



1

Central London

HE APPROACHES THE LUMBERYARD CAFÉ on the corner of Monmouth Street and Tower Street and checks his watch. It's 8.09 a.m. Less than one hour until the curtains drop. A tingling sensation surges through him, prickling his flesh, rousing his senses. He takes a breath and composes himself.

The Lumberyard Café is one of a breed of urban 'cool' coffee shops dotted throughout Central London. The exterior is painted an à la mode Victorian dark grey in a shabby chic style with splashes of contrived meaningless graffiti 'art' that pull at his eyes for all the wrong reasons. The entrance door is a contrasting pillar-box red, not a colour he would have chosen, but each to their own.

Peering through the café window, he sees Elaine Kelly's blonde head nod and shake as she chats to her 'bestie', Jackie; the friend who is forever posting cat pictures, mood memes and filtered selfies with ridiculous pouting lips. Jackie's mediocre existence is gilded through the lens of social media. She is a small candle burning in a cavern. Not like Elaine. Elaine is special. Elaine is the flame that lights the cavern. But Jackie has her uses. Jackie's social media is his window into Elaine's



whereabouts. Her postings have brought him here today. If he is lucky he can sit close to her, listening, watching, smelling. A smile crosses his face as he appraises his muse. She'll be an exquisite addition to his next exhibition.

Pushing open the red door, he is greeted by a rush of different aromas: fresh brewing coffee, fruit teas, fried chorizo and toast. Jazz music plays through tinny speakers, thankfully lost in the drone of the clientele. A fat batch of latte-sipping millennials and thirty-somethings with their heads buried in the latest iPhones and silver MacBooks inhabit the seating areas. Some are in groups and others are alone, but all are online and connected, their personal details open and ready for the taking, should one or more capture his interest. He closes the door quietly behind him.

The floors are stripped pine, scuffed by the leather and rubber soles of coffee-bores seeking a caffeine fix with their breakfast of grilled halloumi and squashed avocado on toasted sourdough. Cold industrial aluminium pipes draped in red, pink and white bunting hang from the ceiling. The walls are exposed brickwork with Warholian graffiti art canvas paintings. One depicts the Queen wearing a baseball cap and another shows several images of an athletic six-packed teenage boy suggestively squeezing the crotch of his tight white shorts.

Edgy, he thinks, and almost laughs.

'Hello. What can I get you today?' says a chirpy voice.

He follows it and sees a young Asian woman smiling up at him from behind a small mountain of doughnuts, cakes and croissants. His eyes flare and he watches her for longer than he should. Her face is small, her eyes bright. His gaze slides to her neck which is tender and smooth. He moistens his lips but

senses a change in her demeanour. He sees a trace of fear in her eyes. She is smart and can see through his shell. He glances at her name badge.

‘Excuse me, Chau,’ he says, with as warm a smile as he can muster, ‘I was miles away.’

Her return smile is trepiditous. She is wise to be cautious.

‘I’ll have an Americano. Please.’

‘Name, please.’ She doesn’t meet his gaze.

He gives her his name.

‘Would you like something to eat?’

‘No thank you.’

‘I’ll bring it to you.’

‘Thanks,’ he says as he passes over a crisp five-pound note. ‘Keep the change.’

He scans for a place to sit. Business is thriving and tables are limited, however, through a partition bookshelf wall, he spots two Spanish tourists leaving from a table in the corner. A perfect location with a direct view of Elaine. It is meant to be. He skirts around the partition, stands by the empty table and looks distastefully at the debris on top. A passing male server quickly clears away the mess, much to his relief.

He sits at the table and from his shoulder bag removes his Moleskine notebook and Maki-e Phoenix fountain pen, which he places neatly side by side. He then takes out his MacBook Air and iPhone. He is assimilating into his environment. Like a chameleon, he has blended into it and become one of them.

In his peripheral vision he sees Chau approach with his Americano. He looks up.

‘Excuse me for asking. I’m intrigued by your name. Is it . . .’

‘Vietnamese,’ she says, finishing his sentence.

He smiles at her.

'I've always wanted to go.'

Chau offers a wan smile as she places the coffee gently on the table top.

'Enjoy,' she says.

'Thank you. Please could you tell me the Wi-Fi password?'

'Lumberyard Café. All one word.'

'Thank you, Chau.'

