
Opening Extract from...

When the Music's Over

Written by Peter Robinson

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For Sheila

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in its bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

WB Yeats, 'Leda and the Swan'

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*

PROLOGUE

They threw the naked girl out of the van on the darkest stretch of road. First she felt the wind whip as one of them slid open the door, then she was in free fall, tumbling through space. Her hip bounced on the hard road surface and she felt something crack. Then she hit damp grass and rolled into a ditch full of stagnant water. She could hear their laughter and whooping over the loud music, but soon even the music had faded into the distance and there was nothing left but silence.

She lay in the ditch winded, her hip hurting, head spinning, and tried to take stock of her situation. She had no idea where she was. Somewhere in the countryside, obviously, miles from civilisation. She struggled to push herself up out of the foul, muddy water. As soon as she moved, she gasped at the pain, which shot first through her hip, then seemed to diffuse through every atom of her body, as if someone were pushing red-hot needles into her flesh. The stuff they'd given her back in the van was wearing off, the last couple of hours fading like a dream as she awoke into pain, but even as it faded it rushed through her when she least expected it, distorting her senses. There was a whooshing sound in her ears, like big waves crashing, and her vision was blurry.

She had also cut her shoulder on something, a broken bottle in the ditch, perhaps, and she became aware of other cuts and bruises as the pain started to focus on more specific parts of her body. She tried to clean the mud and blood off her skin as best she could with water from the ditch, but it was too dirty,

and she only succeeded in spreading the filth all over her body. She felt that she resembled some primeval creature crawling out of the slime.

She limped into the darkness and stumbled in the direction from which the van had travelled. There was nothing she could do about her nakedness except hope someone decent came along, someone who would wrap her in a blanket and take her to hospital. Being naked and muddy were the least of her problems. Her brain wasn't working properly, for a start. The road surface seemed to be undulating beneath her, and the overhanging trees were assuming threatening shapes. She shook her head to try to make it all go away but that only made things worse. She felt dizzy and had to support herself against a tree trunk for a moment. The bark was pulsing under her fingers like the dry scaly skin of a reptile. Her hip hurt so much that she was certain it was broken. And she felt terribly torn up inside. She was certain she was bleeding internally. She needed a doctor. He would give her painkillers, maybe even morphine. Then her pain would disappear and she would drift on warm soft pillows without a care in the world. But they would want to take swabs and samples. They'd call the police and then she would really be in trouble. The police wouldn't believe her. They never believed people like her. Besides, in her experience, such kindness was unlikely. No Good Samaritan would come along and give a lift to a naked girl covered in mud. That wasn't what the sort of people she knew did with naked girls. It wasn't the kind of thing that happened in her life.

It was late July, but a long week of rain had just ended. The night was muggy, and a gauzy mist hung over the dark landscape. No street lamps, only the hazy light of a haloed half-moon. Somewhere in the field beyond the drystone wall a sheep bleated, and she thought she could see a lone light shining in a farmhouse upper window. Should she head for that?

Would they help her? There was the ditch and a stone wall topped with barbed wire in her way, but there might be an entrance further ahead. If she found a gate, she decided, or a gap in the wall, that's what she would do. Head over the field towards the light.

How late was it? Or how early? She had no phone or watch. She couldn't remember how long she had been in the van. Surely dawn couldn't be far off. The sun rose early these days. But everything was still dark, and the trees and walls were silhouettes of scarecrows and demons closing in on her. The road was narrow, and there was no pavement, so she walked on the hard surface. Stones dug into the soles of her feet with almost every step. If a car came she would have plenty of warning. She would hear it and see its headlights from far away. If a car came . . .

She hadn't been walking for more than ten or fifteen minutes when she thought she heard the distant drone of an engine and saw lights playing between the shadows and trees ahead, refracted in the mist down the winding road. A car! It was travelling in the opposite direction she was walking, the same direction the van had been heading, but that didn't matter. As the car came closer, she at least had enough sense to stand back, near the edge of the ditch, so it wouldn't hit her by accident. She threw away her dignity and waved her arms in the air. The headlights dazzled her, and the small van shot straight past. She watched it in despair, then she saw it stop with a screeching of rubber about a hundred yards ahead. She couldn't make out what sort of van it was. The engine purred and the red brake lights glowed like a demon's eyes in the mist. Shaking off the feeling of apprehension that came over her, she started hobbling towards the van as quickly as she could.

I

Detective Superintendent Alan Banks stood in front of the mirror in the gents and studied his reflection. Not bad, he thought, tightening his mauve-and-gold striped tie so that it didn't look as if the top button of his shirt was undone, which it always was. He couldn't stand that claustrophobic feeling he got when both button and tie pressed on his Adam's apple. There was no dandruff on the collar or shoulders of his suit jacket, and his dark hair was neatly cropped, showing a hint of grey, like a scattering of ash, around the temples. He had no shaving cuts, no shred of tissue hanging off his chin, and he wore just a faint hint of classic Old Spice aftershave. He straightened his shoulders and spine, noting that there were no bulges in his jacket pockets to spoil the line of his new suit. His wallet and warrant card were all he carried, and both were slim. He fastened the middle button, so the jacket hung just right, and decided he was ready to face the world.

