



## Prologue

She couldn't watch him die. Not actually see the life escape from his eyes. She thought she would be immune to it by now. What was left to make her care? Not much. Not the blood, the screams, the pleading. Yet she couldn't look into his eyes and watch them mist over with the fog of death.

He was so unaware of what was going to happen. She stood at the foot of the bed, his chest rising and falling, his face creased in some nightmare. Not the one she had embroiled him in. Something else, something more personal. She felt a twinge of envy then, that she couldn't be part of that intimacy. The thoughts inside him, shut off from her. She wondered if his brain was pricking at his subconscious, trying to rouse him. Danger is staring at you. Wake up.

He didn't. He just carried on sleeping. She edged closer to the bed, barefoot, silent. Her fingers reached out, lightly felt his skin. Warm. A memory of someone else. A missed heartbeat. She became reckless then. She decided to give him a chance. A chance she never had.

She sat down, and the bed moved with her. She shook him gently. If he woke up, she would let him live. But he didn't, his breathing became shallow, and then deep again. It was a sign. It was meant to happen. This was all part of the plan.

She tilted his head back slightly, and ran her finger over his throat. It felt so solid, like cord, or steel. Would she have the

strength? She closed her eyes. And remembered. She remembered the beginning. She remembered a time when she wasn't like this. And she remembered the moment she had changed. When they had changed her.

And that filled her with anger, an energy that coursed through her every cell, a hatred that needed to be sated. She took the hand saw from inside her jacket. Reckless again. She was leaving so many clues, but she no longer cared. She looked at the serrated edge, and she looked at the hardness of his throat.

Then the memories came again. And they brought with them the strength. She placed the cool metal against his soft skin, and began to move it. Side to side, each stroke filled with more vigour, as her purpose grew and she knew that what she was doing was the right thing. The blood first poured, then spurted, as she cut, struggling against the gristle, the veins. A mess of flesh and red liquid, her fingers drenched, her face splattered, the white bed sheets covered.

As she hacked away, she didn't stop, and she didn't look into his eyes.

When she was satisfied that he was gone, she looked up.

His eyes were open.

He had woken up, he had felt the pain! That wasn't meant to happen. The empty glass caught her eye. There should have been enough in there to keep him asleep, to keep him from feeling what she was doing. It hadn't been enough.

She started to sob.

She had killed him. Horribly and with no mercy. And he had felt it. She had become one of them. A monster.



## Chapter One

The group all wore masks, the mouths turned up with threatening grins, the skin pure white. Their bodies cloaked in black, only the trainers and boots differentiating them. Detective Sergeant Zain Harris couldn't even tell their gender, let alone race or age. Their menace was broken as they walked past him, and asked him for some weed.

'Go fuck yourselves,' he told them.

'Chill bro,' one of them said, the mask unmoving.

'I'm not your bro.'

The group burst into hysterics at a comment Zain didn't hear, and they wandered off. He felt like chasing them and smacking them into next week. Instead he tried some grounding shit he had learnt during his mandatory 'if you want your job back' therapy nonsense. Engage all five senses and you'll be anchored.

Great. So what could he see? The group were disappearing into the night, joining the thousands of others dressed in similar gear. He could make out the silhouettes of the hordes against the street lamps, against the police strobe lights on every car they could get into St James's Park. Fireworks were being let off randomly, like flares or warning shots into the purplish night sky. He heard clashing voices, as protestors screamed at police, who remained silent, letting the sirens do their talking.

Around the protestors were lines of his colleagues, dressed in uniform, unlike him. Solid yellow blocks of high-vis jackets, broken by armoured vehicles, cars and horses.

The acrid stench of horse shit, smoke and gunpowder from the fireworks filled his nose, lining the back of his throat. His stomach, devoid of food and water, retched against the staleness.

Zain bit back the thought that he didn't know exactly which side he was on. Anonymous or the State. He didn't like to dwell; the answer was too complicated, even more than it had been before. Zain could be loyal, he could be devoted and believe in something. The State technically employed him. Anonymous though, they crossed the lines and asked the questions he wasn't allowed to sometimes. He felt an affinity with them, with their bravery and their disregard for rules when they caught the scum that the law failed to convict.

Except, who made the decision about who was scum in the first place? There had to be some mechanism to discern that, right?

