

SKIN

MO HAYDER



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1

Human skin is an organ. The biggest organ in the body, it comprises the dermis, the epidermis and a subcutaneous fatty layer. If it were to be removed intact and spread out it would cover an area just under two square metres. It has weight too: with all that protein and adherent fat, it has enormous bulk. The skin of a healthy adult male would weigh ten to fifteen kilos, depending on his size. The same as a large toddler.

The skin of a woman, on the other hand, would weigh marginally less. It would cover a smaller area too.

Most middle-aged men, even the ones who live alone in a remote part of Somerset, wouldn't have given any thought to what a woman would look like without her skin. Neither would they have cause to wonder what her skin would look like stretched and pinned out on a workbench.

But, then, most men are not like this man.

This man is a different sort of person altogether.

2

Deep in the rain-soaked Mendip Hills of Somerset lie eight flooded limestone quarries. Long disused, they have been numbered by the owners from one to eight, and are arranged in a horseshoe shape. Number eight, at the most south-easterly point, nearly touches the end of what is called locally the Elf's Grotto system, a network of dripping caves and passages that reach deep into the ground. Local folklore has it there are secret exits from this cave system leading into the old Roman lead mines, that in ancient times the elves of Elf's Grotto used the tunnels as escape routes. Some say that because of all the twentieth-century blasting, these tunnels now open directly into the flooded quarries.

Sergeant 'Flea' Marley, the head of Avon and Somerset's underwater search unit, slid into quarry number eight at just after four on a clear May afternoon. She wasn't thinking about secret entrances. She wasn't looking for holes in the wall. She was thinking about a woman who'd been missing for three days. The woman's name was Lucy Mahoney, and the professionals on the surface believed

her corpse might be down here, somewhere in this vast expanse of water, curled in the weeds on one of these ledges.

Flea descended to ten metres, wiggling her jaw from side to side to equalize the pressure in her ears. At this depth the water was an eerie, almost petrol blue – just the faintest milky limestone dust hanging where her fins had stirred it up. Perfect. Usually the water she dived was ‘nil vis’ – like swimming through soup, everything having to be done by touch alone – but down here she could see at least three metres ahead. She moved away from her entry point, handholding herself along the quarry wall until the pressure on her lifeline was constant. She could see every detail, every wafting plant, every quarried boulder on the floor. Every place a body might have come to rest.

‘Sarge?’ PC Wellard, her surface attendant, spoke into the comms mike. His voice came into her ear as if he was standing right next to her. ‘See anything?’

‘Yes,’ she murmured. ‘Into the future.’

‘Eh?’

‘I can see into the future, Wellard. I see me coming out of here in an hour freezing cold. I see disappointment on everyone’s face that I’m empty-handed.’

‘How come?’

‘Dunno. Just don’t think she’s down here. It feels wrong. How long’s she been missing?’

‘Two and a half days.’

‘And her car. Where was it parked?’

‘Half a mile away. On the B3135.’

‘They thought she was depressed?’

‘Her ex was interviewed for the misper report. He’s adamant she wasn’t.’

‘And there’s nothing else linking her to the quarry? No belongings? She’d not been here before or anything?’

‘No.’

Flea finned on, the umbilical lead – the air and communication line that linked her to the surface – trailing gently behind. Quarry number eight was a notorious suicide spot. Maybe the police search adviser, Stuart Pearce, disagreed with the family about Lucy Mahoney’s state of mind. Maybe that was why he’d put this particular pin in the map and detailed them to do this search. Either that or he was grasping at straws. She’d encountered Stuart Pearce before. She thought it was the latter.

‘Could she swim, Wellard? I forgot to ask.’

‘Yeah. She was a good swimmer.’

‘Then if she’s a suicide she’ll have weighted herself down. A rucksack or something. Which means she’ll be near the edge. Let’s run this pendulum search pattern out to ten metres. No way she’ll be further out than that. Then we’ll switch to the other side of the quarry.’

