

A wooden chair with a woven seat is positioned against a rough stone wall. A pair of metal handcuffs is placed on the seat, with one cuff attached to the chair's backrest and the other lying nearby. The scene is dimly lit, creating a somber and gritty atmosphere.

*He selects
the victims.*

*You choose
their fate.*

THE JACK DAW

**LUKE
DELANEY**

The DI Sean Corrigan Series

THE JACKDAW

LUKE DELANEY

HARPER

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my three kids – DJ, JJ and NB.

To DJ, an inspiration to us all, who has already overcome so many obstacles in such a short life and proved to us all what we can achieve when we show some real grit and determination. A personality the size of the Empire State Building – funny, sometimes a handful, great company, a magnet for other children and always in the centre of the action, DJ's a genuinely unstoppable force of nature. If anyone can make all their dreams come true it'll be this kid.

To JJ, a beautiful and gentle child – the polar opposite of their older sibling. Clever and resourceful but shy and thoughtful. Bright and independent, but never boastful or bragging – JJ continues to develop into a wonderful young person, doing things their own way, blissfully untouched by convention and the need to be like everyone else, seemingly unaware of their Hollywood good looks and million-dollar smile. JJ grows and grows as a person – happier and happier with each passing day. A very special child.

To NB, known to my wife and I as our little gift. Super smart and fiercely independent, but very cuddly and funny too. Their thirst for knowledge is like something I've never seen and long may it last, although everything has to be done their way and watch out anyone who tries to stop them. There's no point in telling NB 'it's the taking part that matters' – this kid's in it to win it. NB is the definition of steely-eyed determination. We already know NB will be anything they want to be.

In many ways my kids are like a flock of jackdaws – intelligent and chatty, brave and loyal to each other – mischievous and inventive – not to mention sometimes troublesome. But we'd have it no other way. You are our everything. So thank you, guys, for all of your awesomeness.

All our love,
Mum and Dad

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The thick hood was pulled from his head and Paul Elkins squeezed his eyes closed tightly against the bright, white light that tried to penetrate his pain and fear, but the agony of the duck-tape being ripped off his mouth fired them open as wide as if he was being electrocuted. As the shock of the pain receded, his eyes blinked the room into focus, his chest heaving with panic as the sweat poured down the sides of his face and back. His arms and legs were bound with more duck-tape to a heavy, old wooden chair that creaked as he struggled, but didn't move. He bucked and kicked in the chair until the futility of his efforts overwhelmed him and drained him of his strength and determination, the desperation of his situation becoming increasingly undeniable.

The details of the room that was now his prison seeped into his consciousness. It was painted entirely white, with portable lamps providing too much light. Sheets of black plastic hung from the walls where he assumed there were windows, so no natural light penetrated the room. In front of him the man who'd abducted him from the London street in broad daylight stood straight and strong, confident and in control, his face concealed by his black ski-mask and wraparound sunglasses, his hands in black leather gloves, the rest of his clothes also all black. Only his mouth was partially visible, slightly obscured by a tiny microphone held in place by a head-strap and connected to two black boxes attached to his chest – one about the size of a hardback book, the other the size of a cigarette packet. The man didn't speak. Behind him a foldable table stretched out – upon it a collection of laptops, cameras, phones and other equipment Elkins didn't recognize, all of which were connected to a portable electricity generator.

Elkins stared at the man through his brown eyes for what seemed an eternity, waiting for him to speak and explain his motivation – to tell him why he'd been brought to this intimidating place. But the man said nothing. In all his fifty-one years Elkins had never been treated with anything other than respect and sometimes fear, but now that counted for nothing. Again his slim, fit body writhed in the chair before once more surrendering to futility. He forced some saliva into his dry mouth, moving it around with his tongue before speaking.

'Do you know who I am?' he demanded, but his voice trembled so much he hardly recognized himself. The man said nothing. Did nothing. 'I know a lot of powerful people. The people I work for will happily pay you whatever you want, if that's what this is about.' The man slowly turned his back on Elkins and began to switch on the various computers and cameras on the table, all of which Elkins noticed were pointing directly at him. 'What are you doing? What's this about? Are you sending a ransom demand?'

The man turned to him and finally spoke. 'No,' he answered, his voice warped by the voice distorter that hung around his neck, electronic and distant – unhuman. 'No ransom demand. I'm summoning your jury.'

'What?'

'Your jury, Mr Elkins.'

Elkins blinked in confusion. 'You know who I am?'

'Of course.'

'Then what do you want?'

'Justice, Mr Elkins. All I want is justice.'

‘I don’t understand.’

‘You will,’ the man told him before turning his back to examine a computer screen, speaking without looking. ‘It appears we’re attracting some attention. Just a few hundred people, but this is only the beginning. You are the first, but you will not be the last. In the future thousands will log in as jurors. Thousands will see justice being done. Justice for the people, where money and power can corrupt the system. Where your influence means nothing. Are you ready to be judged, Mr Elkins?’

‘I haven’t committed any crime.’

‘Is that what you really believe? Why don’t we let the people decide?’

The man spun quickly on his heels and walked to Elkins’s side, filling his chest with air before beginning to speak in that unearthly voice. He addressed the hundreds who watched from their homes and offices, bus stops and trains – all of whom had stumbled across the live-stream of Elkins taped to the chair while searching the Internet for cheap holidays, news updates, amusing homemade videos and God knows what else. He spoke directly into the camera connected to the computer.

‘All of you should know this man you see here is a criminal,’ he accused. Elkins bucked in his chair, a look of disbelief spreading across his face.

‘I’m no criminal. I’ve never even been arrested.’

‘No. No you haven’t, because your type never do get arrested, do they, Mr Elkins? They never get brought to justice, are never punished for their crimes. They are above the law. Not any more. It is time for the people of this country to judge you.’

‘I’ve never done anything to anyone,’ Elkins pleaded, his words stuttering and desperate. ‘Why are you recording this?’

‘I’m not just recording it,’ the man explained. ‘This is being transmitted live, so people like me can finally see justice being done.’

‘I haven’t done anything. You’re not the police. This isn’t a court.’

‘Haven’t done anything?’ the man asked, his electronic voice calm. ‘Then let me explain your crimes – your crimes against honest, hard-working people who lost their jobs, had their houses taken away from them, lost their wives, husbands and their families while you grew richer and fatter on the misery. You paid yourselves millions in bonuses despite your incompetence, leaving the people to pay for your mistakes and your greed.’

‘What?’

‘But as your banks came close to collapsing was it you who financed their survival? No. It was *us*. *The people*. And when the government was emptying our bank accounts and stealing our jobs, did you or any of the other pigs at the trough stop gorging yourselves? No. The feeding frenzy continued whilst we suffered. Some of us lost everything. Many others took their own lives to escape the pain and misery you caused. You continued to not only protect your wealth, but grow it, while we could barely feed our children.’

‘Christ. Is this what this is about – the banking crisis? For God’s sake, that was years ago.’