He glanced at his watch. The meeting was due to begin at nine sharp, and it was about three minutes to. He left the gents and took the stairs two at a time up to the conference room on the top floor of the old mock-Tudor building. Timing was an issue. Banks didn't want to be the first to arrive, but he didn't want to be the last, either. As it happened, he ended up somewhere in the middle. Detective Chief Superintendent Gervaise and Assistant Chief Constable McLaughlin stood outside the room chatting as they waited outside. Banks could see through the open door that some people were already seated.

'Alan,' said McLaughlin. 'New duties not proving too much of a burden, I hope?'

Banks's promotion to detective superintendent had come through a short while ago – a bloody miracle in this day and age, or so he had been told – and he had spent the last few weeks learning the ropes. 'Not at all, sir,' he said. 'I had no idea how much I was getting away with before.'

Gervaise and McLaughlin laughed. 'Welcome to the real world,' said the latter. 'Shall we go in?'

McLaughlin went ahead. Banks turned to Gervaise and whispered, 'Any idea what this is about?'

She gave a quick shake of her head. 'Very hush-hush,' she said. 'Rumour has it that the chief constable himself is going to be here.'

'Not crime stats or more budget cuts, then?'

Gervaise smiled. 'Somehow, I doubt it.'

The conference room was sparsely furnished, nothing but an oval table, tubular chairs and institutional cream walls. They took their seats around the table, and a few minutes later Chief Constable Frank Sampson – soon, it was whispered, to be *Sir* Frank Sampson – did indeed arrive. When he was followed shortly by the new police and crime commissioner, Margaret Bingham, Banks knew that something important must be brewing.

But the last person to arrive, a minute or so after everyone else, was the biggest surprise of all.

Dirty Dick Burgess was now some sort of deputy director or special agent at the National Crime Agency. More commonly known as the British FBI, the NCA dealt mostly with organised crime and border security, but it also worked against cyber crime and the sexual exploitation and abuse of children and young people. Burgess flipped Banks a wink before sitting down. Even he was wearing a suit and a crisp white shirt instead of his trademark scuffed leather jacket,

though he could have done with a shave and a haircut, and he had foregone the tie completely. Clearly the British FBI didn't bother dressing up for a visit to the provinces.

There were eight people seated around the table when the chief constable opened proceedings by introducing them all to one another. One of the people Banks didn't know, by either name or sight, was the lawyer from the Crown Prosecution Service. Her name was Janine Francis, and she was not one of the CPS lawyers that he usually dealt with. The eighth person, still only vaguely familiar to Banks, was the county force's new media liaison officer, Adrian Moss, an ex-advertising agency up-and-comer and political spin doctor with a flowered tie, fresh-scrubbed youthful appearance and a breezy, confident manner. A motley crew, indeed, Banks thought, as he tried to imagine why they might all have been brought together under one roof. It had to be something big.

'I know some of you must be wondering what all this is about,' said the chief constable, 'so I'll make it simple and get straight to the point. I assume you're all familiar with Operation Yewtree and its investigations into sexual abuse, predominantly against children and primarily by media personalities? In the wake of the Jimmy Savile business and the successful convictions of Rolf Harris, Gary Glitter, Dave Lee Travis and Max Clifford, among others, I'm sure you can imagine that a lot of past victims have been encouraged to come into the open over the matter of historical sexual abuse.'

Historical abuse. The words brought about an immediate sinking feeling in Banks's gut. A function of the political correctness of the times, historical abuse investigations were intended to right the wrongs of the past and to send the message that no matter how many years had gone by, if enough people cried foul, someone would be sent off. They were also a way of appeasing the victims of such crimes, of giving them a voice some of them had been seeking for years,

and perhaps even that much overused word 'closure', both things of which Banks approved in principle. In practice, however, it often turned out to be a different matter, a witch hunt where victims were often disappointed, and the reputations of innocent people sometimes went down in tatters. No detective in his right mind wanted to be part of a historical abuse investigation. Banks checked the faces of the others. Their expressions gave away nothing. Was he the only one who thought this way? Did it show?

'I'd like to think we've all learned a thing or two from the way these incidents have been handled over the past couple of years,' the CC went on, 'and one of the things we should have learned by now is to keep things close to our chests. I ask you all not to speak of what's said in here to anyone outside this office. Not even to your colleagues. Adrian.'

Moss glanced from face to face. 'Yes,' he said. 'No doubt you all know there's no way we can keep this from the media for ever. They'll get hold of it eventually, if they haven't already. It's my job to make sure that nothing gets said to them by anyone involved unless it goes through me first. Am I clear?'