‘Uh, Sarge, there’s a problem with that. You do that pattern and it’ll take you to deeper than fifty metres.’

Wellard had the quarry schematic. Flea had already studied it surfaceside. When the quarry company had made finger-shaped holes to pack explosives they’d used ten-metre-long drills, which meant that the quarry, before they’d turned off the pumps and allowed it to flood, had been blasted away in ten-metre slices. At one end it was

between twenty and thirty metres. At the other end it was deeper. It dropped to more than fifty metres. The Health and Safety Executive's rules were clear: no police diver was cleared to dive deeper than fifty. Ever.

'Sarge? Did you hear me? You'll be down to fifty metres at the end of this arc. Maybe more.'

She cleared her throat. 'Did you eat all the banana bread?'

'Eh?'

That morning before work she'd baked banana bread for the team. It wasn't the sort of thing she usually did. She was the boss but she'd never been mumsy with them – she was the second youngest, only Wellard was younger. And it wasn't because she loved cooking either. They'd had a bad, bad time recently: one of them was on compassionate leave and probably wouldn't be back after what he'd gone through earlier that week. And then there'd been her foul moods, too: a nightmare to live with for the last two years. She had to give them something in return every now and then.

'We ate it. But, Sarge, some of those pockets are way over fifty deep. We're supposed to get one of those maniac techie divers in to do something like this.'

'Whose side are you on, Wellard? Ours or the HSE's?'

Silence. Or, rather, the sound of Wellard's silent grumbling. When it came to being an old woman Wellard had the whole team beat hands down. 'OK. But if you're going to do it I'm turning this voice panel down. The whole quarry can hear you and we've got a viewing gallery today.'

‘Who?’

‘There’s a traffic unit cruised by to get a look, sitting up there on the grout dunes. Think they’re having their coffee.’

‘I don’t suppose the audience includes that tit of a search adviser, does it?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Nice,’ she said, sarcastic now. ‘Just, it’s sometimes considered etiquette for the search adviser to get his arse out of bed when he’s hauled a team out like this.’

She slowed. In the darkening water ahead a net was slung across her path. Beyond it was the fifty-metre section, where the water was darker and bluer. Colder. It was such uncertain territory that the company had rigged up netting to prevent access to the recreational divers who sometimes used the quarry for practice. She gripped the net, clicked on her divelight and shone it through to where the quarry floor dropped precipitously away.

She might have had only one previous encounter with Pearce but it was enough. She wasn’t going to let him get one up on her. Even if it meant breaking all her professional rules and going deeper than fifty, she was damned if she wasn’t going to complete the search. There was a sign set in concrete to her right, the words covered in algae. *Danger: depths exceeding fifty metres. Random checks on dive computers are in force in this quarry. Do not dive beyond your capabilities.*

Good place to hang your dive computer, she thought, touching the sign. Just take your wrist unit off, hang it on one of the nails, then collect it on the way back up. No one

checking later would be any the wiser that you'd gone deeper than fifty, and the surface unit didn't generate a computerized dive record. It was the sort of trick Dad had pulled when he was alive. An extreme-sports diver, he'd do anything to push the limits, get to the depth he wanted to be.

She used her dive knife to make a cut in the netting, then carefully slipped off her dive computer and hooked it on to the sign. Switching on her torch she slid through into the enclosure, following the beam down into the darkness.

With her compass lubber line set hard against the north-west notch she began to swim down, down and down, following the lie of the rock, keeping about two metres from the bottom. Wellard paid out the lifeline behind her. The schematic was accurate – it was deep here. She went slowly, letting the torch guide her, doing sums in her head. No computer. She'd have to work out bottom times and decompression stops in her head.

A movement in the dark to her right. She whipped the torch towards it and stared into the beam, keeping herself steady in the water, letting herself float horizontally. There weren't any fish in quarry number eight. It had been flooded for years now and the company hadn't introduced any stock. No nearby rivers so there probably wouldn't even be crayfish. And, anyway, that movement hadn't been a fish. It had been too big.

