

**PETER
ROBINSON**

**Standing in the
Shadows**

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I

28 November 1980

Let me start at the beginning. The first sign that something was wrong was the police patrol car parked outside the house, along with a black Ford Capri. The next thing I noticed was that the front door was wide open, and people I didn't recognise stood talking in the hallway, one of them a uniformed police officer.

I flew up the front steps two at a time and went in. Or tried to. Before I got far, the uniformed officer held out his arm to bar my way.

'Oy, you can't go in there,' he said. 'It's a possible crime scene.'

'What do you mean? I live here.'

He consulted his clipboard.

'Name?'

'Nicholas Hartley.'

He screwed up his eyes and ran his finger down the list. It can't have been that hard to find my name; there are two bedsits on the ground floor, two in the basement, two on the first floor and a one-bedroom flat at the top. Seven of us altogether. It was student accommodation.

'Nicholas Hartley. First floor?'

'That's me.'

One of the men he had been talking to was peering over the officer's shoulder at the clipboard. 'It's OK, Glen,' he said. 'Let him through.' Then he looked at me. 'Come on, son, show me where you live.'

‘What’s going on?’ I asked, but he just gestured for me to get going.

The stairs creaked as we walked up, but other than that, the house seemed quite silent. I opened the door to my lowly bedsit, and the man followed me inside. Within moments he was joined by a colleague, and the room felt overcrowded. Both men were burly, like rugby players, one only slightly shorter than the other. But what he lacked in height he made up for in girth. He was balding and had a nose that had clearly been broken more than once. The other, who had led me up, was younger and slimmer, with cropped ginger hair and freckles. Both wore navy overcoats open over baggy suits, and their well-shined shoes were crusted with mud. I took off my parka and tossed it on the bed, along with my satchel. It was cold in my room, but I didn’t really have the presence of mind to bung a coin in the meter and turn on the gas heater that occupied the large, disused fireplace. I was discombobulated. No doubt that was their intention. They kept their overcoats on.

‘Mind if we come in, Nick?’ asked Baldy.

I was about to say that it didn’t look as if I had much choice, seeing as they were both already over the threshold, but I stopped myself in time. Somehow, I got the impression they wouldn’t have much of a sense of humour. Not on the job, at any rate, and they certainly acted as if they were on the job.

‘Do you mind telling me who you are and showing some identification?’ I asked, shutting the door behind them.

‘Not at all.’ Baldy took a wallet from his pocket and flipped it open. ‘DI Glassco, and my colleague here is DC Marley. Like him.’ He pointed to a poster of Bob Marley I had on my wall.

‘A fan of his, are you?’ asked DC Marley.

‘I like his music,’ I answered.

‘Hmph. Give me the Beatles any day. Student, are you?’

As Marley spoke, DI Glassco started conducting a casual search of my room, poking around in drawers, on top of the wardrobe, peeking behind the moth-eaten curtain that hid the kitchenette with its hotplate and sink. His movements made me nervous.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I’ve just started my final year. What are you doing here? Have you got a search warrant?’

‘No, but if you like,’ said DI Glassco, ‘I’ll stay here with you while DC Marley runs out and gets one.’ They both stared at me, blank expressions on their faces.

‘Forget it,’ I said. ‘Just hurry up.’

‘Why?’ asked Glassco, lifting the edge of the mattress. ‘Got somewhere you have to be? Something you have to do?’

‘An essay to write,’ I said.

‘Mind if I sit down?’ Marley asked. ‘My feet are killing me.’ There were only two small armchairs in the room, rescued from a local bonfire a year ago. Marley eased into one of them and gestured for me to take the other. ‘We won’t bite,’ he said.

I sat. Glassco leaned against the fireplace, tapped an Embassy Regal from a packet of twenty and lit it. I took my tin of tobacco from my pocket and started to roll an Old Holborn. I heard a thud from upstairs. Alice’s room.

‘What’s happening up there?’ I asked, remembering the patrol cars outside.

‘Never you mind about that,’ said Glassco. ‘We’re taking care of things. The uniforms are searching and protecting the scene till the SOCOs come.’

‘Scene? SOCOs?’

‘Scenes-of-crime officers.’

‘What scene? What crime?’

‘You know the lass who lived up there?’

‘Alice? Yes.’ I noticed that he used the past tense, but the significance didn’t really dawn on me fully until later. At the moment, I was simply confused and stunned to find myself being questioned by the police. I had never had any sort of contact with the law before.

‘Know her well?’ Glassco asked.

I paused. ‘Her name’s Alice Poole. She’s a social sciences and politics student. Parents are quite well off. Own a brewery in Lincolnshire. That’s why she can afford the Penthouse.’

‘Penthouse?’

‘What we call it. The upstairs flat.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said Glassco. ‘A joke, eh?’

