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Ragdoll

Written by Daniel Cole

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RAGDOLL

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‘So tell me, if you’re the Devil, what does that make me?’

PROLOGUE

Monday 24 May 2010

Samantha Boyd ducked under the wobbly police barrier and glanced up at the statue of Lady Justice perched atop London's infamous Old Bailey courtrooms. Intended as a symbol of strength and integrity, Samantha now saw her for what she really was: a disillusioned and despairing woman on the verge of pitching herself off the rooftop and into the pavement below. Appropriately, the blindfold carved into her likenesses the world over had been omitted; for 'blind justice' was a naive concept, especially when issues such as racism and police corruption become involved.

The surrounding roads and Tube stations had all been closed again due to the swarm of journalists that had settled there, transforming a busy area of central London into an absurdly middle-class shanty town. Empty food packaging flaunted Marks & Spencer and Pret A Manger logos up from the litter-strewn floor. Designer sleeping bags were being folded away to the buzz of electric razors, while one man's underwhelming travel iron failed to disguise the fact that he had slept in his only shirt and tie.

Samantha felt self-conscious as she wove through the crowds. Running late, she had worked up a sweat during her six-minute march from Chancery Lane, and her platinum-blond hair pulled where she had pinned it up in an unsuccessful attempt to alter her

appearance. The press had identified those attached to the trial on day one. Now, by day forty-six, Samantha had probably featured in every major newspaper in the world. She had even been forced to call the police when one particularly persistent reporter followed her back home to Kensington and refused to leave. Determined to avoid any further unwelcome attention, she kept her head down and strode on.

Two meandering lines stretched across the Newgate Street crossroads, originating from the insufficient set of Portaloos on one side and the pop-up Starbucks on the other. Caught in the current circling perpetually between the two, she broke away towards the police officers guarding the quieter side entrance to the courtrooms. When she accidentally stepped into shot of one of the dozens of recordings taking place, a small woman snapped at her angrily in Japanese.

‘Last day,’ Samantha reminded herself, leaving the incomprehensible torrent of abuse behind; just eight more hours until her life could return to normal.

At the doors, an unfamiliar police officer scrutinised Samantha’s ID before leading her through the now very familiar routine: locking away personal possessions, explaining that she physically could not remove her engagement ring when the metal detectors went off, worrying about sweat marks while being frisked, and then making her way down the featureless corridors to join the other eleven jurors for a cup of lukewarm instant coffee.

Due to the overwhelming worldwide media attention and the incident at Samantha’s house, the unprecedented decision had been made to sequester the jury, sparking public outrage as the hotel bill spiralled into the tens of thousands of taxpayers’ money. After almost two months, the morning’s small talk predominantly consisted of bad backs caused by the hotel beds, the monotony of the nightly menu and lamenting the things that people were missing most: wives, children, the *Lost* season finale.

When the court usher finally came to collect the jury, the tense silence that the trivial chatter had been masking was liberated.

The foreman, an elderly man named Stanley, who the others had appointed – seemingly for no better reason than that he bore an uncanny resemblance to Gandalf – slowly got to his feet and led them out of the room.

Arguably one of the most famous courtrooms in the world, Court One was reserved only for the most serious criminal cases; the room where such macabre celebrities as Crippen, Sutcliffe and Dennis Nilsen took centre stage to answer for their considerable sins. Artificial light flooded in through a large frosted window overhead, illuminating the room's dark wood panelling and green leather upholstery.

As Samantha took her usual seat on the front row of the jury, closest to the dock, she was conscious that her white dress, one of her own designs, was perhaps a little short. She placed her jury bundle over her lap, much to the disappointment of the lecherous old man who had almost trampled someone on the first day in his haste to claim the seat beside her.

Unlike the familiar courtrooms depicted in American movies, where the smartly dressed defendant would sit at a table alongside their lawyers, the accused at the Old Bailey faced the intimidating room alone. The small but prominent glass screens surrounding the raised dock only further adding to the notion that those inside were of considerable danger to the rest of the room.

Guilty until proven innocent.