'Yo, bro,' said another voice.

Zain got ready for another *giveussomeweek* or *gofuckyourselves* exchange. The masked figure stopped in front of him.

'What?' said Zain, baring his teeth.

'Zain, man? Didn't realise you were coming these ends. Been long time bro. How you been?'

The mask was pulled off. It was a cousin, Rakim or Kasim, he couldn't remember. From his mother's half of the family. She was the daughter of a Turkish diplomat and an Indian journalist. Rakim or Kasim had the olive-skinned, dark-haired look that could belong to either side. Zain had the same complexion, but



with his Turkish grandfather's bright blue eyes, and his English-military father's features.

'Yeah, well . . .'

'I mean, I knew you were always a bit off-centre like, but you a proper hacker?'

'I do my bit,' Zain said, looking away. He had done more than that when he was younger. He had even been part of the Anonymous movement for a few months, before being recruited by extremists. Zain didn't look like anyone else in his family and had grown up feeling a sense of alienation every time he faced the mirror. And that's what had started his demise, his willingness to try and belong to something, anything, that could give him a clear identity. Bastardised forms of religion and anarchists were his favourites. But his hacking skills just weren't up to the level of Anonymous, so he had never got very far.

Zain had never truly fit in growing up. His parents were the definition of *opposites attract* – from very different backgrounds, they had met in a war zone, fallen passionately for each other, and then spent the rest of their lives pushing against each other. Loneliness was a frequent part of Zain's life, and despite excelling at academia, he found himself vulnerable to voices that could speak to his emptiness. One of the generation first to be radicalised online, Zain had fallen easily into the hands of predators who wanted to use him to carry out their warped agenda. Brainwashed, but not brain dead – as he became further embroiled in a terrorist cell, making physical contact with his online groomers, Zain's moral compass kicked in. He was trapped and he wanted a way out. And that's when counter-terrorism and MI5 offered him a lifeline. Detective Chief Inspector Raymond Cross from SO15 had come



to his rescue. Zain turned double agent for him, and from then on the teenage Zain was marked, the secret services taking an interest in him and what he could do for them. Through university, Cross had been a mentor to Zain, and afterwards Zain had done stints with GCHQ before turning to SO15 and covert operations. Until that had gone horribly wrong, leaving him almost dead.

‘Nice one, bro. It’s why I’m here, need one of these guys to help me run some business shit.’ Rakim or Kasim’s voice cut into his thoughts.

‘I don’t think that’s what they do. They’re not guns for hire.’

‘There must be some, innit, willing to turn to the dark side. You sure you won’t bro? Do a favour for me innit? Family rates?’

Rakim or Kasim grinned at him. Zain shook his head, said he’d be in touch, maybe.

‘Nice one, bro.’

Zain put his hands tightly into his jacket pockets, pulled his hood up, and headed away from the park. He wasn’t feeling this; he didn’t know why Unit 3 had been dragged in. They were special ops, under the command of the Westminster Police Crime Commissioner Justin Hope. They weren’t here to patrol a riot, that wasn’t their remit. Detective Chief Inspector Kate Riley, his boss, had asked them to blend in. To try to stay one step ahead of the crowds, by infiltrating and manipulating them if need be. They weren’t the only ones. S019, the armed response unit, were on standby in ARU vans. MI5, the security services, and SO15, the counter-terrorism command unit who worked with them, were also dotted around and running their own covert surveillance.

He had been part of that set-up once, knew how that joint-operation stuff worked, and how when things went bad, they went bad really quickly.



Zain could think of better ways of spending Bonfire Night. He was missing a Krav Maga class for this bullshit. And he wasn't even sure this was proper anti-capitalist Anonymous protesting. So far most people he had seen without their masks were just kids.

Actually, *enough*, he thought, he was going. He needed to get home, and get some food inside him. He started heading towards where his car was parked, only to get a frantic message come through to his earpiece.

'Zain, I need you. Something's going down.'





## Chapter Two

Zain was standing in a side street by the Albert Arms pub next to Detective Sergeant Stevie Brennan. She was wearing jeans, and a padded bomber jacket like his. Although he wondered if *bomber* was an appropriate term to use now.

Part of Unit 3, like him, Stevie had given up her previous Met-liaison role within the team, but she was still responsible for any officers that were loaned to them, or any PCC officers that were part of an investigation. She also coordinated interviews, searches, took witness statements and was training to be part of SO19, regularly attending firing ranges for practice.

