

The Angel Maker

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One

The solitary figure sat hunched over the desk straining to see the conundrum in front of him by the meagre flickering light overhead. A mystery he had thus far been unable to unravel, despite what seemed like hours of trial and error the sequence of seemingly random numbers eluded him.

Behind him the tin door rattled on its ever weakening hinges, threatening to break his already tenuous concentration altogether as the storm outside threatened to edge towards the biblical.

He wondered what kind of diabolical oriental imagination had invented such an infernal torture device as this. The light overhead dipped again and for a long moment he was left in darkness with nothing but the rain and wind beating against the window in front of him for company. He looked out through the rattling glass but the outside was as dark as within.

"C'mon," he whispered and willed the light to come back on, the thought of spending the night here in darkness wasn't a welcome one. But he knew if today was anything to go by, the day tomorrow wouldn't be much brighter.

The light came back on and he breathed a sigh of relief, and after taking a sip of coffee from the cup on his desk, he returned to the paper but it just seemed to make less sense than ever. Then, as if out of nowhere the numbers seem to fall in to place. He spoke out loud as he scribbled the sequence onto the paper. Of course, it had been right there all along.

"Right let's see, one, two, three, four, erm, five. Shit! Got no six." His heart dropped as the puzzle threatened to outwit him once again. "Got no six on this line yet." He traced his pen along the squares on the paper. "Ten? Hang on how the hell did I get a ten in there? Oh, no hang on that's crossed out, should be... Six, that's it! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Sorted. Finished, easy." Victory.

The speaker of the powerful radio transmitter next to him sparked into life. "Okay smarty pants. Now you have to fill in all the other lines, making sure they all have one to nine in them, oh and each of those little boxes have to have one to nine in them as well. Then you have to make sure each row and each column all have one to nine in them too. Easy?"

The puzzle hater's heart dropped. "Eh? That's impossible!"

Thankfully this battle of man against mathematical puzzle wasn't life and death to Pete Mulgrave, it was just another way to while away the seemingly endless hours of his shift here at the lovely titled Widow's Bay island volunteer lifeboat station. Which was a good job because it had well and truly kicked his round arse square. He threw his pencil down in disgust.

Mooney's distorted voice came through the radio's external speaker again. "Not impossible, just bloody hard, mate."

Pete threw the speaker a look of disdain, he had the distinct feeling his colleague on the mainland was winding him up. He looked at the puzzle. Just what the hell

did Sudoku mean anyway? Probably mental torture in Japanese. "Have you finished yours?"

"Yep, ages ago."

"Bollocks, fax it through."

"No, then you'll see the answers. Besides the faxes are down remember?" Mooney reminded him.

"Oh, yeah." How could he forget? He had been cooped up in this shack all day due to the storm.

The increasingly strong winds buffeted the side of the prefab office at the back of the lifeboat station he was in sole charge of tonight, and he could have sworn he actually felt the whole building shift. The builders had been working on the new office building when the storm hit and Pete knew this would mean it would be another week or so before they all moved into it. Still at least the lifeboat was safe in the new boathouse which had been completed first.

"Christ I'm bored," Pete said. He took great delight in screwing up the Sudoku and throwing the balled up paper into the waste bin across the office which he missed, of course.

"Anyway," Mooney said. "Here's something for you to wrap your tiny brain around. You're only bored because you associate the word bored with that feeling."

"Eh?"

"Try not using that word, replace it with something else, see if that works."

"Moon-man you're not making a drop of sense, mate."

"It's psychology, you associate being bored with the word bored. Y'know? Just use something else, or simply say 'I am.'"

That was so Mooney, if he wasn't reading some Zen book or other during the considerable down time between lifeboat call outs, (especially in this type of weather) he was reading psychology, that or torturing him with the latest brain teaser craze.

"Okay," Pete said drawing out the word. "I am, I am... I am what? I am a carrot, I am a chair? I am... I am still fucking bored!"

The radio's speaker distorted as Mooney exhaled theatrically. "Christ's teeth Mulgrave, you have the IQ of both a carrot, and a chair. Why don't you watch tele or something? I'm sure there's some Jeremy Kyle on or some such shite to match your brain capacity?" Mooney asked.

"No signal," Pete lamented. The station didn't have cable and the radio was supposed to be for urgent communications only. "I swear it feels like the dark ages on here. One little storm and the whole island goes to shit." He complained. "We're only a mile from the mainland for Christ sake! Might as well be on the fucking moon."

The power had been in and out all night, the main phone lines to the island were down and you could forget about using a mobile at the best of times on Widow's Bay. The place felt like it was twenty years behind the rest of the country, which was a blessing to the hundred or so residents who for whatever reason had voluntarily opted to stay on the rock. These were mostly made up of students who had a small campus on the other side of the island from which they monitored the local wildlife which was protected by the countryside commission. That coupled

with the isolated nature of the place made it an idea 'spiritual' getaway for those looking for some kind of peace and tranquillity.

Pete wondered with a smirk how they were liking Widow's Bay now. Intermittent power and internet, and worst still, no TV. "I tell you, Mooney, I'm half expecting a mob of internet starved students to come up here carrying flaming torches and pitch folks to demand our generator."

"Well at least they can help you with your Sudoku!" Mooney offered.

Pete was about to tell his colleague, who had been lucky enough to be stationed on the mainland tonight where to go when there was an almighty crash from outside, followed by the sound of splintering wood and shattering glass. "Jesus!"

Pete jumped up and went over to the window and cupped his hands either side of his eyes as he strained to see through the rattling Perspex glass and outside. As he watched, the roof of the old storage building which sat adjacent to his prefab office was torn off and flew off into the darkness. The scene put him in mind of the Wizard of Oz and he wondered grimly if he was next.

"Fuck me!" He gasped. Pete did a quick recap of the last couple of days' preparations. Yes as far as he remembered they had cleared the old storage building a couple of days ago and the old place was due to be torn down anyway soon enough so no harm no foul.

"What? What's happened? Pete you alright mate?" Mooney asked.

Pete came away from the window. The lifeboat station was situated well out of the way of any of the other properties on the island, at the end of a half mile dirt road on the coast's edge. He sat back down on the swivel chair. "Fine, mate. At least by the end of tonight the contractors won't need to worry about demolishing the storage hut."

"You did clear it out?" There was an uneasy edge to Mooney's voice through the speaker which set off a spark of recognition in Pete's head. He laughed out loud. It wasn't completely empty.

"Ha! All expect your moped, remember? You were supposed to take it with you at the end of your last shift, but you couldn't be arsed!"

"Oh, bollocks! Pete, get out there and bring it inside, would you?"

"Are you shitting me? It's biblical out there I'd get blown away or decapitated by some of the crap flying around."

"Shit," Mooney lamented, but then added with better humour. "Ah well, it could do with a wash I guess."

"Still as bad where you are?" Pete asked.

"Yeah, but hey, don't knock it. At least no dickhead is going to go swimming or sailing in this weather. We can just kick back."

This was true Pete thought and as long as the storm blew itself out in the two days before the weekend, he was happy enough. TV or no TV. "Have they said how long it's going to last?" Pete asked. He knew Mooney had access to all the relevant info on the mainland office in Scarborough.

"One day, two tops," he replied.

"Good," Pete said. But if it hadn't cleared by the time his shift was over, storm or no storm he was going back to the mainland, even if he had to swim back. He sat back in his chair for a moment, he knew he would have to sign off with

Mooney, the radio was supposed to be for emergencies only. Still he couldn't help adding; "God I'm bored."

Two

There was dedication to duty and then there was suicide, P.C. Ian Williams thought as the high winds buffeted his police car once again. He had decided to give the dock area of the island the once over when the lights in the police station (such as it was) had gone out again. He knew they would soon come back on but hadn't relished trying to work in candlelight until they did. Besides the storm was so violent he just had to do a sweep in case anyone had been foolhardy (or drunk) enough to be out and about in this maelstrom.

But as he had, for the second time tonight, nearly ploughed into a parked car he had decided to give it up until the storm let up somewhat. He carefully pulled the car over to a stop and contemplated his next move. No one would be out tonight that much was clear. You could barely drive in this let alone walk without getting blown off your feet.

Williams had noticed the lifeboat station had power when he had done his sweep so that meant Pete Mulgrave who he knew was on duty tonight would welcome the company and be ready with a warm mug of his signature hot chocolate, which was one of the very few perks of being stationed on Widow's Bay.

He was contemplating this when the patrol car's engine suddenly, without so much as a warning splutter died and Williams was plunged into darkness. "Oh, you have to be shitting me," he cursed. He tried the key and pumped the gas pedal, but got nothing. "C'mon, not now, for Christ sake!" Then he wondered if the car had actually been struck by lightning, but there hadn't been a crack, bang or whatever happened if you got hit by lightning. Surely there must be something? He was about to dismiss the idea when he got a faint whiff of static in the car's musty interior.

"Jesus," he realised the hairs on his arms were bristling with a faint energy. He reached for his radio, but it was as dead as the car's electrics. "Fuck me," he said out loud. "I've been struck by fucking lightning!" Williams couldn't help but laugh. But that soon stopped when he realised he was stuck in a dead car in the middle of a storm. A quick calculation told him the lifeboat station was still closer than the police station, but still that was a long walk in this weather.

The dashboard suddenly lit up again and the car's headlights came back on full beam. Williams yelped in surprise and was damn glad he was alone. He tried the ignition and the car started first time. He gunned the engine and it gave a satisfying roar. "You beauty!" Then the breath caught in P.C. Ian Williams's throat. There was a figure caught in the headlights standing some ten yards ahead.

Williams strained to see through the torrential rain hammering down on the windscreen and wondered if he was hallucinating. But there it was, definitely a figure and by the looks of it a woman, with her back to him. Her hair and clothes blowing wildly in the wind. Just standing in the middle of the road.

"Christ!" Williams got out and was instantly assaulted by the blistering wind and rain. He ran as best he could over to where the woman was still standing seemingly oblivious to the headlights on her. "Hey!" Williams shouted above the storm but the word was barely audible, even to himself.

"Miss?" Williams came around to face the woman and was about to add that she should really get out of the damn road when he stopped dead seeing her face which was blank to the point of catatonia, her coat was unbuttoned and flapped in the wind and although she must have been freezing and soaked to the skin, she made no attempt to pull it around herself. "Miss?" He said again and took a hold of her shoulders but she just stared off into space with no acknowledgement he was even there. Williams shook her shoulders but again got no response. Had she also been hit by the lightning?

As her coat flapped open again Williams got a glimpse of her white blouse which was splattered with dark patches. As she was all but silhouetted by the car's headlights he turned her slightly so the beam hit her head on. "Shit." It was blood. The light was now directly in both their eyes, Williams cursed and brought one hand up to shield his face but she didn't so much as blink.

She was in deep shock that much was clear even out here. But apart from the blood on her blouse she didn't seem to have any physical injuries, "Come on, let's get you out of here." And with that he gently coaxed her over to the car. It was like leading a mannequin of sorts she moved so stiffly, almost as if she didn't actually know how to walk at all. And after much effort he managed to get her into the back seat.

Williams, soaked to the skin and shivering out of adrenalin and cold knelt next to the open door and gave the woman a quick look-over. Yes, now that he had her out of the rain and under the meagre interior light of the car he could see it was blood on her blouse. The material seemed intact, but he would need to get her to a doctor to make sure. He took a moment to compose himself a little and looked up into her young face. She was only in her late teens at most and he still hadn't seen her so much as flinch. Her ashen face was set in a blank expression, her clear green eyes just stared ahead unblinking.

Was she one of the students from the small wildlife reserve on the other side of the island? Then it hit him, if she was a student wandering around out here, was she on some drugged out trip? It wouldn't have been the first time he had come across a drug addled student tripping their face off out here. Maybe, but there was just something about her blank expression that unnerved Williams. He shook it off, time enough for that later. He needed to get her to the nearest help. That meant Widow's Bay lifeboat station. They had power and a decent radio if needed.

Williams slammed the door closed and keyed the mic on the radio which was clipped to his shoulder. Seeing as it was out of season and they were down to a skeleton police force of just two tonight, he could only call one person.

"Munro? This is Williams, do you copy me over?" After a moment his radio sparked into life.

"This is W.P.C. Munro, over." Suzy Munro was the only other police officer on the island tonight. She was holding down the fort at the island's very small police station, still without power no doubt.

"Suzy, I need you to get over to doctor Mayfield's and drive him over to the lifeboat station, I'll meet you there. I have a woman here, looks to be in shock or something, she's got blood on her, but I don't think it's hers, over."

"Roger that Ian, I'll get him straight up there. Has there been an accident, over?"

"Unclear as yet. Meet me up there I'm going to have a quick scout around here, just in case. Over and out." Williams was about to go back over to the car to tell the woman what he was going to do, when something off near a group of derelict buildings right on the dock's edge caught his eye. He strained to see through the torrential rain and took out his torch from his duty belt. He swept it around his surroundings and it caught a large plume of smoke coming out from the back of the buildings. "Shit."

He ran over to the dock and over to the back of one of the buildings where the smoke was at its thickest. The wind suddenly shifted and the cloud blew right at him. Williams braced himself and held his breath against the oncoming acrid and possibly harmful odour, head down he narrowed his eyes to slits and let it hit him. The instant it did he realised his error, the cloud wasn't smoke, it was odourless, and his eyes didn't sting. It was steam of all things.

It took Williams a second to comprehend this and once he had gotten his bearings somewhat he gingerly moved through the steam cloud and around the building, where even above the wind and rain he could hear hissing.

"What the hell?" Williams stopped dead at the surreal sight he was met with. Behind the building was a large open space that looked like it had once been a loading area. Large piles of rubbish and old lobster crates were stacked against the walls and judging by their state of decay they had been abandoned there for some time. Steam was rising in great billowing plumes from the ground and half way up the building's walls. It took the policeman a moment to realise that despite the storm and pummelling rain the whole area was dry. The hissing and steam was coming from where the rain hit the stone and brick work.

He stood transfixed as the rain slowly started to finally begin to wet the ground and walls and the steam began to fade under the onslaught of water. Williams instinctively crouched and held his hand, palm down over the stone ground which was still somewhat dry. He could feel heat even before he touched the ground. He instantly pulled his hand away. The stone was warm to the touch. He stood again and shuddered, the whole place just felt wrong.

A massive clap of thunder overhead snapped Williams out of his frozen state and he cried out in shock. "Fucking weird." He turned and ran back over to the police car and jumped in the driver's side and slammed the door shut.

He winced at the violent action and craned his neck around to the woman in the back. "Sorry about..." The words stuck in his throat. The woman was still just staring blankly ahead as she had been doing when he had left her. He doubted she had so much as moved a muscle since he'd been gone. He watched her for what seemed like a full minute until finally she blinked, but still there was barely any life in those green eyes. Weird indeed he thought and started the car. He put the wipers on full and slowly set off along the road.

It would take a good twenty minutes in these conditions to get up to the lifeboat station but it felt good to have to give it his full attention so he could keep his mind off the strange woman in the back of his police car, not to mention what he

had seen at the docks. But still he couldn't help wonder again if a lightning strike could have caused what he had seen there. It was as if a blast of heat or something had evaporated all the water there for God only knew how long before he had gotten there.

And Williams couldn't remember if he had seen any blackened charring anywhere. Surely a lightning strike could have set something on fire, the place was littered with boxes, crates and all kinds of rubbish. He cursed and tried to push it out of his mind for now, it had been too dark to make much out. First things first he needed to get the woman somewhere safe and warm, let the doctor give her the once over, then maybe they could get some sense out of her.

Williams chanced a glance in the rear view mirror as he drove and caught the woman's lifeless gaze. It was like looking at a photograph she was so impassive. Whatever she had witnessed had shocked the life right out of her.

"Christ," Williams said under his breath. He thought of the blood spattered on her dress. He knew once Suzy and the doc were with him up at the lifeboat station he would really need to come back down to the scene for a more detailed search. Storm or no storm, strange phenomena or not. He would have to come back because if that wasn't her blood. Then just who the hell's was it?

Three

There was something about the tone in P.C. Williams's voice on the radio that had set Pete Mulgrave's nerves on edge. Yes, he had confirmed to the policeman, his generator was up and running and that although the internet and phones were in and out at best that yes their radio communication to the mainland was working just fine.

The short range radio Williams was using was as static as hell and his voice faded in and out due to the storm, but there was no escaping the fear in the copper's voice. He was on his way up Williams had told him, with a woman he had found wandering around out in this weather. Not only that but W.P.C. Munro was also on her way up here with doc Mayfield so he could check the woman over. Looked like shock, Williams had told him, or worse.

Well that served him right for going on at Mooney at just how bored he had been. That numbing monotony felt like bliss now.

Pete stood by the window looking out into the night with a growing sense of trepidation. "Bloody students," he whispered. He tried to convince himself this was just some lovers' tiff gone wrong. That the woman was just some drunken student who'd had a fight with her boyfriend over at the retreat and then stormed off dramatically into the night without fully realising how bad the weather was.

He was contemplating the best case scenario he could muster when a set of headlights flashed across the front of the prefab office and a police car came to a stop outside. Pete moved over to the door and opened it slightly. He was immediately assaulted by the wind and rain outside. "Jesus," he had to put his shoulder against it to stop it blowing right off its hinges.

He could barely make out the two figures get out of the car and struggle through the deluge towards him. As they reached the door he opened it just slightly more.