‘And still we suffer and still the bankers grow fat refusing even to loan us our own money investing it in houses across London that most of us could only dream about, stealing our money just as surely as if they’d robbed us in the street – and you dare to ask what your crimes are, dare to say you’re no criminal.’

Elkins tried to defend himself, but the man talked over him, resting a gloved hand on his shoulder. ‘You are Paul Elkins, correct?’

‘Yes.’

‘You are the CEO of Fairfield’s Bank, correct?’

‘So?’

‘A bank that lost billions because of its failure to properly supervise its own staff – a staff who were knowingly selling mortgages to people who couldn’t afford them?’

‘We made mistakes, yes, but ...’

‘Because they’d been promised bonuses of tens of thousands of pounds if they met their greed-driven targets?’

‘No one was forced to take out one of our mortgages.’

‘Weren’t they?’ Elkins didn’t answer. ‘Decent people sold into poverty, homelessness and bankruptcy by you.’

‘I didn’t sell anyone a mortgage.’

‘You were the CEO,’ the electronic voice snapped at him. ‘You were responsible. You were supposed to prevent it from happening, but you didn’t, because the money kept rolling in – right into your pockets. And when it went wrong, when the walls of your bank almost came tumbling down and you had to be saved by the government, by money that rightly belonged to *the people*, did you lose your job like we would have? No. You kept your two-million-pounds-a-year salary and even had so much contempt for the rest of us that you paid yourself a three-million-pound bonus. A three-million-pound bonus for failure.’

The man stepped closer to the camera, his hand pointing back to Elkins as he spoke. ‘Members of the jury, this man is not just a criminal and a thief – he’s a murderer. Every life taken, every suicide committed because of the crimes of the greedy few – this man and others like him are responsible. But have any of them been punished for their crimes? No. It’s time to change all that. It’s time for justice. My brothers and sisters – it’s time to judge.’

Mark Hudson, seventeen years old, sat in the bedroom of his family’s council flat in Birmingham, hypnotized by the masked man preaching in his electronic voice on the screen of his laptop. His friends, Danny and Zach, messed around in the background, not nearly as interested.

‘Shut the fuck up, you two,’ he demanded. ‘I can’t hear what he’s saying.’

‘It’s all just bullshit,’ Danny argued. ‘It ain’t real. Just a couple of clowns looking for publicity.’

‘No,’ Hudson snapped. ‘Listen to what the man’s saying. That bloke in the chair’s one of the banker bastards.’

‘So?’ Zach joined in. ‘What the fuck’s that got to do with us?’

‘Just shut up and listen,’ Hudson insisted, silencing his friends who had no intention of crossing him further, well aware of his reputation on the estate that had earned him the nickname ‘Psychic Mark’.

‘*Time to judge this man for his crimes against the people of this country,*’ the man on the screen told them. ‘*Your job is merely to pass judgement. Once his guilt has been established I will determine his sentence, which I must warn you now – could be death.*’

‘Fucking hell,’ Hudson declared, his eyes wide with excitement – a grin appearing on his lips. ‘He’s gonna kill him.’

Gabriel Westbrook leaned in closer to his computer screen when the masked man mentioned death. He didn’t know the victim, but they had plenty in common – high-paid careers in the City, beautiful homes, expensive habits – although he was much younger than Elkins at only thirty-four. He considered summoning his wife to watch with him, but decided that was probably a bad idea.

‘Is this for real?’ he whispered to himself as he listened to the man’s words, rendered all the more

disturbing by the warped voice.

'If there was another way I would not be doing what I have now been forced to do. But it is the only way these people will ever listen to us. Only through fear and terror will they take notice. I have no choice but to do what I have to do.'

'Christ,' Westbrook told the empty room. 'Is this a hoax? Please let this be a hoax.'

'Come and have a look at this, love,' Phil Taylor called out to his wife Cathy in their small home in Hull. She sensed the excitement in his voice and walked the short distance from the kitchen to the cramped office. Her husband was sitting in front of a computer screen that displayed a masked figure next to a man taped to a chair.

'For God's sake, what are you watching?' she asked, shocked that he'd want to share it with her. 'This isn't pornography, is it?'

'Don't be stupid,' he told her. 'This bloke's kidnapped one of them bankers.'

'Not this again,' she moaned, rolling her eyes in disapproval.

'Hey,' he warned her. 'Those bastards cost me my business and our home. We wouldn't be living in this shit house and I wouldn't be doing my shit job if it wasn't for their bloody greed and incompetence.'

'We overstretched,' she reminded him. 'That's why we lost the business and house.'

'You can believe that if you want,' he told her with a snarl, 'but I know the truth. Now it looks like someone else has finally had enough too.'

'It's important I make a statement here and now. It's important we show the rich and the greedy that this is their new reality. No more can they steal from us and fear no retribution. From this day on, they will be punished for their crimes.'

'What's he gonna do to him?' Cathy asked.

'I don't know,' he answered. 'Said he might kill him.'

'Jesus Christ, turn it off,' she told him.

'No,' he insisted, never looking away from the screen. 'I want to see what he does to him. I want to see the bastard squirm.'

Father Alex Jones sat in the small office in St Thomas More Catholic Church, Dulwich, watching and listening to the continuing monologue of the masked man. Instinct told him that this was no stunt and the man was deadly serious. His original reason for searching the Internet long forgotten, he pressed his hands tightly together and began to whisper prayers for both the victim and masked man, for salvation for both and forgiveness for one.

'Now I need you – my brothers and my sisters – to play your part. It's time to judge. If you believe this man is guilty of crimes against the people then simply click on the like icon. If you believe he is innocent then click on the dislike icon. Once the judgement is made, the sentence will be carried out accordingly. One click, one vote. Don't waste your time trying to make multiple votes. The Your View system only allows one vote per user.'

'God forgive you,' the priest whispered as he clicked on the dislike icon, leaning away to watch how other viewers were voting. The like and dislike numbers were growing rapidly – but one far quicker than the other.

Mark Hudson watched the voting just as closely as the priest, but he was praying for a different outcome.

‘What’s happening?’ Danny asked.

‘Shut the fuck up,’ was Hudson’s only reply.

‘The people have voted and they have overwhelmingly found you guilty. Have you anything you want to say?’

‘This has gone far enough,’ Elkins shouted as the masked man momentarily disappeared from the screen. *‘You need to let me go now.’* His face twisted with terror. *‘You’ve made your point.’*

There was the noise of metal on metal before the man reappeared with a length of rope – a noose tied at one end while the other looked to go straight to the ceiling, out of shot. The masked man looped the noose over the struggling Elkins, ignoring his writhing and bucking – ignoring his pleas.

‘Please don’t do this. Please. I haven’t done anything wrong. I can give the money back. You can have it. I just want to see my wife and children again. I’m a family man.’ But the man ignored him and he reached for another rope that seemed to hang from the ceiling.

‘The people have judged you, Mr Elkins. Now I must pass sentence. Your punishment shall be death.’ Before Elkins could speak again, the man pulled the rope he was holding towards the floor, the rope attached to the noose around Elkins’s neck instantly growing taut, vibrating with tension as it lifted him, chair and all, from the floor. Terrible sounds came from behind Elkins’s gritted teeth as he fought desperately for his life.

