kill your sister.'

'I don't believe you Tony, or is it Toby or maybe Mark. You're a murdering bastard and the police are on to you.'

‘You’re beautiful when you’re angry’, the cliché came to Mark’s mind as he looked at her. She was a much better shape than her sister was. That had been no loss. ‘The police know all about me,’ he said. ‘I was interviewed several times and they cleared me.’ As he finished, he turned towards Amanda. It would be useful to keep her on his team for the moment at least.

Amanda walked over to him and nestled in the arm he stretched out towards her. They formed a small phalanx against the furious Lesley. She turned to walk out. ‘I hope you’re not going to tell more lies to the police,’ said Mark.

‘What’s the point,’ Lesley said, ‘they didn’t believe me last time. But you’ll make a mistake and, when you do, I’ll be there cheering. I hope you spend most of your life from now on behind bars.’

The slam of the front door confirmed in Mark’s mind that she wouldn’t be back. When she had gone he let go of Amanda and lent over the settee. His face fell forward and he hoped that Amanda could see the few teardrops that he had forced into his eyes. She came to him and put her arm around his waist. ‘I hope you don’t believe that bitch,’ he said without looking round, ‘I liked Patricia although I wasn’t in love with her. I would never have harmed her and I wouldn’t harm you.’

A ring on the doorbell stopped Amanda from answering but Mark felt he knew what she would have said.

When Lesley came out, Fielding stopped her in the road before she got into her car. ‘Well,’ she said. Lesley lent on the bonnet of her car and Fielding could see her chest move up and down fast. She wondered whether the girl would burst into tears.

‘You were right,’ she said, ‘it is the bastard. He *is* Amanda’s man and she won’t believe what I say.’

Fielding nodded. 'I know he's got away with it up to now but I've a feeling this is the end of the road for him.'

Lesley looked up. Fielding didn't enjoy the scornful look on her face.

'You mean like before, when Pat was alive.'

She drove off and Fielding walked over to the flat looked at the list of four names on the entryphone and rang. Upstairs she was able for the first time to see Mark in the flesh. Now she could understand why Stevens was so obsessed: the likeness was amazing. The man in front of her was the image of the photo that had been sent from New York.

Fielding showed them her badge. Amanda was the first to react.

'Are you going to harass him again,' she said, 'I thought you'd finished with that up at Watford.'

Fielding could see now why Lesley had been so upset. Amanda was on Mark's team and she was staying there. 'So you haven't been lonely while your wife has been away,' she said to Mark.

'Amanda and I are going to be together always. Not that it's any of your business.'

Fielding translated Mark's words in her own mind: 'always', meaning, 'together for the rest of her life, which may be very short'. She couldn't say it aloud it *was* after all defamatory. 'I agree it isn't any of my business — yet,' she said and then paused to allow the thought to sink in. 'I just called in because I wondered if you had any idea where Julian Simanovicz was,' she said looking at both of them.

'Is that the writer?' asked Amanda.

Fielding nodded.

'No we don't,' said Mark. 'If we did, we'd have told you. What possible advantage is there for us to keep him free?'

‘It’s only that a car like your own was seen near here on the day he disappeared.’ It wasn’t true but she wondered whether Turney would feel he needed to deny the implication. But he said nothing.

‘Are you mad,’ said Amanda, ‘do you think Mark would help him get away after he’d threatened me?’

Fielding nodded. She really had nothing to gain from the confrontation but she had needed to see Mark Turney for herself. Now she had and it made her a convert. Stevens, Wright and Fielding — they were lined up together now.

After she had gone, Mark took stock of the situation. On the bad side was that he had been tracked from Watford and maybe from Sheffield and Ludlow. He couldn’t believe that the police traced him solely through Lesley. On the good side, it appeared that Julian was still free. That was the best news. The old factory had seemed a good place to hide for a while but he never imagined that the boy could stay hidden for long before Anderson found him. But he hadn’t much time: it had to happen soon.

As he walked away from the flat, he smiled. It was clearly better to know what was going on and both Lesley and Fielding had helped him do that. But where was Clarissa? As her husband he surely had a right to know. At work, he made a phone call. The Superintendent was sympathetic. Mark got the impression that Anderson had gone too far. Had he been right about Clarissa and Anderson?

Fielding got back home before ten. She imagined she deserved a rest and spent some time in the bath before having breakfast. When she got in just before noon, there was an urgent note on her desk. Anderson wanted to see her ASAP. She had been out of touch for a bit and she imagined

Comben had too. Had something happened? She joined Anderson and Comben in the Chief Inspector's office.

'I suppose you have never heard of communication,' Anderson said 'keeping in touch.'

Comben looked at her as though he were doing the accusing. It looked as though he had said nothing about the night before.

'I hadn't thought until now that I was anything but on the periphery of your investigation,' she said. 'I'm here now.'

'Comben tells me you might have something?'

She had had a little time to prepare but, however she saw it, she couldn't keep Clive's name out of it. The two of them meeting up at the same place, Lesley Rathbone being the common link and then Mark Turney and Amanda, it made no sense to her yet. But the coincidence was too much and Comben was part of it. 'Has Clive told you about last night yet?' she asked.

'I haven't had time, I've just got in myself.'

Fielding could see by the prompt way Clive answered that he had also been doing some quick thinking. She left it to him to explain his part first. She wouldn't want to expose his thing with Lesley unless absolutely necessary but how else would Clive explain his presence at the club.

'We both met at a gambling club in town last night. That's why we were in late; those things finish in the early hours.'

Was that it? Did Clive imagine that would satisfy his boss? Fielding waited but she had no need to speak. Anderson continued to look at his sergeant expectantly.

'Felicity, Amanda's ex-flatmate works there. She told me she had some information.'

Fielding waited again. This was taking an age and she had no doubt that Anderson would get impatient very soon.

‘Well?’ Anderson said.

‘I interviewed her again yesterday but she had to go to work. She said she’d speak to me there.’

‘And what did she say.’

‘She told me about Mark Turney.’

It was time for Fielding to help out, so she did. ‘I’m sure that he’s the American. I traced him from Ludlow to Sheffield, then on to Watford and now Kilburn. Felicity is really Lesley Rathbone the sister of the murdered Patricia Rathbone from Watford. She believes Mark Turney alias Toby Langdale, alias Tony Adams killed her sister.’

‘But there was no proof and there’s no proof he is the American,’ said Anderson.

‘The FBI descriptions are so exact that I’m certain that Mark Turney is their suspect but, you’re right, we’ve no proof.’

‘I thought the American evidence did *not* include a detailed description?’

So Anderson had read the file, Fielding was surprised. But it did mean he was taking her theory seriously. ‘Stevens the American investigating officer sent a photo. It looks exactly like Mark Turney.’

‘How’s that?’

‘Stevens got the idea that the man looked like his twin and sent his own photo. The resemblance is uncanny. The only real witness in New York thought Stevens was the man who assaulted her.’

Anderson let the silence in the room last long enough to become oppressive. There was something he wasn’t being told. Why had Comben waited until Fielding turned up before telling his story? Why his reticence? Was this what they called teamwork?

It wasn't as though Fielding had much. All she had was a series of coincidences. Nothing linked Mark Turney to the two murders except Clarissa and her student writer — it would never get to court and it couldn't save Julian.

'We have Julian Simanovicz,' he announced. Fielding looked at him — puzzled. He knew what she was thinking. If they had him, why the mystery. 'His story's confused. I'm not sure he's the man. That's why I'm interested in what you've got to say.'

Anderson waited as Fielding took her time. He appreciated her caution, it was a sort of compliment to himself: she wouldn't want to overstate the case.

'We've got some evidence to suggest that Mark Turney is the man they are looking for in the States but not enough to be certain,' she said, then she stopped. Anderson waited. 'The pattern of the American murders is different but there are similarities,' Fielding continued, 'the American commits senseless murders which are pinned on others — so he gets off.'

Anderson interrupted. 'But this time there's no recent pattern for him to latch on to,' he said.

'Just because the others were senseless, it doesn't mean it wasn't him,' said Comben, 'the others might have been practice for the real thing.'

The three of them sat in silence for a minute or so. They had come to a hiatus and they all knew it. Soon the pressure to release or charge Julian would be too great and Anderson knew he could and would be convicted.

'I need time,' Anderson said, 'If anyone wants me, you don't know where I've gone. Is that understood? I need twenty-four hours. Can you do that?'

Fielding nodded. Anderson could see that she wasn't sure how to do it but he trusted her. 'You two work together on this okay.' They nodded and he was off.

Back at his flat, he unplugged all his telephone receivers and left his mobile off. It was time for silence broken only by the calm of Mozart. The next day would be soon enough to see to

Simanovicz and release Clarissa from her incarceration.

Fielding watched with quiet satisfaction as Anderson walked out of his office. She was in charge. It might only be for a day but she would make the most of it. 'So let's go and get him,' she said. Comben was on his feet in an instant. Fielding was just as eager to leave the station. They wouldn't want to be there that day. A great deal of shit from above might descend and they would prefer Anderson to be under it first.

'Wait a minute,' she said, 'there's something I must do.' She picked up the phone and dialled. 'George, Fielding here. My mobile's on the blink. It could be the battery. Can I leave it with you tonight,' she said and then after a short silence. 'No, I'll take a chance and keep it for today.'

When she hung up, she saw Comben looking at her quizzically.

'We can't have two out of service at the same time it will look suspicious,' he said. 'Shall I accidentally leave mine behind?'

'No,' she said, 'we might need both. If you're asked anything, just play dumb. Say Anderson put me in charge and you don't know where either of us is.'

They used Fielding's car but Mark Turney was not at work, nor was he at Amanda's flat nor at Clarissa's house. Then they collected Comben's car from the station car park so they could watch for him at both houses: Fielding at Clarissa's, Comben at Amanda's.

Chapter 11

At about four in the afternoon, Clarissa came home. Fielding guessed it had been authorised by Kearney, Anderson would never have agreed. She phoned Comben's mobile and told him the news, then she knocked on Clarissa's door. She had never seen anyone so relieved to see her before. Clarissa Downing was worried.

'I was surprised when they sent me home without an escort,' she said. 'I had to get a taxi.'

'This wasn't John Anderson's doing you know that don't you?'

Clarissa didn't know but she looked pleased when Fielding told her. 'I'll stay with you until Anderson can be reached,' Fielding said. Clarissa was duly grateful.

They had tea together and Fielding spent the next hour or so fending off questions about John Anderson's private life. Luckily, she hadn't been working with him when he had been married, so she didn't have to lie about that.

'I'm hungry,' Clarissa said at about six, 'Chinese takeaway?'

'My staple diet,' Fielding said.

'I expect Anderson cooks, don't you?' Clarissa asked.

'The station gossip says he does it very well,' said Fielding.

Clarissa paused with the receiver in her hand before dialling. 'Has he cooked for you?'

'Once or twice when I was his sergeant but it was all very proper,' she said.

'He doesn't like mixing business with pleasure does he,' Clarissa said.

Fielding wasn't sure whether she was asking a question or trying to establish his innocence. She kept a straight face and hoped she looked ignorant of what was going on.

Clarissa never ordered the meal. Before she could dial, Mark Turney walked in. He wasn't as surprised to see them as Fielding imagined he would be.

'So my complaint worked,' he said, 'Anderson couldn't keep you to himself any longer.'

‘What do you mean,’ said Clarissa.

‘I spoke to the Superintendent, he said he would do what he could to get you home and here you are.’

They both looked at Fielding and she felt that they must have a great deal to talk over. It was impossible for her to stay although she wanted to, so she sat outside in her car and waved back when they drove away later.

Back home, Clarissa felt frightened. John, she was sure, had a good reason to keep her safe in that flat and now she had been sent packing and there was no John around. She had no idea who had ordered it but it was a relief when Patricia Fielding arrived. They chatted a while and discovered that Fielding had been Anderson’s sergeant before Comben. She wondered whether the woman had been John’s lover as well but it didn’t seem so, although she wasn’t giving anything away. She learnt very little about John’s life that she didn’t know already. She couldn’t even find out whether Patricia knew about John and herself.

When Mark came home, she wanted to tell him to get out of her house. It simply wasn’t possible to ignore what had happened, now that there was John Anderson. What hadn’t changed was her marriage. Mark was having an affair that was certain but then she knew before as much about Mark’s infidelity as she had wanted to know. But now she felt differently: that had been the big change. But she couldn’t say anything with Fielding there.

When Fielding left, she had her chance but Mark seemed so pleased to see her and hugged her with such gentle enthusiasm that she couldn’t say it straight off. Then he took her out to eat and paid with his own money. They waved to Fielding, as she sat in her car, on the way out and the way back. Afterwards at home, Clarissa felt herself to be woozy and vulnerable and she couldn’t help thinking how very expert Mark was. There was no doubt that he was going to

make love to her. Clearly, he wasn't going to accept his dismissal easily.

She wondered how she would tell Anderson but then, of course, she wouldn't and anyway it might never come to that.

Afterwards she had to admit she enjoyed her husband. *This* time she expected him to stay with her but yet again she was disappointed. After his shower and without one word, he went out.

Normally, as soon as she heard Mark's key in the lock, she would be up and into his arms immediately he had shut the door, however late he had come. But now it was different. He had moved in while Clarissa was away and she had hoped it would be permanent, so Amanda sat squeezed into the corner of the settee and continued to watch the TV when he came into the room. He sat on the settee in the opposite corner but he was still near enough for her to smell his after-shave or body lotion or whatever it was. It meant he had freshly showered and that was unusual and suspicious. Clarissa had been sent home and she understood that he needed to see her but had that been all?

It unsettled her but she said nothing, although something bubbled up inside her and the effort of keeping it down made her face feel hot.

She knew *he* must know there was something wrong but he gave no indication that he was aware of it. He said nothing and watched as though he was trying not to disturb her. But she was not paying attention and was irritated by his pretence.

'Why are you so late?' she asked.

He turned to her and put his finger to his mouth. 'I thought you were listening,' he said.

She launched herself at him and would have slapped his face if he hadn't caught her hand. Then he grasped her other wrist and twisted her round, so that her back was against his side. She

cried out with the pain from her wrists and tears came to her eyes.

‘You’re hurting me,’ she said.

‘I know,’ he said.

Then using one arm to pin both her arms to her breasts, he lifted her with the other under her thighs and carried her into the bedroom. She tried to bite his hand but he moved his arm up under her chin so that she couldn’t do so. She soon found herself short of breath as the weight of her body pushed his arm into her neck.