‘That’s right.’

‘When did you last see Alice?’

‘Yesterday evening.’

‘What time?’

‘Around seven. I was just getting back from the chippy and she was on her way out.’

‘Off where?’

‘She didn’t say, but it seemed pretty obvious to me that she was going to her boyfriend’s place. Mark. They were supposed to be heading down to London for a demo this weekend. She was carrying a smallish rucksack. The weather was terrible, though. It was pissing down and the wind was blowing even worse than today. The roads were bad. Flash floods. I don’t know if they got off this morning or not. I don’t even know if they were planning on driving or taking the train.’

‘Owns a car, does he, this Mark?’

‘Yes. A Morris Marina. Dark blue.’

‘What demo were they going to?’

‘Does it matter? Ban the Bomb. Reclaim the Night. Out with Thatcher. You name it.’

‘Bit of a commie, this Alice? A Bennite?’

‘She’s just very political. Socialist. Marxist.’

‘CND, women’s lib and all that?’

‘All of the above. And then some.’

‘Red Brigade? IRA? Baader-Meinhof Gang? Weathermen?’

‘I wouldn’t go that far. No. Alice is pro-peace, against violence.’

‘You?’

‘I’m apolitical.’

‘A political what?’

‘No. I mean, I’m not really interested.’

‘Did they often go away to demos and suchlike?’

‘I suppose so. They’ve been down to London before, a couple of times. I think Mark has friends there.’

‘Did she say anything to you when you saw her?’

‘Just something about it being a miserable night.’

‘That’s all?’

‘Yes. Neither of us wanted to stand around in the street talking.’

‘How did she seem?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Was she upset about anything? Did she seem worried, angry, frightened?’

‘No, nothing like that. Not that I noticed. Just normal, I suppose. If anything, she seemed in a hurry. It might have been the weather.’

Glassco squinted down at me. ‘Sure that was the last time you saw her?’

‘Yes. I told you. Why would I . . . ? What’s wrong? Has something happened to Alice?’

‘Why would you think that?’ Marley asked.

‘Just the way you’re behaving. What you’re not telling me. You’re not here for no reason.’

‘Ah. I can tell why they let you into university,’ said Marley. He glanced up towards Glassco, who gave him a curt nod.

‘Where have you been?’

‘When?’

‘Let’s start with today,’ Marley asked.

‘The university; I had lectures.’

‘What lectures?’

‘Nineteenth-Century Novel, and a Shakespeare tutorial.’

‘And last night, after you saw Alice Poole?’

‘I was here.’

‘Alone?’

‘Yes.’

‘Doing what?’

‘Working on an essay I had due for today’s tutorial.’

‘Essay about what?’

‘Shakespeare’s use of silence.’

‘What *silent* plays would those be, then?’ Marley asked.

‘*The Tempest. Measure for Measure. Hamlet.*’

‘I thought Shakespeare’s plays were full of people talking.’

I said nothing. I knew he was baiting me.

‘So, you were here all night? In this room? Working on this essay?’

‘And reading. Yes. Mostly.’

‘*Mostly?* You did go out, then?’

‘I finished my essay earlier than I thought I would, so I went to the pub for last orders. The Hyde Park. Just up the road, on the corner.’

‘Who with?’

‘I met some mates there. It was nothing arranged. Just casual, like.’

‘What time?’

‘It would have been about a quarter to ten, something like that. I had two pints, then came home.’

‘Is that what you usually do on an evening?’

‘Sometimes. If I’ve got any money in my pocket.’

‘You’d be able to give us the names of these mates you were drinking with, would you? They’d vouch for you?’

‘If they had to, yes. I’m not lying.’

‘No one said you were, son,’ said Glassco, smoothly taking over from Marley. ‘We just have to cross all the t’s and dot all the i’s in our job. We’ll be asking everyone else here the same questions. What’s the boyfriend’s second name?’

‘Woodcroft. Mark Woodcroft.’

‘You sound as if you don’t approve.’

‘I can’t imagine why you’d think that. You’re reading things into what I say. Anyway, what about him?’

‘We’d like to find him, that’s all, ask him a few questions. Know where he lives?’

‘St John’s Terrace,’ I said. ‘Just across the park. But I told you, they were planning on going away. Maybe they went despite the weather.’

‘*He* might have gone to a demo in London,’ Glassco said. ‘The boyfriend. But *she* definitely hasn’t. Did you see them go?’

I felt my blood turning to ice water. ‘No. Of course not. What do you mean, *she* hasn’t gone anywhere?’

‘Is it likely they changed their minds?’

‘Alice could be impulsive. I don’t know about Mark. And like I said, the weather was bad, though it did stop raining later.’

‘Do you own a car?’

