



1

The beauty and majesty of the place only add to his fear.

Despite the poor visibility, the building ahead of him is unmistakable. Looking as though it has been carved out of the black sky and then suffused with its own light, it demands his attention. He has seen how even the godless are awestruck when they approach, mere specks in its presence.

He knows that this is a place of superlatives. That this is the largest Anglican cathedral in Europe and the fifth largest in the world. That it has the world's heaviest and highest peal of bells. That it has the country's largest organ. That it even has its own constabulary.

But they are all inconsequential tangibles. It is the sheer spirituality here that he finds overwhelming. If God is anywhere, he is here.

The sense of having been dropped into a mystical land is heightened by the weather. It is late afternoon on the first Saturday of December, but Christmas has come early for some. Snow fills the air. Huge, plump flakes swirl and glide before adding their contribution to the thickening white carpet below. It has created an unearthly silence here, and an unsettling change to the ambient light.





It's a sign, he tells himself. A warning. I should go back. I should get out of here right now, while I still can.

But he presses on, stepping up his pace so as not to fall too far behind the jabbering couple ahead of him. There is some slight comfort to be gained from being in their proximity – some sense of safety in numbers – but he knows it will be short-lived.

The snow crunches and squeaks beneath his boots. The hood of his coat is up and his hands are buried deep in his pockets, but still he shivers. Yet he knows there are beads of perspiration on his forehead, and his palms are clammy. His breathing is shallow and fast, and seems not to be bringing enough oxygen into his body. He feels on the verge of fainting, or at least dropping to his knees to spill his guts onto the pristine whiteness.

At the black iron gates he halts. Oblivious to his actions, the garrulous couple continue their plod towards the West Porch, and his fear mounts with each yard they add to their distance from him.

He looks behind him. Peers through the dense snowfall towards the street.

He is being followed.

He wishes it were not so. Wishes that the dramatic change in the weather would have been enough to provoke a change of plan. But no. The figures are there, and heading his way.

He doesn't have much time.

Facing forward again, he wonders what he should do. He catches sight of the huge statue of the Risen Christ, suspended above the entrance to the cathedral. He would like to imagine it wearing an expression of reassurance, of comfort, but from here





it looks stern and disapproving. As if it is cautioning him not to tarnish this holy place with his troubles.

It occurs to him that it has always been this way. There will be no offers of guidance here. No signs from on high, pointing the way. He will have to find his own path.

The path he chooses is to his left. It takes him through another iron gateway and plunges downwards, as if towards the very bowels of the city.

The route could not be more evocative of death and what lies beyond it. On either side, the path is lined with faded and weather-worn gravestones. Countless numbers of them stand shoulder to shoulder against the high stone walls, their inscriptions speaking lovingly of the departed souls of past centuries. And, if further clues were needed as to the earlier use of this land, over to the left stands the Oratory – now forsaken and derelict, but once a thriving mortuary chapel.

He pauses again. Takes a deep breath. The freezing air stings his nostrils and sends a shiver through his body.

He walks on. Reaches a point that always chills him, even on a bright sunny day. It's a tiny triangle of land enclosed by tall headstones. One stone is missing, allowing entry. It worries him that someone, some dark malignant creature, could be hiding in there, waiting to jump out and attack him.

He tells himself not to be afraid, but his inner voice sounds hollow. There is *every* reason to be afraid of what is coming.

And then he reaches the tunnel. Its mouth is a black hole in the solid rock. He knows the passageway is only short, that he will quickly be on the other side, but still it fills him with





dread. The headstones continue on into that tunnel. They stand to attention as if waiting to pass judgement on whoever dares to pass through the narrow space between them.

He knows he has to go on. He has no choice.

He quickens his pace. Hears the echo of his steps as his feet move from fresh snow to unyielding stone in the enclosed tomb-like space.

And then he is through, and he can breathe again. Can feel the freshness of the snowflakes as they push under his hood and melt against his skin.

He stops here, declining to follow the line of gravestones that bends to his right, through St James' Gardens. It's a small but pleasant park, with its own mineral water spring. At its centre is a monument to William Huskisson, former MP for Liverpool, his accomplishments in that position somewhat overshadowed by his fame as the world's first railway fatality, knocked down by Stephenson's Rocket.