He was obviously enjoying his temporary power over such an eminent gathering, Banks could tell from the triumphant expression on his face and the undertones of evangelistic delivery in his speech. And Banks didn't even know what 'this' was yet.

'Mistakes have been made in the past,' Moss went on. 'That business with the BBC cameras in position to film the raid on Cliff Richard's home before Sir Cliff knew about the search himself, for example – and we don't want any of that sort of behaviour dogging our footsteps. As you know, the investigation into Sir Cliff was dropped, and Paul Gambaccini had some harsh words to say about the way he was treated by the police. We've ended up with egg on our faces often enough, and we have to make sure that doesn't happen this time. When

the media do come knocking, as they will, we want everything calm and by the book. Nothing they can get between their teeth and run with. Naturally, celebrities are of interest to them, and celebrity misdeeds are manna for them. We not only have to prosecute this, we need to be seen to prosecute it. It won't take them long to gets their nibs sharpened. I can tell you now, there's a media shit storm due in the near future. My job, ladies and gentlemen, is to manage the flow of information, and to do that I will need the cooperation of all of you. Everything goes through the press office. Is that clear?' He had a sheen of sweat on his forehead as he scanned the room. Most of those present beamed back at him. Moss was one of the chief constable's and the police commissioner's golden boys. Now that the brass seemed far more concerned with publicity and image, people like him were more important to them than detectives, Banks thought. Burgess was the only one to appear unimpressed, the beginnings of that characteristic cynical, seen-it-all smile appearing in the twist of his lips.

'Thank you, Adrian,' said the chief constable. 'Now we all know where we stand, let's get down to brass tacks. You are all here because from now on you're going to be working together in one capacity or another on the same case. Assistant Chief Constable McLaughlin will enlighten you.'

Red Ron cleared his throat and shuffled his papers. 'You're here because we're going to be conducting an investigation into Danny Caxton,' he said, pausing for a moment to let the name sink in.

Danny Caxton, thought Banks. *Shit*. Celebrity, personality, presenter before presenters had even been invented. Household name. *The Man with the Big Smile*. Caxton had started his career in the late fifties with a few pop hits. He wasn't a rock and roller, more of a crooner, a part of the Jim Reeves, Val Doonican and Matt Monroe crowd. Perhaps the girls didn't scream at him the same way they did for Elvis or

the Beatles, but plenty drooled over him as their parents had drooled over Johnnie Ray or Frank Sinatra. From what Banks could remember, Caxton obviously had good business sense and he must have realised early on that a career in pop balladry doesn't last for ever. In the early sixties, he started to diversify. He had always had good comic timing and a knack for impersonating famous people, in addition to having the personality of an affable host. He compered variety shows, both live around the country and on television, cut the tapes at supermarket openings, judged beauty contests and quickly became the regular host of a popular talent-spotting programme called *Do Your Own Thing!* which lasted well into the late eighties. That was his catchphrase, too: 'Do your own thing.' Spoken with a tongue-in-cheek knowingness that tipped a wink towards its hippie origins. Even during the sixties and seventies he had the occasional novelty hit record, and he made a couple of dreadful swinging sixties films when he was already too old and square for such roles. He would have known Jimmy Savile, Banks realised. They were of the same generation. Caxton went from strength to strength: summer seasons, Christmas pantomimes, a successful West End musical comedy. He had married a pop singer at some point, Banks remembered, and there had been an acrimonious and public divorce not long after. His career had slowed down in the early nineties, but he still appeared occasionally as a guest on chat shows and had even hosted the odd Christmas variety special in the noughties.

'I'm surprised to hear he's still alive,' said Banks.

'Very much so,' said McLaughlin. 'At eighty-five years of age.'

'And what does the CPS think?' Banks asked, glancing at the lawyer. He knew there had been some confusion in the Savile business as to whether the CPS hadn't gone ahead with a prosecution because he was too old and infirm, or because

they thought the police had insufficient evidence. Banks knew the CPS had already been criticised for not acting sooner over Sir Cyril Smith, the Rochdale MP, who had been abusing young boys for years until his death in 2010. Now, no doubt, they were eager to show the public they were taking the lead on child sexual abuse and exploitation.

'He's fair game as far as we're concerned,' Janine Francis answered.

'And when did the offence take place, sir?' Banks asked Red Ron.

'Summer 1967.'

Danny Caxton was almost at the height of his success by 1967, Banks remembered. Everyone knew who he was. He was still a handsome devil, too, or so hundreds of mums thought. Christ, even Banks's own mother had sat fixated in front of the screen drooling over him while his father snorted and Banks disappeared upstairs to listen to his Rolling Stones and Who records.

'I'll give you a brief outline,' McLaughlin went on. 'There's a useful bio and a summary of events so far in the folder before you. Take it away and study it later. He certainly had an eventful sort of early life. Overcame a lot of adversity. He was born in Warsaw in 1930. His parents saw the writing on the wall and got Danny and his brothers and sisters out in 1933. They got split up, and he grew up with distant relatives in Heckmondwike.'