He threw her on to the bed on her stomach and she lay there recovering as he fumbled with something she couldn’t see. Then he turned her over and rested his weight on her. She felt it useless to say anything. Then she saw what he had in his hands: the cords from their dressing gowns. They hadn’t done it before but they had talked about it and Amanda had said she wouldn’t like it but it didn’t seem to her as if he cared what she thought right then. He tied her wrists to the bedposts and then sat up. She was relieved, since her breathing was becoming difficult with him lying on her.

Up to then she had been frightened but, when he unbuttoned her blouse, removed her bra and caressed and sucked her nipples, she felt better. He was not after all an intruder who might rape and kill her. He had no need to rape and so no need to kill. He ran his fingers down her flank where he knew she was ticklish but her immobility and rising excitement meant it produced only a new increment of pleasure. She closed her eyes and imagined that he understood that she was signalling to him that her struggling was over and that he could do what he wanted with her. She had never surrendered to anyone like this before and there was still some residual fear.

But, despite this, she acquiesced as he manipulated her: he stripped her naked and then sat between her legs and pushed her knees up and, before she imagined she was ready, he thrust a

finger inside of her. She gave a half-hearted shout as though he had hurt her but he hadn't. He seemed to know before she did what she wanted and could stand. He thrust in and out of her with one finger and then another but left her clitoris alone, so she felt the pleasurable sensation of it without coming near a climax. Then he put a finger into her anus and she thought he must have used lubricant because it also slipped inside her easily. She had never before felt what she did then. His two fingers pressed against each other: one inside her vagina the other her rectum. She shivered and pulled desperately against the rope expecting any moment to feel pain but he kept her at a level of excitement that precluded pain and his fingers went deeper and deeper inside her.

Then he lay his head on her belly and licked her clitoris while keeping both his fingers active inside her. She soon climaxed as a wave of pleasurable sensation tinged with mild pain swept up and over her. She thought for a moment she would faint but, when he sat up and withdrew his fingers, she relaxed. Then he stripped and knelt over her breasts so that his penis was over her mouth. He bent it downwards and propped her head up with his hand so that she could take it into her mouth. She had done this before but only when she was above him. This time, with him over her, she felt him penetrate so far into her mouth and on to the back of her throat that she felt she might wretch or actually vomit. But, every time it seemed as if he might go too far, he withdrew. She sucked at him each time he went in and wondered whether he was going to come into her mouth.

But, before he came, he slid down her body, reached over to the drawer by the bed, took out a condom and put it on. Then he lifted her legs and placed his penis at the entrance to her anus. She was scared at what he might do and shook her head but he appeared to take no notice, although he made no attempt to force himself into her but stroked her anus with the tip of his penis. Then he placed her legs over his shoulder, cupped her clitoris, and moved the whole area

around until she was close to a climax. Before she came, he pressed into her and slid into her rectum. She felt only the slightest discomfort and then as he went deeper a different sort of pleasure crept over her until she came again.

When he came out of her he changed his condom and then undid her shackles. She lay as passively as if she were still tied and allowed him to turn her over and position her so he could come into her vagina from behind. She was used to the position and accepted his uninhibited thrusting while pressing back into him. They both came close together but she had never heard him cry out with such delight and triumph as he did when he eventually came.

Afterwards she noticed the redness on her wrists caused by her own struggles. She had constantly pulled at her bonds while tied and now found her wrists raw from the chafing they had received. But, snuggled up to him against his chest with his arms enclosing her as she was, she did not mind.

A little later, she wondered what would have happened had she objected more strongly to begin with. Would he have stopped and untied her? He hadn't waited for her consent but then she had been so passive that he could have been justified in believing she had tacitly given it. Had she been intimidated into accepting what he did, had he forced her? The problem was that she had enjoyed his power over her. She was sure that it was how he expressed his love and she had responded and would do so in the future. If this was all, it was okay. But was it? This was the first time, would there be more and different — worse?

They lay together for some minutes in silence. Amanda gripped him fiercely as though challenging him to break free. Then he surprised her.

'I'm staying the night,' he said.

'What about Clarissa?' she asked.

'She doesn't matter anymore.'

‘Why now?’ she asked.

‘I’m moving in with you whatever she says.’ he said.

They had never spoken about him leaving his wife. They had been together less than a year and Amanda felt it too soon to talk about it herself but she was pleased he had said something.

‘If that’s what you want,’ she said.

‘Do you want it too?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she said.

So it was decided. Whether Mark intended to divorce and then marry her, she didn’t know but marriage was too remote for her and too definite — all that could wait.

Amanda was pleased. She thought back to those Wednesday evenings and the way the old bag made up to Pete and Dave. It was disgusting but no more so than her attempted ownership of Mark. Still those Wednesdays were always a comfort to her: Clarissa’s hunger was some sort of indication that Mark was not lying when he said they were not fucking each other. Amanda didn’t believe she would have allowed that, if she had been convinced that they were.

She remembered how jealous she had been the time Mark had met his wife after the class. It was the night the two policemen had come. They had left as a group and, on the way out, she saw Mark in his car. She had almost walked across but stopped herself. Had anyone seen her hesitation? Then she had watched as he had got out of the car and kissed Clarissa on the cheek. Amanda had felt invisible and had turned away to walk quickly home. She had felt the same way that evening before he had come to her.

She wasn’t worried about money but she knew he was. She wished Clarissa was poor but she wasn’t. He wanted some of her millions and that meant he needed to keep her sweet. Just how was he doing that, Amanda wondered and then asked herself whether she wished to know?

There was a gap. Anderson knew what that meant. It was going to be a sleepless night. He needed more data before he could close the gap. He might lie in bed trying to sleep but he wouldn't be able to. He would still be trying to fill that gap however hopeless it was.

His bedroom was very dark. The curtains had special linings and there was a pelmet. On summer mornings it was necessary for him to have complete darkness to sleep until the alarm sounded. In the past, the ticking of his clock had kept him awake. Now he had succumbed to a quieter digital radio alarm but tonight even its quiet whirr reverberated in his ear, shattering the silence around him. He glanced over it was 00.15; the sight offended him. He had tried but without success to get a radio alarm clock with hands. But these were simply night thoughts. In the morning it would be better.

Chapter 12

The next morning Mark went home before work. Clarissa was still in bed and her daily had not arrived. He did pause for a moment at the foot of the stairs but it wouldn't do — and especially not with Fielding outside. He wondered whether she had been there all night. No, it was one thing to rid the world of friendless strangers but he would always be the first suspect as far as his wife was concerned. No, it would take more careful planning than that, especially now.

He went to the back of the house and took the key from its place by the back door. Then he drove to a parade of shops some distance away to get it copied. He wore a crash helmet while the man did the job. Mark thought it unlikely that he could be recognised. By the time he got back, Clarissa was awake and having breakfast. He didn't think she knew he had come there earlier.

'Have you got the key to the back door?' she asked. 'It's missing; Mrs Duggan couldn't get outside.

He took the original from his pocket, put it into the keyhole and unlocked the door. 'Now she can,' he said.

'Why did you take it?'

'I thought you might bolt the street door but you can't do that to the back door,' he said.

'You didn't come back last night anyway,' she said.

'No,' he said.

Clarissa stared at him for a few seconds and he stared back. 'Don't you think it's about time you moved out altogether,' she said.

'If that's what you want,' he said.

'I do,' she said.

Fielding rang Clarissa's doorbell once she saw Mark Turney drive off for the second time that morning. She had seen him go off at night and Comben had told her where he had been all night. It seemed the right time to get Clarissa's co-operation. They searched Turney's bedroom together.

Turney hadn't moved out completely and his passport was not hard to find. She took a selection of his clothes but doubted that they would tell them anything. The American passport was enough to be going on with, surprisingly it was in the name of Mark Turney.

She arranged to meet Comben at Turney's workplace. An office was made available for the three of them. Fielding assured him that her questions were unofficial and that no record would be kept. He seemed very calm and, as Fielding expected, had a plausible explanation. Yes, he was American and he had left the States because of harassment from the FBI. He had hoped for a calmer life over her but it hadn't turned out that way, so he had changed his name again.

'And again,' said Fielding.

'And back again,' he said, pointing at his passport.

They left him and took his clothes to the station. He agreed to that with disappointing alacrity.

When Anderson woke, he felt as though he had been groping towards an answer all night — a solution that lay, now, just beyond his consciousness. Julian was innocent — the feeling was still there — but how could he prove it. Before it had been a hunch and the situation with Clarissa could have affected his judgement, but this morning it appeared more concrete, as if the evidence were there if he only knew where to look.

He squashed his down pillow into the back of his neck and lay on his back. Then he moved his legs and took pleasure in the smooth feel of the Egyptian cotton sheets. The distraction

loosened some memory and he got the impression that he was on the edge of something. But it was no good lying there searching for it; like those names that come when they are least expected, this thought would too. He simply had to ignore it for a while until it wanted to be recognised.

The taste in his mouth drove him up and into the bathroom. Toothbrushing first, followed by a shower and a shave, then he dressed but did not yet put on a jacket. He wanted more time and was not yet ready to go into the station and face the inevitable queries about progress that would come down from above. He had had quite enough of Kearney for that week.

He went into his study and took the file that included Julian's confession – if his remembrances could be called that – from the middle desk drawer. He hadn't thought it prudent to leave it at the station while he was hiding Simanovicz's arrest from the Super. He took it into the lounge. This was not a desk job; he needed to relax and let his mind wander a little. He sat in a leather buttoned Chesterfield armchair and read the relevant documents. It was not a fat file. Simanovicz had not said a great deal. He apparently had little to say and what he had said sounded confused.

Anderson imagined that if Julian ever reached the witness stand he would agree to anything a good counsel would put to him. He would not make a good witness but, more than that, there was enough in his testimony to send him away. Anderson knew he could chalk up a success in this case right then if he wanted.

The peculiar thing was that the dream confession sounded more real than the one he gave while wide-awake. Stevens had tried to explain this; he assured them it wasn't unusual for hypnosis to produce greater clarity than straightforward probing. He was equally sanguine about Julian living in the same street as the two murder victims. If he was the murderer, Stevens said, it showed he really didn't want to get away with it; he wanted to be punished. There was always

that ‘if’. Stevens wouldn’t commit himself; proving Julian had murdered was not something for a psychologist, he said, it was Anderson’s job.

What stuck in Anderson’s mind was the coincidence of Amanda living opposite Simanovicz. Mark Turney had moved his mistress into the same road as Julian. It was as though he had wanted Julian to see her, as though he had wanted Julian to reveal himself. But, if he knew where the man was, why hadn’t he told them earlier? Why had he exposed Amanda to such danger? But then, if Julian was harmless, there never had been any danger?

Suddenly a small image came to his mind. It was the outside of the door to Julian’s flat. He needed to see it again. It took him less than ten minutes to walk to the house and let himself in from the street with Julian’s keys — something else he hadn’t yet officially lodged at the station.

He took the stairs two at a time and there it was: the door to Julian’s flat had a spyhole. Anderson knew what one saw through a spyhole; he also knew what happened when a person came up close and looked into the spyhole from the other side. He opened the door of the flat and looked through the spyhole. With the opposite door open Julian could have clearly seen into the flat.

Julian’s testimony was realistic; his account was accurate. He had seen the murderer through his spyhole that was why his view was distorted. Then he must have followed the man on foot and seen the body dumped in the park. It wouldn’t have been too difficult. If Julian had followed the car to the corner by the park, he could have seen it stop further down the road near Clarissa’s house. Julian had then walked down the hill himself but had arrived too late to see the murderer mutilate the body but he had seen the man go into a house by the side of the park. They had the wrong man and Anderson was certain now who the right one was.

He walked back home and drove to Mark’s office. He had left work for that day so he went to Amanda’s flat: there was no one at home. It was a long shot but Anderson then drove to the

park. Clarissa's house was empty. He wasn't there either. He turned back towards the park and wondered what to do next.

The light was fading but the last shafts of sunlight lit up the leaves that remained on the trees in the park. He needed to think so he walked into the park and watched the luminous yellows and oranges fade as the sun finally went down, then he drove home.

Clarissa had to be told but he was shy of doing so. He sipped his Early Grey tea and, for the moment, was uncharacteristically passive. He had now been out of contact with the station for over twenty-four hours. The Super would want to know what was happening and the Stoke Newington station needed some reason to hang on to Simanovicz. He couldn't continue like this. He needed to make some decisions.

First though he should speak to Clarissa. She had a right to know what was going on. If she was married to a murderer, he should tell her. It was dark by the time he arrived at the safe flat and there were no lights on inside and no officer outside. He rang the bell but got no answer.

He phoned Comben's mobile. 'Where are you?' he asked.

'Outside Amanda Clayden's flat. Mark Turney's inside.'

That was the good news, then his sergeant told him the bad news.

'Kearney wants to see you,' he said. 'He wants to know why the officer in charge of a murder case cannot be reached and he wants to know what progress you've made.'

'And what did you tell him?'

'I said your line was out of order and that you probably didn't know since your mobile was switched off.'

'And?'

'I said nothing about Simanovicz. But there is something else.'

Anderson waited expectantly

‘The Super sent Mrs Downing home.’

‘Why?’

‘Apparently her husband kicked up a fuss and she was getting bored.’

‘What’s Fielding been up to?’

‘She found Turney’s American passport and we both questioned him. Fielding’s outside Mrs Downing’s house now. We’ve still nothing definite to connect him to the murders.’

‘Stay where you are. I’ll relieve Fielding by the park later.’

He went back to his flat and phoned the Super at home and asked who’d authorised Clarissa being sent home. He knew what the answer would be.

‘I sent Clarissa Downing back home. Her husband made a fuss and it was best all round.’

Anderson felt hot and wondered whether his face was red. He was sorry the Super couldn’t see how angry he was. ‘This is my case, sir, why wasn’t I consulted or even told?’ he said.

‘You couldn’t be reached. I had to act on my own initiative.’

‘I suppose you know that she might be in danger.’

‘Look John,’ the Super said, ‘you’ve got too close to this. I’ve been looking at the evidence, there’s no reason to believe Mrs Downing is caught up in this thing. You’re worrying unnecessarily.’

Anderson knew what the man meant. It was his own involvement with Clarissa that had prompted the Super’s decision. He himself was to blame for putting Clarissa at risk. He rang Fielding’s mobile and arranged to relieve her later. He wondered how long they would have to keep it up.

At about three in the morning he drove round to the park. Fielding got out of her car to speak to him. He was pleased that she had been so alert.

‘You heard about Turney’s passport,’ she said.

He nodded.