But right now this stretch of land shouts at him of its grimmer past, as the final resting place for sixty thousand people across the ages. He feels he can still sense their presence, as if some trace of their souls has been eternally chained here.

He shudders. And it is not only because of the ghosts.

The moment of decision is upon him. Fight or flight. He feels his stomach tying itself in knots, his intestines clenching and unclenching. He wants to vomit and defecate at the same time. His mouth has dried out and his heart hammers against his ribcage.

I could run, he thinks. I could race through the park and to the far side of the cathedral. I'd be gone before they got here. They'd never know.





But he stands there dithering for too long. They have arrived. He can hear them. He will have to face his fears.

When he turns and heads back into the tunnel, it is as if his body is no longer under his conscious control. It seems to him as though he is simply a passenger in a vehicle, wondering where it will take him.

He sees them, their shapes outlined against the canvas of white beyond the other end of the tunnel. Panic floods his system again, and he dips his hooded head, hiding his face.

I could squeeze past, he thinks. In this darkness, I can't be recognised. I could walk straight past and keep on going, and nobody would be any the wiser.

And then it's as if the knowledge that he has some control over the situation emboldens him. As he draws level with the other occupants of the confined space, he finds himself stopping. Finds himself uttering a word he hasn't heard himself voice for a long time.

It has the desired effect. He registers the confusion, the puzzlement it causes. His pursuers become less than the demons he dreaded, less than the monstrous troll with its Cerberus-like hound. They become what they really are.

A middle-aged woman with her small pet dog.

And so he strikes.

It is all so fast. A blur. His hand leaves his pocket. His fingers curl tightly around the heavy lump hammer as he swings it at the woman's head. But she is fast, too – unexpectedly so – and she manages somehow to get a forearm in the way, and she makes it all go wrong, ruining his aim, getting that limb smashed to pieces instead of her damn head. And then she is screaming, for help



and in pain, and the dog runs off barking, and it seems to him that this is all going to shit, and that he has to bring this to an end, has to fix things. And so he takes another swing at the source of all her noise, and this time he feels the hammer connect with her jaw, and her shrieks cease instantly, but now things become even more terrifying because even in this darkness he can see what she has become. He can see that she is now a slack-jawed zombie-like creature, pushing herself away from the gravestones behind her as if she has just crawled from a coffin beneath the ground, and that useless jaw just hangs and swings, showing him its broken teeth and its bleeding gums and saliva strands as she makes strange keening noises. And it is all fear now, it is life or death for him, it is kill or be killed, and so he leaves it to his body to save him from this apparition, to hit out again and hear the cracking apart of her cranium before she falls, still alive and murmuring and slobbering and drooling, and he has to pound her again and again, grinding that bone and turning that head to mush beneath his righteous blows.

When he is done, when his arm aches with its efforts and his chest heaves for oxygen, he rests against the wall and looks down at his handiwork. Looks down at the still pile of rags that once enveloped a living, breathing force.

Movement catches his eye, startling him. But it is not from the woman's corpse. Sitting in the mouth of the tunnel is a small dark shape, staring back at him, its eyes gathering what little light there is and firing it back at him in twin concentrated beams. He would like to imagine it as some tiny malevolent sprite, released from the unwitting host that has just been vanquished. But he

knows it's only the dog. It sits amid the swirling flakes and waits patiently for its owner, seemingly unaware that all around, the snow is turning dark with her blood.

He chuckles silently at the extent of his own fear. All that wasted emotional turmoil. Telling himself he couldn't go through with it. Convincing himself it would go so badly wrong. Desperate for some higher power to intervene and prevent it happening.

Well, now it's happened.

And for once, God seems to have been on his side.

2

Detective Sergeant Nathan Cody pulls his collar up around his neck. Crunches through the snow and then up the half-dozen cathedral steps.

He likes churches. Religion, not so much. He has been an atheist for as long as he can remember, but he sometimes wonders how he would have reacted if he had been a believer a year or so ago, when he and his partner were having bits cut off them by a sadistic maniac. Would he have managed to find it within him to hold on to his faith after such an ordeal? He doubts it.

At the top of the steps, DC Neil 'Footlong' Ferguson is cradling the victim's dog in his arms. Some kind of terrier, Cody guesses, no expert on canines. He grimaces as he watches the dog licking greedily around the lower half of Ferguson's face.

'You should bag and tag that thing,' he says.

