

**THE  
PATIENT**

ALSO BY TIM SULLIVAN

*The Dentist*

*The Cyclist*

**THE  
PATIENT**  
**TIM SULLIVAN**

**A DS CROSS THRILLER**



*An Aries Book*

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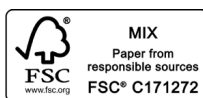
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*For Roger Michell  
with thanks for a lifetime of friendship and wise counsel*

## Chapter 1

Cross was unlocking his bike in the shelter outside the Major Crime Unit in Bristol when he heard a noise behind him. He turned, expecting to see maybe a stray cat or dog, but instead found a woman crouching in the corner of the racks, eating a sandwich. He'd seen this woman before. She had been sitting in the reception of the MCU for the past three days. On one occasion he'd seen her talking to the desk sergeant. She had seemed quite calm, gently spoken, as if whatever it was she was there for was being dealt with. She was well dressed in a middle-class, fairly affluent way. She didn't seem to be creating a fuss or making a nuisance of herself.

After three days of walking past her, Cross had determined to talk to her and find out what the issue was. But she wasn't in reception as he left that day, so he assumed that it had been dealt with. Her presence in the bike shelter obviously contradicted this. She had left the building, yes, but she hadn't left, per se. His previous curiosity was now doubled by her apparent dogged determination not to leave. She was bedraggled, her hair and clothes wet from the incessant rain they'd had that afternoon. 'Wet rain' was how his work partner DS Josie Ottey had once described it. When he'd

asked her whether rain was not, by its very nature, always wet, she explained that she meant the kind of rain that fell in large voluminous drops. Drops so large they were almost impossible to avoid, as if there was a giant leaky tap in the sky.

The woman's dishevelled appearance wasn't helped by the fact that she had tied the plastic carrier bag in which she had brought her lunch round her head as a makeshift rainproof scarf. She had brought her lunch with her every day for the past few days. She'd planned her visits and was organised; obviously anticipating a lengthy wait, he remembered thinking. He had also noticed that she made her sandwiches with baguettes, not sliced white bread. He took this as a further sign of her being middle class, though he was sure that Ottey would call him a snob for such an observation. She looked like she was in her late sixties.

He stopped unlocking his bike when he saw her. She said nothing; nor did he. He was never very good at initiating conversation unless he was conducting an interview, in which case he realised it was a fundamental requirement. However, it occurred to him that as he had been intending to talk to this woman when she was inside anyway, he probably shouldn't wait for her to speak first.

'What are you doing in here?' he asked.

'Keeping out of the rain,' she replied, quietly.

'Wouldn't that have been more efficiently achieved if you'd stayed inside?' It wasn't an unreasonable question, he thought.

'They asked me to leave,' she said.

'Why?'

'Because they obviously think I'm a nuisance and don't want to have to deal with me.'

‘Well, that would be because this isn’t actually a police station. A police station has to deal with everyone. I can tell you where the nearest one is,’ he replied.

‘I’ve already been there. I’ve been to all the local police stations and they sent me here. Now they’ve sent me away as well.’

‘Why?’ he asked.

‘“Why” what?’

‘Have you been to all the neighbouring police stations?’

‘And who are you, exactly?’ she asked.

Cross thought this a perfectly legitimate question. ‘I’m DS George Cross of the Major Crime Unit,’ he replied.

‘Oh good. You’re just the person I need to talk to then. My name is Sandra Wilson and my daughter has been murdered,’ she said matter-of-factly.

Why this had been of no interest to all the desk sergeants in the area was exactly what intrigued Cross and led to him inviting her back into the building to his office. It was possible she had mental health issues, he thought; though if she had, she was hiding them well.

As they walked into the MCU reception police staffer Alice Mackenzie was leaving, her day finished. ‘Goodnight, DS Cross,’ she said politely.

‘Towel,’ he replied.

Mackenzie stopped in her tracks, swivelled round and said to his disappearing back, ‘What?’

‘Towel,’ Cross repeated.