A good person to have your back, Zain had always thought. In front of them a group of protestors were baiting a small line of Met officers.

‘Like a fucking emaciated blue line,’ said Stevie. ‘Where the hell is their back up?’

‘Probably us.’

‘Fuck.’

‘Yeah. What are we doing here anyway? Waste of time.’

‘The edict was for all resources on the ground.’

‘Edict?’

‘Riley’s words. More like Hope’s probably.’

‘Still. It’s freezing, and it’s not like anything’s going to happen. There’s more cops in St James’s Park than I care to even think about.’



‘Maybe,’ said Stevie. ‘Only . . . You know what I thought when I turned up? All these people, look at them. Thousands of them are hidden behind their masks and cloaks. I couldn’t tell one from another.’

‘Clues in the name, Stevie. Anonymous?’

‘Facetious fuck. You know what I mean. And I thought, shit, imagine if something did happen here. Imagine if the worst happened, where would you even start to look? Every suspect looks pretty much the same.’

She shivered, and her hand went to her shoulder. Zain didn’t ask about it. He had more than enough injuries lurking like phantoms in his own body to want to call attention to any that Stevie had.

‘So let’s hope no one turns up dead then,’ he said. ‘Where’s Rob anyway?’

Detective Sergeant Robin ‘Rob’ Pelt, also in Unit 3, was supposed to be infiltrating the riot with them.

‘No idea, and honestly don’t want to know. Since he started seeing that anti-fox hunting woman he’s become a zealot. Does my head in. Glad she dumped him.’

‘That’s a bit unfair. I think she woke up some moral fibre in him.’

Rob had dated Monica for four months. The relationship had ended, but the animal-loving vegan had left Rob with a new outlook on life. He was as bad as an ex-smoker these days, determined to convert everyone else to his viewpoint.

‘Woken up some sort of crap, that’s for sure, nothing moral about him. And shame his animal-welfare love doesn’t extend to the female of the species. He’s still a womanising arsehole.’

‘Well he’s missing all the fun.’

The protestors were jeering, making no sense, nothing coherent to Zain anyway. Just noise circling into the air, hurting his ears. It all felt pointless, until one of them lit a rag stuffed into a glass bottle.

‘Oh shit,’ said Stevie.

‘What is this, the nineties?’

Zain and Stevie started moving quickly towards the figure holding the lit bottle, its black cloak billowing in the breeze.

‘Hope he catches fire,’ said Zain.

‘That can be arranged.’

They were a couple of feet behind the protestor with the flaming weapon, ready to disarm as soon as they got close enough. The Met officers in turn were closing in from the front, trapping the little group. Zain worried about the Molotov cocktail being hurled into the pub at the side, which could cause serious damage and potential casualties.

He began manoeuvring himself to stand in the path of the armed protestor, acting as a stop gap, hopefully. He should be seen, dressed in his casual attire, and hopefully make whoever was lurking under the Guido Fawkes mask think twice. Think about the people inside the building.

Stevie stayed where she was, in case the group decided to retreat, so she would at least be able to follow if not thwart their attempts. But they didn’t seem to care; instead they were inching their way towards the officers that were creeping towards them.

The figure holding the Molotov cocktail turned suddenly, looking at Zain. He felt the same uneasiness he had been feeling all night when staring into the solid white masks with their drawn-on features, their uniform disguise. It was all too familiar: dehumanised opponents. He swallowed hard, staring into the eyeholes, the only discernible features.



There was a thickness in Zain's mind, as he recalled his incarceration. During a botched surveillance with SO15, Zain had been kidnapped and tortured for days. Held in a Portakabin in Portsmouth, about to be beheaded. Every day men with their faces hidden would come and beat him, and one in particular would come only to pull his toenails off, one by one.

Zain felt sick as the masked figure came closer. He thought about letting his cover go, telling the figure to drop the Molotov cocktail, stand down. Instead he stayed fixed, unmoving, caught in what felt like a battle of wills. His nostrils filled with a chemical, not petrol, something else. He didn't get a chance to think much beyond that, as he watched the bottle arc through the air. He tried to work out where it would fall, try to limit its damage if he could. Too late, he saw where it was heading, and ran with every breath he could muster, but he couldn't reach it in time. The Molotov cocktail smashed the windscreen of a parked Honda, and Zain could only watch as the flames spread and in seconds turned it into a fireball, followed by an explosion, renting the night into a hundred pieces of burning rain.