Directly opposite the dock, to Samantha's left, was the judge's bench. A gold-hilted sword hung from the Royal Coat of Arms behind the chair in the centre, which had remained the only vacant seat throughout the entire trial. The court clerk, defence, and prosecution teams occupied the centre of the room, while the elevated public viewing gallery, against the far wall, was packed with the ardent and bleary-eyed spectators who had been camping out on the street to secure their place for the conclusion of this extraordinary trial. At the back of the room, on the forgotten benches below the gallery, sat an assortment of superfluous people vaguely involved in the proceedings: experts that the lawyers might wish to,

but probably would not, call upon; various court officials; and, of course, the arresting officer at the centre of all of the controversy, the detective nicknamed Wolf: William Oliver Layton-Fawkes.

Wolf had attended every one of the forty-six days of the trial. He spent the countless hours staring into the dock with a cold expression from his undistinguished seat beside the exit. Solidly built, with a weathered face and deep blue eyes, he looked to be in his early forties. Samantha thought he might have been quite attractive if he hadn't looked as though he had been awake for months and had the weight of the world bearing down on him – although, to be fair, he did.

'The Cremation Killer', as the press had dubbed him, had become London's most prolific serial killer in its history. Twenty-seven victims in twenty-seven days, each a female prostitute between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, attracting even more attention to the case by exposing the ill-informed masses to the harsh realities happening on their own street corners. The majority of the victims had been found still ablaze, heavily sedated and burned alive, the inferno incinerating any potential evidence. And then the murders abruptly stopped, leaving the police floundering, with no significant suspects. The Metropolitan Police Service was criticised heavily throughout the investigation for failing to act while innocent young girls were dying, but then, eighteen days after the final murder, Wolf made his arrest.

The man in the dock was Naguib Khalid, a British Sunni Muslim of Pakistani origin, working as a taxi driver in the capital. He lived alone and had a prior history of minor arson offences. When DNA evidence, linking three of the victims to the back of his taxi, was presented to the court alongside Wolf's damning testimony, the case had appeared straightforward. And then it all started falling apart.

Alibis came forward contradicting surveillance reports gathered by the detective and his team. Accusations of assault and intimidation while Khalid was being held in custody, emerged. Conflicting forensic evidence suggested that the charred DNA

could not be considered reliable evidence and then, to the delight of the defence lawyers, the directorate of professional standards within the MPS came forward with a letter that had been brought to their attention. From an anonymous colleague and dated just days before the final murder, the letter expressed concerns over Wolf's handling of the case and state of mind, suggesting that he had become 'obsessed', 'desperate' and went on to recommend his immediate reassignment.

The biggest story in the world suddenly got bigger. The police were accused of using Khalid as a convenient scapegoat to disguise their own failings. Both the commissioner and the Specialist Crime and Operations assistant commissioner were pressured into resigning due to the blatant corruption occurring on their watch, while the tabloids were awash with scandalous stories about the disgraced detective: his alleged problems with alcohol, his possibly violent tendencies leading to the breakdown of his marriage. At one stage, Khalid's smug defence lawyer had been reprimanded for suggesting that Wolf and her client swap seats. Throughout, Naguib Khalid watched the circus unfold before him in bewilderment, never showing so much as a glimpse of satisfaction at his transformation from demon to victim.

The concluding day of the trial played out as expected. Both the defence and prosecution made their closing speeches before the judge gave his directions to the jury: a brief summing-up of the limited evidence still considered valid and advice regarding the intricacies of the law. The jury were then excused to consider their verdict and were led out behind the witness stand into a private room unimaginatively decorated in the familiar wood and green leather theme. For over four and a half hours, the twelve jurors sat round the large wooden table debating their verdict.

Samantha had decided how she would vote weeks earlier and was surprised to find the rest of her peers so split. She would never have let public opinion influence her decision, she assured herself, although she was glad that her vote would not add any more fuel to the PR bonfire that her shop, her livelihood, and her happiness

now sat upon. The same arguments were repeated time and time again. Someone would then bring up an aspect of the detective's testimony and become irritable when told, for the umpteenth time, that it was inadmissible and to be ignored.