Ferguson pulls himself away from the dog and looks down at his sergeant – not a difficult feat for this beanpole of a man even though Cody has now reached the top of the steps.

'Eh?'

'It could be evidence,' says Cody. 'You might be contaminating it. It's certainly doing a pretty good job of contaminating you.'



Ferguson turns to the dog again. 'Don't listen to him. He's just a mean, grumpy man. You're lovely, aren't you? Yes, you are.'

In return, the dog resumes exercising its tongue.

Cody says, 'Do you have to let it do that? Doesn't seem very hygienic.'

'To be honest,' says Ferguson, 'it's the closest I've come to snogging for weeks. Got to get it where I can.'

Cody grimaces again. 'You're a reprobate.'

Ferguson puts the dog down, but holds on to its lead. The animal sits and looks up at him with wide brown eyes.

'You've got to admit, she's cute, isn't she?'

'I'm more of a cat person, me,' says Cody.

'Really? I'd never have guessed.'

Cody thinks there's an insult hidden in there somewhere, but he lets it slide. He moves to stand alongside Ferguson. Joins him in staring out from this vantage point in front of the West Entrance.

'I'm starting to feel all Christmassy,' says Ferguson. 'The snow, the cathedral, the old street lamps over there, the Georgian buildings . . .'

Cody adds, 'The police cars, the blue flashing lights, the uniformed officers, the CSIs in their white suits . . . Oh, and that woman with her head caved in.'

'Killjoy,' says Ferguson. 'You'd make a great Scrooge, you know that.' He pauses, then says, 'You had a gander at her yet?'

'Yeah. Not pretty. Someone wanted to make damn sure a couple of paracetamol wouldn't sort her out. This was vicious.'

Ferguson chin-points to the hive of activity below. 'They find anything of interest yet?'





‘Nah. I’m not sure they will, either. Too much to-ing and fro-ing. The vic was found by another dog-walker, then some people leaving the cathedral came for a look, then the cathedral constables were all over it, then some paramedics . . . And there’s only one narrow little path leading down to the crime scene. It’ll be a miracle if they find any useful forensics there.’

‘Well, if it’s miracles you want, this is the place for them. Speaking of little miracles, what do you think about Wibbly coming back?’

Cody snaps a look at Ferguson. ‘Webley? When?’

‘Tomorrow, is what I heard. Just in time to join the fun on this case. You mean you didn’t know?’

Cody shakes his head. Looks back across the city. But now he’s thinking only about DC Megan Webley.

Ferguson says, ‘I thought you’d know more than me about it. Haven’t you two kept in touch?’

‘Not recently,’ says Cody. Which is being a little disingenuous, he thinks. The truth is he’s hardly seen her at all since she was hospitalised. And now she’s coming back, and he’ll have to deal with it.

Ferguson clears his throat before issuing his next words. ‘You, er, you never did tell me the full story about what happened on that roof.’

It seems like an age ago to Cody now. Seems unreal. He was on the verge of sacrificing his life to save hers. She, in turn, almost did give up her life to save his. And all this taking place after Cody revealed things about himself that he has never told anyone else. It should have been one of those happy-ever-after





moments: after forging such a powerful bond, they sail off into the sunset to spend the rest of their days together. But life's not like that. Life is complex and murky and affected by external forces that don't give a shit for fairy-tale endings.

'Nothing to tell,' says Cody, although he knows that Ferguson won't be convinced.

Two men come walking towards them. One is a uniformed police officer. The other is an overweight balding man in a hi-vis jacket.

The policeman says, 'This is the cathedral constable who was the first to be called to the scene.'

Ferguson is quickest to respond. He beckons the man up the steps, like a king granting permission to approach the throne.

When the man gets to the top, he glances at the dog, then proffers his hand to Ferguson.

'You must be Sergeant Cody. I'm Al Glover.'

Ferguson accepts the handshake, but gives an unsubtle tilt of his head in Cody's direction.

'Sorry,' says Glover as he switches his gaze to Cody. 'Don't know why I thought that.'

Cody knows. It's partly a height thing. For some strange reason people always seem to equate height with rank. But the main reason is that Cody has such a boyish face. He looks as though he could be a university student – not a seasoned detective sergeant on the Major Incident Team.