‘Me? Good Lord, no. Can’t afford one. I never even learned to drive. Besides, I hardly need one here. The university’s in easy walking distance.’

‘We can check, you know. The driving and all.’

‘Go ahead.’

‘What about Alice?’

‘No. She could afford one, but she hasn’t learned to drive yet, either.’

‘Can you help us find the boyfriend?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t. I’ve told you all I know. I don’t know much about him. He’s not a student, so he won’t be in a lecture or anything.’

‘What does he do? Where does he work?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t even know if he does. Work, that is.’

‘But he’s got a car, you said. He must have a bob or two. Any idea where he might have got it from?’

‘No. Maybe he did have a job. I don’t know. Maybe he’s unemployed now. Just because I live in the same house as his girlfriend, it doesn’t mean we’re mates or anything. We don’t live in one another’s pockets.’

‘You must see him around the place.’

‘Occasionally. He spends some time here with Alice. They split their time between his place and hers.’

‘So you *don’t* like him?’ said Marley.

I gave him a sharp glance. ‘I didn’t say that.’

‘It’s just the impression I get from your tone, the expression on your face whenever his name comes up.’

I let the silence stretch for a moment, then said, ‘I don’t think he’s right for her, that’s all.’

‘Why not?’

‘I just don’t trust him. There’s something about him. Something a bit off.’

“‘A bit off’?” Glassco repeated. ‘What does that mean? Alice Poole obviously didn’t feel the same way.’

I shrugged. ‘I don’t particularly like him, now that you mention it. I’m sure there are people you don’t like, too. But what I’m saying is that I don’t keep track of him. I don’t have any idea what he does or where he goes.’

‘How long has he been living with her?’

‘They’re not technically living together, but they’ve been going out since the beginning of term, maybe even longer. The summer. I don’t know.’

‘Couple of months, at least, then,’ said Glassco. ‘When was the last time he stopped over?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t keep tabs on them.’

‘Days, weeks, months?’

‘It was earlier this week sometime. Maybe Monday.’

‘How did they seem together?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t have her flat bugged. I didn’t see them together.’

‘What can you tell us about her?’

‘Alice? Like I said, she’s a student.’

‘Bright lass, then, is she?’

‘She takes her studies seriously. Works hard. She’s just like anyone else, really. Perhaps more radical than most.’

‘Good-looking?’

I glanced away, down at the threadbare carpet. ‘I suppose so.’

‘Fancy her yourself, did you, Nick? You’re not queer, are you?’

‘No, I’m not,’ I said. ‘Not that there’d be anything wrong with it if I was.’ I felt myself flushing and knew my anger must be obvious to Glassco and Marley. Maybe that’s what they had been trying to do, make me lose my temper in the hope I’d give something away. But about *what*? They exchanged glances, then Glassco stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray on my work table – pinched from the local pub – and they both just stared at me.

‘Sorry,’ said Marley finally. ‘Didn’t mean to embarrass you or upset you. If you really *did* like her, I’m afraid we’ve got some bad news.’

‘What? Has something happened to her? A car crash or something? Has he hurt her?’ Though I had a terrible inkling of just what was coming.

‘Worse than that,’ said Glassco. ‘I’m sorry to be the one telling you this, son, but Alice Poole was found dead this morning.’

24 November 2019

Time was of the essence, Grace Hutchinson knew as she arrived at the dig early that bright Sunday morning in November. Soon the field she was standing in would be a shopping centre, and its priceless artefacts lost for ever under Tommy Hilfiger, BOSS, Adidas and McDonald’s. She knew that the grid the site boss, Malcolm, had assigned her was not one of the most promising. She also knew that he had done this not because he didn’t like her, but because he *did* like her, too much, and she had turned down his request for a date. Still, she would do her best without complaining. She reminded herself what she had learned from past experience: there was no predicting what she might find under the earth, even at the far end of a neglected field by a drystone wall. The landscape would have appeared completely different in Roman times.

It was cold enough that she could see her breath, but the ground wasn’t frozen yet, and the slightly damp soil was still loose, so it didn’t prove too difficult to make a good start. The mechanical digger had cleared away the sod and topsoil during the week.

After she had worked for a while, Grace leaned on her spade to catch her breath and felt the cold breeze ruffle her hair and chill the sweat on her brow. She looked out over the fields towards the traffic on the A1, almost a mile away

to the east. Before work was due to begin on the giant new shopping centre and access roads, the archaeologists were allowed their turn. Highways England, along with the construction company, had managed to negotiate a deal for the Northern Archaeological Associates to get in there first and see what they could find.