"Christ Ian!" He shouted above the storm. "Get inside, mate."

P.C. Williams had his coat draped around the young woman as he ushered her inside. Pete was about to speak, when he saw that the woman didn't react at all the wind and rain that was buffeting them from all sides as they struggled inside. She was soaked to the skin, with her hair plastered to her head but her expression was blank and she wasn't even shivering. He instantly looked away from her and to the grimacing policeman, suddenly fearful that empty gaze might fall on him.

"Hell of a night!" Williams said as Pete forced the door shut and locked it.

"Yeah," Pete replied resting his back against the door. "If this carries on for another forty days we are fucked."

This won the slightest of smiles from Williams who was still holding on tightly to the woman. "Yeah, feels that way tonight, mate," he said grimly and guided the woman over to a nearby chair. "Here you go, love. Sit here, you're safe and warm now." He stiffly sat her down.

"Christ," Pete said. "What happened to her?"

Williams shrugged, Pete could hear the policeman's teeth chattering from where he was standing. "Dunno, I was doing a quick sweep of the docks, y'know, just in case? She was standing right in the middle of the road. Jesus, if my car hadn't have stalled I might well have hit her." Williams shuddered at the thought.

He suddenly tore his gaze away from the woman and took in the room. "No sign of Suzy and the doc yet?"

"Nar." Pete shook his head. "The doc's place is at the far end of the island, they won't be here for a while yet." He gestured outside. "Especially in this shit. That track up here is treacherous at the best of times."

Williams gave a snort. "Don't have to tell me, Pete. Nearly killed us both at least twice getting up here."

It was now that Pete noticed several patches of dark stains on the woman's front. "Shit. Is she okay? I got a first aid kit out back."

"I don't think it's her blood." Williams said absently studying the forlorn figure seated in front of them. Then he seemed to snap out of it somewhat. "Here, Pete. Get her a blanket will you?"

"Sure," Pete replied and darted out of the room.

Williams knelt down in front of the catatonic woman, he noticed Pete had a small portable heater by his desk and so turned it slightly so it was blowing warm air on her soaked legs. "Hey?" He said softly but she just looked off into the distance over his shoulder to God only knew what horrors.

She put him in mind of a photograph he had once seen of a traumatized soldier from the Vietnam war by the famous war photographer Don McCullin. He had seen the young man sitting on his own during the Tet offensive, just staring off into space and had taken several shots of the soldier and it wasn't until he had developed them that he had noticed that although he had used a single shot manual wind camera, each shot was exactly the same. The soldier hadn't moved so much a muscle in the time it had taken him to click, wind, click, wind the film. The thousand yard stare they called it.

"What have you seen?" Williams whispered softly, more to himself really than the woman.

"Here we go." Pete came back into the room with an armful of blankets. He dumped them on a table and then proceeded to wrap one, then another around the woman's shoulders. "Soon have you as warm as toast." Pete told her.

"Pete, I need to go back out there, back down to the docks." It came out before Williams could think about what he was saying. He knew it was the only option but still he didn't relish going back to that strange place down by the docks. He absently wondered if it would still be inexplicably dry.

"Oh," Pete replied. Clearly not relishing being alone with the catatonic woman.

"Keep her warm, as best you can," Williams told him. "Maybe see if she'll drink something. Suzy should be here soon with the doctor."

"Right then," Pete said.

Williams moved back over to the door, he was about to say something to the woman but thought better of it, he knew it wouldn't register with her in her current state. "Pete, if she does say anything, anything at all. Do me a favour and write it down, no matter how insignificant it seems. You never know, it might be important. I'll call the mainland once I get back, let them know what, if I actually know what is going on."

"Will do."

"Thanks Pete. Hell of a night, eh?" Williams said.

"Hell of a night," Pete echoed.

Four

Doctor Rachel Patten lit another candle and contemplated her current situation. Widow's Bay wasn't a bad place really and to be fair Rachel had only seen the place in winter, she just wasn't sure it had been the best choice to start her career as a G.P. She had taken the job as a favour to her father who had gone to medical school with her boss, Dr. Mayfield, the only other doctor on the island.

And she knew it was only for another six months until Mayfield's partner returned from her maternity leave. It was a steady place to start for sure, the problem for Rachel was it was just so damn small. The tiny island had a population of just under a two hundred mostly made up of either students or retired pensioners that had chosen (God only knew why) to make Widow's Bay their home.

Although she had only been here three months, she had already found herself starting to count down the remaining days of her contract, never a good sign.

Rachel, working on autopilot, was about to go through to the cottage's small kitchen to make herself a cup of tea when she remembered there was no power. Normally being the only G.P. surgery on an island and having no power would have been serious cause for concern, but seeing as nothing dramatic ever happened around here, the intermittent power outs were really nothing more than a pain in the backside. Besides, if tonight was anything to go by the power would

be back up soon enough, so in the meantime she would just have to grin and bear it. At least she had all but a full battery on her iPad so she could read a while and wait for the storm to pass.

She nearly screamed out loud at a sudden hammering on the front door. "Jesus." For anyone out in this weather she thought it must be serious. Well she had wanted excitement. Hadn't she?

Rachel opened the front door to see a young drenched policewoman standing on the pavement with her shoulders hunched up against the cold. It was W.P.C. Munro, Suzy. "Suzy, is that you?" Suzy nodded forlornly. "God, get yourself inside, girl." Rachel ushered the frozen woman inside and closed the door, shutting out the storm.

Suzy shook the water off her coat. "Rachel, hi, I was looking for Doctor Mayfield."

Rachel took her through to the living room. "Doug's on the mainland. Will I do?"

"Course," Suzy replied with a nod that showered the carpet with water from her soaked hair.

"What can I do for you?" Rachel asked.

The policewoman was wide eyed with nervous excitement. "P.C. Williams found a young woman wandering around by the docks."

"Jesus, in this weather?"

"Yeah, apparently she's in shock. I'm going to need you to come with me up to the lifeboat station, he's taken her there, it's the only place with half decent power at the moment."

Before she'd even realized it, Rachel had grabbed her medical emergency bag and snapped it open to check what she had. "Shock, right give me a second." She picked up a candle and went through into the small surgery and over to the storeroom where they kept the pharmaceuticals under lock and key. "I'll be as quick as I can Suzy." She was struggling to open the heavy lock on the door in the half-light when the whole room illuminated.

Suzy was in the doorway shining her powerful police issue torch over Rachel's shoulder. "That better, doc?" She smirked.

"Thanks," Rachel replied and opened the door. It took her a few seconds to find what she was looking for. A vial of Dopamine hydrochloride, this was a gentle but effective treatment for shock. She tossed it into her bag along with a pack of syringes and came back out. "Okay, ready, let me grab my coat."

* * * * *

The journey up to the lifeboat station, which was situated at the end of a small track running down to a secluded beach, could be described as precarious at the best of times, but was made doubly perilous by the driving rain which cut the visibility to practically zero.

Rachel watched Suzy as she tackled the conditions with no small amount of skill. She had been the only proper friend Rachel had made since arriving, due in no small part to the fact that they both under thirty. But this was the first time she had seen her in action so to speak.

Rachel's heart was pumping ten to the dozen and she had done nothing but swear her head off for most of the drive, convinced they would end up in the sea or

in a ditch somewhere. However Suzy had been cool, calm and collected throughout, a model of concentration and a damn good driver to boot.

Rachel was relieved to see the lights of the lifeboat station appear out of the gloom up ahead and Suzy pulled the car over and both women made a mad dash through the wind and rain over to the prefabricated lifeboat office. The door opened just as they reached it and Pete the lifeboat volunteer ushered them inside. "Nice night for it," he said as he closed the door.

"Yeah, great," Patten replied, she shook off her coat and looked around the office a little disorientated for a moment then remembered it was a temporary building they had put up until the new lifeboat station could be constructed. She winced as a gust of wind from outside physically shifted the whole building slightly. "Jesus, is this place safe?"

Pete took her coat and draped it over a chair. "Doubt it," he replied with a shrug.

"It's got power and a decent radio transmitter," Munro said taking off her own coat. "It'll have to do for now. Is P.C. Williams here?"

"No, he's gone back down to the docks, to have a look around." Pete said and moved over to a makeshift kitchenette. "He shouldn't be too long. I'll get the kettle on."

"Where's the girl he found?" Patten asked. She shook the rain off her bag. "I'll need to take a look at her."

"Of course," Pete gestured through the only other door in the cabin. "She's in the next room, we have a makeshift bedroom back there, but last time I checked she was just sat in a chair. She's pretty out of it, doctor."

"Thanks," Rachel said and headed for the door. She hesitated before opening it suddenly unsure of what she would find.

"Okay, Rach?" Munro asked. "You want me to come with you?"

Rachel turned to her and flushed. "No, thanks." She gave the police woman the best smile she could muster. And with that she opened the door and went through to the next room.

She was pleasantly surprised to feel how warm the back room was when she entered and was immediately met with the faint scent of freshly laundered but still damp clothing. A quick glance around the room showed that although it was just a temporary set up the guys at the station had done their best to make it feel as homely as possible. A double camp bed was situated in one corner along with a large obviously second hand sofa in front of which sat a table with a TV on it. The room was lit by a lamp standing in the far corner.

The woman was sitting in the middle of the room in a tatty old armchair with her back to Rachel. A small portable heater was on the floor close by blowing warm air onto her legs. "Hello?" She said softly and came over to the side of the chair. "I'm Doctor Patten." Pete had draped a large blanket over her legs and another over her shoulders for warmth.

"Hello?" Rachel said again and knelt down next to the chair. But the woman just stared off at the far wall with her hands in her lap. Her still damp brown hair was cut into a neat bob which framed the delicate features of her face. Woman? She looked nineteen at the very most and Rachel wondered if she was one of the students from the other side of the island.

"Is it okay if I have a quick look at you? Make sure you're okay? You look like you've had a heck of a night." Rachel put her medical bag on the floor and took out her stethoscope and a small torch. "Would that be okay?" But the girl didn't so much as nod in response.

Rachel gingerly touched the girl's cheek which was warm to the touch, which was a good start. She could see what looked like blood on the front of her blouse between the gap where the blanket had fallen slightly away from her chest. She slowly eased the blanket apart. Yes there was definitely a fair amount of still wet blood soaked into the material. But she could clearly see the material itself was intact. All the time keeping her eye on the girl's face for any sign of reaction, she unbuttoned the first three buttons of the blouse and pulled the material aside. She was relieved to see her skin was unmarked, whomever this blood belonged to, it wasn't hers.

"That's good," she said softly as much to herself as to the near catatonic girl and then she put on her stethoscope to listen to the girl's heart and breathing, both of which, if a little on the slow side, were at least regular.

Finally, Rachel turned on the small torch. "I'm just going to shine this into your eyes for a sec," she told the girl but of course got no response. She hadn't seen many cases of severe shock during her days at medical school, and certainly none here on sleepy Widow's Bay island, but she instinctively knew that whatever had happened to this poor girl it had all but completely shut her down. She needed serious help, help which Rachel was nowhere near qualified enough to administer.

She thought of the Dopamine hydrochloride in her bag but instantly dismissed the idea of giving her a shot. The girl, if borderline catatonic, seemed healthy enough in body if not mind. All she had to do was keep an eye on her and make sure her condition didn't deteriorate until they could call in the cavalry and get her to the mainland and into the proper care.

"Here we go, it's going to be a bit bright." Rachel shined the torch first into one eye and then the other, again the reaction was somewhat slower than normal but both pupils dilated under the light. "There, that wasn't so bad now was it?"

No response, but what had she expected?

She closed her bag and got to her feet. She was about to speak again but thought better of it, so without another word she left the poor girl to whatever nightmare was playing out behind those glacial eyes.

* * * * *

When Rachel came back through into the office, Suzy was sat on the edge of the table sipping a hot drink. Pete instantly jumped up from his seat by the radio and moved swiftly over to the kitchenette.

"Cocoa, doc?"

"Oh, please, thanks Peter." He poured her a large mug which she gratefully accepted. "Cheers."

"How is she, Rach?" Munro asked.

"Physically as far as I can tell from giving her a very brief once over she's okay. But we really need to get her to the mainland for some proper care." Rachel replied and took a sip of the cocoa. It was very sweet and very delicious.

Munro nodded grimly. "Pete's contacted the police on the mainland, but for the time being we ain't going anywhere in this weather."

"I'll do my best to keep an eye on her." Rachel told her.

"Thanks, that's all we can do for now. Once P.C. Williams gets back we'll hopefully have a better idea about what the hell's going on."

"You see the blood?" Pete asked.

"Yeah, it's not hers," Rachel said.

Pete made a face. "Yeah? Well then who the hell's is it?"

Now that was a good question.

Five

P.C. Williams buttoned up his completely redundant coat against the storm which again threatened to knock him off his feet. The coat, which was already damp from his last trip out to the docks had been completely soaked through in just the ten steps or so which had taken him to get from the warmth of his police car to that open area at the back of the derelict building.

The strangely dry phenomena he had encountered earlier was now thankfully gone as the area was now drenched through as it should be, and Williams even allowed himself the comforting thought that perhaps it had just been from a lightning strike after all and that the poor girl he had found wondering in the road had been so close to the impact that it had temporarily knocked all sense out of her. Yes now that he stood here piss wet through it was easy to convince himself that he had witnessed something strange for sure, but natural never the less.

Still, his training told him to give the immediate area the once over, just in case. So he took out his torch and let the light sweep over the crates, old discarded lobster pots and stinking fishing nets that were strewn all around the place. Now that he studied the debris more closely this time he could see blackened and charred patches here and there, which although long since extinguished would lend credence to a lightning strike. Williams made a mental note to have a word with the local fishermen about just abandoning their crap down here.

Although he hardly thought it possible the rain began to come down even heavier. "This isn't rain," he said out loud to the heavens. "This is a vertical sea with slits in it!" That was when a pile of crates and old ropes that had been stacked up against the building collapsed. "Jesus!!" Williams exclaimed and then laughed. Fine night for a fucking heart attack, he mused. He shone the torch over to the still shifting pile of trash.

An arm forced its way through the tangled mass of ropes and reached up to the sky. "Fuck me!" Williams sprinted across the dock and over to the back of the building. As he got closer he could see a figure buried in the debris.

Williams slipped the torch into its loop on his duty belt and began to frantically pull at the crates and clutter that were on top of the figure. He grasped a hold of the hand which gripped his own tightly for a moment only to slip from his grasp a second later, his hand came away slick not with water but with blood. "Jesus."

Williams wiped his palm on his coat and finally managed to get most of the clutter off who he could now see was a man who was all but naked, what was left of his clothes were charred and almost completely burnt away, his body was absolutely covered in watery blood.

Bloody spittle bubbled up from the man's mouth as he let out a strangled moan.

"It's alright," Williams told him. "I've got you." As gently as he could Williams pulled the man free of a length of tangled rope and out onto open ground. Clumps of fabric came away in his hands as he laid the man down. He took off his coat and wrapped it around the prone figure. He could smell a mixture of burnt clothing and the coppery tang of fresh blood as he did so.

Williams picked up the man in his arms with the sudden strength only a massive surge of adrenalin could give you and began to stagger over to his police car. Once at the vehicle he rested the man on the bonnet before opening the back door and then somehow managed to get the man onto the back seat. "Hold on mate," he said and checked the man's pulse at his blood slickened neck. It was there but very weak. "Just hold on," he told him. "Going to get you some help."

With that he jumped into the driver's seat and sped away. He keyed his shoulder mic whilst fighting with the steering wheel. "Suzy! Suzy, it's Ian. Do you copy, over?" At first he got nothing but static, then after a moment was rewarded with a familiar voice.

"Ian? Yes this is Suzy. You're damn faint. Where are you? Over."

"Coming back from the docks. Are you at the lifeboat station, over?"

"Yes, I'm here with Doctor Patten, Mayfield's on the mainland, over."

"Okay, that's good. Now listen. I've got an injured man with me. Looks like he's been struck by lightning. Tell Patten to get ready, he looks to be in a bad way, over."

"Will do Ian." Munro replied.

"Okay, should be there in ten. See you soon, Williams out."

Then the enormity of the situation threatened to overwhelm him. He held up a blood soaked hand which was shaking violently and just looked at it. "Fuckin' hell," he whispered, his voice trembling. A moment later the feeling of utter helplessness passed, replaced by one of urgency. He dragged his concentration back driving as fast as the conditions would allow.

He chanced a glance to the man laid curled up under his ruined coat on the back seat. In the near darkness of the car it was hard to make out any real detail, but he did notice that despite losing most of his clothes to the strike, strangely the man's matted hair seemed intact, plastered to his bloody face obscuring his features.

"Shit!" The car clipped the kerb and the steering wheel spun out of his sleek hands for a heart stopping moment. Heart pounding fit to burst through his chest, Williams returned his full attention back to the road ahead. He corrected the car's line and stepped on the accelerator. He knew these roads like the back of his hand and just needed to trust his instincts as he drove.

After what felt like miles he finally pulled the car onto the long dirt road that led alone the coastline and up to the lifeboat station. He eased off the gas a little – the road could be treacherous at the best of times and driving too fast in this shit weather was bordering on the suicide. He needed to get this poor bastard to a

doctor fast, but in one piece. Crashing now would add half an hour or more to getting him medical help and that could be fatal.