As she leaves he opens a browser and searches through the Lumberyard Café Facebook page where he finds a photo of the staff bunched together in a smiling group pic. Chau is dead centre. He hovers his mouse over her face and reveals her tagged name. Chau Ho. He clicks on the name. Her Facebook page is open for all the world to see. Her history hooks him immediately. She is a 'proud' refugee from poverty and communism. This revelation has elevated her as a potential candidate. He watches her preparing coffee surrounded by puffs of steam and wonders why he has never considered using an Asian person for one of his collections before. He has no answer, but he feels she'll bring an exoticness to his work. The thought both excites and pleases him. He opens the notebook and scratches *New Collection* at the top of the page with his pen. Below that he writes:

Chau Ho.

The time on his wristwatch says 8.15. Forty-five minutes to go.

He looks at Elaine, who is sitting on a re-upholstered red baroque chair. A short gasp of pleasure escapes from his mouth. Her face is heavily made up, but there is no mistaking that her top lip is split. He scans her face and wonders what other bruised delights lie beneath that thick layer of cosmetics. The

raw tones of Jackie's South London crowing interrupt his thoughts. His eyes slide towards her. She has shoulder-length dark hair and judging by the crusting of chocolate powder on her lips she is drinking a cappuccino. He notices the small boy with dark blond hair sitting on a stool opposite them seemingly lost in the glow of a Samsung phone screen that is too big for his hands. He recognises him from Elaine's Facebook page. He is her son, Jordan.

'Jordan, let's get a selfie with you, me and your mum,' shrills Jackie.

'But my lip, Jackie. Frank'll go mad!' protests Elaine.

'Sod Frank! It's about time everyone saw what he does to you.'

He has been communicating with Elaine for five weeks using a faux Facebook account with another person's photos, and is familiar with her troubled marriage to Frank. He has been an attentive, sympathetic and occasionally flirtatious confidant. He has given her the non-judgemental support she craves. It has been a tiresome but necessary part of his grooming process.

He watches as the boy stands between the two women, smiling as Jackie stretches out her arm to take a picture of them all. She can't quite seem to get them all in.

'May I?' he offers.

They all look over at him but he locks eyes with Elaine. Young blonde Elaine with her damaged face. She smiles sweetly at him and something clicks inside.

'Oooh, thanks very much!' says Jackie.

He takes her phone and points it at them as Jackie and the boy each beam brightly at the lens. Elaine moistens her split lip before cracking a toothy smile. With his fingers he enlarges

the screen and focuses in on her lip. ‘Perfection!’ he says, returning the screen to the original size. Their faces are frozen, bordering on impatient.

‘Say, cheese!’

With fixed smiles, they cry, ‘Sheeeze!’

He presses the button and lets it click several times before handing it back. ‘I took a few shots,’ he says.

‘Thanks.’ Elaine’s fingers shield the split in her lip.

‘You’re welcome.’

He returns to his table and hears Jackie say, ‘I’ll check us in on Facebook.’

He opens up Facebook on his MacBook Air, searches for the Lumberyard Café page and straightaway finds the picture he has just taken.

*Jackie Morris has checked into the Lumberyard Café
on Seven Dials with Elaine Kelly and gorgeous Jordan.*

He clicks on Elaine Kelly’s name and indulges once more in the small window of her life. It contains pictures and data from her childhood, school days and the present. Her husband Frank is a rum-looking sort, moody and miserable and twice her age. In her photographs there is a sense of distance between them both. In other pictures she is with her son Jordan, but most of them are shots of her alone, in a park, in the woods, or gazing out the window of her small shadowy apartment. What a wretched life she leads. Only he sees in her what no one else can see. She is a tragic Shakespearean heroine like Juliet, or even better, Ophelia. He pictures her floating lifeless, like in Millais’ painting.

He takes a sip of the bitter hot coffee, which is better than expected. Now it's 8.24, and not long to go before his new collection will be revealed. He is calm but also filled with a sense of nervous excitement. For now, he focuses on his fellow customers and the selection of new candidates.

To his left is an occupied bank of red bar stools framed in the window overlooking Tower Street and Seven Dials. He has a sense of being watched and looks to the mirror opposite. A round woman with bobbed hair is scrolling through her phone and occasionally steals a glance his way.