An earlier dig, further up the A1, had yielded a great deal of information about the Roman occupation of the north. People already knew quite a lot about settlements at Catterick and Baines, and they knew that the A1 followed the old Roman road, Dere Street, from York up to Hadrian's Wall. But they'd had no idea what a wealth of pottery, leather shoes, bracelets, rings and human remains lay beneath the earth, not to mention traces of old boundaries and buildings, walls, bridges and so on. Grace had been on that dig. She remembered well the surge of excitement at each new discovery – unusual beads indicating trade with the Balkans, Spain and North Africa, an amphora with an exotic design, a discarded spur or marble figurine – after hours of hard work and boring sieving or brushing. They had found evidence of Iron Age presence, too – coins and coin-making facilities – so the meeting of the modern A1, running north and south, and the A66, running east and west, had clearly been an important centre of commerce and settlement for many centuries.

Only now were the experts beginning to piece things together. That was why this dig was important. It lay on the eastern outskirts of Eastvale, a few miles south of the Scotch Corner dig, over which the new motorway access roads now ran, and all the signs and preliminary scans suggested this one might also provide a wealth of riches. But not Grace's particular grid, she thought.

Grace tucked her hair behind her ears and got back to work again, but before she had dug much further down, her shovel

scraped against something more solid than the soil. She stopped immediately. At about three feet, she was nowhere near deep enough for Roman remains, but something was clearly there, blocking her way, just beneath the earth. She picked up her trowel and light brush and carefully stepped into the trench. Then she knelt and gently scooped soil away with her trowel, using the brush with her other hand. It was slow and painstaking work, but before long she came to a halt, certain of what she had found, even before the whole object had been uncovered. She stood up, feeling a little shaky, and called out to Malcolm. He came striding over the field in that authoritative male way he had and peered sternly over the lip of the trench at what she had partially unearthed.

‘Bloody hell,’ he said. ‘What have you gone and done now?’

Grace shook her head. ‘What should we do?’

‘Leave it,’ Malcolm said. ‘You’ve hardly disturbed it any more than you needed to see what it is. Best stop now and call the police.’

Grace joined him up on the edge of the hole and they both stared down at what was clearly a human skull.

24 November 2019

When Banks assessed the damage the following morning, he realised that he didn’t feel too bad, despite the large Highland Park he had drunk out in the conservatory before going to bed. It had seemed like a good idea at the time. He had been to the Dog and Gun to hear Penny Cartwright sing. It was a rare local performance, as these days she was much in demand in halls and folk clubs around the country. There seemed to be a folk revival lately, and Penny was reaping some of the benefits of it. Well-deserved, Banks thought, as she had certainly paid

her dues for long enough. He had hoped to spend some time with her over a drink or two after the performance, but there were a bunch of other folkies in attendance, friends and hangers-on, and he had felt excluded, so he had wandered off home alone. Then came the Highland Park and Richard Thompson's *Acoustic Classics*.

Now it was Sunday morning, and time to relax. First, he put the kettle on, then he headed down the hallway and through the small anteroom he used as his study to the front door, where he bent to pick up the papers. Sunday meant movie, music and book reviews. He always seemed to end up buying or streaming something. He felt vaguely guilty about the streaming, but if there were any record shops left, he would certainly frequent them; nor would he complain if the recording artists got their way and took a fairer share of the streaming profits. He had never minded paying for his books or records. Fortunately, Eastvale had both a Waterstones and an independent bookshop, and between them he could usually get what he wanted quickly enough. And he had to confess to using Amazon on occasion.

The kettle boiled, and he made a cup of tea, then slipped a slice of white bread in the toaster as he prepared his spot at the breakfast nook. 'White bread for toast,' his father had always maintained. 'How can you tell when it's done if it's brown to start with?' Banks smiled at the thought of his father, now only about forty miles or so away near the Northumbrian border in a private care home, edging towards his nineties along with Banks's mother. They were still basically healthy, though, despite numerous minor ailments that plagued everyone as they got older.

The toast popped up and he was just reaching for the marmalade when his mobile rang. Wondering who the hell would be calling at such an hour on a Sunday morning, he answered.

‘Sorry to bother you, sir,’ came DC Gerry Masterson’s voice, ‘but we’ve got a situation here, and I think you’d better come.’

‘One thing at a time,’ said Banks. ‘What situation, and where’s “here”?’

‘It’s still a mystery.’

‘Well, I suppose mysteries are our business. Start with where this one might be?’

‘In a field just east of town, about a mile from the A1. You know, where they’re going to widen the road and put up that new shopping centre. To get here, you need to take that lane that runs parallel, just—’

‘I think I know the one you mean,’ said Banks. ‘But what are *you* doing there?’

‘I caught the call. I’m on duty today.’

‘Weren’t you on duty last Sunday?’

‘I was. Yes. But it’s difficult, sir. I don’t mind. I’ve nothing else to do today. We’re short-staffed. DS Jackman’s on that refresher course, and she won’t be back until Monday. And DI Cabbot . . . well . . . you know.’