Periodically Stanley would call for a vote, after which a note was passed, via the usher, to the judge advising that they still had not come to a unanimous verdict. With each vote another person would crack under the pressure of the growing majority until, minutes before the fifth hour, a majority of ten to two had been reached. Stanley grudgingly passed the usher a note to this effect and ten minutes later, the man returned to escort the jury back into the courtroom.

Samantha could feel every set of eyes on her as she returned to her seat beside the dock. The room was silent and she felt irrationally embarrassed as every step in her high heels echoed around the room. Fortunately the awful creaks and scrapes that followed, as all twelve jurors simultaneously took their seats, rendered her minor disturbance reassuringly trivial in comparison.

She could see people attempting to decipher her expression, too impatient to wait another minute for the official verdict, and she enjoyed it. This room of 'learned' people had been strutting about in their wigs and gowns, treating her and the other jurors with a condescending pleasantness; now however, they all found themselves at the mercy of the jury. Samantha had to fight a grin; she felt like a child with a secret she was not supposed to tell.

'Will the defendant please stand?' the clerk barked over the silence.

In the dock, Naguib Khalid tentatively got to his feet.

'Will the foreman please stand?'

At the end of Samantha's row, Stanley stood up.

'Have you reached a verdict upon which you have all agreed?'

'No.' Stanley's voice cracked, rendering his reply almost inaudible.

Samantha rolled her eyes as he cleared his throat with three rattling coughs.

'No,' Stanley almost shouted.

‘Have you reached a verdict upon which a sufficient majority have agreed?’

‘We have,’ Stanley winced, having blown his line. ‘Sorry . . . Yes.’

The clerk looked up at the judge, who nodded his acceptance of the majority vote.

‘Do you, the jury, find the defendant Naguib Khalid, guilty or not guilty of twenty-seven counts of murder?’

Samantha found herself holding her breath despite already knowing the answer. Several chairs creaked in unison as eager ears leaned closer in anticipation . . .

‘Not guilty.’

Samantha glanced up at Khalid, fascinated to see his reaction. He was trembling in relief, his face in his hands.

But then the first shouts of panic started.

Wolf had covered the short distance to the dock, dragging Khalid head first over the glass partition before any of the security officers even had time to react. Khalid landed badly, his winded cry muffled as the ruthless assault began. Ribs cracked beneath Wolf’s foot, the skin liberated from his own knuckles with the intensity of the attack.

An alarm sounded somewhere.

Wolf was struck across the face and could taste blood as he stumbled backwards into the jury, knocking the woman nearest to him off her feet. During the few seconds it took to steady himself, several officers had flooded the space between him and the broken body lying at the base of the dock.

Wolf lashed out as he staggered forward, feeling strong hands grasping to restrain his failing body, forcing him onto his knees and then finally to the floor. He took an exhausted breath, laced with the scents of sweat and polish, watching one of the injured officers’ discarded batons roll with a hollow thud into the wood panelling beside Khalid.

He looked dead, but Wolf needed to be sure.

With a final surge of adrenaline, he kicked out and crawled towards the lifeless man decorated in dark brown stains where

blood had already soaked into the fabric of his cheap navy suit. Wolf reached for the heavy weapon, wrapping his fingers round the cold metal. He had brought it up above his head when a devastating impact knocked him onto his back. Disorientated, he could only watch as the dock security officer swung again, crushing his wrist with a second vicious blow.

Barely twenty seconds had passed since the 'not guilty' verdict, but when he heard metal clattering against wood, Wolf knew that it was over. He only prayed that he had done enough.

People were screaming and rushing for the exits but a flood of police officers drove them back inside; Samantha just sat on the floor, dazed, staring into space despite the events taking place only metres away. Finally someone took her by the arm, pulled her to her feet, and rushed her out of the room. The person leading Samantha away was shouting something, but the words were not reaching her. A muted alarm barely registered at all. She slipped on the floor of the Great Hall and felt a knee connect with the side of her head. The pain failed to come, but she fell back onto the black-and-white Sicilian marble, staring up in confusion at the ornate dome, sixty-seven feet above, the statues, stained-glass windows, and murals.