‘He really is Mark Turney — born in Memphis thirty-two years ago. His story’s plausible, says he’s been harassed by Stevens *and* he was on flight from the States at the right time. I took some of his clothes back to the station but I don’t think we’ll find anything.’

‘Is he still at Amanda’s?’

‘Comben says so. We’ve been phoning each other every hour. He seems content to stay all night.’

‘Can he stay awake?’ Anderson was sorry he asked that.

‘He’s young, so, yes, he can stay awake.’

Anderson was even sorer about the answer but didn’t rise to the bait. He was sure in his own mind that he could stay awake. He would feel better inside with Clarissa but that wouldn’t be right in the circumstances. There had been too much talk already; he didn’t want any more to get back to Kearney.

Chapter 13

They went to bed at eleven and Mark dutifully made love to Amanda. His heart wasn't in it but experience saw him through. It wasn't long after he was back in bed that he heard the regular pattern of Amanda's breathing. He lay on his back so that he didn't fall into a deep sleep but for two or three hours dozed and woke intermittently. When the digital display on his clock showed '03.00' and not a second before, he set the clock in the alarm mode to '07.30' so that it wouldn't change. It was possible that she would wake when he got out of bed and he wanted her to think it was the right time for him to get up for work. He should be back by then to set it correctly. The alarm he didn't set. He didn't want that going off even if he wasn't back.

Then, before getting out of bed, he turned around several times to see what Amanda would do. Her breathing became more irregular and she turned towards him; her eyes briefly opened. He said he was getting up but, before he was out of bed, her eyes closed again. He didn't imagine she would remember him speaking.

Downstairs the back door to the flats opened into a garden bounded by a brick wall at its rear. Over the wall there was a disused cemetery, bounded on its south side by an old mews used now for light industry and garaging. Mark climbed over the first wall and walked over to the southern edge of the cemetery where he climbed a second wall and then scrambled on to the roof of a garage. It was the garage he rented under an alias. Neither the owner nor his agent had ever seen him; he had done it all by post and that's the way he paid the rent. The mews wasn't residential so no one was around as he climbed down on to the roadway and unlocked the garage door.

Inside the garage were his special things. He undressed and put on a waterproof overall plus hood used for de-contamination work; on his hands he wore latex gloves, on his feet a pair of cheap trainers — all new. The others he had dumped and burnt in a hospital incinerator soon

after use.

He ignored the ten-year-old car he garaged there and had used for the other episodes. This time he needed no car, so he took an upright bicycle from the wall brackets on which it was stored and propped it up outside. His watch told him the time was 3.30am. He checked in his pockets for the keys he needed and cycled off.

Half way down a road at right angles to Clarissa's street, a passageway led to a path behind the houses. He cycled up it and then along so that he was behind a house three doors down from Clarissa. He lent the cycle against a fence and used a fence post to lever himself up and then down into the garden. He did the same with the three fences that lay between him and Clarissa's garden.

Her back door had been locked and the key placed in its usual place. He unlocked the door and then placed the old key in the lock and shut the door. There would be no signs of a break-in but no one could guarantee that the back door had been locked. And no one – not even a distant locksmith – knew *he* had a spare. As soon as he walked out of the kitchen into the hall, he saw that something was wrong. It was too light; the porch light had been left on.

Ideally, he wanted to switch all the electricity off at the mains, so that, should something go wrong, he couldn't be identified. But, if he did that, then the porch light would go off. Was there someone outside watching? It was possible. But it was probably worth the chance so he turned the mains off and walked quietly upstairs. Clarissa's bedroom door was open and he gazed at her for a while without going into the room. She was very still and then groaned and turned before becoming quiet again. He stepped lightly across her carpet slid his hands around her neck and squeezed.

Her back was towards him and he pushed her head into the pillow as she struggled. He then laid his whole weight on her body to reduce her thrashing and waited. Every time he did this, he

thought back to Hitchcock. In one of his films there was a protracted struggle while Cary Grant aided by his leading lady killed a Russian agent. He had read that the purpose of the scene was to show how difficult it was to kill someone. But he had never found it so. The film was pure fantasy.

He supposed she was dead by the time he heard the doorbell ringing but he would have preferred to hang on for a minute or two longer. But the sound of footsteps along the side passage sent him across the room and down to the landing before he could satisfy himself. There was a figure between himself and ground floor but the man's attempt to switch on the lights showed that he was not seeing in the dark as well as Mark himself. He bundled past him and with a couple of sharp kicks broke through the man's grasp. He was out of the back door, over four fences and then away on his cycle with no further trouble.

He stopped off at the garage to change his clothes and take the discarded overall, shoes and gloves away with him in a plastic bag. This he left behind a bush in the cemetery before climbing over two walls to make his way to the back door of the flats. It was quiet and dark inside. Upstairs he let himself into Amanda's flat, undressed and joined her in bed. Amanda gave a half groan and turned away from him. He wondered whether she had been in the same position all the time he had been away. The clock he reset; its display then showed '04.27'.

Anderson had asked her to keep the porch light on and it did help. No one could open the front door without him seeing. It wasn't long after he had relieved Fielding that he felt distinctly sleepy. It had been a long time since he had done such work. He tried to remember the tricks they had all used to prevent themselves falling asleep. Smoking was always out; matches and lighters could be seen and maybe even the glow of a cigarette end. But then he no longer smoked anyway. Chewing sweets or peppermints? He thought not, he would feel sick in the

morning. Sheer willpower — that should not be beyond him. He had his duty to perform plus a personal interest, what else could he possibly need. Of course, if he could have relied on the Super's support, then a team of youngsters could have been doing this, not two senior detectives.

He hoped it hadn't been dozing but he had to admit that he hadn't seen it go off. But there it was: the porch was dark. He was out of the car and up the front path very quickly. The old-fashioned bell rang clearly in the hall when he pulled the lever. No one could sleep through that. He rang again but no lights appeared in the house and no sounds came from the hallway when he opened the letter flap. He ran down the side of the house and tried the door into the kitchen: it was unlocked and he was inside. There was still no sound. The largest room in the house was on the first floor front — that was where she slept. There was a glimmer of light that came through a hallway window from a street-lamp twenty yards down the road. He tried several light switches but none worked. He took the first flight of stairs two at a time.

As he climbed the stairs, he saw a dark shape move along the banisters on the first floor and then, as he reached the landing, a hand on the end of a stiff arm landed in his chest. It reminded him of his Rugby days at school. It was a good hand-off and cleared the way for the man as Anderson fell back into the corner a few steps down in front of him. The figure was almost passed him when he thrust out both hands and held tight on to the man's left foot. The man was heavy and his impetus took them both down the final flight. They landed in a heap at the bottom but the other man was quicker on to his feet and Anderson felt the air squeezed from his body as the man stamped on his belly. The man had reached the ground floor before Anderson managed to leap forward and grasp another foot. This time the man spun round and used his other foot to stamp on Anderson's neck. Anderson's grasp loosened and the man was away out the back door.

There was little hope of catching him but Anderson didn't intend to leave the house. He went back upstairs into the front bedroom. Clarissa was lying on the bed very still, very passive.

He drew the curtains and the light from the street allowed him to see the tell-tale red marks around her throat. She had been strangled like the others. He went across and felt her neck. For a moment he was not sure but the excitement in his own heart and the thumping in his chest told him he was right before his mind allowed him to accept it. She was alive. He turned her on to her back before phoning for an ambulance. Then his lips sought hers with a fervour not matched during their one night together. He inflated her lungs, felt for her heart and gave six fierce pumping movements with both hands. He had repeated the procedure six times before the ambulance men were ringing the bell. Once they had taken over, he called Comben.

Anderson felt sure it had been Turney but, at ten to five, it was far too late for Comben to catch him before he got back to Amanda's flat. He asked his sergeant to wait for him and soon they were both standing on Amanda Clayden's doorstep. Mark Turney answered the entry-phone. He let them in. Anderson looked at his bare feet as he opened the door upstairs. He was wearing a man's dressing gown but apparently nothing else. There were no marks around his ankles, no scratches, so there wouldn't be any signs of the struggle under Anderson's own nails. For the first time he cursed his habit of cutting and buffing his nails close to the tops of his fingers. Clarissa might have struggled, of course, but then any signs of a wife on her husband could easily be explained away. Even if she recovered, she might not have seen him and so might not be able to give evidence against him. He would get away with it.

Still, Anderson was sure it was Turney's ankles and firm muscular limbs that he had held and felt in the pit of his stomach. And there was something else, something that explained the paucity of material sent for forensic analysis. He had a memory of feeling shiny material and of seeing a fuzziness about the face that he had sensed even in the faint light. And the hands — no sense of flesh more like rubber. Turney had not been dressed normally and Anderson did not think they'd find those clothes in Amanda's flat. Turney had a hiding place.

Chapter 14

Kearney tried not to say so but it had been *his* mistake. One tactic would have been to blame Anderson for being out of contact for twenty-four hours but Anderson knew he couldn't do that. If he did, then it was tantamount to an admission that his decision had been faulty. No, his strategy was a combination of bluster and reproach about Anderson's secrecy. Why had he not been told about Anderson's suspicions? Why had he been left to suppose Simanovicz was the culprit? And anyway was Anderson so sure it wasn't him?

Anderson was not prepared to allow Kearney one iota of comfort. He sat and drew his chair up to Kearney's desk even before being asked to take a seat. Then he lent forward until Kearney, although he was a yard or so away across the desktop, flinched backwards. Finally, as though in consideration of his superior's feelings, Anderson lent back and relaxed into the leather of his chair before speaking.

'David,' he said using the Super's first name. It was the first time he had breached protocol since Kearney had been promoted over him — the Super would understand the significance. 'We've worked well together for a number of years and on my part I've been very happy at the arrangement. Your talents suit the job *you* do, a job that I could not do.' He paused. Kearney said nothing. 'One of the strengths of our arrangement is that you let me do the detective work. You let me run my cases and I believe we've both benefited from that.'

Kearney nodded. The corollary to what Anderson was saying did not have to be spelt out. This one intervention could have disastrous consequences for both their careers. Anderson could see that Kearney was waiting to see whether his old friend and colleague could get him out of the hole he had dug for himself.

'Maybe I should have kept you in the picture but in the past you haven't wanted that. And I've been happy to take the responsibility until I could present you with the completed case. I

have felt no need to burden you with doubts as I went along. That's what being in charge of a case means.'

For a moment, Anderson thought Kearney was going to intervene. He knew that the man must have been bursting with suppressed indignation as Anderson spelt out to him the basics of their arrangement but he deserved the lecture. It wasn't as though Anderson was doing it simply to enjoy himself – although he *was* getting pleasure out of the situation – it was a lesson that he hoped would produce results for the future. Anderson had no intention of working under a man who did not know his own limits.

'But now this has happened, you *must* be burdened with the details. First, I have Simanovicz. Comben and I arrested him and he is at Stoke Newington. We've questioned him and I have been doubtful about his guilt ever since. He was in custody when Mrs Downing was attacked.'

Anderson paused and was pleased to see Kearney's mouth drop. Then it was Kearney's turn to surprise him. 'I know you had Simanovicz; that's why I released Mrs Downing. The Super at Stoke Newington phoned me. What I *didn't* know was that you were so doubtful about him.'

'I see,' Anderson said, 'the old boy network came into play. Well, you understand now why I wanted Mrs Downing to be kept safe. What you don't know about is the work DI Fielding has been doing. She's discovered that we might have an American serial killer on the loose over here and we suspect that Mark Turney is that man.'

'So I released Mrs Downing into the arms of a murderer.'

Anderson nodded. Kearney had got the message loud and clear. The two men looked at each other. There was no need to spell out the consequences for Kearney if Clarissa died. Interfering with the conduct of a case was a serious breach of police etiquette. To get it wrong and cause a death was a resignation matter.

‘Have you arrested Turney?’

‘No,’ said Anderson, ‘we have absolutely no evidence to do so.’

‘He stands to gain from her death?’

It was hardly a question. They both knew what was at stake. ‘Yes,’ said Anderson, ‘millions.’ Anderson wasn’t sure about this, maybe it was just hundreds of thousands but ‘millions’ sounded better.

Kearney opened his mouth. Anderson imagined he was going to ask questions and make suggestions. He didn’t. ‘I’ve great confidence in you,’ he said, ‘I won’t interfere further.’

When he got back to his office, Fielding and Comben were poring over a detailed map of the area. They had marked a wide channel between Amanda’s flat and Clarissa’s house. Inside the area, a street was marked out in green.

Fielding didn’t look up as Anderson came into the office. She continued to look at the map but she did explain. ‘What we’re looking for cannot be far from both Clarissa’s house and Amanda’s flat. He had to have time to change and then change back between his journeys and we know he was back and in bed within forty-five minutes of the attack.’

‘And Amanda Clayden?’

‘She only woke up when I rang the bell,’ said Comben. ‘They went to bed at eleven and, as far as she knows, Turney was beside her all night.’

‘She doesn’t take sleeping pills?’ asked Anderson.

‘No,’ said Comben, ‘apparently they have better ways of getting sleepy.’

Anderson met Comben’s smirk without a smile. The boy must learn when to be serious. ‘What’s that?’ he asked, pointing at the green area marked on the map.

‘It’s an old-fashioned mews. There are a number of lock-up garages rented out there,’ said Comben.

Anderson looked at Fielding.

‘We should have search warrants very soon now.’

It was good to have Fielding on the case. It had been much more tiring doing all the thinking. Anderson felt very weary and decided to go home. ‘I must rest,’ he said.

‘Do so,’ said Fielding, ‘I had a good sleep last night. Mrs Downing has twenty-four hour protection and, if anything turns up at the garages, I’ll phone you.’

‘Where’s Simanovicz?’ he asked.

‘I asked Stoke Newington to take him back to his parents,’ Fielding said.

‘Who knows about that?’

‘Mark Turney doesn’t,’ said Comben.

The garage was not hard to find and Fielding had her forensic team at work within the hour. The car inside had been stolen and there was no way of tracing the bicycle. Fielding did not imagine that Turney would have left any evidence connecting him to the place. She felt sorry for Comben’s hangdog expression but she couldn’t allow morale to slump. The rest of the team she sent out to trace the owner of the garage and to get some sort of a lead on the tenant. Then there was the car. It would help to know when and where it had been stolen.

She took Comben to the hospital to look over the security arrangements. She was shocked to see Turney sitting by Clarissa’s bed. There was a constable in the room but there were too many vulnerable tubes and wires connecting the poor woman to the machine that kept her alive. Comben sat down beside Turney and Fielding went in search of the senior surgeon in charge of the case.