'No problem,' says Cody. He takes the man's hand. Finds it clammy, despite the freezing conditions. There's a faint tang of alcohol on the man's breath, too. Cody guesses he's had a tot



of rum or Scotch to calm his nerves after what he's seen here tonight.

'I suppose you fellas come across a lot of this type of thing,' says Glover.

'A fair amount,' says Cody.

'Sure. Goes with the territory, doesn't it? Most people don't appreciate what we do, what we have to put up with.'

'No,' says Cody, smiling inwardly at Glover's sudden switch from 'you' to 'we'.

'No. And there are some right weirdos knocking about.'

'Weirdos? You had any here recently?'

'Oh, we get 'em all. Drunks, druggies, homeless – well, you know what I'm talking about, don't you? Our jobs are similar in lots of ways.'

'Anyone in particular, though? Someone who might be connected with the homicide here tonight?'

'Well . . . In particular? Well, nobody in particular. But we get 'em here, all right. All sorts.'

'I'll tell you what,' says Cody. 'Why don't you make a list for us? Local smackheads, regular nuisances – that kind of thing. Could be that one of them was here tonight.'

'Naturally,' says Glover. 'I was already thinking along those lines. I'll get right on it.'

He digs into his pocket and pulls out a packet of cigarettes.

'Either of you . . . ?'

Ferguson shakes his head. Cody says, 'No, thanks.' He watches while Glover brings the cigarette to his mouth with trembling fingers and lights it.



Says Cody, 'Tell me what happened here tonight.'

'Yeah. Okay. Well, the first thing I knew about it was when a bloke knocked on the door of the lodge.' He points to his left at a small building used to house the cathedral constabulary. 'He said a woman had been found on the path down there. Said she was badly hurt. Maybe even dead.'

'Do you know who this man was?'

'No, but he's been talking to one of your guys. He didn't strike me as the suspicious sort. You kind of get a nose for it after a while, don't you?'

'Was he the one who found the body?'

'No. That was a much older bloke. He's being interviewed too. I made sure he hung around. Common sense, really. Some of the younger lads, they wouldn't—'

'Okay, so you get told a woman's been hurt. What do you do next?'

'Well, I go over there, don't I? I grab my torch and I go and have a look. We're trained to deal with every kind of situation. This might be a place of worship, but you'd be surprised at what goes on here sometimes.'

'I can believe it. So you go to the woman, and . . .'

'And she's there, all right. Blood everywhere. Her head . . . Well, have you seen it? She's a mess. Dead, obviously.'

'Obviously?'

'Yeah. I mean, I checked for vitals. Of course I did. That's textbook, innit? But she was gone all right. You could tell that just by looking at her. Nobody could survive that.'

'Did you recognise her?'





‘Not at first. Not sure her own mother would recognise her the way she is now. But I had my wits about me, and I realised who it was.’

‘What made you realise?’

Glover gestures towards the dog. ‘Her. She was just sitting there, only a couple of feet away. She was cold, shivering.’

‘You’d seen this woman walking that dog before?’

‘Every morning and evening, regular as clockwork. Sun, rain or snow. I keep an eye out, see. Pays to be vigilant in our game, doesn’t it?’

‘Ever speak to her?’

‘A few times. Only to say hello, nice day, that kind of thing. I didn’t know her name.’

‘What about where she lived?’

‘Not sure. I’ve seen her coming up Duke Street, but that’s it.’

‘Ever see her talking to anyone else?’

‘Not that I recall. I got the impression she was a bit of a loner. Even went to the services by herself.’

‘The services? In the cathedral?’

‘Yeah. I think she was often in there. I mean, I didn’t go looking for her or anything, but I often saw her going in or out.’

Cody looks at Ferguson, then back to Glover. ‘Thank you, Mr Glover. If you could put that list together for me? And one other thing – you’ve got CCTV here, right?’

Glover nods. ‘Inside and out.’

‘Good. Dig out whatever recordings you’ve got, would you? I’ll send someone over to collect them.’

‘Ahead of you there. Already on my to-do list. Not surprising, really, I suppose. Given how similar our jobs are, I mean.’





‘Exactly what I was thinking, Mr Glover. Good work.’

Glover smiles and nods. Heads unsteadily down the steps and back to his lodge.

‘Enjoying the view, you two?’