She looks familiar and he wonders, but also suspects, what has captured her attention on her phone.

He enters the security code on his device and opens the Tinder app. With location services switched on, he pages through the profiles until he finds her.

CassandraH, 30, project coordinator.

Bright, bubbly, loves cuddles, cats and the books of E. P. Jones. Cassandra Hotchkiss is my heroine! Looking for my very own Max. Hit me up for a date.

He smiles to himself. CassandraH is the username of sweet Megan Burchill. He has been communicating with her for almost one month now and is surprised to see her here, but then, perhaps not. He has mentioned that he is often in the area. She looks older than her stated age and is also plumper and curvier than her photos suggest. He pictures her without clothes. A Renaissance beauty.

His gaze meets hers. She freezes, locked in eye contact, blushes and turns back to her device.

She'll be perfect, he thinks. With the fountain pen he scratches:

Megan Burchill.

His phone chimes with a message. A notification from Grindr.

Thomas Butler.

Another potential acquisition.

He shoots a glance at the artwork of the crotch-grabbing youth with the six pack and considers just how alike Thomas and the painting are. There is a rare synchronicity in this moment that is almost beautiful. Like Elaine, Thomas is meant to be.

He selects the *like* button, sends him a message and scratches Thomas's name in the notebook.

The café door opens and he looks up to see a woman step inside. Her skin is a milky latte, her eyes are blue, or green, he cannot be sure, and her oval face has a determined expression that brightens when she smiles at Chau. She is wearing a navy-blue double-breasted pea coat and carrying a black leather backpack. She orders a green tea and gives her name as Archer.

'Archer,' he whispers to himself. Her surname perhaps. The sound of it sweetens the bitter coffee on his lips.

She walks across the café and finds a space on a high stool facing out of the window.

He is intrigued by her ethnicity and struggles to place it. She could be from central Europe and have a trace of the Middle East or Africa, perhaps, concealed somewhere in her genes. He fancies that with a little more sun her skin would transform to a golden brown.

She takes off the backpack, drops it to the floor and lets the coat slip from her shoulders and fall onto the back of the stool. She is wearing casual dark jeans and a fitted olive-green sweater.

She scoops a phone from the coat and rests her elbows on the window table. Through the reflection in a nearby mirror, he can see it's an old iPhone 6 with a cracked screen. She enters the passcode, dials a number and places the phone to her ear. A moment passes and she ends the call. She bites her thumb and begins to tap the phone on the table top. She seems troubled and he wonders what is turning over in her pretty head.

Chau appears with the tea. The woman thanks her, removes the lid and blows on the hot liquid.

He becomes aware of the time and checks his wristwatch. It's 8.46. Time to go and watch the reveal before paying one final visit to the courier's. He packs up his belongings and notices the woman called Archer is hurrying out through the door. He smiles and walks down St Martin's Lane like a ghost following in her wake.



2

THE SMALL HAIRS ON GRACE Archer's neck stand on end as if she has been caressed by a cold hand. Archer isn't the superstitious type, yet if there were ever a time to think that someone has just walked over her grave, now is that time. She has the sense of being watched and slows her pace. Looking at the shop window to her right, she sees the transparent figures of commuters and tourists swarm around her like spectres from another world. Turning, she scans the faces, but sees no one watching her.

She shudders and rubs the scar on the back of her left hand.

Dark memories from her childhood surface in her head, but she suppresses them and pushes them from her mind. Cold droplets of rain splash onto her face. She wipes them away, turns up the collar of her coat and hurries on, conscious that she should not be late on her first day.

Charing Cross Police Station has had a makeover since she was last here three months ago to make an arrest. A generous and questionable police budget of half a million has seen the immense four-storey Georgian building restored and painted a luxurious period cream colour. She looks up at the four sturdy

columns and newly repaired Corinthian capitals that support the portico entrance. Such a different station to the one she was at recently.

She pauses before entering and considers what lies ahead. She is taking over the job of ex-DI Andy Rees, the same man she had arrested and sent down three months ago. Stepping into his shoes hadn't been part of the plan, but she is hungry to move on in her career and this opportunity is too good to turn down, despite the resentment she will inevitably face from his colleagues. Aside from that, she's never expected to end up working here, of all places. The same station where her father also served as DI, a career cut short by a brutal gangland murder eighteen years ago. She wonders what he would think of her now on her first day stepping across the same portico that he had walked through every morning. He would be proud, she knows that, but he would probably also advise her to be cautious and to watch her back. She smiles to herself. He always had been one to state the obvious.

