
Prologue

She shoved the pushbike behind the hedgerow, checking to make sure it wasn't visible from the road. She felt hot, despite the damp autumn air, and her heart thumped rapidly beneath her sweater, but this was solely due to the exertion of pedalling uphill, and nothing to do with the job she had to carry out.

A narrow, winding lane fifty yards down the hill led to the club, and was the only way to reach the place by car, but on foot there was a track that peeled off from a public footpath through woodland that backed on to the building. Despite it being early November, the trees still had an abundance of brightly coloured foliage. A morning mist hung in the air as she made her way through the autumn mulch.

The rucksack felt heavy, but within ten minutes she had reached the clearing at the back of the club; she made a dash to the rear of the building and hid behind

a stack of empty beer crates. Briskly she swapped her damp canvas Dunlops for a pair of red heels from the rucksack – not too grand, just a couple of inches for effect – and whipped off her baggy sweater, revealing a tiny white top that left little to the imagination. After deftly pinning back her auburn hair she produced from the bag a platinum-blond wig. She used a small compact mirror to check it was straight; satisfied, she snapped it shut and slipped it back inside a red, sequin-studded handbag, next to a Beretta automatic pistol and a lipstick.

Having wedged the rucksack tightly between the stacked crates she slid silently round to the front of the building. Nobody was about. Now it was showtime. She confidently rapped on the door. She made an effort to focus her mind on the job in hand, but really this was a trifle, for the money only, and if anything, her mind was on her next task, something more personal, something she simply had to do before her final bunk to Spain. That detective. When so many of her own had died or been maimed – all thanks to *him* – it was unacceptable for him to still live. She knew he was looking for her, determined to bring in the last of the gang, but it wasn't fear of capture that fuelled her desire to exterminate him, it was revenge, pure and simple. Yes, there was only one way for her to find peace of mind: she had to kill Jack Frost.

The door was opened by a goofy young lad of little more than eighteen. He squinted at the bright morning

light, but once his eyes had adjusted they goggled at the sight of her provocative appearance.

“Ello, can I ’elp?”

‘I’m sure you can, love,’ she purred, seductively. ‘I’m here to see Harry.’

Thursday (1)

There was a freshness to the early November morning, and drizzle hung in the air, but a tepid sun was starting to peek through the vast bank of grey and allow the wet headstones to glisten. Stanley Mullett, the superintendent of the Denton police division at Eagle Lane, shifted his weight uneasily in the wet grass. There was no denying it, he felt uncomfortable standing by the graveside of a woman he didn't know. It didn't help that she was the wife of a detective sergeant he could hardly bear to be in the same room with, and would willingly dismiss at the drop of a hat if he could. But duty was duty.

Mullett glanced surreptitiously at the Rolex his wife had given him last month for his fiftieth birthday. Eleven thirty. The church had been cold and draughty, and now the moisture from the sodden grass was starting to penetrate the leather of his highly polished

Loakes, but Mullett knew that his discomfort and inconvenience was far from over. There was the wake to follow. Yes, he thought, almost the whole day will be given up to Mary Frost. The vicar's voice floated over the remaining mist, a suitably ethereal backdrop to the ample crowd of mourners at the graveside. The deceased's immediate family stood solemnly beside the casket: elegant mother, respectable-looking father, well-dressed sister and new husband. And to the side, a pace removed, the widower, Detective Sergeant William 'Jack' Frost.

Frost was barely recognizable in his smart attire of black tie and heavy overcoat, and though it hadn't occurred to him to shave, his unruly, sandy-coloured hair for once had a side-parting chiselled into it. These superficial fineries of mourning served to heighten the changes in Frost that even Mullett had noticed develop towards the end of his wife's illness – the weight loss, the sunken eyes, the greyish complexion. Mullett sniffed contemptuously; though not wholly unsympathetic, he couldn't help but think that Frost had contributed to his own bad luck.

Alongside the DS were his Eagle Lane chums: the overweight DC Hanlon, Frost's pal of many years who knew the region inside out, though in reality added little to the department beyond acting as Frost's driver; and next to him, good old Desk Sergeant Bill Wells, always dependable but failing the CID entrance exams with stoic consistency. Mullett observed how Frost appeared closer to these oddballs than to his

own in-laws; it seemed that along with the other CID rabble, Waters, Clarke and Simms, they formed Frost's real family. The superintendent reflected sadly that sacrificing family ties for the sake of the job hadn't done much to make Frost a better policeman. Or perhaps it wasn't such a sacrifice. Mullett shivered as Frost suddenly caught his eye with a look suggesting he could read his mind.

The vicar finished his prayer and the casket was lowered slowly into the ground, as gracefully as was possible. Mullett glanced again at Mary's relatives; the two women, now in tears, huddled together, whereas the father remained stiff and resolute. A white-haired man in his late sixties, he suddenly appeared familiar. Where had Mullett seen him before?

Behind the front row of mourners, he noticed a number of Denton dignitaries – a bank manager, the mayor, the local MP. What on earth were they doing here? Frost's wife hadn't worked, hadn't done much at all as far as he could make out. The father was a City banker, unlikely to be on close terms with the local worthies. Surely they couldn't be here on Frost's account? Or had Mullett misjudged Frost's popularity? He'd always assumed he rubbed the town's back up as much as he did his own. So what was the connection?

The alarm clock sounded, but Detective Constable Sue Clarke was only half asleep anyway. After a nocturnal stake-out she only ever managed to doze. She reached to shut off the buzzer then realized it wasn't the alarm

but the electronic telephone. Christ, she felt groggy. It was hardly surprising; having returned to her poky flat just before 7 a.m., she had made the mistake of pouring herself a large glass of Blue Nun. The bottle was a birthday present from her mother and had sat there unopened for over a month, but having just spent eight hours lying in a field of stinging nettles she'd been desperate for something to numb the itch. Clarke thought the whole operation a waste of time; she had spent three nights on the look-out for stolen electrical goods being shunted through an old warehouse out at Rainham, in the back of beyond. The station was understaffed, and those who opted for extra shifts were paid overtime, so she'd been fairly amenable – until now. DS Waters, who was looking to move out of police digs, had done the same and had been on a similarly unrewarding stake-out. The wine had seemed to help, but halfway through a second glass she was struck by a powerful wave of nausea and rushed to the bathroom to throw up.

It was now getting on for midday. Clarke picked up the telephone.

'Hello?' she croaked, reaching for a glass of water and not finding one.

'Didn't wake you, did I, love?' It was the tired but kindly voice of Night Sergeant Johnny Johnson.