Zain fell to the ground, choking, as screams and chaos surrounded him.

But his brain registered something. A last thought. A last vision. Something was wrong. Very wrong. And it wouldn't be until much later that it made sense to him.



## Chapter Three

The body was lying face down, the dark hair exposed behind a Guy Fawkes mask that was still secured to the body's face with an elastic band. DCI Kate Riley watched her breath fog in front of her as she walked towards the lone police officer standing guard. It had been a long, busy night, culminating in a blast which had put her officers' lives at risk. Five hours later the rising sun had transformed the world around her. Kate had sent the rest of her team home as the protestors had begun to disperse. It was as though exposure to morning sunlight would bring them into the glare of discovery, their power of anonymity slipping as the sun slicked up into the sky.

When the masked body had been found it was nearing eight, with St James's Park returning to its status as a shortcut for the civil servants and office workers who used it to get from the Tube to Victoria Street and its surrounding areas. Kate's own team were situated in a building close by, many of her colleagues taking the same route. The body was in a secluded spot, hidden among some thick bushes that kept their foliage in winter. It was close to the lake, and closer to the Buckingham Palace end of the park, away from the protestors.

Kate introduced herself to PC James Alliack. He had been given the night off, one of the few Met officers afforded the privilege. They needed someone awake in the morning to give the impression of business as usual.



'New baby. Works a treat to get out of most things,' he said, smiling.

Ironically, he was probably getting more action than most of his colleagues had the night before. They had mostly ended up babysitting the crowd. Barring a couple of incidents, it had been relatively peaceful. It would have to be Zain at the centre of the biggest action. Coincidence, that was all it was. Though Justin Hope was convinced Zain attracted trouble; in fact he insinuated that Zain stirred it.

PC Alliack was in his early twenties. Kate could see the unmistakable marks of youth on his face, despite the dark circles and lack of sleep smudged under his eyes. A nervousness marked by the way he couldn't hold her gaze for too long. She wouldn't want to be that green and inexperienced again. She couldn't bear to live through those years and uncover that darkness once more.

Born in New England, Kate had been forced by events to give up her identity and relocate, entering witness protection with her mother Jane. Only the boredom of that existence didn't sit well with her, so she had asked for a transfer to another country instead. And here the ex-United States Capitol Police detective, who had also done stints with the Department of Homeland Security, had reinvented herself. The new name, the change from blonde to brunette, had all been relatively straightforward. Impressed by her PhD in Criminal Justice from Brown University, the Met had snapped her up, with some faked references the US government had been obliged to give her.

The only thing that often threatened to give her away, was the American accent she couldn't quite tame. Even though she tried, it slipped through, especially this early. Alliack looked at

her curiously as she spoke. ‘I’m guessing there won’t be many people coming to the party today then? Have you requested support?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ he said. ‘I’ve been told to let SOCO do their part first.’

The Scenes of Crime Officers, the forensics experts. They would be fresh after a full night’s sleep, and were the most useful presence in these situations. They would gather the evidence that people like Kate would need later. She felt her own tiredness in every cell, and fought it back. Her heart was beating faster than usual, fuelled by the many cups of coffee she had drunk. She probably shouldn’t be leading on this, but there were few senior officers around. Plus it was a body, post-riot, in St James’s Park. That didn’t go under anyone’s radar and demanded the PCC’s attention and involvement.

‘What’s their ETA?’

‘Should be here any minute.’

‘How was the body discovered?’

‘Jogger.’

‘What would we do without joggers and dog walkers?’

Alliack laughed, unsure if he should in these circumstances. His rawness was endearing in a way, but worrying if he had to have any sort of involvement in the case.

‘What happened?’ she asked.

‘He was jogging through the park, got a cramp, stopped to massage it. Saw something, came to investigate, and saw the blood. Ma’am.’

Kate looked at the sprawled figure. While cloaked, the exposed neck seemed to be quite thick, the shoulders broad. She estimated the height to be over six foot. It would suggest a male, but she



didn't want to assume just yet. Not until the pathologists did their job. Kate stared again at the body, the pooled red around it, mixed with mud.

