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**Opening Extract from...**

# Happy Days

Written by Graham Hurley

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# HAPPY DAYS

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## Chapter one

PORTSMOUTH: THURSDAY, 13 AUGUST 2009

D/S Jimmy Suttle had never had much time for Gill Reynolds. Not then. And certainly not now. The fact that she was a mate of Lizzie's made him answer the call but he tried to keep the conversation as short as possible.

She said she was worried about Faraday.

'Why?'

'He's not picking up.'

'Maybe he's busy.'

'No way.'

'How do you know?'

'How do you *think* I know?'

Suttle had pulled in beside a bus stop on the Eastern Road. Rush-hour traffic was flooding out of the city. His ex-boss's love life was no concern of his but he understood from Lizzie that Faraday's brief fling with Gill was well and truly over.

'You're together again?'

'Not exactly, but you don't stop caring, do you?'

The question was blunt, with a hint of accusation. Like Lizzie, Gill was a journalist on the *News*. And like Lizzie, she had a habit of trying to back the rest of the world into a corner. Suttle's wife managed it with a smile on her face. Gill didn't. No wonder Faraday had binned the relationship.

Suttle knew what was coming next. Gill was doubtless at

work. Gill was probably mega-stressed. And Suttle, in truth, was one of the few men Joe Faraday might count as a mate.

‘You want me to go round? See how he’s coping?’ Suttle checked his watch. Nearly half six. Faraday’s place was barely five minutes away. ‘Gill? You still there?’

He waited a couple of seconds for an answer then realised she’d hung up. Faraday, mercifully, had seen the light. The woman, once you got beyond first impressions, was a total nightmare: needy, impatient, determined to shape life the way she wanted it. He glanced up at the rear-view mirror and eased back into the traffic. Maybe Faraday would have a Stella or two in the fridge. Maybe he’d be in the mood for a chat. Maybe Suttle could mark the old boy’s card about manic divorcee *News* journos who refused to take no for an answer.

Faraday’s place was called the Bargemaster’s House. It lay at the end of a cul-de-sac that fringed Langstone Harbour, the stretch of water to the east of the city that helped give Pompey its island status. Suttle was vague about the origins of the property but assumed the house was connected to the nearby lock and the canal that had once ferried barges to Portsmouth Harbour. What he knew for certain was how much Faraday loved the place. He’d lived in it for years. He’d brought up his only child there, a deaf-mute called J-J or Joe Junior. And even now, maybe especially now, it meant the world to him.

The house was neat, square, brick built, with white-painted timber cladding on the first floor. Faraday’s ancient Mondeo was on the hardstanding. Suttle parked and walked to the front door. His first ring produced no response. He rang again, then hammered at the peeling woodwork. Still no answer. He pushed the letter box open and stooped to peer inside. The house smelled damp, unloved, and there was a hint of a sweetness, a pungency, he couldn’t quite place. As his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom of the hall, he saw the pile of uncollected post on the mat inside the door. He called Faraday’s

name, listening for an answer. Nothing. He tried the door. Locked.

Stepping away from the door and into the sunshine, he phoned Faraday's mobile number, returning to the letter box to push it open. Faintly, from the depths of the house, he could hear Faraday's distinctive ringtone, a soft peal of bells. The second he ended the call, it stopped.

He began to circle the house, sensing that something was wrong, knowing that he'd have to get inside. As Detective Inspector on the Major Crime Team, Faraday had been his immediate boss on countless investigations. Back in February he'd suffered a nervous breakdown and had been on sick leave ever since. His collapse had taken everyone by surprise. Colleagues who didn't know the man well, and that meant most of them, had blamed his condition on a road accident he'd suffered during a Christmas break in Egypt. Faraday, it was said, had gone through the windscreen and come back to work far too early.

A serious road traffic accident was plausible enough, but Suttle, who'd worked alongside Faraday on the inquiry that followed, had seen something else. His boss, in his opinion, had simply had enough. Twenty years of coppering had ganged up on him. His French partner, Gabrielle, had left in pursuit of a Palestinian child she wanted to adopt. These episodes had taken Faraday to a very bad place. Suttle had never seen someone so alone, so bewildered, so *lost*.

A gravel path led around the side of the house. Suttle paused beside a couple of dustbins. The space between was piled with Waitrose bags filled with wine bottles and empty beer cans. Suttle gazed at them a moment, then lifted the nearest dustbin lid. Two more bottles, malt whisky this time.