'It's all right, Johnny, I was just dozing. What's up?'

'It's just you're the only one . . .'

Everyone else from CID was at Mary Frost's funeral. In the meantime the station was being manned by a

skeleton staff including Johnson, who'd accepted a double shift.

'It's fine, honestly.' She scratched beneath the covers at a nettle sting. 'What's up?'

'Nev Sanderson, the old farmer, found something unpleasant while out on his tractor.'

Fields again. Hell, no. The last thing she wanted to do right now was tramp across a farmer's field.

'I'm sorry?' She yawned, fearing she'd not taken in a word he'd said. 'What was it he found?'

'A *foot*. He found a human foot.'

Harry Baskin smelt bad, he knew it. He stank so bad that no amount of cigar smoke would mask it, although he was giving it his best try. He grunted behind the desk, and poured himself half a tumbler of Scotch. The little card game he'd run through the night was a brilliant wheeze, although he knew that having it on a Wednesday, with the busiest nights of the week still in front of him, would take its toll. But times were hard, he mused to himself, and recession meant you had to work all the harder, to squeeze out every penny from the punters, and get them in beyond the usual Friday and Saturday, even if it meant the hassle of staying up all night, and at his age too. He grunted to himself. Who was he kidding? He might tell the wife it was a hardship, and an economic necessity, but in truth it was just an excuse to stay out gambling and boozing with his pals. He looked down at the pile of banknotes and sniggered again.

Suddenly a sharp knock on the door disturbed him from his thoughts. 'Come!' he rasped. The jug-eared youth poked his head in. 'The girl's here, boss.'

'Which girl, Cecil?' Baskin scratched his expansive midriff. The pain in his lower gut had started to niggle again.

'The stripper, boss.' Stripper? He couldn't recall fixing to see a stripper. Reaching inside his tonic-suit jacket he yanked out another wad of notes, which flopped with a soft sigh on to the desk. Grinning smugly at the sight, he leaned down to open the safe beneath the desk; best not to leave all this cash lying around.

'Remind me, son, what's she like, this bird?'

'Cracker, boss, huge bristols.' The lad puffed out his cheeks.

'Cecil, sunshine, there's more to women than tits. It shouldn't be the first thing you think of,' he admonished with a wagging finger. The boy looked forlorn. 'Never mind, never mind. Where is she?'

'Right here, boss.'

'Well, show her in.'

His words coincided with a deafening blast. Cecil careered across the room. Baskin had barely taken in the sight of the boy sliding down the filing cabinet, blood seeping from his chest, when the pistol swung before him and fired. The big gangster keeled over, banknotes flying through the air like confetti. As he lay slumped on the floor, he thought that Cecil was right; the girl was racked; then everything went black.

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Frost stood in the grand entrance hall of George and Beryl Simpson's luxurious Rimmington home and felt as much connection with his in-laws as would a stranger. Should there not be more of a bond, after the experience they'd shared? He paused for a moment; everyone was here for Mary, his Mary. Theirs had not been the perfect marriage by any stretch, but in his way he knew he had loved her; he couldn't give a monkey's what anyone else thought. At the end he was with her night and day, and he felt they were reconciled; she even teased him about not being able to dress himself without her there. He smiled sadly at the memory.

Now she was gone, and he was rattling around in that house on his own. What would he do? Hell, what did it matter. He felt . . . how did he feel? *Empty*. He went through the open doorway of a large reception room and walked straight to where the drinks were laid out, at the far end of a buffet table, nodding vaguely to one or two guests as he did so. Seizing a cut-glass tumbler he poured three fingers of Scotch and drank swiftly. A sigh escaped his lips.

The last few guests had now arrived and a quiet throng hovered around the finger buffet. Mourners drifted past Frost towards the lounge; he was keen not to engage, affecting a distracted demeanour and avoiding their eye by focusing on *The Horse*, an impressive painting on the far wall at the foot of the staircase.

His reverie was short-lived.

'You might've shaved, William.' Frost could feel the scornful gaze of his mother-in-law upon him. She

put particular emphasis on the first name he avoided using.

He chose to ignore the rebuke. 'Popular girl, our Mary,' he replied instead, but the word 'our' jarred uncomfortably. He surveyed the bustle of guests, of whom only a fraction were familiar.

'Yes, there were plenty who loved her.' Beryl Simpson observed him with cold eyes and exhaled cigarette smoke. 'What will you do now?' she asked, the remark carrying as much concern as if she were enquiring which entrée he'd chosen.

'Oh, I'll be fine.' He said it to himself as much as in response to her question. His attention had already wandered. Who was that chatting to his brother-in-law, Mary's sister's husband, Julian? Some strange, swaggering, foreign type who stood out a mile among the ordinary Joes gathered here. Nobody from Denton wore a cravat. Apart from Julian Brazier himself, of course, but then he was a used-car salesman. Together they looked a right pair of Noddies . . .

Beryl Simpson sighed. 'Of course you will.' Abruptly she turned, and with a steadfast clip-clop of heels across the chequered marble floor she made off towards the drinks, leaving a cloud of smoke and a faint trace of perfume in her wake.

'Suit yourself,' Frost muttered, patting himself down for cigarettes. Then he remembered that the pockets didn't work on this cheap black Marks 'n' Sparks suit. He'd only worn it once before, at his mother's funeral less than a year ago. And now Mary was gone. He was

truly alone in the world – quite a depressing state of affairs if he stopped to think about it. So he wouldn't. End of. He went in pursuit of his mother-in-law to cadge a cigarette.

Superintendent Mullett, sipping his sherry, watched the exchange between Frost and Beryl Simpson. He wondered what they could be talking about. The Frosts' marriage had been in tatters – that fact was common knowledge (although Mullett himself was one of the last to find out, being rather crudely so informed by his secretary on hearing of Mary Frost's passing). It was a bit late, but maybe the detective was penitent in some peculiar way? He did seem a shadow of his former self, and looked slight standing next to the haughty older woman. Mullett hadn't yet spoken to her, but something in her bearing exuded a certain class. Plus there was the quality of the domicile; situated in the most expensive street in Rimmington, its decor was worthy of a glossy interiors magazine. The paintings alone must be worth more than the Mullett residence in its entirety. How could the Simpson girl have married so far beneath her station? What had she been thinking? Frost wouldn't know a Stubbs from a—

'Superintendent Mullett?' The departed's father had unexpectedly sidled up.

'Yes, indeed,' Mullett said stiffly. 'Very sorry for your loss.'