The voice booms from behind the detectives, causing both of them to jump. They turn to see the large and imposing figure of Detective Chief Inspector Blunt. Cody guesses she has just come through one of the cathedral doors rather than materialising out of thin air, but he’s putting nothing past her.

‘We’ve literally just finished interviewing one of the cathedral constables, ma’am,’ he says.

‘I see. And did he tell you anything useful?’

Cody gives her a summary, and watches the effect on Blunt as she digests the information. He likes his boss, despite her fearsome aspect. And he knows that she likes him too. Not in any kind of weird sexual way – her attitude is more of a mother hen as far as Cody as concerned, although he has no idea what he has done to deserve the singular attention.

‘Interesting,’ says Blunt. ‘It could be that our victim chanced upon something she wasn’t supposed to see. A drug deal, for example. On the other hand, if she took the same route every evening at exactly the same time, then anyone who knew her could have just waited for her to turn up.’

‘Meaning it was planned,’ says Cody.

‘Could be. If it was, somebody must have really hated her. You saw the body. There was a lot of pent-up aggression in that attack. Knowing more about what this woman was like might give us some clues as to who could hold such a grudge. And





don't be fooled by the fact that she was a regular church-goer. Sometimes they're the worst.'

Blunt seems to notice the terrier for the first time. She bends at the waist and stares at it. The dog tilts its head as it looks back at her in confusion. Ferguson glances at Cody, who shrugs.

'Hmm,' says Blunt, and straightens up again. To her detectives she says, 'Well, what are you waiting for? Find out the victim's name and address, then get over to her place and find out what made her tick.'

Says Ferguson, 'Er, I'm not sure how we can do that at the moment, ma'am. The CSIs couldn't find anything on the body that could be used to identify her.'

'All right, then, ask her dog.'

Ferguson glances at Cody again before replying. 'Ma'am?'

'The dog, Neil. It's a prime witness. It saw everything that happened tonight, to its living owner, for God's sake. Don't you think it wants to help us find whoever did this terrible thing?'

Ferguson opens his mouth, but no words find their way out. Even Cody thinks the cold must have got to her brain cells.

'Bloody hell, Neil,' she continues. 'Call yourself a detective? Every time I've seen you tonight you've had that animal in tow. Take another look at it. Properly, this time. You'll see that it's wearing a collar, and on that collar is a tag, and on that tag is the name "Trudy" and a telephone number, presumably of its owner. Are you with me now?'

'Ah,' says Ferguson as it all clicks into place. 'Right. Give me a minute.'



Sheepishly, he retreats into the shadows, where he digs out his radio and a notebook and pen. Cody watches him go, thinking about his plans for taking the piss later on.

‘What are you smirking at?’ says Blunt.

Cody affixes a suitably solemn expression. ‘Nothing, ma’am.’

‘Hmm. You’ve heard the news, I suppose?’

‘News?’

‘DC Webley is rejoining us tomorrow. Clean bill of health and raring to go.’

Cody wishes everyone would stop feeling the compulsion to impart this piece of information to him. It’s as though they’re testing him. Sticking a pin in him to see how he reacts.

‘Great,’ he says. ‘It’ll be nice to have her back on the team.’

‘Don’t cock it up, Cody.’

The advice takes him by surprise.

‘Ma’am?’

‘She’s a promising young detective, with a heart of gold. She just wants to get on with the job. You, on the other hand, have a tendency to make everything more complicated than it needs to be.’

‘I have no idea what—’

‘Good. Keep it that way.’

Cody isn’t sure what more he can add to this conversation, and is glad when Ferguson returns, triumphantly waving a bit of paper as though he’s Neville Chamberlain.

‘Got it,’ says Ferguson. ‘The number is registered to a Mary Cowper. She’s got a flat on Duke Street.’

‘Amazing what we can learn from more primitive creatures,’ says Blunt, in such a way that Cody isn’t quite sure she’s referring to the dog. ‘Don’t let me keep you.’

Cody and Ferguson head down the steps, back into the snow. Cody feels the flakes on the back of his neck, and pulls his collar up again. As they approach the gates he turns to Ferguson.

‘Er, we’re not a K9 unit, you know. You need to get shut of that thing.’

Ferguson shoots him a horrified look. ‘She’s not a *thing*. She’s Trudy. And she just gave us our first lead.’

‘Yeah, well, hers is one lead you need to let go of. I’m not going down Duke Street with that mutt. We’ll look a right pair.’