The rear of the house fronted onto the harbour. This, Suttle knew, was Faraday's pride and joy, the view that seemed to offer him endless solace. The last time Suttle had been here, a month or so ago, his ex-boss had handed him a pair of binos and

talked him through the mid-summer birdlife on the harbour. Under Faraday's patient guidance, he'd settled on a gaggle of mallard, then a darting cloud of oyster catchers, ending with a single cormorant perched on a mooring post, the blackness of its wings spread wide in the last of the day's warmth. 'He's hanging himself out to dry,' Faraday had murmured, and the phrase had lodged in Suttle's memory. Was this the way his ex-boss imagined himself? Skewered by circumstance? Waiting for the dying sun to work some kind of miracle?

Suttle tried the windows and the French door on the ground floor. Everything was locked. Peering in, he could make out a glass beside the sofa in the big living room. The glass appeared to be empty but he couldn't be sure. He stepped back. For the first time, looking up, he realised that a sash window on the floor above was open. He stared at it a moment, wondering about a ladder.

He found one behind a shed at the far end of the garden. The garden itself, wildly overgrown after the recent rain, badly needed attention. He could see marrows and courgettes, unharvested, among the weeds. Some of the nearby tomatoes, hanging fatly in tresses, were beginning to split. Faraday had always been meticulous about his veggie patch. Now this.

Suttle carried the ladder to the house and propped it against the timber cladding. He'd never been upstairs in Faraday's place but guessed the half-open window belonged to a bedroom. He began to climb, aware of a quickening in his pulse. In his uniformed days he'd been obliged to force an entry on a number of occasions and rarely had what awaited him been good news. Faraday's gone off on a jolly for a couple of days, he told himself. Or maybe he's had one call too many from the ever-eager Gill and decided to emigrate.

The top of the ladder rested against the window sill. Suttle steadied himself and peered in. The smell here was stronger but it still took him a second or two to recognise the figure sprawled on the bed. Faraday was wearing jeans and a checked

shirt. He lay face down on the duvet, one knee drawn up, one arm thrown across the pillow. The giveaway was his watch strap, a Russian swirl of embroidered flowers, a much-loved gift from his son J-J.

Suttle hesitated a second, then pushed the window open until he could squeeze in. Stepping towards the bed, he knew at once that Faraday had gone. His face had the mottled blues and greens of death. Vomit had filled his mouth and crusted in his beard and there was more of it across the pillow. Suttle flapped a hand, stirring the flies, shocked by what he'd found. He'd liked this man a great deal. He'd respected him, learned from him, and tried to return the favour by offering some small comfort when the going got tough. No one, he thought, deserved an end like this. Least of all Faraday.

Beside the bed, an upturned bottle had bled a dribble of red wine onto the whiteness of the rug. Suttle knelt beside the bottle, taking care not to touch it. According to the label, it was a Grand Cru Côtes-du-Rhône. He gazed at it a moment, wondering how special a bottle like this might be, then got to his feet again. On the desk beside the PC were two blister packs of codeine and a pint glass with half an inch of water in the bottom. The blister packs were empty. Suttle knew already that this sad little tableau probably told its own story but he knew as well that he was standing in the middle of a crime scene. In his shoes Faraday would already be reaching for his phone.

Suttle was downstairs by the time he got through to the office. Detective Superintendent Gail Parsons was a month into her new post, leading the S/E Hants Major Crime Team, and this was the last news she needed.

'Have you called anyone else?'

'No.'

'Stay there, then,' she said at once. 'We'll need to handle this.'

Suttle noticed the envelope moments later. It was lying on



the hall table. He recognised Faraday's careful script. Marked *Private and Personal*, the envelope had J-J's name on it. Among the clutter in the kitchen, tucked away in the cupboard beneath the sink, he found a new pair of Marigold gloves. He put them on and returned to the hall.

The envelope, when he turned it over, was unsealed. Inside was a single sheet of paper. The note – typed – was brief, the tone almost matter-of-fact. Faraday told his son he'd had enough of pretty much everything. The time had come to draw things to a close. He said he cherished the times they'd spent together and thought they'd made a great team. He wished him good luck for the coming years and told him that the Bargemaster's House, plus everything else in his modest estate, was J-J's for the keeping. If he wanted to sell the house, so be it. Otherwise, enjoy. The letter ended with a handwritten flourish. *Take care, my son*, Faraday had scrawled. *Your dad loves you*. Beneath, barely legible, was a brief postscript: *And remember the eagle*.

Suttle studied the letter in the gloom of the hall, trying to get inside Faraday's head, trying to imagine the pressures that must have led to a decision like this. The house was still a crime scene. There were still bends in the investigative road that demanded careful exploration. But this brief voice in the gathering silence surely pointed to Faraday taking his own life. Suttle slipped the letter back in the envelope and returned it to the hall table. He was still wearing the gloves when Parsons appeared.