Out of nowhere tears glistened in his eyes and he had to bite back a sob. "Fuck," he cursed as it hit him. Avoiding this type of situation was exactly why he had taken the post here on Widow's Bay. Precisely because nothing ever happened here. P.C. Ian Williams was thirty eight years old, he had been a policeman for coming up to fifteen years and until recently he had spent the majority of his service on the front line in cities such as Manchester and some of the shittier parts of London. The things he had seen during those years had turned his hair prematurely grey and had on more than one occasion nearly broken his will and with that his sanity.

He had wanted to retire early and fuck his pension, but his Superintendent at the time had suggested sleepy little Widow's Bay. The place is literally in the middle of fucking nowhere, he had said. With a mixture of old folks who had retired there and a few dozen students who wanted to change the world. An easy gig. No more murdered children dumped in wheelie bins. No more rape and abuse of the most horrendous kinds. Humanity at its most bland. It had seemed like heaven to P.C. Williams, and it had been for the three years he had been here. Until tonight.

Williams's thoughts of half-forgotten atrocities fled his mind like a coward as the man in the back suddenly began to convulse and by the sounds of it he started choking on his own blood. "Shit." The awful gagging sound brought bile to the back of Williams's throat. He calculated he couldn't be more than five minutes from the lifeboat station. But that was five minutes too long for this poor bastard if he didn't do something fast.

He took his foot off the gas and tapped the brakes as gently as he could, slowly letting the car come to a halt. Experience had taught him not to simply slam on the brakes on this type of waterlogged dirt road. A second later he was back out in the raging wind and rain and scrambled over to the back door and pulled at the handle. The wind was hitting it hard which meant it took him a few agonizing moments before he could get it open.

He ducked in the back and let out a howl of pain as the wind caught the door and it slammed hard into the back of his legs. "You fucker!" It seemed like everything possible was conspiring against him tonight. Completely missing this poor bastard on his first sweep of the docks, to now nearly breaking his legs in the car door.

Williams crawled over the prone man in the back who had now ominously fallen silent. "Oh, no. Come on, come on mate. Hold on." He felt for a pulse in the man's neck but got nothing. He pulled off the coat and pressed his ear to the man's bare chest, which was quite still. "Shit!" He hammered hard on his chest, then again but still nothing. He interlocked his hands and using the ball of his right hand began to perform CPR.

"C'mon!" He continued the practiced motion for what felt like minutes then pressed his blood soaked fingers to the man's neck once more. Nothing. "God damn it!" Williams sat there panting from the exertion feeling utterly useless. He looked down into the man's face, into his now sightless eyes. "So sorry," was all he could muster.

After what could have been hours, Williams's mic burst into life, it was Munro, she sounded a million miles away. "Williams? Ian this is Suzy, do you have an ETA for us, over?"

He checked his watch in the near darkness and waited for the luminous numbers to come into focus. No he thought grimly. But I do have an estimated time of death.

Six

'He's gone, I'll be there soon.' Williams's final words hung heavy in the increasingly claustrophobic atmosphere of the lifeboat office. You could hear the desolation in his voice even through the tinny speaker. The simple message had stopped them all in their tracks, mid-panic. Pete the volunteer lifeboat man had been running around collecting blankets ready for the arrival, W.P.C. Suzy Munro had gone through into the other room to collect the camp bed and Rachel Patten had been preparing her meagre medical supplies and had already procured everything Pete had at his limited disposal here. At least it did include a decent supply of bandages and a specially insulated blanket used to ward off hypothermia after you pulled some poor unfortunate out of the sea.

All of this useless now, too little too late.

Rachel stood in the middle of the small office just staring at the insulated blanket in her hands. It remaindered her of the type you would see flung over the shoulders of runners after they finished a marathon. And she couldn't help but feel a little shame. The moment she heard the victim was dead the first emotion that came unbidden, even though it was for barely a split second, had been relief. She had been going over the various scenarios she would be faced with once Williams got back with the injured man. What would someone who had been struck by lightning look like? What would they need from her? And as she did so she felt her nerve slowly giving way as she realised just out of her depth she felt.

She had found herself silently cursing Doctor Mayfield for getting himself caught on the mainland and unable to get back until this God forsaken storm had let up. She even cursed her father for suggesting Widow's Bay as an ideal place to start her medical career. Sleepy little Widow's Bay where nothing ever happens.

"Headlights," Munro said pulling Rachel back into the here and now. The policewoman had been waiting by the window ever since the call from Williams had come through. She moved over to the door but she hesitated and turned to the others.

Pete jumped up from behind his desk. "Maybe we should wait until he comes in, don't think we want to be wandering around out there in this shite until we have to." He looked from Suzy to Rachel and gave a weak smile which froze on his face. "Christ," he said. "What are we going to do with the body?"

The body.

Suzy looked around the small prefabricated office. "Well I don't suppose we can bring it in here," she said. "Not with the girl in the next room."

The door opened and all hell came blowing into the room. They all turned to see P.C. Williams standing ashen faced in the doorway. Rachel let out an involuntary gasp. The policeman was drenched to the skin and covered in watery blood. For a long moment no one moved, he looked like an extra from the apocalypse. Finally Williams closed the door behind him shutting out the storm.

"Christ, Ian," Munro uttered.

Williams looked down at himself as if just noticing the state he was in for the first time. He gave a slight shake of the head. "Yeah," was all he could say in response.

"Christ old man, take a seat," said Pete and he grabbed a towel off the back of his chair and threw it to Williams.

"Cheers Pete," he said but tossed it back onto the desk. "But first we need to get the body out of the back of my car."

Suzy moved to grab her coat but Williams held a hand up to the young woman. "No, Suzy. Pete can give me a hand."

"Eh?" Said Pete.

"What do you mean, no?" Suzy asked indignantly. But Williams ignored her.

"Pete, get your coat. We can't bring it in here. Is there anywhere else?"

"Boatshed," Pete replied. "It's got the new lifeboat in it, but there's a long work bench in there to. Will that do?"

"Ian?" Suzy said.

"That'll be fine, it's only temporary until the storm clears then we can get the coroner out here," Williams replied ignoring Munro. "Besides," he added grimly. "I don't think the poor bloke's going to care much."

Rachel watched as Suzy fumed. She remembered Suzy once telling her when the two women had gone out drinking together on the mainland one night, that although they weren't flat out sexist, the other officers felt they had to protect her as she was only in her early twenties.

Munro stepped forwards her face matching anything the storm outside could muster. "Pete. You open the boatshed, P.C. Williams and I will bring the body to you." Before anyone could reply, Suzy pulled on her coat. She fixed Williams with a stare that could strip paint.

Good for you, Rachel thought. Pete for one looked visibly relieved and went scrambling for his keys.

Williams looked for a moment like he was going to say something, but his face softened into a look of pride. But still he said. "He's a right mess Suzy."

"I'm sure he is," Suzy answered firmly. "But I doubt he's going to get any prettier the more we stand around all night debating. Do you?"

"Fair enough," he replied. Williams turned to the others. "Pete, meet us at the boatshed. Doctor, could you please stay with the girl? By the way has she said anything yet?"

"Nothing yet," Patten replied. "She seems calm enough but I think she's deep in shock. Do I need to take a look at the body?"

"Nothing you can do, I'm afraid. Once we've got him in the boatshed, we'll take some pictures for evidence. Who knows when the storm lets up a bit maybe we can show them around, see if we can get an ID from the students."

"Do you think we should show a picture to the girl?" Suzy asked.

Rachel shook her head. "I wouldn't, not just yet. She's traumatized enough as it is."

"Fair enough," Suzy replied. "Oh and Pete? We'll need a sheet or something to wrap the body in."

"Good point," Williams agreed.

Pete grimaced. "Right." He took a folded up bed sheet off the camping bed Munro had put in the corner. Munro took it and gave him as best a reassuring smile as she could.

Williams moved over to the door and waited for Munro to join him. He could feel the door handle rattling in his hand as the wind battered the door from the other side. "You ready?"

"Ready," Munro replied firmly clutching the bedsheet to her chest.

Seven

Williams and Munro stood by the open back door of the police car as the wind whipped viciously around them. Munro watched her colleague with a growing sense of unease. He had stopped dead as soon as he opened the car door and had stood there almost transfixed shining his torch inside for what felt to Munro like a full minute.

She had been steeling herself for what she would find and had half wondered if she would be able to fully function when confronted by her first in the field dead body. But she hadn't expected Williams, who had already seen the poor man, to freeze like this. But here he was just standing there opened mouthed at what his torch light found (or didn't find?) in the back seat.

"Ian?" She said too softly for him to hear in the maelstrom around them as if she were reluctant to break the spell which rooted him to the spot. "Ian?" She said much louder this time but again he didn't reply. She let out a curse under her breath and forced herself to move to his side and following the torch light, she peered into the back of the car, half expecting to find it empty as she did so.

She gasped, it was far from empty. The blood covered body of a man who looked at first glance to be in his mid-forties was laid awkwardly on the back seat. Williams's coat had slipped off the man to reveal him in all his naked glory. She could see rivulets of drying blood, which looked almost black in the harsh torch light, seeping from under the body, off the seat and into the dark foot well below.

Then she noticed fresh scars glistening in the torch light. "Jesus, I thought you said he was struck by lightning?"

Even in the half-light and the position he was laid in Suzy could see the man's back was covered in literally dozens of fresh deep wounds. She turned to Williams who shook his head ever so slightly, his eyes still on the body.

"Ian!" She said harshly.

"They weren't there..." His voice trailed away.

Fear stabbed at Suzy's guts, she had never seen him so terrified. "What do you mean, they weren't there? Look at them!"

Williams finally tore himself away from the ghastly sight. "You think I could miss something like that?" He said firmly. But the instant the words were out of his mouth his face grew uncertain again. "Could I?" He added.

"Ian, it was dark, you were in the middle of a hurricane for Christ sake."

He nodded as if wanting to believe her but still his eyes betrayed him.

She began to unravel the sheet. "Anyway, we can worry about what you did and didn't notice later. First things first, we need to get this poor bastard inside." She ducked into the back of the car and was instantly hit with the sickening smell of fresh blood. She swallowed against a wave of nausea that threatened to overwhelm her.

Thankfully the other back door opened and Williams appeared at the other side. "Here, give me the other end."

Suzy threw the other end of the sheet over to him and they began the awkward task of wrapping him in the material in the cramped confines of the car.

"Suzy," Williams said tentatively. She looked at him as she lifted the man's bare feet and eased them into the sheet. "Sorry, I don't know what happened there. Guess I just froze."

"It's okay," Suzy said. "I won't tell the other lads." She was glad to see the ghost of a smile play on Williams's lips. But added grimly. "But this means this wasn't an accident, Ian."

"Yeah," he said concentrating on the task at hand and trying not to fixate on the seeping wounds he had somehow missed.

* * * * *

Pete Mulgrave offered up a prayer of thanks to the God of volunteer lifeboat men that at least the workmen had had time to completely finish the boatshed before the storm had kicked in. It felt good to be in a solid structure where the wind and rain outside couldn't shake the walls and roof. Although the storm did its best to huff and puff, it couldn't so much as rattle the sturdy double glazed windows.

Pete finished clearing the long work bench which ran almost the entire width of the shed in preparation for the body. The body, he shuddered at the thought of being in the same building as a dead body. Not that it would have been the first time. Pete had been a volunteer lifeboat man for ten years and although it was thankfully rare these days. The sea around the east coast of England still managed to claim the odd victim here and there.

Poor drowned souls found bobbing bloated out to sea, or washed up on shore to be left at the mercy of the birds and wild animals that scouted the coastline for a free meal, those were the worst. Pete shook the image of a woman he had once found snagged on some rocks near Reaton sands half a decade ago now out of his head. They had been searching for her for a week and it still brought bile to the back of his throat to think of the state she was in.

The powerful exterior proximity light perched above the boatshed's large double doors came on pulling him back to the here and now. He trotted alongside the

covered lifeboat and over to a smaller access door just to the left of the main doors and opened it slightly expecting to see Williams and Munro trudging over with a grim bundle between them.

There was a large open area just beyond the shed and beyond that a large wooded area shrouded in darkness which was being battered by the storm. But neither police officer was to be seen. A sudden flutter of movement drew Pete's eye over to the far side of the wood. A large piece of ripped tarpaulin was stuck high in the branches of a tree at the very edge of the light's reach flapping like some huge snared black bat struggling to be free of its clutches. Directly below it a figure turned and walked off into the woods.

Pete started and may well have yelped out loud like a kicked dog. There had been a figure, hadn't there? Just visible through the rain? Pete hadn't noticed it until it moved off into the night, but there had been someone just standing there. Hadn't there? With each passing second Pete doubted he had actually seen anything at all. I mean who would be mad enough to be out in this shit? He thought and scanned the edge of the wood as best he could through the torrent of rain. The tarpaulin whipped and turned in the tree. Yes that was real enough. Besides on a night like tonight with thunder storms and bodies down by the docks, a man could imagine anything.

"Pete!" The word drifted over to him through the storm. He turned to see Williams and Munro struggling over to him caring the body, now thankfully wrapped in a sheet.

"Come on," he waved them over and as they approached he allowed himself one last glance at the wood. Yes a man could imagine anything was out there on a night like tonight he convinced himself. After all, the alternative didn't bear thinking about.

* * * * *

"I, erm, I need to take some pictures," Williams said through chattering teeth as the three of them looked down at the forlorn sheet covered form laid on the bench. Blood had already begun seeping through the material in the short time it had taken them to lug the body from the car to the boatshed.

"Photos?" Pete exclaimed.

"Just a couple, for CID on the mainland."

"This was an accident, right?" Pete asked.

"Someone calved him up," Suzy replied grimly.

"Shite," Pete breathed through his teeth. He turned away and walked over to the lifeboat. The sound of Williams and Munro unwrapping the body was more than enough to turn his stomach, let alone seeing the poor bastard. He idly tugged at the heavy canvas covering the boat. It didn't need securing but he went through the motions nevertheless.

"Jesus," he heard Munro say, as a camera phone flashed once, twice. "Get one of his face," she said and the camera flashed again. "Cut him to pieces," she added.

"Weird," Williams said. "They look like patterns or something." Flash. He exhaled deeply. "I'm sure they weren't there before," he added softly.

"Like I said it was dark, rain hammering down." Munro said.

"Maybe," then; "Bollocks to it, that'll do for now."

Pete was relieved to hear them begin to wrap the body up again. "Safe to turn around?" He asked.

"Sure," Williams replied, "all done for now."

Pete came back over and stood by the two officers. He winced. The sheet was covered with even more blood than before thanks to their efforts. And despite himself he couldn't help but look at the impression of the dead man's face in the tightly wrapped material.

"Christ, can we get out of here? I don't know about you two but I could do with a stiff drink," Pete said.

"Amen to that," Munro said but didn't take her eyes off the body.

Williams scrolled through the pictures on his phone and wrinkled his nose. "These are shit, but they'll have to do for now. Pete do you have a proper camera we can use later, if the mainland need some better pics?"

"Yeah, there's one in the office."

"Okay, we'll contact the mainland, let them know we have a murder here and send the pictures through, see what they want us to do next." He eyed a nearby rain lashed window. "Not that we can do much in this."

"You sure this is murder?" Pete asked.

"Positive," he replied.

Again nobody moved. They were like three mourners at a funeral, each waiting for one of the others to say a prayer.

"Thought I saw someone outside just now," Pete said. It came out of nowhere as he had tried to put the incident out of his mind, but seeing this was now murder, was it now so far from a possibility?

"You sure?" Williams asked.

"Out by the woods. No, I'm not a hundred percent sure to be honest." It seemed ludicrous now that he thought about it, but he was glad he had said it all the same. It felt good to get it out of his head especially now. Just in case.

"Let's all keep an eye out until he can figure out what to do next," Williams said.

Suzy nodded. "Now I really need that drink."

Eight

News of a possible murder and one on of all places that little nondescript lump of rock situated just off the east coast of England called Widow's Bay, had caused quite a stir on the mainland. Within half an hour of P.C Williams e-mailing through news of the attack and several blurry camera phone photos of the victim, he had been patched through to none other than Chief Inspector Lyle of Hull CID.

Lyle had requested any more info Williams could give him about the circumstances and Williams had done his best to bring Lyle up to date. He told him of finding the girl wandering in the vicinity of where he had found the victim, then alive and how he had died in the back of his police car. Williams thought it best to leave out the bit about the strangely dry area he had encountered.

The Chief Inspector had quizzed him on the wounds covering the victim's back, which he seemed particularly interested in. Williams described them as best he could and again he left out the fact that he was sure they hadn't been visible when he found the man. But truth be told he hadn't been able to make out much on the man's body due to the fresh blood which he had to admit must have come from somewhere, and the conditions they had endured just to get him to the boathouse.

Lyle pushed the point about the wounds and Williams had an awful feeling he knew what was coming next.

When he came off the radio, Williams was greeted by two expectant faces. Doctor Patten had gone back through to check on the girl in the next room.

"So?" Suzy asked. "What did he say?" Ever since they had got back into the office she had been sat at Pete's desk idly doodling on a piece of paper. Williams look across at it, she had been trying to sketch the wounds but with little success judging by the amount of scribbled out pictures.

"Nothing much, they can't do anything from the mainland until this weather lets up," he said, tearing his eyes away from the drawings. There was something about them, and the vague pictures he had taken that somewhere in the back of his mind looked familiar, but he just couldn't place it.

"To be honest I couldn't hear half of what he was saying," he continued and turned to Pete. "That thing kept fading in and out," He told him, which won a shrug from the lifeboat man.