Her old boss, Charlie Bates, a scrappy old-school copper laid it bare for her: 'Don't let the past hold you back. Your old man would want this for you. And forget what Rees's cronies think. Take the job at Charing Cross or you'll face a secondment of NCA investigation work in the arse end of nowhere. I can promise you.' Charming Charlie has a way with words. Archer has a sharp mind and is ambitious. Charlie understands that more than anyone and this was his no bullshit way of telling her not to turn down this opportunity.

She gives her name and shows her ID to the receptionist, a stern-looking woman who shoots her a cold stare and mutters something indecipherable. Archer swallows. She isn't even in

the building and it has already begun. The worst is yet to come, she knows it.

Charlie sent her a text this morning reminding her that because of her high-profile arrest of DI Rees, the staff at Charing Cross will probably do everything in their power to see that she fails. He said it would be a test of her resolve. Archer bit her tongue at that. Let them try, she thinks now. After all, she has faced much worse.

She feels an emptiness in the hollow of her stomach. *Much worse.*

‘Third floor,’ says the receptionist. ‘DS Quinn will be waiting for you.’

Archer nods a thanks and makes her way up the stairs.

DS Harry Quinn is standing at the top of the stairs, watching her. She interviewed Quinn shortly after Rees’s arrest. A softly spoken Belfast man with a dry sense of humour that she considered inappropriate at the time. He has a boxer’s stocky build and is wearing a scuffed black leather bomber jacket. His short dark hair is neatly trimmed; his eyes are pale blue, giving him an icy, insolent look. She takes comfort in the fact that he was no fan of Rees. However, she investigated and nailed a copper and that fact alone has tarnished her.

‘Good morning, ma’am. Welcome to Charing Cross.’

‘DS Quinn.’

She glances behind him into the open-plan office where several leery expressions meet her gaze before returning to stare at their computer screens.

‘Ma’am, the Lord Mayor’s Show has left us a little short of staff. So I was wondering if you’d like to accompany me on a wee assignment.’

‘What would that be?’

‘Nothing important. Some la-de-dah artist has been commissioned to produce street art for the Lord Mayor’s Show itself. We’ve had a complaint – actually four, to be precise – from the show director claiming three of his art pieces are obscene and should be taken off the street immediately. He’s kicking up a right stink, so he is.’

In normal circumstances this kind of issue would be handled by uniform or a DC, however, the Home Office’s cuts to police staff of all ranks have been savage. The force is still struggling to cope with the rise in crime. All coppers, Archer included, understand the necessity to step in wherever they can.

‘Of course, DS Quinn. I’d be happy to.’

‘It’s outside The Connection at St Martin’s Place. We can walk.’

Archer knows The Connection well. It is a homeless charity situated in a tired Victorian block on Trafalgar Square next to the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields. It is where Archer took a short sabbatical two years ago to work with the homeless.

‘Ma’am, do you mind if I make an observation?’

‘What would that be?’

‘It’s not my place to say this, but I will, and excuse me for it . . . but Andy Rees still has friends here.’

Archer swallows. ‘You’re right, DS Quinn. It’s not your place to say that.’

‘Sorry, ma’am, I just wanted to—’

Archer changes the subject. ‘Is there anything more to tell me about these complaints?’

‘Nothing more than what I told you already. Derek Manly is the festival director. He’s there now.’

*

A swell of people has gathered outside St Martin's Place and The Connection with hands raised above their heads recording and snapping pictures with their devices. Standing on her toes Archer can see the top of three glass cabinets, but the crowd is dense and the view obscured.

'What does he look like?' asks Archer.

'No idea. He shouts a lot down the phone, though. Look out for a shouty type.'

They begin to push their way through the throng, but the crowd closes in on them. Archer feels her head swim and begins to breathe rapidly. She wants to push her way back out, but holds her nerve.

'Police!' she calls. 'Move out of the way, please.'

'Oi, watch it!' someone calls, as she forces her way through.

'I think I hear him,' says Quinn, pointing. 'There, with the clipboard.'