The old fellow sighed through a neatly trimmed, whitening moustache. 'Yes, yes.'

Mullett was struck again by the sense of familiarity. Where the blazes had he seen him before? Wait, was it . . .

‘Yes, I thought it was you,’ said Simpson in a low voice. ‘Although, we haven’t seen you square . . .’

‘*Square?*’ Of course, the Lodge. George Simpson was a Freemason. That would explain the score of town dignitaries at the funeral. Having made the link, Mullett was anxious to ingratiate himself further, but before he had the chance the crimson face of Desk Sergeant Bill Wells appeared at his shoulder. Damn. To Mullett’s extreme vexation the Master slipped away.

‘Fine woman, Mary Frost,’ Wells said as the superintendent watched Simpson top up the drinks of various guests, all of whom seemed to give him a knowing glance.

‘I can’t say I knew her,’ Mullett remarked. ‘I thought they . . .’ he began but then curbed his intended comment on the state of the Frosts’ marriage, sensing it might seem inappropriate, and instead said, ‘She was clearly well loved – there’s quite a few here.’

‘Yes,’ Wells concurred. ‘Good family, too. I bet the mother was a looker in her time.’

Mullett glanced again at Beryl Simpson and found himself nodding in agreement; she was trim, attractive even, and clearly took care of herself. Perhaps the coloured hair was in a style too young for her years, but it was a minor blot on what was overall a fine example of the mature English rose. Bitterly he downed his schooner of sherry. How on earth Frost had managed to

worm his way into such a superior family was a mystery, and, of course, staggeringly unfair. But now death had broken the connection, and he regarded it almost as an act of poetic justice.

Thursday (2)

Nev Sanderson pointed authoritatively with a large wooden stick. 'That there is a foot.'

'Yes, Mr Sanderson,' said DC Clarke as she winced, 'I'm inclined to agree.'

She took a tentative step forward, her feet sticking in the mud.

'Do you think you could get your dog away? It won't help the lab if the' – what *was* the right word? It couldn't really be classed as a corpse – '*object* is drenched in dog saliva.'

The Border collie snuffled enthusiastically around the pasty limb as though contemplating taking a bite.

'Fenton, here, boy,' the farmer said half-heartedly. He was swigging from an unmarked bottle she took to contain some form of scrumpy. He certainly had the complexion to match. The dog continued to sniff the

prominent big toe. Sanderson leaned on his stick and smirked.

‘Constable, remove the dog,’ ordered Clarke. She was tired and had no patience for the farmer’s lack of respect. Ridley moved to grab it, but at Sanderson’s slap of his thigh the dog came to heel.

‘Ah,’ Clarke said with some dismay, looking across the field at the SOCOs trudging in the distance and what was likely to be Maltby. Not used to being first on the scene, she desperately needed to make some useful observation before Forensics arrived and disturbed the crime scene irrevocably. Frost always lectured everyone on how important these early moments were, although he qualified this by his own admission that he himself was seldom first anywhere.

‘When did you first see the foot?’

‘I see it from tractor o’er there,’ he said, pointing to the becalmed machine twenty yards away.

‘How? You must have pretty incredible eyesight to have spotted it from that distance.’ Clarke frowned.

‘It were the birds. The gulls. They were fighting over it.’

‘I see. So you didn’t unearth it, then? You’re saying it was sitting on the surface?’

‘I guess so.’ He shrugged, his attention now drawn to the approaching entourage.

Perhaps it was left here last night, she thought. But, why here? And where was the rest of the body – dead or alive?

‘Wait a minute. You said “gulls”. But we’re at least seventy miles from the coast. Are you sure they weren’t crows?’

Sanderson rolled his eyes. ‘I know the difference, ma’am. Reckon maybe they came from the reservoir.’ He nodded towards the horizon. Denton reservoir, yes, of course, although there was nothing to see from this aspect; it was somewhere beyond these acres of softly undulating arable farmland.

‘Yes, perhaps.’ Clarke sighed, struggling for inspiration. Frost also said to take in a crime scene fully before focusing on the body, so as not to be unduly influenced in any way by the sight of the corpse. But this was just a field, and this was just a foot. She stepped forward. Yep, it was a foot, all right. She regarded the naked, lily-white limb, flecked with abrasions. What the hell should she do now? The farmer coughed impatiently.

‘Detective Clarke,’ wheezed a familiar voice.

‘Doctor Maltby.’ She was glad it was someone she knew. Next to him stood a visibly unimpressed young SOCO with a whisper of a moustache.

‘Is that it, then?’ the lad said, looking from Clarke to the foot and back again. Clarke raised her eyebrows and shrugged; she instantly loathed this upstart, pathetic bum-fluff and all.

‘This does not constitute a “body”,’ added Maltby irritably.

‘Well, I didn’t call you,’ Clarke countered defensively, but she was distracted by Sanderson, who had turned his back on them and was making for the tractor.

‘Mr Sanderson, wait . . . Mr Sanderson . . .’ The departing figure paid her no heed.

The Forensics men regarded her expectantly.

‘Well, don’t just stand there,’ she snapped, furious with everyone, including herself. She mustered some latent authority and, raising her voice above the roar of the tractor, shouted, ‘Bag it, then!’

After begging a fag from Beryl Simpson, who quickly moved on to an ancient aunt, Frost found himself standing with the Braziers and the cravat-wearing stranger. Frost groaned inwardly; he didn’t like his brother-in-law at all, never had done. A tall, sort of handsome but smarmy individual with greying, bog-brush hair, Julian Brazier had always irritated the hell out of him.

‘So, Julian . . . how’s business, then?’

‘We’re doing great, aren’t we, Jules?’ Elizabeth, Mary’s less attractive younger sister, cut in. ‘Opening another showroom, here in Denton, aren’t we, darling?’

Frost reached for the nearby Scotch bottle and poured himself another drink. He offered the bottle around, well aware they were drinking wine or sherry.

‘Yes, so I heard. That place on the Bath Road. I nicked the last motor dealer to have it.’ He knew the reference would rile them, but Jesus, ‘showroom’ was an exaggeration even for them; a shabby Portakabin with a forecourt were the sum of it.

‘William, allow me to introduce you to Charles,’ said Brazier, ignoring the remark. ‘Charlie is from France.’

‘Hello, Charlie from France.’ Frost took a limp hand. He knew that the Braziers had friends in France, and Mary had been to stay with them in the Dordogne before she became very ill. ‘It’s very kind of you to come all this way.’

‘He’s come for more than the funeral, Will,’ Brazier said.