Her rescuer pulled her back up once the crowd had passed and led her as far as the disused main entrance before running back in the direction of the courtroom. The immense wooden doors and black gates stood wide open, the overcast sky beyond beckoning her outside. Now alone, Samantha stumbled out onto the street.

The photograph could not have been more perfect had she posed for it: the beautiful blood-spattered juror, dressed all in white, standing traumatised beneath the stone sculptures of Fortitude, Truth and the ominous Recording Angel, cloaked from head to toe in a heavy robe, imitating death, preparing to report an endless list of sins back to heaven.

Samantha turned her back to the ravenous pack of journalists and their blinding lights. In the flicker of a thousand photographs,

she noticed words carved into the stone high above, resting upon four separate stone pillars, as if to support their metaphorical weight:

**DEFEND THE CHILDREN OF THE
POOR & PUNISH THE WRONGDOER.**

As she read the words, she was overcome with a sense that she had failed in some way; could she honestly say that she was as unequivocally certain of Khalid's innocence as the detective had been of his guilt? When her gaze eventually fell back to the hooded angel, Samantha knew that she had made the list.

She had just been judged.

4 years later . . .

CHAPTER 1

Saturday 28 June 2014

3.50 a.m.

Wolf groped blindly for his mobile phone, which was edging further across the laminate floor with every vibration. Slowly the darkness began to disassemble itself into the unfamiliar shapes of his new apartment. The sweat-sodden sheet clung to his skin as he crawled off the mattress and over to the buzzing annoyance.

‘Wolf,’ he answered, relieved that he had at least got that right as he searched the wall for a light switch.

‘It’s Simmons.’

Wolf flicked a switch and sighed heavily when the weak yellow light reminded him where he was; he was tempted to turn it off again. The tiny bedroom consisted of four walls, a worn double mattress on the floor and a solitary light bulb. The claustrophobic box was sweltering thanks to his landlord, who still had not chased the previous tenant up for a window key. Normally this would not have been such an issue in London; however, Wolf had managed to coincide his move with one of England’s uncharacteristic heatwaves, which had been dragging on for almost two weeks.

‘Don’t sound so pleased,’ said Simmons.

‘What time is it?’ yawned Wolf.

‘Ten to four.’

‘Aren’t I off this weekend?’

‘Not any more. I need you to join me at a crime scene.’

‘Next to your desk?’ asked Wolf, only half-joking as he hadn’t seen his boss leave the office in years.

‘Funny. They let me out for this one.’

‘That bad, huh?’

There was a pause on the other end of the line before Simmons answered: ‘It’s pretty bad. Got a pen?’

Wolf rummaged through one of the stacked boxes in the doorway and found a biro to scribble on the back of his hand with.

‘OK. Go ahead.’

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a light flickering across his kitchen cupboard.

‘Flat 108 . . .’ started Simmons.

As Wolf walked into his ill-equipped kitchenette, he was dazzled by blue flashing lights strobing through the small window.

‘. . . Trinity Towers—’

‘Hibbard Road, Kentish Town?’ Wolf interrupted, peering down over dozens of police cars, reporters, and the evacuated residents of the block opposite.

‘How the hell did you know that?’

‘I *am* a detective.’

‘Well, you can also be our number one suspect then. Get down here.’

‘Will do. I just need to . . .’ Wolf trailed off, realising that Simmons had already hung up.

Between the intermittent flashes, he noticed the steady orange light coming from the washing machine and remembered that he had put his work clothes in before going to bed. He looked around at the dozens of identical cardboard boxes lining the walls:

‘Bollocks.’

Five minutes later Wolf was pushing his way through the crowd of spectators that had congregated outside his building. He approached a police officer and flashed his warrant card, expecting to stroll straight through the cordon; however, the young constable

snatched the card out of his hand and examined it closely, glancing up sceptically at the imposing figure dressed in swimming shorts and a faded '93 Bon Jovi: *Keep the Faith* tour T-shirt.

