

GONE

MO HAYDER



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1

Detective Inspector Jack Caffery of Bristol's Major Crime Investigation Unit spent ten minutes in the centre of Frome looking at the crime scene. He walked past the road blocks, the flashing blue lights, the police tape, the onlookers gathered in huddles with their Saturday-afternoon shopping bags peering to catch a glimpse of the forensics guys with their brushes and bags, and stood for a long time where the whole thing had happened, among the oil leaks and abandoned shopping trolleys of the underground car park, trying to soak up the place and decide how anxious he should be. Then, already cold in spite of his overcoat, he went upstairs to the manager's tiny office where the local officers and the forensics guys were watching CCTV footage on a small colour monitor.

They stood in a semicircle, holding cups of machine coffee, some of them still in their Tyvek suits with the hoods down. Everyone glanced up as Caffery entered, but he shook his head, opened his hands to show he had no news, and they turned

back to the TV, their expressions closed and serious.

The picture had the typical graininess of a low-end CCTV system, the camera trained on the entrance ramp of the car park. The opaque time code graduated from black to white and back again. The screen showed cars ranked in painted bays, winter sunlight coming through the entrance ramp beyond them, bright as a floodlight. At the back of one of the vehicles – a Toyota Yaris – a woman stood with her back to the camera, loading groceries from a trolley. Jack Caffery was an inspector with eighteen years of the hardest policing in his pocket – Murder Squad, in some of the country's toughest inner-city forces. Even so, he couldn't fight the cold pinch of dread the image gave him, knowing what was going to happen next on the film.

From the statements taken by the local officers he knew a lot already: the woman's name was Rose Bradley. She was the wife of a C of E minister and she was in her late forties, though on screen she looked older. She was dressed in a short dark jacket made of something heavy – chenille maybe – with a calf-length tweed skirt and low pumps. Her hair was short and neat. She was the type who would be sensible enough to carry an umbrella or tie a scarf around her head if it was raining, but it was a clear, cold day and her head was bare. Rose had spent the afternoon browsing the clothes boutiques in the centre of Frome, and had finished the excursion with the family's weekly food shop in Somerfield. Before she'd begun loading the bags, she'd put her keys and

the ticket to the car park on the front seat of the Yaris.

The sunlight behind her flickered and she lifted her head to see a man running fast down the ramp. He was tall and broad, in jeans and a Puffa jacket. Over his head he wore a rubber mask. A Santa Claus mask. To Caffery that was the creepiest part of it – the rubber mask bobbing along as the man raced towards Rose. The grin didn't change or fade as he got close to her.

'He said three words.' The local inspector – a tall, austere guy in uniform who must also have been standing outside in the cold, judging by his red nostrils – nodded at the monitor. 'Just here – as he comes up to her. He says, "Get down, bitch." She didn't recognize the voice and she's not sure if he had an accent or not because he was shouting.'

The man grabbed Rose's arm, cartwheeling her away from the car. Her right arm flew up, a piece of jewellery snapped and beads scattered, catching the light. Her hip slammed into the boot of the neighbouring car, catapulting her upper torso sideways over it, as if she was made of rubber. Her hair flew up from the scalp, her elbow made contact with the roof and she rebounded, whip-like, falling away from the car and landing on her knees. By now the man in the mask was in the driver's seat of the Yaris. Rose saw what he was doing and scrambled to her feet. She got to the car window and was tugging frantically at the door as the guy got the keys into the ignition. The car gave a small jolt as the handbrake

came off, and shot backwards with a jerk. Rose staggered along next to it, half falling, half dragged, then the car braked abruptly, changed gear and skidded forwards. The movement loosened her grip and she fell away clumsily, rolling once, legs and arms in an ungainly crabbed position until she came to a halt. She recovered herself and raised her head just in time to see the car speed towards the exit.

‘What next?’ said Caffery.

‘Not much. We pick him up on another camera.’ The inspector aimed the remote control at the DVR box and shuffled through the different camera inputs. ‘Here – leaving the car park. He uses her ticket to get out. But the picture’s not so good on this feed.’

The screen showed the Yaris from behind. The brake lights came on as it slowed at the barrier. The driver’s window opened and the man’s hand came out, put the ticket into the slot. There was a pause and the barrier opened. The brake lights went off and the Yaris pulled away.

‘No prints on the barrier,’ said the inspector. ‘He’s wearing gloves. See them?’