Banks did know. Annie Cabbot hadn’t been quite on the ball since her father Ray had died the previous month, and she had taken a leave of absence to sort out his affairs. Hardly surprising, Banks thought, as her mother had died when Annie was very young, and Ray had brought her up almost single-handedly.

‘OK,’ he said, biting back the career-killing urge to tell Gerry that an attractive young woman like her ought to have a lot more to do on a Sunday morning than hang about in muddy fields looking at . . . well, he didn’t know that yet. ‘What’s it all about?’

‘A skull.’

‘Human?’

‘The archaeologist says so.’

‘Archaeologist?’

‘She dug it up,’ Gerry said. ‘You know they found all that Roman stuff up the A1 when the motorway work was going on there?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, they think there may be a hoard here, too, further south, and they’ve got permission to dig in this field before work starts on that new designer village.’

‘And this archaeologist . . . ?’

‘Grace, sir. Grace Hutchinson.’

‘This Grace Hutchinson. What else does she say?’

‘She came across it when she’d just started digging in the field this morning.’

‘Any particular reason she doesn’t think it’s one of her Romans? They found a whole burial ground last time they went out on a dig around these parts.’

‘Not deep enough. This one was under only about three feet of soil.’

‘And the field?’

‘Not exactly prime farmland. More like a stretch of waste ground, really. Grace says she doesn’t think it’s been used for years. Not big enough to be worth planting cash crops, for a start, and the soil’s not particularly good. Too acidic, apparently. Besides, the highways department and the property developers have got their hands on it.’

‘Any signs of cause of death?’

‘Not yet. But Grace has been very careful. She only uncovered the skull, and brushed enough soil off to make sure that’s what it was. Then she stopped.’

‘Anything buried with it?’

‘Grace thinks it appears very much as if the rest of the skeleton was present, but she didn’t want to disturb anything.’

I took the liberty of brushing more soil away, and that seems to be the case. What should we do now? Should I call the CSIs? Do you want to come out and have a look first?’

Banks thought for a moment. On the one hand, he could hardly neglect his duty and leave Gerry, still a mere detective constable, to deal with the situation by herself, but on the other, he had a slice of toast fast growing cold in one hand, the culture section of the *Sunday Times* open on the table in front of him, and a cup of Yorkshire Gold tea steaming beside it. And the kitchen was nice and warm. He sighed. ‘Stay put,’ he said. ‘Don’t call in the team just yet. I’ll be with you as fast as I can.’

28 November 1980

Alice? Dead? When Glassco and Marley left, I was sick in my tiny sink. I cleaned myself up, made a cup of tea and rolled another cigarette. I was still shaking. I’d had the remnants of a quid deal in my pocket throughout the police visit, so I’d been nervous as Marley poked about my drawers, worried he would want to search my person. Luckily, I had nothing else stashed in the room, and the visit obviously wasn’t about drugs. As I slumped back in my armchair, I could hear thuds and muffled voices coming from upstairs. They were turning over Alice’s flat. Outside, car doors slammed and footsteps sounded up and down the front steps. What the hell had happened? I had asked how, why, but they wouldn’t give me any more details. Only that she was dead.

Then I realised.

Though the Yorkshire Ripper had been inactive for about fifteen months, and was thought either to have retired or died, he had recently struck again. It was now just over a week since

poor Jacqueline Hill had been murdered – by the Ripper, the police thought – in Headingley, not more than a mile or so up Otley Road from here. Jacqueline was a second-year English student at the university, just like me. I knew her by sight from various lectures, and to say hello to, but we didn't share any tutorial groups, and we obviously moved in different circles. Still, it was bloody close to home, and we were all devastated. Since then, the sense of panic and fear had returned to the north with a vengeance. Nobody felt safe. Despite the overwhelming police presence on the streets, women stayed indoors, or ventured out at night only in groups of two or more. The pubs and university area went quiet after seven o'clock, and the city centre emptied out.

Alice and her friends had organised another 'Reclaim the Night' walk just days after Jacqueline's murder. Along with two hundred other women, she had marched on the Plaza Cinema in the city centre, which, in its wisdom, was showing a double bill of *The Beasts* and *Climax*, and then down to the Odeon, on the Headrow, which was featuring Michael Caine and Angie Dickinson in Brian de Palma's *Dressed to Kill*.

Alice had also spoken at a conference on sexual violence in all its forms – in the workplace, on the streets, at home. She argued that the more power women asked for, the more men used sexual violence as a means of control. I couldn't argue with that. Hundreds of women also marched to defy the curfew, arguing that they shouldn't be the ones to have to hide away and limit their freedom because of male sexual violence. I couldn't argue with that, either. Nor with their contention that the police hadn't taken as much notice when the Ripper was killing prostitutes as they did now there were decent, innocent women among his victims. If Alice had still been with me, we would have been in agreement about it all. But none of the anger and the passion with which it was delivered

diminished the atmosphere of fear that permeated the streets of Leeds in those times.