'Did the jogger touch the body at all? Before he called us?'

Alliack shook his head, but tell-tale redness crept into the corners of his face and he averted his eyes.

'Has anyone else been in contact with the body?' she asked, slowly and deliberately, her voice in a lower register than she normally used. It was something she had learned during her Reid technique training, standard for all US law-enforcement officers. Men responded to lower voices more than higher female ones. It shouldn't have to be done, but often in work she used it to make herself heard. She needed the truth, no matter how worried Alliack was about saying whatever it was he was so obviously holding back from her.

She heard him swallow, his Adam's apple almost bursting through the skin on his throat.

'I did,' he said finally. His shoulders hunched forward perceptibly. 'I checked for a pulse, just in case. I know from external examination they look pretty badly done in, but I just wanted to be sure. Was I wrong?'

'No, you did the right thing. We can eliminate ourselves easily, as long as you didn't move the body out of situ, and God help us if they had been alive and we didn't do anything. I'm assuming you didn't feel a pulse?' Kate arched an eyebrow, hoping it would help to reduce the tension.

'No, ma'am, or I would have called an ambulance.'

Kate didn't respond, instead taking in the surrounding area, trying to piece together how the body might have got to where it was. Nothing to suggest what had happened could be

seen by her naked eye, but they were set away from where the main action had taken place, so possibly forensics would find something. She looked for tracks indicating that the body had been dragged to its final point, but again there was nothing she could see.

She was itching to turn the body over, take the mask off. She tried to judge from height and weight if she could tell the sex, but apart from the exposed bits of neck indicating a Caucasian victim, she didn't want to assume. The short hair was matted with dried blood and dirt. She tried to see if there was a style to it, something gender specific. She thought then of Stevie; from the back her short hair could have been a man or a woman's.

'Now what, ma'am?'

Kate looked through him, feeling a sense of dread she couldn't explain. She rubbed her arms to get some warmth into them.

'We wait.'

He took a step back, involuntarily, as though she might have seen him. That wasn't possible, he was so far away, watching her through his manipulated sunglasses. From the outside they looked like shades, but they were telescopic lenses, the latest in subtle espionage equipment.

He touched the arms, to adjust his view, focusing on Kate Riley clearly. So this is what she had become, this was the new her. He had wanted to see her in action, see what he was up against.

She didn't look like much. Five ten, brown hair to her shoulders, a jacket concealing the shape of her body. There was no resemblance to who she had been, to the bitch that had ruined his life. He felt an anger bubble in his throat. Her stance was the



same though. Erect, sure of herself. Always walking as though she was being propped up by the rod of justice. Fuck her and her righteousness.

He breathed and moved further back into his hiding place. He had to control his anger, the urge to tear her apart. That would come later. Kate Riley would meet her end, in him. For now he had only one task. To keep watching her.





## Chapter Four

The cold air was brushing Kate's ears, and she could see frost on the ground. It looked almost beautiful in the bright sun. All she could hear were the birds. It felt picturesque, until she looked at the trauma lying in front of her. PC Alliack seemed to be looking everywhere except at the victim, or at her.

'Your first dead body, I take it?'

'That obvious, ma'am?'

The same masking laughter he had done before. She thought back to the first time she had seen a corpse. She had been to enough family funerals prior to starting her career, but coming to a crime scene, and realising you were too late, that no one was being saved, was different.

She had been part of law enforcement across Washington, the very power heartland of the nation. The place where politicians and the influential all mixed against a heady cocktail of ambition and corruption. It was probably why the idea of London had been so attractive to her, and she hadn't been disappointed by its reality.

'Mine was fairly tame,' she said, breaking the awkward silence that had fallen between them. 'Homeless man, beaten to death for a bottle of beer and his coat.'

'Nice. I mean, not nice, I meant...'

'I know. I thought it was ironic, here was someone who by the standards of our materialistic world had nothing, yet somebody

thought the bits he did have were worth killing him for. I remember I felt utter sadness. And a sense of powerlessness. There was nothing I could do for him. He was dead, and his final minutes were probably horrendous. It seemed so innocuous, but it threw me. I became really depressed after it.'

She stopped to check she wasn't revealing too much or making PC Alliack feel worse. He was staring at her, intensely, hooked on her words.