‘Freeze it there,’ Caffery said.

The inspector paused the picture. Caffery bent closer to the screen, turning his head sideways to study the back window above the lit-up number plate. When the case had been called in to MCIU, the unit superintendent, an unforgiving bastard who would screw an old woman to the floor if she had information that would improve his clear-up rates, told Caffery the first thing to check was whether or

not the report was genuine. Caffery searched the shadows and reflective parts of the back windscreen. He could see something on the seat. Something pale and blurry.

‘Is that her?’

‘Yes.’

‘You sure?’

The inspector turned and gave him a long look, as if he thought he was being tested. ‘Yes,’ he said slowly. ‘Why?’

Caffery didn’t answer. He wasn’t going to say out loud that the superintendent was worried about all the dickheads out there who’d been known, in the past, to invent a child on the back seat when their car had been jacked, thinking they’d get a higher alert attached to the police hunt for the vehicle. These things happened. But it didn’t look as if that was what Rose Bradley was up to.

‘Let me see her. Earlier.’

The inspector aimed the remote control at the TV and flipped through the menu to the previous clip, to a point ninety seconds before the attack on Rose. The car park was empty. Just the sunlight in the entrance and the cars. As the time code flicked round to 4:31 the doors to the supermarket opened and Rose Bradley emerged, pushing the trolley. At her side came a small girl in a brown duffel coat. Pale, with blonde hair cut in a fringe, she wore pastel-coloured Mary Jane shoes, pink tights, and walked with her hands in her pockets. Rose unlocked the Yaris and the little girl opened the back door and crawled

inside. Rose closed the door on her, put the keys and her car-park ticket on the front seat and went to the boot.

‘OK. You can stop it there.’

The inspector clicked off the TV and straightened. ‘Major Crime’s here. Whose case does that make it? Yours? Mine?’

‘No one’s.’ Caffery pulled his keys out of his pocket. ‘Because it’s never going to get that far.’

The inspector raised an eyebrow. ‘Says who?’

‘Says the statistics. He’s made a mistake – didn’t know she was in the car. He’ll dump her first chance he has. He’s probably already dropped her and the phone call’s just working its way through the system.’

‘It’s been almost three hours.’

Caffery held his eyes. The inspector was right – those three hours were outside what the statistics said, and he disliked that. But he’d been in the job long enough to expect the wide balls that came from time to time. The sudden swerves, the mould breakers. Yes, the three hours felt wrong, but there was probably a good reason. The guy might be trying to get a good distance. Find somewhere he was sure he wouldn’t be seen to dump her.

‘She’ll be back. You have my word.’

‘Really?’

‘Really.’

Caffery buttoned his coat as he left the room, pulled his car keys out of his pocket. He’d been due to knock off work in half an hour. There were a couple of things he’d been considering doing with his

evening – a Police Social Club pub quiz at the Staple Hill bar, a meat raffle at the Coach and Horses near the offices, or a night at home on his own. Dismal choices. But not as dismal as what he had to do now. What he had to do now was go and speak to the Bradley family. Find out if, apart from the statistical blip, there was any other reason their younger daughter, Martha, wasn't back yet.

2

It was six thirty when he arrived at the estate just outside the little Mendip village of Oakhill. It was a smartish executive development that must have been built about twenty years ago, with a wide no-through road and large laurel- and yew-bordered grounds sloping away down the side of the hill. The house wasn't what he would have expected of a vicarage. He'd imagined a detached place with wisteria and a garden and 'The Vicarage' carved into stone gate newels. Instead it was semi-detached, with a tar-and-chip driveway, *faux* chimneys and uPVC windows. He parked outside and switched off the car engine. This was the part of the job that froze him – facing the victims. For a moment he considered not walking up the front path. Not knocking on the door. He considered turning round and getting out of there.

The FLO, the family liaison officer assigned to the Bradley family, opened the door. She was a tall woman in her thirties with shining black hair cut in a bob and perhaps was self-conscious of her height: she wore flat shoes under the wide-legged trousers and

stood with a permanent stoop as if the ceiling was too low.

‘I’ve told them what unit you’re from.’ She stepped back to let him into the hallway. ‘I didn’t want to scare them but they had to know we’re taking it seriously. And I’ve told them you haven’t got any news. That you just want to ask some more questions.’

‘How’re they doing?’

‘How do you think?’