She sees a slender man wearing heavy black-framed glasses and a bright white puffer coat that drops all the way down to his ankles. He is speaking angrily to someone on his phone.

'Yes, this is Derek Manly. I have already told that to the person who transferred me! Yes, I understand that . . . But I have been waiting here in the freezing cold for almost twenty minutes and there is no sign of a police officer. It's just not good enough. I want to speak to whoever is in charge.'

Archer focuses and surges forward. 'Mr Manly . . .'

Manly glares at her. 'I'm on the phone, if you don't mind!' he snaps.

'Mr Manly. I'm Detective Inspector Archer and this is Detective Sergeant Quinn.'

Manly frowns, his head sinks into his neck as he looks them up and down. 'You took your time.'

Quinn speaks. 'Mr Manly, could you please be a little more specific about your complaint?'

The crowd behind Manly begins to thin and Archer catches a fleeting glance of three glass cabinets almost six feet tall. Each is filled with liquid and seems to contain a life-like effigy of a naked man wearing a long scruffy coat, calmly floating in the water. The hands of the men are extended and cupped as if they are begging.

'Look at them! I can't have them here. They're obscene!' cries Manly.

Archer inches forward as the crowd parts, and narrows her gaze at the tattooed torso of the figure in the middle cabinet. Faded blue skulls are inked onto the chest.

They look familiar.

Her eyes rise to the neck, which is ringed with thick purple bruises. The face is long with a high forehead and a wispy beard. Lifeless grey eyes stare over the heads of the crowd. Archer takes a sharp breath.

She knows him.

Her eyes dart to the other cabinets. Each man has bruises around the neck.

'DS Quinn,' she calls.

Quinn is behind her in a second. 'Holy Jesus!'

'This isn't some weird artistic effigy. These men are dead. I know this one. His name is Billy. Billy Perrin. Call in for assistance. I'll start moving this crowd back.'

Quinn calls through to Charing Cross as Archer tries to disperse the crowd. 'Get back, please. This is a police matter.'

‘Help is on its way, ma’am,’ calls Quinn.

‘Forensics?’

‘On it already.’

For every four people Archer herds back, four more appear. ‘Mr Manly, until more police arrive I need you to help me move this crowd back.’

Manly sniffs, places his phone inside his jacket and tucks the clipboard under his arm. He points at the cabinets and waves his finger. ‘I am fuming. Those things should not be here. They are not what I was expecting!’ Manly has clearly not realised exactly what he has on display. Perhaps that is best for the moment.

‘Let’s deal with that later. Right now, please help me move the crowd back.’

With Manly’s help, Archer is able to put three feet of distance between the cabinets and the mob. She hears comments from the crowd: ‘They’re so realistic!’ says a woman. A man adds, ‘The detail is just extraordinary. Hats off to him. He has really exceeded expectations with this collection.’

A visceral scream makes Archer jump and she turns to see Billy Perrin’s girlfriend, Sharon Collins, push her way through the crowd. Her gaunt face is ashen and twists with horror and confusion as she runs toward the cabinet. Archer blocks her path.

‘Sharon, stop. There’s nothing you can do.’

The woman is thin and weak and struggles against Archer’s firm but gentle hold.

‘No. No. No, my Billy!’ she sobs.

Archer looks around for Manly but he has disappeared. Quinn is pushing back a pack of eager phone photographers.

Behind her a new crowd has gathered around the cabinet containing Billy Perrin.

‘Hey! Move away from there,’ commands Archer. She sees Manly beside the cabinet and is shocked to see it rise suddenly.

‘Mr Manly!’

She can feel Sharon’s body tensing. ‘Sharon, please stay here. Let me deal with this.’

‘I can take her,’ comes a voice. Archer looks up to see The Connection director, Eula Higgins.

‘Thank you, Eula.’

As Eula comforts Sharon, Archer rushes forward, shoving aside anyone in her way. She sees Manly directing two men dressed like roadies. They are trying to tip the vitrine onto a small upright trolley.

‘*Stop what you are doing!*’ shouts Archer.

‘Carry on, please,’ instructs Manly. ‘We have precious little time.’

‘This is a crime scene. Put that cabinet down.’

The two roadies stop, confusion in their eyes, as they look from Manly to Archer.

‘Put it back gently,’ orders Archer.