'Officer Layton-Fawkes?' the constable asked doubtfully.

Wolf winced at the sound of his own pretentious name:

'Detective Sergeant Fawkes, yes.'

'As in – Courtroom-Massacre Fawkes?'

'It's pronounced William . . . May I?' Wolf gestured towards the apartment building.

The young man handed Wolf's warrant card back and held the tape up for him to pass under.

'Need me to show you up?' he asked.

Wolf glanced down at his floral shorts, bare knees and work shoes.

'You know what? I think I'm doing pretty well by myself.'

The officer grinned.

'Fourth floor,' he told Wolf. 'And be careful heading up there alone; it's a shitty neighbourhood.'

Wolf sighed heavily once more, entered through the bleach-fragranced hallway, and stepped into the lift. The buttons for the second and fifth floors were missing and a brown liquid had dried over the remainder of the control panel. Using all of his detective skills to ascertain that it was either poo, rust or Coca-Cola, he used the bottom of his T-shirt, Richie Sambora's face, to push the button.

He had been in hundreds of identical lifts in his time: a seamless metal box, installed by councils all over the country. It had no floor covering, no mirrors and no protruding lights or fixtures. There was absolutely nothing for the underprivileged residents to destroy or steal from their own life-enriching piece of equipment, so they had settled for spray-painting obscenities all over the walls instead. Wolf only had time to learn that Johnny Ratcliff was both 'ere' and 'a gay' before the doors scraped open at the fourth floor.

Over a dozen people were scattered along the silent corridor. Most looked a little shaken and eyed Wolf's outfit disapprovingly,

except for one scruffy man wearing a forensics badge, who nodded in approval and gave him a thumbs up as he passed. A very faint but familiar smell intensified as Wolf approached the open doorway at the end of the hallway. It was the unmistakable smell of death. People who work around such things quickly become attuned to the unique mix of stale air, shit, piss and putrefying flesh.

Wolf took a step back from the door when he heard running footsteps from inside. A young woman burst out through the open doorway, dropped to her knees and then vomited in the corridor in front of him. He waited politely for an opportune moment to ask her to move when another set of footsteps approached. He instinctively took another step back before Detective Sergeant Emily Baxter came skidding into the corridor.

‘Wolf! I thought I saw you lurking out here,’ she roared across the hushed hallway. ‘Seriously, how cool is this?’

She glanced down at the woman retching on the floor between them.

‘Could you puke somewhere else, please?’

The woman sheepishly crawled out of their way. Baxter grabbed Wolf by the arm and excitedly led him into the apartment. Nearly a decade his junior, Baxter was almost as tall as him. Her dark brown hair turned black under the gloom of the unimpressive entrance hall and, as always, she wore dark make-up that made her attractive eyes appear abnormally large. Dressed in a fitted shirt and smart trousers, she looked him up and down with a mischievous grin.

‘No one told me it was a mufti day.’

Wolf refused to rise to the bait, knowing that she would quickly lose interest if he only remained quiet.

‘How pissed is Chambers gonna be he’s missed this?’ she beamed.

‘Personally I’d take the Caribbean cruise over a dead body too,’ said Wolf, bored.

Baxter’s huge eyes widened in surprise: ‘Simmons didn’t tell you?’

‘Tell me what?’

She led him through the crowded apartment, which had been dimly lit in the glow of a dozen strategically placed torches. Although not overpowering, the smell grew steadily stronger. Wolf could tell that the fetid source was close by because of the number of flies zipping about feverishly above his head.

The flat had high ceilings, contained no furniture, and was considerably larger than Wolf's own, but was no more pleasant. The yellowed walls were peppered with holes through which the antiquated wiring and dusty insulation bled freely onto the bare floor. Neither the bathroom suite nor the kitchen looked to have been updated since the 1960s.

'Tell me what?' he asked her again.

'This is the *one*, Wolf,' said Baxter, ignoring the question, 'a once-in-a-career case.'

Wolf was distracted, mentally sizing up the second bedroom and wondering whether he was being overcharged for his poxy box of a flat across the road. They rounded the corner into the crowded main room and he automatically scanned the floor, between the assorted equipment and pairs of legs, for a body.