The doctor came back with her and banished Turney from the room. The constable was allowed to stay but only sitting at a distance. The surgeon gave a convincing performance about

his medical concerns to the supposedly grieving husband. Fielding had already thanked him in advance. It was his opinion, he said to Turney, that the presence of emotional relatives would spoil the calmness of the ward and was not good for the patient. Turney left: in a hospital, a surgeon's opinion is tantamount to law.

Fielding asked the Super for two more officers to be permanently at the hospital — one in the corridor outside the ward as well as the one inside and one other. The ward was on the first floor but an agile person could easily climb up from the enclosed garden outside. She stationed a third in the quadrangle. Kearney made no fuss about the overtime and the cost involved.

Turney spent the rest of the morning at the hospital. The site plans helped and were displayed everywhere for the benefit of patients and visitors. But there was not enough detail and he walked around the grounds to see for himself how easy it was going to be. Finding the incinerator was essential and, when he did, he found the place locked with no one on duty. It had been the same at Central Middlesex where he had disposed of his gear in the past; the facility was used intermittently and mostly at night when the smoke it emitted could not be seen by nearby residents. It would do nicely when the time came; he could easily force the lock and add his green plastic bag to the rest waiting to be burnt. No one would rummage around a pile of clinical waste to find his overalls.

Then he walked round the block where Clarissa was receiving intensive care. It was built in the form of a hollow square around a quadrangle. The wards were on the upper two floors with the service areas in the basement. He wandered as though lost at ground level and then took the stairs down. He wandered at will without being challenged. It was always a surprise to him that people felt safe in a hospital.

The imponderable was Anderson. If he could jostle him mentally into doing what was

wanted, then it would be easy. Before he drove north to Watford he fetched his gear from the cemetery and left it close to the hospital incinerator.

Back home in the light of day, Anderson slept. It was unusual of him to be able to do so but his exhaustion allowed it. When he woke it was two in the afternoon and he was angry with himself. He had dreamt and blamed himself as he dreamed. He awoke as tired as he had been that morning or so he thought. But once he got out of bed, he realised that his limbs, at least, did feel stronger.

Turney had managed to stay ahead of them: that was what irritated him. He had to put that right. It was time to take a jump forward and anticipate instead of reacting. And that meant getting inside the man and understanding what made him work. Clearly money did. This whole case had been about money — Clarissa's money. The first two murders had been blinds. Turney had used his previous experience to jump on Simanovicz's ideas as he had done before. But this time he was doing so for profit. The two dead women had never been important to him. They were as irrelevant to Turney as Patricia Rathbone and the other victims in Britain and the States. There was no motive for those senseless killings; all they indicated was Turney's psychopathic tendencies. But he had now found a way of making use of his apprenticeship for profit.

An idea came to him, a notion that needed developing. He needed coffee. Lavazza, of course, twice the amount recommended by the percolator manufacturers. For some reason, it appeared that the British had a taste for weak coffee or at least coffee-making machine manufacturers thought so. He was sure that in France or Italy the number of recommended scoops per cup would be greater.

He watched the water dribble into the top of the filter and drip out underneath a dark brown colour. He did not try to think. The coffee would bring his mind into focus soon enough. Any

forcing would distract the processes that were continuing beneath the surface of his consciousness.

Two cups later he was certain what Turney would do. He would be attracted by killing two birds with one stone — *that* was it. He was an economical killer. If one murder could serve two purposes that was what he would go for. Then he phoned Fielding's mobile and asked if Turney was still at the hospital. He had left four hours ago at least. Then he tried to phone Kevin Walker but his line was unobtainable. The local mechanics would look into it so they said.

The Watford police were alerted and a few hours later phoned back. Walker's lines had been cut and he had seen Mark Turney from his flat window. He was scared. Anderson understood. Turney was a frightening man especially if you had crossed him and he must know by now that Walker had been responsible for Felicity turning up in London. But if he was right, then being seen by Walker was only part of Turney's plan. He would want to see Anderson himself or at least Fielding or Comben. He would want his diversion to distract from the hospital bed in Camden.

Anderson phoned Fielding and told him about the Turney sighting. They agreed that Comben should go and that he should be armed. Anderson could not allow another murder to take place while he was looking the other way. It might be a feint on Turney's part but then it might not. Still he expected Turney back in Camden quite soon and he made his plans.

Turney made quite sure that Walker saw him and his car. Then he parked it across the street and waited. Kevin wouldn't want to come outside to get help but he couldn't phone the police from home, nor could he ask a neighbour to phone for him. Turney had cut most of the lines going to the block of flats. It was a gamble and it might not prove much of a distraction but he felt confident in Anderson. The man would eventually think of Walker. And, since Turney imagined

they regarded him as a wild animal, it was logical to imagine he would take revenge on Walker.

It was two or three hours later than Comben arrived. Turney stayed in full view of Kevin's window, then, as soon as Walker, with Comben at his side, pointed to him, Turney got out of the car and walked away towards the station.

There was plenty of time. Watford Junction to Willesden Junction took thirty minutes then the train to Hampstead Heath another thirty. Leaving time for connections, he should be at the hospital in less than two hours. He had a few minutes to wait for his train, so he phoned the Royal Free Hospital. Clarissa was stable but still under intensive care, so they said. Should he believe them? Probably not. He phoned again and asked for the private wing. Then he asked whether his wife had yet been transferred. There was enough delay before they said 'no' to tell him what he wanted to know.

At the hospital he ignored the main entrance and skirted around the back to where he could climb a low wall behind the incinerator. He was very fond of incinerators; they had helped him to rid himself of unwanted baggage in the past. By the side of the low brick-built building, under a bush, he had hidden the clothes he had stolen from a hospital cupboard earlier. He dressed himself in the nondescript green overalls that distinguished those employees of low status from the doctors and nurses. Absolutely no one would take any notice of him.

When he had worked at a hospital in the States, one of his duties was to collect waste from the wards and take them to the incinerator. There was a high turnover of staff in this section and, he supposed it would be the same over here, so his unfamiliarity should pass unnoticed — no one would be likely make any enquiries. It *was* possible that, later, some nurse would remember seeing a new face but it was unlikely that she would be able to recognise him again. He felt secure as he found a trolley in the basement and wheeled it into the Private Wing.

The policeman outside one of the rooms was enough of an indication for him. He left his

trolley and went downstairs to the outside of the building to work out how he could get into the room without being seen. It was difficult but he reckoned he could climb up to the window. To get inside, though, he needed someone to leave a window ajar. A trip back to the incinerator gave him what he needed. Inside and upstairs again he wheeled his trolley into Clarissa's room. The officer outside followed him in and the one inside watched him carefully. He wore a mask this time to collect the waste and his bin was marked with the words 'Clinical Waste'. The two men kept well away from him.

Before he left, he hid a cloth soaked in chloroform behind the waste bin. It would take a while but the officer inside would open the window eventually. As he wheeled his trolley past the bed, he glanced over at his wife. There were some wires attaching her to a machine but no tubes or oxygen masks. He had not done very well last time. This time it would be easier. A pillow should do the job as long as he held it there long enough. He couldn't imagine that she would struggle much or for long. All he had to remember was to disconnect the machine.

Then he went back to the incinerator and prepared himself. It was five o'clock and dark but he would wait until the night shift took over at six. The changeover traffic should lead to enough confusion to cover any noise he might make or, hopefully, Clarissa's machine if it sent out a warning when disconnected. If he could get into the room, then he reckoned that the officer inside should be reasonably easy to subdue with a cloth soaked in more chloroform. But he could afford to leave no traces. If he wanted to inherit, they mustn't be able to prove anything. Suspicions he could live with.

He wouldn't be coming from inside the hospital, so he could cover his face with a mask. All his clothing would go into the incinerator before he left the hospital grounds. Trainers were necessary for climbing but he had bought them from a multiple store and he had stolen the decontamination gear from a building site he had worked on at Watford. Nor was the garage a

problem: when they found it and they would – nothing inside would connect the place to him.

Now he had to think about what Anderson had been doing. Would he wait all night at Intensive Care? He thought not. He must know that tonight was the best night. At any time Clarissa might gain consciousness. Turney didn't imagine that she could tell them anything but it was just possible that she could. Anderson would know he couldn't take the risk. So, at some point Anderson would check on the Private Ward and it was impossible to know when. Turney decided that he would give him a good reason to stay put.

Access to the quadrangle outside the Intensive Care ward window was through a single door. But, at the semi-basement level, there were a number of windows that opened wide enough for him to get through. Turney walked around inside the building at the semi-basement level below the main hospital corridors. There was no one there at that time of the evening.

Through a window Turney saw him. The man Anderson had stationed was restless and, after a few minutes, he walked to and for in front of the wall under where Clarissa was supposed to be. Turney guessed that Anderson would be above.

Turney eased out of a window into a shadow. The moon illuminated part of the officer's beat and he crept around until he was crouching below the man's line of sight in the shadow at the end where the man would turn. But this time he didn't come that far. Instead, the man stopped and crouched down himself. Turney stayed very still. His right hand was in his pocket clutching a chloroformed cloth sealed in a plastic bag.

After two or three minutes, the policeman fidgeted and Turney knew he would be up quite soon. Turney prepared himself and the cloth. This time when he came close and turned, Turney rose as well and placed his chloroformed rag over the man's mouth as he pressed into his neck with his spare arm. Turney sank down with him on to the ground. He had wanted some noise to attract Anderson's attention but there was none; he would have to wait. It was eight o'clock.

Then Turney crawled back through the window but did not attempt to close it. He walked to the far end of the corridor and waited. It was half an hour before Anderson came out on to the balcony above and shouted. Then he came down the staircase that served as a fire escape into the garden.

Turney imagined that he would have thirty minutes at least to do what he had to.

Anderson worried about his decision. The hospital had wanted to free an expensive bed and, though he could have resisted, it appeared to fit in well with his strategy. Moving Clarissa to another ward – now she was fit enough – seemed to be a sensible safety measure. If there had been a struggle in the intensive care ward, Clarissa could have been harmed while they overpowered the man.

But then there was the unscheduled visit to her room in the Private Wing. It was easily possible that Turney now knew Clarissa was there and that had meant splitting his forces. And it had meant moving Clarissa once more despite the hospital's objections. And then there was Fielding — that was a worry too.

Every half-hour he checked round by phone and then at about eight Wilkins didn't answer. He climbed out of the window on to the fire escape and shouted. There was no answering call and downstairs the smell of chloroform told him why. There was an open window but no sign of Turney. He alerted Fielding and then trotted through the hospital grounds towards the Private Wing.

Chapter 15

Turney looked up and saw one window illuminated from inside. He was also pleased to see from the angle of reflection of the light that the window was ajar. He climbed up a drainpipe and then looked in through the window; a uniformed officer sat across from the bed, which he could not see. A strut held the window partly open; if he could manage to lift it off without being heard, he could probably be on top of the man before he could raise the alarm. It was a chance he had to take.

He was waiting for the officer to show signs of tiredness, when Anderson came into the room. That was enough; he began to slide quietly down the drainpipe. He would have to try another time — if he ever got another chance. Then he heard a woman's voice from above and stopped. He heaved himself up and saw that Fielding was in the room with Anderson. She was dressed in a hospital night-gown. Turney understood immediately what had happened: Anderson must have expected him and put the policewoman in the bed instead of Clarissa. He had not been as inconspicuous earlier as he had hoped.

Down on the ground, he slipped out of his outside clothing. Then, dressed in hospital greens, he went into the Private Wing through the basement and walked up the internal stairs until he was on the right floor. He looked down the corridor so that he could see the door outside of which sat a uniformed policeman. He was in time to see the three police officers come out of the room. He heard Anderson send Fielding — now dressed — and the two uniformed officers arrange a search of the grounds. Anderson then went into another room across the corridor from the first.

Now Turney knew where Clarissa was and, better still, there was no one outside her room. He walked along until he was beside her door and glanced through the glass panel set into it. Anderson had settled himself into a chair opposite to the bed half way between the door and the

window. Turney appreciated his caution — he wouldn't want to be surprised from either direction. Then Turney put on a surgeon's facemask and crouched below the level of the window before reaching for the door handle.

The light went off almost immediately after Anderson heard the door open. Then time slowed. He wondered whether he could honestly say he recognised Turney in the half-light with a hospital mask over his face. And if he did, whether it would stand up in court. Before he could decide, he was thrown to the floor and felt the sweet smell of chloroform engulf him. It was tempting to give in to its charms but deep down he knew that Turney could not allow him to live. A jury might believe his identification. Now he had *two* very good reasons for fighting.

He relaxed and, because the chair was half under him, his body tipped over. Turney rolled with him and couldn't resist the momentum as Anderson continued the roll until he was on top. Turney no longer had his weight to keep the rag in place and Anderson lent back far enough so that Turney had to stretch to reach him. Anderson knocked Turney's arm aside and breathed in fresh air — if dry hot hospital air could ever be fresh.

Then Anderson made a grab for Turney's mask but he shouldn't have done so, because it gave the man time to throw a punch at his face. Anderson jerked back to ride the blow and this gave Turney the opportunity to push him aside. Turney was quickly on to his feet and Anderson felt the power of the man's legs yet again as Turney kicked him in the ribs. But, just like last time at the house, his feet in trainers couldn't do too much damage and Anderson rolled aside and was up on his feet as Turney launched himself. The two men landed on top of the bed and Anderson felt Clarissa squirm beneath him.

On another occasion, Anderson would have been pleased to feel signs of life coming from the woman. But the pressure of two men on top of her made him think that her revival might be

short lived. He grasped Turney and rolled with him on to the floor. Turney was on top and heavier. Anderson felt the breath being squeezed from him and then felt his chin forced upwards by Turney's head. He tried to force the man's head away with his hands but then had to grasp Turney's wrists as the man's hands encircled his unguarded neck. Turney used his weight and his head to push Anderson's chin up, so that he could dig his fingers deep into Anderson's windpipe. Anderson began to lose hope.

Then, just as Anderson felt he was about to lose consciousness, Turney jumped up and away from him and was across the room and out of the door before he could recover. Over him stood a shape and, when he regained proper vision, he saw it was Clarissa. She fell on top of him. He helped her back to bed and called for a nurse, then he called Fielding on her mobile.

As he ran, he felt with his right hand over his left shoulder. He didn't seem to be bleeding much, so Clarissa had not hit an artery. Turney knew that must be so otherwise he would be dead. An inch or two higher and to the right and he would have been badly hurt but luckily for him, she had only hit the muscles above his shoulder blade. It hurt but he made himself hold the scissors in place to reduce the bleeding. He wouldn't want his own blood spattered in a trail leading from her room.