Manly’s lips tighten. ‘DI Archer, we need to get these off the streets. There are children present and the Lord Mayor will have my head on a stick!’

The roadies struggle to hold the cabinet, and as the trolley begins to wobble the frame starts to bend. Liquid seeps through the edges and a warm sweet chemical smell fills the air. Archer moves forward to help, but it’s too late. The trolley collapses and the cabinet slips, crashing to the ground as glass shatters and liquid spills across the paving stones, washing over the feet of all nearby.

The smell is foul. The smell of a mortuary and death.
Formaldehyde.

A hushed silence falls over the walkway.

Archer puts her hand to her mouth in an effort to block the stench.

She hears a shriek and then notices Manly swoon and fall to the wet ground.

Sharon continues to sob somewhere behind her. Archer isn't sure if she feels revulsion or pity at the sight of Billy Perrin's naked, twisted corpse. His dead, half-lidded eyes stare back at her with a helpless expression and she looks away.

Then there's the crunching of glass underfoot and the clicking of camera phones.

'Shit!' says Archer.

'*Stop filming!*' shouts Quinn.

One of the roadies doubles over and throws up.

More people approach and gather in a circle.

'*Stay back. This is a crime scene.*'

Archer calls to the roadie who has managed to keep his breakfast down. His face is grey. 'You. Find me something to cover this man's body.'

He nods and disappears.

Archer is relieved to hear the sound of police sirens. The roadie returns with a large dirty dustsheet. Archer and Quinn help drape it over Billy's body. The scene is beyond contaminated now, but at least Billy will have his dignity.

A gap opens in the crowd as two uniformed officers barge through. One is a young Indian woman. Her partner is a younger dark-haired man, clearly not long out of Hendon, whose face begins to pale at the smell.

‘What’s going on, Harry?’ asks the female officer.

‘Neha, could you and Junior there move these people on and then cordon off this area.’

‘Sure thing.’

‘What’s your name?’ Archer asks the young officer.

‘Nesbitt, ma’am.’

‘PC Nesbitt, take a few deep breaths and just keep the crowd back. Understood?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

Something flashes at the corner of Archer’s eye. Frowning she turns to see a man photographing the cabinets from all angles.

‘Sir, please stop what you are doing.’

The man has a mop of untidy grey hair and looks like he has slept in his clothes. He has either not heard her or is ignoring her.

‘Get away from those cabinets. You are trespassing on a crime scene.’

‘It’s a bit late for that. Half of London has been through here already.’

‘I won’t ask you a second time,’ says Archer.

‘*Mike!*’ says Quinn.

The man called Mike second-glances Archer before looking over her shoulder.

‘DS Quinn, how are you?’ asks the man, his eyes flitting back to Archer.

‘Goodbye, Mike,’ replies the sergeant.

‘Anything you’d like to say on this matter, Harry?’

‘I just said it.’

The man’s staring unsettles Archer, but she focuses back on the job. Through the thinning crowd, she notices a second

squad car pull up by the pavement. Two male officers step out of it, deep in conversation and in no particular hurry.

‘DS Quinn, could we get some help from those two?’

Quinn follows her gaze. ‘Oi! You two! Tape off this entire area. Make sure no one gets inside.’

Archer hears the click of a camera.

‘*Get out of here, Mike,*’ bellows Quinn.

‘Leaving now,’ he replies, retreating quickly. ‘I know when I’m not welcome.’

‘Who is he?’ asks Archer.

‘Mike Hamilton.’

‘The *Daily Mail* reporter?’

‘The same.’

‘You’re on first-name terms. Nice for you.’

‘He can be useful, when the time is right.’

‘A tabloid reporter isn’t what we need right now. Tell him not to publish those pictures.’

‘It’s a little late for that.’ He nods at the crowd watching from a distance. ‘This rabble’s pictures will have gone viral already.’

Of course they have, thinks Archer. ‘We need to get them taken down.’

‘That may take some time.’

‘Detective Inspector Archer?’

Archer turns to see a recovered Manly supported by one of the roadies waving at her from behind the tape.

‘DI Archer . . . thank you . . . I have a very important event to run today, so do you think we could please hurry along and remove these things?’ He swirls his hand at the cabinets.

Archer bites her tongue. ‘Mr Manly, did you take delivery of these cabinets?’