'That could have a serious effect on a person's mental health,' said Banks. 'I mean, just trying to pronounce it.'

There was a brief ripple of laughter, then DCS Gervaise said, 'Be careful, Alan. My dad came from Heckmondwike. Anyway, it wouldn't be too hard. Just omit the vowels and it'd be perfect in Polish.'

McLaughlin waited for the laughter to die down, then went on. 'For the moment, I want you to consider the

following. The complainant in this case is a woman called Linda Palmer. She was fourteen years old at the time of the alleged assault.'

Banks had heard of Linda Palmer. She was a poet, lived locally, had been written up in the paper once or twice. Been on BBC2 and Radio 4. Won awards. 'The poet?' he said.

'One and the same. She first called Childline, and they told her to get in touch with us.'

'And why do we believe her?' asked Gervaise.

'Same reason we believe any claim of historical abuse,' said McLaughlin. 'Her story's convincing, and we hope it will be even more so after you have all finished your tasks.' He glanced towards Janine Francis. 'The CPS has given a green light to continue with this, even on what little we have so far. That's why what Mr Moss said about managing the media is so important. We don't want to draw flak the way some other county forces have done. On the other hand, we don't want to appear to be operating in secret. And we know how difficult it is to keep a low profile in a case of this magnitude. You'll just have to do your best for as long as you can.'

'What are the facts?' Banks asked. 'Briefly.'

'That's what we want you to find out, Alan. You'll be conducting the initial interview with Linda Palmer. You'll also be interviewing Danny Caxton. Mr Burgess here will be monitoring the case nationwide.'

'Surely it would be protocol to send a female officer to interview Linda Palmer?' said Banks.

'Not necessarily,' said McLaughlin. 'The detective she talked to when she first called in is a female, a DI MacDonald, and she asked the same question, but Ms Palmer said she didn't care as long as it was someone who would believe her. She doesn't want any special treatment. That having been said, you have three extremely competent female officers on your team.'

'What did Linda Palmer accuse Caxton of doing, exactly?' Banks asked.

'According to Ms Palmer, Danny Caxton raped her.'

'And she's just come out with this story?'

McLaughlin sighed and glanced at the police and crime commissioner.

'That's irrelevant,' Margaret Bingham said. 'The reasons women have for coming forward so many years after a traumatic event are complex. It's not, at the moment, your job to question these motives, merely to ascertain their veracity.'

'And how do we do that?' Banks asked.

'The way you usually do it,' McLaughlin answered. 'Use your detective skills. We also have trained child protection officers who specialise in knowing the sort of details true victims are likely to remember, and whether they are telling the truth. If you have any doubts after you've talked to her, you're welcome to go over her statement with one of them, if you wish. And if it makes you feel any better, Ms Palmer *did* report the incident shortly after it occurred in 1967.'

'And what happened to that investigation?' Banks asked.

'That will be another aspect of the case for you to determine,' said McLaughlin. 'Clearly it was derailed at some point, for some reason, as Mr Caxton wasn't brought to justice at the time, and he's never been charged with raping Linda Palmer or anything else since.'

'Don't you think that might be because he never did anything?' said Banks. 'I mean . . . nearly fifty years ago . . . It's about as cold a case as you can get.'

'I know,' said McLaughlin, 'and I sympathise, Alan. But some of Jimmy Savile's crimes went back further than that. We've got historical abuse going back to the early sixties and before.'

'I get that you don't like it,' Margaret Bingham interrupted. 'But you'd better get used to it. All of you. We might have

dropped the ball in the past, but not again. Not on my watch. There's going to be more and more cases of historical abuse coming up over the next few years. People who think they've got away with something for ever. *Men* who think they've got away with something for ever because of their fame or their wealth or their power. Or just because they're men. This was the brutal rape of an underage girl by a man of thirty-seven, and I expect you to go about it investigating it as you would if it had happened yesterday.'

'That's not possible,' said Banks.

'Oh? And why not, *Superintendent* Banks?'

'No physical evidence. Dodgy memories. Missing statements. With all due respect, ma'am,' Banks went on, 'you're a civilian. So is Mr Moss. Most of the people you're talking to here are veterans of many investigations, and the fact of the matter is that you simply can't investigate a crime that happened almost fifty years ago in the same manner as you can investigate one that happened yesterday. All you have to go on is the accuser's statement. I understand all about cold cases solved by new DNA evidence. They're the ones that make the news, and I've seen *New Tricks*, but those are the exceptions. Do we even have any DNA in this case, for example?'

'I have no idea,' said Margaret Bingham, clearly irritated by Banks's objections. 'That's for you to determine. And I may be a civilian, as you say, but I am the police and crime commissioner, and I have every right to ask my officers for their best efforts. That's what I'm asking. You put as much time, effort, intelligence and investigative skills into this as you would into a sexual assault that happened yesterday. Believe me, you'll have all the resources you need at your disposal.'