He shrugged. ‘Fair enough. Stupid question.’

She closed the door, then gave Caffery a long, appraising look. ‘I’ve heard of you. I know about you.’

It was warm inside so Caffery took off his coat. He didn’t ask the FLO what she knew about him, if it was good or bad. He was used to wariness from a certain type of woman. Somehow he’d dragged a reputation with him from his old position in London all the way out here to the West Country. It was part of what was keeping him lonely. Part of what was making him plan futile things with his evenings, like meat raffles and police pub quizzes.

‘Where are they?’

‘In the kitchen.’ She kicked a draft excluder against the bottom of the door. It was cold outside. Freezing. ‘But come through this way. I want to show you the photos first.’

The FLO took him into a side room where the curtains were half drawn. The furniture was good quality but shabby: a dark-wood upright piano

pushed against one wall, a TV set in a marquetry cabinet, two battered sofas covered in what might pass for two old Navajo-weave blankets stitched together. Everything – the carpets, the walls, the furniture – was scruffy with years of kids and animals. On one of the sofas lay two dogs – a black and white collie and a spaniel. Both lifted their heads and watched Caffery. More scrutiny. More wanting to know what the hell he was going to do.

He stopped at a low table where twenty or so photos had been spread out. Torn out of an album – in the family’s haste they’d pulled the sticky corners off the pages. Martha was small and pale with fine white hair cut in a fringe. A pair of glasses – the type that’d get a kid teased. In investigative circles conventional wisdom said one of the most important skills in finding a missing child was choosing the right photo to release to the public. It had to be representative for identification’s sake, but it had to make the child appealing. He used his finger to move the pictures around. There were school shots, holiday shots, birthday-party shots. He stopped at one. Martha wore a melon-pink T-shirt, her hair tied in two plaits at either side of her face. Behind her the sky was blue and the distant hills were puffy with summer trees. From the view it must have been taken outside in the gardens of the estate. He turned it for the FLO to see. ‘Is this the one you chose?’

She nodded. ‘I emailed it to the press office. Is it the right one?’

‘It’s the one I’d have chosen.’

‘Do you want to meet them now?’

He sighed. Eyed the door she was pointing to. He hated what he had to do now. For him it was like standing at the door to a lion’s den. He just never knew with the victims how to get the right balance between the professional and the sympathetic. ‘Come on, then. Let’s get it over with.’

He walked into the kitchen, where the three members of the Bradley family immediately stopped what they were doing and lifted their faces to him expectantly. ‘No news.’ He held up his hands. ‘I haven’t got any news.’

They let out a collective breath, sank back into their miserable, stooped postures. He ticked them off in his head against the information the Frome police station had given him: that was the Reverend Jonathan Bradley over at the sink, mid-fifties, tall with dark blond hair growing thick and wavy from a high forehead and a wide, straight nose that would look as confident above a dog collar as it did above the grape-coloured sweatshirt and jeans he was wearing now. The word *Iona* was embroidered under a harp on the breast of the sweatshirt.

The Bradleys’ elder daughter, Philippa, sat at the table. She was straight out of the rebellious-teen box with a ring in her nose and dyed black hair. In the real world she should be slouched on the sofa at the back of the room, one leg over the arm, finger in her mouth, staring blankly at the TV set. But she wasn’t. She was sitting with her hands shoved between her

knees, her shoulders hunched, a sick, terrified look on her face.

Then there was Rose, also sitting at the table. When she'd left the house this morning she must have looked like someone on their way to a church-council meeting with pearls and styled hair. But a face could change irrevocably in just a matter of hours, he knew from experience, and now Rose Bradley seemed halfway to the mad box in her shapeless cardigan and polyester dress. Her thinning blonde hair was smeared and plastered to her skull, there were inflamed bulges under her eyes and a hospital dressing on the side of her face. She was medicated too. He could see that from the unnatural droop to her mouth. Shame. He'd have liked her sharp.

'We're glad you're here.' Jonathan Bradley attempted a smile. He came forward and touched Caffery's arm. 'Sit down. I'll pour you tea – there's a pot ready.'

The kitchen was worn out and faded like the rest of the house, but it was warm. On the windowsill above the sink birthday cards had been lined up. A small shelf near the door was loaded with presents. A cake sat on a wire tray waiting to be iced. In the centre of the table there were three mobile phones – as if each member of the family had lined them up, expecting one to ring at any moment with news. Caffery noted the things, the places Martha seemed to be reaching into the room, but he didn't let the family see him focusing on them. He chose a chair opposite Rose, sat down and gave her a brief smile.