‘Fucking hell,’ Hudson exclaimed, unaware that his two friends were backing away from the screen, their faces serious and pale while his beamed and glowed. ‘He’s hanging the fucker. He’s really doing it. Ha. This is fucking brilliant.’

Westbrook watched on as the older version of himself hung from the rope, still taped to the chair – the man’s eyes growing increasingly bulbous and grotesque – his mouth now open with his tongue protruding and writhing around like a dying lizard. He felt sick and scared all in the same moment. Someone wanted revenge – revenge against him and all his type. Which one of them would be next? He felt a shiver run up his spine.

‘I can’t watch this any more,’ Cathy told her husband. ‘I think I’m going to be sick. Turn it off.’ She reached for the computer’s power switch, but her husband pushed her hand away, eyes full of hate although not for her.

‘Leave it,’ he ordered.

‘Please tell me you don’t want to watch this,’ she pleaded. ‘A man’s being killed. Murdered. What the hell do you want to watch it?’

‘Maybe he had it coming. Maybe he deserved it. Maybe they all do.’

‘Jesus, Phil,’ she told him. ‘No one deserves that.’

‘Don’t they?’ he asked. ‘And what about me? Did I deserve what happened to me? Did I deserve to lose everything?’

‘You just lost money, Phil. This is a man’s life.’ She turned and walked from the room. ‘I won’t be in the same room as this. I hope they catch the bastard and hang him.’ She left him sitting staring at the screen – a thin smile spreading across his face as he watched Elkins’s body finally go limp.

The priest closed his eyes and drew an imaginary cross over his heart, summoning the courage to once again look at the scene of barbarity he’d just witnessed on his computer screen. Being a priest in modern London was not what the public imagined it to be. He regularly had to deal with abused youngsters and battered women who for whatever reason were too scared or unwilling to go to the

police, although he'd always encourage them to do so. And then there was the missionary work he'd done in Africa – teaching men and women who'd had their arms hacked off with machetes how to somehow survive after yet another civil war in the Congo, as well as many other terrible things he'd seen that he never talked about. But this was as repellent as anything he'd ever witnessed. When he finally opened his eyes the masked man was standing in front of the still swaying body and chair.

'Justice has been done. The first of the guilty has been punished. Rest assured, my friends – my brothers and sisters – there will be more.' The man released the rope and allowed the body and chair to crash to the floor before walking towards the camera. A few seconds later the screen went blank.

Father Alex clasped his hands together and began to pray, but found it difficult to focus – his mind still trapped in more earthly matters. The terrible crime he'd just witnessed would no doubt have to be investigated by the police – by detectives. The thought brought to mind the troubled policeman who occasionally came to see him – DI Sean Corrigan. Would he be the man who'd have to try to catch the remorseless killer?

'Our Father who art in heaven – protect us from this new evil in our lives and forgive him who has done the unforgivable.'

Detective Inspector Sean Corrigan sat in his office on the seventh floor of New Scotland Yard reading through the latest batch of CPS memos about the soon-to-begin trial of Douglas Allen – a man the media had aptly named ‘The Toy Taker’. Allen had been declared mentally fit to stand trial at the previous Pleas and Directions hearing and now it was full steam ahead for the trial. The investigation had been Sean’s first as head of the Special Investigations Team and now he waited for the next, praying it wouldn’t come until after Allen’s trial and the conviction it was sure to bring. The last thing he wanted was to be dashing backwards and forwards to the Old Bailey whilst trying to run a new investigation. DC Paulo Zukov appeared at his door and tapped more times that was needed on the door frame, breaking Sean’s concentration and making him look up.

‘What is it, Paulo?’

Zukov smiled smugly before answering, sure he was for once one step ahead of Sean. ‘Just wondering what you thought about that online murder thing that’s all over the news?’

‘What are you talking about?’ Sean asked, not interested in Zukov’s games.

‘The online murder, boss. Haven’t you seen it yet?’

‘No I haven’t,’ Sean told him. ‘I’ve been a little too busy to be staring at the news all day.’

‘This happened last night, boss.’

‘Paulo, I haven’t read a newspaper or watched TV for days, and one day, God forbid, if you’re in my position, plus two young kids and a wife who works, you’ll know what I mean.’

‘Just thought you might have had a call from someone.’

‘Like who?’

‘Superintendent Featherstone. Mr Addis.’

‘Why would I?’

‘Well, we are Special Investigations, aren’t we?’

‘Paulo,’ Sean asked, losing his limited patience, ‘is there something I should know about?’

‘The online murder, boss. Just thought it was the sort of thing we might pick up.’

The look on Zukov’s face told Sean he needed to find out more. ‘Get in here,’ Sean told him. ‘Go on, then. Tell me about it, but keep it succinct.’

‘Some bloke from the City gets grabbed from the street in broad daylight,’ Zukov began, ‘and the next thing he’s on Your View strapped to a chair with some nutter going on about how he and all his banker buddies are criminals and how he’s going to teach them all a lesson. Keeps a hood on all the time and uses some sort of electronic device to alter his voice.’

Sean stared at him disbelievingly for a while before speaking. ‘And then?’

Zukov shrugged his shoulders. ‘And then he killed him.’

‘How?’

‘Looks like he used some sort of pulley system to hang him. Pulled the chair up and everything.’

‘And this is genuine?’ Sean asked, still unconvinced.

‘Apparently. Bloke’s family’s already been in touch with the local CID. He went missing some time yesterday and hasn’t been seen since.’

‘Could he be in on it – some kind of prank or publicity stunt?’

‘Doesn’t look like it. Not the type, apparently.’

‘Where you getting all this from?’ Sean asked. ‘How come you know so much about it?’

‘Like I said – it’s all over the news, boss. All over the Internet.’

Sean looked him up and down before pushing his laptop across his desk and indicating for Zukov take a seat in front of it. ‘Show me.’

Zukov sat and quickly logged onto the Internet and began to navigate his way around. He soon had what he was looking for and spun the laptop back towards Sean. ‘Here you go, boss – the whole thing available to watch on Your View. It’s been the most watched video since word got out.’

‘Jesus,’ Sean muttered as he concentrated on the screen. ‘That says a lot about our society. Who the hell would want to watch a man being killed?’

‘Thousands,’ Zukov answered. ‘Maybe even millions.’

Sean didn’t answer, the video of the masked man and his victim taking over his world. He watched the entire ‘show’, until finally the masked preacher drew a curtain of darkness across the screen.

‘What the hell is this?’ Sean asked himself.

‘Dunno, boss,’ Zukov said, mistaking it as a question directed at him. ‘But some in the media reckon maybe he thinks he’s some sort of avenging angel.’

‘What?’

‘You know – man of the people sticking up for the little guys, striking back at the rich bankers.’

‘You’ve got to be joking,’ Sean told him. ‘Avenging angel? More like another bloody psychopath looking to make a name for himself. This is all we need.’