Her heart beat low in her chest. She kept her breathing steady – too deep and she'd start to rise, too shallow and she'd lose buoyancy. Nothing should, or could, be moving down here: there were no currents in the quarry.

Everything should be motionless. She began to swim towards where she'd seen the movement.

'Sarge?' Surfaceside, Wellard had noticed the diversion instantly. 'Everything OK?'

'Yeah, yeah. Give me another bar.'

As she went deeper it was Wellard's job, as the panel operator, to increase the pressure of the air reaching her down the umbilical lead. She turned and shone the torch behind her, trying to see how far back the netting was. She was probably at about forty-seven metres deep and still going down. Just another three metres to the HSE limit. 'Yeah – up it to sixteen.'

'Sixteen bar? That'll put you at—'

'I know what it'll put me at. Let me worry about it, not you.'

She swam on, her hands out now because she wasn't sure what she was going to see. Forty-eight metres, forty-nine. She was at the place where the movement had been.

'Sarge? Do you know what depth you're at?'

'Just hold it,' she whispered. 'Hold me steady.'

She turned the torch upwards and looked up. It was uncomfortable with her mask wanting to lift off and let water in. She pressed it to her face with her fingertips and stared into the effervescent silvery stream of bubbles marching determinedly above her in a long column – up towards a surface that was too far away to see. Something was in that column. She was sure of it. Something dark was swimming up through the procession of darkness and air. A shiver went through her. Were those the naked soles of someone's feet?

‘Sarge – that’s it. You’re over fifty. Can you hear me?’

‘Hey, Wellard,’ she whispered, looking up to where the bubbles had cleared now, dispersed into nothing but frosty jags of light. Now, suddenly, everything looked as it should. The water was empty. ‘Is there anyone else in here?’

‘Anyone else?’

‘Yeah,’ she hissed, not wanting to sound scared. She hoped he’d turned the comms panel down. Didn’t want her voice broadcast across the water to every person on the quarryside. ‘Is anyone swimming around in here with me? You’d have seen them getting in.’

There was a pause, a hesitation. Then the voice, a little cautious. ‘Boss? You know you’re well over, don’t you? Maybe it’s time to put the standby in.’

Narcosis, he meant. At this depth it would be easy to succumb to the disorienting, poisonous effect that nitrogen could have at high pressure – her reactions and thoughts were as they’d be if she’d been in the pub all afternoon. A hallucination like this would be classic narcosis stuff. She stared up after the bubbles. It had been something dark, the size of a large turtle. But not with a shell. It was something smooth and hairless, with agility and strength. With the feet of a human being.

‘I’m not narked, Wellard, I swear. I’m fine. Just reassure me there’s no one else swimming around down here. That’s all.’

‘There’s no one in there. OK? And the standby’s getting ready now.’

‘No.’ Her umbilical had snagged on a ledge or a rock

behind her. Irritably she lifted her shoulders, waved her right hand in the air to free it and felt it pop easily away from the rock or ledge, freeing her. ‘No need for anyone else. I’m nearly done here anyway.’

Wellard was right, of course. If this was narcosis she should get out. But she wanted one more minute to check that she’d searched everything, so, tilting herself back down, liking the way it eased the pressure on her mask, she pointed the torch ahead. There, about ten yards away, was the bottom of the wall, the edge of the quarry. She’d come as far as she could and there wasn’t any doubt about it: Lucy Mahoney wasn’t here. Good. She’d been right. She was going to enjoy surfacing and sending Pearce the message that he’d been wrong.

The rubber seals of her mask sucked tight against her face. And locked.

She groped at the mask. Tried to take a breath. Nothing came, just more tightening of the seals and a familiar pressure under her sternum. She knew this feeling well from all her training sessions. No air was getting through. She fumbled at the side of the mask above her right ear. This wasn’t going to be a problem. The surface crew were pumping air down to her – she couldn’t run out. But just occasionally the umbilical got tangled with the positive/negative pressure lever on the mask and cut off the supply. It was easy to solve. If you kept calm. Easy.