That was a good opening move on his part, Banks thought. Piss off the bosses and the crime commissioner at the first big meeting of the new job. But he'd never had much time for

Margaret Bingham and her agendas. She and Adrian Moss would make a fine team. 'Yes, ma'am,' he muttered.

McLaughlin cleared his throat again. 'Though the Met is technically in charge of Operation Yewtree, Mr Burgess here from the NCA will be bringing his expertise of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection command to bear on the case.'

Burgess tipped his hand in a mock salute. 'At your service,' he said.

'What will your role be?' Banks asked.

'Co-coordinating between you and the Met, mostly,' said Burgess. 'I'll be trying to make sure that the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. The case is unwieldy enough already. Linda Palmer was living with her parents in Leeds in 1967, but the assault took place in Blackpool. She now lives near Eastvale, a village called Minton-on-Swain, and Danny Caxton lives out on the coast, as you probably know already, though he lived in West Yorkshire for some years. In Otley. If we involved all the local forces – not to mention the rest that will soon come into play as the complaints add up – you can imagine what a mess we'd have on our hands. That's why we decided on one SIO for Linda Palmer, one team manager, and that's you. It's your job to keep a firm hand on the rudder. I'm available to provide updates and background intelligence from other sources wherever possible. Believe me, in this investigation, the different county forces involved *will* be talking to one another, and complete records will be kept of every interview, every allegation, every scrap of evidence. We have several complaints about Caxton from around the country already. The one thing you can be certain of is that there will be more complainants coming forward once the news gets out, and there's strength in numbers as far as we're concerned. How many depends very much on the access and opportunity Caxton had to satisfy his needs. It's my feeling, given his

long and wide-ranging career, that he had plenty. They'll all have to be traced and investigated. Possible witnesses tracked down. Locations probed. I'll be searching for similarities in the complainant accounts.'

'Just how wide is this investigation?' asked Gervaise.

Burgess looked at Chief Constable Sampson, who put on a suitably grim expression and said, 'So far, according to the NCA, we have seven independent complaints about Danny Caxton spanning the years between 1961 and 1989. All from females between the ages of fourteen and sixteen at the time. The county forces involved have done as much background checking and taken as many preliminary statements as necessary so far, but we, and the CPS, feel it's time to move quickly now. The CPS also happen to feel that ours is one of the crucial cases, that it has a good chance of netting a positive result.'

'Why is that?' asked Banks. 'As far as I've heard so far it's no different from any other such case. One person's word against another's. What gives us a better chance of making a charge that sticks?'

'Simply this,' said Chief Constable Sampson. 'Linda Palmer has informed us that, in her case, there was someone else present. There was a witness.'

When DI Annie Cabbot and DC Geraldine Masterson arrived on the scene around half past nine that Wednesday morning, the whole eight miles of Bradham Lane were already sealed off from where it began at a T-junction two miles west of Eastvale to where it ended beside a bridge over the River Ure.

'It would be in the middle of bloody nowhere,' said Annie. 'We'll have to get a mobile unit out here and find the bodies to man it. And we'll have to run the Major Incident Room from HQ. There's not enough facilities out here.'

The uniformed constable standing by the police tape bent to talk to them. 'There's an officer and a patrol car down by the bridge at the far end, and two officers at the scene,' she said, then pointed. 'The crime scene is three miles down there.'

'Thanks,' said Annie. 'As long as we don't have to walk.'

'It's a hard road surface, ma'am,' said the officer. 'And a rough one at that. Not much chance of tyre tracks, but you never know what the CSIs might find. I'd go carefully.'

'We will. I know those CSIs.'

The patrol officer untied the tape at one end, and Gerry drove slowly along the narrow road.

Annie was intrigued by the shapes of the trees. Some seemed dead and stunted, standing there like men doing handstands, or the twisted and darkened shapes of burned bodies in a pugilistic stance. Others made a dazzling symphony of green in the breeze after last week's rains, leaves glistening and dancing in the morning sun. The road meandered, and on a couple of occasions, there were narrow unsurfaced lanes leading off, signposted to villages or farms Annie had never heard of. It would be easy to get lost here if you took a wrong turn, she thought. Here and there were passing places in case you met someone coming the other way.

The first sign that they were close to their destination was a patrol car blocking the road ahead and a cyclist in bright purple Lycra leaning against the bonnet, head in his hands. A female PC stood next to him, notebook in her hand. A male officer, also making notes, sat in the car. The sleek bicycle leaned against the drystone wall. Annie bet it weighed about two ounces, cost a fortune and went like the clappers. So many cyclists had been inspired by the Tour de France's Grand Départ in Yorkshire that you could hardly move for them on the roads these days. Some of them looked quite fit in their Lycra, too, Annie thought, though not this one. He

needed a few more thousand miles on his speedometer to get up to snuff.