'Baxter!'

She stopped and turned to him impatiently.

'What didn't Simmons tell me?'

Behind her, a group of people, standing in front of the large floor-to-ceiling window that dominated the room, moved aside. Before she could answer, Wolf had stumbled away, his eyes fixed on a point somewhere above them: the one light source that the police had not brought with them: a spotlight on a dark stage . . .

The naked body, contorted into an unnatural pose, appeared to be floating a foot above the uneven floorboards. It had its back to the room, looking out through the enormous window. Hundreds of almost invisible threads held the figure in place, which, in turn, were anchored by two industrial metal hooks.

It took Wolf a moment to identify the most unnerving feature of the surreal scene before him: the black leg attached to the white torso. Unable to comprehend what he was seeing, he pushed his

way further into the room. As he drew closer, he noticed the huge stitches binding the mismatched body parts together, the skin tented where the material punctured through: one black male leg, one white; a large male hand on one side, a tanned female counterpart on the other; tangled jet-black hair hanging unsettlingly over a pale, freckled, slender, female torso.

Baxter was back at his side, clearly relishing the look of revulsion on his face:

‘He didn’t tell you . . . One dead body – six victims!’ she whispered gleefully in his ear.

Wolf’s gaze dropped to the floor. He was standing on the shadow cast by the grotesque corpse and, in this simplified state, the proportions appeared even more jarring, gaps of light distorting the joints between the limbs and body.

‘What the hell are the press doing out there already?’ Wolf heard his chief shout at no one in particular. ‘I swear, this department has got more leaks than the *Titanic*. If I find anyone talking to them, they’ll be suspended!’

Wolf smiled, knowing full well that Simmons was only playing the part of the stereotypical boss. They had known one another for over a decade and, until the Khalid incident, Wolf had considered him a friend. Beneath the forced bravado, Simmons was in fact an intelligent, caring, and competent police officer.

‘Fawkes!’ Simmons strode over to them. He often struggled not to address his staff by their nicknames. He was almost a foot shorter than Wolf, was now in his fifties, and had developed a managerial belly. ‘Nobody told me it was a mufti day.’

Wolf heard Baxter snigger. He decided to adopt the same tactic that he had used on her by ignoring the comment. After an uncomfortable silence, Simmons turned to Baxter.

‘Where’s Adams?’ he asked.

‘Who?’

‘Adams. Your new protégé.’

‘Edmunds?’

‘Right. Edmunds.’

‘How am I supposed to know?’

‘Edmunds!’ Simmons bellowed across the busy room.

‘Work with him a lot now?’ asked Wolf quietly, unable to hide the hint of jealousy in his voice, which made Baxter smile.

‘Babysitting duty,’ she whispered. ‘He’s the transfer from Fraud, only seen a few dead bodies. He might even cry later on.’

The young man stumbling through the crowd towards them was only twenty-five years old, stick-thin and immaculately presented, apart from his scruffy strawberry-blond hair. He was holding a notebook at the ready and smiled eagerly at the chief inspector.

‘Where are forensics up to?’ asked Simmons.

Edmunds flicked back a few pages in his book.

‘Helen said that her team still haven’t found a single drop of blood anywhere in the apartment. They have confirmed that all six body parts are from different victims and were roughly amputated, probably with a hacksaw.’

‘Did *Helen* mention anything we didn’t already know?’ spat Simmons.

‘Actually, yes. Due to the absence of blood and lack of constriction of the blood vessels around the amputation wounds . . .’

Simmons rolled his eyes and checked his watch.

‘. . . we can be certain that the parts were removed post-mortem,’ finished Edmunds, looking pleased with himself.

‘That’s some fantastic police work, Edmunds,’ said Simmons sarcastically before shouting out: ‘Could someone please cancel the milk carton ad for the man missing a head? Thank you!’

Edmunds’ smile vanished. Wolf caught Simmons’ eye and smirked. They had both been on the receiving end of similar putdowns in their time. It was all part of the training.