She twitched her mouth back at him. Just for a moment. Her cheeks were spattered with broken veins from crying and her eyes were slack, the red rims sappy and loose against the whites – the way the eyes of head-injury victims sometimes went. He'd have to make a note to check with the FLO where the tranquillizers were coming from. Check there was a GP somewhere in the wings and Rose wasn't just raiding the emergency medicine cabinet.

'It's her birthday tomorrow,' she whispered. 'Are you going to get her back for her birthday?'

'Mrs Bradley,' he said, 'I want to explain why I'm here and I want to do it without alarming you. My firm belief is that from the moment the man who took your car realized his mistake – that Martha was in the back – he's been making plans to release her. Remember, he's scared too. He wanted the car, not a kidnap on top of a jacking charge. It happens in every case like this. I've got literature on it back at the office. I was reading it before I came over and I can get copies of it, if you'd like. On the other hand—'

'Yes? On the other hand?'

'My unit has to treat it as a kidnap because that's the responsible thing to do. It's completely normal, and it doesn't mean we're alarmed.' He could feel the FLO watching him as he spoke. He knew the FLOs attached red flags to some words when dealing with families affected by violent crime so he trod lightly on the word 'kidnap', said it in the light, barely there voice his parents' generation would have reserved for the word 'cancer'. 'We've got every ANPR team on

alert. Those are the automatic numberplate recognition units – cameras watching all the major roads for your car. If he hits any of the major routes in the area we're going to pick him up. We've drafted in extra teams to do questioning. There's been a press release to the media so we're virtually guaranteed local and probably national coverage. In fact if you switch on the TV now you'll probably see it on the news bulletins. I've got someone from our technical department coming over. He's going to need access to your phones.'

'In case someone calls?' Rose looked at him desperately. 'Is that what you mean – that someone might call us? You're making it sound like you really think she's been kidnapped.'

'Please, Mrs Bradley, I meant what I said. This is all completely routine. Completely. Don't think there's anything sinister or that we have any theories yet because we really haven't. I don't believe for a minute the investigation is going to stay on the Major Crime Unit's books, because I think Martha will be back safe and sound for her birthday tomorrow. Still, I need to ask you some questions.' He fished a little MP3 recorder out from his inside pocket and placed it on the table next to the phones. The red light blinked. 'You're being recorded now. Just like you were earlier. Is that OK?'

'Yes. It's . . .' She trailed off. There was a pause, then she gave Caffery a flittering, apologetic smile, as if she'd already forgotten not only who he was but also why they were there, sitting around the table. 'I mean – yes. It's fine.'

Jonathan Bradley put a mug of tea in front of Caffery and sat down next to Rose. 'We've been talking, thinking, about why we haven't heard anything.'

'It's very early days.'

'But we've got a theory,' said Rose. 'Martha was kneeling up on the back seat when it happened.'

Jonathan nodded. 'We've lost count of the number of times we've told her not to but she always does it. The moment she gets into the car she leans over into the front seat and fiddles with the radio. Tries to tune it to something she likes. We're wondering if maybe when he took off in the car he was going so fast that she was thrown back – down into the footwell, maybe banged her head. Maybe he doesn't even know she's there – she could be unconscious, could be lying there, and he could still be driving. He could have abandoned the car already and she could be in there, still unconscious.'

'There's a full tank. I filled it up on my way into Bath. So, you see, he could be a long way away. An awfully long way.'

'I can't listen to this.' Philippa pushed her chair back, went to the sofa and began rummaging in the pockets of a denim jacket. 'Mum, Dad.' She pulled out a packet of Benson & Hedges, shook it at her parents. 'I know this isn't the time or the place, but I smoke. Have done for months. I'm sorry.'

Rose and Jonathan watched her go to the back door. Neither spoke as she threw it open and fumbled with a cigarette lighter. Her breath was white in the cold night air, and beyond her, clouds shattered and

fragmented across the stars. Distant lights twinkled in the far valley. It was too cold for November, Caffery thought. Much too cold. He felt the frozen enormity of that countryside. The weight of a thousand lanes where Martha could have been abandoned. A Yaris was a smallish car with a relatively big petrol tank and a long range – maybe as much as five hundred miles – but Caffery didn't think the jacker would just have driven in one direction. He was local – he'd known exactly where the street CCTV cameras had been. He'd be too nervous to leave his patch. He'd still be somewhere quite close by, somewhere he knew. He was probably trying to find a place secluded enough to let her go. Caffery was sure that was what had happened, but the elapsed time was still knocking silently inside him. Three and a half hours. Nearly four now. He stirred his tea. Looked at the spoon rather than let the family see his eyes straying to the clock on the wall.