‘Yes, my business partner and I have opened an antiques shop in Denton; we opened early last month.’ The Frenchman smiled cordially.

‘Really?’ said Frost, unimpressed. ‘Well, I’m not sure we’ve got the requisite clientele for such’ – Frost searched for the words – ‘overpriced knick-knacks.’ Just then he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder and a blast of hot, boozy breath on his ear. ‘Arthur, say hello to Charlie from France.’

Hanlon lurched forward and winked at the Frenchman. ‘Spain: three–one,’ he chided.

‘Eh?’ Frost said, baffled.

Charles smiled politely at Hanlon’s remark, turned back to Frost and bowed gracefully. ‘I’m sorry for your loss,’ he said before rejoining Brazier, who was deep in conversation with some town official Frost vaguely recognized.

‘What was all that about Spain?’ Frost asked, spearing a cocktail sausage from the buffet table.

‘The World Cup, Jack! You know, football? Just a couple of months back. England trounced the Frogs three–one. Where’ve you been?’ Hanlon guffawed.

‘Hospital, in the main.’ Frost waved away Hanlon’s

sudden embarrassment. 'Well, it wouldn't be the first time we trounced them in Spain. 1812. Salamanca.'

'Not with you, Jack.'

'Not many are, Arthur, not many are,' Frost said, feeling suddenly very alone.

Detective Constable Derek Simms, having dropped off DS Waters in Denton High Street, now found himself snarled up in traffic. He regarded the almost black Georgian buildings that lined the northern perimeter of Market Square; he'd never before stopped to consider how filthy the place was. Perhaps it really was turning into a dump, as his mother constantly bemoaned. Denton's former glory as a very pretty market town seemed a distant shadow, not that he'd remember – his parents always complained how it had been ruined by a splurge of building in the mid 1960s, transforming it into what government officials called a 'new town', the purpose of which was to generate new business and industry. Much of that 'transformation' started and finished with the Southern Housing Estate, a sprawling urban mess of council houses, purpose built for the London over-spill. Twenty years later, Denton's population had swelled and with it a tide of crime and unemployment, but very little in the way of increased prosperity, leaving the town very much the poorer relation to upmarket Rimmington, which remained untouched by the developers' hands. Not that Simms minded. The more crime, the more experience for him and the more fun the job; though he could curse the bleeding traffic.

Given the recession and high unemployment, why were there so many motors on the road?

And he needed a pee, badly. Prior to dropping Waters off the pair had stopped in at the Bird in Hand, to shake off the solemnity of the church service, and to warm up – St Mary’s had been cold as a tomb. They’d reflected on how depressing it all was. Dead at thirty-six. Although, being only twenty-four, thirty seemed old to Derek Simms.

Frost had invited them both back to his in-laws’ house for what by the sounds of it was going to be a full-blown wake, lasting the whole day, but they excused themselves on account of being technically on duty, even though Waters had arranged to see his girlfriend and view a flat. After only six months the pair were moving in together. Jesus, talk about a whirlwind romance. Wouldn’t catch me doing that, Simms snorted, fumbling in his pocket for cigarettes. He figured the big man was on the rebound from his recent divorce, but wouldn’t dream of saying so. They certainly had tongues wagging around Eagle Lane; interracial relationships were unheard of, especially within the police force. John Waters, the token black member of the Denton force, and diminutive blonde Kim Myles turned heads on a daily basis.

As Simms waited for the lights to change, Morrison’s, the undertakers, caught his eye, causing him to reflect again on the morning. He had seen Mary Frost only once, years ago, when she had stormed into the station late one night demanding to know where the hell Jack

was. She'd been pretty but scary, with bright red lipstick and elaborate 1950s-style hair – fiery but somehow still quite cute. She clearly thought Frost had been out all night misbehaving; it transpired he'd been sleeping in the cells. That was marriage for you.

He turned on the police radio, feeling slightly guilty that he hadn't done it sooner, but then for all Johnson knew he was still at the funeral. Within minutes it crackled into life.

'Yep, Simms here.'

'Where the dickens have you been?' Johnson sounded out of sorts.

'At the funeral, Sarge, along with everybody else. What's wrong, the daylight not agreeing with you?'

'Less of your lip, laddy. The service was over an hour ago. You were supposed to be on call after that. You're needed; Sue Clarke has gone off straight from her night-shift to check out what might be a human foot in one of Nev Sanderson's fields. And that's not the half of it.'

'Eh?' Simms scratched his head. 'OK, sorry, it was hard to get away – you know how it is at these things. Anyway, what else is up?'

'There's been a shooting,' Johnson stated coldly. 'At the Coconut Grove nightclub. Two in intensive care.'

'You're having me on!' Simms's pulse quickened. A serious incident, no one else on call, just him to pick it up. It was a gift. 'The Coconut Grove, eh? Bet Big H ain't happy about that.'

'Too right,' Johnson said sombrely. 'He's one of them that got shot.'

‘I know you turn your nose up at Julian and Elizabeth, William,’ said Beryl Simpson. Her green eyes were misty, Frost wasn’t sure whether from booze or genuine emotion; probably both. The afternoon was waning, and he wished it would all end. ‘And despite what you think of us, and all this’ – she waved the glass unsteadily around her – ‘we’re not precious about money. Certainly the girls were well educated, and that’s because of George. George worked hard to provide them with opportunities he never had.’ Mrs Simpson looked to the vicar for confirmation of this statement. Father Hill, of whom Frost was fond, nodded encouragingly, and then endeavoured to steer the conversation away from family feuds by clasping her shoulder and adding something about generous donations to the Church.

However, Frost’s emotions were running high as well, and he wasn’t finished with her yet.

‘I’ve never said a thing, Beryl,’ he replied, prompting Father Hill to give him a scathing look.

‘You don’t have to, it’s in your manner,’ she almost sneered, revealing the lines decorum and powder had hidden. She suddenly looked her age – just when he was almost beginning to fancy her again. ‘And for all your high-mindedness you never took proper care of Mary. Whereas Julian’ – her glass indicating the favoured son-in-law, lounging on the sofa with legs sprawled apart – ‘he may only be a car dealer to you—’

‘He *is* a car dealer, Beryl!’ Frost exclaimed, looking expectantly at the vicar for a sign of solidarity. ‘To

everyone!’ Father Hill studied the marble floor, unwilling to get involved.

‘You know damn well what I mean – the point is, *he* loves Elizabeth . . . and . . .’

Frost stared intently. Don’t you dare try and claim he’s never cheated on her, he thought.