He was thinking fast. He needed time to dispose of his overalls and the scissors and dress in his normal clothes, then there'd be nothing but the wound to connect him with the hospital. That was the main problem. It would take him longer to get home than Anderson or the others, so they would be waiting for him. He had to have some story for them. He needed Amanda. He needed her to do something for him and he needed her to get away from the flat before the police got there.

But first his clothes. He changed and then bundled everything else into a green bag, levered

open the door to the incinerator and placed the bag under the pile already there. His shoulder hurt but it hadn't stiffened up yet. The adrenaline was flowing and that kept him going, even though the blood began to flow with the effort.

He phoned from a call box a hundred yards or so down the road from the hospital. She answered and he was in time: the police had not yet arrived. He had a chance but it was a slim one. She was surprised at his request but said she would do as he asked and meet him outside the gates to the cemetery. She was waiting when he got there.

She was holding the kitchen knife in her right hand and, before she could ask him anything, he got hold of her hand turned his back to her and dug the blade through his jacket and shirt into his wound. He reckoned he knew just where it was. He nearly fainted. Amanda screamed and tried to withdraw her hand from the blade but he kept a firm grip until the blade penetrated. Then he let go. He turned and saw Amanda's horrified face before he dropped to the ground.

'Have you got a handkerchief,' he said, 'I'm bleeding.'

She rummaged in her pocket and came out with a small dainty cloth. 'That will have to do,' he said and took the cloth and pressed it firmly below his neck with his left hand. Then he grasped her around the waist with his right arm and pulled himself upright. They walked off with him leaning towards her with his right arm around her shoulders. She staggered under his weight but steadied herself after a few strides.

'Better put the knife in your pocket,' he said.

She hadn't said a word yet and Turney could see she was stunned, so he opened the pocket of her coat wide so that she could drop the knife into it. Then she spoke. 'Why?' she asked.

'I wanted us to be together always,' he said. She looked puzzled, so he went on. 'I've done something bad or tried to but it was for us,' he said.

'What did you do?'

'I tried to kill Clarissa.'

'Did you succeed?'

'No thank god,' he said, then he staggered a little as though about to faint and Amanda took more of his weight. The trip round the cemetery back to the flat took half an hour. Anderson, Comben and Fielding were waiting for them when they arrived.

Fielding drove Amanda back to the station. Anderson wondered whether to take Turney to hospital but the man seemed lively enough, so he got Comben to take him back to the station in a police car. He didn't want to use his BMW and have the man bleeding all the way on to his leather upholstery.

No one was to speak to them on the way and they couldn't speak to each other. Anderson wanted this to be played by the book. He did not intend to allow Turney to get out of this.

At the station, he got the doctor to look at his wound. With a corpse, it would have been easier to discover what sort of sharp instrument had caused the wound but the doctor was more interested in stopping the bleeding than carrying out a forensic investigation. Still, Turney could hardly claim that he had cut his shoulder shaving. The blade had penetrated an inch into him. Anderson wondered what sort of story he would concoct to explain that.

Amanda seemed shaken and Anderson allowed Fielding to question her. She seemed confused and all they found out was that the blood on the knife in her pocket came from Turney. Outside the interview room, he discussed it with Fielding.

'If she stands by him, we haven't got enough,' Anderson said.

Fielding looked puzzled. 'But you saw him,' she said, 'the two of you struggled with him.'

'Mrs Downing is too ill to be a good witness. And my testimony will be made to look like jealousy. Remember he had a mask on all the time.'

‘I see,’ said Fielding, ‘so he’ll say he had a fight with Amanda and she stabbed him. His wound had nothing to do with Mrs Downing.’

‘Quite and, if she backs his story, he’ll get away with it — probably.’

‘But you and Mrs Downing — no one will say anything.’

‘In court they will and remember Turney already suspects something happened between us. No one’s going to risk their career to dig me out of a hole.’

Fielding wondered whether to tell him that she would but maybe he wouldn’t like that. She said something different. ‘Let her go. No, even better, let’s get Lesley Rathbone to pick her up and take her home. She’ll be pleased to do so once we tell her what has happened.’

Chapter 16

He came back from the bathroom and slipped under the covers. Clarissa turned and they hugged each other. Anderson waited patiently for Clarissa to break away. His marriage had taught him not to be the first to slip out of an embrace. Now they were barely touching as he lay on his back waiting for the right moment to turn, switch off his table lamp and search for sleep. She spoke and, in a moment, he was wide-awake.

It was unusually tactful of her to wait for the right moment. Anderson had soon learnt that, as an independent woman, she had long since given up pandering to male egos. It had to be something unpleasant but nothing serious enough to row over. So, she had brought it to surface at a moment of special intimacy.

Anderson appreciated her timing. It was not too soon, which would spoil the exquisite pleasure that pervades a couple after sex and persuades them that they have merged and are now one. But it was not too late; reason had not yet resurfaced and shattered the illusion of oneness. He turned his head. She kept her eyes on the ceiling.

‘Will Mark go to prison for a long time?’ she asked.

He lent over and ran his fingers over her neck. It was still red and sensitive and even his light touch caused her to flinch. He wanted to show her that he understood that Mark’s release would be an imprisonment for her; a confinement defined by the man’s ability to reach her and harm her. But what could he say. ‘We’ve a meeting with the CPS tomorrow,’ he said.

She turned towards him. ‘CPS?’

‘Crown Prosecution Service,’ he said.

‘What’s the meeting for?’ she asked.

Anderson took a deep breath. She hadn’t yet found the courage to step inside her own home. That was why they were in his flat, in his bed. What he had to say would not be pleasant. ‘It’s

the CPS who decide whether to prosecute and, if so, what the charges would be.’

Clarissa raised herself on her elbow. He could see that his words had shocked her. Fear, he had seen its signs many times: the special whiteness of the skin, the glistening of sweat suddenly released and the fine quivering of muscles.

Her free hand clasped her neck. ‘Are you saying he might be set free?’

‘It’s possible.’

‘After trying to kill me and all those others.’

‘It’s the lack of evidence. I’ll do all I can but it’s still up to them.’

Clarissa slumped on to her back. ‘We both recognised him in the hospital and surely the Clayden girl won’t defend him now?’

‘You were sick and Mark was masked. They may not believe that either of us could identify him to the satisfaction of a jury.’

‘And Amanda?’

‘Mark says he was about to jilt her. A jury might believe she’s lying about the knife episode.’

‘Forensic evidence? There must be some of that to connect him to us and maybe some of the others as well.’

‘No, he destroyed everything that might have incriminated him. We’ve got no forensic evidence.’ Anderson wondered when the questions would stop. Each one when answered sent a tremor through his lover. Each answer made her clasp her neck. Then her left elbow slid away from her and she collapsed back.

‘There’s something else,’ she said.

Anderson waited.

‘My solicitor thinks I should sue the police.’

Anderson had no need to ask why.

‘I know it was not your decision, so I hope it doesn’t embarrass you.’

‘It would be better if you didn’t do it before Mark’s trial, if we ever *do* get him into court.’

Clarissa turned again. Anderson could see she was puzzled.

‘What difference would it make?’ she asked.

‘Kearney knew about us. He made the decision to send you home to avoid scandal. If we shovel dirt on to him, he might do the same to me. He might even decide not to back me in the case against Mark.’

‘So that’s the way it works,’ she said.

‘Yes, that’s the way it works. Mark already suspects that there’s something between us. It might come up at trial anyway. It wouldn’t help.’

‘And tomorrow?’

Anderson had thought about that. Kearney wouldn’t mention it; it wouldn’t help him. Fielding and Comben? Of course not and not only because of loyalty to him. They wanted Turney behind bars as much as he did. But where had the gossip stopped?

They had decided that three of them would make the case. Anderson as officer in charge, Kearney to ensure they knew he was fully behind his man and Fielding to present the American side of the case. The files they all carried were thick, too thick for Anderson’s comfort. His own contribution had been fulsome. It had been example of trying to cover up a lack of hard evidence with reams of circumstantial nonsense. Then Fielding had added to it. It might just work in court in front of a jury but Anderson knew that it wouldn’t work here.

Anderson admired Fielding’s judgement. She had thought about presentation, as he had, and was wearing a suit with a skirt, a jacket with wide power-shoulders and a discreet amount of

jewellery and make-up. She had even phoned him to find out what colour suit he would be wearing. He had said grey; she was in dark blue. Kearney as the senior man had allowed himself a touch of frivolity: a bright tie. Anderson had a waistcoat to show solidity.

He wondered whether it was Kearney's influence that had got them a second chance. He couldn't believe that it was the public's safety that had made the difference. They had been summoned to the CPS headquarters and it was the Director's deputy who was sitting at the head of the table. Anderson had met him before but years ago, when the man did this sort of thing regularly before his promotions. Obviously, he felt this case was something special. Next to him were a man and a woman Anderson had never seen before. They were much younger. Clearly, it was their case and Anderson supposed they had rejected it.

Anderson noticed that apart from the thick files he had passed on to the CPS each of the three had a thinner file. Did it contain a distillation of his own overblown report or was it something else? Either way it didn't look good.

The three of them sat together on one of the long sides of the table, Kearney nearest the Deputy Director, Anderson next and then Fielding. Opposite the two senior police officers sat the two younger prosecutors. There were introductions but no pleasantries. The weather was not mentioned and there were no polite enquiries about families or wives. Anderson knew that Kearney and Matteson had known each other for years. He even had the suspicion that they went to school together. Perhaps that was why they were allowed this audience. But whatever connection the two men had, was not revealed by their initial exchanges.

Matteson spoke first. 'There are one or two matters I want to clear up first before we get down to the main agenda,' he said.

A committeeman, the word came easily to Anderson's mind.

'Is this meeting to be minuted?' asked Kearney.

The question seemed to surprise the prosecutors. The woman had a pencil and pad at the ready. Anderson could see a heading already in place.

‘As you can see,’ said Matteson, indicating with the upturned palm of his left hand the young woman introduced to them as Miss Joanna Smythe.

‘You won’t mind then if we do the same.’

Matteson’s nod was curt rather than affable. Fielding reached inside her handbag for a pen and pad. Anderson saw that Kearney might want to cover himself and the station should anything go wrong but that would be cold comfort to Clarissa. It was looking much worse. This whole thing could be a charade set up by Kearney to assuage his troops. He might know already what the decision was going to be.

Matteson continued. ‘I understand that Mrs Downing was released from protective custody the day before she was attacked. Was that her own choice?’

Anderson answered before Kearney. He wanted to show willing even if it was hopeless. If he tried to protect Kearney then he could expect the same from his superior. ‘Mrs Downing was very bored. She wanted to get home and back to work. She’s a writer.’

‘So she asked to be allowed to go home?’

There was no way to avoid it now and although Anderson was willing to continue, Kearney interrupted him.

‘I sent her home. I knew Simanovicz our suspect was in custody and I thought it was safe.’

‘But it wasn’t,’ said Matteson. ‘You know she might sue?’

Kearney didn’t know and Anderson had not thought to tell him.

‘No,’ said Kearney.

‘But I understand Detective Chief Inspector Anderson was in charge of the case. Why was it left to you?’ asked Matteson.

'He could not be reached,' said Kearney.

Matteson glanced at Anderson.

'My home phone was out of order,' he said.

'You have a mobile instrument, haven't you?'

'I switch it off at home.'

'Well we'll leave that to Mrs Downing's solicitors shall we. I'm sure they'll have a great deal more to ask but it really isn't our affair. The more important question is Turney's allegation.

'What allegation?' asked Kearney.

Matteson turned to his left and Chandler spoke for the first time. 'Turney's solicitor has alleged that his wife is having an affair with a police officer and that is why he's being persecuted.'

'He's a murderer,' Anderson said, 'and that's why we're trying to put him behind bars. There is no other reason.'

'Quite,' said Matteson, 'but it's the impression we make on a jury that counts. I'm not going into court and made to look a fool.'

'Then let someone more keen do it,' said Kearney.

Anderson was impressed. It looked as though Kearney had some steel about him. He was beginning to fight. If Turney was let out and killed again, as he would, then Kearney was not going to be blamed this time.

'I meant I'm not going to allow the department to look foolish,' said Matteson.

'We're all going to look very bad indeed if Turney gets out,' said Anderson. 'The question is not whether Turney is locked up. It's whether he's locked up before he kills again. You've all read the evidence. Is there anyone around this table who doesn't think Turney is a violent serial killer and a menace?'

‘That’s hardly the point,’ said Chandler.

Anderson didn’t let him continue. ‘Oh yes it is. What isn’t important is whether you get egg on your face. We’ve got to have a go and try and convict Turney. *I* certainly won’t sleep in peace if we let him go and he kills again. The question is will you?’

‘And do you think DCI Anderson that you’ve done all you could to bring this man to justice?’ replied Chandler.

Anderson knew what he was insinuating. He could not allow it to pass. ‘Can we go off the record for a moment?’ he asked looking at Matteson. He nodded and both the women put down their pads. ‘You may think I’ve made a mistake by getting involved with Clarissa Downing but remember this: unless I had, I wouldn’t have had my suspicions about Turney. She would be dead by now and Turney would be a millionaire.’

‘Still,’ said Matteson, ‘it doesn’t help the case. What have we got that would prevent a judge from throwing it out?’

‘Amanda Clayden’s evidence,’ said Fielding. It was the first time she had spoken and her clear firm feminine voice brought the men back from the brink. ‘I take it that we *would* all like to put Turney away. And I believe the best way to do this is to work together.’

It was a refreshing counter to the belligerency that had swept over the table and Anderson was thankful for it.

‘Unfortunately, we’ve had a number of high profile failures in the department recently. The Director is keen not to have another fiasco.’ Miss Smythe matched Fielding in tone, although her accent was several points up the class scale from Fielding’s. She continued. ‘Is Miss Clayden going to make a good witness? She’s an adulterer, she’s young and pretty which can work both ways and Turney alleges that she’s lying because he jilted her. A woman scorned and all that. It’s not a good list.’

‘Turney’s account isn’t credible. Why break up with Amanda outside a cemetery three hundred yards from the flat they share? Why phone her and ask her to bring a knife?’

Smythe continued. ‘We can’t prove Turney asked her to bring a knife but we do know about the phone call and we do know it was made at a call box near the hospital.’

The two women had managed to bring the discussion back to the nitty-gritty of the evidence and Anderson could see that they were enjoying their limelight. It was a friendly sparring. Smythe was trying to find chinks in Fielding’s argument but hoping not to.