'This is Mr Roger Stanford,' said the PC. Then she gestured towards the misshapen bundle lying in a cordoned-off area several yards further along the road. 'He found the . . . er . . . her.'

'Thanks,' said Annie. 'And you are?'

'PC Mellors, ma'am. Stephanie Mellors. Most people just call me Steph.'

Annie gestured for PC Mellors to follow her a short distance from Roger Stanford. 'Tell me, Steph,' she said, 'what do you think? First impressions?'

'You mean did he do it?'

'Well, if that's where you want to start.'

Steph shook her head. 'He's gutted, ma'am. A blubbering wreck. You can tell. I don't think he's faking it.'

'You look a bit peaky, yourself.'

'You haven't seen her yet, ma'am. It's never easy, something like this.'

'Too true. What do you think happened?'

'From my limited experience, I'd say she was either hit by a car or beaten to death.'

'Have you any idea who she is?'

'No. There's no ID, and as far as I can tell from . . . you know . . . I've never seen her before in my life. It's such a strange thing. She's not wearing a stitch of clothing.'

'OK. Let's have a word with Mr Stanford.'

Roger Stanford was still leaning on the bonnet of the patrol car with his head in his hands. He wasn't crying, Annie noticed, just propping his head up as if it were too heavy with images of violent death to hold itself up. He would need to be investigated, being the person who had found the body, but he didn't need to be treated like a suspect. 'Mr Stanford,' she said, touching his arm. He raised his head, a blank expression

on his face, as if he had been startled out of a deep sleep. Annie introduced herself. Gerry stood beside her, notebook at the ready. 'What time did you find the body?' Annie asked.

'It would have been about a quarter to nine.'

'Is this journey part of a routine, or are you on holiday?'

'Daily routine. I live in Bradham and I work in Eastvale. Clinton Estate Agents. I usually pass here about a quarter to nine. That's how I know. I keep track of my times.'

'There are quicker ways.'

'No nicer ones, though. I always make sure I have plenty of time.'

Annie looked him up and down. 'You go to work dressed like that?'

'Oh, no.' He pointed to the little bundle strapped to the back of his saddle. 'I change at the office. We have a shower there, too.'

'Very civilised.' Annie made a mental note to take in the bundle of work clothes for forensic analysis. Maybe he didn't do it, but she couldn't go around letting things like that slip by. 'So you make this same journey every morning?'

'And evening. More or less. Every weekday.'

'Do you ever notice anyone else using the road?'

'No. I mean, once or twice I've seen a tractor out early, pulling a few bales of hay or something from one field to another, and once there was a farmer shifting some cows over the road, blocking the way. Maybe the occasional car, but they're few and far between, thank the Lord. Cars are . . . well let's just say they're not always sympathetic towards cyclists. Usually the lane is deserted. That's why I like it. Nice and quiet.'

Yeah, thought Annie, and cyclists are a pain in the arse as far as motorists and pedestrians are concerned. They don't stop at red lights, they go the wrong way up one-way streets, they ride on the pavements when it suits them, and the list went on. But she said nothing. 'Let's go back to this morning. Anything unusual at all?'

'No,' said Stanford. 'I set off the same time I always do, around a quarter past eight, and I got here as I said, about a quarter to nine. It's only about six miles, but there's a tough uphill stretch, and I wasn't really pushing my speed.'

'Did any cars pass you?'

'No.'

'See anyone on foot?'

'No one. It was a perfectly ordinary morning – until I got here.' He put his head in his hands again. 'The first thing I saw was the crows. That poor, poor girl . . .'

'I'm sorry I have to ask these questions Mr Stanford, but the sooner I'm done, the sooner you can go home.'

'Home? But I haven't . . . I have to . . .'

'I'd go home if I were you, Mr Stanford. Phone your work. They'll understand. Delayed shock and all that. We'll have someone come around and take a statement from you this afternoon. Who knows, you may have remembered something else by then.'

'He's already given his address,' said Steph.

Annie nodded. 'You're free to go, Mr Stanford. If I have any more questions, I'll be in touch. But I'd like to take the clothes you're carrying to our lab. We'll let you have them back good as new. Is that a problem?'

'My clothes? But . . .? Oh, I see. But surely you can't think I did it?'

'Just for purposes of elimination, Mr Stanford.'

'Of course.' Stanford walked over to his bike, still stunned, unbuckled the bag and handed it over. Then he got on the bike and rode back, rather wobbly, down the lane.

'Where are the nearest houses?' Annie asked PC Mellors.

She pointed. 'Nearest farmhouse is over there, at the other side of that field.'

Annie could see the house in the distance. 'Unlikely they'll have witnessed anything,' she said, 'though it's not so far away.