Heart thudding she found the lever, flicked it down and went for another breath. Her ribs tried. Wouldn’t inflate. Quickly she snapped the lever back down.

Nothing.

Up. Nothing.

‘Sarge?’ Wellard sounded panicky. ‘What’s going on? What’s happening?’

But there was no air in her lungs to answer. Her arms were aching. Her head was pounding as if it had swollen to twice its size. Someone could have been standing on her chest. Her head jerked back, her mouth gaped. She groped for the switch block on the side of her vest. Tried to get her air supply to transfer to the Scuba bail-out system.

‘Sarge? I’ve opened all my valves but there’s air haemorrhaging from somewhere. Have you got pressure?’

She knew what would be happening up there. The standby diver would be fumbling himself into his equipment, getting his fingers tangled in the mask spiders in his panic, forgetting everything. Legs like jelly. He wouldn’t be in time for her. She had seconds left, not minutes.

Numbly she batted at the switchblock again. Couldn’t find it. Her head swelled harder and tighter now. Her limbs were tingling.

‘I’m going to have to pull you out, Sarge – having to make assumptions here.’

She’d stopped listening. Time had slowed and it was in a different world – on a distant planet – that Wellard was pulling frantically at the lifeline, dragging her out. She knew her limp body was jerking backwards in the water. She felt her fingers lose their grip on the torch, felt it bump lazily against her leg as it sank. She didn’t try to stop it.

In the gloom, about ten metres away, something that looked like a white jellyfish had appeared. Not the same thing she’d hallucinated earlier, but something else,

something that billowed, moving up and down in eerie corkscrew shapes, like a cloud of hair. It seemed to hover, buffeted by unseen currents, as if it had been on its way somewhere – to the bottom maybe – but had stopped its descent to watch her. As if it was interested in what was happening. Interested in her struggle.

The top of the shape lifted, seemed to lengthen and slip out into long, tendril-like hair and now she knew what she was looking at.

Mum.

Mum, who had been dead for two years. The long blonde hair that she'd always kept in a knot at the back of her neck lifted and wallowed in the gloom, wafting around her face.

'Wake up, Flea. Look after yourself.'

Flea didn't answer. She wasn't capable. In the real world her body had tilted on to its side and was twitching like a fish with a broken swim bladder.

'Look after yourself.'

Mum turned in the water, her small white hands propelling her body around so her head was facing Flea's, her hair floating in a cloud around her, her thin white legs trailing like wisps. She came forward until her sweet, pale face was close up to Flea's, her hands on her shoulders. 'Listen.' Her voice was sharp. 'Wake up. Now. Look after yourself.'

She shook her, and when Flea didn't respond, she closed her fingers around her hand, moved her fingers across and flicked the lever on the switching block to SCUBA.

Air flooded the mask. Her lungs inflated in one blast

and her head shot back. Light poured into her eyes. Another breath. She threw her arms out and coughed, the air dry in her parched lungs. Another breath, panicky, feeling her heart beat again, feeling blood hammer in her temples. And another. Flailing blindly, the equipment gauges, the emergency sports valve bobbing around her like tentacles as she righted herself in the water. In Wellard's panic he'd pulled her along the bottom. Silt had come up and was billowing around her like smoke. She hung limply in the milky water, letting him bump her along the wall.

Mum?

But the water rushed past her and all she could hear was Wellard's frantic voice screaming into the communications panel. 'Are you there, Sarge? Answer me, for Christ's sake.'

'I'm OK.' She coughed. 'You can stop dragging me now.'

He let go the tension on the line abruptly and she came to a halt. She floated face down, still holding the bail-out toggle, staring into the place where Mum had been. The water was empty. It had been another hallucination.