‘Maybe,’ Zukov added.

Sean leaned back in his chair and fixed him with look Zukov knew all too well. ‘You don’t sound convinced.’

‘It’s just a lot of people seem to agree with him. Not necessarily the murder, but that it’s about time something was done to the bankers.’

‘What people?’

‘People on Facebook and Twitter. They’re all saying it.’

‘Facebook? Twitter?’ Sean asked. ‘It’s a wonder anyone gets any work done any more. Get hold of Donnelly and Sally for me. Get them back here for a briefing. They’ll need to know what’s happening. Shit!’

‘You reckon we’ll get this one then, boss?’

‘Does this look like a run-of-the-mill murder to you? Does this look like someone who intends to stop any time soon? Yeah. This one’s coming our way. I can feel it.’

Zukov knew he’d used up his usefulness. ‘I’ll go track them down for you, boss.’

‘You do that,’ Sean told him, watching him leave just as Detective Superintendent Featherstone entered the main office and headed his way carrying a pink cardboard folder – the colour indicating the contents were confidential. Featherstone appeared to be his jovial self, despite the bad news Sean knew he carried tucked under his armpit. He knocked once on Sean’s doorframe before entering and taking a seat without being asked.

‘Morning,’ he began. ‘How’s it going?’

‘Fine so far, but I’m guessing it’s about to change.’

‘How’s the prep for the Allen case going?’

‘Pretty much done,’ Sean told him, his eyes never leaving the pink folder. ‘Down to the jury as to whether they believe he intended to kill the boy or whether they think it was an accident. Nothing more we can do now. The abductions and false imprisonments are beyond doubt.’

‘Good,’ Featherstone answered, although he hadn’t really been listening.

Sean nodded at the folder. ‘Let me guess – the banker who was murdered live on the Internet yesterday?’

‘You heard then?’

‘Only recently.’

Featherstone tossed the folder across the desk. ‘Courtesy of Mr Addis. Felt this was right up your street.’

‘Thanks,’ Sean said without meaning it, pulling the file towards him and flipping it open to be greeted by a professional-looking photograph of the smiling victim. ‘Not the usual holiday snap-shot. Someone important?’

‘Paul Elkins,’ Featherstone explained. ‘CEO of Fairfield’s Bank based in the City, so yes, he’s both important and wealthy, or at least he was. If it hadn’t been for the video on Your View and the rantings of the suspect I would have assumed it was a professional hit – some Colombians or Russians making an example of him.’

‘You have reason to believe he was laundering money for somebody he shouldn’t have been messing with?’

‘No, not yet, but it’ll need to be eliminated as a possible motive.’

‘Of course, but ...’

‘But what?’

‘You’ve seen the video – looks more personal than professional.’

‘There you go,’ Featherstone told him. ‘I knew you were the right man for the job – you’re making inroads already.’ Featherstone’s smile was not returned. ‘Anyway, he finishes work late yesterday afternoon and takes the tube home, shunning the use of a company chauffeur, as usual. He’s walking along the street where he lives in Chelsea when he’s attacked from behind, apparently hit over the head several times and then dragged into a white van that’s parked up next to the abduction site. The van takes off and not long after that he’s live on Your View. As they say, the rest is history.’

‘How do we know all this?’

‘We have two witnesses who saw pretty much the whole thing – a housekeeper on her way home and a neighbour who happened to be looking out of her window.’

Sean scanned through the file, noting the details of the witnesses and the fact the victim had been hit over the head several times with something the neighbour described as a small, black bat. ‘Looks like he used a cosh.’

‘I reckon,’ Featherstone agreed.

‘Then he’s definitely no professional.’

‘How so?’

‘Because a professional would have taken him out with one hit. This guy’s not done this before. He’s learning as he goes.’

‘Which all fits with him being a disgruntled citizen with an axe to grind with bankers.’

‘Well that narrows it down to just a few million suspects.’

‘Indeed.’ Featherstone shrugged his shoulders and heaved himself out of the uncomfortable chair. ‘It’s all in the file – what we know so far. I’ll leave it with you and good luck. The Assistant Commissioner would of course appreciate a quick result – media’s already all over this one.’ He headed for the door before turning back. ‘One more thing.’ Sean looked at him with suspicion. ‘Mr Addis has decided he’d like an old friend of yours on this one. Anna Ravenni-Ceron will be joining you shortly. Try to get on with her this time.’

Sean swallowed hard, the excitement in his stomach unwelcome, but it was already too late. A

much as he might object to the criminologist and psychiatrist being attached to his investigation, he could never deny his attraction to her – or hers to him. He could almost smell her long dark hair and her soft skin, just as surely as if she was standing in the office next to him.

‘I’ll try.’

Assistant Commissioner Addis looked over the top of his spectacles at Anna, who sat on the opposite side of his oversized desk in his larger than normal office on the top floor of New Scotland Yard, his stare making her feel uncomfortable and disloyal.

‘You understand what I need you to do, yes?’ he asked her.

‘I understand.’

‘Same as before. Watch him, study him, speak to him as much as you can without showing your hand and report directly back to me. In exchange you get unrestricted access to the investigation including the chance to assist with any interviews with the suspect once he’s apprehended, which I’m sure with DI Corrigan in charge won’t take too long.’

‘I’ll get as close as I can,’ she told him, ‘but it won’t be without the risk of DI Corrigan working out what’s happening. He’s clever and instinctive. It won’t be easy.’

‘You’ll find a way,’ Addis leered at her. ‘I have every confidence in you.’

She wondered if he knew – somehow knew about that afternoon when Sean had visited her in his office in Swiss Cottage and they’d come so close to giving in to their desires and attraction for one another. But how could he? Then again, how did he know half the things he seemed to know?

‘I’ll do what I can,’ she finally answered.

She felt him studying her for a while, searching for a weakness. ‘You think I’m being ... underhanded in wanting him watched by someone from your profession?’ She said nothing. ‘You see, Anna, DI Corrigan is an asset. No matter what you may think, I value him as such. But let’s be honest with each other, he’s not exactly ... conventional. I’ve seen his type before – the ones who need to be right on the edge all the time to get the best out of themselves. Trouble with being on the edge is you’re more likely to fall. I want to see that coming before it happens with DI Corrigan. I have his best interests at heart here, which is why I value your professional opinion as a psychiatrist.’

‘Of course. I understand.’ Anna didn’t believe a word Addis was saying.

‘One thing about Corrigan that does concern me,’ Addis told her, ‘is his compulsion to confront the suspects, once he has them cornered, so to speak. He seems determined to challenge them face-to-face, and *alone*. Any ideas as to why that could be?’

Anna moved uncomfortably in her chair and cleared her throat. Was this Addis gathering evidence against Sean for some reason, or was he concerned Sean would do something to damage the reputation of the Metropolitan Police? The possibility that the Assistant Commissioner could be concerned for his officer’s welfare never crossed her mind.