Someone might have heard a car, for example, especially as the lane is little used by traffic.' No houses lined its sides, she noticed, only trees and fields of grazing sheep beyond the ditch and the drystone walls. That said, it was certainly a scenic route if you weren't in a hurry. But it's hard to see pretty landscapes at night. On the other hand, she realised, if you wanted to avoid the Automated Number Plate Recognition cameras, the speed cameras and all the rest of the Big Brother paraphernalia that makes any road trip practically a public event these days, then Bradham Lane was your route of choice.

Annie glanced over at the body by the roadside and took a deep breath. No sense putting it off any longer. 'Come on, Gerry,' she said. 'Let's go have a butcher's at what we've got.'

The girl lay curled up in the foetal position, half in the long grass that edged a ditch, hands covering her face, as if to protect it. She was naked, and her body was streaked with mud, dirty water and blood. The soles of her feet were crusted with dried blood, and small stones from the road were embedded in the skin. There were no obvious bullet holes or stab wounds, and her throat seemed unscathed. Not so the rest of her. She could have been hit by a car, Annie supposed, but it would be up to the medical professionals to determine that. It was hard to see her features because of the position of her hands, but Annie noticed between the fingers that one eye was swollen shut, her lips were split and bloody, with a tooth protruding through the lower one, and her nose was crooked. Squatting to examine the rest of the body again, Annie noticed signs of bruising around the ribs, stomach and left hip. There were also signs of a scuffle in the earth around the body and, not so far away, the only obvious skid marks on the road surface, far too faint and blurred to give a decent tyre impression. In the absence of a medical and CSI opinion, Annie was convinced that this girl had been beaten to death, kicked,

perhaps even jumped on. And girl she was. Despite the injuries, Annie could see that the victim was hardly any older than fifteen or sixteen. She sensed Gerry's presence beside her and stood up.

'My God,' said Gerry, hand to her mouth.

Annie put a friendly hand on her shoulder. 'I don't think God had much to do with it, do you? And I'd like to say you get used to it, but you don't.' Not so used to it, Annie thought, that you become indifferent to it, that you don't feel that tightening in your gut and that surge of anger that someone had done this to a fellow human being, or don't feel you're going to put your all into catching the bastard who did it.

'But she's so young. She's just a girl.'

'I know.' Gently directing a pale and trembling Gerry away with an arm around her shoulder, Annie headed back towards the uniformed officers. 'Come on,' she said. 'It's time to call in the heavy brigade.'

'Well, Banksy, what a turn-up for the books. You and me working together again. Just like old times. Congratulations, by the way. The promotion. Long overdue.'

They were basking in the sunshine at one of the tables outside at the Queen's Arms, eating lunch: monster fish and chips and mushy peas, with a pint of Timothy Taylor's for Banks and a cheap lager for Burgess. Cyril, the landlord, had taken on a new barmaid to deal with the summer rush, an attractive blond Australian called Pat, to whom Burgess had already taken a shine. Luckily, Cyril wasn't around, as he and Burgess had history.

'So what's your official title these days?' Banks asked. 'What do I call you?'

'I always fancied "Special Agent". It has a ring to it. But in actual fact I'm a non-executive director. Sounds like a dull second-rate businessman. Mostly I go by plain "Mr Burgess" these days.'

'Like a surgeon.'

'Exactly. It's got class, don't you think?'

The cobbled market square was buzzing with shoppers and tourists, and clogged with parked cars. Young girls in vests and tight denim cut-offs over black tights hung out around Greggs eating pasties, then disappeared into the amusement arcade next door. A gaggle of serious ramblers, with walking-sticks like ski poles, expensive boots, baggy shorts and maps in plastic bags around their necks gathered by the market cross. A few people sat on the plinth around the market cross waiting for a local bus. Not far from Banks and Burgess sat a group of bloke-ish tourists in garish shorts and even more garish shirts, their faces flushed and eyes glazed from sunburn and beer. They were talking and laughing loudly enough that nothing Banks and Burgess spoke of could be overheard.

'Have you done this sort of thing before?' Banks asked.

'Once or twice.' Burgess sat back and sipped his drink, studying Banks over the rim of his glass. 'I was peripherally involved in Operation Yewtree when I was back at the Yard, so I know the way things go. Look, Banksy, you probably thought the same as I did when all this stuff started coming out. You thought it was some sort of witch hunt, wondering who'd be the next celebrity to be accused of groping a young publicist fifty years ago. Different times, you'd say, and you'd be right.' He leaned forward and tapped Banks on the chest. 'You probably even thought, what's so wrong with pinching the office girl's bum, maybe suggesting a hotel room after work for a bit of hanky-panky? Right? I might even have a go with young Pat here, given half the chance. After all, I'm only human, and if you don't ask . . . But that's not what this is about. We're not talking about a bit of how's your father in a dark corner at the office Christmas party. A hand casually resting on a knee in a restaurant. A surreptitious brushing up against a nice pair of tits. We've all done that, all had a kiss and cuddle in the broom

cupboard and a bit of slap and tickle under the stairwell with that secretary we fancied all year.'