She began to tremble. She'd been close. She'd broken the HSE's rules, she'd cocked up an emergency procedure and the whole team had heard her going into narcosis. She'd even bloody wet herself in the process. She could feel it running down the inside of her thermals.

But it didn't matter. It really didn't matter. She was alive. Alive. And she was going to stay that way.

3

Bristol's Major Crime Investigation Unit was dealing with one of the most notorious cases it had ever known. Until a few days ago Misty Kitson had been a B-list celebrity, known only to the nation as another footballer's wife who'd put enough cocaine up her nose to destroy it from the inside out, collapsing the septum. For months the press had been scrambling to get pictures of her nose. Now they were scrambling to find out what had happened to her on the day she'd walked out of a rehab unit on the other side of Somerset, never to be seen again.

The countryside around the clinic had been searched: the police had ripped open every house, every wood, every livestock barn within a two-mile radius. It was unprecedented: the biggest land-based search the force had ever conducted and it had turned up nothing. No body. No clue. Misty Kitson seemed to have vanished into thin air.

The public were fascinated by the mystery, and by the unit handling the investigation. They pictured MCIU as an

élite team: a group of dedicated, experienced men, pouring every ounce of energy into the case. They pictured the men clearing their heads and their lives for the case, dedicating themselves to the hunt. On the whole they were right: the officers on the case were one hundred per cent committed to finding Misty.

All, that was, except one.

Just *one* man was having problems concentrating on Misty. One man found that, no matter what he was supposed to be doing, what time he was supposed to be giving to finding Misty Kitson, the only place his head would go was backwards. Backwards to another case, one he'd worked on the previous week. A case he was supposed to have put away and moved on from.

That man was Detective Inspector Jack Caffery.

Inspector Caffery was new to MCIU, but he had almost twenty years of experience, most of it on the murder squad in London's Metropolitan Police. In all that time he'd never had trouble letting go of a case.

But, then, he'd never had a case that had scared him.

Not in the way Operation Norway had.

At eight thirty a.m. on the morning after Flea's accident, at the other side of town from quarry number eight, Caffery sat in his darkened office in the MCIU building at Kingswood. The blinds were down, the door was locked. He was watching a DVD.

It showed two men in the unlit room of a derelict squat. Both were white. Both were under thirty. One wore a zipped-up S-and-M leather hood and was naked to the waist. The camera sat steady on him as he took some time

to prepare tools and show them to the camera. This man was twenty-nine. The other man was also naked to the waist, but he hadn't chosen to be dressed like that. He was unconscious, drugged and lying strapped to a bench. He didn't move. Not until the hooded man moved the hacksaw to his neck. Then he moved. He moved a lot. He was just nineteen.

This video was infamous throughout the force. The press knew it existed and would have done anything to get a glimpse of it. It showed the death and near decapitation of Jonah Dundas. Caffery had arrived in that room just minutes too late to save him. Most officers who'd worked Operation Norway insisted on keeping the sound turned down if they had to watch the video. Not Caffery. For Caffery the soundtrack was another place to search for answers.

He let it run through to the place where he'd arrived and the hooded man had fled. Then he skipped back to the beginning, to the part he was interested in: the first five minutes when Dundas had spent time alone in the room, strapped to the bench, before the hooded man began the beheading. Caffery pressed the headphones to his ears and shuffled forward in his seat, his face close to the screen.

The name 'Operation Norway' was arbitrary. The case had had nothing to do with Norway, the country, and everything to do with Africa. The hooded man – 'Uncle', as they called him – had been running a scheme among the African community in Bristol. Through greed, sadism and chance he'd tapped into the community's ancient belief, called loosely '*muti*', or African black magic, that some

parts of the human body could be used to treat certain medical and spiritual conditions. Over the last ten years there had been just eight cases like this in the whole of Europe and for the British police it was uncharted territory, but what they had learnt was that a human head, the head of a young man, especially one that had been removed when the victim was alive, would fetch a huge amount of money in some circles. That had been Dundas's misfortune.