Smythe continued. ‘In my mind it depends on DCI Anderson. Miss Clayden’s evidence is neutralised by Turney himself — I’m sure he’ll make an excellent witness; psychopaths often do. The question is, Detective Chief Inspector, can you convince the jury that you recognised Turney and can you do it when the defence starts throwing mud in your face?’

‘Yes I can,’ said Anderson.

There wasn’t much either side could say after that and there was a full three minutes of silence. Anderson continued to look hard at Matteson who looked down at the table and polished the space in front of him with his fingers while they waited.

All six got up without any formal end to the meeting. Anderson looked around him. It wasn’t a room with the patina of history about it. Modern, with low ceilings, cushioned vinyl floors and lots of diffused lighting — it spoke to Anderson of pragmatism and a lack of principle. Bad decisions would be taken in such a room. Defendable decisions that guaranteed pensions and steady promotion but decisions that gave little hope to those outside. Anderson felt a wave of pessimism flow over him.

They left. It was up to the Director, Matteson said. Kearney was not hopeful either.

Chapter 17

Turney felt as if he were emerging from a crystalline state. It was as though he had been frozen to preserve his body until a cure could be found for his disease. Well the disease had been short-lived and the cure miraculous: he was free.

He hadn't faced the possibility of defeat. He had no idea what would happen to him if he was forced to spend years inside prison. He had thought about it. He had known it was more than likely to come and often he had thought it would be a peaceful place. But now there was so much to do and now he had the chance to complete his task.

He went back to the flat. She had left, naturally she had left but he would find her. It wasn't so much her rejection; it was more the treachery of it. Lovers – especially women – should be loyal. Why else did the law prevent wives from giving evidence against their husbands? And they would have been married had he got rid of Clarissa. No, it was clear that she had been in the wrong to give him up and his freedom did not make it right. And then there was Kevin. Men should stick together, everyone knew that. No, it was clear that Kevin had been in the wrong too. Clarissa was unfinished business and he hated to leave a task undone. 'Stick at it' isn't that what his father always said?

He would be watched, of course, so he would take his time. The police had to do their job and he felt no animosity towards Anderson. He wasn't the brightest of men but he didn't hold that against him. American cops were no better. No, he would leave Anderson alone as long as Anderson left him alone.

First, he had to look after the money side. He needed to buy time and he had no job. There was an officer on duty outside Clarissa's house, so he forced a window at the back. Inside he found the key to the side door. The back way over the fence that he had used before would come in useful again.

Bits of jewellery, video and Hi Fi equipment he could carry over the fence so he took whatever was portable. He knew she wouldn't be back in time to notice the loss until it was too late. It was a treasure chest that he could raid intermittently for some time. Her laptop was still there and so were the PC, carpets, original paintings and he supposed much else that was saleable. Given time he could manoeuvre much of it over fences and on to the street.

He knew where she had gone and he knew where Anderson lived. For a day or two he would hang around outside, so he could be seen. That should keep the great detective busy for a while. Kevin would be the first. Would he have run already? He thought not. Kevin would know that he could trace him and that he would be persistent. He would stay where he was and hope that whatever precautions he took would work.

Building sites were good places for 'accidents'. Kevin's flat would by now have all sorts of security devices fitted but building sites were different. He allowed Clarissa a week of looking at him through Anderson's top floor window before taking the train to Watford.

It was a surprise to Anderson that, of the two women, Amanda held herself together best. Clarissa refused to move from his apartment and couldn't sleep without pills once Turney began to stand outside. The doctor had left him in charge of her medication and Clarissa accepted that with surprising docility. They both knew she was hanging on desperately. He knew he had to do something even if it wasn't strictly legal and he was forced to have a word to a uniformed sergeant.

But Turney disappeared from the front of the flats before the any action could be taken. It had been a long shot anyway. They couldn't have done much to Turney even if they had arrested him and taken him down to the station. Anderson knew he shouldn't have involved others in the force but he was becoming desperate. Soon he would have to decide how desperate. His respect

for 'law and order' had taken a battering. If the authorities couldn't protect the innocent citizen then he would have to take the law into his own hands. It was not a phrase that he had any liking for. 'Taking the law into one's own hands' had been a recipe for corruption in the force. Was that the way he was going?

Amanda Clayden was back living with Lesley Rathbone. Fielding had been to see her and reported to Anderson that she was being careful. But Anderson wondered just how careful that was and whether it was careful enough. He thought he had some idea now of Turney's mind. Most murderers want to get away with it. This was what protected their potential victims but he saw Turney as being different. Consequences didn't seem to matter to him. He might wish to keep his freedom but it didn't seem to Anderson that it was this that was most important to him. He was probably reconciled to being in prison at some time.

Anderson imagined that he would be inexorable in carrying out unfinished business. His thoughts constantly harked back to the meeting with the CPS. If the law couldn't stop him then someone must.

A tour around the town for one morning was enough to find Kevin. He had expected to have to return another day but his chance came earlier than expected. While the crew went off-site for a break he got in through a wire fence at the back and climbed to the top floor. He had seen Kevin up there and he knew that's where he would be: they both enjoyed the exhilaration of leaning out over nothingness and balancing on foot-wide girders. There were nets but, as usual, there were holes and no one had tested them. A little push and he would be over and he would make sure there were no witnesses, then it would be one man's word against another if it didn't work.

Turney could see that Kevin was being cautious as the crew came back on site. He looked around him and allowed others to climb before him. Turney hid in a cupboard and waited. He

left the cupboard door ajar so he could see something of what was going on. The opportunity came sooner than he had a right to expect. Kevin was calling down for more bricks when Turney placed his hand on his back. The man turned but it was too late. Turney was pleased that Kevin had seen him before falling.

The men took time down at ground level checking for life and then covering the body and calling for an ambulance. Turney was away before the police came.

In one way Kevin's death was a comfort to Anderson, although he wouldn't tell Clarissa about Turney's attack. There was no evidence, so, yet again, no way of arresting Turney; he hadn't even threatened the man. But, each time he acted, there was a chance. A chance that he would make a mistake. Anderson took Fielding and Comben to Watford. Maybe they could find something. The local police had been thorough but the only result was a possible charge against the builders for an unsafe site. No one had caught even a glimpse of Turney. It looked as though twenty-four hour surveillance of the man was the only way to catch him and they couldn't afford that.

Kearney was sympathetic. If the three of them wanted to, they could take their holidays early and see what they could do. So they took turns outside Amanda's and Anderson's flats. There was no point in trying to stay with Turney. He had too many ways of leaving his flat without being seen. And then he disappeared entirely.

Chapter 18

Anderson swung his legs over the side of the bed and, before he had rested them on the floor, he had the impression that something had been decided. It had happened to him before – the clarification of some problem or decision following a good night's sleep – and normally he

welcomed it. 'Sleep on it' that was the cliché but it had worked for him many times. Now, this time, he allowed the idea remained below the level of his consciousness. Or rather, he made an act of will to keep it there.

He moved quietly to the bedroom door and cautiously turned the knob. Lately, even pills did not prevent Clarissa from waking when he got up but this time she didn't stir and he was pleased. The fear in her eyes as she reached consciousness was one of the reasons for his decision.

Outside in the hall he realised that it was already there in the front of his mind and that he had begun to argue with himself. It was not much of a debate. He knew that the argument, if there had been such a thing, had already been settled. It didn't mean that there wouldn't be anxieties and regrets. He saw himself as a virgin who had lost their virginity or perhaps had decided to lose it and was feeling a little ashamed in anticipation. The thought brought a wry smile to his mouth. That sort of moral debate dated him. He couldn't imagine that many young girls and certainly no young men went through that sort of struggle these days.

Later he would look back and try to decide when the idea had come to him and how it had escaped the censor that he imagined had saved him in the past. He had always imagined that it was his well-developed conscience that had separated him from those in his own force who allowed crime to creep over them.

Turney would have to die.

He allowed the thought to become concrete in his mind and then, as if he were taking some sort of vow, he spoke the words aloud: 'Turney must die'. But it was a passive vow: it didn't seem to commit him to anything personal, he could still contemplate the words without feeling he was implicated in the act.

Afterwards, what would happen afterwards? Could he remain in the police force if he killed

a man, if he killed Turney? There it was: he had put it into words — silent words, he wasn't sure whether he would ever be able to say them aloud. Perhaps he would have to but it would be only to Clarissa. There wasn't anyone else he could ask to do the job for him and so there would be no collusion, no one else that needed or should know. 'Job', was that what it was? Murder the man — that was what he really meant.

He busied himself. There was the coffee to make the breakfast to prepare. He let his mind concentrate on those things. He got the newspaper out of the letterbox and read the headlines as though they were important. He gave himself a respite, a sort of moral respite. But it was short lived. How was he going to justify it? Clearly it would be easy to do so to Clarissa but impossible to anyone else. And he didn't want to be caught. He was no Raskalnikov. There would be no confession.

It wasn't so much a decision he had made; it was more an inevitability that had overtaken him. Not that he could or would pretend to himself that he was not responsible. However it was arranged, however he managed to provoke the man, however he camouflaged the event, it would still be murder. He took his first sip of coffee that day — he had crossed the line. For him the thought was equivalent to the act itself — morally to have decided to cross that line was the turning point. Whatever might come between him and the finality of Turney's death now mattered little to the judgement he must make about himself.

He sat at the table for a while and considered. Murder was murder but perhaps there were degrees of murder? Maybe he could distinguish the act he was set upon from the crude slaying that constituted the raw material of his work. It was worth the attempt, since he had no way of knowing how he would live the rest of his life now that he had decided to make his life's work a nonsense. So, he tried, much as a judge who was sympathetic to a plaintiff might subtly allow his feelings to alter the course of his legal judgement and so seek the obscure precedent for what

he had wanted to do all along.

He tried on some obvious defences: was his act worse than killing for self-defence? If not then he could exonerate himself completely. But where was the immediate threat? He would not have accepted such an excuse from others. Was he doing it to save his loved ones, as though he were a soldier sent to war? But was the danger as real as that? Was it Clarissa's or his own welfare that was at stake? What use to him was a woman too scared to live?

Was his decision like those others: driven by some overwhelming necessity or temptation into corruption? He had hoped he was better than they were. But then stealing was not the same as murder. If he couldn't excuse corruption that was concerned only with money, how could he forgive the taking of a human life?

By the time he had taken his first cup of coffee of the day, he had given up. Killing Turney is what he wanted to do and must do. Morality did not come into it, so justification was irrelevant. All that counted now was how to do it and get away with it. He had thought himself as a man ruled by ethics — his particular version of moral behaviour. Was that not why he was a policeman? But it wasn't so; it was a hard lesson and a salutary blow to his pride.

By the end of his second cup of coffee, he had put the philosophy behind him. It would take planning and he couldn't be distracted by his conscience if he was to pull it off. Then he discovered that while he had been debating so seriously with himself, another part had already made certain practical decisions. He would have to shoot Turney and he would have to do it in 'the line of duty.' Turney would have to be provoked and he would need to have a gun in his hand when the provocation had born fruit.

The first thing to do was get firearms issued to himself, Comben and Fielding. Not that he wanted to involve the two younger officers but, if they were not armed too, then his own decision to draw a weapon would look suspicious. It was a sort of thin smokescreen. He would

want to provide an excuse for his superiors to forgive him — to exonerate him. They may then chose not to understand his true motives. In public they could expound with a straight face the pretext that Anderson would provide for them.

He felt calmer now. The principles of the affair had been laid out. He felt confident about filling in the details. Once he had developed his plan he would then decide what to tell Clarissa. It would be safer to tell her nothing but he might need her cooperation. And then he couldn't expect to succeed immediately. Clarissa would have to wait for some time and knowing his intentions might help her survive the strain. He couldn't imagine that she would regret Turney's death.

It would all depend on offering Turney his chance. Anderson was sure Turney would try to kill Clarissa once he thought she had been left unguarded. It would take a little time to set the situation up since Turney would wait patiently until he imagined Anderson had forgotten about him.

But Anderson knew the man. He was mad, of course, but inexorable. Anderson could see that Turney would not rest until his enemies had been vanquished. It was a war the man was waging against the world and those in it who stood against his desires. He had revenged himself on Kevin and would want to do the same with Amanda and Clarissa. Yes, Anderson felt he could set Turney up and he was sure he could pull the trigger when necessary. All that needed to be decided was how long to wait and then how to signal to the man that his chance had apparently arrived.

In the end, it was Clarissa's health that decided the timing more than Anderson's judgement. Turney hadn't been seen for three weeks and Anderson was due to go back on duty, Comben and Fielding had gone back sooner. Clarissa's growing hysteria when the time came for her to be

guarded by others rather than Anderson himself made him decide to act.

Throughout the waiting period, Anderson had been careful to stick to a routine. He wanted Turney to know exactly what he did and when. When the time came for him to deliberately alter that routine then he wanted Turney to know about it. A trip to the off-licence alone, an early morning visit to the dentist or even the station, an evening excursion to buy some item forgotten earlier — that was the sort of variation Turney would be looking for and Anderson had every intention of providing it. But first he wanted to know where Turney was watching from; for that was what Anderson knew the man must be doing. But he had stopped his obvious surveillance. His car was nowhere to be seen in the streets outside the flats and he had never been seen inside one of the houses opposite. For some time Anderson had realised that the rear of the flats must be providing Turney with a vantage point. He had made no attempt up to then to find out exactly where Turney was positioning himself. He hadn't wanted the man to be frightened away.

The bins for the rubbish were kept at the car park level at the back so that vans could drive down a service road each week and empty them. The caretaker kept them neat and the surrounding area clean; residents had no need to visit the area since their own rubbish was left out each day and was collected. That Saturday morning, early, Anderson took his own rubbish down an hour or so before the caretaker would begin his round. He waited behind the bins.

He got lucky. A short while before the caretaker was expected, Turney drove past the back entrance to the flats and parked further down the service road. The road ended fifty yards or so along and had been used by the owners of two garages, which had fallen into disuse for the same reason as the space under his own block to remain empty of cars: vandalism.

Turney opened one of the garage doors and drove the car inside. He didn't come out. Anderson waited awhile and then worked his way along the fence dividing the refuse area from the next door garden. Finally, he was close enough to see the side of the garage and the window

through which Turney was watching. He got even closer and saw that the window was very clean and then he saw the binoculars. From where Turney was sitting there was a direct view into Anderson's kitchen. Nothing would have been easier than to open the door of the garage and shoot the man. Anderson caressed the pistol in his pocket. But that would not do. He needed a reason. Turney would not be armed. The man would use his hands when the time came as he had before.