The police wouldn't give any details away about Alice's death, but they probably thought it was also the work of the Ripper. Why else wouldn't they tell me anything?

But, my God, could it really be Alice? All Glassco had said was that she was dead, not murdered or anything. But would they be making such a fuss if she had died in a car crash, for example? And if that had been the case, wouldn't Mark have been killed, too, or at least badly injured? Yet they implied they didn't know where he was. Did they suspect him?

Maybe it hadn't been the Ripper, but I was becoming convinced that somebody had killed Alice. And *where* had she died? When? I imagined her body lying broken and pale, maybe even bloody, in some bushes or on some waste ground somewhere. As far as I knew, she had stopped at Mark's last night, then they would have set off early this morning to London. She didn't have any lectures on a Friday, though she never minded missing one or two if they got in the way of a good cause, so I hadn't expected to see her back here until maybe Tuesday or Wednesday next week.

I tried to remember exactly what she had said when she passed me on her way out. As I'd told Glassco, she had been in a hurry, and she had seemed brusque and keen to get away. But I'd thought nothing of that. For one thing, I was her ex, and we'd hardly been talking much lately, even in comfortable surroundings, and, as I remembered, Alice had never been much of a one for street-corner conversations. It was also raining hard.

She had, I remembered, hardly stopped walking, just muttered something about the miserable weather and having to get along. There had been a sense of purpose about her, though. She was walking with that stiff, determined, clipped

gait – her *clickety-clack* walk, I always called it – that she always walked with when she had somewhere important to go or something to do. Or when she was pissed off with someone. An impatient walk. I had thought little of it at the time, more concerned with getting in out of the rain before my fish and chips went cold and got soggy, but when I thought about it now, there was definitely a sense of urgency about her. Was she not going to Mark's, as I had assumed? Or perhaps not immediately? Had she somewhere else to go first? Something to do? Something to say to someone? Could that have been the reason for what had happened? I told myself not to let my imagination run away with me, but as usual, it was more a matter of me running away with my imagination, which was hard to stop.

Alice. I couldn't believe it. Didn't want to believe it. It was true that we had split up, and that for a while I had hated her. But that passed. Then Mark entered the scene. She had seemed happy with him. That was the main thing, I told myself. And almost convinced myself. But I *couldn't* keep on hating her; I loved her too much. And now she was dead, and the police were all over her life. I kept imagining how she had died. Did she suffer? Was she raped? Strangled? Beaten? Stabbed? Was it slow and drawn-out or mercifully quick? Did it hurt?

I stayed where I was and listened to the footsteps coming and going. The SOCOs, if that was who turned up in the minivan, certainly made plenty of noise. I knew that Glassco and Marley, or others just like them, would be back knocking on my door again before long. They would talk to all the tenants in the house, to Geoff, Dave, Sally, Anton and Maria as well. But they would certainly be back at my door. I could tell by the way Glassco had stared at me when he told me Alice was dead. It sounded impossible, I know, but I couldn't

help thinking that he suspected maybe *I* was the one who had killed her. Did that mean he also thought *I* was the Yorkshire Ripper?

24 November 2019

Banks stood on the edge of the trench with DC Gerry Masterson and the supervisor, Malcolm Briers, looking down at the skull and the patches of bone Grace had uncovered with her light brushing. This wasn't his first skeleton. Some years ago, a young boy had discovered one in a dried-up reservoir, and that had resulted in a case that took Banks right back to events of the Second World War. He discovered then that putting a timeline to such things was often a long and difficult process, with no guarantee of success. Just *how* long was a job for the forensics team, the pathologist and the lab technicians to work out.

As he stared at the dirt-streaked skull, he thought of Webster's line about the skull beneath the skin and about the way skulls had been used over the centuries as *memento mori*, something the Romans who had lived in the area would certainly have known a lot about.

He found himself having too many uninvited morbid thoughts these days, as he got older. According to his doctor, he was in good health, with blood pressure and cholesterol under control, albeit through medication. He was also trim and in fairly good physical shape, more through good luck than good habits. Most people said he looked hardly a day over fifty. On his last check-up, the doctor had mentioned a 'slightly worrisome' liver enzyme that he would like to keep an eye on, and added that it may have something to do with alcohol consumption. As he assumed most people did, Banks halved the true number of drinks he had per week when his

doctor asked. He hadn't yet started thinking in units and hoped he never would.

'I do hope you can wrap this up quickly,' Malcolm Briers said. 'We have limited time to do our job here as it is, before the heavy equipment comes in.'