Ferguson frowns, sighs. But he walks over to a uniformed officer and puts the dog lead in the bemused man’s hand.

‘Here. And remember, she’s not just for Christmas.’

3

It takes them less than five minutes to walk to Mary Cowper's flat. On the way, they cut across the end of Rodney Street, where Cody's own apartment is. It strikes him that he may well have passed Mary on his travels without even knowing it. He often goes jogging in this area, sometimes even in St James' Park. He may even have said 'hello' or 'good morning' to her, with not a thought that she might end up in a victim case file on his desk.

It's still snowing heavily. The huge ceremonial arch at the entrance to the oldest Chinatown in Europe is just a dark, unremarkable shape through the shifting white veil. Cody is glad to get to the converted Georgian building where the woman lived until a few hours ago. He rings the bell for Flat 1. Gets no response. Presses the button again.

'Try another one,' Ferguson suggests.

Cody looks at him. 'Never would have thought of that. I was just going to walk away.'

He leans on the bell-push for Flat 2. Thinks, I need to get inside. Anywhere that's warm and dry.

The answer over the intercom is almost immediate: 'Hello?'

'We're police officers. Do you mind if we come in, please?'

‘Police? Why police?’

It is clear to Cody now that the voice belongs to a foreigner. Eastern European or something.

‘Nothing to worry about, sir. We’d like to talk to you about one of your neighbours. Flat 1? Mary Cowper?’

‘Mary? Okay. Come, please.’

There’s a buzz and a loud click as the door unlocks. Cody pushes his way inside. Feels relieved to be out of the wind and snow. He flaps his jacket to shake off the flakes. Wipes his feet on the welcome mat.

Ahead of them is the stairway, and to the right of that a wooden door with a shiny ‘1’ screwed to it.

‘Worth a try,’ says Cody. ‘Maybe the doorbell’s not working.’

Ferguson steps up to the door and raps loudly on it. There is no answer, and no noise from inside.

‘She is not there?’

The voice comes from the top of the first flight of stairs. A man is looking down at them.

‘No,’ says Cody. ‘She isn’t. Does she live alone?’ He sticks to the present tense for now. No need to alarm the man just yet.

‘Yes, alone. Yes. You say you are police?’

Cody approaches the stairs, pulling out his warrant card as he goes. He holds it in the air, even though he knows the man won’t see it properly from there.

‘I’m Detective Sergeant Cody. This is Detective Constable Ferguson. Do you mind if we come up and speak to you?’

The man beckons to them. ‘Yes, please. Come. We can speak in my apartment.’

The detectives trudge up the stairs, then follow the man who beckons them into his abode.

‘Please,’ says the man. ‘Take off coats. Have seat.’

Cody smiles and nods. ‘Thank you, Mr . . . ?’

‘Demidov. Yuri Demidov. Like spaceman.’

‘Spaceman?’

‘Yuri. Yuri Gagarin. You know him?’

‘Ah, yes,’ says Cody. Here, in the warm light of the living room, he gets a better look at their host. He is a thin man with a fat head. Or, rather, his head is widened by an explosion of dark curls that lends him the overall shape of a microphone. He looks to be in his mid-forties. He grins almost incessantly, his cheeks bulging and red as if from the constant facial exercise.

The flat is a mess. Not dirty, but untidy. Papers, books and folders dropped almost at random, it seems, across the room. Texts on complex mathematical topics cover the coffee table. Propped up on the mantelpiece are a couple of cheaply produced certificates for ‘Best Paper Award’.

‘Would you like some tea?’ says Demidov. ‘I have real Russian samovar. You know this, samovar?’

Cody sees the puzzled look on Ferguson’s face, but decides not to get into explanations now.

‘No tea, thank you. We’d like to talk to you about—’

‘And cake. I have special cake from the Asda. You know this place, the Asda?’

Cody can’t help smiling at Demidov’s adoption of the Scouse manner of putting the definite article in front of the supermarket’s name.



‘Mr Demidov. Do you mind if we talk about Mary Cowper now?’

‘Mary. Yes. Please. She is wonderful lady.’

‘You know her well?’

‘Not well. I live here only few months. I am visiting professor at university mathematics department. This is my first time in UK. But Mary, she is very kind to me.’

‘Kind in what way?’

‘She brings me pies.’