"That's the best reception you are going to get in this weather, just be thankful it's working at all" Pete told him.

"True," Williams had to admit, at least the e-mail with the photos got through, albeit at the third attempt.

He perched on the end of the table and listened to the storm battering the prefab as if he needed reminding it was still out there.

Doctor Patten came back in, her face set in a frown.

"Hey Rach," Suzy said. "How is she doing?"

"Same," Rachel replied. The girl still hadn't so much as acknowledged her presence since she arrived. At least she was calm she conceded, well borderline catatonic if truth be told, but that was better than her screaming the place down she told herself. "Here," she said and threw Williams' phone to him. The policeman had asked her to take a photo of the girl just in case they needed to ID her.

"And she still wasn't said anything?" Williams asked hopefully as he caught the phone.

"Sorry, nothing at all, but to be fair you need a shrink not a family GP." She looked at him, although he had dried off somewhat and had discarded his police jacket and tie, he stilled looked like a drowned rat who hadn't slept in days. "So what's the plan?" She asked. "Keep an eye on her until the storm clears?"

"Pretty much," he said. Then he made a face like he had just swallowed something foul tasting. He glanced at Suzy behind the desk. "The Inspector wants more photos of the body. Clearer more detailed stuff. He's got a bee in his bonnet about the wounds. He thinks there's something significant about them."

Suzy tapped her pencil on the pad in front of her. "Makes sense," she said less than enthusiastic.

"What about them?" Patten asked.

"I'd like for you to see them for yourself, if you wouldn't mind?" Williams asked. "Suzy, you can sit this one out, keep an eye on the girl and the radio in case they call back." He waited for her to protest, but she just nodded. He couldn't blame her.

"Pete, I'm gonna need your camera?" Williams said.

"Oh, sure." Pete darted over to the desk and began opening drawer after drawer looking for it.

"You ready doc?"

Patten nodded although she wasn't sure ready was the right word. Her mind drifted back to student autopsy observations when she was at university. Back then the bodies had all been specially prepared, the environments clean, sterile and above all controlled. Which she always found helped her maintain a certain distance from the physical task at hand. Just another lesson, interesting in a clean clinical way.

Certainly there had been videos and presentations on the more gory aspects of medical procedures. Road traffic accident aftermaths and the odd placement at the A&E department at Jimmy's in Leeds. But there she was just an observer, occasionally called upon to assist but never more than fetching and carrying really. She was training to be a GP not a trauma surgeon.

This however Rachel Patten knew would be neither clean nor clinical. She suddenly felt a strange buzz of anticipation despite herself, after all it's not every day you get to attend the photographing of a murder victim. She picked up her medical bag which had a few pairs of surgical gloves in it. "Ready when you are." She said and was pleased at how confident her voice sounded.

"Here you go, Ian," Pete passed a small digital camera to Williams.

"Thanks Pete. Right." He took a breath and looked at each of them in turn. "We shouldn't be too long. Suzy, if the girl says anything, anything at all..."

"I know," Suzy said. "Write it down."

"Right," he said and pulled on his still damp coat. "Let's go get piss wet through again, alright doc?"

She smiled and zipped up her coat as far as it would go. "Right behind you."

Pete forced the door open against the blistering weather outside and they both headed into the night for a date with a corpse.

Nine

Hell of a place for a make-shift morgue, Rachel thought grimly as she took in the boatshed. The overhead florescent lights flickered for a moment as if for dramatic effect when Williams turned them on, and she could hear the distant sound of the generator, which was in the next room, splutter in protest under the strain of the extra power surge before it finally settled back into a more even rhythm again.

The building was dominated by the huge bulk of the canvas covered lifeboat which took up a good three quarters of the space. A long work bench ran along the

opposite wall and Rachel's gaze followed it down to a pathetic looking blood stained bundle at the far end. Not the most dignified of resting places for a life so brutally cut short if Suzy and Williams were to be believed. Well she would soon find out for herself.

She didn't notice Williams appear at her side until he spoke. "Not ideal, is it?" He said softly.

"No," she said, the word caught in her throat and she cleared it before continuing. "But like you said, don't suppose he cares."

With this she gripped the handle of her medical bag a little tighter and strode over to the body. She placed the bag on the bench next to it and took out a pair of surgical gloves. She offered them to Williams who approached. He held up a hand which was already covered with his own police issue glove, then took the small digital camera out of his coat pocket and placed it next to Patten's bag.

Rachel snapped on the gloves with a practiced efficiency and studied the shroud. A good half of which was now stained with dark blood, the remaining material had a sickly yellow hue to it thanks to the unflattering light from the florescent strip overhead.

She pulled at the edge of the sheet, which for a moment was caught under the dead weight of the body. It finally came away as she tugged harder and she let it fall away over the bench to reveal the dead man inside.

He was naked and at first glance looked to be in his late forties, his blood matted hair was grey in parts and receding back to thin wisps on the top of his head. His face was badly battered and bruised but still his face was set in a peculiar half smile as though he had just gotten the joke before death had claimed him.

"Ian, you said you thought at first he was struck by lightning?"

"Yeah," Williams was fiddling with the camera at her side mumbling under his breath until he finally got it to switch on.

"But if he wasn't, what happened to his clothes?" She could see smudges of soot on his shoulders and neck and patches of red that could have been the beginnings of burns, but they were nowhere near the third degree you would expect from a lightning strike.

"I think he may have been hit after he got attacked," he said and began taking pictures of the body. "When I found him he still had a few bits of clothing on him, but they were burnt to shit, flaked right off when I moved him."

It didn't add up, but she had to admit she hadn't the first clue of what someone who had been hit by lightning would actually look like. Besides, people survived being hit all the time. Didn't they?

Williams made a face and put the camera down. "We need to turn him over. The wounds are on his back. I need to get a clear shot of them for the Inspector."

"Okay, ready when you are," Rachel said and placed her hands under the body's right shoulder. Williams eased his hands under the man's lower back and upper thigh.

"On three," Williams said. "One, two... Three."

They rolled him on his side. "Jesus," Rachel hissed through her teeth. The man's back was a mass of deep wounds covered in drying dark blood. They

pushed the body onto its front then Williams tugged at the sheet under it so the body laid relatively flat against the bench.

"That's some nasty shit," Williams blurted out.

"I'll say," Rachel agreed. It took a moment but as she began to examine the gory slashes she started to see some sort of order to the wounds. She wasn't sure at first but the closer she looked the more it seemed these weren't just random cuts. This wasn't just some frenzied attack as she had first thought.

"Tell me you see that?" Williams asked and took a couple of shots. He looked at the screen on the camera as if hoping the digital picture would offer up something more tangible.

"Yeah, I see it, whatever it is." She looked back to the other end of the boatshed where she remembered she had noticed a large sink by the door when she first came in and sure enough there it was. "Hang on," she said and ran over to the sink. There was a bucket just under it which she scooped up and filled until it was all but overflowing, then lugged it back over to Williams and the body.

She placed the bucket on the bench and then scooped up some water in her cupped hands and began to rinse the blood from the man's back. With each handful the wounds became more and more clear. Yes there was definitely a rhyme to this mutilation but she couldn't quite make out what it was just yet.

As she cleaned the blood from the body, Williams took more pictures. He studied the small screen after each one.

Two symmetrical patterns divided by the man's spine began to emerge, Rachel wiped off as much of the blood as she could so she could get a better sense of what had been carved there, but much to her frustration it eluded her.

Being so intent on the puzzle before her Rachel wasn't aware Williams had stopped taking pictures until he uttered. "Fuck me." She turned to him. His face was ashen he shook his head in disbelief, eyes glued to the camera's screen.

"Ian?"

He had been taking the pictures flat on in landscape and had been looking at them in the same way. But it wasn't until he happened to turn the camera and looked at the screen in portrait that he got the full desired effect the perpetrator was after. He held the camera up for Rachel to see.

The killer had carved a set of angel's wings into the flesh of the man's back. One wing each side of the backbone.

"Jesus H," Rachel gasped. She hauled herself up on the bench so that she could look down on the body and see the rendering in all its gory detail.

It was like looking at some insanely intricate inkless tattoo. The outline of the two wings had been expertly carved with a thicker blade but it was the obsessive detail of the feathers that really beggared belief. Each individual feather, possibly a dozen or more to each wing had been painstakingly wrought using the thinnest of instruments, perhaps a surgical scalpel or something finer still.

It must have taken hours to create this grim work of art and surely under the most controlled of conditions. But on a living canvas such as this had been?

"You sure he was alive when you found him?" Rachel had to ask.

"Yes," was all Williams could say unable to take his eyes off the gruesome creation.

Rachel felt a wave of nausea wash over her so she awkwardly climbed down off the bench. If the poor soul had been alive when this had been done to him? Her head swam at the thought. He must have been drugged, that was the only explanation. She shuddered and prayed he had been unconscious when it had happened because the alternative was almost too much to bear.

Ten

Detective Sergeant Kate Bell had been studying the large cork board for a good five minutes before she realised she had her arms wrapped around herself despite the relative warmth of the office here at the heart of New Scotland yard in London. The board was covered, sometimes two deep with photos, clippings, maps and all manner of scraps of evidence, no matter how tenuous they might seem at first glance.

It was a brainstorming tool they called the wall of 'machafuko' which was Swahili for chaos. Nothing was off limits here, nothing was deemed too far-fetched or unsubstantiated. If anyone from the ten-strong task force thought something might pertain to the case, up on the wall it went. And just the same, if it led to yet another dead end, down it came and filed away (never dis-guarded) as some of the more dog eared papers had been pinned up and taken down again so many times they resembled the surface of a cheap dart board.

But despite the clutter there were eight untouched photographs lined across the top. Eight which they all hoped wouldn't become nine, or God forbid, ten.

These were the photos of the killer's victims. There had been only six when Kate had joined the task force three years ago and they were still no closer to catching the maniac. Until now perhaps.

It was hard, but she forced herself to look at each one in turn. They were, after all, why they were here. The photos were divided into two parts. The left hand side was a photo of the person in life. They always seemed to be taken in happier times, bright faces smiling for the camera, as if to deliberately add to the sickening impact of the right hand side, a picture of them post-mortem. It was like some ghastly make-over show. Before and after crossing paths with a serial killer.

As always it was victim number five which caused her the most distress. Little Amy Peebles had been only ten when her life had been cut so horribly short. The killer was considered quite unique in his/her choice of victims, most stick to one ethnic, age or gender group, but this sick bastard was an equal opportunities murderer. So far they had linked four women of various ages, three men and of course poor Amy.

If it hadn't been for the unique 'signature' scarring on each of their backs you could have been forgiven for thinking none of the killings were linked.

Kate dragged her gaze away from the wall and picked up the four grainy photographs she had printed earlier. These were the best of a bad lot really, four half decent images from the nearly a dozen they had received. She felt a much

needed hit of adrenalin as she shuffled through them. Was she holding the key to finally unlocking this nightmare in her hands?

"Now there's over time and then there's taking the piss!" A familiar voice said from behind her.

She smiled as her boss Detective Chief Inspector Pearce came into the office, bleary eyed with his coat slung over one arm. She knew he'd been at his old colleague's leaving do but thankfully he didn't look too worse for wear. Besides she had a feeling what she was about to show him would sober him right up.

"Sorry to drag you away from a night of debauchery boss."

He snorted at this and threw his coat on a nearby desk. "I'm sixty one, I'm afraid those days are long gone."

"Rubbish, I've seen you at the Christmas party," she said.

He smiled. "Hmm. Okay so apart from your abuse, why am I here Kate?"

With a flutter of excitement in her stomach, Kate handed him the four photos. "Take a look at these, they were taken in Yorkshire earlier tonight."

She waited for a reaction, but he just squinted at them and frowned. He then reached into the inside pocket of his dinner jacket and took out a pair of spectacles put them on and looked at each photo in turn, his face unreadable.

Finally he spoke. "Hmm, I hope the crime scene photographer was fired after taking these. What is he, on work experience or something?"

"It was a local bobby," she told him. "He took them on one of those small digital cameras. The murder happened..." She checked the notes she had scrawled down earlier on a pad of A4 paper. "Happened on a small island, Widow's Bay. It's a small island just off the east coast, near Scarborough."

"Very catchy."

"Isn't it?" She agreed, waiting, but still no reaction, so she grabbed them back off Pearce and shuffled through them looking for the best one. Pearce's eye sight was notoriously bad at the best of times, let alone at half past midnight and after a night drinking. She found the one that had first pricked her interest and handed it back to Pearce. "Look at it, boss!" She said trying to keep the irritation out of her voice.

Again for an agonising amount of time his face didn't alter a twitch and for one horrible moment Kate thought that maybe she had misread the picture.

Pearce's grey eyes gave a flash of recognition. "Jesus."

"You see it, don't you?"

"Not again," he uttered and looked up at Kate from over the top of his glasses. She could see the desolation in his face then suddenly realised she hadn't given him the full details.

"No, boss listen," she said taking the photo out of his shaking hands. "That was taken on an island. But that's not all."

"How did we get these?" Pearce asked not letting her finish. He glanced at the board, clearly contemplating having to add another photo to the top row.

"They came from Yorkshire CID, Hull," Kate told him. "The copper who took these e-mailed them to the mainland and someone at Hull CID thought he recognised the markings. I think he was involved in the case a little during the early days. Anyway he sent them through to us. Not more than an hour ago."

"I need to speak to the copper who took these," Pearce said. "We need to get that place on lock down, quick as we can."

"Boss, it's okay." She put a hand on his arm and he finally looked away from the board of *Machafuko*. "They are holed up at the lifeboat station on the island. From what we know there's a massive storm up there at the moment, it's got the whole island cut off from the mainland. Apparently the phone lines are in and out at the moment, they were lucky to get these through as it is."

His face brightened. "Right, we need to get going now, whilst this storm holds out." He moved to grab his coat but stopped mid action. "What about the body?" He asked. "We could do with some better photos."

Kate glanced at one of the photos on the desk, that old familiar pattern so delicately carved into the flesh made her wince. "The body's with the copper. It's at the local RNLI lifeboat station. Apparently it's the only place with half reliable power due to the storm."

She watched as her old mentor pulled on his coat. She had seen him age terribly over the three years she had been with the task force. The weight of the stalled investigation had lain heavy on his shoulders and she knew he took every setback as a personal failure. It felt good to see him so energised, filled with renewed purpose. She just hoped that this time they truly had the break they needed.

"Let's go," Pearce said and Kate had to jog to keep up as he pushed through the door and into the long corridor which led to the lift at the end.

"Oh and boss?" She said as she got level with him. "That's not the best part."

He turned to her with a quizzical look on his face but didn't break stride.

"They have a witness."

Pearce's jaw practically hit the floor. "Don't mess with me," he said warily as they approached the lift.

"No shit boss," she said and punched the down button. "A woman, they think maybe she saw the whole thing. She was found near the scene. She's in shock apparently so hasn't said anything yet."

The lift doors opened and they got in. Kate couldn't remember seeing Pearce so animated; he seemed to have lost ten years in as many seconds. "Jesus, this could be it!" He said and hit the down button. As the lift began to descend he clapped his hands together. "Christ, Kate. This is the closest we've been for years. It may be the middle of October, but it feels like Christmas to me."

She nodded in agreement as something else occurred to her. "Y'know, boss. If this island really is cut off..."

Pearce's face bloomed with recognition. "No one can get on. Or off."

"Exactly. The local police on the mainland say it could be another day or so before the ferry will be up and running again. And sure as shit no one could swim back in that weather."

Pearce exhaled. He closed his eyes trying to stay calm. "He's still on there." The finality of the statement hung in the air between them like a physical presence.

"For at least another twenty four hours," Kate said and her heart skipped a beat seeing what looked like a tear in Pearce's eye. This was the best lead they had had as long as she had been working on the case, if ever before. She looked at the old man and felt a slight hint of despondency. If the murdering bastard got away this

time, with so much stacked against him, she worried it would kill her boss, or at the very least break him beyond repair.

The lift reached the ground floor and they came out into the reception area. "I've got to make a couple of calls," Pearce told her. "Meanwhile, find out if we can get onto that island on a chopper. Christ, see if you can get your hands on one of those sea king helicopters the navy use. Either way I want to get as close to that island as I can ASAP.

"Don't know about the navy, but I can have one of ours on the helipad on the roof in an hour."

"Do it, and wake up the rest of the team. They'll have to follow by road. I want you and me and every bit of info we have on this bastard up in the air in an hour, got it?"

"Yes sir," Kate replied and moved over to where a telephone was attached to the wall, her heart hammering.

Pearce left her and headed for the large revolving doors at the front of the building which led out into the street beyond. "I'll call the Chief Superintendent from my car, he'll get us all the clearances we need." He turned but didn't stop walking. "This is it, Kate," he said firmly. "I don't care if we have to call in the bloody army. No one gets on and off that island until we have that bastard. Even if we have to arrest every living soul on it."

With that, he negotiated the revolving doors and was gone. Kate took a moment as she waited for the phone to connect. She took in the deathly quiet reception area and couldn't help but think this was the calm before the (quite literal) storm.

Eleven

Doctor Patten stood in the doorway and watched the girl as she just sat there. It seemed to her that she hadn't moved so much as a muscle since she had been seated down in front of the heater what was a couple of hours ago now. She still had her hands placed in her lap, gazing off towards the far wall as if she were looking through the prefabricated concrete and steel structure to something far beyond. Perhaps to a happier, safer place far away from the horrors she had seen here on Widow's Bay.