'Speak for yourself,' said Banks. But he remembered. It was just such an indulgence in a dark corner under the mistletoe at an office Christmas party that had led to the only affair of his married life. He didn't much care to be reminded of it now, though at the time it had seemed exciting and dangerous; it had made him feel alive at a time when he had felt the world and his marriage were falling apart around him. Looking back, it just made him feel guilty. Maybe it was some kind of poetic justice that his ex-wife Sandra had finally left him for another man.

'But this is something else,' Burgess went on. 'It's not even a matter of someone sticking his tongue down a girl's throat or squeezing a breast. Believe me, I've had enough access to statements that I can say what we're talking about here is the deliberate, arrogant and systematic abuse of innocent young girls – underage girls – by people who believe they're above the law. People so blessed and so famous that in the general run of things they probably get more free pussy than they can shake a stick at. And what do they do? They pick on vulnerable thirteen-, fourteen-, fifteen-year-olds, and they assault them and rape them, force them to do vile stuff, and then tell them they ought to be jolly grateful for getting raped by Danny Caxton or whoever. These girls end up so terrified, so fucked up, that often the rest of their lives are blighted. They see themselves as natural victims and that's what they become. All their lives, people abuse them just the way Caxton or whoever did all those years ago, and they can't stop it. They can't even figure out why. But even that's not the point. The point is that these bastards, and I mean bastards like Danny Caxton, have been getting away with it for years and making us look like the fucking Keystone Cops. They've abused these girls and boys, just like those Pakistani grooming gangs in

Rochdale and Rotherham, and nobody did a fucking thing about it. Not the parents. Not the social workers. Not us. Well, times have changed, mate, because here comes the cavalry, with a vengeance.'

'I never did think that,' said Banks.

'Think what?'

'That this business is insignificant, that what we've been asked to do doesn't matter. And I'd certainly agree that some very influential people have got away with a lot of serious crimes over the years. Nothing new about that. It's just so bloody difficult to put a good case together after so long, like I said at the meeting. That's all. Memories change; evidence gets lost. People become convinced that something happened when it didn't, or that things happened differently. It's damn near impossible to sort out who's right in most cases. All you end up with is a shifting sandstorm of accusations, lies, half-truths, minor transgressions and full-blown felonies. Nobody knows what the truth is, in the end.'

Burgess ran his hand over his unruly hair. 'Too true. Too true. But we're getting better. The CPS are building stronger cases, they're more willing to prosecute, getting more convictions.'

'So we ride their wave of success?'

'Why not? Isn't it better than riding a wave of failure? Besides, since when have you not risen to a challenge? This time they think we're in with a chance. They rate this Linda Palmer as a credible complainant. According to them, she's definitely not some fucked-up alcoholic with a chip on her shoulder.'

'That's good to know,' said Banks. 'Does Caxton know we're on to him?'

'Probably. He shouldn't, but I wouldn't be surprised. He's still got friends in high places. I want you to go and talk to him tomorrow. After that, we'll get a team in to search his premises

before he gets a chance to destroy any evidence there might be in his papers and on his computer. You can talk to Linda Palmer today. I trust your instinct enough to know that you won't need a child protection expert to figure out whether she's telling the truth. I know you, Banksy. I think once you get the bit between your teeth, you'll take to it like a duck to water, if you'll forgive the mixed metaphor, and you'll be only too glad to bring down the wrath of God on arrogant bastards like Danny Caxton.'

'I will?'

'I think so.' Burgess finished his pint. 'Another? I wouldn't mind having another word with that buxom Australian barmaid. I like the way she pulls a pint.'

'You need real cask ale to get a full show of flexed muscle, not that piss you drink. All she has to do is flick the lever.'

'She can flick my lever any time. Why do you think I'm offering to buy you another one? Out of the goodness of my heart?'

Banks rolled his eyes. 'I'd better not,' he said. 'Not if I've got to get this crusade off the ground and talk to Linda Palmer this afternoon. Can you tell me anything about her, other than that she's a poet and claims to be a victim of Caxton's?'

'I've never met her,' said Burgess, 'but from what I understand, she's got her head screwed on right. I've talked to plenty of others who've been in her position. Memories are unreliable, you're right about that, very vague sometimes. Like chasing shadows of shadows. You just have to keep at it. Gently, mind. They're sensitive souls, these victims of historical abuse. Especially poets. Some of the girls buried it right away. Really deep. They were just kids, after all. Some went through years of analysis and therapy without really knowing why – why they couldn't hold down a job, why they couldn't handle a relationship, why they couldn't bring up their kids properly. Some of them just turned to drugs and booze to

help them forget. Some even committed suicide. But Linda Palmer isn't like that, from what I understand. She's different. She's got her shit together.'

Banks finished his drink and stood up. 'OK,' he said. 'Thanks for the pep talk.'

Burgess gave a mock salute. 'My pleasure.'

As Banks walked away, he turned and saw Burgess disappear inside the pub with his empty glass and a spring in his step.