He let her in and followed her down the hall. She saw the letter at once. Suttle explained what was inside. The mention of an eagle in the postscript drew an inquisitive frown. She wanted to know what it might mean.

'No idea, boss. Maybe we should ask his son.'

Parsons nodded, said nothing. Suttle sensed she was irritated by this sudden turn of events and found himself wondering to what degree Faraday had written himself out of her script. His

illness had tidied him away. Faraday, alive, was no longer any concern of hers. Dead, on the other hand, he could be a real problem.

‘I talked to Personnel just now,’ she said. ‘They think we’re in the clear.’

‘In the *what?*’

‘In terms of procedure. We organised the counselling. We insisted he stayed the course. We were in touch with his GP. I just had to remind myself. That’s all.’

Suttle digested this news while Parsons bustled up the stairs and took a look at the bedroom. She was a small, squat, big-chested woman who rarely let emotion trouble her unswerving progress towards ACPO rank. Among some of Suttle’s older colleagues she’d become a byword for the kind of career pushiness that the bosses sometimes mistook for talent. Within seconds she was back at the top of the stairs.

‘Horrible,’ she said briefly. ‘I think we’re pretty safe with a Cat 2 death. Call the OCU.’

A Category 2 death is one stage down from an obvious homicide. Suttle needed a D/S from the Operational Command Unit to make an assessment of the facts. As he put the call through he was aware of Parsons leaving. She had a scheduled meet with the Police Authority at headquarters for half seven. With luck, she’d just make it in time for the pre-presentation drinks. Suttle heard the slam of the front door and then the growl of her new Audi TT before silence returned to the Bargemaster’s House.

Still in the big downstairs living room, Suttle looked around. Like every detective, it was his job to tease a story from a scene like this, to coax out a sequence of events that would explain the body upstairs. For a couple of years now he’d been driving the Intelligence Cell on the Major Crime Team and his special talent lay in the careful compilation of other people’s lives: what motivated them, what moved them out of their comfort zones, what made them angry, or hurt, or homicidal. To this

end, before the Scenes of Crime blokes arrived, he knew he should be conducting a quick intel search, lifting all the usual stones beneath which most people hid their secrets: PCs, laptops, mobiles, landline messaging tapes.

That would mean another trip upstairs to Faraday's bedroom. His PC was on the desk beside the window. His mobile was probably up there too. Both might yield vital clues as to exactly why he'd necked a bottle of decent wine, swallowed a load of tablets and called it a day. That's where Suttle should go. That's what he should do. But the thought of the body on the bed was too much for him. It wasn't death that put him off. It was the fact that this needless collision with the buffers had happened to someone so close, and yet so distant. The real enigma, he sensed already, was the terrifying cul-de-sac Faraday had chosen for himself. Why had the guy been so desperate? And so alone?

The state of the body upstairs plus the post on the doormat suggested that Faraday had been dead for a couple of days. Suttle gazed down at the sofa, trying to picture how it must have been before he climbed the stairs that final time. The abandoned glass on the carpet had held alcohol – Suttle could smell it. He stepped across to the audio stack and hit the eject button on the CD player. He hadn't a clue about Mahler's Ninth Symphony so he reloaded the player, turned up the volume and waited for the opening bars.

The music was quiet at first, barely a whisper, but then came a passage on the violins full of sadness and regret and loss, and it was suddenly all too easy for Suttle to visualise Faraday stretched on the sofa, a glass of something consolatory in his hand, his eyes closed, his letter typed, his mind drifting off towards God knows where. The music gathered speed, bracing itself for the next hurdle, but the aching sense of desolation was still there, and Suttle shook his head, reaching for the stop button then turning away towards the big picture window with its semi-curtained views of the harbour beyond. If you listened to

this kind of stuff too often, did topping yourself begin to make some kind of sense? Was Mahler a co-conspirator in Faraday's death? Had he orchestrated a lifetime's disappointments and somehow led him to his end?

Suttle didn't know. More importantly, he was honest enough to acknowledge that neither Hantspol, nor the Coroner's Office, nor any other branch of the judicial system had a reporting form with room enough for this kind of speculation. To understand Faraday when he was alive was challenge enough. To make sense of a death like this was, to be frank, beyond him.

Out on the grey shadowed spaces of the harbour a single swan was flying low, heading for the open sea. Suttle watched it for a moment or two then pulled the curtains back. He'd had enough of this gloomy half-light, of Mahler, of empty glasses and of the lifeless corpse in the bedroom above. He checked his watch and began to turn away from the window, but as he did so he caught sight of another letter. It was lying on the window sill. The masthead was all too familiar. Hantspol.