'What happened?' he said, in a whisper.

'It took a long time to get over it. I saw other murder victims after that, but that man, he never left me. It was the smell, it lingered. Sounds crazy I know, but it was there at random times, like a sensory memory that triggered at inappropriate times. And that hopelessness kept coming back. What was I? Just there to clean up after the fact, not do anything useful?'

She had changed so much, she had moved her world quite literally, and been in some tough battles over the years. Yet that first time was still fresh, she could recall it in an instant. She saw herself back then, educated to the eyeballs, but on the street she was so raw.

'Isn't that part of our job though, ma'am?'

'Yes. And that was what got me through it. I realised I wasn't just there to mop up. I was the last chance for the dead. When their final breath had left them, I was there to be their voice and to make sure they were still heard. Make sure the evil that had fallen on them wouldn't go unchallenged.'

'You found who did it?'

'Yes. Another homeless man. On the streets because the mental health system had failed him, because society had failed him. He should have been in a hospital getting help, instead . . .'

'Sad.'

Kate thought pointless was a more appropriate word.

'Well look on the positive, PC Alliack. We're in the open air so at least you won't have the smell of death to contend with. Until the autopsy of course.'

As if on cue, she saw the forensic pathologist assigned to the PCC making her way through the park.

Dr Rani Kapoor was in her early thirties, with a singsong voice, as though she had stepped out of an animation movie rather than a morgue. Kate didn't like to think it was forced: the pathologist trying to fight the stereotype of the job by always being so cheerful. It irritated her, but she let it go.

'Sorry, sorry, my team are all stuck. Flat tyre so the Batmobile is currently being rescued by the AA. Imagine the look on the face of their mechanic when he rocks up and there's a van full of my lot with their face masks on.'

Even her laughter trilled. Kate felt her insides tightening. She was tired, needed sleep, more coffee, but more importantly some answers.

'Dr Kapoor, this is PC James Alliack, he found the body.'

'Lucky you,' said Dr Kapoor, putting down the metallic case she was carrying. 'Did you touch or move it in any way?'

PC Alliack gave the same details he had already given to Kate about how the body was found, and what he then did. He seemed a lot more relaxed talking to her than he had to Kate earlier. Maybe it was the authority chain – Kate was his superior – or maybe it was just her personality? Really, she must be tired, she thought. Second guessing if people liked her. She had given

up that garbage years ago; she was here to do a job. Who she pissed off, or what people might or might not think about her, was of no consequence.

From her case Dr Kapoor pulled out disposable overalls for herself and Kate. They both suited up in the white plastic, Kate immediately glad of the warmth, if not the sharp smell. Dr Kapoor pressed above her right collarbone and began dictating the scene. No more need for manual audio recorders; they were now built in to the forensic suits. Like airplane black boxes, the recordings were removed as the overalls were destroyed. They stepped close to the victim, and the smell of PVC was replaced by the distinct smell of human decay.

‘That’s odd,’ said Dr Kapoor. ‘Given the temperature and the fact we are outside, there shouldn’t be such an overpowering aroma.’

‘It might have been here a lot longer than we thought?’ said Kate doubtfully. The protest was the night before and the figure was clearly adhering to the dress code.

Dr Kapoor didn’t reply, her face serious, as she studied the body, dictating her observations into the air. She went back to her case, and took out a small digital camera. She started to take shots of the scene and body, then filmed it carefully, taking small steps as she covered the ground painstakingly. This was the Dr Kapoor that Kate preferred, the professional one she could engage with.

Dr Kapoor handed Kate the camera, asked her to do another video scan of the area and body. Meanwhile the pathologist inserted a digital thermometer into the right ear of the victim, and watched her machine beep until she had a reading.

‘Ok so this is a KX67, new thing we’re helping to trial,’ said Dr Kapoor.

‘Trial for a thermometer? Aren’t they a few centuries late?’

‘It comes highly recommended. Records the temperature of the body, the air or room temperature, and takes into account readings for humidity and other pertinent environmental factors, runs an algorithm, before finally churning out a probable time of death.’

‘Does it work?’

‘I’ll take manual readings during the post-mortem, use the liver and rectum temperature to compare the results it gives me, but I’ve used it in a couple of cases now and the results seem valid.’