‘It’s a part of him he can’t control. A recklessness that manifests itself in other ways too.’ She stopped, realizing she’d probably said too much.

‘Other ways?’ Addis seized on it. ‘Such as?’

‘Such as he takes risks that others probably wouldn’t, and he can be a little clumsy, socially. Can say things he immediately regrets or sometimes doesn’t.’ She hoped Addis had bought it.

Addis said nothing for a while before grunting and shrugging his shoulders. ‘Indeed. But why do you have this reckless need to be alone with the suspects at all? He was damn lucky Thomas Kelly didn’t blow his head off.’

‘I think he needs it,’ Anna told him, trying to tell him the truth while also protecting Sean. ‘To have

a chance to talk alone with them, before the lawyers and procedure take over – to speak with them an *undiluted* way. So for a while he can observe and absorb everything about them while they're still their true selves.'

'And why would he want to do that?'

'So next time, if he has to, he can become like them. You have to think like a criminal to catch a criminal. Isn't that what you police say?'

'Maybe twenty years ago,' Addis scoffed.

Anna ignored him. 'Only with DI Corrigan the criminals are murderers. Psychopaths, sociopaths and sometimes just the mentally ill. It can't be easy, having to think like them. It must be a very dark and lonely place to be – don't you think?'

More silence from Addis before he spoke. 'Quite. And this time alone he craves with the suspects an important part of him being able to think like them?'

'I believe so. He clearly learns from the encounters. I can't see him stopping, unless he's made to.'

'There's no need for that just yet,' Addis jumped in. 'Like I said – he's a valuable asset to me. I wouldn't want to do anything to upset his ... *modus operandi*.'

'No,' Anna agreed. 'I don't suppose you would.'

Geoff Jackson sat on his swivel chair with his feet on his desk while he chewed his pen and twizzled an unlit cigarette in the other hand. He'd been staring at his screen all morning watching the footage of Paul Elkins's murder on Your View over and over again, oblivious to the constant clatter of voices and the ringing of phones in the huge office he sat at the centre of. As the crime editor for *The World*, the UK's bestselling newspaper, he could have had a private side office, but he liked to be in the middle of it – it helped him think. He was forty-eight now and had been a journalist all his adult life. The silence of a private office would have driven him mad and he knew it. He also knew that the Your View murder was the biggest story out there and he was determined to make it his. He could smell the paperback already, maybe even a TV documentary. But first he needed to make his name and face synonymous with this murder and the other killings he was sure would follow.

Jackson sensed the editor close by before he saw her, leaping to his feet, his tallish body kept slim by smoking as often and as much as he could in this new non-smoking world, his accent-less voice made increasingly gravelly by the same addiction. 'Sue,' he stopped her. 'Can I have a word?'

Sue Dempsey rolled her blue eyes before speaking. 'What is it, Geoff?' At five foot nine she was almost as tall as Jackson, with the same lithe body, her hair dyed ash blonde to hide the grey. At fifty-one she still turned heads.

'The Your View murder – I need you to hold the front page for me. Tomorrow and the days after that.'

'What?' She almost laughed, walking away with Jackson in pursuit. 'You must be crazy.'

'I need this, Sue,' Jackson all but pleaded, thinking of his above-average flat in Soho and the expensive thirty-two-year-old girlfriend he shared it with.

'You know the score, Geoff. Everything has to be discussed and agreed in the editors' meeting. I can't sanction anything alone, not in this day and age.'

'But you can back me up.'

'And why would I do that?'

'Because this story is the biggest thing out there. It's fucking huge.'

'Bigger than the terrorist attack in LA?'

'If it doesn't happen on our shores the readers soon lose interest – you know that. This Your View

thing could run and run. We need to make this story ours. This story needs to belong to *The World*. Dempsey stopped and turned to him. He felt her resolve weakening. ‘The LA story will be dead news in a couple of days. I still have my contacts at the Yard. We could get the inside track. People are already talking about this guy as being some kind of avenging angel. We could even run our own public polls – “Do you agree with what the Your View Killer is doing or not?” It’s a winner, Sue. I’m telling you, this is gonna be big. Remember no one believed me when I started digging up the dirt on our celebrity paedophile friends. Look how big that story got. Surely I’m still owed a few favours.’

‘I have to admit that was good work,’ Dempsey agreed.

‘It was better than good,’ Jackson argued. ‘The cops didn’t have a clue what was going on – didn’t believe what the parents of the children were telling them until I blew the lid off the whole ring.’ His expression of self-congratulation suddenly faded to something more serious, as if he was recalling a sad moment from his own life. ‘I saved a lot of kids from suffering the same fate as the ones those bastards had already got their hands on.’

‘Yes you did,’ Dempsey admitted. ‘It was good work all around. All right, Geoff. All right, but not a funny business. Keep it clean or it might be a journalist this madman comes after next.’

‘And exclusivity,’ he almost talked over her. ‘I get exclusivity. No other journos on the story. Just me.’

‘Thinking ahead, Geoff?’

‘I just want what’s best for the paper.’

‘Of course you do,’ she answered. ‘That’s what we all want. OK. You have your exclusivity, but you better bring home the meat.’

‘When have I ever not?’ he asked with a broadening smile.

‘Don’t ask,’ she told him and began walk away before turning back to him. ‘I noticed you still haven’t written the paperback about the celebrity paedophile ring. You usually turn the paperback around in a few weeks – strike while the iron is hot and all that bollocks.’

‘Not this time,’ he answered. ‘As much as I’d like to expose those slimy bastard celebs for everything they are, some things are still sacred. I wouldn’t write about abused kids for money. Not my style.’

‘Not going soft on me, are you, Geoff?’ Dempsey smiled and turned on her heels before he could answer.

Jackson made his way back to his desk whistling a happy little tune and wondering whether he should call his publishers now, whet their appetites, or wait until things had really brewed up. Until then was the only thing anyone was talking about.

Sean and Donnelly pulled up on the south side of Barnes Bridge in southwest London. The Marine Policing Unit had found a body floating in the Thames underneath the bridge, trapped by the whirlpool created by the current trying to find a way around. They climbed from their car and made their way to the small gathering of both uniformed and CID officers next to the bridge watching the police launch still trying to recover the forlorn body from behind the sanctuary of a small taped-off area of the pavement. Sean and Donnelly flashed their warrant cards to the uniformed officer guarding the small cordon and headed for the two men in suits.

Sean offered his hand. ‘DI Corrigan – Special Investigations Unit.’ Donnelly followed suit.

‘DS Rob Evans,’ the older, shorter, stockier man offered, speaking in a mild Yorkshire accent.

‘DC Nathan Mead,’ the young, lean, tall one introduced himself in his London accent.

Evans looked back down at the launch struggling in the swell of the river below. The stiff bod

arms stretched to the side, face down, swirled in the dark brown water of the Thames by the bridge foundation as another train crashed over above.

‘They’re still struggling to get the poor bastard out,’ he explained. ‘Every time they almost have him they nearly get smashed against the side of the bridge, but the current’s calming down now. They should be able to get a hook into him soon.’ Sean and Donnelly just nodded as they watched the grisly spectacle. Bodies fished from the Thames were always tough to deal with – the cold of the water intensifying rigor mortis, while the marine life also took a quick toll.