Beryl Simpson held herself, and touched her bottom lip, as if to check it was still there. He thought for an instant she was going to continue her tirade, but all she said was, ‘Just get me another drink.’

‘Do you mind if we discuss the particulars another time, Sidney? I don’t feel it appropriate to go into such things here.’

‘No, quite.’ Mullett flushed. What was he thinking in pursuing it? He must’ve had more sherry than he thought. The elderly Mason had acknowledged him and that should suffice for now. So as not to add to the embarrassment, he didn’t correct the old boy on his name.

‘Besides, you could start looking closer to home,’ Simpson added. ‘The force is no stranger to our organization.’

A woman approached with a sherry bottle. She was slightly chubby but with a hard face, and Mullett surmised that she must be the other daughter, whose name he couldn’t remember. ‘Top-up?’ she asked. He’d probably had enough but it was rather good sherry, so he grinned amiably and watched the bronze liquid flow. One more, then he really must be off to the station.

‘You’re Will’s boss,’ she said abruptly.

‘Sergeant Frost?’ He smiled as generously as he could. ‘Yes, I have the honour of having *William* serve under me.’

She looked surprised. ‘You call it an honour? We’ve been led to believe he’s a royal pain in the backside, eh, Dad?’

Simpson senior merely raised his eyebrows.

‘Well, he has his own inimitable style, and yes, we do have our ups and downs,’ Mullett admitted. He took a proffered cigarette. ‘But he is dedicated.’

‘Oh.’ Her look softened. ‘So it wasn’t all an act, then.’

‘I’m sorry, I’m not with you,’ Mullett said.

‘Gave Mary a hard run, didn’t he, Dad?’ she said. The old man sighed. Mullett wasn’t altogether sure he was listening. ‘Good to know it was all for a reason; that he was just being good at his job . . .’

Mullett wasn’t aware that he’d said that, but he was touched by how the young woman took comfort from his words. He suddenly felt a peculiar closeness to this grieving family, with whom his only connection was through a man who was the bane of his life. Perhaps it was a sign that to be around these kinds of people was his rightful place? Or perhaps it was just the sherry.

‘I’ve got nothing more to say to you. You ruined my daughter’s life, you selfish, selfish man.’

Beryl Simpson shook her bowed head, clutching the kitchen work surface. That wasn’t true and she knew it – until the cancer had taken her, Mary was

happy-go-lucky despite their ups and downs. Or so he'd convinced himself anyway. Frost felt his relationship with Mary was misunderstood. Perhaps it was time to address this with the in-laws, reassure them that Mary wasn't the unhappy, downtrodden victim they thought. He picked up the picture of his late wife resting on the dresser in a gilded frame; it had been taken some years ago – fiery red hair, the brightest red lipstick imaginable, lively eyes and a full bosom. She was a cracker all right.

'But for years . . . she, she carried on with that bleedin' plumber,' he said absently. He realized his mistake as soon as the words had left his lips.

'Get out! Out of my house. How could you say that?'

She broke down in sobs. Frost's head spun. He felt despair and frustration rising up inside. He had to leave – he needed air. On impulse he grabbed one of the many bottles of spirits on the worktop.

Frost barged through a throng of people still in the hall, drunken laughter ringing in his ears. If it wasn't for the prevalence of black clothing it could well have been a party, not a wake. Perhaps that was the way a send-off should be? Despite coming into contact with death on a regular basis, he'd attended very few funerals.

'Jack, you all right?' Frost had collided with a red-nosed Arthur Hanlon.

'Fine, fine, just need some air.' He could hear himself slurring his words.

'That much "air"?' said Hanlon, pointing to the bottle. Before Frost could respond an equally smashed

Bill Wells had clutched him to his chest, squeezing the wind out of him.

‘We love you, you know,’ Wells said to his scalp.

‘Get off, you great sippy oaf. I’ll be back.’ Then, opening the front door, he muttered to himself, ‘Hmm . . . or was he an electrician?’

Thursday (3)

Clarke pulled up at the Coconut Grove, next to DC Derek Simms's red Alfa Sud. Baskin and Cecil had long been whisked off in an ambulance to Denton General. Simms was outside the club talking to a girl in a red miniskirt.

The sky was overcast and there was rain on the way again, giving the place an even seedier air than usual. Clarke avoided the puddles as she made for her colleague.

'Who's this?' she asked. Simms turned away from the distraught-looking girl. Mascara streaked her puckered cheeks, and her hair was in disarray. A WPC patted her shoulder.

'The girl who found them,' Simms replied. 'Kate Greenlaw. She's a twenty-three-year-old "Exotic Dancer".'

Clarke rolled her eyes, although she was careful that

the girl didn't see it. She thought Simms looked pale. She asked him to show her the crime scene and he led her through to Harry Baskin's office.

Simms talked Clarke through the facts: 'The lad, Cecil Rhodes, was shot at point-blank range. From the doorway, here.'

A Forensics officer kneeled by the door, his tape measure stretching several feet from a filing cabinet spattered with blood. Clarke realized that Simms had been waiting for her; though his confidence over the last year had grown, he still valued a second opinion, especially in something as serious as a shooting. As things stood either one of the victims might die, and Eagle Lane would find themselves in the middle of a murder inquiry. It was a wonder that no one was dead already; there was blood everywhere.

'You can tell from the blood smears on the cabinet that he was hit from this angle,' the Forensics officer said.

'Were either Rhodes or Baskin armed?' Clarke asked, addressing Simms.

He shook his head. 'Nope.'

'Someone they both knew?'

'Or they were taken by surprise. Looks like a hit to me – see.' He gestured to the pile of notes scattered on the desk and floor. 'Unlikely to be a robbery.'

'Better get that accounted for,' she said.

Clarke had never been inside Baskin's office before. Oddly enough, it was not dissimilar to Mullett's – smaller of course, but wood-panelled with garish furniture and

an over-the-top leather chair, trappings typical of the terminally self-important. However, the super's office had certainly never been sprayed with blood, and she'd never seen as much as a pound note in there either, while there must be at least five grand lying scattered around the desk and on the floor.

'Any witnesses?'

Simms was at the window, impatiently rattling the latch. 'The girl was the only other one here. She'd arrived with Rhodes at 9.30, him to admin the takings from last night and she to practise her moves. Baskin was already here when they arrived and she was under the impression he'd been here all night, slept in the office.'

'So, did she hear the shots?'

Simms finally opened the window, releasing the metallic stench that was starting to claw at Clarke's throat. 'Claims she didn't see or hear anything.'

'Silencer?'