‘I certainly didn’t.’
‘Then who did?’
‘No one. They were here when I arrived.’
She feels Quinn standing behind her.
‘But you knew they were coming?’ asks Quinn.
Manly’s face pales. ‘I’m finished. Oh my God, I’m finished.’
‘Did you know the contents of these cabinets prior to their arrival?’ asks Archer.
‘No! That was part of the surprise.’
‘What surprise?’
‘The Mayor is supporting the work of up-and-coming artists. There are street exhibitions across the capital. There are sculptures of cows, snails and dogs appearing all over the streets of London.’
‘Who commissioned a dead persons’ exhibition?’ asks Quinn.
‘No one. I mean . . . someone, yes. But I didn’t know, I swear! He assured us his pieces would be the most talked about of the show.’
‘Who is he?’
‘He’s an up-and-coming artist. He calls himself Anonymous but spells it with an “@” sign for an “a”. It wasn’t meant to be an exhibition of dead people! It was something for the homeless.’
‘Have you met this artist?’ asks Quinn.
‘No, nobody has. He only communicates through different email addresses. He’s like Banksy – keeps his identity secret.’
‘I think it might be a good idea if you come with us to Charing Cross Police Station to make a statement,’ Quinn tells him.
Manly’s expression is grave. ‘There’s something else. In his last email, he, @nonyomous said: MORE WILL FOLLOW.’
Archer and Quinn exchange concerned glances.

‘What did he mean by that?’ asks Quinn.

Manly shrugs. ‘Your guess is as good as mine.’

‘Tell me what you think it means?’

‘I would assume in light of these that it means that if this is the first part, then there will be further cabinets containing more bodies to come.’

‘During your email communications did you ask him to confirm what he meant?’

‘I told him that was very exciting and asked when we could see the next wave of the exhibition, but he didn’t respond. Our exchange was over at that stage.’

‘Mr Manly, we would like to see all communication and paperwork you have relating to @nonymous and this exhibition.’

‘Of course.’

Archer notices a man dressed in a hi-vis jacket, watching them from behind the tape. A street cleaner. She has a thought and walks towards him.

‘Hello,’ she says.

He is holding a cap in his hand and looks away, a worried expression on his face. ‘Hello,’ he responds. His accent is Eastern European, but she cannot place it.

‘Were you working earlier this morning?’

The street cleaner wrings his hat. ‘No . . . erm, yes. I did a few hours.’

‘What’s your name?’

‘Dimitri Novak.’

‘Mr Novak, did you see the cabinets arrive?’

The street cleaner pales as he glances at the cabinets. ‘Yes, I saw them arrive.’



3

‘I DON’T WANT NO TROUBLE,’ SAYS Novak nervously. Archer offers a reassuring smile. ‘Mr Novak, do you have reason to believe you’ll get into trouble by speaking to us?’

He hesitates for a moment before shaking his head. ‘No.’

‘Tell us what you saw.’

‘They come early this morning.’

‘What time was that?’

‘I think . . . oh . . . just after six o’clock.’

‘Where were you going at the time?’

‘I had just finished outside the gallery.’

‘The National Gallery?’

‘Yes. I had turned the corner onto Charing Cross Road and I look around and I see a truck, like a big van. The back is open and there is a light. The truck is like cold inside, you know the type that take meat . . . beef, pigs, the sheep . . . you know what I mean?’

Archer nods.

‘But there is no meat. Just the cabinets, which are covered in the cloth. A red cloth, I think. Anyway, these men, they are wheeling the cabinets, with trolleys, you see, and putting them

outside here.’ He points to the location of the cabinets. ‘That was it.’

‘How many men did you see?’

‘Two.’

‘What did they look like?’

Novak shrugs. ‘I do not know. It was dark. I couldn’t see their faces.’

‘Was there a company name written on the truck?’

He thinks for a moment and then shakes his head. ‘No.’

‘Did you talk to the men at all? Even to say good morning?’ asks Quinn.

‘I didn’t,’ he replies, indignantly. ‘I was working.’

‘Did you hear them speak?’

‘Ah yes. I did.’

‘What did they say?’

‘I do not know.’

‘Did they mention a name, perhaps?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Mr Novak, it’s important you think hard about what you heard. Even the smallest of details can help,’ says Archer.