Suzy Munro gently pushed past her and came into the room. She was carrying a mug of hot chocolate in hopes of tempting the girl back to the here and now. Patten came into the room after her and closed the door behind her. Now she was in the room she felt just how hot it had become thanks to the heater that had been quietly blasting away all this time.

Suzy placed the mug down on to a small coffee table set just next to where the girl was sitting and then got down onto her knees. "Hi, my name's W.P.C Munro, Suzy." She motioned across to Patten who turned off the heater. She found the atmosphere in the room oppressive, which she took as being due to the heat. Then the doctor moved over to stand next to Munro. "This is Doctor Patten, Rachel." She studied the girl's face but it didn't register so much as a flicker of recognition.

"We're here to help," Rachel said. "Could you tell us your name?"

Nothing.

Rachel could see Suzy biting her lip as she concentrated on the girl's blank expression, looking for any sign they were getting through to her. "It must have been awful," she said with genuine compassion. "Seeing what you saw out there."

The girl flinched ever so slightly. It was a barely noticeable twitch and one Rachel might well have thought he imagined if Suzy hadn't glanced up at her. They waited for any further response but there was nothing.

Suzy sighed and nodded to the mug on the table. "I've brought you a mug of hot chocolate. Lots of sugar." She picked up the mug and gently raised it to the girl's lips. She tipped it slightly and the girl took the smallest of sips but still her face was an indecipherable mask.

At least that was something, Rachel thought and knelt next to Suzy. She took her pen light out of her pocket. "Hi, I'm just going to shine this into your eyes again if that's okay?" She hadn't been expecting a response and got none. She shone the light first into her right eye, then the left. "Pupils responding normally," she said.

"No sign of physical trauma," Suzy said looking the girl over. "Are you in any pain, miss?" She asked.

Rachel motioned to the dried blood on her blouse. "The blood's not hers." She tapped her own temple. "I'd say it's all in here," she added in a whisper.

"Miss?" Suzy said putting the mug back down on the table. "I know this is really hard, but we need to catch whoever did this. Can you remember anything about what happened?" Still nothing but the girl's slow regular breathing, it was almost hypnotic. "Did you know the man who was attacked?" She waited for a flinch but this time nothing came.

"Did you see who attacked him?" Rachel asked. When she got no response she got back to her feet. "This is useless," she said softly trying not to let her frustration show. "We have to get her to a hospital where she can be properly looked after."

"That's not going to happen," Suzy said. "Not for a while at least." All the while she didn't take her eyes off the girl, not even for a moment, fearful she might miss the slightest hint of recognition. She placed her hand gently on the girl's knee and leant forwards. "I know this is hard for you," she whispered. "But please, we want to help. How about a name, huh?"

Both women almost cried out in shock as the girl slowly raised a hand to her still blank face, a slight frown played across her lips as she touched her pale cheek.

"Mary," it was barely a breath.

"Mary? Your name's Mary?" Suzy asked, her face flushed with relief at the breakthrough, however small it might turn out to be.

Mary gave the hint of a nod in response. Her gaze flicked towards the police woman but it seemed to go straight through her.

"Good girl!" Rachel said, she waited for the flood gates to open but that was it. "That's great Mary, my name's Doctor Patten, this is W.P.C Munro..."

"Suzy," Mary said softly.

"Suzy, yes that's right," Rachel replied.

The girl turned her head stiffly to look Suzy straight in the eye. "Thank you for the chocolate Suzy, it was lovely."

"You're most welcome Mary," she replied, clearly taken aback.

"Now Mary," Rachel said. "I want you to tell me how you are feeling, physically I mean. You look okay, but did you get hurt in anyway tonight?"

Mary simply looked down at her hands rested once more in her lap and the doctor had to suppress her growing frustration once more.

Suzy, whether it was her training or not, was much calmer. She took Mary's hands in hers. "Look Mary, I know you've been through a lot tonight, but we really need for you to try and remember what happened out there."

"No!" Mary snapped and Suzy pulled her hands away like she had been given an electric shock. She held them up defensively.

"It's okay, it's okay," Suzy tried to reassure her. "All we want to do is catch the person who did this. But we really need your help to do that." She waited for a response but Mary just knitted her fingers together in her lap and didn't look up. "I can only imagine how horrible this has been for you, Mary," Suzy continued. "But we need to know what happened."

"He died," Mary said without looking up. It was a statement of fact said without any trace of emotion.

Rachel felt the hairs on the back of her neck bristle. This girl was seriously traumatised by what she had seen.

"I know," Suzy pressed on regardless. "Believe me, I've seen the body." She paused looking for a response to that but got nothing. "That's why I know it must be incredibly hard for you to think about what happened, what you saw."

"I, I don't remember, what I saw," Mary replied hesitantly.

I don't blame you, Rachel thought. She knelt down by the opposite side of the chair to Suzy again. "You're in shock, Mary," she explained as gently as she could. "And God knows that's understandable. You've suffered a terrible trauma and it's at times like this that your brain thinks; hang on a minute, hold everything I can't deal with this right now. I don't want to remember, it's too hard. Too painful."

Mary slowly raised her head to look at Rachel as she spoke. "Your brain just shuts it out," Rachel continued. "It's a defence mechanism. To help you cope. Mary I've seen the body as well. It must have been terrible to see someone die like that, or even just to stumble across a body in that state."

"I shouldn't be here." Mary said to her, it was almost a plea.

"I know," Rachel replied. "But we can't get you to the mainland for a while just yet I'm afraid."

"I shouldn't be here," she said firmer this time and Rachel thought she caught a hint of venom in her voice. Mary looked around the room as if only just realising where she was. She shook her head in disbelief. "Where am I?"

"Hey, hey, it's okay," Suzy said trying to calm her. "You're at the lifeboat station, on Widow's Bay, remember?"

A look something akin to horror flashed across her young face. "What a horrible name," she said with genuine disgust.

"I know, God knows where it came from," Suzy said.

"A widow is touched by death," Mary said obliquely. "Someone left behind after death." She began shaking. "I can't be here!"

Rachel had never thought of it that way before, but she supposed that was true. She was giving serious consideration to giving the girl something to calm her when all of a sudden she stopped shaking and a strange serenity came over her.

"Mary?" Suzy said but the girl simply folded her hands in her lap once again.

Unnerved, Rachel got to her feet. "Come on, Suzy, let's let Mary rest." She suddenly wanted to get out of the room but Suzy didn't move.

"Mary, please we just want to help. Is there anyone you want us to get in touch with? Someone must be missing you."

"There is no one," Mary said bitterly without shifting her gaze which was fixed on the wall once more or what lay beyond.

Rachel moved over towards the door. "Suzy, come on, let her rest."

Finally Munro relented and got to her feet. "We'll just be in the next room, Mary," she said but got no response.

Twelve

Detective Sergeant Kate Bell offered up a silent curse as the helicopter shuddered alarmingly again. She could feel the acid in her churning stomach rise another couple of PH levels and did her best to push all thoughts of throwing up out of her head. She tried to focus instead on the constant stream of information coming through on her iPad in hopes it would take her mind off the growing nausea.

She hated flying in helicopters at the best of times, but even though they were still someway from the storm's epicentre, it felt like they were being thrown around like a child's radio controlled toy. She glanced across to Pearce whose face was set in deep concentration as he listened to his headset. He had one hand over the right headphone speaker, putting her in mind of an aging radio DJ.

Pearce had been speaking to the local police both in Hull and just recently those on their way to Scarborough seemingly on mass to ensure that when the storm did clear, no one could get on, or more importantly off the island until they got there.

Bell scrolled through the photos the copper had sent through before of the victim. It didn't do much for her rebelling stomach, but still she forced herself to study each in turn. Bad quality though they were, there was no doubt this was the work of the killer they had tracked for so long in vain. The horrific 'wings' carved into the victim's back, insanely intricate, truly the work of a madman and all too familiar.

But still for all their familiarity there was something about them that had set off a distant alarm at the back of her mind. Something she couldn't quite put her finger on. So she scrolled through them again hoping for that spark of recognition she knew was so tantalizingly close to igniting into full blown revelation.

Next to her, Pearce was flicking through the more traditional paper evidence he preferred whilst listening intently to whomever he was speaking to at the Hull CID. "Uhuh, uhuh," he nodded trying to get a word in edgeways. "Yes, and once again I'd just like to thank you Chief Inspector, your help in this has been invaluable..."

It was Chief Inspector Lyle. He had been the one to recognise the markings on the victim and in turn had informed Bell's office of the find. And by the sounds of it to her he was making sure if any collar was made he would get his just praise. To be fair, she couldn't blame him, he had done more in the last few hours than they had managed to achieve in years. But still he wasn't one of the team who had spent every waking hour obsessing over the case. She couldn't help but smile seeing Pearce roll his eyes.

"Yes, yes Chief Inspector, as I said we are well aware of how invaluable you have been to the investigation. Truly, yes we couldn't have done this without you, and I can assure you once this is wrapped up it won't be forgotten." He held his hand over the mic for a moment and exhaled. "Tosser," he hissed with a weary shake of the head before speaking again. "Of course Chief Inspector, yes. Now it's important that you listen to me. We should be with you in an hour or as close as we can get in this weather. Now I need you to get as many of your officers together as you can down..."

He began to rummage in his pockets as he listened and pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. He took one out with his teeth and was about to look for a light when Bell cleared her throat. She raised her eyebrows when he looked at her and glanced to the no smoking sign on the side window next to her.

"Bollocks." Pearce spat out the cigarette and concentrated again on what Lyle was saying. He nodded. "That's right, as many as you can lay your hands on. When this storm clears no one, and I mean no one leaves that island until we have this bastard. I'll invoke martial law if I have to!"

He glanced at Bell who mouthed; 'I don't think you can do that.' And he mouthed back; 'watch me'.

"Okay, Chief Inspector," Pearce continued into the mic. "We will contact you when we land. Now if you'd be so kind as to have someone at your end patch me through to the island? Splendid, thank you, goodbye...Yes I'll wait."

Pearce exhaled again and gave Bell a look of exasperation. She winked at him. "You'd make a great politician boss."

"Hmm," was all she got in reply.

"Sir?" The co-pilot stuck his head out of the cock pit. "Sir, we're going to have to land a few miles out of Scarborough. There's a small private air strip we can use, it's too dangerous to land closer to the coast. We'll have a car standing by."

"Good work," Pearce replied and the co-pilot ducked back.

"Looks like God's on our side this time, boss." Bell said and eyed the worsening weather outside.

"Yeah," he said. "It's about fucking time."

Thirteen

The radio in the lifeguard office began to spit static and Williams cursed and pulled his ear away from the ear piece. "Christ!" He had been told to stand by and await further instructions which had set his nerves on edge. What the hell else

could they do? Widow's Bay was only a mile from the mainland, but at the moment they just might as well be a thousand miles from anywhere for all the help they could expect.

He looked at the others. They all looked dead on their feet. Suzy and the doc had hardly said a word since coming back from seeing the girl in the next room. He had thought about going through to talk to her himself but what could he say to get through to her that Suzy and Patten couldn't? Pete, bless him, had been pacing nervously around the room for the best part of an hour until about five minutes ago when he had fair collapsed exhausted into a chair in the corner, all the nervous energy that had thus far been keeping him going had seemingly fled in an instant and it had knocked the wind right out of him.

"Hello? Hell-o, can...You..." The voice came through on the radio's headphones, making Williams start in shock, it was distorted to the point of almost incomprehension. He cursed and tried to listen. "Hello, can you hear me?" It said again.

"Hello, yes I can just about hear you," Williams replied. Everyone, even Pete perked up at this new development.

"Hello? Who's this?"

"This is P.C Williams, who the hell is this?" He strained to hear as the reception faded in and out.

"Who is it?" Munro asked.

"Give us a chance!" Williams snapped back.

Pete moved over to the radio's console. "Here, I'll put it on speaker then we can all hear." He flicked a couple of switches. "You can switch the mic off Ian then they should be able to hear us as well."

Williams switched off the mic and spoke into a small speaker/mic type contraption on the desk. "Hello?" A burst of static came through masking what the person on the other end was saying. "Christ, this reception's shit," he told Pete who shrugged. "Hello? Say again I didn't catch that last part."

"That any better?" The voice said a little clearer now.

"Yes, much better, thanks," Williams replied with some relief. "Now who the hell is this again?"

"This is Chief Inspector Pearce. Scotland yard."

Williams cursed under his breath. "Sorry sir," he gave the others a look and cringed.

"You're fading in and out a bit, but that can't be helped I'm afraid. I'm in a chopper on route to Scarborough. Has Chief Inspector Lyle filled you in on the situation?"

"No sir," Williams replied. "Not really, to be honest he was a bit vague."

"Scotland yard!" Munro said forgetting she could be heard.

"Who else is there with you, Williams?"

"Erm, W.P.C Munro, our local GP Doctor Rachel Patten and the lifeboat volunteer Pete Mulgrave, sir." Then added. "Oh, and the witness, she's in the next room."

Suzy lent forwards towards the mic. "Sir, this is W.P.C Munro. Excuse me for asking, but what has all this got to do with Scotland Yard?"

There was a long pause and for a moment Williams feared the connection had been lost. Pete was about to mess with the tuning when the Chief Inspector spoke again. "Right, now listen carefully. And I must insist that what I'm about to tell you goes no further. That includes the good doctor and the lifeboat chappie, understand?"

Everyone nodded to Williams and crowded around him listening intently. "Of course sir," he replied.

"Good, now who else knows you have a murder up there?"

"Just us," Williams said. "And the killer I suppose."

"Of course, right that's good. I understand everything's on lock down there due to the storm?"

"Yes sir, it's hit us pretty bad."

"Okay, now might sound mad from your point of view, but from mine that's a good thing. Right, what is the situation as of right now?"

Williams thought for a moment before replying so he didn't miss anything. "Erm, we have the witness here with us at the lifeboat station, it's the only place with half decent power at the moment. I had to put the body in the boatshed I'm afraid, nowhere else I could think of."

"Good man, don't worry about it, that couldn't be helped." The Chief Inspector paused again before continuing. Rachel for one got a knot in her stomach. They all knew something bad was coming. "Right, judging by the pictures you took, more specifically the scarring on the victim's back. This was the work of a serial killer we have been tracking for years."

"Shit," Munro gasped her blood running cold. Of course she thought she had seen the markings somewhere before.

"A serial killer?" Pete said. "Christ."

"Of course we need to see the body for ourselves," Pearce continued. "But I'd stake my career on it, and believe me I've seen too many of his victims to think otherwise."

"Right, okay sir," Williams said trying to keep his voice even. "What's next?"

"What's next is that you have a serial killer trapped on your little island for as long as this storm holds."

"Fuck, me," Pete whispered and got to his feet. He went over to a window and peered outside as if half expecting to see the killer standing right outside.

"Right." Williams said all business. "What do you need us to do, sir?"

"Stay where you are for now. We are going to stomp all over that island as soon as the weather breaks. Your priority is to keep the body and especially the witness safe until we do...Huh?" He broke off and sounded to be speaking to a woman next to him. After a brief conversation he came back on. "Sorry about that. Do you have an ID on the witness?"

Suzy leant forwards. "Sir, this is W.P.C Munro. Sorry no ID, she's borderline catatonic. We got a first name though. Mary."

"Okay," Pearce said. "That's a start. Do you have a photo of her?"

"Yes, I think so," Williams replied. "He motioned to his mobile which he had put on the desk. "Suzy, check my phone will you, I'm sure we took one earlier."

"Will do," she moved off and picked up the phone and started scrolling through the photo folder.

"Great, send it through," Pearce told him. "Okay, now listen all of you. You have to assume the killer is still at large. Christ, he might live on the island for all we know. And if he knows you have a witness, he may try to get to her. So keep an eye out."

"Yes sir," Williams said.

"About the witness, I know she's in shock, but you need to press her for a description. We'll need something for when we hit the island."

Patten didn't like the sound of that. She moved forwards and put a hand on Williams' shoulder. He sat back and she leaned into the mic. "Chief Inspector. This is Rachel Patten, the doctor? I'm sorry but she's in no state to tell us anything at the moment. She's too far gone. What she really needs is a professional psychologist."

"I sympathise doctor, really I do," Pearce said, his voice growing more distorted as the storm continued playing havoc with the signal. "But by our reckoning there's close to a hundred and fifty, two hundred people on that island. Mostly students who come and go. I need to know what this guy looks like. Like it or not doctor, you have a mad man running around on that island, one we've been after for years. This girl is the only real lead we've had so far. She's seen him, Christ, she might even know the bastard."

"We understand sir," Williams said. He gave Patten a sympathetic shrug but she just gave him daggers back.

"I'm sorry to be harsh, but don't pussy foot around with her, we don't have that luxury," Pearce said with an ominous finality. Patten moved to speak but Williams touched her arm and shook his head no.

"Jesus Christ," Patten said and turned away for fear she would say more.

Suzy put her hand on the doctor's shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze. Then she turned to the mic. "We'll do our best sir," she said.

"I know you will," Pearce replied sounding more and more like a Dalek as the signal phased in and out. "Keep her safe, and yourselves. We'll never get a better chance than this. I'll contact you again when we know when we can get across to you. Good luck. Out."

"Yes sir, thank you, out." Williams hit the off switch and the speaker faded out.