'So, Mr Bradley,' he said, 'I'm told you're the parish priest?'

'Yes. I used to be a headmaster but I was ordained three years ago.'

'You seem like a happy family.'

'We are.'

'You live within your means? If it's not a rude question.'

Jonathan gave a small, bleak smile. 'We do. Very well within our means, thank you. We have no debts. I'm not a secret gambler or a drug addict. And we haven't upset anyone. Is that your next question?'

‘Dad,’ Philippa muttered. ‘Don’t be such a rude shit.’

He didn’t acknowledge his daughter. ‘If that’s what you’re edging towards, Mr Caffery, I can promise you it’s the wrong path. There’s no reason for anyone to want to take her away from us. No reason at all. We’re just not that sort of family.’

‘I understand your frustration. I’m only wanting to get a clearer picture.’

‘There is no picture. There is *no* picture. My daughter has been taken and we’re waiting for you to do something about it—’ He broke off as if he’d suddenly realized he was shouting. He sat back, breathing hard, his face a livid red. ‘I’m sorry.’ He pushed a hand through his hair. He looked tired. Beaten. ‘I’m sorry – really sorry. I didn’t mean to take it out on you. It’s just you can’t possibly imagine what this feels like.’

A few years ago, when he was young and hot-headed, a comment like that would have infuriated Caffery – this assumption that he couldn’t know what it felt like – but with the benefit of age he could keep himself calm. Jonathan Bradley didn’t know what he was saying, had no idea – how could he? – so Caffery put his hands on the table. Flat. To show how unruffled he was. How in control. ‘Look, Mr Bradley, Mrs Bradley. No one can be a hundred per cent sure, and I can’t predict the future, but I am prepared to go out on a limb and say I’ve got a feeling – a very strong feeling – there’s going to be a happy ending to this.’

‘Good God.’ A tear ran down Rose’s face. ‘Do you mean that? Do you really mean that?’

‘I really mean that. In fact ...’ He smiled reassuringly – and then said one of the stupidest things he’d uttered in his life. ‘In fact I’m looking forward to the photo of Martha blowing out her candles. I’m hoping you’ll be sending me a copy for my wall.’

3

The cement works in the Mendip Hills hadn't been used for sixteen years and the owners had installed a security gate to stop people coming in and joyriding round the flooded quarry. Flea Marley left her car about a hundred yards from the gates on the edge of the track among some gorse. She broke off a couple of branches from a nearby tree and placed them so that the car would be hidden from the main road. No one ever came down here but it didn't hurt to be cautious.

It had been cold all day. Grey clouds off the Atlantic blanketed the sky. It was windy too, so Flea wore a cagoule and a beanie. The chalk bag and the bundle of climber's cams, the knee and elbow pads were in the rucksack on her back. Her Boreal 'sticky' boots at a glance could look like hiking boots. If she encountered anyone she was a walker, strayed off the footpath.

She squeezed herself through a gap in the perimeter fence and went down the track. The weather was getting worse. By the time she got

to the water's edge a squall had come up. Under the white cloud canopy, smaller, darker clouds stuttered along in regular squadrons: fast as flocks of birds. No one would be out on a day like this. She kept her head down anyway and walked fast.

The rock face was on the far side, out of sight of the quarry. She paused at the bottom and gave a last glance over her shoulder to check she was alone and ducked behind the rock. She found the place she wanted, dropped her rucksack and pulled out the few things she wanted. The key was speed and determination. Don't think, just do. Get it over with.

She rammed the first cam into the limestone. Her father, long dead now, had been an all-round adventurer. A *Boy's Own* hero – a diver, a caver, a climber. The adventure thing had rubbed off on her, but the climbing part had never come second nature. She wasn't like one of the climbing dudes who could do pull-ups on two fingers. This limestone was supposed to be easy to climb, with its vertical and horizontal cracks, but she found it a bastard – always got her hands in the wrong places – and now the crevices were full of the congealed chalk she'd used in the past. As she climbed she paused every few feet to rake the handfuls of white muck out of the fissures. Leaving tracks didn't work. Ever.