Novak thinks for a moment; his face scrunches. ‘I think they were Polish.’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘I’m not sure. I don’t speak Polish.’

Archer hears Quinn sighing. ‘How do you know they were talking Polish, then?’ he asks.

‘Something . . . one of them said to the other.’

‘You just said you couldn’t speak Polish.’

He raises his hands and shrugs. ‘OK, I know a few words. One of the men called the other *dupek* . . .’ Novak turns to

Archer. 'Please excuse my language. It means *asshole*. I know that. When I was young man I was with a beautiful Polish girl and she would call me that all the time. She was very pretty . . .'

'These men, Mr Novak. What time did they leave Trafalgar Square?'

'I really not be sure. I left to do my job. Why don't you ask the police officer?'

'What police officer?' asks Archer.

'The one who arrived and spoke to them.'

'What did he look like?' asks Quinn.

'It was dark. I couldn't see. He looked like police. He had uniform.'

'What time did this policeman arrive?'

'I don't remember for sure. After the men, is all.'

'Did the policeman ask about the cabinets?'

'How would I know?'

'Was there any indication the delivery men and the policeman discussed the cabinets?'

'It's possible, but I couldn't hear them.' Novak scratches his chin. 'There was laughing. Yes. I heard someone laugh.'

'OK, Mr Novak. Is there anything else you can think of that might help us?' asks Archer.

Novak scrunches his face and after a moment replies, 'No, that is everything. Please may I go?'

'I'm afraid we'll need a bit more of your time,' says Archer. She turns to Quinn. 'I knew the man in the broken cabinet. I met him at The Connection two years back. His girlfriend, Sharon, was just here. We need to talk to her.' Archer looks around for Sharon Collins and sees Eula leading her into The Connection.

Quinn nods his understanding. ‘Coombs,’ calls Quinn, looking toward one of the officers. The uniform hurries across. ‘Whizz Mr Novak and Mr Manly to Charing Cross in your nice police car and take their statements.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Quinn makes a call. ‘Os, it’s Harry. Three glass cabinets containing human remains were delivered to The Connection at St Martin’s around six this morning. Check the CCTV and find out the name of the uniform who stopped by and chatted to the delivery men . . . That’s right . . . get whoever it was in for an interview as soon as possible. Thanks.’

Archer and Quinn enter The Connection and show their ID to the male receptionist. He tells Archer that Sharon is with Eula in the dining room.

They follow the clinking and scraping of cutlery on china and enter the large dining space. Archer scans the tables and sees them sitting at a remote spot away from the lunch crowd. Eula Higgins is a sturdy West Indian woman of indeterminate age with shoulder-length plaits of curly black and purple hair. She looks across and nods at Archer and Quinn.

‘Sharon, Detective Inspector Archer is here. She would like to talk to you.’

Archer and Quinn sit at the table.

‘Hello again, Sharon,’ says Archer.

Sharon trembles as she holds onto a mug of hot tea. The ravages of addiction and street life have taken an even greater toll on Sharon than when Archer first met her two years back. She is in her thirties, however the lines on her face suggest a much older woman.

‘Are you OK to talk?’ asks Archer.

Sharon nods her head.

‘Thank you. I’m so sorry about Billy.’

Her shoulders begin to shake and her face contorts. Eula squeezes her forearm gently.

‘Could you tell me when you last saw Billy?’

It takes a moment for Sharon to compose herself. ‘I ain’t seen him in some weeks or more. He just upped and left.’

‘Do you know where he went?’

‘No. Where would he go? He ain’t got nowhere, or no one. Just me and the streets. That’s all.’

‘Did he tell you why he was going?’

‘He just said he had somewhere to be.’

‘Can you tell me about when it actually was that you last saw him?’

Sharon shrugs. ‘I dunno. Three weeks maybe. Sometimes he’d disappear for days and I wouldn’t see him, but he’d always come back to me. Dunno the date. Don’t have much call for dates no more.’

‘Where did you see him?’

She frowns as she tries to think. ‘We was on the Strand with a few tinnies, mindin’ our own business.’

‘Did he say where he was going?’

She shakes her head.

‘How was his mental health when you last saw him?’

‘He got by.’

‘Was he using?’

She gives Archer a suspicious look. ‘Whaddya mean?’

‘Anything you tell us might help to find who did this.’

She hesitates before responding. ‘Yes.’