She looked at the woman walking up the stairs with Cross and saw that she was soaking wet. She sighed and went back into the building in search of a towel. She had become used to his often peremptory-sounding instructions by now and



didn't take offence – most of the time. She couldn't help smiling, though, as she heard the desk sergeant calling after Cross futilely. He was presumably wondering what Cross was doing taking the woman who'd been sitting in reception for the last three days, and who he himself had escorted off the premises at lunchtime, back into the building. This was classic Cross. He was Marmite to most of his colleagues at the MCU. They either liked him or loathed him. There was no in-between. He often came across as rude, difficult or plain obtuse. But it wasn't intentional. George Cross was on the spectrum, which sometimes made him a little challenging to work with. But it was also his gift. It was what made him an extraordinary detective.

Cross took his time going through the slim file of documents Sandra Wilson had given him. Mackenzie had decided to invite herself to the meeting, if indeed that was what it was, as she'd said that it might make Sandra feel 'more comfortable'. Cross wasn't entirely sure why this was but was too tired to take her up on it. For her part Mackenzie had quietly congratulated herself on being a little more assertive with Cross recently, and proving her value to him. She'd joined the force the year before and, despite her initial qualms, she was loving the job more and more each day. She was also beginning to see where she could be of use to Cross, which helped; making others at their ease with him was one of those occasions – unless, of course, she had determined that a degree of discomfort was what Cross wanted for his interlocutor. She made small talk with Sandra as Cross concentrated on the file. He finally looked up and cut across their conversation completely, as if it wasn't even taking place.

'The coroner has determined that your daughter died

on the seventeenth of June this year from an accidental overdose. There was a post-mortem, and the toxicology report clearly confirms his finding. Your daughter Felicity—'

'Flick,' Sandra interrupted. 'We called her Flick.'

'Your daughter Flick had a long, troubled history of drug abuse. Several unsuccessful stays in rehab. There's a detailed statement from her psychologist...'

'Dr Sutton,' Sandra volunteered.

'...saying that she had been a suicide risk in the past. It all points to a tragic death, Mrs Wilson – self-inflicted, whether deliberately or not. Anyone reading this report would come to the same, inevitable conclusion. Which is, I imagine, the reaction you received from the various police stations you've visited.'

'She did not kill herself, deliberately or otherwise,' Sandra said.

'Sometimes these things are hard to accept, particularly for a mother,' said Mackenzie.

'I'm telling you, she didn't kill herself. She was murdered,' Sandra reiterated.

Cross wondered about this woman's conviction for a moment. She was obviously determined, as evidenced by her presence in their reception for the last three days, as well as her apparent refusal to take the verdict of the coroner and the subsequent reactions of the police as final. 'Why would anyone want to murder your daughter?' he asked.

'I have no idea,' she replied.

Cross went back to the report, turning the pages slowly.

'Nothing was taken; there was no evidence of there being a break-in. Indeed, there is no evidence of anyone else having been with your daughter at the time of, or immediately prior

to, her death. What makes you so convinced, in complete contradiction to the facts, such as they are, that she was murdered?’

‘I knew my daughter,’ was the reply.

Cross said nothing. He’d heard this kind of intuitive, emotionally based statement thousands of times before from relatives, friends, family who couldn’t accept what they were being told: that their son was a killer, a rapist, a thief or, as in this case, dead. A refusal to believe what was evident and right in front of them was understandable but, in his opinion, equally frustrating. Sandra was an obvious case of this. He regretted having brought her back into the building. The facts were plain to him. Suicide or accident.

‘Many people think they know those close to them, only to find out that something was being hidden from them all those years. Do you know anyone who might have wished your daughter harm?’ he asked.

‘I knew everything about my daughter. Everything. And I am telling you. She was killed,’ she said, ignoring his question.

Cross was never impressed by people’s instinctive convictions about things. He dealt in evidence. Facts. There was nothing in this situation that made him think that the grief-stricken woman in front of him was right about her daughter. He went back to the coroner’s report to ensure that he hadn’t missed anything. He read it again. Twice. This took a further twenty minutes, during which he didn’t look up.