Pete pressed his face against the window and cupped his hands over his eyes to look outside. "Holy Christ. A serial killer, here?"

"Sleepy little Widow's Bay, eh?" Suzy said.

Widow means death, Patten thought bleakly. Wasn't that what Mary had said before?

Without realizing it, Rachel found herself almost guarding the door to the next room when Williams got to his feet with an air of real purpose about him. She moved between the policeman and the door ready to block him if he tried to interrogate Mary. "Ian," she said as firmly as she could. "She's not ready for this we need to give her some space."

Williams held out his hands defensively. "I agree. But I think maybe you should try again. The last thing she needs is twenty questions from the police, I get that."

"I'm not a shrink," she said and saw Williams looking down at her hands which were by her sides. She glanced down and saw she had made them into fists.

"I know," he said softly. "But please, give it ago. Anything she can remember might be the difference between catching this guy and him getting away."

"I'll try," Rachel relented and made a conscious effort to relax her hands.

"Thanks," he said then turned to Munro. "Get your gear on Suzy, we're going to give the area the once over, just to make sure."

Suzy pulled on her coat and began checking her duty belt, taking out each item in turn to make sure it was in working order. CS spray, baton, torch and cuffs.

As she did so, Williams clipped on his own belt and pulled on his coat. "Pete, keep your eye out, we'll only be a few minutes and don't open the door for anyone but us, okay?"

"Jesus Christ," Pete uttered looking green in the gills. "Okay, but you know if we were in America you two would have guns. I'd probably have one too."

"Things are bad enough as they are without you wandering about with a gun," Suzy said. "You'd almost certainly shoot yourself in the foot." Then to Williams; "Right, I'm ready."

"Okay then, five minutes tops, see you soon." With that Munro and Williams moved over to the door. Williams opened it ever so slightly and it immediately began rattling violently on its hinges as the wind outside caught it. He turned to his colleague. "You know, I can't remember the last time I was dry?"

And then they were gone out into the night. Pete forced the door closed with his shoulder. "Can you believe this shit?" He said.

"No," Rachel replied. "No I can't."

Fourteen

When Rachel poked her head around the door she was surprised to see that Mary was out of her seat and standing over by the window at the far side of the room, staring out into the dark beyond.

"Hi, Mary, good to see you on your feet. How are you feeling?" She asked and closed the door gently behind her.

"Numb," the girl said to the window. "Where am I again?"

"You're at the lifeboat station you were brought here after..." She let her voice trail off.

"I'm on an island," Mary said.

"Yes that's right," Rachel was about to say its name but thought better of it, remembering how she had reacted last time. "Don't you remember how you got here?" Rachel thought she caught the slight hint of a smile from the girl's reflection in the window. "You smiled."

"Did I?"

Rachel moved into the room. She could see from the empty mug on the coffee table that Mary had drained the remainder of the hot chocolate. That at least was a good sign. "Look, Mary. Why don't you come and have a sit down. You won't see much out there just more wind and rain."

"It's so dark out there," she said almost inaudibly.

"Don't worry, you're safe in here. There are two police officers doing a quick circuit outside. They know what they're doing. And once this storm clears we can get you some real help."

Did she just see the girl flinch at that? "Mary, we need to know what happened tonight. I know it's hard but a man's dead, the police think his killer is still on the island."

Mary slowly turned away from the window and looked straight at Rachel. Her face had such a haunted look to it that the doctor almost winced. She felt so out of her depth, she knew she needed to ask the questions but she couldn't help but fear she would drive the girl back into that near catatonic state she had been in when she first arrived. Christ, she thought, the things this poor girl must have seen.

"Such a nightmare," Mary said. "Did you ever feel like you were asleep but couldn't wake up? That's what this is like."

"Come on, sit down before you fall down," Rachel told her.

Mary shook her head suddenly agitated. "I shouldn't be here," she said.

"Mary, please." Rachel moved to take the girl's arm, but she pulled violently away.

"Don't touch me!"

"Sorry, sorry. Mary, I'm trying my best here but I need you to trust me. Let's start with why you were out in this weather in the first place. Do you live at the retreat at the other side of the island, are you a student there? Did you know the man who was killed?" Rachel instantly regretted blurting out the torrent of questions but it was too late now.

"What, no, I mean I came here..." Mary shook her head in frustration clearly fighting to find the right words.

"Were you on a date?" Rachel asked lamely.

This won a cry of derision from the girl. "A date?"

"Mary, please I'm sorry, no more questions for now." Rachel had to bite back a sob, she was supposed to be helping the poor woman but she was just making matters worse. "I'm sorry," she repeated.

This seemed to calm her somewhat. Mary screwed her eyes tight shut and seemed to concentrate on regulating her breathing. "It was all so vivid at first," she said her eyes still closed. "So many forgotten things, hitting me all at once, it was so over whelming, so disorientating. I wasn't prepared for that."

"Of course not," Rachel said.

"But now," Mary continued. "It's like it's all just slipping away from me. The pictures in my head, the sound of it all fading away." She made a strange rolling motion with her shoulder and straightened her back as if surprised she could move it so freely.

Mary finally opened her eyes to look at the doctor. "It's bliss," she said with the hint of a melancholy smile.

Fifteen

Suzy Munro braced her back against a nearby tree as another gust of wind and rain threatened to knock her onto her backside. She watched Williams as he swung his torch left then right into the thick wood beyond. He shook his head in frustration. You couldn't see more than a few feet into the dense foliage which was moving and swaying so much in the storm any hope of seeing anything let alone a solitary figure if one was out here, was virtually nil.

"Not one of my better ideas this," he shouted across to her and laughed at his own stupidity. He struggled over to where she was propped up against the tree. They had done a circuit of the prefab building and the boatshed and he had then suggested a look into the wood, which had seemed to Suzy like a reasonable idea until they reached it. Although it wasn't so large the visibility out here was only a few feet, especially like now when the rain was hitting you straight in the face forcing your eyes into narrow slits. She mused you could walk right passed some and not even know it.

"It was worth a try," she said as he finally reached her.

"Yeah, suppose," he relented.

"Pete did say he thought he saw someone earlier out here," she said. "Although no one in their right mind would stay out in this shit all night."

"But this guy isn't in his right mind," Williams said grimly.

She nodded, true enough. She glanced across to the boatshed and thought of the poor soul inside. She couldn't get the image of those grotesque carvings on his back out of her mind. "Why do you think he carves wings onto their backs?" She asked.

"Huh?"

"The killer, why does he carve wings onto their backs after he kills them?"

"Christ only knows," Williams said. "Let's hope we can get the chance to ask the sick fuck when we catch him, eh?"

"Yeah." Suzy was about to asked if they should head back when Williams spun and shone his torch over her shoulder.

"Jesus, look."

She followed the torch light as it cut through the gloom. Deep in the woods she could just make out a flash of white as someone darted in between the trees.

"Hey!" Williams shouted and set off running. "You, stop!"

Suzy stumbled after him shining her torch just ahead of her to avoid tripping on the uneven undergrowth.

Sixteen

The helicopter shuddered violently as it was buffeted by the oncoming storm they were heading right into. "Jesus!" Kate Bell snapped as she nearly dropped her iPad. She was flicking through the pictures of the victim again. One in particular had caught her eye before. At the time she didn't know why it felt significant but it had been gnawing at the back of her mind ever since. She scrolled from one gory

image to the next in a desperate attempt to find the picture again. She cursed herself for not keeping the image separate, but she had to admit she couldn't put her finger on what it was that could be so important.

The co-pilot stuck his head around the back of his seat, his face white as a sheet, which didn't fill Bell with much confidence. "Thirty minutes, if we don't fucking crash first!" He called through.

"Good man," Pearce said. He hardly seemed to notice the co-pilot's panicked demeanour or the fact the helicopter felt like it might shake apart at any moment. Bell knew this was because he only had eyes on their eventual destination and hopefully a date with a so far elusive killer.

Finally she came across the photo. It was a shot of the victim's face, half obscured, battered and bruised out of shape and blurry as hell. But still there was something about it. She messed with the re-sizing tool but this just pixilated the image. "Bollocks." She reduced it back down and then a flash of recognition hit her hard. "Christ!" She had heard the expression of someone saying their blood turned to ice water when hit with shock, now she knew exactly how it felt.

She turned to Pearce who was staring straight ahead, his brow knitted in concentration, no doubt his thoughts focused on the potential confrontation to come.

"Boss?" Bell said but the word came out in little more than a choked whisper. She cleared her throat and spoke again much clearer this time. "Boss!"

He turned to her with a look of mild amusement on his face seeing her expression. "You alright, Kate?"

"Boss, now you're gonna think I've lost it..."

"Too late for that Bell, but go on," he joked.

She gestured to the iPad. "I've been looking at the pictures of the victim, well one in particular," she hesitated, suddenly afraid she was going to look like a complete idiot. But one glance back down at the photo dispelled the feeling instantly. No she was right.

"Go on," Pearce told her patiently.

She handed him her iPad. "Sir, take a look at this one. I can't believe I'm going to say this, but I think that's Harrold Carrick." Pearce frowned and squinted at the photo. Bell told herself over and over she wasn't mistaken, but still her heart missed a beat when Pearce didn't react to the picture.

"Harrold Carrick," she blurted out. "We brought him in twice for questioning last year in connection with the killings."

"I know who Harrold Carrick is detective. And I seem to remember we couldn't prove a thing."

"Sir, please," she was almost pleading with him now. "Let me pull up his mug shot so we can compare the two."

Pearce held up his hand to silence her as he looked at the photo. After what seemed like a full five minutes to Bell he let out a long slow breath. "Jesus wept, it could be."

"It is, isn't it?" Bell said as tension gave way to a wave of relief.

Bell took back the iPad and began searching through her files. She typed in Carrick's name and was rewarded not only with his mug shot, which confirmed it

was him, but also his personal details. "Carrick lives in Grimsby, that's on the same coast, seventy miles away. You could drive it in an hour and a half tops."

Pearce nodded ever so slightly. Bell could see the gears turning in his brain at what this could mean. If this was Carrick, a suspect in the killer's case, how did he himself become the latest victim? Her already aching head began to swirl with possibilities. Revenge? Could someone close to one of the victims have sort Carrick out? If so how did they know he was a suspect? Moreover, the exact details of the scarring on the victims backs had been kept under wraps to weed out any of the inevitable false confessors that always came out of the wood work in these types of cases. Yet this latest victim, Carrick or not exhibited the exact same wounds.

Then an even scarier scenario hit her. What if it was one of their own team? They had all the facts and she knew as much as any of them how frustrating their lack of real evidence against any of the very short list of suspects was. No! She almost said it out loud and actually wished she was mistaken about this being Carrick, after all it was a crap picture.

"This doesn't make any sense," Pearce said snapping her out of her daze. Then he turned to Bell. "I need to be sure, get back onto the island, get Williams to take a clear picture of the victim's face."

She smiled to herself. He always could read her mind.

Seventeen

Just when Pete Mulgrave had believed tonight couldn't get any weirder he had seen the little girl dancing in the rain outside.

He had spent the whole time since Williams and Munro had gone outside to 'look around' like two fugitives from a bad horror movie, pacing the floor and on occasion listening at the door. He had on a couple of occasions, entertained the idea of peeking outside but then had come to his senses and dragged himself away.

The doctor was still in the next room with the witness so he had been left alone with his over active imagination. The storm outside had set his nerves well and truly on edge as he waited. He thought about giving Mooney a call on the radio just to hear a familiar, if far off, voice but he knew he needed to keep it clear just in case the coppers from the mainland called back. So all he could do was listen to the wind and rain battering the prefab like demons from hell, or at the very least from his imagination.

That was when he had gone over to the window and cupped his hands over his eyes to look out into the storm. And there she was dancing just on the very edge of the prefab's flood lights outside. She was skipping and pirouetting arms out wide with her face turned up to the dark sky, dressed for a winter's walk complete with a bobble hat. It wasn't hard to imagine she was laughing.

Movement to his left caught Pete's eye and he looked to see two other figures appear at the edge of the wooded area they were just visible through the gloom as the lights barely reached that far. The child's parents? No, as they moved away

from the trees Pete could just about to make out they were both men. His rapid breathing was beginning to fog the glass. He cursed and wiped away the condensation with his hand and when he looked again he half expected the bizarre trio to be gone but they were still there. After a moment of watching the girl dance, one of the men beckoned her over. She stopped and waved as if just noticing them for the first time. The man beckoned again and the young girl half ran half skipped over to them and then the three vanished into the darkness of the woods.

The radio's external speaker burst into life, voices tried to come through but they faded in and out. Pete tore himself away from the window and was about to see if he could get better reception when a young girl's laughter came through loud and clear for a moment. "Oh, come on," Pete said his sanity slipping a little.

The front door burst open and he screamed in shock. Williams and Munro came inside with the wind and rain at their backs and forced the door back shut. Pete thanked the storm for sparing his blushes as they clearly hadn't heard him. "Fuck me," he uttered.

The radio's speaker returned to spitting static and garbled voices. Williams shook the rain off himself. "Well I've seen it all now," he said.

"You saw them?" Pete asked and almost choked with emotion.

"Huh?" Williams replied then sat by the radio and began to delicately adjust the tuning.

Suzy Munro threw off her coat. "We just nearly ran off the edge of the fucking cliff!" She said shaking her head in disbelief. "There's a woman of all things running around in the woods out there!"

"A woman?" Pete asked with a sinking feeling.

"Yeah," Suzy replied. "We tried chasing her but we lost her near the cliff's edge. Christ I hope she didn't get swept off, the sea is getting mental. It's crashing right up to the top of the cliffs. Jesus!"

"Weird shit," Williams said concentrating on the radio. "Our radios went haywire as well, spewing out all types of garbage. Must be this damn storm. Weird, weird shit."

Yeah, Pete thought there's a lot of that going around tonight. He was suddenly hit with a massive wave of shock which knocked him down into a nearby chair. He looked at his hands which were shaking manically. Tears came out of nowhere.

Suzy saw this and moved swiftly over to him and knelt down. "Pete? Christ, what's wrong?"

What's right? He thought and with great effort told them what he had seen.

* * * * *

"Widow's fucking Bay, the east coast's number one out of season tourist trap!" Williams said once Pete had finished his surreal tale of the dancing child and her audience of two. He began playing with the radio's tuner once more. "All manner of people running around despite a hurricane."

"Yeah," Pete said feeling better for having unburdened himself. "Come see the mutilated murder victim and scare the locals half to death." The gallows humour made Suzy laugh out loud and the sound fairly lit up the room.

"Hello, hello?" The voice came faintly through the radio's speaker.

"Oh, thank Christ." Williams adjusted the tuning ever so slightly, fearful of losing the connection again. "Hello?" Much clearer now, it was the Chief Inspector. "Can you hear me there? Williams? Can anyone hear me?"

"Chief Inspector? Yes, we can hear you now. This is P.C. Williams, over."

"Thank Christ! Williams, we've been trying to get through to you for ages."

"Yeah," Williams said giving Suzy and Pete a look in turn. "We've been having some technical difficulties."

"Right, now listen to me..." Pearce began but Williams cut him off.

"Sir, we've had a couple of..." His voice trailed off as he fought for the right word.

"Incidences," he said with a wince. "There are at least four people running around here."

"Shit, have they tried to get in, or to the body?" Pearce asked.

Williams covered the mic for a moment and turned to the others. "Why would he think they would want to get in here?"

Suzy leant forwards and flicked on the radio's hands free mic set up. "Sir, this is W.P.C. Munro. With all due respect, what are we really dealing with here?"

There was a long pause and for a second it seemed the connection had been lost. But then Pearce's voice came through again loud and clear. "We think, although we are not sure, that maybe the victim was killed in a vigilante attack. You see he may be a previous suspect in the killer's investigation. And there is the possibility that perhaps he was killed by relatives of one or Christ all the victims. But the truth is we're not sure."

"Fuck me," Pete uttered.

Williams nodded. "Okay, sir, so what's next? You think they are going to come after the witness, maybe us?"

"Look, first thing's first. We may be way off track here. What I need you to do is get me a clear, and I must stress very clear picture of the victim's face."

Williams hung his head. "Christ," he whispered. Would this rain soaked nightmare never end?

"Get me that picture and keep everyone there together in the station until we can get to you. Is that clear?"

"Crystal," Williams said all thought of chain of command etiquette gone. He switched off the mic with a violent flick of the wrist.

"Well that's easy for him to say," Suzy said in dismay.

"Yeah." Williams got stiffy to his feet and drew his baton. "Keep everyone here Suzy..." She made to protest as he knew she would but he threw up a hand to silence her. "Keep everyone here and safe, please."

He looked at her and she reluctantly nodded.

"I'll be five minutes," he said.

"Bet you wished you had that gun now," Pete reminded him with a sympathetic smile.

"Hell yeah," he replied wearily. And he really did.

* * * * *

It seemed impossible, but the constant wind and rain seemed to fade away to nothing as P.C. Ian Williams stood numbly in front of the boatshed not two minutes later.

The heavy front doors were standing wide open, half shattered and smoking in the night air. The acrid smell of burnt wood and plastic stung his sinuses as he slowly walked through the doors and into the boatshed itself. The tarpaulin that covered the lifeboat was all melted down one side as if something incredibly hot had brushed down the side of it, the charred fiberglass bodywork just visible though the still bubbling plastic.