Flea was small, but she was as strong as a monkey. When you lived a life where you never knew what was coming round the corner at you, it paid to keep yourself hard so she worked out every day. At least two hours. Jogged, lifted weights. She was at her

peak. In spite of her lousy climbing technique, the scramble up the rock took less than ten minutes. She wasn't even breathing hard when she reached the top.

This high up the wind howled around and flattened the cagoule against her frame. It whipped her hair into her eyes. She dug in her fingers, turned her head and looked back down into the rain-swept valley. Most of the rock was hidden except for this small section, which could, if her luck was really out, be seen by passing motorists. But the road was virtually empty: just one or two cars going by with their headlights and wipers on. Even so, she kept herself tight against the rock, making sure she presented less of a profile.

She dug her toes in, shifted her torso slightly to the left until she found the place, then gripped the scrappy roots of a gorse bush in both hands and wrenched them apart. She hesitated for a moment, not wanting to do it. Then she pushed her face in. Took a deep breath. Held it. Tasted it.

She let out the air with a long, hoarse cough, let go of the bushes, turned away and pressed the back of her hand to her nose, her chest heaving.

The corpse was still there. She could smell it. The bitter, gagging stench of decay told her all she needed to know. Overwhelming, but it was weaker than it had been. Fainter, which meant the body was doing what it should. During the summer the smell had been bad, really bad. There had been days she'd come up here and caught the odour down on the footpath, where even a casual passer-by could have smelt it.

This level was better. Much better. It meant the woman's corpse was disintegrating.

The tiny gap Flea had put her nose to led to a crevice that snaked away back into the rock. Deep, deep down, almost eight metres below her, there was a cave. The cave had only one entrance and that was from under the water. The route was virtually impossible to find without specialist diving equipment and an encyclopedic knowledge of the quarry contours. She'd done it, dived down and entered the cave twice in the last six months that the body had been there, just to reassure herself that no one had found it. Now it was crammed into a hole in the floor, covered with rocks. No one would know it was there. The only clue to what Flea had done was the unmistakable stench working its way through the cave's natural ventilation system, through unseen fissures, to expel itself here, high up on the rock face.

A noise came from the other side of the quarry: the security gates were opening. She spread her arms and legs and let herself slither down fast, scraping her knees, getting a long orange line of soil on the front of her waterproofs. She ended up at the bottom in a crouch, hands out, ears trained on the quarry. In the wind and the rain it was hard to be sure, but she thought she could hear a car.

Stealthily, she crept to the edge of the rock. Poked her head round. Jerked it back again.

A car. Headlights on. Making its way leisurely down from the gates in the rain. And worse than

that. She turned her head against the wet rock and peeped out again. Yes. It was a cop car.

Ho-ho. What now, smart-arse?

Quickly she pulled off the knee pads, the chalk bag, the gloves. The cams higher up the rock face she couldn't get to – but the nearer ones she quickly released. She snapped them out and, with her discarded clothing, jammed them into a space under the gorse that grew at her feet. She dropped to her haunches and did a crab walk, out from the rock, shielded by the gorse bushes, until she reached another rock where she could straighten up and peer round.

The cop car had stopped at the far side of the quarry where all the discarded stripping material had been piled by the cement company. Its headlights were splashed with mud. Maybe he'd pulled in for a pee. Or to make a phone call. Or have a sandwich. He cut the engine and opened the window, put his head out and squinted up into the rain, then leaned over on to the passenger seat. Rummaged for something.

A sandwich? Make it a sandwich, for Christ's sake. A phone?

No. It was a torch. Shit.

He opened the door. The rain and the clouds had dropped the daylight so much that the beam was strong enough to pick up the raindrops. It flashed off the car as he stood, pulling on a waterproof. It stuttered across the trees at the edge of the track. He slammed the door, went to the water's edge and shone the torch on to the surface of the quarry.

Watched the water bounce and boil in the hammering rain. Beyond the gates, further up the track, one of the branches she'd used to conceal her car had been pulled away. The cop knew someone was in here.

That's you, then, she thought, knee deep in the proverbial.