But how would Turney know when Clarissa was alone? The man would need to know that and Anderson needed him to know it.

Chapter 19

As soon as Julian woke, he knew something had changed. His mind had cleared up much as a cold might do or a boil. The mist that each day had sat across his forehead was gone. But the clarity brought him discomfort as well as joy. He felt very strongly that he had no excuse now; that were certain responsibilities he needed to fulfil and that these duties needed to be carried out soon.

He got up and showered. The clothes, which had lain where he had thrown them across the chair the night before, he gathered up and put in the laundry basket in the bathroom. They smelt and he grimaced as he carried them along the hallway. He could not remember when last he had changed into clean underwear — maybe he hadn't bathed or showered for some time either.

No one was in the kitchen but there was a place laid for him. The egg was cold as usual. Julian couldn't imagine why his mother had such faith in the little jackets she placed over the eggs — the small knitted woolly hats he remembered from two decades before. He supposed she had boiled the egg at nine and then had left it on the table under its jacket until eleven, when he had got up. He imagined that she had been doing that ever since he had been returned home by the police. Apparently, she had the energy to care for him but not the patience to wait to cook breakfast until he got up.

He sat back and looked at the table. He could hear them outside, squabbling in the garden. It was a bright day, was it summer? He thought it must be. How long had he been that way — living but not living, seeing but not seeing? Was he better now? He supposed he must be.

The healing must have started some days ago. He remembered that he had started to listen to his parents' voices: was that good or bad? Oh how they wished he was a small boy again: the endless stories of his childhood and how he had done this and said this; the mimicking sound,

tuk, tuk, as his mother broke the shell of his egg; the smiles that came over their faces when they looked at the photos on the wall — of him on his ‘Mickey Mouse’ tricycle, of him clutching his father on the merry-go-round; of him in blazer and cap, old-fashioned even then for all but the stuffiest of private schools. Would they have felt so nostalgic if he had made a success of himself?

It was time to go. To leave again but it was different this time. Before when he had left he had been off to university and had known he would not be back. He hadn’t known what he *was* going to do but he had known that it was to be the end of childhood. This time he had a mission. He had been too passive up to then — too reactive. It was time to become active – proactive – that was the way they put it, those people who did things and made an impression on life. He would take life by the ‘scruff of its neck’, isn’t that what people said you should do? He would no longer be the one who took it without giving back.

He had been made the scapegoat and had only escaped by the merest of lucky chances. No it hadn’t been luck; he owed Anderson, he owed him his life. John had believed in him, he had been the only one to do so, even though the woman had pretended later that she had too. He was determined: he was going to earn the right to call him by his first name — it was time to pay the man back.

It had been last week that they had come, he thought. It could have been before, because time had meant so little. He had, they thought, a right to know but they had left, he realised that now, without being certain that he *had* understood. Maybe he hadn’t then but he did now. Turney was free. The man – Comben, Detective-sergeant Comben, was his name, Julian remembered now – had apologised. The other, the woman, had said she knew he had never been responsible.

He wished he had more to tell them but there had been no connection, except the telephone

call and the lift Turney have given him to the factory and they knew all about that. Turney had lied about the note – the one he had never sent – and Julian had told them so right at the beginning. Had he told them about it again, when they came this time? He supposed he had and hadn't they smiled and said it was not enough?

And now Anderson was on leave and Clarissa distraught. That wasn't right and it was up to him to make it right.

They came in from the garden and the chatter began. He couldn't listen, so he left the egg on the table and went to his room, ignoring, as he did so, to plaintive cries from behind him — 'aren't you going to eat the egg, I made it specially for you.' Yes, especially for him two hours before.

There wasn't much to pack but he had to wait until they went to bed in the afternoon. Then he left.

His old flat was no longer a crime scene and neither was the one across the hall. That one was still empty and he supposed the landlords might have to wait a while until memories grew dim before trying to let it again. Blood would have seeped into the wooden floors through the carpet. There would be traces if one cared to look. The next tenant needed to be ignorant enough to look at the stains and imagine they had been made by spilt red wine.

He slept well that first night and in the morning rang up a few numbers from the phonebook. John Anderson was a common name but he knew the flat was nearby, Comben had let that out and he had only to phone three numbers. Anderson wasn't there and Clarissa took a long time to answer; he could understand that. But she seemed pleased to hear from him. He could tell she wasn't well. After speaking to her, he knew he had been right in his decision. He walked round to see her and she gave him her house keys: that settled it. She even asked him to bring back her

laptop. He thought that was a good sign.

The next day he took up his post. That was how he thought about it. He was a soldier on duty. He was a scout and he would need patience but he knew that the man would come.

He sat just inside the park railings, propped up against a tree facing South. He had a book open in his lap but seldom glanced down. There was a stretch of grass ten yards or so to his right separating him from the path that formed the boundary of the main field, where the bodies had been found. To his left and down the hill in front of him was Clarissa's house. There were no trees or bushes between him and the front door, so it was in clear view. He enjoyed the idea that he had been there before in that same spot. Last time it had been for his own sake but this time he was on mission of mercy or was it revenge.

At first, he wore a sweater but it was August and became warm from eleven in the morning. At noon he stripped off his sweater but left his shirt on for the rest of the time. There were a few others who sat or lay or played football in the centre of the field. Soon no one would remember what had been found there. At dusk he put his sweater back on.

Turney came late in the evening, he walked passed the house on the park side of the street and then walked back on the other side. Julian supposed that Turney was looking for police cars but all the parked cars were empty. Julian imagined that the police had long ago given up watching although they knew where Turney lived. Following a man who wasn't wanted couldn't be justified as a reasonable expense — that is what he had been told.

Turney turned first left after he had passed the house and, when he did so, Julian moved. He walked down the grass towards the gate and sat again nearer the railings this time. He was higher than the road and could look over Clarissa's hedge and along the side of house. Although it was gloomy, he soon saw Turney come from behind the house and let himself in through the side door.

Julian waited but no light was switched on inside. It had got too dark to see much now from where he sat and anyway the park was closing, so he walked out of the park across the road and stood behind the hedge in front of the house. He was out of sight of the road and positioned himself so that he could see the side path. He crouched down and was very still. Turney very soon left the way he had come without even looking in his direction. Julian saw him climb over the fence at the back of the house.

As soon as Turney had gone, Julian let himself into the house through the front door. He had keys for the latch and the deadlock. He switched on the hall light, walked into Clarissa's study, and switched on the light there. Both Clarissa's desktop and her laptop had gone. Would she have been able to write again, even if he had brought the laptop to her? Probably not. Julian was disappointed for her. He understood; he himself hadn't yet started to write again.

After this, Julian walked around the house. Everything portable had gone: television sets; microwave; video recorders; computers; ornaments; paintings. He guessed that Turney had sold them. He had been living off his wife since his release, as he had done before. Now the place looked empty. Anything else that Turney wanted to remove would require a van and Turney couldn't afford that. It would be noticed. The man would have to find work now.

Upstairs Julian found out what he wanted to know. Turney was sleeping in his old room; his clothes were scattered around and the covers loosely thrown back over the bed. He hadn't wanted any of them to know, that was why he didn't use the front door to the house. He had wanted to appear from nowhere and surprise them. Julian did not intend to allow him to do that again. As he had told Clarissa, he was waiting no longer. It was his turn now. Turney had had his chance.

He wasn't Turney's target. He had helped Turney – albeit unwittingly – and the man would have no grudge against him. That was what made the whole thing possible. And, in a strange

way, he really ought to thank the man. Turney hadn't meant to do him a favour. He had wanted him locked up but it hadn't worked like that thanks to Anderson. Instead, the shock had helped. He no longer felt helpless and his headaches had gone. It was time to give thanks – not to God he would leave that to his father – but to Anderson and Clarissa and to Amanda. They had had a hard time one way or another and it was payback time.

He left the house in darkness and locked up. Back home a wave of happiness came over him. He had seldom felt this way. He gloried in his freedom — not just from jail but from the claustrophobia of the semi in North London. He would never go back to that and, if he couldn't make money from writing, then he would do something else. There was no way he would be a client, sponging on those two old people again. The thought made him uncomfortable as a wave of guilt passed through him. He owed them everything and they had helped him get better. In some ways, if they had been less fussy, it would have been worse. Maybe he would never have left.

He walked to the front window of his living room and looked across the road. The curtains were drawn across the window through which he had seen Amanda that time. Was she still living there? He thought not but he would like to know, so he walked across the road and rang the bell. Amanda answered but he could tell she was frightened. His voice calmed her and she buzzed him through the street door.

Upstairs, he stood at the front door to the flat and made no attempt to go inside. 'I came to apologise for the last time I was here,' he said. 'I'm surprised that you're still here, I thought you would have moved.'

It was Felicity who answered. 'We moved here when Mark disappeared. I don't suppose it worked but we thought he might not find us.'

Inside Amanda and Felicity clung together. His voice and his demeanour made them more

comfortable; he could see that. And he was dressed neatly in jeans, a clean shirt and a short jacket. They all looked newish and pressed; he felt respectable. They smiled and ushered him to a seat and offered coffee. He said he would like that. He joked and stipulated that it had to be real coffee. They nodded and fussed and were pleased.

Amanda served him and he was rude enough to hold her hand to steady it as she tried too hard to put his cup on the small table by the side of his seat. Felicity brought him a tissue to mop up the saucer, while Amanda sat opposite and allowed the tears to come to her eyes.

Turney of course, he had known that before they had told him. Turney spooking them, ringing their bell at night or when he thought one of them was alone.

‘I’ve no intention of letting Turney get away with it,’ he said.

Amanda stopped crying and sat up listening attentively. Julian imagined it was a measure of her desperation to have been so affected by his words. They couldn’t know how he had changed. They could have no reason for feeling confident that he could turn his intention into action. Julian appreciated that. He didn’t know either but he felt that he might. He would give it a good try and he thought he might very well succeed.

‘And how will you do that?’ asked Felicity.

Julian looked round at her. He knew the story. Did she still want to be called Felicity? In any event, whatever she called herself it was to her he would look for help. ‘Will you help?’ he asked.

‘What do you want me to do?’ she answered.

‘We will stalk him just as he has been stalking you.’

‘How do you know about that?’ asked Amanda.

Julian was not going to tell her. It wouldn’t help and it would get Fielding and possibly Anderson into trouble if he told. He would be economical with the truth — wasn’t that the

proper phrase? 'Clarissa told me what has been happening.'

'Even the police don't know where he's living,' said Felicity.

It wasn't true of course, Anderson was not at all surprised when he had told him what he had seen but he wasn't going to tell them why he knew that. 'I know,' he said. They waited for him to continue but it was too early, they needed time to absorb what he had told them, to understand how he had changed.

He finished his coffee and got up. 'I'll call on you, when I need you,' he said and left.

Back home he thought over their conversation. He had wanted to prepare them but not frighten them and he had done that. They must know deep down what he was going to do but he wasn't sure how they would react. He imagined that Felicity would do anything to rid the world of Turney but what of Amanda and, even if she wanted to help, would she be able? Three of them should be enough even if two were women. They would need to be resolute and tomorrow he would test them.

He phoned the next day and then visited again. This time, after the coffee was served and he was seated, Julian could see that they expected something. That was an improvement. They had believed him and he would not disappoint them.

'I know where Turney sleeps,' he said.

They waited.

'It was quite simple, if the police had wanted to know they could have found out.' He stopped and sipped his coffee. His little white lie had its affect. They waited patiently for him to continue and did not interrupt. He liked it. He was enjoying himself. It hadn't happened before that women had taken notice of him and waited on his every word. He took another sip. 'He lives in Clarissa's house. He never switches on the lights and he has been selling her stuff to live on.'

The two women looked at each other. He had scored and it had been so easy. Now he would see how far they would go. He told them his plans.

Amanda was not shaking that morning. The cup she had placed on his table had a clean saucer and when he had grasped her wrist it had been still and cool. She hadn't pulled it away either. There hadn't been any women as beautiful as Amanda who had left their wrist in his hand so willingly. He looked into her eyes and wondered whether they would seem so appealing afterwards.

But, by the time he had left, it had all changed. Felicity had taken Amanda into her arms to quieten her and the girls' bodies appeared to vibrate together in front of Julian's eyes. Would they be able to do what was necessary? He had to believe that they would. Turney had run out of money; both of them would need to act very soon. Julian felt it had to be that night.

Chapter 20

Her hands shook. At first she imagined it was because she hadn't been sleeping. Then she ignored it, or rather did not allow the thought to rise high enough in her mind to become unavoidably conspicuous. Then came acceptance: it wasn't because she was tired or because she was ill, it was Mark Turney; he had got to her. She had held out with Felicity's help through those early weeks when he had stalked her but now, though he was invisible or maybe because he had successfully made himself so, she had succumbed.

She knew Felicity must have noticed. When she brought a cup with tea or coffee to the table there was an unmistakable rattle. And, when she made the effort to stop the liquid from slopping over the rim, it rattled even more. She had heard of the same thing happening to people – old people – she had to put a stop to it.

Felicity had the night off. When she was out at the club and that was most nights, it was worse. There were bars on the windows and locks – lots of them – but Amanda still sat and shook until she felt she had to be in bed, not to sleep but to be there when Felicity returned. Felicity was keeping them, they both needed her to work but it couldn't go on. This night they sat together on the sofa and then, instead of hiding her hand or sitting on it as she often did, she held both hands out towards her friend. They both watched the tremor that danced along her fingers. Felicity lent towards her and grasped her wrists. They sat and looked at each other and Amanda knew that the vibrations of her fear could be felt by the other through their clasp.

'We must do something,' Felicity said.

Amanda nodded.

'I've been watching you. It can't go on like this.'

'The police?' Amanda knew what Felicity's reaction would be.

'They can do nothing. They couldn't save my sister and they can't save you. Mark Turney

is the devil. We have the right and the duty to get rid of him.'

'How?' asked Amanda.

'We must kill him.'

Amanda had known she would say that. But it wasn't what she said but the determination with which she said it that caused Amanda's hands to stop shaking. Felicity let go and Amanda's hands feel peacefully on to her lap. It was better now. She was calm. Felicity would know what to do and she would follow. The waiting was over.

'He wants to come here. He wants to get into our stronghold, our home. And we must let him.'

Amanda nodded back. Yes, it was their fortress and, in it, they were under siege. They were not safe even though it seemed so for the moment. Every fortress can be breached and given time Mark would do just that.