'Possibly. Or maybe *she* shot them?' Simms professed.

Clarke pulled a doubtful face. 'An old lag like Harry, it could've been any number of people. He'll have run up dozens of enemies over the years.'

A cigar, half smoked, lay resting on the blood-soaked carpet by the side of the oak desk. 'What sort of shape was he in when they found him?'

'Unconscious but alive. He's a tough old bird. He took a bullet to the shoulder. Just the one, though.'

'Just the one . . .' Clarke repeated, following Simms's

line of thought. ‘If it was a hit, you’d think they’d shoot again, just to make sure.’

‘Exactly,’ Simms said, his brow furrowed. Then, for the first time since she’d arrived, he seemed to look at her properly. There was an awkward pause. ‘How’s your day been going?’ he asked; though he must have known full well – Sanderson’s foot was all over the air-waves.

‘A foot in a field,’ she replied with mock jauntiness. She wanted to ask about the funeral, knowing that’s where he’d been, but she couldn’t bring herself to do so.

‘A foot,’ mused Simms, as if it were nothing more unusual than finding a lost dog. He wasn’t interested in her, she realized; he was consumed by the here and now, this bloody mess. She recognized that disconnected air, and knew he was determined – no, desperate – to elicit something from the scene, some clue. She took in the disarray in the office, the open safe, the scattered notes. The shooting, it would appear, interrupted something – Baskin counting his cash. The attack was unexpected, which would explain why Baskin and Rhodes had been unarmed; had it been a business transaction gone sour, they would’ve undoubtedly been tooled up as a precaution.

‘Was the door open or closed when the girl found them?’ Clarke said suddenly.

‘Eh?’

‘Was the door open or shut?’

‘I don’t know – why?’

‘Maybe the attacker was in a hurry, that’s why they didn’t finish Baskin off, and if they panicked they wouldn’t have shut the door.’

‘Good point,’ he conceded, ‘I’ll check with the girl. Then we’d best get over to the hospital, see if the fat bastard has survived.’

‘That was a waste of bloody time,’ said DC Derek Simms, resting his feet on the desk in the main CID office. The hospital could at least have mentioned when they radioed ahead that Baskin was still out of it. He lit a cigarette, watching Sue Clarke settle at the desk opposite. There was something funny in her demeanour that he couldn’t put his finger on. She picked up the phone immediately without answering him, not that he required an answer. Though he did fancy a drink after today’s peculiar chain of events. Never can tell what’ll happen next in this job, he thought.

He retrieved a half-bottle of Scotch from the desk drawer, picked up a mug, peered inside and decided to take it straight from the bottle instead. After a couple of swigs he paused, watching Clarke nattering on the phone. They had recently called it quits on their on/off relationship. There had been some fun times – well, one or two at least – over the summer. He’d been keen to have her back at first, as there was no denying how well they got on, but he couldn’t shake off the suspicion that she was with him only because Frost had ditched her, on account of his sick wife. The niggling fear that she was on the rebound wore away at him and made

him bad-tempered, until eventually he called time on things.

But now, a month on, Simms suspected he'd made a mistake. He discovered he'd been wrong about Clarke's feelings yet again. DS Waters, who had become a great friend, was seeing Clarke's buddy Kim Myles; she'd told him it was Sue who had ditched Frost in May because she'd blatantly had enough, and at the time she'd known nothing of his wife's illness. Though he wasn't totally convinced she'd dropped Frost for good, as once Frost's wife's condition became common knowledge the pair did seem pretty close . . . Anyway, Clarke had decided to give it another go with Derek because, well, Derek was Derek. She'd told him as much, but he'd never really grasped the idea that she liked him for himself – it wasn't until he heard it from a third party and there was some distance between them that it finally registered, and he saw what a fool he'd been. Still, they were young, there was time. There was always time . . .

'DC Simms! End of the day already, is it?'

DI Allen's sharp tone snatched him from his musings. Jesus! He swung his legs off the desk.

'No, sir.'

'No, sir, indeed. Where the bloody hell is everyone?'

'Mary Frost's funeral, sir.'

Detective Inspector Jim Allen scratched his beard thoughtfully. Within the worn face his pale grey eyes flickered with mild irritation.

'Are they now. And Superintendent Mullett?'

‘He was there this morning.’

‘Well, that toerag from the *Echo*, Sandy Lane, is banging on the front door. He had a call from a farmer – something about a foot in a field. Brief the superintendent – we’ll have to make a statement.’ With an angry frown he disappeared from the doorway as silently as he arrived.

Clarke was equally perturbed by DI Allen’s surprise visit. ‘What the hell was he doing here?’ she asked as soon as she hung up the phone. ‘I thought he was on secondment to Rimmington on that abduction case?’

‘Beats me. Don’t like him one bit,’ Simms reflected. ‘I agree with Frost; never trust a man with a beard. Even if he is a DI.’

‘Oh, don’t be ridiculous. Besides, you’ve never agreed with Jack on anything. Ever.’

‘Not true.’

Clarke chose not to pursue Simms on this point, although she knew he’d argue the sky was green if Jack said it was blue. ‘Anyway, that was the lab.’

‘Go on.’

‘The foot found in the field was a male foot, and is, as Drysdale put it, “fresh”.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘It means it was severed recently – in the last twenty-four hours or so. The wound is precise, so it’s likely it was hacked off in one stroke, using maybe a machete, or large meat cleaver.’

‘Christ!’

‘That’s not all. The condition of the tissue reveals the

body was most likely alive when the foot was severed. Which I guess is significant.'

'Yep.' Simms swigged from the bottle again. 'We're looking for someone with a bad limp.'

He held up his hands in apology for the dodgy joke. Clarke declined his offer of a swig, so he placed the bottle precariously on the desk and stretched. 'What a day. Well, Allen is right, the press will want a statement.'

'Bloody farmer, couldn't keep it to himself.'

'No surprise, really, a town this size – not every day a limb pops up in a potato field.'

He was right, of course, they'd be lucky if they could keep it under wraps for long. They sat in silence for a minute.

'How was . . . ?'

'This morning?' Simms finished her dangling sentence. 'Odd. Frost had left all the arrangements to Hanlon. Big Eagle Lane contingent – even Winslow from County – which seemed strange given that most of them hadn't even met his missus.'

'But you were all there to support Jack – surely that was the point?'

'I guess.' Simms's tone was dismissive. 'Still, I would've thought by now at least some of them would have made it back here. It's nearly three and the place is like a graveyard, if you'll excuse the pun.'