He turned suddenly as if he'd heard a noise and aimed the torch at the place she stood. She shrank back into the lee of the rock, standing side on, the wind making her eyes water. Her heart was hammering. The cop took a few steps, his feet crunching on the gravel. One, two, three, four. Then more purposeful. Five, six, seven. Heading towards her.

She took a breath, pulled her hood off her head, stepped out into the beam. He stopped a few feet away, with the torch thrust out, rain dripping off the hood of his coat. 'Hello,' he said.

'Hello.'

He ran the torch up and down her. 'You know this is private property? Belongs to the cement company.'

'I do.'

'You a quarryman, are you?'

She gave him a half-smile. 'You've not been doing this long, have you? The police thing?'

'Tell me,' he said, 'what do the words "private property" mean to you? *Private property?*'

'Means I shouldn't be here? Not without authorization.'

He raised his eyebrows. 'Nice. You're getting the hang of this.' He shone the torch back up the track. 'Is that your car? Up there on the lane?'

‘Yes.’

‘You weren’t trying to hide it, were you? Under the branches?’

She laughed. ‘God. Of course not. Why would I do that?’

‘You didn’t put those branches in front of it?’

She held up her hand to shield her eyes from the rain and made a show of staring at the car. ‘Wind must have blown all the stuff around it. Still, I see what you mean, what you’re saying. It looks like someone’s tried to hide it, doesn’t it?’

The cop turned the torch on her again and studied her cagoule. If he noticed the sticky boots he didn’t dwell on them. He came a couple of steps nearer her.

She reached into the inside pocket of her jacket. The cop’s reaction was lightning fast: in under a second he had jammed the torch under his arm. He had his right hand on the radio, the left on the canister of CS gas in his holster.

‘It’s OK.’ She lowered her hand, unzipped the jacket and opened it so he could see the lining. ‘Here.’ She pointed to the pocket inside. ‘In here. My authority for being here. Can I show you?’

‘Authority?’ The cop didn’t take his eyes off the pocket. ‘What sort of authority is that?’

‘Here.’ She stepped forward and held the jacket out to him. ‘You do it. If it makes you less nervous.’

The cop licked his lips. He took his hand off the radio and reached out. He rested his fingers on the edge of the pocket.

‘There’s nothing sharp in here, is there? Anything sharp I could cut myself on?’

‘Nothing.’

‘You’d better be telling the truth, young lady.’

‘I am.’

He slowly slid his hand into the pocket, felt what was in there. He let his fingers run over it. A frown crossed his face. He pulled the object out and studied it.

A police warrant card. In a standard black leather wallet.

‘A cop?’ he said slowly. He opened it, read the name. ‘Sergeant Marley? I’ve heard of you.’

‘Uh-huh. I run the Underwater Search Unit.’

He handed her back the card. ‘What the hell’re you doing out here?’

‘I’m thinking of running a training session in the quarry next week. This is a recce.’ She looked up dubiously at the clouds. ‘In this weather you may as well be freezing your arse off under water as top side.’

The cop switched off his torch, shrugged his coat a little closer round his shoulders. ‘USU?’ he said.

‘That’s the one. Underwater Search.’

‘I hear a lot of things about your unit. It’s been bad – hasn’t it?’

She didn’t answer but felt a hard, cold click in the back of her head at the mention of the unit’s problems.

‘Visits from the chief superintendent, I heard. Professional Standards starting an investigation, are they?’

Flea made her face go light. Pleasant. She folded the wallet and put it back in her pocket. ‘Can’t dwell on past mistakes. We’ve got a job to do. Just like you.’

The cop nodded. He seemed about to say something but must have changed his mind. He put a finger to his cap, turned and walked slowly back to the car. He got in and reversed about ten yards, did a sweeping three-point turn, and drove back up through the gates. The car slowed a little as he passed Flea’s car, hidden in the bushes. He gave it a good look over, then put his foot down and was gone.

She stood, motionless, the rain pouring down on her.

I hear a lot of things about your unit . . . It’s been bad – hasn’t it?

She shivered, zipped up her jacket and looked around at the deserted quarry. The rain dripped down her cheeks like tears. No one had said anything about the unit to her face. Not so far. When she tested how it made her feel she was surprised to find the truth. It hurt that the team was in trouble. Something solid in her chest buckled a bit. Something that had been put there at the same time as she’d hidden the corpse in the cave. She took a breath, pulled the solid thing back together. Held it in tight. Kept breathing slow and sure until the feeling went away.