He walked like a man in a waking nightmare over to the work bench and wasn't the least bit surprised to see the body was gone. All that remained was the smouldering material of the makeshift shroud it had been wrapped in.

And he knew this meant things were going to get much, much worse.

Eighteen

Kate Bell stared at the blank expression in the eyes of the photo of the witness the coppers on the island had sent through earlier. She had forgotten all about it in the commotion of the discovery that the victim was one Harold Carrick. Whereas there was still a little doubt (although not to her) to the identity of the victim. She knew the face looking back at her from the iPad screen all too well. At first she had thought for a brief second it had been her own face because she knew it so well.

It was a face she had seen in photos looking at its best and at its most gut wrenching worst. It was eighteen year old Mary Cardille. The killer's first victim. She looked away from the screen then back again hoping it would change to that of a stranger. But there she was sitting in an armchair in a lifeboat station on the little island of Widow's Bay. Even thought she had been brutally murdered seven years ago.

Bell lunged for the radio making Pearce start in shock. She keyed the mic. "Williams? Munro? For Christ sake pick up!" But she was rewarded with a burst of static. "Hello? Widow's Bay, pick up, over!"

"Kate?" Pearce said and gently touched her arm.

She pulled away and looked at him through tear blinded eyes and half-passed half-threw the iPad to her mentor. "The, the witness..."

The look on his weary face flashed between several expressions in quick succession as he eyed the photo.

Concern melted into recognition which melted into fear which finally gave way to anger.

"Is this some sort of fucking hoax?" He spat.

Kate Bell wanted desperately to say yes, but that desolate look in Mary Cardille's eyes would have made that a lie. "She came back," Bell whispered and keyed the mic again.

Nineteen

"I'm sorry?" Rachel said. She had thought she had heard Mary say something from behind her. The doctor had been at the door, earwigging at what the others were doing in the next room. She had been prompted to do so when she had heard a shriek which she took as coming from Pete, but when she listened at the door (she was for some reason fearful to go through) she had been relieved to hear both Williams and Suzy in there to and no sound of a rampaging axe wielding killer hacking up the poor lifeboat volunteer.

"Sorry Mary, did you say something?" Rachel said and came away from the door.

The woman didn't acknowledge the question for a moment she just continuing staring outside. "He didn't recognise me," she finally said to her reflection in the glass.

"Who?" Rachel asked.

"Can't believe he didn't recognise my face."

Rachel caught an edge of anger in her voice. "Mary? What happened out there?" This time there was no reaction as she seemed to recall the incident in her head. She turned slowly and fixed Rachel with a mournful expression. It almost broke the doctor's heart.

"None of this," she gestured around the room, to Patten then finally to herself. "None of this is what I expected. Didn't even notice it was raining out there." She shook her head and smiled. "It's all like a dream. It's like remembering what it's like to feel rain on your face but that memory is off somehow. It's like you can't quite remember the sensation clearly enough. Just doesn't feel right. The way it smells, sounds. All just off slightly." She looked down at herself as if seeing her body for the first time. "Strangest thing." She added.

"It's the shock," Rachel said but knew it was much, much more than that. And she was vaguely aware of hammering on the door behind her and muffled shouts from the other side.

"Strangest thing," Mary repeated. "This illusion of life."

This illusion of life? Rachel turned to the door, she could see the handle turning madly but it didn't open. She knew there was no lock. "Door's stuck," she said matter of fact but somehow it didn't really register.

She moved away and over to where Mary was standing. Rachel felt like she too was in some kind of dream. From a million miles away she thought he heard a familiar voice. "Rach! Rach, open the door. It's jammed I can't get it open!"

It sounded like it should be important but the panic in Suzy's voice barely registered even when the police woman began hammering on the door again. Rachel stood transfixed by the strange melancholy young woman in front of her.

"He didn't remember me," Mary said, her voice ether.

"Who?"

"There was fear," Mary continued her eyes flashed at the word fear. "Of course there was fear. But he had no idea who I was."

"Who killed that man, Mary?" Rachel said. "You know, don't you?"

This won a smile from the girl. "It was almost beautiful in a horrific kind of way."

As she spoke, a breath of wind rippled through Mary's blouse and hair, she closed her eyes and a look of serenity came over her face. Then Rachel felt a drop of water hit her face, followed by another. She looked up half expecting to see a hole in the roof caused no doubt by the storm, but it was perfectly intact.

The breeze that had brushed Mary's clothes caressed Rachel's face followed by a gentle spray of water. She could hear the distant sound of the storm outside as the wind and rain increased in ferocity moment by moment. Mary was by her side now as the prefabricated room seemed to dissipate around them like it had walls made of smoke. Then the storm hit them with a vengeance.

Rachel cried out as the world became a blur around her, the only constant was her own form and that of Mary standing close to her eyes tight shut. She struggled to see through the maelstrom but the stinging rain blinded her. She felt a hand take hers and Mary pulled her close.

Voices close by; a woman's she recognised and that of a man screeching words she couldn't quite catch above the raging wind battering her. She thought at first it was Ian, Suzy and Pete, they had been in the next room when the storm tore the room apart. She caught herself a split second later. No the room hadn't been torn apart, not in the conventional sense anyway. This was something else, something Mary had conjured up for her to see, she didn't know why she had come to that conclusion but she knew, felt it was true.

As if by her acknowledging she was a part of something supernatural the storm around Rachel and Mary eased somewhat. She could still feel it and it seemed to still have all its power but they were partially protected from its might. And as a scene half played out already began to appear before her, she knew why.

Firstly she was hit by the smell of static and burning. Then came the sound of the sea close by. She turned to her right and looked past Mary to see the sea battering a small boat jetty which stretched out from the bay area of the island. They were at the docks.

Two figures began to fade out of the gloom ahead of her. They were Mary, who had her back to them, and a man who Rachel instantly recognised as the victim. He was in extremis, laid awkwardly on his side cowering by a pile of old ropes and discarded lobster pots which were on fire. His clothes were half burnt away and smouldering despite the torrent raining down on the scene, his skin was red raw. It looked like the aftermath of a napalm attack yet Mary was untouched.

The frail young woman that Rachel knew from the lifeguard station was but a shadow of this figure before her now. She seemed nearly twice the size her hands twisted into near claws as she loomed over the prone man. Although the storm was pulling and twisting her hair and clothing she seemed to be moving in slow motion almost as if she were underwater. There was a terrible majestic beauty to it. She was like some great projection of the inner rage she felt, a rage Rachel instinctively knew she had harboured for half a dozen years or more. A seething goddess of vengeance. And the focus of all this anger and rage cowered before her.

"Look at me!" She screamed and Rachel felt the words resonate in her chest they had such power.

The man seemed to be dragged to his knees by something unseen. He screamed in pain and did his feeble best to cover his battered face with his hands. He gave her a faltering look through his burnt fingers.

"Look at my face!"

Rachel could see his eyes, clear as day. There was no recognition in them, just utter fear. *'He didn't recognise me.'* Mary had said back at the lifeboat station.

Rachel could somehow feel the rage building in the woman like a physical energy edging towards critical mass. Mary's feet lifted inches off the ground and she seemed to be glowing with the power which was ready to be released. Rachel somehow could see the faint outline of angel wings calved into the flesh of Mary's back despite her heavy coat. "He did that to all of us," Rachel heard in her head. She remembered Mary hadn't had the wounds when she had briefly examined her earlier, yet the victim had. But that detailed scarcely seemed to matter now, faced as she was with such a sight of retribution.

Then Mary screamed.

A burst of blinding light and energy seemed to burst from every pore in the woman's body in an explosion of murderous power. This was outrage and pain made physical and its effect was devastating.

The prone man took the full brunt of the onslaught and was sent spinning into a nearby wall as the remains of his tattered clothes were burnt from his body as he fell in a crumpled bloody mess amongst a pile of smouldering old ropes and discarded fishing paraphernalia that had been dumped at the back of the docks some time before.

Rachel gasped out loud as she was hit by a blast of suffocating heat which dried everything within thirty feet in an instant. Such was the residual power from the brief but devastating attack that the rain pouring down hissed like water hitting a hot plate and the whole area began to fill with a thick plume of steam so dense that after a few moments the doctor couldn't see a foot in front of her.

She felt Mary next to her squeeze her hand and a moment later they were back in the prefabricated back room of the lifeguard station. Rachel staggered away from the young woman. She reeled in shock at what she had felt and seen. She tried to clear her addled mind of the images still seared into her mind's eye but they refused to shift. She half-sat, half-fell into the chair gasping for air.

"That should have been an end to it," Mary said and turned to move over to the window once more. "I thought it would all be over, but I'm still here. Why?"

All Rachel could do was stare dumbstruck at the apparition before her. The ghost, for want of a better word who had come to Widow's Bay somehow to seek vengeance on the man who had killed her. Panic began to twist at her guts, she instinctively knew Mary meant her no harm but that didn't alter the cold fact she was in a room with a dead woman. And one who was somehow still talking and breathing. Who still had a pulse Rachel herself had taken, slow but regular.

"Why am I still here?" Mary asked her reflection in the window. She strained to see outside but shook her head. At her own question or at seeing nothing of help outside, Rachel didn't know.

Someone was slamming hard against the door to the office and Rachel suddenly remembered the door was stuck. She was about to speak when she noticed the slight darkening of the material on the back of Mary's blouse. The young woman winced slightly and rolled her shoulder at the irritation.

"Oh Christ," Rachel uttered as blood began to bloom across the back of Mary's blouse now and she was put in mind of the faint markings on the other Mary's

back and of course of the hideous angel wings carved deep into the victim's/killer's back.

A look of terrified realisation came over Mary's face and she turned to Rachel. "Something is very wrong," she said in horror.

Twenty

The man who had once dreamt he was Harrold Carrick felt like he had jet fuel in his veins instead of blood. And that fuel was alight.

When he had opened the door from the boatshed and walked out into the night he had been immediately hit by the storm. He let the rain hit his body and held his face up to the heavens. This was perfect, an almost operatic welcome back from the dead. Because he had been dead of that he was sure. He remembered dreaming of fire and pain and blood and of an incandescent woman filled with rage.

There were supernatural elements at play tonight, of that there was no doubt. He had always known he was special, even when he had stared death in its face earlier tonight he knew it wouldn't end this way, as just another victim.

He was stronger than that. So much so that when he looked death in its face, it was like looking into a mirror. Ever since he could remember he had thought of himself as possessing the secret face of death. Murder incarnate but for a purpose much greater than himself. He should have known the creator wouldn't let him die so easily for he still had so much more work to do, so many more lost souls he needed to guide to the heavens. Those poor unfortunates without wings needed his quite unique creativity to help them on their way.

And at that moment of utter power, he doubted he could die, even if he wanted to.

He could see at first what he thought was smoke rising up from his naked body, but as he studied his flesh he saw it for what it truly was. It was steam; every time a drop of rain hit his skin it hissed and evaporated away.

His resurrection had been perfect, but yet more perfect still were the fresh energy pulsating wounds on his back. He had always, deep down, envied those he had painstakingly (quite literally) bestowed the means to which they could ascend from this hell on earth to the heavens above. The wings so lovingly etched into their unworthy flesh. Wings which he now possessed, a gift no doubt from a higher force for a job well done.

As he strode through the wind and rain shrouded in a mist of steam he grasped the six inch screwdriver he had taken from the rack of tools in the shed he had awoken in. It was hardly fit for the purpose of his celestial artistry but it would end a life if needed. He would have to find his bag of surgical instruments once he got his bearings again. He had it when he was at the docks, of that he was sure.

Then that strange woman had appeared and he had felt a feeling so alien to him that it had taken a few disorientating moments after her first onslaught for him to identify it. It had been fear, a feeling he couldn't imagine he would ever feel again.

Whether she had meant to or not, his would-be assassin had left him not only with the exquisite wounds but power like nothing he had felt before. Power that had brought him back from the dead.

The instant his bare feet trod on the waterlogged ground it was dry, leaving a trail of smoking footprints behind him. The power he felt surging through his body was almost overwhelming at times. He knew it was a power he must harness if he was going to continue his much needed work. Work he would be able to do with impunity now that he was nothing short of a deity. No more hiding in the shadows always one step ahead of the police. Once he was in control of this new power he would be unstoppable.

* * * * *

P.C. Ian Williams's brain couldn't work out what was the more surreal. The fact that the man he had himself pronounced dead was walking, naked, across a clearing close the lifeboat office. Or that he was smoking from head to foot. As he approached the oddity he could see what looked like arcs of static energy forking between the wounds on the man's back.

He instinctively flicked out his extendable baton seeing through the mist that the man was carrying a thin knife of some sorts. "Hey," he shouted above the storm and the man stopped dead in his tracks. "Put down the knife and turn around," he ordered and was almost surprised when the man did stop and slowly pivoted on one heel to face him. He didn't drop the knife however. "I said put down the knife."

The man looked across the clearing to the drenched looking policeman who stopped some twenty feet away, apparently seeing something in his face that made the pig fear coming any closer, perhaps he sensed his newfound power. He normally hated the police but saw nothing but beauty in his bedraggled uniformed creature. "Arh," he said, his voice sounding alien to him, it had changed, it had more authority to it than it ever had before. "Another angel for the making."

Twenty-One

Back at the lifeboat office, Pete Mulgrave stared through the window as Williams and a naked smoking man stood facing each other like two very unlikely gunfighters and hoped to hell he was dreaming. Behind him Suzy Munro was still kicking and struggling at the door to the other room which was still inexplicably stuck somehow.

"Suzy? Just how dead was that bloke Ian brought back?" Pete asked. It seemed a reasonable enough question considering what he was seeing taking place outside.

"Very," Suzy replied with irritation. She turned to him panting with the exertion. "Come away from the window and give me a hand will you?"

"I only ask," Pete continued. "Because he's outside now with Ian."

It took Suzy a moment to register what he had just said. "What?" She came over to the window and nudged him aside. And sure enough there they were. Suzy

gasped at the strange sight. He had been dead, she was sure of it. But still there he was and from what she could see from the meagre floodlight attached to the side of the prefab, he was very much alive, naked and smoking it seemed, but very much alive.

The radio close by began to spit static and both of them started in shock, but neither could look away from the surreal scene outside. Then a voice began to be heard through the static, at first Suzy thought it was the mainland, but it soon became clear it came from somewhere else.

"*Mary...*" Suzy glanced at the radio's speaker. The word was distorted and seemed to have been spoken by half a dozen or more different voices all in unison. There was something about them that sent a shiver down her spine.

"*Mary?*" Suzy repeated. A sound behind her drew her attention to the once jammed office door which was now ajar. Mary was standing in the doorway looking directly at the speaker.

"*Mary...*" The voices on the radio said again. Suzy made out at least six, maybe more. She could have sworn one of them was a child.

"I must go to him," Mary said out loud. "I'm so sorry, this is my fault." Mary began to move over to the front door, but Suzy stood in her way.

"*Mary, what's happening here? That man, the one from the dock? The victim. He's outside,*" she said.

Mary fixed Suzy with such a cold lifeless gaze that the police woman nearly physically wet herself. Her once young natural features had grown pallid and grey. It was like looking at a walking corpse. "That man is no victim." She said her voice as lifeless as her eyes.

"Christ, Mary your back." Pete said from behind them.

But the young woman didn't register the remark. Suzy couldn't get out of the way fast enough when Mary moved over to the front door. As she left Suzy could see a large bloody patch on the back of her blouse.

The door shut with the finality of the closing of a tomb.

* * * * *

Out in the rain Williams stood watching the impossible man as if in a trance. He was vaguely aware that the man was moving closer more from the increasing hissing sound that as emanating from his steaming body than any actual signs of movements in his limbs. He could have been hovering over to him for all his legs seemed to move. Perhaps he was, either way a moment later the man came through a cloud of foul smelling vapour like something emerging through the gates of hell themselves. He was grinning but it was anything but humorous.

"You should be honoured," the man said now that he was within three feet of the policeman's face. There was an air of something akin to envy in his voice.

But P.C. Ian Williams didn't feel honoured at all. He pissed his trousers then and there and felt oddly thankful that it was raining to cover his shame.

"I'll carve such beauty onto your back," the man continued his voice had dropped to that of a lover's whisper promising untold pleasures to come and moved closer still. "Then you'll fly." He looked up to the heavens and Williams followed his gaze skyward.

Williams didn't see the blur of rapid movement that killed him. He felt three sharp blows to his neck in quick succession then a gout of blood hit the man's chest and hissed like fat on a hot plate. The policeman instinctively grabbed the man by the shoulders but instantly pulled away as the skin was seared off the palms of his hands. He looked dumbfounded at his red raw hands and got a whiff of burnt flesh which would have made him vomit if the next two blows from the screwdriver hadn't taken out both his eyes.

"No!" Suzy screamed from the office window as she and Pete watched on impotently as Williams crumpled to the ground like a ragdoll. She screamed in frustration and hammered hard on the Perspex glass but it didn't give. Tears came and she felt Pete grab her but pulled away. She ran blindly over to her duty belt which was hooked on the back of a chair and pulled out her baton.

"Suzy, no!" Pete yelled. "You can't go out there!"

He recoiled back as Suzy turned on him and almost snarled. "I'll fucking kill him," She growled.

"You can't," Rachel said from the doorway to the other room.

Her sudden appearance caught Suzy off guard for a moment she shook her head in incomprehension as everything hit her all at once.

"Suzy, there's nothing we can do," Rachel said and the calmness of her voice knocked Suzy to her knees.