‘Pies?’

‘Yes. Apples pies. She cook them herself. She is very good cook. And she takes parcels for me, when I have deliveries. She is—’

He stops speaking suddenly, and his grin drops away as if something has just occurred to him.

He says solemnly, ‘You have bad news, yes? In Russia, policemen at your door is always bad news, but I thought may be different here.’

Cody doesn’t like to tell him that the police turning up at your door is usually an ominous sign here too.

‘We’ve found the body of a dead woman. We believe it may be Mary Cowper.’

Demidov sits back in his chair and looks up at the ceiling. ‘Oh, my God. Oh, my God. This is terrible. Such a wonderful lady. A good woman.’ He looks at the detectives again. ‘You are sure?’

‘We’re fairly certain.’

‘Oh, my God. That is so terrible. How did she die?’





'We believe she was murdered. Her body was found in the grounds of the cathedral.'

'Oh, my . . . Who would do such things? She would hurt nobody. Nobody. I do not understand this.'

'We don't understand it either, so we were hoping you could tell us more about her.'

'All right. Yes. I will try.'

'You said she lived alone. No husband or children?'

'No. Nothing. Wait! She has dog. Trudy. Did you find her?' His eyes flicker in mild panic between the two detectives.

'Don't worry, Mr Demidov. We found the dog. She's perfectly safe.'

Demidov relaxes a little. 'Mary, she loves animals. She gave money to them.'

'I'm not sure what you . . . She gave them money?'

'Yes. Animals charity, you know? RPCSA, or something like this.'

'I see. But other than the dog, nobody else lives in Flat 1?'

'No. Nobody. She likes to be alone. She loves her dog. That is enough for her. But still she is kind to me.'

'When did you last see her?'

'Today! I see her when I come back from doing shopping. She is going out with Trudy. This is normal for her, you understand? I do not think this is last time I will see her. Oh, my God.'

'Please,' says Cody. 'Try to stay calm. Just a few more questions, okay?'

'Yes.'

'Good. What was Mary wearing when you saw her earlier?'





Demidov brings his fingers to his temples in concentration. 'I think maybe long brown coat. And – how you say . . .' He makes a circular wrapping motion around his neck.

'A scarf?'

'Yes. Scarf. Many colours. That is all I remember.'

'That's very helpful,' says Cody. 'Thank you.'

The description matches what the victim was wearing. Long brown coat and tartan scarf. Worth checking. Cody would hate to discover later that the corpse is that of a completely different woman, even though the dog was sitting next to it. It's an unlikely possibility, but he has known of worse blunders in the past.

He says, 'Tell me more about Mary. Did she have any close friends? A boyfriend? Any family?'

Demidov shakes his head. 'I do not know this. There is a man. Sometimes he comes here. But I do not think he is boyfriend.'

'Do you know who he is?'

'No. I have not seen him. I have only heard man's voice in her apartment.'

'How often does this man come here?'

'I do not know. Maybe not many times.'

'Okay. What about Mary's job? Do you know where she worked?'

'Yes. Mary is schoolteacher.'

'Do you know which school?'

'I forget name. It is in Wall-ton, I think. Girls only are allowed.'

'Walton? Oakdale Girls?'

Demidov stabs the air with his finger. 'Yes. Oakdale. That is right. She teaches religion. She is very religious woman.' He frowns before correcting himself: '*Was*. She *was* religious woman.'





Ferguson jumps in at this point. With both feet. ‘But nobody’s perfect, right? I mean, she must have had some vices.’

‘Vices?’ says Demidov. ‘Explain, please.’

‘Well, some people drink too much or take drugs. Some gamble or have wild orgies or—’

Demidov looks as though he’s about to go into apoplectic shock. He straightens his spine, digs his fingers into the arms of the chair. ‘No! Mary would not do any of those things. She is good woman always. Church woman.’

‘I think that what DC Ferguson was trying to get at,’ says Cody, anxious to defuse the situation, ‘is whether Mary might have inadvertently upset someone. Even the nicest people in the world can sometimes irritate others.’

Demidov drags his gaze from Ferguson and focuses it on Cody instead. His mood softens, and there is a glint of wetness in his eyes. ‘She make apples pies for me,’ he says, as though that’s all the eulogy she needs.