‘Reckon he’s your man, do you?’ Evans asked.

‘Could be,’ Sean answered. ‘He looks to be suited and booted. Can’t be too many men in suits floating in the Thames today.’

‘I bloody hope not,’ Evans told him. ‘That’s the trouble with being posted to Wandsworth – we cover the Thames all the way from bloody Barnes to Battersea. We get more floaters than most. At least this one’s still in one piece.’ Sean didn’t answer, watching the launch inching closer and closer to the body until finally one of the crew managed to hook the dead man’s clothing with a grappling pole.

‘About time,’ Evans moaned. ‘We can’t get on the boat here. I’ve told them we’ll meet them down by the local rowing club. There’s a small pier there, or mooring, or whatever you want to call it. Anyway, I’ve said we’ll meet them there once they fished him out. You coming?’ he asked Sean, who barely heard him, transfixed by the macabre scene of the unyielding body being heaved on board the launch by the crew. The man’s head was raised by the rigor mortis in his neck muscles, his eyes and mouth wide open as if staring straight at Sean. ‘I said, are you coming?’ Evans repeated.

Sean snapped out of his reverie and spun to face him. ‘What? Yeah. Sure. We’re coming. Where to?’

Evans rolled his eyes. ‘Just follow us.’

‘Fine,’ Sean answered and followed the other detectives back to the waiting cars. Donnelly spoke first as they pulled away from the kerb.

‘Think it’s our man?’

‘Looks like it. Has to be really, doesn’t it,’ Sean answered.

‘Aye. I reckon so. First thoughts?’

‘To be honest, I’m trying not to have any.’

‘Not like you,’ Donnelly pointed out. ‘You all right?’

‘I’m fine,’ Sean lied, the man’s staring eyes mixing with images of Anna in his troubled mind – a sense of fear and excitement at the thought of being with her day-to-day distracting him from where he needed to be – preventing him from being able to fully immerse himself in the abduction and murder of the man who now lay dead on the floor of a police launch.

‘Well, I don’t suppose he dumped him in the river around here,’ Donnelly offered. ‘Too busy unless he chucked him off the bridge in the middle of the night.’

‘No,’ Sean dismissed the possibility. ‘Tide brought him here. The Marine Unit might be able to tell us where from.’

‘Aye,’ was all Donnelly replied and they finished the rest of the short journey in silence, parking up and following the Wandsworth detectives to the small pier of the rowing club where the police launch was already moored.

‘We’ll wait here for you,’ Evans told them, standing at the beginning of the pier. ‘Not a lot of room on those things,’ he explained, nodding towards the launch. ‘If he’s not your man you can always kick it back to us, but if it is ...’

‘Fair enough,’ Sean agreed and headed off along the short pier.

Donnelly waited until they were out of earshot before speaking quietly. 'I guess he's had his fill of floaters.'

'He could always get a posting to Catford,' Sean told him before pulling his warrant card from his coat pocket and flashing it to the wary launch crew. 'DI Corrigan. Special Investigations Unit. I think this body belongs to us.'

'Come on board,' the sergeant replied. The three white stripes on his lifejacket singled him out as the boat's leader. 'Mind your step though. Deck's a little slippery. Never ceases to amaze me how much water comes out of a dead body – especially when it's fully clothed.' Donnelly rolled his eyes while Sean ignored the comment as they stepped on board.

The river police had already managed to manhandle the body into a black zip-up body-bag, although the victim's arms still protruded somewhat out to his side. They'd left the bag open for the detectives.

'Gonna have a hell of a job getting that zipped up,' the sergeant explained.

'You'll manage,' Sean told him before moving closer to the body and crouching down, the movement of the boat adding to his rising nausea. 'How long d'you reckon he's been in the water for?'

'Hard to say,' the sergeant replied. 'A good few hours at least.'

'Was he dumped close by?' Sean asked.

The sergeant pulled an expression of indifference. 'I shouldn't think so. Tide's been going out for a good while now. Probably somewhere between Teddington and Richmond.'

'Great,' Donnelly complained, aware of the size of area they would now have to consider.

Sean studied the remains of Paul Elkins, the cause of death and exposure to the water making his face appear bloated and grotesque, his eyes bulbous and red – mouth open with a swollen, grey tongue protruding from within. Sean tried not to think of the small marine creatures that would have already found their way into the man's mouth, making his body their temporary home as well as a food supply. The burn marks and bruising left around his neck by the rope used to kill him left no doubt as to the cause of death, although the mandatory post-mortem would still have to officially confirm it.

'When we're done,' Sean told the sergeant, 'I want you to ensure the body is taken to the mortuary at Guy's Hospital. Understand?'

The sergeant drew a sharp intake of breath. 'Tricky. Bodies from this area are supposed to be taken to Charing Cross. Coroner's Courts are very twitchy about jurisdiction.'

'My call,' he snapped at him slightly. 'He goes to Dr Canning at Guy's. No one else.'

'So he is the man you're looking for, then?' the sergeant deduced.

'Yeah,' Sean answered mournfully. 'He's our victim.' He stood and turned to Donnelly.

'Anything catch your eye?' Donnelly asked.

'Nothing particular, although ...'

'Although what?'

'Although there's only two reasons a killer removes a body from the scene of the murder,' Sean explained. 'One is because the scene links them in some way to the victim, so they have to move it, ...'

'Or?' Donnelly pushed, impatient to hear the answer.

'Or because they need to continue using the scene – to live in, to run a business from, although in this case neither of those seem likely.'

'What then?' Donnelly asked.

'He needs it,' Sean explained. 'He needs to use it again for other victims and there will be more. He's as good as told us there will.'

'I was afraid you were gonna say that,' Donnelly told him. 'Why is it with us there's always going'

to be more?’

‘Welcome to Special Investigations,’ Sean answered.

‘So what we dealing with here? Just another fucking lunatic, or could this one really be some sort self-proclaimed avenging angel – a normal guy pushed too far?’

‘It doesn’t really matter right now,’ Sean explained. ‘What does matter is that he’s organized, motivated, clever and dangerous. And we need to find him and stop him, before this whole thing gets completely out of control.’

‘Fair enough,’ Donnelly agreed. ‘D’you want me to sort out a Family Liaison Officer?’

‘Yeah, sure.’ Sean tried not to think of the pain he was about to put the family through. ‘But I need to see them first – let them know what to expect, maybe get some early answers.’

‘Want some company?’ Donnelly asked.

‘Why not,’ he answered. ‘You can keep me on the right path.’

‘Meaning?’ Donnelly asked.

‘Meaning,’ Sean explained, ‘this isn’t exactly what we’ve become used to – is it? Not like he’s a young woman abducted from her own home or a young child snatched from his bed. They were *vulnerable*. This man had no vulnerabilities – or so he thought. Male, in his fifties, rich, powerful. Can’t see the public shedding too many tears over him.’