The KX67 beeped three times. Dr Kapoor went to pull it out, but it was stuck. She tugged at it harder, and then gasped. The victim’s ear had come off with the machine.



## Chapter Five

Kate looked at the fleshy stump at the end of the thermometer. Blood and internal veins that had attached it to the head were hanging off the ear, making it look like a fake prop for Halloween. A holiday the British still didn't have the hang of, she thought, as images flooded her mind. New England Fall evenings, the trees riotous colours of red, orange, gold. The noise, the excitement, the atmosphere on the night of 31 October. Her brothers tormenting her, Kate standing up for herself even back then. Her parents looking on, so normal. But when a layer of normality was peeled away there was a darkness that eclipsed most horrors she could attribute to that night. She closed that door before it even opened; it was not the time or the place to be thinking of her past. She was doing too much of that lately.

'Well this is a first for me,' said Dr Kapoor, laughing, as she bagged the torn body part and the KX67, and described for her notes what had happened.

'Ears don't usually un-attach themselves from heads unless they have been cut,' Kate said coldly.

Dr Kapoor moved in closer, using her fingers to trace the bloody hole where the ear had been. The remaining flesh was deep brown, but it was hard to tell if there was any other damage.

'I don't think it was removed with a blade. There's no visible sign of any adhesive or connecting matter, without which the ear wouldn't have remained in place. No, I think I simply

pulled it off. Question is how, what's happened inside to make it so loose?

Dr Kapoor checked the hands next. They were covered in black gloves, bits of leaves and mud. She then traced her fingers around the body, following its shape gently.

'Just checking in case there's anything directly under the body that might get moved when I turn it over,' she explained. 'Curious. See here, there's splash marks on the trouser legs and boots, but the back of the cloak is clean. I think we can rule out the body being dragged to its current location.'

'The splash marks would suggest the victim was alive at some point in St James's? Did you check the reading on the KX67? Did it give a reading?'

'Yes, but it suggested a body temperature of 40.2 degrees. That would be impossible even under normal circumstances. I think it's met its match in testing. A dislocated ear. I'll report back to the manufacturer.'

Dr Kapoor took a phone from a pocket of her suit, dialled her team.

'Look, just show some initiative, and get here somehow. Get taxis and claim them back through expenses. I need this place examined asap. Something isn't right.'

She tutted when she ended the call.

'Honestly, they have a combined IQ of thousands, and can give you an academic paper worthy of a doctorate on some of the most complex science around, but when it comes to common sense, I do despair, DCI Riley.'

'You said something didn't feel right?'

'Are you OK to assist me moving the body?'

'Yes, of course.'



Dr Kapoor covered the gloved hands of the victim in plastic bags. They were positioned as though the victim was asleep, the right hand at ninety degrees and close to the shoulder, the left hand arched at a higher angle over the head. Dr Kapoor put covers over the boots next.

‘The cloak doesn’t seem to have any folds in it, from the back anyway. None of the clothing does. It’s very odd: even if the body had been carried here rather than dragged, there should be something.’

‘You think it was positioned after the act?’ asked Kate.

‘Possibly.’

She motioned Kate over, and asked her to grab the body at shin level. Dr Kapoor took hold of the body at shoulder level, and counted them in. On three they moved the body over onto its back. Kate felt a moment of horror as the masked face stared up at her. Dried blood congealed at the sides where it touched the face, and more blood had spattered down the torso. The ground that had been hidden under the victim was pocked with puddles of more red and brown, where blood had leaked and congealed with the soft earth.

For a moment Kate pictured her mother Jane. And then her father. His orders had led to an assault in which Jane had been physically broken. When Kate had found her after the attack, her mother’s face was a bloody, damaged mess, with pools of red on the wooden floor of their family home. Kate blinked the image away, guilt always palpable that it was her actions that had caused the attack on her mother. Always ready to pinch deep inside.

The front of the body was covered in mud, but Kate couldn’t tell if that meant it had been in contact with the ground by

being pulled across it, or if it was just from where it had been lying. Dr Kapoor looked more intently, shook her head. She took out her digicam again and began taking photographs while describing what they could see.

Satisfied she had taken a note of everything, and that her external examination was done, Dr Kapoor put her hands on the mask.

'Ready to see who we have under here, DCI Riley?'

Kate nodded, as the pathologist began to pull the smiling white plastic off.