Cody obtains the phone number of the landlady from Demidov, then gives her a call. As she is currently entertaining a male friend, she is reluctant to bring the key over, but quickly changes her mind when Cody tells her not to worry, he’ll use his own key – a massive red one that will take the door off its hinges.

He also calls in some CSIs, most of whom come directly from the cathedral. This isn’t a crime scene – at least as far as anyone is aware – but if the attack on Mary was planned, then there is the possibility that the murderer may have at some point been in this apartment. Cody wants to make sure they gather any forensic clues to identity that may have been deposited here.





While the CSI team do their thing, Cody and Ferguson carry out some snooping of their own. Unlike Demidov's flat, Mary Cowper's place is spick and span to the point of obsession. In the kitchen there is not a spot of grease to be found, even on the oven. No plates or cups have been placed in the sink unwashed, or abandoned to dry on the rack. Grocery items in the cupboards are arranged neatly in categories rather than thrown in at random. It's not so extreme as to be classed as OCD – it's not as if the tins have all the labels facing outwards and sorted into alphabetical order – but Mary Cowper did like to be neat. Even the dog's bed looks to have been recently vacuumed.

It's a similar story in the living room. No dog hair or coffee-mug stains or films of dust here, thank you very much.

Cody is drawn immediately to the bookcase in one of the alcoves. He's a bibliophile, and believes he can tell a lot about people from the contents of their bookcases.

Mary Cowper was a woman after his own heart. She liked the classics – Dickens, Hardy, Brontë – but whereas Cody will admit to reading the occasional pulp thriller, there is no evidence of that here. Certainly nothing racy, either: not so much as a single *Shade of Grey*.

On the lower shelves are her reference books. Some are concerned with the various world religions, although those on Christianity dominate. There are also tomes on history and art. Next to those is a stack of school notebooks, presumably waiting to be marked or returned to her pupils. Cody picks up the top one and flicks through its pages. Finds that the most recent essay is on the importance of religious leaders.





Cody moves to the television stand in the other alcove, then crouches to study the row of DVDs. He finds *Mary Poppins*, *The Sound of Music*, *Les Misérables*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and a number of recordings of ballet performances and other musical shows. Nothing from the *Saw* franchise, nor anything by Tarantino.

There is only one book on the coffee table, its edges square with those of the wooden surface below it. It's a copy of the Bible, big surprise. Cody picks it up in his latex-gloved hands, notices that it contains a bookmark. He flips the book open.

Romans 1. Cody's eyes scan quickly down the page. They alight on verse 18: 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.'

Is that what happened? he wonders. An act of vengeance, in payment for some perceived 'unrighteousness' by Mary?

Cody returns the Bible to its position, then resumes his search of the flat. On the bedside cabinet in Mary's bedroom he finds another Bible, without a bookmark this time. A carved crucifix hangs above her bed. On the chest of drawers are two framed photographs. The first shows a woman – presumably Mary – accompanied by a small group of pupils at Oakdale School. In her hands is a large cheque (both physically and financially) made out to the Children in Need appeal. More evidence of her good works, thinks Cody.

He spends some time staring at the image. It's the first time he has seen what Mary looked like when alive – when her head wasn't spread across an area of several square feet. He guesses





this is a very recent photograph: the birth certificate in her desk drawer puts her age at forty-two, which looks about right here. She was fair-haired, with twinkling blue eyes and an attractive smile. He tries to remember whether he has ever seen that face in the area, but no occasions come to mind.

He turns to the second photograph on the chest of drawers. He thinks at first that it shows a smiling Mary standing next to a similar-looking younger woman – similar enough to be her own daughter. But then he looks closer and realises that Mary is the daughter in the picture. She must have been in her early twenties when it was taken. The mother looks much older – at least sixty.

Cody wonders why Mary hasn't put on display a more recent photograph of the pair of them together. Did her mother pass away? If not, she would be in her eighties now. The news of her daughter's tragic death could break her heart.

He takes a step backwards to look again at the first photograph. Thinks to himself, Who are you, Mary Cowper?

You are profoundly religious. You love animals. You give money to charity. You bake pies for your neighbour. You keep your home spotless. You attend church services regularly. You love your mother. You are well educated. You avoid trash in what you read and what you watch. You are in the noble profession of teaching.

And yet the violence used to end your life spoke of hatred as pronounced as any I have ever encountered.

Are you too good to be true, Mary?