Mackenzie filled the silence by making small talk with Sandra once more. She was pleased she’d stayed, because even though Cross may not have valued her presence there, she was sure Sandra derived some comfort from it and it might be of use in the long run. She had discovered in her time at

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the MCU that she could be useful sometimes as a point of contact for people during an enquiry. She thought of herself as a conduit between them and Cross.

Cross looked up, pushed the file across his desk back to Sandra and stood up, hoping to indicate that the meeting was over.

‘Mrs Wilson, there is really nothing I can add to the information you have been provided with. It seems quite clear to me that your daughter died from an overdose, accidental or otherwise. Nothing in there indicates any other possibility.’ He looked at her with a neutral expression which he hoped would go some way to persuading her that he was telling the truth. He then remembered what Ottey had told him to say in such circumstances and so added, ‘I’m sorry for your loss.’

The woman got up, obviously very disappointed, but she smiled in a dignified manner and put the file back into her handbag. She then said, ‘Thank you for your time, Detective Sergeant.’

‘I’ll show you out,’ said Mackenzie. ‘Where are you off to now? Do you need transport?’

‘No, you’re very kind. I’ll take the bus. I’m picking up my granddaughter from a neighbour who’s been looking after her.’

‘How old is she?’ Mackenzie asked.

‘Just two; she’s Flick’s child,’ Sandra replied as Mackenzie closed the door behind them.

Cross thought for a moment then immediately strode over and reopened the door.

‘Your daughter had a small child?’ he asked.

Mackenzie and Sandra stopped and turned.

‘Yes – Daisy,’ Sandra said.

Cross did not speak for a moment but was thinking as he stared at the carpet.

‘Where was this child when your daughter overdosed?’ he asked.

‘In the flat with her. In her bedroom,’ Sandra replied.

‘The child was in the flat?’ he asked again.

‘Yes. Flick would’ve just put her down for the night. She was very big on routine. Daisy went to bed at seven every night, tears or not.’

Cross thought about this.

‘So she puts the child down and then injects herself,’ he said slowly, as if asking himself.

Mackenzie thought she detected a tone of disbelief in his voice, but with him it was always so difficult to know.

‘Exactly,’ said Sandra.

Mackenzie showed Sandra out of the building ten minutes later. Sandra was happy to leave, as Cross had promised to look into a couple of things. She, in return, had promised not to come back to the MCU until he’d called her with some more information.

Mackenzie went back to Cross’s office but he’d gone. He often did this, she had noticed, when he didn’t want to discuss something, or wanted to avoid confrontation. Sometimes it was when he simply wanted to have time to think on his own. He would then leave the office by the back stairs, and have to walk round the entire building, on this occasion in the rain, to get to his bike. She toyed with the idea of running down and intercepting him, but decided against it.

What she didn’t know was that it wasn’t her Cross was

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avoiding. It was his boss, DCI Ben Carson, who he knew was still in the building, as he'd seen his car outside in its parking bay when he'd gone to get his bike. He knew that Carson would have been informed by the desk sergeant, who didn't like Cross and had no time for his 'weirdness', that the woman Carson had asked to be removed from reception had now been taken back into the building by DS Cross. Cross had neither the time nor the patience for issuing unnecessary explanations to his superior that night.

His interest in Flick's death had been piqued by the obvious lack of logic in the process of her overdose. He found it hard to believe that Flick, either about to relapse or kill herself, would not make arrangements for her child. Her infant. If she had been wanting another drug-induced trance – which he thought unlikely in the context of her recent behaviour – or wanted to kill herself, she surely wouldn't have done it with the child in the next room. That seemed out of place to him. What alerted him even more was the fact that the child hadn't featured at all in the inquest. That indicated a lack of thoroughness to Cross, and more often than not such an approach led to a mistake. He'd give it more thought in the morning. Right now, he needed his bed.