Charles Pierrejean was glad to be outside the Simpson residence, however briefly. What a bunch of ignorant fuckwits, he thought, as he opened the car door to

retrieve a fresh pack of Gauloises. *Oh, you don't sound like one of those Frogs – positively one of us, hawhaw!* And all that crap about the World Cup . . . on a day like this. *C'est incroyable.* No respect. He was indeed as English as he was French, but when presented with such peasants he sank into detached embarrassment.

Pierrejean had been in Denton for six weeks. He had met the Braziers early last summer, in his father's family-run restaurant in the Dordogne. It was there one evening that Julian had posited the idea of opening a business in Denton. Charles had a passion for antiques, inherited from his middle-class English mother, far greater than the one for cooking Pierrejean senior wished to instil in him; but it was a passion that went beyond the fringes of legality. England had been hard hit by recession, but, Brazier argued, the flipside was that leases had become cheap, and the well-heeled, who were more affluent than ever, were eager for something to put their money into. Denton had its fair share of nouveaux riches, such as Brazier's own in-laws, the Simpsons, and was ripe for the taking, all it needed was someone with the right skills and contacts, such as he.

Pierrejean was well-educated, cultured but unscrupulous; he and his business colleague, Gaston Camus, knew they could exploit the boorish upper-middle class of provincial Britain and were looking for an 'in'. Somewhere out of the way, a place that wouldn't draw attention to itself, and in particular that wouldn't attract the scrutiny of the French authorities. Denton would be ideal.

The Simpsons were exactly the kind of people Pierre-jean and his shady contacts had in their sights. Thanks to over-inflated City salaries and bonuses enjoyed by Simpson and his ilk, they had money to burn and liked to advertise the fact with showy, expensive furniture and decor. However, the shop itself thus far was seeing little custom, hence he found himself here, cringing at a funeral wake of somebody he didn't know, which had no sign of ending, and with the most bizarre collection of people he'd ever encountered in one place.

He sniffed the English autumn air. Rain again. It was just coming up to three, and in the time it took to smoke his cigarette his hands were cold enough for him to wish he had gloves. What a miserable, wet country this is, he grumbled to himself, flicking soggy leaves off his Citroën windscreen. God, he thought, making his way back to the house, something better improve, either the weather or business – he could barely imagine anything more grim than a winter in Denton.

Thursday (4)

Mullett knew he should leave the Rimmington house – it was growing dark outside – but then he stiffened upon noticing his superior, the Assistant Chief Constable, across the room. He'd spotted Winslow at the church, but having not seen him afterwards he'd assumed he'd returned to County HQ. When the hell did he slip in here? As usual there was tension between them; the ACC was unimpressed with the lack of progress in a rape case involving a teacher from a Rimmington school. The incident had been reported on Monday and all Denton CID had managed so far was to trace the source of some crank phone calls to the victim to 'somewhere' on the Southern Housing Estate. Detective Sergeant Waters had then spent two days on surveillance amongst what Mullett regarded as 'the scum' of the estate, but with little to show for it. Winslow was furious to hear that an officer whose chief characteristic was standing out

like a sore thumb had been chosen for surveillance. He berated Mullett for poor judgement and a row then ensued over the tiresome issue of resources.

The superintendent sighed. He scanned the room for any other hobnobbing opportunities. He'd put in a good hour sucking up to Sir Keith, the MP for Denton and Rimmington, and the mayor, a blustering old fool by the name of Francis. Old man Simpson's connection with the Lodge was the reason all these others were here, including Hudson, that great fat layabout of a bank manager. But in what capacity was Winslow here? True, he was a fan of Frost's, albeit from a distance (but close enough to be pressuring Mullett to promote him by the end of the year), but there'd never been any personal connection as far as Mullett was aware. Perhaps his presence was also down to the Masonic influence?

Mullett cursed as Hanlon and Wells moved towards the buffet table and obscured his view. He watched them with distaste, scoffing as if it were their last meal, although soaking up some of this alcohol was undoubtedly a good idea. He really should be getting back, but his curiosity about Winslow had given him another reason to stay. Of course, Mullett hadn't forgotten that the ACC had a skeleton in his cupboard: he'd been spotted leaving the unsavoury Pink Toothbrush sauna back in May. Perhaps this compromising information was something Mullett could use to his advantage? He moved unsteadily towards the two Eagle Lane officers.

‘Ah, gentlemen, what a very sad day,’ he said in a loud voice. ‘I take great comfort in seeing so many of Denton’s finest here, supporting our colleague in his hour of need.’

Hanlon reached his great bear’s paw around the super’s narrow shoulders, and pulling Mullett towards him said, ‘You’re all right, sir, you’re all right.’

What an idiotic remark, Mullett thought. However, Wells was nodding in sombre agreement, emotion brimming barely below the surface. He conceded that they might both be steaming drunk but at least they were well-meaning.

Mullett gently extricated himself from Hanlon’s grasp. ‘Why thank you, *chaps*,’ he said. ‘What are we on here? One more for the road, eh? Wait, where is old Jack?’

Within a few minutes, as the Simpsons’ grandfather clock chimed three, all thought of Winslow and Mullett’s own Masonic ambitions had dispersed from his thoughts.

‘*A hand?*’ said DC Derek Simms, gripping the telephone receiver. ‘Are you sure? Just a hand?’

‘That’s what the man said, son,’ replied Johnny Johnson.

Simms had started to take down the details when he noticed a very pale-looking Sue Clarke making to go. ‘Johnny, I’ll call you straight back.’ He hung up. ‘Hey, where you off to?’

‘Home.’

‘But it’s only just gone three. C’mon, you went to look at the foot earlier, this is your case. At this rate we’ll have a whole body by the weekend.’ He was eager to forgo a missing limb, just to keep the Baskin case all to himself.

‘I spent all night lying in a field, remember? Besides, the whole of Denton CID can’t all still be getting hammered – it’s a wake, not a party. Anyway,’ she conceded, ‘I don’t feel too good.’

‘Oh.’ He backed down immediately. ‘If you’re not well it’s fine, I’ll take it.’ He had to admit, she didn’t look too clever. He knew her health had suffered after the trauma of being stabbed in the leg earlier this year, and he didn’t want a relapse on his conscience. ‘You get off to bed.’ He smiled encouragingly.

He watched his colleague shuffle off down the corridor, sighed and picked up the telephone receiver.

‘Johnny,’ he said, lighting another cigarette. ‘Gimme the details, I’m all ears.’

‘It’s that same farmer Miss Clarke went to see earlier.’