Operation Norway was broken apart before the head could be trafficked on and the police had arrested two people: the hooded man, who was local, and an illegal African immigrant, who'd been teaching him the customs, helping him to open up a network of customers for his merchandise. The African was in custody now, still trying to convince the police that his name was Johnny Brown and that he held a British passport. They'd searched him and found he was carrying a key fob with the Tanzanian national flag on it and that the T-shirt he was wearing was by a Tanzanian manufacturer, so MCIU was combing records from Dar Es Salaam to get a hit on him.

'What's all this?' Superintendent Rolf Powers, the head of MCIU, opened the door at ten past nine. 'No lights? It's like my teenage son's bedroom in here.' He switched on the fluorescents. 'Where were you? I've just done a whole press conference on the Kitson case without you.'

Caffery froze the DVD and rotated the monitor to face the superintendent. 'Look at this.'

Powers did so. Frowned. 'That's Operation Norway.'

We've finished with that. The files should be with the prosecution service by the end of the month.'

'Watch this.' Caffery tapped the screen. 'It's important.'

Powers closed the door and came in. He was tall, wide and well dressed, and must have been athletic once. The lifestyle had taken its toll, though, and his body was spreading around the middle, the neck. He put the wallet he was holding on the desk and pulled the chair up to the screen.

The freeze frame of Dundas alone in the room before the attack showed another shape, standing close to Dundas's head, its back to the camera. It was bent over, concentrating on doing something. After the arrests, when they'd got Dundas's head to the morgue and examined it, they'd discovered that clumps of his hair were missing. In the same place on which the figure in the video was concentrating now.

Powers shook his head. 'It's the Tanzanian, Johnny Brown, or whatever he's really called. The one we've got in the bin.'

'It's not him. He's lying.'

'Jack, the little shit's 'fessed to it about a thousand times. Straight cough – said he cut Dundas's hair, wanted to make some voodoo bracelet with it. And if it's not him, then who the hell is it? The support group emptied that place out, raked the place clean. There was no one. And no way out.'

Caffery stared at the shape on screen. No one who'd seen the video had ever stated the obvious: that the figure on the screen didn't look quite human. 'No,' he said. 'It's

not him. I had the guys in the custody suite measure him. He's five four. Short, but not this short. The camera was set at exactly one metre fifty high and was two metres from the table. I've looked at the CSI plans. Johnny Brown would have stood here.' He pointed at a place on the screen. 'More than a head taller. And look at those shoulders. There's something wrong there, seriously wrong.'

'They dressed him up – he admitted it. They sent him out to scare people into buying their voodoo crap. Pretty crude beliefs, these people have – not that those exact words ever came out of *my* mouth, of course.'

Caffery stared at him stonily. 'How'd they "dress" someone up to look like that? Look at it.'

'Prosthetics. Lighting.'

'There weren't any prosthetics when we searched the place. And Brown didn't have Dundas's hair on him when they took him in, did he?'

'Says he tossed it. And call me slow, call me a woollie, or however you Met people refer to us, but out here in the boonies someone 'fesses up to something like that, we kind of find it easier just to go ahead and believe him. No.' His voice was suddenly efficient. 'No, Jack. Let's pretend we haven't had this conversation. Operation Norway is over, OK?' He stood. Pushed the wallet he was carrying across the desk to Caffery. 'This is where the chief wants our time spent. This is the case I'm taking the beta-blockers for now. Open it.'

Caffery did. It contained six eight-by-ten glossies. Photos of clothing laid out next to a measuring tape.

Women's clothing. A dress. A pair of high-heeled sandals. A purple velvet coat. A silver mobile. 'Misty Kitson?'