He picked up the single sheet of paper. It had come from a woman in the Personnel Department. She was pleased at the progress D/I Joe Faraday appeared to be making and noted that he had nearly a year to serve before he could retire on a full pension. Under the circumstances, she hoped he'd agree that a return to Major Crime would be inappropriate, but another vacancy had come up and she had great pleasure in making the formal offer. An interview would be unnecessary. The job was his for the asking.

Suttle checked the date. The letter had been written barely a week ago. Add the delay for second-class post and Faraday must have been living with this career-end curtain call for no more than a couple of days. He'd no idea what Theme Champions' Coordinator on the Safer Portsmouth Partnership actually entailed, and Faraday had probably been equally clueless, but it was all too easy to imagine the eternity of meetings that lay ahead. A body like this would speak the language of the new

policing. The language of Service Performance Indicators and Victim Focus, of the Outcomes Matrix and the Neighbourhood Policing Offer. After years and years of life at the coal face, of multiple homicides and complex stranger rapes, of high-profile kidnaps and simpler acts of mindless brutality, what would any half-decent copper make of a letter like this?

From Hantspol's point of view, of course, it made perfect sense, the gentlest of landings after a bumpy ride. But for someone with blood in their veins, someone with an ounce of self-respect, someone who thought that coppering had some faint connection with justice rather than collective hand-holding, the thought of becoming a Theme Champions' Coordinator would have been the kiss of death.

The latter phrase drew a shake of the head from Suttle. He returned the letter to the window sill. A knock at the front door took him down the hall. There were two figures waiting to come in. He didn't recognise the D/S, but the duty D/I had decided to come too. Nick Hayder was probably the closest Faraday had to a friend in the job, a like-minded forty-something who rarely let sentiment get in the way of the facts. On this occasion, though, he looked shocked.

'What's going on?'

Suttle explained. Hayder nodded, made no comment, accompanied the D/S upstairs. Then came another knock on the door. Hayder, it seemed, had already contacted Scenes of Crime. There were two of them, a Crime Scene Investigator and the Imaging Specialist who'd tote his cameras up to the bedroom and put the lot on DVD. They both knew Faraday well. They took an appraising glance around the big living room and then followed Suttle up towards the bedroom.

Suttle had been through this routine on countless occasions. Normally, whether they were dead or alive, you were dealing with strangers. You stepped into the wreckage of their lives and did what you had to do. You were respectful and businesslike, but behind closed doors you often lightened proceedings with

a muttered quip or two as the occasion suggested. Not this time. The CSI, a guy in his forties who'd had a great deal of time for Faraday, took one look at the body and left the image specialist to get on with it. There were windows to dust for prints, items to seize for analysis, the PC and Faraday's mobile to bag for the techies at Netley. Soon, the doctor would arrive.

On the landing Hayder was conferring with his D/S. Back downstairs in the living room, Suttle waited for them to finish. He'd found an old address book in a drawer and was leafing through it, amazed at how few friends or family Faraday appeared to have had. He was transcribing J-J's contact details when the CSI returned from the bedroom. He needed to know how far D/I Hayder wanted to take this thing. He'd bashed the bedroom and the bathroom and checked out the other windows upstairs. No signs of forced entry. Nothing remotely suspicious. Suttle shrugged. This was Hayder's decision, not his. As far as he was concerned, the story told itself. Faraday had slipped his moorings. Maybe death had been a kindness. Maybe the voice in the letter to J-J had it right. Maybe that's exactly the way he'd wanted it.

The CSI, drawn and pale, agreed. He said he'd check around downstairs just in case and then use the last of the daylight to have a nose outside. But, unless D/I Hayder had views to the contrary, he saw little point in turning this thing into a major production.

Suttle nodded. The two men looked at each other. In all probability Faraday had jacked it in. There was nothing left to say.

The doctor arrived within the hour. Suttle explained exactly how he'd found the body. Then he conferred briefly with Hayder and the D/S, and left them to it. Walking to his car, he suddenly realised how late it was. His wife, Lizzie, had long been used to the craziness of CID hours, but since the baby had arrived she'd been banged up at home on maternity leave, trying to coax some order into their domestic lives. Grace was

a delight but a handful. A sight of her dad from time to time would be a real help.

The moment Lizzie answered the phone, Suttle knew things weren't going well. He could hear his infant daughter in the background. If she wasn't asleep by now they were probably in for another sleepless night.

Lizzie wanted to know where he was. He could hear the anger in her voice. Lately, more and more, married life was like living with a stranger.

'I'm at Faraday's place,' he said.

'You stopped for a drink? Only Gill's been on. She still wants to know where she stands. I told her I had no idea. This time of night, you're probably both pissed. Am I right?'

Suttle was looking out at the gathering darkness on the harbour. He felt suddenly very old.

'He's dead, love,' he said. And rang off.