'It's hard to say,' Banks told him, turning his gaze away from the skull and his mind from thoughts of death. 'Too many variables. But we'll do our best. Wouldn't want trying to find a murderer to interfere with digging up a few old coins and baubles, would we?'

Briers reddened. 'I wouldn't exactly call . . . er . . . well, no, I suppose not, if you put it like that. But how do you know this person was murdered? And isn't it likely the perpetrator is long dead, too?'

'Those are both questions we have to answer in our investigation, and neither one is as easy as you may think. First off, who owns the land?'

'It belonged to a local farmer. I'm sorry, but I don't know his name.'

'You say belonged. Did he sell up?'

'Compulsory purchase order. This is the last field to the west of the road. That lane just over the wall there marks the border of his land. This place was more of a scrag-end than anything else.'

'I see. When was this?'

'About two years ago. Highways England decided they needed to widen this section of the A1, turn it into another stretch of motorway. And build a shopping centre, of course.'

'That wouldn't be Highways England, though? The shopping centre?'

'No. A private developer. Or a consortium. In league with them. Luckily, we – that's the Northern Archaeological Associates – get first dibs before the heavy work begins.'

‘Know where this farmer is now?’

‘No idea. He moved away, of course. Probably living it up on the Costa del Packet or some such place.’

Banks turned to Gerry. ‘Make a note,’ he said. ‘Find out who owned the land before the compulsory purchase order, and where he lives now.’

Gerry made a jotting in her notebook.

‘Who found the skull?’ Banks asked Briers. ‘DC Masterson mentioned someone called Grace Hutchinson.’

‘That’s Grace, over there,’ Gerry said, pointing.

Briers nodded. ‘Yes. Grace is one of our best archaeologists. She’s beads.’

Banks glanced over at Grace and the three of them started walking towards where she sat on a picnic hamper, a red plastic cup from the top of a vacuum flask held in both hands. ‘Beads?’ Banks said.

‘Yes,’ said Briers. ‘Her speciality. You’ve no idea how much beads can tell us about migratory patterns and trade relations in the ancient world. Grace, you’ve already met DC Masterson. This is Detective Superintendent Banks. He wants to ask you a few questions, if you would be so kind.’ Then Briers stalked off, slipping his mobile from his pocket and keying in a number as he did so. Banks thought of calling out to ask him not to tell anyone about what they had found, but he decided not to bother. People would find out soon enough, and it was hardly a race against time. Despite the sunshine, it was a cool day, and every once in a while, a brief gust of frigid air blew in from the east.

Grace glanced up at Banks’s approach. She had nice eyes, he noticed: sea-green behind her black-framed glasses, under dark, well-groomed eyebrows. No make-up, cheeks a little red with the cold. Like the rest of the archaeological team, she was wearing a baseball cap, high-vis orange jacket and jeans.

‘Hello,’ she said, standing and shaking his hand. ‘I’m afraid I can’t tell you anything more than I’ve already told DC Masterson.’

‘Just humour me,’ said Banks. ‘Did you disturb or move the bones in any way?’

‘No. We’re trained to be especially careful in this job, of course. Much of what we find is incredibly fragile.’

‘Done much of this sort of thing?’

‘I’ve been on quite a few digs, yes. Here and overseas.’

‘Still, it must have come as a shock to you?’

‘Well, I’m quite used to finding skeletons, but it’s not every day I find a fresh one, so to speak. I’m all right.’

‘Haven’t you done some sort of preliminary tests? To find out if it was worth digging here, for example?’

‘Yes, of course. Though we knew there was something here because of other finds nearby. It’s all linked. But we certainly weren’t expecting a Roman burial ground. This is what we call a “rescue excavation”. Soon it’s going to be buried for ever. Well, at least until shopping malls become archaeological finds themselves. If you know what I mean.’

‘I do,’ Banks said. ‘I can just imagine some lucky blighters digging up a Marks & Spencer outlet a thousand years in the future. I wonder what they’ll make of it?’

‘Perhaps that they’re not that much different from the people who came before them. The Romans had markets, their version of the shopping mall, I suppose.’

‘The closest I’ve come to a Roman shopping mall is the one in Caesar’s Palace,’ said Banks, remembering a brief side trip to Las Vegas on his California holiday some years ago – the life-size replica of Michelangelo’s *David* and the ‘Forum Shops’.

Grace laughed. ‘Anyway, we drew up a project design about exactly what we’re going to do, and why.’

‘What about X-rays and so on? Or detectorists?’

‘The latter can be an occupational hazard, though they have on occasion proved valuable. Not this time, though. And we used ground-penetrating radar on certain areas, but we couldn’t cover everything, of course.’

‘And nothing showed up?’

‘Not this. We didn’t get this far back.’

‘We’ll probably have to bring in cadaver dogs, at least to cover the immediate area.’