'Of course. These are reproductions of what she was wearing. We've circulated them force-wide. Every person in every office across the force is going to have a copy of these pinned above their workstation by this evening, so even if they don't read the papers or watch the telly they'll've heard of her.' Powers went to the map on the wall, put his hands in his pockets and studied it. 'I can't fathom it. I really can't. A two-mile radius, the biggest search I've ever seen in the force, every inch gone over and we haven't turned up a *thing*. Not a sausage and— Christ, you're not listening to a word I'm saying. Are you?'

Caffery was sitting forward, staring at the post-mortem photograph of Dundas pinned up on the wall, at the way his hair had been clipped.

Powers picked up a photograph of Misty's clothes and stuck it, pointedly, over the one of Dundas. 'Jack, you've got three DSs and four DCs out there waiting to hear what you want them to do. *They* all want to find her.'

Caffery opened his drawer and pulled out the photographs of another post-mortem that had taken place two nights ago. It had come to him yesterday on the Centrex Guardian database and had everything he needed. He got up and pinned it over the photo of Misty Kitson's clothing.

'Ben Jakes. Twenty years old. Student at Bristol University. Can't face his exams, girlfriend leaves him, ends up with a penknife and a case of *wkd reds*. Down in the Elf's Grotto area. It's pretty there. You can see the lights of Bristol. Very popular suicide spot.'

‘What’s that got to do with anything?’

‘His phone was missing – still hasn’t been found. He’d been robbed. Roommate said he had money, a twenty at least, plus cards, never been used. Even sandwiches in his rucksack. They were gone. Oh, and he was naked.’

‘Stripped off to kill himself? What was it? A full moon?’

‘No. The thief took the clothes too. At first the officer in charge had it down as a murder. It was in the “too hard for district” file for a while, even flagged up on a watch-list for us, until the PM came back as suicide. The clothes came off him more than twenty-four hours after he died, says the coroner. Plus the other evidence – depression. No one’s got any doubt it was a suicide; even his parents said they’d half expected it. But this is what I want you to look at.’

Powers took off his glasses and peered at the photograph.

‘See it? His hair?’

‘It’s been cut.’

‘Shaved. Remind you of anything?’

Powers frowned again. He took the photograph off the wall and turned it over. It was stamped by the Audio-Visual unit at Portishead. ‘Where did you say it happened?’

‘Quarry number eight. Down near Elf’s Grotto.’

‘And it’s the hair that’s the important factor? Because it’s the same as what happened to Dundas?’

‘The same person did it. The marks are almost identical.’

‘So?’

Caffery gave him a grim smile. ‘The pathologist, being

a pathologist, is typically vague about when Jakes died. But he's admitted that whoever rolled up and stole his clothes did it a minimum of six hours after death – there's livor mortis to prove that. The roommate says it's six a.m. when Jakes leaves his room. We don't know how he gets to the quarry but it's got to take at least an hour, probably more, assuming he doesn't stop on the way, which gives us seven a.m., so our thief has to come along at one p.m. at the *absolute* earliest. Meanwhile Brown was in that place,' he jabbed a finger at the screen, 'at two that afternoon. I saw the bastard with my own eyes. Can you really see him cruising out to the quarry, shaving Jakes's head and winging it back to the other side of Bristol within an hour?'

'I take it these are on the quiet, these timings the pathologist's given you. I can't picture him writing any of those in the report. They *never* commit when it comes to time of death.'

'You're right. But I don't need his say-so. Vodaphone coughed up Jakes's phone records. They showed calls made on his mobile at eight p.m. that night. Brown had been in custody for five hours by then.'

Powers lifted the blind and glanced outside. One or two reporters had taken up permanent residence outside since the Kitson case had come to MCIU. He stared at them for a while. Then he dropped the blind and gave his DI a long look. 'Jesus Christ,' he said. 'What do you want from me?'

'A week. A week on this. Give me two men and a week off from the Kitson case. I want to know how Brown cut

Ben Jakes's hair when he was twenty miles away at the time. I want to know what he wanted the hair bracelet for. And . . .'

'And?'

'And I want to know what prosthetics you'd have to use to make a human being look like *that*.'