‘I just meant that whoever the arms and legs belonged to are definitely dead as well. They will know more once they get the body back to the lab,’ Edmunds mumbled self-consciously.

Wolf noticed the reflection of the body in the dark windows. Realising that he had not yet seen it from the front, he moved round to look.

‘What have *you* got, Baxter?’ asked Simmons.

‘Not a lot. Slight damage to the keyhole, possibly picked. We’ve got officers questioning the neighbours outside, but so far no one’s seen or heard a thing. Oh, and there’s nothing wrong with the electrics – every bulb in the apartment’s been removed except for the one above the victim . . . s, like it’s on show or something.’

‘What about you Fawkes, any ideas? Fawkes?’

Wolf was gazing up at the body’s dark-skinned face.

‘I’m sorry, are we boring you?’

‘No. Sorry. Even in this heat, this thing’s only just beginning to stink, which means the killer either murdered all six victims last night, which seems unlikely, or he’s had the bodies on ice.’

‘Agreed. We’ll get someone to look into recent break-ins at cold-storage units, supermarkets, restaurants, anywhere with an industrial-sized freezer room,’ said Simmons.

‘And see if any of the neighbours heard drilling,’ said Wolf.

‘Drilling is a reasonably common sound,’ blurted Edmunds, who regretted the outburst when three pairs of angry eyes turned on him.

‘If this is the killer’s masterpiece,’ continued Wolf, ‘there’s no way they would risk it dropping out of the ceiling and just being a pile of bits by the time we got here. Those hooks will be drilled into load-bearing metal beams. Someone should have heard it.’

Simmons nodded: ‘Baxter, get someone on it.’

‘Chief, could I borrow you a moment?’ asked Wolf as Baxter and Edmunds moved away. He pulled on a pair of disposable gloves and lifted a handful of knotted black hair away from the gruesome figure’s face. It was male. The eyes were open, the expression unnervingly calm considering the victim’s clearly violent end. ‘Look familiar?’

Simmons walked round to join Wolf by the chilly window and crouched down to better examine the dark face. After a few moments, he shrugged.

‘It’s Khalid,’ said Wolf.

‘That’s impossible.’

‘Is it?’

Simmons looked up again at the lifeless face. Gradually his expression of scepticism transformed into one of deep concern.

‘Baxter!’ he shouted. ‘I need you and Adams—’

‘*Edmunds.*’

‘. . . over at Belmarsh Prison. Ask the governor to take you directly to Naguib Khalid.’

‘Khalid?’ Baxter asked in shock, involuntarily glancing at Wolf.

‘Yes, Khalid. Phone me the moment you’ve seen him alive. Go!’

Wolf looked out towards his block opposite. Many of the windows remained dark, others contained excited faces filming the spectacle below on their mobile phones, presumably hoping to capture something grisly to entertain their friends with in the morning. Apparently they were unable to see into the dimly lit murder scene that they would otherwise have had front row seats for.

Wolf was able to see into his own flat, a few windows over. In his hurry, he had left all of the lights on. He spotted a cardboard box, at the bottom of a pile, with the words ‘Trousers and Shirts’ scrawled across it.

‘*Aha!*’

Simmons walked back over to Wolf and rubbed his tired eyes. They stood quietly, either side of the suspended body, watching the first signs of morning pollute the dark sky. Even over the noise of the room, they could hear the peaceful sound of bird-song outside.

‘So, most disturbing thing you’ve ever seen then?’ Simmons joked wearily.

‘A close second,’ replied Wolf without taking his eyes off the growing patch of deep blue sky.

‘Second? Do I even want to know what tops this – this thing?’ Simmons took another reluctant look at the hanging collection of dismemberments.

Wolf gently tapped the figure’s outstretched right arm. The palm looked pale in comparison to the rest of the tanned skin and the perfectly manicured purple nails. Dozens of silk-like

threads supported the outstretched hand and a dozen more held the extended index finger in place.

He checked that no one was listening in to their conversation and then leaned across to whisper to Simmons.

‘It’s pointing into my apartment window.’