‘Can they sniff out Roman remains, too?’

‘Actually, they’re quite remarkable, though I’m not sure their talents go that far.’ Banks paused. ‘But you said you weren’t expecting a Roman burial ground.’

‘We’re not. Not just here. But you never know your luck.’

‘What were your first thoughts when you found the skull?’

‘That three feet was too shallow to be uncovering anything ancient, and that somebody must have dumped it there recently. I mean, if you end up dead under two or three feet of earth, it’s pretty obvious somebody put you there, isn’t it?’ She gave a brief shudder.

‘I’d say so. But we still need to know cause of death before we can begin any full investigation. It’s not rare for someone to bury a relative who died a natural death, for example. Not everyone’s as rational as we’d like to think. I know it’s probably impossible to answer, but I have to ask: any idea how long ago?’

‘That’s for the scientists to figure out,’ Grace said. ‘I’m an archaeologist, not an anthropologist.’

‘We need both on a case like this. Can you have a stab at it?’

Grace glanced down at the skull, then back at Banks and Gerry. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘Lacking any kind of external evidence, I can’t say. I mean, if it was like Vesuvius or something, timing is relatively easy, as long as you know when the

eruption took place and covered everything and everyone in lava, of course, but without . . . Well, you'd need to know the soil composition, pH balance, insect activity and so on. I don't know much about all that. Also, how long the layer above took to form. There's no simple formula, as far as I know. Even your experts must have told you it's near impossible to gauge how long a relatively recent skeleton has been lying there?'

'It was worth a try. I'm no anthropologist, either, and believe it or not, it's not every day I come across a human skeleton.'

'It's my first,' Gerry announced. 'What about carbon dating?'

Banks had been caught out on that one before, and he jumped in before Grace had time to answer. 'That's only useful for true archaeological finds, really old ones. It only works on something over five hundred years old or thereabouts, and I certainly wouldn't say our friend has been here that long.'

Grace gave Banks a nod of approval. 'Your superintendent is right on both counts,' she said.

'Ah,' said Gerry. 'Pity.'

Grace smiled. 'Yes. I stopped as soon as I knew what it was. I know enough not to disturb the scene. I suppose you'll want your experts in to dig the whole thing up now?'

'Yes. And we might have to dig up a larger area.'

'Why?'

'If this is a murder victim,' Banks said, pointing over at the trench, 'then there's always the possibility there might be other victims buried nearby.'

'You mean a serial killer?'

'Something like that. We'll start with the radar, too, of course,' said Banks, 'but as you remarked, it's not always a hundred per cent reliable. I'd still value your help. I doubt my men could do a better job than a trained archaeologist in clearing up the earth around a skeleton and searching for

anything of interest, anything that might help us answer a few basic questions, so I'd appreciate it if you would stick around and help out. I need our official forensic team on it for legal reasons as much as anything. Chain of evidence and so on. But when they're here, I think you should carry on doing what you were doing and work with them. Stefan Nowak's our Crime Scene Manager. He's a good bloke. You'll get along fine with him. We'll take care of the procedural stuff and the lab analysis. Gerry here will act as liaison.'

'You want *me* to work for you?'

'Well, we could bring some other, outside archaeologist, someone we've worked with before, but as you're here, and you did uncover the corpse, I think your input could be valuable.'

Grace gave Banks a crooked smile. 'So, I'm sort of deputised, am I?'

'Well, I don't have a sheriff's star to give you, but yes, you can consider yourself a fully paid-up member of the posse.' Banks glanced over at Briers, who was now chatting with one of the other diggers. 'Your boss seems worried about us taking over the scene.'

'Don't worry about Malcolm,' Grace said. 'I can handle him. He tends to be a bit of a worrywart. And he's not exactly my "boss". It's true we're on a tight deadline, depending on the construction company. They can be impatient. Bullies. But, even so, he's got no real reason to get his knickers in a twist. They'll wait. They'll have to. Especially now.'

Banks stepped into the trench and felt his knees crack as he squatted to get a closer look at the remains. The front of the skull and jaw were completely free of dirt, and the bone had turned a dull yellow. Chemicals in the soil composition, he guessed. The right side, around the temple, was broken. He could see no more structural damage – no more cracks

or splits or holes – but one other thing did catch his attention. When he got up, he turned to Grace and said, ‘See the exposed teeth there?’

Grace nodded.

‘I could be wrong,’ Banks went on, ‘but as far as I know, the Romans didn’t use gold fillings in their teeth, did they?’

‘As a matter of fact, they did, but I very much doubt they’d be as well fitted as that one, and probably not on one of the grunts posted to the northern provinces.’

‘Ha,’ said Banks, straightening up and smiling back. ‘Now I can see I made the right decision in deputising you.’