"We, we, have, to, do, something," Suzy sobbed in faltering staccato.

Rachel ran over to her and sank to her knees. She grabbed Suzy and pulled her close as the police woman began to sob her heart out. "There's nothing we can do here," Rachel whispered into her ear.

Twenty-Two

The man who had once been Harrold Carrick looked down at the crumpled body of the dead policeman at his feet and felt something he hadn't felt since returning back from the oblivion of death. Weak. It was as if his newfound power was draining from him as fast as the blood was fleeing from the prone officer. And what was worse still, he could feel those perfect wounds on his back fading in solidarity also.

"No," he gasped and reached around to his back as best he could. He let out a cry of anguish as the once deep wounds were now no more than the faintest of scars. He could feel the rain beginning to finally soak him through and realised that he was no longer giving off that wonderful hissing sound. Yes his power was fading moment by moment along with his strength.

He was becoming normal again and it sickened him. He'd had such grand thoughts of the carnage he would reap on the world now he was immortal.

Carrick frantically looked around for the architect of this newfound frailty and there it was coming around the side of the building. "You." He threw an accusatory finger in the direction of the treacherous woman as she cleared the structure and began a slow methodical walk over to where he was standing.

Although she was just a young frail looking woman with nothing about her of that terrible power she had unleashed at the docks, what seemed like a lifetime ago now, Carrick found himself backing away from her. His head was suddenly filled with images of fire, nerve searing pain and that horrific all-enveloping darkness that had accompanied her assault.

With great effort he managed to stop his retreat and forced himself to stand his ground. After all, he had survived her attack once before. Indeed it had left him more powerful than he could ever have imagined, not to mention turning him into the living breathing work of art he had always so longed to be. The thought of the loss of his beloved wings nearly made him sob.

Besides, looking at her now, he thought she was nothing but a grey sketch of that creature from the docks. "I'm not afraid of you," he said, but still grasped the screwdriver in his hand a little tighter.

The woman stopped when she reached the dead policeman. She glanced down at the body in the mud and winced. "I'm sorry," she said, her voice barely audible above the storm. But she wasn't addressing the dead man.

"It's not your fault, Mary." The voice came from over Carrick's shoulder and he wheeled around to see a man in his mid-fifties dressed in a sodden suit come walking out of the woods closely followed by a woman wearing a chef's uniform who was perhaps thirty. Carrick had a strange flash of déjà vu. He knew these two from somewhere way off in the past like characters from a childhood dream.

"You are a bad man, Harrold Carrick," said a child from behind Carrick.

He turned again. Another familiar face from way off when. A young girl in a bobble hat and thick overcoat was standing scowling at him as only a child can from next to the body. She slipped a mittened hand into the young woman's who looked down at her and smiled affectionately.

"Hey you," Carrick thought he heard the young woman say to the girl.

"You should have waited for all of us, Mary," This came from a man in his early thirties, who appeared from behind the boatshed with another two figures, both woman all three were dressed differently, in strangely normal everyday clothes which was odd to Carrick since they surely could be anything but that.

"I know," Mary relented. "It was just he was there, right in front of me. All those memories of what he did, what he did to all of us, I just couldn't help myself." She shook her head at her own stupidity.

"It's okay," The girl next to her said.

"I'm not so sure," Mary said. "What if we were wrong, what if he can't be stopped."

Carrick watched the discourse in disbelief. Now he recognised them. "You, you're my angels," he said in awe.

"You are a sick fuck, Carrick. You know that?" It was another man who came out of the darkness beyond which the sea could be heard crashing violently against the rocks close by. He nodded to the young girl. "Sorry Amy."

Amy shrugged at the language; it wasn't the worst thing that had happened to her in her all too short a life.

"Thought we'd lost you Derek," the chef said.

The man smiled and gave a rueful shake of the head. "Sometimes even angels lose their way," he replied.

The eight moved slowly to encircle Harrold Carrick. He turned from one to the other in turn his mind reeling. They stopped when they had him completely surrounded each standing a good twenty feet from him, but despite his disorientation, he didn't feel fear now. If anything he felt pride, he and he alone had created these walking works of art.

The only thing he couldn't understand was why they had returned. He had given them, quite selflessly, the means to ascend from this mortal coil to the heavens, but for some reason they had come back. And he knew it was not to thank him. Then he got a flash of the power the woman had given him, but more importantly the wings.

"Have you any idea the gift I gave each of you?" Carrick said. "I took you from this ordinary mundane world, from your grey banal lives and made you into works of pure art." He turned to each in turn as he spoke. "You're walking, talking masterpieces. That is because of me!"

He suddenly came to a sickening realisation. They didn't deserve such a gift. They couldn't understand the significance of what he had given them. Only he was truly worthy of it and in that the irony hit him. Only he could create this wonder, but he himself would never be able to wear it. And with that he mourned those fleeting minutes he had felt such power and so proudly worn those wonderful wounds.

Was that why she had attacked him? To give him a glimpse of the one thing he could never be? "You should be thanking me!" He screamed. He jabbed the screwdriver at them to punctuate each word. His knees gave way and he fell weakly into the mud.

* * * * *

Rachel, Suzy and Pete watched all this from the office window. It had all the makings of a surreal execution scene but one that was taking its sweet time to conclude. None of the three spoke they just watched, huddled together at the window. The radio was somehow picking up fragments of what was being said outside so they felt like eavesdroppers into another world just on the edge of reality, which in a way they were. It was a scene they were not meant to have been touched by, one that should have been played out without the knowledge of the waking world. But for whatever reason they were spectators at the end of a nightmare they could barely comprehend.

* * * * *

In a helicopter no more than two miles away, Pearce and Bell clung to each other. Their gateway to this final scene came purely through their radio. Names so familiar to them through the years plucked from the ether somehow. Each felt like a physical blow as they listened making a nonsense of the belief this was all just some sick hoax.

Mary Cardille, victim number one then another Derek, who could only be Derek Moore, victim number six. Then the one voice that had brought both detectives to tears. Little Amy Peebles, she sounded so alive, so full of mischief. Not the pathetic crumbled bundle that had been found in a ditch in Salford. It was all impossible of

course, this bizarre radio play from literally beyond the grave, but they heard it play out all the same.

Twenty-Three

"This isn't right!" Carrick exclaimed and made his free hand into a fist and slammed it repeatedly into the mud. Steeling himself he looked up at one of the eight, one of the women, the chef, with murderous intent and she flinched. Yes! He saw that old familiar look flash in her eyes and it made him grin. Despite his current situation he still had the power to inflict fear in her. Even though she was just some lost remnant of the woman she had once been she still recognised him for what he was and what he had done to her. And Harrold Carrick wondered if he could kill her twice.

"Becky, he can't hurt you anymore," Mary said but there was no conviction in her voice which gave her killer yet more hope.

Carrick got to his feet, he was still weak but would be damned if he would show it, especially to her. "You couldn't stop me before. What makes you think you can stop me now?" He got a perverse sense of satisfaction seeing Mary move to speak but then she shook her head. "A little lost soul, lost for words." He added with delight.

Again he looked at each one in turn. He could see little signs of nagging doubt in each of their sallow dead faces. They were as much as at a loss as to why he was still alive as he was. Whatever grand revenge fantasy they had concocted together from whatever limbo they had been drifting in was falling apart second by second.

Perhaps it was the power he had taken from the first attack, perhaps they were indeed fearful of what would happen if they were to assault him in unison. Yes, they were glancing amongst themselves now, each looking for a leader in the one next to them but turning away finding none.

"It, it wasn't supposed to be this way..." The man in the suit said.

"How was it supposed to be?" Carrick asked and none of them replied. It seemed impossible to him but the power had shifted to his favour. He was the one common denominator here. The one catalyst that had ended all of their meaningless lives. The woman, Mary hadn't feared him at the docks, she had hated him and that had been the spark that had ignited the onslaught.

Now he suddenly despised them all, they had obviously been expecting something miraculous to happen once they were all together. For some divine intervention to send their tormentor kicking and screaming to hell. Instead? Nothing but indecision.

They were looking to Mary now for inspiration as she at least had been able to harness the rage and pain she had felt into an attack. But even she didn't know how it had started. Then of course there was the fact that the attack had in the end an unexpected side effect, it had infused him with such power, fleeting perhaps, but enough for him to realise his heart's desire. Carrick inadvertently let

his free hand move to his back. He winced the wounds had now completely gone. If he was honest he didn't miss the power so much as the exquisite scarring she had transferred to him.

He lamented that lost as he imagined they mourned their pitiful lives. Christ how he hated them. "You have no idea how special you are!" He said in disgust, the venom in his voice surprising even himself. "Such beauty..." He choked with genuine emotion. "You ungrateful bastards! I made you magnificent, unique. Christ, you should have been skinned and exhibited in the Tate modern. I'm an artist, a creator. And what do you care about? Your worthless insignificant lives." Carrick spat on the floor.

"You murdered us!" The one called Derek said and his eyes flashed with anger.

"Huh, a side effect, you were nothing but canvases." Carrick told him.

Instantly Carrick regretted the remark, there was an instantaneous shift in the mood around him like the flicking of a switch. The air between him and the dead began to crackle with electricity. Carrick spun around at the sound of childish laughter. The child Amy was looking at her gloved hands and her arms. They were beginning to steam ever so slightly as the rain hit them.

"You forget one thing, Carrick," Mary said from next to Amy, the girl's hair was now beginning to steam through her hat. "You left us with so much more than those hideous mutilations."

Mutilations? "You bitch," Carrick spat, that was bordering on sacrilege to him.

"Rage," she continued and Carrick could see that look in her eye from the docks. "Growing rage at the years you have stolen from us. Building up. How could we let go? How could we move on when we are filled with such pain?"

"Rage that needs to go somewhere Carrick," one of the other women said. She too was beginning to fair glow with a pulsing power.

It was like some unseen electrical spark was passing from one of the eight to the other. Each in turn began to emanate such terrible power that Carrick felt it pressing hard against his chest like a physical pressure. His head began to pound and he felt fear growing in his guts with each pulsating beat.

This was the horrific power he had first felt at the docks, moments before Mary had unleashed her attack on him. But magnified eight fold. He tried to bite back a sob of terror but it came out all the same. And it took all his dwindling willpower not to fall to his knees in fright.

The all too familiar sound of hissing followed as the rain vaporized feet above them all. The steam enveloped the group and came in waves at Carrick from all sides until the figures around him were just radiant points of light, ready to go supernova at any moment. He felt the sweat on his already tender skin evaporate off the flesh as the temperature rose and every fitful breath he took felt like breathing fire.

* * * * *

Rachel Patton watched from the relative safety of the office window in quiet disbelief as one by one the eight became incandescent light. She placed her palm on the Perspex glass and immediately pulled it away as it was warm to the touch. She remembered that terrible power that had erupted from Mary and what it had done to the surrounding area at the docks. She had been little more than an

observer then, a witness to the awesome destructive power of rage and as such had been immune to the full force.

But this was the real world, or as real as such a fantastical situation could be. Mary had been alone at the docks, now she had seven others to go nuclear with her.

The three all had to shield their eyes as the light became impossibly bright. "What the hell is happening?" She heard Pete utter from next to her.

"Get down!" She shouted and pulled Suzy and Pete away from the window and down on to the floor with her. She didn't know if it would do any good but there was nowhere else to go. They pulled each other close for protection and comfort and waited for the detonation as light brighter than any day streamed through the window above.

"Bollocks," Pete said somewhat obliquely. "They'd just finished that bloody boathouse as well."

Rachel couldn't help but laugh at the insanity of it all.

* * * * *

Harrold Carrick hit the ground before he realised he was even falling. It was bone dry like it had been through a thousand years of drought. He couldn't see anything as the blinding light had quite literally burnt through his overloaded retinas. He screamed blindly but the roar of energy around him stole the sound even before it had left his cracked lips. It was like standing in front of eight jet engines going full blast.

So much rage he thought and all for me. A narcissist to the very end.

The pain, which was all encompassing, began to intensify on his back now and Carrick's addled brain vaguely registered what this meant. Yes, despite the excruciating pain, he could feel the wings burning deep into his back once more. Again his sociopathic ego couldn't accept this was an execution, far from it they were granting him the ultimate gift. Perhaps, his dwindling synapses mused, they were worthy after all.

The eight around him sensed this supposition as their collective wrath reached its cataclysmic crescendo. He was wrong, that hideous scarring their mortal body's had been subjected to would never be his. It was just the beginning of his end, the focal point of their fury. The fact he thought it was a reprieve made his end all the sweeter.

They would be at peace now that much was clear to their fading united consciousness. He would not.

"No more angels for you, Harrold Carrick." Eight voices told him and it was the last thing he ever heard.

Twenty-Four

Rachel, Suzy and Pete, held each other as the impact hit the side of the prefabricated building, the structure shifted violently but not as much as the massive light explosion outside had suggested. It was like being cocooned from the

blast of a nuclear explosion. It had all of the light, a hint of the heat but almost none of the devastation.

Rachel slowly lifted her head and at first she thought it was snowing, images of post-nuclear fall-out came to her but then she realised it was in fact flakes of plaster raining down from the cracked though amazingly intact ceiling.

"I think it's over," she said tentatively. The light from outside was beginning to fade until the room was in near darkness again.

"We're alive?" Pete said as he stiffly got to his feet.

"Looks that way," Suzy said brushing plaster out of her hair. She moved to take a look out of the window but the Perspex glass was melted and had the consistency of toffee. "Christ."

* * * * *

There was a strong sense of residual power in the night air when the three of them came outside. They could each hear the wind and rain, but it had not yet breeched the area again which gave the scene an unreal quality to it. The paint had been stripped from the whole side of the building but other than that the structure was relatively intact.

There was an almost perfect circle of burnt ground where the eight had stood. They were gone but at its very centre laid the charred remains of a body. Rachel instinctively began to walk across the open area and over to it. She needed to see for herself that the bastard was indeed dead and that there was no way he could come back from this. She would stomp his ashes into the still dry ground herself if needs be.

She heard a cry of anguish as she approached and turn to see Suzy leant over the body of P.C. Williams. She felt a flash of shame. In all the excitement she had completely forgotten the killer's last victim. Suzy cradled her dead colleague in her arms and began sobbing.

Pete was still standing numbly by the office building he seemed to be trying to take it all in. Good luck with that Rachel thought bitterly. She couldn't even imagine how they would all process what had happened here tonight, but that was a problem for another time.

Finally she reached the charred body, it was curled up in the foetal position and put Rachel in mind of one of the victims of the Pompeii volcano eruption you saw on TV it was so shrivelled and desiccated. Hardy recognizable as the man it had once been.

She could have been standing there for a second of an hour for all she knew when the rain began falling once more. Tentatively at first, just a drop here and there as if it were testing that the natural order of physics once more ruled the area. Rachel felt it first on her face as it drifted in on a light breeze.

A smattering hit the corpse and it flew into a thousand fragments of still burning embers.

The storm seemed to take courage from his and swept back in with a vengeance until what was left of Harrold Carrick was washed away into the night.

Doctor Rachel Patten turned her face up to the night sky and let the rain cool her face. It felt good because it felt real.

Epilogue

After the helicopter's radio announced; '*No more angels for you, Harrold Carrick*' it spat out a burst of static and went dead.

Pearce and Bell stared at the speaker, each willing it back into life but it refused any more revelations. They sat in stunned silence until Bell became aware that the co-pilot was shouting something over his shoulder to her but she couldn't make out a word. She could feel the first signs of shock coursing through her body like a creeping paralysis.

She doubted she would be able to speak even if she wanted to so Bell nodded just to get him to leave her alone and whatever he had said that was clearly the correct response because he ducked back again.

Bell became aware of a dull pain in her hand which drew her attention to Pearce who she had forgotten was sitting next to her. She glanced down at her hand to see his clasping hers knuckles white. "Boss," she managed to say softly. "You're hurting me."

Pearce looked at her with an expression of incomprehension then slowly his grey tear-filled eyes seemed to clear. He relaxed his grip and was going to release her hand but she held onto his not wanting to completely break the connection. Pearce moved to speak but clearly couldn't unscramble his thoughts. But in the end what was there to say?

Bell looked out of the rain streaked window, she could see lights in the distance and it seemed they were coming in to land but something was off somehow. They were clearly still ascending but the helicopter was no longer being buffeted by the storm even though it was still clearly visible through the window.

She leant forwards to look into the cockpit where the pilot was fighting with the controls against the heavy winds as they were coming in to land and the rain was clearly lashing the cockpit window yet it was deathly still back where she and Pearce were. Almost tranquil.

"What does the wall of Machafuko mean?" Someone asked.

"It's Swahili for wall of chaos," Pearce replied absently. "You know that..." He stopped mid-sentence. Neither of them had spoken. Pearce now became aware of the stillness of their surroundings, he glanced at Bell who shook her head numbly and then to the cockpit where the pilot was struggling to land.

"Sounds rude! The wall of *mach-a-fuko*." It was coming from the radio's speaker and it was Amy Peebles.

Both Ball and Pearce were hit with an intense almost physical feeling of well-being and an instinctual sense that this was just a little parting moment to say thank you for caring. No more sleepless nights no more guilt at their inability to bring the killer to justice. And to say goodbye.

Relief hit them in an almost overwhelming wave of emotion at Amy's parting words.

"You can take our photos down now."

[Ed. Note: The numerous errors in text have not been corrected.]