‘Aye, well,’ Donnelly reminded him, ‘the man’s still been killed and anyone who gets murdered in a strange and interesting way on our patch relies on us to find their killer – no matter what the background.’

‘I know that,’ he agreed, ‘but don’t expect an avalanche of information if we end up relying on the public to help us solve this one.’

‘Sometimes, boss,’ Donnelly told him, ‘you have a very bleak view of mankind.’

‘We’ll see,’ he warned him more than told him. ‘We’ll see.’

DS Sally Jones was in her side office ploughing through the huge number of reports the investigation had already generated. She’d spent a good part of the day speaking on the phone with people from Your View, all of whom who were deeply upset and shocked that their ‘medium’ had been used for such a mindless act of violence, but were powerless to stop it happening again, unless they closed down their entire operation, which of course they were not prepared to do. They were sure the police and public would understand. She sensed a disturbance in the main office and looked up to see Anna standing in the middle of a small group of detectives chatting cheerfully, explaining her sudden unannounced arrival.

Sally felt the colour drain from her face and an old, familiar sick feeling spreading in her stomach. Her private sessions with Anna had been held in complete secrecy, without the knowledge of anyone connected to the police, but now her psychiatrist was standing in her office talking to her work colleagues.

She practically jumped from her chair and paced into the main office, weaving her way through the small group and seizing Anna by the arm. ‘Anna. So nice to see you. What are you doing here?’ she faked and began to steer her towards the relative privacy of her own office.

‘No one knows, Sally, if that’s what you look so worried about,’ Anna tried to calm her concerns. ‘and no one’s going to know. I’m only here to advise on the Your View investigation – that’s all.’

‘Advise on the investigation?’ Sally questioned. ‘I seem to remember the last time you did those things didn’t work out too well. Not for Sean, anyway.’

‘Sally,’ Anna explained, looking around to make sure they were out of earshot. ‘If me being here

going to cause hostility between us – if it’s going to adversely affect our patient-doctor relationship then I promise you, I’ll tell the Assistant Commissioner I can’t help with the case.’ There was a silent pause. ‘You’re more important to me than this investigation.’

Sally studied her for a good while, this woman she’d grown to trust with her deepest secrets, secrets she kept even from Sean. ‘Jesus, Anna. I’m really sorry. I just didn’t expect to see you standing in here, in my office. It threw me a bit.’

‘My fault,’ Anna admitted. ‘I should have spoken to you first. Warned you.’

‘You don’t have to check with me. Your work is your work. Outside of our relationship you owe me nothing.’ There was a silent truce between them for a moment before Sally spoke again. ‘So, here we are again. You. Me. *Sean*. A murder investigation.’

‘Looks that way. Speaking of which, how is Sean?’

Sally tried to hide her suspicion about the true nature of Sean and Anna’s relationship. She barely knew Sean’s wife Kate, and didn’t particularly like the little she did know, if she was honest, but still she felt strangely compelled to protect Sean’s marriage – some deep instinct in her warning he could be lost into a world of turmoil without her and their two young daughters. In Anna, she sensed a threat.

‘Sean’s Sean,’ she answered. ‘He’s fine, as usual. Bull in a china shop, all guns blazing, shooting from the hip and God help anyone who gets in the way.’

‘Hasn’t changed then,’ Anna joked.

Sally forced a smile. ‘Same old, same old.’

‘Well,’ Anna told her, getting to her feet. ‘I’d better get on with what I’m being paid for. Do you think Sean would mind if I borrowed his office?’

‘No,’ Sally said and immediately regretted it. ‘Or you could share with me.’

Anna looked around. ‘Looks like you’re already sharing the rent.’

‘Ah. Yeah. DS Donnelly,’ Sally admitted.

‘I think Sean might tolerate me a little better.’

‘I take your point. Is there anything you need?’

‘No,’ Anna told her. ‘I already have the file and the video. That’s all I need for now. I’ll see you later for coffee perhaps?’

‘Yeah, sure,’ Sally replied, trying to sound a lot friendlier than she felt, watching Anna float from the office and into Sean’s. ‘This is not good,’ she whispered to herself. ‘This is not good at all.’

‘Are you sure this isn’t a professional hit made to look like something else?’ Donnelly asked as they approached Elm Park Road in Chelsea – the victim’s home street and the place he was abducted from.

‘I’m not sure of anything yet,’ Sean admitted, ‘but if he got caught with his hand in the cookie jar while laundering someone’s money, especially if they’re Eastern European or South American, they wouldn’t want to hide what they’d done. They like to make public statements – keep everyone else on a tight line. And the abduction too doesn’t feel right. If it had been organized crime they would have lured him somewhere – somewhere quiet and out of sight. But I’m not ruling anything out until we know more.’

Donnelly parked as close as he could to Elkins’s home. Sean was out the car before he’d had time to kill the engine, looking up and down the upmarket street – looking for ghosts. Donnelly soon joined him.

‘Hell of a place to abduct somebody from,’ he offered.

‘And in daylight,’ Sean added.

‘A confident customer.’

‘Or insane.’

‘Either way the whole thing was seen by a couple of witnesses – both saying the suspect’s white van was parked in the street already, waiting for Elkins. So he wasn’t followed.’

‘Not yesterday anyway,’ Sean explained, ‘but he was followed at some point, otherwise how could the suspect know where he lived and the fact he regularly walked from the tube station to his home? Unless he already knew him – knew his habits.’

‘Someone who worked for him in the past?’ Donnelly suggested.

‘In the City?’

‘No. These people have a lot of hired help. I was thinking more a disgruntled gardener, a maintenance man, or even a husband of a cleaner his missus sacked.’

‘Possibly,’ Sean agreed. ‘It’ll all need to be checked out. It’ll be nice if it’s that easy.’

‘Shall we do the witnesses first or the family?’

‘The family,’ Sean replied. ‘Get it over with.’

‘If you don’t want to see them you don’t have to,’ Donnelly offered. ‘I can always come back later with Sally.’

‘No,’ he insisted. ‘I want to see them, or his wife at least.’

‘Fair enough.’ Donnelly didn’t argue. ‘After you.’

Sean walked the short distance along the immaculate street and climbed the short flight of steps to the shining black door of number twelve. He imagined Paul Elkins coming home to this door, day after day, content and confident, untouched by the problems *normal* people had – unable to imagine something like this could ever happen to him. Was that what the killer wanted – to drag the wealthy and privileged into a world where they could feel the pain of everyday life? Had the killer felt too much pain to bear? He took a deep breath and rang the doorbell – avoiding the heavy-looking metal door knocker in the shape of a lion’s head that looked like it would wake the dead. The last thing he wanted to do was advertise their presence. It was only a matter of time before the media discovered the victim’s home address and came crawling around, but he wanted to keep things quiet for as long as he could.

After a few seconds the door was opened by a short, stocky man in his late twenties wearing spectacles and dressed in an inexpensive-looking dark suit. He eyed them suspiciously. ‘Can I help you?’ he asked with a slight London accent.