Simms knew he should go after her. For continuity’s sake she ought to take the call. Why the hell hadn’t the whole sodding field been searched straight away? Clarke should have stopped the farmer in his tracks and sealed it off. This was a serious oversight. What was the matter with her?

‘OK, mate, get an area car down there. Grab Sanderson’s tractor keys until the field has been combed. I’ll call the lab, put Drysdale on alert, then I’ll be straight down there.’

*

Sue Clarke felt a dreadful wave of nausea; it must be my bloody hormones, she thought. She'd sat in the car for five minutes with her eyes closed before she'd started to drift off to sleep. Tired and emotional was an understatement – death-warmed-up was closer to it. She wondered if she had a temperature; she certainly felt feverish. She'd probably caught a chill from her night in the field. She should never have been sent on surveillance on a night like that, and in her condition too. Not that anyone knew, though.

She reversed the Escort out and was about to pull forward but paused instead, closing her eyes and resting her damp forehead on the steering wheel. Damn, she thought. She realized she'd made a mistake: she should have sealed off the field and had uniform tread through. As if Forensics would look beyond the immediate area; they weren't best pleased to be there at all in the first place. Genuine intrigue and commitment to duty were battling against her desperate need for sleep. She re-parked the car and got out. Have a strong coffee, that would help. She missed the nicotine which she'd often relied upon to keep her going, but she'd had to can the fags as they made her even more queasy. And she probably would have packed them in anyway as soon as she found out . . . And everybody else would find out soon enough – she wondered how long she had before it began to show. She'd had a scare six months ago, but this time there was no doubt. For what seemed the billionth

time she cursed her stupidity and slammed the car door shut.

Frost was going to thump him. Wife's funeral or not, any minute now he would bust the bleeder's nose, just watch him.

He shouldn't have returned to the wake. After a stroll around the block to clear his head Frost had intended just to pick up his coat and car keys and leave, figuring he could make his peace with his mother-in-law some other time – if that were possible at all. But while fetching his coat he'd been collared by Winslow and agreed to have a drink in the study. Frost, surprisingly, got on fine with the bald, bespectacled ACC.

Unfortunately, a few drinks had had the effect of turning Winslow into a bore, and after the customary condolences Frost found himself on the receiving end of a lecture on the coming of the computer age. It was enough to send him to sleep, so when Winslow paused for a pee, Frost made a break for it. He exited the study, intending to leave by the front door, but on entering the hall bumped straight into his brother-in-law. By Frost's own generous standards Brazier had had a lot to drink. Rather like Winslow, this seemed to compel him to deliver lectures, but Brazier's chosen subject was Mary Frost's decline.

Frost endured it for a couple of minutes, but it was clearly an encounter that was never going to end well. He heard all about Mary's good breeding and the usual

tosh about how he'd corrupted her. Usually he just shrugged off the views of people he considered idiots, but there was a faintly sleazy tone beneath Brazier's drunken reproach, as he talked about that lovely girl and how wasted she'd been on an oaf like him, that gave him the mounting urge to plant one right between Brazier's shifty eyes.

'... And then she started drinking – which, as anyone knows ...'

That was it. Frost grabbed Brazier by the cravat and pulled down the leering face so he was level with it, and then head-butted him for all he was worth. Blood spurted from Brazier's smashed nose and he staggered back against the hall table, knocking over some poncey china clown figurine which smashed on the floor. Frost felt concussed from the blow and was sure he was going to topple over. But just then he felt a firm grip on his shoulder and a calm voice saying, 'Hey, Jack.'

Frost looked up into the concerned eyes of DS John Waters.

'John. Nice of you to pop by.'

'Time to go, Jack.'

'Probably should, eh?' He smiled.

'It's highly likely they're from the same body, and blood tests will corroborate this, though not prove it one hundred per cent.' Drysdale continued: 'They are, I think we can all agree, both from a male.'

Simms regarded the pale hairy foot in the tray before him, and beside it the upturned hand, which was large and thick-set. Both articles he was having difficulty registering as real body parts; they looked more like props from *The Addams Family*.

‘We can also observe that the method of severing is consistent,’ said Drysdale.

‘The fingers look broken,’ Clarke mused. Drysdale nodded enthusiastically. Simms was put out – why the hell couldn’t he notice things like that?

‘Yes, quite! Now look at this,’ Drysdale added. ‘See the toenails – manicured, clean. And the palm of the hand, soft, indicating no manual work. Someone with a comfortable life, perhaps?’

‘I see,’ responded Simms, racking his brain for something useful to say. ‘Skin must tell you something, about age?’ he offered doubtfully.

‘Yes. Texture is a good indication.’ The pathologist stroked the severed limb, almost affectionately. ‘I would hazard that the victim is under thirty. There’s a powdery residue underneath the fingernails – I will need to run some tests . . .’

‘Any idea how long these have been lying there?’

‘A matter of days at most. The cold weather would slow the decomposition, but as the detective rightly mentioned, they couldn’t have been there very long as the birds would’ve had them. I shall be in touch with Forensics.’ The pathologist looked quite excited; unusual for him, thought Simms.

*

‘Thanks for coming, Sue,’ Simms said quietly, holding open the door. The showers had ceased and the sun hung low above the pine trees that bordered the lab grounds. Simms had always found the tranquil, picture-postcard setting of the County lab to be at odds with the morbid secrets it held inside.

‘No, not at all – I screwed up. I should have cordoned off the field when the foot appeared, I know that.’ She smiled tiredly. ‘Thanks for not making a meal of it – Mullett would have gone ballistic. Him and his procedure . . .’

‘He need never know,’ Simms reassured her, pulling out his cigarettes.

‘Not for me, thanks.’

‘Given up?’ He flicked the Zippo top up, lighting one.

‘Yep, sort of . . .’

‘Lots are. At seventy pence a packet, no wonder . . .’ He sensed something awkward in her manner. ‘Right, I’ll drop you off, you look beat.’

‘What about you?’

‘I’ll head back to the station, see if the SOCOs have turned up anything interesting from the Coconut Grove, then wait for Harry to come round.’

‘You want that case badly, don’t you, Derek? I know they’re all out and it seems like your chance – but don’t get too excited; once Frost is back in the land of the living . . .’

Simms frowned at her unfortunate turn of phrase, but she misread it as boyish dejection and reached out to touch his cheek. He pulled back in surprise – she

was never touchy-feely at the best of times, so he hardly expected that! He could never work her out. He looked at the dark smudges under her eyes and said, 'C'mon, you're shattered, we'd best get you home.'