'We mustn't make it too easy for him and we are going to have to accept some danger. Can you face him?'

Amanda tried to imagine it. She looked across the room and faced him. She stiffened as she saw him advance towards her with those hands.

'I'll have a knife and so will you. He won't know I'm here. Can you do it? You'll have to stab him too.'

Amanda had no doubts about Felicity. Her friend had such hate for the man. She imagined Felicity had longed for the moment that she would sink a knife into the man's back and that she had dreamed about it until it was almost real. Had she worked it out and had been waiting for Amanda to speak?

'He expects me to go out at night. I've seen him when I've driven round the block before going into town. He's waiting for us to become slack. Maybe he'll knock and pretend to be a

delivery boy or a tradesman.'

'But that won't do,' said Amanda. 'He mustn't choose the time. It's us who must do that.'

'Yes,' said Felicity, 'you're right. We have to know where he is what he does during the day. We can't sit and wait any longer.'

Felicity drove Amanda to the police station the next day. Fielding was willing to see them. Anderson was not yet back on duty.

'Officially I can't tell you anything,' she said, 'the man has not been found guilty of any crime.'

'And this is a very official sort of place,' said Felicity, looking around her.

'Yes,' said Fielding.

'Ever feel you want to enjoy the delights of night life again?' Felicity asked.

'Is that an invitation,' said Fielding.

Felicity smiled and held out her card. 'Why don't you ask for me tonight. Amanda is coming too.'

Later, at the club, during one of Felicity's breaks the three women sat at the bar and sipped their drinks.

'He's around all right,' Fielding told them, 'he has been seen by officers outside Chief Inspector Anderson's flat.' She stopped.

Amanda wondered whether it would be right to ask but Felicity had no such inhibition.

'Is that where Turney's wife is living?'

Fielding waited before answering. 'Yes,' she said, 'but don't tell anyone I told you so.'

'Do you know where he is living?' asked Amanda.

'We have an idea,' said Fielding, 'but I can't tell you.'

‘Why not? We have a right to know,’ said Felicity.

‘You might do something foolish.’

‘And that would worry you?’ asked Amanda.

‘Turney would win either way. First he might be able to harm you in self-defence and secondly if you succeeded in harming him, you’d go to prison.’

‘It might be worth it,’ said Felicity.

‘No,’ said Fielding, ‘he’s not worth that.’

The next day Julian came. They clutched at the straw he offered. They had no other plan.

Chapter 21

Julian's plan was simple. He would be waiting for Turney when he came to the house that evening and he would have a knife. He would wear gloves and Amanda and Felicity would help him dispose of the body. The four of them, including Clarissa, would be bound together and there would be no comeback. Turney would be consigned to the past and good riddance.

The evening after he had seen them in the morning, Felicity drove him and Amanda to the house but parked around the corner. Julian left them in the car and let himself into the house. It was already dusk and he expected Turney quite soon. He walked up the stairs and into Turney's old bedroom. He was sure to hear Turney come through the back door and he would be ready. He had rehearsed the thrust he would make with the knife — one of Felicity's kitchen knives.

Very soon he heard the back door open and close and footsteps on the stairs. He stood behind the open bedroom door and tensed himself. The steps continued along the hall towards him and then went further to the front of the house. He heard the main bedroom door opening.

It was irritating that Turney had not come straight into his own room but there was no reason to be worried. He might have remembered something he could sell in his wife's room and had gone to fetch it. He would be back down the hall soon.

Half an hour later, Julian could feel that something was not right. He walked slowly and quietly along the hall and looked inside the open bedroom door. A figure lay on the bed but it was too small to be Turney. He walked across and listened to the man's deep breathing. It was not cold and the man had lain on top of the covers, he had kept on his overcoat, which Julian could see was very worn. His shoes were on the floor; the soles had holes in them, as did the socks covering his feet.

Julian shook the man's foot until he woke. 'Who are you?' he asked.

'He said I could stay here.'

'Who said?' asked Julian but he already knew the answer.

Turney sat on the grass roughly where he had seen Julian the day before. He saw Felicity drive past the house and turn the corner and then, once he had seen Julian let himself into the house, he walked out of the park round the corner to the library.

There was a bench outside and, as usual, one or two derelicts with bottles in their hands sitting there. He told one that he had a place for him to stay the night and offered him money. He had a job pushing the others away. They could all see bottles floating in front of their eyes when they realised he had a twenty pound note in his hand.

He told the man he needed to get in the back way and he shepherded him along the alley and helped him over the fence. He told him the door was unlocked and watched him as he went inside. Then he went back down the path and uncovered the can of petrol he had left earlier.

He gave the man thirty minutes and then very quietly let himself into the house leaving the back door open. He sprayed the petrol around the ground floor and threw a match inside. It all happened very quickly. There was a great deal of smoke. He walked down the side of the house to the front and waited behind the hedge to see whether anyone came out of the front door. They didn't. The sound of fire engines sent him back along the side of the house and over the fence.

At Anderson's flat he waited outside until the man left then he climbed up the fire escape and levered open the small sash window to the side of the back door. It opened more quietly than he thought it would. He thrust himself head first through the window opening and rolled over his back to land on the floor.

Anderson took the call in his study. Clarissa was in the lounge and hadn't moved towards the phone that sat a foot away from her hand. He wasn't surprised; she wasn't keen on picking up

the phone. Early on, Turney had called frequently and sometimes he had spoken.

He told her what had happened and that he would have to go. She didn't seem surprised that something had occurred at the house and it made him feel that there was something he should know. Was one of the bodies Julian Simanovicz, she asked? He didn't stop to ask her why she thought that. It could wait.

He didn't use his car and started to walk round. It would have taken him ten minutes, which with the ten minutes to walk back made twenty. It was too long and might be what Turney was waiting for. He turned back. On the way, he considered what it could mean. That two bodies had been found after the fire had died down might mean nothing. The house had appeared to be empty for some time and squatters might have moved in. And even if one were identified as Julian, it didn't mean the other was Turney. He didn't hesitate further. Turney had staged this to get him out the flat. He was right to go back.

He phoned Fielding on his mobile.

'It was definitely arson,' she said, 'I've had a look at one of the bodies, it could be Julian Simanovicz and what's more Amanda and Felicity are here.'

'What are they doing there?' he asked.

'They won't say but it looks as though they had some plan with Julian to get rid of Turney. It didn't work out.'

He trotted back to the flat and took the stairs two at a time. He had his key ready at the front door. He pushed it into the lock but it wouldn't turn. He heard the sound of footsteps inside. Through the opaque glass he could see a shape running away from him. He tried the key again but realised that Turney must have pushed the knob on the lock on the inside. It wasn't going to work.

There was no sound from inside but he couldn't afford to wait any longer. He mashed the

glass with the pistol he took from his pocket. Down the hall he could make out two shapes. One was Turney but Clarissa was right behind him. He couldn't shoot.

Chapter 22

As soon as she heard the click or creak or whatever it was, she knew. It was how she had imagined it would happen. He would find some chink that John had not thought of or they would be careless one day and leave something unlocked. It had to be the back door. He had watched them from the garage behind for months. He would know that was the best place. The balcony outside could be reached by climbing up the fire-escape ladder at the back. They had both thought of that. But the lock, how had he got through the lock John had installed? She would have wanted to know that and the fire, whose were the bodies? She might never know now. Still it had been clever of him however he had managed it.

He'd won after all but not really. In that short time when her own safety was not yet the only thing she could think about, she had changed the will. Whatever he had wanted he was not going to get; she was pleased about that. But the money meant nothing to him now; she understood — revenge, that was what he wanted. She wondered whether he would kill himself afterwards. But that was an afterwards she would never see. Would he go after the others: Amanda, Felicity, John himself? She couldn't believe he would forget them. They had betrayed him, so *he* thought. She knew that's the way *he* would see it.

She was very still. He might think she was in the bedroom. Could she get out? The hope quickened her body and her mind. If he went into the bedroom, she could go through the back door on to the balcony and climb down as he had climbed up.

She sat very still in the high backed leather chair that must hide her from his view if he looked through from the kitchen hatch into the room. She could afford no movement that might cause the leather to squeak and reveal her. In the quietness, she imagined she could hear him walk along the hall to the bedroom. Soon he would be able to see her from the open door leading from the hallway. She had to move.

She was up very quickly and smoothly. In her bare feet, she walked across the carpet to the opening that led to the kitchen. Her lungs stopped sucking in air for a moment. It was as though her body was catching up with what her mind already knew: he was there and he wanted to kill her. She had to quieten herself before hoisting herself through the hatch into the kitchen. Once inside, she lowered herself gently from the worktop and glanced through the kitchen door: there was no sign of him in the hall. Ahead of her was the back door. She hesitated. There it was: the small window to the side of the door hanging open. So he had not needed to pick the lock or in some devious way get himself a duplicate key. He had levered aside the window lock and slid inside. She could visualise him head first through the open window and then doing a sort of forward roll to land neatly on his feet.

But she must have made a sound for suddenly there were frantic footsteps from the bedroom and then down the hall. She turned and there he was in front of her — very large, very strong but different. There was no hope of her making it to the back door.

She looked at him and smiled. He was not as he used to be. He was unkempt — the word came easily to mind. And his eyes, they had lost that clearness that confidence. She didn't imagine that she would have much time before she found his hands around her neck. But for her own dignity, she would not die without speaking.

'Well Mark,' she said, 'here you are, how clever of you. Are you going to tell me how you did it?' Her voice was calm and strong and she was able to stand and watch the effect without wavering. He rocked back on to his heels. She had stopped him but for how long?

He smiled but it was not the warm sexy smile that she had known. It was coarse and cunning. The smile of a crook or a tradesman that has just swindled you out of twenty pounds, the smile of a madman who will soon squeeze the life from your neck.

'I'm surprised that you trusted that fool,' he said.

Clarissa admired the way he now had his voice under control. The hate, the excitement, the brutality — whatever it was that motivated him had been pushed aside. It was his moment of triumph. He was going to tell her how clever he had been. ‘Which fool?’

‘Julian,’ he said, ‘and maybe John Anderson too. He wasn’t so difficult.’

‘Well Mark, I can only say well done. But are you prepared to spend the rest of your days in prison?’

‘That’s not going to happen,’ he said, ‘I have or two other scores to settle and then ...’

He hesitated and then she knew that he hadn’t thought further than revenge until that very moment. She looked and she could see him thinking. It wouldn’t stop him killing her she knew that but he might now have to think about covering it up. Had he left fingerprints? Where were his gloves? Was he now thinking about her neck and the incriminating marks that he would leave? ‘So, you’re not really prepared are you? Not like the last time. Julian did get to you. By the way, whose was the other body?’

He didn’t answer but looked down at himself as if he hadn’t realised until then that he was without overalls, without rubber gloves. She walked forward and placed her hands on the doorframe, as she did so her right hand brushed against something cold. She didn’t look but knew what it was. A row of knives stood upright stuck to a magnetic strip screwed to the wall. The nearest knife was a ten-inch kitchen knife. She slid her hand towards it and grasped the handle. Could she do it? Could she watch the blade sink into his chest?

She didn’t have time to answer herself. He gave a cry of rage and rushed towards her. She made no attempt to turn or run but offered up her neck as though accepting his execution. She took a deep breath and then found his hands tight around her neck. She was afraid that she would faint. Wasn’t there some sort of reaction to pressure on the neck that made that happen?

Her hand had already slid the knife off the magnetic strip before he had reached her but she

had kept it hidden behind the doorframe. She allowed her right arm to drop down but cocked her wrist so that the knife blade pointed upwards.

In the film *Dial 'M' for Murder* Grace Kelly had stabbed her attacker to death with scissors from behind but she had never trusted that. It had never seemed to her possible to get enough power that way. No, in her mind, in her dreams, the knife would have to travel up under the rib cage into the heart.

At first there was no space between their bodies to do what she intended, so she allowed her legs to buckle and her eyes to close as though she had already fainted. Last time he had been interrupted and had no chance to finish the job but this time she knew he would hold on until certain there was no life left in her. He would not let go.

Her weight on his arms now caused him to lean forward from the waist while her torso was upright. There was a huge space between their chests. Her body was limp but to thrust effectively she needed the firmness of her legs to provide a fulcrum, so she bent her knees and then stiffened her whole body.

He almost fell on to her as she did this but, after staggering for a second, stayed on his feet. He still hadn't seen the knife even though they had staggered through the doorway into the kitchen. She opened her eyes and saw him glance downwards and to his left. The kitchen light must have glinted on the metal of the blade but for him it was too late.

She thrust upwards with the knife and straightened her legs at the same time. The point of the knife entered his abdomen below the rib cage and the whole shaft buried itself inside his chest cavity. She could see he had died before his hands released their grip. His body crashed down towards her but she managed to twist and release the knife handle. His face hit the tiled floor of the kitchen as she moved her head and body to the side. There was a metallic sound as the hilt of the knife struck the ceramic. She saw the tip of the knife appear out of his back driven

there by the weight of his body falling forward on to knife handle.

She found herself alive but trapped by his embrace. She took a deep breath and filled her lungs. It had not been as bad as the last time. She would not need to stay in hospital. When she had recovered her breath, she heard John's voice. He must have been speaking for some time but she hadn't heard. She looked up and saw him leaning over the two of them. Her eyes flickered and from the expression on his face she knew he had thought her dead.

Anderson lifted the dead body of Clarissa and then pulled her on to her feet. He guided her into the lounge and the winged chair and left her there. Then he walked into the kitchen to look at the body lying on the floor. He took a sharp intake of breath as he saw the blood pooling and congealing on the floor and the knife tip sticking out of Turney's back. He walked back into the lounge.

She turned towards him. 'I saved you the trouble,' she said.

Anderson was puzzled. 'What trouble,' he said.

'Poor Julian,' she said.

Anderson walked over to her and put his hand on her head and then ran his palm down her neck. She shivered but with pleasure; she seemed calm, so he turned to the phone and called the station.

'He's dead,' he said to Clarissa.

She turned to him and smiled. 'I know,' she said.

'What trouble did you save me from?'

'Killing him,' she said, 'isn't that what you had in mind?'

'How did you know?'

'We have to thank Julian. I suppose his is one of the bodies.'

‘Yes,’ said Anderson, ‘we don’t know who the second one is.’

‘Did you know he was living there, Julian did?’

‘Yes.’

‘You could have arrested him for theft. Julian told me he had stolen a lot of my things.’

‘You were still married, it would have been difficult to prove.’

‘Would you have done it?’

‘Yes,’ he said. Then he called Comben in from the car.