Sean knew immediately he was a fellow detective as he showed him his warrant card. ‘DI Sean Corrigan from the Special Investigations Unit.’

‘DS Donnelly,’ Donnelly told him without producing his identification, ‘from the same.’

The other detective seemed to immediately relax. ‘Am I glad to see you,’ he whispered. ‘I was told you’d be taking this one over. Babysitting the family of a murder victim isn’t exactly my thing. Do you mind?’ Donnelly nodded. ‘I’ll be here for you,’ he said. ‘You’d better come in.’ He stepped aside and allowed them to enter before closing the door and continuing to talk in a whisper. ‘They’re all gathered in the living room,’ Donnelly explained. ‘Mrs Elkins and her two kids, Jack and Evie. There’s also a friend of Mrs Elkins’ here too, Trudy Bevens – a shoulder to cry on and all that.’

‘Fine,’ Sean acknowledged as he and Donnelly followed Mendham towards the living room and the desperate sadness he knew he’d find inside.

‘Any idea how long it’ll be before you send someone to take over from me?’ Mendham’s voice held a slight pleading note. ‘I’m not trained for this family liaison stuff.’

‘Soon enough,’ Sean answered carelessly. ‘Until then just keep a watch out for reporters and make sure they don’t speak to anyone they don’t know on the phone. Remind them details of the

investigations are confidential and not to be shared even with family and close friends until I say it OK.'

'No problem,' Mendham agreed in a whisper. 'Just get me out of this mausoleum.' He opened the living-room door before Sean could reply and raised his voice to its normal volume. 'Mrs Elkins,' he addressed the attractive woman in her late forties who remained seated as she looked up at them – her appearance still immaculate despite the circumstances, her ash blonde hair framing her tanned face and piercing blue eyes that had reddened somewhat with crying.

'Yes,' she answered as strongly as she could, her voice wavering somewhat.

'This is Detective Inspector Corrigan and Detective Sergeant Donnelly from our Special Investigations Unit,' Mendham explained. 'They'll be taking over the investigation.'

'Why?' she asked in a slightly clipped accent.

'It's the way things work,' Sean spoke to her for the first time as he scanned the other faces in the room – a weeping girl of no more than eleven or twelve who sat close to her mother wrapped in her protective arm, a stoical-looking boy probably about fourteen and Mrs Elkins's tearful friend. 'Most serious and unusual cases get passed on to us. We have a certain amount of experience in dealing with investigations like this.'

'I wasn't aware that anything like this had ever happened before,' she questioned him.

'It hasn't,' he agreed. 'I meant experience in dealing with things that are a little out of the ordinary.'

'*A little out of the ordinary,*' she repeated, looking at him blankly. 'My husband's dead. Murdered by some lunatic.'

'And we're very sorry for your loss,' Donnelly intervened. 'We're here because we're best equipped to find whoever did this and bring them to justice, but we need to ask some questions. Maybe it would be better if the children weren't here for that.'

'No,' she snapped back. 'We stay together. I'm not about to let them out of my sight. Not until you've caught this madman.'

'Fair enough,' Donnelly didn't argue. 'I reckon I'd be the same. Do you mind if we sit down?'

'Sorry,' she apologized. 'Of course not. Please.'

They both sat on the same large sofa opposite Mrs Elkins and her daughter, Sean glad of the large size of the room – just the thought of being trapped in a small room with this many grieving people was enough to make him feel claustrophobic.

'I appreciate this must be very difficult,' Sean tried to say the things she no doubt expected him to say, 'but our questions really can't wait.'

'I understand,' she assured him. 'Ask what you need to. Let's just get it over with.'

'What time did your husband leave for work yesterday?' Sean asked.

'Not long after seven,' she answered. 'His usual time.'

'A hard-working man,' Donnelly tried to ease the tension.

'You don't get to where Paul was working nine to five,' she told them. 'It takes dedication and sacrifice.'

'Yet he was abducted at about five pm – in the street outside,' Sean reminded her. 'So he didn't always work late?'

'No,' she agreed, slightly defensively. 'Not always, but most days. Does it matter?'

Did you know he'd finished work early? Sean asked the killer silent questions. *Did you somehow know?*

'Did he call you at all during the day?' he asked, more to try to establish a rhythm of questions and

answers than hoping to discover anything useful, 'or contact you somehow?'

'He called me a couple of times,' she answered. 'Once in the morning and again early afternoon – let me know he was about to leave work.' She suddenly choked up, her tears contagious amongst the other women while the boy looked on blankly. *Was the boy somehow involved?* Sean asked himself before deciding he was most likely still in shock. The tears would come later. 'It was the last time I ever got to speak to him,' she managed to say.

'Why call twice?' Sean asked, trying to remember the last time he'd called his wife Kate more than once a day just for the sake of it. 'Was something troubling him?'

'No,' she answered tearfully. 'He usually called me twice or more a day just to say hello. No particular reason. I think he worried I'd get bored if he didn't.'

'But he didn't seem worried about anything?' Sean persisted.

'No,' she insisted.

'Didn't mention anything at all?'

'No,' she repeated. 'What could he be worried about?'

'He was the CEO of Fairfield's Bank, yes?' Sean asked.

'So?'

'Not exactly the most popular people in the world right now – bankers,' he reminded her.

'I understand that,' she assured him, 'and I know this madman used that as some type of twisted justification to commit murder, but Paul was a good man. He believed in responsible banking. He was as interested in making extra pounds and pennies for ordinary people as he was millions for the multinationals.'

Sean couldn't help but roll his eyes around his salubrious surroundings. 'I'm sure that's true,' he said as tactfully as he knew how, 'but from the outside he would have looked like just another wealthy banker.'

'From the outside,' she pointed out. 'This monster knew nothing about Paul. He gave away thousands to charity. I used to joke that he'd give away everything we had if I'd allow him – make us homeless.'

'Why?' Sean asked, not sure where his questions would take him, but asking anyway. 'Did he feel guilty about his wealth for some reason?'

'No,' she bit. 'Why should he? Why should we? We've worked hard for everything we have. We both have. But there'll always be jealous people who would rather just take what we have than earn for themselves.'

Sean imagined her and her dead husband's backgrounds – wealthy families sending them to the best schools and the best universities, feeding them in to the network of the privileged to ensure they'd be groomed for the top jobs. He swallowed his resentment.

'So you think your husband was killed by someone who is jealous of him?' he asked.

'Of course he was,' Mrs Elkins insisted. 'What else could it be?'

'Do you have someone in mind?' he encouraged her. 'Someone you know was jealous of your husband?'

'No.' She shook her head and pulled her daughter closer. 'We don't know anyone who could possibly do anything like this. Paul was killed by a stranger – a bitter, jealous stranger.'

'And work?' Sean persisted. 'Was there anyone he'd been having trouble with at work?'

'Look.' She closed her eyes and tried to compose herself. 'Paul was a very senior executive. It would be unrealistic to think there wasn't a degree of professional jealousy, but nothing that would lead to this.'

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